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## Habitus of home and traditional drinking: a qualitative analysis of reported middle-class alcohol use

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**Abstract** There is evidence that alcohol consumption among those in middle-class occupations consistently exceeds safe levels, yet there has been little research into why this occurs. This article explores the meanings associated with alcohol use among professional, managerial and clerical workers. Qualitative data were collected from five focus groups of male and female employees aged 21–55 ( $N=49$ : 32 male, 17 female). Each focus group was conducted on the premises of a medium-scale or large-scale employer, four public sector and one private sector, in the north-east of England. Using Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus', 'capitals' and 'fields' we found that, among these middle-class occupational groups, alcohol use was associated with two habitus: a 'home drinking' habitus and a 'traditional drinking' habitus. Those of the home drinking habitus particularly used wine as a source of cultural capital and a means of distinction, whereas those in the traditional habitus consumed lager, beer and spirits to have fun in social settings. A small minority appeared to belong to a third, omnivorous, habitus where a wide range of alcoholic drinks were consumed in a variety of contexts. Existing public health initiatives to reduce alcohol consumption may require modification to accommodate a range of drinking cultures.

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**Keywords:** middle-class, alcohol, Bourdieu, habitus, distinction

### Introduction

A recent study of drinking patterns in England showed that 69 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women (aged 16 and over) reported drinking an alcoholic drink on at least one day in the week prior to interview (Department of Health [DoH] 2011). Similarly, a European survey investigating excess levels of alcohol consumption (TNS 2010) found that UK residents were the most likely to report consuming 10 or more alcoholic drinks on days when they consumed alcohol. Such levels of consumption are not evenly distributed across socioeconomic groups, however. In the UK households with an adult working in a managerial or professional capacity had the highest proportion of alcohol consumption in the previous 7 days (78 per cent of men and 66 per cent of women; TNS 2010: 18). By contrast, men and women in routine and

manual households had the lowest proportion of alcohol consumption in the same period (60 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively).

Despite the possible differences in consumption between middle-class and other socioeconomic groups, to date there has been little research exploring the patterns of alcohol consumption among middle-class groups. Marmot (1997) concludes that wine is preferentially consumed by those of a higher socioeconomic status and that 'there are higher levels of moderate drinking in higher grades' and the 'high consumption of wine is more likely to be associated with daily moderate drinking rather than binge drinking' (Marmot 1997: 5). Indeed, a high rate of alcohol consumption among higher socioeconomic groups is a cause for concern, as such groups can be disadvantaged by their resilience (Rossow and Amundsen 1996; see also Mäkelä *et al.* 2003). That is, a higher socioeconomic status affords individuals resistance to the deleterious effects of alcohol through their diet, exercise and other lifestyle factors, so that relevant services may not be accessed until irreparable damage to health has occurred. This situation is compounded by the nature of alcohol itself, because harm resides in the dose not the substance, enabling tolerance and toxicity to blend imperceptibly (Batty *et al.* 2009, DoH 2000).

Thus, there is general agreement that more complex theories of alcohol consumption are needed, theories that address the contexts of alcohol consumption and the meanings associated with it (Abbey *et al.* 1993). As Brennan (1989: 71) argues:

The emphasis on quantifying consumption suffers from mistaken assumptions and leads to an inadequate understanding of the social role of alcohol [and] illustrate the need for a greater awareness of, and investigation into, the cultural aspects of alcohol.

In this article we use Bourdieu's conceptual framework to develop a cultural understanding of alcohol use among middle-class occupational groups (Bourdieu 1984).

#### *Bourdieu: 'habitus', 'field' and 'practice'*

In his work on distinction and taste, Bourdieu (1984) argues that choices in food and drink are allied to one's position in the class hierarchy. While Bourdieu recognises such choices to be the product of material means he argues that once individuals have met their fundamental physical needs and obtained a 'distance from necessity' (1984: 46), consumption and other behaviours become symbolically marked. Practices such as eating and drinking come to symbolise a propensity or inability to share in or aspire to the tastes and habits of the dominating class, of being 'cultured'. Differential practices thus function to symbolise distinction from some social groups and affinity with others, so conferring status.

Practices are the outcome of various configurations of capital interacting with habitus. While capital can be economic (income, wealth, stocks and shares), cultural (demeanour and behaviour but especially educational qualifications as a 'patent of nobility' [Bourdieu 1984: 137]) or social (networks and communities), habitus is the sum of social structuring influences on individual biographies that direct aesthetic choices below the level of consciousness (Bourdieu 1977). Habitus, as a set of dispositions, secures both the patterned and the durable nature of practices such as eating and drinking (Williams 1995). Theoretically, habitus can be as individual as we are, as we all have a unique set of early childhood experiences that are formative of the habitus. In practice, habitus is itself structured and collective, constituting a set of dispositions shared with others in social space.

The utility of the concept of habitus lies in its multifaceted nature, being empirical, heuristic and theoretical. As a heuristic device habitus enables social practices to be analysed, so revealing the principles of the generative habitus. It may even act as a method in this instance when

the mode of data collection is direct observation (Reay 1995). As a theoretical mechanism, and with its impressive historical and philosophical provenance, Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers a mechanism for explaining the reproduction of dispositions and practices (and inequalities) between generations (Nash 1999). Such practices are first and foremost transmitted by the family of origin, or familial habitus, as the site of early socialisation and where the most enduring dispositions are formed. Other significant habitus include the occupational habitus, 'the body for the job' (Bourdieu 1984: 189) and the educational habitus, 'the necessary manner' (Bourdieu 1974: 38). The habitus even forms love relationships, for:

Taste is a match-maker; it marries colours and also people ... [as the] loving of one's destiny in someone else [amounts to] feeling loved in one's own destiny. (Bourdieu 1984: 239–41)

The social and cultural practices produced by capital and habitus operate within autonomous fields of play, of which food and drink are instances. Fields are configurations of objective (that is, structured) relations between social positions, arenas of conflict where whatever is of value and at stake is struggled over. Individuals and groups bring to these struggles varying amounts of capital and a feel (habitus) for the game (field) (Bourdieu 1990: 61). The fundamentally dichotomised nature of the social fabric between the dominant and the dominated means that field struggles centre round 'potential taxonomies', or paired opposites. So, luxury and presentation stand opposed to necessity and utility leading to the selection of light and delicate foods by some social groups and filling and energy-rich ones by others. Such choices become symbolically marked as more or less tasteful according to their affinity to bourgeois taste and their distance from necessity. The realisation of tastes relies upon the state of the system of goods on offer. While tastes change as a result of changed conditions of existence, the field of production is transformed in its relative ability to satisfy tastes so that the relation between the fields of consumption and production are neither the result of intentional design nor cynical manipulation but of a 'meeting of two systems of differences' in a homology between the fields (Bourdieu 1984: 229). By means of habitus, taste becomes embedded into mental structures and 'bodily hexis' (the shape and demeanour of the physical body) and organises the 'system of matching properties' in such a way that 'each taste feels itself to be natural – and so it is almost, being a habitus' (Bourdieu 1984: 169, 49). Thus, choices, behaviours and even people 'naturally' go together.

#### *Striving for distinction among the new middle classes*

Bourdieu argues that it is in the lifestyle of the new middle classes, or service class, where the most insightful and sensitive analysis of cultural capital can be conducted, as here the struggle for distinction is pronounced (Wynne 1998). This group, occupying the space between the bourgeoisie and the working class, are attuned to the fine distinctions between practices used to create symbolic distinctions between themselves and those immediately beneath them in the class hierarchy. Those lowest in the middle-class group, in particular, seek a rupture with traditional practices. So, food, drink, dress, leisure and so on become arenas of struggle where participation in and identification with dominant class practices and values are sought. At the same time, the dominant class reconfigures all species of capital so that taste moves on: cultural capital shared by everyone ceases to be capital at all.

In this study, participants were asked to discuss alcohol and its relationship to their working and home life. Analysing their accounts using the concepts of habitus, field and capital, and their impact on practice, provides a framework in which sense may be made of their consumption of alcohol, and perhaps offer insight into over-consumption. While governments and

public health point to the ‘irrationality’ of such drinking practices, an analysis informed by Bourdieu enables us to establish the ‘logic of practice’ of professional, managerial and clerical workers (DoH 2009). While representing a range of white-collar occupations, those under investigation here are not representative of all middle-class groups, particularly some upper middle-class professionals and executives.

In what follows we particularly focus upon the nature of home drinking. Traditional drinking patterns, associated with consuming large amounts of alcohol in social settings, are well documented in the literature and provide the rationale for existing harm reduction strategies and public health messages (DoH 2012, Szmigin *et al.* 2008). The nature of home drinking, however, has not yet been analysed in detail. While there is a recognition that the context of drinking has recently changed, with home drinking becoming more widely practiced, studies that address home drinking have not gone beyond describing the stated reasons and motivations of individuals for engaging in the practice (Emslie, Hunt, and Lyons 2011, Foster *et al.* 2010). Although valuable, such analysis does not go far enough, because socioeconomic and cultural influences that exist beyond individual consciousness and structure practice are not addressed. The aim of this study was to explore the attitudes, meanings and reported behaviour in relation to alcohol consumption of professional, managerial and clerical employees who worked full time – at least 35 hours per week.

## Methods

Focus groups (FGs) were considered the most appropriate method of data collection as they provide a forum for views to emerge. Five FGs were conducted in different workplaces in the north-east of England. The FGs were facilitated around the following themes: the perceived benefits of alcohol consumption and alcohol reduction, factors influencing alcohol consumption, the mechanics of awareness-raising regarding alcohol units and workplace support of a safe drinking culture.

### *Sample*

All workplaces were medium to large organisations and all had an existing relationship with the local public health directorate which assisted the research team in gaining access to the workforce. In all 49 people (32 women, 17 men) participated voluntarily. Participants chose to respond to an internally circulated e-mail, thus there was some self-selection in the sample. The participants’ ages ranged from 21 to 55 years (recorded on consent forms) and their employment status ranged from junior office staff to senior management. Their ethnic origin was not sought for the study.

FGs 1 and 2 took place at local government offices, group 3 at a chemical storage company, group 4 at a prison and group 5 at a taxation office. Group 1 was all female and group 3 was predominantly male. All other groups were mixed, with slightly more women than men. The human resources department of each organisation introduced the study to the employees and recruited participants for the groups. At the time of the study the human resources departments were engaged in alcohol-reduction training and ‘alcohol in the workplace’ interventions, and the organisations concerned were involved with the ‘Better Health at Work’ scheme.

### *Ethics*

Ethical considerations were a central concern for the project. Participants were given an overview of the research aims to enable them to give their fully informed written consent. Ground rules were established at the start of each group to ensure confidentiality and maintain mutual

respect. As there would be a potential personal risk to participants from revealing alcohol misuse in front of colleagues, the participants were advised that they were not expected to reveal any personally sensitive information. Ethical approval was granted by the lead institution's Research Ethics Committee.

### *Data collection*

The data were collected by two facilitators via five FGs, during lunch breaks and with employees from that employment location only. The participants ate their lunch around tables while the FG was underway, potentially creating a more informal atmosphere. The FGs ranged in size from eight to 12 people and lasted between 40 and 75 minutes. Four of the five FGs were conducted by the same two facilitators (one man, one woman). The fifth FG was conducted by an original and a new facilitator (both men). The open-ended nature of the themed questions enabled the participants to raise issues of significance to them and explore areas of agreement and disagreement.

### *Analysis*

The FGs were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with personal information anonymised prior to analysis. Following initial analysis by the group facilitators and discussion by the research team the data were analysed by a member of the research team who was not involved in data collection for emergent themes across all five FGs.

The analysis revealed that two distinct drinking patterns were described by participants. Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field and practice the nature and boundaries of these drinking patterns were made more apparent. Quotations from participants were selected because they were the most illustrative of a particular aspect of habitus. Most quotations illustrating the home drinking habitus were made by women in FG 4. Most of the quotations illustrating the traditional drinking habitus were made by men in FG 3. Thus, it could be concluded that the home drinking habitus is a predominantly female phenomenon and the traditional drinking habitus is a predominantly male phenomenon. Gendered practices may reflect cultural differences between a traditional industry (chemical storage company) and a service industry (local government offices) and lead to acceptable stories (wine among women, beer among men). Thus, the quotations selected as most illustrative may indicate a story better told in some groups than others, rather than a reflection of differences in practice.

The concept of habitus was used in this study as both a heuristic device (findings) and a theoretical framework (discussion). As a heuristic device habitus enabled us to locate and describe landmark, or archetypal, individuals, who reflected the essence of each habitus, to which other respondents approximated to a greater or lesser extent. (Le Roux *et al.* 2008: 1058). As a theoretical tool habitus gave us a mechanism to explain differential drinking practices in the same occupational groups and the (re)production of drinking practices in and through a range of social spaces.

## **Findings**

### *Habitus: home drinking versus 'traditional drinking'*

Two principal patterns of alcohol consumption were reported in our study and each comprised a unique configuration of four variables: choice of alcoholic drink (divided roughly between grain and grape), quantity of alcohol consumed, time of the week it was consumed and the context or location of consumption. Each pattern was further associated with a distinct set of beliefs and meanings. First, a pattern of home drinking was reported and associated with the

consumption of wine in regular, moderate amounts throughout the week, often with meals and as part of domestic and family life. Such regular home wine drinking was portrayed as respectable and sophisticated. A second drinking pattern was reported by a different group of individuals in our sample and represented a traditional drinking pattern associated with drinking beer, lager and spirits, mainly at weekends, on public premises and sometimes in the homes of others, in what were characterised as large quantities.

Thus, we use the term home drinking habitus to refer to home drinkers, particularly of wine, at home in moderate amounts and suggest this is an emergent contemporary practice. We use the term traditional habitus to refer to the practice of drinking beer, lager and spirits on public premises in large quantities as these are established, historically pervasive and enduring practices. In using these terms we follow previous research in the lifestyles literature that makes a distinction between established and emergent practices (Le Roux *et al.* 2008).

Responses illustrating the two habitus were taken from all five FGs, from men and women of varying ages and at different life stages. In what follows, and for heuristic purposes, we initially focus upon landmark individuals to capture the essence of each habitus (Le Roux *et al.* 2008: 1058). We recognise that most respondents approximated to, rather than fully expressed, the habitus to which our study assigns them membership.

We then consider variations of practice showing that a degree of slippage exists within each habitus (Bourdieu 1984: 152). This requires a consideration of changing circumstances in relation to capitals, such as education, and fields, such as the family (becoming parents, children leaving home), work (changes in occupation, pattern or location of employment) or social networks (different groups of friends or acquaintances). We also consider those practices that place individuals at the margins of one or other of the habitus, enabling us to determine each habitus' boundaries and the limits of practice in the field of alcohol. Finally, we consider those individuals who did not seem to fit into either habitus but fell between or straddled the two and possibly represent a third habitus requiring further investigation.

### *Respectability versus having fun*

The typical home drinker perceived regular, moderate home drinking of wine as unproblematic when compared with the large quantities consumed in the social, weekend drinking of beer, lager and spirits associated with the traditional drinker:

Binge drinking's not good. It's having a lot of vodka in one session. My understanding is you would be better to have a glass of wine a night than to have a bottle of wine one night (FG 4, female, home drinker).

Many home drinkers reported drinking wine regularly, even daily, whereas others reported that wine was not drunk every night in order to keep it 'special'. Both men and women reported using wine to relax, unwind and alleviate stress:

Relax, have a glass of wine, yeah had a bad day, but not to excess I don't think on a week night ...

One glass of wine [and] that's it I'm alright now.

It's a bit of a treat I think, you know, Friday night, I think 'Right I will have a treat' my glass of wine or two glasses of wine, whatever. (Exchange between two female participants in FG 5, home drinkers).

The perceived respectability of wine arose in part from its association with the fulfilment of domestic and family responsibilities such as childcare and cooking at home. Wine drinking was embedded in home life, being used to mediate multiple identities and roles, signalling a transition from one task, or part of a day, to another, and was usually consumed after the completion of domestic responsibilities. As such, home wine drinking was a marker of liminal time – space between ‘work time’ and ‘relaxation time’, between ‘family time’ and ‘my time’ (FG 3, male, home drinker). Wine also marked transitions from ‘responsible parent’ to ‘autonomous adult’ and from ‘employee’ to ‘free agent’. Wine consumption delineated time periods within days or weeks. Thus, some reported having a drink as soon as they came home from work to mark the end of the working day, or on a Friday evening to mark the beginning of the weekend. In both instances, wine signalled the advent of liberty, an expression of free choice and identity as an individual:

I definitely have a drink [of wine, mentioned elsewhere in the discussion] on Fridays on early evening when I come in from work because I think, I do sort of deserve that ... it's my time. (FG 1, female, home drinker)

We know people who we work with who sit and have a glass of wine after the kids have gone to bed and go through a bottle of wine quite easily and I don't really think that's uncommon nowadays you know, it's used as a relaxation method, especially with people with children I think. (FG 1, female, home drinker)

By contrast, the stated purpose of traditional drinking was to socialise and have fun. Pubs, clubs and the homes of friends were all considered suitable places to meet to drink for socialising with partners and mates. Drinking beer, lagers and spirits was associated with having ‘belly laughs and the hilarity’, of having a ‘mad’ or ‘daft’ night. Some reported ‘losing control’ and sought to ‘get like whoohoo’ when out drinking:

I hit at least 12 bars that day and drank from silly o'clock in the morning to silly o'clock at night 'cos we just fancied it, and we can and so we did it, we set off, boiling hot day and hit every pub in [town] I think. (FG 4, male, traditional drinker)

While the typical traditional drinker often consumed alcohol purposefully to get drunk, the typical home drinker did not. The latter reported a dislike of the sensation of intoxication, though some liked ‘feeling tipsy’. One home drinker claimed: ‘I enjoy one glass of wine ... but that's it, I don't particularly like to feel drunk or feel sick or anything like that’ (FG 4, female, home drinker). This contrasts with the traditional drinker who claimed she drank when out with friends ‘until I am sick’ (FG 3, female, traditional drinker)

### *Sophistication versus vulgarity*

Wine was reported as possessing a transformative capacity. It conferred sociability on a couple's time at home together, one participant claiming, ‘it's [wine drinking at home] still sociable with your husband’. Whether in the house in winter or the garden in summer, wine transformed a private space into a public one:

There is nothing nicer ... than sitting down on a night time when you've finished work with a nice glass of wine and it works both ways, in winter time you draw the curtains and you think ‘Oh, this is lovely’ and put your feet up with a glass of wine and in summer time

you're sitting outside in the sunshine and you've got a nice cold glass of wine, so you know it is, social isn't it? (FG 4, female, home drinker)

As a symbol of good taste, wine transformed a banal, routine activity into something special. Wine was described as turning a 'basic' meal into a 'nice' one, particularly by those who reported they did not go out socially. Similarly, wine transformed the same evening meal from 'tea', something every day or perhaps a meal associated with young children, into 'dinner', something special and adult. Wine also turned a meal at home with friends into 'a dinner party': 'when you go home and you're having your tea and it's like 'Oh, have a glass of wine with your dinner' (FG 4, female, home drinker). Perceived as a mature and sophisticated drink, wine was associated with experiences of the Continent and European cultural practices which helped legitimate its consumption:

You look to [the] Continent, I mean me – being brought up in Germany – I had wine from a certain age with a meal. It wasn't much but it was that kind of culture it was *sophisticated* almost – you felt bigger because you were more mature and [had] more responsibilities. (FG 2, female, home drinker)

Negative behaviour associated with alcohol centred round the stereotypical 'drunk' and was more closely allied to (but not identical with) the traditional drinking pattern. Thus, 'problem drinking' was described in terms of '16–21 year olds rolling around the town' (FG 3 male, traditional drinker), being 'drunk every night' (FG 3, male, traditional drinker), 'fighting ... upsetting anybody [or] breaking ... laws' (FG 3, male, traditional drinker) or being 'offensive', 'lary' [loud, aggressive and anti-social] or 'vocal' in public (FG 5, female, habitus unclear). This behaviour was seen as particularly undesirable but was also interpreted by home drinkers as an indication that their pattern of drinking (in contrast) was unproblematic. Traditional drinkers, too, were keen to distinguish their controlled drinking pattern from the vulgar excesses of the 'problem drinker'.

#### *Form versus substance*

In discussing why they chose to drink wine at home, wine drinkers focused on the aesthetic aspects of wine, or its form, claiming it was 'lovely' and 'hits the spot'. Wine was said to 'go nicely with European food compared maybe to other [plainer, English] foods' (FG 4, female, home drinker). Quality was more important than quantity, so that home drinkers talked in terms of having 'one or two glasses of wine' (FG 4, female, home drinker) of a 'decent' quality (FG 3, male home drinker). The availability of quality wine was seen as 'more accessible' at home as in 'supermarkets you can get a nice bottle of wine for £5 [whereas if] you go to a pub or restaurant ... you are paying £20' (FG 3, male, home drinker). Wine was drunk in many cases, not to relieve stress but for the pleasure it gave: thus, in response to the query, 'do you drink at home for ... the stress thing, or do you enjoy it?' the answer was 'I just enjoy it.' (FG 3, male, home drinker).

For the typical traditional drinker quantity was more important than quality so that 'seven or eight pints' of beer or lager constituted 'a good drink' (FG 4, two men, traditional drinkers). Beer and lager were drunk more for their substantial, or functional, qualities to 'quench your thirst' rather than 'sit and sip, sip, sip', a function rooted in a regional history of employment in heavy industry. Beer and lager continued to possess this function despite the non-physicality of white collar employment:

There is a village pub [near us which] used to open at 2 am in the morning, quite legally, when the pub closes at 10.30 because there had been a melt on at the firing foundry and

they all went for a drink and that was part of the law of the land ... They used to open the pub because the fellas needed [it], and they used to get an allowance for drink, to put the sweat back into them. (FG 3, male, traditional drinker)

This pattern of drinking was seen as part of a tradition that was shared in a community and handed down between generations and as such formed part of a familial habitus. Here, heavy drinking was reported as obligatory, indicating the iron cage nature of habitus in some contexts:

In the 70s ... standard jobs [were] in the pits, or the shipyards or on building sites ... or farming, so we used to have to work hard and wanted a drink ... there was a lot of pressure to ... drink because all your brothers did or your mates did or the people you looked up to did, and the people you play football or whatever sports you did so it was ... always there ... it was all about ... got to get the drink. I don't think it's changed a lot, to be honest. (FG 4, male, traditional drinker)

Traditional drinkers viewed spirits in the same way so that here, too, quantity was important. One participant compared measures of spirits served in bars on the Continent to those in the UK:

The British [were] bricked off [treated unfairly] for years ... you could hardly see [the drink] in the bottom of the glass. [In] Spain they give you a gin and tonic and you think 'that's a drink!' (FG 4, male, traditional drinker)

Familial habitus was also reported as informing taste regarding what to drink, where and how. The drinking patterns of parents in particular were frequently commented upon as influential and this was the case for both habitus. One home wine drinker recalled:

I personally look at [my] parents, just from the example that they've always set ... my parents have a glass of wine every evening with their meal, it's probably very rarely that they would have a day where they didn't have a glass of wine ... but ... I've never seen any of them drunk in my life ... that's where I get my ... opinions from. (FG 5, female, home drinker)

Likewise, a traditional drinker claimed:

If you look at your father or your father-in-law and you see what they drink, and you think, 'Well you are 84 and drank about five pints a night that's not bad going' ... My father was 76 and he drank about six pints a night. So sometimes you base it [your drinking pattern] on what you perceive from your family. (FG 3, male, traditional drinker)

Despite the differences in meanings attached to drinking by the home and traditional drinkers, both claimed they enjoyed the taste of the alcohol they chose to drink. One home wine drinker said:

I drink a glass of wine for the taste, I like how it tastes ... I am not going to just drink it, if I didn't like it I wouldn't drink it. (FG 2, female, home drinker)

Furthermore, the taste for wine could be acquired:

My mum never used to drink at all ... when [name] first started going over there he sort of introduced my parents to wine ... now they do enjoy it ... they didn't like the taste of it at all because they never had it, so I think ... you introduce yourself on a social level and you start liking it. (FG 4, female, home drinker)

Beer and lager were also enjoyed by traditional drinkers because of their taste. As one traditional drinker said: 'I think I am probably classed as a binge drinker yeah'. Another FG participant asked, 'Do you really enjoy the taste of lager?' 'I do', she replied (FG 3, female, traditional drinker). Others in the traditional habitus considered real ales to have a superior taste to lager.

### *The future versus the past*

Differences in taste in relation to the type of alcohol preferred, the time and location of consumption and the quantities consumed were accompanied by differences in attitudes toward the past and the future. One traditional drinker claimed he wanted to look back at the end of his life and think 'That was a good night'. Home wine drinkers, by contrast, tended to view their biographical past as something to learn from rather than cherish:

Man: I think you learn your own lessons.

Woman: You do ... yeah. [You think] 'I don't feel well', so you think 'I don't want to do this again'. I mean obviously some people don't. There are ... some people who just don't have those boundaries in themselves ... it's just different people isn't it?

(Exchange between a female and a male participant in FG 5, home drinkers)

Home drinkers claimed current drinking practices might be modified according to anticipated futures. Women, in particular, were more likely to reveal concerns about the long-term consequences of excessive consumption of alcohol, such as changes in weight and appearance, especially the potential for premature ageing. One participant who drank wine during the week said:

I think ... a lot of the time the health issues are missed on people like ourselves that work every day and ... have a few glasses of wine throughout the week ... whereas I suppose for me something that would really put me off, is if I ... saw what I would look like down the line if I was to carry on those habits, and the effects it can have on your health in that way, especially through aging and everything. That would be something that would kind of make me think twice. (FG 4, female, home drinker)

Traditional drinkers were more likely to see the future, particularly the relationship between alcohol and future health, in nihilistic terms, as something largely outside of their control: 'It's almost like a lottery isn't it? ... you could develop a cancer because of drinking and other people get cancers and they never drink' (FG 3, male, traditional drinker).

## **Variations within habitus**

### *Drunk home wine drinkers versus moderate traditional drinkers*

Variations in drinking practices, or slippage, within each habitus centred round the location, timing and quantities of alcohol consumed. Thus, in the home drinking habitus there occurred the drinking of large, rather than moderate, quantities of wine at the weekend by some and in the traditional habitus there occurred the drinking of moderate, rather than large, amounts of

beer and lager on public premises and sometimes at home in connection with watching sport on television during the week. These variations from typical practice were frequently the product of different or changed material conditions across different fields. In the field of the family, for example, drinking practices altered according to increased or reduced commitments. In the field of work, distance to work, which necessitated driving, moderated the mid-week drinking of some respondents in both habitus. Similarly, changes in the field of community where work colleagues or friends no longer lived in close proximity (as perhaps previous generations had done) restructured patterns of socialising. Such changing conditions across fields led to capital being used (converted) differently.

At the same time, the limits of these variations marked the boundaries of each habitus. Thus, some home drinkers reported concerns over driving to work and performing professionally the next day, which restricted their drinking to weekends and thus they drank more when they did drink. Variation within the traditional habitus included those whose drinking on public premises was restricted by family commitments or geographical locations so that they, too, drank moderately during the week (one or two pints) and sometimes at home. Thus, one participant reported that people drank larger quantities of wine at home than when going out because the 'cycle of getting another drink is probably a lot longer [in a pub] than going into your kitchen and topping up' (FG 1, female, home drinker). This same participant reportedly got drunk at home on wine:

The safe drinking limit is 2–3 units a day for women ... however to me ... that's like a couple of glasses of wine, and ... that's sensible but I would have another couple until I got ... bladdered [very drunk].

Others claimed they knew work colleagues who 'sit and have a glass of wine after the kids have gone to bed and go through a bottle of wine quite easily' (FG 1, female, home drinker) while others drank wine only at the weekend, claiming:

If I was having a glass of wine it would have to be a large glass of wine ... because I work during the week [so I] try to keep it to a Friday night and a Saturday night. (FG 4, female, home drinker)

Drinking large quantities of wine at home was not a pattern of drinking restricted to women. One participant reported that her male partner 'never goes to bed without drinking half a bottle of wine every single night now ... and that's gone down from nearly a bottle of wine every night' (FG 4, female, home drinker).

Similarly, within the traditional habitus not all drinking was confined to weekends. One participant reported that he did not 'go out specifically drinking [but for the purpose of] socialising with ... friends'. At weekends he claimed 'we tend to stop in' whereas during the week he would 'go out now at 10 [pm] for a couple of pints' on a 'Wednesday or Thursday night [because you can] get to the bar easier through the week' (FG 3, male, traditional drinker). This participant also reported drinking with colleagues occasionally after work and this appeared to be for socialisation purposes as opposed to getting drunk. Just as with some members of the home drinking habitus, this participant reported that responsibilities at home constrained his drinking:

Monday to Friday [I] am at work all week and then Saturday [and] Sunday I've got two days to cram everything in that I need to get done so I don't tend to get slaughtered [very drunk]. (FG 3, male, traditional drinker)

When lager, beer or spirits were drunk at home, a phenomenon that was reported less frequently than home wine drinking, they were consumed moderately, during the week and frequently in connection with other activities, such as watching sport on television. One lager drinker said 'if the football is on [I have] a couple of cans, watch the match, just chill out [and] have a night in,' (FG 3, male, traditional drinker) whereas another claimed they knew those who enjoy 'a gin and tonic, as they are making the tea' (FG 1, female, home drinker).

Some traditional drinkers reflected on how drinking patterns had changed due to changes in patterns of working and employment locations:

When I joined the job [colleagues] used to go straight out the gate to the ... club, literally you walked from here to the door ... lads used to come straight off shift ... into there and some guys used to sleep in there that's how bad it was. (FG 4, male, traditional drinker)

Whereas now:

I think it's just a logistical thing, because we are all scattered, ... a few of the guys ... work and live closely together but for most of us it's a drive to anywhere so you don't tend to do that do you? I wouldn't think of getting in the car now and going to the pub and then drive on home. [I] might have one pint but then it's like what the point? (FG 3, male, traditional drinker)

Some traditional drinkers reported that their drinking pattern varied in terms of volume and according to social context, that is, according to the individual or group they were with:

But I drink differently as well, if I go out with [my partner]. We will have a few drinks but don't ever get absolutely shit faced [very drunk] ... but I have no self-control when I am out with the women. You know what women are like ... not during the week yeah just on the weekend. (FG 3, female, traditional drinker)

You can't really let yourself go [with colleagues but] with my friends I just think, 'Oh, I will have another [drink]'. (FG 1, female, traditional drinker)

Far less variation within each habitus was reported on the choice of alcoholic drink. That is to say, regular beer drinkers, for example, drank beer regardless of the location or occasion. Thus, when eating out at a pub or restaurant they reported drinking beer with their meal rather than making a transition to wine or some other alcoholic drink. Similarly, a home wine drinker who claimed she restricted her wine intake for weight-watching purposes said she would drink water rather than switch to gin and slim line tonic when this was suggested by a fellow FG participant. Another drank 'exotic juices or [soft drink brand name] and put it in ... one of my nice wine glasses' (FG 4, female, home drinker) when trying to control her unit intake. Thus, taste in relation to the type of alcohol consumed seemed relatively fixed in both the home drinking and traditional habitus.

#### *Variations in habitus over the life course*

Variations in practice also occurred within each habitus over the life course and such variation was, again, precipitated by changes in material circumstances. Some participants reported abandoning traditional drinking practices for home drinking with the advent of parental responsibilities:

I've got a little boy now ... my drinking habits I think have changed ... it's like, 'Oh, have a glass of wine with your dinner'... so it's become more about during the week now than maybe it was previously. (FG 4, female, home drinker)

Migration from the traditional to the home drinking habitus appeared to be particularly associated with university education. One home drinker who drank wine at home every evening from Wednesday onwards claimed 'at university everyone drank pints, [even] women', (FG 4, female, home drinker) and another reported how she used to drink lager but now drank wine as her reasons for drinking had changed:

When I [was a teenager] ... [I used to drink] lager and lime and ... when I was at university it was all about being sociable ... now that I am working it's more about relaxing at the end of the day ... I will just have one glass of wine ... my attitudes kind of shifted in terms of how I use alcohol and *what I use it for*. (FG 2, female, home drinker)

A similar transition from spirits to wine was also reported:

When I first started drinking it was shots ... girls drank shots, it was a gin and tonic or a vodka and tonic or whatever, and as I've got older my tastes have changed to wine ... I would drink a glass of wine rather than have a gin and tonic now. (FG 4, female, home drinker)

Traditional drinkers who remained in that habitus as they got older simply limited (or possibly ceased) their drinking with the advent of parental responsibilities, only to take up traditional drinking again when they were older, when their children had grown and left home. One traditional drinker claimed:

Before we were married and we had children we were going out quite often, and then we had children and, obviously, if you want to go out you are going to have to get somebody to look after them so you tend ... to just stay in. [Our] drinking was less frequent than it is now ... that's why I go out an awful lot more than I used to when the kids were there. (FG 3, male, traditional drinker)

Such reversion to traditional drinking practices enabled some to experience a 'second wave' of youth (FG 4, male, traditional drinker), of 'back to being young again' (FG 3, male, traditional drinker). Traditional drinkers did report that taste changed with age, but these were within the limits of the habitus, such as from lagers to real ales:

As you get older you like things that have a ... harsher taste ... your palate completely changes ... real ales ... have something about them and you can actually taste the stuff because lagers all taste the bloody same, to be honest. (FG 4, male, traditional drinker)

Thus, while migration from traditional to home drinking and thus from beer, lager or spirits to wine was reported with the increasing age of the respondent, we did not find any in our study who reported making the transition back from home wine drinking to traditional drinking, that is from wine to beer, lager or spirits. The apparent unidirectional nature of migration between habitus thus suggests a further boundary of habitus. Those who engaged in traditional drinking at university experienced an increase in their volume of cultural capital which they were then able to convert differently on becoming parents: that is, into markers of distinction. Those

who came to traditional drinking via family, work or community were more likely to remain in that habitus.

Parental responsibilities did not automatically lead to the adoption of home drinking or limit traditional drinking. One male participant with a baby claimed that he and his wife still got 'slaughtered' at least once each weekend and that 'the lifestyle habits haven't changed that much, there is just no more lie-ins' (FG 3). This pattern was, however, associated with a certain volume of social capital: the availability of overnight childcare from nearby grandparents and thus with a more traditional family pattern.

Indeed, this participant was one of a small number in our study who did not appear to fit into either the home or traditional habitus. We suggest these participants may inhabit a third, omnivorous habitus in which the typical individual reported consuming a wider range of alcoholic drinks in variety of contexts. While one participant seemed to wholly reflect this pattern, two participants partially reflected it. Thus, the female participant who enjoyed 'two glasses of wine ... or my gin and tonic' (FG 3, omnivorous drinker) on a Friday evening at home and the male participant with young children who claimed that at home:

I might have some wine or I might have beer, but I've made a conscious effort to stop drinking as much during the week. At Christmas I got ... two bottles of whiskey and a bottle of brandy ... and I think they were probably gone by the end of January 1 ... I drank the bloody lot because they were there. (FG 4, male, omnivorous drinker)

Another participant, who seemed the most omnivorous of all, reported drinking wine moderately during the week with his wife, combined with drinking large quantities of beer, lager or spirits at the weekend on public premises with his wife or friends:

[My wife and I] don't get slaughtered ... through the week ... more [at the] weekend ... if I fancy half a bottle of wine with the wife then [I'll] just do it whether it's the weekend or not. (FG 3, male, omnivorous drinker)

## Discussion

### *Home and traditional drinking typifications*

Our study showed that, among professional, managerial and clerical workers, alcohol consumption polarised around two principal drinking styles associated with two habitus: a home drinking habitus associated predominantly with wine drinking and a traditional habitus associated with the consumption of beer, lager or spirits on public premises. We believe the existence of two distinct drinking patterns within middle-class occupational groups to be new and this supplements existing quantitative analyses in this field (Tomlinson 1998) but undermines the individualisation of lifestyles thesis (Bauman, 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), which suggests a greater variation in practices. The recently suggested homogenisation of European drinking practices is also critiqued by these patterns (Gordon and Heim *et al.* 2012). While offering some support to the view that lifestyles are patterned according to class position (Jones *et al.* 2011, Le Roux *et al.* 2008), our findings support recent research suggesting that the intermediate class is far from homogenous (Savage *et al.* 2013, Wynne 1998). Indeed, our findings help fill a gap within the existing space of lifestyles literature by suggesting an additional line of enquiry. The suggestion that drinking habitus have four components: the choice of alcoholic drink (grain versus grape), the quantity consumed, the timing and the

context and location of consumption; could lead to a useful quantitative study to determine the relationship of these components to other leisure patterns and respective middle-class fractions.

We have shown that home drinking as a practice embedded in family and domestic life marked liminal time (Oldenburg 1989), defined situations and constructed identities. Wine drinking was perceived as controlled (defined as not intoxicated) because of its regular and moderate nature (Gusfield 1987). It was associated with responsibility, dignity and sophistication and drunk with ease at home due its greater accessibility in that setting (Bourdieu 1984: 252). Drinking within the traditional habitus, while also considered controlled (defined as not getting into fights or trouble, not being ill in the street, being fit for work), was, by contrast, associated with fun; a return to youthful patterns of behaviour, large quantities of alcohol at the weekends and sociability. Here we see evidence of a typically Bourdieusian taxonomic struggle between the ethic of sobriety (restraint) and convivial indulgence (fun), between the rare (wine) and the vulgar (beer), in short over what is acceptable drinking practice (Bourdieu 1984: 175).

Using habitus as a heuristic device enabled us to identify landmark individuals (Le Roux *et al.* 2008). Thus, the home drinker can be typified as an individual with family responsibilities who drinks wine regularly (at least two or three nights) throughout the week at home, is future-time oriented, calculates quantity and excess according to alcohol units and feels a degree of control over their health. The traditional drinker can be typified, by contrast, as an individual who drinks beer, lager or spirits in large quantities in public drinking establishments with the aim of having fun and/or getting drunk with friends at weekends, focuses upon an enjoyed past, who calculates quantity and 'excess' according to how they feel, whether they get into trouble or not, the perceived alcohol tolerance of older family members, as being retrospectively time-orientated, and have a fatalistic view of health. Our finding that the taste for home drinking and wine or traditional drinking and beer, lager and spirits were not found to exist in isolation suggests that such drinking practices are part of the space of lifestyles (Bourdieu 1984, Le Roux *et al.* 2008).

That habitus may be gendered was suggested by the source of quotations selected to illustrate both drinking styles. Thus, home drinking may be more frequently practiced by women and traditional drinking may be more frequently practiced by men. This may be because home drinking is associated with child care, whereas beer, lagers and spirits are associated with the fun of youth. Bourdieu saw the properties of class and gender as inseparable (since social identity emerges from sexual identity), arguing that the family is a field in which being normal confers capital (because of the family's putative universality) on those playing the (gendered) game. Thus, there may be (further) capital to be gained by women who drink wine at home (private and feminine space) and men who drink socially (public and masculine space) (Deem 1986). However, feminists who critique Bourdieu's minimal attention to gender argue that it is men who may have most to gain from adopting certain 'feminine practices' in some contexts (such as home wine drinking) especially when these intersect with other dispositions of privilege and power. At the same time, women who drink more traditionally may do so because the category of femininity is not available to them, as femininity has been historically constituted as a particular version of middle-class moral femininity (Skeggs 2005). In our study we found both male home drinkers of wine and women who became intoxicated at weekends in public drinking places on beer, lager or spirits. Further research could show how the drinking practices of each habitus may be gendered and how this may intersect with class and capital (Crompton 2006).

A further difference between the habitus was seen in the identifications made in accounting for drinking practices. Those in the home drinking habitus alluded to parental responsibilities (Emslie *et al.* 2011), European culture, Mediterranean food and moving on from university

drinking habits. Those in the traditional habitus, particularly men in that habitus, alluded to a local history of heavy industry characterised by a close-knit workforce and the ready availability of pubs and clubs near work premises when discussing their drinking habits, which they described as being 'bred into them'. Drinking large quantities of beer after physically exhausting work was claimed to perform a necessary physiological role for those working in heavy industries in the past: 'putting the sweat back into them'. Thus, the traditional drinker who said he drank beer because it can 'quench your thirst' suggests an identification with drinking practices associated with lost industries, even though beer has no corresponding physiological function in contemporary middle-class occupations: an individual perhaps exemplifying the intersection of contemporary occupational chances with the collective history of a generation.

Different trajectories into middle-class occupations were suggested by participants in terms of their family and social class of origin or familial habitus, and these influenced whether they became home or traditional drinkers. Thus, one young female home drinker who reported enjoying a couple of glasses of wine on a Friday evening had witnessed her parents drink wine with their evening meal every night while she was living at home but had never seen them drunk. This participant reported drinking gin and tonic, possibly because in addition to wine with the evening meal her father would also often have a brandy or whiskey. By contrast, traditional drinkers reported learning their drinking habits from their fathers, brothers, friends and other role models who drank heavily in pubs affiliated to their place of work which created pressure for them to drink in the same way.

#### *Variation within and migration between habitus*

Variation in practice, or slippage, in the home drinking habitus was reported in terms of the quantity of wine consumed and the time of consumption. Some home drinkers reported getting drunk at home on wine but that this was restricted to weekends because of driving to work during the week. Others reported drinking when out with friends or family but they still drank wine on these occasions, frequently with a meal at a pub or restaurant. Similarly, those of the traditional habitus who also drank at home reported that they drank beer, lager or spirits, rather than wine, which was often associated with leisure activities such as watching sport on television.

Some members of the traditional habitus reported drinking in pubs throughout the week because it was easier to get to the bar. At the weekend they would remain at home (it is not clear whether they drank or not). For these traditional drinkers, drinking was about socialising rather than getting drunk and having fun. Variation in practice within the traditional habitus was often the product of different social contexts so that drinking practices differed if participants were out with friends or with partners or work colleagues. Both men and women within the traditional habitus reported drinking larger quantities when out with same-sex friends. A few also drank in the same manner with partners but many reported moderating their drinking with partners and work colleagues.

Immediate contexts, such as geographical location (proximity to work and friends) and social networks (being out with friends of the same or opposite gender or partners), as well as social capital (the availability of childcare) caused slippage within each habitus, leading to a modification in drinking practices. Nevertheless, there were structured limits to such slippage that centred round taste, particularly the choice of alcoholic drink. Habitus can be seen here to be a structuring structure as members of both habitus had a preferred alcoholic drink (wine or beer, lager and spirits) and a preferred manner of consuming that drink (home or public premises). Even with a change of context a different alcoholic drink was not selected. Thus, some in the traditional habitus preferred to drink water with a meal when abroad on holiday rather

than beer or wine or would still drink beer when out for a meal. Similarly, home wine drinkers preferred water on occasion to other drinks such as gin and tonic if, for example, they were slimming, or soft drinks if they were moderating their unit intake. The boundaries of the home and traditional habitus are also shown by the absence of two further, theoretically possible drinking patterns: that of drinking large quantities of wine on public premises and of drinking large quantities of beer, lager or spirits at home. These drinking patterns may be practiced by others in the social class hierarchy but were absent in our study.

A potential, third, drinking pattern that emerged from our data was an omnivorous one, where a wide range of alcohol was consumed in a variety of locations (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007, Peterson and Kern 1996). A typical member of this habitus was a man with a young baby who reported drinking wine at home with his partner during the week or beer if he was watching sport on the television as well as drinking heavily on public premises with his wife or friends at weekends. One difference in capital for this participant was the availability of childcare from an extended family structure. His family capital may have afforded him an 'individual trajectory' at odds with many in his class fraction (Bourdieu 1984: 105) or he may represent a 'new aesthetic' (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007) or a transitional status between habitus. Further investigations may reveal if and where such omnivorousness may fit into Bourdieu's typology and if this pattern of drinking, detected in the highest social classes, is filtering through the class hierarchy (Sintas and Alvarez, 2000) to become 'the latest difference ... the latest conquest' (Bourdieu 1984: 244), or whether it constitutes a methodological artefact (Atkinson 2011).

#### *Taste and the conversion of capital*

We argue that the choice of alcoholic drink represents the essence of taste in the respective habitus and since taste classifies, the choice of alcoholic drink is the invariant that principally defines the habitus (Bourdieu 1984:2 29). In our study, choices over the type of alcohol consumed remained most stable. Variations in practice centred on the context and quantities of alcohol consumed. Of course, choices over quantity and location reflect the same logic as choices over alcohol, since the latter represents a 'coherent preference', part of a wider set of preferences stemming from 'distinctive systems of dispositions' (Bourdieu 1984: 258):

As the propensity and capacity to appropriate a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, [taste] is the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences which express the same expressive intention in the specific logic of each of the symbolic subspaces, furniture, clothing, language or bodily hexis. [Taste ensures that] each dimension of life-style 'symbolises with' the others (Bourdieu 1984: 169).

What is the expressive intention, the logic that each habitus portrays? In the field of alcoholic beverages choosing wine or beer represents a taxonomic struggle over respectability versus having fun, sophistication versus vulgarity and form versus substance: in short, what constitutes acceptable drinking. Defined equally by their negation, or by what they reject, the home drinker is not vulgar (drunk) just as the traditional drinker lacks pretension (sip, sip, sip).

Taste neither drives nor is driven by the field of commercial production. The homology of forms ensures that the social location of producers and consumers is sufficiently similar, being the outcomes of competitive and class fraction struggles respectively, to ensure the ready availability of the right product ('our kind of product') for the right people ('our kind of people'). Elective affinity ensures that the things that naturally go together find each other, that the 'two spaces' meet (Bourdieu 1984: 238–41). Thus, for those in the home-drinking habitus it feels natural to drink wine at home when one has parental responsibilities and no childcare. It feels

natural to add wine to the family shopping list in a cultural context of its ready availability in supermarkets. At the same time, however, the dynamism of the field of cultural production means that taste is always in flux. Interestingly, 'real ales' were mentioned by a member of the traditional habitus as superior to lagers which 'all taste the... same' (FG 4, male, traditional drinker). It will be interesting to see how local and specialist beer (draught or bottled, not cans) fare as the field of production expands the 'space of possibles' enabling beer to fight back and potentially offer competition to wine in the battle for distinction in the future.

For now though, consuming wine at home represents effective capital conversion. Lacking bourgeois economic resources the middle-class groups in this study 'haven't got that sort of money [to] rack up £100 on a night' out in pubs and restaurants (FG 3, male, home drinker), so home drinkers create distinction by drinking a better quality wine at home than they could afford on public premises. Thus, as well as liking different things (wine as opposed to beer), home wine drinkers like the same things (as others) differently (drinking wine at home rather than in restaurants and wine bars), so that under similar material conditions they are able to outflank their nearest rivals: their middle-class poor relations, the traditional drinker (Bourdieu 1984: 280).

These differences between the habitus represent different configurations and conversions of capital across a range of fields. Home drinkers were more likely to report having a university education, whereas traditional drinkers most often alluded to their longevity of service made possible by continuous employment. Indeed, using habitus as a method and working backwards we can speculate that the differences in drinking practices portrayed here, while resulting from familial habitus are, more specifically, the outcome of a differential volume of capital and configuration between members of the habitus (Nash 1999). While having similar volumes of economic capital as those in the traditional habitus, those in the home drinking habitus who reported having a university education would have had a greater volume of cultural capital as a result, so that in changed circumstances they are able to convert that capital in particular ways for example, home wine drinking. In so doing, their volume of cultural capital would increase further ('sophisticated' wine drinking) but may compensate for a lack of capital in other fields (for example, social capital – fewer traditional support networks such as family and friends). Those in the traditional habitus without a university education and whose drinking practices were informed by a regional history involving heavy industries may be more likely to remain in the traditional habitus with changed circumstances (in the absence of significant cultural capital) but with modified practices (drinking less frequently rather than turning to home wine drinking). Drinking practices may be modified differently (to a lesser extent) where there is a greater volume of social capital. The relationship between capital volume, conversion and fields merits further investigation in this context.

Thus, wine (though considered vulgar in France) remains the drink of taste for certain middle-class groups in the UK, with the home the preferred location of consumption. Wine symbolises nice, social, free or my time, transforming the home from an arena of responsibility to a place of leisure. Formality invades the once informal home and as Bourdieu puts it, 'true freedom [becomes identified] with the elective asceticism of self-imposed rule' (1984: 199). Control (defined in the home drinking habitus as non-drunkenness) and privacy become synonymous with sophistication. Just as form (decent wine) supplants substance (a good drink), seeming takes priority over being and the distinction between inside and outside the home, domestic and public is rejected. This dissolution of boundaries further renders home drinking innocuous, at worst, as it does not compromise appearances. At best, it enables a fleeting engagement with the dominant culture, an escape from 'the common present' (Bourdieu 1984: 183).

Indeed, wine in our study enabled home drinking to be more easily legitimated as safe and sensible. While home drinkers claimed to drink at home because of issues surrounding cost,

convenience, safety, child care and stress, as a suitable accompaniment to meals or as the result of non-smoking legislation (Foster *et al.* 2010), such accounts are not synonymous with reasons, still less explanations. Indeed, our study showed that wine conferred distinction upon home drinking as sophisticated, mature and moderate, a symbol of both success and aspiration. Wine's transformative power stems from its cultural capital as a luxury product consumed regularly, sometimes daily, a consumption pattern easily justified due to wine's multifaceted nature as food, drink and medicine (especially red wine). As Douglas (1987: 8) has observed, drinking practices are often used to construct an ideal world or to enable people to enact 'what they think they are' or 'what they [think they] should have been or may yet be' (Papagaroufali 1992: 262). Thus, in this study, home drinking, particularly of wine, represented bourgeois taste and, we argue, reflected participants' perceptions of their status as middle class as well as their status aspirations.

Distinction also produced in participants' notions of restraint and the emphasis upon controlled home wine consumption. Bourdieu notes that the ethic of sobriety is associated with the highest levels of the social hierarchy (1984: 179). Restraint was associated with the deferment of gratification, uncharacteristic of the labouring classes 'who refuse to participate in the 'Benthamite' calculation of pleasures and pains, benefits and costs' (Bourdieu 1984: 180). Thus, regular, moderate wine drinking was considered respectable by those in the home-drinking habitus making the drinking style of the traditional habitus hedonistic and vulgar by default. Home drinking represented a 'dignity of conduct and correctness of manners' that accumulate for those who practice it. Wine was described in terms of its affinity with bourgeois disinterestedness and distance from necessity; that is, of taste unguided by utility. Frequently, wine did not quench thirst or enable relaxation but was simply desired. Taking wine further from the functional and utilitarian is the knowledge base associated with it: the art of selecting, drinking and enjoying wine. In drinking wine, one is also appropriating knowledge surrounding wine and to know wine is to know culture. Thus wine was reported as being appropriate with Italian food but not with plain English dishes.

Historically, wine has acted as a social and cultural marker of distinction 'even within exclusive, high-ranking circles' (Purcell 1994: 193) and has been credited with possessing a transformative power (McIntyre 2011). Wine has long been considered an eloquent choice, particularly in Britain where its foreign and exotic origins bestow a sophisticated status on its users (Engs 1991). Nevertheless, when practices transcend cultural boundaries modification often results. Thus, wine was often reportedly consumed in the home drinking habitus in a very 'British' way: that is, in larger amounts than is typically found on the Continent.

Why might this be? Home drinking was attributed by many in our study to the greater availability and affordability of alcohol: Bourdieu's homology between the fields of cultural production and taste (Bourdieu 1984: 227). However, the emergence of a home drinking culture is, in part, a socio-historical contingency: Britain shares with Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Australia and North America (but not with Southern Europe) an ambivalent attitude toward alcohol. This attitude rests upon a paradox: in all these countries alcohol consumption per capita is not particularly high but alcohol consumption has long been regarded as problematic. This is despite the fact that a large proportion of these populations refrain from drinking at all (Heath 1995). Historically, these nations have often physically and visually concealed the consumption of alcohol behind solid doors, frosted glass and screened outdoor drinking areas, indicating cultures conflicted and at odds with their own value structures, a conflict underwritten by a common history of Protestantism and temperance (Hofstadter 1962, Nicholls 2011). The ongoing stigma associated with alcohol was shown in this study by the admission that the alcohol problems of individuals were 'never mentioned, it's never spoken about, it's like such a stigma, such a taboo' (FG 5, female, traditional drinker). Indeed, alcohol 'problems' were

framed in terms of the drinking pattern associated with the 'other' habitus (Ling *et al.* 2012). Thus, stigma surrounding alcohol may serve to reinforce patterns of home drinking as respectable in some national contexts by continuing the cultural practice of bestowing a cloak of invisibility upon a morally ambiguous behaviour.

### *Limitations*

This study was conducted on the premises of five organisations based in the north-east of England. The FGs were therefore conducted in a work context, among work colleagues and in several instances in the presence of senior management and human resources or occupational health representatives. This context is far from neutral and may have circumscribed the accounts that participants felt it was acceptable to give. Our data thus represent what the participants were prepared to discuss or reveal. A different context, such as public drinking premises or a university seminar room, may have elicited a different range of responses. This is especially the case with a subject like alcohol consumption where, as several participants pointed out, problems in this area remain taboo, particularly in the workplace. Thus, normative accounts may have been encouraged by this context. That said, the dynamics of several FGs permitted the eliciting both of candid admissions of excess (though of course in certain contexts this could also be considered normative) and the challenging of the views of some as well as a general debate around alcohol use and excess.

However, revealing perceptions of acceptable, normative practice is important for harm reduction interventions. Attitudes surrounding alcohol use were the main line of enquiry in our study. Further, the framing of actors' accounts is itself related to occupational background (Katainen 2010) and may also be constitutive of habitus. While the north-east of England has a culture of heavy drinking this is similar to many other regions of the UK. Thus, although our results may not be applicable everywhere it is likely that similar attitudes will be held elsewhere.

Furthermore, the attitudes and practices surrounding alcohol consumption and the habitus of the middle-class fractions portrayed in this study may represent those of a narrow range of the middle class. Other members of the middle class, groups such as the medical, legal and educational professions as well as the self-employed and business sector, may have attitudes, practices and thus a habitus quite different to those portrayed here. Further research is needed to reveal their alcohol consumption patterns.

### **Conclusion**

Our findings suggest there is a polarisation of drinking practices among professional, managerial and clerical employees into two principal habitus: a home drinking and traditional drinking habitus (and possibly a third, omnivorous habitus). This presents several challenges for alcohol harm reduction strategies. Firstly, current public health messages are aimed at those with more traditional drinking habits which resemble most closely the typical 'problem drinker' (DoH 2012). Secondly, home drinking, particularly of wine, as an embedded social practice, a means of distinction and a source of cultural capital, may make it resistant to change (Jones *et al.* 2011). Thirdly, minimum pricing may prove ineffective for higher socioeconomic groups, as increasing the economic capital required to obtain alcohol may increase further wine's symbolic value. Further research would be valuable in placing the drinking patterns of the habitus into a wider context of cultural practice and taste and contribute to a more nuanced account of the finer gradations in middle-class occupational groups (Le Roux *et al.* 2008). Further exploration of the relationship between gender and alcohol consumption within each habitus may

inform harm reduction strategies as well as shed light on the nature of gender itself: a bounded, knowable entity (as Bourdieu suggests) or an ambivalent one and a potential source of cultural capital (Skeggs 2005). Finally, while cultural capital has been traditionally communicated by means of the family and education, the media may be a third source of capital transfer requiring investigation. However, reducing the harm of alcohol for middle-class drinkers may take nothing less than the identification of new sources of cultural capital and as such whether it is may take a generation to achieve.

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