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# YOUNG PEOPLE'S SAFETY PRACTICES WHEN DRINK WALKING IN THE SUBURBS OF MANCHESTER, UK

Samantha Wilkinson\*, Catherine Wilkinson\*\*

## Introduction

Whilst the dangers of drink driving are well-known, drink walking has recently faced scrutiny in the UK's popular press for its potential dangers. Recent headlines include: *Warning Issued over 'Drunk Walking'* (BBC, 2014); *The Danger of Drinking and... Walking?!* (Women's Health, 2013); *Students Warned about Dangers of Walking near Harbour after Drinking* (ITV, 2017). In Manchester, a major city in North West England, UK, over the last six years, there have reportedly been over 60 deaths of, predominantly, young men found in the area's canals. This has led to speculation of a 'Manchester Pusher', and questions as to whether 'a serial killer haunt[s] the city's canals?' (BBC, 2018). However, David Wilson, the chair of Manchester Water Safety Partnership, has asserted that a significant number of these deaths are likely alcohol-related (BBC, 2018). Walking whilst intoxicated is a high-risk activity; it is thus important to enhance understandings of young people's experiences of walking, bound up with the consumption of alcohol. In this paper, we argue that 'mobilities' theory has potential to enhance understandings of the emotional, embodied and affective aspects (Spinney, 2009) of young people's alcohol-related journeys.

This paper draws on innovative qualitative research, comprising: individual and friendship group interviews and peer interviews, conducted with 40 young people, aged 15-24, living in the suburban case study locations of Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Manchester, UK. Though based on a small suburban cohort, the paper has relevance to international scholars similarly concerned with mobilities and young people's safety in public spaces. When young people's alcohol-related mobilities have been considered, for instance in the transport studies literature (Gannon et al., 2014), it has typically been conceptualised in a reductive manner which theorises mobility as "a product of rationally weighed decisions" (Spin-

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ney, 2009. 820). We join a small body of work (e.g. Duff and Moore, 2015; Jayne et al., 2012), in highlighting the emotional, embodied and affective aspects of alcohol-related mobilities.

This paper is structured as follows; first, we engage with literature on young people and safety on nights out, bound up with the consumption of alcohol, before going on to engage with young people's emotional and embodied alcohol-related im/mobilities. Following this, we introduce the case study locations, and outline the methods underpinning this study. This paper then turns to present findings around two main themes: performing walking and safety, and forced and adaptive mobilities, respectively. This paper concludes by recommending ways to improve the safety of young people's walking practices when on nights out involving alcohol.

### **Young People and Safety on Nights Out**

Exploring how college freshmen in the context of the US stay safe whilst consuming alcohol, Howard et al. (2007) highlight that college students have a repertoire of coping strategies they utilise in an attempt to safeguard both themselves and friends from harm when drinking. These include: planning a safe space for drinking; using safety measures to minimise harm whilst consuming alcohol; and caring for someone who is perceived to be too intoxicated (Howard et al., 2007). Further, findings from Russell et al.'s (2011) UK based study argue that friends look after one another when drinking by knowing the signs that limits are being reached, and will warn each other when they have reached their limits. In this vein, excessive drinking is seen as a risk to friendship, or means that young people are not able to care for their friends.

Moreover, in the context of Australia, Armstrong et al. (2014) focus on the female perspective, by highlighting protective behaviours young women deploy in public spaces in order to moderate the adverse effects of alcohol. The authors argue that most of these strategies derive from the friendship group to which the women belong. Armstrong et al. (2014) argue that the friendship group offers protection against 'other drunken people', through what one participant identifies as 'safety in numbers'. 'Safety in numbers' is perceived as particularly important when in the presence of unknown males, or whilst travelling on public transport. Further, young women in Armstrong et al.'s (2014) study commonly mentioned monitoring and regulating the alcohol consumption of group members, whilst others recalled how they had given or received suggestions to slow down the rate of their alcohol consumption. According to Armstrong et al. (2014, p. 756), for women, more so than men, there is a "group-based culture of helping" in public space where alcohol is involved.

An additional example of this “culture of helping” (Armstrong et al., 2014, p. 756), can be seen in Sinkinson’s (2014) research into alcohol consumption in, on, and around, water in New Zealand. The young people in Sinkinson’s (2014) study deploy strategies to keep themselves safe against the potential risks associated with combining aquatics and alcohol. These could be individual rules, such as limiting the amount of alcohol they consume, or not drinking when participating in water activities; not swimming; or exercising more caution. Additionally, Sinkinson (2014, p. 53) discusses “sober minders” as techniques deployed by young people to increase safety. Sober minders are the presence of people who could adopt the role of minders, along with having sober people outnumber intoxicated people. Despite drinking in high-risk spaces, young people in Sinkinson’s (2014) study articulated strategies they utilise in order to maintain their own, and others’ well-being.

However, there are barriers to the implementation of protective behaviours. Armstrong *et al.* (2014) contend that heavily intoxicated group members may refuse to accept the supervision or instructions given by less intoxicated friends. More than this, the authors contend that maturity, individual differences in risk perception, and attitudes towards alcohol are factors influencing the extent to which one complies with group-based safety routines. It is also worth recognising that some friendship groups lack the “culture of helping” (Armstrong et al., 2014, p. 756) alluded to above. In such groups, as Armstrong et al. (2014) recognise, there is a tendency to encourage, rather than manage, heavy or dangerous drinking amongst group members. This paper has thus far brought to the fore young people’s strategies for looking after friends on nights. We now move on to cohere literature on embodied, emotional and affective alcohol-related mobilities. Together, these bodies of literature can enhance understandings of young experiences of drink walking. Doing so, will lead to recommendations to improve the safety of young people’s walking practices when on nights out involving alcohol.

### **Towards Emotional and Embodied Alcohol-Related Walking Im/Mobilities**

We now draw together literature which goes some way towards addressing Jayne et al.’s (2012) claim that drinking spaces have largely been reduced to static, bounded terrains. Drink walking; that is, walking in a public place whilst intoxicated, is the focus of Gannon et al.’s (2014) work. According to the authors, it is commonplace for young people to have consumed alcohol in bars and clubs, and to walk to their next destination – or, to pre-drink at home and walk to a bar/club/pub or party to continue consuming alcohol. Gannon et al. (2014) utilise the theory of planned behaviour, based on the premise that people make rational

decisions to perform a behaviour that is within their control. This theoretical framework predicts that a person would have stronger intentions to drink walk, and ultimately s/he would be more likely to do so if: s/he has positive attitudes towards drink walking; perceives approval/support from important others; and believes drink walking is a behaviour that is easy to perform. However, there has been a marginalisation of the ‘immaterial’ embodied and sensory aspects of alcohol-related in this work. As Spinney (2009, p. 821) questions: “what about the intangible and ephemeral, the meanings that accrue in the context of the journey itself?”

Addressing the dearth of attention directed towards young people’s emotional, and embodied alcohol-related mobilities, Duff and Moore (2015) explore the atmospheres of mobility for young people residing in the inner city who take trams, walk or cycle to nearby venues, along with young people from periurban communities. According to Duff and Moore (2015), inner-city participants described ‘fun’, ‘comfortable’ journeys, whereas participants from periurban communities spoke of ‘boring’, ‘unpleasant’ journeys. These divergent affective atmospheres ‘prime’ young people to act in particular ways, having direct and indirect impacts on alcohol-related problems in the night-time economy (Duff and Moore, 2015). Further, Jayne et al. (2012) provide an in-depth consideration of the embodied aspects of alcohol-related walking. The authors contend that alcohol can help to soften a variety of (un)comfortable embodied and emotional materialities linked with budget travel; act as an aid to ‘passing the time’ and ‘being able to do nothing’; and heighten senses of belonging with other travellers and ‘locals’. For instance, some participants in Jayne et al.’s (2012) study describe alcohol as allowing them to generate memorable moments of backpacking travel, through behaving badly with the locals, whilst others discuss alcohol as a means of erasing tensions with fellow travellers.

Research exploring the rhythmic experiences of space when bound up with the consumption of alcohol are scarce. Rhythm is intimately associated with movement and, as such, the spaces in which humans and more-than-humans dwell in, and move through, are composed of myriad rhythms (Edensor and Holloway, 2008). Rhythms are, however, distinct from mobility – the key distinguishing feature being that an analysis of rhythms is concerned with issues of “change and repetition, identity and difference, contrast and continuity” (Elden, 2004, p. xii). Lefebvre (2004), one of the main proponents of analysing the rhythms of cities, advanced the theory and method of ‘rhythmanalysis’. Lefebvre’s (2004:15) central proposition is that “everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm”. The work of Shaw (2012) is novel for paying attention to the rhythmicity of Newcastle’s, UK, nightlife, placing the spotlight on the rhythms of: taxis; night-time street cleaners; and bodily experiences of street and bar spaces.

Further, Middleton and Yarwood (2015) engage with work on urban rhythms when examining the growing presence of street-pastors in the night-time economy of British cities. The authors contend that a night out is characterised by a rhythmic engagement with the city, structured by licensing laws and policing, amongst other components. Street-pastors, whilst immersing themselves in the rhythms of the night, challenge and affect the socio-rhythmic spaces of a night out, for example: by walking with a lone woman who may have lost her friends (Middlewood and Yarwood, 2015). Interestingly, street-pastors are aware that, the date of the month in which people are paid from work influences the rhythmicity of a night out. At the start of the month, close to pay-day, people spend money travelling to a nearby city to go out. Towards the end of the month, with less disposable income, people elect to stay in their home town, or to stay in. Here then, to paraphrase Middleton and Yarwood (2015), the night-time economy follows a monthly rhythm that street-pastors are attuned to. This paper has thus far brought to the fore young people's strategies for ensuring the safety of friends on nights, and literature on embodied, emotional and affective alcohol-related rhythmic mobilities. Together, these bodies of literature can enable insight into the lived experiences of young people's drink walking practices. This paper now moves on to outline the methodology.

## **Methodology**

This findings in this paper arose from a larger study interested in exploring young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences in often-overlooked suburban realms. Put another way, walking mobilities and rhythms bound up with the consumption of alcohol were not the study's original focus, but emerged as important to participants throughout the data collection process. This section first provides an overview of the case study locations, before going on to outline the process for sampling and recruitment. Following this, we discuss the methods underpinning this study, and outline the means of data analysis.

### *Case Study Locations*

Wythenshawe was created in the 1920s as a Garden City in an attempt to resolve Manchester's overpopulation problem and 'depravation' in its inner-city slums. Wythenshawe continued to develop up to the 1970s. However, the 1980s and 1990s saw steady decline, high unemployment, decaying infrastructure, crime and drug abuse problems (Atherton et al., 2005). Wythenshawe was the outdoor filming location for the Channel 4 series *Shameless*, which showed various shots of the local tower-blocks and housing estates. However, in 2007 production moved following disruption to filming caused by local young people (Manchester



Evening News, 2007). The town centre – known as the Civic Centre – was built in the 1960s, and was renovated between 1999-2002 to include new stores. The main shopping area now includes gates that are locked at night to prevent vandalism. The Forum centre, which opened in 1971, houses a library, leisure centre, swimming pool, and cafe. Wythenshawe is a district eight miles south of Manchester city centre, and faced with relatively poor transportation links (Lucas et al., 2009).

Chorlton is a residential area approximately five miles from Manchester city centre. Chorlton is a cosmopolitan neighbourhood with traditional family areas alongside younger, vibrant communities. The area has good road and bus access to, and from, the city centre, and is situated within easy access to the motorway network. Drawing on Manchester City Council's (2012) data from close to when data collection took place, Chorlton has a higher proportion of minority ethnic residents in comparison to Wythenshawe, and compared to the national average (19.1%, compared to the national average of 11.3%). As of November 2011, private residential property in Chorlton accounted for 90.3% of all property in the ward, much higher than the city average of 68.7%. Chorlton has three secondary schools; a shopping precinct; library; and is home to *Chorlton Water Park* – a local nature reserve comprising of a lake surrounded by grasslands and woodlands. The data shows that there were some differences in drink walking practices and experiences, dependent on case study location, along with being influenced by others factors including age and gender; this will be brought to the fore in the later analysis.

### *Sampling and Recruitment*

The first author recruited 40 young people, aged 15-24, for multistage qualitative research. In some respects, the sampling strategy was purposive, as she aimed to recruit 20 young people from each case study location, and aimed for an equal gender distribution. She recruited the majority of participants through gatekeepers at local schools, community organisations, youth clubs and universities. In order to reach potential participants, she also distributed flyers and business cards to houses and businesses in both case study locations; posted on discussion forums concerning both areas; used Twitter and Facebook to promote her study to locals from each area; and arranged to be interviewed by the host of a local radio station in Wythenshawe. The young people in the study were all able-bodied, predominantly heterosexual (one participant self-identified as having a lesbian identity), and predominantly white (two participants were mixed-race). The accounts in this paper thus relate to a specific group of young people.

Some young people, particularly those under the legal drinking age, were initially cautious about participating in my study, due to worries about others



(predominantly their parents or teachers) finding out about their drinking practices. In the UK, the legal age for purchasing alcohol is 18, and it is illegal for those under the age of 18 to consume alcohol unless in the space of the home or eating a table meal at a licensed premises with those over the legal drinking age. By building trust and friendship with participants (Valentine, 2013), they could then tell their friends about the study and, from their first-hand experience, reassure friends that confidentiality and anonymity are strongly abided by; this is recognised as a snowballing sampling technique.

## **Methods**

The methods I draw on in this paper include: individual and friendship group in-depth semi-structured interviews, and peer-interviews, as will now be discussed in turn.

### *Individual and Friendship Group Interviews*

Individual interviews enabled me to gain insight into the participants' perceptions, which are subjective in nature (e.g. who they drink with; where they consume alcohol; and what they like to do when drinking) (Kaar, 2007). Whilst the individual interview has its benefits, there are drawbacks. Despite the first author's relative closeness in age to some of the participants, some young people did not feel comfortable participating in a one-to-one interview with an adult researcher, and asked to be interviewed with their friends. To address this, a friendship group style of interviewing was implemented. The first author had not intended to use this method; this illustrates the agency of participants to shape the research design, and the need for researchers to be flexible. Friendship group interviews created a non-threatening and comfortable atmosphere for participants to share drinking experiences (Renold, 2005). Moreover, friendship group interviews provided access to interaction between participants (Miller et al., 2010) – this helped tease out the importance of friendship and care to young people's drinking experiences (see removed for anonymity). Overall, friendship group interviews allowed the collection of data that otherwise may not have been accessible (Miller et al., 2010).

### *Peer Interviews*

When researching young people's alcohol consumption practices, the presence of adults may restrict young people from speaking about their experiences and thoughts surrounding drinking (Katainen and Rolando, 2015). Recognising the 'otherness' (see Jones, 2008) of those participants younger than herself, the first

author deployed a peer interview method. This method acknowledges that young people's experiences of spaces and places differ from those of adults (Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008). Young people are suitable for conducting peer interviews because they speak the same language as other young people (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Further, they often have first-hand insights into matters affecting peers, as they are often affected by these issues themselves (McCartan et al., 2012).

### *Analysis*

The first author adopted the manual method of coding by pen and paper, perceiving that computer-assisted qualitative data analysis distances researchers from the data (Davis & Meyer, 2009). Initially, following Miles and Huberman's (1994) three-stage model, a process of data reduction occurred, whereby the first author organised the mass of data and attempted to meaningfully reduce this. Second, she undertook a continual process of data display in the form of a table. Third, she undertook a process of conclusion drawing and verification. Participants feature in this paper through pseudonyms, to conceal their identities. Yet, in order to contextualise quotations, genuine ages and locations are given.

Having discussed the methodologically underpinning this study, we now present two themes arising from the data: performing walking and safety, and forced and adaptive mobilities, respectively.

### **Performing Walking and Safety**

Findings from the research highlight that young people's drink walking incorporate performances; that is, different styles of walking in different spaces, at different times, and with different people (Middleton, 2011). Related to the notion of walking with people, a safety strategy predominantly talked about by young women under the legal drinking age in Wythenshawe and Chorlton, involves sober, or less inebriated, friends supervising heavily intoxicated friends when on nights out involving alcohol (see Armstrong *et al.*, 2014). This strategy can be illustrated by the following comments from Heather and Olivia:

So like, the most amount of people I'd probably go with is like eight people, that is it. I wouldn't go any higher than that because then I'd probably just worry about losing them. But I make sure it's in the two times table if you know what I mean. Like it's either two, four, six, or eight people, so then we can pair up and look after like one person. Cos if there's seven of us that means that there's gunna have to be a group of three, and two groups of two. So like make sure there's pairs of two so like we can look after each other. We'll tell one person "which one of you wants to get more drunk, and which one wants to stay sober to look after one of us?" Like he'll say "I'll get more drunk" and the other one will say "I'll look

after them". So there'd be two, and one of them would be sober so we'd know what we'd be doing. So like, I think that's sensible.

(Heather, 15, Wythenshawe, interview)

A good night out needs people who you feel comfortable with. Safe environment, that is really important, urm and someone there to take care of you... Someone who is the designated carer of everyone, so if anything goes tits up\* they are there to take care of you. Yeah, cos I don't like going out when there's no designated carer, even if it's someone that's the same as me that doesn't drink, they drink, but they don't drink as much as everyone else, so they know what they're doing and the surroundings so and they're throwing up and they can be like "right come on, it's time for you to..." you know

(Olivia, 17, Wythenshawe, interview)

As the above quotations suggest, for young people a safe and comfortable affective atmosphere are important for their nights out involving alcohol. Moreover, the quotations highlight that being a (relatively) sober minder is something young people commonly undertake in order to achieve this comfortable atmosphere, and is often pre-planned. The buddy system/use of a sober minder was not something young people typically spoke negatively about, or objected to in any way. These findings contradict many conclusions drawn in the existing alcohol studies literature. For example, MacLean (2015) concludes that many young people dislike going out with friends who do not drink. To the contrary, my findings suggest that the use of a (relatively) sober minder was a common sense tactic. This was also the case with Sinkinson's (2014) research into young people's strategies for keeping safe when combining alcohol consumption and water activities in New Zealand. The author found that the presence of a sober person, or people who could perform the role of minders, and having sober people outnumber drunken people, were strategies young people commonly utilised to increase safety. Here then, my findings lend credence to the use of the term "calculated hedonism" (Szmigin *et al.*, 2008, p. 359), a term recognising that young people manage their pleasure around alcohol.

Related to the above, some young people in my study, predominantly women below the legal drinking age, attempt to walk together in friendship groups as a means of being more spatially confident. This practice of walking together can be referred to as being "mobile with" (Jensen, 2010:293). Indeed, when friends walk out of sync with each other, this can cause tensions. This idea can be seen through the following exchange:

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\* 'Tits up' is a phrase used to describe a situation where something goes wrong.

SW: What do you think of the streets in Wythenshawe during the night?

Vera: Urm, oh it was early in the morning, and I was with one of me mates, and it was really dark and we was walking over a bridge, but I get dead scared, I do get scared, really scared, I was holding on to her like “please wait for me”. And we was drunk as well, and I was high, so I was like para [paralytic] terrible, I was nearly crying, and she was going fast, she was walking really fast

(Vera, 15, Wythenshawe, interview)

Here, Vera tells that her friend was walking too fast, ‘stretching’ the mobile formation (see McIlvenny, 2015), by walking away from her. Resultantly co-presence was not maintained, increasing Vera’s feelings of fear, and creating a negative affective atmosphere.

Whereas young women in my study spoke about walking as groups, it was more common for young men in my study, particularly those above the legal drinking age, to speak about walking alone. As such, a strategy young men, in both case study locations, talked about for keeping safe was to utilise the rhythms of the micro-mobilities of their bodies – that is, walking – as an embodied tacit knowledge to avoid potentially dangerous situations:

You see people getting into bust-ups on the streets after closing time. So it’s maybe if it’s getting to closing time, you walk a bit quicker, don’t hang about too much

(Charlie, 23 Chorlton, interview)

When I was coming back from Fresher’s\* in September, I decided to walk home, about half two in the morning, and about an hour’s walk, and I was stood five minutes from my door and I felt these two people riding on their bikes behind, following me, one of them cornered me, and the other one came next to me and said “give me your phone”. Anyway, usually if I wasn’t drunk I’d have given it to them, but I was so out of it, I legged it and managed to get to my door

(Tim, 19, Chorlton, follow up interview)

From the above quotations, one can see that the young people were confronted with potential threat; this causes them to change their walking, as they pick up speed (see Karrholm et al., 2014); Charlie ‘walks a bit quicker’, and Tim ‘legs it’.

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\*‘Fresher’s’ is a period of time, typically a week, at the beginning of the academic year at a university or other tertiary institution during which a variety of events are held to orient and welcome new students.

These are examples of what Jensen (2010, p. 389) terms “negotiation in motion”. Both young people explain that, in order to avoid being “mobile with” those involved in ‘bust ups’, or perpetrators of crime, they negotiate the speed of their motion in relation to the “mobile Other” (Jensen, 2010, pp. 393, 395). Here, one can see that fear animates rather than paralyses (Sharpe, 2013) the young people’s walking practices. As Creswell (2010, p. 23) contends, “velocity is a valuable resource”. According to Jackson (2012, p. 730), “knowing an area is seen as important in order to be able to read it, which in turn is equated with safety”. For some young people above the legal drinking age then, such as Charlie, they have acquired embodied knowledge of closing rhythms, which enables them to appreciate that streets are not inherently dangerous spaces; instead, there is a temporal dimension to their feelings of danger. Having brought to the fore how young people perform their walking; that is, how they control their style of movement dependent on who they are with, where they are, and at what time, this paper turns to explore young people’s forced and adaptive drink walking experiences.

### **Forced and Adaptive Drink Walking**

As mentioned previously, many young women in the study, below the legal drinking age, discussed how they habitually walked together to negotiate risk and promote safety (Burcht, 2015). However, some young people in the study, particularly from Wythenshawe, expressed disapproval that their attempts at keeping safe by remaining in groups were compromised by the current police practice of dispersing large groups of young people (Galloway et al., 2007). The following exchange is quoted at length here to illustrate how current policing approaches / strategies can contribute towards negative affective atmospheres:

Jenny: I was with my cousin, like down Withers [a small locality in Wythenshawe], and like we were walking down the road, there was, I think there was nine of us, but you’re not meant to be in a group of more than three, it’s got to be a group of less than three less now

SW: Why?

Jenny: I don’t know, in Wythenshawe

Kelly: In most places now

Julia: Oh right, so you’re supposed to walk across the road from each other?

Jenny: Pretty much, yeah, so that’s what we had to do and they [the police] said to us, because we were all together at this moment, we was all like shit-faced, all had bottles of vodka and coke in our hands, and like they said to us, they were like “what are yous doing tonight?” we was just like “oh, we’re going to a house party”, and all that lot, and they were like “are you old enough?”. I was like “yeah, I’ve just not got my ID on me, and my cousin was like “I’ve got mine so

I can vouch for her and all that lot”, and then the police was like “well, you can’t be in a group of like nine, you’ve got to be in a group of no more than three”. So the lads were like “oh right, we’ll meet you there” or whatever. So we walked off and they started following us again cos the others like crossed back over the road and started standing with us again, and so we went to the shop and some of them went in the shop to get cigs [cigarettes] and they came out, and the police were there again, so we were like “right, we’re all going to the same place, so why do we have to split up?”

Julia: That’s really stupid, you’ve got more chance of getting raped

Jenny: Isn’t it

Kelly: But apparently it’s cos you could be in a gang or rob somewhere or something

(Jenny, 16; Kelly, 17; Julia, 17, Wythenshawe, friendship group interview)

As the above exchange illustrates, being together with friends is very important to these young people (see also Matthews et al., 1999); they deploy this mobile formation in order to protect each other against the risk of “rape”. The above exchange lends credence to Leyshon et al.’s (2013) contention that young women’s mobilities are commonly predicated on a sense of vulnerability, and this is exemplified through these young people’s preference to move around in friendship groups. In line with Horton et al. (2014), this example shows that young people’s gestures of care and responsibility, by walking together, contrast markedly with popular representations of ‘anti-social’ young people in public spaces (see Brown, 2013). Nonetheless, it is this “we-ness” of young people’s mobilities – in which the focus of group members is directed inwards towards each other, rather than forming outward connection with others (Milne, 2009:115) – that the police find threatening in the ‘hanging out’ behaviours of young people. The police consider the young people to be, what Matthews et al. (2000:279) term, “unacceptable flaneur[s]”. The young people quoted above feel stereotypically predefined as potentially deviant; they believe they are perceived “as a potential threat to the moral fabric of society and up to no good” (Matthews et al., 1999:1724). This is recognised by Joanna, who claims that the police strategy has been implemented because the young people “could be in a gang”. This supports Tani’s (2015) contention that space offers affordances to young people, affecting their ways of being; yet, equally, young people give new meanings to space by hanging out, and thus contribute to the production of space.

The clashing mobilities of young people below the legal drinking age and the police mean young people are required to create new geographies through forced and adaptive mobilities (Skelton and Gough, 2013), as Rik and Kelly suggest:



We'd probably go to like, a park. And then the police would end up coming, and then we'd go, and we'd go to a different park, and if the police come there again we'd all just split up and go different places

(Rik, 15, Wythenshawe, peer interview)

Cos we all use to live right near the park, so everyone that use to live near the local park, we'd all meet up in the park and then we'd all walk down to Fletcher Grounds, which is the biggest park. And the police used to come, kick us all out and we'd all go back to the separate parks, and then we'd meet up again in Fletcher Grounds about an hour later, start again, it was mint

(Kelly, 17, Wythenshawe, peer interview)

Many young people in the study then, were not always mobile through their own volition. Their walking practices were characterised by an experience of always moving on (Horton et al., 2014); the young people were “fixed in mobility”, much like the young homeless people in Jackson's (2012, p. 725) study. Whilst Edensor and Bowdler (2015) contend that policing can constrain the scope for engaging playfully with space, the above quotations suggest that, in some respects, policing can enhance playful engagements with space. That is, young people, rather than expressing frustration at constantly being ejected from parks (Townshend and Roberts, 2013), told such stories with enthusiasm, proclaiming it was “mint”, and thus can be said to have experienced a positive affective atmosphere through the “geographical game of cat and mouse”<sup>\*</sup> (Valentine, 1996, p. 594). Whilst the young people quoted above appear to have the ability to actively resist policing, by carving out new places to assert their presence (see Hil and Bessant, 1999), it is important not to romanticise this. Many young people in the study gave the impression that policing seems to be solely shifting outdoors drinking elsewhere. Whilst not articulated by the young people, it could be intimated that, by reducing the visibility of young people drinking in such outdoor spaces, as Pennay and Room (2012) found, displacement may lead to young people drink walking to / in more covert and less safe spaces.

## Conclusions

This paper opened by highlighting the increasing scrutiny that drink walking has faced in the UK media, related to the dangers it poses, particularly to young people (e.g. BBC, 2014; ITV, 2017; Women's Health, 2013). Manchester was the location of focus for this study, in which, over the last decade, there have been a

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<sup>\*</sup> Here, it is worth reminding the reader that the sample was a specific one, predominantly consisting of white participants, and all participants are able-bodied; the accounts of mobilities thus relate to this specific group of young people.



number of, predominantly, young men found dead in the area's canals. It has been asserted that a significant number of these deaths are likely alcohol-related (BBC, 2018). This paper thus started from the notion that walking whilst intoxicated is a high-risk activity, and as such it is important to enhance understandings of young people's experiences of walking, bound up with the consumption of alcohol.

This paper contended that when young people's alcohol-related mobilities have been considered in the existing literature (e.g. Gannon et al., 2014), it has typically been conceptualised in a reductive manner, which theorises mobility as a "product of rationally weighed decisions" (Spinney, 2009, p. 820). In order to overcome this, we utilised 'mobilities' theory in order to enhance understandings of the emotional, embodied and affective aspects (Spinney, 2009) of young people's alcohol-related journeys. The findings from this paper show that young people's alcohol-related walking mobilities incorporate performances, including different styles of walking, in different spaces, at different times, and with different people.

The findings from this paper show that young women under the legal drinking age in Wythenshawe and Chorlton, often have a pre-planned safety strategy involving sober, or less inebriated, friends supervising heavily intoxicated friends when on nights out involving alcohol. Relatedly, it was highlighted that, particularly young women, below the legal drinking age, talked about being "mobile with" (Jensen, 2010, p. 293) friends as a means of promoting safety. However, young people, predominantly in Wythenshawe, suggested that this is at odds with current police practices of dispersing large groups of young people. Whilst many young women below the legal drinking age saw this as illogical, creating a negative affective atmosphere, and enhancing their vulnerability, other young people appeared to somewhat enjoy the "geographical game of cat and mouse" (Valentine, 1996, p. 594). Somewhat differently, predominantly young men, above the legal drinking age, discussed walking alone on nights out involving alcohol, yet were shown to draw on embodied knowledges surrounding rhythms of spaces (e.g. closing times), and use this to negotiate their mobilities. Moreover, such young people articulated how they varied the speed and rhythm of their walking, in order to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

This paper has shown that police often fragment groups of young people, or move groups of young people on. Both tactics may displace young people to more marginal, less safe, spaces, where they may be more vulnerable when drink walking (Pennay and Room, 2012). Current policing approaches and strategies thus need rethinking. We argue that the use of a 'buddy system' / 'sober minder' is a safety strategy in keeping with many young people's nightlife practices and, as such, it should be encouraged. Further, young people should be advised to be attentive to, and draw on their embodied knowledges of, rhythms of space, and use this to negotiate their drink walking mobilities accordingly. Moreover,

young people should be encouraged to communicate with others as to why they walk together in groups (e.g. for safety reasons, and to create positive affective atmospheres), in order to reduce the stigma surrounding seeing groups of young people, who are often perceived to be “up to no good” (Matthews et al., 1999, p. 1724). Moving forward, we encourage researchers to engage with the alcohol-related im/mobilities of a sample of young people that accommodates the diversity of bodily forms and abilities in society (Andrews et al., 2012). Further, future research should engage with the drink walking experiences of young people of different ethnicities, religions, and sexualities. Doing so, will lead to more targeted and culturally credible means of improving drink walking safety.

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## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S SAFETY PRACTICES WHEN DRINK WALKING IN THE SUBURBS OF MANCHESTER, UK**

### **Abstract**

Walking whilst intoxicated is a high-risk activity; it is thus important to enhance understandings of young people's experiences of walking, bound up with the consumption of alcohol. In this paper, we argue that 'mobilities' theory has potential to enhance understandings of the emotional, embodied and affective aspects of young people's alcohol-related journeys. This paper draws on innovative qualitative research, comprising: individual and friendship group interviews and peer interviews, conducted with 40 young people, aged 15-24, living in the suburban case study locations of Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Manchester, UK. When young people's alcohol-related mobilities have been considered, for instance in the transport studies literature, it has typically been conceptualised in a reductive manner which theorises mobility as "a product of rationally weighed decisions" (Spinney, 2009:820). We join a small body of work, in highlighting the emotional, embodied and affective aspects of alcohol-related mobilities. This paper presents findings around two main themes: performing walking and safety, and forced and adaptive mobilities, respectively. This paper concludes by recommending ways to improve the safety of young people's walking practices when on nights out involving alcohol.

**Key words:** Mobilities, Night, Safety, Suburban, Qualitative, Walking, Young People

**JEL:** I1, R2