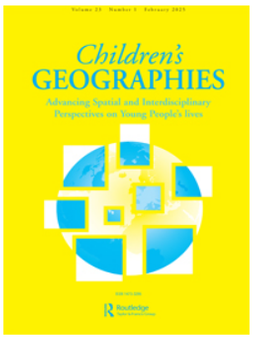

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Mother's ruin? The relational alcohol consumption practices and experiences of mothers and their teenage and young adult children

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relational alcohol consumption practices and experiences of mothers aged 38–59 and their teenage and young adult children aged 15–24, living in Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Greater Manchester, UK. Through 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews with mothers, this paper explores the ways in which mothers facilitate the alcohol consumption practices and experiences of their children, and the spaces of their drinking, through the provision of 'dens'. This paper is original in arguing that surveillance of drinking practices and experiences is not a one-way process; teenage and young adult children transmit their knowledge and opinions surrounding alcohol consumption in ways that shape and curtail the alcohol consumption practices and experiences of their mothers in, and beyond, the home. Through doing so, this paper highlights the need to recognise the role of negotiated interdependence in the alcohol consumption practices of both young people and their mothers. A key contribution of this paper to understanding children's geographies is methodological. Whilst not undermining the important work that seeks to elicit and showcase the voices of young people themselves, this paper demonstrates that there is real value in harnessing parents' perspectives, for offering alternative viewpoints into relational drinking geographies.

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Alcohol consumption; family; interdependence; intergenerational; mothers; young people

Introduction

There is now a significant body of literature in the social sciences on young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences (e.g. Hennell, Piacentini, and Limmer 2021; Nicholls 2020; Wilkinson and Wilkinson 2020a). This follows a trend in geography, still present after Hopkins and Pain's (2007) declaration nearly 20 years ago, that the *aged* geographies of young and middle-aged adults are somewhat missing. The motivation for this paper is that, in comparison to what is known about young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences, much less is known about how mothers shape the drinking experiences of their teenage and young adult children (see, however, Jayne, Liu, and Valentine 2022; Jayne, Valentine, and Gould 2012; Valentine, Jayne, and Gould 2012 on the transmission of drinking cultures in families more broadly), and less still about the role that teenagers and young adult children play in shaping their mother's alcohol consumption practices and experiences. This is an important omission, since the alcohol consumption practices of mothers are a longstanding source of moral concern

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and critique (Waterson 2000), with little attention to the two-way, intergenerational nature of influences on drinking practices. This paper seeks to address the relative dearth of attention to adult geographies, and the relative absences of relational geographies in much of the youth alcohol research literature, by joining Blazek (2025, 1) in 'flipping the script' in which children are the ultimate focus of children's geographies, to instead explore the relational alcohol consumption practices of mothers (aged 38–59) and their children (aged 15–24), living in the suburban case study locations of Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Greater Manchester, UK. Through doing so, this paper brings to the fore what mother–child relationalities can reveal not only about children but about mothers too.

Turning to moral discourses about mothers' drinking, in the eighteenth-century gin became known as 'Mother's Ruin' in England, because of its perceived effects on women's ability to mother. William Hogarth's famous engraving 'Gin Lane' from 1751 has become a visual shorthand for discourses about mothers who drink to excess at the cost of fulfilling their responsibilities toward their children (Agabio and Sinclair 2019; Waterson 2000). Moreover, the drinking of women, including mothers, has received significant negative media coverage over more recent years, for instance: *UK Women Top List of World's Biggest Female Binge Drinkers* (*The Guardian* 2023); '*Mothers with Young Kids Consumed 300% more Alcohol during Pandemic*, study reveals' (*The Independent* 2021); *'Oh Well, Wine O'Clock': What Midlife Women say about Drinking and Why it's Hard to Stop* (*The Guardian* 2022). Recent academic literature has proclaimed that, what Fleming et al. (2023) phrase as 'maternal drinking' (that is, alcohol consumption during pregnancy and motherhood), is a hidden public health concern that can have significant negative effects on women and children.

In media and academic discourses alike, concerns about women's health are interwoven in complex, and sometimes problematic, ways with moral assumptions about women's responsibility for their children's welfare. These discourses have at times extended such responsibilities to all women of 'reproductive age', regardless of whether they are, or intend to become, mothers (Fenton and Nicholls 2021). Marketing campaigns for alcohol brands have been quick to provide counter-discourses of emancipation and equality through alcohol consumption, with campaigns for wine brands like Echo Falls linking their products to imperatives of wellness and self-care. These marketing strategies form part of a wider shift by the alcohol industry to replicate the tobacco industry in symbolically fusing women's prerogative to drink alcohol with gender equality (Emslie 2019).

The transmission[1] of beliefs and practices related to alcohol is usually configured as uni-directional: from mother to child. Moreover, in academic, policy and media discourses about mothers' drinking practices, children are usually imagined as either unborn, or as young children, such as toddlers or primary school-aged children. In this paper, we unsettle these tendencies of existing approaches: we explore how transmission consists of two-way traffic, with children influencing the practices of their mothers, and we depart from the focus on young children to consider teenagers and young adults aged 15–24. In pursuing this agenda, the paper draws on 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with mothers of children aged 15–24. This paper demonstrates how mothers facilitate their children's alcohol consumption practices and experiences, and the spaces of their drinking, through the provision of 'dens'. As mentioned, the approach adopted in the paper is novel in showing that this is not a one-way process; children transmit their knowledge and opinions surrounding alcohol consumption in ways that can shape and curtail the alcohol consumption practices and experiences of their mothers. Through doing so, we highlight a '*negotiated inter*dependence' (Punch 2002, 123, emphasis in original) between mothers and their children, bound up with the consumption of alcohol.

Consequently, in this paper, we argue that there is a need to go beyond treating generations as distinct and separate, and move towards a 'joint inter-generational' (Kjorholt 2003, 273) drinking geographies approach, which stresses interdependencies between generations. In doing so, we explore other ways of being an adult and a child that disrupt fixed-age geographies further and offer a more inclusive, holistic view (Hopkins and Pain 2007). We contribute to scholarship on children's geographies and beyond, by emphasising a need to move beyond recognising children and their parents as counterparts with separate and demarcated phases of life (Kjorholt 2003; Wilkinson

et al. 2022). Through adopting a relational drinking geographies approach (Wilkinson 2024), we engage with relational time-spaces bound up with alcohol consumption, exploring how alcohol shapes mother–child relationships, moving beyond moralising, disciplining and normalising discourses, bound up with alcohol consumption (Jayne and Valentine 2024a, 2024b).

This paper is structured as follows. First, we cohere literature surrounding relational geographies. We then bring together literature surrounding alcohol consumption across generations. Following this, we detail the methodology underpinning this study, before presenting findings surrounding the themes of: motherhood, and alcohol consumption in the space of the home; and child to mother transmission of alcohol consumption practices. Finally, we draw this paper to a close, emphasising the significance of the findings to children's geographies, and by proposing policy recommendations.

Relational geographies

Instead of simply examining the experiences of different age groups, we echo Hopkins et al.'s (2011) contention that there is a need for holistic and relational geographies of age. This is important because identity is relational; it only develops and operates in relation to other identities (Valentine 2003). In this section, we propose two ways of considering age in a more holistic and relational manner, these are: intergenerationality, and interdependence. These approaches should not be used in isolation, for they relate to each other. We recognise that these terms are not necessarily clear, clean, or causal; indeed, everyday life is messy and complex (Horton and Kraftl 2008). However, for purposes of explanation, we have separated them here.

An intergenerational approach draws attention to relationships and interactions between different generational groupings (Hopkins and Pain 2007). Combining an interest in generations, rather than segregating age categories, is a way of avoiding reproducing sharp distinctions between the 'young' and 'old' (Hagestad and Uhlenberg 2005). Botterill, Hopkins, and Sanghera (2020), through research conducted with ethnic and religious minority youth in Scotland, explore how family histories and intergenerational experiences shape young people's sense of security. The authors contend that when structural racism and exclusion is a shared familial experience, intergenerational relationships emerge as important in providing a sense of continuity and a trustworthy source of support against broader uncertainties and inequalities. Indeed, for many participants in Botterill, Hopkins, and Sanghera's (2020) study, the family home was a space that provided the foundation for a secure life. Botterill, Hopkins, and Sanghera's (2020) study is important for moving beyond stereotypical imagined geographies, to highlight the importance of banal, mundane, places for the development of intergenerational relationships (see also Hall 2019). As can be seen, in comparison to studies highlighting generational discreteness, intergenerational studies can provide more nuanced understandings of everyday spatial processes.

Another example in the literature of allowing for a more inclusive and holistic view of age (Hopkins and Pain 2007), without fetishising the social-chronological margins, comes from Kjorholt (2003). Kjorholt (2003, 273) contends that it is important to make explicit intergenerational relationships that signal co-operation and reciprocity across generations, in what the author terms a 'joint inter-generational' geographies approach. With a focus on children's hut building in Norway, Kjorholt (2003) argues that children need to craft their own special places during middle childhood. Yet, the male children in the study make clear that their identities as autonomous individuals are constructed through a gendered generational relationship, comprised of men. That is, the young men's social practices in forests highlight the continuity between generations of men, in terms of how they use the space. As an integrated part of everyday life, knowledge of how to use the space is transmitted between generations (Kjorholt 2003). Continuity and integration with adults are thus a fundamental characteristic of the young men's stories. Appreciating intergenerationality as an aspect of social identity recognises that individuals' and groups' sense of themselves and others is, as Hopkins and Pain (2007) argue, in part, based on generational sameness or differences.

Despite the importance of intergenerational relationships, Punch (2020) questions why 'age' and 'generation' are not recognised as important social variables in the social sciences to the same extent as other key variables such as gender, class, ethnicity and disability. Along similar lines, Punch (2020) questions why the concept of 'generational order', which emerged in the early 1990s, is not fundamental to the social studies of childhood. The notion of 'generational order' is linked to an interest in childhood's relationality, with an intention not to point at one inter-/intragenerational structure, but at what Alanen (2020, 141) calls an 'inventory' of a variety of generational structures. However, the notion of 'generational order' has faced critique, based on the perception that it has a static, inflexible structure, and is focused on the child–adult dichotomy (Oswell 2013). This is a far cry from Alanen's (2020, 21) intention that the theory be used to understand how 'the two generational categories of children and adults are recurrently produced and therefore they stand in relations of connection and interaction, of interdependence'. Mayall (2000), an advocate of the generational order approach, with a focus on how ideas about childhood changed in the interwar years, argues that progress has been made in viewing children as a social group, and as active contributors with meaningful participation in the social order.

An alternative to viewing generations separately is by exercising the notion of *inter*dependence. An interdependence perspective thinks through dependency/independence as relational states, examining young people's transitions not as solo projects, but as processes that are shared with family and significant others (Holdsworth 2007). Engaging with the notion of interdependence is important for allowing a consideration of the ways in which young people's lives are connected to others (Evans 2008). Punch (2002) usefully highlights that, in rural Bolivia, interdependent house relations underlie young people's choice of transitions; notably these relations are not fixed, but are worked out and renegotiated according to the existence of different constraints and opportunities. Punch (2002, 123, emphasis in original) advances the notion of 'negotiated interdependence' as a way of understanding how young people work within their structural limitations, whilst asserting some level of agency over their choice of transition.

The concept of 'negotiated interdependence' recognises that young people engage with significant (extra)familial others during key 'transitional events'. An interdependence perspective also recognises that this is not a one-way relationship; parents' social identities, emotional well-being and material resources can develop through interacting with their children, such that parents can sometimes be dependent on their children (Valentine and Skelton 2007). This approach is intergenerational and relational, highlighting, following Hopkins and Pain (2007), that age is produced in interactions between different people. As such, it is difficult to talk about the geographies of children, young people, or adults, in isolation. To echo Holloway (2014), such an approach can be praised for saving the geographies of children, young people, and families from an overly narrow focus on children's micro-worlds. This paper further advances the efforts of authors including Mayall (2020); Alanen (2020); Punch (2020) and Holt et al. (2020) who have encouraged a shift away from more relational understandings of childhood being at the margins, to bring front and centre the role of children and young people within broader relationships of generation. This paper does so by listening to other voices (i.e. mothers), while simultaneously continuing efforts to highlight young people's agencies (Holt et al. 2020), shining light on some of the intricacies and complexities of the generational order.

Having cohered literature that has engaged with age in a more holistic and relational manner, through intergenerational and interdependent understandings, we now draw together literature exploring alcohol consumption across generations.

Drinking across generations

In comparison to a burgeoning body of literature on young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences (e.g. Hennell, Piacentini, and Limmer 2021; Nicholls 2020; Wilkinson and Wilkinson 2020a), there is a relative dearth of literature surrounding the generational transmission of

drinking culture. Notable exceptions include the edited collection by Thurnell-Read and Fenton (2022), which focuses on age, life-course and generations. The authors recognise that alcohol is situated in biographical and generational time, and consequently, there can be striking differences characterising the consumption of alcohol and its role in the lives of different age groupings and generations.

In their analysis of the intergenerational reproduction of alcohol consumption practices amongst middle-class working professionals in North-East England, Brierley-Jones and Ling (2022) find that the family habitus continues to remain influential in contemporary alcohol consumption practices and experiences, and in reproducing drinking styles across generations. Participants in the study recognised how the drinking practices of grandparents and parents legitimised their own tastes and consumption practices. Whilst cultural capital was found to be transmitted through generations, there were differences due to changes in the fields of alcohol; work; public health policy; and wider socioeconomic changes (for instance the decline of traditional industries and communities, and changing family structures) (Brierley-Jones and Ling 2022). Nonetheless, Brierley-Jones and Ling's (2022) findings demonstrate how drinking practices are influenced by family traditions.

Not dissimilarly, Jayne, Liu, and Valentine (2022) have explored alcohol, drinking and drunkenness and everyday financial lives, in the context of relational geographies of family and work in China. The authors focus on intergenerational relationships and the ways in which alcohol constitutes everyday financial lives. Through ethnographic research, the authors reflect on the importance of 'ritualised', 'rule-bound drinking' and 'toasting', and pay attention to the banal everydayness of family/work relationalities. The authors find that younger family members are taught the importance of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness for the personal and career progression of older family members (Jayne, Liu, and Valentine 2022).

Further, Fenton, Markham, and Wilkinson (2022) use a generational approach to examine the decline in youth drinking. The authors found that there is evidence of spatial shifts, with young people consuming alcohol increasingly away from public spaces, and towards the space of the home (see also Holdsworth, Laverty, and Robinson 2017). Fenton et al. (2024) contend that this renders youth drinking increasingly moderate, risk-averse, incidental and mediated by parents, as opposed to excessive, transgressive and fundamental to youth culture. Following Törrönen et al. (2019), Fenton et al. (2024) note that sobriety and drinking in moderation have taken on positive values for young people, de-stabilising the cultural status of intoxication as a marker of adulthood. Having brought together literature on relational geographies, and drinking across generations, we now explain the methodology underpinning this study.

Methodology

This paper emerged out of a larger study, in which the focus was on exploring young people's (aged 15–24) alcohol consumption practices and experiences. The age range of 15–24 was chosen, as it is in keeping with the United Nations (n.d.) definition of 'youth'. As part of this broader study, the first author, Samantha, conducted interviews with mothers of children aged 15–24, living in the suburban locations of Chorlton and Wythenshawe, Greater Manchester, UK. Suburban locations were chosen due to a pre-occupation in the substance use literature with cities, typified by a large body of work on the night-time economy (Fenton, Markham, and Wilkinson 2022). Chorlton and Wythenshawe were chosen due to the differences in ethnic diversity, socio-economic status, educational attainments, and drinking micro-geographies between, and within, the areas.

Case study locations

Wythenshawe was created in the 1920s as a Garden City to resolve Manchester's overpopulation and deprivation in its inner-city slums. It continued to develop up to the 1970s, however, the 1980s and 1990s saw a steady decline, high unemployment, decaying infrastructure, crime, and

problems with drug misuse (Atherton et al. 2005). Wythenshawe is eight miles south of Manchester city centre, and, when the research was conducted, was faced with relatively poor transportation links. Wythenshawe was the outdoor filming location for the Channel 4 series *Shameless* which first aired in 2004 with 'a motley cast of chavs, slags, scallies, hoodies, and layabouts'. Hopkins and Hebbert (2019, 15) contend that the characters reinforce stereotypes of the 'Wythenshavian': 'their families were dysfunctional, and their alcohol and drug abuse funded by welfare and crime'. There are distinct neighbourhoods within Wythenshawe, along with a town centre with various shops, supermarkets, hairdressers, pubs and a club. Numerous pubs have shut down in recent years.

Chorlton, on the other hand, is a residential area approximately five miles from Manchester city centre. It 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 it is situated with easy access to the motorway network. Chorlton is renowned for having a more bohemian feel than other parts of Manchester; it has a large number of independent bars and pubs, yet no club (Manchester Bars 2017). The drinking venues are popular with both students and young professionals, and include a mix of traditional pubs, and modern bars (Manchester Bars 2017). Bars often have some form of music, including live bands, and are considered to have a relaxed door policy (Manchester Bars 2017).

Interviews

The focus of this paper is on the 10 interviews the first author conducted with mothers of children aged 15–24 (five mothers from Chorlton, and five mothers from Wythenshawe, Greater Manchester UK) aged between 38 and 59. The interviews were focused on hearing from mothers about intersubjective and intercorporeal relationships with their children when bound up with the consumption of alcohol. Whilst previous publications from the wider study have focused on young people's alcohol consumption practices (see, for example, Wilkinson 2020; Wilkinson and Wilkinson 2020a), and 10 interviews were also conducted with fathers (see Wilkinson 2015), it is the words from mothers in the study that have 'glowed' (MacLure 2010, 282), over the years since the interviews were conducted. That is, they have glimmered and had a lingering presence, and we would argue have a renewed importance now, in the context of increasing attention to the decline in youth drinking (Holmes et al. 2022). This decline has broadly coincided with greater interest in what Kersey, Lyons, and Hutton (2022) recognise as the increasing alcohol consumption of mid-life women.

Interviews took place in spaces that both participants and the researcher felt safe and comfortable in, which included cafes, and a private room at the University. Interviews typically lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were useful for researching complex behaviours, opinions, and emotions. We do not suggest that this sample is representative of mothers who consume alcohol in Chorlton or Wythenshawe, or elsewhere; we are more interested in exploring rich, nuanced experiences of space than in searching for generalisable or exhaustive patterns of experience. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.

Data analysis

The interview material was transcribed verbatim. For all the data, a manual method of coding by pen and paper was adopted. Initially, following Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018) three-stage model, the first author exercised a process of data reduction; she organised data and attempted to meaningfully reduce this. Second, she undertook a 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, as do names of bars/pubs and roads, to uphold anonymity and confidentiality. Yet, to contextualise quotations, genuine ages and case study locations are given. Having

detailed the methodology underpinning this study, we now discuss the findings surrounding motherhood and alcohol consumption in the space of the home; and child to mother transmission of alcohol consumption practices geographies, respectively.

Motherhood, and alcohol consumption in the space of the home

Many mothers in this study, across both case study locations, noted that becoming a parent was pivotal in changing their alcohol consumption practices and experiences, curtailing the times and spaces of their drinking (Gomez et al. 2022). For Grace and Shirley, becoming a mother was pivotal in changing the spatio-temporalities of their drinking:

> Especially when you've got children, going out isn't an option, but sitting in and having a bottle of wine once the child's in bed … cracking, you know, great. (Grace, 50, Wythenshawe)

> When I had my son, my first son, and I was a single parent, I felt trapped. Well, I didn't think it at the time, but as I look back now, that's when I started drinking in the house every night, so I suppose I had a drink to … I don't know why I did, but I drank. Once he was in bed I would just have a drink. (Shirley, 43, Wythenshawe)

The above quotations support research conducted by Paradis (2011, 1259), which suggests that, given the contemporary cultural belief that mothers should always be 'on call' for their children, having babies or young children may mean mothers have fewer opportunities to drink in bars or to visit the homes of others in the evening. Consequently, for both mothers with a partner, and single mothers, their choice of drinking spaces is largely spatially restricted to their own homes, and temporally to once their children are in bed. However, not all mothers cited home drinking as being 'trapped'; indeed, for Claire, home drinking has several affordances (MacLean et al. 2024):

> I like drinking at home – you can choose exactly what you want to drink; exactly the glasses, and you know coldness, and specifications. You can have a chair of your own choice. You can listen to the music of your own choice. You can have the people you like. You can hear them. And all that really. And you can have the temperature you want, nibbles. I suppose that's again being old, you've got everything you want. I mean, it is cheaper, but I don't think that really is an influencing factor. (Claire, 48, Chorlton)

Claire's words highlight important entanglements of place, affect, and alcohol (MacLean et al. 2024). She values the ability to have agency over the multi-sensory atmosphere of the space, in terms of the ability to control the temperature of the alcohol; the comfortability of the space; and to play with the musicscape. In doing so, Claire intimates that bars, pubs and clubs are not conducive to the spaces she desires to consume alcohol in during the early evening. These findings chime with the experiences of young people in Wilkinson's (2017) paper, who enjoyed controlling atmospheres of lightness and darkness in the space of the home when consuming alcohol.

Despite there being significant similarities in the reasons young people (reported elsewhere, Wilkinson 2017) and mothers give for enjoying consuming alcohol at home, mothers, particularly from Chorlton, often expressed a lack of understanding of the reasons why young people drink at home prior to going out, as Linzi and Sue comment:

> I know there's a culture of like pre-loading isn't there for young people, of drinking before you go out, so things like drinking for the sake of it. Urm, and I suppose that's like getting into binge drinking isn't it, so I think I don't really like it, like the idea of it (Linzi, 50, Chorlton)

> One of the things that I see particularly the youngest one doing, is this thing of friends coming round and drinking before they go out. Whereas, when I was that age, what you did when you went out was drink. Whereas they'll get, you know, loaded before they go out, because it's cheaper, and I find that really weird. That was totally different to the drinking practices that I was used to, whereas they'll get bottles of really cheap vodka, and it's all about what's going to have the biggest hit quickest, so I find that quite bizarre (Sue, 53, Chorlton)

In the above examples, mothers view home drinking as 'drinking for the sake of it'; 'weird'; and part of a desire to 'have the biggest hit quickest'. Through doing so, the mothers appear to construct their

own drinking as moderate, contrasting it with their children's. For instance, Linzi refers to her children's drinking practices as 'binge drinking', and separates herself from this practices of her daughter by stating: 'I don't really like it, like the idea of it'. Supporting findings from other studies, pre-drinking at home is a valued social event, enabling young people to enjoy camaraderie with friends (MacLean et al. 2015). Indeed, pre-drinking provides opportunities to enhance social bonds, which could be threatened in the club-space due to loud music, and a busy environment (see Bancroft 2012). This coincides with some of the reasons parents value drinking in the space of the home (valuing the ability to drink at home with the people you select, in the atmosphere you control), but these motivations for consuming alcohol at home seem to be unrecognised by parents as possible reasons why their children may choose to consume alcohol in the space of the home.

Akin to the findings from Jayne et al.'s (2012) study, most mothers in the study perceived it would be safer for their children to drink at home, where they could be under surveillance from family to moderate the behaviour, in comparison to them drinking on streets. Rather than drinking in the home space in front of parents, mothers permitted young people to have interdependence, by providing them with a drinking space within or adjacent to the home (e.g. garage) so that they could feel a degree of 'separation'. The garage is an example of what Sin (2024) may term a taken-for-granted and mundane space of alcohol and drinking. To understand its 'becoming' as a drinking space, it is useful to consider a brief history and use of garages. In the UK, in the early twentieth century, houses begun to be built with garages, known as 'motor houses', intended to be dedicated for the storage of cars. As of 2021 though, the RAC (2021) reports that half of the UK's garages are used for other purposes, including workshops, gyms and storage. A garage, for some homeowners, may be a 'geography of nothing' (see Holmes and Ehgartner 2021, 252 on the 'sociology of nothing'); this makes it ripe for the opportunity as a space to enable young people to explore alcohol. Some mothers in the study adopted the approach their mothers had used with them if they perceived it to be successful in enabling their early explorations with alcohol. This includes purchasing alcohol on behalf of their children, and turning a blind eye to the consumption of alcohol in spaces in the grounds of the home, such as garages. This is illustrated through the quotation from Elizabeth below:

> Mum actually bought our drink for us cos her reason was instead of me asking strangers, and that's actually something I adopted with my elder daughter, cos she was 15 and I found out, 14 I found out she was drinking round the streets, and I put a block on it. I said, if you drink, give me a list so I know what you're drinking. And I was lucky because I had a converted garage, so it was like a den, they're in there, you're drinking, you're in there, you're not coming out of there, so I can keep an eye on you, you can do your giggles and your dancing and listen to music. (Elizabeth, 38, Wythenshawe)

For some, an unused garage may be a materiality of absence and nothingness (Holmes2024). Elizabeth's garage had been converted, and repurposed, to become a 'den' for her eldest daughter and friends to drink. It is noteworthy that whilst garages may typically be associated with wealthier households, participants across both case study locations spoke of the value of dens, including garages. Whilst participants were not asked how they identified in terms of social class during recruitment, this commonality across and within case study locations may reflect the availability of good quality social housing available in Wythenshawe, and /or the lower house prices in the area, meaning that owning a house with a garage is more obtainable in this area. Whilst the extant literature and popular press often focus on the conflict between generations (Koohsari et al. 2015; Nelischer and Loukaitou-Sideris 2022), the accounts shown here provide insight into the ways in which young people and their parents are utilising spaces in mutual and supportive ways (Wilkinson and Wilkinson 2020b). This can be seen through Grace's words below:

> Probably around the age of 14/15 my son was going to parties round his friend's houses, and they were having drink, and what I tended to do, sounds like I'm a facilitator here, but I use to like to be able to keep an eye on the situation. Because, I knew they were going to drink, whether I said no or not. He was going to have the peer pressure to drink. So I thought, if I could at least be around to control it, so we have a, a separate garage that the lads use to use as a den because we'd never put a car in. So it was like the local den. I mean, obviously it use

> to get to me sometimes because there'd be 12 or 13 lads in there, but while they were there, I could keep an eye on it, and I could keep a check on it, and I could see what was going on. I use to just keep saying to my husband "well, while they're there, we know where they are, they're not hanging … .", cos the thing was, before then they use to hang on the street corner. They weren't drinking necessarily, and they use to get moved on, and they weren't bad lads. But they would be standing on the street corner and it's understandable, people don't want a gang of 16/15 year olds standing on the corner. So, providing them with the garage meant they could relax somewhere, you know. (Grace, 50, Wythenshawe)

It is noteworthy that when parents spoke of young people's consumption of alcohol in spaces such as garages, it was often young people under the legal drinking age who would likely not be served in commercial drinking spaces. Consequently, rather than the dens being a space for pre-drinking, they are spaces in which young people may spend the entire evening. The above quotation from Grace shows some similarities with the phenomenon of keten (dens) used by rural young people in the Netherlands (see Haartsen and Strijker 2010). Keten are typically associated with young people consuming large quantities of alcohol, and are described by Haartsen and Strijker (2010, 163) as spaces where young people define their own ways of socialising and using space, 'without having to consider the rules of parents'. However, as the above demonstrates, when in their dens, children are not outside of the parental purview; their mothers can still 'keep an eye' on them and monitor their alcohol consumption practices and experiences. The den, in effect, operates as an 'extension of the home' (Haartsen and Strijker 2010, 165). Indeed, for the children, the den-like spaces above do not function as concrete and symbolic boundaries between generations (see Kjorholt 2003). For dens to function efficiently then, there is an unwritten intergenerational pact that mothers will not interfere in the evening's proceedings, if young people abide by their expectations. Whilst we have considered the role of mothers in enabling, monitoring and/or containing the alcohol consumption practices of their children, we now build on this and explore the ways in which children transmit cultures of drinking to their mothers.

Child to mother transmission of alcohol consumption practices

Most mothers in the study perceived their children to be vocal about their alcohol consumption practices and experiences. That is, there was evidence of an upwards transmission of guidance and judgements surrounding drinking from the children to their parents. Take the quotations from Helen, Grace and Laura below:

> My younger daughter is avowedly tee-total. As far as she's concerned her body is a temple, she's never had alcohol, and she's not beyond giving us a hard time if I decide I'll have a second glass. Even when my younger one was 18, and she was going out, I said "would you get me a bottle of wine?" and she refused firstly on the grounds that her body was a temple and she wasn't facilitating anybody else. (Helen, 51, Chorlton)

> My son hates it if I'm drunk, and he's not, ah, he's dreadful! Really, really, I've had some … he's walked out in a pub on me before now, when I've been like "ahhh son", he's been like "you're disgusting", and he'll walk out. He can't stand me being drunk, he hates it. Unless, if he's drunk then we're great friends, but if I'm more drunk than him, my son will start and he gets very sniffy with me. (Grace, 50, Wythenshawe)

> Sometimes my daughter gets annoyed if she thinks that my partner's drinking too much, and if he's hungover the next day she can be really … There's been a couple of occasions where he's been really hungover, and turned up, arrive home late, and she's been aware that he's been noisy and stuff and she's, she's found it very difficult, and so has he. He finds it embarrassing and humiliating. She finds it disgusting, and how can her wonderful dad do that kind of thing. So yeah, then I'm negotiating that minefield. (Laura, 39, Chorlton)

The above examples demonstrate how ideas about proper conduct around alcohol, whether that is avoiding intoxication, or avoiding alcohol altogether, can be transmitted upwards from children to mothers, turning the presumed 'generational order' on its head. Whilst not a common theme amongst young people who participated in the wider study, Helen's daughter's words do support the notion which has now become increasingly common, that some young people are drinking less due to cultural pressures to achieve, and maintain, health (Caluzzi et al. 2021) and to avoid

perceived risks to personal safety (Yeomans, Fenton, and Burgess 2022). For many mothers in the study, the 'annoyance', 'disgust' and questioning expressed by their children led to them feeling 'restricted' and 'changing' their alcohol consumption practices and experiences. Take the comments from Jacquie and Shirley below:

> The only restriction would be if I did want to drink lots and my daughter was there, she would be very disapproving. (Jacquie, 55, Chorlton)

> My sons would always say to me "are you drinking again?", "You're always drinking!", yeah, I'd get a lot, maybe with them getting older as well and pointing out to me would be, maybe that made me change as well. (Shirley, Wythenshawe)

As the above quotations demonstrate, there are occasions when children's presence and questioning may limit their mothers' alcohol consumption. For some participants, their children's criticisms of their drinking facilitated reductions in their alcohol consumption. For example, Shirley notes how the continual questioning from her sons about whether she was 'drinking again?', and comments surrounding the frequency of her drinking, were key factors in her changing her alcohol consumption practices (consuming less alcohol and less frequently).

The family, as a significant context for the socialisation of drinking behaviour in young people, has been considered in the geographical alcohol studies literature (e.g. Jayne, Liu, and Valentine 2022). Elsewhere, the role of siblings in transmitting embodied knowledge surrounding alcohol consumption has also been considered (Wilkinson 2020). However, much less is known about the role of young people in modulating the alcohol consumption practices of their parents. The findings from this study demonstrate that whilst having babies and young children can curtail the alcohol consumption of mothers to certain spaces and times (Gomez et al. 2022), with older children the relationship surrounding alcohol consumption becomes more dialogical (see also Windle 1996).

Whilst older children are potentially useful agents for encouraging parents to reduce their alcohol consumption practices and experiences, this is not uniformly the case, as Helen makes clear:

> I recognised we had been drinking far, far too much and I checked out guidelines, and I was quite horrified. They are so low. We have a range of size glasses, and the oldest ones, you know, the glass itself is quite small. And then, of course, newer ones are huge. So I've filled the glass as I would normally fill it, and poured it into the measuring jug and saw how much there was, and then worked out that if I stuck with the small glass that was x number of units compared to normal white wine kind of thing. My younger daughter took this on, and would sort of point out to my partner that two glasses of white wine and that was over his limit for the day. That actually wasn't very useful at all and, you know, she and I had a few conversations about people's autonomy and things. (Helen, 51, Chorlton)

As this quotation demonstrates, Helen herself had come to a realisation that she was consuming too much alcohol, through checking guidelines. She found that the drinking accoutrements she had been consuming alcohol in, which were larger glasses, had masked how much she had been drinking in her mind. As Helen recognises, it is important to pay attention to the role of more-than-human actants, such as the glasses in drinking practices and experiences (Hoops 2012). Indeed, Helen mentioned that her daughter 'took this on', which led to her pointing out to Helen's partner when he had consumed more than the recommended alcohol limits. However, Helen found these interjections by her daughter not 'very useful', which led to conversations surrounding people's autonomy (e.g. that adults should be able to exercise their own decision-making as to what constitutes an appropriate level of alcohol consumption). Thus, while some of the mothers in the study reported valuing their children's questioning stance toward their alcohol consumption, at times their children's interventions could cross a line and breach boundaries around respectful intergenerational conduct. Punch's (2002) concept of 'negotiated interdependence' is useful here. Young people and their mothers then, are interdependent agents whose power to shape alcohol consumption practices and experiences is negotiated within various possibilities.

Discussion

Despite calls to understand generations otherwise, there is still a legacy of generations being considered in a binary manner in the existing geography literature and beyond (Hopkins and Pain 2007). It is noteworthy that there has been some movement to fill the gap in intergenerationality. First, an important text on intergenerational space, which provides insight into the transforming relationships between younger and older members of contemporary society, by Vanderbeck and Nancy (2015). Second, a reference work on families, intergenerationality and peer group relations, which explores familial relationships within and beyond the home, including examining intimacies and interdependencies (Punch and Vanderbeck 2018). Notwithstanding these valiant efforts, in the extant literature, there is still a presupposition to view generational discreteness and difference in a way that emphasises disrupture and discontinuity between adults and children, at the expense of valuing continuity (Kjorholt 2003). This paper has disrupted this view, and a fundamental contribution is thus highlighting the importance of intergenerational relationships that signal co-operation and reciprocity across generations, bound up with the consumption of alcohol – what Kjorholt (2003, 273) terms a 'joint inter-generational' geographies approach.

Findings from this paper show social cohesion across generations: mothers are often key players in many young people's early experimentations with alcohol, in terms of purchasing alcohol for their teenage and young adult children, and providing 'safe' spaces for them to consume this alcohol within, or adjacent to the home (e.g. a garage), so they can feel a degree of 'separation'. These findings support those of Fenton et al. (2023) in showing that homes play a significant role in shaping, and providing a spatial and relational context for, young people's and mothers' alcohol consumption practices and experiences. However, in line with Jayne, Valentine, and Gould's (2012) earlier findings, it may prove problematic that some young people are only consuming alcohol in quasi-domestic spaces, such as dens. Providing safe spaces for their children to socialise may lower risks of injury, but it may also limit experiential learning of navigating public space, or of negotiating to belong in public spaces.

Moreover, this paper's second significant contribution is in highlighting that, rather than being passive to their mother's alcohol consumption practices and experiences, teenagers and young adult children aged 15–24 in this study, from their mother's perspective, had a dialogical relationship with their mothers surrounding alcohol consumption. Indeed, teenage and young adult children were pivotal in shaping, and even encouraging their mothers to reduce their consumption of alcohol through a variety of strategies including: judgment; knowledge of safe limits; and appreciating the health of their own bodies. The relationship between teenagers and young adult children and their mothers, bound up with the consumption of alcohol, is thus one of negotiated interdependence (Punch 2002). While on the one hand, the children appear to have at least partially internalised cultural scripts that judge mothers' drinking as morally problematic, some of their responses can also be interpreted as expressions of care and intimacy (Fenton 2018), reflecting their concern for their mothers' health.

A third original contribution of this paper is methodological. In addition to research conducted with young people surrounding alcohol consumption that is reported elsewhere (e.g. Wilkinson 2017; Wilkinson and Wilkinson 2020a), and whilst not undermining the important work that seeks to elicit and showcase the voices of young people themselves, this paper has demonstrated that there is real value in having parents' perspectives. Parent's perspectives can provide a threefold insight into: their views on their own alcohol consumption practices; on their children's alcohol consumption practices and experiences; and regarding what their children say about their drinking.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has enhanced our understanding of complex mother/child relationships bound up with geographies of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness, thus contributing to work in

children's geographies on relationalities, interdependencies, and intergenerationality. Moreover, this paper has harnessed the value of recognising children as a window into comprehending adulthood (Blazek 2025), a point in the life course that is rarely scrutinised and that relies on its opposition with childhood for its coherence and intelligibility. The findings presented in this paper thus indicate that traditional harm reduction messages that assume a downward transmission of knowledge and beliefs about alcohol – from parent to child – require reconsideration. While mothers have an important role to play in influencing young people's alcohol consumption practices and experiences, the findings of this study suggest that children too have a significant role to play in shaping the drinking practices of their mothers. This reworking of the presumed 'generational order' when it comes to knowledge and beliefs about the harms and risks of alcohol consumption is worthy of further exploration on the part of researchers and policymakers alike.

Note

1. By transmission, we mean a fluid and flexible process of passing on beliefs and practices in which elements of the latter may be adopted or resisted.

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