

# **Young People's Street Drinking Behaviour: Investigating the Influence of Marketing & Subculture**

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## **SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

Previous research has revealed that much binge drinking among young people takes place in outdoor/hidden locations. The unsupervised nature of these locations and the products typically preferred by these individuals, have been linked to immodest consumption and an increased risk of alcohol-related harm. This qualitative study examined the street drinking behaviour of young adults (aged between 16 and 25). Twenty four focus groups were conducted with naturally-occurring groups of street drinkers (N=98) recruited in outdoor locations. Participants included both male and female drinkers from a range of subcultures (i.e. 'neds', 'alternatives' and 'mainstream') in order to provide a more appropriately gendered perspective as well as more insight into the differences which might exist in the behaviours and views of groups of young adults from different cultural backgrounds. Overall, the aim was to provide further knowledge about patterns of off-trade outdoor drinking culture among drinkers in this age group. A specific focus of the investigation was to discover what alcohol products were preferred by these individuals and why. The relative roles of alcohol marketing and sub-cultural beliefs as factors affecting consumer choices were of particular interest in this respect.

### **Findings**

#### Perceived Risks of Street Drinking

- Being detected by the police and the threat of violence were major concerns whilst drinking outdoors but were afforded varying degrees of importance according to the age, gender and cultural background of group members. 'Ned' drinkers described feeling excessively targeted by police officers due to negative stereotyping of their cultural group. 'Alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers were more concerned with the threat of violent victimisation by 'neds' describing experiences ranging from physical intimidation to serious violence. 'Neds' also discussed experiences of violence whilst drinking outdoors but referred to gang fights with other youths from similar cultural backgrounds.
- Females (though occasionally reporting fights with other females) were perceived to be at a lower risk of violence than their male peers when drinking outdoors but at greater risk of sexual harassment. Though most females acknowledged these potential dangers, such threats did not appear to be taken too seriously.

### Reasons for Street Drinking

- For many participants outdoor drinking represented a forced choice, arising from exclusion from indoor settings which occurred due to age; by association (i.e. individuals were prevented from entering pubs and clubs due to the age of their friends); due to the drinkers' own behaviour (i.e. being barred from indoor drinking locations); or by being 'costed out' (i.e. discouraged from spending part or all of their night in indoor drinking locations due to the expense of such activities). This said, drinking outdoors was seen as advantageous in some respects being less physically and socially restricting. Street drinking was also viewed as good value for money allowing drinkers a chance 'preload' on cheap alcohol before going to pubs and clubs later in the night.

### Locations for Street Drinking: Choices and Risks

- The settings chosen for drinking were intended to minimise the risks street drinkers' felt they faced when drinking outdoors. This varied according to cultural group. For 'neds,' the priority was to choose settings that might reduce the risk of detection by the police. As such, groups tended to move around whilst drinking and preferred well-hidden, isolated locations. Current policing strategies involving group dispersal appeared to encourage this pattern of street drinking further. The high mobility of these groups increased the risk of violent territorial clashes with other youths in their local areas whilst their choice of drinking locations exposed group members to environmental hazards.
- Locations chosen by 'alternative' and 'mainstream' individuals were intended to minimise the risk of victimisation. These participants typically travelled from their local communities (where they felt outnumbered and persecuted) to central areas where other like-minded youths and 'safety in numbers' could be found. Drinking locations were very public and well-lit. A police presence was often considered an advantage in terms of increasing (if not assuring) safety despite the risk that alcohol might be confiscated.

### Drinks Marketing and Product Preference

- Heavily promoted drinks were not popular (with the exception of 'Lambrini'), as street drinkers could not afford these beverages. Other promotional activity (3 for 2 offers and cut price offers) seemed to have a more widespread impact and could tempt drinkers to change brands and less often the type of alcohol they chose to drink.

- In general, preferred drinks were considered good value for money in terms of cost-strength ratio, had a pleasant taste and were convenient for drinking outside (e.g. easy to carry and conceal with screwcaps which were easily opened and resealed)
- The cultural significance of the beverage to the individual's social group was also important. Preference for specific drinks was linked to brand image and the degree to which this reflected that which the drinker wished to project as an individual and at a group level. For example, 'Buckfast Tonic Wine' was the subject of a marked cultural division with 'ned' groups expressing a strong preference for this drink and 'alternative' and 'mainstream' groups expressing an equally powerful aversion.
- Though 'Buckfast' was considered ideal by 'neds' in terms of cost, strength and packaging, the drink's popularity appeared to owe more to its cultural significance (being symbolic of masculinity, group affiliation, class and national identity to these youths). Indeed, 'Buckfast' was preferred to drinks that represented better value in terms of cost-strength ratio demonstrating that in some cases subculture may override marketing as an influence on consumer activity.
- 'Alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers viewed 'Buckfast' as a drink stereotypically preferred by individuals perceived as problematic street drinkers (i.e. 'neds' and 'jakeys'). The desire to avoid being associated with these groups was linked to their rejection of this product. Perceptions that drinking 'Buckfast' might induce violent tendencies also acted as a deterrent. Given these combined factors, these individuals chose products that had fewer negative connotations and which were deemed acceptable by their social group (i.e. vodka/'Lambrini' etc.).

#### Source of Supply: Preferred Outlets

- In general, participants preferred to purchase their alcohol from smaller off-licenses and corner shops and were tempted into larger outlets (such as supermarkets) only by promotional activity. Underage participants targeted small stores they believed to be struggling for profit with the view that they would be less likely to be asked for proof of age and/or refused service. Purchases of alcohol were made by agents (adult strangers) or female group members. Overage participants also preferred to make their purchases from smaller off-sales as this was viewed as a more discrete method of buying beverages associated with street drinking, thus avoiding

embarrassment. Importantly, smaller outlets were also more likely to sell the products street drinkers preferred and were in addition more likely to sell these drinks chilled and therefore ready for immediate consumption.

### Suggested Improvements

- Suggestions concerned the management rather than the prevention of street drinking (as the latter was seen as unlikely). Underage individuals called for the provision of more age-appropriate leisure activities (though comments suggested that young people saw such places as safer, more comfortable venues in which they could continue drinking). Others felt that reducing the age limit for drinking in pubs and clubs would allow drinkers earlier access to these locations and limit risk by removing them from harm's way. Designated areas for drinking outside were suggested as a way of reducing risk of alcohol-related harm by containing drinking so that it could be monitored.
- Observations that 'Buckfast' bottles were frequently used as weapons and irresponsibly disposed (as was the case for other drinks packaged in glass), led to suggestions that recognised 'street drinks' (but especially 'Buckfast') should instead be packaged in plastic in order to limit alcohol-related injury.

### Implications

- Findings suggest that street drinking was considered a risky activity by young adults but represented a forced choice due to exclusion from inside drinking locations. Participants' desire to minimise perceived risks (and the practice of dispersing groups of street drinkers) appeared to displace street drinking to settings which could increase exposure to environmental hazards and the threat of harm. An examination of current policy and policing may inform strategies to reduce alcohol-related risk, whilst the provision of indoor drinking locations or designated areas for drinking outdoors may allow street drinking to be contained and monitored as a way of increasing the safety of drinkers. Current findings may also inform educational programmes for street drinkers designed to make young adults more aware of the potential harms of drinking outdoors. Results regarding beverage preference highlight a number of potentially harmful design features which might be designed out to reduce the immodest consumption and alcohol-related injuries associated with irresponsible disposal and street violence. Encouraging socially responsible practice among retailers would also seem important at a national level and more especially at the local level in the smaller off-sales preferred by street drinkers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A significant amount of binge drinking by young people takes place in unsupervised (often outdoor) locations (Loretto, 1994; Newcombe et al, 1995). Greater likelihood of intoxication in outdoor settings places youths at heightened risk of alcohol-related harm (such as accidents, hospitalisation and becoming involved in high-risk situations involving unsafe sex, drug use and fighting: Coleman & Carter, 2005; Pavis et al, 1997) and can also result in exposure to the environmental dangers inherent in these contexts (i.e.: hazards such as traffic or deep water, Forsyth & Barnard, 2000). Despite these risks, many young drinkers still choose to consume alcohol outdoors, though the reasons for this remain unclear.

As well as being potentially dangerous for the young people involved, street drinking is also seen as a threat to public safety, for example, the Home Office (2003) report that 70% of respondents to a public survey saw street drinking as a problem (with one in four claiming alcohol-related antisocial behaviour to be a problem within their own neighbourhoods). According to this report, young people under 18 years are viewed as mainly responsible for this disruption, whilst young adults over 18 are perceived as the next most problematic group. Overall, these findings suggest that street drinking among younger members of the population is a particular cause for concern. Whilst the focus of much research attention is on males who drink excessively, less is known about their female peers (though a recent Office of National Statistics report (1999) revealed that this pattern of drinking is not confined to young males with over a fifth of 16-24 year old women report consuming over 14 units of alcohol per week).

Evidence implies that most young people who drink in outdoor locations obtain their alcohol by getting others (e.g. older friends and/or strangers) to buy it for them from off-sales establishments, with a smaller percentage of these individuals buying alcohol from these outlets themselves (Brain & Parker, 1997; Boreham & McManus, 2003; Corbett et al, 2005). The preference among younger or more regular drinkers who tend to drink in public places is for stronger, cheaper, large volume alcohol products, such as a white cider or fortified wine (Forsyth & Barnard, 2000; Brain & Parker, 1997; McKeganey et al, 1996; Hughes et al, 1997). In turn, these products have been identified as encouraging immodest consumption (e.g. see Brain & Parker, 1997; Forsyth et al, 1997; Hughes et al, 1997). Thus, the type of products preferred by young street drinkers may increase their risk of harm. Furthermore, when alcohol is purchased from an off-license in contrast to on-trader outlets (e.g. pubs), the retailer may have no way of knowing who consumes the alcohol (e.g. under-18s, those already intoxicated or known problem drinkers and offenders), how quickly they consume it, how intoxicated they become and what harms result. These factors are likely to exacerbate risk even further. Thus, the



context of alcohol consumption, in terms of location, source and method of supply appear strongly related to level of intoxication and exposure to harm. These findings suggest that greater knowledge of what factors facilitate young peoples' choice of particular products (i.e.: in terms of place, product, price and promotion) may be of use in reducing alcohol-related harm among young street drinkers.

Some authors argue that the development of alcoholic beverages such as high strength bottled beers, white cider and alcopops has increased excessive, sessional consumption of alcohol among young people (Measham, 1996; Brain & Parker, 1997). Preference for these particular alcohol products is likely to be linked to a number of factors. Choice of alcoholic beverage may be linked to its cultural credibility. Some argue that conveying a particular image or group allegiance through the use of brand names and associated product imagery is a growing aspect of youth culture (Epstein, 1998) which "appears to extend to the alcohol market" (Jackson et al, 2000, p598). Brain & Parker (1997) note "in addition to drinking for being drunk, there is also the pleasure of consuming (and hence projecting) alcohol products which carry certain images. Different groups of young drinkers will identify and construct different images for themselves through the alcohol products they consume" (p62). Indeed, the work of these authors lends some support to this observation, offering preliminary evidence about the importance of the image and style of alcohol products. Interviews with "delinquent drinkers" revealed particular alcohol products were preferred according to the image they were felt to project, in that drinks which were felt to indicate masculinity, affluence and maturity (such as *Pulse* (a strong cider), which the authors describe as a "poor man's designer drink") whilst products considered to be weak or "designed for women" (such as alcopops) were rejected (p67). Unfortunately, though females were included in the sample, the authors do not provide detailed information regarding the product choices of these individuals.

Although the perceived image of a particular product is of importance, Brain & Parker (1997) report that considerations of taste, strength and price also play an important role. A focus on value for money was particularly likely among heavy and frequent youthful drinkers whose motivation for drinking was to get drunk. However, choices were found to be further affected by the individual's financial means. This study demonstrated that despite a general preference for 'high status' alcoholic drinks (apparently perceived as such due to marketing), young people were forced to buy within their means, resulting in choices of cheaper regional versions of international premium brands on the basis of value for money i.e.: strength to cost ratio. Jackson et al (2000) and MacKintosh et al (1997) also suggest that the alcoholic drinks chosen by young street drinkers may be linked to practical considerations such as the portability of the product. It is also possible that matters such as how easy a product is to conceal or

consume in an outdoor setting (such as if the product has a screw cap instead of a cork) may also influence product choices, though this has yet to be explored. Overall, these findings indicate that even when limited financially, considerations of cultural credibility still emerge to be an important aspect of product choice, suggesting that subculture and marketing may interact to produce the preference for the particular brands of strong, cheap alcohol associated with street drinking. Indeed, Coleman & Cater, (2005) report that motivations for binge drinking are strongly influenced by normative beliefs within the peer group.

Current findings suggest that the products apparently preferred by young outdoor drinkers are therefore strong in alcohol but low in price. By their very low cost nature the manufacturers of such budget priced products are unlikely to be investors in expensive promotional activity. Indeed this lack of overt advertising may have served to keep these products hidden from the scrutiny of the media, parents and policymakers, with other drinks perhaps unfairly being blamed for alcohol related anti-social behaviours by street youths (Forsyth, 2001). This raises the question of how do consumers become aware of these drinks and how do such products develop brand relationships, kudos, even cult status with young people. It may be that information about such products is spread by viral marketing (where brand awareness is spread via word of mouth using pre-existing social networks) without the manufacturer requiring their own designated advertising (though retailers may do this). Additionally products with 'street-cred' may benefit from viral marketing on new media popular with young people, such as the internet, where websites such as 'tramp juice' (<http://gk007a0336.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/tramp.htm>) or 'wino: the Buckfast society' (<http://wreck.theshoppe.com/index.htm>) praise or review products popular with street drinkers. In these respects the marketing of such alcohol products bear some similarities to illegal drugs (Forsyth, 1995).

To summarise, research reveals that much binge drinking among young people takes place in outdoor/hidden locations. However, the reasons for this preference are not known. For example, it is unclear whether choice or exclusion from indoor settings such as pubs and clubs motivate this activity among those who Hobbs et al, (2002) term 'the legion of the banned' nor is it known what geographical aspects of particular locations encourage their use as drinking hangouts. Current research also reveals that the consumption of alcohol in unsupervised locations (particularly outdoors) is linked to greater likelihood of intoxication than when drinking occurs in more controlled settings (e.g.: pubs/clubs or in the presence of older or more moderate drinkers at home). This may be linked to the products consumed outdoors in that these are more likely to be cheaper, stronger drinks which represent good value for money to young people who have limited financial means. However, the association between particular

products and street drinking is yet to be explored fully. Preferences for particular brands are not only likely to be based on their strength-cost ratio but also on the basis of their perceived cultural credibility i.e.: the statement the product is viewed as making about the individual or the group. In this way, subculture and marketing may interact to produce consumer choices among young people. Though Brain & Parker (1997) offer preliminary evidence in this respect, more information is required regarding the possible interaction of these factors as a means of identifying ways in which street drinking and associated harms can be reduced. Finally, while it would appear that most street drinkers are male, the involvement of girls has yet to be investigated fully. A recent report from Bates et al (2004) indicated that general levels of drinking among young females is increasing whilst other work suggests there may be a rising trend of female involvement in street drinking. Sweeting & West's (2003) study for example, found that changes in female adolescents' leisure activities which resulted in them spending more time outdoors were related to an increase in alcohol use which exceeded the use of similarly-aged boys.

With this in mind, the aims of this research were to:

- (a) investigate patterns of off-trade outdoor drinking culture among young adults
- (b) examine the relative roles of alcohol marketing and sub-cultural beliefs in encouraging such activity
- (c) give young male and female street drinkers a voice in order to help explain their behaviours and the risks involved

## **METHOD**

The focus group interview is a qualitative methodology frequently used to obtain data about feelings and opinions of small groups of participants about a defined area of interest, such as a particular problem or more specifically a way of generating impressions of a particular product or service (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p15). By providing a group context, and allowing participants to direct the flow of conversation amongst themselves, the active involvement of the interviewer/researcher (and therefore the influence of their preconceptions) can be minimised. As a discussion, the focus group also allows us to see more of how individual perspectives might interact in an everyday context, making participants more likely to rationalise the statements they make to each other (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). This technique has been successfully employed in the past with adolescent participants. For example, Beck & Bargman (1993) used focus group methodology to explore patterns of alcohol consumption, influences on drinking patterns and possible intervention strategies with Hispanic adolescents, whilst Wagenaar et al (1993) used focus group methodology to explore patterns of

acquisition of alcoholic beverages by underage youth. Data generated from focus groups has also been used to design adolescent tobacco use prevention and cessation programs (Heimann-Raitain, Hanson, & Peregoy, 1985). Though providing valuable information, this previous work has typically been conducted in controlled environment (such as youth clubs and schools). Focus groups are intended to deliver conversational exchanges which are as close to everyday discourse as possible, in that discussants should feel entitled to direct the conversation to their own ideas of the issues. It would seem likely that participants are more likely to feel thus entitled in an environment over which they feel some sense of ownership. Indeed, for young people struggling to find/define their own spaces, it would seem to make sense to speak to them in those spaces. In the current study focus groups were conducted with naturally occurring groups where young people were found to congregate in their own communities. This could be argued as improving on previous work in two ways: firstly by increasing the chances that young people feel confident to speak freely on the issues at hand (being within their own 'territory') and secondly by allowing accounts to be verified by the observations of the researchers during fieldwork.

#### *Recruitment*

Focus group data was collected over a 3 month period (June to August 2006). Field work took place on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings between 5.30pm and 9.30pm. Data collection was restricted to these periods of 2 reasons. Firstly, the observations of the research team in the early stages of fieldwork indicated that these were the most typical times for street drinking to occur among this age group. Thus, conducting data collection at these times maximised the research team's chances of successfully locating street drinkers. Indeed, fieldwork demonstrated that finding suitable groups before 5.30pm or on alternative days was largely unsuccessful and not an efficient use of the research team's time. Though it was clear groups might easily be located after 9.30pm it was important to ensure the safety of the researchers by ensuring that data was (theoretically at least) collected before street drinking groups had the opportunity to get too drunk to be manageable. Another deciding factor in choosing this specific time to end data collection was that this was when it began to get dark. As data collection continued this decision was supported further as it became apparent that groups interviewed towards the end of the data collection period were becoming intoxicated and more difficult to manage than those who participated earlier on in the evening.

For safety reasons, each session of fieldwork was carried out by a research team of two individuals comprising the lead researcher (a female, 32 years old) and one of three fieldworkers (2 male and 1 female). Researchers began by selecting an area (either city centre, suburbs or semi-rural) using a

combination of media reports, tip-offs from local authorities and their own local knowledge to identify likely places where street drinkers might be found. Over time researchers learned to refine their searches further in line with their observations and participant accounts which identified the criteria street drinkers used to select a location for drinking outdoors. In a number of cases, groups were located using a chain referral technique where one group was asked to give details of places where other groups of street drinkers could be found (e.g. FG13 provided information which led to FG14 and FG15).

The team explored the areas they identified on foot or by car dependent on the area to be covered. The method of data collection was decided according to the distances to be covered by the research team and safety considerations. Thus, the city centre and some suburban areas were largely covered on foot, whilst researchers travelled to and around semi-rural small towns and villages by car. When attempting to locate groups by car, researchers first drove around the area focusing on possible hot spots for street drinking before branching out (if no groups were to be found in these areas) to conduct a more general search of the locale. When a potential group was spotted or an area in which groups might be located was found, researchers left the car and continued by foot. This was done in order to approach groups directly or to investigate an area more closely for 'hidden' drinkers not visible from the road.

In order to work efficiently and safely, researchers had to assess the suitability of groups from a distance. This limited the chances of recruiting individuals who did not meet the research criteria or approaching groups who were potentially hostile. Thus, researchers chose a particular area to be covered, walked the periphery of that area noting the position and characteristics of potential groups as well as whether they were visibly displaying any overtly aggressive behaviours. Researchers attempted to select groups of young adults with 3 or more members who appeared to be of the desired age range. The research team also looked for some sign of alcohol consumption: either that the group had recently been drinking alcohol (indicated by the presence of empty bottles or seemingly intoxicated behaviour i.e. shouting, singing, staggering), were in the act of drinking alcohol or intended to drink alcohol in the very near future (suggested by the presence of full bottles of alcohol either in plain sight or contained within tell-tale 'blue bags' (often used by smaller off-sales) or bags bearing the logos of shops where alcohol could be purchased). As data collection proceeded, care was also taken to attempt to include roughly similar numbers of groups from different cultural backgrounds (i.e. groups of 'neds', 'alternatives' and 'mainstream' youths).

This recruitment technique was highly successful in that groups approached typically met the desired selection criteria. The biggest problem for researchers was accurately judging the age of participants.

Difficulties in this respect led on a number of occasions to researchers approaching groups who were either too old or too young to be considered suitable. Though groups with members substantially outwith the desired age range were rejected, one aim of this study was to engage with naturally occurring street drinking groups as such it was decided that if the group contained some members who were of the required age (i.e. 16-21) they would be considered eligible for inclusion.

In order to achieve a representative sample of outdoor drinking behaviours, it was proposed that young adults would be recruited from range of localities, including: a city centre, suburban neighbourhoods and semi-rural environments. Though the research team covered a range of different geographical areas in order to recruit participants, it soon became clear that groups were not conveniently located in the areas pre-selected for sampling. For example, though fieldwork covered former local authority housing schemes and affluent areas, sweeps of these areas inevitably led back to the more central, green places (parks, public squares) which street drinkers themselves favoured and where a surprising assortment of drinkers were found in terms of SES and cultural background. Thus it appeared that a large number of young adults used the same small cluster of locations for outdoor drinking. It is interesting to note that despite the association often made between 'neds' and street drinking, these groups were surprisingly difficult to find in deprived urban locations. Fieldwork conducted in schemes where these individuals might be thought of as gathering yielded little except the most fleeting glimpses, often of groups of young people making their way into more concealed areas such as woods or waste ground. As a result, when this type of group was recruited by researchers it was public parks or in the city centre. Overall, the tendency of some street drinking groups to cluster in central locations and the propensity of others to seek out well-hidden, isolated locations meant groups were necessarily recruited from a narrower range of geographic locations that was first envisaged.

### Participants

24 focus groups (of between 2-6 participants, mean=4) were conducted. This resulted in a total of 98 research participants aged between 16 and 25 years old, 69 of whom were male and 29 female. Detailed descriptions of these groups drawn from researchers' field notes can be found in appendix 1. Female participants were typically part of mixed sex groups (the majority of whom were male). Indeed, though 3 focus groups were conducted (FG8, FG15 and FG24) comprised of all-female participants, 2 of these groups involved samples drawn from a larger mixed sex group and the third group (FG24) though self-contained, identified that it was typical for them to drink in a group which also included males.

Participants could be distinguished further in terms of their cultural backgrounds which were loosely categorised as ‘ned’, ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream.’ These categorisations were made on the basis of self-identification and/or using the distinctive clothing styles associated with each of these youth cultures as a guide.

### *‘Ned’ Groups*

The Collins English Dictionary defines ‘ned’ as "a derogatory term for a young, working-class person who dresses in casual sports clothes." Other sources suggest that this term also implies the assumption that individuals labelled thus are likely to engage in various forms of antisocial behaviour. However, usage of the term varies and is often used to describe “any working class youth” who dresses in a particular manner (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neds>). Stereotypically, ‘ned’ clothing can be thought of as including: “baseball caps, casual sports clothes (with brands such as Lacoste or Fred Perry amongst the most popular), football shirts and trainers. Accessories might include gold jewellery (chain necklaces and earrings and sovereign rings) whilst females in this cultural group are stereotypically thought of as wearing “a variety of jewellery, almost always gold, including bangles, sovereign rings, necklaces and large hoop earrings” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neds>).

Though this term is often used in a derogatory manner by the media, politicians and members of the general public, in the current study it was a label that was adopted and used by some participants to identify their own cultural group. The appearance of those who identified themselves as ‘neds’ was observed to closely fit the stereotypical image described above, whilst the accounts of these individuals further confirmed this as the appearance adopted by young adults whom they considered might also be thought of as being part of this cultural group. This participant discussed how he was identified by the police as a ‘ned’ by his clothing (i.e. a Lacoste tracksuit and baseball cap):

*Put it this way, for instance myself, walking about with this Lacoste trackie [tracksuit] on, pull me [arrest me] no bother, but see if I was wearing ma denims and ma cap? If I walked about without this Lacoste trackie and without ma cap they wouldnae [wouldn't] pull me cause I look respectable. Anybody that walks about wi' trackies - neds, they pull them...(FG2)*

With this in mind, 10 groups were categorised as ‘neds’ all of whom either identified themselves as ‘neds’ or were observed by researchers to closely resemble the descriptions offered by these individuals. In the current study the term ‘ned’ is used in its broadest sense to refer to youths who adopt the distinctive cultural image described above rather than in any way that might be seen as derogatory

to participants labelled thus. This noted, there was no class dimension to this classification. Indeed, some of the ‘ned’ groups (e.g. FG15) appeared to be from middle class backgrounds.

#### *‘Alternative’ groups*

10 focus groups were conducted with youths who identified themselves as ‘alternative.’

*...we’re like alternative, coloured hair and piercings and stuff (FG8)*

These individuals were typically observed wearing dark or black clothing in a range of styles heavily influenced by punk and grunge. Hair was most often worn long or spiked with a long fringe and was in some cases also dyed black, a bright colour or a combination of both. Females and some males typically wore heavy makeup (dark kohl eyeliner) and accessories including silver chains, facial piercings, ‘gothic’ style jewellery (e.g. skulls and crucifixes) and in some cases tattoos. As with groups categorised as ‘neds’ the term ‘alternative’ is used to refer to youths who either self-identified as such or who adopted the distinctive cultural image described above. In common with ‘ned’ participants, these groups have suffered negative stereotyping by the media, politicians and general public. However, in the current report, this terminology is not intended as derogatory but used only to refer to a particular youth culture and style.

#### *‘Mainstream’ groups*

The category of ‘mainstream’ was given to groups who did not adopt the clothing style of either ‘ned’ or ‘alternative’ groups and whose account and appearance was not indicative of any other definable youth culture. Clothing, hairstyles and accessories within these groups reflected high street fashion (typically understated and causal e.g. jeans and t-shirts). 4 focus groups were conducted with participants whom the researchers categorised as ‘mainstream.’

#### *‘Mixed’ groups*

Group membership was mixed (in terms of youth cultural identity) in 7 of the 24 groups. Groups with mixed membership most often comprised of ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ youths. However, 2 groups participated which though comprising mainly of ‘alternative’ participants also included a single group member whose appearance was more indicative of the ‘ned’ youth culture. Mixed groups are primarily referred to using the label which applied to the majority of their members. Where mixed membership was observed however, this is noted in more detailed group descriptions which can be found in appendix 1.



### Conducting Focus Groups

Groups were approached and the study introduced with a brief explanation of the nature of the research. Group members were told that data would be recorded and anonymised and that each participant would be paid for their involvement. No information which could identify the individuals who took part was recorded for any participant (i.e. no names or home addresses (other than individuals' local area) were known by the researchers). Those who chose to participate were then asked to confirm their ages and indicate their consent by checking a box on the form provided. Focus groups were conducted in situ (or the nearest available location deemed suitable for this purpose) using a tape recorder and hand-held microphone.

Focus groups were moderated by JG but fieldworkers also contributed where appropriate to further facilitate discussion and give the focus group a more informal feel. Focusing exercises (i.e. ice breakers) were employed in the first 5 focus groups. These were quickly discarded as such exercises seemed unnecessary given most young people appeared sufficiently motivated to contribute from the outset. Indeed, spontaneous discussion often began before the recording equipment could be set up. Though participants knew they would be paid a £5 record token for taking part, this did not seem their main motivation. Indeed, a number of individuals commented they would have taken part anyway, or agreed to take part before payment was mentioned. In general, young people seemed flattered by the attention and welcomed the chance to be interviewed as experts on this particular aspect of youth culture. The enthusiasm with which young people approached participation could be attributed to lowered inhibitions linked to their previous alcohol consumption. However, not all groups had been drinking before the focus group commenced. A further consideration is that these young people (as a function of their age and in some cases their cultural background) might be considered a socially excluded group whose views and opinions are rarely directly sought. The chance to express those opinions freely in a context in which they felt comfortable (i.e. 'their own turf') might be seen not only as novel but as a valued opportunity to have their voices heard.

Only 2 groups approached which fit the selection criteria refused to take part. One group of 'mainstream' females approached in a city centre location declined due to concerns about confidentiality as the focus group was to be conducted outside within hearing of other members of the public. Researchers offered to conduct the group in a more private location but the group could not be persuaded stating as their reason their fears that they may 'get into trouble' if discovered drinking. The second refusal involved an all male group (identified by their clothing as 'neds') who were approached

whilst drinking on the move in a housing scheme. Though some group members seemed interested in taking part, others in the group seemed keen to continue on their way to begin drinking and could not be persuaded otherwise. Though it was rare for the research team to receive refusals from the groups that they approached, refusals within groups were more common. Thus, many of the focus groups conducted involved only part of the entire drinking group as it was discovered. Reasons for individual refusals were typically shyness or because the person concerned was already intoxicated.

Each group lasted approximately 20 to 35 minutes. In keeping with Kitzinger and Barbour's methodology (2001) the agenda and specific topics covered in the focus groups were at the discretion of participants as far as possible, as such interview materials were kept to a minimum with a range of non-leading questions pertinent to the research topics to stimulate discussion. With more intoxicated groups questioning was necessarily more directive as participants who had been drinking often found it difficult to concentrate for any length of time and tended to lose track of what was being discussed unless the focus group was carefully managed. A schedule of topics for discussion was derived from objectives identified for this study; the main areas of discussion were:

- Problems associated with street drinking (e.g.: harms to self and others – both experienced and observed)
- Reasons to street drink
- Locations for street drinking
- What drinks are preferred (by type and brand)
- Reasons for product preference (examining contribution of subcultural influences and marketing)
- Designs for the “ideal” street drink
- Source/method of supply
- Policy issues (what young people would like to see)

Given that most groups were highly motivated, difficulties facilitating discussion were uncommon. Instead the research team's skills were more often needed to manage the sheer volume and exuberance of responses from participants who wished to speak (typically all at the same time). Encouraging group members to speak in turn and discouraging interruptions became a priority, particularly for larger and more inebriated groups. Selective eye contact and the hand-held microphone were important for directing who would speak and when. When presented with very large groups, researchers asked that group members split into two or three smaller groups which would be run consecutively to minimise

overtalking and disruption. However, this was not successful as individuals waiting to take part rarely did so quietly. On other occasions, other young people who were known to participants would arrive whilst the focus group was being conducted. This inevitably led to disruptions as the newcomers demanded an explanation of what was happening both from the research team and the participants who became distracted as a result. In a number of cases, newcomers spontaneously joined in the group offering their opinions or took the opportunity to sing or yell into the microphone. When interruptions from non-participants were sustained, the member of the research team who was less involved in facilitation attempted to distract these individuals and lead them outwith the range of the recording equipment. This was largely successful as a way of minimising overtalking and provided another source of information for the research team. However, given that the functions of the fieldworker included ensuring the researcher's safety and to act as note taker, the research team did not attempt to conduct focus groups simultaneously.

Participants rarely behaved aggressively even though many were in varying states of intoxication when focus groups were conducted. Indeed, aggressive behaviour was a problem on only two occasions and it was not group participants who presented a threat but other individuals within the drinking environment. Details of these incidents can be found in appendix 1 under 'problems' for FG14 and FG15.

#### Analysis of focus group data

All focus group material was subsequently transcribed. Data were stored in a password-protected computer file and analysed using theory-led thematic analysis supported by NVivo software. Hayes (1997) endorses this approach as allowing rich data and interpretation to be brought to bear on specifically targeted research questions. In this case, the topics generated by the research team for the discussion were taken as broad categories for primary analysis of all data. On repeated reading of the transcripts, these data were coded under these devised categories and then emergent themes identified under the given headings. These fine-grain codes were then discussed allowed the coding to be refined into coherent system.

## **RESULTS**

The results of the analysis are presented as seven broad categories, these being: i) the perceived risks of street drinking ii) reasons for street drinking iii) locations for street drinking iv) locations of street drinking as a source of risk v) factors associated with beverage preference vi) source of supply and vii) suggested improvements. Throughout the report, focus group extracts are presented in support of the

findings. The particular quotes presented were selected because they were felt to best represent the shared understandings of the groups. Where there was disagreement between groups the reasons for this are highlighted within the text in order to illuminate important nuances in the data. Illustrative quotes are presented verbatim using italics. The names of individuals that participants discussed during focus groups have been removed in line with the confidentiality agreement. Further, each focus group was assigned a random number in order to conceal the identity of the participants. Colloquialisms which appear in the narratives are clarified where use of local dialect was thought to directly affect the clarity of the passage. These clarifications appear in plain text within square brackets immediately following the potentially confusing language.

### **Perceived Risks of Street Drinking**

Given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts about street drinking, most groups of participants chose to focus on what they felt to be the risks associated with activity. Of most concern in this respect were the possibility of detection and reprimand from the police and the dangers posed by other street drinkers. Each of these themes is discussed in turn.

#### Unwanted Police Attention

The majority of participants described some contact with the police in relation to their street drinking activities. Typically, groups talked about being stopped and alcohol confiscated. Frequently this involved alcohol being poured away by officers or the individuals themselves being instructed to do likewise. A number of participants who were over 18 had been fined and in fewer cases charged and taken to police cells. Reports suggested that groups comprising of underage drinkers were more likely to be stopped and reprimanded by the police than older drinkers. This was seen by older participants as being due to the greater likelihood that these individuals would act in a manner which would attract attention to themselves, as this participant observed.

*P1: It's more the underagers...we're all over age apart from him [indicates another member of group] it's not us though; it's the younger ones that's causing hassle, eh? They bring the police to us basically. (FG13)*

This noted, accounts indicated that experiences of police contact differed markedly according to the cultural background of the groups interviewed leading to variation in how different groups perceived and dealt with police intervention. Views regarding policing and the impact these perceptions had on group behaviour are discussed below.

Of all the groups interviewed, self-identified ‘neds’ expressed most concern regarding police intervention. Typically, these participants described feeling excessively targeted and harassed by the police officers. Individuals felt undeserving of this treatment which they perceived as being fuelled by negative stereotyping of their particular cultural group, rather than their drinking behaviour per se. Though the physical appearance (i.e. distinctive clothing style) of group members was emphasised as a key factor in producing increased levels of police attention (in that this identified individuals as part being of this particular cultural group), some participants also felt that their choice of alcoholic beverage (typically ‘Buckfast’) was another factor in attracting police interest.

*P1: Put it this way, for instance myself, walking about with this Lacoste trackie [tracksuit] on, pull me [arrest me] no bother, but see if I was wearing ma denims and ma cap? If I walked about without this Lacoste trackie and without ma cap they wouldnae [wouldn't] pull me coz I look respectable. Anybody that walks about wi' trackies - neds, they pull them... you look like a ned the polis will pull you, disnae matter wit. Take for instance the day. Me and ma pal come oot and I usually buy ma Mad Dog or Buckfast, walked to the park and the polis pulled us, said if we catch you in here wi' this you'll get the jail... even though, I mean there's thirty, forty people in here, up the top of that hill the noo, drinking... (FG2)*

These comments were echoed in other accounts. In the following extract, another group described feeling singled out by police officers when drinking outside despite the presence of others engaged in similar behaviour<sup>1</sup>, again identifying not only their physical appearance but also their choice of alcohol (i.e. ‘Buckfast’) as key in producing this increased attention. As in other groups, the anger and resentment felt by participants as a result of this treatment was apparent.

*I: You've got Buckfast and Miller and Tennents. Is this what you usually have?*

*P3: Aye, that's what the police are looking for [indicates Buckfast]. See when they start walking about this hill, they'll pick us out of the bunch coz we don't look like students. They don't like us being up here coz we're not students.*

*P4: Happened the last time we were here. Just walked up and says we didnae look like students.*

*P2: Aye, they're [points to others on hill] all students. Even though there was one lassie that was oot her face [drunk]*

*P3: Last time we were here, they stood up there looking round for about 20 minutes then picked us out from everybody on the hill. Bastards. (FG7)*

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<sup>1</sup> As this focus group drew to a close, researchers were able to observe directly the treatment described by the group who fearing that they would be targeted by police officers requested that the research team remained with them in order to deflect attention. (please see Appendix 1 for a more detailed description of this incident).

These claims were supported further by the observations of ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ drinkers who reported having witnessed and/or experienced similar incidents. Many confirmed the differential treatment of groups of ‘neds’ agreeing that these individuals were often singled out by police officers. This was felt to be due to the perceived tendency of such groups to behave in an antisocial manner. Though these young women had some direct experience of, it was clear that they felt some discrimination might also be involved.

*P2: They [the police] usually just drive by and make sure no one is having a fight but they’ve cautioned a couple of people so far today.*

*I: Do you think they target particular people?*

*P1: Yes*

*P2: Oh yeah, definitely.*

*P1: They’ve targeted all the boys with, all the football boys in the shorts and no top, with the bottles of Buckfast, you know what I mean really, kind of classical drunk Glaswegian boy.*

*P2: I’ve had experiences like that before when drinking in the park, like last year? There was a big group of us and like a big group of kinda, basically what you’d class as neds. And they started giving us hassle coz we’re like alternative, coloured hair and piercing and stuff and they started giving us a little bit of hassle and because like we kinda like tipsy we kinda gave ‘em hassle back. And like the police did show up and they sorted them out and didn’t say anything to us at all. It’s kinda like; I don’t know if that’s kinda better? Like they’re taking the sort of stereotype of those guys started it, which yeah, they did which is fair enough. It’s fair enough I guess.*

*P1: I think they know the types that are more likely to start a fight. (FG8)*

Indeed, though ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ participants generally agreed that ‘neds’ were the cause of most trouble associated with street drinking, some believed that current policing practices also played a role. Targeting groups who were drinking but not behaving antisocially and the practice of pouring out alcohol in front of those who had been apprehended were seen by this group of older drinkers as potentially inflammatory practices likely to lead to anger, resentment and possibly even violence.

*P1: I think it’s just mair [more] at night with neds running about the streets drinking. That’s where it’s coming from the trouble.*

*P3: I live in a tower block and you see them all at the front sitting enjoying themselves and the police come along and they’re no bothering anybody and they’re like that pour your drink out and whatever and you think I’m sure if I was paying money for that drink there’s no way I’m going to be happy if they’re pouring it out down a drain. I’d be well pissed off. So I think that the police have a lot to do with what causes the trouble although they’re trying to stop it. I think they’re very much involved in*

*causing it in the first place. If they left them to get on with it, then they'd maybe be lying about like, "Aye, nae bother."*

*I: Do you two agree with that?*

*P1 & P2: Oh, totally, aye, aye.*

*P1: I think they play a part in it.*

*P3: I think particularly in the cases where people have been sitting enjoying themselves and bothering naeboddy, they just make a beeline for you deliberately coz they know it's going to rile you up. Right? And you've had a couple of 'sherries' [drinks] you know, as they say, and you're sitting enjoying yourself and they make you pour that away then you're going to get all riled up and want to hit somebody. And then that's when the police are like I'm doing you for breach and I'm doing you for assault. I think they just do it so they can mark up their crime statistics, you know? Clear up a few ...we've no got enough arrests this week lets go and arrest a few neds and we can jail them.(FG6)*

Though 'neds' themselves often reported feeling persecuted by the police, the general impression was that police intervention was viewed by these individuals as more of an inconvenience (in that it led to the confiscation of alcohol) than something to be feared. This was apparent in the comments of one group who were interviewed whilst drinking in the centre of their scheme in full view of the surrounding houses. Though making some effort to avoid police intervention, it was clear that the longer term consequences of being in trouble with the police were of little concern with the result that drinking behaviour remained largely unaffected by such interactions. This attitude appeared to be linked in part to the apparently normative nature of underage drinking within the families and communities of these participants (see appendix 1 for details). Indeed, despite (or perhaps because of) their experiences with the police, these groups remained staunchly defiant, often assuring the researchers that they would continue street drinking regardless of the consequences.

*I: So you've been in the cells?*

*P3: Aye, hundreds of times*

*P1: We get our fucking drink poured out...*

*P2: ...our names taken... and a wee letter sent to the door and that...*

*P1: ... your son's been drinking...*

*I: And does that have any impact on whether you decide to drink again?*

*P2: No, does it fuck!*

*P1: Cause it's only a letter haim [home], eh? Yer maw [mother] and that kens [knows] what you're coming out for, eh? To hae [have] a wee drink and that.*

*P3: Your mum and da [father] don't even bother about you drinking that much...we don't drink that much. They only bother if you're getting right out yer nut and that.*

*P1: It's just if you get fucking steaming.*

*P1: Aye, but see if the police come you run, if you dinnae run then they catch you. Any police I see I run, I canny bother with this taking names and stuff like that.*

*P4: Half the time they don't even take your name coz you've done it hunners [hundreds]of times so they ken your name already so they don't need to take your name...(FG 12)*

The experiences of 'alternative' and 'mainstream' groups were markedly different in that these young people did not expect to be targeted by police officers whilst drinking outdoors. Indeed, the experience of some young people had demonstrated to them that such behaviour was likely to be overlooked (or at least meet with minimal consequences) should they be observed drinking by police officers.

*I: What about hassle from the police?*

*P1: No we don't get any.*

*P4: The police don't bother with us really, turn a blind eye. They don't pick you up, you just get a warning or something if you're drinking. I mean, I walked past them with my friends the other night and we were mixing some vodka and we poured it from one bottle to the other then threw the empty bottle in the Clyde [river] just as they were walking past and they didn't say a thing and it was pretty obvious what we were up to you know?*

*P3: They don't care really. They'd just give you a warning and make you pour it out I think if they caught you but I've never been caught.*

*P1: No I've never been caught either. She has though...*

*P2: Yeah but that was just a warning coz they'd seen my Frosty Jacks [brand of white cider]. They didn't even make me pour it out though. (FG9)*

Indeed, when these groups of young people were reprimanded by police officers they generally saw themselves as responsible, citing their own behaviour as being the reason for this attention. As in the following extract, such groups typically experienced police intervention when acting in an overtly dangerous or irresponsible manner.

*I: Do you ever get hassled by the police?*

*P2: Once well, we really did ask for it. We were really stupid.*

*P3: Hmm, yeah that wasn't really for drinking that was more for the location we'd chosen...*

*P2: We went up to the primary school refectory and we got on the roof. <laughs> (FG4)*



'Mainstream' and 'alternative' groups comprised of members over the age of 18 also viewed the response of police officers in this way i.e. as something which could reasonably be expected should they act in an irresponsible or antisocial manner.

*P2: They've got to do their jobs and we shouldn't be out here wrecking the place after drinking. So they've got a job to do and we should just be okay. It's fair enough. But if we're just behaving ourselves like tonight then we're alright.*

*I: A few people we've spoken to feel like they're getting chased around?*

*P2: No I don't feel like that at all, I think that when we cause them bother, they cause us bother eh? (FG13)*

Though 'alternative' and 'mainstream' street drinkers generally saw policing as fair, some resentment was expressed regarding the confiscation of alcohol, specifically the manner in which some police officers chose to carry out these duties. Treatment seen as patronising or even vindictive in nature was viewed as arising as a result of police officers' stereotypical beliefs about young people.

*P2: They don't seem too bad, they're quite nice...*

*P3: Sometimes they're evil though and pure pour it out in front of you and you're like [makes a horrified face] "Oh, no! What you doing? I just bought that 10 minutes ago!"*

*P2: Some of them are quite cheeky! And see if they just said right, "We're going to throw this away" and just threw it in the bin you'd be like sound and that coz we're not allowed it but some of them are pure wide about it...*

*P3: ... just really, really cheeky to you. And they pure patronise you and all that.*

*P3: It's kinda like, "Ha, ha! You got caught," kinda thing.*

*P2: Aye, aye.*

*P1: And it's like "Don't say anything or we'll take you to the van" sort of thing.*

*P3: I know! Aye, coz you can't answer back, like if you say to them like, "Oh, do you have to do that?" They say, "Oh, shut up or we'll just take you down to the station" and you're like, "Crap!"*

*I: But why do they do that? I don't understand?*

*P3: Coz sometimes some of the people that they do catch are quite cheeky towards them so they just assume – it's like stereotyping. They just assume that all the kids will be "Oy, what you doing you prick" and all that. But we're really nice [FG24]*

In general however, relations seemed good with some accounts suggesting that at least a proportion of these young people felt that police officers had their best interests and safety at heart.

*P3: Yeah, they're like "Watch out you don't get stabbed" and all that - they're the nicest. The undercover ones pour out your drink.*

*P4: Watch out you don't get too drunk. [FG19]*

#### Violence and Harassment from other Street Drinkers

In many of the focus groups conducted, participants reported the experience of harassment and sometimes violence whilst drinking outside. This was most apparent among groups of younger drinkers, especially 'mainstream' and 'alternative' youths who frequently complained of being victimized by 'neds' looking for a fight.

*I: Do you ever get any hassle?*

*P2: Off neds? Usually, "Gies a fag" and all that. I've been in a fight and all.*

*P1: This boy was trying to fight with him [indicates P1] He was smashed and he thought he could do anything coz he was from the [name of area].*

*P2: He thought he was mental coz he was from the [name of area] and he was like 6 foot so he thought he could hassle us. He was an arsehole.*

*I: Why do you think they go for you?*

*P2: They'll just go for anyone if they're drunk. They just want to fight people. (FG11)*

Often 'alternative' youths felt that their appearance was a key reason for this alleged harassment, in that this readily identified them as outgroup targets for 'neds.' However, it was evident that the visible presence of cigarettes and alcohol acted as a catalyst for trouble by attracting the attention of these individuals who, according to reports, used violence or physical intimidation to extort these resources from their victims, be they male or female. The following extract from a mixed-sex alternative drinking group was fairly typical in this respect.

*P1: We get hassled a lot by neds, he got [referring to P3] his beer got stolen*

*P3: They grabbed it right off me....*

*P1: ...his can got nicked, they threw it at his head, threw it at him..*

*P3: But I put my hands up like that and deflected it so I only got beer on my trainer.*

*I: Do you get that a lot when you're out drinking?*

*P1: Last time my twin, coz I've got a twin...last time a ned tried to hit her with a belt. Like they came right up and he'd taken his belt off and swung it at them [points at P3]*

*P3: But I ducked so he didn't get me.*

*I: Why do they hassle you?*

*P1: Coz we're not neds like them, they don't like anyone else who's not neds. They just think they can do what they want. So they see our clothes and that we've got beer and they come after us for that.*

*P2: Yeah, because they can't get it themselves, they can't be bothered getting it for themselves. They take one look at the way we look, you know?*

*P4: They prefer to take ours than get their own, probably no one would serve them. (FG1)*

Though the experience of physical aggression appeared quite common in young people's descriptions, it was clear that the violence involved in such episodes varied widely from intimidation which stopped short of physical aggression to more serious assaults involving weapons. The response of most of these young people was to give in to the demands of the aggressors or to avoid further trouble by running away. However, as in the following extract, it was clear that the consumption of alcohol could increase the risk of confrontation as drinkers became less inhibited and more prone to act in defiance of aggressors. These points are illustrated in the extract below.

*P1: They walked along past us and then about 10 minutes later they came walking back and came straight to me and my friend and they were just kinda like, you know, "Gies your beer." Straight away. Straight away! They'd like they'd walked past and seen us and decided further on like oh, lets go get a drink. We were just kind, "Nah" - we'd already had a couple by this point so we were already sitting there and we were like, "Nah!" Just completely confused by what they were asking! I mean we'd known that neds'll kick the shit out you and all that but it's just we weren't thinking about it at the time coz we'd been drinking. We were like "We're no giving you our beer!" It was like and they just kinda went "Oh, er goanee just gies wan [one]!" And we're like "FINE" - opened it for them and just handed to them and they just kinda like, "Can we like have another?" And then they walked off! We're like, "Ooooh, shit! We'll find another spot."*

*I: What about you have you any experiences like that?*

*P2: Yeah 'cept not as nice!*

*I: Can you give me an example?*

*P2: Sitting in the park just next to my house, yeah? And me and some of my friends and we're all big guys so the neds come for us first so they get the weaker ones. And sitting with waur [our] vodka and waur beers and they come over and say give us that and we're like same as him, "Nope." So they whip out a blade which is like this size [6 inches] roughly and chase us, round the park like 3 times, out the park, along to my friend's house and then try and tan [smash] the windows. And another time when they chased us along to the police station. (FG23)*

The threat of violence seemed a particular problem for younger drinkers. Indeed, older 'mainstream' and 'alternative' groups felt themselves to be relatively safe from such harassment. When older groups

did discuss violence associated with drinking outdoors it was as an inconvenience, in that should a fight break out this would necessitate moving to a different location to avoid involvement, thus interrupting the drinking session. These accounts typically confirmed groups of 'neds' as the aggressors in observed incidents.

*P3: Guaranteed you'll get some ned coming in here later on, fucked out his face on a litre of Bucky [Buckfast Tonic Wine] and all the atmosphere just changes and it'll be a riot and then next thing you know the police'll be in the park clearing everybody and that'll be it so I think in social gatherings like this when everybody is in a good mood and that, I think it should be allowed.*

*I: So if trouble started would you just leave?*

*P2: Aye, aye if there was a fight broke out we'd just go. Go straight away.*

*I: But the neds don't bother you?*

*P1: No, they're only interested in stabbing each other [laughs] (FG6)*

Overall then, the reports of 'alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers indicated that violence and harassment by 'neds' was a common problem associated with street drinking. No equivalent descriptions were found within the accounts of self-identified 'neds' however, suggesting that such violence was not reciprocal in nature. Instead, when these groups did discuss violence, they described fighting with gangs of youths from similar cultural backgrounds. Such infractions were believed to be the inevitable result of large numbers of young males gathering in the same social space.

*I: Do you get any hassle off anyone else when you're drinking outside, like not the police but other people your age?*

*All; Aye, aye*

*P4: Aye, we do, probably end up gang fighting. Aye.*

*I: So do you think there's a link between fighting and drinking outside?*

*All: Aye, aye definitely. Definitely.*

*I: How come?*

*P4: Well, whenever you get another crowd of boys even when you don't want to cause it's you know, it's just slagging each other and stuff and then it gets out of hand and stuff happens. (FG7)*

Indeed, another participant described how "getting your drinking head on" could lead to challenges being issued between young males in rival gangs with violence as the likely outcome.

*I: What about other gangs?*

*P1: Well that's a different story. Me personally when I was younger I did used to get into a lot of trouble but. It was because we were annoying people. You're just drinking and getting your drinking head on which makes you want to annoy people they say something, you say something back and before you know it everyone is going for it, you know? (FG3)*

Other participants reported experiencing no problems of this kind. For this group, this seemed less related to harmony between participants and other street drinkers and more to do with the deterrent effect of the groups' reputation as being comprised of 'hard' men (i.e. capable of handling threats of violence).

*P4: We dinnae get hassled by folk man. Nae mair [no more] than anyone else.*

*P2: Aye naebody bothers us man, naebody bothers us he's a convict man [pointing to man on bench who has chosen not to participate] Hard man. People will nae mess wi' him.*

*P4: Aye, you've got a record yersel, ya wee prick.*

*P2: So has he [points to P1] (FG5)*

The amount of harassment street drinkers encountered from others whilst drinking seemed to some extent to be determined by the amount of time they spent drinking outside. Indeed, older groups who drank outside for only short periods of time before going to the pub reported less trouble than younger groups who did not have this option and thus tended to spend their entire nights drinking in outdoor locations.

*I: Do you get any hassle from guys that might be wandering about as well?*

*P3: Naw, naw, we don't get hassle from folk, we're no here long. We're only here till we go tae the pub. (FG13)*

#### *Violence and Harassment from other Street Drinkers: Gender-specific risks*

Typically, the violent incidents described by participants involved young males as both victims and perpetrators. Indeed, young male street drinkers were seen by both males and females as being more at risk of violence than their female peers. As a result, girls felt they were relatively safe when drinking in locations considered dangerous for boys. This female participants did appear to feel at risk of violence when drinking "under the bridges" by a major river despite seeing her male friends as likely to be targeted for aggression there.

*P2: ... if you're a guy it's dangerous, if you're a girl it's alright.*

*P1: Thanks very much*

*P2: Aye, you can't drink down under the bridges. All my guy friends like you'll get folk that are the same as us and then you'll get the neddy guys come down drunk and they're just like, "Aw, he looks different, he's a guy we'll kick his head in" kinda thing. (FG19)*

Though females were believed to be less likely to be the target of violent assaults, they were not entirely free from physical threat whilst outside drinking. Indeed, a significant number of female participants reported they had been physically assaulted whilst drinking outdoors. Most often the perpetrators were other females from different cultural groups also engaged in street drinking. Here, females in a 'mainstream' group discussed a violent clash with female 'neds.'

*I: So do you ever have problems with other young people?*

*P1: She did. Got hit by a girl.*

*P5: Aye we do, see that [points to cut on her face] that got done by a girl with a heel. And the guys they hang about with are just as bad. (FG16)*

This was not always the case however, in that some young women interviewed reported physical aggression from male street drinkers as well. This was apparent in the account of this 'alternative' female.

*P4: We get hassled just as much as anyone, we get hassled from guys, It's guys we get hassle from, like I mean my friend, she's just walking along from [name of large mainline train station] and someone banged into her and she turns round and says, "Excuse me!" Like as in, "Manners don't cost nuthin" and he punches her in the face. A drunk guy just punches like a 15 year old lassie in the face. (FG21)*

More commonly reported as a problem by female drinkers was the predatory behaviour of older males encountered whilst street drinking. Experiences of sexual harassment appeared in a number of accounts.

*I: Have you ever been hassled by someone else other than police?*

*All: Neds. Drunken old men. Perverts!*

*P2: There used to be this wee old man in a wheel chair and he had one leg and he used to go about with like a bottle of vodka and he passed me once and he felt my boob! I should have pushed him down a hill or something, it was disgusting! [laughs] (FG21)*

Though girls frequently recognised the threat from predatory males, such harassment did not appear to be taken too seriously. Indeed it was evident that regardless of their degree of awareness of the potential dangers that faced them, some girls still took risks. In the following extract, one girl described becoming separated from her group after wandering off alone whilst drunk. Ironically, her expectation of support from others present appeared to decrease her inclination to view herself as being at risk by increasing her perception of safety.

*P3: Usually another group will come and stick up for you, if there's another group they'll come and sit behind you and everything. Like that's what usually happens when I'm sitting by myself other people will come up.*

*I: You go out by yourself?*

*P4: Why are you sitting by yourself?*

*P3: Coz like I usually walk away or something*

*P2: She just gets drunk and wanders off basically.*

*P3: I just go up to new groups of people and say "Hiya!"*

*P2: She just gets herself into trouble.*

*I: Do you not worry about like sleazy guys...*

*P3: No, who cares? (FG19)*

Indeed, it was questionable in some cases how much protection could be gained from drinking in groups which included older (and therefore apparently more responsible) individuals. Rather than looking out for younger individuals in the group, this participant appeared to view their risky behaviour as a form of entertainment.

*I: So why do you two prefer drinking outside when you can get into the pub?*

*P3: Coz it's mad!*

*P4: You get a better laugh, better patter, eh? You get to see them [younger ones] out their nuts.*

*P2: The younger ones and that, making an arse of theirself.*

*P4: Falling about. Lying on street corners and that. Up at the post office man, he was sleeping up there. (FG12)*

This noted, the preceding extract was taken from an all male group. Other comments indicated that females in street drinking groups may in fact have gained additional protection from male group members even if they were not part of the immediate group, perhaps due to some sense of chivalry on the part of these individuals.

*P4: He took someone to the hospital one night, didn't even know her name.*

*P3: I canny even remember her name but, I had to gie her a fireman's lift to the hospital she was that drunk. She was only 14. She was a wee girl with blonde hair from up by the big graveyard (FG21)*

In other cases, the groups girls were members of appeared to be involved in risky behaviour which may endanger them. This seemed to be the case in this group of underage drinkers interviewed in a rural location whose comments indicated that young people in this group were engaged in risky sexual activities whilst drinking heavily.

*P2: No you want me to tell you right? We drink outside coz there's bushes, better for shagging*

*P3: Aye can you no shag in the hoose, like?*

*P2: See her? I took her virginity in that bush there. She's not a virgin any mair [points to intoxicated girl] (FG22)*

### Summary

Thus, most participants viewed street drinking as an activity which carried certain risks for the individuals involved. In general, street drinkers were concerned with being detected and reprimanded by the police and/or being victimized by other street drinkers. The extent to which street drinkers were concerned with these potential hazards was a function of their age and cultural background. Younger street drinkers were revealed as a particularly high-risk group, whilst their older counterparts viewed themselves as relatively safe from harm when drinking outdoors. Culturally, 'neds' felt themselves most at risk of unwanted police attention and frequently reported feeling persecuted due to negative stereotyping by police officers. These observations were confirmed by 'alternative' and 'mainstream' groups some of whom expressed concern that current policing practices were potentially discriminatory and as such might encourage rather than prevent trouble among 'neds.' With regards their own treatment, these groups typically felt they were treated fairly and continued to hold positive perceptions of the police. Indeed, 'alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers expressed more concern about the possibility of being victimized whilst out street drinking, providing numerous examples of (often) violent harassment from groups of 'neds.' Young people who identified themselves as 'neds' also discussed the possibility of violence whilst drinking outdoors but referred to gang fights with other youths from similar cultural backgrounds. Indeed, such clashes were viewed the inevitable outcome of large numbers of young males gathering in the same social space whilst drinking. In general, females saw themselves at less risk of violent victimisation than males of a similar age and when violence was described incidents typically involved other females as perpetrators. This noted, females spoke of the sexual threat they felt they faced when out drinking. Though such risks were recognized, these dangers did not appear to be taken too seriously. Further, though girls often discussed the risks posed to them by the strangers they encountered whilst out drinking, rarely did these individuals recognize that group members themselves might also pose a threat to their safety.



### **Reasons for Street Drinking**

Given that street drinking was viewed as a risky activity by most of those involved, it was of interest why participants still chose to drink outside. Analysis revealed that participants' decisions to drink outside were due in large part to their exclusion from indoor drinking settings but were further shaped by their perceptions of outdoor locations as desirable places to consume alcohol.

#### Exclusion from indoor drinking locations

Exclusion from indoor drinking locations was a problem for many of the participants interviewed. Street drinkers could be excluded by age (in that they were too young to gain access to these settings); by association (prevented from entering pubs and clubs due to the age of their friends); due to their own behaviour (i.e. being barred from indoor drinking locations); or by being 'costed out' (i.e. discouraged from spending part or all of their night in indoor drinking locations due to the expense of such activities). These types of exclusion are discussed here in turn.

For many participants, outdoor drinking represented a forced choice, arising from exclusion from indoor settings such as pubs and clubs. For some participants, this exclusion occurred a result of their age (which was below the legal limit) and/or their youthful appearance. The accounts of these individuals suggested that given the option, their preference would be to drink indoors. As this was not possible however, outdoor drinking became the acceptable (if not ideal) alternative. In other words, street drinking became a necessary stop-gap adopted until such time that access to more desirable indoor locations could be obtained.

*P4: Drinking in the park at night when you're younger, you do that until you don't have to do it any more.*

*P3: It's till you can get into pubs*

*P2: Aye, you canny get in anywhere.(FG3)*

For many underage drinkers, the potential embarrassment of being turned away or denied service was enough to deter attempts to gain access to pubs and clubs until such time as they felt they would obtain entry. Others still attempted to gain access pubs and bars on the off-chance that they would be admitted but were only occasionally successful. The following extract demonstrates this range of opinions.

*I: Do you actually try to go to pub or do you just tend to drink outside?*

*All: No.*

*P3: I very seldom go into a pub*

*P4: No, we don't coz then we don't get in when we do come of age.*

*I: I was wondering whether you've tried*

*P3: I've been into a few pubs*

*P4/5: I've been in...some, some pubs.*

*P4: I wouldnae [would not] try I'd be too embarrassed, I wouldnae even try and buy it in case somebody told me no.*

*P2: Try it! Try it! You might get in, you might not, that's the way I see it. (FG21)*

As well as being excluded from bars and clubs, younger participants were also less likely to have free access to alternative indoor locations (such as private houses or flats) where they could drink. Living with parents who disapproved of their behaviour meant that drinking had to be concealed for fear of repercussions. This in turn displaced drinking to settings where discovery was less likely. In this case, parental disapproval was avoided by drinking whilst walking the streets.

*P2: I usually have to drink outside because my friend's mum is against us drinking we can't sit in the garden like this man, so we usually walk in the street with like a bottle of vodka or beer. Whatever we can drink. (FG23)*

Indeed, fear of parental reprisals meant that even if most young people preferred to drink in their homes this was not perceived as possible. Though expressing the belief that their homes represented a safer environment than the streets as a place to consume alcohol, this group felt that unless their houses were empty (something which did not happen frequently) they would be forced to go elsewhere.

*P2: It's fun to drink outdoors coz you can do more like, really, do more stuff than you can really in your in the house and stuff like that, if there are like parents there, outside you can basically do anything but It's safer in the house*

*P3: Yeah, I was gonna say actually I prefer to do it in the house that's if there's no one in, coz yeah like it's safer but that hardly ever happens. (FG4)*

For some, this meant not only drinking outside but drinking in locations far removed from the family home in order to limit the chances of detection. This group of female street drinkers indicated that one reason for travelling to the city centre as a location for street drinking was to ensure that detection by parents was not possible.

*P3: I always come to town to drink coz if you're in like your own area you always scared in case like your mum or something...there's always something..*

*P1: ...get OVER it!...*

*P2...Nah, but when I was younger especially, that's what I always used to worry about! In case like my ma walked round the corner and I was sitting with a bottle of cider like..hi! [laughs] (FG24)*

This noted, parental disapproval was not a problem for all the underage drinkers interviewed. Indeed, some individuals (typically those participants who identified themselves as 'neds') reported that their parents accepted this behaviour (though within certain parameters). Despite this, drinking at home was still not an option, seemingly because parents did not wish large groups of teenagers hanging around under foot. As a result underage drinking among these groups was also displaced to outdoor locations.

*I: How come you drink outdoors then?*

*P2: Underage!*

*I: So would your mums and dads not approve?*

*P1 & 2: No they know we drink outside.*

*P3: They all ken [know] we drink.*

*P1: See us three here [indicates 1,2 and 6] We usually sit in our houses*

*P3: Yeah, but yous can do that coz he's got his ain bit [own place]...we're no allowed. And you canny fit all your pals in yer house so you get more excited*

*P4: Aye there's too many of us. My maw [mother] goes mental man if we're hanging about [about] the house. (FG22)*

Street drinking for some young people of this cultural background appeared to be part of a larger pattern of risk-taking behaviour that was culturally recognized as part of growing up in the areas where they were from.

*P2: No my ma [mother] knows I drink but she knows she cannae [can't] stop me because my two older brothers and my two older sisters have done it so she cannae stop me.*

*P1: Ma ma couldnae stop me since I was about fourteen.*

*P2: Since I turned sixteen I've been allowed to stay oot aw [out all] night because again she knows she cannae stop me. She knows it be unfair if she didnae [didn't] let me because she let them, but ma brother got a girl pregnant when he was thirteen and he started smoking dope and smoking, drinking at twelve as well and he's been allowed to smoke since then.*

*P1: So wis ah. [So was I]*

*P2: So I started smoking since then.*

*P1: So wis ah, smoking, smoking weed, smoking whatever we wanted. That what happens when you stay here. (FG2)*

Amongst participants over 18 (i.e. those able to legally gain access to licensed premises), exclusion could still play a role in decisions to drink outside. Indeed, two of groups interviewed (both comprised of ‘neds’) reported that their street drinking was in some part due to being barred from pubs in their local areas. Thus, street drinking was seen as a forced choice.

*I: Why do you choose to drink outside instead of in a pub?*

*All: Coz we’re barred, we’re barred from all the pubs down our way! Barred, aye.*

*I: How did that happen?*

*P4: It wasnae us it was two other people erm, fighting in the pub and coz we were with ‘em*

*P2: We were barred coz we were with them we got barred.*

*P3: Coz we were with that group we were barred from the pubs for that reason.*

*I: So if you could get into a pub would you prefer to?*

*All: Aye! (FG7)*

Though it would seem possible for members of these groups to find bars in other areas where they might be served, they seemed unwilling to attempt this. This was linked to the expectation that they might be refused entry to pubs and clubs in different neighbourhoods. Anticipating that this would lead to frustration, disappointment and a spoiled evening, drinking outside became a more appealing option as this participant explained.

*P1: So the only way I get into that pub right is eh, because ma family’s well known in that pub. There’s nae point in going in the toon [town] cause you’re no gonnae get in the places there. Well probably you could try to get in the place but if you get knocked back you’re gonnae hae [have] to try and get in another place and you get knocked back but. It’s gonnae take you about three quarters of an hour tae try and get in. S’no worth it. (FG2)*

A more common reason for over-18’s to drink outside was their desire to socialise with younger friends who were unable to gain entry to pubs and clubs due to their age. As young people did not tend to socialize in groups conveniently delineated by age, this was a common problem. Like many other participants, these individuals (aged between 17 and 19) chose to exclude themselves from such settings in order to keep their social groups intact.

*P3: I think mostly the reason why we drink in the streets is because most of our friends are like underage so they can't get in so it's a bit boring when we're sitting in a pub and all of our friends are outside. You're like we'll just drink anyway, we'll just go and drink with them, kinda thing.*

*I: So you could go to a pub...*

*P3: Yeah, we could but we hang about with so many different people that we...*

*P1:...you just don't want to leave them all outside..*

*P3: Yeah, It's not as if we all hang about with everyone whose 18, it's not like 18 year olds, then 17 year olds, then...it's like everyone just mixes and we all talk to different people so you feel bad if two of us are 18 and we're like, "Oh, we'll go for a drink" and then you've always got one sitting there thinking, "Oh I canny get in." So you feel bad. (FG24)*

Other drank outside because they could not afford to spend an entire night drinking in pubs and clubs. As such these individuals could be seen as being 'costed out' of such environments. Indeed, almost all groups whose members were over 18 (or else confident of being allowed into a bar to drink) reported that their street drinking was a form of preloading which preceded (or else replaced) going to the pub.

*I: All you guys can get in pubs so why are you still outside?*

*P4: Coz it's cheaper, it's cheaper to get a carry -out first.*

*P2: It's cheaper to get gassed outside like - whether it's in the house or outside, it's cheaper to get gassed outside than go in the pub and have a couple of drinks, that's what we're saying. (FG13)*

### Drinking outdoors by choice

Though exclusion played an important role in decisions to drink outside, outdoor locations were themselves identified as having a distinct appeal as places to consume alcohol. Locations chosen were often green, open and picturesque. Many participants felt that drinking outdoors meant they were socially and physically unrestricted. A number of individuals commented that they enjoyed the sensation of freedom and physical space which accompanied being outside in that this gave them the freedom to do what they wanted.

*P3: It is a good laugh, you can do anything you want outside. You make as much noise as you want outside.*

*P2: You can make a lot of noise up this fucking hill I'm telling you. (FG14)*

This was apparent in several accounts. For example, this group contrasted the restricted nature of drinking indoors to the freedom of drinking outside where they could enjoy physical activities such as football.

*P1: There's less rules*

*P2: You can mess about and that when you're outside, eh?*

*I: What sort of stuff do you get up to?*

*P3: Kick a ball, run around with a ball, just stuff like that, playing football and that you canny play football in a pub! (FG3)*

Thus, drinking outside was seen as fun. Though enjoyment of this activity was a powerful motivation for engaging in street drinking, it was also clear that underage youths saw few alternatives. This was particularly apparent in rural locations where leisure activities for young people were felt to be lacking. According to this group the absence of "something good" in their lives led to street drinking as a way of filling this gap. Though having "nothing to dae" appeared to be part of this problem, the overall impression was that for some young adults the social problems which motivated street drinking went beyond a lack of resources for young people.

*P3: Tell you what it is, there's nothing for us round here, nothing to dae [do]. And I think the reason we all drink is because it's something good in our lives. Makes us feel good. I don't think we'd drink as much if we had something else.*

*P4: Yeah, it's shit round here. (FG22)*

In urban areas where more resources were available, activities offered to young people were often rejected as being inappropriate or undesirable. In general, young people wished to engage in activities which provided a chance to meet others of a similar age (or better still, those who were older). These participants contrasted street drinking to other activities available to youths of a similar age to themselves (i.e. 16 to 18 years). One of these activities (i.e. going to the cinema) was viewed not only expensive but also as preventing socializing, thus failing to fulfil the criteria of a good night out. Street drinking on the other hand, represented better value to those with limited funds, providing an activity that (for the same amount of money) lasted longer and allowed young people to socialise with others of a similar age.

*P3: I know there's like the cinema and that but it's like really expensive as well and you're thinking, why should we pay a fiver a head to go and like sit for two hours when we could pay a fiver and sit for hours and hours and hours and talk to all these different people, kinda thing. You can have a better time!*

*P1: Yeah, yeah!*

*P3: Coz you can pay a fiver and sit in a cinema hall for 2 hours you don't talk to anyone.*

*P2: You don't meet people!*

*P3: You don't do anything, whereas if you pay a fiver, have a couple of drinks like you're sitting in a park you're having a few drinks you're talking to everybody round about you coz they're all kinda of like going, "Ah, how you doing? Nice day the day." (FG24)*

Another activity available to under 18's was underage discos or "the unders." Though this gave youths of a similar age a chance to socialize, this activity was seen as appropriate only for younger individuals. As this group continued they made it clear that by the age of 16, young people felt they had matured out of this activity and desired instead the company of older youths with whom they felt they identified more. Increased contact with older individuals underlined further the necessity for young people of this age to distance themselves from such activities or risk being seen as immature. Overall, these comments reveal a developmental gap in resources available to young people who considered themselves too mature to attend activities designed for underagers but who were too young to gain access to licensed premises.

*I: Did you ever go to the unders?*

*All: Yeah*

*I: What are they like?*

*P1: Rubbish [general agreement]*

*P2: You love it when you're younger but, it is well good.*

*P1: Aye, when you're 14 you're like, "Oooo!"*

*P2: Aye, It's amazing. I think that's where you meet most people...*

*P3: ...aye but then after that you're just like, nah, come on we'll just go out and have a drink instead of going to the unders coz it just gets boring.*

*P1: Aye exactly!*

*I: So what age do you reckon that happens at?*

*P1: About 16...*

*P3: Aye.*

*P1: One of the main reasons that I would never go back to the unders is coz of, there'd be 12 year olds and all that there.*

*P3: Aye, exactly!*

*P1: It becomes like, yeah what's that all about?*

*P3: Especially when you get to 16 you just start to talking to older people anyway and all the older people are like, "Hah! You go the unders - state!" (FG24)*

Indeed, street drinking was considered a highly social activity, providing a reason for groups of friends to gather together. For drinkers who could not gain access to indoor drinking locations, parks and public greens served a similar purpose, providing known areas where large numbers of like-minded individuals could meet and socialise freely. Indeed, field observations indicated that small groups of street drinkers tended to cluster, often occupying the same physical space leading to socialising between groups. An added benefit of drinking outdoors therefore, was meeting new friends.

*P1 & 2: There's always lots of people to meet and hang out with.*

*P2: Our friends are here usually and other people as well, like alternative people.*

*P3: Yeah, you get to meet new and interesting people [laughs]*

*P1: Make new friends with people who are here as well. (FG1)*

For the same reasons, drinking outside also provided the opportunity for meeting potential romantic partners. This was particularly important for group of lesbian and gay youths interviewed who explained that street drinking gave them the opportunity meet other young people of similar sexuality.

*I: Do you come here a lot to drink?*

*P1: Yes! All the time. To drink!*

*P2: If you come here there's more lesbians here. I can pull.*

*I: Do you come to the city centre if you're going to drink?*

*P1: Yes!!*

*P2: No, I come here to pull!*

*P1: Shut up! She comes to drink here as well.*

*P2: Yeah, pull and drink at the weekend. Coz there's other people like us there, who all hang about there, other lesbians.(FG9)*

The socially unrestricted nature of drinking outside was also important to those in mixed-age drinking groups, in that this allowed these groups to remain intact. For older individuals in these groups street drinking was not only more fun (due to the presence of their younger friends) but also saved them money.



*I: Why do you choose to drink outside?*

*All: [in unison] Coz we're too young to get in the pubs...*

*P1: I can get into the pubs in town but it's not the same.*

*P2: Depends which pubs you go to...*

*P1: Coz you go in with people. You don't go in with a bunch of people and it's not as fun and it's much dearer.*

*P3: And you don't get served (FG19)*

For some groups of preloaders, an additional advantage of drinking outside was being able to drink large quantities of alcohol at speed. This group discussed the comparative effectiveness of pub drinking and outdoor drinking as a means of getting “wallaped” (i.e. very drunk) noting that the expense of buying drinks in pubs made this form of drinking “too slow.”

*P4: Aye, it's cheaper tae get fucked here and then go doon the pub. Saves money. If you drink in the pub, it's too slow man.*

*P2: Get mad wi' it up here then go doon, it's cheaper and it's quicker. Then yer wallaped for the rest of the night man but you dinnae pay as much. (FG5)*

Drinking in outdoor locations also allowed smokers the opportunity to have a cigarette whilst drinking alcohol. This was particularly appealing for young people whose parents disapproved of them smoking in their presence.

*I: To what extent has it [drinking outside] to do with, do any of you smoke? Does that have anything to do with drinking outside?*

*P2: Yeah, yeah, when I drink I normally smoke coz it's really social. I know that's stupid answer to say but it's true*

*I: Would being able to drink and smoke at the same time be a motivation for drinking outside rather than inside though?*

*P2: Erm, yeah. Because you can't exactly smoke in the house (FG4)*

For participants who had the option of smoking in their own homes, being able to smoke outside whilst drinking was not so important. Indeed, though the smoking ban in Scotland prohibits smoking in pubs and clubs, most participants expressed positive (or at least neutral) opinions of this arrangement.

*I: Does it make you more likely to drink outside, because outside you can smoke?*

*P2: I think it's quite good actually [the smoking ban]. The one time I drink outside is with 'Henry' [cannabis] (FG13)*

As in both the previous and following accounts, it was apparent that drinking outside did hold an additional appeal for those who wished to smoke cannabis whilst drinking.

*P1: No, SHUTUP. Let's give them the right reason, [FUCK YOU!] we come here to get stoned. [laughter]*

*I: So is that a big part of it so you can drink and get stoned at the same time?*

*P1: Aye! Aye! Just like to sit here with a big fat cone and get really stoned. (FG22)*

### Summary

In general, participants chose to drink outside because they were excluded from indoor drinking locations. Some individuals were too young to gain entry to pubs and clubs and risked parental disapproval if they tried to drink at home. With extremely limited access to indoor drinking locations, street drinking became the norm amongst these individuals until access to indoor drinking locations could be gained. Street drinkers who were over the legal age limit also felt that exclusion played a part in their decision to drink outside. Some had been barred from their local pubs and were unwilling to try other places in case of refusal. For these individuals, outdoor drinking was an easy (if not ideal) alternative. Others could gain access to licensed premises as individuals but because of younger friends could not get into pubs and clubs as part of a group. Faced with the choice of drinking alone or with only a selection of their friends, these individuals chose to self-exclude in order to keep friendship groups intact. Though exclusion was a problem, drinking outside had its own appeal. Participants saw drinking in outdoor locations as less physically and socially restricting allowing individuals of different age groups and backgrounds to interact freely. As alternative leisure activities were limited for underage drinkers, or considered inappropriate (being too restrictive or expensive etc) street drinking held a special appeal in this respect. Street drinking was also seen as being good value for money, offering a cheap alternative to those who felt an entire night in the pub to be beyond their means. The chance to preload was especially important for those whose aim was to get very drunk rapidly but did not have the money to do so in a pub. Being able to smoke whilst drinking was important only to younger participants who risked parental disapproval by engaging in either activity within their own homes. When drinkers did have access to other inside locations where they could smoke and drink simultaneously such considerations had only minimal impact on decision to drink outside. This noted, stronger links were apparent between smoking cannabis and street drinking among this age group.

### **Choosing a Location for Street Drinking**

The locations groups chose to drink and the extent to which they moved around whilst drinking were affected by a number of factors. In general, street drinkers preferred quiet, attractive locations where they could relax and socialise with others of a similar age and social background. The following account was typical in this respect:

*I: So when you do drink outside, what kinds of places do you go?*

*P3: If it's like sunny but we'd try and find somewhere nice, like if it was sunny.*

*P1: Like a grass bit*

*P3: Just so like you could enjoy the company of other people as well though (FG24)*

For those whose drinking was very occasional (i.e. encouraged by the desire to enjoy good weather), this was the only criteria for their choice of location. This was particularly apparent in the choices made by older 'mainstream' and 'alternative' groups for whom outdoor drinking was weather dependent.

*I: How often do you drink outside?*

*P3: Every time it's a sunny day*

*P1: Most times when it's nice, aye. If not we tend to drink in the house mair. [more]*

*I: So if it's rainy or if it's cold would you still...?*

*P3: No, no not if it was rainy I mean what's the point in sitting here if it's raining, know what I mean? Whereas if you a sunny day you can keep your eye open for the talent as well, it's good fun. (FG6)*

By contrast, younger drinkers who were excluded from indoor drinking locations and thus did not have the option of drinking in pubs or at home, tended to drink outside whatever the weather. As such their choice of drinking location could vary dependent on weather conditions.

*I: What do you do when the weather's bad, do you still come out?*

*P3: We go somewhere like it's covered*

*P2: Like that one over there. We've asked if we can go into that pub when it's pure freezing outside.*

*P3: ...but if it's pure freezing we still come out coz there's nothing else to do anyway but we just try and find somewhere, it just gives us a challenge to find somewhere to go! (FG21)*

However, other considerations were involved in participants' decisions about where to drink. A powerful influence on the locations chosen for street drinking was group members' desire to minimise

what they felt were the risks of drinking outside (i.e. unwanted police attention and harassment from other street drinkers). Choice of location was motivated by the groups' priorities in this respect which in turn appeared to be shaped by the age and cultural background of group members. Unsurprisingly, a concern for many groups containing underage drinkers was choosing a location that made detection by the police unlikely.

*P1: We're not supposed to drink outside so you're best if you go somewhere quiet then naebody can complain about you.*

*P4: That's basically what we try and do...*

*P5: Avoid the police*

*P4: So we go to places like the wee Jewish graveyard over there... (FG21)*

However, the emphasis placed on this as a priority when choosing a location for street drinking varied according to group members' expectations of how they would be treated by the police. Thus, groups of 'neds' who felt targeted and harassed by police officers, placed a great deal of emphasis on finding ways of evading detection. Moving around whilst drinking was one way of doing this. Indeed, some groups went to great lengths to ensure they were not caught as the following extract demonstrates. Places frequented by these groups for the purposes of consuming alcohol were varied. Though this group seemed to prefer central, public locations as a venue for street drinking (such as parks and street corners), they were forced to abandon these locations as a result of police intervention, moving further out to a more isolated and hidden locations where interruption was less likely.

*I: When you are drinking outside where do you choose to drink?*

*P2: Anywhere, streets or anywhere.*

*P4: Local park really.*

*P3: Streets, street corners and that, aye.*

*I: Do you move around when you're drinking?*

*All: Aye.*

*I: What types of places do you go?*

*P2: There's a field we go to...*

*P4: And then there's a park right next to it. We go there and there's a bookies, stand on the corner there.*

*I: The places you drink, do you choose them for any specific reason?*

*P4: Just to get away from the police, somewhere to get away from the police really.*

*P2: Like anywhere we know the police canny go and pour out your drinks we just go in there.*

*I: How much hassle do you actually get from them?*

*P1: All the time. Every weekend man. Need to run away from them move to another park or somewhere out the way.*

*P4: They know us on a first name basis, just pour out all your drink for nae [no] reason. So even though it's no opened they just still pour it all out, in front of you. Or they make you pour it out.*

*P3: There's no really any point in running away from them coz they follow us about, know? They already know us so they'll get us later on...*

*P4: Aye, just get you later on in the night. Willnae leave us alone.*

*P4: So it's places with big trees, basically for camouflage.*

*P2: Aye, the field is the place for that. It's just a big abandoned place with hunners of trees and that, just sit away up there and it's away oot the way. Police never come up there.*

*P1: Next to the motorway.*

*P2: It's next to the motorway so it is. (FG7)*

This was also apparent in the comments of this group of female ('ned') street drinkers. Such individuals felt forced to wander the streets to evade the police, frequenting numerous hang-outs and hideaways in their quest to find a spot where they would remain undetected.

*P5: The police never leave us alaine [alone].*

*[girl 1] The police are always chasing us about...*

*P3: Aye, aye from here to there to there to there, all over the place, even when we're no causing trouble they after us, man.*

*P5: It's no fair, just all night like we start off here and we might head up the road to [name of area], or the woods or doon the park or the school..*

*[girl 1] ....we're just walking around all night, never getting a seat. It's shit man. We never get to stay anywhere for more than 5 minutes. (FG22)*

Thus, attempts to avoid the police often led to high mobility among these groups and a tendency to select locations which were well-concealed from public view. This was apparent in a number of reports

from these young people and supported by field observations. A group of girls interviewed in one such 'hidden' location (situated near thick trees by a river walkway) had this to say:

*P1: We hide our drink down our tops and that like coz like...*

*P2: Coz we're scared*

*P1: We're scared in case we get caught and the police come down*

*P2: Aye, aye! Coz every person who walks past we're always feart [afraid] so we always hide our drinks down our top. That's why we come here. (FG15)*

However, according to another group interviewed in the same area, the setting they had chosen had been suggested by a police officer keen to reduce the level of disruption caused to local residents by the groups' activities.

*P4: I suppose it's coz we get moved from everywhere by the police. But it was a policeman that told us that the best place to go without getting complained about the noise is up here. Right up the back.*

*I: Are you kidding?*

*P1: I'm not kidding they actually did do that.*

*P2: So it's okay to drink in front of lots of kids.[the location was a child's swing park in a larger country park]*

*P1: He told us to go up the back where we wouldn't get caught. (FG14)*

An additional consequence of increased mobility was that groups moving around in their local areas as a way of avoiding police, ran the risk of crossing into the territory of rival gangs of other young people in their local area. According to this group, such clashes could lead to violent disputes. In turn, this became another reason for finding more isolated areas in which to drink.

*P2: You need to run away from the police when they come. It just makes people move around more, man.*

*P4: It's probably caused mair [more] fights with people having to move about and all that coz of the police.*

*P2: Like when you get a big crowd that are from one place and they don't stay in that same place.*

*P4: They're all just going to keep moving about and eventually they'll bump into people from different areas.*

*I: So you mean teams [gangs] from different areas?*

*All: Aye, aye*

*P4: Aye and if the police come you need to move, move to somewhere else and then you end up bumping into people and you end up fighting.*

*P2: It's a fight, but.*

*P3: But as long as you're out the way and not bothering people and that, that doesn't happen. (FG7)*

This was also acknowledged as an issue by 'alternative' groups. One such group discussed the problems caused in their local area that they felt were caused in part by current policing practices involving dispersal of antisocial groups. According to this account, such tactics did little to put a stop to antisocial behaviour but instead displaced trouble to other more concealed areas, thus decreasing the ability of the police to deal effectively with the problem.

*I: Do you know about that thing in [name of area 1] where they're moving people on, do you know about that?*

*P1: Yeah, the dispersal orders, it's the [name of area 1] kids, the [name of area 2] kids, a couple of other areas but it's all done at the banks to the canal, just where [name of area 1] comes over to [name of area 2]*

*I: Do you think by moving them like that (coz obviously you've got various teams) the police will cause them to clash more, do you think it will cause any more trouble?*

*P2: ...they're just encouraging it by pushing them about.*

*P1: If the police are coming in and moving them all from this one spot where they KNEW where everyone was coming in and doing it, if they move them on from there then it's going to take them quite a while coz the police always take a while to figure out these spots. Like where they're going to move onto and where they're going to start causing all the trouble next! So you know that they're going to move a couple hundred of feet down the canal and do their fights down there or they're going to find another spot that's just as secluded in a different part of the area.*

*P2: Coz what they done there is that they come down and they organise their fights, like, "See you on Friday night" and all that. (FG23)*

One group of 'neds' explained how the desire to avoid such gang fights led to them travelling to areas far away from their own neighbourhoods, to locations where they felt they would avoid attention from other young people as well as the local police. Indeed this group had travelled from their homes to the middle-class area where they were interviewed for this purpose.

*P3: See, we aren't from here right? Coz we're not from one of the areas round here, see if we were they'd probably have taken our wine and that afe [off] us. We're from the other side of town, we've come up here to get away fae [from] that.*

*I: Do you move a lot to different parts every weekend then?*

*P4: No, No. It's basically the same ones we're at. We stay round our bit usually but when it's sunny you canny go to our park when it's sunny coz it's full o' youngsters. Full of trouble basically. (FG7)*

Though 'alternative' and 'mainstream' individuals who were underage were also concerned with avoiding police attention this was not the primary consideration when choosing a location to consume alcohol. Rather these decisions were driven by young peoples' fear of victimisation from other groups.

*P2: It's just neds really they just want a fight all the time and when they're drunk it's just an excuse to so...it's quite stupid.*

*I: Is that part of your decision when you're deciding on where you're going to drink?*

*P2: Basically, we're just trying to avoid trouble.*

*P3: Well, I dunno, it depends where we are, where we'll end up, if we're somewhere else...if we're in the Southside we'll end up going to [large park area] or something and just sitting there (FG10)*

The desire to avoid trouble and drink in a location which offered some semblance of safety led many 'alternative' and 'mainstream' young people to drink in areas which were far removed from their local communities. Though drinking in a suburban park meant having to take a train from their own neighbourhood, this group of young people viewed this as necessary should they wish to avoid victimisation given that in their own area they were "outnumbered" and therefore unlikely to be able to defend themselves.

*I: So you get the train up here, why do you not drink in [name of town] then?*

*P2: Coz it's shite!*

*P3: Coz it's all full of neds*

*I: What happens with the neds?*

*P3: They try to batter us.*

*P4: I know!*

*P3: Coz we're Goths! It's coz we're Goths.*

*P4: And we go to the [name of club]*

*P3: ...in [name of town] we're just outnumbered...(FG19)*

As such, the locations chosen by 'alternative' youths for the purposes of drinking represented somewhat of a forced choice. This group of young people explained how their sexuality and 'alternative' social



identity meant they had felt they had few options in terms of where they chose to drink if they wished to remain unharmed.

*P2: We come here to get away from the neds. There's no way they'd let us have a good time and leave us alone down where we live, We have to come here. We usually come here to [public square in city centre] or we just go to the station coz there's more people like us there usually.*

*I: So do you think you're at more risk when you're drinking?*

*P1: Oh, aye yeah, coz they want to steal your drink but they don't like us anyway coz we're gay.*

*P2: It's better here though than where we're from.*

*P1: Aye, coz there's hunners [hundreds] of the wee bastards down there and they'd love to beat the shit out of us. (FG9)*

The desire to minimise risk of this kind led to these groups choosing centrally located, public places where others were present as a way of ensuring their safety, as this group explained:

*P2: If you do it on a regular basis then you get to know the safer spots, if say it's town you're hanging around, you get to know like – the Square isn't the best of places but it's safer than the alleyways down there or like hanging around the [name of shopping centre]...*

*I: How come?*

*P2: Lots of CCTV, lots of lights*

*P1: Lots of lights, people passing all the time, there's always someone who's going to see what's going on.*

*P2: No matter what time I've hung around here and done an all-nighter with my friends, I mean this place is busy till 5/6 in the morning when it starts getting light again and you're safe!*

*P1: Plus in the city centre, there's like the delivery trucks and stuff. So even if you're here till after the clubs close coz I mean people are still here trying to get home from the clubs until about 5 in the morning. (FG23)*

Often these settings were places where street drinkers were aware that other young people like themselves (i.e. 'alternative') would be present in large numbers. Though there was a social aspect to drinking in such locations, it was apparent that young people also viewed this as lowering their risk of victimisation by providing safety in numbers.

*I: Why do you hang about here then?*

*P1: Coz there's more Goths.*

*P3: There's tonnes of Goths! They're all here (FG20)*

Other 'alternative' groups felt their safety was best assured by moving from place to place within their local areas, never staying in one place too long. These young people explained how they spent their evening wandering the streets and residential areas in their neighbourhood in preference to staying "out in the open" which they considered too dangerous after experiencing a violent incident in their local park whilst out drinking.

*P2: Yeah, we tend to walk about. We don't go to the park coz there's too many neds here and one time we came here and we got a kicking.*

*P1: You get some dodgy folk around the park so you know...*

*I: So you don't come to the park coz you get hassled by neds. So where do you go instead then if that's the case?*

*P2: Streets, really just wandering around wherever, just like...*

*P3: [name of road] and that sort of thing, keep on the move.*

*P2: Yeah, I go round [name of residential area] with my friends mostly.*

*P3: Yeah, we just go to the back of [name of residential area] coz there's a lot of dangers around this place, you don't want to stay out in the open.*

*P2: Yeah, but we don't go into people's gardens or anything. We just stay to the back of the Lanes but if they ask to move on, we move on, we won't give them any hassle.*

*P3: That's us though I suppose other people might*

*I: You don't want to be out in the open, how come?*

*P3: Just don't want to really attract any attention from the wrong people. (FG4)*

Though increasing perceptions of safety from victimisation, the locations chosen by these groups could (due to their public nature) be argued to increase the likelihood of detection by the police. Though these young people expressed a desire to avoid such attention, safety concerns appeared to override such considerations. Indeed, many of these young people valued a police presence due to the perceived protection this provided against groups of other youths (i.e. 'neds') from whom victimisation was feared.

*P3: The police hassle us in [name of area] so that's why we come here cause they'll follow us around there. They know we're probably drinking.*

*P2: Yeah, but here it's better.*

*I: But I saw two policemen earlier on?*

*P2: Yeah, but here they don't bother. They're just here to make sure there's no trouble, they're only interested in the neds so they don't bother with us really. They don't care about us coz they know we won't cause any trouble just by looking at us. It's the neds that they want so that makes it safer for us as well.*

*P1: Yeah, coz there's less trouble with them wandering around. (FG1)*

This is not to say that the choice of central, public areas was not to some extent a form of rebellion against adult authority. One group interviewed in the city centre had chosen what might be considered a central but fairly unpleasant place to sit (in amongst rubbish and globs of spittle). Though choosing this location to increase their safety it was apparent that to some extent this choice represented a small defiance against the police as figures of authority.

*P4: I mean it's smelly, it's dirty here, just don't want to let them win. Know what I mean? (FG21).*

Overall however, the desire to remain safe combined with a largely positive perception of the police appeared to be what motivated the selection of drinking location among these young people. Though safety was the foremost concern however, the choices these young people made did not entirely protect them from trouble. Indeed, many of these youths still faced violence and harassment when drinking in the central locations they supposed to be relatively safe. However, given the persecution they faced in their local neighbourhoods, most considered what they saw as a lowered level of risk as acceptable or at least "not as bad."

*I: So do you get any hassle from them here?*

*P1: Yeah, they'll still bother you but it's not as bad. We had one ned the last time we were out saying, "Gies one of your fags" And I'm like, "No! I don't have any left" And he's like, lets see the packet then' And I'm like "Fuck off, cheeky cunt!" And then he wants a sip of your drink. They always like want something.*

*P2: Yeah, they're always coming down begging, it's pathetic.*

*P4: I've been hassled for booze as well. Or a spare fag where we live but not here, not in the centre of town. (FG9)*

### Summary

In general street drinkers wanted a location which offered pleasant surroundings and a chance to socialize with others of a similar age and background. Locations chosen by younger street drinkers were also influenced by their desire to minimize what they felt were the risks of street drinking. Current

policing practices appeared to cause 'ned' groups to move around frequently whilst drinking as a means of avoiding unwanted police attention, often choosing well-camouflaged locations when they did settle where they felt detection was less likely. Though perhaps reducing their chances of being caught by the police, these groups increased their risk of violent territorial clashes with other youths in their local areas. This resulted in some groups moving far outwith their own communities to different neighbourhoods where they felt their safety was assured. Locations chosen by 'alternative' and 'mainstream' individuals were selected to limit the likelihood of victimisation by 'ned' groups. Attempts to find such a setting led many of these groups to choose locations outwith their own neighbourhoods where these young people felt outnumbered by potential bullies. Typically, these groups chose central, public places where others were on hand to provide protection if necessary. Though drinking in such locations increased the chance of detection by police, many viewed a police presence as an advantage in terms of increasing (if not assuring) their safety. Overall then, the types of places young adults selected to drink outdoors were shaped by what they perceived the risks of street drinking to be resulting in different locations being chosen by young people with different cultural backgrounds.

#### **Locations of Street Drinking as a Source of Risk**

In general, findings suggested that a priority when choosing a location for drinking was to minimize what were perceived as the risks of street drinking. Though young people's efforts in this respect appeared successful in limiting (if not entirely preventing) the chances of detection and victimisation, findings indicated that the places chosen by young people also exposed them to other kinds of risk.

Field observations combined with young peoples' own reports suggested that the locations selected for drinking could be in many cases considered dangerous. Groups of 'neds' intent on evading the police often frequented isolated locations for the purposes of drinking. That these groups were often difficult to locate would seem to support the accounts of these individuals who reported drinking in well-concealed settings. For example, one group reported feeling forced to drink in an abandoned wooded area near a motorway, others chose a well-concealed spot by the side of river. Equally 'alternative' and 'mainstream' youths, though generally found by researchers in more central and public locations, also reported drinking in more isolated locations such as old graveyards. In addition, these individuals tended to move to more sheltered locations when the weather was poor (a popular spot for this was under the high-level bridges over a major river). Again, the settings favoured by these street drinkers were often nearby deep water. Locations next to canals or rivers were amongst the most popular in both urban and rural areas. Thus, the settings frequented by these young people raised concerns with regards

their own safety. Indeed, the potential for alcohol fuelled accidents (wandering onto main roads, drowning etc) and the difficulties street drinkers might experience attempting to reach a source of help from these locations should such an event occur, seemed obvious to the onlooker but were rarely recognized by drinkers themselves. For example, suggestions that participants might meet with accidental harm whilst drinking were typically seen as a joke.

*I: What about falling in the river...?*

*P3: I don't care, if we fall in the river it doesnae matter to us!*

*P4: We're not going to fall in the river...*

*P2: I wouldnae want to fall in the river but that's about it, just in case I get the sudden urge to dive in or anything. It'd just be the whole getting back out. [laughs] (FG19)*

Some street drinkers reported travelling from their local neighbourhood to distant locations in order to drink with friends who lived in other areas. Though young people felt protected by drinking as part of a larger group, such practices could be construed as threatening the safety of individuals who at the end of the evening had to try and get home along. For example, these girls discussed their attempt to walk the 5 miles home along country roads whilst drunk after a missing their taxi home. Again, the potential dangers of this situation were not recognized by these drinkers, rather the predicament they had faced was viewed (in retrospect at least) as humorous.

*P1: I mind [remember] me and her got lifted [arrested] one time*

*P2: For trying to walk to fucking [name of home village] [laughs]*

*P1: Aye it was coz we had to walk to [name of home village] coz we missed the taxi, so then me and her walked to [name of home village] but we got lifted halfway but we didn't actually get lifted and the police said they could smell drink off us but..(FG15)*

In general, drinkers tried to keep safe by avoiding trouble and by ensuring they were never alone whilst drinking outdoors. Girls achieved this by joining larger mixed gender groups in which it was expected that older males would provide protection, or by “keeping an eye on each other.” Though this offered some form of safeguard during the course of the evening, it was evident that this was impossible to maintain these strategies at the end of the night when it was time to go home as group members rarely all lived in the same area.

*I: See when you go home are you ever by yourselves I mean are you still in a big group or do you split up?*

*P3: We all get the train together*

*P1: I split up coz I live far away.*

*P2: She lives far away but all us girls we all get the train together. It just coz of where we live we all live close so it's convenient to all get the train together.*

*I: As you're moving around are you checking each other are safe or are you just too blasted to care eventually or what?*

*P2: We definitely check on each other, not in a pure "Oh, my god where are they" sort of way but we keep an eye on each other just to make sure. (FG19)*

Girls also complained that their attempts to keep safe by remaining in mixed sex groups were compromised by current police practice of dispersing large groups of youths to keep public order. This was apparent in the following extract:

*All: ...it's protection, protection.*

*P4: That's why we hang about in groups but then when the police get you they tell you to split up and you're more vulnerable when you're split up. I mean three lassies walking up an alley, two guys get you, you're gone. You can't protect yourself.*

*I: Do you agree with that?*

*All: Mmm, uh-huh.*

*P1: I don't agree with the police splitting us up. I don't agree with it.*

*I: So do you feel less safe in smaller groups as girls?*

*P5: Aye, I feel more safe with all my guy pals are around (FG21)*

As was mentioned in an earlier section, it was unclear as to how much protection girls might expect from other group members in reality. Indeed, though girls tended to feel safer with their "guy pals" around, it was clear that these were not the only individuals they encountered.

*I: Do you ever feel you might be in danger or unsafe at any time?*

*P3: Only when certain people come round...*

*I: ...like who...what do you mean?*

*P3: Like big scary guys, like junkies, I'm saying junkies I'm not meaning actually junkies I just mean big, creepy guys, we try to just move out their way....(FG21)*

Given that this was the case, the willingness of females to drink in well-concealed, isolated locations (even as part of larger groups) could be seen as posing a risk to their safety. Possibly the best example

of this was observed during a focus group conducted in a rural setting (FG15) where younger female participants were observed to be drinking in a hidden location also frequented by much older men, one of whom did not hesitate in physically intimidating the lead researcher who was female (see appendix 1 for details). The research team were so concerned about the safety of these girls that the fieldworker (who was also threatened by another older male in connection with what the girls “might tell” him) later elected to inform the local council’s anti-social behaviour officer about this situation for ethical reasons.

Though street drinkers perceived themselves as relatively safe it was evident that the amount of alcohol consumed by some individuals may have limited their ability to look after themselves and each other. Groups were generally approached between the hours of 5.30 and 9.30pm. Despite being early in the evening, it was not unusual for participants to be displaying signs of intoxication i.e. staggering, slurring and so on. The account of this group gave some indication of the general level of drunkenness reached by groups on a typical night and the problems this might pose for their own safety and that of others.

*I: Do you ever regret anything you do when you’ve been drinking*

*All: Aye aye! [laughter]*

*P3: I’ve regretted a lot of things..*

*P4: Hitting people that you don’t mean to hit.*

*P2: Falling!*

*P1: Aye, falling aye!*

*P4: Making a fool of yourself*

*P3: Getting the jail for...*

*P5: ...being sick on the street...*

*P3: ...battering people...(FG21)*

Some young people also seemed to engage in behaviour, that given their intoxicated state and the areas they frequented, would seem to further increase their risk of alcohol related harm. For example, some individuals reported climbing buildings, scaffolding and trees as a favoured pastime whilst out drinking:

*P1: No, coz I nearly got lifted. Coz I was trying to climb a big thing like that [points at scaffolding]. I don’t know [starts giggling] (FG19)*

### Summary

Though street drinkers readily recognised some of the dangers of drinking outdoors, this rarely extended to them acknowledging the potential risks posed by the physical surroundings in which they chose to drink. Findings indicated that the locations preferred for outdoor drinking potentially posed an additional risk of alcohol-related harm to young drinkers, especially given their intoxicated state and the activities they chose to engage in whilst drunk. The potential risk posed to female participants from other street drinkers who were either part of their group or associated with it was also evident to the research team but rarely acknowledged by the girls themselves. Equally, risk of alcohol-related harm through accidents, walking home alone etc. seemed obvious to the onlooker but were not seen as problematic by drinkers themselves.

### **Beverage Preference**

An important reason for conducting focus groups was to identify what alcoholic drinks were typically purchased and consumed by street drinkers and why. Focus group data supported by observations during fieldwork revealed that a rather limited range of products were bought by participants for the purposes of drinking outdoors. These included: fortified wine ('Buckfast' and less commonly 'MD 20/20'), perry ('Lambrini'), white cider (e.g. 'Frosty Jack') and lager (typically 'Tennents,' 'Carlsberg' or 'Miller'). Vodka was another beverage frequently consumed by street drinkers. Individuals were most often observed drinking this spirit (typically 'Grants' or a supermarket home-brand) mixed with a soft drink in unmarked containers (usually plastic pop bottles). Though pre-mixed vodka drinks (such as 'Red Square') and other spirits (such as 'Sambuca') were also observed, these were much less common.

The number of different products purchased per group varied. Some groups were observed with only one type of alcohol whilst others had purchased several kinds. Though vodka, cider and lager seemed universal in their appeal (in that these products were equally likely to be found across groups), other products seemed to have cultural significance making them more likely to be bought and consumed by particular groups. Indeed, analysis revealed that the choice of particular products and brands among young people was motivated by a range of considerations. The factors affecting product choice are discussed in detail, first examining the product characteristics valued by street drinkers before moving on to consider the impact of marketing and subculture on product preference within particular cultural groups. Further detail of which products were bought by each specific group can be found in appendix 1.



## **Beverage Characteristics**

The price of the product and its physical characteristics such as strength, volume and taste were important factors influencing product preference. Practical considerations about place and packaging (that is how easy or difficult a product might be to drink in an outdoor location) also affected street drinkers' decisions about what products to buy.

### Price

Accounts suggested that street drinkers had limited finances with which to purchase alcohol. Therefore cost-strength ratio was a primary consideration, that is whether the product was value for money in terms of getting the individual drunk at little cost. With this in mind, beverages purchased were typically among the cheapest available. This participant explained how lack of funds limited the choice of alcoholic drinks available to young people.

*P1: Aye well you'd like something that tasted nice obviously but it really depends on what you can afford. That's got a lot to do with it. You want to go out and have a good laugh but you don't have a lot of money. You need to get the cheapest thing you can get your hands on. (FG3)*

This created a disparity between what street drinkers would ideally like to drink and what they bought and consumed in reality. This participant explained how lack of funds resulted in the group of which he was a member drinking cheap white cider rather than the products they preferred. Indeed, cider represented the 'default' product for most groups who found themselves short of money, as this participant observed:

*P1: We're drinking cider cause I'm skint the now, usually I'm a dear drinker, I like dear drinks. When I'm out and that I usually have Southern Comfort or something along those lines. But it's a fact, when you've money, you'll buy what you like, if you're skint, you'll buy cider. That's what everyone does. (FG9)*

Though street drinkers did not want to pay a great deal, they wanted the product they bought to be strong in terms of alcohol content as the goal of drinking outside for most participants was to get drunk (or at least tipsy). In other words, for a product to be considered good value it needed to give the drinker a "good buzz for the money."

*I: When you are choosing your drinks, what are you choosing them on?*

*P1: The cheapest one you can get gassed off. (FG15)*

*P3: It's whatever gives you a good buzz for the money. You know what I mean? (FG6)*

This noted, the extent to which the perceived potency of a product was a selling point for drinkers varied according to their drinking patterns. For some participants the aim of a drinking session was to get as intoxicated as possible. Those “drinking to get drunk” placed a great deal of importance on the cost-strength ratio of the product.

*I: So you drinking to get drunk?*

*P2: I want to get drunk out my tits, I buy a bottle of vodka to see what happens to me. (FG20)*

For others getting “smashed” was not the primary goal of drinking outside, instead the goal of the drinking session was to relax and socialise with friends. For these drinkers the taste of the drink was more important than the strength. These street drinkers, who wished to pace their drinking throughout the course of the evening, contrasted their own choice of product (i.e. beer) to a nearby group whose aim they believed to be rapid intoxication.

*P1: Beer tastes nicer and it doesn't get you drunk as fast. We don't want to get smashed it's more like sitting and relaxing in the sun. But if you went over there and asked them [indicates group of 'neds' across the river: laughs]. (FG10)*

Indeed findings indicated that there was some correspondence between the cultural background of groups interviewed and their drinking style. Though variation was noted, ‘ned’ groups (regardless of their age) were more likely than ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ groups to report heavy, frequent drinking and getting “wasted” as the desired outcome of a street drinking session. In line with this, products chosen by these groups tended to be stronger and bought in larger amounts than those purchased by other participants (see appendix 1 for details).

For younger, underage drinkers other considerations came into play with regards to cost-strength ratio when purchasing alcoholic products. Though these individuals (regardless of their cultural background) often expressed a preference for cheap products that were also strong, they also believed that they were more likely to be sold drinks with a lower alcohol content. Thus, in order to avoid suspicion and increase the chances of successfully purchasing alcohol for the group, some younger groups traded off potency for availability. One group of underage drinkers had this to say:

*I: Why those drinks in particular?*

*P2: Lambrini? Well, it's only 6% so they don't mind in the shops when you buy that. They just think, Och, “It's them again” They totally know you're buying it to drink outside but it's not really strong or anything so they don't care. (FG1)*

This was confirmed by groups with older members who agreed that such a strategy was often most effective for underage drinkers who wanted to buy alcohol. This participant explained that though strong drinks (such as spirits) were preferred by these individuals, products with a lower alcohol content (such as cider) were likely to be purchased more often by these groups due to the greater likelihood of success.

*P1: ...a lot of folk when they're underage you're more likely to get sold something like cider rather than going in and trying to buy something like spirits. (FG3)*

Younger groups (who were often most limited in terms of finances) were also willing to trade off potency for large volume in that this meant the supply of alcohol lasted longer and could be shared between group members. This added to the appeal of products such as 'Lambrini' for example, in that though this product had a relatively low in alcohol content it could be made to last the duration of an evening, thus representing good value for money.

*I: Lambrini is not that high in alcohol*

*P2: No, but you can get a lot, quite a lot of it and just spin it out, share it out so...*

*P3: Yeah, quite a lot for cheap. (FG4)*

### Product

Overall, it appeared that the products purchased by street drinkers were rarely those they would choose if their finances allowed. Instead their choices were restricted to those drinks which they could afford, which meant making some sacrifices, often in terms of palatability.

*P1: I wouldn't drink cider at all if I had money, just have to hold your nose and down it!*

*I: What would you drink out of preference?*

*P1: I don't know, maybe I wouldn't drink outside if I had money. It is gut-rot, it's stinking. (FG6)*

Though willing on some occasions to trade off taste for cost-strength ratio, street drinkers generally wanted a product that was not too unpalatable in terms of its flavour. As such the taste of the product was sometimes the deciding factor regarding which of the drinks considered affordable would be purchased.

*I'd choose Lambrini over Frosty Jack's coz Lambrini tastes better and they're both cheap so... (FG4)*

Thus, if presented with a range of products which were similar in terms of strength and price, the product considered to be most palatable would be purchased. This group observed drinking 'Frosty Jack' explained their preference for this product over other white ciders e.g. 'Pulse'.

*P1: There's quite a few, same price, same strength but they taste different, that ['Frosty Jack'] tastes better.*

*I: But would you avoid any of these drinks? Like the cheap ones?*

*P2: Pulse I don't like, it's the smell it gives of when you put it to your mouth, I don't like that. (FG6)*

Flavour was particularly important for female street drinkers who frequently placed more importance on how a drink tasted than their male counterparts. One reason for this appeared to be that sweet tasting drinks could be consumed quickly, thus leading to faster intoxication.

*I: What's your favourite drink for drinking outside?*

*P1 & P2: Lambrini!*

*P2: It tastes like cherryade, like it's sweet an it gets you drunk quickly coz you can drink it quickly cause it tastes nice. (FG1)*

Though girls generally preferred sweeter tasting drinks, the advantages of having a drink which could be consumed quickly was recognized by male participants as well. This participant explained his preference for any product he could "stank" (i.e. down quickly). That one reason for this was to keep warm whilst drinking outside raises concerns about safety.

*P2: vodka's the favourite, it gets you nice and pissed. Erm, stuff that you can just open and stank [down]*

*P1: Stuff you can just drink from the can or open the bottle and that's you*

*P2: preferably when you're outside, you stank it so you're warm, you make sure you're warm and then you stank even more so that you get blootered [very drunk]*

*P1: Does stank mean like down it all?*

*P2: Yeah, anything with an alcoholic content (FG23)*

In some cases, more palatable drinks were used as a prelude to other more potent but less palatable products as a way of easing the drinker into the drinking session. This group described drinking 'Lambrini' before drinking vodka later on in the evening when drunk and therefore less concerned

about the taste of what was being consumed. This noted, a more common strategy was to consume strong but unpalatable products quickly in order to achieve similar effects.

*I: So taste is quite important to you then...*

*P2: Aye, but if you buy a pure cheap bottle of drink and it tastes alright and you get kinda drunk, after that you don't care what it tastes like! [laughs] But your first kinda drink it's like eeugh...like that's what you're like with vodka, you're like eeeugh...*

*P1: First few minutes it doesn't even taste nice and then after that it's fine..just down it*

*I: So do you ever switch your drinks, like do you drink something different at the beginning than at the end?*

*All: Yeah, yeah.*

*P4: I drink Lambrini then vodka... (FG19)*

#### Place and Packaging

Though value for money and taste were important, beverage preference was also driven by a number of practical considerations. Participants were looking for products which were convenient to drink outside. As street drinkers needed to carry their alcohol around with them (either to reach the spot where they were drinking or to evade the police), the portability of the product was important. This group explained how products contained in a single, reasonably sized container were the most convenient in this respect being more easily transported in case trouble was encountered.

*P1: It'd have to be in a single bottle coz that way you can carry it about easily.*

*P4: Run away from the police (FG14)*

It was also important that products could be easily concealed. Indeed, another advantage of buying drinks packaged in single containers was that they could be hidden about the drinker's person. This was apparent in this group's discussion of the ideal street drink. Products which could fit in a pocket and which made little noise whilst being transported (plastic bottles were seen as an advantage in this respect) were preferred in that such packaging increased the chances of drinkers evading detection.

*I: What if you could design the ideal drink for drinking outside?*

*P2: ... it would be quite small as well so you could keep it somewhere so the police wouldn't see you had alcohol when you were walking around. You could fit it in your pocket possibly.*

*I: So it would be small so you could fit it in your pocket, what about what it was made of?*

*P2: Possibly not glass? Plastic coz if you get a bit drunk then you've less chance of breaking it*

*P3: Yeah, plastic so you won't break it but also so it won't jingle in the bag you know?(FG4)*

As was apparent in the previous comments, plastic packaging was also considered an advantage for limiting the possibility of accidental breakages when drinkers were on the move.

*I: I see you've all got a bottle of Frosty Jacks. Is that normally what you drink outside?*

*All: Aye, aye.*

*P2: Aye, aye, see then you can run with the bottle. Bring out vodka and you smash your bottle and that's you. Drop this on the ground and it bounces, you can pick it back up again and away you go, away from the police.(FG6)*

Though drinks which did not require mixing were generally preferred, a number of groups were observed drinking vodka which they had mixed themselves. Though this represented more fuss (which most street drinkers wished to avoid) alcohol prepared in this manner could be decanted into whatever bottle the drinker desired. By using soft drinks container, drinkers felt they could more effectively conceal their activities from the police, as this group explained

*P3: We mix it [vodka] with blackcurrant usually, it's nice with blackcurrant, just get an empty bottle and mix them and we put it in Ribena bottles so the police don't know what we're drinking. But you just mix them somewhere quiet and then that's you. (FG9)*

How easy a product was to open and re-seal was also a consideration. Street drinkers wanted drinks which they could consume immediately which meant being able to open packaging quickly and with minimal fuss. As such drinks with screw-caps were much more popular than those with corks or crown caps which were acknowledged as being more difficult to open and therefore less convenient for drinking outside.

*I: Coz you can get cheap wine but it's normally got a cork in it...*

*P1: No, you'd be there all day!*

*P3: No, no. (FG12)*

Though many participants agreed with these sentiments, some individuals had found 'alternative' means of opening difficult packaging, meaning that screw caps were no longer a requirement for the products they bought when drinking outside. For example, this group of beer drinkers had learned to open bottles with their teeth when a bottle opener was not available.

*P2: Just whatever, just whatever's easier. I'm wrecking my teeth with 'em like.*

*I: So how do you open the tops?*

*P2: Bottle opener, we carry a bottle opener.*

*P3: But as I say I can do it with my teeth. (FG17)*

Screwcaps had other benefits in that the drinks could be re-sealed, thus preventing spillage when set down on an uneven surface. This could be an advantage when drinking in an outdoor environment.

*P3: Aye, it's better with the screw-cap and all*

*P2: Aye, coz you're sitting doon and you don't have to worry about it falling over.*

*P3: Aye, coz with one of these glass bottles, you canny put the top back on so if it falls over it's gone.*

*P1: I've tried sitting outside before with wee plastic cups and a bottles of vodka and that but it doesnae work. The flies get a drink!*

*P2: It's the easiest when you're outside. (FG6)*

For those who did not want to get drunk too quickly, a screwcap also allowed gradual consumption of alcohol over a longer period. This was considered an advantage in terms of 'harm-reduction' among groups who wished to pace their drinking.

*P4: Screw cap! Screw cap! Then you can put it back on and put it in your pocket and then you don't have to drink it all at the same time coz if you drink too fast you get alcohol poisoning (FG21)*

Screw-caps were also considered to be a benefit should the group need to move quickly. This group discussed the advantages of having a container which was easy to open and close for the purposes of evading police officers.

*I: What about is it important that it has got a screw cap on it?*

*P3: Aye, you canny be trying to bite through a cork and then you've got to get the thing back on to cover it, aye.*

*P2: Aye, like in case you get chased off the police. You need to get the lid back on quickly. (FG7)*

Thus, beverages bought by street drinkers were typically those which were considered good value for money in terms of cost-strength ratio though this varied according to whether participants were drinking to get drunk or drinking to relax and socialise. When presented with several similarly priced products which were considered as roughly equivalent in terms of value, taste became a deciding factor. A pleasant taste also meant that alcohol could be downed quickly leading to more rapid intoxication.

Another important consideration for street drinkers was whether the product was convenient for drinking outside. Drinks which were easy to carry and conceal; which were packaged in such a way to limit accidental breakages and spillage and which could be opened and re-sealed easily were preferred.

Though the product's characteristics were important factors underpinning choice of beverage, further considerations were apparent which in some cases could override these preferences. Though 'Buckfast' Tonic Wine was (in terms of its characteristics) theoretically ideal for outdoor consumption, it was bought and consumed almost exclusively by groups of 'neds.' By contrast, though 'Lambrini' did not meet some of the requirements mentioned by street drinkers in terms of preferred characteristics, it was popular among some street drinkers, specifically female and especially 'alternative' females. The reasons for this appeared to lie to some extent in how these drinks were promoted but were influenced more powerfully by the cultural significance of particular brands. The relative contribution of these factors to beverage preference are now discussed beginning with an overview of the influence of promotions before moving on to consider the meaning of specific products for particular cultural groups.

### **Promotion**

A key goal of this research was to examine the interacting roles of marketing and subculture in beverage choice among young adult street drinkers. Though the impact of overt drinks promotion was of interest, few products discussed by participants were advertised or promoted in the usual ways. For example, 'Buckfast' and 'Frosty Jack' cider (brands observed most frequently during fieldwork) were not the subject of widespread promotional campaigns.

*I: How do you choose what products to buy? Have you seen them advertised? Like Frosty Jack? You've been drinking that tonight, have you seen it advertised?*

*P2: It isn't advertised, none of them are. (FG9)*

Equally, vodka drinkers did not tend to buy heavily advertised premium brands. Instead, they bought cheaper brands such as Grants or supermarket home-brand vodka as, quite simply, this was all they could afford. Thus, lack of funds narrowed group options when buying vodka or (as in the following extract) led to individuals to adopt other methods of getting access to a supply of alcohol which ruled out the luxury of choice. For example, these participants bought the cheapest vodka they could find or had one of the group member's take whatever she could steal from her mother's house.

*I: What is it you drink outside then?*



*P2: Vodka! Vodka!*

*P1: Yeah, either vodka or cider. It was cider tonight coz I'm so skint so she bought it.*

*P2: I get the money from my mum or I just nick it from the house and bring it out. Vodka is the best!*

*I: Any particular brand?*

*P2: It's whatever I can get from my mum or the cheapest we can buy. (FG9)*

Though the vast majority of products preferred by street drinkers were not advertised or promoted extensively, the exception was 'Lambrini'. All those interviewed who consumed this product were aware of the advertising campaign "Lambrini Girls just want to have fun" frequently quoting this phrase (unprompted) during focus groups. The impact of this advertising campaign on purchasing patterns seemed evident in a number of ways. Reports from a variety of groups (regardless of cultural background) suggested that 'Lambrini' was considered to be a highly gendered product. Indeed, this product was purchased almost exclusively by females in 'alternative' groups (though observations revealed that this drink was frequently shared between group members of both sexes). Thus, marketing appeared to influence to some extent the purchases that both females (and by exclusion), males chose to make.

*I: What do you guys drink?*

*P4: We drink beer outside*

*I: Not Lambrini then?*

*P3/4: [laugh] No, no that's just for girls. We wouldn't drink that. (FG1)*

Indeed, advertising seemed to discourage males from purchasing particular drinks. For example, this group appeared to consider drinks that were advertised as being emasculated in some way.

*I: Do adverts make any difference to what you buy?*

*P1: Naw, it's all poof juice. [other boys in group laugh]*

*P3: It's all poof juice is adverts. It's what lassies drink!*

*P5: Oy!*

*P3: It's all stuff like Lambrini and all that, that Red Square shite. (FG11)*

Individuals who preferred 'Lambrini' also appeared to like the light-hearted, fun image with which the drink was promoted. It appeared that by consuming this beverage, individuals felt they would be associated with these positive characteristics, as in this account from two 'alternative' females:

*I: So what do you prefer when you drink outside?*

*All: Lambrini! Lambrini!*

*P2: We're Lambrini Girls!*

*P1: It's cheap, it's a good laugh, it doesn't get you, you know how you get some alcohol for some people that makes them dead violent. Or it makes them angry or get into a fight or whatever? Lambrini is just, a good light-hearted drink, you can drink it on its own,*

*P2: It's fun!*

*I: But you say Lambrini Girls? Is that anything to do with the adverts?*

*P1: It's a joke.*

*P2: Well, yeah, it's a joke between us, coz like the adverts were out and we were like, "Oh Lambrini girls just wanna have fun." And coz we drink Lambrini all the time we're just like the classic Lambrini girls! They should make us the advert coz we drink Lambrini every time we go out. (FG8)*

Though preference for this beverage appeared to some extent to be associated with its advertising campaign, it was clear that the characteristics of the product itself were also (if not more) influential in shaping product preference, in that 'Lambrini' was well-suited to outdoor street drinking in terms of volume and taste (the one disadvantage being perhaps, that multiple bottles were required if the individual wished to get very drunk). One group had this to say:

*I: So what's good about Lambrini?*

*P3: Because I don't like drinking wine, I'm no wine connoisseur but that's just nice coz it's sparkling and it's...*

*P1: Sweet*

*P3: Aye, it's sweet and it doesn't have that high an alcohol content where you're going to like drink one glass and go – oh that's vile and have to bin it. Whereas it's like drinking lemonade really and you end up with enough bottles of it that's you steamboats [drunk]. (FG6)*

The packaging of 'Lambrini' also appeared to be considered suitable for street drinking in that this product did not require mixing and was contained in a single container with a screwcap. One participant noted:

*P1: You don't need a mixer, you don't need to be taking like – I love vodka but I'd never take vodka to the park coz you've got to pour the vodka and then pour the mixer and you're sitting with a wee plastic cup going, "Oh that's great." Whereas Lambrini, don't need a bottle opener, you don't need a corkscrew or like anything! (FG8)*

Promotions of this product further increased its popularity. Indeed, 3 for 2 offers could perhaps be considered as overcoming 'Lambrini's' one disadvantage as a street drink (i.e. its low alcohol content) by providing more for the drinker's money.

*P3: The advert I seen was the Cherry 'Lambrini' advert and it's like buy two bottles you get the third free, and you're like, "Sound I'll buy them!" You're sitting with three bottles like "da da daaaa!" (FG24)*

Indeed, a number of accounts suggested that promotional activity at both national and local level had some impact on the products street drinkers bought. For example, evidence suggested that though street drinkers generally preferred to buy their alcohol from smaller off-licenses and stores, they could be tempted into supermarkets by particular promotions. The low of cost of 'own brand' spirits was a particular draw in this respect. Though special offers appeared to discourage brand loyalty however, it was questionable whether such promotions could tempt drinkers to switch from one type of alcohol to another to save money. This group discussed how promotions affected the products they chose to buy:

*I: Do you sometimes go to supermarkets, like Tesco, Asda and stuff like that?*

*P3: Aye. Tescos, Asda, Somerfield*

*P4: Aye, Tesco has got their own brand of vodka in there which is a lot cheaper.*

*P3: Bottle of vodka for £6 you can't beat that.*

*P2: Yeah, I've bought lots of 'Budweiser' for a tenner in Iceland but it's more difficult getting served in there.*

*P1: I'd be too embarrassed to try and get served in case they said no.*

*P2: Cheaper though.*

*P3: If it's on offer and it looks nice then I'll buy.*

*P2: I don't drink anything else other than beer ever*

*P3: Aye, you're a fussy drinker but. (FG21)*

Purchases could also be affected by promotions at a more local level. This group discussed how brands popular in their local neighbourhood were promoted by the store there.

*I: What about your Red Square?*

*P4: Yeah, 3 for 2, you buy 2 and get a third one free and stuff like that.*

*P2: There's this really minky [dirty] street over there, eh? And they all like stole bottles of Bucky out it so they stopped selling it. But they selt [sold] it cheaper than the rest of the shops, eh?*

*I: Do they advertise it in the shops like do they have stickers or anything saying prices?*

*P1: In the [home scheme] shop last week they had it advertised for world cup special. Cans of Tennents, cans of Stella and bottles of Buckfast. All reduced.*

*P4: That's because everybody drinks it! (FG13)*

Though some evidence was found of local shops promoting 'Buckfast' however, it was more typical for participants to report restrictions on the sale of this product due to its association with antisocial behaviour.

*P2: I've never seen an advertisement for Buckfast. There's never been any offers for it either.*

*P4: No, no.*

*P1: I worked in Haddows and they put the prices up on it.*

*P2: Coz everybody buys it.*

*P1: Coz it's associated wi' neds and neds are associated wi' violence.*

*P2: You saying I'm a ned?*

*P3: It's no associated with neds because look at everybody on this hill, they're all drinking it!*

*P4: In the [local shop], you're only allowed one bottle of 'Buckfast' per person. Off-license. (FG7)*

Overall, the impact of promotion was seen mainly in the accounts of individuals who were able to purchase their own alcohol. Some underage drinkers felt they were unaffected by promotional activity in that they rarely had the opportunity to buy their own drinks, depending instead on agents to do this for them. In this way, in-store promotions were rarely witnessed by these drinkers and thus had little effect on their purchases.

*P5: It's not like we can get sold stuff really so we don't really pay attention to stuff like that it's just like people we know that are over age that go and get it for us. But you just get anything you get your hands on. (FG21)*

In the absence of promotion it was of interest how young people became aware of the drinks they typically purchased. Most young people described learning about alcohol through observing others. The

earliest influence in this respect was often older siblings who appeared to act as role models for their younger brothers and sisters. Later on, friends became an important source of influence as well.

*I: So how do you know about these drinks then? Have you seen them advertised?*

*P2: No, not really. It's just what everyone else drinks. Like my older sister. You see them drinking it when they're like 14 and you're 8 and that gives you the idea to drink the same thing. So it's just watching them when you're younger.*

*P1: And it's what your friends drink as well. All our friends drink Lambrini as well so you just kinda drink it, plus it tastes nice. (FG1).*

Though it was clear that participants learned through observation it was apparent that knowledge about particular products was also spread by word of mouth. Young people talked to each other about what drinks they had tried, creating a pool of knowledge about which products to buy and which ones to avoid.

*P2: I've got an older sister and she told me a lot about drink and stuff. Like she never got drunk in front of me but she knew about drinks and her and her boyfriend told me stuff and that so I kinda learned drinks and that from them but we've got loads of other friends like that drink a lot as well so... (FG4)*

As drinking among this age group was common, alcohol was also frequently present when individuals socialised. This gave drinkers an opportunity to sample drinks they had not tried before, allowing them to establish their own likes and dislikes.

*I: You've been drinking Frosty Jack tonight, have you seen it advertised?*

*P2: It isn't advertised, it's my older cousins. I've seen them drinking it.*

*P4: Yeah, you just drink whatever you've seen other people drinking or try things, see what you like then drink that. (FG9)*

Thus, it was clear that young peoples' choice of product were shaped by those around them. Indeed, some saw their choices as being led by what was accepted within their local communities. For these boys, the drinking of cheap white cider rather than premium brands was characteristic of their local neighbourhood and thus part of growing up. As such this seemed a more powerful influence on product choice than marketing campaigns for other less culturally significant products.

*P3: White storm, white lightening, I could name them all!*

*I: How do you know about them though? Are they advertised?*

*P1: No, you walk into the shop and there's "Strongbow" [indicates sign above the counter] just see them there.*

*P3: If you were brought up in a place where every cunt, er every folks drinking, you just get used to it. Just the way you was brought up. (FG12)*

### Summary

Most of the products preferred by street drinkers were not the subject of widespread promotional campaigns as participants could not afford to buy premium brand drinks that were widely advertised. One exception in this respect was ‘Lambrini’, the adverts for which street drinkers were very aware. Indeed, the campaign associated with this drink appeared to affect product preference in two ways leading to perceptions of this product as both highly gendered (i.e. for girls only) and as “fun” to drink (a characteristic with which those who consumed this product often wished to be associated). The influence of ‘special offers’ was more widespread in that reduced prices and 3 for 2 offers seemed to have some impact on the likelihood of drinkers purchasing such products. This noted, several drinks preferred by participants were allegedly never advertised nor promoted and the sales of ‘Buckfast’ (which was extremely popular among some drinkers) were often restricted. Given the absence of marketing, the continued popularity of such drinks was of interest. Reports indicated that young people got to know about these drinks through what they observed and communication with others in their peer group. Indeed, a major driving force in producing brand choice for products which were not widely promoted appeared to be the cultural significance of these products to particular social groups.

### **Cultural Significance**

Though it was apparent that beverage characteristics played an important role in street drinkers’ choice of product, analysis revealed that the cultural significance of particular drinks could have an even more powerful influence. According to accounts, particular brands of alcohol were associated with different characteristics which in turn were felt to reflect the social identity of the drinker in terms of individual image and group membership. Preference for specific drinks was therefore linked to the particular image the individual wished to project and the groups he or she wished to be seen as being part of or (just as importantly) apart from.

Findings from the current study suggested a cultural split in terms of product preference centring on ‘Buckfast Tonic Wine.’ Observations and focus group data revealed a strong preference for this product among groups of street drinkers comprising of ‘neds’ and an equally strong rejection of this product among ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ groups. Though a range of reasons were revealed for this split, the most influential appeared to be the cultural significance of this product to each respective group. Group perceptions of ‘Buckfast’ and how these beliefs shaped purchasing habits among those of

different cultural backgrounds is discussed, considering first the strong preference expressed by group of 'neds' for 'Buckfast' and then the reasons given by 'alternative' and 'mainstream' groups for their rejection of this product and consequent preference for alternative types of alcoholic beverages.

#### "We are the Monks": The Cultural Significance of 'Buckfast' among 'Ned' Street Drinkers

Field observations and focus group data showed overwhelmingly that the product of choice among 'ned' groups was 'Buckfast Tonic Wine.' Indeed, although these groups tended to buy a range of drinks from beer to bottles of spirits, only one such group was approached that did not also have at least one bottle of 'Buckfast' in their possession. A range of reasons were given for the popularity of 'Buckfast'. One of these was to do with the groups' reasons for street drinking in that the aim of a drinking session for these individuals was to get as drunk as possible without being caught by the police. In terms of the product's characteristics therefore, 'Buckfast' was viewed by 'neds' as being ideally suited to street drinking being cheap, potent and easily transported.

*P1: That's what you go for the cheaper, stronger drink that you can carry easily. You know what I mean? Buckfast is a prime example. (FG14)*

The perceived strength of the product was especially important. As the following comments demonstrate, drinking 'Buckfast' was seen as the most effective way of getting very drunk extremely quickly. Indeed, even when it was pointed out to participants that 'Buckfast' did not perhaps represent the best value for money in terms of cost-strength ratio, it was clear that they remained convinced that 'Buckfast' was more potent than other products, or as this group put it, "nothing gets ye wrecked like Bucky."

*I: So I presume from what you're all holding [they all raise bottles and cheer] that your favourite drink for outdoors is Bucky, is that right?*

*P4: Aye, Bucky man, nothing better, there's nothing better.*

*[general agreement/cheering from all]*

*I: But what specifically about it?*

*P3: It's cheap man, it's cheap and it gets you fucking shit-faced.*

*P4: Gets you oot yer skull, man. Fleeing.*

*P3: It's cheap and it gets ye fucked man. Out yer face. Good value for you money man, gets you wallaped.*

*I: But as far as I remember it isn't the best value...*

*P4: AYE BUT IT GETS YE FUCKED MAN!! That's why we like it.*

*P3: Are you saying cider, why don't I drink cider?*

*I: Well, yeah it cheaper...*

*P3: Naw, cider's pish man, tastes like shit. Disnae get you drunk as fast either, man.*

*P4: Nothing gets you wrecked like Bucky. (FG5)*

The belief that 'Buckfast' led to intoxication more quickly than other products was reiterated in several focus groups by both 'mainstream' and 'ned' participants. These 'mainstream' participants discussed the 'Buckfast' "effect."

*I: Bucky is not that cheap though is it, why do you think folk drink that?*

*P1: About a fiver a bottle. It's the effect*

*P4: It goes straight to your head. Gets you drunk quicker (FG3)*

From their own experiences, word of mouth and media reports, participants were also aware that 'Buckfast' had a bad reputation. That sales of this drink were often restricted confirmed this further. This did not temper drinkers' enthusiasm for 'Buckfast', rather the perceived notoriety of the product appeared to be appealing to those who bought it. For example, the account of this group implied that they considered buying 'Buckfast' to be somewhat subversive, an "under the counter" purchase, exclusive to those from the wrong "side of the tracks."

*P4: Buckfast is only ever in the paper with bad stories about it...*

*I: Do they advertise it in the shops like do they have stickers or anything saying prices?*

*P2: No it's normally kept under the shelf for like 'special' people like us...*

*P2: That's coz what they all drink up there. See this side of the tracks. The whole of [name of town] is split in two eh, there's this side and there's the other side where we're fae you don't drink nothing but Buckfast and cans. (FG13)*

Indeed, drinkers appeared to relish the idea that 'Buckfast' could potentially "make you go mental" i.e. cause the drinker to become "horny" or to be in "fighting mode." Such effects were believed to be induced by certain ingredients contained within 'Buckfast' rather than being attributable to the drinker him/herself. Rather than discouraging these individuals from buying 'Buckfast' however, the idea of losing control/going wild seemed to be considered appealing. Not only this, but the belief that such



effects were caused by particular ingredients uniquely contained in 'Buckfast' appeared to encourage brand loyalty. This was apparent as this group went on to discuss the relative merits of 'Buckfast' and 'Monksford' (a tonic wine of comparable price) which was believed to be missing the crucial component that gave 'Buckfast' its edge.

*I: But Buckfast is not actually the cheapest?*

*P2: Oh, no no no no no. There's only one tonic wine and that's Buckfast. The Monksford...*

*P4: ...that's just a copycat...*

*P2: Oh! I don't know who's trying to rip them off but...oh! It's not right. I don't know what but they're missing an ingredient out. We read the label.*

*P1: Monksford. Missing one ingredient.*

*P2: One ingredient, I don't know what it is but it's the stuff that makes you go mental. [whistles]*

*P3: A bottle of Buckfast makes you horny. [sarcastic laugh] You always want a girl when you've been on the Buckfast.*

*P2: You either want a girl or you want a fight that's for sure.*

*P4: There's something about it.*

*I: Do you think that people are more violent on Buckfast?*

*P1: I think it's all in the heid [head] basically, I think it's all in the heid.*

*P3: Once you drink that, that's you, you're in fighting mode.*

*I: But if you got pished out your skull on beer would you not still want a fight?*

*All: Nah, no.*

*P4: I dunno you're in a chilled out mood. Just a happy gassed mood, like 'bllleeeuuugh'*

*I: So what is it about this stuff then?*

*P3: I dunno... (FG13)*

Though considerable brand loyalty was apparent, accounts suggested that some drinkers did not perceive such effects as being exclusive to 'Buckfast'. Indeed, drinking other high strength products (such as 'Sambuca') were seen by some as resulting in similar outcomes. That consuming such products might result in a visit to "the cells" (i.e. being charged and taken to the police station) did not seem to

concern to these individuals, instead it appeared to make the prospect of drinking them more attractive, perhaps by adding an element of unpredictability to the evening.

*I: When you're drinking outside I'm seeing plenty of Buckfast here, is that usually what you buy?*

*P3: No, no man, we've got Red Square and that got Sambuca as well.*

*P4: I've got Blackjacks ['Sambuca' mixed with bourbon] that would send you to fuck knows where.*

*P1: The cells! Buckfast, Buckfast and beer is the main thing we drink. (FG12)*

Given that some participants believed that the desired effects of 'Buckfast' could potentially be gained by drinking other products, their overwhelming preference for 'Buckfast' requires explanation. One reason for brand loyalty was that this product was perceived as best value for money, affording the drinker similar effects as could be gained by drinking spirits but with less expense. For example, these participants observed that 'Buckfast' despite being cheap was equivalent in its effects to drinking a bottle of vodka.

*P1: The cheap and nasty stuff*

*P2: It's five fifty and it's like drinking a bottle of vodka. (FG13)*

A number of participants reported drinking 'Buckfast' before going out for the night. Preloading in this manner was viewed as saving the drinker a considerable amount of money (given that drinking one bottle of 'Buckfast' was seen as having similar effects as drinking larger quantities of other alcohol). An additional benefit was that drinking this product (which drinkers were aware contains caffeine) was believed to increase the drinker's energy levels before their big night out

*P1: Buckfast saves you money, you get a good deal with Buckfast.*

*P3: It gives me energy as well. It gives me EN-ER-GY! It's got caffeine.*

*P1: It saves you money you drink a bottle of Buckfast and you're gassed it saves you money*

*P2: Exactly. Five pounds right?*

*P1: It saves you going up and spending loads and loads of money. You canny go to a party sober so one way of doing that is to have some Buckfast and then go there and have a good time... (FG16)*

'Buckfast's' energy giving properties were considered especially important by clubbers. This group discussed how drinking 'Buckfast' allowed them to keep dancing all night or as they put it, gave them

“Bucky shoes.” According to this group, an added benefit of drinking ‘Buckfast’ was that it enhanced the effects of other drugs (specifically ecstasy) which they also took when clubbing.

*P1: We always call it the “Bucky shoes” coz it keeps you dancing all night!*

*P3: AH, ARRRGH! That's what the eccies [ecstasy] are for.*

*P1; You need to get the Bucky shoes on when you're going to The Beat [nightclub] you know.*

*P3: That's what the ching [cocaine] and eccies are for. You need a wee bottle before you hae a few eccies you know or they don't do much, you know?*

*P2: Aye, exactly. (FG17)*

Thus, the perceived potency of ‘Buckfast’ (in terms of its strength and energy-giving properties) added to the appeal of this product. Focus groups also revealed that the taste of products played an important role in creating preference between cheaper drinks that were considered affordable. The taste of ‘Buckfast’ was a matter of great debate within focus groups. Some drinkers expressed a genuine enjoyment of the taste of ‘Buckfast,’ a number of whom appeared to be connoisseurs of the product. These individuals differentiated between bottle numbers (which were believed to indicate the point at which the wine had been drawn from the barrel during production) in terms of viscosity and the impact this had on taste and enjoyment.

*I: Is there different tastes?*

*All: Aye!*

*P1: Do you know number 1?*

*P3: 1 to 48!!*

*P1: See number 1...*

*P6: You want tae taste it Big Yin, Big yin? We've got a 25 want to taste it?*

*P1: There's a number...*

*P3: See on the bottle, right there [shows number on bottom rim of bottle under label]*

*P6: Right there, right there? Number 25. Number 1 is the best.*

*P1: Number 1's the best!*

*P1: See number 1 that's 1 out of the barrel that's why it's thin*

*P3: Really thin! Really thin! It's like water.*

*P6: ...but 25's thick...*

*P2: One to ten's the best. No number 1 that's the lightest. That's the best. (FG22)*

However, there was a good deal of variation in reports regarding whether drinkers enjoyed the taste of 'Buckfast'. Though a number of participants expressed a strong dislike for the flavour they were still prepared to tolerate it in order to gain the perceived benefits of drinking Buckfast (i.e. getting drunk quickly).

*I: What about the taste?*

*P3: Tastes fucking beautiful man. Love it, love it. Goes down pure...*

*P4: Aye I fuckin love it, man. You take one mouthful and you want mair and mair. Fucking lovely man, gets you oot yer nut.*

*P2: Naw, it tastes like pish man, but you're no caring coz it gets you pished quick. [FG5]*

'Buckfast' was also considered extremely convenient for drinking outside. Packaging made this product portable and easily concealed as this group observed.

*P3: It's easier to carry a bottle of Buckfast, you don't want to be carrying tonic or mixers, just easier to carry a bottle outside. You don't want to come out with a couple of tinnys it's more hassle.*

*P1: You must have done it when you were younger, you get the easiest carry-out to carry, you would go somewhere local.*

*P3: It's easiest to carry, well if you carry like a big bottle of cider around with you, a 3 litre bottle of cider in your back pocket, that's not happening! (FG14)*

Though 'Buckfast' had all the characteristics street drinkers' generally wanted from a product they intended to drink outside, its greatest appeal appeared to be its cultural significance to the group. Indeed, 'Buckfast' was viewed by 'neds' as a cultural icon. To purchase and consume this drink was to declare oneself a 'ned' and through this distinguish oneself from other cultural groups who by their rejection of 'Buckfast' identified themselves as the out-group. This was evident in the following extract where to demonstrate his point one participant (who identified himself as a 'ned') called out to a passing group of 'alternative' youths to back up his point that 'Buckfast' was exclusive to 'neds' or as he put it, the "ned drink."

*P1: Everybody drinks it. You just get mad wi it.*

*I: What is it about Bucky though?*

*P1: It gets you drunk, you get mad wit it, it gets you nuts.*

*P2: It's a ned's drink.*

*I: But what do you mean?*

*P1: See ned's like, if you don't usually know what ned means....*

*I: No, no, no, what do you mean by it's a ned drink, is it like an image?*

*P2: Mm hm.*

*P1: Technically.*

*I: So what's the image. Can you describe it?*

*P1: Like they boys there and they boys there, they'll no be on Bucky. I'll go and ask them. [shouts to a group of 'alternative' youths passing] Boys there! Do you drink you Bucky? [group answers: No]. There you go. Point exactly! Know what I'm saying? No neds.*

*I: [laughs] Ah, you're great!*

*P1: Get ma point but, don't ye. (FG2)*

Young people who drank 'Buckfast' clearly identified with the drink as part of their culture, adopting it as part of their social identity. Aware that 'Buckfast' is produced by monks, this group had adopted the catch-phrase "we are the monks" to express group affiliation through loyalty to the product.

*P2: You buy it because that's what everybody else has drunk.*

*P4: You've watched everybody else drink it but.*

*P3: It's been out years and years but. And who are we? We are the monks.*

*P4: We are the monks. (FG7)*

Not only was 'Buckfast' clearly identified as a "ned drink" within accounts, it was also a gendered product, in that most participants viewed 'Buckfast' as a drink for males only. Indeed, some accounts gave the impression that the ability to tolerate (or even develop a liking for) the taste of 'Buckfast' was in some way considered masculine (in that females were generally seen as preferring sweeter tasting products). These participants discussed the differences between 'Buckfast' and "Maddog" ('MD20/20') which was recognised as a "lassie ned drink."

*P1: Most lassie's don't drink Bucky right? You can ask mostly aw' [all] the lassies round here. See Maddog, that's what lassies drink. See that's a lassie ned's drink. It's no as strong exactly as Bucky. It's fucking, it's like a bit of a drinking whisky when your fucking straight know what I mean pure burny*

*throat, but if you drink Maddog it's no. You get the Maddog you don't get the burny throat so that's why lassies prefer Maddog compared to Bucky.*

*I: Is that right? Do you prefer it?*

*P2: [female participant] I would prefer, probably for getting drunk Maddog is the best. (FG2)*

Indeed, males who drank products other than 'Buckfast' were often the subject of derision. This was typically light-hearted but appeared to indicate that some in-group pressure existed regarding what products were considered acceptable for group members to drink. This was evident in a group of males in which one participant (P4) rejected 'Buckfast' in preference for 'Red Square'. This met with insults from other group members intended to emasculate this individual due to his preference for a drink which was viewed as "poof-juice." The comments directed at this participant suggested that those who drank products other than 'Buckfast' (especially those considered to be less potent) could expect to be viewed as an "outsider" and maybe even less of a man. Thus, consuming 'Buckfast' appeared to be considered as evidence of the drinker's masculinity.

*I: What else have you got? Bucky, Red Square*

*P2: Aye, the old poof-juice, he's on the Red Square Ice. [referring to P4]*

*P3: That's all he drinks poofjuice though isn't it?*

*P1: Aye.*

*P2: Aye, Red Square, Miller, Tennents. We just drink anything we can get our hands on. It's a done deal.*

*P3: [pointing to P4] He likes a good rubbing up the ass!*

*I: Why that ['Red Square'] then?*

*P4: Coz that's stinking! [pointing at Buckfast]*

*P2: Aye, he's got a different taste. He's a lightweight basically. He likes boys!*

*P3: That's what makes him an outsider. (FG12)*

As 'Buckfast' was not the subject of extensive overt promotional activity, it was of interest where young people had heard about the product. As with other cheaper alcoholic drinks preferred by street drinkers, participants' knowledge of 'Buckfast' seemed to have been gleaned through word of mouth. Indeed, drinking 'Buckfast' was considered so normative in this groups' community as to be considered part of growing up.

*I: So how do you know about Bucky then?*

*P3: Whit do you mean?*

*I: Like advertising and that?*

*P4: No, man it's no advertised, you, just everybody drinks it.*

*P3: All our friends drinks it so you see that when you're a boy and then you drink it and aw [as well]. (FG5)*

Indeed, it was clear from a number of accounts that drinking 'Buckfast' was equivalent to a badge of membership in some communities, declaring the individual to be part of a particular group or neighbourhood. Here one participant explained why he considered 'Buckfast' the "local drink."

*It's just a local drink man, if yer fae here you drink it, everybody drinks it, oor pals drink it and their pals man, the whole lot o' us. (FG7)*

Another group described 'Buckfast' as "the national drink." Such declarations suggested that the popularity of this product went beyond the its price and physical characteristics, symbolising part of the drinker's identity, perhaps giving the individual a sense of belonging to something much larger than himself (i.e. a bigger collective) which appeared to be considered by these boys as source of pride.

*P2: It's the main Scottish drink!*

*I: What do you mean?*

*P2: It's the national drink! Simple as that. Registered trademark.*

*P4: Everybody, everybody drinks Buckfast. Everybody drinks Buckfast. (FG12)*

Indeed, being "brought up with" 'Buckfast' appeared to counteract (or at least lead to acceptance) of the more negative aspects of its image. This participant described being unconcerned by the perceived links between 'Buckfast' and violence due to his prolonged familiarity with the product (though as was noted previously, the product's perceived notoriety appeared in some cases to be part of its appeal).

*P4: You drink this from when you're about 14. You hear stories about people getting bottled by folk with bottles of Buckfast but we've just and things like that but we've just been brought up with it basically, haven't we? (FG7)*

As well as being linked with individuals' sense of masculinity, community (and even national identity) this product also appeared to be associated with class. In this group (of whom the majority were 'Buckfast' drinkers), two participants (P1 and P2) made derogatory comments about 'Buckfast'. As the main discussion continued, two of the other participants (P3 and P4) began a whispered conversation

about what they had said. This was picked up by the recording equipment and transcribed and is included here to demonstrate the negative attributions which could be applied to those who expressed such opinions. Indeed, so strong were participants' perceptions of 'Buckfast' as a 'working class' drink, that those rejecting it were seen as denying these class origins (e.g. "kidding on they're posh"), a declaration which was the source of much resentment for the other participants in the group who appeared to see this as an affront to themselves and others of a similar background.

*P1: I've had it once in my whole life but never, never again. It tastes disgusting.*

*P3: [whispering as an aside to P4 referring to P1] They're kidding on they're posh and all, pretending they don't drink it, man but hanging about with us, know what I mean?*

*I: If you designed the ideal drink to drink outside what would it be?*

*P1: I suppose for them [rest of group], Buckfast.*

*P3: [whispering as an aside to P4] Aye yeah, the yuppies, check the up and coming yuppies. (FG7)*

The link between product choice and class was also implied in the account of this participant. His representation of how he felt drinking "posh" alcohol (i.e. red wine) would be viewed within his local community clearly indicated his feeling that to drink products other than those which were culturally sanctioned was not an option.

*P1: It's just the Bucky, eh? What you gonna do? Walk out your house with a bottle of like "Cava?" Like the poshest red wine you can get? You walking about like that? Nae chance! Red wine, red wine or that... "Oh, here's me with my bottle of wine!" [mimes clutching a bottle like a baby swinging from side to side with other arm outstretched to suggest an effeminate mincing walk] (FG12)*

Thus, for these groups, 'Buckfast' was loaded with cultural meaning. Indeed, the cultural significance of 'Buckfast' appeared key in creating brand loyalty, even in circumstances where promotional activity made other products better value. For example the comments of this group indicated that the significance of 'Buckfast' as a cultural icon meant that though they were occasionally tempted by promotional activity, such marketing campaigns would have little impact on them as consumers over the longer term.

*I: If they did put something on offer in an off-license would you buy it instead of Buckfast?*

*P2: Aye, I've done it with Carling beer, you get 6 for £2.50.*

*P4: 6 for £2.50. At the [local off-licence], 6 Carling for £2.50 I don't normally drink beer and I started buying it coz it was 6 for £2.50.*



*P3: Aye, but that makes no difference, really. Everybody in Glasgow drinks Buckfast and that's it. (FG7)*

### Summary

Findings suggested a strong preference for 'Buckfast' among 'ned' groups. Indeed, focus group data (verified by field observations) indicated that though these groups tended to buy a range of products, 'Buckfast' was almost always included in group purchases. Important in creating brand preference was that this beverage was viewed as being well-suited to street drinking representing good value for money (in terms of cost-strength ratio) and being packaged in such a way as to be highly convenient for drinking outside. Such beliefs were heightened by the perception that certain ingredients in 'Buckfast' made it more potent than other drinks of similar price. Perceived links between this product and violent or antisocial behaviour did not seem to discourage drinkers, rather this was considered an acceptable side-effect or considered an appealing attribute. Most important in shaping 'neds' preference for this drink however was its cultural significance, in that to these young adults 'Buckfast' was symbolic of group affiliation, class, national identity as well as the drinker's masculinity.

### "That's a ned drink, the jakiest of them all": The Cultural Significance of 'Buckfast' among 'Alternative' and 'Mainstream' Street Drinkers

The popularity of 'Buckfast' amongst 'ned' groups was counterbalanced by the fierce rejection of this product by 'mainstream' and 'alternative' groups. Focus group data (supported by field observations) revealed a uniform absence of this product amongst these participants' purchases (see appendix 1). 'Alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers appeared to view this drink as representing a constellation of characteristics which they did not wish to project to others. In turn, this desire to distance themselves from the image they associated with 'Buckfast' shaped product choice, discouraging purchases of this drink. The views of 'alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers and their impact on product preference are discussed.

'Alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers typically held negative opinions of 'Buckfast', viewing this product as that preferred by problematic street drinkers (i.e. 'neds' and 'jakeys') whom they understood to be social outcasts; either violent and socially deviant or else down-and-out and the subject of disgust and exclusion.

*I: So now I have to ask, what about things like Buckfast?*

*All: Eeeuw!*

*P1: Now that's a jakey drink, man. That's a ned drink, the jakiest of them all. I wouldn't touch it.*

*P2: Yeah. Classic ned drink. (FG9)*

As 'Buckfast' was considered the archetypal drink of these groups, participants felt that to be seen drinking this product would be to risk being associated with them. Though 'mainstream' and 'alternative' participants reported that one reason that they did not purchase 'Buckfast' was a dislike of the taste, the desire to avoid negative labelling appeared a much more powerful motivation. As this group continued they explained how their desire to avoid being seen as 'neddish' or 'jakey' (i.e. deviant and therefore socially unacceptable) underpinned their reasons for avoiding particular drinks. This was especially true for 'Buckfast' which was viewed as the product most strongly associated with 'ned' culture or as they put it the "classic ned drink."

*P4: That stuff is minging [disgusting] anyway. I've tried it once and it tastes like...*

*P2: [interrupts] Yeah, it tastes awful, how can they drink it?*

*I: So is the image of a drink important then?*

*All: Aye, very important.*

*P1: You don't want to be drinking anything that's jakey! I mean I wouldn't walk down the street with a can of lager even! I mean I don't like lager but that's beside the point, it's just the way it looks, it...it gives a neddish look to you. Buckfast is the worst for that. I'm a dear drinker myself anyway.*

*P2: It's just so neddy. I wouldn't be seen dead drinking it. (FG9)*

Even when individuals did report enjoying the taste of 'Buckfast' they still tended to avoid buying it due to the drink's perceived image. This was encouraged to some extent by other group members. Indeed, those who admitted to liking 'Buckfast' within focus groups were often the subject of ridicule from the rest of the group members. This derision appeared to act as a way of gently reminding those who said they enjoyed 'Buckfast' of the negative connotations of drinking this product.

*P2: I'm a fan of Buckfast myself. I love it.*

*P3: She's a mink [disgusting/dirty] but. (FG18)*

Recognition that they shared the same social space with 'neds' and 'jakeys' when drinking outside and were essentially engaged in the same activity seemed to heighten these participants' fears of being seen as problematic street drinkers. Indeed, several accounts existed in which participants contrasted their own reasons for drinking to those of other street drinkers, seemingly as a way of distancing themselves from groups whom they saw as behaving in a socially unacceptable manner. The comments of these

'alternative' youths clearly delineated between drinking 'Buckfast' (which they believed was motivated by the desire to blot out underlying problems) and drinking for fun which they felt characterised their own drinking habits.

*P1: You never see a person that's good and happy on Buckfast drunk, you just see complete and utter twats on their own like, "MWAAHHHH," that can't speak.*

*P2: It doesn't associate with a good time. On Buckfast...*

*P3: It's more a kind of wasted thing.*

*P2: It's not a 'go out and have a laugh' drink, it's a, 'I hate my whole life, I want to get wasted' drink or 'I'm a ned and I don't have a home. I drink Buckfast to make myself happy.' ...like we always drink Lambrini before we go out but obviously when we get to a club or something we'd switch to something like erm vodka, or cider and black or something. But we love our Lambrini, it's fun! (FG8)*

As this discussion continued, these participants explained that their choice of other products (i.e. 'Lambrini' and alcopops) arose in part as a way of distancing themselves from "ned culture" and all it was seen to represent. This appeared to be linked not only with a desire to avoid the stigma of being associated with this social group but also a way of demonstrating loyalty to the youth culture to which they themselves claimed membership.

*P2: Yeah, yeah, I think that the people that we know that are originally from this city don't drink Buckfast because they've grown up knowing it is a ned culture if you drink Buckfast. So they will stick to other things like Alcopops and Lambrini and that sort of stuff? But like as she was saying her friends from like Brighton and Ireland they sort of drink Buckfast because it is like the punk culture which is fair enough coz we do all like to stick to our cultures.*

*I: So how important is the image of a drink to people?*

*P3: I would get embarrassed even asking for Buckfast.*

*P1: I don't get embarrassed easily. I can go in anywhere and ask for anything and I'm quite the unembarrassable person, that's not even a word but I'm making it up [laughs] But yeah, it's just like I don't like Buckfast. I don't like the taste of it but even if I did I don't think I'd buy it coz it has got such a stigma attached.... (FG8)*

Opposition to 'ned' culture among 'alternative' and 'mainstream' participants was largely linked to the perception of this group as deviant and violent (a belief which according to many reports was based on personal experience of victimisation by individuals perceived as belonging to this cultural group). Some saw the consumption of 'Buckfast' as playing a causative role in violent incidents believing particular ingredients or "chemicals" uniquely contained within 'Buckfast' as key in producing this link. In this way the accounts of 'alternative' and 'ned' groups overlapped somewhat. These participants attempted to describe why they believed that 'Buckfast' led to violence (one as a perpetrator of such an act)

explaining their view that certain ingredients in the product induced violent urges and acted as a trigger for angry aggression regardless of the “personality type” of the individual.

*I: What is it about Buckfast? Why has it got such a bad reputation?*

*P1: It tastes foul, it's cheap and it's one of those drinks that it doesn't matter what kind of personality type you have when you drink it, you usually get violent.*

*I: So why do you think neds drink it?*

*P2: THAT'S WHY! Coz it gives them, not so much Dutch courage, a bit stronger than Dutch courage - the courage to STAB people.*

*P2: Most of the time you're guaranteed to get violent on Bucky no matter how much of a nice person you are. Like I used to be really nice, really, really when I was younger and I took a stank [swallow] of that and smacked a bottle over a boy. It's not nice stuff.*

*P1: I'm pretty sure there's some chemical in it that triggers something, I dunno like some kind of adrenaline rush or something.*

*P2: Aye, there's something. It's not even adrenalin though it's a sicky feeling, and then you feel this thing in your brain when you wanna punch something and you just become so violent, like a mini Arnold Schwarzenegger or something. (FG23)*

Others rejected the notion that ‘Buckfast’ was a cause of violence and that those drinking ‘Buckfast’ were not responsible for their actions. Instead, these participants felt that ‘Buckfast’ was no different from any other alcoholic beverage and was linked to physical aggression only through causing drunkenness if consumed in large enough quantities. The association between ‘Buckfast’ and violence was therefore felt to BE dependent on the individual who consumed it rather than the product itself.

*P3: If silly folk want to say that Buckfast makes folk do stupid things and getting drunk out your nut on something else makes you keep sane then they're goddam lads, they're fucking lads!*

*P2: Eh, [name of P3] is all political about this, eh?*

*P3: So like Buckfast makes you pan in a window but if you drink like 18 litres of vodka then you wouldn't? No.*

*P4: Aye but...Folk like react different off different drinks. Like [name], he gets aggressive off Bacardi. (FG16)*

Indeed, others felt that the intention to engage in violence preceded the consumption of ‘Buckfast’ amongst ‘neds’ and that drunkenness merely provided an excuse for such behaviour. As such, ‘ned’ culture was seen as underpinning violence and ‘Buckfast’ was seen merely as an accessory, providing justification after the fact.

*I: They [neds] like it ['Buckfast'] coz it gets you drunk fast and then they like being drunk because it gives them an excuse to beat people up and act like pricks. (FG9)*

Though variation existed in how 'alternative' and 'mainstream' participants explained the perceived link between 'Buckfast' and violence, the belief that there was a link was so powerful that even those who reported enjoying the taste of the drink still avoided consuming it for fear of becoming aggressive.

*P3: Aye, all the neds drink it. It's part of their culture and you can see them all hanging about the street corners wanting to fight with each other and stab each other coz they've had a bottle of Buckfast, you know? No....*

*P1: I love the taste of Buckfast, but. I love the taste of it but I don't tend to drink it that often.*

*I: Is that anything to do with the image of it? You said you liked the taste of it but you said you wouldn't drink it?*

*P1: It is wild aye. I've seen myself and like other people going a bit...scatty on it. . (FG6)*

These groups were also aware that the perceived link between 'Buckfast', 'ned' culture and street violence, meant that those seen drinking this product were more likely to attract police attention. Knowledge of 'Buckfast's' reputation and the likely consequences of being seen drinking it acted as an additional incentive to avoid 'Buckfast' and buy other products.

*P 4: Plus it more likely that you'll get it taken off you. Like the police will hassle you coz you've got Buckfast, coz then they'd think you were a ned so you're maybe more likely to have to pour it out and then you don't have anything. I've had it a couple of times anyway but when you have or, I didn't really drink it but when people drink it they're really angry on it, like violent so I think the police know that. (FG9)*

### Summary

'Buckfast' was strenuously rejected by 'mainstream' and 'alternative' groups. One reason for this was a strong dislike for the taste of the product. More important in deterring these groups from consuming 'Buckfast' however, was the perceived image of this product. 'Buckfast' drinkers were typically thought of as 'neds' or 'jakeys' (i.e. vagrants) or in other words social groups with whom 'alternative' and 'mainstream' individuals did not wish to be associated. Rather than valuing the perceived potency of 'Buckfast', this was seen as a negative characteristic potentially leading to irrational behaviour including violence by those who chose to drink it outside. The belief that 'Buckfast' might be a cause of physical aggression acted as a powerful deterrent to 'alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers. Such was the strength of this perceived association in fact, that even individuals who reported enjoying the taste of 'Buckfast' avoided it for this reason. This was encouraged further by in-group pressure to reject this

product in preference for others that had fewer negative connotations or which were deemed acceptable by the individual's social group.

### The Ideal Street Drink

In order to ascertain what characteristics were associated with products suited to street drinking participants were asked to design the ideal product for drinking outside. In general, suggestions centred on strength, taste and packaging which was convenient for drinking in outdoor environments. Most participants, regardless of their cultural background wanted products that were cheap and strong but had a pleasant taste.

*P6: Something tasted just like water or something but that was strong...no minging [disgusting] taste*

*P1: Or something that tasted sweet but was strong as fuck that you could...s'cuse the French!*

*P3: I think Buckfast but stronger but tastes the same.*

*P1: BUT CHEAPER.(FG14)*

As was apparent in the previous extract, many participants based their design around products they already bought, suggesting minor adjustments which brought their favourite drinks closer to the ideal. For these 'Lambrini' drinkers, this involved retaining the sweet taste of the drink but increasing the alcohol content so that they could become intoxicated faster underlining the desire amongst most participants for a product which would get them drunk quickly.

*I: So tell me, if you could design the ideal drink for drinking outside, what would it be?*

*P1: Lambrini but stronger, a lot stronger.*

*P1: Yeah, stronger but sweet.*

*P2: Sweet, so you, so it tastes nice but gets you drunk quickly. Yeah, cause Lambrini tastes like cherryade. (FG1)*

Others simply suggested a cocktail of their favourite products as a way of retaining the tastes they enjoyed whilst increasing potency. Again a high level of agreement was found in different cultural groups that cost, strength, volume and taste played an important role in creating the ideal street drink. One 'alternative' group had this to say:

*I: If you could design the perfect drink for drinking outside what would it be?*

*P3: Probably vodka.*

*P4: Apple sours, vodka, cider - what other drink do you like? Just all of them mixed together. Lambrini! (FG11)*

These comments were echoed by a group of females identified as 'neds':

*I think you should get a drink with vodka, Maddog and Irn Bru coz they're my favourite drinks. And Southern Comfort maybe! Just a wee tiny drop. Put them in a plastic bottle that people could enjoy and people could get gassed off, that's what I think and it should cost you three pound. And people could get gassed off. (FG15)*

Participants were also asked about what they envisaged as the ideal packaging for street drinking. In general, participants wanted a drink packaged in a single container with a screwcap.

*I: What about packing and stuff?*

*P3: One bottle, one bottle.*

*P5: Plastic...*

*P3: Screwable top, man. Well you do have that...*

*P2: Aye, screw tops are better for outside. (Fg16)*

Avoiding detection from the police was a particular concern among many street drinkers. As such, having a drink that could be easily concealed was a priority. Screwcaps were also considered useful for this purpose making drinks portable and allowing them to be resealed and hidden should the group be interrupted. This was apparent in groups of all cultural backgrounds. These 'alternative' youths commented:

*I: What about packaging or that, plastic bottles or glass or screwcaps or corks, what would you want?*

*P2: Definitely a screwtop coz then when the police come you can close it and stash it in your bag.(FG19)*

Others favoured packaging which concealed the true nature of what was being consumed. Alcoholic drinks which, by way of their packaging, gave the appearance of soft drinks were suggested, as in the comments of these two groups.

*I: See if you could design a drink to drink outside, what would it be like?*

*P1: Miller in a coke can!*

*P2: Beer in a less suspicious can. Aye.(FG10)*

*P2: Something with a label over it so you canny see what's in it so when the police drive past, like*

*disguise it as Ribena or something. Put it in a Ribena bottle and the police don't know its alcohol. (FG11)*

For the purposes of concealment, half bottles of 'Buckfast' were considered by many to have achieved the ideal. Bottles were reported as being convenient in terms of size, being easily transported and concealed in a bag or pocket.

*P4: A wee bottle, you know like the wee half Buckfast bottles? Coz they fit in your pocket. (FG19)*

*P3: The ideal? Really it's just a bottle of Buckfast. It's perfect coz it's one bottle and it fits in your pocket. It's nice (FG16)*

Indeed, 'Buckfast' was considered highly suited to street drinking by those who bought it, requiring few (if any) alterations to transform this product into the ideal.

*I: Say you had to design the ideal drink to drink outside*

*P3: The Tonic! ['Buckfast Tonic Wine']*

*P2: It's sitting there.*

*P3: Sitting right in front of us! Buckfast. (FG13)*

Groups also wanted packaging which was unbreakable in order to prevent accidents. As such, a number of individuals suggested changing products packaged in glass to plastic. On this point there was some agreement between cultural groups. The following extracts were from a group of 'alternative' drinkers and a group of 'ned' drinkers respectively.

*I: Would you prefer glass or plastic?*

*P2: Plastic coz if you drop it, it won't smash. It's always crap if you drop the bottle and it smashes, so it wouldn't smash. (FG11)*

*P4: Plastic bottle so you could put it in the bin. If you drop it, it'll smash. If you drop a plastic bottle you can pick it up and drink it again but if you drop a glass bottle it's fucked. It's away WOOOOO! (FG15)*

There was also some agreement among groups that glass should replace plastic as a way of reducing alcohol-related harm. This 'mainstream' participant was concerned with the potential damage done by broken glass left behind by street drinkers.

*P1: Well, there's some folk who smash their bottles like and that's pretty fucking wide, and animals and stuff, know what I mean. I'm an animal lover. (FG16)*



Others were more concerned with the damage that could be done with glass bottles should a fight begin. This group of ‘neds’ discussed the value of changing packaging from glass to plastic as a way of limiting injury to those involved in violence whilst drinking outside (a need underlined by the perceived frequency of fights involving weapons in Glasgow where the participants were interviewed).

*I: For like outside, what kind of packaging?*

*P1: Plastic bottles, guaranteed obviously because glass bottles are just totally oot.*

*P2: Somebody could pick it up and slash you. Like earlier on...*

*P2: Earlier on there was a fight and [...]*

*P1: It's mostly the case that if you stay in Glasgow you understand what I'm saying [...]*

*I: So you want a plastic bottle, what about the...?*

*P1: Everything should be in a plastic bottle. (FG2)*

However, there was some disagreement on this point amongst ‘ned’ drinkers in that those who enjoyed the taste of ‘Buckfast’, expressed a strong preference that the glass bottle to be retained. This was linked to the perception that the flavour of the product would be adversely affected were the packaging to change. Indeed, some groups felt that drinking ‘Buckfast’ from anything but the bottle it was packaged in was unacceptable. These two groups were in agreement on this point:

*I: So you wouldn't want plastic bottles instead?*

*P3: Naw, man naw. That would ruin the taste. [general agreement] You've got to have it oot a glass bottle, it'd change the taste if it was plastic. Naw, plastic would be shite, man.*

*P4: Doesnae even taste the same from a glass man, you just want it straight out the bottle. (FG5)*

*P1: You canny drink it out a glass, it has to be a green bottle. That's the reason why it's in a green bottle coz it tastes minging [disgusting] if it s out anything else.*

*P4: Aye exactly.*

*P3: It's minging [disgusting] altogether right, but it's in a green bottle for a reason. (FG7)*

An additional (more sinister) reason given for the preference for glass bottles among these groups, was that they could be used as weapons should a fight occur. Though the participants in this group could see the value of having plastic bottles to some extent, they objected to such a change on the grounds that these would be less effective as weapons.

*I: See if they sold it in plastic bottles would you like that better?*

*P6: Aye it would be..it would be better but it wouldnae be for bottling cunts...[mimes hitting fieldworker over head with bottle]*

*P1: It wouldnae taste better (FG22)*

Amongst 'alternative' groups there was agreement that 'Buckfast' bottles were frequently used as weapons in violent affrays involving 'neds' as the perpetrators. The young men in this group were aware of this as a result of personal experience.

*P2: Neds like the glass bottles coz it's a weapon. Neds see it as a weapon because the bottles are solid you can hit someone lots of time over the head and it won't smash.*

*I: So plastic would be better?*

*P2: Aye, coz I usually get hit with 'em and I'd prefer not to be. (FG20)*

Another group, which was unusually comprised of a majority of 'alternative' females and one 'ned' male (P3), discussed the relative merits of plastic and glass underlining further the contrasting views of their respective cultural groups on this matter.

*P3: [male 'ned' drinker] Glass, glass suits me better*

*P4: [female 'alternative' drinker] That's coz you like to hit people with bottles!*

*P3: [male 'ned' drinker'] That's true.*

*P1: [female 'alternative drinker] Plastic would be better coz then if you dropped it somewhere it wouldnae smash.*

*P3: [male 'ned' drinker'] Aye, but glass is better in that way but, glass ones are better..*

*P5: [female 'alternative drinker] [angry] Coz you go about hitting people over the heed with 'em, [name]!*

*P3: [male 'ned' drinker'] If they fucking try and hit me what you supposed to do?*

*P5: [female 'alternative drinker] That's what you always say!*

*P3: [male 'ned' drinker'] Wait while I put this bottle down and hit you? I don't think! Bottle's easier (FG21)*

## Summary

Participants' ideas of what might constitute the ideal street drink were similar across cultural groups with most individuals describing a product which was cheap, strong, palatable and contained in packaging which made the product convenient for drinking outside. For most this meant an easily concealed and transported single container with a screwcap. Given that 'Buckfast' was seen by those who bought it as having many (if not all) of these characteristics, this product was often seen as having achieved the ideal in terms of street drinking. Many believed that plastic should replace glass packaging to reduce the chance of accidental breakage but also to limit alcohol-related harm arising from irresponsible disposal of glass packaging and/or glass bottles being used by street drinkers as weapons. Some debate surrounded this notion however, with some 'ned' groups arguing for glass 'Buckfast' bottles to be retained due to concerns about how a change in packaging would affect the taste of the product and in fewer cases because the existing glass bottles made effective weapons.

## **Source of Supply: Preferred Outlets**

Almost without exception, participants reported purchasing their alcohol from licensed grocers (corner shops/convenience stores) or off-licenses. Supermarkets on the other hand, were rarely used. This was the case regardless of whether or not drinkers were over 18, though the reasons for this preference varied with age. Among younger (underage) participants, a preference for corner shops was linked to the perception that these outlets were considerably less likely than supermarkets or off-licenses to request proof of age. Reports suggested that younger drinkers specifically sought out what they viewed as "quiet" shops which they felt were struggling for trade as these businesses were viewed as "desperate" for profit and therefore more willing to sell to underage customers. The following extract is typical in this respect:

*P2: Wee corner shops is what you're looking for, with Pakistanis. I'm not being racist or anything but they will sell you anything...*

*P3: We just look for quiet places really that don't get much business coz you know they'll be desperate. There's none in [name of own area] but there are a few round here. There's that wee Turkish shop, he doesn't care the guy in there. I went in one time with my shirt and tie on, my school uniform! That was last time I went in, it's a while ago but he sold me drinks for all of us.*

*I: How about the offies [off-licenses] or supermarkets?*

*P3: No, we don't go there, just the quiet places where they're desperate. (FG1)*

The reports of underage participants suggested that shops that would sell to underage youths were initially located through a process of trial and error. However, some evidence indicated that when such

a shop was discovered, its location was passed on by word of mouth between groups of underage street drinkers, thus increasing the popularity of these outlets among these individuals. This was evident in the comments of this group of underage boys who discussed how some outlets were “renowned for being really easy” amongst drinkers of their age. The ease of buying alcohol from these outlets was often contrasted against the difficulties that were expected when attempting to buy alcohol from supermarkets, which in general were seen as “stricter” and therefore more likely to ask for proof of age.

*P3: We don't want to say specifically where the shop is but there are a few shops in the area that...*

*P2: ...Sell...*

*P3: ...that are renowned for being really....easy.*

*I: What kind of shops are they?*

*P3: Just really wee corner shops, wee newsagents and off sales places. None of the big places like supermarkets or anything coz they're stricter coz they've got more to lose I suppose.*

*P2: You have to be 18 to buy from there.*

*P3: It's 21 before you can get it out the supermarkets so they check like your age if you look under 21. So you can be 18 and....*

*P2: Yeah, but there's some shops that know you're under 18 but they're just doing it because they want the money so...they'll sell it.*

*I: So how do you choose a shop?*

*P3: Just go in and try.*

*P2: If it looks a bit dodgy...*

*P3: I just try it, you've got nothing to lose anyway.*

*P2: Everyone kinda knows which shops, there's this one shop in particular that sells it to everyone and everyone knows that shop.*

*P3: Yeah, yeah.*

*P2: So they all go down there. (FG4)*

Underage drinkers tended to prefer to purchase alcohol from shops outwith their local area as this reduced the chance of them being recognised and refused service. For those who were over 18 (but whose appearance meant they were still likely to be asked for proof of age), the opposite applied in that such an eventuality was considered less likely at local stores where the customer (and therefore his or

her age) was known to the shopkeeper. Thus, a preference for buying alcohol from corner shops as opposed to off-sales or supermarkets, remained among over 18s who looked younger than their years.

*P3: I had a haircut the other day, I'm 23 and I went and got a hair cut the other day and they wouldnae serve us at all. Both off-licences in the town. Two Haddows I went in and they wouldnae serve us in either of them.*

*P4: But in your local off-license you don't get any trouble. Everybody knows us, knows our face, aye. (FG7)*

The desire to avoid embarrassment also shaped the purchasing habits of street drinkers who did not feel they were likely to be asked for proof of age, and again led to a preference for local off-licenses and corner shops as opposed to larger stores and supermarkets. Some participants reported that they wished to avoid being seen purchasing alcoholic drinks favoured by street drinkers (such as 'Buckfast' and cheap ciders) due to the perceived association of these products and problematic drinking. For these individuals, buying from smaller local shops (which were shops where they were known to the owner) provided a more discreet method of purchasing the products they desired, thus avoiding embarrassment. This group (whose ages ranged from 21-25) described their preference for smaller, local stores in this way. Like other individuals they referred to these outlets as "Jake Juice shops" revealing a common association between this type of outlet and street drinking.

*I: Where do you buy your drinks then?*

*P3: Local off-licenses, local Jake Juice shops.*

*P2: Every corner shop in [name of city]!*

*I: But not supermarkets?*

*P2: Oh, no we'd go for a wee offie [off-license] man!*

*P1: You're not going into Asda to come out with bottles like that, come on man! Oh, no! No!*

*P3: To be honest!*

*P1: No, no that's like coming out of somewhere with a like a 'What Everyone Wants' bag instead of a 'Versache' bag in the toon. It's just something you don't dae!*

*P2: I've bought 'Morrison's own,' mate! Imagine that! (FG6)*

Thus, the preference for smaller off-licenses expressed by most research participants owed much to their perceptions that purchasing alcohol from these outlets would avoid the potential embarrassment associated with such transactions. An additional reason for buying alcohol from smaller off-licenses

was that smaller shops tended to chill the products preferred by street drinkers making them more palatable and ready for immediate consumption. Given the value placed on chilled drinks this greatly increased the likelihood that purchases were made from such outlets rather than from larger stores and supermarkets. Among 'Buckfast' drinkers the preference for smaller off-licenses was particularly notable not only due to a strong preference for this product to be chilled but also because this product was more readily available in such stores than in supermarkets.

*I: What about supermarkets?*

*P3: No, no don't go to supermarkets.*

*P4: It's all warm, they've nae fridges.*

*P3: Supermarkets don't sell Buckfast.*

*P4: Somerfield does.*

*I: But they'll sell your Miller and your Tennents?*

*P4: But it's on shelves it's all warm.*

*P2: Aye, aye but. They don't have fridges.*

*P4: You want it cold so you drink it straight way.*

*P3: You canny drink Buckfast warm, man. It's bogging... (FG21)*

Smaller off-licenses were also seen as being more likely than larger stores and supermarkets to sell alcohol to customers who were already intoxicated.

*P5: Naw, man, I dinnae buy it there [at a supermarket], I'd go there second, once I'd been to the corner shop and that, you can get ID-ed in the supermarket. But I go doon there if I canny get it anywhere else.*

*P3: Aye in the wee offies they'll gie you it no matter what state yer in, man (FG5)*

In general, underage drinkers preferred not to attempt to purchase alcohol themselves due to the potential embarrassment of being refused service. As such, those who felt it was likely that they would be asked for proof of age relied on other individuals who were (or at least appeared to be) over 18, to make their purchases for them. In mixed age groups, the oldest member of the group typically bought alcohol for the whole group using funds clubbed together by all members or donated by the individual who had the most money at the time. For underage groups with no older members making purchases was more problematic. These young people typically depended on strangers to act as their agents, as this group explained:

*I: So do the people in the shop ever refuse you?*

*P2: No, no we dinnae even try to go in and buy it*

*P4: We just try and get other folk to go in for us, aye. "Get us a carry-oot Big-yin"*

*P1: We wouldnae take the red neck [be able to tolerate the embarrassment] to go in and ask for the booze. We've always got someone that's over 18 to get us it. (FG12)*

It appeared from reports that asking strangers to purchase alcohol had a degree of risk involved. Underage drinkers frequently reported relying on "jakeys" (i.e. tramps/'winos') or "junkies" (i.e. problematic drug users) for this purpose. The participants in this focus group described some of the hazards associated with such transactions.

*P2: I done that. I gave a junkie ma money and he took ma money off me and I was raging*

*P4: That happens hunners of times.*

*P3: If I ask someone to go inside an off-sales for me I'm standing outside with another bottle! [mimes hitting someone] Dinnae try and run away with ma money!*

*P5: If you ask a junkie to go in for you and give them money, they won't bother, they just walk right by the shop and run away with your money. (FG22)*

Quite apart from the risks involved, such behaviour carried negative connotations for some street drinkers. Asking strangers to purchase alcohol was strongly associated with being underage or desperate or both. Image-conscious youths struggling to demonstrate their maturity were keen not to be associated with such characteristics. As such, this method of purchasing alcohol was quickly discarded as individuals got older so that though reports of this behaviour were common among 16 year olds, they were much less likely in the narratives of young people just one year older. Though this in part appeared to be due to other sources of supply (such as older friends) becoming more available, it was clear that being able to purchase alcohol without having to rely on strangers was also considered a sign of maturity and therefore desirable, as was apparent in the comments of these drinkers themselves aged between 17 and 19 years old:

*P3: I try every off-sales I can get to and they always ID me.*

*I: Is there a particular person you would ask to get you stuff or..?*

*P4: Just someone I trust to give my money to, so one of my friends*

*P2: Someone we can trust.*

*P3: Aye they don't stand outside the off-sales and wait, and like [adopts a whining nasal accent] "Ah, wantae go in the off-sales for us?"*

*P5: Ha! I done that, done that years ago when I was younger.*

*P3: Aye I've done that, years ago.*

*P1: Aye, you do that when you're about 12 or something. (FG21)*

When members of a group did attempt to purchase alcohol, girls were typically felt to be more successful than boys of a similar age. Rather than this being associated with girls' ability to make themselves appear older (e.g. through the use of clothes and makeup), participants felt their success lay in their willingness to use their sexuality in order to gain favour with shopkeepers. This was reported by males and females alike. The boys in one focus group had this to say:

*I: What about the girls, do they get served easier?*

*P1: Aye, coz they've got the tits and the bums, get a couple of bits of toilet roll doon there and that, that makes it easier for them to get the drink. (FG12)*

This was confirmed by a number of female participants who described using sexually flirtatious behaviour to increase the likelihood that shopkeepers would sell them alcohol. Typically, girls described such transactions in such a way as to suggest that they viewed them as harmless fun.

*P2: They will sell you anything and they just don't care coz...*

*P1: We just do that [flashes cleavage]*

*P2: [laughs] Yeah, yeah.*

*P1: I wear a low-cut top and they'll sell me anything, they're really pervy so they're too busy looking there to say no. (FG1)*

### Summary

Overall, participants (regardless of their age) preferred to purchase their alcohol from smaller off-licenses and licensed grocers rather than larger outlets such as supermarkets. In general, participants preferred such outlets because they anticipated that transactions undertaken there would be less likely to result in the embarrassment. For underage individuals and those who looked younger than their years this was linked to the belief that the staff in such stores were less likely to ask for proof of age and/or refuse service. Participants who were below the legal age limit for buying alcohol discussed sending female group members to buy alcohol as girls could potentially increase the group's chance of making a purchase by flirting with the shopkeeper. Other underage drinkers who did not have access to a group



members who were (or appeared to be) over 18 tended to rely on adult strangers to buy their alcohol (a method that was not without its risks). By contrast, the policy in larger off-sales and supermarkets was seen as much more strict, thus discouraging groups from attempting to make purchases from such outlets. As a result, underage participants tended to target small shops outwith their local area which they felt were struggling to make a profit as a way of maximizing their chances of making a purchase whilst minimizing their chances of being detected. Participants who were over 18 also expressed a preference for smaller off-sales but generally frequented those in their local area either to avoid being asked for proof of age or because this method was viewed as more discrete than buying alcohol in larger stores, thus avoiding the embarrassment of being seen purchasing 'street drinks.' An additional reason for street drinkers' reliance on smaller off-sales was that these outlets were more likely to sell the drinks they preferred (i.e. had a 'better' product range) and were more likely to sell these drinks already chilled and therefore ready for immediate consumption (this was especially important for 'Buckfast' drinkers).

### **Suggested Improvements**

Groups interviewed were asked to discuss how they felt their situation might be improved. As most street drinkers viewed drinking outside as a forced choice, it is unsurprising that many of these suggestions focused on the provision of alternatives, specifically designated areas for drinking outdoors and more resources for young people such as youth clubs and outdoor entertainment. Participants were also concerned with reducing the dangers of street drinking, presenting ideas which might minimise harm. The suggestions made by street drinkers interviewed are discussed, describing first the ideas presented regarding alternatives that might be provided to discourage street drinking (or at least outdoor drinking which could be considered antisocial in nature) before moving on to discuss what participants felt might be done in terms of harm reduction.

#### Providing alternatives

Findings revealed that many street drinkers chose to drink outside because of exclusion from indoor drinking settings. Most commonly this was due to the drinker's age (in that they were under 18) or because they had friends who were below the legal age limit which prevented drinking in pubs and clubs if the individual's social group was to be kept intact. When asked how their situation could be improved these individuals most typically suggested more leisure activities for young people which would allow them to socialise with friends of different ages. This was felt to be particularly important given the perceived lack of appropriate activities provided for individuals between the ages of 16 and

18 for whom “the unders” were seen as inappropriate. These girls noted the difficulties of finding an activity which would attract a range of age groups suggesting outdoor music as a possible attraction.

*P2: Do you know what would be good? See if they opened up a like dancing for like 16 and up, coz you don't want to go to the unders in case you get a wee 12 year old coming up and asking you to dance [laughter]*

*P3: See if you had somewhere like 16 to 18...*

*P2:...aye coz you're all together and that eh?...*

*P3: ...like, 16-21 or something like that...*

*P1: But then the older ones wouldn't bother with that though coz they'd just..*

*P2:...they can go to the pub or that...*

*P1: You'd need to get like a band or something and maybe older people would go then...*

*P2: I think it'd still be good!*

*P1: I don't know...*

*P3: I think it'd be good if they had a like a big area and they just put...remember the way they used to do at [name of place] when they'd have like the big screen and they'd have music going and stuff like that. Everyone would just go up and talk and listen to the music, they wouldnae be really thinking, “Lets just go and get a drink.” They'd just be thinking music...(FG24)*

The idea of having a place to go that was warm which provided entertainment (in the form of music and/or games) was also popular. This noted, it was clear that young people did not see such places as way of preventing underage drinking but rather as a way of moving drinking into a more comfortable, indoor location.

*P5: If we had somewhere we could go, we would go!*

*I: Like what?*

*P5: A youth club or something?*

*P4: Well, a pool hall where you can play games*

*P4: We had a pool hall*

*P5: We had a pool hall but it shut down like underneath the bridge. It had pool and games and stuff.*

*P4: It was underneath [name of place], like we weren't allowed to drink in it but if we just put it in Macdonald's cups and stuff like that then they never noticed. It's not like anyone got too blathered or anything when they went in. But it was fun and it was warm and we had somewhere to go. (FG21)*

This was apparent in the comments of a number of groups. Existing arrangements for young people were generally considered too restrictive for what young people had in mind. The account of these girls again highlighted that what underage drinkers really desired was an indoor location which would provide them with shelter but also the freedom to do what they wanted.

*P1: HELLO LISTEN! I think you should start a youth group or something like an under 18s in [name of town] coz I know they do it in [name of city]. I think we should do it here..*

*I: Would you all like an under 18's here?*

*All: YES. WAAAYYYYYYYYYY!!!!*

*I: I know I am a lot older than you right? But see at your age those places were considered kinda naff...*

*P1: No but see, but see!*

*P4: They are shite. they are crap....*

*P1: ...but see in the under 18's you're not allowed to bring in chewing gum, fags, or anything, lighters like, anything.*

*P2: FREE-DOOOOOMMMM!*

*P1: Yeah, we want freedom (FG15)*

Indeed, it was clear that those who suggested that such facilities might be provided for young people were aware that some individuals might be tempted to misuse these places.

*I: How could things be improved for you guys? Could they make somewhere where you could go?*

*P4: No, coz if they made somewhere for us to go people would just rip the piss out of it (FG20)*

### Harm Reduction

Many participants felt street drinkers were at risk of harm when drinking outside. Ways of reducing violence on the streets or at least limiting young people's exposure to harm were suggested. A number of participants felt that a total ban on drinking outside was inappropriate and suggested that designated areas for drinking (for example, in parks) should be provided. This group explained their belief that by containing drinking in one place (where drinkers could be monitored) it would be possible to reduce the trouble associated with street drinking, thus providing a safe place for drinkers similar to themselves whose main goal was to relax and enjoy good weather.

*I: Could things be improved for you?*

*P3: I would lift the ban on drinking outside*

*P1: I dunno, I'm split. No, no...*

*P3: I don't think a complete blanket ban is necessary, I think when you're somewhere like this where it is, for want of a better word, a restricted area, where we're all in one particular area somewhere where there's no gonna be any trouble but as for drinking in the streets and all that I don't agree with that.*

*P1: Yeah, like walking through the town and that. Standing on a street corner, I think it should still be banned.*

*I: So somewhere like this but contained. (FG6)*

As this discussion continued, it became evident that these participants believed that the provision of designated areas for drinking might be beneficial in other respects. This participant explained how such areas might provide 'neutral ground' for dispossessed youths where they could drink with impunity, thus preventing them from drinking in other less appropriate locations i.e. "hang[ing] about street corners."

*P3: I think a lot of the time though a lot of the trouble stems from the fact that there is a blanket ban. They don't have anywhere, they canny go and sit in certain places at night and have a drink, that's why they're having to hang about street corners you know? I think were they allowed to come and sit in the park and have a drink without the police harassing them then, or somewhere where it was open and that... (FG6)*

Indeed, the accounts of young people themselves lent some support to this suggestion as a means of harm reduction. These girls suggested that having a specific place where they could go would reduce fighting between gangs in their local area, presumably by reducing the amount of time they spent in areas where teams (i.e. gangs) might clash.

*P6: If you give us somewhere to sit that would keep us off the streets and fighting*

*P3: Aye, that'd stop us from fighting*

*P6: We wouldn't fight if we had somewhere to go. There's 3 teams round here and we dinnae like each other and there's always fighting, if we had a wee seat that was ours that wouldn't happen as much (FG22)*

'Alternative' groups had similar ideas suggesting that having a place where they could meet with youths who were "more open-minded" might limit their chances of victimisation. However, it was clear that the anger and resentment caused by previous experiences of bullying led to this being viewed as a potentially workable but unsatisfying solution. Though the suggestion made by one participant (i.e. "kill

all the neds”) was evidently one made in anger, it was clear that this individual believed more direct action was needed were this problem to be solved.

*I: Last but not least then, what would make things better for you, what would improve your situation?*

*P1: Kill all the neds, get rid of them, there’s so many of them and all they want to do is fight or beat you up. We can’t even go out where we live coz of them so shoot them all, sorry but that’s how I feel.*

*P2: I’d like to have somewhere where we could go, like for alternative people. Where there’d be other people like us there.*

*P4: Where they’re more open-minded about things.*

*P2: Or you could just kill all the neds.*

*P1: That’s why I’m not open about being gay, it’s not like I’m ashamed but they would kick me in. So somewhere to go, yeah that would be good. (FG19)*

Thus, ideas focused upon reducing risk by removing drinkers from harm’s way. Another means suggested as a way of achieving this was to allow them earlier access to the relative safety of indoor drinking locations by reducing the legal age limit from 18 to 16. One group had this to say:

*I: If things could be improved ?*

*P3: Drop the legal age of drinking to 16.*

*P3: That’s what it’s like abroad but you get more violence here, coz it’s not so violent abroad.*

*P1: If we could go to pub it would be much more civilised, it would be much better to drink in a pub coz then you’re not really going to get into a fight then or anything like that. Less trouble. (FG4)*

Changes along these lines were seen by some as going some way towards tackling Scotland’s drinking culture. According to this participant, the very act of making alcohol consumption forbidden for those under 18, made drinking an almost irresistible act of rebellion for younger people keen to demonstrate their autonomy: “we only do it coz we’re not meant to”. As a result, she reasoned that changing the law in this respect might lead to a change in culture, reducing street drinking and related harms by making alcohol consumption less of a “big deal” to young people.

*P4: I have a theory, do you want to hear my theory? See in foreign countries there’s no...some foreign countries like Finland there is no legal age for drinking. I think that should be made in this country coz then drinking would not be such a big deal, it wouldn’t be such a big deal and no one would be so desperate to do it. See if we were allowed to drink from when we were wee it would not be a big thing and we probably wouldn’t do it, we’d probably be like pure, “Oh, there’s no point everybody can do it.” We only do it coz we’re not meant to. It’s not...you only do what people tell you you can’t do. If it was made just originally so there was no drinking age at all, no one would drink! Hardly any adults*

*would drink as well, it wouldn't be such a social occasion coz everywhere you'd be like, doesn't matter, it's alright. Naebody would drink in the streets either coz they'd be like, aw, we can just go in there, in a club or something and in a club you're a lot safer. Well, not a lot safer but at least you've got walls. (FG21)*

A number of more specific suggestions were made regarding harm reduction which appeared to arise from the perceived link between 'Buckfast' and violence among street drinkers. Indeed, tackling this problem was viewed as a priority by a number of participants interviewed. However, individuals were often divided in their opinions about whether 'Buckfast' drinkers could be considered responsible for engaging in violence having consumed this product. Those who felt that certain ingredients in this drink induced violent tendencies sometimes called for an outright ban of this product. By contrast, those who reasoned that the individuals themselves must be held responsible for their actions saw this as unnecessary, as the following comments demonstrate:

*P2: I think they should stop selling it [Buckfast] myself, stop selling it completely.*

*P1: They canny really blame like the alcohol for making people violent, it all depends on what kind of mood they're in when they start drinking anyway! (FG21)*

Others argued that a more in-depth understanding of the perceived links between 'Buckfast' and violence was needed before such a decision might be made. Though calling for further evidence however, it was clear that this participant held grave reservations.

*P1: They should seriously do some sort of research into this though, find out if it should be banned or not because it. You hear about someone being bottled or all that and you walk past that part of town and all you see are broken Bucky bottles all over the place, you don't see any other kind, you don't even see vodka bottles. You know they ['neds'] drink vodka but all you see are the Bucky bottles lying about all over the place and blood everywhere. (FG23)*

Observations that 'Buckfast' bottles were often used as weapons in street fights also led to a widespread belief that repackaging 'Buckfast' in plastic rather than glass would lead to less serious injuries being inflicted during such incidents, as well as a safer environment in terms of reducing the harms associated with the irresponsible disposal of this product. The following extract was fairly typical in this respect:

*P1: I think especially here, a lot of problems would be solved if every alcoholic drink was sold in a plastic bottle. I genuinely believe that.*

*P2: I mean the number of times you walk down the street and you see like basically bottles of Buckfast smashed on the ground and you're basically trying to dodge the glass so you're not getting it in your foot or anything.*

*P1: And the amount of fights! I mean that's a great idea, why don't you sell neds' number one drink in glass bottles coz that's not going to make the fights worse, you know? (FG8)*

### Summary

Suggestions made by participants concerned the management (rather than the prevention) of street drinking, in that most individuals viewed this as an activity which was likely to continue unabated. Suggestions focused upon providing more resources for young people in terms of alternative activities, though comments suggested that such places were likely to be misused given that what young people really appeared to desire was the provision of indoor locations for drinking. Another means of removing underage drinkers from harm's way was to allow them access to pubs at an earlier stage by dropping the legal age limit from 18 to 16. A complete abolishment of these laws was called for by others who felt restrictions of drinking fuelled the current drinking culture in Scotland rather than discouraged it. Others suggested designated areas for drinking outside where such activities could be contained and monitored, thus reducing the occurrence of individuals drinking on the street and related harms. More specifically, the perception that 'Buckfast' was associated with violent behaviour led to calls to ban this product (though there was disagreement in this respect given that some participants did not acknowledge such a link). Given that more drinkers agreed that 'Buckfast' bottles were frequently used as weapons and irresponsibly disposed (as was the case for other drinks packaged in glass), greater support was found for the suggestion that recognized street drinks (if not all alcoholic products) should instead be packaged in plastic in order to limit alcohol-related harm.

### **DISCUSSION**

This research examined the street drinking behaviours of young adults in Scotland and has contributed to current understanding of street drinking among this age group in a variety of ways. This work illuminates why young adults choose to drink outdoors and the risks they are exposed to whilst doing so. Importantly, findings also tell us more about the types of beverages preferred by these individuals, the reasons for these preferences and where such purchases are made. By including female participants as well as their male peers, a more appropriately gendered view of street drinking among this age group has been gained than has been previously possible from studies using all-male samples. What is more, the inclusion of participants from a range of youth cultures has also revealed how differences in the views and beliefs of these groups might shape their behaviour in this context leading to different experiences whilst street drinking, as well as distinct patterns of consumer activity.

Previous research has revealed street drinking to be linked to increased risk of alcohol-related harm (Coleman & Carter, 2005; Forsyth & Barnard, 2000; Davies et al, 1997). The current study provides

further support for this, revealing young adults who drink outdoors face a variety of dangers (some of which are recognised by these young people, others which are not).

What participants understood to be the dangers of street drinking varied according to their age, gender and cultural background. A number of older drinkers (towards the higher end of the 16-25 age range) did not see themselves as the likely targets of violence, viewing themselves as having aged out of the youth culture in which victimisation appeared commonplace. That older drinkers spent less time drinking outside in a single session (typically moving on to the pub instead of staying out all night like younger drinkers who did not have this option) also appeared to act as a protective factor, in that this had the effect of physically removing them from harm's way. As older drinkers also perceived their drinking behaviour as a peaceable social pastime, neither did they feel they were likely attract the attention of the police.

For younger drinkers (16 to 18) the threat of police intervention was a more daunting (and more likely) prospect. This was a particular concern of 'ned' groups who felt excessively targeted by police officers whilst drinking outdoors (treatment they viewed as a form of discrimination against their particular cultural group rather than a result of their drinking behaviour per se). Similar observations were found in the reports of 'alternative' and 'mainstream' participants. Indeed, though some felt that the behaviour of 'ned' groups invited such treatment from police officers, others viewed the way police handled incidents involving these groups as exacerbating rather than preventing further trouble. Current research on displaced aggression, suggest that this may be a possibility (Bushman et al, 2005). The impact of such interactions as a risk factor for alcohol-related harm might be usefully examined in further research.

'Alternative' and 'mainstream' groups who held a fairly positive opinion of policing tended to focus more on their fear of violent victimisation by 'neds.' Indeed, numerous examples were provided of incidents ranging from experiences of physical intimidation to assault with a weapon. Though these young people identified these assaults as primarily motivated by their appearance (suggesting a broader social problem), it was clear that alcohol (and cigarettes) could increase the risk of violence by a) attracting the attention of perpetrators who used violence to extract these resources from their victims and b) by making the response of victims more confrontational in nature.

The risks young people perceived as being associated with street drinking were revealed as shaping their choice of drinking location. Though groups with different cultural backgrounds differed with



respect to the settings they favoured for drinking, attempts to avoid risk led to mobility among drinking groups which in turn appeared to increase the dangers to which these groups were exposed. Current policing strategies of dispersing large groups assumed to be antisocial (and a strong motivation to avoid having alcohol confiscated) meant that groups of 'neds' moved around whilst drinking in their local communities. It was reported that instead of preventing antisocial behaviour this simply displaced drinking (and associated trouble) to other areas whilst also increasing the risk of violence between rival gangs as territorial lines were breached. Given these findings it would appear that further research on the effects of this method of policing would be illuminating, especially with regards the possible links between group dispersal and an increased risk of street violence between rival gangs.

In a bid to avoid the police and rival youths, some of these young adults reported trying to find more hidden locations in which to drink, or moved outwith their communities to different locales. When drinking in their local areas, sessions seemed to begin in more central, public places (such as street corners) before moving to quieter, more isolated spots later in the evening. Thus, it appeared that young people traded off safety from detection for convenience in the early stages of the evening, taking the chance that they might be caught in order to drink in locations which were quickly and easily reached. Moves to other, quieter spots seemed to be encouraged by repeated interruptions from the police (or residents who might inform the police) or because trouble with other youths was encountered. Drinking in hidden locations appeared to carry its own risks by exposing drinkers to environmental hazards which might potentially increase the chance of accidental harm whilst decreasing the chances of reaching help should such incidents occur. Though 'alternative' and 'mainstream' groups were less likely to drink in hidden locations it was clear that locations chosen for drinking were not always safe and exposed these groups to similar environmental dangers as their peers who frequented such places more often. That young people rarely recognised these risks (regardless of their cultural background) is concerning and should be addressed.

'Alternative' and 'mainstream' individuals reported travelling from their local communities where they felt outnumbered by 'neds' to more central locations where other youths of similar cultural backgrounds could be found whom they felt would provide 'safety in numbers.' This strategy was only partially successful as a safety measure however. The police practice of group dispersal was viewed as leaving drinkers vulnerable by breaking up the large groups which were perceived as providing protection. Neither could the group be relied upon at the end of the night after the drinking session was over as group members could live in a variety of different areas meaning some individuals were forced to travel

home alone. Girls seemed particularly vulnerable in this respect, especially as many had travelled some distance to reach their chosen drinking spot.

Though seeing themselves as less at risk of violent victimisation than their male peers, such experiences were not uncommon among female street drinkers and typically involved females as both the victims and the perpetrators of violence. More of an issue was the possibility of sexual harassment by predatory males encountered whilst street drinking. Whilst girls took some precautions against this (hanging out in large mixed gender groups in which older males were felt to provide protection and keeping an eye on each other), this was only partially successful. The perception of safety afforded by being part of a large mixed gender group could in some cases act as a risk factor, lulling girls into a false sense of security which encouraged them to behave in a manner which might put them at risk (for example one girl talked about approaching groups of strangers with the idea that others (who were also drunk) would come to her rescue should things go wrong). Furthermore, the potential danger posed by group members themselves was rarely considered by females interviewed despite evidence of risky behaviours taking place within these groups. Though doubtless girls' trust in the older males in their groups was well-placed in many cases, in other scenarios the risks seemed obvious, especially when smaller groups merged with other less well-known groups from different locations whose intentions might not be so clear. In general, findings suggested that female street drinkers may be a particularly vulnerable group in terms of sexual threat due to a combination of intoxication, drinking in isolated locations and failure to fully recognise the risks they faced when engaged in this activity.

The current findings might usefully inform alcohol education programmes for young adults who engage in street drinking. Ensuring that young people are aware of the dangers of rapid alcohol consumption; how to recognise the symptoms of dangerous levels of consumption and how to deal with such emergencies should they arise seems paramount (especially given that many young drinkers who drank heavily tended to choose isolated out-of-the-way locations for this purpose where help may be difficult to access). Encouraging young people to bear potential environmental hazards in mind when selecting a location might reduce associated harm. Especial attention seems required with regards to the risks faced by female street drinkers particularly by raising awareness of the possible harms which might be encountered from individuals other than strangers. Some evidence also suggests that improved education regarding risky sexual practices might also be an important step forward. Though such behaviour was reported by only a minority of street drinkers, such action would seem appropriate particularly given that the median age of first heterosexual sexual intercourse in the UK is around 16

years for both men and women and the rising rates of sexually transmitted infections in young people of both sexes (Tripp & Viner, 2005).

Despite the risks associated with street drinking, young people still chose to engage in this activity. Though there were some advantages to drinking outdoors (in that drinkers were socially and physically unrestricted), for most this represented a forced choice resulting from exclusion from indoor drinking locations (either due to age or association with younger friends or by being barred or costed out of pubs and clubs). In other words, if given the choice participants would have opted to drink indoors. This was not a choice available to underage drinkers however. Lack of appropriate or desirable alternatives meant that these youths often felt street drinking was the 'only thing to do.' This noted it was clear that underage participants enjoyed street drinking. Indeed, drinking appeared so much a part of youth culture that the possibility that young people might be encouraged to stop and find alternative pastimes was rarely considered.

Another aim of this study was to shed more light upon product preference among young adults who street drink and the reasons particular drinks were purchased for drinking outdoors. Findings revealed that a very narrow range of products were bought and consumed by the groups interviewed. Fortified wine ('Buckfast' and 'MD 20/20'), white cider ('Frosty Jack'), perry ('Lambrini') and home brand vodka and mixer were the most popular suggesting that other drinks (such as alcopops) have perhaps been unfairly blamed for alcohol-related anti-social behaviours by street drinking youths in the past (Forsyth, 2001). As in previous studies, findings suggested that drinks preferred were typically cheap and strong (Forsyth & Barnard, 2000; Brain & Parker, 1997; McKeganey et al, 1997). When two drinks were similar in price and alcohol content, flavour could become a deciding factor, especially as this allowed alcohol to be consumed faster leading to more rapid intoxication. Practical considerations (i.e. how easy a product was to drink in an outdoor environment) also played a part. Like previous research (Jackson et al, 2000; Mackintosh et al, 1997), results of this study indicated the portability of the product was important. In addition, findings revealed that drinkers preferred products which were easily concealed (e.g. single containers which fit easily into a pocket or bag) and easily-opened (the importance of a screwcap was emphasised by several groups in this respect). Plastic packaging was also seen to be an advantage in terms of concealment (reducing tell-tale 'clinking' noises as drinks were transported) and as a way of limiting breakages. Having said this, glass packaging did not seem to deter drinkers from buying products if they were considered suitable for street drinking in other respects. Overall, reports suggested that the 'ideal street drink' was one which had all of these characteristics i.e.

a cheap, strong (and preferably palatable) drink which did not require mixing contained in a single, reasonably-sized, easily-opened container, easily-concealed about the person of the street-drinker.

Though price, strength and packaging shaped drinkers' decisions of what to buy to some extent, consumer choices were more complex than this. Decisions were affected by the individual characteristics of the drinker. Age was important in this respect, younger drinkers though professing to prefer strong drinks felt it unlikely that they would be sold such products and thus traded off potency for availability (often relying on cheap, white cider as a 'default drink'). Older drinkers who had access to more funds could afford to be choosier. The cultural background of the drinker was also important in that particular drinks were found to be popular as result of their cultural credibility among particular social groups.

Regarding the impact of promotion, most of the products purchased by street drinkers were not advertised widely. In the main, this was because heavily promoted premium brands could not be afforded by drinkers whose financial means were often limited. This supports previous research findings (e.g. Brain & Parker, 1997). Promotional activity which put these products within drinkers' means did influence what was bought however, encouraging drinkers to change brands and less often the type of alcohol they chose to drink. However, this seemed to be more the case for older drinkers who could purchase their own alcohol, in that underage drinkers who used an agent to make their purchases could not browse the shelves within retail outlets in order to take advantage of the offers there.

'Lambrini' was one product which was bought by street drinkers which had an advertising campaign that was readily recognized by participants. This marketing campaign did appear to have an impact on product preference, generating a view of 'Lambrini' of as a 'fun/party' drink for females only. Indeed, this product was consumed almost exclusively by females whose accounts suggested that the image of the drink was an important part of their reasons for purchasing it. This noted the drink's popularity was also linked to product characteristics in that this drink was large volume (meaning it could be shared among the group) had a pleasant taste (especially valued by female participants) and was packaged in a way which made it convenient for drinking outdoors (i.e. single vessel with a screwcap). The only perceived disadvantage of this product was its low alcohol content but this often seemed to be overcome by price and promotional activity (3 for 2 offers) which made the product better value for money. The reasons male participants gave for avoiding this product suggested that this was to do with its highly gendered image. Males' avoidance of products seen as being 'designed for women' has been

noted in previous research and demonstrates the impact of marketing on consumer choices (Brain & Parker, 1997).

Other products (white cider and fortified wine being perhaps the most frequent examples) were not marketed in the usual ways. The popularity of these products appeared to be a result, first and foremost, of viral marketing with knowledge of particular products spreading from older to younger relatives and from peer to peer by word of mouth. In addition, some evidence was found that certain retailers promoted those drinks known to be popular among street drinkers at the local level, seemingly in response to demand. The practice of chilling these products (making them ready for immediate consumption) also seemed an important incentive provided by retailers. Thus, though these drinks were not advertised by their manufacturers, they were quite efficiently marketed in other ways.

However, this was not always the case. Indeed, the sale of certain products (namely 'Buckfast') was restricted by some outlets. Despite, or indeed perhaps because of this, this drink retained its popularity amongst groups of 'neds.' The overwhelming preference for 'Buckfast' among these individuals arose from a variety of factors the most important of which was the cultural significance of this product to this particular group.

The drink was considered particularly effective for inducing rapid and extreme intoxication in the manner that only other high-strength (but considerably more expensive) drinks were capable of doing, due to certain ingredients present in this product but not in other similar drinks (such as Monksford). As such it was considered good value for money despite the availability of other cheaper products of high strength. Participants' understanding of 'Buckfast' as 'notorious' (i.e. linked with loss of control and violence) also appeared to add to its appeal. In some ways therefore, promotion (created by word of mouth and media reports) and culture seemed to interact. In addition to these perceived benefits, the cultural significance of this product to 'neds' was enormous. 'Buckfast' was considered by those who identified themselves as 'neds' as "the ned drink" symbolic of group membership at the local and national level, identifying the drinker as part of this particular cultural group; the solidarity this implied being a source of personal pride. Not only this but 'Buckfast' spoke of the personal characteristics of the drinker; of his masculinity and perhaps also his origins as a 'working class' man. To drink products other than 'Buckfast' was to deny this heritage and risk the disapproval of the group. As the cultural significance of 'Buckfast' was so powerful, it seems unsurprising that other products were rejected even if they were in reality better value in terms of cost-strength ratio. It would appear therefore that

subculture could in some cases outweigh marketing to create product preference. This would appear to challenge the assumption that price increases are the only solution to street drinking behaviour.

'Buckfast' was strenuously rejected by 'mainstream' and 'alternative' groups. One reason for this was a strong dislike for the taste of the product. Perhaps due to lack of in-group pressure to consume 'Buckfast' as the cultural standard, these young people did not feel compelled to habituate/tolerate the taste and could therefore reject it on these grounds. More important however in creating this aversion was the image of this drink (i.e. its perceived association with problematic and antisocial drinkers), in that 'alternative' and 'mainstream' youths wished to avoid being labelled with these characteristics. The belief that drinking 'Buckfast' could lead to a loss of control and potentially violent behaviour was particularly important in this respect in that some 'alternative' and 'mainstream' drinkers feared such effects and avoided drinking this product because of this. This applied even to those drinkers who enjoyed the taste of 'Buckfast', though their avoidance of the product was further encouraged by in-group pressure from other drinkers. Given that 'Buckfast' was reviled among these individuals as a symbol of a culture that was so strongly opposed to their own, rejecting this product (and choosing others which did not have these associations) was a symbol of individual loyalty to the drinker's own chosen youth culture. As no equivalent drink appeared to exist for these drinkers in terms of cultural significance, preference for particular drinks appeared to depend more on product characteristics and marketing than the cultural credibility of the drinks which were bought and consumed. Overall, what these findings reveal is the powerful impact that the perceived image of particular drinks had on consumerism in different social groups, leading to products being embraced or rejected in line with the beliefs of group members. In this study, the cultural divide apparent regarding Buckfast appeared symbolic of the animosity between two opposing youth cultures (i.e. 'alternatives' and 'neds'). Future research might examine the extent to which these views are held by other groups of street drinkers who do not identify themselves as part of these subcultures as opinions may well be different where group pressure regarding the consumption of Buckfast does not exist.

In general, drinkers preferred to buy their alcohol from smaller off-sales rather than supermarkets. For individuals over 18, this provided a more discrete method of buying products commonly acknowledged as 'street drinks' thus avoiding the embarrassment of being labelled as a problematic drinker with whom these drinks were synonymous. For those who believed they might be asked for proof of age this preference was linked to the belief that smaller outlets were likely to be less strict in this respect. The policy operated by larger stores thus seemed to have a deterrent effect. Underage drinkers who did not have friends or siblings over 18 who would buy their alcohol for them had to depend on adult strangers

to act as agents. Where underage members of the group did attempt to buy alcohol, girls were considered more successful than boys of a similar age due to their willingness to use their sexuality as a way of gaining favour with shop-keepers.

A variety of suggestions were provided by participants as how their circumstances might be improved. What was most clear about these suggestions was that participants did not view outdoor drinking as problematic in all its forms. Rather individuals distinguished between problematic street drinking (commonly associated with violence and drinking in what were considered 'inappropriate locations' such as street corners) and more occasional social drinking which occurred outside but was relatively peaceful in nature. Neither did participants believe that street drinking was something that could be entirely prevented, as such suggestions tended to focus on ways of *managing* street drinking. For example, suggestions made by underage drinkers were typically for activities which would 'keep them off the streets.' However, it was clear that these activities were ones which did not rule out drinking but instead made drinking more comfortable and safer for those involved by providing a more secure indoor location (or at least a location which kept young people out of harms way). Equally, when it came to the question of outdoor drinking, it was clear that the blanket ban currently in place in many areas was considered inappropriate as not only did this prevent 'social' drinkers from enjoying themselves safely but also displaced those with more antisocial tendencies to places where they might be more likely to cause trouble. Providing designated drinking areas where drinking could be contained but where drinkers could relax and feel safe (e.g. well-lit 'tolerance zones' monitored by CCTV and/or near a police station) might be considered. The provision of a specified area for drinking (e.g. shelters or such like) where highly territorial gangs exist might prove problematic however, in that this may provide a focal point for violence or increase animosity between groups by creating an imbalance in resources.

Other suggestions focused on how to reduce alcohol-related harms by designing out potentially harmful features in 'recognised' street drinks. As 'Buckfast' was most strongly associated with antisocial behaviour in the minds of participants, most used this product as an example, calling for glass bottles to be replaced with plastic in order to limit injuries caused by irresponsible disposal and bottles being used as weapons in street fights. However, these observations might be applied more broadly to other products currently packaged in glass. The possibility of making bottles less easy to conceal and replacing screwcaps with corks might also be examined. This noted, some drinkers preferred screwcaps because they allowed drinking to be regulated over the course of the evening's drinking. It must be considered therefore that changes to design which make bottles harder to reseal may increase the

likelihood of immodest and rapid consumption. The merits of replacing glass containers with plastic packaging however seem clear.

Encouraging socially responsible practice among retailers would also seem important at a national level and more especially at the local level in the smaller off-sales preferred by street drinkers. Promotions of products strongly associated with street drinking might also be monitored given that such activity appeared to increase the popularity of these drinks, whilst the practice of chilling popular street drinks (making them ready for immediate consumption) might also be addressed as one which may support street drinking activity. It is likely however, that further research examining the facilitators and barriers to socially responsible practice at the industry and retail level is needed.



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**APPENDIX**  
**Group Descriptions: Extracts of Observations taken from Field Notes**

**FOCUS GROUP 1**

**Area:** Suburban 'middle class' area

**Located:** on foot via media reports of this area as popular drinking location among young people

**Conditions:** 8pm. Weather dry, cold and windy

**Participants:** The focus group comprised a mixed gender group of 2 males and 2 females, all aged 16 years old. Participants reported they were still at school and had travelled to the area from another suburban area. Clothing of the two males and one of the females was 'alternative' i.e. black with 'Gothic' accessories, whilst the 2<sup>nd</sup> female was more 'mainstream' in appearance (jeans, low cut top, bangles). Two of the 'alternative' participants appeared to be boyfriend and girlfriend.

**Locus:** Park in middle class area. Quite empty, except for the occasional jogger and 4 young men (possibly students judging by age and clothing) playing football near one of the pathways. The participants were initially part of a larger group of 'alternative' youths (N=8) made up largely of couples who were strolling round the park drinking openly, wrestling each other, laughing and shouting. 2 of the female participants stopped on the pathway next to the footballers and began to call out to them (seemed teasing/flirtatious rather than malicious). Though recruited on the pathway the focus group itself was conducted with participants sitting on the green which was deserted other than the footballers. Care was taken to sit apart from these young men to ensure that this was not a distraction. Group reported drinking regularly in the park and also under the high bridges over the river when the weather was poor.

**Alcohol:** Participants were sharing a bottle of 'Lambrini' which was passed between them and reported they had finished another before the researchers arrived.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in participants' account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Group was friendly, lively and in high spirits (play-fighting as we approached). Initially suspicious we were the police but were easily reassured. All had been drinking and seemed quite tipsy (one of the females was slightly unsteady on her feet, very loud and easily distracted throughout the focus group, apologising several times for being drunk). Very enthusiastic, starting their discussion even before the recording equipment was set up. Seemed harmless enough, got the impression they were just out to have fun with their friends. In fact, they told us they met here every weekend to drink with their friends, travelling from another area to do so.

**Problems:** Participants found it difficult to concentrate and were easily distracted by each other and by their surroundings. Lots of giggling and in-group jokes throughout. However, there was good rapport with this group and it was relatively easy to regain their interest, the male and female who appeared to be a couple were slightly more difficult to manage, seeming more intent at times on rolling around the grass kissing and laughing. Overall, good rapport.

## **FOCUS GROUP 2**

**Area:** Suburban 'middle class' area

**Located:** on foot via media reports of this area as popular drinking location among young people

**Conditions:** 8.45pm. Weather cold and windy.

**Participants:** 2 participants (1 male and 1 female). The male participant was 18 years old, heavy-set, wearing jeans and a white 'Lacoste' tracksuit top. He had clearly been drinking and was slurring slightly. The female was 16 years old dressed in jeans and a short denim jacket, giant gold hoop earrings and hair scraped back into pony tail. Participants referred to themselves as 'neds'.

**Locus:** Research team were leaving the park when these participants appeared walking towards us through the park entrance, drinking 'Buckfast' from a half bottle. The focus group itself was conducted on nearby park bench. Participants told us they intended to meet friends in the park and remain there drinking till late (11ish). There were very few people around in park by this time, so the group was conducted without any interruptions.

**Alcohol:** Half bottle of 'Buckfast' each, male participant was keeping his concealed in his pocket, whilst the female participant was carrying hers in her handbag.

**Other Drugs:** Suspect the young man had been smoking cannabis at some point during the evening. Both participants reported smoking cannabis regularly.

**Behaviour:** Both looked drunk, (the young male especially - pink, unfocused eyes and slurring). The male participant was initially suspicious and asked a few times if we were the police, when reassured this was not the case, he told us they had already been stopped once that evening and had been cautioned on a number of occasions for drinking in the park. After establishing we were not the police, both relaxed and seemed to enjoy the interview. The female took out her Buckfast again and took sips from the bottle as we chatted. Both were very polite and compliant. Good rapport.

**Problems:** None.

## **FOCUS GROUP 3**

**Area:** Suburban 'working class' area

**Located:** from car

**Conditions:** 8.15pm, weather cold but dry

**Participants:** 5 males (17-18 years old). 4 wearing 'mainstream' clothing (jeans/leather jackets/t-shirts), one wearing Celtic football top, tracksuit bottoms and shaved-in hair. Looked out of place in group in terms of appearance and accent (this was confirmed by one group member who

revealed they were from different areas – got the impression he meant 5<sup>th</sup> male was from more deprived area).

**Locus:** Group spotted on walking down road towards high flats. Reported they were on their way to the house of one of the participants before going out on the town for a drink. Pulled up in car and conducted the focus group at side of road on narrow pavement in front of council houses.

**Alcohol:** Not drinking at time of focus group but were on their way begin doing so. Each had a blue bag containing bottles of beer ('Carlsberg' and/or cans of 'Tennents') and a bottle of vodka between them.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Polite but seemed slightly edgy throughout, possibly due to location in which group was conducted.

**Problems:** This was not ideal due to traffic noise. Equally, the abrupt nature of recruitment (fieldworker rolling down window and hopping out of car) seemed to alarm participants somewhat and affect rapport with group. For these reasons it was agreed to avoid this method of recruitment in future.

#### **FOCUS GROUP 4**

**Area:** Suburban 'middle class' area

**Located:** from car, research team proceeded on foot

**Conditions:** 8.45pm, weather dry and windy, getting dark by end of group

**Participants:** 3 males, all 16 years old, seemed quite well off in terms of accent and appearance. 1 wearing 'mainstream' clothing (jeans/t-shirt). Other two more 'alternative' in appearance (i.e. black, baggy clothing) one with dyed black hair, facial piercings and eye make-up.

**Locus:** Park was quite busy with people out for a walk, two football games, some groups of young people playing on swings and sitting chatting around the picnic tables, eating crisps and drinking coke – no alcohol visible. One group of young people were spotted drinking cider. They had chosen to sit on the steps of the tennis pavilion to do so (this made them relatively well concealed and difficult to reach due to a large wire fence). Closer inspection showed they were too young to interview (possibly 13-15 years old). Participants were spotted walking round periphery of park chatting, FG itself conducted under a large tree.

**Alcohol:** Sharing a bottle of 'Frosty Jack' between 2. Third male not drinking.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, but one of the 'alternative' males reported smoking cannabis regularly.

**Behaviour:** Though initially nervous, the participants relaxed quickly into interview and seemed to enjoy opportunity to chat about their views. Seemed well meaning and friendly. Good rapport.

**Problems:** None

## **FOCUS GROUP 5**

**Area:** Suburban 'working class' area

**Located:** from car

**Conditions:** 9pm. Weather: warm and dry

**Participants:** 5 young males (aged between 18 and 20). All wearing tracksuits or football tops and tracksuit bottoms etc. 2 had facial scars. Originally part of a larger group of 8 young people (7 males and 1 female) similarly dressed.

**Locus:** Park was surprisingly busy for late evening: joggers and dog walkers, a group of footballers and several groups of young adults (maybe students) sitting on the grass, chatting and drinking coffee/soft drinks. The group we approached had made no attempt to conceal themselves but were drinking in plain view of the rest of the park, spread out over 2 park benches on the second rise of the hill. From here they had a good vantage point of the park but could also be spotted as far away as the main road. Other groups of students and such like had maintained a good distance from them. Most group members had a carry-out bags and the area around them was littered with empty cans, split drinks and cigarette butts.

**Alcohol:** All drinking 'Buckfast' (including the female who did not take part) - either full or half bottles. Only one was drinking cider ('White Lightning') unusually from a plastic glass. Halfway through the focus group one of 'Buckfast' drinkers produced a quarter bottle of 'Aftershock' from his pocket which he explained was for later on when the group was making their way from the pub to a club.

**Other Drugs:** No evidence in account of drug use, impossible to tell given the level of intoxication whether or not drugs had been recently used.

**Behaviour:** The group were laughing and joking amongst themselves when approached but quickly became rowdy and excitable as focus group began. 2 males and the female refused to take part despite encouragement from the others involved who appeared highly enthusiastic (one group member even insisted that payment was not necessary). Immediately launched into discussion of merits of 'Buckfast' (even though recorder wasn't out of the bag). Very loud throughout (lots of laughing and shouting) and frequent toasts (to 'Buckfast'). All continued taking swigs from their drinks throughout the focus group.

**Problems:** Group members were very drunk and rowdy, often crowding the research team in their attempt to be the focus of attention. Singing and screaming throughout also led to recording problems. Despite initial attempts to split the group of 8 into 2 smaller groups who would be interviewed one after the other, the fieldworker was unable to keep 3 males (who were supposed to be interviewed after the first group was conducted) from joining in the discussion, laughing and shouting comments. These interruptions increased overtalking, especially as individuals who were 'officially' being interviewed dealt with this by shouting insults at the others until they

backed off. Though this group was successful the problems with overtalking and interruptions suggest that large intoxicated groups are not ideal for interview purposes due to difficulties controlling their movements and contributions.

## **FOCUS GROUP 6**

**Area:** Suburban 'middle class' area

**Located:** on foot via media reports of this area as popular drinking location among young people. [due to previous success, returned here after several unsuccessful attempts to find appropriate groups in preceding 2 weeks]

**Conditions:** 6.30pm. Weather: very hot and sunny

**Participants:** 2 older males (late 20's) and one younger 19/early 20's. All three were dressed in jeans, 2 older men wearing t-shirts with logos. Younger participant was bare-chested having tied his shirt around his waist. The oldest participant had his leg in plaster. Each had very short hair bordering on skinhead, giving the impression of working class 'hard-men.' When approached participants reported they were gay, describing themselves as 'camp.' 2 worked in local area as mechanics.

**Locus:** Park was crowded, almost every square inch of grass occupied by sunbathers and drinkers enjoying the sun. Very mixed crowd, old and young; families and groups of young people from 'alternatives' to 'neds'. Very relaxed atmosphere. Focus groups were conducted on main green where most drinking groups had gathered. Area was packed, strewn with litter (cans and bottles, crisp bags, sandwich packs, cigarette butts) with areas of grass charred into rectangles by burnt-out instant barbeques. Student-type groups seemed to take up central part of green, some having picnics whilst drinking. 'Ned' groups were scattered throughout in fewer numbers but mainly gathered on the higher ground under the tree-line.

This group were sitting at the top of the slope keeping their distance from the other groups under the shade of the trees. The spot they had chosen provided a good view over rest of green which they explained made it easier for them to "look for talent."

**Alcohol:** Each participant had his own bottle of (half-finished) 'Frosty Jack' cider. 2 more bottles sat in bag in the shade of the tree.

**Other Drugs:** All group members indicated that they smoked cannabis regularly. One of the participants offered to build a joint for the researchers during the focus group.

**Behaviour:** The group lay on the grass talking peacefully amongst themselves, smoking and drinking their cider. Sporadically the youngest one would stand up and stare down the hill as if looking for someone. Good rapport throughout the focus group, had a 'gossipy' feel to it. Polite and enthusiastic.

**Problems:** None



## **FOCUS GROUP 7**

**Area:** Suburban 'middle class' area

**Spotted:** on foot via media reports of this area as popular drinking location among young people.

**Conditions:** 7.05pm weather very hot and sunny

**Participants:** The group comprised of 4 young people (3 males and 1 female). Reports indicated ages ranged from 16 (the female) to 23 years old. Clothing comprised skip caps/tracksuits. Participants reported that they had jobs and lived in another area but travelled to the park to drink. Referred to themselves as 'neds.'

**Locus:** This group were sitting in amongst other more 'studenty' groups in the centre of the green (participants later reported they chose this spot as a way of concealing themselves from the police). They had arranged themselves in a staggered line with a pile of blue bags containing alcohol (mostly beer) in front of them. The area around them was littered with rubbish (food packages/empty soft drink cans and cigarette butts) how much of this (if any) belonged to the group was uncertain.

**Alcohol:** 3 group members were drinking Buckfast (all half-bottles). The female participant was drinking beer ('Miller'). Bags contained several bottles of 'Miller' and 'Tennents' and a full-sized bottle of 'Buckfast' unopened.

**Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** As we approached the group they were sprawled on the grass, chatting and playing ringtones to each other, when we approached looked surly and demanded to know if we were the police. All were quite friendly and polite after introductions except one who seemed to be in a bad mood (made several nasty remarks about the female group member after she made some negative comments about Buckfast – seemed to take these personally). Overall, a helpful group - if not a little tense due to animosity between these two participants.

### **Problems:**

This group talked at length about being unfairly targeted by the police whilst drinking. Towards the end of the focus group, 2 police officers appeared on the green and began to make their way through the groups surrounding us (most of whom were openly drinking). Two of the participants asked if we would stay with them as a distraction (given our more "studenty" appearance). As participants had previously pointed out, we watched police officers singling out 'ned' groups to caution despite the fact that these groups did not appear to be behaving any differently to the groups of students also drinking nearby. As the officers chatted to one group of 'neds', a female who was clearly very drunk (part of a large student group of around 10 or 11 members) attempted to conceal the groups' empty bottles by throwing them into a plastic bag. This shattered audibly but the police officers continued to ignore these drinkers despite the mess they seemed to have created (i.e. large piles of rubbish and charred grass from a burnt-out instant barbeque). After the police officers moved on, we left the group clearly feeling angry and resentful.

## **FOCUS GROUP 8**

**Area:** Suburban 'middle class' area

**Spotted:** on foot via media reports of this area as popular drinking location among young people.

**Conditions:** 7.35pm, weather warm and sunny

**Participants:** Participants were observed as part of a larger group of 4, 3 females and 1 male all dressed in 'alternative' clothing (more extreme end of market i.e. metal cased biker boots/medieval style accessories (lots of velvet/corsetry for females, guy had long leather coat, velvet scarf, heavy makeup, spiked jewellery and multiple piercings). As we approached the group began to get up and clear their rubbish into a plastic bag. Very friendly when approached, couple apologised profusely for not being able to take part, remaining females agreed to participate. Both identified themselves as students who lived in the city centre and worked part-time promoting 'alternative' clubs.

**Locus:** Group was sitting on the grass on the main green in the park.

**Alcohol:** Between the initial group of 4, participants had a few bottles of 'Smirnoff Ice' and 'WKD' and a few bottles of beer ('Miller'). The females explained these had been bought locally as the only alcohol available that was chilled, in other words this carry-out was not their usual which according what they told us was 'Lambrini.'

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Overall, friendly and well-meaning, seemed to consider answers carefully/take process quite seriously

**Problems:** Having just conducted FG7 just slightly further up the hill we had aroused the interest of another group of young people who were very drunk and quite rowdy. These young men spotted the microphone and were shouting towards us repeatedly throughout the interview. Despite the possible distraction this could have created, the group continued relatively uninterrupted as participants did not seem to notice these boys or at least did not pay attention.

## **FOCUS GROUP 9**

**Area:** City centre (main public square)

**Located:** On foot

**Conditions:** 6.30pm Weather: sunny and dry.

**Participants:** 5 participants (3 male and 2 female) aged between 16 and 19 years old. Dressed to varying degrees in 'alternative' clothing (long coats/black t-shirts for males/females in 'distressed' clothing (ripped tights and jumper/heavy boots) bleached blonde hair/heavy eye makeup. All identified themselves as gay and in town to 'pull' whilst drinking.

**Locus:** Area fairly busy with shoppers and tourists, one group of young Black males break dancing on one of grassy verges. Benches were almost all full with families, people drinking coffee/resting feet, laden with shopping bags. Group interviewed had chosen to sit behind one of the monuments on a patch of grass where they were partially concealed from view. The team were surprised to see a group drinking so openly this early in the evening in such a public place.

**Alcohol:** Group was sharing two bottles of 'Frosty Jack' cider. Participants also reported they had drinking vodka and mixer earlier in the evening

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** When we arrived 2 females were rolling around grass laughing whilst males watched them, amused. Another 2 males were sitting at the base of the statue smoking and chatting quietly (these males did not wish to take part, so focus group was conducted with 5 remaining group members). They sat quietly for most part and did not interrupt. Participants approached interview with enthusiasm, enjoying the novelty though it was clear that when discussing the problems they had experienced with 'neds' in their area that this was a serious issue for them. Oldest male (aged 19) seemed genuinely distressed by his experiences.

**Problems:** None

## **FOCUS GROUP 10**

**Area:** City centre (riverside)

**Located:** on foot via tip-off from previous focus group participants – a few groups observed but looked like older homeless people in the main.

**Conditions:** 8.45pm. Weather: dry but very windy

**Participants:** 3 males (each 17 years old) wearing jeans and casual jackets. Expensive trainers, seemed by clothing and appearance to be quite well-off. Told researchers they were still at school, lived in middle class area but were in the city centre because "half the neds in our area are after us."

**Locus:** Group sitting in a secluded area on benches at the side of the river. Spot chosen was in the sun with a good view of river, bridge and pathway, whilst being partially concealed by small walls/shrubbery to both sides. Spot itself not pleasant between two overstuffed bins (with further signs of previous drinkers), ground was sticky with dried up alcohol and littered with tiny pieces of broken glass). Area was quiet, except for an older trio of drinkers in their late 40's walking across bridge (seemed drunk/possibly stoned) and another group of older drinkers (possibly from nearby homeless unit) who had crawled through the railings on the other side of the river to sit on the verge by the bank. These individuals were later approached but were too old to take part.

**Alcohol:** The participants had a bag with lager in it (each was drinking a can, and the bag contained another 6).

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Quite a reserved group, barely talking to each other when we spotted them. Quiet at first when group started (put off by recording equipment) but got into the swing of things as we continued even showing us their home-made fake IDs.

**Problems:** None

## **FOCUS GROUP 11**

**Area:** City centre (main public square)

**Located:** on foot

**Conditions:** 9.15pm. Weather: raining earlier in day, cold and getting dark

**Participants:** All 6 participants (3 females and 3 males) aged between 16 and 18 years old. Dressed in 'alternative' clothing (spiked black hair and eyeliner, black clothing and docs, one female with a nose piercing and lip piercing, the other with chin length black and purple hair. 2 of the females and a male present from the beginning, the other 3 appeared later on and were included as participants as the focus group up till that point had been a bit stilted).

**Locus:** Square not busy, possibly due to weather and time of day. No other benches in this quarter being used, though groups of tourists elsewhere. A big screen TV was being tested at one end of the square which sporadically spurted out blasts of loud music before lapsing into silence again. This attracted the attention of a group of young tourists/students who came and sat nearby to watch. The group itself was sprawled across 2 benches openly consuming 'Frosty Jack' cider.

**Alcohol:** 2 bottles of 'Frosty Jack' cider were visible (one being shared by the females the other being consumed by the male), a third was concealed in a blue bag under the bench.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** One female was leaning back in her seat taking a long swig of cider as we approached, the male was scuffing the ground with his boot making patterns from the liquid spilled around the bench and seemed intent on looking nonchalant and 'cool.' As we approached, it was clear the split liquid was cider as it smelled like a brewery. Though agreeing to take part the participants did not seem especially enthusiastic. The female participants seemed a little intimidated, talking only sporadically. The male was more vocal but seemed torn between maintaining an image of cool defiance and showing enthusiasm. The arrival of the additional participants was a welcome relief. They were much more enthusiastic about their involvement and had fun debating the points. This seemed to encourage the females in the original group to lapse into total silence. Though the male continued to be aloof, the arrival of the new participants had the reverse effect encouraging him to contribute more as attention was turned elsewhere.

**Problems:** Initial group not overly communicative. Females in the original group seemed too drunk to focus sufficiently, the male seemed to treat group as an opportunity to demonstrate his rebelliousness. These problems were resolved however when additional youths arrived.

## FOCUS GROUP 12

**Area:** Rural (former coal mining town, population 6,000)

**Located:** from car via a tip-off from local council anti-social behaviour unit.

**Conditions:** 6.45pm. Weather: warm and sunny.

**Participants:** Group of 7 young males (5 of whom took part). Appearance: stripy/football tops, some in tracksuits with shaved-in, dyed hair. Aged about 16-20 year, referred to themselves as a 'team' i.e. a local gang taking their name from the housing scheme

**Locus:** Sitting around a wooden picnic-style table-bench next to a multi-court. This small playground was in the middle of a scheme (post-war semi-prefabs) surrounded and overlooked on all sides by council houses, in which at least one of their families lived (one participant shouted for money from his 'maw' to buy soda for their 'Sambuca'. A female came out and gave him some change). This was very public drinking.

**Alcohol:** Several (full-size) bottles of 'Buckfast' plus a bottle of 'Sambuca' (accompanied by metal shot glasses they reported getting free from the local shop). 'Red Square' and cans of lager were contained in carry-out bags which were concealed in bags under the picnic bench.

**Other Drugs:** One of the participants had 'pinned' eyes suggesting he was on opioids. They stated that the rival gang from an adjacent similar area nearby used needles and that they themselves smoked "weed" during the week on a daily basis. They also complained about being stopped by the police for using drugs.

**Behaviour:** They were acting remarkably sensibly. Initially suspicious that the research team were undercover police officers but were reassured this was not the case and accepted this quickly. Very trusting group, polite and complaint and appeared to enjoy being interviewed.

**Problems:** The main group of older youths were accompanied by several younger children who interrupted the focus group throughout. They were reprimanded (quite kindly) on several occasions by the older males but one child continued to ask persistently for money throughout. At one point during the interview a younger child grabbed one of the unopened 'Buckfast' bottles and ran off with it. He was chased by one of participants across a children's climbing frame (he could swing like a monkey by one arm with his trailing arm holding the bottle by the neck). This caused some disruption but the participant soon returned with the 'Buckfast' intact.

Towards the end of the interview the police arrived. What followed was of interest. The participants who were over-age took the unopened 'Buckfast' bottles, while those who were under-age took the opened bottles. They and the police both knew 'the drill'. The police stated who was over and who was underage (i.e. they knew each other well) and confiscated the opened bottles held by the underagers (presumably if these had been unopened the police would have confiscated them and presumably the overagers would have been fined had they held the opened bottles). Meanwhile one participant ran off into the scheme with the bottle of 'Sambuca' stuffed hastily up his t-shirt. The police did not chase him. Although the group were understandably annoyed, they seemed philosophical about their losses (presumably as this happened a lot) and were quick to realise that we were not responsible for this raid. However the 'bust' stymied the group which ended soon after, despite the feeling that more information could have been gained

from this group. Nevertheless this observation confirmed what other participants reported would happen if they were caught drinking by the police.

### **FOCUS GROUP 13**

**Area:** Rural (commuter town, population 9,000)

**Located:** On foot, via a tip-off from local council anti-social behaviour unit. The research team had not intended going to this particular area on the evening it was visited, but drove there following the police bust of the previous focus group. As we drove into town we did not feel that we were likely to find any street drinkers as it was very genteel, with elderly couples out walking / enjoying the evening's sunshine.

**Conditions:** 7.30pm. Weather: warm and sunny.

**Participants:** The group comprised four young men, one quite smartly dressed (dark shirt and trousers), the others in tracksuits/football tops and jeans. One was supposedly aged 16 the others were aged between 18 and 20. They all claimed to be working locally (e.g. hairdresser, car mechanic). Got the impression they were all that was left of their peer group after others gone to university.

**Locus:** This group were sitting on park bench on walkway beside a river overshadowed by a large historical building. They seemed to be using the river as a utility to drop items or bodily fluids in while they drank (one group member had just vomited before the research team approached). Though still located on a public pathway, the location was not visible from the road or any housing.

**Alcohol:** 3 of the group were drinking 'Buckfast', the other 'Red Square'. This latter drink was frowned upon by the other three who seemed very enthusiastic / knowledgeable about tonic wine. Also had some lager to share (6 pack of 'Tennents'). When we returned to the locus later, one of their empty 'Buckfast' bottles was evidence of their presence.

**Other Drugs:** One subject made several references to Henry (cannabis) and cocaine (ching) and at one point gestured to his pocket saying he had some "bomph" in there for later when they went to the pub and would have stopped drinking 'Buckfast'. At another point, he moved away from the FG and appeared to be arranging some sort of cocaine deal over his mobile phone.

**Behaviour:** This group was quite loud, but not rowdy. They were quite humorous, but also very compliant and helpful, seemed happy to help identifying other places where we could find participants (directing us to site of next two focus groups) with the warning us to "watch ourselves" as the drinkers there were "off their nuts" and would probably try and beat us up.

**Problems:** None.

## **FOCUS GROUP 14**

**Area:** Rural (commuter town, population 9,000)

**Located:** on foot via tip-off from previous focus group participants

**Conditions:** 8.15pm. Weather: warm and sunny.

**Participants:** Part of a larger crowd of about 12 when we approached which then quickly swelled to over 30 young people by the time research team left. 6 young males (aged between 16 and 19), dressed in casual sports clothes (tracksuits/trainers) seemed middle class. One was wearing pirate outfit and fake moustache “for fun.”

**Locus:** The focus group and many other drinkers were located in a children’s playground in a large country park on the edge of town. The playground was in a bowl in the landscape with one side facing the river and mature trees. This topography made the locus very private. One group member said that police had told them to drink there so as not to disturb local residents. Although the park was being used by children/grandparents at beginning of focus group when only 2 groups of youths were present, they soon left as the area started to fill up rapidly with more street drinkers. In effect this made the park a no-go area for non-drinkers and made this a de-facto hidden location. This group were sitting at one of two park benches in the playground whilst at the other were a much rowdier group of youths some of whom we later found out were from a sink estate in a nearby urban area.

**Alcohol:** All group members drinking ‘Buckfast’

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in participants’ account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Participants themselves fairly polite and compliant (if a little flippant). Cheeky/challenging comments throughout but in good fun, seemed fairly good natured – for example, tried to warn researchers to exclude particular individuals whom they felt would be disruptive. Got more rowdy as time went by and other drinkers started to arrive.

**Problems:** When the area was initially approached there were two groups of youths spread across 2 benches, team approached smaller group hoping to minimise interruptions. This was unsuccessful. The focus group started well but was soon interrupted by kids from the other bench wanting to add in their views/scream obscenities into the microphone. As the group continued however, more and more youths arrived there to drink, crowding in on the researchers to ask questions/add views and/or chat to participants. This very quickly became utter chaos with the researcher conducting the focus group shouting in order to be heard. In order to preserve the data from the original focus group one of the team used a second tape recorder (which had run out of batteries) as a dummy device to draw the newcomers away from the main group. This was successful (limiting if not entirely preventing interruptions to the ‘real’ focus group) but resulted in the female researcher being mobbed by large numbers of curious, drunken teenagers clamouring to take part or demanding answers regarding why the researchers were at “their bit.” Whilst the team was split up in this manner, much older youths arrived (in their mid twenties) who seeing the recording equipment became physically intimidating, squaring up to the female researcher saying, “you better take your stuff and fuck off right now.” Simultaneously at the other bench the male researcher (who was attempting to continue the original focus group) was told repeatedly that he “better watch his back” as “they lassies might tell you things” by a third older male who was also behaving aggressively. Threats were taken seriously and the team moved off

trailed by a group of female street drinkers still asking to take part. We estimated that in total about 30 or 40 young people congregated there by the time the research team left.

## **FOCUS GROUP 15**

**Area:** Rural (commuter town, population 9,000)

**Located:** Followed researchers from site of previous FG. Research team walked to what was considered a safe distance before beginning next focus group

**Conditions:** 8.50pm. Weather: warm.

**Participants:** 3 females who followed us down from the previous locus and another who joined in halfway through. All aged 16, wearing tracksuits with tight t-shirts, large gold hoop earrings and sovereign rings. 4<sup>th</sup> participant emerged through trees halfway through the focus group and insisted on taking part (similarly dressed but a little older, maybe 18). Told us they came from two nearby villages and got taxis or walked home (5 miles along country roads).

**Locus:** Focus group was conducted behind a pavilion toilet block on the edge of the country park beside a river and within sight of a busy foot bridge leading into town. This was not where the female participants would normally drink but this location was chosen for safety reasons given the events in the previous group. During the focus group the female participants pointed out several spots where they came to drink alcohol. These included the area from which we had just come as well as a spot over the railings and down the embankment next to the river edge. Others arriving on their way to the playpark arrived through the trees to our rear suggesting that they had taken the earth track along the riverside to get to the spot we were at rather than the actual pathway. Given that many of these young people were quite drunk this seemed to us like a serious safety risk.

**Alcohol:** Each had their own alcohol, one was drinking 'Buckfast', one 'MD 20/20' and one vodka mixed with diluting orange in a 2 litre plastic drinks container (label peeled off). The late comer did not have any alcohol on her but begged a drink from the female with the 'MD 20/20'.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in participants' account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Very drunk but enthusiastic. Loud in places as they shouted each other down but in general quite compliant, genuinely seemed to want to help. Interruptions from others walking past were generally dealt with by the female participants joining forces and screaming at them to leave – seemed quite fearless in this respect (worrying given the men we had just had to contend with). Some aggression towards a younger Goth/skater kid (not a street drinker, maybe about 14 years old) who walked past in the form of name-calling.

**Problems:** As we were still located near the pathway which led up to the site of the last focus group, the male researcher kept a look-out. As the group progressed there was a steady stream of drinkers heading from the town up to the playground (some up the pathway, others alongside the river). Some of these spotted us and approached. The researcher acting as look-out attempted to field interruptions. In order to avoid further trouble, the focus group was wrapped up somewhat hastily and the researchers made their way back to the car followed part of the way by some of



the drinkers from the first locus. As it was clear there were ethical issues regarding the older men present in amongst these much younger street drinkers (including these and other females) and due to the environmental dangers posed by the setting, the local council's antisocial behaviour unit were informed about the situation.

## **FOCUS GROUP 16**

**Area:** Rural (tourist town, population 7,000)

**Located:** This area was visited via tip-off from local council anti-social behaviour unit. All locations suggested as areas where street drinking might be found were searched but no drinkers were found. After a lot of driving about we saw two males (bare-chested, football tops tied around waist) behind some trees and stopped to investigate.

**Conditions:** 7pm, weather hot and sunny

**Participants:** Large group of about very middle class youths (aged 18-20). Most of males wore jeans/t-shirt or jeans and stripped to waist, one exception was more 'Indie' in appearance (looked like a member of Oasis). Females also quite 'mainstream' in their clothing: skinny t-shirts, denim skirts and sunglasses. Of the original 10, 5 chose to take part.

**Locus:** Parked car and went on foot to the ornamental gardens where we had spotted the two males. These individuals turned out to be part of a much larger group of around 9 or 10 who were sitting in a clearing concealed within a circle of mature rhododendrons which blocked the area from the sight of anyone walking or driving by.

**Alcohol:** This group were not drinking, but some of them had been earlier. They were fairly sober, but you could smell alcohol off their breath.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use but several of them mentioned drugs (e.g. LSD). One individual (who was not part of the focus group) came over and went on at length about "chemicals" and how he preferred these over alcohol which was the "worse drug of all" – this met with a mixed response from the other group members.

**Behaviour:** Group was quite friendly when we approached (had already learned of the study from the participants from the night before). Though the research was never introduced as such, these individuals referred to it as "the Buckfast study." Half of the group agreed to take part though those who ended up contributing most were not all the same as those who had initially agreed to participate.

**Problems:** This was a large group with its participants widely spaced, requests that they move closer together were not heeded. Instead participants continued to sit in two clusters which led to difficulties facilitating the group as splits in conversation occurred occasionally. There were also some interruptions from those in the crowd who had chosen not to take part however, these comments made useful additions to the group's observations.

## **FOCUS GROUP 17**

**Area:** Rural (former mill town, population, 5,000)

**Located:** From the car

**Conditions:** 7.30pm. Weather: warm and dry

**Participants:** 3 young males (aged 18-19 years). All wearing track suits and trainers, one in peaked cap.

**Locus:** Researchers took car and parked within car park of local park then investigated further on foot. Park was deserted except for a family at the swings and a couple walking a puppy. Despite the sunshine, the group (3 males) were found drinking beer in a small wooden shelter (shape reminiscent of a bandstand) near the play park. This concealed the drinkers from view from the main road and houses but provided a view of rest of park.

**Alcohol:** All drinking bottled lager (first time we'd seen this). Small crown cap bottles which one of them opened with his teeth.

**Other Drugs:** One participant produced a cannabis joint and began smoking it with his friend halfway through the focus group.

**Behaviour:** Participants froze upon seeing us, seemed suspicious and immediately asked if we were police officers but made no move to leave or conceal their alcohol. They were very downbeat and bored and seemed indifferent to taking part but agreed possibly because they had nothing better to do. They were compliant during interview however, though perhaps less enthusiastic than other groups.

**Problems:** This focus group was not as productive as previous ones had been. One participant was not happy about the group taking place and repeatedly made offensive comments (which only he found amusing) leading to quite an uncomfortable and tense atmosphere. The other two were more relaxed but seemed terminally bored with life in general.

NB: These participants directed us to a nearby wood where they told us we could find underage street drinkers (similar to the previous night this came with a warning that any attempt to find and approach these drinkers would be dangerous and may end in violence). The research team drove to the spot and found plentiful evidence that drinking had been taking place there (almost empty 3 litre bottle of cider on picnic table, overstuffed bin with various bottles thrust into it and blue bags strewn about the ground). However, there was neither sight nor sound of the underage drinkers that the previous group had been talking about. It seemed plausible that these youths had moved on to drink in a more secluded area up a pathway that led through thick bushes and trees into a narrow glen. With the researchers' safety in mind however, this lead was not followed up.

## **FOCUS GROUP 18**

**Area:** Rural (manufacturing town, population 19,000)

**Located:** From car

**Conditions:** 9.30pm Weather: dry and warm, getting dark.

**Participants:** 3 male participants (18/19 years old) dressed for a night out clubbing in nearby urban area.

**Locus:** Bus shelter on busy main road near town centre. This was very public drinking which they intended to continue while on the bus.

**Alcohol:** One participant had 'Buckfast', the other two 'MD20/20'. Reported they had also been drinking cider in the house before they came out.

**Other Drugs:** Difficult to tell though account suggested they took ecstasy and possibly cocaine fairly regularly

**Behaviour:** All 3 participants were drunk and very rowdy. As we approached one began kicking the side of bus stop 'kung-fu' style whilst shouting incoherently. The others found this hilarious and were guffawing loudly as we approached. Participants were immediately friendly and very open, treating focus group as a social event. Seemed in a very jovial mood throughout (though felt sorry for whoever had to serve them later on that night).

**Problems:** The main 'problem' was they were too friendly and were socialising with us, (telling jokes and stories) which made them easily distracted. Started getting a bit out of hand towards the end (obscene comments towards female researcher), overall however, a good group.

## **FOCUS GROUP 19**

**Area:** Suburban 'middle' class area

**Located:** on foot

**Conditions:** 7pm: Weather: sunny

**Participants:** 7 'alternatively' dressed youths (1 male and 6 females) all aged around 16. 3 females and the male chose to take part.

**Locus:** Group observed congregated around a stand of saplings near a skate park.

**Alcohol:** Several bottles of 'Lambrini' between the group. Two open, one lying empty on the grass and others still in a plastic bag.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in participants' account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Female with black and purple hair from focus group 11 was with the group! Introduced us to rest of group as 'alright' and told them about gift voucher which they seemed enthusiastic about. She then departed with 2 of her friends to another cluster of youths she evidently knew who were sitting behind thick shrubs partially concealed from view drinking 'Frosty Jack'. As we explained the study in more detail another female tottered towards us, stumbled and fell to one knee giggling before stretching out spread eagle on the grass (much to the amusement of the other group members). Group seemed well motivated and interested apart from the drunken female who managed to only chip in occasionally/wandered off a one point to return 5 minutes later having finished the 'Lambrini' at which point she appeared to fall asleep on the grass. No efforts made to conceal drinking.

**Problems:** None. Good opportunity to speak to a group comprised mainly of females

## **FOCUS GROUP 20**

**Area:** City centre (main public square)

**Located:** On foot

**Conditions:** 7pm. Weather: sunny and warm.

**Participants:** 4 males and 1 female. All participants wore black, grungy clothing and referred to themselves as 'alternative'. They were all 17 years old, barring one group member who identified himself as 19 years old. One male and a female were clearly a couple. Reported to researchers they had travelled into centre from another area to avoid bullying from 'neds' in their local neighbourhood.

**Locus:** This group was located where others had been found previously, at the rear of the square on a patch of grass behind one of the monuments.

**Alcohol:** 2 bottles of 'Lambrini' visible, one empty, one with about half an inch left in the bottom.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in participants' account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** Group of 5 was quiet, lying around on grass smoking and talking. 3 of the group appeared to have been drinking, the other 2 were sober. Group did not seem sure initially about taking part, and though agreeing appeared sullen. One female (lying on ground) contributed little (seemed slightly surly as if she resented intrusion or wished to be seen as moody), smirked and continued to roll bottle on ground when asked questions whilst waving her legs in air. 2<sup>nd</sup> female participant was more enthused and seemed to enjoy the discussion (was slagged off light-heartedly by rest of the group for this but continued regardless). This said, all became much more involved when the issue of 'neds' was mentioned. Even those participants who had said little up to this point joined in. Towards latter end of group, another three young people arrived and sat on periphery of group. Though they asked what was going on they appeared to be content to listen and did not try and interrupt.

**Problems:** Males in group were cocky/arrogant throughout taking the interview as an opportunity to demonstrate how cool and laid back they were. For one male this meant taking as many opportunities as possible to mock or challenge the researchers. Other than this being mildly annoying it seemed to have little effect on how the rest of the group interacted with researchers and was largely ignored.

## **FOCUS GROUP 21**

**Area:** City centre

**Spotted:** on foot

**Conditions:** 9.30pm. Weather: had been raining previously in day but dry, getting dark.

**Participants:** Group of 4 females in 'alternative' clothing – black, stripy tights, heavy eyeliner etc. and 1 young man (aged 18) in Celtic top and tracksuit bottoms.

**Locus:** Square usually very popular with 'alternative' youths and skaters. Though not many groups of these young were there at the time of the focus group (more outdoor diners and shoppers) two (seemingly unconnected) groups were found sitting on the back steps of a large department store which faced onto the square.

**Alcohol:** Group comprised 4 females sitting in a line with a blue bag in front of them. This was presumed to contain alcohol and as a result the group were approached.

**Drugs:** Group indicated that they occasionally took 'pills' but had not on this occasion

**Behaviour:** The research was explained and three of the female group members seemed willing to take part. The 4<sup>th</sup> was more suspicious of our intentions (possibly because I had embarrassed her unintentionally by remarking on the spittle as "gross"). She attempted initially to persuade the others not to speak to us but they ignored her arguments which appeared to annoy her more. She then insisted she would not contribute and even at one point left the group. However, this did not last long and eventually she came back and began to contribute (though somewhat grudgingly). As the group began a young male (short, plump, wearing tracksuit and trainers) approached and began to ask persistently what the participants were doing. To our surprise (given their very different styles of dressing) the females in the group and this new arrival knew each other quite well. In order to prevent further disruption, the newcomer was asked to join the group. This made for an interesting dynamic as the opinions of this young man, consistently contrasted from those of the rest of this group revealing a different belief-system which seemed culturally influenced. Though three of the females seemed to accept these differences easily, the fourth clearly disliked and resented this individual, sulking openly when he was speaking, casting him dirty looks and making derogatory comments when given the opportunity. He treated this good naturedly and the rest of the group appeared not to notice suggesting perhaps that these behaviours were not unusual (maybe a long-standing feud?).

**Problems:** None. Very communicative group. Mixed membership gave an opportunity to observe clashes in opinion between young people with different backgrounds.

## FOCUS GROUP 22

**Area:** Rural (manufacturing town, population 19,000)

**Located:** from the car. We hesitated before approaching them as there appeared to be too many in group to do a good quality focus group. Seeing that the group was breaking up and walking away however, the opportunity was taken to interview the remaining youths.

**Conditions:** 8.40pm. Weather: mild and dry but had been raining torrentially earlier in day

**Participants:** 6 participants in total (mostly aged between 16 and 17 years old with a couple of older males). Males wearing tracksuits tucked in socks, lots of Eminem hairstyles. Females very 'hip-hop' - big parkers slung low across their shoulders/tracksuits/ 'bling' jewellery. Identified themselves as a young team (i.e. a gang) from a deprived area of town (though some of the females were from outlying villages).

**Locus:** This group were spotted in the ornamental gardens of a large mansion house (now used as office space). A thick stand of trees and a small wall provided partial concealment from main road. The youths were gathered around a picnic bench about 200 yards up a wide 'woodland' walkway with trees concealing their position from both sides. From the end of the path however they were clearly visible to the occasional elderly person hurrying by. Indeed, the spot itself was not far from a small car park and some sheltered housing (though none of the houses faced the location of the group directly, thus offering some cover).

**Alcohol:** Some females drinking vodka and orange mixed in plastic juice bottles, whilst others had 'MD 20/20'. Males without exception were drinking 'Buckfast' (half and full bottles).

**Other Drugs:** None visible but participants reported smoking cannabis regularly/taking "blues" (diazepam). Told researchers that one of the reasons they chose to drink in this particular location was because it was well-concealed from most angles and reduced the chance of them getting caught.

**Behaviour:** The participants were clearly intoxicated (staggering and slurring). Initially suspicious (one female asking repeatedly whether we were police and threatening to 'kick our heads in' if we were or if we 'grassed' on them). Despite this group started well but was interrupted midway by more similarly dressed youths (also very drunk and somewhat hostile as they did not recognise us). Overall, a lot of showing off from both males and females either being protective of each other in couples, or making sexual boasts/slurs.

**Problems:** Very drunk and boisterous and as a result fairly difficult to control (overtalking/interruptions a problem). As group went on, more young people arrived who began to disrupt proceedings demanding to know what study was about from researchers. Began crowding the researchers/standing behind them etc. in a seemingly deliberate (though fairly half-hearted) attempt to intimidate. One female began tugging on the female researchers' sleeve quietly but persistently asking for a cigarette. A male participant took the male researcher's hat (but was made to give it back by one of the original group members). Another demonstrated why he did not want 'Buckfast' to be sold in plastic bottles by demonstrating the efficacy of the bottle as a weapon (taking a couple of swings at the male researcher's head). It quickly became apparent that the researchers were losing control over the situation and that data would be lost as the group had now become too big to manage. At this point the female researcher split off from the main group taking as many of the new arrivals as possible in order that the original group could

continue with fewer interruptions. This distraction worked quite well and allowed the female researcher to talk in more detail to the females in the group (this was recorded as field notes immediately after the group had ended).

### **FOCUS GROUP 23**

**Area:** City centre (main public square)

**Spotted:** on foot

**Conditions:** 5.30pm: sunny and dry but very windy

**Participants:** 4 participants (aged between 17 and 20). 2 males and a female dressed in 'alternative' clothing and a 4<sup>th</sup> male dressed in football top, jeans and a skip cap. Group explained that they had met at college where they were studying. Group formation in this neutral context might explain unusual group membership. Indeed, group members did not appear to know each other particularly well. 2 identified themselves as from a very deprived area of the city well known for problems with violence, another lived in the city and the female was from "out in the sticks."

**Locus:** Square fairly quiet. Group spotted sitting on benches to far side of square chatting to each other. No sign of any other groups of equivalent age in immediate vicinity. Participants reported that the city centre was their usual spot for outside drinking to avoid being bullied by 'neds' in their home area.

**Alcohol:** None visible

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in participants' account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** The male in the Celtic top and the 'alternative' male did most of the talking but their views and preferences often differed widely. Anecdotes were not overlapping suggesting that these two individuals, though spending time with each other at college, spent their free time with others. Though the male in the football top referred to the rest of the group as his friends, this was not reciprocated. In fact the female participant seemed slightly uncomfortable with some of what he was saying (especially when the conversation turned to violence he had witnessed and/or been involved in). Felt that this group was not what could be considered a street drinking group per se, but was composed of individual members who themselves were part of other groups that drink outdoors. Seemed reticent at first saying they drank outside very rarely, as they relaxed however it was apparent that they engaged in street drinking fairly regularly, sometimes doing "all-nighters" in the square where they felt safe because of the crowds and CCTV.

**Problems:** None.

## **FOCUS GROUP 24**

**Area:** City centre (small public square)

**Located:** on foot

**Conditions:** 8.10pm. Weather: cold and windy.

**Participants:** 3 females aged between 17 and 19 years old. All were attempting a grungy, 'Avril Levine' look with varying levels of success. Two seemed very middle class and identified themselves as being from fairly affluent areas. The third seemed more working class in terms of accent/preferences etc. They had met 2 years previously in town on a drinking session and become inseparable. They now met regularly every weekend to drink, splitting up at the end of the night to go to their various communities.

**Locus:** Group was conducted in city centre square popular with 'alternative' youths, quite busy with shoppers as it was late night opening.

**Alcohol:** No visible sign of alcohol but group was observed giggling and falling about which attracted attention of researchers who felt they may possibly have been drinking. We later found this was not the case on this particular occasion but this group reported that they did drink outside regularly confirming the range of locations reported as popular by other 'alternative' groups.

**Other Drugs:** No visible signs of recent use, no evidence in account of drug use.

**Behaviour:** First seen exploding into fits of giggles/shoving one another around playfully. Very lively, seemed confident and out for a laugh. Did not seem suspicious of researchers at all but were highly motivated by promise of payment (voicing only the concern that they might sound stupid on tape). Relaxed and easy throughout, began discussion before tape recorder was on. Seemed to enjoy process and chatted informally joking among themselves. Came across as good natured and not especially wild, out to enjoy each other's company and unlikely to get into too much trouble.

**Problems:** None. Good rapport.