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‘EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT’: DRINKING AND DISTINCTION IN BOURNEMOUTH

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Introduction

In Britain in the early 21st century, there is a focus by media, government and academia on alcohol and its regulation. There is a generally accepted understanding that alcohol consumption, in particular amongst young people, is a problem in Britain. This discourse is most obvious in media discussions of drinking. The *Daily Mail* (2008b), for example, describes “Victims of Binge Britain” and writes about the “shame of binge drink Britons” who get drunk abroad and are arrested (Massey, 2008). British society is generally understood to be “a culture that celebrates getting drunk” (*The Independent on Sunday*, 2008). These analyses tend to focus on *behaviour* associated with young people’s drinking, rather than strictly quantity. Hence, on the same day as it reported on the victims of binge Britain, the *Daily Mail* criticised the “lectures from public health minister Dawn Primarolo on the “dramatic and serious harm being done by middle-class, middle-aged drinkers sipping wine at home”, because the real issue is “youths out of their minds on cheap drink” (*Daily Mail*, 2008a).

Such concern is not confined to the media however, as the government has produced a raft of documents on the subject, most notably two alcohol ‘Strategies’ (Cabinet Office, 2004; HM Government, 2007) and a series of public education campaigns (Home Office & Directgov, 2008; NHS & Home Office, 2007; NHS & Home Office, 2008). In government discussions, ‘binge’ drinkers are defined as those who “drink to get drunk” (Department of Health, 2008: p. 9). It is also stated that they tend to be those aged 18 to 24 (HM Government, 2007: p. 6).

In contrast with other forms of “problem” drinking identified by the government, which are defined in terms of quantity of alcohol consumed, “binge” drinking is an issue because of the change in norms

from the everyday. The 2004 Strategy put it: “a crowded and noisy environment can increase the risk of disorderly behaviour””(Cabinet Office, 2004: p. 12). This is explicitly understood to reflect a change in norms:

> In the culture of drinking to get drunk, which often sets the tone for the night-time economy, the *norms* differ from usual behaviour — noisy behaviour may be expected and aggressive behaviour tolerated, with drunkenness used as an excuse. Where there is little social control, such behaviour is likely to increase. (Cabinet Office, 2004: p. 46, my emphasis)

This disapproval of the altered norms of behaviour is particularly highlighted in the recent public education campaign launched in June 2008 entitled “Would You?”, which runs with the tagline: “You wouldn’t start a night like this, so why end it that way?”. The aim is to encourage drinkers to see their behaviour on nights out through “sober” eyes, and shows scenarios including tearing one’s clothes, urinating or vomiting on oneself, and committing acts of violence (Home Office & NHS, 2008). This was launched in tandem with the “Units” campaign, aimed at reducing consumption of alcohol amongst over-25s (NHS, 2008). In October 2006, the “Know Your Limits” campaign was launched, which sought to highlight how people may overestimate their abilities when drunk (NHS & Home Office, 2007).

These campaigns, alongside the opening up of licensing laws as a result of the 2003 Licensing Act, can be seen as reflecting a neo-liberal approach to alcohol. Where classical liberalism sought to protect certain spheres of life — such as the family and the economy — from state intervention, neo-liberalism is characterised by seeking to introduce market mechanisms where they did not exist before. This approach implies a certain view of the individual. Classical liberalism saw its role as freeing up the “natural” tendencies of individuals and markets, where neo-liberalism sees its task as moulding individuals such that they act as desired given the market mechanisms being introduced (Burchell, 1996; Dean, 1999; Harris, 1999; Rose, 1992). It is in this context that one should see the opening up (“liberalisation”) of licensing laws, and the consequent attempt to re-shape individuals’ ways of thinking and acting concerning alcohol using public education campaigns. The “responsible”, calculating individual that can be seen to be at the heart of contemporary neo-liberal approaches to government (see Clarke, 2005) is at odds with the irrational, intoxicated “binge” drinker.

In this paper, I argue that young people’s approaches to drinking can be understood as on a continuum from the everyday to the carnivalesque. These approaches should be understood as “drinking styles”, which do not necessarily reflect participants’ objective drinking practices,

but rather the ways in which these are understood and represented. I suggest that these are classed in two ways. First, the participants who expressed them tended to be of different class backgrounds. Second, the discourses themselves are constitutive of class — that is, by expressing particular views and understandings of the world, participants conveyed a particular classed impression of themselves.

Methodology

This paper is based on ethnographic research conducted with drinkers themselves and related professionals, based in Bournemouth, a seaside town in the south of England. The research comprised preliminary observation in drinking venues in the town totalling approximately 27 hours, followed by conversations with a total of 113 drinkers over 13 sessions of participant-observation totalling more than 18 hours. Although most of these conversations took place in drinking venues, they also included one individual interview and three group interviews, as well as two open-ended surveys conducted via email. In terms of professionals, I conducted interviews with the 'club chaplain'[1], four youth work professionals, two drug and alcohol professionals, one bar manager, five bar workers, one door supervisor, the two MPs for Bournemouth and the night-time economy coordinator[2]. In addition, when I initially spoke to the night-time economy coordinator and the bar manager, who was chair of Town Watch, the local trade organisation, also present were two other venue managers, who were the co-chair and treasurer of the organisation. All interviewees quoted herein are anonymised.

Class and the carnivalesque

My analysis of class follows Bourdieu (1984), who argues that cultural and social "capital" can be as important as conventional economic capital in understanding how social inequalities are perpetuated. Just as money or machinery can be viewed as economic capital when their effects are analysed, this approach proposes that knowledge or behaviour can be understood as cultural or social capital when they produce effects on material and symbolic rewards. The application of such "capital""– the enacting and understanding of certain behaviours — can be seen as constitutive of class. This formulation therefore stays true to the idea that at its most fundamental level class should, as Crompton puts it, explain society's "unequal distribution of material and symbolic rewards" (1993: p. 1).

Such an understanding of class requires some idea of judgement — the "capitals" described by Bourdieu are only powerful when they are recognised as such by others. Not all resources can be transformed into capital. Therefore, disputes over taste and culture are crucial to the distribution of power. However, the value of an object or practice

in these symbolic terms does not simply inhere in its objective properties; it can also be affected by any accompanying narrative. To give an example, the very same object can either be read as "working-class" or "kitsch", depending on the way in which it is re-signified and re-valued (Skeggs, 2004: p. 107).

The effectiveness of such narratives depends on the capital one can mobilise (Bourdieu, 1989: p. 23). Those whose cultural capital is uncertified constantly have to prove themselves, since they are defined only by what they do, whereas those who have the resource of capital behind them have more freedom not to be defined by their actions (Bourdieu, 1984: pp. 23-24). As Skeggs puts it with respect to sexuality and class:

> The central characters in *Sex and the City* can offset sexual pathology through professionalism; they are unlikely to be read as "Essex girls", as Manolo Blahnik shoes replace white plastic stilettos. (Skeggs, 2005: pp. 969-70)

Bourdieu (1984) argues that the dominant system of cultural value legitimates those cultural practices that broadly accord with a Kantian aesthetic — and that taste of this kind is most common amongst the "dominant class". He claims that this legitimate taste is defined by its distance from sensual, "naÔve" pleasures — the complex as opposed to the "facile". This is linked with modes of distinction, which emphasise the individuality and thought behind taste practices.

"Popular" taste on the other hand is characterised by a "sense of revelry, the plain speaking and hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over heels, overturning conventions and proprieties" (Bourdieu, 1984: p. 34). This can be linked with Skeggs' outline of a challenge to the dominant worldview an "anti-pretension critique" (2004: pp. 114-116). This critique decries attempts by working-class people to embody middle-class cultural attributes as pretentious — a form of betrayal.

My understanding of the carnivalesque is largely based on the work of Bakhtin (1984a; 1984b). Bakhtin saw the carnival as a time when the "laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life, are suspended" (1984a: p. 122). The most striking feature of the carnival, according to Bakhtin, is the dissolution of the everyday "hierarchical structure" of society in favour of "free and familiar contact among people" (1984a: pp. 122-3). During the carnival, then, one interacts with different people from one's everyday life, and in a different way. Notably, Bakhtin (1984b: p. 7) is keen to emphasise that carnival is not strictly a performance, since that metaphor requires the separation of cast and audience, whereas in the carnival all members of the community are involved.

Given that the carnival is defined by its inversion of everyday culture and norms, the idea of the everyday is naturally opposed to it. There is a broader point to be made, however. Stallybrass and White (1986) have argued that a high/low binary has been central to ways of understanding the world across European cultures, echoing Bourdieu's discussion of the Kantian aesthetic cited above. They argue that the carnivalesque has long been classified as "low", and has therefore long been used in the construction of the (working-class) "Other" for the bourgeoisie to present itself as (by contrast) "respectable and conventional".

However, it is not clear whether such a link between the carnivalesque and class holds today in terms of "binge" drinking. Hayward and Hobbs, for example, state that "Six pints of lager or a bottle of champagne can provide a transgressive pharmacological and cultural nexus that is not class specific" (2007: pp. 440-441). I argue that these drinking styles are classed in two ways. First, and most straightforwardly, they are generally expressed by those of differing class backgrounds and so can be understood as reflecting class. Secondly, I argue that they are constitutive of class because the everyday style draws on themes of responsibility and moderation familiar from government discourses, while the carnivalesque style is not valued according to this symbolic economy. As Hayward and Hobbs (2007) themselves have argued, although "binge" drinking is a spectacle that provides news copy and television shows with material, it is not transferable into symbolic capital. Moreover, on this point of drinking styles constituting class, I observe that drinkers negotiated the government and media discourses in different ways, some employing language and motifs familiar from Bourdieu's (1984) work on distinction and class.

Unusual behaviour and funny stories

As might be expected, while doing fieldwork I encountered what I would consider unusual behaviour if it were in an everyday setting. This is best illustrated by recounting a number of incidents from Chris's birthday party, when he went out drinking with friends. As it was coming up to closing time in the pub, Sienna complained that she would never finish the bottle of wine she and Emily had bought to share if Emily was going to spend all her time outside with people who were smoking. Chris jokingly offered to help her out, and started to drink straight from the bottle. Sienna clearly did not appear to approve of this behaviour, as she ostentatiously wiped the rim of the bottle before topping up her own glass. When Chris later decided he could not finish his own pint of lager in time, he put it into Emily's handbag, hoping he could carry it out and drink it on his way to wherever they would go next. Earlier, Bradley, who seemed to me to be quite drunk, shouted "Cunt, cunt, cunt" and "Sex, sex, sex""– as if trying to provoke a shocked reaction

from staff or other customers —bringing to mind Bakhtin's discussion of carnivalesque "profanity" (1984b: pp. 16-17). Chris more than once turned to me at moments like these and, with a smile on his face, jokingly explained that they were examples of "binge drinking", suggesting that this behaviour is specific to and characteristic of a particular approach to drinking alcohol. Certain drinking practices — which I call the carnivalesque — can therefore be understood to imply different norms from everyday behaviour, just as described by the government.

This shift in norms is frequently understood as being amusing. For example, Chris himself laughed when Joey told me how Chris had once set fire to some public bins in a park on his way home from a night out. For some people such behaviour is not simply an unintended side-effect of drinking; it is the very reason for going out — most notably because of anticipation of the consequent "funny stories". Ollie explained to me in no uncertain terms that the best thing about drinking is that "unusual" stuff happens which makes the night "legendary".

In contrast, some drinkers rejected such celebration of out-of-the-ordinary behaviour, stressing their difference from such drinkers. Rachel said that one of the reasons she disliked a particular club was that people get too drunk there, and told me how on one night out someone had been sick on her friend's hand in a (different) club. This was not told as a "funny story", but rather with a sense of outrage, and can be seen as reflecting the same sense of disgust at vomit that the "Would You?" campaign seeks to cultivate. David was very clear in his disapproval of such drinking when he emailed me: "Don't like to see the completely drunk people who have no self-mastery and have lost their respect of other people". Here again there are clear echoes of government and media discussions regarding self-control, and parallels could be drawn between David's use of the term "respect" and Tony Blair's "Respect" agenda (see Squires, 2008).

In terms of their class backgrounds, Chris and his friends all worked in sales at two call centres, while Ollie was an undergraduate student — all therefore lacked any significant economic capital. Telesales workers would be ranked in the bottom tier of the NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification) schema (Office for National Statistics, 2000), and these jobs are considered by Winlow and Hall (2006) to be characteristic of the new, insecure working class. Those who condemned the unusual behaviour offer an interesting contrast. As an investment banker, David could command considerable economic capital, and while Rachel may not have had significant economic capital being in her first job since leaving university, she could be said to have considerable cultural capital as a graduate working in a professional role as a graphic designer. They would be ranked as 'Managerial and Professional' and 'Intermediate' respectively according to the NS-SEC schema.

Drinking to get drunk

Going out to get drunk was one of the most common recurring themes in my discussions with participants, and the consumption of alcohol was often linked with the changed norms symbolised by the unusual behaviour and funny stories noted above. When discussing his idea of "legendary nights", for example, Ollie told me alcohol was necessary to ensure the requisite "unusual" behaviour.

A corollary of this approach is that alcoholic drinks may be viewed in a functional manner, as a means to an end: getting drunk. Nicole, for example, explained that wine gets her really drunk, and so she would drink this if she was looking to get drunk, whereas she was "immune" to vodka, and so this would be her drink of choice on a night out where she didn't want to get drunk. Penny had precisely the same approach, choosing wine to get drunk and vodka and a mixer otherwise, while Jane explained that she tended to drink wine at the beginning of a night out because it gets her drunk "quite quickly".

Importantly, not all participants agreed with this view which places alcohol's intoxicating properties at the centre of the account of a night out. Just as in Stallybrass and White's (1986) analysis, the carnivalesque' other' is key to the construction of a responsible, controlled individual; alcohol may be consumed, but it is not at the centre of their night out. Simon expressed this idea neatly when he told me "I enjoy a drink, rather than drink to enjoy myself", and "I drink and have a laugh", contrasting this with those who drink *in order to* have a laugh. He explained that, for him, drink *is* involved, but for most other "people today" drink *has* to be part of their night out.

Although such comments reflect government discourses which condemn drinking to get drunk, these discourses were reworked in specific ways. For example, Sam argued that the concept of a "binge" is a "stupid" way to think about drinking. He and his friends had been drinking in the pub since 12.30pm and it was now about 7.30pm yet they were not about to "kick off", even though he stated that according to government consumption limits they had binged. As far as Sam was concerned, quantity was irrelevant; what he was concerned about was people's behaviour, and he stated in his defence that he and his friends were probably the "sanest" people there, certainly more so than some "eighteen-year-olds" who had had "a couple of pints of Stella". In this way, although he rejects the specific definition of moderation and "sensible" drinking outlined by the "Units" campaign, for example, he still mobilises the association between young people's "binge" drinking and violence that the "Would You?" campaign advances.

Andrew, who was in his late twenties, described his drinking to me in similar terms, stating that he did not miss being a student,

when he could start drinking at 10am if he wanted. Rather, he emphasised that he enjoyed the “structure” and “responsibilities” in his life now and said he was a “moderate” drinker, and not excessive. Importantly however, he went on and noted without any trace of irony that he probably did go over the “weekly limits” that were set by government. He stated that he might have “6 pints” on a Friday night, “8 pints” on a Saturday night, and maybe one on a Sunday, and said that he had had 6 pints that evening. At one point as he walked off to go to the toilet he knocked into a waist-high barstool, to the amusement of the work colleagues he was drinking with. Here, he lays claim to the ideas of moderation and responsibility that are common in government discussions of drinking, but according to his own definition, as in the common media rejection of the government’s condemnation of “middle-class, middle-aged drinkers sipping wine at home” noted above.

If participants were not deliberately seeking intoxication, their narratives required a different emphasis. One way in which this was done was to implicitly emphasise the facile nature of the carnivalesque by presenting an alternative practice that had “substance” and “purpose”. The idea of “substance” draws upon the Kantian aesthetic of complex, higher pleasures is drawn upon, while the idea of purpose draws on Clarke’s (2005) claim that New Labour like to see its citizens busy. Ellie, for example, explained how when she went to one particular venue in the town centre this was different from going to others because it had a “different vibe about it”, and this was related to the *purpose* of the evening:

> You go there for, um, to see something like a comedy night or … a band night or something. So that’s got a different, that’s got like a, a purpose. You’re not just going to a bar … You’re going somewhere so therefore that’s slightly different.

Therefore, although “entertainment” is different from the everyday, it is contrasted implicitly with the assumed carnivalesque of other venues in the town centre.

This sentiment was echoed by Simon, when he contrasted his preferences on a night out with his colleague Frank’s, who he joked liked cheap drinks and getting “pissed”. Simon started off by saying he did not want to stereotype, but then stopped himself and said, “but I will stereotype” and, after the qualifier “it sounds bad”, told me that he liked nights out with “a little more substance”. It was while discussing this that he made the comments about alcohol not being central to his nights out that were cited above.

Looking at the background of the participants cited here, again a pattern emerges, though perhaps less strongly than in the first section.

Of those who seemed to embrace ideas of intoxication, Nicole, Penny and Ollie were all undergraduate students, while Jane had graduated just a few months previously and was working as an insolvency officer, which could place her in either the 'Intermediate' or 'Routine and Manual' categories of the NS-SEC schema. In contrast, Simon was a graduate working in a high street bank whose job would be classified as 'Intermediate' and Ellie was a Higher Education lecturer studying for a Master's part-time, and thus classified as 'Managerial and Professional'.

Individualism and distinction

In addition to the different discourses being employed by those of different socio-economic backgrounds, they also incorporated alternative worldviews. In this section I will demonstrate how some drinkers sought to construct ideas of an apparently responsible, moderate self through their drinking practices and discussions of them. This model of the responsible, moderate self is linked with ideas of distinction familiar from Bourdieu's (e.g. 1984) work, emphasising individuality, rationality and complex tastes. This involves the creation of an image of an irresponsible, irrational 'binge' drinker against which to define itself, which is linked with the denigration of the cultural choices of the' mass' as favouring facile, superficial pleasures (see also Williams, 1990).

The most powerful way in which distinction was expressed was through the obvious word: "different". When Frank was describing the venues available in Bournemouth, he started off by stating that there were certain "student" places, but then one particular venue occurred to him and he told me this was good because the music was "different" from other venues and it offered "different" beers. At this point Anna chimed in, telling me "everything is different" there. She had just responded to one of the questions on the back of the flyer I had handed out — "What do you like or dislike about a typical night out?" — by saying that what she disliked was the very fact that it is "typical", and described this as comprising "Alcohol, drugs, girls — girls not well dressed — and sex, girls and boys". She could have done little more to indicate that the "difference" she was referring to was defined by its opposition to the carnivalesque drinking style.

In more general terms, Toby told me that only a few venues in Bournemouth "stand out", naming them and explaining that they played "different music", implicitly contrasting them with some idea of a mainstream. However, sometimes a direct contrast was drawn with the idea of a mainstream (or "binge") drinker. For example, Chris told me that he admired what I was doing for two reasons. First, "binge drinking" was "clearly a problem" in Britain, and secondly, he would be afraid of approaching random people. Both Chris and his friend Joey had a clear idea that there was a "sort" of person who dominated Bourne-

mouth, and indicated some men who went past wearing jeans and smart ironed shirts and a group of young women sitting at a table in the venue as illustrations of these people. They were characterised as the "same sort" of people, who, amongst other things, liked the "same sort" of music. In terms of musical taste, this was contrasted with what members of the group variously termed as "independent" or "alternative". The apparent danger was therefore linked with cultural practices.

Sometimes distinctive taste was understood not only to be different and individual, but also more complex than the mainstream. Oscar explained that he liked "rocky" or "alternative" music, echoing the ideas of independence and difference discussed above, though he might like a bit of "cheese" if he was drunk enough. His friend Dean went on to explain that it was easier for them to go to a club and dance to "cheese" then it would be for someone else to come to the sort of place that they might go to for music and dance or appreciate it there. Their taste is, according to Dean, not as accessible as the mainstream "cheese".

Simon more clearly expressed Bourdieusian ideas of class and taste when he was challenged for drinking wine when all the other men sitting at the table were drinking pints of beer, which it was said made him look like a woman. He responded by telling me that the others simply did not have "good taste", and that meant they had to resort to "taking the mickey". He also made clear that he drank the wine because he liked the taste, thereby emphasising his individual choice. The distinctive individual, therefore, has a dual nature: they make cultural choices for themselves, *and* these are the right choices, in accordance with a wider socially-sanctioned "good taste".

Chavs and townies

Distinction was most powerfully expressed through the figure of the "chav". This apparently distasteful figure"– notably conceived of as–not a thinking, choosing individual — can be seen as the necessary 'other' to construct the figure of the distinctive, tasteful individual. When Tilly praised the bar that various participants described as having all sorts of "different" features as quoted above, she noted how there was a "diverse range" of people there, which was "different" to other venues. At this her friend Matt pointed out, with a tone that suggested scepticism of Tilly's claims of diversity, that it was "quite elitist" and did not allow "chavs" or "skanks" in. Tilly then took this idea up, commenting favourably that she had seen "chavs" being turned away for not having a membership card, and confiding with some obvious pleasure that she and her friends did not have membership cards either, but had never been asked. This attitude is summed up neatly in Skeggs' phrase "the cosmopolitan limit" (2004: p. 162); diversity can be employed as an exclusionary concept. Since Tilly's account informs us that the

judgement is not in practice made on the basis of a membership card[3], it must be made on the basis of people's appearance and manner — to be precise, their "corporeal style" to use Butler's phrase noted above.

In some ways, "chav" can be seen as a term representing all the aspects of the carnivalesque that participants wished to denigrate. When Samir, Kurt and Steve — all investment bankers — were discussing the dismissal of someone from their firm for choosing to "entertain" a set of clients by taking them to a strip club, Samir described this as part of a general rule: there is a "line" the management do not want you to cross. He then explained that the policy could be understood simply as the fact that the management do not want their employees to behave in a "chav" way. "Chavs" are here associated with sexual excess — going to a strip club. Later, Steve identified the JD Wetherspoon's chain as "a bit chavvy". This might be seen as similar to Leo and Richie's characterisation of Wetherspoon's as somewhere that would be full of people who had been in there drinking all day, spending their "green giros", a clear reference to their being unemployed.

Another theme associated with "chav" was violence. Sally characterised the whole of the town centre of Bournemouth as "chavvy" and "aggressive". Dean similarly complained that the town centre on a Friday night is full of "chavs" drinking and "getting fighty". He elucidated this by saying he did not have the time for an argument with a "drunken chav" about "what t-shirt" he was wearing, suggesting that as well as liking getting excessively drunk, and fighting, "chavs" have a different sense of style"– or "taste", to think in Bourdieusian terms.

On a lighter note (though no less harshly criticised), Georgina, who worked in a town centre bar three or four days a week, started to tell me, without any prompting apart from my usual preamble introducing myself as researching drinking, "chavs are the worst". When I asked what she meant, she explained that they were the most likely to cause "trouble" (suggesting violence again) and were simply rude to the bar staff, expecting to be served first even if someone else had been waiting at the bar longer.

Hayward and Yar (2006) have argued that "chav" is a comparable term to "underclass", but refers to consumption rather than production (or a lack of it), as this is increasingly the basis for defining people's "social and status differences" — i.e. class as I understand it. According to Hayward and Yar, "chav" is defined by "vulgar" consumption that lacks "distinction" from the perspective of the "superordinate classes".

One example of such consumption is apparently "binge" drinking, especially involving "premium lagers" such as Stella Artois — precisely the brand chosen by Sam to signify what 18-year-olds would drink when getting violent and drunk. Jane was more explicit in this association. She told me that some people were more likely than others to get drunk

and when I asked if there were any reasons for this, or if she was referring to any particular people, she went on, after a pause: "I don't know, oh I would say that quite often the really drunk people I see are quite chavvy looking".

Hayward and Yar list a number of comparable words, such as "townie". Frank was called a "townie" when he suggested that bars or particular nights that catered specifically for "foreigners" would have worse music than others. This was then built on by Anna, who made fun of his corduroy trousers and joked that they probably came from Primark [low-end clothing chain], which he grudgingly admitted to, but seemed to try to sustain some pride in this, going on to state that his jumper came from George [clothing brand] at ASDA [supermarket chain]. In this way, "townie" was associated with flawed consumption and potentially racist views. This also seemed to relate to his earlier criticism of students — Hayward and Yar notably locate "townie" as being a term common in Oxford and Cambridge, and "most university towns" (2006: p. 15). This opposition between "townie" and student can be linked with cultural capital in Bourdieu's terms: a "townie" lacks the (higher level education) qualification which is a formal symbol of cultural capital (see Bourdieu, 1977: p. 187).

Samir, an investment banker, was the other participant who used this term. He used it to identity a person who was different from him and therefore might drink for different reasons to him — fitting in with his belief that–"demographics" were a "key driver" behind people's behaviour. He explained that a "townie" was someone on a "low income", "doing the same job" on a "9 to 5" basis, and suggested that a townie might well go out just to get drunk. In this way, the desire for intoxication was directly linked with class in terms of income and occupation.

Tyler (2008) has suggested that the figure of the "chav" can also be seen as directly opposed to the figure of the student, noting the prevalence of "chav nites" held at student union venues across the country, where students dress up as "chavs", which she describes as "class warfare". Bournemouth University's own student union nightclub, The Old Firestation, itself runs such events on a regular basis, for example on Monday 4 February 2008, when it was called the "Über-Chav Party"[4], and the "Chav Ball" on Monday 17 November 2008 (see **Figure 1**). This opposition between "chavs" and students is reinforced by George's claim that the venue with the restrictive door policy mentioned above was usually full of students from the Arts Institute, the other higher education institution in the town.

Both terms — townie and chav— show that when participants drew a figure of the excessive,–"binge" drinking mainstream to contrast with their own practices this was associated with violence, a particular

Figure 1 *Chav Ball poster, November 2008*
Student Union, Bournemouth University

cultural style, and even bad manners. The figure was also classed, as the connection was made with a lack of cultural and economic capital. The undesirable features of "binge" drinking as identified by the government were thus deflected from the speakers by their association with broader cultural terms; it is "chavs" who cause "trouble" and drink to get drunk. In this way, the problems of "binge" drinking as defined by the government are presented as not issues that concern the participant speaking; they are associated with a pathological other.

Rejection of individualism and the anti-pretension critique

A "binge" drinking identity was not comfortably inhabitable for any participant I spoke to. For example, although Chris described the activities of his birthday celebrations as being instances of "binge" drinking, he did not see this as representative of his typical drinking behaviour, and he employed mechanisms of distinction and individuality to distance himself from this impression. He told me how his group of friends was "chilled out", even he himself had once set alight some bins in a public park when he was drunk. The sections above are illustrative of how other participants negotiated the idea that, as the government sees it, there are desirable and undesirable forms of drinking (e.g. Cabinet Office, 2004: p. 9). However, not all participants were willing or able to distance themselves from the figure of the "binge" drinker in these ways. This was particularly striking with respect to individualism.

Individual choice lies at the centre of the mechanism of distinction, as described above, and yet one of the main attractions of the carnivalesque is the free and familiar contact between people and the sense of community that is engendered. To emphasise one's individuality would be absurd when the ideal night out is a case of "follow the leader" as Lee suggested. To some extent, it should be expected that participants would relate various "routines" to me — Owen was surely not unusual when he described how his usual night out would consist of drinking at someone's house, then moving on to a pub before possibly going on to a club. Interestingly, when Jane talked about growing out of carnivalesque drinking, as she got "fed up of it", she explained this was "because we always did the same thing. Have like our little route". It seems that part of this growing up is becoming more individual and discerning, and doing "different" things. In contrast, some participants seemed to celebrate the similarity of each trip to the town centre. Nathan, for example, described how his Saturday nights were governed by an "unwritten law" that dictated that they would start in one particular bar, before moving on to another specific one, and then move on to one more, which was not so strictly specified.

Some participants more explicitly challenged claims to distinction, following what Skeggs calls the "anti-pretension critique" as discussed

above. Sarah complained that some clubs were more about "image" than having "a good time", and her friends Lisa and Pete agreed. Sarah and Lisa, disparagingly, said that these were "celeb clubs", and Pete told me they were too "stuck up". Importantly, the targets of this critique are those clubs that are valued most by the local authority. The clubs Lisa and Sarah mentioned were in the part of town that the night-time economy coordinator described as "what we'd call where the West End of clubs are in Bournemouth … they're quite nice clubs … So it's quite a nice area". It is true that this "West End" moniker is partly geographical, but it meant something more than simply the fact that these venues are west of the town centre. The venue that so many participants described as being "different" is in this part of the town.

Sarah, Lisa and Pete contrasted these clubs with their own approach to choosing a venue, which was simply that they did not mind where they went so long as it had a "good atmosphere" and you could have "good fun" there. As examples of such places, they named town centre clubs owned by large companies, one of which has a nationally recognisable name. Such clubs were certainly not described as "different" or "alternative" in the sense implied by those quoted above. The same disregard for distinction seemed to lie behind her statement that when she is out all she is looking for in terms of music is something with a strong beat, while Pete described how "cheese" was ideal when on a night out. Such views are diametrically opposed to the description of a complex musical taste by Oscar and Dean.

In one case, even the figure of the "chav" seemed to be reclaimed as a challenge to the "stuck up" venues. Natasha, a bar worker, initially described the "West End" of town as "what you might call upper-class" venues. She clarified this by explaining that she thought people go to these places to say "look at me and how much money I've got". This sort of approach was contrasted with that prevalent in the other end of town —"the more chavvy end", as she put it — where drinkers are more–"up for a laugh" and out simply to have a "good time".

It is worth noting the backgrounds of Natasha and Lisa and her friends, to put their challenge to these claims of distinction into context. Natasha was a bar worker who had left school at sixteen to do a three-year performing arts course at a local college, before deciding on finishing that she did not want a career in this field, and turned what had been a part-time bar job to earn some spending money while a student into a full-time job. Lisa and Sarah were first-year media students and seemed to feel uncomfortable on the course, with Sarah saying that she preferred doing "practical things" to working on essays. Pete was studying at the local college for a foundation course, hoping to go on to university locally the following year. None of the three seemed to know what a PhD was, and thought it might be similar to a foundation course

of some kind. In this way, I suggest, they lacked conventional cultural and economic capital.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that class is constituted *through* drinking practices, rather than simply being prior to them. Class can be understood as "performative" in some way, and can incorporate cultural and social as well as economic factors. Cultural and social attributes can be transformed into capital — and thus become constitutive of class — when they are recognised as such by others. Government and media discourses regarding drinking can be understood as constructing a particular model of the rational, responsible, moderate self. Drawing on this model — as some participants did to explain their own drinking practices — can be understood as claiming authorisation for one's narrative, and thus transforming (or attempting to transform) it into cultural capital in terms of the dominant discourse. The classed nature of such claims is emphasised by the figure of the "binge" drinker constructed in opposition, drawing on traditional classed themes of a lack of education, income, and competence in consumption understood as enjoying "facile" pursuits, particularly through the terms "chav" and "townie". On the other hand, some participants did not emphasise the complexity of their tastes, preferring to understand them as unpretentious and "fun". Nevertheless, they did not readily accept the characterisation of the "binge" drinker they saw in media or government discussions of young people's drinking, preferring to emphasise the positive aspects of an approach to drinking I suggest is better understood as "carnivalesque".

Notes

1 This was a post for a youth worker to offer help to drinkers on the streets, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, funded by a number of town centre churches.

2 This is a post jointly funded by the Borough Council, the local Police and the on-licensed venues in the town centre to "lead on projects and initiatives to ensure that Bournemouth's Night-time Economy is safe, inclusive, vibrant and market leading" (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2006).

3 That these membership cards do actually exist was confirmed when I visited the site for observation (15 December 2007) and picked up a flyer for their New Year's Eve Party, which stated "Priority entry for regular card holders".

4 From *The Old Firestation Events Guide*, Spring 2008.

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