

**Please cite the Published Version**

Wilkinson, Samantha (2018) Researching Drinking 'with' Young People: A Palette of Methods. *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 18 (1). pp. 6-16. ISSN 1745-9265

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1108/DAT-08-2017-0036>

**Publisher:** Emerald

**Version:** Accepted Version

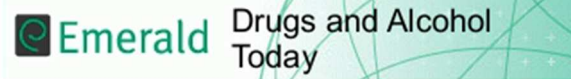
**Downloaded from:** <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/619523/>

**Usage rights:** © In Copyright

**Additional Information:** This is an Author Accepted Manuscript provided by Emerald of a paper accepted for publication in *Drugs and Alcohol Today*.

**Enquiries:**

If you have questions about this document, contact [openresearch@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:openresearch@mmu.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)



## Researching Drinking 'with' Young People: A Palette of Methods

Journal:	<i>Drugs and Alcohol Today</i>
Manuscript ID	DAT-08-2017-0036.R1
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Alcohol, Drinking, Co-Production, Participatory Methods, Young People, Qualitative Research

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

**Researching Drinking ‘with’ Young People: A Palette of Methods**

**Abstract**

**Purpose**

This paper outlines a study characterised by ‘pockets’ of co-production and argues for the benefits of offering young people a palette of interdisciplinary methods to ‘opt into’, giving participants the opportunity to discuss their drinking practices and experiences ‘on their own terms’.

**Design/methodology/approach**

40 young people, aged 15-24, from the suburban case study locations of Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Manchester, UK, were recruited for multi-stage qualitative research. Participants were presented with a suite of both long-standing and innovative methods that they could ‘opt into’, including: interviews, peer interviews, diaries, mobile phone interviews, text messaging and participant observation.

**Findings**

This paper shows that both long-standing and innovative methods have their own individual strengths for researching into young people’s alcohol consumption practices and experiences. Yet, each of the methods utilised in this study also had specific drawbacks for researching substance use. Offering a palette of methods for participants to ‘opt into’ was thus beneficial in: offsetting the weaknesses of other methods; triangulating the study findings; and enabling participants to communicate with the researcher in culturally credible ways.

**Originality/value**

By offering an honest account about the successes and failures of deploying a range of methods when exploring young people’s drinking practices and experiences, this paper is valuable for researchers in, and beyond, the field of substance use, seeking to broaden their methodological toolkit.

**Key words:** Alcohol; Co-production; Drinking; Participatory Methods; Qualitative Research; Young People.

## Researching Drinking ‘with’ Young People: A Palette of Methods

### Introduction

This paper critically reflects on the experiences of conducting mixed-methods qualitative research *with* young people (aged 15-24), with the aim of exploring their alcohol consumption practices and experiences. We purposefully emphasise researching ‘with’ to demonstrate that research is a shared process of knowledge creation between all those participating in the research (Leyshon, 2002). It is worth noting from the off-set that this study was not an entirely co-produced one: the aims and objectives were set by the researcher; the analysis occurred in isolation from participants; and the writing up has not involved participants (see names removed for anonymity). What we are stating though, is that the project involved “pockets” of co-production (Franks, 2011:15). For instance, the first author offered a suite of methods for young people to ‘opt into’ (Leyshon, 2002), including interviews, peer interviews, diaries, mobile phone interviews, text messaging, and participant observation. Such methods enabled participants with a variety of different skills to participate in the research ‘on their own terms’ (Leyshon *et al.*, 2013:180). We also contend that it is important that such methods are not deployed in a ‘one size fits all’ manner; instances are highlighted where the research design was refined and developed through listening to the experiences of young people in the study. The above methodological approach works with Bennett and Roberts’ (2004) notion of participatory research as a methodological philosophy that reflects the desire of researchers to give more control to participants; it is a philosophy that aims to be interactive, as opposed to extractive.

Research about substance use and its place in the lives of young people has employed flexible approaches. For instance, MacLean (2015) offered both individual and friendship group interviews in a study of young adults’ (18-24) drinking in Australia. Further, Jarvinen and Ravn (2011) offered participants the chance to take part in a focus group, either with a group

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

58 of friends, or with other drug-experienced clubbers. If uncomfortable participating, they were  
59 invited to participate in an interview either alone or with a friend. Moreover, Seaman and  
60 Ikegwuonu (2011) investigated the role of alcohol within the transitions to adulthood of 18-  
61 25 year olds living in Glasgow, UK using both interviews and a drink diary. Nonetheless,  
62 such studies often rely on a narrow range of long-standing methods; they do not offer a  
63 diverse palette of long-standing and innovative methods which reflect the varying skills and  
64 abilities of young people. Moreover, such publications on substance use typically present the  
65 research process as a seamless act of formulating aims, collecting and analysing data, and  
66 presenting findings. This makes it difficult for early career researchers to gain a true insight  
67 into the challenges of deploying specific methods. In this paper, we go some way towards  
68 filling this void by foregrounding the successes and complexities of using a variety of  
69 qualitative methods as a means of researching young people’s drinking practices.

70 **Participatory Research with Young People**

71 Since the 1990s, research with children and young people has witnessed significant changes  
72 in methods and epistemologies that have challenged long-standing research methods (Weller  
73 2006), and have endeavoured to dismantle conceptions of children as mindless and deviant  
74 (see Pain 2003). The literature has witnessed a surge in children-centred and, less so, young  
75 people-centred research methods. Such methods endeavour to remedy power inequities by  
76 supporting young people to choose their own methods of communication (Weller 2006). This  
77 is in line with the emphasis within social sciences upon young people’s agency (e.g.  
78 Holloway and Valentine 2000). Alongside this movement, participatory research has gained  
79 increasing popularity (Wright *et al.* 2006) and can be seen as an effective, and more  
80 inclusive, way of engaging hard-to-research populations in the research process.

81

Whereas children and young people were previously considered passive, or at best marginal, in research encounters, participatory research positions them as co-creators of knowledge. Often methods are employed to draw on skills possessed by the age group. For instance, older children may be involved in methods such as completing diaries and story-writing, whilst younger children may be invited to participate in drawing activities. Accommodating different skill sets is important as young people are a highly differentiated group, and approaches that are appropriate for children may be unsuitable or unacceptable for teenagers, and vice versa.

As Pinter and Zandian (2015) point out, creative participatory methods can provide heightened opportunities for enjoyment, education and a sense of empowerment. Importantly, however, though potentially enjoyable, adopting creative participatory methods does not guarantee that young people have genuine opportunities to develop and perform agency throughout a research project (Waller and Bitou 2011). To explain, the success of the implementation of these methods is, in part, related to the positionality of the adult researcher. There are arguments that researchers should adopt the ‘least adult’ role (see Randall 2012), and debunk children’s impressions of the powerful and “potentially dangerous” researcher (see Phelan and Kinsella 2013:85).

However, Ansell (2001) cautions that equal research relationships are impossible. The joint production/co-construction of research is complex as young people often do not possess the same level of data collection and analysis skills as researchers, who may have spent several years at university honing their skills. Enabling young people to develop the knowledge, skills and responsibility to co-construct research signals the “conscious exchange of power” (McCartan *et al.* 2012:10) between adult researchers and young people. Participatory research, then, increases young people’s capacity to identify and solve problems affecting

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

107 them. However, this is not without critique, and some authors have condemned such  
108 ‘teaching’ as implying that participants would benefit from “superior” knowledge (see  
109 Ansell, 2001:103). Others instead argue that participatory research is a process of mutual  
110 learning (Ho 2013); whilst young people may be trained as peer researchers, developing skills  
111 in interviewing and facilitating focus groups (see e.g. Cahill 2007), researchers become co-  
112 learners in their everyday lifeworlds (Minkler *et al.* 2002).

113 **Methodology**

114 The research was conducted in the suburban case study locations of Chorlton and  
115 Wythenshawe, Manchester, UK. Suburban locations were selected due to a pre-occupation in  
116 the substance use literature with cities, typified by a large body of work on the night-time  
117 economy (Holloway *et al.*, 2008). Chorlton and Wythenshawe were chosen, in particular, due  
118 to the differences in ethnic diversity, socio-economic status, educational attainments, and  
119 drinking micro-geographies between the areas; this makes for a useful comparative analysis.  
120 The first author recruited 40 young people, aged 15-24, for multi-stage qualitative research  
121 over the course of 12 months (September 2013-September 2014). The first author aimed for a  
122 relatively equal distribution of participants between both suburban case study locations,  
123 resulting in 19 young people taking part from Wythenshawe, and 21 young people taking  
124 part from Chorlton. Further, slightly more young women ended up taking part in the study  
125 (eight young men, and 11 young women in Wythenshawe, and eight young men and 13  
126 young women from Chorlton).  
  
127 In order to recruit participants, the first author contacted gatekeepers at local universities,  
128 secondary schools, sixth forms, colleges, community organisations, libraries, leisure centres,  
129 and youth clubs, in, and in close proximity to, the case study locations. She also distributed  
130 flyers and business cards to houses and businesses in both case study locations; posted on

1  
2  
3 131 online discussion forums concerning Chorlton and Wythenshawe; used Twitter recruit; and  
4  
5 132 posted on Facebook groups about the two areas. Further, the first author arranged to be  
6  
7 133 interviewed by the morning host of a local community radio station, Wythenshawe FM 97.2,  
8  
9 134 in order to broaden her recruitment strategies. As this paper now turns to explore, the  
10  
11 135 research was conducted utilising a “palette of interdisciplinary methods” (Mason, 2006:13).

### 136 **Towards A ‘Palette’ of Methods**

137 The palette of methods (Mason, 2006) that the first author presented for participants to ‘opt  
138 into’ consisted of: interviews, peer interviews, diaries, mobile phone interviews, text  
139 messaging, and participant observation. Each of these methods was not dependent on a  
140 minimum sample size, nor an equal sample size across the case study locations (Leyshon *et*  
141 *al.*, 2013). Participants opted into the methods they perceived to be the most enjoyable and  
142 felt the most comfortable with - they were by no means obliged to participate in all of the  
143 methods, although they were more than welcome to do so. This was a research strategy  
144 successfully deployed by Leyshon (2002) in his research with young people in the  
145 countryside. As Holland *et al.* (2008:19, emphasis in original) argue, “by enabling young  
146 people to choose *how* they wish to communicate with us we recognise them as social actors  
147 and begin to move our practice away from adult-centric procedures”. As the below  
148 demonstrates, we are committed to an attitude of “methodological immaturity” (Gallacher  
149 and Gallagher, 2008), which privileges an open-ended process over a predefined technique.  
150 This is reflected in the first author’s commitment to modifying methods in light of the  
151 preferences and characteristics of different young people (Ansell *et al.*, 2012). We now  
152 demonstrate this by discussing individual and friendship group interviews. **It is worth**  
153 **highlighting though, that there are difficulties in adopting a truly open-ended approach, given**  
154 **the structure and nature of many university ethics committees (Skelton, 2008).**



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

155

156

*Individual and Friendship Group Interviews*

157 Thirty-five young people opted in to the interview method. Individual interviews enabled the  
158 first author to gain insight into the participants’ perceptions, which are subjective in nature  
159 (e.g. of their motivations for drinking, how they feel when they drink, where they like to  
160 drink), (Kaar, 2007). Whilst the individual interview has its benefits, there are also  
161 drawbacks. Some young people did not feel comfortable participating in a one-to-one  
162 interview with an adult researcher, and asked to be interviewed with their friends. To address  
163 this, the first author implemented a friendship group style of interviewing. The first author  
164 had not intended to use this method; this illustrates the agency of participants to shape the  
165 research design, and the need for researchers to be flexible.

166 There are advantages of conducting interviews in friendship groups for substance use  
167 research. Friendship group interviews create a non-threatening and comfortable atmosphere  
168 for participants to share drinking experiences (Renold, 2005). Moreover, friendship group  
169 interviews provide access to interaction between participants (Miller *et al.*, 2010) - this  
170 helped tease out the importance of friendship and care to young people’s drinking practices  
171 (see name removed for anonymity). Overall, friendship group interviews allowed the  
172 researcher to collect data that otherwise may not be accessible (Miller *et al.*, 2010). Although  
173 occasionally suppressed by more dominant friends, less confident participants may not have  
174 participated in the research otherwise. When researching young people’s alcohol  
175 consumption practices, the presence of adults may restrict young people from speaking about  
176 their experiences and thoughts surrounding drinking (Katainen and Rolando, 2015).  
177 Recognising the ‘otherness’ (see Jones, 2008) of participants younger than herself, the first  
178 author also employed peer interviews.

179

180

*Peer Interviews*

181 Thirteen young people opted into the ‘peer interview’ method. Peer interviews acknowledge  
182 that young people’s experiences of spaces and places differ from those of adults (Schäfer and  
183 Yarwood, 2008). Young people are suitable for conducting peer interviews because they  
184 speak the same language as other young people (Kilpatrick *et al.*, 2007). Further, they often  
185 have first-hand insights into matters affecting peers, as they are often affected by these issues  
186 themselves (McCartan *et al.*, 2012). As Alderson (2008:278) rhetorically questions, if young  
187 people’s “social relations and culture are worthy of study in their own right, then who is  
188 better qualified to research some aspects of their lives than [young people] themselves?”

189 Despite contentions that peer interviews can offer a “genuine perspective” into young  
190 people’s lives (Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008:4), we found that peer interviews provided a  
191 space for some young people to playfully fabricate their drinking stories. Take the following  
192 exchange:

193 Rik: Can you tell me what you get up to on a night out?

194 Oscar: Get a taxi to town [said in an ironic tone].

195 Rik: And get wankered in the Union [laughs].

196 Oscar: And meet some ladies.

197 Rik: Meet some ladies and take them back to my house.

198 Oscar: [Laughs].

199 Rik: And you know where to go from there don’t ya.

200 Oscar: [Laughs].

201 Rik: No, I’m only joking, only joking

202 (Rik and Oscar, 15, Wythenshawe, peer interview)

203

204 Oscar and Rik, aged 15, quoted above, playfully fabricated accounts of their drunkenness  
205 through hyperbolic descriptions, in order to perform and produce particular kinds of ‘cool’

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

206 masculinities through their alcohol consumption. The notion that this story is an embellished  
207 one can be gleamed through: the ironic tone in which the young people spoke; the laughing  
208 which permeated this section of the peer interview; and Rik’s frank admission at the end, in  
209 which he states “no, I’m only joking, only joking”. As von Benzon (2015) says, silencing  
210 playful contributions can risk losing valuable data, and ignoring one form of young people’s  
211 voices. We argue that the young people’s fantasies are interesting in illuminating their  
212 ingrained assumptions about alcohol consumption. For instance, Rik and Oscar appear to  
213 assume that alcohol is associated with enabling men to meet women, and to have sexual  
214 relationships.

215 A drawback of standalone interviews (whether individual, friendship group or peer-led) is  
216 that participants often do not feel as if they have much time to think through their answers -  
217 an immediate response is expected (Literat, 2013). Recognising this, the first author also  
218 offered young people the choice of participating in drawing elicitation interviews.

219 *Drawing Elicitation Interviews*

220 Seventeen young people in the study opted into the drawing elicitation interview method.  
221 Each drawing elicitation interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and took place in spaces  
222 participants felt safe and comfortable in, including: schools, homes, and cafes. Through the  
223 drawing-elicitation interview, “the visual representation becomes a process of ‘working  
224 through’, rather than spontaneously responding” (Literat, 2013:210). After providing the  
225 young people with a blank sheet of A3 paper and a pack of colouring felt tip pens and some  
226 pencils, the first author asked the participants to draw free-hand sketch-maps of their drinking  
227 spaces and places. Discussing their maps enabled participants to look back on their products  
228 reflexively, along with giving them an additional medium through which to express their  
229 thoughts (Lehman-Frisch *et al.*, 2012). Inviting participants to interpret their own maps

230 further facilitated a sense of empowerment, as the researcher became a respectful listener of  
231 the young participants who were in charge of the discussion (Literat, 2013).

232 Through its combination of visual and oral methods, the drawing elicitation interview  
233 enabled an understanding of the complexity of young people's relationships with drinking  
234 spaces (Lehman-Frisch *et al.*, 2012). While the first author anticipated that the maps would  
235 offer a static snapshot of drinking spaces, she was surprised that young people's mobilities  
236 came through in their drawings. Many young people drew arrows to signal their movements  
237 in, through, and beyond, drinking spaces. This method had its weaknesses as, despite the first  
238 author's reassurances, some young people lacked confidence in their drawing abilities (Rose,  
239 2012). It was therefore important to offer alternative methods that do not rely on drawing, or  
240 oral communication.

#### 241 *Diaries*

242 Diaries are a method through which young people can express themselves, perhaps with less  
243 embarrassment, or fewer feelings of being judged, than in interview scenarios. This can be  
244 captured through Kelly's (17, Wythenshawe, drawing elicitation interview) comment: "ah I'll  
245 have to write about it, I can't, I'm not saying that, I'll write about it". Eleven young people in  
246 the study completed the diary method, five young men and six young women. The first  
247 author asked the young people to complete unstructured solicited written diaries, regarding  
248 their alcohol consumption experiences, over a minimum of three weeks. Leyshon (2002)  
249 contends that utilising a written diary method with young people is challenging, as they  
250 perceive it to be time-consuming and it may feel like a form of homework. However, some  
251 young people in the study were enthusiastic about keeping a written diary; some participants  
252 claimed to have "never had a diary before" (Jemima, 15, Wythenshawe, interview). Far from

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

a tedious homework-like task, for some young people, keeping a diary was novel and exciting.

Diaries yield considerable benefits for substance use research. First, as the diary method was not undertaken face-to-face, it made it easier for young people to be more candid about their drinking practices and experiences than in face-to-face methods (Milligan, 2005). Second, by enabling participants to document their own drinking practices, in their own space and time, a more empowering research relationship emerged between young people and the researcher. The first author found that one of the drawbacks of using diaries is that several young people opted to participate in this method, yet never returned their diaries. An additional downfall with using diaries for research is that they depend on the participant’s writing skills (Buchwald *et al.*, 2009). Relatedly, the first author was often disappointed by the limited detail some of the completed diaries contained. In addition to oral, written, and artistic mediums, it is important to offer alternative methods, which enable young people who are technologically skilled to communicate their thoughts on alcohol, drinking and drunkenness. This is now illustrated through a discussion of mobile phone interviews and text messaging (see reference removed for anonymity).

*Mobile Phone Interviews*

The first author had planned to ask young people to send her photographs and videos on their nights out, via their mobile phones. Despite gaining ethical approval to do so, this approach was not suitable ‘in practice’ because of the costs involved with sending photograph and video messages. Whilst many young people held a mobile phone contract, which often allows unlimited text messages to be sent, often this does not include photograph or video messages, which, in the UK, are typically charged at 30-40 pence per message. The first author

278 developed and refined the research design through listening to the experiences of a young  
279 person in her study; Heather (15, Wythenshawe, interview) stated: “there’s a party on Friday.  
280 I’ll video some of it through the night on my mobile, like video bits and I’ll come in and  
281 show you”. Mobile phone interviews involved asking young people to use their phones to  
282 take photographs and videos on their nights out. The first author then met the young people  
283 individually, a few days after the event, and asked them to navigate through relevant  
284 photographs and videos on their phones. The visual data then served as prompts to elicit  
285 discussion in an informal interview.

286 Some of the benefits of mobile phone interviews for substance use research are as follows:  
287 asking participants to take photographs and videos enabled “ethnography by proxy”  
288 (Bloustein and Baker 2003:72), for spaces that may be difficult for a researcher to gain access  
289 to, such as homes of participants’ friends and relatives. Further, the mobile phone offered  
290 participants an opportunity to ‘show’, rather than solely ‘tell’, aspects of their drinking  
291 identities that may have otherwise remained hidden (as Croghan *et al.*, 2008 note of photo-  
292 elicitation methods). In line with this, the interview element of this method acted as a means  
293 of triangulating what young people *said* they did, with what the photographs and videos  
294 *showed* they did. Further, mobile phones changed the materiality of interviewing participants;  
295 the young people were, to some extent, ‘in charge’, whilst the researcher largely watched the  
296 scenes unfold.

### 297 *Text Messaging*

298 Ten young people in the study opted into the text messaging method (eight of which were  
299 young women, and two young men). Text messages were used as data in two predominant  
300 ways. Firstly, conversations the first author had with the young people, via text messages,  
301 regarding nights in/out that they had invited her to, were a valuable form of data. The first

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

302 author asked the young people about their plans regarding: where they were going; what they  
303 would wear; what they would drink; whom they were meeting, and so forth. Secondly, the  
304 first author asked participants to update her, via text messages, of their experiences and  
305 practices during their nights in/out involving alcohol, when she was not present.

306

307 Researchers have typically undervalued text messages as a source of data. Whilst diary  
308 entries are often perceived to require literacy skills, texting requires a different type of  
309 literacy skill, enabling the inclusion of young people with a range of abilities (Walker *et al.*,  
310 2009). Further, social anxiety may cause some young people to prefer technological  
311 communication, rather than face-to-face communication (Pierce, 2009). Text messaging is a  
312 particularly important method when researching substance use because most other methods,  
313 such as diaries and interviews, require participants to remember and recall events, which can  
314 be problematic with memory impairment associated with alcohol consumption. The date-and  
315 time-stamped text messages provide an “experience snapshot” (Plowman and Stevenson,  
316 2012:539) of young people’s alcohol-related, present-tense, actions. Overall, text messaging  
317 offered an informal, undemanding, and unobtrusive, means of understanding young people’s  
318 drinking practices and experiences, as they unfolded. Text messaging is a research technique  
319 in line with many young people’s everyday/everynight practices. For young people in the first  
320 author’s study, and as Leyshon *et al.* (2013) make clear, text messaging is a culturally legible  
321 means of communication.

322

323 Those researching drinking practices, whether through interviews, diaries, drawings, or  
324 mobile phone methods, must contend with the issue that people do not always do as they say  
325 they do (Holloway *et al.*, 2008). This may be due to worries about being judged by the

researcher or peer-researchers, for instance. It is for this reason that the first author also deployed participant observation as a method for young people to 'opt into'.

### *Participant Observation*

The first author undertook participant observation over a period of 12 months. She observed the drinking practices of seven different young people and their friends participating in the research. She went on 21 nights out/in in total, lasting a minimum of three hours, and up to a maximum of twelve hours. She undertook approximately 96 hours of participant observation in total, in a diverse range of spaces, including: pubs, bars, clubs, casinos, streets, parks, and homes, and for a variety of occasions, including routine nights out, to more celebratory occasions, such as an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday party. By "hanging out" with participants (Kusenbach, 2003:463), the first author was able to explore young people's drinking experiences as they moved through, and interacted with, their surroundings. The first author considers that her age, appearance, personality and drinking biography were key factors that enticed young people to invite her on their nights out. We cannot help but think that an older, less fashionable researcher, who abstained from alcohol consumption, for instance, would not have been so openly invited to selectively invited 'special occasions', such as 18<sup>th</sup> birthday parties. It is worth noting that the first author was going to offer the method of participant observation later in the study, when she had built up a level of trust and confidence with the participants. However, upon explaining the study to participants at a first meeting, one participant stated: "why don't you just come on a night out with us?". Participant observation, to participants, seemed like a logical way of gleaming insight into their drinking experiences.

By joining young people as they moved in and between different spaces, the first author acquired an understanding of young people's embodied drinking practices, and the multi-sensory nature of drinking experiences (Langevang, 2007). This included the role of music,



1  
2  
3 351 the impact of darkness and lightness (reference removed for anonymity), the taste of  
4  
5 352 particular alcoholic drinks, the smell of vomit, and the importance of touch, for instance,  
6  
7 353 when caring for drunken friends. To provide an example, when the first author went out with  
8  
9 354 participants to a club for an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday party, participant observation provided support for  
10  
11 355 the notion that drunkenness is not about alcohol alone (see Jayne *et al.*, 2010). The music,  
12  
13 356 lighting, (non) alcoholic drinks, and bodies were all materials acting on the researcher,  
14  
15 357 influencing her corporeal experiences of space, and making a difference to the social  
16  
17 358 experiences of alcohol consumption (Duff, 2012). The can be illustrated through the  
18  
19 359 following passage from the first author’s field diary:  
20  
21  
22

23 360 It is interesting that, despite only having one vodka and coke, I felt drunk. Normally, I  
24 361 require a certain number of drinks in order to have the confidence to dance. However,  
25 362 tonight, being surrounded by other mobile drunken bodies, the darkness of the club,  
26 363 and the thump of the upbeat music, increased my ability to dance uninhibited...I even  
27 364 found myself participating in the Gangnam Style dance<sup>1</sup> without feeling self-  
28 365 conscious! (Field diary, night out with Maisy, 18, and friends,  
29 366 Wythenshawe)  
30

31 367 From the above extract, one can see that the first author experienced a transformation, her  
32  
33 368 body ‘became’ drunk, through its practices and encounters in assemblages with other drunken  
34  
35 369 bodies, the sonic environment, and lighting in the affectively charged space (Waitt and  
36  
37 370 Stanes, 2015). Such visceral insights are not easily obtained through other methods. Having  
38  
39 371 provided an overview of the strengths and weaknesses, and the complimentary nature of the  
40  
41 372 interdisciplinary methods underpinning this study, this paper now concludes.  
42  
43  
44

45 373 **Concluding Remarks**  
46

47 374 This paper has outlined a substance use study characterised by “pockets” of co-production  
48  
49 375 (Franks, 2011:15). In this paper, we have argued that when conducting substance use research  
50  
51 376 ‘with’ young people, researchers should offer palette of diverse, yet complementary, methods  
52  
53  
54

55  
56 <sup>1</sup> A pop single by the South Korean musician Psy, released in 2012, renowned for the choreography and moves  
57 in its music video, including gallop, lasso, leg sweep, flick, shuffle, pop and pose.  
58  
59  
60

for participants to 'opt into'. Such methods could include, but are by no means limited to: interviews, peer interviews, drawing elicitation interviews, diaries, mobile phone interviews, text messaging, and participant observation. Combining mixed qualitative methods provided young people in this study with the space and time they needed to communicate the complexities of their lives (Langevang, 2007). This paper has also argued for the need to privilege an open-ended process to conducting substance use research (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008); for instance, by modifying methods in light of the preferences and characteristics of specific young people (Ansell *et al.*, 2012).

Each method deployed in this study was argued to have its own strengths for researching into young people's drinking. Interviews offered in-depth insight into alcohol consumption practices and experiences, and friendship group interviews provided a comfortable setting for young people to discuss their drinking stories and have their voices heard. Whilst young people may feel uncomfortable articulating drinking stories to an adult researcher, peer interviews addressed this. Peer interviews provided interesting data as, whilst young people sometimes fabricated drinking stories, such embellishments illuminated their ingrained assumptions about alcohol consumption. Whilst interviews (individual, friendship or peer-led) often require an immediate response, drawing elicitation interviews gave participants a chance to 'think through' drinking practices and experiences. Drawing elicitation interviews also enabled insight into young people's alcohol-related im/mobilities.

Additionally, diaries were argued to provide a space for more candid drinking accounts. Whilst diaries rely on participants' writing ability, mobile phone methods enabled those more technologically skilled and minded to participate in the research. Mobile phone interviews enabled young people to 'show and tell' the researcher about their alcohol consumption practices and experiences - through a culturally credible medium, whilst text messaging provided real-time updates of drinking practices as they unfolded. Finally, although many

1  
2  
3 402 methods relied on participants’ versions of drinking events, participant observation enabled  
4  
5 403 the researcher to both see and *feel* multi-sensory and embodied drinking experiences. As this  
6  
7 404 paper has demonstrated, by being equipped with a palette of methods, the strengths of one  
8  
9 405 method can offset the weaknesses of another (Cresswell and Clark, 2011).  
10  
11  
12 406 The palette of interdisciplinary methods deployed in this study enabled the researcher to  
13  
14 407 triangulate the research findings. Importantly, it also gave participants the opportunity to  
15  
16 408 communicate with the researcher in ways they were comfortable with, and found meaningful.  
17  
18 409 By being honest about the successes and failures of deploying specific methods when  
19  
20 410 exploring young people’s alcohol consumption practices and experiences, this paper is  
21  
22 411 valuable for researchers in, and beyond, the field of substance use, seeking to both broaden  
23  
24 412 their methodological toolkit, and research ‘with’ participants in culturally legible ways. We  
25  
26 413 are not suggesting that the methods outlined in this paper should be extracted by researchers  
27  
28 414 for substance use research. Rather, we contend that researchers must be attentive at listening  
29  
30 415 to, and becoming attuned to, the methodological preferences of the specific group of  
31  
32 416 participants in their study, and consequently adapt their methodological offerings to enable  
33  
34 417 participants to communicate with researchers “on their own terms” (Leyshon *et al.*,  
35  
36 418 2013:180).  
37  
38  
39  
40

41 419 **Word count: 6000**

42  
43  
44 420 **Acknowledgements**

45  
46 421 This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number:  
47 422 ES/J500094/1] [names removed for anonymity] and Alcohol Research UK Postgraduate  
48 423 Research Studentship [grant number: RS 12/02] [name removed for anonymity].  
49

50 424 **Conflict of Interests**

51  
52  
53 425 The authors declare no conflict of interests.  
54  
55 426

## References

- Alderson, P. (2008). Children as Researchers: Participation Rights and Research Methods. In Christensen, P. and James, A. (Eds.) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* Second Edition. London: Routledge. pp. 276-290.
- Ansell, N. (2001). Producing Knowledge about 'Third World Women': The Politics of Fieldwork in a Zimbabwean Secondary school. *Ethics, Place and Environment*. 4. (2). pp. 101–116.
- Ansell, N., Robson, E., Hajdu, F. and Blerk, L.V. (2012). Learning from Young People About Their Lives: Using Participatory Methods to Research the Impacts of AIDS in Southern Africa. *Children's Geographies*. 10. (2). pp. 169-186.
- Bennett, F. and Roberts, M. (2004). *From Input to Influence. Participatory Approaches to Research and Inquiry into Poverty*. Joseph Rowntree Trust, York.
- Bloustein, G. and Baker, S. (2003). On Not Talking to Strangers: Researching the Micro Worlds of Girls through Visual Auto-Ethnographic Practices. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practices*. 47. (3). pp. 64-79.
- Buchwald, D., Schantz-Laursen, B. and Delmar, C. (2009). Video Diary Data Collection in Research with Children: An Alternative Method. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 8. (1). pp. 12-20.
- Cahill, C. (2007). Doing Research with Young People: Participatory Research and the Rituals of Collective Work. *Children's Geographies*. 5. (3). pp. 297-312.
- Cresswell, J.W. and Clark, V.L.P. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Croghan, R., Griffin, C., Hunter, J. and Phoenix, A. (2008). Young People's Constructions of Self: Notes on the Use and Analysis of the Photo-Elicitation Methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 11. (4). pp. 345-356.
- Duff, C. (2012). Accounting for Context: Exploring the Role of Objects and Spaces in the Consumption of Alcohol and other Drugs. *Social and Cultural Geography*. 13. (2). pp. 145-159.
- Franks, M. (2011). Pockets of participation: Revisiting child-centred participation research. *Children & Society*, 25(1), 15–25.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Gallacher, L. and Gallagher, M. (2008). Methodological Immaturity in Childhood Research? Thinking Through ‘Participatory Methods’. *Childhood*. 15. (4). pp. 499-516.

Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, N. and Hillman, A. (2008). The Everyday Lives of Children in Care: Using a Sociological Perspective to Inform Social Work Practice. *Qualitative Working Papers*. pp. 1-27. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/466/1/0108%2520everyday%2520lives%2520of%2520children.pdf>

Ho, P.S.Y. (2013b). Researching with a Broken Arm: Finding Sisterhood in Injury. *Sexualities*. 16. (1/2). pp. 78-93.

Holloway, S. and Valentine, G. (2000). *Children’s Geographies: Playing, Living and Learning*. London: Routledge.

Holloway, S.L., Jayne, M. and Valentine, G. (2008). ‘Sainsbury’s is my Local’: English Alcohol Policy, Domestic Drinking Practices and the Meaning of Home. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 33. (4). pp. 532-547.

Jarvinen, M. and Ravn, S. (2011). From Recreational to Regular Drug Use: Qualitative Interviews with Young Clubbers. *Sociology of Health & Illness*. 33. (4). pp. 554-569.

Jones, O. (2008). True Geography [ ] Quickly Forgotten, Giving Away to an Adult-Imagined Universe. Approaching the Otherness of Childhood. *Children’s Geographies*. 6. (2). pp. 195-212.

Kaar, M. (2007). *A Critical Investigation of the Merits and Drawbacks of In-Depth Interviews*. Grin: Verlag.

Katainen, A. and Rolando, S. (2015). Adolescents’ Understandings of Binge Drinking in Southern and Northern European Contexts - Cultural Variations of ‘Controlled Loss of Control’. *Journal of Youth Studies*. 18. (2). pp. 151-166.

Kilpatrick, R., McCartan, C., McAlister, S. and McKeown, P. (2007). ‘If I’m brutally Honest, Research has Never Appealed to Me...’ The Problems and Successes of a Peer Research Project. *Educational Action Research*. 15. (3). pp. 251-369.

Kusenbach, M. (2003). Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool. *Ethnography*. 4. (3). pp. 455-485.

Langevang, T. (2007). Movements in Time and Space: Using Multiple Methods in Research with Young People in Accra, Ghana. *Children’s Geographies*. 5. (3). pp. 267-282.

Lehman-Frisch, S., Authier, J.Y and Dufaux, F. (2012). ‘Draw me your Neighbourhood’: A Gentrified Paris Neighbourhood Through its Children’s Eyes. *Children’s Geographies*. 10. (1). pp. 17-34.

Leyshon, M. (2002). On Being ‘In the Field’: Practice, Progress and Problems in Research with Young People in Rural Areas. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 18. (2). pp. 179-191.

Leyshon, M., DiGiovanna, S. and Holcomb, B. (2013). Mobile Technologies and Youthful Exploration: Stimulus or Inhibitor? *Urban Studies*. 50. (3). pp. 587-605.

Literat, I. (2013). Participatory Mapping with Urban Youth: The Visual Elicitation of Socio-Spatial Research Data. *Learning, Media and Technology*. 38. (2). pp. 198-216.

Mason, J. (2006). Mixing Methods in a Qualitatively Driven Way. *Qualitative Research*. 6. (1). pp. 9-25.

- MacLean, S. (2015). Alcohol and the Constitution of Friendship for Young Adults. *Sociology*. 50. (1). pp. 93-108.
- McCartan, C., Schubotz, D. and Murphy, J. (2012). The Self-Conscious Researcher - Post-Modern Perspectives of Participatory Research with Young People. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 13. (1).
- Milligan, C. (2005). Placing Narrative Correspondence in the Geographer's Toolbox: Insights from Care Research in New Zealand. *New Zealand Geographer*. 61. (3). pp. 213-224.
- Miller, P.G., Strang, J. and Miller, P.M. (2010). *Addiction Research Methods*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.
- Minkler, M., Fadem, P., Perry, M., Blum, K., Moore, L. and Rogers, J. (2002). Ethical Dilemmas in Participatory Action Research: A Case Study from the Disability Community. *Health Education and Behavior*. 29. (1). pp. 14-29.
- Pain, R. (2003). Youth, Age, and the Representation of Fear. *Capital & Class*. 27. (2). pp. 151-171.
- Phelan, S. K., and Kinsella, E. A. (2013). Picture this... safety, dignity, and voice—Ethical research with children: Practical considerations for the reflexive researcher. *Qualitative inquiry*. 19. (2). pp. 81-90.
- Pierce, T. (2009). Social Anxiety and Technology: Face-to-Face Communication Versus Technological Communication Among Teens. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 25. (6). pp. 1367-1372.
- Pinter, A. and Zandian, S. (2015). I Thought it Would be Tiny Little One Phrase that we said, in a Huge Big Pile of Papers': Children's Reflections on their Involvement in Participatory Research. *Qualitative Research*. 15. (2). pp. 235-250.
- Plowman, L. and Stevenson, O. (2012). Using Mobile Phone Diaries to Explore Children's Everyday Lives. *Childhood*. 19. (4). pp. 539-553.
- Porter, G., Hampshire, K., Abane, A., Munthali, A., Robson, E., Mashiri, M. and Maponya, G. (2010). Where Dogs, Ghosts and Lions Roam: Learning from Mobile Ethnographies on the Journey to School. *Children's Geographies*. 8. (2). pp. 91-105.
- Randall, D. (2012). Revisiting Mandell's 'least adult' role and engaging with children's voices in research. *Nurse Researcher*. 19. (3). pp. 39-43.
- Renold, E. (2005). *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities: Exploring Children's Gender and Sexual Relations in the Primary School*. New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Rose, G. (2012). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials: An Introduction to Interpreting Visual Objects* Third Edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Schäfer, N. and Yarwood, R. (2008). Involving Young People as Researchers: Uncovering Multiple Power Relations Among Youths. *Children's Geographies*. 6. (2). pp. 121-135.
- Seaman, P. and Ikegwuonu, T. (2011). 'I Don't Think Old People Should Go to Clubs': How Universal is the Alcohol Transition Amongst Young Adults in the United Kingdom? *Journal of Youth Studies*. 14. (7). pp. 745-759.



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

546 Skelton, T. (2008). Research with Children and Young People: Exploring the Tensions  
547 Between Ethics, Competence and Participation. *Children's Geographies*. 6. (1). pp. 21-36.

548 Von Benzon, N. (2015). 'I Fell out of a Tree and Broke my Neck': Acknowledging Fantasy  
549 in Children's Research Contributions. *Children's Geographies*. 13. (3). pp. 330-342.

550 Waitt, G. and Stanes, E. (2015). Sweating Bodies: Men, Masculinities, Affect, Emotion.  
551 *Geoforum*. 59. pp. 30-38.

552 Walker, M., Whyatt, D., Pooley, C., Davies, G., Coulton, P. and Bamford, W. (2009). Talk,  
553 Technologies and Teenagers: Understanding the School Journey Using a Mixed-Methods  
554 Approach. *Children's Geographies*. 7. (2). pp. 107-122.

555 Waller, T. and Bitou, A. (2011). Research with children: Three challenges for participatory  
556 research in early childhood. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. 19. (1).  
557 pp. 5-20.

558 Weller, S. (2006b). Tuning-in to Teenagers! Using Radio Phone-in Discussions in Research  
559 with Young People. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 9. (4). pp. 303-  
560 315.

561 Wright, D.E. and Mahiri, J. (2012). Literacy Learning Within Community Action Projects for  
562 Social Change. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. 56. (2). pp. 123-131.