

# The Student Drinking Experience

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Expectations, Friendship and Drinking Practices

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## Declaration

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**I, Hazel Marsh, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted for assessment purposes at any other institution. I have acknowledged and cited all sources used.**

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## Abstract

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The 'student experience' is a recent 'buzzword' that has emerged in the UK alongside the repositioning of students as consumers (see Bunce et al, 2016). Universities market themselves as providing the means for students to be both academically and socially 'successful', however, the dominant form of socialising for students, outside of everyday life at university, is participating in a university drinking cultures (UDC). This raises a number of issues in relation to risk, harm reduction, gender, inclusivity and reputation. There is a plethora of data and literature that proposes methods and interventions to decrease both young people's harmful drinking and the associated behaviours (e.g. Harrison et al, 2011; Hutton, 2012; Ramstedt et al, 2013; Spencer, 2013; Kelley, 2017). However, young people are notoriously difficult to reach with harm reduction and safety campaigns which stem from a top-down approach denying the pleasures, agency and social ties (Thurnell-Read, 2016) of those they are aimed at. Drawing on observations and analysis of qualitative interviews with a range of university students, staff, and a secret Facebook focus group with pre-university students, this research argues that students are *aware* of the risks associated with alcohol consumption but actively prioritise friendship and their social lives over any concerns, whilst negotiating the drinking culture with their own strategies or 'risk rituals' (Moore & Burgess, 2011). Indeed, friendship was a key concern for participants in this study, with UDC utilised by students to both meet new friends and maintain friendships. However, with the societal idea and 'norm' of the typical student bound up in UDC, and with its relation to friendship practices, I argue that students who abstain from or limit alcohol intake at university are subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982). There is an awareness of this amongst young people; highlighted here by the pre-university students who discussed their expectations of UDC and planned/established 'survival' techniques should they wish to avoid it. Expectations then, serve to affect the transition of students to university life, for unrealistic expectations can cause stress and discomfort. This thesis draws together ideas of a UDC, expectations, friendship, gender, dividing practices, the student as a 'subject' and risk rituals to provide a snapshot of the current 'student drinking experience' and its implications.

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The 'student experience' is a recent buzzword that has emerged alongside the repositioning of university students as consumers (in line with the Consumer Rights Act 2015) and has been defined as 'the totality of a student's interaction' with their institution (Temple et al, 2014: 3). The 'student experience' encompasses both the 'academic experience' and 'campus experience', and also extends beyond university time to the 'application experience' and 'graduate experience' which form part of 'the student journey' (Temple et al, 2014: 3). In this culture universities are ranked not only in terms of academic league tables but by surveys such as the *Times Higher Education's* Student Experience Survey, which in 2017 was based on results across seven composite groups which cover: academic experience, university facilities, societal experience, student welfare, accommodation, industry connections, and security (see Bhardwa, 2017). What this research is most interested in, however, are the University Drinking Cultures (herein UDC) that form such a big part of the sociality of students and are so (stereotypically) linked to students. Students are often represented as 'extreme drinkers' (Martinic & Measham, 2008: 1) and it is widely expected and accepted that students will engage in drinking practices at university (see e.g. Avci & Fendrich, 2010; Dempster, 2011; MacLean, 2016; Palfai et al, 2011; Pederson et al, 2017; Piacentini & Banister, 2006; 2009; Quigg et al, 2013). In line with this students are either homogenised as 'partiers' or 'nerds' in the discourse about university life (see Chapter Four, section 4.3.2) but how do students themselves perceive and experience UDC? Furthermore, what function do UDC play in the 'student experience'? This research seeks to provide a snapshot of the current context of UDC and how students are managing them.

Students' lack of engagement with alcohol harm reduction information was one of the significant 'problems' that this thesis sought to address. Universities, as stakeholders in young people's futures, often engage in harm reduction campaigns in attempts to protect both students' welfare and the reputation of their institutions. At the study site, approaches have



varied from gimmick campaigns and in-situ interventions, such as handing out water and sweets outside the student nightclub, to reminding students of the health impacts of excessive alcohol consumption, running sexual consent workshops and campaigns, and working with communities who are concerned by the social impacts of excessive alcohol consumption. More widely the National Union of Students (NUS) have been running a 'social norms' initiative *Alcohol Impact* (see Chapter Two and e.g. Chung & Rimal, 2016; Marley et al, 2016; Moore et al, 2016; Stock et al, 2016) which is 'a strategic framework and supported accreditation mark designed to bring students' unions and institutions together in partnership' to 'create the conditions for a social norm of responsible alcohol consumption by students' (NUS Alcohol Impact, 2017: 1). *Alcohol Impact* seeks to reduce harm to students, promote responsible drinking, improve welfare, well-being and academic achievement, create more inclusive spaces and enhance the student experience (NUS Alcohol Impact, 2017: 1), and provides resources for institutions such as a workbook with examples of good practice, a community of shared learning, teleconferences, meetings, research, and what auditors look for when accrediting an institution. The scheme has seen successes with the 28 institutions currently accredited or working towards accreditation, including my study site, citing 'a doubling in the number of non-drink focused events during the autumn term [...]; a 40% decrease in students being excluded from venues on campus due to irresponsible drinking; a reduction in noise complaints from the local community; a decline in alcohol related violence and fewer welfare incidents in halls of residence' (NUS Alcohol Impact, 2017: 1-2). However, research has found that young people are notoriously difficult to reach with harm reduction information (see Spencer, 2013) and my research has added to this as I found that the majority of my participants knew that there were harm reduction initiatives both on campus and nationally but could not recall harm reduction information with clarity (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2). I therefore set out to find out if they employed their own practices of regulating and managing UDC. My participants were also dismissive of non-drink centric events, cited by my participants as 'alternative' events, as poorly attended. Though there is awareness of the need for events that are not centred totally around

alcohol (see Chapter Four, Section 4.3.1) it is still a work-in-progress of initiatives such as *Alcohol Impact* to change the normative culture that privileges alcohol consumption and sidelines those who do not drink. This research has also, therefore, focused on the experiences of students who abstain from or limit participation in UDC and argues that they are often subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982), see Chapter Five, section 5.2.1 and chapter Six, section 6.3.3.

It is clear that, as mentioned above, drinking cultures are an accepted and expected part of university life and form a large part of the social side of the 'student experience'. The representation of students as hedonistic can play a role in the formation of new students' expectations of university along with a number of sources such as family, friends, media, social media, previous education, and other students (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Barnes, 2017; Pancer et al, 2000). It can be argued that this conceptualisation of 'student' is homogenising and hides the complexities and individualisms of students. Unrealistic expectations can also cause stress for new students (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Jackson et al, 2000) both before they start university and after. This research, therefore, spoke to pre-university and current students about their expectations of university to find out how perceptions of UDC fit into their ideas of the 'student experience', and if and how they were realised in reality; this is the focus of Chapter Four. Expectations can therefore affect students' transition to university. There is a consensus, however, that forming friendships can ease the transition to university (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Buote, 2007; Krause & Coates; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Wilcox et al, 2005) and I found that students have a focus on making friends as they start university. For many students, and young people more generally, UDC provide an opportunity to socialise, to make new friends and maintain established friendships (see also e.g. Hackley, 2015; MacLean, 2016; Thurnell-Read, 2013, 2016, 2017) as drinking is a 'collective practice' (Niland, 2013: 531). Friendship is, therefore, a focus of this thesis as it became clear that friendship underpins UDC. Furthermore

not only is participating in UDC a method of making and maintaining friendships but it is a normative method of socialising amongst friends which can further exacerbate divisions between students who participate and students who do not. In light of this Chapter Five examines the significance of friendships at university and in UDC.

In order to address the themes above this research has drawn on data from a number of qualitative methods, as is discussed in detail in Chapter Three. These have included: fieldwork at various university events, including a harm-reduction initiative, with student union staff members, the police, and accompanied by a friend, in-depth qualitative interviews were also undertaken with students at university and staff members from the deanery and management services, and finally, a Secret Facebook Focus Group (SFFG) was undertaken with students who transitioned from pre-university to university status during the process of this research. Through this I sought to provide an overview of the 'student journey' (Temple et al, 2014: 3) mentioned above from pre-university to post-graduation. The methodological approach for this thesis is fully addressed in Chapter Three, which also provides a self-reflexive analysis of the research. This follows Chapter Two, which serves as the literature review for this thesis, draws together literature from the vast areas of alcohol studies, friendship studies, intercultural friendship at university, social media, harm reduction, risk, gender and 'Lad culture', and anti-consumption and abstention to provide a contextual background for this research.

As is referenced above, UDC are normalised by students and expectations of alcohol's role in university social life are often established prior to the start of university. Chapter Four, the Pervasiveness of Alcohol in Expectations and Experiences of Starting University, considers the transition of new students to university and how they form friendships. The data from the SFFG with pre-university students, who transitioned to their first year at university over the course of the research, is analysed in this chapter alongside qualitative data from established students.

The data allowed me to see what students were expecting from the 'student experience' and following this how students experienced and adapted (or not) to social life at university. This adds to literature which found that unrealistic expectations of university can cause stress for students and have an impact on student retention (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Buote et al, 2007; Jackson et al, 2000; Keup, 2007; Kreig, 2013; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Pancer et al, 2000; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005) alongside where these expectations emanate from. This chapter also indicates that established students can serve as tradition keepers and markers of what it means to be a 'student', often reinforcing the normativity of UDC. More widely the chapter also addresses the role of Freshers' Week, now rebranded as 'Welcome Week' by many universities but still known colloquially as Freshers' Week by students, as an introduction to university life. Amongst these findings the preoccupation students have with making friends at university was revealed, which leads on to the focus of Chapter Five.

Chapter Five, the Significance of Friendships in University Drinking Cultures, further extends the argument that friendships underpin UDC and provide a number of functions for students. My data has highlighted that friendships are inextricably linked to drinking cultures in both the formation of new friendships and in the maintenance of established friendships. As drinking and 'going out' hold a special status as a social event, UDC are normalised as the 'done thing' and those students who limit their participation in drinking practices, including abstainers and often international students, are subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982). However generally students viewed UDC as fun and social 'events', whereas 'sober' or 'alternative' events were seen as unpopular and dividing; it is interesting to note that students abstaining from alcohol were subject to dividing practices for not participating in UDC but events that were not centred around alcohol, and so arguably cater to a wider audience, were viewed as divisive and segregating. This chapter also recognises a number of friendship practices associated with UDC including: caregiving (see e.g. Armstrong et al, 2014a; Armstrong et al, 2014b; Chrzan, 2013;

Frederiksen et al, 2012; Lavery et al, 2015; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacLean, 2016; Niland et al, 2013; Vander ven, 2011), storytelling (see e.g. Bogren, 2014; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Fjaer, 2012; Fleetwood, 2014; Hackley et al, 2013; Hebden et al, 2015; Hutton et al, 2013; Katainen, 2014; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013), 'matching pace' (see e.g. Burgess et al, 2009; Chrzan, 2011; Frederiksen et al, 2012; Levine et al, 2012; MacLean, 2016) and what I have termed 'night-out nostalgia'. However, this chapter also recognises that men and women are experiencing nights-out in different ways (see also Maclean, 2016) especially in terms of perceived risks and personal safety. Analyses of the caregiving and personal safety responsibilities students are enacting in UDC are also further developed in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six, How do Students Perceive and Manage the Effects of University Drinking Cultures, argues that students are aware that their drinking practices are perceived as problematic and worthy of intervention. However, students themselves perceive their drinking practices as pleasurable and social and they also enact strategies to manage their safety and the safety of their friends in UDC, showing that whilst they know that elements of UDC are problematic they prefer to manage themselves or be 'managed' by the caregiving of friends. There is also awareness amongst students that time at university is temporary and there is a widespread notion that this is *their time* to enjoy themselves before they enter the 'real world'. This awareness is aided by leniencies afforded to students, I argue, because of the futures they represent. Friendship and UDC are, therefore, prioritised over health concerns and paying attention to harm reduction campaigns; whilst, since the qualitative data was collected for this research, there have been studies purporting that 'millennials' are drinking and attending nightclubs less 'whilst other experiential events are gaining popularity' (EventBrite, 2017: 8) and reports that students are spending more money on keeping fit than on alcohol (see Featherstone, 2017) UDC is still prevailing on UK campuses. Students are, however, employing

self-management strategies such as the caregiving outlined in Chapter Five, safety in numbers, drink monitoring, and 'knowing their own limits' in attempts to control their experience which is in line with literature that suggests young people enact a 'controlled loss of control' (Measham & Brain, 2005: 274) in relation to drunkenness. The disregarding of harm reduction information by students is therefore not clear-cut as they have knowledge of the potential harms and risks of alcohol consumption but *choose* to regulate UDC in their own ways.

Concluding the thesis is Chapter Seven which draws together the arguments of the findings above, and maintains the assertion that UDC are positioned as normative and students, in a cyclical pattern, accept this either through participation or through abstention and resistance. As is argued throughout this thesis, those who abstain or limit participation in UDC are subject to Foucauldian 'dividing practices' and are often excluded from the friendship practices associated with the shared experiences of UDC. However, the portrayal of students as hedonists is also challenged as it is clear that participation in UDC is one of the ways in which friendship is 'being done' at university; students are not drinking solely to get drunk but to have fun, make friends and maintain friendships though this can be an exclusive culture. The following chapter, Chapter Two, now goes on to provide a detailed theoretical and contextual framework for this thesis before I move on to the findings chapters, Four, Five, and Six.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

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To think of student drinking is often to think of a ‘social problem’ – hedonistic students putting themselves at risk of harm and causing trouble. This is represented by the plethora of literature that aims to tackle the *problem* of youth drinking. Indeed, this was the original intention of this research as I began from a public health perspective on student drinking and worked towards this with contacts, meetings, field observations, and following the aims of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) CASE award. However, in the process of this research I moved towards a more critical, sociological engagement with the topic with an intention to inform on student engagement with public health related information. My research shows that some students knowingly take risks relating to alcohol consumption making harm reduction more difficult as, not only are students aware of, dismiss, or develop strategies to manage potential risks, but they also knowingly and actively prioritise their social lives. A key finding of this research has been the importance that friendship holds for students, and how participation in UDC is a catalyst and maintainer for student friendships. Whilst there have been moves to recognise the pleasures of alcohol consumption for young people (see e.g. Frederiksen et al, 2012; Lyons & Willott, 2008), and there are recent studies that suggest the pleasures of drinking are *about* friendships or are intertwined with friendships (see e.g. Lyons et al, 2016; MacLean, 2016; Niland et al, 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2013, 2016, 2017), this has occurred alongside ‘an intensification of media and policy discourses that position alcohol and drugs as a societal problem to be blamed on the moral failures of individuals’ (Thurnell-Read, 2017: 337-338). I am applying these themes directly to university students who can be set apart due to their particular and time restricted social experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce, and justify, the literature that has been used throughout the process of conducting and writing this doctoral thesis. In exploring the topic of university drinking cultures I have drawn on a novel combination of literatures from the

debates on young people and alcohol, friendship, identity, the 'student experience', post-feminism, harm reduction, risk and gender. Clearly the subject matter of this thesis spans multiple disciplines including sociology, cultural studies, human geography, psychology, marketing etc. In this chapter I unpack the primary sources that have provided the conceptual framework for this thesis, and the secondary sources that have been invaluable in exploring and understanding the topic area. Through this focus I will show how my work is situated in the field and identify the rationale for this thesis. This chapter is organised thematically, and in accordance with the thesis structure, although there are obvious overlaps and links between topics and literature.

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework: Foucault**

This thesis draws upon the Foucauldian notions of the 'subject', disciplinary institutions and 'norms' to argue that universities are creating a certain kind of citizen. Foucault suggests that 'human beings are made subjects' (1982: 777) and he sought to create a history of the cultural modes by which this is achieved. For Foucault there are 'three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects' (1982: 777) these are: the sciences or 'modes of inquiry' that objectivize the subject; dividing practices whereby the subject is objectivized by being divided either from others or within themselves – Foucault gives the examples of sanity and insanity, criminals and law-abiding; and thirdly, 'the way a human being turns [them]self into a subject' (1982: 777). Throughout this thesis I argue that students who do not participate in the university drinking culture are subject to dividing practices, compared to the societal idea and 'norm' of the 'typical student' that is bound up in drinking culture (see Pederson et al, 2017; Piacentini and Banister, 2006). I argue that this also relates to the university as an educational institution that has a 'whole ensemble of regulated communications' in the form of lessons, levels of knowledge, and 'differentiation marks of the "value" of each person' and 'by the means of a whole series of power processes' including reward, punishment, enclosure and surveillance



(Foucault, 1982: 787). This is particularly pertinent in chapter 5 and the focus on friendship as I extend the argument of institutional surveillance to peer surveillance (see Fujimoto & Valente, 2012; Kelley, 2017) from friends and friendship groups. I argue that this can result in coercion, or 'fear of missing out' (see Chapter Four; see also MacLean, 2016), if students do not participate in the university drinking culture, particularly in the context of pre-drinking (see below). If 'norms' are a harmful construct in that they exclude those who do not conform to 'normal' categories, and they are used to evaluate and control us; and if surveillance is coercion by observation and feeling self-conscious, what does it mean for the norm amongst students to be participation in drinking cultures? I would also argue that social media, described as 'a ubiquitous part of young people's everyday lives' (Lyons et al, 2016; see below), is another arena in which 'norms' can be reinforced and disseminated. For, as Foucault states, 'there is no doubt communication is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons' (1982: 786).

Foucault suggests that to understand power relations we should look to struggles and resistance, for the objectives of such struggles against domination, exploitation or subjection are against the form of power that:

...applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault, 1982: 781).

Considering this, university students have both authorities to answer to and which they have certain dependencies on (see Chapter Six), because they exist (are 'becoming') within an

established educational institution, establishments that Foucault related to prison in terms of discipline. Yet they are also aware, in some respects, of what is expected of them, proven by the pre-university students who participated in this study and who were planning how to insert themselves into university life and how to 'survive'. This highlights that subjects are being made of students before they even start university. There is an idea, or an 'ideal', life trajectory for students linked to the homogenous 'student' catered to by the 'student experience', and transitions and rites of passage they are expected to successfully negotiate on their way to becoming a 'productive citizen'. Also, as has been referenced above, students are legally conceptualised as 'consumers' of higher education under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, and Naidoo et al suggest that framing students as consumers has the potential to empower students, through greater opportunities, increased and informed choice and the use of league tables, or it may confuse them (2011: 1149). In Chapter Six I argue that this can result in certain leniencies towards students, for misbehaviour and misdemeanours, as they have a 'future' which has been invested in. This also relates to the regulation of space and time and in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault outlines the importance of the regulation of time, space and movement, stating that:

There is the modality: it implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result, and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement. These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed on them a relation of docility-utility, might be called "disciplines" (1984: 181).

For students, university is generally a place they experience freedom and independence for the first time as they move away from the supervision of parents or parental figures. Yet there is still a widespread idea that time at university is 'time out', a time to enjoy life as well as study, before students enter the 'real world' (see Piacentini & Banister, 2006). Are (certain) students therefore being *allowed* a period of freedom whilst they are captive in the space of university on

the understanding that they will be good future citizens and a good economic investment? This chapter now moves on to consider the main themes that have emerged in the process of this thesis, beginning by outlining the drinking practices that are at the core of argument around the 'student drinking experience'.

## **2.2. Drinking Cultures and Practices of Drinking**

Before I move on to chart specific themes it is important to introduce the topic which serves to run throughout the whole thesis, drinking culture. This section therefore tries to bring together literature from a vast field of study that, as has already been mentioned, crosses multiple disciplines although there is, of course, a focus on young people and students for whom there is a consensus that drinking is a largely social activity (see e.g. Gordon et al, 2012; Hunt et al, 2014; MacLean, 2016; Niland et al, 2013; Pederson et al, 2017; Piacentini and Banister, 2006; Smzigin et al, 2008; Thurnell-Read, 2016, 2017). For example Dempster's research indicated 'drinking heavily is one of the main resources through which undergraduates attempt to fit into student cultures' (2011: 649). Hunt et al also found that amongst their Asian-American participants 'the pleasures of drinking were largely bound up with sociality and commensality and primary motivations for drinking included making it easier to socialize, to loosen up, or open up' (2014: 975). Whilst the 'buzzword' that sought to encompass 'problematic' youth drinking was 'binge drinking', there have been recent moves away from that (see Szmigin et al, 2008) and Martinic and Measham in their edited book 'Swimming with Crocodiles: The Culture of Extreme Drinking' suggest that:

Concern regarding certain drinking behaviours among youth and young adults transcends countries, cultures, and social classes and has for some time moved to the forefront of alcohol policy and prevention. Whether or not young people are legally permitted to consume alcohol, their drinking often puts them at risk of harm; the toll from accidents and injuries is high. However, it seems to be the visibility of young

people's drinking and the potential threat this poses to public order that particularly galvanize communities to call for action to reduce problems of public drunkenness, threats to safety, and instances of public disturbances in general (2008: 1).

In the case of the students who are my focus here, it is interesting to question who harm reduction strategies and campaigns will benefit; universities reputations, local residents of university towns/cities, students themselves, or all; particularly when recent studies have continued to show the social pleasures and benefits, for most young people, of drinking with friends. As Thurnell-Read writes, 'despite recent advances, academic studies of alcohol still frequently struggle to reconcile the individual, social and cultural pleasures and benefits of drinking and drunkenness with concerns for health and well-being, public order and social policy' (2016: 4). The efficacy of harm reduction is considered in greater detail below and in Chapter Six of this thesis. Martinic and Measham, then, propose that the term 'extreme drinking' is needed to account for 'a drinking pattern that has many dimensions' including young people's motivations, behaviours, the drinking process, and outcomes that follow (2008: 1-2). They suggest that in many ways 'extreme drinking is not so far removed from other extreme behaviours, such as extreme sports, which also offer a challenge; their pursuit is motivated by an expectation of pleasure; and they are, by design, not without risk to those who engage in them, others around them, and society as a whole' (Martinic & Measham, 2008: 2). However, Martinic and Measham suggest that there are 'social and cultural variations linked to behavioural components of drunkenness' and considerable variations in attitudes towards it (2008: 7). Thurnell-Read also advises that practices of drinking are diverse and 'spatially and culturally defined' (2016: 4) and that 'the conditions under which drugs and alcohol are consumed are inescapably socially defined' (2017: 337; see also Fjær et al, 2016). There is an importance in the 'spaces' where drinking takes place and, for example Gordon et al note that places of drinking, in this case pubs, are designed to be socially inclusive environments that disengage 'individuals from their social status and background' and 'facilitate social interaction independent of individuals' social standing' (2012: 5-6). They also note, however, that across

Western Europe there appears to be a homogenization of drinking cultures (Gordon et al, 2012: 6-7) and suggest a move towards 'understanding the role and meaning of drinking alcohol in society' including the 'social and cultural factors that influence how people drink' (2012: 8).

Grant and MacAvoy also analyse 'drunkenness' and highlight that there are a number of terms used by individuals to describe 'the state of alcohol impairment, and cultural variations of these definitions are commonplace. Indeed, diverse perspectives, insights, and nuances come into play in discussions about the term of intoxication and its true meaning. A multitude of words and phrases are used to describe the behavioural expression of intoxication' (2011: 1). Grant and MacAvoy state that the cultural perspective of intoxicated and drunken behaviour cannot be overlooked as 'cultural impressions of drunkenness are shaped by the social context, symbolism, and perceived purpose of alcohol in a given society, facilitating a multitude of behavioural outcomes' (2011: 5). They also assert that culture defines the 'boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable drunkenness' and, whilst public drunkenness is generally frowned upon, drunkenness itself is found in every alcohol permitting society and is something we can all recognise in its different forms (Grant & MacAvoy, 2011: 5). Drunkenness in some cultures, they suggest, can be widely accepted, sanctioned, and regarded as normative, or it can be 'frowned upon and confined to carefully delineated settings and contexts (these are well-defined and often ritualized "time-outs"). In many cultures, drunkenness offers an escape from restrictive norms and social order of everyday life' (Grant & MacAvoy, 2011: 5). Having established that drinking and drunkenness are culturally and spatially differentiated and defined (see also Stepney, 2014) it is imperative to move on to consider the risks against which debate, in defence of the pleasures and agency of drinkers and in attempts to minimise harm and consequences of intoxication and sustained drinking, has emerged.

There are a variety of risks associated with alcohol consumption for young people such as violence injury, assault, sexual violence, the potential for arrest, and harmful consumption patterns in later life (see e.g. Avci & Fenrich, 2010; Boiler et al, 2011; Bowring et al, 2012; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Kelley, 2017; Moore et al, 2016; Nelson et al, 2009; Norberg et al, 2011; Palfai et al, 2011; Park, 2004; Quigg et al, 2013; Ramsdedt et al, 2013; Stock et al, 2016) and so on, and, out of concern with this, harm reduction initiatives, campaigns, strategies and policies have emerged (as can be seen in the harm reduction section below). Quigg et al, for example outline that the 'excessive alcohol use amongst student populations is a major health concern' with evidence that their consumption levels are higher than the general population (2013: 2924). Whilst, as has been discussed above, benefits of student drinking include fun, friendship, an enhanced social life, and an increase in self-confidence, there can be negative impacts on students' finances, physical and mental health, pressure on local health and criminal justice services, and 'impacts on the communities in which students consume alcohol' (Quigg et al, 2013: 2924-2925). Hackley et al also refer to the 'health and social consequences of rising levels of alcohol consumption with increasing rates of liver cirrhosis and a greatly lowered mean age of sufferers' (2015: 2126). However, in relation to health, Stockwell highlights the difficulties of quantifying harms from alcohol stating that there are 'at least 60 major categories of serious health consequences and over 200 specific diagnostic codes in the International Classification of Diseases [...] to which drinking contributes causally, with a wide range of different risk functions of the relation between level of consumption and the disease' (2012: 121). Quigg et al conclude, however, that despite these consequences alcohol consumption is an 'accepted and routine part of student life' with the presence of 'at least one student bar licensed to sell alcohol' commonplace at universities (2013: 2925).

Palfai et al specifically relate 'hazardous drinking' harms to university students, stating it to be one of the major risks to student health and well-being and 'predictive of a number of serious

negative consequences including injury, sexual risk behaviour, assault, and driving under the influence' which may 'lead to lower overall quality of life amongst university students' (2011: 169). They suggest that this is of particular concern for students as they are 'managing' social environments that have limited monitoring from 'adults' and that 'typically provide heightened access to alcohol' (Palfai et al, 2011: 169). Avci and Fendrich also determined that alcohol consumption can impede academic success and 'increases the odds that students will be both victims and perpetrators of student assault' (2010: 545). Whilst Palfai et al's and Avci and Fendrich's studies are from the American college context, and so the concern with lack of adult monitoring may refer to the fact that students in the US can start college from 18 but cannot legally drink until they are 21, it is relevant here in that many UK students are experiencing living away from home for the first time, so whilst drinking alcohol may not be a new experience for them it is likely that they are away from parental supervision in some form for the first time. A less serious consequence of alcohol consumption reported by the literature is that of regret or shame as students and young people may come to feel embarrassed by their behaviour when intoxicated (see Brown & Gregg, 2012; Kelley, 2017; Norberg et al, 2011). However, my data shows that students have knowledge of the consequences that have been outlined here, they are aware that they are targeted by harm-reduction campaigns and many of them continue to enjoy the sociability of university drinking cultures anyway.

As Katainen et al suggest, 'the reason, purpose and style of young people's drinking are largely determined by the situation [...] this means that the drinking situation has a bearing on which factors and events are perceived as risks of alcohol use' (2014: 13). They further state that, for young people, risk is a by-product of participating in drinking cultures as even when drinking heavily 'young people are not necessarily aiming to achieve the rush of risk-taking, but the risks are just side products of the drinking event that are not necessarily even contemplated in the situation itself, or that are regarded as an inevitable nuisance that goes with the territory of

drinking' (Katainen et al, 2014: 14). They surmise that 'what from the outside appears like risk-taking may from a subjective point of view be part of practice' (Katainen, 2014: 14) and that their research suggested 'that young people's risk perceptions derive above all from the world that they themselves inhabit. In other words, there is a mismatch between young people's and adults' understandings of the risks of drinking' (Katainen, 2014: 14). As will be outlined in sections below, students have management strategies and 'risk rituals' (Moore & Burgess, 2008) in place, provide caregiving for friends, and believe they 'know their own limits'. They go through a process of othering believing that campaigns and information are not talking about them (see Spencer, 2013). In a Foucauldian sense, whilst society might see young people as 'deviant' for their 'extreme drinking' (Martinic & Measham, 2008: 1), they position others as deviant for their drinking associated behaviours (see Lavery et al, 2015) and often fail to recognise their own behaviours (see also De Visser et al, 2013) within practices of 'pre-loading' and 'going out', terms which participants in this study used to encompass various aspects of university drinking cultures and which I will now unpack in line with the literature.

For students, university drinking cultures are often encompassed by the phrase 'going out', a phrase that, for them, stands to portray the pattern of how students enact rituals around alcohol consumption (see Quigg et al, 2013) including getting ready (see Duff, 2014), pre-drinking (often academically known as pre-loading; see below), drinking to get drunk (see Measham & Brain, 2005; Measham, 2006), attending pubs and clubs, eating take-away, and travelling (see Shaw, 2014). Smizgin et al define 'going out' as heightened experiences encompassed in a world of 'fun and friendship, and also of risk and danger. It holds that promise of fulfilment (sexual and social) and is defined by the attendance or avoidance of, different bars and clubs [...that offer] an opportunity to be amongst friends away from the pressures of work or college in an environment that is designed for pleasure' (2008: 364). Smizgin et al also found that despite risks, their participants did not consider 'harm' an outcome of drinking and rather constructed a



'good whole' combined from positive and negative outcomes (2008: 365). Other research has also suggested that young people often re-frame negative events into 'good stories' (see Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013) and consider that the 'good' outweighs the 'bad' (see Brown & Gregg, 2012; Niland et al, 2013), often with a belief that the social risks are greater than risks to safety or health (see de Visser et al, 2013; Katainen et al, 2014; Spencer, 2013). This may be because of the aforementioned social role of alcohol, and the lack of an alternative that has the same mass appeal or normalised embedded social function (see also Macneela & Bredin, 2010).

Pre-drinking (pre-loading) is another term used casually by participants in this study as part of the make-up of university drinking cultures, it is part of the 'norm' and refers to the practice of drinking at home (within university accommodation/student housing) before 'going out'. As McCreanor et al note this 'phenomenon' is of growing concern internationally as it is a practice 'marked by the quantity and speed of alcohol consumption' motivated by intoxication (2016: 36; 44). They found that in their New Zealand study, young adults pre-drinking practices were 'patterned around the price of alcohol, but were nevertheless strongly socially driven, located and timed. For young people, it appears that pre-loading is not an epiphenomenon to their drinking culture, but an important drinking strategy to minimise costs and also enter urban night-time economies in an already inebriated state' (2016: 43). Labhart et al also outline reasons for pre-drinking as: saving money, becoming intoxicated, getting 'in the mood' to party, and socialising with friends and potential sexual partners (2013: 285). However, they found that whilst young people may 'pre-drink' to save money they are not, in fact, consuming less alcohol at licensed premises and so pre-drinking is not a substitution and 'adds to the total amount of alcohol consumed in the evening' (Labhart et al, 2013: 289). Pre-drinking is thus linked, indirectly through increased consumption, with 'more adverse or risky outcomes' (Labhart et al, 2013: 289). However, Wells et al note that there are also positive social outcomes of pre-drinking for young people as it is a ritualised activity that allows time to socialise with

friends before going out to loud bars and clubs, can ease discomfort and awkwardness of meeting new people and ‘may serve to enhance group bonding’ (2008: 5). Although, in line with determined drunkenness literature (Martinic & Measham, 2008; Measham & Brain, 2005; Measham, 2006), Wells et al also recognise that amongst young people the underlying motivation for drinking appears to be getting drunk (2008: 7). Pre-loading also often involves drinking games, which many of my participants have also mentioned, in which individuals ‘drink according to a set of rules’ in a social context (Fairlie et al, 2015: 91). Drinking games are also associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption (Fairlie et al, 2015) and players consume more alcohol than non-players, and experience more consequences (Alfonso & Deschenes, 2013; see also: Borsari et al, 2007; Ham et al, 2010; Østergaard & Skov, 2014; Zamboanga et al, 2010; Zamboanga et al, 2014).

My data shows that students have expectations that university sociality includes drinking cultures, with the pre-university participants suggesting that specific universities have reputations built upon the ‘nightlife’ of their locations which can either attract or repel potential students. The participants of this study were often aware of the everyday nature of university drinking cultures, some embraced it and some did not. The next section goes on to consider the implications of expectations of university as is the focus of the Chapter Four.

### **2.3. Expectations and the Transition to University**

Widespread ideas about university play a role in the formation of expectations for new students. The impact of such expectations is the focus for Chapter Four: ‘The Pervasiveness of Alcohol in Expectations and Experiences of Starting University’. As Pancer et al state, students envision ‘a life free of parental control, filled with interesting and novel activities, new people to meet, and stimulating academic work. They also expect university to offer them significant opportunities

for personal, social, and intellectual growth' (2000: 38). However, the reality of students' experiences are 'harsher and more stressful' as they spend more time at university and positive expectations are often 'replaced by feelings that are more negative' (Pancer et al, 2000: 39). This is important because a number of studies agree that unrealistic, or romanticised, expectations of university can lead to stress, discomfort, or even dropping-out of university (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Buote et al, 2007; Jackson et al, 2000; Keup, 2007; Kreig, 2013; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Student retention is, of course, of concern for universities in terms of financial consequences and 'the quality of the student experience in the context of expanding student numbers and resource constraints' (Wilcox, 2005: 707). Participants in my study, for example, found themselves surprised by the pervasiveness of UDC and its dominance as the form of socialising used to meet and bond with new people. One of the first, and most longstanding, studies to explore the disparity between expectations and realities was Stern's 1966 *Myth and Reality in the American College*, which concluded that there was a 'Freshman myth' resulting from unrealistically high expectations. Ailes et al state that more recently students tend to be pessimistic about transitioning to university but optimistic about both their social and academic life (2015: 35). They state that 'while the Freshman myth is a phenomenon that most first-year students experience, the impact of disharmony experienced by students can determine the case of their transition and levels of success achieved throughout college' (Ailes et al, 2015: 35).

Literature on expectations and student retention suggest that expectations come from a number of sources of information, particularly family, media, previous or current education, and other students (see Ailes et al, 2015; Pancer et al, 2000). Students can also gain cultural knowledge from experience passed down by their parents and/or siblings (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Shutz and Luckman, 1973). In my research I have found that participants most commonly cited parents, siblings and friends as the main sources of their expectations of university life, but they

also listed social media (see also Barnes, 2017), other media, wider family, other students and visit days at university as sources of influence. Jackson et al identified, using cluster analysis, four distinct clusters of students amongst their participants: optimistic, prepared, fearful and complacent (2000: 2111-2112). They state that 'the four clusters appeared to differ meaningfully in terms of how optimistic their expectations of university were, with the optimistic group being the most hopeful, followed by the prepared, complacent, and fearful groups, respectively' (Jackson et al, 2000: 2112). Jackson, however, argues that 'there is no singular view of what a student should be like, but rather that there are diverse student identities' (2003: 342). This relates to my pre-university participants who resisted being categorised into the student stereotypes they identified of 'nerds', 'heavy drinkers', and 'party goers'.

A recent survey and report from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Unite Students has also analysed the perceptions and attitudes of university applicants. They sought to 'identify areas where prior expectation and the reality of higher education are out of step with one another' (HEPI, 2017: 6). The *Reality Check* report highlights that 'there is a gap between applicants' ambitions and hopes for life at university and the reality of student life' (HEPI, 2017: 6). Applicants feel a combination of excitement and anxiety about starting university, they report that whilst most applicants (71%) feel satisfied with their lives, supported and optimistic about their future they also often complain of common symptoms of anxiety and stress, with 1 in 8 suffering from a pre-existing mental health condition (2017: 14) (see also reports: Aronin & Scott, 2016; Brinkworth & Jenkin, 2016; Marsh, 2017). The report found that 'in general applicants feel confident about making friends at university', with almost three-quarters (71%) feeling prepared for new people (HEPI, 2017: 21). Though they are confident about making friends in a new context, 47% experienced a level of anxiety about living with people they had not met and felt less confident about it. My data reflects this, but

shows the nuances of *how* students prepare for making friends (especially outside of university drinking cultures), and how they attempt to reduce accommodation anxiety where possible by talking to others assigned to the same buildings on social media pre-arrival. The report concludes that ‘the overall picture this survey paints is well-recognised: a cohort of young people approaching university in an emotionally heightened state, juggling a range of different feelings – excitement, apprehension, optimism and vulnerability’ (2017: 32). They therefore ask what can be done to better prepare young people for university.

Studies agree that students are often unprepared for the realities of transitioning to university life (see e.g. Alessi et al, 2017; Briggs et al, 2012; Erb et al, 2014; Krause & Coates, 2008; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Wilcox et al, 2005;) and Scanlon et al found that students have ‘decontextualized, naïve, “knowledge about” the university’ (2007: 237). Buote et al also found that students often have romanticised expectations of university as ‘wonderful’ that can ‘conflict with the reality of the transition and its inherent hardships’ (2007: 686). However they suggest that, whilst violated expectations can consequently cause students to feel that there is something wrong with them, ‘when they find that their new friends are experiencing similar kinds of problems, this helps normalize the experience, and allows students to feel [...] less “weird, sorry, abnormal”’ (2007: 686). Buote et al also suggest that friends help students adjust to university life providing sources of both fun and support alongside ‘advice, guidance, reassurance, acceptance, sympathetic listening, encouragement, feedback and a sense of belonging’ (2007: 666). They state that ‘new friends are also a source of fun and enjoyment, balancing out the many stressors that students experience in adjusting to university life’ (Buote et al, 2007: 686). Buote et al conclude that as young people start university, as well as transition to other new social environments such as new jobs, new communities etc., the development of friendships will be a determinant of how they will adjust (2007: 687) as the next section now considers.

## **2.4. Friendship**

As Cronin states, 'the specificity of the friendship bond – but also its intersections with other bonds – form key sociological concerns' (2015: 1168; see also Adams & Allan, 1998; Allan, 2008; Cronin, 2014; Giddens, 1991; Jerome, 1984; Pahl, 2000; Pahl & Pevlin, 2005; Schutz, 1967; Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Rawlins, 2009), and as we have seen above in relation to Buote (2007), friendship is an important part of university life and is the subject of Chapter Five: 'The Significance of Friendships in University Drinking Cultures'. In attempting to define friendship, Spencer and Pahl state that 'friend' is a 'single term to describe a variety of relationships' (2006: 34), and that:

Friends are sometimes defined as people who have something in common, perhaps the same sense of humour or similar interests, or they belong to the same organization, live in the same locality, come from a similar background, lead a similar lifestyle, work in the same occupational field, or are at the same stage in their lives. Friends are people who enjoy each other's company, sharing activities, going out together, chatting on the telephone, emailing or visiting each other's home. A core conception of friendship is the idea that friends are people who like each other, who "get along", though of course the strength of the attachment can vary a great deal. The tie between friends is defined as an informal one: friends are people who can relax with each other, who feel comfortable in each other's presence; there is a sense of being off-duty with friends, free from work or family responsibilities. Friends are also perceived as people who offer each other practical help, or give emotional support, sharing in each other's highs and lows, and friends are often defined as people who can confide in one another, who know each other's secrets. Finally there is a narrative dimension to friendship and friends are sometimes defined as people with a shared history who have "been through things together" (Spencer & Phal, 2006: 59).

As can be seen, defining friendship encompasses a myriad of characteristics and, there is general consensus that 'friendship is a complex construct' (Demir & Urberg, 2004: 68) but that there are key features such as 'reciprocity' (see e.g. Allan, 2008; Pahl, 2000; Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Zimmerman, 2004) and 'homophily', which Cronin describes as having friendship groups that 'tend to be composed of individuals who closely resemble ourselves in terms of age, class and ethnicity' (2014: 72; see also Spencer & Pahl, 2006). Spencer and Pahl also say that friends are chosen and not given, and thus they are highly prized as 'someone has chosen you for "who you really are"' (2006: 59). Cronin also suggests that 'the significance individuals ascribe to friendship is shaped by discourses of choice which can act as key signifiers of contemporary individuality: because they are *chosen* relationships, friendships are popularly thought to represent our "authentic" identities' (2014: 72; see also Allan, 2008; Pahl & Pevlin, 2005). Zimmerman, for example, suggests that 'one of the major developmental changes in friendship quality during adolescence is the growing importance of reciprocity, trust, and emotional closeness within these relationships' (2004: 83). Allan also argues that the boundaries between friends and family are becoming blurred and suggests that 'individuals now have greater flexibility in the construction and management of their different friendships with the consequence that some of these friendships may come, at least in some periods, to be quite central within their everyday lives' (2008: 9). Pahl and Pevlin confirm that 'younger people are, indeed, more likely to have their closest friends outside the family' although this pattern and reliance changes over time (2005: 445). Allan suggests that overall 'for some individuals in specific structural locations, friendships can come to play a highly significant role in their lives [...] quite often [...] associated with a particular phase of the life course' (2008: 9; see also Hiatt et al, 2015). Participants in this research are either entering or are embedded in a particular phase in their life, that of attending university.

In the same way that Cronin's participants found that 'sharing work experiences that are emotionally or physically demanding can forge distinctive bonds that endure' (2014: 74) and that the workplace can throw 'people together and [facilitate] friendships which may not have developed elsewhere' (2014: 77), participants of this study are 'thrown' together in terms of accommodation, courses and societies at university. It seems that friendship, and the support, fun, and shared experiences, can make or break the student experience for individuals. For example, relating to the previous section on expectations and transition to university, there is a consensus that strong friendship links are important for adjustment (see Ailes et al, 2015; Buote, 2007; Briggs et al, 2012; Krause & Coates, 2008; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Wilcox et al, 2005) and Pittman and Richmond suggest that 'it would be useful for university administrators to consider ways to enhance 1<sup>st</sup>-year students' sense of belonging and development of more positive friendships' as they found that their study suggested 'that university belonging and friendship quality are important factors in students' adjustment to college during the 1<sup>st</sup> year' (2008: 356-357). Scanlon et al also found that 'making new friends was [...] part of students' identity formation' as they adapt to their new situation 'by "remooring" their identity to new social supports' (2007: 238). The students they spoke to 'found that while interaction with other students at first increased their feelings of anonymity within a few weeks of their transition, it was this interaction that proved to be critical in identity formation' (Scanlon et al, 2007: 237). They suggest it was this that gave students the cultural capital to 'negotiate new connections to the university and new learner identities' (Scanlon et al, 2007: 237). I argue that one of the ways that students are making friends, particularly for first years at the start of university, is through participation in UDC which, whilst enjoyed by a majority, can be problematic for a number of students.

## **2.5. Intercultural Friendships at University**



McLaren suggests that 'friendship is a social relation that cuts across boundaries of family and kinship as well as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, class, sexual orientation, and gender open us up to others unlike ourselves' (2006: 200). University as a microcosm of society can introduce students to a wide range of people and provide the opportunity for a variety of friendships to develop, and as Hendrickson et al suggest – and as we have seen above – 'friendship is an extremely important component for individuals in satisfying deep personal and emotional needs' and can 'have a large impact on the lives of most people in most cultures' (2010: 2). Sias et al define intercultural friendship as characterised by differences between cultural values, languages, divergent meaning systems, and enduring stereotypes that individuals need to negotiate to 'gain unique cultural knowledge, broaden their perspectives, and break stereotypes' (2008: 2). However, in line with literature in this area (see: Hendrickson et al, 2010; Scharntner, 2015; Sias, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yoon et al, 2015), data from my research has shown that divides exist between students in terms of nationality, particularly where drinking cultures are involved as is discussed below. Henderickson et al point out that a number of studies (such as Bochner et al, 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Neri & Ville, 2008; Scharntner, 2015) identify that international students 'primary' friendship groups are mostly made up of co-national friends. However their study, which asked participants to 'give an exhaustive list of their whole friendship networks, where each friend was from, and the strength of each friendship', found that 'participants had a higher ratio of host nationals in their friendship networks than co-nationals' (2010: 9). They do acknowledge, however, that: participants may have weaker friendships with host-nationals as they were asked to list *all* of their friends, their sample of students had high English ability which reduces the possibility of language inhibiting friendship, and as the study was conducted in Hawaii, which is a unique 'pluralistic sociocultural' region with no evident dominant culture and 'individuals of Chinese and Japanese descent comprise a significant portion of the population that is potentially more receptive to Asian international students', this may have provided more opportunities for participations to 'develop relationships with local people' (Hendrickson, 2010: 9-10). My data

reflects that co-national friendship groups are most common, though not exclusive, and vice versa shows that 'home' (or host-national) students also tend to have friendship groups made up of other home students; this can also be related to the concept of 'homophily' that was introduced above (see Cronin, 2014; Spencer & Pahl, 2006).

Schartner also found that there were segregations between British and international students and that 'despite strong motivation to interact with host-nationals, students' expectations and aspirations to form ties with British people were largely disappointed' (2015: 231). She also found that international students had periods of loneliness and homesickness that caused them to retreat to 'the safety of compatriot circles' (Schartner, 2015: 232). International students compensated for the 'dearth of host contact' by forming bonds with other international students, resulting in a 'greater attachment to the community of international students, and participants seemed able to lead a fulfilling social life largely independent of the host community' (2015: 232). Schartner concludes by raising the question of 'whether host institutions [...] should put less emphasis on the integration of international students with host nationals, but instead encourage co-national friendships (2015: 238) because 'it is important that host institutions recognise the value of co-national bonds for international students' wellbeing and sense of belonging' (2015: 239). Sias et al also found that, in the US college context, for some of their respondents targeted and specialised socialising, such as attending events aimed only at international students, was important to friendship development and demonstrated 'the importance of structured intergroup activities to increasing the likelihood of friendships' (2008: 9). My data suggests that whilst targeted socialising events for international students can foster beneficial co-national friendships, they can also reduce the likelihood of intercultural friendship, particularly at the start of university when the majority of British students are attending the mainstream (and often 'drinking') events. Sias et al's finding that cultural differences can enhance, rather than hinder, friendship development as differences are

‘interesting and exciting’, and allow for the construction of a “third culture” and unique “relational identity” (2008: 9) that represent individual intercultural friendships would suggest that emphasis should perhaps be shared between encouraging both co-national and intercultural friendships.

However, my data found that university drinking cultures can be a limiting factor for intercultural friendships, particularly amongst British and Asian students (see also Piacentini & Banister, 2006). Yoon et al studied the decisions of Chinese adolescents in relation to alcohol consumption and found that it was comparatively less common amongst this group, that there is little to indicate that they are pursuing intoxication (as has been argued of British students, see above and Measham & Brain, 2005; Measham, 2006) and ‘uncontrolled drinking was commonly felt to be inappropriate’ (2015: 1234). Yoon et al state that, ‘a body of past qualitative studies acknowledge that alcohol drinking among adolescents does not occur uniformly and that cultures of alcohol consumption and regulation are socio-culturally differentiated practices’ (2015: 1232). This serves to reinforce that there is not a mono-drinking-culture, but different forms aligned with different contexts and cultures (see Grant & MacAvoy, 2011). Yoon et al also found that, amongst their participants, there was respect for those who chose not to drink and a valuing of individual choice, with drinking not necessarily representative of ‘an emblem of group membership’ (2015: 1234). However they found that, for those Chinese adolescents who did not drink, there was a feeling of discomfort with some participants reporting that ‘they developed strategies which helped them to rationalise not drinking [including] bringing their own soft drinks, circumstantial excuses such as feeling unwell or not being able to consume alcohol concurrent with Chinese medicine intake or just simply stating drink preferences’ (Yoon et al, 2015: 1235). This is in line with other literature on anti-consumption (see Piacentini & Banister, 2009) and abstention, a discussion of which can be seen below and as is considered

throughout this thesis in relation to students who resist, limit or abstain from UDC and who I argue are subject to dividing practices (Foucault, 1982).

## **2.6. Alcohol and Friendship**

Thurnell-Read suggests that rather than viewing the consumption of drugs and alcohol as an isolated, problematic behaviour of 'disparate, possibly deviant, individuals' it would be better analysed as a social and relational practice 'constituted and (re)formed by and through friendships, groups and spontaneously formed acquaintances' (2017: 339). For (some) students it seems that participation in university drinking cultures provides an opportunity to bond with friends and maintain friendships, but also allows them certain freedoms and an opportunity to enact a rite of passage emblematic of student social life. There are literatures which suggest that: peer settings (e.g. Overbeek et al, 2010; Seaman & Ikegwuonu, 2011), friendships (Fujimoto & Valente, 2012a), and 'normative behaviours' of others/peers (Fujimoto & Valente, 2012b; Katainen et al, 2014) can have influencing factors on drinking practices. Hackley et al, for example, suggest that for some young adults in the UK 'drinking heavily amongst friends is not merely a transient rite of passage between youth and adulthood but [...] is deeply implicated in young adults' phenomenological experiences of social life and "going out"' (2015: 2126). Sarah MacLean also argues that drinking is a friendship practice, stating that 'drinking together seems to enable friends to affirm their relationships through generating a different sociality to that which is possible when sober' (2016: 96). This is important for, as she asserts, 'to sustain a friendship we must continually constitute it by engaging in friendship making practices' (MacLean, 2016: 94). MacLean concludes by arguing 'that 'young adults' drinking should be understood rather as part of a broader social process; the contemporary constitution of friendship, which occurs through the continuous enactment of culturally – and historically – specific friendship-making practices' (2016: 102).

Niland et al also found that drinking was ‘a collective practice rather than an individual experience’ (2013: 531) and that pleasures of drinking included fun, enjoyment, feeling good, relaxing, and being sociable, ‘pleasure is *social*’ (2013: 531). Their participants drew on a discourse of ‘friendship fun’ and caring ‘to construct their drinking as a pleasurable friendship practice and to justify their drinking and drunkenness as everyday pleasurable socialising for friends’ with being drunk interpreted as ‘normalised social fun’ (Niland et al, 2013: 532-533). They posit that this discourse privileges drinking to intoxication as friendship caring and protection, where friends have responsibilities to care for and protect each other which was ‘evident in a deliberate positioning of the “good friend” when negative experiences were encountered’ (Niland et al, 2013: 534). They found that ‘even “bad” experiences are constructed in retrospect as pleasurable: as friends caring and protecting each other and having fun’ (Niland et al, 2013: 534). As was discussed earlier in this chapter, friendship is a catalyst for drinking, it ‘cements’ social bonds and allows time and space to ‘practice’ friendship. Niland et al found that the pleasure of drinking is so bound to friendship practices and fun for young people that ‘traditional harm-reduction messages [which] target individual young adult drinkers to make the decision to reduce their alcohol consumption [...] are effectively asking young adults to *break* strong and highly valued friendship bonds’ (2013: 536). This is also why ‘looking after your mates’ has become a familiar part of more contemporary harm reduction and personal safety campaigns, including a ‘Look After Your Mate’ campaign and workshop focused on aspects of the mental health issues affecting university students (see Student Minds, 2017), and a recent *Drinkaware* campaign that encourages young people to ‘Stay with your pack’ (Drinkaware, 2017b). Niland et al suggest that it would therefore be valuable for alcohol-harm reduction strategies to ‘further explore young adults’ drinking as a shared *social* practice that is pleasurable and undertaken within friendships’ (2013: 530), and move beyond the idea of individual bodily harms to ‘shared meanings of “caring and protection” within the context of drinking as a friendship practice’ (Niland et al, 2013: 535).

There is agreement that one of the pleasures of participating in drinking cultures is in the shared experiences and storytelling, and that this is one of the ways that young people make sense of drinking cultures (e.g. Bogren, 2014; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Fjaer, 2012; Fleetwood, 2014; Hackley et al, 2013; Hebden et al, 2015; Hutton et al, 2013; Katainen, 2014; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Thurnell-Read, 2017; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). As was suggested above in relation to Niland et al (2013) negative experiences can be reframed as a 'good' story. As Griffin et al state 'stories from the culture of intoxication are constructed as a route to inclusion within student social life, but also as providing material for that social life' (2009: 463). Tutenges and Sandberg found that drinking stories 'were used for a number of reasons, including for entertainment, to overcome distressing experiences, to put ethical dilemmas up for debate, to present "moral selves", to explore taboos and to strengthen friendship ties' (2013: 542). They also found that that some of their participants explicitly stated that part of their reasoning for heavy drinking was to 'build a repertoire of personal drinking stories' and that 'there is much to suggest their alcohol consumption was subtly motivated, inspired and guided by the drinking stories prevailing in their social environment' (Tutenges & Sandberg 2013: 543). Within my data this was typically constructed after the event, often during 'day after' deconstructions of the 'night before' and sometimes alongside photographs that were taken and that provide what I call 'night-out nostalgia'. Fjaer suggests that hangovers, and getting together the 'day after', mean that young people gather around stories and around food which offer space to laugh about, forgive, and provide closure on transgressions of the night before and can therefore be construed as 'a ritual transformation of negative emotions to positive ones' (2012: 1002).

Another theme that has emerged within my data is the role of friends as caregivers within university drinking cultures, and this is also a theme within the literature on young people and alcohol (see e.g. Armstrong et al, 2014a; Armstrong et al, 2014b; Chrzan, 2013; Frederiksen et

al, 2012; Lavery et al, 2015; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacLean, 2016; Niland et al, 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2017; Vander ven, 2011). Returning to MacLean's work, she found that devolving responsibility of their 'intoxicated selves' to friends allowed her participants to 'constitute these relationships as real and protective' (2016: 99). Chrzan also suggests that 'caring for drunk and disorderly friends is a means to practice care of others, learn new life management skills, gain confidence to handle problems and reason through appropriate and inappropriate interpersonal actions' (2013: 150). There are, however, gendered differences in regards to friends' caregiving, and in my own data I found that, generally, the young women expressed or alluded to feeling more vulnerable (see Lyons & Willott, 2008) and had a number of management strategies or 'risk rituals' (Moore & Burgess, 2011) already in place such as plans to get home safely, keeping their friendship group together, employing one group member as 'the mum', and stopping a friend getting 'too drunk' etc. Armstrong et al list a number of their (female) participants' strategies for managing risk as: safety in numbers, a 'group-based culture of helping', monitoring and modifying group members' intoxication and behaviour, keeping in contact via mobile phone, monitoring the crowd for disturbances, and consuming food and water (2014b: 755-757). In comparison young men would encourage each other to drink more or 'match pace' with the heaviest drinker in their group but were also protective of their friends (see also Burgess et al, 2009; Chrzan, 2011; Frederiksen et al, 2012; Levine et al, 2012; MacLean, 2016; Thurnell-Read, 2013). However, I found that in mixed groups there were often unspoken friendship agreements to try to stay together, get home safely, and prevent anyone becoming 'too drunk' but also, amongst my participants, young men were often given the 'responsibility' of warding off unwanted male attention from their female friends with many of the young women asserting that they felt safer on a night out with a male friend (see also Lyons & Willott, 2008;<sup>1</sup>). Armstrong et al suggest that this may be 'because men and women encounter different alcohol-related risks, use different protective strategies when drinking and belong to different alcohol cultures that influence their drinking experiences' (2014b: 751). They also found that

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<sup>1</sup> For analysis of 'GLBTIQ' young adults' experiences of unwanted sexual attention in pubs and clubs see Fileborn (2013).

for women, a sense of safety was felt in the knowledge that 'they would be taken care of by their friendship group' (2014b: 755). However, caregiving is also shown to potentially put a strain on friendships if individuals get too drunk and whilst friends come to expect that they should care for each other the 'provision of care must be managed carefully so not to intrude on the autonomy of either the friend who is cared for, or the friend who does the caring' (MacLean, 2016: 100; see also Niland et al, 2013). My data shows that for individuals who are often tasked with taking care of their friendship group, or another individual, their role can dissuade them from participation and lead to a feeling of 'growing tired' of being 'the responsible one'.

## **2.7. Social Media, Friendship and Alcohol**

As Lyons et al point out 'social media are a ubiquitous part of young people's everyday lives in Western societies' (2016: 1), and as has been indicated here drinking cultures are a normalised, central, everyday aspect of 'young people's social lives' (Griffin et al, 2009: 458) and theorists have analysed their roles (see e.g. Barnes, 2016; Boyle et al, 2017; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Bryant & Marmo; 2012; Hebden et al, 2015; Hutton et al, 2015; MacLean, 2016; McCreanor et al, 2013; Niland, 2017). As Barnes et al state 'social media contribute to the expansion, amplification and durability of drinking events, linking different drinking groups and locations in real time and creating new virtual intoxicogenic spaces within drinking cultures' (2016: 71). There is also research that suggests social networking sites are 'saturated with material encouraging the heavy alcohol consumption among university students (Hebden et al, 2015: 224) and that online exposure, via social networking sites, to friends' 'risky' behaviour can be an influencing factor for drinking and smoking amongst adolescents (Huang et al, 2012: 512). Lyons et al studied the prevalence of 'drinking photos' amongst young people and found that their participants used 'Facebook to organize drinking events, connect with others while they were drinking, and share drinking photos' (2016: 5). Lyons et al found that 'young women become the custodians of the memories that pictures encode' as photo-taking and sharing is coded as 'feminine' (2016: 5). They did find, however, that there is value for young men and women in



having drinking photos on Facebook and whilst young men distance 'themselves from the notion that they may become an image to be consumed', young women's 'meaning-making' around these practices disrupt constructions of traditional gender dichotomies such as 'men as active/women as passive, man as subject/women as object' as the young women 'construct their take up of Facebook photo-sharing affordances as active (they produce the image), themselves as both subject and object, and as being in control of their own identity performances' (Lyons et al, 2016: 10). My data has shown however that some students, particularly younger students, are turning to the instant-photo sharing app Snapchat as a less permanent alternative to Facebook - with 'Snapchats' lasting a maximum of 10 seconds, or 24 hours if shared as a 'story'. Boyle et al, in the US college context, also suggest that students are turning away from Facebook towards Instagram, which can 'airbrush' and 'glamourize' alcohol use, and Snapchat which assures 'students that there will be no lasting proof of their alcohol misuse and embarrassing negative consequences [...as] Snapchat accounts do not require any identity or age verification, minimizing potential legal and social consequences associated with positing images of underage drinking' (2017: 65-66). Whilst it is more likely for UK students to be of legal-alcohol-limit age, they do have concerns for their futures and show awareness that Facebook can often be seen by potential future employers. As Niland et al state, by celebrating their drinking cultures and lifestyles on social networking sites (SNSs), young people can reveal them to wider audiences such as parents, family, employers and the police, they state that 'the consequences of having one's hedonistic displays of excess more broadly depicted to such "audiences"/"publics" complicate the notion of SNS's as an autonomous place of self-expression and (re)introduce a range of different power dynamics that young people must actively negotiate' (2014: 61-62).

However, Niland et al recognise another function of Facebook within drinking cultures, that of marketing. They suggest that 'the alcohol industry embeds marketing "inside" young adults'

online friendship activities, and becomes obscured, taken up, or rejected within these practices' (2017: 281). Niland et al found that social media can reinforce alcohol marketing as 'part of the fun, pleasure and socializing of alcohol consumption' (2017: 282) but also that alcohol venue marketing appeared more effective in 'infiltrating young people's social media activities' (2017: 281). They conclude that 'alcohol venues engage with young adults within their drinking occasions and experiences and this is a highly effective way to infiltrate their everyday socialising, is less subject to regulation, and less likely to be seen as marketing' (Niland et al, 2017: 281). This is interesting in relation to my observations of the increased use of social media not only by student venues (such as university bars, clubs etc.) but by official university pages (such as universities themselves, academic departments and students' unions). Particularly in Freshers' week, Facebook pages are being used to disseminate information about events including drinking and non-drinking events, but all aid in building a picture (and expectations) of what the 'student experience' is and, often, that alcohol has a place within it. This can also be linked to the difficulty of disseminating harm reduction messages in the face of a tide of online alcohol promotions, both in terms of marketing and in terms of normalisation amongst students and young people.

## **2.8. Harm Reduction**

Young people are notoriously difficult to reach with harm reduction information (see Spencer, 2013) and a plethora of research exists with suggestions for interventions, campaigns and methods to reach young people, this also forms part of Chapter Six: 'How do Students Perceive and Manage the Effects of University Drinking Cultures'. Examples of harm reduction include, for example, alcohol server training and 'responsible alcohol service' (Boiler et al, 2011: 1576), perceived injunctive norms and actual attitudinal norms (Pedersen et al, 2017), social norms (see Chung & Rimal, 2016; John & Alwyn, 2014; Moore et al, 2016; Stock et al, 2016), practice-oriented public health policy (Blue et al, 2014), informal sanctions (Kelley, 2017), low-risk

drinking guidelines (see De Visser & Birch, 2012; Stockwell, 2012; Thompson et al, 2012), campus and community coalition (Newman et al, 2006), college alcohol citations (Hustad et al, 2011), individualised and personalised feedback (Marley et al, 2016; Walters et al, 2000), and media messages (Elmore et al, 2017). One theory that has been the subject of much recent interest is social norms, defined by Chung and Rimal as 'customary rules that constrain behaviour by eliciting conformity' (2016: 3). They suggest that the area of research on social norms stems from the idea that 'individuals' behaviours and attitudes are shaped, in part, by the behaviours and attitudes of others in their social midst' and are conceptualised as properties of individuals (perceived norms) and social groups (collective norms) (Chung & Rimal, 2016: 3). Social science definitions of social norms 'share a common theme of explaining norms as collective awareness about the preferred, appropriate behaviours among a certain group of people' (Chung & Rimal, 2016: 3). Social norm theory has then, been applied to drinking cultures as a potential for interventions and is currently in use by the NUS in its *Alcohol Impact* initiative (see NUS Alcohol Impact, 2017), as was outlined in Chapter One. For example, Stock et al in discussing the harmful consumption of alcohol and drugs by adolescents in Denmark, suggest that misperceptions of peer alcohol use can have the serious consequence of individuals striving to match the perceived norm amongst their peers (2016: 2). They suggest that the social norms approach 'works on the premise that if misperceptions about a group norm are challenged, the social pressure on the individual to behave in the respective risky manner will decrease and result in the promotion of more positive, healthy behaviour' (Stock et al, 2016: 2). The social norms approach is different, they state, because it is not moralistic or reliant upon negativity or fear and aims instead to 'empower individuals through promoting informed decision making' and 'focusing on the positive behaviour of the majority, rather than on the negative behaviour of the minority' (Stock et al, 2016: 2). They suggest that, overall, evidence is convincing that the social norms approach is effective in reducing the use of alcohol and other drugs in adolescents and young adults and they aim to further trial its use (Stock et al, 2016: 6-7). Moore et al also studied social norms and how people judge their levels of drunkenness

whilst intoxicated and found that ‘people are more influenced by those who are more sober than them, relative to those who are more intoxicated’ and that, whilst intoxicated in a drinking setting, ‘people are influenced by the actual rather than the imagined behaviour of others’ (2016: 6). They suggest that this goes against the social norms model which uses sober participants and finds that ‘people tend to underestimate their relative drinking, suggesting a greater focus on those who drink more’ (Moore et al, 2016: 6). They therefore propose that it may be beneficial to encourage a ‘mix of consumers in drinking environments’ and ‘capable guardians’ such as street pastors (Or Street Angels – see below) who could act as ‘sober comparators with which at risk drinkers could compare themselves’ (Moore et al, 2016: 7). Marley et al found that personalised social norms feedback through a web-based intervention could facilitate change within an individual (2016: 1019). They found that, in their study, feedback on individuals’ personal behaviour could challenge common misperceptions about student alcohol consumption, and ‘create an opportunity for students to reflect on their own behaviour and its relationship to their peers’ (Marley et al, 2016: 1021).

However, social norms theory has also had criticism as John and Alwyn found that ‘social normative interventions are not effective in reducing excessive levels of alcohol consumption in UK universities’ (2014: 1826). Chung and Rimal also highlight that individuals often identify with multiple groups, each of which can inform ‘a different version of “self” that is dependent on the social context’ (2016: 4). They also state that although norms are powerful, they do not always affect behaviours as ‘people do not act solely on the basis of what others are doing in a given situation – they also act defiantly, refusing to go along with the clear majority’ (Chung & Rimal, 2016: 10). However, we have seen the importance of friendship amongst the participants in this study and Chung & Rimal highlight that ‘norms emanating from close others are more predictive of behaviour than those from distal others’ (2016: 11). Szmigin et al also suggest that ‘government alcohol policy approaches which, in a neo-liberal vein, locate responsibility with

the individual, fail to engage with the sociality of young people's drinking and [...] lack the empathetic approach advocated by contextualism' (2011: 775). With the prevalent and normative nature of university drinking cultures, there are expectations for behaviour which can become a cyclical pattern between older students and new students (see Chapter Four), so perhaps elements of social norms interventions could be beneficial on university campuses with reiterations that it is also 'normal' not to drink. However, my data has added to the literature that suggests young people do not engage with harm reduction information (see De Visser & Birch, 2012; Harrison et al, 2011; Hutton, 2012; Spencer, 2013) and further suggests that students often see university as their 'time' to have fun, particularly in their first year where, in some universities, they need to pass their course but marks do not count towards degree classification.

As Hutton advises, 'harm reduction initiatives that focus on cultural, social, economic and personal effects often fail to engage with young people's pleasure seeking, risky behaviours' (2012: 230) as students pursue a 'state of intoxication because it is pleasurable and fun' (2012: 234). However, she found that whilst there are inherent difficulties in producing harm reduction information for young people it is still a 'valuable strategy' in addressing excessive drinking amongst young people and materials can 'influence ongoing decisions about drinking and safety' (Hutton, 2012: 234). She further highlights that for harm reduction to be successful there must be a level of consciousness from the recipient that 'may be gender specific' (Hutton, 2012: 234). One element that resonated somewhat with some of my participants was that of 'units' and drinking guidelines, particularly following: informative demonstrations at Freshers' Fair, being given free unit measuring jugs, and following signing up to their new doctor's surgery at university. This is important, for as has been established above, students often engage in practices of pre-drinking in student accommodation and so will be pouring their own drinks and, as De Visser and Birch outline, 'most people [...] misperceive the alcohol content of

the drinks they pour for themselves' (2012: 206). For the students in my study, whilst they had some knowledge of units and drinking guidelines, and were initially shocked by doctor's assessments of what would be 'safe limits' of alcohol consumption, it was often not followed in practice with, once again, issues of social reputation, friendship, and a pursuit of intoxication prioritised. As Measham points out, 'although most young adults know about units of alcohol and many can recall recommended sensible drinking levels, this does not necessarily mean that they then apply them to regulate their own consumption levels on a night out' (2006: 262).

De Visser et al have also discussed intervention methods and participants responses to them. Their participants described an awareness of a societal expectation to drink alcohol, with a desire to avoid stigmatisation as boring or unusual and with use of alcohol cited as aiding in: the overcoming of shyness, lowering inhibitions, and socialising. However, De Visser et al found that, similar to the assertions of Brown & Gregg (2012) and Niland et al (2013) the good often outweigh the bad in drinking cultures, as the 'shared social identities help people positively re-frame negative drinking outcomes as positive social bonding outcomes' (2013: 1467). An example of a negative aspect of drinking is the consequential hangovers, and De Visser et al find that, though this could be used as a focus for campaigns the 'undeniably physical aspects of a hangover [...] are countered by the positive social aspects of shared suffering' (2013: 1467). Further, similar to the caregiving arguments outlined above (see e.g. Armstrong et al, 2014a; Armstrong et al, 2014b; Chrzan, 2013; Frederiksen et al, 2012; Laverty et al, 2015; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacLean, 2016; Niland et al, 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2017; Vander ven, 2011), De Visser et al found that 'caring for others and being cared for when drunk offer opportunities to display and strengthen friendship' and therefore drinking can be important in making and strengthening friendships (2013: 1466). However, De Visser et al later note that caring for friends can also become a social burden (2013: 1468). They also note that there are gender 'double-standards' for alcohol consumption (as is discussed in detail below) and these can lead

to concerns about reputation, that 'concerns about safety were more influential than health concerns', that young people go through a process of othering in relation to drunken behaviour, and that shocking graphic images may be disregarded as their participants were already aware of the undesirability and unhealthy nature of excessive alcohol consumption but still enjoyed it (De Visser et al, 2013: 1468-1471). Finally, they suggest that their participants 'did not engage with messages because they were patronising' and that to avoid young people rebelling against them 'public health interventions should provide advice and leave choice about alcohol consumption to individuals' (De Visser et al, 2013: 1472).

As Griffin et al suggest 'within the harm minimization model, only rational, civilized and above all moderate drinking is constituted as unproblematic, so drinking to intoxication cannot be linked to pleasure or to subjects of moral worth within discourses of liberal governance' (2009: 461). Hackley et al found that their data suggested 'that transgressions of official norms and rules is an inherent part of counter-cultural alcohol consumption for some groups, and therefore alcohol policy messages that ostensibly seek to dissuade targeted groups from engaging in certain drinking practices, may unwittingly contribute to the discursive constitution of those very practices' (2015: 2129). As Hackley et al identify harm reduction and government campaigns are problematic in that 'they fail to engage with the lived experience of young people who have to try to forge a sense of identity within a cultural environment with deeply conflicting values around alcohol' and with opportunities that are bounded by, and revolve around, alcohol consumption as the UK night time is proliferated by drinking venues (2013: 943). They also suggest that campaigns add a 'transgressive force to the extreme drinking culture they are intended to counter', which they found in their Bakhtinian analysis of young people's accounts of the role of alcohol (Hackley et al, 2013: 944). Hackley et al state that their analysis highlights the cultural contradiction of young people's extreme drinking and transgressive pleasures. Their participants described experiences that are 'usually

uncomfortable, unhealthy, expensive, [...] embarrassing, not to mention troublesome to parents, police, club owners, and other public services' and with the potential to damage a young person's future but positive in their 'transgressive resonance as mass expressions of carnival, as countercultural expressions of putative freedom from social norms that are constituted as oppressive or lacking in fun and a sense of freedom (Hackley et al, 2013: 944). Whilst gimmicks and in-situ interventions observed as part of this research were effective, in getting students to drink bottles of water, eat free sweets and wear stickers before entering a student nightclub, they were seemingly effective because of their immediacy, lack of judgement, and proximity to the nightclub, serving to catch students between venues, and this is not sustainable in the long term for (at the very least) university and union budgets (although there are Christian groups, such as *Street Angels* and *Club Angels*, UK-wide that perform a similar function on a regular basis).

It is also worth noting in relation to 'intervening' that universities were, up until moves to change it in 2015, following the 1994 Zellick report guidelines which sought to advise universities on how to deal with student offences and protect higher education institutions from 'legal challenges and loss of reputation' (NUS, 2015) and which also advocated universities having relationships with police for advice on crime (Zellick, 1994: 12). The report stated that universities were justified to assert disciplinary jurisdiction because the community environment requires 'certain standards of behaviour' and universities have a duty of care and responsibility in upholding certain values, they are also 'entitled to protect and defend their good names and reputations' (Zellick, 1994: 5). However, in 2015 the guidelines were called 'inadequate' (NUS, 2015) particularly in relation to the guidelines on sexual violence which state that internal investigation by the university is 'out of the question' (Zellick, 1994: 12) unless it has been investigated by the police and the outcome is known, and in 2016 a Universities UK (UUK) taskforce reconsidered the guidelines and rejected them (see UUK, 2016). The NUS



suggest that as students are recognised as consumers ‘the handling of incidents of student misconduct and the imposition of disciplinary sanctions must therefore be seen in the context of the contractual relationship between the university and the student’ (2016: 2). The UUK taskforce recommend that universities should ‘promote and reinforce positive behaviour within the student population’ and there are several steps that can be taken to achieve this including: facilitating a zero tolerance culture and ‘making use of evidence-based bystander initiative programmes’, partnership working with university staff, police, specialist services and community leaders to prevent and respond to ‘violence against women, harassment and hate crime’ and support students (UUK, 2016: 5). They also found that the evidence ‘underlined the importance of having visible and accessible reporting mechanisms in place for students, as well as staff who are appropriately trained and sufficiently aware of the support available to students, both on and off campus’ (UUK, 2016: 5). This review further raised concerns about the guidance available to universities on managing student criminal behaviour and guidance on ‘how to handle alleged student misconduct which may also constitute a criminal offence’ was also released by UUK in partnership with Pinsent Masons LLP (2016). These new guidelines recommend that universities publish codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures and disciplinary regulations (UUK & Pinsent Masons LLP, 2016: 2) and that support, advice and assistance should be accessible to students involved in incidents, particularly those who are reporting incidents or those who are accused (UUK & Pinsent Masons LLP, 2016: 4). UUK have also made available case studies, and examples of good practice, from universities as they have begun to evolve (see UUK, 2017).

My data suggests that whilst students could often recall seeing drink safety, or harm reduction campaigns, and, whilst they were comfortable suggesting potential future directions for such campaigns, they were also clear that they were unlikely to pay too much attention as they were

often so confident in 'knowing their own limits' and trusting themselves, their friends, and some university services. The next section moves on to consider this in greater detail.

## **2.9. Students' Management of University Drinking Cultures; 'Risk Rituals' and their Relation to Harm Reduction**

As was discussed at the start of this chapter in relation to drinking practices, there are a number of risks associated with excessive drinking and sustained drinking (see e.g. Avci & Fenrich, 2010; Boiler et al, 2011; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Kelley, 2017; Moore et al, 2016; Norberg et al, 2011; Palfai et al, 2011; Park, 2004; Quigg et al, 2013; Ramsdedt et al, 2013; Stock et al, 2016). For example, Bowring et al state that 'alcohol consumption by young people is often characterised by periodic heavy drinking over short periods of time leading to increased risk of adverse outcomes, such as accidents, physical injury, road trauma, alcohol poisoning, memory loss, aggression and violence, self-harm and sexual risk-taking' (2012: 213). As we have also seen in the section above there are a variety of ways that have been proposed to intervene and prevent and reduce harm. However, as was also seen above, students do not always engage with such measures and this section, along with Chapter Six, examines how students manage UDC including through, I argue, management strategies and 'risk rituals'. Moore and Burgess state that rituals are important and worthy of study:

"risk rituals" have a dynamic independent of the risks they ostensibly attenuate. They are behavioural adaptations to perceived risks or uncertainties that become embedded in daily practices. They are practices that are comfortably absorbed into everyday routines, and, like habitual behaviour more generally, this often means that the efficacy of the practice in allaying risk is unlikely to be the subject of reflection or scrutiny (Moore and Burgess, 2011: 113-114).

The ways in which students are managing university drinking cultures is under scrutiny here (see Chapter Six), particularly as I argue this is one of the reasons why harm reduction campaigns have little impact on them as they have their own methods for safety and risk aversion. Moore and Burgess suggest that their participants developed 'risk rituals' in relation to drink spiking out of concern with 'drug-facilitated sexual assault', but did not direct this concern to the 'risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption' despite it being 'the more important' risk factor for sexual assault (2011: 113) (see also Burgess et al, 2009). They argue that 'risk rituals' are 'entrenched social practices' that involve 'repeated checking' and an 'unconscious attempt to enforce a sense of personal control', which are 'easily absorbed into unconscious daily routines to become an unquestioned aspect of life' (Moore & Burgess, 2011: 116). 'Risk rituals' are often made up of the most convenient risk aversion strategies which may not be the most effective but foster 'a feeling that one is "doing all that one can"', and play a 'role in dissipating feelings of uncertainty and/or affirming group norms and cultural motifs' (Moore & Burgess, 2011: 116-119). Moore and Burgess further state that there are two categories of "risk rituals", those that are driven by social pressures that reflect 'prevailing social conditions' and 'are based on the moral imperative that one should "do one's bit"', and those that are 'self-orientated and self-protective' reflect another moral pressure 'to foster a commitment to take care of oneself' (2011: 120). I argue that this can also be related to the harm reduction initiatives considered in the previous section which often appeal to the individual to keep themselves safe, be responsible for their own actions (see Measham, 2006; Niland et al, 2013), and often their friends in line with the caregiving literature discussed above; this is often highly gendered as the next section goes on to consider.

I now turn, briefly, to consider risk and young people, which is another of vast area of literature. Bunton et al suggest that 'risk appears to have become central to our understanding of childhood and adolescence' and that young people have been framed as 'risky' where they were

previously regarded as 'dangerous' or 'trouble' (2004a: 1). Concern for young people, and the risks they encounter 'reflects a general concern for their continued well-being in relation to a number of potential threats' and assumes that risk-taking is irrational and in need of intervention (Bunton et al, 2004a: 2). Seabrook and Green, however, suggest that for the young girls they studied there were perceptions that 'certain times and spaces [were] risky and thus their own position/place in time and space was continually under self-surveillance' (2004: 140) (see also Duff, 2010). In a similar sense, my participants constructed certain times and spaces as riskier than others, for some this was being inside a nightclub, for others this was leaving the club and getting home safely, although they did have their own methods for dealing with this; this was definitely gendered, however, with female participants far more concerned about personal safety. As Bunton et al suggest, young people can 'often reject "objective" definitions of risk behaviour in favour of constructing their own "risk hierarchies"' and negotiate risk in gender specific ways (2004b: 164). They also state that their participants' definitions of risk could be grouped into seven different criteria: 'taking chances, getting or not getting caught, health/lifestyle risks, getting into trouble, pursuing pleasure, being in danger and doing something bad' and risk can be positive or negative (Bunton et al, 2004b: 165;172). Miles also suggests experience of life in a risk society (see Beck, 1992) for young people is often constructed as entirely negative with an 'alarming tendency to imply that young people [...] are powerless victims of that society' (2002: 58). He argues that young people are not passive and 'actively engage with the power structures that surround them and [...] often such structures are a positive force for change in their own lives' (Miles, 2002: 58). Finally, Worbe et al state that 'the evaluation of risk is ubiquitous in daily life [...] we weigh our options based on potential probabilities of good or harm [...] and influenced by our personal experiences' (2014: 717). This can also be related to the way in which Fjær et al suggest that normative regulations of drunken behaviour 'must be understood at the individual, situational, and cultural level; on the one hand, the way people perceive and evaluate a situation reflects their previous experiences in different situations, on the other, the situations are embedded in culturally

meaningful drinking practices that are generated and developed by participants' (2016: 31). My participants actively engaged with UDC with knowledge of the potential risks listed above, and whilst such risks are negative in nature they have practices of risk avoidance that they would describe as common sense such as staying with their group of friends (safety in numbers), planning how they will get home and 'knowing' and sticking to their own 'limit' of alcohol consumption (see also Macneela & Bredin, 2010). As such they re-frame risks as manageable, drawing on previous (successful) experiences as evidence of such.

Other literature also studies the self-efficacy of young people to manage drinking cultures, and suggests that they have knowledge of, and understand, the risks and potential harms that may result from excessive alcohol consumption, but this may not prevent them from doing it (see Bowring et al, 2012; Zajdow & MacLean, 2014). For example Rosenberg et al found that of their participants, 'the typical respondent felt at least moderately confident he/she could engage in multiple specific harm reduction strategies while drinking' (2011: 741). They also note that such alcohol-related harm reduction strategies could include, eating before drinking, using a designated driver after drinking, avoiding drinking games, and reducing the quantity, frequency or speed of drinking (Rosenberg et al, 2011: 736). Zajdow and MacLean suggest that young adults understand and willingly engage in the 'instability at the heart of intoxication' and aim for 'a sensory state [...] between being tipsy and drunk, while acknowledging that this point is unstable and that they frequently find themselves more drunk than they wanted' (2014: 523). They further suggest that 'intoxication is experienced, performed, and managed simultaneously and inextricably by the rational thinking about self and the body, and hence that both pleasure and risk management are embodied social practices. For example, intoxication is generally sensed through internal affective states rather than counting standard drinks' (Zajdow & MacLean, 2014: 523). This relates to the assertion above that students are not following unit guidelines when pouring their own drinks. It also relates to my data which suggests that

students are often confident in 'knowing their own limits', *feeling* when they have had too much (see also Bailey et al, 2015; Macneela & Bredin, 2010) and learning this through (often negative) experience. As Zajdow and Maclean found, 'many young adults don't actually want to become intoxicated to the point where they have no control; rather they seek a state between tipsy and drunk where they may enjoy a certain loosening of the constraints of selfhood, without altogether abandoning their rational and responsible capabilities' (2014: 532). They suggest that this could actually be used to educate young people, if they share stories of how they 'know' they have had too much and 'reinforce people's efforts to monitor how intoxicated they *feel*' (Zajdow & MacLean, 2014: 533; see also Griffin et al, 2012). As young people have cited a preference not to be patronised by harm reduction information (see De Visser et al, 2013; Spencer, 2013) and as they potentially learn from established students (see Chapter Four; see also Willsher, 2010) this could also hold resonance for students.

## **2.10. Gender, Alcohol and 'Lad Culture'**

Above I have considered risks and harm reduction, and it is clear that the experiences of these two things are highly gendered. The experiences of university drinking cultures amongst my participants have also been gendered. This section therefore goes on to consider the gendered elements of drinking cultures that literature has identified alongside those I have encountered in the process of this research. These include the recent proliferation of 'lad culture' (see: Jackson, 2010; Jackson et al, 2015; Lewis et al, 2016; Nichols, 2016; Phipps, 2016; Phipps et al, 2017; Phipps & Young, 2014; Phipps & Young, 2015), gendered forms of responsibility (see: Armstrong et al, 2014a; Armstrong et al, 2014b; Brooks, 2011; Laverty et al, 2015; RÚDÓLFSDÓTTIR & Morgan, 2009) and how young women negotiate conflicting views of femininity and cultures of intoxication (see: Bailey et al, 2015; Griffin et al, 2012; Hutton et al, 2013; Hutton et al, 2015; Jackson & Tinkler, 2007; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Macneela & Bredin, 2010; Nicholls, 2016).

For young women participation in drinking cultures appears to be full of contradictions (see Griffin et al, 2012) particularly as their consumption is 'catching up with that of their male peers' (Bailey et al, 2015: 747). Griffin et al, for example, suggest that:

Young women are called on to "have fun" *as if* they are "free" and "liberated" subjects, and *as if* pervasive sexual double standards have faded away. They are extorted to enjoy the pleasures of the post-feminist masquerade within the culture of intoxication *as if* the risks and dangers associated with being visibly drunk [...] can be dealt with without recourse to feminist critique – or the presence of a boyfriend. More than this, young women are called on to operate *as if* they were unaware of the illusory and unstable nature of the promise of freedom, fun and empowered sexuality offered by hyper-sexual femininity and the culture of intoxication. Our work indicates that young women *are* aware of the illusory nature of this promise, as well as the unstable character of respectable femininity and the continued existence of the sexual double standard. They *do* manage to inhabit this impossible space in which pleasure and danger are locked in a dangerous and alluring embrace (Griffin et al, 2012: 198).

In related research Bailey et al found that young women are in an 'impossible dilemma' of being called upon to adopt positions of excess in relation to drinking and hyper-sexual femininity when they are 'still constituted in derogatory ways', serving to 'render young women's negotiation of contemporary femininity as fraught with anxieties and dilemmas' (2015: 754). Jackson and Tinkler suggest that 'an important dimension of young women's hedonism is its public visibility. Both the modern girl and ladette are presented as occupying space outside the traditional feminine domestic space, and crucially, as taking space once regarded the principal or sole preserve of men' (2007: 254). Ladettes, they suggest, are commonly portrayed in relation to alcohol and presented as 'a cause for concern in relation to crime and social order [relating] to alcohol consumption and operate at two levels: that ladettes no longer act as caretakers of men, and that ladettes commit crime' (Jackson & Tinkler, 2007: 260). Ladettes are

seen as transgressing normative femininity (Jackson & Tinkler, 2007: 262). Women who are seen to transgress 'feminine norms' through alcohol consumption could therefore be seen to be 'deviant' in a Foucauldian sense, similar to young people being framed as 'deviant' for drinking associated behaviours (see Lavery et al, 2015).

A process of othering can therefore be perceived within drinking cultures (see Griffin et al, 2012; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Hutton et al, 2015; Nicholls, 2016). Griffin et al, for example, found that, amongst their participants, young women 'distanced themselves from the troubling figure of unfeminine, irresponsible female drinkers through a process of classed othering' (2012: 195) (see also Nicholls, 2012). Hutton et al refer to this as 'positioned othering' as young women 'place themselves in opposition to these drunk, slutty and out of control others' (2015: 75). They state that this 'positioned othering' is puzzling when young women describe their engagement in similar practices of drunken excess, 'however, it could be argued that young women distance themselves from such "unfeminine" practices precisely *because* they engage in them themselves' (Hutton et al, 2015: 81). However, they also suggest that 'intoxication can give young women the courage to enact [...] different kinds of drunken femininities' helping young women to 'transgress the boundaries of "respectable" femininities' (Hutton et al, 2015: 84). Nicholls, however, suggests that it may be valuable to consider that 'women might remain constrained in their ability to redefine femininities, particularly in the highly gendered and heterosexualised spaces of the [night-time economy], where they remain subject to a number of competing and contradictory scripts regarding "appropriate" dress and behaviour' (2016: 79). She also argues that 'imitating masculine drinking practices – particularly to enhance heterosexual desirability – is unlikely to be liberating for women and fails to challenge gender norms or assign more positive meanings to female drinking in its own right' (Nicholls, 2016: 88).



However, in terms of the risks of drinking cultures, as discussed above, young women are often represented, and construct themselves, as vulnerable. Nicholls posits that there is a contradiction in how the 'night-time economy' is conceptualised as both 'a site of female pleasure, empowerment, sexual agency, independence and bonding [...] and also as a key site of regulation in which women are expected to conform in appearance and behaviour to certain modes of heterosexual femininity [...] and manage risk in spaces that carry the threat of male violence' (2012: 17). Griffin et al found that one of the challenges young women face in the 'culture of intoxication' is 'dealing with drunken men' (2012: 191). They state that within this discursive frame of alcohol being constituted as responsible for men's sexual approaches, young women are constituted as relatively passive and 'saying a polite "no thank you" is likely to be ignored. This has wider implications in the light of recent research evidence on alcohol and rape indicating that some men target drunken women who are then held responsible for their own victimisation' (2012: 193). This can also be seen in harm reduction information and campaigns that hold women personally responsible for preventing violence against them (see Brooks, 2011; Brown & Gregg, 2012; RÚDÓLFSDÓTTIR & Morgan, 2009). Hutton et al relate this to the neo-liberalistic emphasis on individualism, responsibility and construction of 'self', stating that individuals are asked to 'manage' uncertainty and risk in late modernity and that 'this ignores risk as being unevenly distributed throughout societies and that structural factors such as gender, race, and class still have enormous power to constrain and shape people's social worlds' (2013: 454). They also suggest that while raising awareness of potential serious harms from drinking is important, 'harm discourses and images that proclaim that the inevitable end to a night's drinking is assault, humiliation, and rape may not find points of resonance with young women when most drunken evenings end perfectly well and are experienced as good fun' (Hutton, 2013: 473). Similar to assertions above that students engage in self-management techniques, 'risk rituals' and caregiving, Armstrong et al state that caregiving was 'at the heart of women's protective behaviours' as 'women frequently expressed a sense of safety derived from the knowledge that they would be taken care of by their friendship group' preferring this to

reducing their consumption levels (2014b, 755 - 759). They state that, as with my participants, the Australian women they spoke to were aware of risks that accompanied their alcohol use but that no risk seemed to dissuade their drinking as they preferred to drink *and* employ 'a multitude of protective strategies to mitigate the negative effects of intoxication' (Armstrong et al, 2014b: 759).

One element that has been particularly prolific in UK university contexts, and of recent academic and media interest, is that of lad culture (see Jackson et al, 2015; Lewis; 2016; Nichols, 2016; NUS, 2013; Phipps, 2016; Phipps & Young, 2014; Phipps & Young, 2015; Phipps et al, 2017) and laddism more broadly has also been of academic interest (Dempster, 2009; Dempster, 2011; Jackson, 2002; Jackson, 2010). Laddish behaviours have been linked to alcohol consumption, for example Dempster found that his participants 'highlighted how alcohol consumption fuelled incidences of laddishness, and they also noted that levels of consumption were often used as a means of determining who was worthy of the title "lad"' (2011: 638) (see also Dempster, 2009). However, he also noted that engagements with laddism were 'fraught with tension' and 'although many drew upon facets of laddishness in gender performances, few chose to identify with the "lads" label' (Dempster, 2011: 638) noting their 'ability to "slip" into laddishness in predominantly or exclusively male groupings on nights out, recognising their laddishness as socially situated, fluid, and contextually bound' (2011: 648). Jackson suggests that laddish behaviours start before university with "'laddish" anti-school cultures' serving as potential 'self-worth protection strategies' (2002: 47). In later research Jackson identified that teachers commonly described laddish performances of masculinities in schools as 'group behaviours; attention seeking; competition; (publicly) prioritising sport over academic work; avoidance of overt academic work; disruptive behaviours; and lack of respect for authority' (2010: 509). Extending this to the university context, Jackson, Dempster and Pollard found that 'lads' were typically characterised as 'loud and attention-seeking, confident, into sport, popular,

jokers, often heavy drinkers and sexually promiscuous' (2015: 303). Also, relating to the earlier section on transitioning to university, Warin and Dempster suggest that laddishness is 'an easy, comfortable form of social currency in the early days of university where a key goal is to fit in and be accepted amongst a friendship group and where the biggest anxiety is to end up lonely' although the transitional and temporary nature of this was also noted (2007: 901). Perhaps lad culture is a manifestation of the time-restricted 'freedom' of attending university that is a consideration throughout this thesis.

Phipps and Young further suggest that whilst laddism is only one of a variety of masculinities and whilst the 'banter', groping, sexism, and pressure that their female respondents reported were extreme there was still a 'feeling that these dominated the social and sexual side of university life' (2015a: 472). Phipps and Young also found that their participants described sexual harassment and violence as 'a normal part of university life' with sexism trivialised through the use of humour, irony and 'banter' (2015b: 311; see also NUS, 2013). Phipps therefore suggests that the types of sexist banter that 'spills over into sexual harassment [...] cannot and should not be interpreted using the same idea of alienation and resistance that are pertinent to discussions of classroom-based laddism' (2016: 9). This laddish sexism of white, middle class men can be, she argues, 'a reassertion of superiority in reaction to perceived or real lost privilege' (Phipps, 2016: 11). Participants in my study have related experiencing incidents of lad culture and 'banter', and though they did not always name it thusly there was clearly a culture of awareness, protective strategies (Armstrong et al, 2014a, 2014b), and caregiving surrounding drinking spaces in particular. My participants have also indicated that banter is difficult to challenge because it is framed as humour (see also Nichols, 2016). However, there are recent advances that have challenged the generalisation and homogenisation of terms such as lad culture, rape culture, and everyday sexism (see Phipps et al, 2017). Nichols, for example, introduces the idea of 'mischievous masculinities' in an attempt to provide greater flexibility

and acknowledge 'the myriad ways in which men de/construct and re-negotiate laddish identities throughout the different stages of their lives' and 'account for life course perspectives' and explores how men have agency, reflexivity and self-awareness which 'laddism' does not account for (2016: 8-10). There have also been suggestions that in response to lad culture there has been an increase of feminist activity (see Phipps & Young, 2015b; Lewis et al, 2016). Lewis et al found that 'despite the dangers of campus lad cultures, as well as the wider environment of everyday sexism, women in our research demonstrated that universities are also places of feminist growth and activity' (2016: 12). They found that against the 'encroaching neo-liberalism' in university environments, the women in their study demonstrated that they were able to 'carve out "safe spaces" in universities, to engage in counter-hegemonic activities, politics and personal growth' (Lewis et al, 2016: 12).

### **2.11. Anti-Consumption and Abstinence**

With the above confirming that drinking cultures are an everyday part of life for young people, what does this mean for young people who divert from this 'norm'? There is comparatively less research on those who do not drink, but findings from this thesis suggest that they are worthy of study as they highlight the 'norms' and the exclusive nature of university drinking cultures. As Thurnell-Read suggests 'amongst a group that readily defines their sociality around drinking of alcohol, non-drinkers might be seen to not "fit in" with the group identity and, as such, be conspicuously marginalised' (2017: 347). It could also be argued, however, that abstaining from, resisting or limiting participation of drinking practices are potential strategies for managing the effects and potential harms/risks of UDC, as discussed above. Griffin et al note that the numbers of abstainers and occasional drinkers are rising with 'a polarization of alcohol drinking patterns among young people aged under and over 18' but that alongside 'extreme' or 'determined' drinkers (see: Martinic & Measham, 2008; Measham & Brain, 2005; Measham, 2006) 'this polarization of alcohol consumption does not (yet) appear to have undermined the pervasive

culture of “determined drunkenness” in which drinking to intoxication is a normal part of many young people’s social lives’ (2009: 458). There is a consensus however that those who moderate their alcohol intake or abstain from it all together risk social exclusion (see Frederikson et al, 2012; Hepworth et al, 2016; Nairn et al, 2006; Piacentini & Banister, 2006, 2009) and as I argued earlier in this chapter they can be subject to ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1982). For example, Hepworth et al found that, for students, alcohol consumption becomes ‘the easy option’ (2016: 259) with ‘limited choice in choosing whether or not to drink’ (2016: 260). They concluded that their participants, in explaining and understanding why they drink as they do, turned to a ‘perceived culture of drinking’ (Hepworth et al, 2016: 265) and an individual choice that was ‘embedded within social dynamics that were coercive, involved college rituals of drinking games that exerted pressure on themselves and other students, particularly first-year students, that going to university involved an accepted notion of risk-related alcohol use and that alcohol consumption was gendered’ (Hepworth et al, 2016: 265). Nairn et al suggest that in navigating this ‘normative’ culture young people take up alternative subject positions, though they came to realise that ‘it is never possible to operate outside processes of normalisation as other norms come into effect even if they are not pervasive or hegemonic like the norm of youth as consumers of alcohol’ (2006: 301). They found that non-drinkers were often asked to ‘justify why they did not drink, rather than drinkers having to justify their drinking’ and so some non-drinking participants who socialised with drinkers kept up appearances by: ‘passing’ as drinkers, drinking small amounts, constructing ‘legitimate subject positions as sporty and health conscious’, whilst others socialised with other non-drinkers and created ‘their own norms of socialising and having fun that indirectly challenged the dominant norm where having fun was premised on alcohol consumption’ (Nairn et al, 2006: 301-302). My participants highlighted that they were able to take up alternative subject positions but that their abstention or limited alcohol consumption were subject to scrutiny, and they themselves to ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1982) particularly as they started university.

In studying how students 'cope' with alcohol, Piacentini and Banister found that 'students have multiple identities, which are relevant to alcohol consumption and employ coping strategies to help them deal with alcohol-related situations' (2006: 152) whilst light and non-drinkers 'see themselves as residing outside the mainstream student culture' (2006: 149). Similar to Nairn et al (2006) Piacentini and Banister suggest that light and non-drinkers have strategies for alcohol-dominated situations including: 'escape-avoidance', 'distancing strategies', attempting to hide their non-drinking, giving in, and in once case a 'confrontive' coping strategy (2006: 153). However, they point out that 'if those who are not drinking are concealing this fact, this presents more of a challenge in making abstinence acceptable in mainstream social events' (Piacentini & Banister, 2006: 153). This relates to the social norms interventions considered in Chapter One in relation to *Alcohol Impact* (see NUS Alcohol Impact, 2017) and discussed below. Finding that the social lives of their student participants revolved around alcohol consumption Piacentini and Banister suggest that there is a 'need for universities to encourage more forms of activities unrelated to alcohol, and the need to change perceptions (amongst the general public, academics and other university staff) about "what students do"' (2006: 154). In their later work Piacentini and Banister relate such methods and resistance to 'anti-consumption', the method of 'people who opt out of the dominant culture of excessive alcohol consumption' (2009: 279). They suggest that 'students who decide against excessively consuming alcohol have no choice but to operate within the wider student body; they cannot exist outside the (alcohol dominated) student culture, despite consuming in ways that are divergent to the prevailing norm' (2009: 280). They maintain their stance that due to 'the social effects of withdrawing from this culture' their participants used 'coping strategies' (2009: 285) but that 'encouraging anti-consumers to become more self-confident and vocal about the stance they choose to take' may be a useful way forward (2009: 286). One could argue that resisting university drinking cultures or abstaining completely is a management strategy or 'risk ritual' (Moore & Burgess, 2011), a method by which some students manage the pervasiveness of a potentially harmful culture as is discussed in chapter six. However it is clear from my data that it was not easy for any of the participants

who related stories of resisting or abstaining, and they certainly felt that they were 'going against' a pervasive and dominant culture of socialising with alcohol. As Willsher asserts, perhaps young people could be better supported in their decision to not drink alcohol (2010: 282).

Throughout this chapter I have made reference to my data and participants and the following chapter goes on to identify both who they were and also the methodological strategy for this thesis.

## Chapter Three: Methodology and Reflection

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Focusing mainly on one university site as a case study, this chapter seeks to explain and justify the qualitative methods that have been used in the process of this research on UDC. These methods have been: individual, pair and group interviews with students and recent graduates, a Secret Facebook Focus Group (herein SFFG) tracking a pre-university friendship group's transition to various universities; and field observations with police and student union staff members. How these methods have been utilised, conducted for data collection and subsequently analysed will be one of the main focuses here, alongside the ethics of this research. Ethics will be considered both in terms of the procedure that was undertaken to achieve ethical approval and the issues and considerations that have arisen throughout the research and fieldwork process. Such issues have included: participants becoming defensive, particularly in relation to the reputation of the study site; building rapport with participants; insider/outsider status, when to use it and its function within pair and group interviews; and dealing with my own emotions/insecurities during the research. The literatures which have aided in the formation of my theoretical assumptions, strategy and process will also be discussed here.

### **3.1. Contextual Background**

Due to reputational concerns it has been agreed that the study site, and references to other institutions, will remain anonymous, however in the interests of clarity I will now provide relevant contextual details. The study site, at which observations and interviews were undertaken, is a British campus based collegiate university. The university is divided into colleges and each college has its own areas of residence, common rooms, dedicated staff and college bars. Students therefore have the option to live on campus as well as study there, and new students are guaranteed a place in on campus accommodation in their first year (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2.1). Each college also has amongst its staff a 'Junior Common Room' (herein JCR) made up of students, a 'Senior Common Room' (herein SCR) made up of staff,



college Deanery, and Porters. The college Deanery, made up of the Dean and Assistant Deans, are responsible for promoting good behaviour and dealing with breaches of college and/or university rules. Assistant Deans are also usually postgraduate students who live within college campus accommodation with undergraduates. College Porters are a 24 hour service linked to the Security team and are the first point of personal contact in an emergency. The university also has a dedicated Students' Union, with whom I worked, which is run by both student and staff members and is independent of the university. The Students Union serves as both a support and advice service for students and as a commercial agency running campus bars, a nightclub, a convenience store, and not for profit off-campus student accommodation. Both the college system and Students' Union also play a role in Freshers' week, which is considered in detail throughout this thesis (see Chapter Four specifically). Each college has a JCR made up of students who, alongside the Students' Union, organise social events, including Freshers' week, for their colleges and provide support for their college members. Elements of this research can therefore be specifically applied to campus based universities, and particularly to the collegiate context as participants have made reference to their specific experiences in this particular context, as can be seen throughout this thesis. However, I believe the research and findings are more widely applicable across the Higher Education sector.

### **3.2. Interviews, Key Questions and Recruitment**

As mentioned above, the methods used throughout this project have been individual interviews, pair/group interviews, observations at the study site and a SFFG, and I will now go on to discuss the merits and disadvantages of each along with how they have been used here. To get in-depth insight into how students feel about the current context of university drinking cultures it was decided that face-to-face interviews would be the best option as this would allow me to ask for greater detail and ask follow up questions immediately. Whilst a survey was initially considered, it was decided that interviews would provide a more open and honest space in which to

facilitate discussion and that more narrative responses would be beneficial. As Psychologist Daphne Keats suggests:

Research data from interviews [...] differ from data from questionnaires and psychological tests and scales. The distinctive feature of the interview is that it is carried out orally, which means that factors relating to interpersonal communication become important. However, the interview has the advantage that additional information can be obtained by probing the initial responses. Reasons for the response can be explored and all questions can be responded to without loss. This gives a richness to the data, allowing many individual differences in opinions and reasoning to be uncovered (Keats, 2000: 20).

Social scientists Hilary Arksey and Peter Knight also agree that interviews 'allow answers to be clarified, which is not the case with self-completion questionnaires' (1999: 32). I therefore conducted 23 individual interviews with students and staff as can be seen in Table A below. I conducted interviews with a further 10 students in a pair or group format (Scarlett was interviewed twice with separate individuals). These interviews were guided by a number of key questions (see appendices A-C), however I also tried to let interviews flow in the direction taken by the participant. The questions did not, therefore, follow a certain order in every interview and immediate follow up questions based on participants answers were asked. Examples of such key questions include: What were your expectations of university before you started?; Do you think there is a Drinking Culture at university?; What is a usual week at university like?; How was Freshers' Week?; How are you socialising at university?; How are social events organised?; What do you think is the most common representation of students?; Have you seen or heard of any drink safety campaigns at university? I also had a number of sub-questions relating to key questions such as: How did you meet people in Freshers' Week?; Are people taking photographs on nights out?; Is there a way students might be better reached by safety information? Whilst the questions obviously follow the same theme and key questions remain

the same, there were slight differences between questions for undergraduate (see Appendix A) and postgraduate individuals (see Appendix B), friendship groups (see Appendix A) and recent graduates (see Appendix C) to account for their different contexts. Questions for the SFFG worked differently as is discussed below. My key questions were aimed at finding out how students are experiencing university socially and so were catered around how social events are organised, experienced, who with, their different forms, how they were discussed afterwards, what was enjoyed and what was not, in order to get an overall picture of the current context of how my participants experienced university.

Participants were recruited for interviews in a number of ways: I sent out a call for participants to college administrators which was then put in weekly newsletters and emails and sent to all students within the individual colleges of my university study site, the call for participants was also placed on a postgraduate research advertisement page. Specifically within my own department I visited first year undergraduate seminars and spoke to students directly asking them to sign up, and a further call for participants was sent to students studying within the department via email. A poster was also put up around the department. Students signed up by completing a Doodle Poll and leaving me their email address. Recent graduates and college students were recruited through contacts who 'snowballed' by inviting friends and colleagues to participate. I also asked individual students who had signed up to bring friends with them. Recruitment was the most challenging part of the process and was, in fact, much more difficult than expected; if I were to conduct the research again I would make allowances for this. However, I asked many students during their interviews why they were interested in the research/had agreed to take part and a common answer was one of altruism and a 'pay-it-forward' frame of mind. For example, Alice, Imogen and Jason, and Rajan when asked why they had agreed to take part all wanted to 'help out' in some way:

- **Alice:** I'm not British, so the drinking culture right here is really different, it's something that I think I notice more, and then I know that it's always hard to get people to sign up for things, it's like I have enough free time, I can do that.
- **Imogen:** Yeah just helping out because I do sociology anyway so I just thought when it's me and I'm doing research kind of want people to actually join in, so. And I just made him.

**Jason:** Enlisted.

**Interviewer:** That's good for me.

**Jason:** I like research anyway 'cos I do psychology.

- **Rajan:** I have nothing else going on at this time so I just figured I may as well, 'cos I don't know if I ever need some, I always participate in research and stuff or focus groups whatever, 'cos I always think that if it ever comes to the time where I need to do it I'm going to have to be relying on people like me to repeat the cycle basically.

It was necessary to rely on students' good nature given that there was no reward for participating; although this did not seem to hinder the amount of time students were willing to give as many interviews overran with participants happy to continue for longer than one hour. I believe that whilst the recruitment process was arduous it would be much more difficult to gain participants without incentive in a context outside of the university, as research and calls for participants are expected occurrences here.

**Table A: Individual Student and Staff Interviewees**

<b><u>Interviewee pseudonym</u></b>	<b><u>Gender</u></b>	<b><u>Year of Study</u></b>
Malc	Male	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Phil	Male	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate

Nick	Male	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Rajan	Male	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Elsie	Female	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Fox	Female	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Alice	Female	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Emily	Female	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Lola	Female	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Gary	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Undergraduate
Sarah	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Undergraduate
Jen	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Undergraduate
Lee	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup> year Undergraduate
Fan	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup> year Undergraduate
Bronwen	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Postgraduate
Collette	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Postgraduate
Hector	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup> year Postgraduate
Sophia	Female	Recent Graduate
Katie	Female	Recent Graduate
Thomas	Male	Recent Graduate
Ade	Male	Recent Graduate
Dean Stephanie	Female	Staff
Staff Participant	Female	Staff

However, it was even more difficult to gain interviews or even audiences with staff members, such as management and those who have student disciplinary or support roles, who often felt that it was a risk to talk to me about students' drinking or processes around it. The two staff members that I interviewed formally also varied in their responses to the research, with one

being interested and open and another defensive - as will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Also, with two non-university participants from the police and from a local drugs and alcohol service who I spoke to informally, it was on the premise that they would be completely anonymous and due to the nature of their work that they would not be recorded. I was, however, able to take notes and so, whilst I have not drawn on the data from these in the same ways I have with other interviews, they have been used to inform my knowledge and understanding and were of significant value.

Pair and group interviews were conducted where participants who had signed up to the research brought friends and in one case a partner along to be interviewed and as Arkey and Knight suggest 'collective interviews can be used to explore the dynamics of intact social groupings' (1999: 33). As with all interviews participants were given time at the start of the interview to read over the information sheet and consent form and ask any questions they might have to ensure they were comfortable taking part in the research. Students were asked to choose their pseudonym and identify their year of study. Demographically the majority of participants were white and aged between 18 and 24; information was not collected on ethnicity, nationality, sexuality or class as recruitment had been so difficult and I did not want to dissuade people from participating (see below) but also because I am not making claims as to the representativeness of the data. However, such information often arose naturally in interviews as students became comfortable and rapport was built (see below) and I have been able to refer to this in the thesis. Following this process no participant from the individual or pair/group interviews declined participation or withdrew at any point, two individuals declined participation of the Facebook Focus Group, and one participant withdrew a statement from their interview. Interviews with friends were very different in nature as there was already rapport and (genuine) friendship between the participants and they often seemed to bolster each other's confidence being more open and eager to talk. Keats defines 'rapport' as 'the term

given to that comfortable, cooperative relationship between two people in which there are maintained both feelings of satisfaction and an empathetic understanding of each other's position' (2000: 23), she also suggests that building this comfort with participants is one of the first tasks to which a researcher must attend. However, it did mean that interviews were harder to 'control' as participants would often fall into their usual habits such as talking about other friends, talking over one another, and talking without filling in the details. For example Scarlett and Thea throughout their interview would converse and laugh with one another, and whilst the conversation would often have stemmed from a question it was not always relevant:

**Scarlett:** It's your student email though.

**Thea:** Oh, that never gets checked.

**Scarlett:** I do I check mine all the time.

**Thea:** I'm going to have to start checking it.

**Scarlett:** You should you know, you find out some useful information on it.

**Thea:** I know you always say 'have you seen this email?' I'm like '[Scarlett] I don't check them'.

**Scarlett:** I'm an email person.

**Thea:** I'm not I'm just not text to be honest.

**Scarlett:** I've got to start emailing people to get in touch with them.

**Thea:** How funny, can we start having conversations via email and still text.

**Scarlett:** Yeah, I did that with [Dan] once actually.

**Thea:** Me and [George] used to do it as well.

**Scarlett:** He sent me something over email and we just started emailing each other like hi how are you, what do you want to do later, are you ok? Funny.

As the interviewer you have to get the conversation back on track without disrupting the rapport and informal context, particularly when at other times the conversation between friends is more natural than that of participant-interviewer and vice versa. Further, when studying the 'normal' practices of a culture it can be useful to hear the realities of friendship, storytelling and practices involved in drinking culture, particularly where friends contradict each other and negotiate the 'truth' between them, as was the case with Becky, Betty and Ryan for example.

**Interviewer:** Oh no. So was there one event that each of you liked the most or did you all enjoy different bits?

**Becky:** I think, did we all like the same thing?

**Betty:** James Bond night.

**Becky:** James Bond night

**Betty:** I had to leave early actually

**Becky:** because [Fiona] was sick

**Ryan:** The big night out

**Becky:** The big night out

**Ryan:** The orange t-shirt one

**Betty:** The big night out, the orange t-shirt night was good

**Becky:** yeah the big night out, I did enjoy that. I think Saints and Sinners was my favourite.



**Betty:** Saints and Sinners was really good, yeah.

**Becky:** It's because we all socialised, I think that night

**Betty:** It was like the second night in of Freshers'.

**Becky:** Yeah, all the awkwardness went and we was just quite comfortable with each other, I think.

**Betty:** Yeah the awkwardness was gone after pre-drinks.

**Becky:** No it was and it wasn't

**Betty:** Yeah, but that's because you pre-pre-drunk

**Becky:** Yeah, true.

It is also interesting to note that Becky, who was the participant who signed up and brought Betty and Ryan with her, opens the question back out to the others. Both Becky and Betty begin to speak for the group and for others, which has been a common theme amongst both individual and group interviews here, before either re-phrasing as a question to the group or being contradicted or corrected. Becky and Betty also dominated the discussion throughout the interview, with Ryan occasionally having input or being directed questions by his friends. This was also the case in the interview with friends Zed and Yasmin, with me having to direct questions specifically to Yasmin. It is worth noting however that whilst one individual might speak for the group, concerns were raised if others did not agree and similarly assent was shown by nodding, laughter and statements of agreement.

**Table B: Pair and Friendship Group Interviewees**

<b><u>Interviewees</u></b>	<b><u>Gender</u></b>	<b><u>Year of Study</u></b>
Zed and Yasmin	Male, Female	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduates
Scarlett and Thea	Female, Female	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduates
Scarlett and Amo	Female, Male	1 <sup>st</sup> Undergradaute and 2 <sup>nd</sup> year Undergraduate
Imogen and Jason	Female, Male	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergradautes
Becky, Betty and Ryan	Female, Female, Male	1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergradautes

### **3.3. The Secret Facebook Focus Group**

The SFFG, made up of pre-university students, differed in this sense however as whilst you can see the interaction between participants everything said is considered and constructed. With the focus group taking place online you cannot see the physical reactions to interview questions and the answers of others, as is discussed below. You also do not get that initial blurt of an answer that you can, most often, expect from face-to-face interviews. There was, therefore, no public disagreement. Where one particular participant did not agree with another they used the Facebook messaging tool to talk to me privately:

**Susan:** Can I add to that reputations one without writing on it and therefore offending?

**Interviewer:** Of course you can, go for it

This would not be possible in face to face interviews, and I believe this has its advantages and disadvantages. The participant can immediately make a side remark to the researcher that they may not have felt comfortable saying aloud in an interview context or may have deemed unimportant, but equally you do not get the interaction between participants if it were to be said to the group. It was also difficult to gauge whether or not rapport was being built on the Facebook platform and I was worried of sounding patronising without tone of voice. It was,

therefore, initially difficult to elicit conversation with the group. Following a small number of attempts I decided to compact the questions into eight and list them on the page all at once (see Appendix E). Two participants then began to answer and over the course of the next few days three more participants answered; as stated above two participants declined to participate and did not answer the questions, and so to protect the privacy of the five active members they were removed from the group. I used the same approach with the follow-up questions by compacting questions into six and listing them all at once (see Appendix F). It was, however, also difficult to get the SFFG participants to respond to the follow up questions, and as Kivits says 'the principal challenge that the online interviewer faces is to preserve the respondent's interest in the research [...] while it is tempting to declare the participant has given up the interview, patience and humour are certainly the key qualities for the email interviewer' (2005: 44). I therefore bided my time and sent gentle reminders to the participants, though still only 3 of the original 5 responded to the follow up questions.

The SFFG was chosen in order to track the expectations of a post-college/pre-university friendship group, along with how these expectations met with reality as they began their university lives. This method was used to allow me to follow the progress of the individual members of the friendship group as they took up places at university around the United Kingdom. As Lijadi and van Schalkwyk discuss, the popularity of Facebook has 'opened the opportunity for us as researchers to use this platform for conducting the online focus groups' (2015: 2). The friendship group were recruited through one contact within the group who then 'snowballed' to recruit the others - I created the Secret Facebook Group and added my contact who was then able to 'invite' other participants. As stated above, three young women and two young men have been involved; two young women declined participation. The only way to join a secret Facebook group is through invitation. The SFFG was used because it is 'invisible' meaning that it cannot be searched for, will not appear on Facebook news feeds, and there is no way for

non-members to see the group or access it; this is in contrast to other group functions on the social media site which are 'public' where anybody can see the group, its members and its content, and 'closed' where anybody can find the group and who is in it but only members can see content. Lijadi and van Schalkwyk discuss the advantages and disadvantages of conducting a Focus Group in this manner including allowing participants time to consider answers when using 'asynchronous' focus groups which are 'text based and [allow] greater time flexibility and typically use online discussion boards or forums allowing participants and researchers to read the prompts and have more time for reflection before responding to the discussion' (2015: 2). They also suggest that:

the physical absence [...] and psychological distance of the Internet could stimulate group participation and boost self-disclosure, especially for individuals who might hesitate to participate in a face-to-face focus group [...]. The main limitation, however is that online focus groups are restricted to participants with Internet access. The role of the facilitator of an online focus group could also be more complex as he or she might have to respond to more than one posting at the same time, while also having to pay attention to the interaction between participants, and maintain the flow of the online conversations (Lijadi and van Schawlkwyk, 2015: 2).

I found that it was, at first, difficult to facilitate conversation and had to try a number of routes, although once one participant had begun answering questions others followed. As Kivits found in her research using email-interviews it was best 'to find ways to escape a too strict interview context and create a comfortable interview situation favouring free speech' (2005: 38). I tried to achieve this by introducing elements of humour and being as open and friendly as was possible through text-based speech. Though as Kivits also points out, the lack of physical presence between the participants and researcher means that perceptions are negotiated by text and 'the simple gestures of nodding, agreeing or eye interrogation are, for instance, not possible through email' (2005: 40). I certainly found this to be an issue within the SFFG as it would have been

overwhelming to respond in some way to each answer. I therefore tried to condense responses into one reply which most participants would then respond again to. I also tried to ease the ‘pressure’ on participants by making the focus group asynchronous; there was no time limit for answers which worked well for a group with different work responsibilities and time constraints. It allowed the group to reply when they were ready, and also gave them time to consider the questions and their answers meaning that their answers are clearly very different from those of face-to-face and spoken interviews. The online platform also allowed participant Susan to contact me again when she was appointed the role of Resident’s Assistant at her university and wanted to share information about her role.

**Table C: Secret Facebook Focus Group Interviewees**

<b><u>SFFG Participant</u></b>	<b><u>Gender</u></b>	<b><u>Year of Study</u></b>
Susan	Female	A-level – 1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Publius	Male	A-level – 1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Charlotte	Female	A-level – 1 <sup>st</sup> year undergraduate
Rose	Female	A-level – 1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate
Luke	Male	A-level – 1 <sup>st</sup> year Undergraduate

### **3.4. Coding and Analysis**

Individual, pair and group interviews, and the SFFG were coded and analysed thematically using Atlas.ti based on key themes identified throughout the process of this research. Some key

themes were based upon my expectations, or those which I sought to look for, such as 'drinking culture' and 'expectations', for as Bazeley suggests 'preparation for analysis begins when your project begins' (2013: 1), whilst others arose from observations and interviews such as 'black-out' and 'fear of missing out'. These themes were then used to code my data (see Appendix J for a full list of codes used). Saldaña defines a code in qualitative data analysis as 'a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data' (2014: 584). Examples of coded interview data from individual, group and the SFFG can be found in Appendices F to H. Gibson and Brown defined thematic analysis as a process of analysing data 'according to commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set. The word "thematic" relates to the aim of searching for aggregated *themes* within data' (2009: 127), and they suggest that there are three general aims in thematic analysis: 'the examination of commonalities, the examination of differences and the examination of relationships' (2009: 128). Whilst using Atlas.ti did not analyse my data, for as Friese suggests its role lies in 'supporting the process of qualitative data analysis [...as] the researcher first needs to tell the computer, by way of coding, which data segment has what kind of meaning' (2014: 1), it did afford me a closeness with my interview material. Bazeley suggests that it is the process of coding using software that encourages attention to detail, constant review and 'an unusual degree of "closeness" to data' (2013: 18). Having the opportunity to be thorough with the data allowed me to recognise commonalities, differences and relationships amongst the interview material and identify patterns.

Friese also relates data analysis to storytelling as you learn to describe both surface observations through recognising common characteristics, and 'explore more of the data landscape until you feel that it is mapped out well and that you can describe what the terrain looks like' (2014: 5). Computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data, she asserts, increases the validity of results particularly at the conceptual stage as it is easy to 'forget' the raw data using

manual methods (Frieze, 2014: 1-2). As stated above Atlas.ti allowed for a deeper engagement with my data and also meant that when it came to writing about particular themes I could easily pull up coded material and identify or 'map' patterns in the data, and choose examples to highlight these findings in the thesis. For as Bazeley notes, coding data is a necessary part of the analytic process 'to gain meaningful results supported by data [...through] seeing and interpreting what has been said, written, or done; reflecting on evolving categories [...and] deciding what is important to follow up' (2013: 15). The analytic process for me was fluid in some respects as the codes developed throughout the conception, interview and analysis stages of the research and would often evoke more questions. As Saldaña suggests there are multiple pathways, journeys and destinations along the way in qualitative research and outcomes can range from 'rigorously achieved, insightful answers to open-ended, evocative questions; from rich descriptive detail to a bullet-pointed list of themes; and from third-person, objective reportage to first-person, emotion-laden poetry' (2014: 584). It seems that, just as in research itself, analysis of research is dependent on context, the researcher, the data and what it is being used for. In this research coding the data thematically was the most appropriate to deal with substantial transcripts of interview data in a time-restricted setting. Coding allowed me to thoroughly engage with my data, recognise patterns and assign themes that linked or separated accounts of students' experiences and raise these within the thesis.

### **3.5. Observations**

A number of observations have also been carried out in support of this research. This has included work with both the Students' Union and the local police force along with independent observations accompanied by a friend. Gale Miller suggests that there is a 'long-standing emphasis on observational methods in qualitative sociology' and that as methods they are 'central to diverse qualitative research strategies' (1997: 27). She also suggests that researchers often use a combination of qualitative methods such as observational strategies and interviews

to inform 'reality reconstruction, formal sociology, case studies concerned with the uniqueness of particular social worlds, and those designed to produce generalizations' (Miller, 1997: 27). Observations have therefore formed the purpose of informing my interviews and interview questions whilst providing me with a wider context for the research, for as Patton states 'the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on a person's mind [...], to access the perspective of the person being interviewed [...], to find out from them things that we cannot directly observe' (1990: 278). I found that it was less conspicuous to attend events with a friend as it was much easier to 'blend in'; I used this for events on campus during Freshers' Week both evening and daytime: the 'quiet night' and Ceilidh, societies showcase, Freshers' fair(s), and sexual consent talk. Other observations included: attending a drugs, alcohol and consent talk for students by the local police officer; accompanying a plain clothes police officer on a 'round' of the university campus and the city centre at night; visiting each college's end of term event on campus with members of the student union; attending a campus-wide event, talking with police and security staff; working with the students' union to carry out a drink safety awareness 'intervention' outside of the student nightclub; and attending a Police and Communities Together (PACT) meeting with university staff members and local police. Whilst the observations accompanied by staff members and officials were less inconspicuous, as staff and police have signifiers that mark them as professional such as clothing, staff passes and body language, they proved interesting in other ways such as in how students related to them. This also meant that I was introduced to other staff members; of particular interest for this research were the security personnel I was able to speak with at the end of term parties and during the 'round' with the police officer, with whom they had formerly established working relationships. Observations, for me, have keenly related to notions of 'insider-outsider' research which I will now go on to discuss.

### **3.6. Insider – Outsider Research**



As Paul Hodkinson states, enquiries into insider research have 'become particularly prevalent in the study of youth cultures, not least at the doctoral level' (2005: 131), and as David Bridges suggests 'the relationship between researcher and researched had become a matter of intense controversy' (2001: 371). It therefore seems imperative to situate my work in relation to these debates. Having experienced life as a student who did drink and now abstains from alcohol it can be argued that I can be placed as an insider and as outsider in both respects. I could also be an insider as a 'student' but an outsider as a postgraduate and as older than the majority of undergraduates. This is important since, as Dwyer and Buckle suggest, 'the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation' (2009: 55). I had expected that it would be beneficial to be considered as, to some extent, an insider sharing a 'specified social status' rather than a 'non-member' as an outsider (Merton, 1972: 21), and in many respects it was, however I also realised that it was a useful research tool at times to act naïve as students would illustrate answers with more detail. Having insight into the culture I was researching was useful as 'one must not only be one in order to understand one; one must be one in order to understand what is more worth understanding' (Merton, 1972: 16-17). Furthermore, as Hodkinson proposes, 'longstanding calls for the "matching" of interviewers with respondents suggest that in addition to its potential benefits in terms of access, insider status may enhance the quality and effectiveness of qualitative interviews' (2005: 138). Hodkinson states that this is because having had comparable experiences, feelings, motivations and affiliations to participants, insider researchers have an 'extra pool of material with which to compare and contrast what they see and hear during the research process' (2005: 143).

Whilst Dwyer and Buckle believe that 'the insider role status frequently allows researchers more rapid and more complete acceptance by their participants. Therefore, participants are typically more open with researchers so that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered'

(2009: 58), there are those that claim otherwise. For example, Burgess asserts that 'being a stranger, an outsider in the social setting, gives the researcher scope to stand back and abstract material from the research experience' (1984: 23). I believe that since my role was not fixed as 'insider' I was able to utilise the openness of participants and also maintain a level of critique; as Martin Hammersley suggests both positions have advantages and disadvantages:

the chances of findings being valid can be enhanced by a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement. However, no position, not even a marginal one guarantees valid knowledge and no position prevents it either. There are no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or an outsider. Each position has advantages and disadvantages, though these will take on slightly different weights depending on the particular circumstances and purposes of the research (Hammersley, 1993: 219).

In line with this the success of my fieldwork has depended upon a number of factors. For example I felt that the very nature of observing distanced me from those I was studying, and I did not feel comfortable approaching students in nightclubs or at events, nor with obtaining potentially drunken participant consent for an interview. Observation consent was granted by gatekeepers, such as student union staff members and police, as it is impossible to gain formal, informed consent of all people 'in the crowd' at an event such as a club night or end of term event.

I do believe, however, that a certain level of insider knowledge pertaining to the study site and drinking culture was vital in understanding and analysing my data. As Hockey argues, there are advantages to insider research such as 'the relative lack of culture shock or disorientation, the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication, the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses, and the likelihood that respondents will reveal more intimate details of their lives to someone considered empathetic' (1993: 199). As is discussed in more detail below

I believe that I built a good level of rapport with participants, was empathetic and that most participants responded well to this. I have also been aware, however, of the assumption that can emerge from 'insider' knowledge and been mindful of the fact that youth cultures and groupings are diverse, loosely bounded and transient 'something that would make the proximity or distance of social researchers variable and hard to predict' (Hodkinson, 2005: 133). I have also attempted to avoid the pitfalls proposed by academics who suggest that insiders may have trouble critically observing events and situations, which they take as unquestionable truths compared to an impartial outsider (Hellawell, 2006: 486). Therefore as this research, for me, blurs the boundaries between "insider" and "outsider", I am inclined to favour the argument of Dwyer and Buckle (2009) that there is a "space between". Further that 'the researcher should be both inside *and* outside the perception of the "researched"' as Hellawell (2006: 487) contends. Whilst I have been able to identify with participants I have also had to maintain control over the research process and this has set me apart. As Hodkinson states that whilst it is widely accepted that researchers outside of their subject culture may "go native" and struggle to assess their data critically, 'it seems equally likely that those who begin in an insider position and at least partially "go academic" may find themselves in a strong position to both empathise and to scrutinise' (2005: 144). As mentioned above it was useful to utilise my position as partial insider and partial outsider to build rapport with participants whilst maintaining a level of critique. Furthermore, working with university staff members and police officers I felt I had to appear more professional and situate myself as outside of UDC. Merriam *et al* claim that there are inherent complexities in respect to insider/outsider status and recent discussions have acknowledged that the 'boundaries between the two positions are not all that clearly delineated. In the real world of data collection, there is a good bit of slippage and fluidity between these two states' (2001: 403). The role of the researcher, and situating oneself with one's research, is therefore important in qualitative methods as 'the researcher plays such a direct and intimate role in both data collection and analysis' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 55) and it is this subject that I move on to now.

### **3.7. Ethics and Emotion**

It has been suggested that in ‘whatever way researchers are an instrument of, or in, their research, their emotions, memories and subjectivity will affect their understanding [...] such that in order to engage with the lives of others, they must be willing and able to engage with their own’ (Haynes, 2011: 143). However, as Collins and Cooper (2014) assert, ‘graduate courses do little to address feelings evoked through the research process and how to handle them’ (:89). This is important since, as Collins and Cooper further suggest, ‘qualitative inquiry is unique because it requires both emotional maturity and strong interpersonal skills to “collect data” or, more precisely, hear the stories of others and use their words to describe phenomena’ (2014: 89). However, research ethics boards do not often account for the emotions inherent in the research process, which Aluwihare-Samaranayake refers to as ‘emotional risk’. She suggests that ‘the static, formalized guidelines may render invisible the inherent nature of tensions, fluidity, and uncertainty of ethical issues arising from qualitative research’ (2012: 66). I would assert that, regardless of topic, every PhD researcher has emotion attached to their work because, at the very least, there is so much time, energy and often passion invested in their studies. This has, for me, manifested itself in several different ways including ‘Imposter syndrome’, and a resurgence of anxiety. Whilst I completed the rigorous ethical approval process, I did not feel that my mental health was considered on the forms – although I had to account for how I would be safe physically during fieldwork, stating that I would always be accompanied. In accounting for the non-maleficence and beneficence of the research, I did not consider the impact that pushing myself out of my comfort zone, in order to recruit participants and collect data, would have on me and as a result my anxiety became a factor that limited the scope and quantity of data I was able to collect. Rather, my main concern, following the lead of the ethics forms, was on participants, their experience of the research, and doing justice to their words and accounts. But emotion also arises, of course, within interactions with participants

themselves and within my research there has been both laughter and upset – alongside a myriad of other emotions, as I am sure is experienced by other qualitative researchers and as is the nature of personal and in-depth interviews. Hammersley and Traianou suggest that:

there is a common tendency to treat research ethics as primarily or even exclusively about how researchers should treat the people they study, this often being conceptualised in terms of protecting rights and interests, for example avoiding harm, respecting people's autonomy, and preserving their privacy. [They] argue that, while such matters are important, they do not identify the primary obligation placed upon researchers, which is to pursue research in ways that answer worthwhile questions to the required level of likely validity. Other ethical considerations, [they] suggest, must be evaluated against this background' (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012: intro).

I would further this argument by suggesting that whilst, of course, research ethics must be concerned with the people being studied, and whilst the pursuit of research is important and worthwhile, the welfare of researchers must also be considered. As Aluwihare-Samaranayake also states, Research Ethics Boards 'are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring respect for research participants, that participants enter research voluntarily and with sufficient information of the research procedures and possible consequences' (2012: 73), however she also points out that researchers have to manage and deal with the emotional content of their research. I agree, therefore, with Aluwihare-Samaranayake that more questions should be asked and the emotional conditions of the research further considered, not to judge the effectiveness of the researcher but to ensure they have adequate support should they require it.

Miller and Bell (2002) argue that receiving ethical approval is not the end of the ethics process. They suggest that "“consent” should be ongoing and renegotiated between researcher and researched throughout the research process [...] satisfactorily completing an ethics form at the beginning of a study and/or obtaining ethics approval does not mean that ethical issues can be

forgotten, rather ethical considerations should form an ongoing part of the research' (Miller and Bell, 2002: 54). I believe this is an important consideration to hold with you whilst undertaking research, for it needs to be remembered that you are representing real people with real stories. This came to play a part, for example, when I felt a certain quotation out of context from a participant would have done them a disservice in terms of their representation. I therefore decided that, rather than misrepresent them, I would remove the quote from my account and discuss their opinions and answers in a different way. Also, as has been discussed above, since the researcher plays such an inherent part in and for the research, they need to be mindful of their own role and their own emotions. Within my research this has been most prevalent in the interview process. Dollard suggests that conducting research such as this means that the researcher 'pays the price' of becoming intensely aware of themselves and others (1949: 20). This amounts to qualitative researchers being inherently reflexive of the research, something which Galletta and Cross (2013) believe is important for the interview process. They state that 'it is fundamental to reflect and act upon the nature of the exchange between the researcher and participant. You may prompt the participant, rephrase questions, and make changes according to the interview situation. In this manner, the idea of *researchers as instrument* is a frequent point of emphasis evident in qualitative research' (Galletta and Cross, 2013: 75). Upon reflecting on the research process I realised that my anxiety had been an issue, however as Galletta and Cross allude to here, this reflexivity, whilst potentially causing worry/anxiety from overthinking, can be useful in paying attention to participants and having the right reaction at the right time. For example being empathetic and laughing at appropriate times can lead to better rapport building and a more rewarding interview, as is discussed in greater detail below. I have also come to appreciate that which Arksey and Knight argue that 'being socially skilled is not the same as being voluble. For example, a quiet and sensitive person may make a far better qualitative interviewer than an egregious party-goer who overwhelms others' (1999: 41). Once I realised that the majority of participants also felt a little nervous or apprehensive of the

process I feel that my empathy took over and I was able to approach the interviews in a more productive way and build rapport with participants.

### **3.8. Building Rapport and Faking Friendship**

Building rapport is an issue debated within qualitative research in a variety of guises, including faking friendship, feigning naivety, reading between the lines, how far to become involved if a participant becomes emotional or is struggling, and the commodification of 'rapport' (see e.g. Duncombe and Jessop, 2002; Collins and Cooper, 2014). However, before I go on to discuss these I would like to outline my own interview technique. Duncombe and Jessop believe that the value of research that can 'persuade interviewees to disclose their more private and "genuine" thoughts' has been highlighted by the expansion of consumer research and interviewing jobs 'as a result of which, the ability to "do rapport" by "faking friendship" in relatively less-structured qualitative interviews has become a set of "professional" and "marketable skills"' (2002: 108). Whilst I agree that building rapport was the best way to put my participants at ease, it is not always an easy thing to achieve and sometimes failed. Also, coming from a background of qualitative research that was, mostly, reflexive, literature based, and analytical I tried to be as natural and friendly as possible with participants to put both them and me at ease. However, whilst I appreciate that interview scenarios are not natural, it still feels somehow unjust to refer to this friendliness as faked as many interviews had moments of genuine laughter. It was, in fact, this laughter that I felt was one of my most important tools as an interviewer, showing the participants that I was actively listening and that the context was informal. Where laughter occurred, interviews ran smoothly. However, for the few participants who appeared nervous or defensive it was difficult to elicit laughter, and in one interview it was not appropriate. I found these interviews more difficult and they were generally a little shorter in length. However, in some cases empathy would take the place of laughter in showing understanding to the

participant and giving them space to talk. This relates to the idea that for some participants, being involved in research can be a place to air their grievances and worries.

Collins and Cooper suggest that 'there is a wide range on the continuum between uncaring and overly-involved. Refining and balancing the role of the researcher to avoid taking advantage of situations for personal gain and being positioned with a savior-complex is important for individuals, but also for the field of research' (2014: 13). When I encountered a situation in which a participant was clearly struggling with certain aspects of university I was initially uncertain of how to proceed, not wanting to either take advantage or believe myself to be a 'saviour'. Outside of the research process my instinct would be to try to help and to console the person, and within the interview itself I tried to listen and put the participant at ease by sharing some stories and recollections of my own. This worked to a certain extent and the participant moved from what were sad and sometimes monosyllabic answers to more open ones, however they appeared to remain uncomfortable. The participant also sent an email following the interview which further outlined their difficulties with social life at university. It did not feel ethical to simply thank the participant for their time and not respond and I therefore sought advice on what would be the best course of action to take. I was advised to recommend university support services to the student and did so in what I hope was a helpful manner. I feel that, as Collins and Cooper suggest 'interviewers always face issues involving role expectations, a complicated tangle of what participants expect and what researchers themselves expect their role to be' (2014: 97). They also suggest that, when faced with a participant who had become emotional they had a number of choices, to go into therapy mode, to interrupt and refocus the interview, or to listen and understand. Cooper states that she chose to listen, viewing her participant as a 'human being trying to find her way through life' (2014: 97), but also believed that had she been more experienced as a researcher she could have better managed both the emotions of the situation and the interview process better (2014: 97). I relate to this in that I



felt unprepared for the level of upset from the participant and sought advice, however I also have difficulty in the 'faking friendship' and rapport building only going one way. In 'real' friendships support and compassion are natural and expected both when things are going well and when they are not, and this is difficult to switch off. Whilst I understand the necessity not to go into 'saviour mode' with participants I do believe that it should not be deemed an unsuccessful interview if a participant has required a space to 'vent' or has become emotional, especially when, as researchers, we want honest reactions to our research topics. Furthermore, for me, faking friendship and building rapport are two different things. Building rapport can be professional in nature whilst faking friendship feels just that – fake. However, I am not sure if it is possible to disentangle the two in research processes, particularly because you cannot account for participants' feelings nor can you control human nature.

Rapport building also has another interesting consequence when participants turn the interview around to question the researcher. This can throw the interview off balance and the interviewer has two choices, to avoid the question and re-focus the interview on the participant or to answer their question. Perhaps it was my 'green' status as an interviewer but I believed that were I to refuse to answer a personal question from a participant it would disrupt the informal context I was working to create. This was not an issue within all interviews, but one participant in particular directed a number of questions at me, which I answered. I believed that as the interview was going well and was to be of use, it would have disturbed the interview more to not answer. A recent graduate, Ade, also asked me about my questions directly which left *me* feeling self-conscious:

**Ade:** Have you not got probing questions there hey?

**Interviewer:** Do you want me to ask it in a different way?

**Ade:** Ask it in a different way hey.

This felt like a 'power play' in many ways, but I moved forward with the interview which was successful in every other way. Martin Packer suggests that qualitative research interviews have a certain flexibility that relates to this allowing researchers to 'phrase questions on the fly [...] [answer] interviewee's questions [and offer] personal information', characteristics which he agrees make for an interview that 'allows flexible use of the resources of everyday conversation' (2011: 46-47). The nature of qualitative interviewing therefore allowed me to answer participants questions and re-phrase them where requested. However for some participants the interview context made for moments of self-consciousness and, away from the idea of 'everyday conversation', they worried about their answers and relevance to the research, for example:

**Hector:** If I'm not relevant your research you can tell me, I won't be hurt! It'll be fine.

**Emily:** I'm giving you really bad answers I'm sorry.

**Katie:** I'm struggling to think of one, I'm really sorry my brain isn't 100%

I did my best to dispel these worries and continue with the interview by starting conversations and sharing with participants, as is discussed below, though this was particularly difficult with Emily who continued to give short answers and often said 'I don't know'.

'Researcher self-disclosure has been proposed as one way to foster trust' (Arksey & Knight, 1999: 103), and as is mentioned above, when it was appropriate I regularly shared particular stories/moments with participants to build rapport and to put participants at ease with sharing their own stories. Hodgkinson suggests that 'previous experience and preconceptions [...] can be utilised as a means to guide elements of the investigative process and to assist in the interpretation and verification of data' (2005: 146). Haynes agrees that reflexively using autobiographical material and personal, intuitive and subject knowledge of a specific social context can provide a valuable resource (2011: 134). It has therefore been beneficial in this research to utilise my own experiences, stories and social and cultural knowledge as it has given me something to refer to with participants, and I have been happy with the depth of material I

have accessed. I have, however, been careful not to rely upon my own experiences to such an extent that they have shaped the results, as Hodkinson warns against (2005: 146), or intimidated participants as suggested by Arksey and Knight (1999: 103).

Also, Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) suggests that 'ethical unsoundness or physical and emotional risks to the researcher can arise in qualitative research if the researcher (a) faces aggression from the participant, (b) undertakes fieldwork at premises unfamiliar to the researcher, or (c) divulges too much personal information during the process of the research' (: 72). Whilst I shared stories with participants I was careful in selecting what to share, how to share it and when to do so. Also, whilst I have not dealt with aggression in the way Aluwihare-Samaranayake suggests, I have faced reluctance and concern from university staff under the assumption that my research will damage the reputation of the study site. I found this particularly difficult as whilst I knew that this was not my intention it was not easy to convince others. This relates to trying to gather information or stories from participants who are reluctant to share. Vigolis Stokker Jensen (2015) discusses her experience interviewing individuals with autism and how this lead to an understanding of the ontological effects of interviews and ethnography. Her article discusses the different ways people can react to the interview process and context and is therefore more widely applicable – for me it also advocates being open to a participant's needs in the interview process; it cannot be a one-size fits all approach. For example Jensen found that for one of her participants, John, direct eye contact was difficult and off-putting, and for another, Frank, voice and sound were important. Jensen states of her interview with Frank, 'I support almost every word he says with soft and feminine sounds like hmm, yes, ok, exactly, and he goes on in a firm and masculine voice' (2015: 5). Whilst it was a necessity in Jensen's research for her participants to feel at ease, this is also applicable to all interviews. If a participant does not feel at ease you, as the researcher, can feel it and if you do not or cannot reduce the nerves or tension it can be a difficult interview.

However, as discussed briefly above, if rapport has been or can be built, or if laughter can be elicited the interview process can be easier and much more comfortable.

With some participants, and particularly the groups and pairs, laughter was easy to achieve. I wanted to try and achieve a sense of an informal context and establish myself as a non-threatening interviewer from the start, and so would often make a 'joke' about not choosing a ridiculous pseudonym. As Keats states, 'there are three major phases in all interviews: the opening, the development of the main themes, and the conclusion or release. What takes place in the opening phase sets the stage for what follows, so it is important to make sure that it begins well' (2000: 22). Choosing a pseudonym could therefore be an ice-breaker as some participants were highly excited to use a name they had always liked and pairs and groups would discuss their choices with each other. However in some cases participants struggled and it appeared as though they felt they had been put on the spot, although only one or two participants had me choose pseudonyms for them. In these cases I would try to make participants feel comfortable in another way asking general or trivial questions before moving onto my interview questions. This is also one of the reasons why more data relating to age, ethnicity, nationality, class and sexuality was not collected as it felt intrusive and I worried that students would be less open if they felt categorised in some way, when actually, as is asserted above, my data acts as a qualitative case study without claims to the representativeness of the data. I also found that whilst it could be difficult to start an interview it could also be difficult to end them without awkwardness. I felt that having built rapport with participants it was like bursting a bubble of interview 'safety' by returning to formality and thanking participants for their time. I felt that this was exacerbated by the fact that participants left the interview room first and worried that they would then be thinking over everything we had discussed – although the participant information sheet made it clear that they had time to retract any statements which one participant did immediately after the interview. A number of participants also

referred to friends by name and clarified during their interviews that these would be changed in the writing up process to maintain anonymity. Two participants also contacted me post-interview to make additions to their transcripts. This showed me that participants (or at least some) were thinking about the project in detail and in ways that stayed with them after the interview. Whilst Dollard suggests that to do qualitative research the researcher 'must pay the price of intense awareness of self and others and must constantly attempt to define relationships which are ordinarily taken for granted' (1949: 20), I would argue that this applies to participants also, particularly where questions pertain to personal experiences, relationships and everyday practices that are perhaps taken for granted in their 'normality'.

### **3.9. Conclusion**

It is this 'everyday normality' that is the focus in this thesis in terms of taken-for-granted practices of student drinking. Within this methodology I have also tried to reflect on the role of interviewer and researcher which I have, at times, taken for granted as 'normal'. As Keats suggests, 'one of the most interesting, yet demanding, aspects of interviewing is the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. It is a dynamic relationship which develops as the interview proceeds. It begins on the very first occasion on which the two people interact and can change in many ways before the interview concludes' (2000: 21). As we have seen some participants have responded well to the research feeling comfortable enough to share stories and opinions with me, and others have not struggling with either the interview context or the emotion of their feelings towards the subject matter. Hammersley and Traianou (2012) state that within qualitative research today there is commonly 'a commitment to understanding people's perspectives, attitudes and feelings *in depth*', and whatever the response of the participant I have tried to achieve this whilst attempting to maintain a level of rapport, understanding and/or empathy. In terms of reader experience Norman Denzin suggests that 'interpretive interactionism attempts to make the meanings that circulate in the world of lived

experience accessible to the reader. It endeavours to capture and represent the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied. The focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meaning persons give to themselves and their experiences' (2001: 37). The interpretations here aim to provide insight into the normalisation of student drinking and the active role that students play in managing the drinking cultures that pervade universities. With this in mind I now move on to analyse the expectations my participants had of starting university, and the social realities they faced when they arrived.

## Chapter Four: The Pervasiveness of Alcohol in Expectations and Experiences of Starting University

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### 4.1. Introduction:

For new students, starting university involves a combination of nerves and excitement fostered by expectations of what life will be like as a student. This chapter argues that students have prior knowledge of university sociality and this can create a cyclical pattern of beliefs and behaviour at university. This is illustrated by the case of Freshers' week as it is a focal point upon which expectations are based, stories are circulated and media representations are portrayed. As it has a reputation as a week of partying, drinking alcohol and making friends, Freshers' week can lead to, for some students, a feeling of anticipation but also (potentially unwelcome) pressure. Data from this study also suggests that established students play a role in setting up the tone of what the university experience 'should' be like and so whilst universities might be attempting to rebrand Freshers' week as more of an 'introduction to university life', students themselves can pass on traditions of drinking as the significant form of socialising. This chapter discusses this in relation to the students who serve as Freshers' reps and are therefore tasked with taking care of new students, or 'Freshers', in particular ways, and also analyses data from a pre-university friendship group who transitioned to university during the process of this research.

As students start university they enter an educational institution that has a set of established norms and disciplines (see Foucault, 1975; 1982), and go through processes of 'becoming' a 'student'. However, in this chapter I argue that due to their expectations and (potentially unconfirmed) knowledge of university, subjects are being created of students before they arrive. This is discussed here in relation to the pre-university-students who participated in the SFFG, and who were already planning how to insert themselves into university life. For students there is an expected life trajectory and transitions they are expected to successfully negotiate on the

path to becoming a 'productive citizen'; in the Foucauldian sense there is a certain kind of subject that university can create, bound up in layers of capitalism and neo-liberalism. As Rizkallah and Seitz posit, 'while colleges and universities have been learning to market to their students/consumers, and even to some extent, to measure and manage satisfaction, student populations have been seen as a unified whole' (2017: 45), and this can also lead to the establishment of certain norms and expectations. However, as will be seen in this chapter, not all students have their expectations - positive and negative - met and this can be a pleasant surprise or lead to feeling of being unprepared. This chapter therefore focuses on the pervasiveness of alcohol in such expectations and experiences of starting university.

#### **4.2. Expectations, Prior Knowledge and the First Foray into University Life**

The following sections argue that students *do* arrive at university with pre-conceived expectations; here there is a focus on social lives and Freshers' week. Participants of this study related how they planned to navigate the 'norms' of university life, particularly those who already believed they deviated from the norm – in this instance this often related to wanting to limit or withdraw from participation in UDC. However, in believing that they deviated from the norm, participants who had such expectations, prepared and equipped themselves for certain difficulties in the transition to university. Whereas those participants whose expectations were unrealistic or unmet struggled, as will be seen in section 4.3.2 of this chapter. Much literature argues that ideas of university are romanticised and problems can therefore arise for new students who are underprepared for the realities of life at university (see e.g. Buote *et al*, 2007; Lowe and Cook, 2003; Kreig, 2013; Wilcox *et al*, 2005). Kreig, for example, suggests that, in the US college context, unmet and unrealistic expectations are a potential source of stress for new students and that 'failing to meet their somewhat idealistic expectations has been associated with academic ambivalence, failure, and early withdrawal from college' (2013: 635), and that 'the transition to college is more than an academic experience and that expectations of other



factors, specifically the social environment, contribute to overall stress' (2013: 642). It is the social lives of students that are of concern here and as we will see, friendship, forming bonds and being social are vastly important to students and are key to their transition to university.

#### **4.2.1. The power of expectations**

I have found that expectations emerge from a number of sources and have a variety of impacts upon students. Participants here have cited parents, siblings, cousins, friends, films, TV, news, previous educational institutions, university visit days, correspondence from universities and social media as affecting their expectations. Ailes et al also found that their participants were 'engaging in information seeking behaviour by taking in information from different sources, such as family, friends, Facebook, movies, and other forms of media' (2015: 42) (see also Elmore et al, 2017). As we shall see expectations of university are powerful and can help shape the early experiences of students. For example, Scanlon et al (2007) discuss students' transition to university and suggest that students have knowledge *about* university rather than knowledge *of* it. They suggest that since knowledge about university has not been verified through experience it is naïve, decontextualized and untested, and that 'this contrasts with "knowledge of" the university that is contextually tested knowledge consisting of "trustworthy recipes", which provide students with routine procedures and ways of interpreting the new situation, it is insider knowledge' (2007: 226-227). As this section will mainly focus on the data from the pre-university friendship group it is concerned with knowledge *about* university, whilst the following sections move on to knowledge *of* university and the experiences of participants. However I also argue that the two are bound together and serve to affect how quickly, if at all, students transition to university life.

I asked the pre-university students if they had been told anything to expect from university, potentially from a number of sources such as parents, siblings, friends, college, or universities themselves, and the SFFG thread was as follows:

**Susan:** Every university that I visited before making applications insisted that they were the best at the really clichéd “work hard, play hard”, so I suppose that is an expectation. My English teacher repeatedly told me not to go to a stuck up university because she said that I’d get annoyed with rich kids and end up not enjoying it at all (she was probably very correct). My cousins all really loved it and that was probably my biggest influence about it, especially when I was younger!

**Interviewer:** So when they advertise the ‘play harder’ side of things was it about a mixture of things e.g. societies, sports teams, culture or was it mainly around nightlife?

**Susan:** I got the impression that it was more about nightlife, and possibly some of the less serious societies than sports teams and culture. Unis all want to give the impression that even if the course is difficult you can have a good time, which often means partying

**Rosie:** Quite a lot of people in my family seem to have gone to university but I think my biggest influence on what I expect is my sister who’s currently in her third year. She has a very laidback approach to it and enjoys the social side a lot as well as studying what she loves; as a result I think I’m expecting my uni experience to be quite similar but I don’t know if it will be yet because I guess only time will tell?

**Charlotte:** My family constantly go on about how I’m going to be drinking all the time and that when I’m not drinking I’m going to be studying.

**Luke:** I’ve been told many different things. From my parents telling me about how I’m gonna be poor and have to look after myself and make a washing up rota to people who

are already there and have told me about the ins and outs of how life works there. Generally the people who have been more recently all say it's absolutely fine and very enjoyable though I have been told it depends on which term you're in massively; exam term is meant to be hard work and very stressful

**Publius:** I have a vague understanding of what to expect from speaking to friends who have either been or who are at university, however, as none of my immediate family have been to university (i.e. parents and siblings), I haven't had any in depth experience of university, so as a result, I haven't got a big image in my head of what I'm expecting, which may not be a bad thing as I can experience university as it comes and not be disappointed or overwhelmed by my previous expectations which will add to the adventure.

For this friendship group the most striking influences were their families and friends, particularly for those with family who had attended university themselves, but they also seemed keen to make up their own minds. This appears to be at odds with the tone as students begin university and look to Freshers' Reps/Residents Assistants and established students for examples of how to 'be' at university as is explored in section 4.3.1 of this chapter. However, there is also a certain level of uncertainty amongst the group with phrases such as 'I got the impression', 'only time will tell', and 'vague understanding' being used. As Briggs et al state, studies into expectations, aspirations and decision making 'indicate that students before transfer have difficulty envisaging university life and accurately predicting their student experience' (2012: 5). It seems, from this conversation, that expectations are positive and the friendship group further expressed excitement about: meeting new people, exploring new cities, independence, freedom, starting new courses and 'learning for the love of learning'. However, the group did express nerves around: missing out, independent food shopping, managing finances, living with new people, being 'thrown into the unknown' and losing touch with friends outside of university. Whilst the group's expectations might not necessarily be realistic, it seems

they have been able to envisage life at university to a certain extent and have built up a picture of both what they would and would not like their experience to be. Recognising the expectations of pre-university students is, therefore, an area where more work could be done across the Higher Education sector to ease new students' transition to university life and to cater events better to their wants and needs. There is also a potential that, in acknowledging what new students want and expect, the re-cycled nature of UDC and Freshers' Week (see Section 4.3.1 of this chapter) could begin to change.

The group have therefore portrayed a certain level of 'readiness' for university, and in preparing for difficulties, individuals were already planning 'coping mechanisms' (see also Piacentini & Banister, 2006) should they wish to decline participation in UDC. For example Susan, who worried about not being 'really in the mood for Freshers' or going out loads' planned to take part in 'coffee crawls' and group visits around her university which she stated sounded 'more like my kind of socialising' (see full quote on page 106). Publius, who said he had not yet 'found his feet' going on nights out, also had plans to vary his social life:

**Publius:** I'm expecting it to be quite varied. By the feel I get from when I have looked around the university is that it's quite relaxed and friendly. Yes I'm expecting the night life in parts but what I like is that the freshers' events put on by my college are varied in that some are nights out, some are day trips shopping, movie nights and even a formal dinner which means there will be something for everyone. Also, as I'll be looking to join the drama society and carry on my judo while at university, I feel I will be able to socialise with people in a collaborating sense, whether it be training with them or working alongside them on stage, which from my own experience, will create very varied social lives with those respective groups of people.

Publius has mapped out methods for making friends and getting to know people at university, and has allowed himself different options for doing so. This highlights the onus that new

students place on making friends at university, which is explored in greater detail in chapter five. It also seems that, whilst Publius will be exploring the new environment of university and night-life, he hopes to continue with extra-curricular activities he already knows he is comfortable with and joining groups he feels he can 'belong' to. As Krause and Coates found, 'extracurricular involvement in clubs and societies is an important mechanism for developing a sense of belonging on campus' (2008: 503). However, both Susan and Publius also expressed that they expected pressure, not to drink or go out, but to not be left behind or miss out:

**Publius:** I expect there will be a notion of often going on nights out and going clubbing which isn't something I'm really interested in. Anyone who knows me knows I'm a light weight and don't like to drink more than two or three drinks in a sitting. So I'm slightly nervous about feeling the pressure from others about going on nights out during the week and drinking fairly large amounts. But I don't feel like I will be forced into anything. But more of a case of not wanting to be the only one sat in my accommodation because of it if any of that makes sense?

**Susan:** Slightly nervous because everyone will go out, and that I might miss something even if I don't want to do it, if that makes sense? Hopefully the other events are of good quality and will be good fun.

'Fear of missing out', a phrase MacLean states is a 'contemporary term for anxiety when people are absent for events' (2016: 5), was a common concept amongst the participants of this study, and is in common parlance on social media as FOMO, and it is easy to see how this can lead to feelings of pressure, particularly where friendship-making is so prioritised by students as they start university. As mentioned above, Ailes et al found in their American study that prior to college their participants were 'engaging in information seeking behaviour' and once at their college 'strategies ranged from conversations with their residents assistants (information seeking), becoming involved with campus organisations (direct action)' and inhibition of action (2015: 42-43). However, they found that their participants highlighted 'having an effective

support system' as 'the most important aspect of managing the transition process' (2015: 43). It seems that the experience of university, whether matching the expectations discussed in this section or subverting them, is one that requires friendship and support for new students (see also Wilcox et al, 2005).

A final aspect raised by the friendship group as expectation forming was that of reputation. Emerging out of a question regarding the representation of students, the group discussed learning which universities had reputations and what for; universities have been anonymised due to concerns over reputational damage (see Chapter Four, Section 3.1):

**Interviewer:** Are there particular unis that have reputations of being party heavy then?

**Susan:** [Names a Scottish and a university in the North-East]

**Rosie:** [Names a Yorkshire university]

**Interviewer:** Okay, so do other universities have reputation based on other things? Are those things considered when you're choosing where to go?

**Charlotte:** I know some universities are thought to be quite boring which would probably influence me to an extent. Also some unis are thought to be posh and stuck up while others have loads of international students and some are expensive. I don't think these things mattered to me much when choosing though.

**Luke:** I think most unis have some sort of a profile based on nightlife, 'poshness' and how academic they are. It affected me in terms of choosing the one with the best course and I know other people who chose based partially on nightlife.

**[As a private aside]: Susan:** [Names South-Western and North-Western universities] get the reputation of stuck up, Oxbridge reject unis full of "gap yah" students, even in literature like *The Sense of an Ending*, and that was a major

reason I didn't put [South-Western university] down in the end, so I guess the stereotypes do influence you a bit.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so is it something that comes, alongside the literature, from people who've visited, impressions when visiting or?

**Susan:** It is like a major joke that I've heard and also probably spread – like when I left [Southern university] last March everyone was shouting “see you in [South-Western university]!” because it seemed so daunting to get in at [Southern university] and Rosie thinks that they deliberately keep offer grades lowish so you can put [Oxbridge] as a first choice with [South-Western university] as a reasonable back up. We had to study a book for our A-level lit that was grim, and the characters all went to [Oxbridge] or [South-Western university], and those at [South-Western university] were really bitter about it. I think it is just that all four unis appeal to the same kinds of people, smallish, quite posh and historic uni cities with a similar atmosphere. I didn't really want that in the end, I wanted somewhere that was a city and not just based around only a university. Wow that was long, Charlotte has basically just said the same thing with less judgement and detail.

**Publius:** I agree with what everyone is saying about different unis having their own stereotype. And I think the problem is that those stereotypes turn into reality by those public images. A lot of people choose unis based on the kind of life it will give them, so people who want to spend their time partying are most probably going to pick a university with that kind of reputation, hence making that become a reality. I know in my own personal experience of shortlisting universities, there were a few that I ruled out straight away as the location came across as one that I wouldn't feel safe in. So going back to the question, I think how students are represented is highly varied and dependent on which university they attend.

**Interviewer:** Was there something in particular that made you feel like you wouldn't feel safe in certain locations/unis?

**Publius:** The reputations of the places and things people have told me. Like [North-Western university] was one I ruled out due to its reputation of gangs and the number of things that have happened to people at night there.

What becomes clear from this is that in the process of applying for universities, pre-university students have an ongoing discourse about which institutions have reputations and what for. It is also clear that these reputations *are* being taken into account when decisions are being made for which universities to apply to; along with safe or 'reasonable' back-ups after first choices. According to these participants, there are reputations aligned with drinking and partying which put off some of the students who were concerned about safety, while others wanted to ensure there was culture and atmosphere outside of the academic university context, and others still remained confident in their independence and the prioritisation of their academic course. It also appears that students very quickly gain a sense of loyalty with their chosen (or first-choice) university as Charlotte became defensive over her chosen university later in the conversation (see section 4.2.2), and Susan used the Facebook instant messaging service (Messenger) to privately provide her opinions and avoid offending her peers. This is, I believe, one of the functions of Freshers' week, to provide students with a sense of their university's 'brand' or identity and showcase and open up the community built around this. Freshers' week is therefore an intense period for students as they are plunged into life at university, seek to become a part of the community, and form friendships with peers. The following section therefore considers the role of Freshers' week more fully.

#### **4.2.2. Freshers' week and the introduction to university life**



New students have expectations of Freshers' week as a week of heavy drinking and partying; it has gained this reputation through representations, shared stories, portrayals, and reports. Freshers' week is also, however, the week, or fortnight, in which students arrive at university, move into their accommodation, establish social bonds, and begin to explore their new campus and city/town. As stated in Chapter One, many universities are now rebranding Freshers' week as Welcome Week in an attempt to move away from negative portrayals and associations with Freshers' week, but colloquially amongst students Freshers' week is still in use. Quigg et al define Freshers' week as the period at university when new students are welcomed to the campus and local community, and 'usually includes invitations to events held in bars and nightclubs' such as student pub crawls (2013: 2925). This establishes an expectation, and a social norm, which is extended throughout term time as student nights and events run by students unions, commercial organisations, or a mixture of both, 'can play a major role in a student's university life' (Quigg et al, 2013: 2925). This section analyses the participants' perceptions of this intensive start to university life and the common themes that emerged.

Alongside the negative media depictions of student drinking in Freshers' week, studies have found that family, friends and previous educational experience are influential in forming expectations of university (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Maunder et al, 2013; Pancer et al, 2000). It was common amongst my participants to make reference to their families, friends and particularly siblings as influencing factors and as Ailes et al found, in the American college context, 'sources, which included peers, family, media, and teachers, played a significant role in influencing first-year students' expectations' and that, according to their participants, family and media were two of the greatest factors helping to form perceptions of college (2015: 6). First year Jen, felt nervous about attending university and Freshers' week in particular as her sister had guided her expectations:

**Jen:** Yeah, so I was really nervous because I came to university, the thing I was most worried out of the whole thing of university was about drinking. I was telling you about my sister earlier and she told me before I went to university that I had to drink coz she was like “It’s the only way you can make friends during Freshers’”, like she was just telling me there was no other option so that was really scary

Jen’s expectation of Freshers’ week and friendship formation at university has been formed through her older sister who, as an experienced student, worried that Jen would struggle to make friends if she did not partake in Freshers’ week drinking. As is referenced above, we learn from the cultural knowledge and experience of family and friends (see Bourdieu, 1984, Shutz and Luckman, 1973) and in this case it led Jen to anticipate university as ‘scary’ and worry that she would struggle to make friends if she did not drink alcohol. However, Jen sought out information from others to reassure her and when she arrived at university her fears were lessened:

**Jen:** Yeah, but then I had spoken to other people that were like “no you don’t need to drink, it’s fine” [...] then in Freshers’ week yeah it was ok actually, like so in the evenings when the rest of our flat would all be liked crammed into the kitchen playing drinking games and stuff and the rest of us didn’t really want to do that, we always found alternative things to do together. So like on the first night everyone went out to one of the flats near us, and they were having like a big party with everyone, and the three of us stayed in and watched Little Mermaid. But I think we only watched a little bit of it and then we got persuaded to go and say hi and meet other people. So then we did go and meet other people but we just didn’t drink. And then for the rest of the week when people were playing the drinking games and stuff we’d just sit out in the corridor playing. I brought some Disney trivia cards with me, so we just played those instead which was a lot more fun. But yeah, I think I was very fortunate that I had other people in my flat that didn’t drink, if it weren’t for those two I’m not sure how that week would

have been. I think it would have been a lot scarier and less enjoyable. But yeah because I was living with two others that didn't drink I just didn't really feel any pressure to drink

What this highlights is that, although family and friends are an influencing factor, students have the capacity and drive to make up their own minds and through their own experiences they begin to increase their own cultural knowledge. However, although Jen was happy to find alternative things to do there is a clear prioritisation of drinking and partying by her flatmates and a divide between those who did and those who did not drink alcohol. There is also an element of rejecting drinking games, seen as 'adult', for a Disney game which could potentially be seen as infantilising or immature. A number of other participants have also noted joining peers in drinking games (see e.g. Alfonso & Deschenes, 2013; Borsari et al, 2007; Fairlie et al, 2015; Labhart et al, 2013; Wells et al, 2009; Zamboanga et al, 2010; Zamboanga et al, 2014) whilst not drinking, and so even though they are involved they are side-lined in a game which privileges drinkers. This is further discussed in Chapter Five in relation to friendship practices.

Whilst drinking games and 'alternatives' emerge from a desire to meet and bond with peers, new students are increasingly using social media to (virtually) meet other new students before they arrive at university. This can give them a sense of what their peers are expecting and a feeling of 'knowing' someone before they arrive. For example the thread from the SFFG with pre-university students, when I asked 'what are you expecting from university socially?', was as follows:

**Susan:** The stereotypical Freshers' week is obviously meeting people and creating a social life centred around partying. However, there are also so-called "coffee crawls" and group visits to other parts of Scotland and within [my university city], which sound much more like my kind of socialising for Freshers' and in general.

**Luke:** I imagine it to be heavily drinking focused during fresher's but with other events thrown in so that if you don't drink/aren't that into that kind of thing you can still meet people. After that I imagine it can be however you want it to be; plenty of opportunity but no pressure to be social.

**Interviewer:** So have you both been sent or seen information from [your chosen universities] about what's happening in Freshers' week then? When I started uni most of it came in the post but are there now Facebook pages etc. that keep you informed instead?

**Susan:** I've been sent two booklets in the post and there is supposedly a website but it hardly works and is really difficult to navigate. Some things have event pages on Facebook I think

**Luke:** I'm in more FB groups that I can count and several group chats. Some general Freshers' stuff is online but I'll get a timetable once I get there of all the details

**Interviewer:** so do you feel like you will already know a few people/faces when you arrive from being in FB groups/group chats then? Is that reassuring?

**Luke:** Yes I think I should recognise a few people. I think it will definitely help me to settle in. Even if I don't stay friends with them it will be somebody to speak to on the first day.

**Rosie:** [my university] have sent me a few things and from speaking to my friends the wristband that [they] offer to get into Freshers' events is the cheapest? I'm expecting most people to be a little awkward and nervous because we're all in the same boat but I reckon by the end of the first week friendships and groups will start forming like they do when you start any new school

**Charlotte:** Everyone always says that it's always just wild nights out at [my university] but I've been talking to people in my accommodation and I don't think that's completely true. Sure there are definitely lots of massive events you can go to but there are also loads of alternatives which plenty of people do as well

**Interviewer:** do you have a FB group for your accommodation then? Is it good to have spoken to a few people before you arrive?

**Charlotte:** Yeah we do and I think it's made me more confident that I'll be able to make friends with people which is good but I find it easier to talk to new people in person so I feel a bit awkward at times

The availability of online spaces where new/prospective students can talk to a number of people associated with university (current students, other new/prospective students, staff, alumni and so on) provided these participants with an increased sense of confidence and comfort. It is common for there to be specific Freshers' Facebook pages for each new academic year and in this way students can get to know who is on their course or in their accommodation, set up further Facebook groups or pages, and ask questions such as if there are others who are not interested in going out and drinking meaning that they can arrange to attend the 'alternative' events or to meet up themselves outside of UDC. It seems that the use of social media in these ways is fostering a sense of community amongst students and so should be encouraged. For Charlotte it also dispelled a myth about her university's reputation as others confirmed there were alternatives to 'wild nights out'. Vickery recognises that 'communities – both virtual and offline – can transcend the boundaries of place' and create a sense of belonging through shared experience, discourse, cultural text etc. (2010: 185). These students share the experience of studying to get into university, applying and preparing to attend university and Briggs et al suggest that 'for students, the move to university is a personal investment of the cultural capital accrued through school and college education' (2012: 3). These online spaces, which generally seem to be positioned around university specific Facebook pages, societies, and

college/accommodation groups, therefore foster a sense of community, and indeed expectations, before students start university and can extend it once they have arrived. Stephenson-Abetz and Holman, in their study of college students use of Facebook in the transition to college, found that their participants felt a need to connect with both their old and new communities and Facebook provided this (2012: 181). They found that 'overwhelmingly, students loved the ease with which they could connect and communicate with new people on Facebook' and the ability to talk casually to peers 'all contributed to their sense of community in the early days of college' (Stephenson-Abetz and Holman, 2012: 187-188) (see also Barnes, 2017). Whilst online spaces are clearly being used in various ways to engage with students this could be furthered to discuss their expectations and wants, as recommended above, and potentially disseminate information in a format that is familiar and attractive to them. For Rosie, Luke and Susan, who worried about and experienced homesickness, Facebook can also provide a link to home with connections with old friends, family and reminders of 'good memories' (see Stephenson-Abetz and Holman, 2012). There is, once again, clearly a concern with friendship, old and new, and what is also clear from this conversation with the friendship group is that Freshers' week, for them, was all about meeting people. This came with an expectation that, although universities offer 'loads of alternatives', drinking would be the principal form of socialising organised by universities and attended by students; the word 'alternative' is indicative of this in itself.

Collette, a postgraduate student who completed her university 'career' at the same institution has had varied experience of Freshers' week: as an undergraduate and postgraduate student, as a Freshers' Rep, and as a staff member. She stated that there have been changes in how Freshers' week is run but the image of Freshers' week still centres on big night's out, and there is still a cultural hang-up that for students the first taste of independence 'has to be the taste of alcohol':

**Interviewer:** So have you seen a change in how Freshers' week happens over your time here?

**Collette:** Oh definitely, yeah. I was saying before, nowadays if you're a Freshers' Rep and you had students who didn't want to drink, for one thing I don't think you could say 'right well we're all going out drinking with the fun lot so you can go find the alternatives by yourself' I think someone would go along with the other group, and to be honest now I even think they'd try and encourage the whole group to go along and try the alternative event. That said I've done the big night's out a few times, I did work it last year as one of the people who ticks off the groups as they come in and I think, certainly in [my university], the image I have of sort of Freshers' week in particular is the big night out because it's the big bar crawl around the town. And that was still, the year before when I was working it there was still the girl who got herself so drunk that she curls up in the corner in the girl's toilets and you have to get security to come and help out. So certainly there's still lots of heavy drinking that goes on and still I think that thing that there's always been of the ones who haven't had a big night out before, either because that's not the group of friends they've had at home or because home doesn't have anywhere where you can go and drink like that, I think it's still a little bit of a shock to the system, well it probably is a bit of a shock to the system suddenly putting that much alcohol in your body. And I think it's more responsible now, there's far more emphasis on making people like the Freshers' Reps aware that it can't all just be all about drinking. And even if your group of Freshers want to go off and do that, say you've somehow hit, as it were, the jackpot and your group want to go out drinking, actually there's a responsibility there to make sure that they're safe and looked after while that's going on. Whereas I think there was, I can remember our Freshers' Reps were just reps because they wanted to have a week of getting pissed basically. There were some nights when they were more drunk than we were so I think that whole thing of it has changed quite a bit. Partly as well there's always the stories, press stories around Freshers' week

of 'oh this student's got so drunk they've done this' or 'this student's go so drunk that they've done that' and I think universities themselves are a bit more aware of the reputational issues that can come with it. So I think obviously their first priority is going to be the students and making sure that they're safe, but I think there's also a slight issue of we also don't want to be the one university that has this happen in Freshers' week.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, it's strange isn't it that difference between wanting to give people their first taste of independence but also recognising that they can be a bit vulnerable.

**Collette:** And I think that idea as well that your first taste of proper independence has to be the taste of alcohol, it's an odd cultural hangup in some ways. Another thing as well is as much as Freshers' week's become better run, better organised that, and it's harder to look at, but stuff like the initiation ceremony's for say the rugby clubs which obviously aren't formalised in the same way because they're done on the club level and so I know they're banned in quite a lot of places but obviously you can ban them and they still go on in a slightly different guise so that's an odd bit that I don't know much about.

This conversation is suggestive of the transitions and 'rites of passage' (see e.g. Macneela & Bredin, 2010; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013) students are expected to go through at university; an example of the 'freedoms' students are allowed in time away from being studious and in preparing to become a 'productive citizen'. In the Foucauldian sense the university is a disciplinary institution which uses disciplinary technology to forge a 'docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1975: 198). Rabinow suggests that this is 'done in several ways: through drills and training of the body, through standardization of actions over time, and through the control of space. Discipline proceeds from an organization of individuals in space, and it requires a specific enclosure of space', and that disciplinary technologies preceded modern capitalism (1987: 17-18). I argue that students are 'allowed' this period of 'freedom' in a space that is controlled, and where to a certain extent they are monitored (see Chapter Six for an in-depth discussion of the implications of this). However,



considering Collette's response it seems that students are *expected* to participate in such freedoms relating to alcohol in an 'odd cultural hang-up', and university is marketed as a period of fun alongside hard-work. Piacentini and Banister state that amongst their participants there was clearly 'a socially constructed view of what it means to be a student, with many commenting on the prevailing view held by society of a 'student identity' relating to alcohol consumption', causing potential difficulties for those who go against the norm and distance themselves from 'the prevailing "typical student" image' (2006: 148). However, Collette also suggests that in the time she has been at university, there has been improvements of the understanding of the 'students who didn't want to drink' as Freshers' Reps would now be trained not to leave them alone and encourage others to try the 'alternatives' to big nights out. However, she also suggests that the 'jackpot' for Freshers' Reps would be to be charged with a group of new students who 'want to go out drinking' suggesting that this is still the desired 'norm'. The following section goes on to explore the role of Freshers' Reps in greater detail, along with the experiences of students in relation to their expectations of starting university.

#### **4.3. Experiencing and Adapting to Social Life at University**

For new students adjusting to university, difficulties can arise through differences between their expectations of university life and their experience as they begin (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Jackson, 2000; Keup, 2007; Pancer et al, 2000; Maunder et al, 2013; Smith, 2005). As has been established above, Freshers' week plays an important role in introducing students to university social life, and the next section furthers this discussion in relation to the roles of Freshers' reps who I argue can serve to reinforce ideas of what social life at university should be. The following section then analyses the experiences of participants who have both had expectations met and not, and the significances of this.

#### **4.3.1. The role of Freshers' Reps as tradition keepers and markers of what it means to be a 'student'**

As interaction with others is one of the ways in which people understand new experiences and situations, we can further discuss the implications of expectations passed down from parents, siblings, previous education, fellow new students and established students such as Freshers' Reps, and how this affects the adaptation of students to university life. As has been discussed above participants in this study have gained knowledge about university from family, friends, other students, media sources, and educational institutions. This is important as for example, Schutz and Luckman suggest that 'understanding' can be based on a combination of individual experience and the communicated experiences of others, in their words they state that:

Each step of my explication and understanding of the world is based at any given time on a stock of previous experience, my own immediate experiences as well as such experiences are transmitted to me from my fellow-men and above all from my parents, teachers and so on. All of these are communicated and immediate experiences are included in a certain unity having the form of my stock of knowledge, which serves me as the reference schema for the actual step of my explication of the world (1973: 7).

From my data it has become clear that Freshers' Reps have 'insider knowledge' (see Scanlon et al, 2007) and are passing on their familiarity and understandings to the new students they are charged with introducing to university. Freshers' Reps, and Resident Assistants (RAs) welcome new students to campus and are current students who are assigned to a group of first-year students, or Freshers, for the duration of Freshers' week and sometimes beyond. Freshers' Reps and RA's are established students and so can act as models of what it is to 'be' a 'student'.

Lee, a male third year undergraduate student described his experience as a Freshers' Rep:

**Lee:** You have like a Fresher rep for your house and then a block rep for the whole block of houses, so like my second year just had, like my first day of the JCR [Junior Common Room] we had a block of five, there was five of them, we were meant to have more but it got split up. So we were responsible for all 60 Freshers across them five houses, and then the Fresher reps, the two or three of them, were responsible for those 12. So like we were meant to be like coordinating and telling people where to go but really I just picked a house and pre-drinked with them. I had friends in all the houses, Freshers' reps, because we block repped in pairs, so I just went right shall we just go there and pre-drink with them? And then that started on the first day and it just happened to be every other day.

**Interviewer:** So when you say you're responsible for 60 people, what does that mean?

**Lee:** I made sure they didn't die.

**Interviewer:** How?

**Lee:** I don't know because nothing happened so I didn't really have to jump in that action.

Lee describes a distinction between responsibility and the desire to have fun in Freshers' week which is indicative of much of university life; there is a dichotomy between new and more 'adult' responsibilities and the freedom and fun of being away from home and a 'parental' eye. There was nonchalance in the way that Lee shrugged off the duties of Freshers' reps when I asked what it meant to be responsible for sixty students, with a privileging instead of how he arranged his social time and how he was viewed by other students. Lee prioritised arranging social time instead of 'coordinating and telling people where to go'; he represented the prioritisation of fun.

However, Freshers' Reps and Resident's Assistants (RA) are prepared for their roles and Susan, one of the participants of the SFFG, contacted me as she was undertaking training as a RA at her university. Talks had been delivered to them about the alcohol-centric nature of university and the number of underage students who would be arriving and she thought of this research. Her university implemented training from university staff and police which the RA's then presented to Freshers. She said that the police had information points on campus but compulsory welcome and safety talks were delivered by the student-staff; 'I think they think Freshers will be more likely to listen if it comes from other students'. She told me, 'I like the RA thing here because it is the students organising things for the students. Like the newbies think we're older and boring...but really no, we're just more students'. As the 'older' students have had a say in alternative events, following their own experiences and the training they have received, they planned alternatives which, she told me, they hoped would cater to everyone:

**Susan:** We're taking them late night paintballing. Found it cheap on Groupon so it's less than £4 per person and the uni is paying. We're a bit proud we've organised it. I'm doing city tours/cultural stuff/coffee crawls first weekend, as like the only Brit on the team. Paintballing stuff though, it's like adrenaline and stuff, not sitting in doing board games or whatever. So the people who would be drinking otherwise should be interested even though it's alcohol free.

This repositions the idea of expectations, as the role of Freshers' Reps and RA's are reactions to expectations of what students will be like, enjoy and need. As Smith and Wertlieb posit, 'orientation staff and particularly resident assistants [...] play an integral role in any transition program. They often see the problems that students confront before other college personnel' (2005: 19). Susan has taken her experience as a 'Fresher' and applied it to the planning of the Freshers' week activities she was involved in, aiming to provide events that appealed also to those who would normally be interested in the alcohol-centric events and therefore provide opportunities for students to meet each other. For Susan this also involved training on how to

include students who would find themselves immersed in a, potentially alcohol centric, culture which they are legally not allowed to participate in as they are under the UK legal alcohol age of 18. Whilst these events were still positioned as 'alternatives' there were clearly attempts to diversify social opportunities, and as Ailes et al point out it is important for RA's and Freshers' Reps 'to know that not all students arrive expecting the same experience, and that not everyone experiences the same events in the same ways' (2015: 43). As examples of students who have survived, and thrived in, university life Freshers' Reps and RA's can show new students that whilst UDC are pervasive, and often fun, there are also options and the potential for a varied social life.

Other participants also referred to their time as Freshers' Reps and the training they received, particularly in relation to non-drinkers, for it seems that there is always a level of concern for how to accommodate students who do not want to participate in UDC. Similarly to Susan these excerpts from the individual interviews with Sarah and Gary, second year undergraduates, suggest that Freshers' Reps have some autonomy, despite training, in how they introduce students to university:

- **Interviewer:** So what sort of training did you get?

**Sarah:** we had to go to like equivalent of this [interview] sat in a [...] seminar room saying, basically a job interview in terms of they presented a situation and how would you deal with it but everybody can say the right situation it doesn't mean they're gonna do it. Everyone was saying like "well if I've got foreign students I'd make sure they'd be involved blah blah blah"but nine times out of ten they don't do it...well it didn't feel like they did.

- **Gary:** Yeah well we got sort of like trained on how to look after people that aren't coming out, the training was literally "go and talk to them"

**Interviewer:** Was that by the JCR?

**Gary:** Yeah, so like internal we had to do this JCR [Junior Common Room] Freshers' rep training day with the JCR, but we were quite lucky with ours because like half of the house was made up of like second and third years so it was sort of a case of going, I knew a lot of them so I'd just say like do you wanna, you can come out with us you can join in it's up to you and they just they either went out on their own coz obviously they knew [the city], they knew where to go, other than that it was mainly the international students that seemed to find it quite hard to like, especially if they're not used to going out in the sort of capacity that, you know, young Brits go out kind of thing.

Freshers' reps are given training with how to deal with situations should they arise and there is a Freshers' week social timetable/schedule to follow. As Sarah points out, reps may say that they will deal with a situation one way but that does not mean they will. Sarah and Gary believe that although Freshers' reps are trained to involve international students and those who do not want to participate in the scheduled events (the most popular usually involving alcohol and going out to bars and/or clubs) this is often not the case which suggests that some students are being left out (see also e.g. Schartner, 2015; Sias et al, 2008; Yoon et al, 2015). It can be seen here that international students are often perceived as students who will struggle with the pervasiveness of alcohol and going out in Freshers' week, and indeed beyond, as both Sarah and Gary refer to these students as needing looking after. This has various implications: it shows that the university takes seriously the need to care for new students, particularly those who have moved to another country, and there are various events for international students run in Freshers' week, but also run the risk of potentially patronising students. First year international student Fox, for example:

**Fox:** I don't know, 'cos it's very difficult for Chinese people to get engaged in the Fresher Week activities 'cos the representatives are responsible and they were getting you

engaged but you just basically [...] really didn't know what to do, you don't know what to chat or something, what to do, this kind of like, I think it's because of cultural differences yeah.

**Interviewer:** But do you think there's something that could make it easier perhaps? Is there anything that you think oh I'd really like to get involved in that or?

**Fox:** Yeah I think I don't have any idea about how to improve the situation but I can provide you with the situation that [won't], I saw few Chinese people in the pub on campus or in the clubs, I don't know why but yeah I guess it's not that interesting, the activities are not that interesting or something.

The lack of intercultural socialising is a wider issue in university society and the cultural distinctions of UDC that Fox referenced here are considered in greater detail in chapter Five, section 5.2.1.

Having 'established' students serve as Freshers' Reps is therefore a method of peer learning and care that is less likely to patronise new students, and also gives the experienced students responsibilities that they can apply to future careers. The higher education sector clearly recognises the benefit of employing established and experienced students to welcome and mentor new students, although elements of this could perhaps be better regulated in future as Freshers' Reps can also serve to reproduce certain ideas and attitudes of what it means to be a student and aid in the reproduction of the (stereo)typical behaviours, and reputation, of Freshers' week as alcohol centric. For campus-based, collegiate universities, like the study site, Freshers' Reps can also serve to represent and reproduce their colleges and universities 'brands'. Briggs et al suggest that, in adjusting to university academically, students need to form positive social bonds. They state that this is a process that begins before students start university and through the first few months with visits and contact with other students enabling

applicants to envisage what it is to be a student and ‘form a sense of their student identity’ (Briggs et al, 2012: 6). They also affirm that ‘supportive university systems can enable socialisation and adaptation’ including from student guides at induction and student peer coaches (2012: 7). I would argue that this highlights the importance of strong social links for new students for not only do they reportedly aid in academic adjustment but they also provide sources of everyday support, fun and camaraderie. I would also argue that what it means to be a ‘student’ is bound up in the shared experiences of all of university life. The following section therefore moves on to discuss the experiences and revised expectations of students as they start university.

#### **4.3.2. Experiences and revised expectations**

In the above sections I have discussed the social expectations of students arriving at university, and how these expectations are formed. This section moves on to argue that students’ expectations of university are not always met and this can cause disappointments and difficulties compared to those who have their expectations met. Expectations therefore have a role in how well, if at all, students can transition to university life. Smith and Wertlieb, for example, found that there is a ‘disconnect in students’ prematriculation expectations and their actual first-year experiences’ (2005:14). Participants here have often found that their experiences, and the realities of university life, have caused them to revise their initial expectations as we shall see.

Talking to the pre-university friendship group, during the follow-up session on the SFFG, after their first-term at university their experiences had differed somewhat from their original expectations:



**Susan:** I went out more than I expected to, although lots of the pre drinks turned into groups of us deciding to have hot chocolate and watch Father Ted or play Articulate<sup>2</sup> rather than going to clubs. Some of the activities that I had thought would be good were a bit disappointing, like the law soc were meant to do a “strawberries and fizz in the quad” event that ended up inside due to rain and with lemonade rather than champagne.

**Rose:** Freshers’ week for me felt very intense. I had the Freshers’ wristband which had me prepaid entry to a few of the nights out which was good, but like...Yeah, very full on. The best part of Freshers’ for me was freshers’ fair because I got to actually find out more about all the societies I wanted to join, and there were every student’s favourite thing: free stuff.

**Charlotte:** Freshers’ week was really awkward? Like nights out were great because everyone is your friend when you’re drunk but during the day it’s a lot more difficult. Especially since most people did things with their flats and my flat did nothing as a group.

For each of the young women, Freshers’ Week presented a challenge to their original expectations. For Susan some of the alternative activities she had been looking forward to were ‘disappointing’ and she went ‘out’ more than she had thought she would, for Rose the week was ‘intense’, and for Charlotte the ease of talking to people during the day was more difficult than she had anticipated. The presence of alcohol was also evident from the friends’ responses, and Charlotte suggested that it was easier to socialise with the aid of alcohol. Overall it seems that the young women had mixed experiences of Freshers’ week, enjoying parts of it and finding others difficult. Talking to the students it was also clear that whilst the group enjoyed meeting new people, and were settling into university life, there were still things that challenged them, highlighting that the transition to university is not a dichotomous process:

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<sup>2</sup> Articulate is a timed board game played in pairs or teams where you describe a word to your team mate(s) from a list of categories without saying the word and they guess what it is.

**Susan:** The amount of time with other people has made me realise what an introvert I am, I really need my own space sometimes and don't feel that I really have it all the time. I have a flatmate who is very energetic and loud, which I can find challenging. I also have a tutor who is quite insensitive regarding personal circumstances, who I need to talk to but feel reluctant to. Sometimes the structure of everything can be unclear, and no one seems to know who to talk to in order to deal with problems or issues.

**Rose:** Like Susan, I'm finding constantly being surrounded by other people quite difficult, but at the same time there's certainly a lot of "Fear of Missing Out." I'm also finding it actually a lot more difficult that I thought to be in a different country than my parents and my sister, I already arranged a visit to [them] that I never planned to go on because I'm "homesick" though I'm not really certain that's what it is. But the course is going better than I thought it would with the labs being relatively simple and the majority of my assessments so far being multiple choice.

**Charlotte:** Because the lectures are all recorded and available online and so actually motivating myself to turn up to early lectures has been really hard, especially since most of my lecturers don't take attendance

There is a combination of social and academic concerns for the group, but what is interesting is that, having looked forward to meeting new people, Susan and Rose found the new external expectation to be socially available too demanding. Rose in particular did not expect to feel homesick but found it difficult to be so far away from her family and, as Wilcox et al suggest, becoming a student is 'about constructing a new identity and sense of belonging as well as acquiring new academic skills [...but] it is also about students negotiating between the old life they have left behind (family, home and friends) and the new life they have ahead of them' (2005: 712). Susan and Rose left a home environment where they had their own space, family support and a familiar friendship group and entered their university life where they were surrounded by people, whom they would not necessarily have chosen to spend time with as

they were placed together in accommodation. They are therefore learning to live on their own and deal with challenges independently, such as 'energetic and loud' flatmates, wanting space, and feeling a 'fear of missing out'. Charlotte also found a challenge in being responsible for her own motivation. As Lowe and Cook suggest, 'perceptions of higher education tend to revolve around stereotypical assumptions such as moderate academic demands and an exciting social life' (2003: 55). In the process of transition to university life, the students were learning to balance the demands of the social and academic.

Taking Sarah, a female second year student, as another example here we can see that messages are being disseminated and reproduced that you have not fully experienced university, or 'made the most' of your time at university unless you have experienced the social culture most commonly associated with drinking.

**Sarah:** Yeah looking at the photos [of the nights out] is like, or everyone says "go out take loads of photos, memories [for] when you're older and you miss uni". And like drunken night out photos are the same, it's not normal, it's not the same unless you've got a funny drunken picture in a supermarket trolley with a cone on your head, like apparently you've not graduated properly unless you've done that. Even my mum said that "there's a substantial lack of stolen signs in your drunken photos" and I'm like "what?"

Sarah demonstrated that even outside the university context, her family expected her to be part of a student culture that values drunken antics. Symbolic capital can be gained from participating in UDC, and the well-trodden tropes of students stealing road signs and traffic cones, for both immediate gratification and to look back on 'when you're older'. This is in line with what I call 'night-out nostalgia' as students are collecting stories, photographs and shared experiences to both 'look back on' with friends as they recount experiences in 'day after' discussions, and later in life which also suggests that students are aware of their limited time at

university and before the 'real world' (see Chapter Six). Tutenges and Sandberg suggest that drinking stories can serve to motivate, guide and inspire, and 'in many drinking situations individuals can be seen as acting out drinking stories that they are familiar with from the media, movies, music, literature, the Internet and their friends' (2013: 543). There is a suggestion that to not participate is to stray from the student norm and risk future regret. Sarah's tone suggested that she questioned the purpose of participating in such practices, but she disclosed that she took and is present in 'drunken photos' as she confirmed that her mum had seen them, indicating that drunken photos are a prevalent element of the student drinking culture. As Bourdieu suggests, 'struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life' and there is logic behind the accumulation of symbolic capital (1990: 22). However, despite her participation, the acquisition of symbolic capital through UDC was a point of frustration for Sarah as she encountered peer disdain for applying herself to her studies.

**Sarah:** I expected to go out more but I didn't expect to be labelled as 'boring' and a 'loser' if I didn't. Do you know what I mean, like I was naïve in terms of thinking that everybody would be like-minded and everybody would be like "nah, she's just doing her assignment, like...fair enough"

Sarah revised her expectations based on her experience, labelling herself naïve for hoping that her peers would be like-minded. She also highlights that social life and UDC are prioritised by other students as they strive to gain status in ways other than academic knowledge acquisition. This is further emphasised as Sarah goes on to explain that there is a pervading belief amongst students that first year is for fun, whilst the work that 'counts' begins in second year. Sarah's flatmates refer to this as being a 'Wasteman Fresher', a term used against Sarah when she declined invitations to go out drinking.

**Sarah:** Definitely, "you're a Wasteman Fresher why do you even care?"

**Interviewer:** Wasteman Fresher?

**Sarah:** Wasteman Fresher that's what it's called, yeah. "You're a Wasteman, come on come out it doesn't matter, doesn't matter, don't go towards owt'. I was like, I don't understand.

The idea that students can 'waste' their first year at my study site university, and others, stems from the fact that results from many first year courses do not count towards final degree results, instead students must pass their first year in order to continue with their course. Students prioritising their social lives is a theme that runs throughout this thesis as not only does this relate to their academic studies but also the importance of friendship (see Chapter Five), and the lack of engagement with drink responsibly information (see Chapter Six).

Whilst many of the participants in this study recognised their participation in UDC as for them ordinary, a *part* of being young and a student, there are students who find this emphasis on socialising with alcohol at university difficult. As Piacentini and Banister found:

students are influenced and affected by widely held beliefs about their behaviour. Those preconceived assumptions regarding students' alcohol intake are suggested to encourage consumption or at the very least excuse behaviour. The widely accepted norms and expectations surrounding students and their alcohol consumption presents a very real set of problems, stresses and barriers for those not wanting to engage with the stereotype (Piacentini & Banister, 2006: 154).

Similarly to Sarah, Phil, a first-year mature student, expected university to be focused on learning and the emphasis on drinking surprised him in a negative way:

**Phil:** [...] just people come in with hangovers and you know either people are absent and they'll say "Oh he's not in 'cos he was with so and so last night", and it's always conversation about what they're going to do this weekend, what they're going to do that weekend. And I don't know if that's representative of everyone, but I'd say almost

everyone in my class is that's all they're, that's why they're here, that's what they're here for, they're not here to learn anything at all really. It's quite depressing, it has an effect on my study because I'm in a seminar, I've come all the way here for a 50 minute seminar and there's people on campus talking about the most inane things ever

What is clear from Phil's comment is that the way students are connecting is through sharing stories, experiences and plans of participating in UDC. This was a cause of frustration for Phil who interpreted his peers' behaviour as a lack of engagement with their studies which affected his studies in turn. Phil also found that his resistance UDC made it difficult for him to form bonds with other students. It has been recognised that students who resist, desist or limit participation in the university drinking culture may encounter social problems and/or pressures (see e.g. Piacentini and Banister, 2006; 2009). For example, Piacentini and Banister assert that 'students who decide against excessively consuming alcohol have no choice but to operate within the wider student body; they cannot exist outside the (alcohol dominated) student culture, despite consuming in ways that are divergent to the prevailing norm' (2009: 280). For Phil the fact that his expectations had not been met lead to a number of emotional responses as he struggled with the alcohol dominated culture at university. In a Foucauldian sense, Phil feels excluded because he does not conform to the student 'norm' of drinking; he deviates by focussing entirely on his studies. In the two excerpts below he described his Freshers' week experience and his feeling after having been at university for two terms:

- **Phil:** Yeah I felt very alone, isolated, left out. I didn't really want to take part in going into town, into [the city] you know, going out drinking and all of those sorts of things, so I felt very kind of pushed out and I felt, actually I was really upset, I did actually cry.
- **Phil:** No I didn't think it would be this bad, I really am shocked, really am shocked by how bad it is. Like I said, you know, sort of just got used to it and just hope that it improves in the second and third year I think.

Phil had positive preconceptions of university life and when his experience was more negative than he had anticipated he struggled. As Ailes et al suggest, 'ill-conceived expectations and perceptions [make] many students feel emotionally stressed because their perceptions are incongruent with their environment and reality' (2015: 34). Phil's difficulties in coping with the realities of university seem to stem from the fact that he is academically focused, stating 'I really want to learn you know', and finds the social focuses of his peers distracting. As he is also considered a mature student, at 27 years old, he found interacting with his peers difficult as he felt he had already been through a period in his life where he drank with friends in pubs and clubs: 'I've done this before, I suppose it's just age I guess'. Phil's experience of university was affected by his awareness of being older than the majority of students, a feeling shared by many mature students. The experiences of mature students are important for, as the Guardian reported in 2015, of the half a million students who found their university place through UCAS, 80,000 were aged 20-24 and more than 52,000 were aged 25 or over (Whitehouse, 2015); although the number of mature students applying to university is said to be dropping (see Butcher, 2017). As Hopkins suggests, 'if age is regarded as a socially constructed category rather than an independent variable, then the role of space and place becomes very important, as people will have different access to and experiences of places on the grounds of their age, and spaces that have associations with certain age groups will influence who uses them' (2006: 241). University is, in regards to undergraduate degrees, associated and dominated by young people fresh from college and entering the next stage of their lives. Phil feels that, having given up a full-time job to invest time in his studies, he is at a different stage in his life to his younger peers. However, I met Phil a year later and he was involved in a university society. This seemed like a turning point because, as mentioned earlier, involvement in extracurricular activities, societies, clubs etc. can aid in a feeling of belonging on campus (Krause and Coates, 2008) and Phil seemed more at ease.

However, for some students university is a social environment within which they thrive, for which they feel prepared and excited for. For example, first year student Elsie felt excited to start university, for when I asked her if she'd had any expectations prior to starting university this is how she replied:

**Elsie:** Yes, everyone does. Well I live in Ireland and I'm the first of my family, there's four of us like siblings, and I was the first to go to England so it's like oh okay I'm the first to experience this. And they had sent the whole Freshers' Week timetable and it was so packed and I was like oh my god this is going to be amazing, this is going to be like everything I've heard. And then I got here and I didn't know anyone and I was in my room like okay now what. And then 20 minutes after, almost immediately, people came knocking at the door and they were like "hey we live next door to you", and I was like okay this is how it starts, and then kind of went round saying hi to everyone and then kind of immediately started pre-drinking I guess

Elsie had not had the cultural knowledge from experience passed down by her parents or siblings (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Shutz and Luckman, 1973) but felt prepared from what she had learned about university from friends and, by her own admission, films. She was, therefore, excited to be the first in her family to attend university and her 'almost' immediate positive experience with other new students set up the rest of the week to 'be amazing' as she had expected. Where some new students might feel daunted by a 'packed' Freshers' week timetable, for Elsie this matched what she had been told and seen in media depictions and she felt prepared. This is important because, as Jackson et al found, those students who are prepared for university are generally well-adjusted with expectations to have a good transition due to a past of good experiences (2000: 2119). As mentioned above the higher education sector could do more to promote realistic expectations to ease new students' transition to university.



First year friends Scarlett and Thea also felt prepared for the level of drinking at university, perceiving themselves as experienced drinkers and having expectations of UDC:

**Thea:** [...] everyone says oh uni you're going to be partying and getting pissed. I know that's what everyone just seems to associate uni with, as well as like academics but there is such a massive drinking culture, I don't know why. But I used to drink quite a lot before I came to uni.

**Scarlett:** Yeah I've been drinking since I was like 15

**Thea:** So have I

Thea was aware of the external expectation that students drink and party heavily, and both responded to this nonchalantly stating that they started drinking young, suggesting that they were not fazed by the reputation of UDC. The account of Thea and Scarlett would suggest that their pre-university drinking practices eased their transition to university as they had experience of a drinking culture. The friends also went on to discuss how their drinking habits actually manifested whilst at university:

**Thea:** To be honest we go out with the intention of getting [drunk]

**Scarlett:** I don't know like I don't think I have the intention, I just know it's going to happen.

**Thea:** yeah exactly, yeah that's what I mean.

**Scarlett:** So I don't try to lie to myself.

**Thea:** It's already a given, like we're going out, we're going to drink, we're going to go.

**Scarlett:** I never intend to get completely smashed though, like it's always an accident.

**Thea:** It's funny when you do.

**Scarlett:** It's always an accident when I end up really drunk, with three for one drinks like don't help

**Thea:** I always get really drunk really fast.

**Scarlett:** You're always drunk before we even go out, pre-drinking.

There are various themes commonly associated with student drinking present in this conversation between Scarlett and Thea: pre-drinking, group drinking, drinks offers, knowing (or not knowing) your limits, and intentional drunkenness. However, the intention that Thea states the pair have for getting drunk is converted into inevitability by Scarlett, framed as an unavoidable accident. Overall, there is an undercurrent of 'having fun' running through these positive experiences of university; the reality experienced by Elsie, Scarlett and Thea matched their expectations and they used language such as 'amazing' and 'funny' to describe their experiences. Coupled with the overall 'fun' tones of these interviews, the three participants seemed to enjoy talking about their experience of the social side of university which was, in both cases, intrinsically linked to drinking cultures.

However, for one first year international student, expectations of British drinking culture were not met:

**Zed:** Yeah that's personally the way, like when I came to the UK 'coz I'm originally from Finland, my perception of the typical English university was binge drinking, I was like argh it's going to be rough on me, I hope I'll be able to survive this. But turns out I've been a little bit wrong. It's a lot more, binge drinking still exists, but it's a lot more moderate than I thought. Honestly when I first came here I thought it would be like every weekend there would be some sort of party, everyone would always go out, but it's not that way, it's a lot more moderate than I thought it would be.

Zed had expectations of the British 'binge-drinking' culture, and outlines that he had certain apprehensions of not being able to cope with the 'typical English university' drinking. He found himself surprised by the fact that his expectations were challenged by a 'more moderate' reality. However, based on the rest of the interview with Zed I believe that this had something to do with his living context and friendship group who he described as happy to socialise in their accommodation – though often still with alcohol. Also, coming from Finland, Zed may have particular perceptions of alcohol consumption, and wider drinking cultures comparatively, as Finland has seen a threefold increase in the per capita alcohol consumption level in the last forty years and in 'even greater increases have been observed for various indicators of alcohol-induced harm' (Mäkelä et al, 2012: 831). Zed outlined this in an excerpt that can be seen as a counter example to the UDC under analysis in this thesis:

**Zed:** No it's pretty bad in Finland too but it's just, maybe shall I say, the drinking culture's more into, like it's not so much within set establishments. It's not within buildings like bars and nightclubs, it's more out on the streets and I don't like that at all. I actually prefer the British drinking culture, well depending where you are obviously, but taking [my university town] as an example I prefer the nightlife here to the nightlife in Helsinki. It's a lot worse in Helsinki in that sense, drunk people everywhere, you've got police on the streets and you know who takes responsibility for these people, they're in the establishments, in the building. It's the building and the owners of establishments that have to take responsibility for whatever happens in there, on the streets it's the police, so every night or every weekend it's the police resources are wasted on monitoring these people that are out on the streets completely drunk rather than actually responding to real distress calls so.

In making a comparison between his British University town and his home country, Zed found that his expectations were more negative than the reality and he seemed pleasantly surprised, perhaps because he was expecting the same culture he seemed to find so frustrating in Helsinki.

Zed also succeeds in painting a picture of not only the atmosphere of the drinking culture he is describing, but also the themes of space, place and security and policing.

Finally, the pre-university students from SFFG raised interesting points in relation to the stereotyping of students as either 'partiers' or 'nerds':

**Interviewer:** How do you think students are most commonly represented? (Do you think this is an accurate representation?)

**Susan:** Students are often represented as doing little work, living on pasta and drinking lots while spending their parents' money and protesting about things. I think that for some this is somewhat accurate, although a very stereotypical and over simplified view. I also believe that students remain individuals – you cannot judge them entirely as a group.

**Luke:** I feel like we are represented as being either heavy drinkers and party goers that don't really care about the education or total 'nerds' that only do work. In reality I think most people are a mixture of the two. I also think cities/unis can get stereotyped into one of those two categories which is definitely not true; there is always a nightlife and always somewhere to study in any city

**Rose:** I agree with Luke and Susan that we're sort of represented as big drinkers who do little work. While this may be accurate for some I don't feel that it's the majority. I feel like it's a combination of the fact that these people may be the loudest – especially at universities and cities that are represented as they "party" ones – and that this is the easiest image for some types of media to present and sell to their target audience, which is typically an older generation.

It is easy, when conducting a study such as this to be drawn to stark dichotomies and forget the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of individuals within a large population of people. The friendship group showed that, not only do they believe stereotypes of students are simplistic but they are also unrealistic, and that such representations diminish the individuality of students. As discussed above 'student populations have been seen as a unified whole' (Rizkallah & Seitz, 2017: 45) and it is a wider expectation for (British) students to be heavy drinkers aiding the perception of UDC as the 'norm'. Lowe and Cook found, such is the pervasiveness of this norm, that 'many students still measure their first year success by the extent to which their ill-found expectations, such as a rich social life, have been met' (2003: 55). They state that universities need to do more to help students form realistic expectations and prevent the 'demands of the new environment' becoming overwhelming (Lowe & Cook, 2003: 55) (see also Pancer et al, 2000; Wilcox et al, 2005). This is something that certainly would have benefited the majority, if not all, of the participants in this study.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Students arrive at university with expectations they have developed in line with the views of parents, siblings, friends, previous education and media depictions of university (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984; Maunder et al, 2013; Pancer et al, 2000; Schutz & Luckman, 1973). As has been seen throughout this chapter, alcohol and drinking cultures are prevalent throughout such interpretations, expectations and experiences of university life. These pre-existing expectations, whatever their origin, serve to impact how students transition to university and therefore how comfortable they feel, how they make friends and how they experience their first weeks of university life. This can also serve to create a norm against which students are measured, that of the 'typical' student who participates in UDC, and potentially excluding those who deviate.

In a broader context this chapter has raised important issues in relation to several aspects of university life. Firstly, stereotypes of students exist linked to drinking cultures, both by students themselves and more widely by the media sources, friends, and family of students who are cited as sources of expectations by new students. This serves to set a precedent in the cultural knowledge gained by young people before they start university, and the expectations they arrive with. The reality of this is that some students are excited to start university and feel prepared for the social aspects of this whilst others feel apprehensive or worried they will be left out. I have therefore argued that Higher Education institutions could do more to promote realistic expectations amongst new/pre-university students. Secondly this chapter has served to point out that Freshers' Reps and established students can play fundamental roles in reproducing the patterns of university social cultures as new students look to them as examples of how to 'be' at university. Their roles could therefore hold importance in creating an inclusive Freshers' week. Thirdly, as has been raised here and discussed by a number of academics (see e.g. Ailes et al, 2015; Jackson et al, 2000; Smith et al, 2005), it may aid new students' transition to university by preparing them for the realities of university to alleviate any distress caused by potentially unrealistic expectations. One such method that has been explored here is that of social media fostering a sense of community, and potentially friendship, amongst new students both before and after they arrive at university. Chapter Five now goes on to consider, in detail, the theme of friendship within UDC and its importance for students.

### 5.1. Introduction

For young people the consumption of alcohol and experiences of drinking are often underpinned by the sociality of being with friends. As I argued in the preceding chapter, making friends is a preoccupation for new students as they start their university lives, and this chapter extends this to consider the role of alcohol in the initiation and maintenance of friendships. I also argue that within UDC friends take on roles of responsibility and caregiving which are often highly gendered. This leads on to a wider argument in Chapter Six, which is that friendship and sociality are prioritised over the health and harm reduction strategies that stakeholders such as universities, student unions, parents, police etc. are often keen to implement, and which young people are notoriously dismissive of. My data, for example, has shown that during processes of dismissing harm reduction messages and prioritising their social lives, students go through a process of othering. They believe harm reduction information does not apply to them and that the pleasures of alcohol consumption outweigh the negative impacts (see also Spencer, 2013; McCreanor et al, 2013; Harrison et al, 2011). This chapter contributes to a body of literature that maintains that there are a number of friendship practices which can be associated with alcohol consumption (see e.g. Frederiksen et al, 2012; MacLean, 2016; Niland et al, 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2013, 2017). Such practices include: protective behavioural strategies (see e.g. Armstrong et al, 2014a; Armstrong et al, 2014b; Levine et al, 2012); use of social media (see e.g. Barnes et al, 2016; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Huang et al, 2014; McCreanor et al, 2013; Hebden et al, 2015); pre-drinking and drinking games (see e.g. Alfonso & Deschenes, 2013; Borsari et al, 2007; Fairlie et al, 2015; Ham et al, 2010; Labhart et al, 2013; Zamboanga et al, 2010); and storytelling (see e.g. Bogren, 2014; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Fjaer, 2012; Fleetwood, 2014; Hackley et al, 2013; Hebden et al, 2015; Hutton et al, 2013; Katainen, 2014; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacLean, 2016; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Thurnell-Read, 2017; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). This

chapter therefore serves the important function of combining research on friendship and the alcohol practices of young people with analyses of UDC.

I have found that there are two ways in which alcohol and friendship manifest most keenly in UDC: in students bonding and socialising together through consuming alcohol and in the caregiving that is associated with drunkenness and friendship. In relation, this chapter also applies the Foucauldian notions of peer surveillance and dividing practices to friendship and drinking culture practices, such as ‘pre-drinking’ and storytelling. However, there are gendered dynamics that have emerged from my data in relation to experiences within drinking cultures, caregiving and the roles of responsibility assumed or undertaken in friendship groups (see also Brooks, 2011; Lavery et al, 2014; Macneela & Bredin, 2010; RÚDÓLFSDÓTTIR & Morgan, 2009) and these will be analysed here. The data has also shown the potential influence of friends’ normative behaviours (see e.g. Foucault, 1982; Fujimoto & Valente, 2012a; 2012b) as with the roles of Freshers’ Reps and Resident’s Assistants discussed in Chapter Four. The relationship between alcohol and friendship at university will first be considered before the chapter moves on to analyse the nuances of this relationship.

## **5.2. Fostering Friendship at University**

This section argues that friendship is critical to the ‘student experience’ as friends at university provide: a source of fun, a support network, someone to share experiences with, and someone to care for/be cared for by. The significance of friendship has long been a topic for sociological consideration (see e.g. Adams & Allan, 1998; Allan, 2008; Cronin, 2014, 2015; Jerome, 1984; Pahl, 2000; Pahl & Pevlin, 2005; Schutz, 1967; Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Rawlins, 2009) and there are a variety of ways in which friendship has been defined. Pahl suggests that there are varying levels of friendship from acquaintance to close friend and the word “friend” covers a broad



continuum of possible forms and styles of relationship' (2000: 75), and as Spencer and Pahl further state, 'people talk about friends without saying what they mean, and we only have a single term to describe a variety of relationships' (2006: 34). As was discussed earlier in Chapter Two, there are a myriad of characteristics that make up 'friendship' including: shared experiences, common interests, 'getting along', homophily, trust, reciprocity, and as Jerome states 'friendship, in our culture, is a voluntary, informal, personal and private relationship' (1984: 696) described by Giddens as a 'free-floating' pure relationship (1991: 89). My data has shown that friendship is of the utmost social concern for students, and as Erb et al found 'the quality of new college friendships predicts how well students adjust to interpersonal experiences at college, their feelings of attachment to university, and their coping with academic demands' (2014: 43-44). I have found that friendship at university intersects with alcohol in a number of ways as for my participants alcohol has been used as a social-aid, a method of bonding, a topic of conversation and a mass activity outside of 'everyday' socialising. Participation in UDC can therefore provide a 'shared history' (Spencer & Pahl, 2006) and a feeling of group affiliation and belonging. However, this can be problematic for those students who do not engage with UDC and who I argue are subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982). This section argues, therefore, first that alcohol is used to facilitate friendship in a culturally distinctive way and second that it is used as a method of sustaining friendships at university.

### **5.2.1. The privileging of alcohol consumption as a friendship making practice and a cultural distinction**

As outlined in Chapter Four, students have expectations of university before they start and one of their major concerns is how they will meet people and make friends when they arrive. At university, the first people students will often have an opportunity to meet are the people with whom they will be sharing their accommodation, 'flatmates' or 'housemates', and this can often

be a source of apprehension. Whilst in many cases 'housemate' can come to symbolise a social tie potentially more intimate than 'friend' in that living space is shared, a position which for more has only previously been inhabited by family or partners (see Erb et al, 2014), it can also be reference to an individual who is not a friend but simply someone they (have to) live with. This is particularly the case for first year students who are placed in accommodation by the university, and so have little choice in regard to the people they live with. For some the expectation of this is a source of concern as the most common instances, and indeed popular representations, are either of flatmates as firm friends, or as sources of difficulty (see e.g. Erb et al, 2014). For example, Imogen and Jason, first year friends, described their excitement about starting university which was coupled with the apprehension of not knowing if they would get on with their new flatmates.

**Interviewer:** So you both felt quite excited about arriving at uni then?

**Imogen:** Yeah.

**Jason:** Oh yeah.

**Interviewer:** Were there any nerves or?

**Imogen:** I was quite.

**Jason:** I wouldn't say, I was like worried...

**Imogen:** Yeah.

**Jason:** That I wouldn't like my flat mates or they wouldn't like me.

**Imogen:** Yeah the flat mate thing, I was worried I wouldn't get on with them. And as soon as I arrived I think I was ok straight away really, it's just the build-up of not knowing.

**Jason:** Knowing that you need to move in with like seven other strangers, then when I got here it was like oh no you've got nine now, and it was like what? There's more people that I could like hate or not hate? But yeah as soon as I met them it felt like quite a good bunch so I got used to it now and I was happy after that.

Imogen and Jason summarise the experiences of many of this project's participants, for it seems that much of both the excitement and nerves around starting university are based upon the making of new friends. The pair also suggested that their nerves were alleviated upon arrival and the realisation that they were going to be 'okay' and, for Jason, that his housemates were 'a good bunch'. There is also the indication here that having found their flatmates agreeable, Imogen and Jason were immediately okay and 'happy'. This highlights the onus placed upon making friends and getting on with housemates as this was the key to them feeling settled at university. This could be linked to the notion of 'ontological security', discussed by Anthony Giddens as follows: 'the development of relatively secure environments of day-to-day life is of central importance to the maintenance of feelings of ontological security. Ontological security, in other words, is sustained primarily through routine itself' (1991: 167). Imogen and Jason are comforted by the familiarity of being part of a group, in which friendships quickly become routinized, creating a sense of order and continuity.

However, for some students their apprehensions are met by an uncomfortable reality that living with people is not easy. As was discussed by participants Susan and Rose in Chapter Four, section 4.3.2, this can be challenging for new students who are used to their own space. Erb et al suggest that because housemates are the first people of equal status, compared to family members etc., with whom students live there are added challenges to students' abilities to get along (2014: 44). Staff participant and College Dean Stephanie also stated that the complaints the Deanery receive most regularly are as a result of noise in accommodation,

**Dean Stephanie:** Yeah Freshers' is, it gets quite hard to say because Freshers' week is like the noisiest possible week but you tend to get less complaints because students aren't really aware of how to complain or who to complain to also they are *desperate* to make friends and so don't want to complain about their newfound neighbours. I'd say probably this time of year, which is the quiet time so fines are doubled but it's also when students are more likely to be complaining about any bit of noise. Tends to be towards the end of term so weeks 8 through 10 when they've got coursework to do as well.

As Dean Stephanie suggests, due to a desire to make friends it is unlikely that complaints will be made within the first few weeks of university, but as time goes on and students focus on studying and particularly exams in 'quiet time'<sup>3</sup>, complaints occur. This would suggest that the 'desperation' to make friends wears off as students settle in to university life and new friendship groups, and there can be tensions within accommodation where individuals have differing opinions of what is acceptable. With accommodation at university often being multicultural and a mixture of British 'home' students and international students, there can also be cultural differences, particularly in relation to socialising and drinking. Dean Stephanie shared her awareness of this,

**Dean Stephanie:** Yeah I've got a few insights, I've worked quite a lot with students from overseas in my day job and I'd say less so in the deanery but they do kind of come and chat as well. I find they do sometimes find it hard to settle in just cos it's such a massive, like, culture shock really. I do find that students who come to me, cos I used to be a college advisor so when they came to me in that role they were more saying 'I don't understand how British people can get so drunk, I don't understand how they can be so unreserved' and that was mainly students from China, and it tended to be the Chinese female students who would come to me, and I'm not sure why by they did sort of, they

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<sup>3</sup> 'Quiet Time' refers to the examination period at university where anti-social noise that would normally be served with a 'warning' is punishable by fines, as universities hope to foster an environment in which students can work, revise and sleep undisturbed.

did confide in me quite a bit and they were quite horrified at what they saw. They said 'we don't want to do that', and it did end up that it tended to be the Chinese students stuck together which does create silos and it's not really what we as a uni want because it's so great to go and mix up students. I do to a certain extent know how weird it is because I did go out and spend quite a bit of time in Beiwei in Beijing and that was a massive culture shock for me and I kind of have got that insight into what it's like for a student who's suddenly dropped on this really weird campus and it's quite a challenging place to be anyways cos it's not like living in a house, it's not like being in a city Uni [...] which are spread out, it's very much a campus so I'm aware that it is quite a challenge and I think the drinking culture does not help that in the slightest for a lot of people. But then again some students come and test the boundaries and they do want to take part in things, so I've certainly seen students from China say 'I got really drunk last night and I hated it but I'm meant to like it, what do I do?'

Dean Stephanie raised a number of factors that can hinder both the social connectedness of students and intercultural friendships. She also referred to the concept of 'culture shock' which was used often by the international students who participated in this study as a means of describing feelings of not yet understanding or being comfortable in a new environment. It seems that the 'normative' practice of engaging in UDC was an initial stumbling block to intercultural friendships particularly between British/European students, who were often happy with drinking practices, and Chinese students, who, as Dean Stephanie highlights, were not. Dean Stephanie also raised the issue that practices of getting drunk and participating in UDC are so commonplace and normative that some students attempt to take part even when they do not enjoy it, rather than be subject to the 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982) that this research recognises. I argue that students who do not drink alcohol, or participate in UDC, can both make themselves into a subject through knowledge that they are deviating from the 'norm', and be made a subject by other students through dividing practices, with the awareness that the 'typical' student is related to drinking cultures. International students therefore form co-

national friendships more easily and more commonly as has been recognised by a number of studies (see e.g. Bochner et al, 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Hendrickson et al, 2010; Neri & Ville, 2008; McLaren, 2006; Schartner, 2015; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Here Dean Stephanie further highlights the problems or difficulties that arise from the specificities of a campus based university which can exacerbate social issues and cultural 'norms' in particular ways and provide a 'challenge'. Whilst the international students I have spoken with often expressed sadness at the lack of host-national friendships they had acquired (see also Schartner et al, 2015), the British/home students were often dismissive or patronising towards international students who they deemed 'quiet' and in need of looking after, as was seen in Chapter Four, section 4.3.1, with Freshers' Reps being trained in how to 'deal with' international students and non-drinkers.

Participants in my research also described a distinction and a separation between 'home' and international students, particularly in relation to living together, despite the best efforts of universities and student unions to better integrate students. This can be seen in an extract from Emily's interview in which she describes her living situation:

**Emily:** Well 'cos there's me, our flat, and we get along with the flat next door, and they've got like three internationals in there, and they don't come out, I don't even know their names. And there's this girl, she was out all the time, I feel like I'm just going off on one, but she was like out in Freshers' and stuff and I thought she seemed really nice but now she hasn't seen anyone in ages, she's just staying in her room, and she's dropping out of uni this week.

Emily shows little concern for the international students who seemingly do not feel comfortable socialising with their flatmates. Instead Emily, and her friends from her flat and the flat next door, seem somewhat put out by the unwillingness or hesitation of some students to socialise in their preferred manner. This is particularly clear in the description of the girl who was 'out in

Freshers' but has since taken to staying in her room. This is noteworthy as, from their research on the social capital renewal of international students in Australia, Neri and Ville found that 'many students experience relative unhappiness and disorientation on arrival from overseas' (2008: 1535) and that they arrive at university 'generally denuded of social capital' (2008: 1515). However Emily and her flat seem to have little sympathy as these students are not reciprocating her preferred form of friendship and so are not deemed 'friends'. As Allan discusses 'reciprocity is important in all forms of friendship' and 'because of the importance of reciprocity, maintaining a level of control over the exchanges can become a prime concern, especially when available resources are unequal or limited' (1998: 77). It could be argued here that the social resource of drinking together is not reciprocated in this context and so friendship has not been initiated, or in one case has faltered. This is evidenced by both the dismissive and past-tense language used by Emily about her international flatmates 'I don't even know their names', 'I thought she seemed really nice'. Rather than recognising this, Emily and her flatmates are happy to be indifferent towards, and to an extent disappointed in, the students who are not socialising in the same ways as them by engaging in drinking cultures or 'going out'. To Emily, the international students and the 'girl [who] was out all the time' are not matching the effort put in by other flatmates to 'go out' and socialise, and so reciprocity is limited. The reciprocity of drinking and 'going out' together is somewhat unspoken in that it is the 'done thing' amongst many British students, something that international students may not know or feel able to follow and so, as is discussed in relation to Fan's account below and in Chapter Six section 6.3.3, they are subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982). This is particularly problematic since, as Scharfner points out, 'a considerable body of research has highlighted the importance of social connectedness for [international students'] subjective wellbeing, and their academic and socio cultural adjustment' (2014: 226). For the British students who cannot see their own biases in not allowing for cultural differences, this speaks of a much wider issue of prejudice within British society.

Fan, a third year junior year abroad (JYA) student from China, experienced the lack of reciprocity from the other side to Emily. For Fan it was a challenge to settle into university life in the UK because she found it difficult to make friends in a culture that was privileging socialising with alcohol.

**Fan:** Yeah I think the cultural issue is a bit easier for me, for instance, in doing the Freshers' Week almost every night my flatmates will invite me to socialise with them mainly in the form of drinking, but in our country we don't do this very often, we hardly do this actually, so if I don't attend those activities maybe they'll think that I'm not willing to socialise with them, but to be honest I'm really uncomfortable doing that occasions. I don't know how to behave myself, how to do it properly, yeah, that's one thing. And also the communication at first is a bit hard for me because I'm not quite used to the native speakers flow of speech and stuff.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So in Freshers' Week did you find another way to socialise with your flatmates or did they just go out anyway or?

**Fan:** Well I find that to stay in the kitchen and wait for others to come in and have small talk is sort of useful, and then to the pub for twice and later on I just gave up because it's too much for me.

Similar to the assertions of Dean Stephanie, Fan attempted to engage in normative UDC to prevent her flatmates thinking she was 'not willing to socialise with them', which alludes to a feeling of pressure. Fan made an effort to engage with the culture and context of her new social environment, despite that not being reciprocated by her flatmates, and in spite of feeling that she did not know how to behave having been socialised in a culture where alcohol consumption is less common and abstention is much more accepted (see Yoon et al, 2015). Fan found that even after a month in the UK she still struggled to make friends with British students:



**Fan:** Yes, to be honest I still find it difficult to make friends now, even if I've been in England for more than one month, because I discover that the way British citizens make friends is to actually socialise with each other in a pub, they dance together 'til very late and they share this interesting stories when they got drunk [...] and the other day after the event they just talk very merrily about what happened and gradually they get close to each other in this way. But, well, unfortunately I just can't take part in th[ese] activities.

Fan is aware that, as was discussed above, the involvement in shared activities is something that brings people together and in the case of university this often centres on alcohol consumption. It is clear that, certainly for many participants here, the activity of 'going out' and drinking has brought the groups together and cemented friendships through shared experiences and storytelling which have, in turn, ostracised those, such as Fan, who have declined such activities. As Pahl states 'friendship exists largely through an involvement in certain activities, which generates sentiments which, in turn, encourage further activities' (2000: 14). Drinking cultures can therefore serve as 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982) as the decline of participation in drinking by Fan not only excluded her from that one particular event, but prevented her being considered as one of the group, denied her the 'shared experience' and meant that she could not participate in what I call 'night-out nostalgia' which is enacted through shared storytelling, photo-sharing and experiences. Fan was reliant on a 'co-national' friendship (see Schartner et al, 2015) with a young woman who had taken up the same Junior Year Abroad (JYA) placement and who had more success in 'kitchen' socialising with her flatmates through sharing 'cooking disasters', however Fan still only described these as 'relatively intimate relationships' and not as friendships.

Universities are aware there is a division between home and international students and are also aware of where the prejudice seems to lie, as I found talking to a staff member from the university:

**Participant:** Yeah, so I think thinking about if students are going to do well, they've got to feel comfortable and feel engaged with the university. [...] So if they're living in a college, if they're taking part in one of the clubs or societies, if they don't feel it's for them, and if a whole segment of our community don't feel, we're failing. And we're very aware that many of the activities are put on by one segment of the community, and that's great that they do, but they've got to be always thinking about the segment of the community that haven't engaged and why they haven't and how they can help make them feel equally welcome. So certainly within the colleges we're doing a lot in terms of talking with the international students, if it's the international ones we're thinking of here, and trying to understand what it is they would like to do, and so I run a survey [...] and one of the questions I ask is do you feel you have enough opportunities to get to know students from other countries and cultures, and then I can check the answers compared to whether the student is a UK or an EU or international, and the UK students generally say yes there's plenty of opportunity, enough, and the international students say there isn't, and I think there's a mismatch between wanting to be internationalised and so we're doing quite a bit of work with the students' union to actually encourage the UK students to see the benefits of the international, it's not so much how do you help the international fit it, it's more how can the UK welcome and want to mix, want to work with or work within their groups in the academic department, or be within the social side, so we're sort of turning it into, it's not the internationals' problem, it's the UK's not seeing the value of the international students being here.

Given the experiences that have been outlined here of some international students feeling uncomfortable with the dominant form of socialising at university, and given the dismissive

attitude of some of the students who do take part in UDC, it is unsurprising that international students are leaning on co-national friendships. It is also unsurprising that this division is a cause for concern for universities and student unions, as a large part of the student population are essentially being segregated from dominant social cultures by UK students who think there are 'enough opportunities to get to know students from other countries' but whose actions are often indifferent or patronising. By attempting to emphasise the benefits of attending a multicultural university, as the participant above outlines, universities are highlighting the opportunity for students to make new friends, break stereotypes, broaden their perspective and 'gain unique cultural knowledge' (Sias et al, 2008: 2). However, Fox, a first year international student from China, found that she relied on co-national friendships and that her group engaged in their own drinking cultures:

**Fox:** Just the kind of card games like that, I don't think there are other games 'cos I don't really go out with natives, I basically go out with my Chinese friends. And drinking alcohol, we're also drinking some drinks wines maybe during dinner, outside dinner and something. Don't really go to the clubs, we usually drink in our flat, not in our flat, in their flat. One of my friends he can make some mojitos so we drink mojito or some other things, just like vodka and kind of thing [sic].

Whilst Fox's friendship group did not engage in UDC in the same way as host-nationals, who she refers to as 'natives', they were socialising with alcohol in accommodation and often with food (see also Hunt et al, 2014). What this serves to reinforce is that there is not a mono-drinking culture at university and that co-national bonds are valuable for 'international students' wellbeing and sense of belonging' (Schartner, 2015: 239). Alcohol consumption is then, in various guises, a dominant and normative practice at university and whilst this can be difficult for those who 'deviate' from this norm, as seen above, for many participation in UDC is a method for making friends and maintaining friendships, as the next section argues in greater detail.

### **5.2.2. Maintaining relationships: drinking and 'going out' as methods of sustaining friendships**

The sociality that is fostered by university drinking cultures has been described by my participants as one of the pleasures of consuming alcohol. This section therefore argues that drinking is normalised as a key mode of socialising at university and has come to be one of the ways in which friendships are maintained. This adds to a body of literature that recognises the pleasures of alcohol consumption and its intersections with friendship (e.g. Fujimoto & Valente, 2012a; 2012b; Katainen et al, 2014; MacLean, 2016; Niland et al, 2013; Overbeek et al, 2012; Seaman & Ikewuonu, 2011; Thurnell-Read, 2016, 2017). As Niland et al suggest, 'young adults' drinking is linked closely to the intimacy of bonding with friends in the fun and adventures of nights out together' (2013: 531). It seems that much of what concerns researchers from harm reduction perspectives are what is deemed fun and social bonding by young people. It is in this that one of the difficulties of producing effective campaigns lies, as drinking is seen as one of the ways in which friendship is 'done' (Niland et al, 2013: 531; also see Chapter Six). Not to drink would be to deny a particular way of maintaining friendships for a majority of young people, and certainly the majority of student participants here. The theme of friendship, as such, appeared to underpin everything else when I discussed UDC with students. It is apparent in my data that from the very beginning of university, as is discussed in Chapter Four and above, a major concern for students is how they will make friends and form bonds with housemates. This leads to social activities and a period of bonding that, for those who participate, are often facilitated by alcohol and drinking games for as Thurnell-Read highlights, drinking games 'provide a common group focus, a competitive activity [and] encourage involvement' (2017: 343). First year friendship group Becky, Betty and Ryan for example describe how drinking games were used at the start of university when they did not know each other, but are now disregarded for less staged and more comfortable forms of socialising instead:

**Interviewer:** Okay, so what sorts of nights out do you have? If you start in the flat do you play drinking games or do you chat or?

**Ryan:** We did in the first few weeks drinking games, now it's just gone to like playing Fifa

**Betty:** Now we just talk and

**Ryan:** people talk

**Betty:** make jokes

**Becky:** I think the games were there because people weren't talking, now I think we'd rather talk wouldn't we than play the games?

**Betty:** we mess around but not really

**Becky:** sometimes we start with a game and the game just trails off and we just end up talking and

**Betty:** sometimes someone tries to get in 'never have I ever'<sup>4</sup> but it never lasts

**Becky:** it never lasts

**Interviewer:** Everyone seems to play that

**Ryan:** We know too much information now to play it, they get too personal after a bit

**Becky:** We know far too much

**Betty:** it does get personal

It is clear from this that whilst drinking is still being used to facilitate socialising as a group, drinking games are regarded as 'ice-breakers' and were used when the students did not know

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<sup>4</sup> 'Never Have I Ever' is a drinking game often played by students and young people who take it in turns to say a statement starting with 'never have I ever' followed by an action, those who have done the action take a drink.

each other so well. Once their friendships had been established they found that playing drinking games got 'too personal' and so they preferred to talk and 'mess around'. However, the friends were still making an effort to come together as a group and drink, a special effort alongside their regular and everyday socialising. Whilst drinking games are associated with higher levels of alcohol consumption (see: Alfonso & Deschenes, 2013; Borsari et al, 2007; Fairlie et al, 2015; Zamboanga et al, 2010; Zamboanga et al, 2014), and despite the fact that the friendship group had moved past the need for drinking games as conversation starters, they were still pre-drinking which is a practice patterned around saving money by drinking cheaper alcohol at home before going to licensed venues but is also socially driven and 'motivated by intoxication' (McCreanor et al, 2016: 44; see also Labhart et al, 2013). The practice of pre-drinking formed part of the construction of a 'night out' for students, a normative practice in normalised drinking cultures.

It is therefore clear that drinking and 'going-out' hold a special status for students in terms of socialising, and was considered as such by the majority of my participants. However, there are examples of the importance of friendship in terms of everyday life, and how students socialise in different ways together. Following the excerpt above, Becky, Betty and Ryan describe their everyday lives together:

**Interviewer:** So what other ways are you socialising together other than the nights out side of things?

**Betty:** we sit in each other's rooms

**Ryan:** Just, 'I'm a Celebrity' is on so someone streams it and then we watch it

**Becky:** We watch 'Great British Bake Off' with the other flats as well, there's quite a few of us in the common room

**Betty:** The final

**Becky:** That was really good. We watch 'The Apprentice'. We just, usually end up sitting in the kitchen just talking for a little while and just

**Betty:** and sometimes we end up in someone's room just talking about stuff, yeah it's nice.

This suggests that friendship to the group means more than drinking and going out together, but there are differences in how the two methods of socialising are discussed. For example both examples refer to talking but in the first in relation to getting together to drink Becky states that the group would 'rather talk' whereas here she states that they 'end up' talking for a little while. There is a difference in the intention of the socialising, with one a purposeful 'get-together' and the other a natural occurrence. Other students have also described the various ways they spend time with friends such as recent graduate Sophia, second year undergraduate Jen, and first year undergraduate Zed:

**Sophia:** Well we would still go to the pub...on occasions. We did a pub quiz once a week and I had the Real Ale Society one night a week but on the others nights it was generally staying in and watching television together, playing board games that sort of thing.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, so is that what a regular week would look like?

**Sophia:** Yeah, a couple of nights going out to the pub and things like that. Occasionally going out for a meal, but most of the time it would be staying in and just socialising together, enjoying, we enjoyed TV so we'd sit and watch TV or films.

**Jen:** Yeah I remember in first year I used to have a much worse sleeping pattern, like I used to go to bed at like two or three in the morning because it was all so exciting having like these new friends that I lived with, so we'd go to the kitchen like at dinner time and just stay

there chatting for hours and hours and go to bed at like two in the morning or something. But still, it was still just chatting, we didn't even have a TV but we never needed one last year. I guess by now we've run out of things to say a bit. No, but yeah it was good, we never really needed to go out much to have fun, which was nice.

**Zed:** Well for starters we have game nights at our flat, for instance if you know the game 'cards against humanity', we play that from time to time without any drinking. Also my girlfriend recently she participated in a sober social where they also did just games, things like musical chairs and stuff like that, so it's funny to see such simple things like board games and card games are usually what people play when they don't want to drink as well.

It seems that, for these students their normal daily lives were very inclusive of friends and friendship, with drinking and going out seen as celebrations or as treats at the end of the week. Accommodation is also clearly important in giving students a space in which to socialise, play board games, watch television and talk to one another as referenced by the examples above. However, revealed here is a clear desire to be together and be co-present with an onus placed upon having fun. This fun is often encapsulated by teasing, 'being silly' and playing games which all signify the status of students as young adults in the liminal stage between youth and the realities of adulthood, and something which alcohol is often used for amongst the other 'everyday activities' that still fit with the student status and that these students recounted.

For some participants, everyday socialising was not seen as 'enough' or special enough to maintain, particularly group, friendships. Whilst in many cases the opportunity to have a good time and drink is welcomed by students as 'student drinking cultures include camaraderie, fun, and a sense of belonging' (Hebden et al, 2015: 214), for others the normalisation of drinking cultures fosters a feeling of social pressure. For example, postgraduate student Bronwen



describes how in her second year as an undergraduate student she felt that she had to go out because it was the only activity that her friendship group did all together:

**Bronwen:** Second year it was more frequent, it was probably the most frequent, it might have been as much, no it probably wasn't every week for me but it might have been every two weeks I reckon. Although maybe not even that, I think it was a really strange sense of if I wanted to hang out with my housemates that I needed to go clubbing because that was the only activity that we all did together. So I think that put pressure on me a bit to go out as a sense of social obligation and doing things as a house. Also Laura was an interesting sort of example, she was a girl I lived with, she's really serene it's really unusual, and she's a very committed, probably quite conservative Christian and she would go clubbing with them every time and I think she did that as a kind of looking out for them kind of thing, but she totally didn't make it seem like that's what she was doing. She seemed like she wanted to go out clubbing – did she? I'm not sure. She would drink a bit, she wasn't like tee-total, she could hold her drink better than me for sure. So part of it, perhaps I was like I knew Laura would be there and that was nice and like Kate wasn't a massive drinker either. There was a massive division in our house between those that drank or would get drunk and so sorry yeah, I probably drunk the least, then Laura who would never be drunk she'd be in control, Kate didn't drink much, and she was never sort of crazy and it was also the division between those that got off with people in clubs and those that didn't.

Within this extract it becomes clear that, for Bronwen's friendship group, going out clubbing is seen as an active way of bringing the group together. In this case the everyday sociality of living together in a shared house was not seen as enough, or fun enough, to count and so a night-out was 'needed' to regularly bring everyone together. This alludes again to the special status given to drinking as a friendship group practice as it is seen as distinct from other social activities partaken by the group. There is also a clear distinction made between those that drank alcohol

and those who did not, with those who did not exemplified as the anomalies in this context. It could be suggested that this group camaraderie and active socialising could be achieved in other ways for those who, like Bronwen, would prefer alternatives, and within Freshers' week attempts are always made to achieve this (see Chapter Four). However, from my data it has become clear that many alternative events (which in this context is meant to signify a non-drink specific or sober event) are looked down upon or are not well attended, for example Lee who was a member of the Junior Common Room (JCR), who organise Freshers' week for their respective colleges, said:

**Lee:** I don't think the sober events work at all, because we tried to put them on, there was like mocktail making and stuff and no one turned up.

And Gary, a second year undergraduate, believes that even if alternative events are put on, they are likely to cause divisions between the student body:

**Gary:** It does coz that's splitting people up isn't it? It's like going you're not gonna drink, you go sit in there with the other people [*the other non-drinkers*] as opposed to like something that has everything kind of thing.

This aids in the perception that non-drinkers at university are on the fringe, as Frederiksen et al point out 'it is important to recognise the social meaning of alcohol and not just to reduce alcohol to an instrument for intoxication' (2012: 590). It seems that the everyday forms of socialising discussed above are recognised as 'nice' in that they are not purposefully set aside for drinking, and so it is acceptable to be together without alcohol, but events clearly marked as 'alcohol-free' or 'sober alternative' are not viewed in the same way. As Frederiksen *et al* found, parties without alcohol are considered boring and drinking is seen as 'a necessary and established social norm at parties, as a desirable atmosphere and sociality is created around alcohol consumption' (2012: 586). This may be due, in part, to the knowledge that such events will not have the social aid of alcohol and so social anxieties about being with people and meeting new people may not be alleviated. However, as was seen in Chapter Four, Section 4.2.1,

the pre-university students had planned to attend 'alternative' events before they arrived at university which suggests, again, that more conversations should take place with pre-university students as to what they want to see from social events at university and ensure that more is decided with them rather than for them.

Alcohol and participation in UDC are therefore valued in that they provide common ground for students both in being part of the culture and in giving them something to talk and tell stories about (Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). The involvement of alcohol seems to create stories that are considered more entertaining and worthy of remembering, than for example a trip to the cinema or a film night which are often used as an alternative to alcohol-centric events. For example after a conversation about social media group chats and the use of them to discuss nights out, I asked first year friendship group Betty, Becky and Ryan if storytelling plays a part in the fun of nights out:

**Interviewer:** so is there quite a lot of storytelling after nights out then?

**Becky:** Yeah

**Betty:** a bit too much

**Interviewer:** Do you think that's part of the fun?

**Becky:** I think it is

**Ryan:** Something to look back on isn't it

**Becky:** course it is

**Betty:** it is something to look back on but

**Ryan:** when you've graduated

**Becky:** I think it brings us together after going out and like these events have happened when we're all there and we can talk about it and build a bit of a history, cos when we first come here we know nothing of anyone so I think going out allows us to have this common ground

**Betty:** Yeah but even in like our third and fourth week and we were going out, Freshers' week was only a couple of weeks ago but we were reminiscing

**Becky:** I know, reminiscing throughout Freshers' week

**Betty:** But we were always reminiscing as if it was like months and months and months ago, or even like ages ago and it's only like when you think about it

The shared experience and 'history' brings these friends together and gives them memories to look back on from even such a short space of time. There is again what I term 'night-out nostalgia' in this account in the way in which nights-out were being taken-up as (shared) stories, particularly from Freshers' week, when as Becky says people 'know nothing of anyone'. Storytelling can give people common ground in the reminiscing of what made nights out good, bad, or funny, and often allows for a 'bad but good overall' construction as stories can help reframe negative experiences (see Niland et al, 2013), help students navigate UDC (see also: Brown & Gregg, 2012; Fjaer, 2012; Hackley et al, 2013; Hebden et al, 2015; Katainen, 2014; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacLean, 2016; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013), and can both support the status of the individual storyteller and 'build and sustain group loyalty' (Thurnell-Read, 2017: 343). This is therefore another way in which drinking cultures aid in the maintenance of friendships as storytelling can be a social 'route of inclusion' for students and provide 'material' for that social life (Griffin et al, 2009: 463). Stories amongst my participants often included instances in which one person, or a group of people, had drunk over their 'limit' and required the help of friends or a friend. In line with storytelling, this often extended the sociality of the night before as friends got together to 'fill in the blanks' (see also

Fjaer, 2012). The following section goes on to consider the friendship practices that characterise these stories of university drinking cultures.

### **5.3. Friendship Roles in University Drinking Cultures**

As has been discussed above and in this thesis so far, friendships at university are formed and maintained through participation in drinking cultures. From my data it has emerged that norms of caregiving are established very quickly between friends in relation to keeping each other 'safe' on nights-out, though these can often differ in terms of gender. MacLean argues that friendship practices must be engaged in a process of continually constituting friendship (2016: 94) and both caregiving and participation in UDC serve as friendship practices. Niland et al also argue that drinking is a 'shared social practice' and allows both the time and space for friendship practices and there are shared meanings of 'caring and protection' (2013: 534-535). Caregiving also sets up friendships as real (MacLean, 2016) and trustworthy, which is argued to be an important quality of friendship (see e.g. Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Zimmerman, 2004). Pahl, for example, argued that trust is at the 'heart of true communicative friendship in the contemporary world' (2000: 63). While friendship usually requires time to develop (Pahl, 2000) my data suggests that in a context of being 'thrown together' some friendships at university seem to flourish faster, for example in Freshers' week; although students choose their courses and preferences for accommodation which are also managed by university staff. Whilst some of my participants were not in the habit of 'going out' without people they did not feel completely comfortable and 'safe' with, it seems easy to be 'swept up' in the excitement of starting university and new students put their faith in new friends and Freshers' Reps. Later in their university lives the majority of participants had strategies in place, as is discussed extensively in Chapter Six, to avoid risks and had learnt who could be trusted, or if they were the ones to be 'responsible'. The following sections go on to consider these themes, first in the issue of responsibility and caregiving amongst friends and secondly how such caregiving roles can also

serve to reinforce gender stereotypes, and particularly represent a wider concern of women's (perceived) vulnerability.

### **5.3.1. Friendship roles and caregiving within university drinking cultures**

My data shows that university students very quickly establish bonds with friends for example, friendship group Becky, Betty and Ryan discuss the differences between university friends and home friends in terms of comfort:

**Interviewer:** So do you think it makes a difference, say from your friends at home to your friends at uni, living together?

**Becky:** Yeah

**Betty:** Yeah

**Becky:** I think cos everyone's in the same boat, and usually if there's one issue someone else has experienced it as well because we're all going through the same thing, I think we've all got a common ground to work off so

**Betty:** You get more comfortable as well though faster with your friends here because

**Becky:** They see you 24/7

**Betty:** I'm weirdly a lot more comfortable with people here than I can be with some of my friends there, like open and yeah

Here the friends suggest that the proximity and amount of time spent with university friends is what leads to the level of comfort and openness they have. Furthermore they suggest that the specificity of the shared experience of university provides a common-ground for friendships. The successes of university friendships for Betty even lead to feelings of comfort greater than

those of her established friendships from home. Recent graduate Sophia also felt that it was important to have a level of comfort and someone you could 'be yourself with' at university:

**Sophia:** I think I was very lucky to find the friends that I did so soon. I lived with a friend who had been to another university, who'd had a horrible situation where she'd not wanted to go and *everybody* in her dorm wanted to go out all the time and she ended up leaving, and then we became really good friends because we stuck together and I think I was lucky to meet her so early and that I could just relax and be myself and not be somebody that I'm clearly not.

Similarly to Betty and Becky above, Sophia found that 'sticking together' and spending a good deal of time with her friend meant that she was able to relax and not feel like she was pretending to be someone else in order to fit in. Armstrong et al (2014b) discovered that unknown others were seen as a particular risk of drinking on nights-out; so at university the people you have known for hours become the 'known' whilst students you have not yet met are 'others'. This explains the speed at which friendships are made in those first few hours/days/weeks at university; there is a desire for comfort, reassurance, friendship, as seen in the excerpts above, as well as safety. And whilst some of these initial friendships do not last, see Bronwen's account below, others endure past university with Sophia still describing the friend she was 'lucky to meet' as her 'best friend'.

However, for others trust has to be earned for a comfortable friendship to ensue. As Pahl discusses, 'the inevitable uncertainties of interpersonal interactions have to be overcome through trust [...] There are no rules and contracts to bind us to our closest friends: we simply have to trust them. The closer we are to our friends, the more they are able to betray us. Without trust, friendships will fail' (2000: 63). For burgeoning university friendships, then, uncertainties have to be overcome as people get to know one another, share experiences and learn who they can trust. For example, Bronwen explains that, during her undergraduate

Freshers' week, two of the people she considered 'friends' left her alone and frightened in a nightclub. Following this she was careful about who she would go on nights out with:

**Bronwen:** No. No, no, no, no, there was no acknowledgement that they'd gone out as a three and come back as a two, none at all. I think I was a little pet to them, they'd always be like 'oh you're so sweet and small' – no, not cool actually. Yeah so that was the end of that friendship. They were Freshers' week friends; I learnt the hard way that Freshers' week does not give you the friends you want. But yeah I definitely felt more pressure later on, because by that stage I trusted the people, I really trusted the people I lived with we were very good at looking after each other. Everyone always went home together; it was quite safe, we were careful and considerate of each other I think.

For Bronwen there was not the immediate sense of ease with fellow new students and flatmates that Betty, Becky and Sophia experienced, instead it was a process of trial and error and learning who she could trust and feel safe with. Bronwen also highlighted the commonplace group practices, typical of my participants, of returning home together and 'looking after each other' which I argue in Chapter Six are management strategies of UDC.

As has been mentioned briefly above, one theme that has emerged from my data is the position of one person within a friendship group who will be the 'responsible one'. This often falls to a female group member and, as a number of female participants have asserted in this research, they are often referred to as 'mum'. This was also the case within Armstrong et al's (2014b) research, where one person was labelled the 'mother' of the group, this is clearly gendered as the next section analyses. This, they say, is an accepted and well established practice of 'monitoring and modifying other group members' intoxication and associated behaviour', this title falls to the person who will ensure that the group remains safe and intact (Armstrong et al 2014b: 756). According to second year undergraduate Sarah however, this role is one of many within her friendship group:



**Sarah:** Yeah, I'm the mum. Something goes wrong and you have massive responsibility on your shoulders. Like why did you leave her, Sarah? Or, it's assumed that they can leave her because I won't. There's the mum, there's the funny one, there's the one that'll pull, there's the one that'll cry over an ex-boyfriend or a 'why has he not text me back' ...does my head in I swear to God, just need to chill out on the texting back thing. There's the one that's got so many friends we'll always lose her on a night out because she'll go with this group, then she'll go with this group like a bit of a social butterfly, and then there's Effie who's always home for One; I don't know why, I don't know if it's just who they are or if that's a role.

For Sarah it seems that her (reluctant) acceptance of the role of 'mum' has allowed other roles to develop within her friendship group that are, in some ways, reliant on drinking and participating in drinking cultures. For example 'pulling', crying and getting lost have been discussed in my data as normal elements of student nights-out and so these roles are dependent on that context. Yet also, with the safety net of a responsible and trusted friend, participants feel able to relax and get drunk, leading to other group roles such as 'the social butterfly' and 'the one that'll pull'. However, I have also found that male-only groups can often attempt to match each other's level of drunkenness and therefore not have a person singled out as 'the liability', as according to Gary:

**Gary:** I think it is like a bad reaction coz we, we'll sort of like, when we're out with our mates we always make sure we try and stay at the same level to avoid someone having to take someone home or someone ending up in a bad situation so we always like match each other which can be bad it depends, it depends how fast the other one's going

**Interviewer:** so if someone's had a bad day that's it you're all...?

**Gary:** yeah we're all having a bad day.

**Interviewer:** that's really interesting, because you often find in groups of people that there'll maybe be one responsible person

**Gary:** yeah and the liability

**Interviewer:** so you avoid that by either drinking as little as each other or drinking

**Gary:** as much as each other yeah

**Interviewer:** is that the more common one?

**Gary:** Yeah, generally. It depends who it is again, it depends who's sort of like taking the, coz there's always one person that speeds up so everyone's gotta catch up with 'em.

Here Gary suggests that the way in which his friendship group cares for one another is to match each other's level of drunkenness, and to all share in either a good day or a bad day. It is in this way that they try to prevent one group member becoming the 'liability', and as Thurnell-Read discusses this can be related to practices of masculinity as consuming alcohol, and successfully enacting drinking and drunkenness, can be 'a means of supporting masculine identity [and] can play a key role in facilitating male bonding rituals through which masculinity is enacted' (2013: 2.2). There is an assumption here that if the group are at the same level of intoxication they will all be responsible for each other, or less responsible for their actions. As Maclean posits 'epidemiological studies examining drinking patterns among peer and friendship groups have consistently shown that young people's alcohol consumption levels resemble those of others around them' (2016: 93). Here Gary's group of friends have taken this one step further by *knowingly* matching each other's levels of intoxication. This can again be linked to reciprocity within friendships. For example Graham Allan discusses the study of a community in a small Australian town by Oxley (1974) and claims this study showed that framing male 'relationships around the drinking setting, and deliberately excluding from them areas of activity which would make social and economic difference apparent, fostered an ethic of equality in which reciprocities could be managed unproblematically' (1998: 77). Gary's friendship group ensure

that they 'stay at the same level' of drunkenness, and although they do not account for variations in tolerance levels it is their intention to be equal and reciprocal.

It is clear that responsibility for each other forms part of the narrative of group nights-out. However an extract from Alice, a first year undergraduate from Texas, provides a comparison as she found herself being put in a position of responsibility over others, which she also related to a 'mothering' role, because she rarely drank alcohol:

**Alice:** I'm definitely a plan ahead kind of person, I think it's drilled into my head after years of like horror stories, my mum's one of those people very safety conscious on these things, but it's one of those we do normally just take a taxi back home, but I'm never drunk enough to be worried about it. They call me mum most of the time, because I'm counting everyone, making sure we're all here, but no I plan ahead, are we all going back home, who's here, who's not here, calling a taxi, getting everyone back safely?

**Interviewer:** So do you end up being the responsible one?

**Alice:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel about that?

**Alice:** I don't mind, I've had friends at home who legally can't drink, call me if they don't think they can drive, which I'm fine with, so I'm fine with it here. I mean it's not kind of fun particularly, drunk people are not, they're funny at first but they get very irritating after a while, they're kind of like small children. I don't mind, it's not something I even consciously volunteer to do, I just instinctively 'mum' people as they say.

**Interviewer:** So have people started to notice that you'll do that and rely on you?

**Alice:** Probably some. I think if I went out more they would, and so it's I guess a reason not to, but at the same time I do worry about them when they go out, like when my

flatmates come back and they're just completely out of it I'm worried, I worry that they won't come back some nights because I mean I can hear them when they come in, the doors slam pretty loud, so it's one of those things I worry about when they're not there, but I can't go out and take care of them every night and that's not my responsibility.

Even though it has been noted that 'caring for others and being cared for when drunk offer opportunities to display and strengthen friendship[s]' find out who are 'real friends' and develop shared social identities (de Visser et al, 2013: 1466), my data shows that there are limits to the responsibilities young people are willing to take on. Those who regularly drink too much and often rely on friends to take care of them risk becoming an 'unwanted burden' (de Visser et al, 2013: 1468). Niland et al also found that 'a dominant tension in the friendship practice of caring was when the 'carer' (male and female) resented and resisted this positioning' (2013: 535). It is clear here that whilst Alice is obviously concerned for the welfare of her friends as she recounts her 'worry' for them when they go out drinking, she also believes that were she to go out with them on a more regular basis they would become reliant on her help to stay safe and so she resists this by staying at home. As Rawlins states 'as friends we appraise each other's actions and hold each other accountable to our negotiated moral standards and trustworthy practices' (2009: 182). Alice holds her friends accountable for their own actions, and so does not wish to be made responsible for them.

Imogen and Jason provide a further example of care-giving roles that occur on their mixed-gender group nights-out, and which exemplify many of the experiences discussed above:

**Jason:** There's not much of one here, 'cos Anna wouldn't normally go out with us and she's usually the one, and then there's people which like are more responsible for certain other people 'cos we have friendship groups now, we have like a divide in our flat. 'Cos I'm living with a certain five next year and the others are another five, so

there's people which are responsible for each other, so I'm like responsible for Jake and Howard, and it's just a good night out, you have like a support group, but other than that.

**Interviewer:** So what sorts of ways are you responsible?

**Jason:** Like if you see someone who's getting too drunk and you're not as bad yourself you like make sure they go to the toilet, make sure they throw up, that's what Howard did.

**Imogen:** Don't go near the weird guy.

**Jason:** Oh god yeah.

**Imogen:** Yeah we had, there was a situation, this was probably about a month ago, I just remember I was in [the student nightclub] and this boy, he lives in a couple of floors down from me which I didn't know at the time and he didn't know at the time either, I think he could see I was quite drunk so he started buying me drinks, I was just like yeah ok then, which I probably shouldn't have done in hindsight.

**Jason:** Pre drinks.

**Imogen:** Yeah and somebody kept giving me drinks and he started getting a bit close and I was like ooh and then the responsible person came over and literally saved me 'cos thinking back I'm a bit worried, like what could have actually happened?

**Jason:** We have a Norwegian in our flat and we have the one that no one wants to move in with and he's quite a predator, he's really annoying in just general, but there was one night where he was trying to like be with Julie and most of the night, and there was me and Violet another one of our flat mates and we were just like directing her away from him, so like we were dancing over here and he'd be like trying to like get close to her in the corner and we'd be like, and I'd like block him off from the group and he'd just like walk away, but he'd always come back and keep trying, god loves a trier.

Again there are a number of consequences discussed here as though part of the routine of a night-out. The friends make reference to the consequences before relating them to an experiential story. For example, 'if someone is getting too drunk [...] make sure they throw up, that's what Howard did'. These are also clearly stories that have been delivered and discussed a number of times as the two friends intervened either to assent to a fact, or correct a mistake, and as William Rawlins states 'the dialogues of friends turn into various degrees of shared narration' (2009: 62-63). This suggests that, as Tutenges and Sandberg discuss, storytelling forms part of the experience of drinking and going-out and can hold a number of functions including: 'for entertainment, to overcome distressing experiences, to put ethical dilemmas up for debate, to present "moral selves", to explore taboos and to strengthen friendship ties' (2013: 542). There is also evidence here of the sort of behaviour evident on nights-out that can lead to feelings of vulnerability, and the requirement of interventions from friends as 'other' males are considered 'weird guys' and 'predators'. There is also a difference here between the telling of these two stories that indicates the safety and comfort of being part of a group. For Imogen her individual experience is now something she looks back on with worry, and the feeling that her 'responsible' friend 'saved' her. Whilst Jason's re-telling of how the group protected Julie from the approaching male student was told with elements of humour and an indication that this student was known for such behaviour and group strategies were already in place for dealing with him. As can therefore be seen, men's and women's experiences of drinking and drunkenness still seem to differ (see Maclean, 2016). There are, therefore, elements of drinking cultures that are gendered and the following section goes on to consider this in greater detail.

### **5.3.2. Are caregiving roles and drinking practices reinforcing gender stereotypes?**

As we have already seen in this chapter, there are gendered elements of UDC in storytelling and 'roles' such as 'the mum' and further elements emerge from the friendship caregiving practices participants recounted. For example Bronwen's earlier assertion that her friends were 'careful

and considerate of each other' leads onto another element of concern over safety which can be seen in the gendered experiences of drinking cultures, and how this gives rise to forms of caregiving. There is a particular 'groupness' inherent in many student nights out as there is a perceived sense of safety in numbers against 'other' drunk people (see also: Maclean, 2016; Armstrong, 2014b), and as Armstrong et al found 'women were particularly wary of potential hostility, aggression and sexual violence from intoxicated people whom they did not know' (2014b: 754; see also Griffin et al, 2012). Second year Jen, for example, describes the safety she feels from belonging to a group:

**Jen:** [...] every time we do go out, it's kind of the assumption 'cos people can't be bothered to walk, we're quite lazy. But yeah no I do always feel safe because I always go in a group and the group never really splits up or anything 'cos I guess we're all a little bit shy so we don't tend to speak to other people much. There was one, yeah out of all the times that I've been out with my friends there's only been one time that one of them's made out with a stranger and we all were like wow this is weird. Which my friends at home find really funny because like their friends are doing that all the time, but my friends never ever do that. But other than that we're always sticking in a group. And we arrive at the club together and then we leave the club together, we all get in a taxi home and stuff. So yeah I do feel safe.

As Jen says, she feels safe because she is in part of a group and, similarly to Bronwen, she trusts them. This then, does have gendered elements as Armstrong et al discuss 'women frequently expressed a sense of safety derived from the knowledge that they would be taken care of by their friendship group [...] through what one participant identified as "safety in numbers" [...] in the presence of unknown males or while travelling on public transport' (2014b: 755). For both women it was important to arrive as a group and leave as a group and this was seen as being safe. This was a common theme amongst participants within this research, for example recent

graduate Katie also discussed safety and the 'normality' of care-giving amongst her friendship group:

**Katie:** Yeah, there were the bouncers on the doors after a certain time about 11-12 'O' clock the bouncers would be on. To be honest I always felt safe in [my university city] probably because it's a small city. It feels pretty small, where we were, but as a group we'd be pretty sensible even if we'd had quite a lot to drink nobody went off all on their own, we all, if someone wanted to go home it was like that's it night's done we're all going, kind of thing. Yeah, I mean none of my friends that were in my group, kind of went off with people but if they did there would definitely be that 'right will you send me a text when you get there, and send me one when you're leaving, send me one when you're home', that kind of thing. I don't even remember a time when we let somebody leave on their own.

It seems there is an unwritten rule about safety that even if participants have had 'quite a lot to drink' they will, most often, stick together. For Katie's group this was enacted even if only one person wanted to go home. This implies that the end of the night and getting home are seen as the time when people are most vulnerable, or something could go wrong. Being part of a group is therefore seen as being sensible whilst being alone or travelling home alone is not, particularly for women. Katie suggests that there were also protocols in place for those friends who wanted to go 'off with people' as it was expected that they would confirm to friends (via text message) that they were safe. This highlights the nature of university friendships as responsible and accountable, and relate to the strategies students use to manage the 'risks' of UDC as is argued in Chapter Six.

In contrast, the male participants in this research have indicated that they feel more able to talk to strangers and meet new people when on a night-out, seemingly having less concern for their own safety. For example, 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduates, Nick and Malc said:



**Nick:** I don't [lose] people, and I usually talk in advance to them, we'll meet that hour there, but if I go there I will wait for you. And usually I just find people, like I look on Facebook who's coming and maybe some people are just clicking that they're attending an event through a club but they're just like...But usually I talk with people when I go to them, meet with them at that hour, like last weekend I was waiting for my friends from Romania and when I get to the club [...] I met a friend from film society production, film production society and some other friends from marketing, that are in my group and I talk to them and there are multiple groups, and also the music was good, I just started dancing with random people that were dancing good.

**Malc:** Err wouldn't find it any other way, I'm actually fine talking to strangers sober and drunk [...] I think drunk I'm just a bit more slurry.

There is a contrast here between Jen's assertion above that as a shy group of people they do not really talk to other people when clubbing and prefer to stay in the safety of the group, whilst Nick and Malc seem to consider it par for the course that they will meet and talk to strangers on a night out. MacLean suggests that this is as a result of women's and men's expectations and experiences of drinking still differing. She states that despite women's alcohol consumption patterns drawing closer to those of men, it has been found that 'young women are more likely than young men to believe that they should constrain their level of intoxication and [...] feel a greater sense of personal responsibility to protect their own safety' (2016: 103). Both Nick and Malc claim that they are at ease being alone in these spaces and Nick particularly has a nonchalance in describing how he will arrange to meet friends but also 'just find people' to talk to and dance with.

The contrast has further emerged from my data as within interviews with both male and female students there have been assertions that women are more vulnerable within drinking spaces and in need of a group member who will ensure safety or provide a reassuring presence. Whilst in many cases in this research this task fell to a close female friend (see the account of Sarah below, for example) it has also emerged that there are male-female care-giving roles which are common in friendship group contexts, and that are based on this idea that women are more vulnerable. For example in describing how she feels frightened of a male stranger approaching her to dance in a nightclub, Jen asserts her belief that the presence of males in her friendship group will deter others from approaching:

**Jen:** Yeah I'd say they'd be more likely, I guess like the bigger the group the less likely you are to have someone approach you and then yeah if you've got a guy with you then I don't know, I think I'd feel less likely to be approached and also just more safe even if I were approached that that guy would be able to kind of scare them off somehow. Otherwise I'd feel a bit vulnerable like if it were just me and another girl, I would feel vulnerable and scared.

For Jen, even the presence of a male within her friendship group makes her feel able to relax with the decreased likelihood that she will be approached and feel 'vulnerable and scared'. As Grffin et al found, women who participate in drinking cultures often have the challenge of dealing with drunk men in contexts where alcohol is held responsible for men's sexual advances and polite refusal may be ignored (2012: 193; see Chapter One, section 2.10). Jen therefore feels that there is a safety in numbers, particularly with the addition of a 'guy', as discussed above. The contrast here between Jen and Nick's statements is stark for Nick claims to be someone who would be happy to dance with 'random people' (or others), whilst Jen would feel very uncomfortable if a 'random' person joined her group. It seems that the male participants in this research feel less vulnerable in such contexts. However, such constructions might be reproducing the idea of 'stranger danger' whilst statistics point rather to victims knowing their

perpetrators (see e.g. Goodey, 2017) as research has found females have 'elevated levels of fear' in regards to sex offenders (Katz-Schiavone et al, 2008: 293; see also: Scott, 2003). Though it should be noted that not all female participants felt 'vulnerable' and some, such as Elsie, enjoyed the 'community' spirit of belonging to a university and a university town:

**Elsie:** I go with the flow, I'm very bad at this, I don't know how many, 'cos as soon as I drink I just feel like I need to socialise with people, and that's why I don't like clubbing because you can't really talk to people, and so I'd always be in the smoking area talking to so many people. So I've lost count of how many times I just didn't know where my friends went and I was like whoops. So then I have to go round to people and I'm like 'hi, do you live on campus?' And they're like 'yeah' and I'm like 'can we share a taxi?' And they're like 'yeah', and it's actually a really good way of making friends, so yeah. Once I was, I think it was [a local nightclub], I had only gone out with two people, and I had forgotten that they lived in town and so we go out and everything and they're like 'oh but you can crash at our place if you want' and everything, and I was like 'oh I have a lecture tomorrow I kind of want to be back on campus', and I was like ok I'm going to ask people. And so I asked and this group of like I think it was 5 people I don't know, and I went over to them and I was like 'do you live on campus' and they were like 'yeah come share a taxi with us' and I was like 'yay', and so they went and there was a taxi there and they were like 'we only take 5 people' and I was like 'you guys go I'll find another way', and I didn't know these people and they were like 'no no no, we'll get you back' and I was like 'oh that's so sweet'. And so they got a taxi with me and I was like 'it's my birthday next week, you're all invited'.

Elsie felt a sense of safety derived from the status of 'student', and did not worry about approaching people she did not know, although she later suggested that she was less likely to approach individuals and questioned whether she had been naïve:

**Elsie:** Yeah so, I don't know, maybe I am just really naïve and I'm like we're all students, we all love each other.

Perhaps as students extend caregiving to their friends in UDC, they also extend this to other students, with the status of 'student' being a point of homophily.

However, young men also perform certain caregiving tasks for their male friends, most commonly aiding in getting home or breaking up or preventing fights (see e.g. Levine *et al*, 2014). For example Nick states that:

**Nick:** I don't know among everyone, like this stuff, if you have a girl around, you have a girlfriend or girls are aware of how much boys are drinking and some just say hey stop you're drinking enough, sometimes I tell that to friends that I know they are drinking too much and I say hey that's enough, stop drinking. Sometimes I don't know, people just drink as much as they feel, like you experience more headaches and hangovers and many bad nights, and you start getting used to it, oh I don't want to be ashamed, this is in Romania, you feel ashamed if you puke on the street, like in the Freshers' Week I carried Alex to his house, a friend of mine that was a rep, and he shouldn't drink anything, but he was just on the street puking and I was just going from a club to another club and I was seeing him oh man what are you doing? He was with a girl and I was carrying him all the way to his house.

**Interviewer:** Is that something you've done in the past as well, like do you feel responsible for friends, to make sure they're ok?

**Nick:** Really close friends yeah, I feel responsible for them, to see they're going home ok, and they can walk, if they can walk and still be ok I'll just let them but if they're not I will go with them until they're home.

There are a number of themes within this extract including the belief that the presence of women will slow down the pace of drinking, or that there will be interventions either by the women or on their behalf. There are also a number of consequences mentioned including hangovers, vomiting, an inability to walk, and shame - which Nick hints there is not enough of. These are consequences that have been discussed by a number of participants, particularly hangovers and vomiting, often considered as part of drinking culture, and in the case of hangovers sometimes enjoyed as part of the experience with students getting together to 'be hungover' (see e.g. De Visser et al , 2013; Fjaer, 2012). There is also a difference in how these accounts are being framed, for both male and female participants have recounted incidences in which they have helped a friend home or have returned home as a group, but the male accounts are said with either humour or in a way that suggests help was given begrudgingly e.g. 'oh man what are you doing?', whilst female accounts are portrayed as though their help or groupness was a necessity e.g. Katie's 'I don't even remember a time when we let somebody leave on their own'.

Whilst there is therefore an awareness of negative components of nights-out and alcohol consumption, many participants attributed these to the behaviour and responsibility of 'others', most typically as people they do not know but sometimes friends. For example, participants here have described the ways in which 'others' behave on nights-out whilst recounting stories of their own behaviour which are not held to the same standards or regulations. Spencer found that 'young people appeared to identify risky drinking, and other harmful health practices, as a feature of some other young people's behaviours nor their own' (2013: 457). This can be seen particularly in the ways that participants have recounted incidents that have gone wrong on nights-out and how they justify them and/or narrate them to claim that the night out was still good or that the incident was humorous, as seen above in Section 5.2.2. Niland et al state that this can be defined as a 'bad but good overall' construction (2013: 535) (see also Brown &

Gregg, 2008; Smizgin et al, 2008; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). This is a particularity of the groupness and sociality of the nights-out and alcohol consumption of students, and young people. De-Visser et al, for example, suggest that 'shared social identities help people positively re-frame negative drinking outcomes as positive social bonding outcomes' (2013: 1467). Research also suggests that narratives of drunken sociality include support and protection from friends, when friends re-cast drinking stories to protect friends' self-integrity, or tease friends to transform negative feelings to positive ones during drinking story sessions (Niland *et al*, 2013: 531 – see also: Vander Ven, 2011; and Fjaer, 2012). Within my research I found that within pair or group interviews, friends would tell stories that would re-frame negative experiences as humorous, whilst individual interviewees were more likely to reflect on the potential dangers inherent in the stories they were recounting, as seen from the accounts of Jason and Imogen above. First year undergraduates Scarlett and Thea also describe their experiences of aggression and violence on nights-out:

**Thea:** Oh I've had fights, well people have started fights with me, I always get started on, it's not funny, you find it hilarious I don't know why.

**Scarlett** It's proper funny. It was the first one, I wasn't even there for it but I really wish I was, I was in [a nightclub], I was inside talking to someone and when I came outside and she was like 'Scarlett I've just had a fight with someone' and I was like.

**Interviewer:** a physical fight?

**Thea:** Yeah some girl started pulling my hair for no reason and then that was horrible. And then the other time a girl threw a drink over me and then pushed me, girls hate me.

**Interviewer:** So do you have more problems with girls than lads?

**Scarlett:** you do.

**Thea:** Yeah I have problems with girls, well they have problems with me.

What can be seen in this exchange is that incidents such as this, in which women are privy to aggression and violence when in drinking contexts, are not deemed uncommon for Scarlett and Thea. However, this is something they seem to enjoy talking about afterwards and is not taken seriously by Scarlett; or she retrospectively frames her account this way as a method of working through the problem, as Tutegenes and Sandberg (2013) state is a function of storytelling. Rawlins also suggests that,

The conjunctive freedoms and other dialectical tensions of friendship shape and reflect the individuation of friends through participation in shared moments of their lives. Friends become themselves partly through the belonging they negotiate with each other. In this ongoing process, practices of narrative and dialogue interweave in performing the identities, actions, and values that are important to friends. Friends co-construct the grounds for appraising each other as persons and as participants in shared moral vision. Our dialogues cross-examine our narratives, demarcate our individuated positions, and dramatize premises for celebrating differences that matter between us. Pursuing dialogue and telling stories also dignify our significant similarities that enable us as friends to identity with each other (Rawlins, 2009: 68).

This is a shared experience between the friends, and a story they can tell together. It is clear that Scarlett and Thea have a 'shared moral vision' in this account as the incident is considered the fault of the other person, described here as the perpetrator of the aggression and violence with the hair pulling, drink throwing and pushing of Thea. This creates a sense of camaraderie and loyalty between the friends, where whilst Scarlett laughs at the experience of Thea she also confirms her story.

The friends, however, go on to discuss that there are underlying safety protocols they put in place with each other when on nights-out, such as always ensuring they leave together. It is also clear that they attend venues together, with Scarlett only having missed witnessing the violence

towards Thea when she was inside and Thea was outside. This sort of caregiving, much of it subconscious, is indicative of the experiences of many of the participants in this research, and is a common theme throughout research on young people and alcohol (see e.g. Armstrong et al, 2014a, 2014b; Laverty et al, 2015; MacLean, 2016). This is also in-line with the aforementioned research, and arguments above, that suggest that the good aspects of nights-out and drinking are seen to outweigh the bad (e.g. Brown & Gregg, 2008; Niland et al, 2013; Smizgin et al, 2008; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). There is also a gendered element to this as it has been argued above, that most commonly women are concerned with personal safety and the safety of their friendship group, whilst men are more concerned with matching their friends level of drunkenness and getting themselves and their friends home in one piece. The perceived vulnerability of women within night-time spaces where alcohol is involved is also asserted to put women at greater risk of sexual violence and aggression (see e.g. Armstrong et al, 2014a, 2014b), whilst men are more likely to encounter physical violence from fighting (see e.g. Levine et al, 2012). With these concerns in mind there are various 'protective behavioural strategies' used by friendship groups in terms of safety such as: pre-planning transportation; ensuring they have enough money to get home; staying in a group; ensuring there is someone accompanying them home; scanning night-time venues for any incidents that might cause problems; stopping or slowing their drinking if they notice a friend has drunk too much and is in need of help; and giving advice/soft drinks to friends who have drunk too much (Armstrong et al, 2014a, 2014b). As is argued in Chapter Six, students are therefore employing harm reduction practices of their own. Such strategies seem to be in response to common knowledge of the potential risks and negative outcomes that might befall young people, and particularly women, within night-time spaces, these include risky sexual practices, violence, sexual assault and drink spiking (Armstrong et al, 2014a, 2014b).

## **5.4. Conclusion**



I have argued in this chapter that whilst students are socialising in a number of ways on an everyday level, and there is a clear importance to friendship and co-presence, there is a special status associated with drinking and 'nights out'. Drinking is seen as a way to get everyone together and, in some cases, as a social obligation. 'Sober' or 'alternative' events are not awarded this status, seen as unpopular and dividing despite alcohol-centric events being potentially divisive for those who abstain from or limit their consumption of alcohol, and despite pre-university students discussing their plans to attend them. Nights out also follow a pattern, starting in student accommodation with 'pre-drinks' and drinking games before moving into either college bars or pubs/bar venues in town and then a nightclub, or straight to a nightclub. However participants here have also stated that drinking games were used more frequently at the start of university as ice-breakers when friendships were not so familiar, and have tended to fall by the wayside to conversation and stories as they have become more comfortable with one another.

This chapter has also shown that friendship is crucial to students' experience of university life. For students, friendship provides a support network, people to share experiences with – good and bad, and someone to care for/be cared for by. My data has highlighted that such friendships are inextricably linked to UDC as alcohol is used as a social aid in the formation of friendships, and in the maintenance of friendships as a way of 'getting everyone together' and providing fodder for future storytelling and 'night-out nostalgia'. It also lead, amongst my participants, to group roles such as 'the mum', 'the liability', 'the one that'll pull', and 'the protector' which are gendered in terms of 'mothering' (see also Armstrong et al, 2014b), in terms of masculinity and drinking practices (see also Thurnell-Read, 2013), and in terms of the vulnerability felt by some of the young women in this study in relation to unwanted advances from men (see also Griffin et al, 2012). As has been evidenced here, men and women are still experiencing nights-out in different ways (see MacLean, 2016) particularly in terms of personal safety. However, there was

a commonality in caregiving to friends, especially in getting each other home safely which was a primary concern for many of the participants of this study. There is a tacit knowledge that within drinking cultures trouble is most likely to occur at the end of the night, and students are therefore enacting responsibility in various ways, for themselves and for their friends, particularly through performing the management strategies/'risk rituals' of 'safety in numbers' and planning for (group) safety. This is one of a number of strategies students were found to be using to reduce the risks of harms in UDC, and Chapter Six now goes on to analyse these strategies, and how they relate to harm reduction, in detail.

### **6.1. Introduction**

This final analysis chapter explores the finding that students enact strategies to manage the pervasive and normative UDC that this thesis has so far identified and discussed. Whilst students themselves may not perceive UDC as a ‘problem’ in the same way as stakeholders such as the university, the police, parents and academics do, it is clear from my data that students know that elements of the culture can be problematic. Part of what students are therefore mitigating against when they manage their involvement in the drinking culture, are the expectations of the stakeholders who are attempting to externally manage student drinking with interventions and harm reduction information. However, it is also clear that most students are happy to prioritise the social benefits they feel come with participating in the drinking culture, as this thesis has identified. This manifests itself in various ways including gendered risk management, abstention, tensions around authority and, as this thesis argues, in students’ desire to not be externally managed they are more likely to turn to self-management strategies. We have also seen throughout this thesis so far that for students there is a cultural commitment to UDC as it is how they are making and maintaining friendships. This works against the common representation of students as hedonistic who drink solely to get drunk, as it is one of the ways in which friendship is ‘being done’.

This final analysis chapter was originally intended to address the ‘problem’ that students remain impervious to interventions with further suggestions for university specific policies. I had set out to find ways to increase student engagement with harm reduction information and interventions but my data has raised other issues. Typically interventions aim to address the drinking of students and young people, which have long been problematised and subject to academic and policy scrutiny, and range from studies of positive alcohol expectancies (see e.g.

Carlson & Johnson, 2012), web-based interventions (see e.g. Marley, Bekker & Bewick, 2016), community interventions (see e.g. Newman et al, 2006; Ramstedt et al, 2013), practice-oriented public health policy (see Blue et al, 2014) and social norms interventions (see e.g. Chung & Rimal, 2016; Moore et al, 2016; Stock et al, 2016) as are discussed more extensively in Chapter One. This thesis is also operating in the context of a Higher Education sector that is becoming increasingly marketised and competitive as universities market themselves as 'fun' places to be often with vibrant nightlife, 'serious' academic institutions with high standard teaching, and 'caring' institutions that look after their students' mental and physical health and wellbeing. Negative stories about any of these aspects of university can lead to reputational problems and so university campuses across the country have therefore administered policies, campaigns and safety information, particularly in response to drinking cultures but the success of such procedures are difficult to quantify. Other stakeholders are also on board with measures that attempt to inform young people about alcohol related risks such as criminal behaviour and increased vulnerability. These include police, parents, drinks corporations, academics, and licensed venues. It is clear that huge amounts of time, effort and resources have been, and are being, applied to the cause of decreasing alcohol related harms for young people. Yet still students, and young people in general, are difficult to reach and this chapter will consider why. In this chapter I therefore analyse potential reasons as to why students are still disinclined to take notice of harm reduction information as my data has revealed that, whilst students might prioritise fun and friendship, they are already practising their own harm reduction strategies and so can view alcohol campaigns as patronising, as is discussed further below. This chapter examines these issues in relation to the Foucauldian notion of 'the subject' and argues that students are being made subjects through dividing practices and through the context of university creating norms and shaping 'future citizens'.

My data has also prompted me to think about harm reduction and interventions in a number of different ways and in this chapter I present findings from my qualitative research with university students and staff members who suggest that interventions are, at the ground level, denying the agency (independent choice), pleasures and fun, of those they are targeting. Such omissions make it less likely that young people will take notice of information targeted at them as, as we will see, they place so much importance on their independence and the pleasures and fun of participating in drinking cultures. I also argue that gender biases are being reinforced and re-represented in harm reduction campaigns and interventions and they are not addressing the majority of the student body or their major concerns, and so many students have become adept at negotiating the drinking culture with their own management strategies or 'risk rituals' (Moore & Burgess, 2011). Reaching students with harm reduction information will not therefore be successful until we recognise their agency and social enjoyment as important, highlighted by the fact that they are typically prioritised over health or behaviour concerns. This has been shown in my data through the methods in which students regulate their own drinking practices and take on roles of responsibility for themselves and their friends, as was outlined in Chapter Five. This chapter first considers how students respond to both authority and harm reduction information before moving on to outline the (gendered) management strategies they enact within UDC.

## **6.2. The Best of Both Worlds: Students, Authority and Consequences**

For many students university is a place to test out being an adult, a rung on the ladder between youth and adulthood, a 'liminal' stage (Piacentini & Banister, 2009: 281). From my data it is clear that support and lenience are given to students as they make this transition to university, though academics debate the extent to which universities should provide pastoral care (see e.g. Carlisle, 2017). I argue that my data, particularly the data analysed in Chapter Four, shows that there are students who require more social support when transitioning to university, for

example in regards to culture shock for international students and anxiety of 'fitting in' for those who deviate from the university drinking cultures 'norm'. I also argue that students are, to a certain extent, protected by universities and this allows them freedom to behave in certain ways. This section will analyse evidence from students and staff to argue that there is a safety net in place at UK universities, especially in relation to student drinking behaviours, that is creating and protecting 'future citizens', as students can be seen as subjects of the university which Foucault recognises as an educational institution with a 'whole series of power processes' (Foucault, 1982: 787). This section, therefore, goes on to examine student responses to authority, and the complex relationship between their desire for independence, and both their critique and use of pastoral care systems and authority.

#### **6.2.1. The university safety net: does life at university represent the 'real' world?**

Aligning with the 'liminal' stage discussed above, shared and campus based accommodation is often recommended for first year students and many universities, such as The University of Exeter (2017), University of Leeds (2017), Lancaster University (2017), and The University of Manchester (2017) guarantee this in the first year, which is a selling point for the universities. This is made available in the hope that it will make the transition to university easier as, as was discussed in Chapter Four, settling in to university can provide challenges for new students (see e.g. Alessi et al, 2017; Briggs et al, 2012; HEPI, 2017; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Scanlon, 2007). Campus-based accommodation is a step towards independent living but still provides a 'safety-net' of sorts for students, in the form of security staff, support staff, porters, deanery, and maintenance personnel. As can be seen in the extract from her interview below, graduate Sophia believes that there are 'buffers' which both protect students and allow them to enjoy their university experience:

**Sophia:** [...] you leave university and you start doing grown up things like getting a house and getting a job in the real world and you realise how much freedom you did

have in university and how much, I think it's the last time you're sort of really able to manage your own everything really, your own time, your own money, your own...there was a lot more freedom. Definitely.

**Interviewer:** It's quite interesting people use this term 'real world', is university not...?

**Sophia:** Oh yeah. No I don't think it is the real world 'cos you've got buffers

**Interviewer:** Yeah, and what are they?

**Sophia:** You've got, well I think for me, I'm going off my personal experience here, I went from living at home with my parents to going to university where I lived on campus so I was sort of protected then by, although I was paying like a rent I was protected by the university, we were looked after and there were cleaners who'd come in and Hoover, you know just look after you a little bit make sure you're okay and then, I think it gives you nice steps. And then I moved into a house with friends where again I was paying rent and things but there's other things you don't have to pay like Council Tax. You're in a student accommodation so the landlords, well our landlord looked after us a bit more and I just think it's bringing you closer to the real world where all of a sudden you've got to pay for everything and you've got to look after everything and clean your own living space but I don't think it is the real world, no.

For Sophia there was a continuation of care from her home environment to university living. There was a contrast between the freedom she felt at managing her own time, money and 'everything really' and the sense of relief that she felt 'protected' and 'looked after' by the university, her landlord, and cleaners. The move to university was made easier for Sophia by a level of pastoral care. University, for her, was a transitional space between home and the 'real world' (see also Briggs et al, 2012). First year student Malc agreed that university provides steps or a half-way point to adulthood:

**Malc:** I think university gives you, it's like a half point from being a teenager to being an adult. It's half way in between, you've got the responsibility of looking after yourself and stuff, but it's like being still wrapped around your parents arms, or in this case your parents arms is the university. So you've got somewhere to live, you've got somewhere and all that, you've got loans covering where you live, so really, yeah.

Malc suggests that in providing a liminal space, universities act in *loco parentis* (see e.g. Carlisle, 2017). This is interesting in relation to the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (see e.g. Bunce et al, 2016; Nixon et al, 2016) as despite students having legal status as both adults and 'consumers' of education, universities have arrived at a point where they are required/obligated to provide an increasing amount of pastoral care. From the US college context, Brian Carlisle suggests that the expectations of parents and society put pressure on institutions to act like parents and that this continues to grow (2017: 48). He states that 'we have created institutions that are not just "homes" they are like communes, providing the care and compassion expected of families while simultaneously offering resources and services to meet a very broad range of needs' (Carlisle, 2016: 49). Malc directly relates the university to a parental figure, who are often both caring and controlling, and both he and Sophia appear to have appreciated having a 'buffer'; although referring to institutions providing 'familial' support is potentially oversimplified as for some students university is them branching out and away from the discourse of 'family'. However both Malc and Sophia also claim responsibility referring to 'managing' and 'looking after' themselves. This shows that they do consider themselves adult and responsible in certain terms.

As mentioned above, this idea of a 'buffer' extends to being a 'safety net' for students. For example, a member of staff I interviewed indicated both that the police will look out for the welfare of students during drinking events, and often report students back to the university (rather than charging them) for misdemeanours related to drinking:



**Participant:** I mean [the police] do try to take, and they have a difficult job 'cos they have to take a fine line between being legal people and being a friend to the students, but for example at the, [there are end of term events] that each college have, but at those the policeman, the local policeman [...] will wander round, so he sort of knows the students whilst keeping an eye as well on things, so, and then also because [students] work with the police I think they help the police understand the student culture. So are there issues with the police, yes well if the police have issues of course they will talk to us, equally there's an organisation called Carnage, which is a national company that essentially arranges drinking nights out and pays students to get other students to go on these nights out, and they're pretty revolting and our Students' Union and [the other local university] always get together and say we're not part of this, I mean students can still do it but they don't promote it. But on those sort of events, obviously we make sure the police are aware there's going to be big events in town, and not that students should get arrested but more to look after them, you know, so I guess we work quite closely with the police and I suppose they therefore respect that we'll tell them when we think there's a big event going on, so they're prepared. Yeah I don't want that to come out as if, it is very much protection.

Under this label of protection it seems that students are being given license to act in particular ways, reinforcing the idea that behaviour that may be deemed misdemeanours from non-students, such as breach of the peace, anti-social behaviour, drunk and disorderly, criminal damage etc, is reinterpreted as just 'students being students'. This raises concerns about what the university are actually protecting students from, as it is clear there are expectations that there will be 'trouble' at particular events. We can relate this to the narrative of 'boys will be boys' as discussed by Nichols (2016) and the prevalence of lad culture at university as is discussed later in this chapter (also see Jackson, Dempster & Pollard, 2015; Lewis, Marine & Kenny, 2016; Phipps & Young, 2014, 2015; Phipps, 2016). Nichols states that 'definitions and popular perceptions of lads places an emphasis upon youth, with laddish behaviours deemed to

be synonymous with boyishness and lack of discipline and maturity [...and] understood to be tied up to particular moments of the life course' (2016: 3). I argue that the popular perception of students as hedonistic, as discussed in earlier chapters, also places emphasis on both youth and time. The majority of students are young (18-21), their *time* at university is temporary and is seen as functioning both in terms of working towards a degree *and* socialising. This explains the desire to protect students as this is the time in their lives to 'have fun' before they enter the 'real world', but conversely in providing this protection students are being treated leniently. The campus is seen as a protected environment by both students and staff, with a reciprocal relationship between the university and police; I attended a PACT (Police and Communities Together) meeting held on campus, for example. Of course, universities do not rely on police services for all of the behavioural and disciplinary aspects of student life. In fact, there are some situations where the internal university mechanisms overlap with what a lay person might see as being a legal or justice matter. This was reaffirmed when, during my observations and fieldwork with local police, we discussed the process of referring a student back to the university for disciplinary proceedings (see also NUS, 2016; UUK, 2016, 2017). Such procedures are often taken on by the college deanery, who are known to students and form part of college communities. The police confirmed in a talk to students that if they caused 'alcohol-related trouble' they would be fined by the college. Such fines would often be instead of police action such as cautions, banning orders, direction to leave orders or potentially arrest (see e.g. Cheshire Constabulary, 2017), which non-students may be subject to. However, whilst the police stated their position on campus to be one of reinforcing safety and assisting with welfare issues, they were also clear that serious crimes would not go unpunished and also positioned themselves as a presence for deterrence. However, the police also expressed reluctance to give students a criminal record and affect their futures; this again reaffirms the Foucauldian theory of the 'subject' as it is being assumed that students will go on to become successful and law-abiding citizens and so time is being allowed for them to enjoy the freedoms permitted by university. Foucault, for example, suggests that the body is political because of its economic use

and the way it is invested with power and domination relations but this is only possible if it is 'caught up in a system of subjection [...] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body' (1975 in Rabinow Ed., 1987: 173). As has been argued throughout this thesis so far, one reason for this could be that students are likely to become 'productive citizens' as they have an expected life trajectory that fits neoliberal ideals, they have future potential and they are expected to be successful as they have 'made' it to university.

Another member of staff I spoke to had reservations about the benefits of the mechanisms described above that deal with students in-house. Dean Stephanie, a college dean, was unsure if the university protection and care that allows for student freedom was an advantage or not. She begins by discussing the protocol for helping a drunken student, reaffirming that students have support on the collegiate, campus based study site and showing that there is a level of care. However, she then goes on to question whether students might begin to take for granted that they will be looked after. She said:

**Dean Stephanie:** [...] it tends to be the university who find students who are in a dreadful state so a porter in [my college] may get a phone call from a porter in a different college and say we've got a students of yours outside the college, they're drunk and they need some help and I know certainly the porters would go to the security lodge, get a wheelchair and then wheel the student back to their room if they can't walk back. It's quite a way if you're drunk and you're in the middle of the square for example. So they do care a lot.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, it must feel reassuring that they're there, feel safer?

**Dean Stephanie:** Yeah, you do. Yeah, and I think that may actually make the problem a bit worse, even though I may not ever say this to them, because they are so caring and because they are so kind of nice about it, it might just take someone to yell at the student

or to not help them, or send them to the police or whatever to actually make them not do it in the future. You know, just without that safety net because you don't get that sort of level of safety net in many places. If you were drunk in the middle of [a big city centre] I can't imagine someone would bring you back to [the university].

Here Dean Stephanie highlights that there are instances of students getting so drunk they cannot get themselves home, and this is one of the reasons why harm reduction interventions are considered necessary and worthwhile. However, she also suggests that more involvement on the part of the university can be counter-productive and exacerbate the very issues that harm reduction interventions are trying to address as students recognise that a 'safety net' is in place. Whilst in-house mechanisms are dealing with students 'alcohol related trouble', as described by the police, they are potentially becoming reliant on both the security and care of university personnel and the leniency of authorities. This has implications for the future as following departure from university such care and leniencies disappear, and learnt behaviour around these has the potential to become habitual; although students also show awareness of the temporary nature of university, as discussed below. There may then be long term repercussions for health and wellbeing for students who go on to have problems with alcohol, which relates to the long term chronic risks of alcohol consumption such as alcohol-related diseases. Whilst neither my participants or study site concentrated on such long term harms, as they focused on immediate risks such as injury, arrest, assault, and loss of reputation, national charities such as *Drinkaware* regularly disseminate information regarding alcohol misuse and harm via campaigns, interventions, and social media (see Drinkaware, 2017a). Stock et al, for example, observe that 'an early debut of alcohol drinking increases the risk of alcohol dependency and alcohol related diseases later in life' (2016: 2) (see also Yoon et al, 2015). Without the safety net of their student status, behaviour associated with 'alcohol related trouble', which can, alongside less serious behaviours, include: drunk and disorderly, criminal damage, sexual harassment, and assault amongst other criminal offences, may be punishable by the legal and justice system and the penalties discussed above. Whilst this care and protection

might not prepare students for aspects of the 'real world', they do seem to be aware of the temporary nature of this situation and the safety net that the space of the university offers. Their awareness of the temporary nature of university may also extend to their responses to both authority and harm reduction information, which I will now move on to consider.

### **6.2.2. Student responses to authority and harm reduction information**

It can be argued, as has been seen above, that there is a safety net in place in UK universities, and we have heard from students who had some appreciation for this as a 'step towards' the 'real world'. However, in this section I argue that students also recognise the complications between care and control at university. As the 'safety net' can blur the boundaries between university and parental responsibility, misbehaviour and criminal behaviour, it also has the potential to infantilise students. The focus of this section is, therefore, how students respond to authority and harm reduction information. This will add to the literature that notes the difficulties of reaching young people with harm reduction information and interventions, particularly those that deny the pleasures of socialising with alcohol (see De Visser & Birch, 2012; Griffin et al, 2009; Harrison et al, 2011; Hutton et al, 2012; Spencer, 2013). I also argue that students are aware of the potential risks and health problems that can arise from drinking, but they *choose* to do it anyway. Whilst this choice is made within a pervasive culture that is difficult to abstain from, as this thesis argues, it is still a choice. As such, students deny the intent to control them in certain ways because there is a mismatch between their lived experiences and harm reduction campaigns (see Hackley et al, 2013). I have found that students feel they are in control of themselves, or have the support of friends if they are not as was argued in Chapter Five, and have their own practices of managing UDC, analysed in section 6.3 of this chapter, however these are enacted within the 'safe' context of their university campus/city that has been studied above.

An example of a case in which students have felt infantilised by one aspect of university authority but supported and enabled by another was presented by the friendship group of Betty, Becky and Ryan. The group showed that they were resistant to monitoring in certain ways as they described themselves as being opposed to regulation from their residential assistant dean, as can be seen in the extract from their interview below:

**Becky:** Yeah cos sometimes when these lot come back, sometimes when they get a bit, they like to be very happy and quite loud and I understand that but when we come back I'll just complain and they wake up and what not

**Ryan:** assistant deans come

**Becky:** then I feel really bad

**Betty:** the assistant dean has come down so many times

**Becky:** yeah

**Interviewer:** Oh really, what do they say?

**Betty:** Cos he lives upstairs, so he just comes round anyway. To be fair sometimes he comes down and

**Becky:** He just victimises, I actually feel victimised by him, I don't like him.

**Betty:** No yeah, cos that one time

**Becky:** I was making noodles once and he come downstairs and told us off and the same night she said she saw him in [the student nightclub]

**Betty:** Yeah he was out, we saw him in [the student nightclub] and the next morning she told us that he'd told them off for making noodles and I was like how is that when he was out in [the student nightclub]?

**Becky:** It was 3 o'clock in the morning, yeah

**Betty:** He must have come back

**Becky:** It was about 3 but we weren't making a lot of noise. I haven't liked him since. I haven't eaten noodles since either.

**Interviewer:** Have security been as well?

**Betty:** The porters came down once

**Becky:** See the porters came down

**Betty:** but they were very nice

**Ryan:** but that just cos of a little bit of noise after a night out

**Betty:** all he said was can you just close the window a bit, just put the sound down a bit then I put it down and he went 'no put it a bit louder than that' he was very nice

**Becky:** but I think cos they were really nice, they go about it in a really nice way like before one of our friends I was walking him back and one of the porters comes and says 'is he okay?' and I was like 'yeah I'm just taking him back to his room' and he was like 'okay just make sure he goes' and then that was it, it weren't as if it was a telling off it was more of a 'are you okay, have you got it handled', but I think the assistant dean it's more of a telling off now and I feel like we're too old for that

**Betty:** whenever he comes by you're just like 'oh not again'

**Becky:** Yeah

**Betty:** He's more of a nag whereas the porters are more like, I think maybe because they understand more, they've been around

**Becky:** I think yeah

**Betty:** they're on 24 hour, I don't know

**Becky:** I don't know, but he's a student himself the assistant dean is

**Betty:** He's a postgrad in the middle of loads of undergraduates and he's been through that and he's been there, done that

**Becky:** Yeah I know but, I dunno like when we do socialise we always worry like is it making too much noise, other's may not worry but I worry cos I don't want him to come down and tell us off again, cos it'll get to the point where we're either having an argument with him and it escalating or we just won't, we'll just stop what we're doing probably find somewhere else and it won't be the same.

The friends felt that they were too old for a 'telling-off' and resented the input of the assistant dean who they felt was authoritarian in dealing with them. This is in contrast to their perception of the porters who, in recognising their capabilities in helping friends and pleasure in listening to music, were more respected. Age also seems to have formed part of their assessment of the assistant dean who, as a 'student himself', they deemed had grown tired of student life and had 'been there, done that' and who had the role of enforcing rules on behalf of the college deanery; the college deanery at the study site are responsible for promoting good behaviour and dealing with breaches of college and/or university rules (see Chapter Four, Section 3.1). This again contrasted with their opinion of the porters who 'understand more' because they have 'been around'. This relates to Chapter Four in this thesis in which I argue that Freshers' Reps can influence the formation of studentship as they are a point of reference for new students due to their university knowledge and experience. Perhaps the assistant dean, as a postgraduate who has completed his time as an undergraduate, is regarded as being past the liminal stage but not far enough to have the respect of those such as the porters. In addition to this, the role of the porters can also be related to the caregiving of friends and friendship groups within UDC. As the porters are 'on the ground' working and dealing with students twenty-four hours a day they can become an extension of that caregiving. From Becky, Betty and Ryan's conversation and from



Dean Stephanie's assertions above, I have determined that porters are seen as a trusted and non-judgemental authority figure. They are also seen as someone who can enable friends to help other friends as Becky shows: 'it weren't as if it was a telling off it was more of a "are you okay, have you got it handled"'. The porter allowed Becky to maintain her independence and responsibility but also gave her the chance to ask for help.

As has been argued at the start of this chapter, see section 6.2.1, there is also an idea that university is like a 'time-out' from the 'real world' and this, for some students, extends to considerations of health. Building on her claim that university is not the 'real world', Sophia suggests that students are not concerned with their health and safety because they are at university to have fun:

**Sophia:** [...] I think in general and the people I hung around with, no people aren't as health and safety conscious and things like that at university 'coz you're still young and you go to university to have a good time. I think more people go to university for that reason than they do to get a job later in life. They go because it's easy, you wanna go to uni and have the best time of your life, and you're happy to go a bit wild.

Sophia believed that both the age of university students and the context of university social life itself means that students' are not fazed by health concerns and are 'happy to go a bit wild'. Going 'a bit wild' and having 'the best time of your life' is related to friendship as students are orienting their experiences of university, and of drinking, around their relationships, as was argued extensively in Chapter Five. What matters to students is not health but everyday friendship, through which they are creating a sense of self (see e.g. Allan, 2008; Cronin, 2014). My data shows that, typically, students are happy to 'have fun' and feel safe in the belief that health is something to worry about later, or that negative consequences of participating in UDC only happen to 'others'. They do not believe, as Gillen et al (2004: 53) assert, that issues of drink safety are pertinent to them. Social norm theory, which is applied in the NUS *Alcohol Impact*

scheme discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two S.2.8., suggests that young people can misperceive their peers drinking levels and that this can serve as justification for heavier drinking (see e.g. Walters et al, 2010; De Visser & Birch, 2012; John & Alwyn, 2014; Chung & Rimal, 2016). The theory is relevant here for young people may attribute risks to their 'heavier drinking' peers/others rather than themselves. First year friends Scarlett and Thea suggest that they would not (and do not) take notice of information regarding their health and safety in relation to alcohol consumption:

**Interviewer:** So what about drink safety messages at university, do you ever see any of those around?

**Scarlett:** I haven't, I'm not going to lie to you.

**Thea:** To be honest yeah and even if they did I wouldn't pay attention anyway.

Scarlett and Thea unapologetically agree that they have not seen any safety messages on campus, though they exist. As has been seen in other extracts, the friends have embraced UDC and enjoyed it, and Thea therefore states that she would not pay attention to harm reduction information relating to drink safety. Their interview revealed that Scarlett and Thea privilege friendship and sociability over harm and risk implications. As Katainen et al outline, young people are not necessarily aiming to take risks but risks are side products of drinking regarded as 'an inevitable nuisance that goes with the territory of drinking [...] the presence of risks can also be accepted as part of the drinking experience, and therefore awareness of those risks will not have the effect of deterring drinking' (2014: 14). For many students participating in UDC is bound up in sociability and friendship, and, as we have seen throughout this thesis, those students who do not participate in UDC can experience feelings of loneliness and be subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982), therefore not drinking at university is a social 'risk'. We have also seen how important friendship is to students, and how UDC contributes to the making and maintaining of friendships at university (see Chapter Five). As Allan (2008) suggests, the construction and management of friendships is flexible and may, at certain times in life, become

central to individuals' everyday lives such as living with non-family in early adulthood. In the context of this study university accommodation can provide the space in which 'friends may be the main component of [...] emotional and practical support' (Allan, 2008: 9). From this perspective it is easy to see why students may be favouring the friendships, through which their social lives are given such importance, over health concerns in this 'time-out' period of university.

In privileging sociality and friendship my participants typically said that they already knew a number of ways to look after and keep themselves and friends safe; this is one of the reasons why campaigns can often be deemed patronising as they assume that young people do not know something (see Katainen et al, 2014; Spencer, 2013). Rajan, for example, suggests that although new students had safety talks when they started university he already felt able to look after himself.

**Rajan:** Well we had a lot of talks about it, we had that uni smart talk which was like really good, how to look after ourselves, that was like more or less half way through the week, I don't think before we started going clubbing and stuff, but otherwise I just knew like how to look after myself, how to look after my drinks, and just looking after your belongings and things like that. I mean and I don't recall my any Freshers' reps saying anything about is, safety wise, but they made sure we were safe, by keeping us all in a group and making sure we were all together and making sure we didn't get lost. And but otherwise like I was just being looked after by my friends as well, I mean making sure they were looking after my drinks and stuff like that, making sure nobody did anything stupid.

As was discussed in Chapter Four, Freshers' reps are tasked with keeping new students 'safe' particularly since, as Rajan points out the safety talks they received were not until after they had already started going out. Furthermore, as was discussed in Chapter Five, friends are sharing

the responsibility for safety. Although Rajan claims that they 'knew how to look after' themselves, he then goes on to list reliance on Freshers' reps and friends. He also suggested that because students can look after themselves and each other, common sense and awareness are all that is required:

**Rajan:** Yeah, I mean I'm pretty sure there are already like drink aware campaigns or something to make sure that people look after themselves on nights out, but I honestly think that word of mouth is probably the best option. I mean a campaign, I think it's already been campaigned enough I think. I think it's just more or less just common sense at this point, which people just need to be aware of, and I'm sure like one in like three people know how to like be safe and responsible on a night out.

However, despite these assertions that campaigns have been overdone and friends keep each other safe already, he also believes that only one in three people know how to be safe and responsible. This again suggests that othering is inherent in UDC as it is other people who are unsafe and irresponsible. Green et al discuss young people's perception of risk and how it is constructed based on both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' and an ongoing and relative territorialisation of place (2000: 117). This 'othering' adds another tension to young people's relationship with harm reduction information, as they perceive that it pertains to others and not to them; they feel that they are aware of risks and know how to keep themselves safe. As Rawlins states 'for every way that the other is (perceived as) different from or similar to self, there are ways that self is (perceived as) different from or similar to the other. There are comprehensive challenges in trying to overcome our self-centred windows on human events, people, and possibilities' (2008: 31, emphasis removed). Despite this othering being a challenge to harm reduction information, Rajan posits that 'word of mouth is probably the best option' to reach students, which can be related to the sociological concept that friendships are of great consequence in the 'role they play in establishing social identities' (Allan, 2008: 14), as is also indicated in the above from Rawlins (2008). This can also be related to the aforementioned

social norms theory and interventions, such as *Alcohol Impact* (NUS Alcohol Impact, 2017), which attempt to utilise the influence of peers (see e.g. Walters et al, 2000; Bowring et al, 2012; John & Alwyn, 2014; Katainen et al, 2014; Chung & Rimal, 2016).

However, in line with Rajan's assertions above, there was a broad agreement amongst my participants that most undergraduates in UK universities know how to look after themselves. Jen believes that this may make it difficult to reach students:

**Jen:** Oh I don't really know. 'Cos it almost feels like if someone's decided to drink then like not much is going to change their mind on it I guess, by this age like they've had a couple of years to already think about it and yeah I guess most people have made up their minds about I suppose like when you start university, it might change your mind. I don't know, it's quite a tricky one to think of how they could actually reach students successfully. [...] Don't want to seem like kind of annoying parents.

Jen suggests that because young people have had time to think about drinking before starting university and already have ideas in place, recommendations may be akin to advice from 'annoying parents', contrasting with the data from Sophia and Malc, in section 6.2.1, which suggested students can appreciate the input of adults and the safety net that comes with this. Harm reduction campaigns, guidelines, and recommendations may therefore be deemed as patronising, and it is not difficult to see why since, as Spencer states, young people are viewed as immature, irrational and the 'official discourses largely view risk-taking as the expression of individual ignorance and irrationality, citing deficits in the individual's knowledge and reasoning' (2013: 450). Students are not ignorant of the potential risks of participating in UDC, but often prefer their own methods of harm reduction and risk prevention as section 6.3 argues.

Thomas, a student who graduated in 2010 and worked for a student union, further suggested that awareness campaigns are engaged with so little that they become 'wallpaper':

**Thomas:** [...] Yeah we did quite a lot about, one thing I found really interesting was the keeping your drink safe, about date rape. Because it wasn't until I was actually helping deliver the campaigns that I fully knew that the union was doing these kinds of campaigns and actually understood much about it. It goes to show how much of the students who aren't engaged in the union or aren't engaged in campaigns, how much they actually knew. Because I knew the most about drinking safety when I was part of the students union, you know until I was fully engaged. So I think it's all well and good running these campaigns you know, 'if a guy buys you a drink and it's a double but you only wanted a single that's date rape', that sort of thing, it's interesting. But it's all well and good getting that message out there but if people aren't engaged it's a complete waste of time. Awareness campaigns just become wallpaper. It just becomes the next thing on the wall. I always found, and I wasn't good at it but it wasn't my area actually, but I think the most effective one was the one's where you're actively engaging people, getting them on board, and doing things with them interactively.

Here Thomas suggests that many students are not engaged with campaigns (or the union) and that a different, more interactive approach is needed. It is also worth noting that Thomas framed his account of campaigns as aimed at women, and that this was so normal to him that it did not warrant explicit explanation. Perhaps it is so commonplace for women to be made individually responsible and often 'victim blamed' that this also becomes 'wallpaper'; this gendered element is something this chapter will consider in extensive detail in section 6.3.2.

It is clear from my data, and the extracts above, that the student participants in this study were not engaged with harm reduction campaigns or health advice. Instead, they had already established ideas about their limits of alcohol consumption, how to keep themselves safe and

how to look after themselves and friends. Many of the student participants in this research believed that they were well equipped to drink alcohol having learnt their own limits. They trusted that this experience meant that they did not have to pay attention to safety advice, guidelines or recommendations as they knew what worked for them personally. However this is impossible to regulate as each individual has their own idea of what their limit is, and of course the amount that alcohol affects individuals varies vastly depending on a number of factors. Also studies have found that many people overestimate safe levels of alcohol consumption and 'misperceive the alcohol content of the drinks they pour for themselves', finding units unhelpful (DeVisser & Birch, 2011: 206; see also Measham, 2006). It is also clear that there is an intention by many students to get drunk, or pursue a 'determined drunkenness' (Measham & Brain, 2005: 1), because they enjoy it, and Seaman and Ikegwonu suggests that this 'shows how information via health promotion to encourage moderation misunderstands the intentions of many young adult drinkers' (2011: 755-756). Typically students in this study deemed themselves in control of themselves and their own limits, as section 6.3 will now consider, they often enjoyed being drunk with friends and participating in UDC, and so harm reduction information and interventions can be an unwanted disruption.

### **6.3. Students Coping with University Drinking Cultures: Management Strategies and 'Risk Rituals'**

Students are habitually dealing with risks within UDC from a position of awareness. Habits emerge and are legitimised as reactions to perceived or real risks when management strategies and 'risk rituals' (Moore & Burgess, 2011) have been deemed to be successful. Academics list a range of risks associated with student drinking with varying degrees of consequence, such as assault and sexual violence (see Avci & Fendrich, 2010; Palfai et al, 2011), vomiting and blacking-out (see Griffin et al, 2009), regret and embarrassment (see Brown & Gregg, 2012; Norberg et al, 2011; Kelley, 2017), and hangovers (see De Visser et al, 2013; Fjaer, 2012). This

section will discuss how students are managing risks within UDC, and what they are perceived to be. I argue that two particular strands within this management discourse are gendered management and abstention which are considered in sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3. These are of particular significance because it can be argued that both gender and abstention in UDC are management strategies that have, themselves, to be managed as they transgress or deviate from the 'norms' of UDC. Section 6.3.1 will first outline some of the management strategies students typically referenced before moving on to consider the nuances of gendered management and abstention.

### **6.3.1. Management strategies and 'risk rituals' at individual and friendship levels**

Since 'drinking alcohol is central to student life' (Moore and Burgess, 2011: 117) it can be argued that risks are present in students' social lives. In our individualised society risk becomes something to be managed at a personal level; or at least the level of risk with which this research is concerned. Moore and Burgess suggest that drinking alcohol provides,

both the pretext and context for socializing, It is difficult to reduce alcohol consumption in social situations where there is marked pressure to drink voraciously. However, alcohol consumption and the pressure to forge friendships quickly create a sense of vulnerability. It is precisely this sort of situation that creates the desire for ritual, some absorbing practice of unquestionable worth that provides the feeling that one is "doing all that one can" to allay a risk [...] the sublimation of uncertainty by means of ritual (Moore and Burgess, 2011: 117).

My research has discovered that there are certain management strategies or 'risk rituals' that students engage in within UDC; and often with a level of self-awareness that shows they are not naïve to their own vulnerabilities. We have already seen a risk ritual in this thesis in the form of students planning how to get home from a night out (see Chapter Five); students are aware of a



potential 'future' risk of struggling to get home following a night out and so prepare for such an eventuality. Often students are aware of potential risks from consuming alcohol before they start university as, as was discussed in Chapter Four, they have preconceived expectations about university and often have experience of drinking with friends from school, college, and home.

The belief in 'safety in numbers' (see also Armstrong et al, 2014b) I argue can also be considered a management strategy. As was discussed in Chapter Five, students often 'go out' as a group and return home as a group, and there is commonly one group member who will 'step up' to the role of co-ordinating their friends. Moore and Burgess suggest that 'risk rituals might help alleviate worry, displace, or absorb uncertainty – this is how they operate at the level of individual experience – but they are *produced* by social conditions rather than individual neuroses, and this is a crucial distinction' (2011: 117). However, they also state that 'while "risk rituals" might frequently be unreflexive and unconscious, the threats to which this behaviour is a response are still recognizable as risks of a modern variety' (Moore & Burgess, 2011: 118). I argue that, in the context of UDC, whilst risk rituals may be produced by the social conditions of the culture and may *become* unreflexive, they are often conscious responses to perceived risks; students are aware. For example, in his interview Zed outlined a number of practices he engaged in to alleviate the risk of getting 'too drunk' and be prepared to help others:

**Interviewer:** So what about in terms of your own preparation for going on nights out, do you sort of plan for safety yourself?

**Zed:** Yeah, for me personally, I always eat before I go out, so I always eat before I drink, just to make sure that I don't get too drunk, because everyone else is already pretty much wasted by the time I get to pre drinking, and I think ok well someone's got to watch over these guys, someone's got to make sure that they're ok. I'm not the only one but I am pretty much the one who is able to see ok who's doing how well, so when I do

go out. This one time, me and my girlfriend did have to take care of another couple in our flat, it was very, very bad. It was basically we had to stay with them for about four or five hours because of some drama that evolved at the [student nightclub], there was a misunderstanding which just made it worse. And really like that was the one time I regretted why do I have to be the guy who prepares, yeah.

**Interviewer:** So why do you feel like you need to be the responsible one? And how do people notice, have they assigned you then as the responsible one?

**Zed:** No, no, I choose the ticket myself because no one wants to be that guy so someone's got to be that guy, and I think like, and generally like I don't enjoy being wasted, because I just don't think it's, there's nothing fun about it. I think it's more fun being on what I like to call the golden lights, so you're not so drunk that you can barely walk, you can barely talk, but you're not that sober that everything seems boring to you, that you don't see the inside jokes, you don't get what's going on, so I like to be in that sense where I can still have fun, I can relate to the others, but I'm still clear headed enough to see if someone's got a problem and then I can help them out. It's been that way for a long time for me so.

Zed outlines rituals through which he engages with UDC, and also through which he compares himself to others. Describing how he makes sure he has eaten so he 'doesn't get too drunk' and can 'watch over' friends who are often 'already pretty wasted', Zed defines his 'controlled loss of control' (Measham & Brain, 2005: 274). This suggests that young people are aware of potential risks and Measham and Brain reported that motivations behind the 'controlled loss of control' tended to be based around issues including personal safety, health, and security (2005: 274). They stated that 'by and large most drinkers do manage their intoxication in terms of desired and actual states and do not utterly lose control and become unbounded in their consumption' (Measham & Brain, 2005: 274). Zed describes his desired state of intoxication as 'the golden lights', somewhere in between sobriety and being 'so drunk you can barely walk, barely talk',

where you can still have fun. As was commonplace amongst my participants, Zed suggests that he knows and works to his 'limits'. Though, as is thematic with the 'knowing your limits' argument discussed below, there is no measurement to this stage of intoxication other than a subjective feeling and a direct comparison with peers. Zed exemplifies some of the common ways participants reported dealing with risks, controlling their drinking, eating before drinking, looking after friends, and being looked after by friends. As stated above, such strategies become habitual but emerge from a position of awareness and are legitimised by instances in which management strategies have been deemed successful in the past.

As has been argued in section 6.2.2, students are aware of the presence of authorities and monitoring in various ways at university. However, my data, such as the above from Betty, Becky and Ryan, has shown that students are resisting monitoring or surveillance in certain ways. Surveillance and punishment are, according to Foucault, characteristics of educational institutions (1982: 787) and there are clearly in-house sanctions of surveillance and punishments to keep students 'safe' and protect their futures and universities' reputations. I would extend this further, however, and argue that forms of surveillance are not only from institutional and intervention sources but also from friends. My data has shown that not only does 'peer surveillance' (see e.g. Fujimoto & Valente; Kelley, 2017) manifest in friends' caregiving and safekeeping roles but also in encouraging alcohol consumption through observation and self-consciousness, particularly in pre-drinking contexts. For as Kelley suggests, 'informal sanctions, such as the negative consequences deriving from reactions of others close to the individual, appear to have a stronger deterrent effect on individuals than formal sanctions' (2017: 412).

The general consensus amongst participants in my study was that the best way to learn how to keep safe was to get to know your own limits through experience, and whilst this advocates

individual responsibility there was no consensus of what this 'limit' was: feeling drunk, blacking out, having to be taken home, vomiting, being embarrassed, or avoiding all of these? Similarly there was no consensus of how regularly these personal limits were adhered to and what the consequences were if not. Knowing your own limits therefore varies subjectively. For example, in his interview, 1<sup>st</sup> year international student Nick described his own limits along with how others learn, or never learn, their own:

**Nick:** I'm turning twenty this year, at the end of this year, and you're starting get used to what are your limits and you know how much you can drink and still be able to walk and not have a headache the next morning, suffering from hangover.

**Interviewer:** So do you think that's the best way to learn then, just sort of to see what you can take? Or do you think there's other ways to?

**Nick:** It depends on the person, some person never learn, they're just they have been drunk so many times and they just don't care, some are more aware, some just drink one glass and they say that's enough I drink something, because I'm quite big I consume a lot, even in Romania when I was feeling unwell of beer my friends were just half of it or less than a half or more than a half and I'm drinking quite fast. And I don't know, here in the UK I'm drinking, I say tonight I will spend five pounds, I will buy two drinks, like I consider more the price, but if I had money were no problem I would drink as much as I can.

**Interviewer:** So how do you know when you've had enough? Like what is the point where you stop for you?

**Nick:** You feel it, I personally feel it, you feel it when you can't, you're too dizzy and everything is quite blurred around you and you feel it it's starting it starts hurting inside, like it's hurting inside your head or you're not able, you see that you're not able to control your moves and or you're less aware of your body. Also when you're so not

aware of your body that's the point of no return, you need to vomit in order to get well, if you don't vomit you're going to have a very bad hangover and headache next day.

As was the case amongst a significant proportion of the participants in this research, Nick got to know his limits for alcohol consumption through experiencing the bad effects of alcohol: the dizziness, the hurting and the loss of control. However, the 'limit' for Nick was only reached when he began to feel the bad effects and not before. He suggested that those who do not know their bodies as well can reach 'a point of no return' in which they will need to vomit to feel better. There is the implication that those who are still learning their own limits will reach the 'point of no return' in order to learn for future experiences. The 'point of no return' obviously has potential health consequences for students, but to them it is a learning curve within, what they perceive to be, a safe context.

However, students are also at university to study, and this was a key concern for the majority of my participants. Many students take a break from socialising with alcohol during times of heavy workload, such as during the exam period. There are also students who advocate healthy lifestyle choices, a position which is worthy of future study, and those who abstain or drink moderately. Palfai et al also suggest that students who prioritise their academic goals have less intention to drink frequently whereas students who place greater importance on social goals are predicted to drink more (2011: 170). For example, Becky, Betty and Ryan agreed that they had been going out drinking 'too much' since they had started university, and Becky did not want to make this a pattern; once again showing that students have awareness of potential consequences:

**Interviewer:** So have you been out quite a lot since Freshers' week?

**Ryan:** Too much.

**Betty:** Way too much.

**Becky:** These two have, I had a bit of a break, I had a two week break because I just felt like I needed to reset myself, yeah just get a bit of a rest

**Interviewer:** Had you just got tired of it or?

**Becky:** I didn't get, I don't think I got bored of it, it was just drinking I didn't feel like doing it, it made me feel unwell just smelling it so I was thinking I just want a break from it, and I told myself I don't want to make it a regular pattern either.

**Betty:** So you'd like wait until a set date, okay in two weeks, I'll save myself until then.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and did you find that worked quite well?

**Becky:** Yeah, that worked really well. There was a lot of temptation, a lot, but I just said I'm going to stick to my word and then I think the second week we did we went out and it was a good night, we drank a lot but it was a good night.

**Betty:** It was a lot.

For this friendship group having a 'two week break' was deemed a 'reset' and warranted a reward which for them was a night in which 'a lot' of alcohol was consumed. This also indicates that there is a lack of knowledge of 'safe' drinking (see e.g. De Visser & Birch, 2012; Measham, 2006) as whilst Becky does not want to make excessive drinking a regular pattern they followed a 'break' with 'a lot' of drinking. De Visser and Birch found in their research that 'inaccurate knowledge and lack of skill meant that participants would tend to underestimate how much they drink and to drink in excess of guidelines for safe consumption' (2012: 210). However, we can see the importance of socialising for the students here as, despite the fact that alcohol was making Becky unwell she still felt tempted to go out with her friends. The group also seemed to have an idea of what constitutes 'too much' in relation to going out and drinking, which highlights that young people attach importance to pleasure and autonomy and 'risk-taking often occurs in full knowledge of the potential risks to health' (Spencer, 2013: 452). Students

therefore have a certain relation to responsibility, individually and often for friends, though this is often gendered as section 6.3.2 now moves on to analyse.

### **6.3.2. Gendered management of university drinking cultures**

Whilst, as I have argued above, students are aware of potential risks within UDC, issues have also emerged from my data in terms of the responsibilisation of risk – particularly in relation to gender as this section will cover. As is often the case in wider society, risk is seen as something to be managed at a personal level. I argue that both female and male students feel a pressure to keep themselves and their friends safe on nights out, that women are judged more negatively for being drunk, and that students’ are regularly enacting management strategies or ‘risk rituals’. Moore and Burgess outline that:

“risk rituals” are driven by moral and social imperatives; they do not arise randomly but reflect prevailing social conditions. Two social pressures are particularly important in producing “risk rituals”: firstly, the injunction that each of us should “do his or her bit” to lessen a collectively created risk and, secondly, the injunction to “take care of yourself” to lessen one’s personal experience of risk (2011: 120).

The most obvious ways this manifests itself in UDC are in the responsibilisation over self and friends, as I began to argue in Chapter Five. Hutton *et al.*, suggests that risks are not evenly distributed and ‘structural factors such as gender, race and class still have enormous power to constrain and shape people’s social worlds’ (2013: 454). In the context of drinking cultures it is widely reported that women are more ‘at risk’ and are ‘vulnerable’ (see e.g. Brooks, 2011; Roznowski, 2012; Hutton *et al.*, 2013) and have always been held individually responsible for preventing violence against them (see Brooks, 2011). This section will argue that female students are being depicted, represented and judged in certain ways and that they are finding their own ways to deal with drinking cultures that are still seen as predominantly masculine.

Within my fieldwork I spoke briefly to a small number of door staff at bars and nightclubs, two of whom suggested that female students caused more problems for them as they 'totter about' in heels and often need to be held up by friends, whilst male students 'hold their alcohol' better. From this I certainly felt that there was a greater level of judgement on women for drinking and being drunk in this context, which is noteworthy in relation to recent arguments on the 'pedagogy of regret' (Brown & Gregg, 2012). Oona Brooks suggests that 'young women have been identified as the primary audience for safety campaigns about socializing and consuming alcohol', despite evidence that suggests men are still likely to consume more alcohol than women (2011: 636). For example 'in 2014/2015 there were 1.1 million estimated admissions where an alcohol-related disease, injury or condition was the primary reason for admission or a secondary diagnosis' and men accounted for two-thirds of these admissions (Health & Social Care Information Centre, 2016). Such findings are consistent with data from recent years, and previous Office for National Statistics (ONS) research reported that men were more likely to be both offenders and victims of alcohol-related violent incidents. ONS suggest that 62% of violent incidents that were alcohol related involved male victims, compared to 38% female victims (Office for National Statistics, 2015: 13). They also state that the available data suggests that offenders of alcohol-related violence 'share a similar age and gender profile to victims in these incidents' and 'in the combined 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 surveys, the offender(s) were male in 80% of alcohol-related violent incidents, female in 12%, and from a mixed gender group of offenders in 8% of incidents' (Office for National Statistics, 2015: 15). Why then are women targeted as the audience for safety campaigns and interventions; and why are they positioned as responsible for their own safety rather than offenders/potential offenders being reminded not to commit crime?



From my data it is clear that female students typically do feel a burden of pressure to keep themselves and their friends safe, and also the majority of male participants' spoke of keeping friends (generally referring to female friends) safe; as was also discussed in Chapter Five section 5.3.2 with the recurring theme of women being more vulnerable in the night-time-economy and how this manifests in female students feeling that they *require* the protection of, particularly male, friends (see also Griffin et al, 2012). Also, as mentioned above, women are seen as more 'at risk' of harm, most notably from sexual assault when intoxicated, and therefore more in need of guidance. Such guidance often advocates individual responsibility, and can therefore encourage rather than discourage a culture of victim blaming. Elizabeth Stanko suggests that for women there is a self-awareness of vulnerability and that the requirement of safekeeping behaviours form part of 'a continuous lesson about what it means to be female' (1990: 85). My data showed that students did not ask *why* I was asking questions regarding safety and I wonder if this was because of their knowledge of risks or simply because I asked a question for them to answer. Brooks found that 'the necessity of engaging in safety behaviours was both normalized by participants and understood to be gendered', she also found that few of her participants questioned why they should need to adopt safety behaviours (2011: 640). Brooks suggests that such patterns are due to young women being forewarned: 'young women's assertions that they were already aware of the advice contained within safety campaigns were largely based on receiving messages from their family and the media at an early age' (2011: 639). I would argue that this also relies on othering; seeing how other individuals behave whilst drinking, or hearing stories of other's experiences. As was argued in Chapters Four and Five, storytelling plays a role in the experience of UDC and can aid in the normalisation of certain behaviours, whilst othering allows students to justify or dismiss their own behaviour in comparison to others. As Griffin et al found:

the derided figure of "chavvy girls" enables young middle class women to speak about the risk that *all* young women face in getting (very) drunk and operating as actively (hetero)sexual subjects in the culture of intoxication without implicating themselves.

This process of class and gendered Othering constitutes the speaker as a responsible and respectable female drinker who is *self-aware* (2012: 197, original emphasis).

Othering is therefore useful in that it allows young women, and young men, to work through issues without implicating themselves. As Rawlins states ‘sustaining our lived sense of identity continually requires reconciling our *self-identity* (our perceptions of our own identity) with our *meta-identity* (our perceptions of how others perceive our identity[...])’ (2009: 31). However, such othering and comparison can also work against harm reduction information as it can result in young people believing such information does not apply to them but to ‘others’ (see Chapter Two, S2.8, S2.10 and S6.2.2 above).

What this othering also reveals, however, is that women are othered, or subject to ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1982), for being ‘less feminine’ and for participating in drinking alcohol (see e.g. Jackson & Tinkler, 2007; Brooks, 2011; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Griffin *et al*, 2012; Nicholls, 2012; Hutton, 2013; Nichols, 2016). Where does this leave female students who want to participate in the pervasive UDC, for all the reasons that have been discussed in this thesis, such as friendship, escapism and fear of missing out, but do not want to be judged negatively for it? Griffin *et al*, for example, suggest that women ‘*do* manage to inhabit this impossible space in which pleasure and danger are locked in a dangerous and alluring embrace’ (2012: 198, original emphasis), and that approaches that attempt to ‘scare women back into feminine respectability [...] risk reinforcing patriarchal discourses around gender, alcohol and sexuality, and seldom recognise the pleasures for young women’ (2012: 199). The characteristic gender tensions of UDC were identified by Sarah and she explained her experiences to me:

**Sarah:** [...] there’s definitely more girls getting more confidence in terms of if they see someone attractive they’ll go and talk to them. I’ve definitely seen, seen my housemates do that like “ah yeah he’s well fit go on, go on” pushing each other towards him like proper like playground behaviour. Erm, but I think banter is definitely more lad because

I think it's this, do you know this like, this, have you ever seen the film 'Gone Girl' [...] because there's this thing about being a cool girl and like Amy the main character wants to be a cool girl and she wants to be accepted as the girl that's like, can come to the football and can take the banter and can do the neck nominations<sup>5</sup>, like there's massively this thing about wanting to be like 'in with the lads' and yeah. You know that film with Mila Kunis and Justin Timberlake erm 'friends with benefits' it's massively like that kind of oh yeah she's cool, she's different, she's not... girly. Yet you've still gotta dress like a girl but act like a lad.

**Interviewer:** That's really interesting – so is there this sort of lad culture in the nightclub, more 'banter'?

**Sarah:** [...] like I'm in a relationship and then obviously people sometimes will come over and dance with you and if you say no it's literally like you've just like smacked them, like you've massive hit to their ego, like 'why? Who do you think you are to turn me down?' Like it was a, he was, I was genuinely like stood there like yeah! I'm not just passive in terms of ah finally yes I'm waiting for a boy to pick me up, can't wait I'm buzzing, and I'll get down on my knees and worship you. It's just like what are you saying? I'm not out, I'm not dressed up for you, I'm not out with my friends and done all this for you it's coz I want to be.

**Interviewer:** So you feel like there's an expectation if you dress up nicely...

**Sarah:** that it was for the lads. We're doing about this in [class], it's like, I think it's called like a male gaze or something where you're all, all you wanna do is, is look nice for the lads yeah, it's not at all, I just like the dress or whatever. It's just not, I don't know.

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<sup>5</sup> Neck nomination or NekNominate was a social media phenomenon in which players 'filmed themselves "neking" or chugging copious amount of alcohol or drinking alcohol in a novel or humorous manner' (Wombacher *et al*, 2017: 596) or faced ridicule from their peers online.

Sarah suggests that there is a difficulty for young women, or an 'impossible space to occupy' (Griffin et al, 2012: 198), in that they are expected to 'dress like a girl but act like a lad'. Griffin et al relate this to the notion of 'hypersexual femininity' 'characterised by high heels, short skirts, low-cut tops, fake tan, long, straight and (bottle) blonde hair, smooth bare legs in all climates, lots of make-up and a buxom slimness' (2012: 186). Sarah shows that there are particular social norms to adhere to in being both 'ladylike' in appearance – 'look nice for the lads' – and to fit in with UDC that involves banter, drinking and confidence – 'can take the banter'. 'Banter' has materialized as a recurrent theme in my data and through the course of this study there has been emergent literature on this topic (see e.g. NUS, 2013; Phipps and Young, 2015a; 2015b, Phipps, 2016, Lewis *et al*, 2016, and Nichols, 2016) following widespread concern of its negative impact on university campuses in the UK, becoming synonymous with 'lad culture' in the UK and 'rape culture' in the US. Nichols offers a definition of banter stating that:

Banter is a fast growing form of interaction within British society, becoming synonymous with lads and laddish behaviours, commonly acting as a way for men to convey discourses of gender relations and sexist ideas. Understood as a type of humour and interactional practice which permeates all spheres of the social world, banter is seen to be a specific form of jocular interaction based upon adopting impolite, offensive and abusive language and tone' (Nichols, 2016: 2).

What Sarah is therefore suggesting is that young women can navigate the 'impossible space' by not challenging banter, which often relates to sexism and the objectification of women. She seems to suggest that for young women to fit in university drinking cultures there is a requirement to look a certain way, for the male gaze, and accept certain sorts of behaviours. The established norms of such a culture become shocking when one realises that sexual harassment and violence has been seen by students as an 'ordinary' part of university life and the student experience (see NUS, 2013). As Phipps and Young suggest in their report for the NUS, 'banter' is used as an excuse, 'a means of getting away with being offensive, a disguise for misogyny,

sexism and homophobia, a way of shaming those who felt offended, and a way to refrain from taking topics such as sexual violence seriously' (2013: 38). Sarah, however, was clearly resistant to this as she negotiated the unwanted attention of people that approached her in the nightclub, stating also that she dresses 'up' for herself and to have a good time with her friends. Hutton et al state that 'women are called upon to behave as if they are free and liberated (individualized) subjects, but find that this freedom can only be practiced within the boundaries of continued gender hierarchies. Young women's drinking is an uneasy combination of having "fun", managing potential risks (such as unwanted sexual attention), and remaining attractive to men' (2013: 455). Sarah, with a level of self-awareness, states that she is out having fun because she wants to be, but this was achieved through comparison with others who do adhere to the constraints of femininity in UDC. She also outlined her frustration at having to manage unwanted attention saying 'I'm not just passive', as if it is expected that she be polite and moderate her own behaviour to deal with the situation. In her study on young women and their adoption and rejection of safety advice in bars, pubs and clubs, Oona Brooks found that young women 'resented and resisted that their own behaviour should be questioned or moderated in order to maintain their safety' (2011: 641). There is also the suggestion from Sarah that young women are challenging the expectation that they will passively be approached by subverting this norm and approaching others: 'if they see someone attractive they'll go and talk to them'. Sarah, however, judges this with similar disdain citing it as 'playground behaviour', reiterating that this *can* be somewhat of an 'impossible space' for young female students to navigate.

Ideas of what are 'appropriate', accepted and expected behaviours in UDC reinforce the context as a 'liminal' space that still has a 'criteria of girliness or femininity [that] appear[s] to be stricter in a club setting' (Nicholls, 2016: 84). This often relates to not getting 'too drunk'. My data typically showed that there is a perception that women are more vulnerable when they drink too much. As Nicholls found, 'whilst *some* alcohol consumption was normalised and

expected for young women on a night out, drinking with the specific *intention* of getting very drunk continued to be positioned as problematic for women, and heavy drinking was depicted widely as unfeminine behaviour' (2016: 82). Whilst many of my participants were happy to engage in UDC, particularly with management strategies in place and considering that drinking in this context may be seen as a 'student practice' above a gendered one, other participants found drinking cultures concerning and problematic. For example Fan stated that:

**Fan:** I think maybe for boys it's ok even if they got completely drunk but it's not that decent or nice for girls to drink too much because well you know, I think there's some maybe sexual abuse that you are not quite aware of. I remember that I've read something like a news report from the social media saying that a female student in Hull had got raped in her first year when she went out and got drunk, and she can't resist and it just sort of happened. And I think maybe certain abuse probably or might happen to the students here if they drink too much. And I remember once that my flat mates got really drunk and the other day they talk in the kitchen and they didn't chat with me but I overheard something like one boy was trying very hard to approach her, but in the end she refused it, but what if somebody else just make use of the opportunity to do something very bad, yeah, I think that's one issue.

**Interviewer:** So do you think it leaves people more vulnerable to that sort of thing?

**Fan:** Yeah I think so.

Fan typifies the concerns of some of my participants which have been exemplified by the assumption that when I asked about safety I was referring to safety from sexual assault or unwanted attention. Fan's response also highlighted the importance of current attempts to increase students' knowledge of sexual consent issues which have taken place at a number of UK universities and been subject to mass media interest. One reason is that there are still issues with victim blaming, exemplified by Fan's assertion that the student 'went out and got drunk, and she can't resist'. It has also been considered necessary due to the concern over lad culture,

which has also been subject to mass media interest. As Phipps states, ‘the figure of the “Lad” has especially come to dominate discussions around masculinities in UK higher education, and has been associated with concerns about sexual harassment and violence’ (2016: 1). She also acknowledges that, following the NUS study that highlighted the risk of sexual harassment and violence for female students (NUS, 2013) ‘a subsequent wave of grassroots activism and policy conversation was set within an ebb and flow of media stories which incorporated both genuine concern and elements of moral panic’ (2016: 2). The sexual consent talk that I attended as part of my fieldwork was held as part of the series of talks that introduce new students to university life. Alice, first year international student, discussed these but was shocked that more information was not available:

**Interviewer:** So I just want to ask people if they’ve seen any safety information in terms of alcohol, in terms of nights out, and I know you’re not going out so much but I just wondered if you’d seen anything around campus or?

**Alice:** There were the consent talks the first week and I think I’ve seen one or two things out, I can’t think of anything specifically, but I think so. I think one thing that did shock me, as a comparison, is in the States there’s a lot of talk about sexual assault on campus, and then it’s not talked about over here, so it’s one of those things that I think I just notice because I spend enough time on American campuses that like there’s flyers everywhere with like phone numbers to call, it’s very clear where the resources are, and that’s not here, and that kind of freaked me out, just ‘cos as far as everyone I know like nothing has happened, so I’m hoping that your sexual assault rates are just much lower than ours, but it’s one of those safety issues that I feel like isn’t addressed, and I feel like I’m slightly paranoid but it’s one of those odd things to me, with people going out so much that it’s not an issue that’s really addressed.

Alice feels that sexual assault is not being discussed enough on campuses; certainly in relation to the concern over lad culture as discussed above. This is particularly problematic as the NUS

research project 'Hidden Marks' found levels of sexual harassment were high at 68% whilst institutional reporting was at a low level of 4% (NUS, 2010) (see also: NUS, 2013; Phipps & Young; 2015). A continuation or furthering of current consent educating would therefore be warranted.

It is worth noting, however, that of the male students interviewed in my study more were concerned with the safety of their friends and were disparaging of lad culture on campus; though this could be related to Dempster's finding that few young men chose to identify as 'lads' but could 'slip into laddishness' when in male groups, and particularly on nights out (2011: 638). Female students also showed that they were not passive in accepting lad culture, its associated sexual harassment, or the difficulties of navigating femininity in the night-time economy. Rather they were more concerned with friendship and having fun. In relation to research that suggests feminism has had an upsurge on university campuses in a backlash against lad culture I, for example, attended a talk by 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate gender & women's studies and feminist society students who were working to resist the prevalence of lad culture on their campus. Lewis et al assert that 'feminism's re-emergence appears to be especially vibrant in universities, where various forms of activism, particularly related to combating sexual harassment and challenging sexist norms in social life, are taking root and gathering momentum' (2016: 1). It should also be noted that exploring sex and sexuality is often a big part of university for students and 'within the sexual panic discourse, sexualised cultures currently determine young people's, and in particular girls' and young women's sexualities. Such critiques often rest on the assumption that sex at a young age is dangerous and damaging and tend to incorporate judgements on promiscuity, positing that girls and young women need to be protected' (Phipps & Young, 2016: 468). I would argue that the active ways in which students are approaching potential risks, caregiving and responsibility, and challenging lad culture, as have been analysed in this section, also extend to a belief that they 'know their own limits' and



have little need for harm reduction campaigns or interventions, as was discussed in section 6.3.1. In the following section I also consider if limiting participation in, or abstaining from, university drinking cultures is a management strategy.

### **6.3.3. The effects of managing university drinking cultures through abstention**

It is clear that UDC are pervasive. They serve as expectation forming, shared experiences, friendship making and maintenance and are the social activity of choice for many students. However, what does this mean for students who limit or abstain from engagement in UDC for a variety of reasons? I argue that students who do not participate in UDC are 'othered' and subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982) by their peers, often to the point of exclusion from alcohol inclusive social events. Students not participating, by not going out and/or not consuming alcohol, are considered 'buzz-kills' for subverting the 'norm' of socialising with alcohol at university. Returning to participant Phil, for example, he found that he felt isolated from the very start of university due to his lack of interest in 'going-out':

**Interviewer:** What sort of things would you have liked to have seen to maybe feel more included?

**Phil:** I don't know I suppose I'm being a bit, I was being a bit hopeful if there'd be something to cater towards me, 'cos I understand that that's what university life is about but I suppose, I don't know I'm more kind of natural, you know getting to know people rather than let's just all go out for a week. And I think that sort of started, I don't know anyone at university and for me I think that kind of being left out from the very beginning I've just never really been able to make any bonds with anyone, 'cos I don't do that I suppose.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, so you feel like it's quite an inclusive culture like you go out and that's how people make friends and.

**Phil:** Yeah and if you don't do that then you're not a part of university.

Phil goes so far as to say that due to his preference not to participate with drinking cultures he did not feel as though he was part of the university. He found it difficult to make friends at university for, as we have seen in Chapter Five, friendships are formed and maintained through drinking and going out. This is particularly the case as new students start university and experience Freshers' Week, as was discussed in Chapter Four. Phil felt that there was little that catered to him socially due to this focus on drinking. Drinking cultures are so entrenched in daily life that there can be a lack of understanding for those who do not wish to partake. For example, Phil also found that his friends outside of university assumed there had to be a 'reason' for him not drinking:

**Phil:** I think I've noticed that when I've gone out with friends where I work in [town] and I've sort of been drinking lemonade and they've gone 'are you alright, are you feeling alright, are you taking medication or something?' 'No I just don't feel like drinking'.

Phil's friends assume he is not drinking alcohol due to being unwell or taking medication. This is indicative of a culture in which there are few 'acceptable' excuses to not drink with friends. Through his decision not to drink Phil struggled to gain access to friends at university. Abstaining from alcohol came to form part of his identity, and his awareness of the fundamental nature of friendship at university, and how alcohol enables this, left him feeling unable to 'make any bonds with anyone'. Hepworth et al suggest that 'young people's constructions of identity become closely interwoven with an expectation that they will drink' (2016: 254) and that students who do not conform to the dominant drinking culture face challenges (2016: 264). As I argue, these students are subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982).

Students who do not drink often find alternative spaces to socialise in or find ways to UDC in their own way. For example, as discussed in Chapter Four section 4.3.2, I ran into Phil around six months after his interview and he had joined a university society that was better catered to him socially than UDC. The availability of a multitude of societies, and the option to set up new ones, gives students social options that are not necessarily catered only towards alcohol consumption. It provides another way to meet like-minded students and form friendships away from accommodation, studies and from drinking cultures. However, many students who drink rarely or not at all find ways to participate in drinking cultures without consuming alcohol. First year undergraduate Alice represents this argument. Similarly to Phil, Alice initially found UDC shocking and sometimes felt left out. She also described the culture as exclusive, which suggests that there are insiders and outsiders and therefore a process of othering. Below is an extract from her interview:

**Alice:** I think there were one or two other people who stayed in, there was one of the floors in our house that's mostly international students as well, they just don't come out of their flat very often and we don't have a way to contact them, so I wasn't the only one, but out of the people who like socialise I think I was the only one who stayed in.

**Interviewer:** Was that quite difficult or?

**Alice:** I enjoy a fair amount of time being alone, so it was ok, and I was tired and I did Skype my family which was fine, but I think if it was really consistent it would be difficult, I mean I think it is hard just because some people make friends that first week, and so much of that first socialising is done, but it's also all done in a way that it excludes people who don't want to go out and party.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, so I mean did you find it still sort of easy enough to talk to your housemates, or did you feel a bit left out because they'd had these other experiences?

**Alice:** There's times when I felt a little bit left out, we do enough, we eat dinner, do things that don't involve an extreme amount of drinking now, but at first it was hard to start socialising with them after Freshers' Week because they were already all so close.

**Interviewer:** Yeah that sounds hard. So you said that they're really good with you, not making you go out kind of thing, but do you have discussions about it, do they still invite you out or?

**Alice:** They still invite me out, a lot of times when they all get together to pre drink in one of our kitchens, I'll go in then and drink tea and sit in the corner and talk to them so I'm still socialising, and then I'll go to my room and they go out.

**Interviewer:** Ok yeah.

**Alice:** But every time they always ask if I want to go out, but they never like pressure me to go so that's really nice.

**Interviewer:** 'Cos there's sort of that mix sometimes isn't there, like I don't actually want to go but I still want to be thought of.

**Alice:** Yes, I want you guys to ask I just don't want to go.

Alice illustrates that, although she claims to be content, there are only certain ways students can participate in UDC without drinking because part of the experience is in alcohol consumption. It also seems that despite the modified participation, Alice is still marginalised. Participating in university drinking cultures involves socialising with alcohol, those who abstain get pushed to the periphery. Alice suggests here that she only began to socialise with her flatmates *after* Freshers' Week because it was so centred on 'going out', and following that it was more difficult to get to know them as they had formed bonds. Alice worked a way around this, stating that they did 'enough' that did not involve 'extreme drinking' and she participated in the pre-drinking by 'sitting in the corner' and joining in the conversation before her flatmates went out.

She therefore highlights the difficulty for students who do not want to participate in UDC but also do not want to be forgotten by friends or flatmates. This is interesting in relation to the way in which international students are often left out of such discussions and invitations, as was also discussed in Chapter Five section 5.2.1, Alice's interpretation of this is that, because the international students who live in her house do not socialise in the visible ways expected from students, they do not 'like to socialise' and 'don't come out of their flat'. This is symptomatic of many of my participants' perceptions. It is also indicative of the ways in which students form close bonds with friends through homophily, as was discussed in chapter 5. Socialising within UDC allows students to feel a sense of belonging but, in certain ways, excludes those who do not participate. Alice's account also draws attention to the use of 'international student' as a term that is often reserved for those who have English as an additional language, and particularly Asian students who are less likely to participate in drinking cultures that are not associated with sharing food (see Hunt, 2014; Yoon et al, 2015; see also chapter 5 section 5.2.1), as Alice is an international student from America but seems to be positioned as separate from the international students who preferred to stay in their accommodation.

I argue, therefore, that socialising at university is not carefree for every student and that this is contrary to how the 'student experience' is represented, and marketed. The examples here have shown that the students' have had to either situate themselves within a culture they do not wish to participate in, or be excluded from that culture. As Piacentini and Banister suggest, since alcohol 'plays a central role in the social lives of students [...] this presents problems for students who choose to resist the pressures to conform and participate in the prevailing alcohol culture [...] and] may prevent full engagement with student social life' (2009: 280). Whilst Alice quickly found her own way through this and was happy to spend time alone, Phil found this more difficult. Seaman and Ikegwuonu found that, within their research on the alcohol transition of young people aged 18-25, a problem emerged in that 'the cultural norm that made

excessive alcohol use appropriate in group situations appeared to have become so taken-for-granted that it became a default choice for peer association, raising a question of if not alcohol, then what else?' (2011: 751). In terms of socialising outside of everyday normality, e.g. living together, sharing meals, and talking, there are alternatives such as attending societies but, according to my data, events that are marketed and labelled as 'sober', 'alcohol free' or 'a quiet night' etc., are rarely well attended (see Chapter Five, section 5.2.2). As has been discussed in the preceding two chapters, participants have said such events are unsuccessful and divisive despite UDC clearly marginalising some students. Whilst much bonding is done within 'the everyday', drinking is still the 'done' thing for students, it is tenacious and taken-for-granted (see e.g. Martinic & Measham, 2008; Piacentini & Banister, 2009; Quigg et al, 2013; Seaman & Ikegwuonu, 2011; Thurnell-Read, 2016).

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

Although students do not necessarily see drinking as a problem, and indeed identify the pleasures of participating in what has become a culture of drinking at university and an integral part of student life, they are still aware of the need to regulate and manage aspects of it. Having a good time is still an important feature, and whilst many students themselves may not see drinking cultures as a problem they are aware of problematic elements. This has been identified in the various management strategies that participants of this project have relayed, for they are a reaction to potential risks and problems within UDC.

I have argued throughout this thesis that friendship is fundamental to the experience of university. Through analysis of the data in this chapter I have shown that friendship, and the drinking cultures through which much of friendship is enacted at university, is prioritised over potential health and/or safety issues. Participating in UDC at university can therefore provide a

sense of belonging for students and, in turn, those who do not drink are often left out and can be excluded from particular friendship practices. Indeed, the very environment created at university often actively encourages drinking in attempts to foster fun and sociality for students. There is a safety net in place for students that condones and even facilitates problematic behaviours. Students are aware that there are services upon which they can rely and believe that certain aspects of university life are not like the 'real world', however in other ways I have shown that they value their independence and resent authority that denies them that.

My data and analyses have also highlighted that students have management strategies, or 'risk rituals' (Moore & Burgess, 2011) with which they claim to regulate their own drinking and take on roles of responsibility for themselves and their friends. In an extension of the argument from Chapter Five that friends provide caregiving roles within UDC, we have seen here that students are aware of potential risks from alcohol consumption and (attempt to) manage them for themselves and for friends. One method involves getting to know their own limits; whilst this is problematic as it often involves learning from a bad experience it does show that they have developed a level of self-awareness from their own experiences and from comparison with others. Feeling that harm reduction messages and intervention do not apply to them, I have shown that students have developed their own methods and self-regulation. Therefore, whilst alcohol is central to the social experience of university, I argue against the common representation of students as hedonists who drink solely to get drunk as they have a cultural commitment to the student drinking culture in its capacity as a friendship forming and maintaining exercise.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

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The aim of this research has been to identify and analyse student experiences of university drinking cultures. Drinking cultures are pervasive on UK university campuses and form a significant part of student socialising. External stakeholders are concerned with the levels of alcohol consumption by students and young people more widely, and so drinking cultures are often constructed as a social problem due to issues such as anti-social behaviour, criminal damage, and noise that can be related to excessive or 'extreme' (see Martinic & Measham, 2008) alcohol consumption. This research has spoken to a number of such stakeholders both formally and informally, including: university staff from management, the deanery and the student union, and also police, a local drugs and alcohol service, and security personnel. However, the major data has come from students of pre-university to post-graduate level for, whilst much of student drinking is vilified as a 'problem', students themselves are often managing UDC with not only awareness, management strategies and risk rituals, but enjoyment.

The theoretical framework for this thesis has utilised the Foucauldian theories of the subject, norms, and dividing practices and found that UDC are positioned as normative and those students who limit their participation or abstain are subject to 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982). For example, both students who abstain and international students in my study have reported that they either have to align themselves with a culture they will always be slightly outside of, given that alcohol consumption is a pre-requisite for 'insider' status of UDC, or find alternate methods of socialising. In line with Piacentini and Banister's research, students have little choice but to 'operate within the wider student body; they cannot exist outside the (alcohol dominated) student culture' (2009: 280). I argue that the friendship and social practices, which form part of UDC, can therefore exacerbate division as they span more than just the 'night-out'. As we have seen throughout this thesis, UDC practices involve caregiving, taking photographs, storytelling, and shared experiences, and this can be a lot to 'miss out' on. Indeed, a number of



participants in this research even referred to 'fear or missing out' or 'FOMO' (see also MacLean, 2016) as a motivating factor for participating in UDC.

I have also argued that the subject status of 'student' allows certain leniencies for the young people it applies to because of the 'future' they represent. This has been highlighted in the university in-house disciplinary proceedings, which the police can report students to, and which can limit the effect on students' potential futures by, depending on the behaviour or offence, preventing a police caution or criminal record. As was outlined in Chapter Six, universities have relationships with the police, and the study site in this research positioned the police as protection for students and as an extension of the 'looking after' that they provide. The police also reaffirmed their position on campus as one of reinforcing safety and assisting with welfare issues; though they would step in for 'serious' crimes. Though it is worth noting briefly that, as discussed in Chapter Two, during this research the Zellick guidelines (see NUS, 2015; Universities UK, 2016) that had been the reference point for universities on dealing with student offences were reviewed and rejected and new and more appropriate guidelines, and examples of good practice, were released to provide advice and examples of how Universities should deal with alleged offences, particularly sexual violence, hate crime and harassment (see NUS, 2016; UUK, 2016; 2017). The university suggested that this relationship with the police was reciprocal as they would alert the police to any big 'events' happening at which there might be 'trouble'; this was positioned again as a preventative and safety measure. This adds to the conception of university as a 'safe' space, and there are freedoms being allowed to (arguably, certain types of) students as it is predicted that they, as subjects, will be successful, law-abiding citizens in the future having lived in a 'safe' environment that serves, for many, as a stepping stone to the 'real world'. University is seen as students' *time* to be young and 'have fun' before they step up to 'real world' responsibilities. The 'safety' and welfare of students are promoted by university services such as the deanery, the porters, residential services, the student union,

counselling services, career services, academic advisors, peer mentors and other student based services. However, some of these services are specific to a campus-based collegiate university, like the study site, such as the college deanery and porters whose roles further promote the site as a safe space. Whilst it seems reasonable and rational to help students rather than punish them, it does beg the question of privilege as the same services are not necessarily available for young people who do not attend university and do not have the subject status of 'student'. However, as was further argued in Chapter Six, I identified that there were tensions within students' relations to authority with both a desire for independence and an appreciation of (some forms of) university authorities and services. University students occupy a liminal space between being young people who are learning to be independent adults with a 'safety net' in place and young people who have responsibilities over themselves, their studies, accommodation and finances (notably debt).

In addressing these themes, this research has attempted to span the breadth of university life and I have spoken to students from pre-university to first year undergraduates, second and third year undergraduates, post-graduates and recent graduates, alongside the staff and stakeholders mentioned above. This has highlighted themes such as how students are transitioning to university, the expectations that they have pre-arrival and the importance of friendship. One thing that has emerged, however, is that despite its longevity as what has long been considered part of student life, UDC is not a mono-culture. There are variations in how people participate in UDC and it seems that there are differences year to year in how elements of UDC are enacted and the consideration of potential risks. For example, over the course of this research pre-drinking has become more prevalent with students 'going out' much later and consuming more alcohol at home than at pre-nightclub and nightclub venues. This may be attributed to students attempting to save money amid the rising levels of debt that newer students are taking on, following the increase to £9000 fees (and often higher for international

students). My participants also suggested that pre-drinking, and particularly drinking games, were socially important as 'icebreakers' at the start of university but decreased in intensity as students got to know each other better. This adds to research into the pre-drinking/pre-loading of young adults that has found motivating factors of minimising costs, becoming intoxicated before 'going out' to 'get in the mood', and socialising (see Labhart et al, 2013; McCreanor et al, 2016; Wells, 2008). I have also argued that because pre-drinking is a social activity it can become an environment of peer-surveillance, through observation, encouragement and self-consciousness, particularly where drinking games are involved. Paired with the 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) referenced above, this can lead to a feeling of 'pressure to participate' for some students.

The use of social media has also changed over the course of this research, and this could be seen in the different considerations between the third-year undergraduates and recent graduates and the pre-university and first-year students. The students who started university earlier had used the social media platform Facebook as a site for (multiple) photo-sharing (see Boyle et al, 2017; Lyons et al, 2016) and Facebook played a big part in the construction and representation of UDC. However, many of the recent graduates looked back on this with concern and often intentions to now keep Facebook private should it affect their employability. Newer students seemed more aware of the potential for employers to see their posts and photographs on social media and were more likely to use Snapchat to document their nights-out as, due to the apps nature as time-limited, photographs last between 10 seconds and 24 hours; although it should be noted that users still have the ability to 'screenshot' and save photographs. Photographs on Facebook from nights-out were, according to participants, more likely to come from the official photographers of nightclubs, which in turn markets the nightclub (see Niland et al, 2017). They also recounted that they were more likely to share 'embarrassing' stories and/or photographs privately through Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp groups – storytelling often being used to

reposition negative occurrences as humorous anecdotes (see Chapter Five and e.g. Bogren, 2014; Brown & Gregg, 2012; Fjaer, 2012; Fleetwood, 2014; Hackley et al, 2013; Hebden et al, 2015; Hutton et al, 2013; Katainen, 2014; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacLean, 2016; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013). However, despite these differences, there was an overarching similarity in how students were using social media to document their nights-out and often dissect them the following day as part of what I have termed 'night-out nostalgia'. Social media were therefore adding to the sociality, and often enjoyment, of UDC.

Newer students were also using specific university affiliated social media pages as question and answer platforms talking to current students, other new students and staff which appeared to have alleviated some of the nerves of the pre-university SFFG participants. The group were able to talk to people who would be sharing their accommodation and courses, and who were likeminded and so the formation of community/communities began before the students had even started university. The use of social media in this way can be reactionary to pre-conceived ideas/expectations about what life at university will be like particularly in relation to the social side of the 'student experience'. I have also argued that social media could be one way in which to engage better with pre-university students, promote realistic expectations of university life, and disseminate information including relating to harm reduction, thereby easing the transition to university. In line with other literature (Ailes et al, 2015; Buote et al, 2007; Jackson et al, 2000; Keup, 2007; Kreig, 2013; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Pancer et al, 2000; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005) I found that unmet expectations could be a source of disappointment and discomfort for new students, though the use of social media as outlined above seemed to aid this and so should be encouraged. However, I also found that there were students who were pleased to have unmet or unrealistic expectations, such as finding that they were not the only non-drinkers, as was the case with participant Jen and as some students used university social media pages to discuss. I further found that whilst there were a number of influencing factors on the expectations of

students such as family, friends, previous education, established students, media representations (see Ailes et al, 2015; Elmore et al, 2017), students were constructing their own ideas and through early experiences of university began to increase and rely on their own cultural knowledge. The agency of pre-university students should therefore be better recognised when considering how expectations of university are formed. However, as was argued in Chapter Four, early experiences of university may also be influenced by the established students who serve as Freshers' Reps and Residents Assistants and play a role in introducing new students to university life, often through participating in UDC.

Such participation in UDC is something that is used as a social aid and 'icebreaker' as new students start university and establish friendships. These new friendships helped students build confidence and I found that students utilised UDC not only in friendship making practices but in maintaining friendships. Friendships were maintained in the aforementioned practices of sharing experiences together, caring for one another, storytelling and photosharing which are all encompassed in, what I have termed, 'night-out nostalgia'. Whilst I have found that there are everyday practices that bring students together such as cooking together, watching television, and talking, there is a special status reserved for drinking and 'going-out' together. The importance of friendship, and the maintenance of it through participation in UDC, has also been highlighted in the prioritisation of sociality over health and harm reduction. Whilst students might have seen harm reduction campaigns they did not recall them with clarity, whereas stories of shared experiences with friends in UDC they did recall. However, students were enacting their own management strategies and/or 'risk rituals' such as planning how to get home, staying together in groups for 'safety in numbers' (see also Armstrong et al, 2014b), getting to 'know' their own 'limits', monitoring or limiting their own or friends intoxication levels, 'matching pace' (see also Burgess et al, 2009; Chrzan, 2011; Frederiksen et al, 2012; Levine et al, 2012; MacLean, 2016), intervening should a friend appear to be in difficulty

(particularly noted here was the potential for young women to feel vulnerable if approached by men in nightclub spaces), and having caregiving roles within friendship groups. These strategies show that students *are* aware of potential risks but are employing their own strategies/plans for safety that they feel do not patronise them, or interfere with the fun, pleasures and friendship practices of UDC. This adds to the literature that found that young people are difficult to reach with harm reduction information (see e.g. Hackley et al, 2015; Spencer, 2013). The theme of friendship was not something that was originally anticipated to form such a big part of this research, however upon embarking on the research it became clear that friendship and sociality underpin UDC. Harm reduction campaigns and interventions, such as the NUS *Alcohol Impact* scheme (2017), have already begun to recognise this and, for example, the *Student Minds* charity runs workshops at universities titled 'Look After Your Mate' which, whilst focused on aspects of mental health and 'understanding the issues affecting students' (Student Minds, 2017), identifies the importance and potential of friendships at university.

The implications of the findings above are that external stakeholders can position students (and young people more widely) as deviant, in Foucauldian terms, for alcohol associated behaviours (such as drunk and disorderly, criminal damage, noise) and 'excessive' drinking (Martinic & Measham, 2008: 1). However, students hold a counter position as they view drinking as normative and non-drinking as 'deviant', with those who do not drink subject to 'dividing practices', as argued above. There is, therefore, a disconnection between the thinking done *for* and *about* students and young people, and the thinking done *by* them. The harm reduction information and interventions that target students are therefore coming up against drinking cultures that are not only normative, but are being used to make friends and maintain friendships, and that hold a special status as a social 'event'. I also outlined in Chapter Four that young people pre-prepare themselves for UDC before they arrive at university and therefore bring their ideas of what sociality at university *should* look like. My data has suggested that at this age (the pre-university students were all 18 years old), ideas of drinking cultures are already entrenched and viewed as the 'done thing', and as how young people have fun. Harm

reduction and interventions may, therefore, arrive too late in the timeline for when to talk to young people about alcohol. Further research may therefore wish to establish if there is an opportunity to talk with young people in a transitional period before ideas become entrenched; this might allow young people to talk about what they expect from drinking cultures and from friendships, and allow them to talk *to* each other rather than be talked *at* in a traditional top-down fashion.

I suggest, therefore, that future policies and practices need to take into account a number of factors based on this research. First, students have their own methods for regulating their drinking practices and are not without knowledge and/or experience so should not be patronised or infantilised by harm reduction and safety information that is aimed at them. Instead, their own practices should be encouraged and supported. Second, friendship and caregiving practices are intertwined with UDC and this could be (further) utilised in supporting students to look after themselves and each other. Third, drinking and nights-out hold a special status amongst students and ‘alternative’ events need to provide a similar, non-divisive opportunity for socialising especially as pre-university students did not hold non-drinking events in disregard, and planned to attend, until they got to university. Fourth, pre-university students should be part of the process of planning events such as Freshers’ Week to ensure that they cater to the people they are supposed to and that the stereotypical hedonistic week is not recycled when it could be moving forward. This could be achieved through social media since both students and universities are already using the platforms successfully and through employing and training responsible Freshers’ Reps and Residents Assistants. Fifth, it should be recognised that a proportion of the student population are subject to ‘dividing practices’ including those who do not drink or engage with UDC, international students, and mature students. I believe that these findings from my research, although based on data from quite a specific campus-based collegiate university, are widely applicable to the Higher Education

context. However, I am aware that the research evokes further questions and I make suggestions for future research below.

I suggest that there are opportunities for future research that have emerged from this study. For example, whilst I had a small number of international students from Europe and Asia participate in the research, the majority of my participants were British, white and aged between 18 and 24. The experiences of international students in relation to UDC would clearly warrant further investigation, particularly with regards to their pre-university expectations and how this can affect their transition to university life. The experiences of LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or questioning, and others) students should also be further studied, particularly in relation to the gendered elements of UDC discussed here and to literature such as Alessi et al (2017). Furthermore, it was an original intention of this thesis to analyse in depth the role of religion in decisions of abstention from UDC. However, religion only emerged naturally in a small number of interviews and not in enough detail to analyse. Earlier in this thesis I argued that students are often 'required' to have an 'excuse' for not drinking and it would be interesting to see if religion is deemed 'more legitimate' an excuse than, for example, medication or choice. I also attempted to contact all of the societies and sports teams at the study site, but gained only one interview for my efforts. This would be a great data set for future research as both are sites of 'alternative' bonding and socialising, and may act as spaces that can both reinforce UDC and subvert aspects of them with, for example, inclusive LGBTQ+ events that may subvert the heteronormativity of club spaces, and specific music nights such as House, Dubstep, and Drum and Bass music which have subcultures of their own (see Thornton, 1995). Furthermore, the qualitative data I have collected, from interviews, friendship groups, and the secret Facebook focus group (SFFG), have been drawn from a relatively small sample of 38 individuals due to the limitations discussed in Chapter Three. Data has also been drawn mainly from one study site, the college of the SFFG and the small sample of recent graduates, where the original intention was to draw from three separate and geographically varied higher education institutions. The research could, therefore, be extended to a wider and more diverse population



and consider changes to higher education in line with the Consumer Rights Act 2015, the Higher Education Bill 2017, and Brexit. As stated above, my research has attempted to span the breadth of university life and I have spoken to students ranging from pre-university status to postgraduates and recent graduates. Whilst this has been on a small scale, I argue it has provided an idea of transitions to university and after, and this could be extended to a focus for future research. The impact of UDC on the lifestyle choices of recent graduates would be an interesting and important topic for further study, for example. Such research could further assess the notion that UDC can set up habits around alcohol consumption that extend past the 'bubble' of university time and into the 'real world', as participants in my research described.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix A: Individual/ Group Interview Question Guidance

(For group: How do you all know each other?)

- Why were you interested in taking part in the research?

How was Freshers' Week?

- What was it like?
- Was it easy to get to know people?
- How did you meet people?
- What were your Freshers' reps like?
- Did you feel you had enough support?

What were your expectations of university before you arrived?

- Where did those expectations come from?

Do you think there is a drinking culture at university?

- If so how do you feel about it?
- What sort of stories are circulating?

What other ways are you/others are socialising at university?

Is there anything you would change about your experience of university?

Are you in any societies?

- If yes what are they?
- What are they like?

Is there ever any pressure to drink at university?

What is a 'usual' week at university like?

How are social events organised?

- How are Facebook and other social media used?
- Are people taking photographs on nights out?

Do you feel that [study site] city centre and campus are safe?

- Do you plan for safety if socialising? E.g. how you are going to get home.
- Is a particular member of your group most 'responsible'? How so?
- How do you feel about police and security presence?

Do you socialise differently with different groups of friends?

Is money a consideration when decisions are made about socialisation?

Has how you socialised changed since you've arrived at university?

- Do you think it will change after you leave university (graduate)?
- How does it compare to 'home'?

What do you think is the most common representation of students?

- Do you agree/is it realistic?

Are drinking and socialising used as forms of escapism?

Have you seen or heard of any drink safety campaigns at university?

- Is there a way that students might be better reached by safety information?
- Was there a lot of safety information in Freshers' week – did you go to talks etc.?

## **Appendix B: Postgraduate Interview Question Guidance**

What do you think is the most common representation of students?

- How do you feel about it?
- Is it realistic?

As a postgraduate what is a normal week at university like for you?

- Does this differ from when you were an undergraduate?

How would you summarise your experience as undergraduate?

What were your expectations before you started university?

- How did your expectations compare to your experience?
- Particularly in relation to Freshers' Week.

In Freshers' week (both undergraduate and postgraduate):

- How did you meet people and socialise?
- How did you feel over the course of the week?
- Did you feel there was enough support?

Has how you socialise changed as a postgraduate?

When socialising, do you plan for safety?

- Did you at undergraduate – how has this changed?

What have you found to be the best social activities at university?

Have you been/are you part of any sports teams or societies?

- If so did you find there were drinking cultures amongst these?

How have you found the levels of security/policing at university?

Have you found that you socialise differently with different groups of friends e.g. is university different to 'home'?

What sorts of stories circulate amongst students relating to drinking cultures?

Have you found that there are enough social opportunities for postgraduates?

How big a role has money played in decisions about social activities?

Have you ever felt any pressure to drink at university?

How did you/do you organise social events at university?

- What role has social media played in this?

What do you think about drink safety campaigns?

- Is there a way that students might be better reached by safety information?

### **Appendix C: Recent Graduates Interview Question Guidance**

When did you graduate?

What were your expectations of university before you started?

- Where did your expectations come from?

How did university compare with your expectations?

How did you find Freshers' week?

- What were the most common ways you would socialise at university?

Were you part of any sports teams/societies? What were they like?

Do you think there was an emphasis on drinking/socialising at university?

Did you feel you faced any challenges at university?

- How did you deal with them?
- Did you feel there was enough support?

What sort of pattern would a night-out at university follow?

- Were nights out different with different friends?

Has how you socialised/how you drink changed since university?

- If yes, how and why?

How big a part did money/studying play in decisions about socialising?

Did socialising differ over the course of university? How?

How were social events organised?

- How big a part did social media play?

Did you find university to be an inclusive environment?

Do you think anything would be different if you were starting university today?

Did you plan for safety when socialising at university?

- How did you find levels of security and policing?

Did you ever notice any drink safety campaigns at university?

- Did you think they were effective?
- What do you think might better reach students?

#### **Appendix D: Secret Facebook Focus Group Question Schedule**

How are you all feeling about starting university and which universities are you going to?

How do you think students are most commonly represented? (Do you think this is an accurate representation?)

What are you expecting from University socially?

Have you been told anything to expect from university? (This could be from a number of sources e.g. parents, siblings, friends, your college, or information from universities themselves).

Do you expect how you socialise to change at university? If so, how?

Do you expect there to be a drinking culture at university? If so, how do you feel about this?

Is there anything you are nervous about regarding starting university? Is there anything you are excited about?

Have you seen or been told any safety information regarding university? (Particularly around issues of e.g. drinking, drugs, consent etc.)

#### **Appendix E: Secret Facebook Focus Group Follow-Up Question Schedule**

Considering your original expectations, how have you found university so far? Has anything surprised you?

What did you do during Freshers' week and how did you find it?



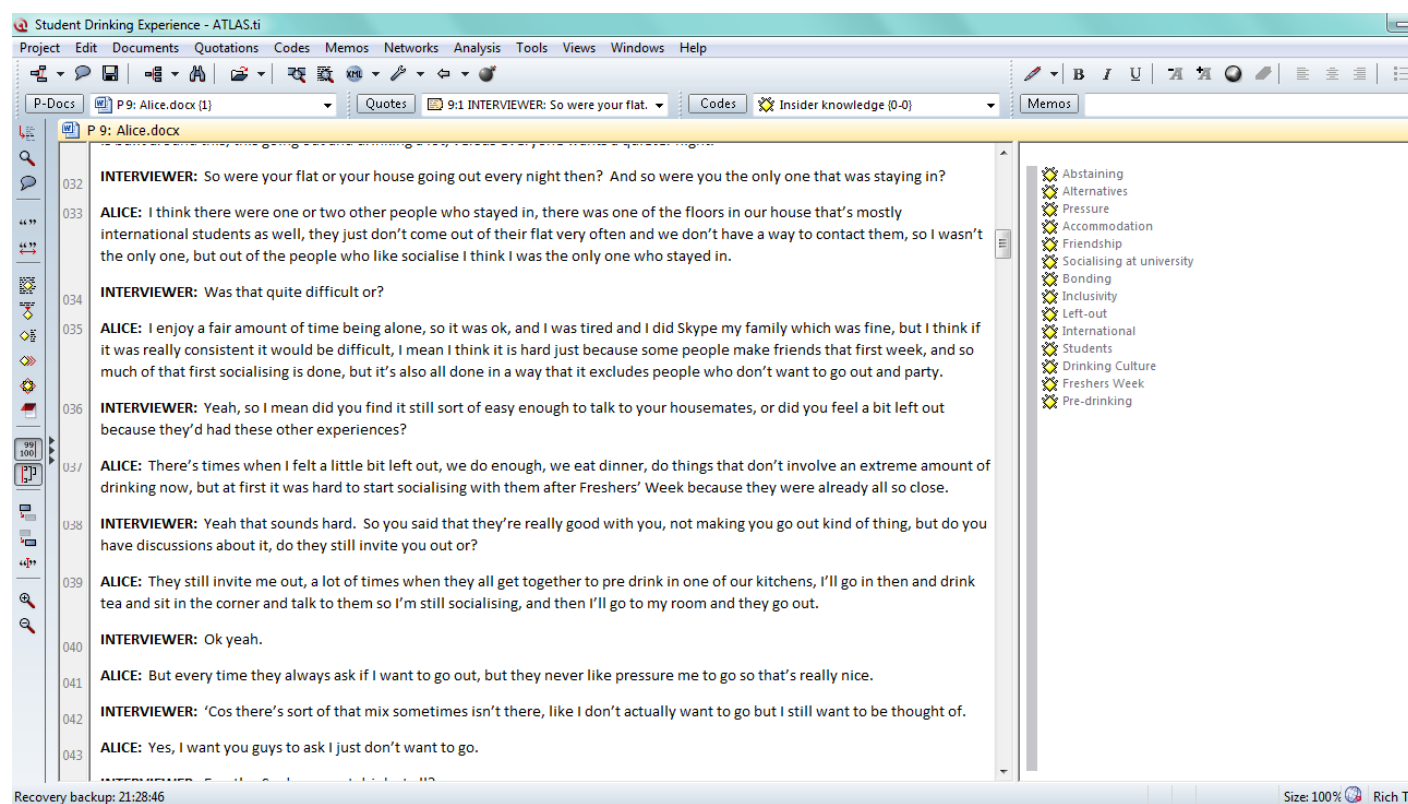
Did you find it easy to meet new people? (For those of you that had spoken to other students using social media before you arrived, did you find that helped you?)

How are you regularly socialising at university now?

Have you been given/have you seen any more safety information regarding socialising at university? Have you felt safe/comfortable so far whilst socialising at uni, particularly in Freshers' week?

Have you found anything challenging about university life so far?

## Appendix F: Alice Coded Interview Section



## Appendix G: Becky, Betty, Ryan Coded Interview Section

Student Drinking Experience - ATLAS.ti

Project Edit Documents Quotations Codes Memos Networks Analysis Tools Views Windows Help

P-Docs P3: Becky, Betty and Ryan.docx (18) Quotes 3:18 Interviewer: Okay, so what sor. Codes Insider knowledge (0-0) Memos

P3: Becky, Betty and Ryan.docx

214 **Becky:** It was a lot.

215 **Interviewer:** Okay, so what sorts of nights out do you have? If you start in the flat do you play drinking games or do you chat or?

216 **Ryan:** We did in the first few weeks drinking games, now it's just gone to like playing Fifa

217 **Becky:** Now we just talk and

218 **Ryan:** people talk

219 **Becky:** make jokes

220 **Becky:** I think the games were there because people weren't talking, now I think we'd rather talk wouldn't we than play the games?

221 **Becky:** we mess around but not really

222 **Becky:** sometimes we start with a game and the game just trails off and we just end up talking and

223 **Becky:** sometimes someone tried to get in 'never have I ever' but it never lasts

224 **Becky:** it never lasts

225 **Interviewer:** Everyone seems to play that

226 **Ryan:** We know too much information now to play it, they get to personal after a bit

227 **Becky:** We know far too much

228 **Becky:** it does get personal, after the very first one lately, I think in fact Ben started it off with the very first one I was like erm, I don't know

229 **Interviewer:** so it's alright when you don't know people so well and you can just do silly things, but when you know people?

230 **Becky:** It's like an attack

231 **\*All laugh\***

Recovery backup: 16:15:16

Size: 100% Rich Te

Drinking Games  
Pre-drinking  
Bonding  
Friendship  
Accommodation

Student Drinking Experience - ATLAS.ti

Project Edit Documents Quotations Codes Memos Networks Analysis Tools Views Windows Help

P-Docs P3: Becky, Betty and Ryan.docx (19) Quotes 3:19 Interviewer: so is there quite.. ( Codes Insider knowledge (0-0) Memos

P3: Becky, Betty and Ryan.docx

533 **Interviewer:** so is there quite a lot of storytelling after nights out then?

534 **Becky:** Yeah

535 **Becky:** a bit too much

536 **Interviewer:** Do you think that's part of the fun?

537 **Becky:** I think it is

538 **Ryan:** Something to look back on isn't it

539 **Becky:** course it is

540 **Becky:** it is something to look back on but

541 **Ryan:** when you've graduated

542 **Becky:** I think it brings us together after going out and like these events have happened when we're all there and we can talk about it and build a bit of a history, cos when we first come here we know nothing of anyone so I think going out allows us to have this common ground

543 **Becky:** Yeah but even in like our third and fourth week and we were going out, Freshers week was only a couple of weeks ago but we were reminiscing

544 **Becky:** I know, reminiscing throughout Freshers week

545 **Becky:** But we were always reminiscing as if it was like months and months and months ago, or even like ages ago and it's only like when you think about it

546 **Ryan:** It's sort of like a way of apologising as well if you've done anything, you'll just put it on that so you don't have to say anything face to face if it gets awkward

547 **Betty and Becky:** Yeah

Recovery backup: 16:40:16

Size: 100% Rich Te

Bonding  
Drinking Culture  
Friendship  
Nostalgia  
Storytelling  
Going Out  
Groupness  
Freshers Week  
Being drunk  
Consequences  
Social Media  
Storytelling

## Appendix H: Secret Facebook Focus Group Coded Section

Student Drinking Experience - ATLAS.ti

Project Edit Documents Quotations Codes Memos Networks Analysis Tools Views Windows Help

P-Docs P33: College Students Friendship Focus Group.docx Quotes 33:9 5. Interviewer: Do you expect ... Codes Insider knowledge [0-0] Memos

051 **4. Interviewer:** Have you been told anything to expect from university? (This could be from a number of sources e.g. parents, siblings, friends, your college, or information from universities themselves).

052 **Susan:** Every university that I visited before making applications insisted that they were the best at the really cliché "work hard, play hard", so I suppose that that is an expectation. My English teacher repeatedly told me not to go to a stuck up university because she said that I'd get annoyed with rich kids and end up not enjoying it at all (she was probably very correct). [My cousins] all really loved it and that was probably my biggest influence about it, especially when I was younger!

053 **Interviewer:** So when they advertise the 'play harder' side of things was it about a mixture of things e.g. societies, sports teams, culture or was it mainly around nightlife?

054 **Susan:** I got the impression that it was more about nightlife, and possibly some of the less serious societies than sports teams and culture. Unis all want to give the impression that even if the course is difficult you can have a good time, which often means partying

055 **Rosie:** Quite a lot of people in my family seem to have gone to university but I think my biggest influence on what I expect is my sister who's currently in her third year. She has a very laidback approach to it and enjoys the social side a lot as well as studying what she loves; as a result I think I'm expecting my uni experience to be quite similar but I don't know if it will be yet because I guess only time will tell?

056 **Interviewer:** Has she given you any tips for enjoying university?

057 **Charlotte:** My family constantly go on about how I'm going to be drinking all the time and that when I'm not drinking I'm going to be studying.

058 **Luke:** I've been told many different things. From my parents telling me about how I'm gonna be poor and have to look after myself and make a washing up rota to people who are already there and have told me about the ins and outs of how life works there. Generally the people who have been more recently all say it's absolutely fine and very enjoyable though I have been told it depends on which term you're in massively; exam term is meant to be hard work and very

Recovery backup: 20:33:09

Student Drinking Experience - ATLAS.ti

Project Edit Documents Quotations Codes Memos Networks Analysis Tools Views Windows Help

P-Docs P33: College Students Friendship Focus Group.docx Quotes 33:10 Charlotte: Yes because I won't ... Codes Insider knowledge [0-0] Memos

056 **Interviewer:** Has she given you any tips for enjoying university?

057 **Charlotte:** My family constantly go on about how I'm going to be drinking all the time and that when I'm not drinking I'm going to be studying.

058 **Luke:** I've been told many different things. From my parents telling me about how I'm gonna be poor and have to look after myself and make a washing up rota to people who are already there and have told me about the ins and outs of how life works there. Generally the people who have been more recently all say it's absolutely fine and very enjoyable though I have been told it depends on which term you're in massively; exam term is meant to be hard work and very stressful

059 **Publius:** I have a vague understanding of what to expect from speaking to friends who have either been or who are at university, however, as none of my immediate family have been to university (i.e. parents and siblings), I haven't had any in depth experience of university. so as a result, I haven't got a big image in my head of what I'm expecting, which may not be a bad thing as I can experience university as it comes and not be disappointed or overwhelmed by my previous expectations which will add to the adventure.

060

061 **5. Interviewer:** Do you expect how you socialise to change at university? If so, how?

062 **Susan:** In many ways no. I go out fairly often but not loads due to cost and time, which I don't think will change significantly, maybe I'll go out a bit more in freshers. I try to socialise and work and end up meeting people in coffee shops lots, which I imagine will continue, especially while studying languages because it is such an easy way to practice conversation skills while being vaguely sociable.

063 **Charlotte:** Yes because I won't have to try to justify my choices to my parents so I'll probably be staying out later and spending more time away from where I'm living and with friends.

Recovery backup: 21:13:45

Size: 100% Rich Te

## Appendix J: List of Thematic Codes

<b>Drinking Culture</b>	<b>Harm Reduction</b>	<b>Students</b>
<b>Friendship</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Knowing your limits</b>
<b>Freshers' Week</b>	<b>Socialising at Uni</b>	
<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	
Abstaining	Dancing	Identity
Accommodation	Day activities	Inclusivity
Alternatives	Drink Spiking	Initiations
Bar Crawls	Drinking Games	Instagram
Bars	Drugs	International
Being Drunk	Embarrassment	JCR
Birthday	Events	Judgements
Black-out	Extravs	Lad Culture
Board-games	Fancy Dress	Left-out
Bonding	Fear of Missing Out	Loneliness
British	Fines	Making Friends
Campaigns	Flatmates	Marketing
Campus	Food	Mobile phone use
Care-giving	Freshers' Reps	Money
Chanting	Fun	Music
Colleges	Getting home	Nightclub
Community	Getting Ready	Noise
Consent	Going out	Nostalgia
Consequences	Groupness	Off-Campus students
Contact	Hangover	Othering
Coping mechanisms	Home	Parents
Culture Shock	Hustle	Part-time work
Pattern of night out	Photographs	Planning

Pleasures of drinking	Resistance	Starting Universty
Porters	Risk	Story-telling
Pre-drinking	Security	Students union
Pressure	Snapchat	Studies
Promotion	Social Aid	Sugarhouse
Pub culture	Social Media	Training
Queues	Socials	Travel
Reasons for drinking	Societies	Underage
Regulation	Spaces	University Experience
Representation	Spontaneity	Vomiting
Reputation	Sports teams	Vulnerability