

National Drug Research Institute

**Assembling Drinking Moralities: An Ethnographic Analysis of
Youth Alcohol Use in Melbourne**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University**

December 2017

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number HR 107/2012.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Amin', written in a cursive style.

Date: 13-12-2017

Acknowledgements

At the time of writing this, the current life expectancy for an Australian male is understood to be approximately 80 years. If I somehow manage to hit the average, I will have spent roughly 7.5% of my life working on this thesis. At the moment, that number is currently closer to 20%. This means that there is a lot of myself in the pages that follow. However, it also means that countless numbers of people have become implicated in this process and shaped it in unimaginable ways. I have spent the last few years trying to paint a picture of the important, valuable worlds in which young people who use alcohol live their complex lives. This section pays tribute to those intimate, valued relations that have co-constituted my own world and the person I have become.

I must first thank my supervisor, David Moore, for his patience, keen eye for detail, and willingness to engage with my often poorly-formed ideas. His vast knowledge of the field and his theoretical acuity are valuable resources for the Melbourne-based NDRI researchers, and David has significantly shaped this thesis and my development as an academic. The high standards David sets for his own work undoubtedly trickle down to the staff and students around him, and ultimately ensure they remain a competitive, adaptable and forward-thinking outfit that people interested in drugs will always long to be a part of.

I must also thank David for introducing me to my associate supervisor, Grazyna Zajdow. Although her involvement in the production of this thesis was perhaps not entirely what we had initially envisaged, her influence on my work has been profound, and the energy she has always provided in our meetings has been infinitely refreshing, energising and inspiring.

I am also particularly grateful for Kerry Biram's contribution to this thesis. Kerry provided professional editing and proofreading services in accordance with the Institute of Professional Editor's Guidelines for Editing Research Theses. Her comprehensive and flexible approach to tackling my thesis was very much appreciated amidst the stresses of trying to finalise a PhD.

Working on the other side of the country from your affiliated university can be a challenging situation, and one that relies heavily on staff such as Jo Hawkins and Paul Jones based in Perth for its success. I must thank them for all their administrative and IT support over the years.

It also requires a vibrant and collaborative local network of staff and students who can support and learn from each other. The litany of brilliant researchers and thinkers who have passed through the NDRI Melbourne doors over the last few years have all been important to the ethos of high quality research that David and Suzanne Fraser in particular have helped create. Together with other staff members such as Peter Higgs, Robyn Dwyer, Kiran Pienaar, Cameron Duff, Kate Seear and Dean Murphy, the academics that have surrounded the PhD students during my time at NDRI possess not only an unprecedented understanding of the AOD field, and impressive writing and theoretical acumen, but they've also been incredibly generous with their time and advice. The same goes for staff associated with CAPR or the Burnet Institute, with whom I have worked closely at various times throughout my candidature. I must particularly mention Paul Dietze, Michael Livingston and Nick Scott for allowing Aaron Hart and I the opportunity to share our ideas with them. More importantly, these dynamic researchers are also great to have a chat and a drink with.

My years at NDRI would not have been same without the students, past and present. There's the first batch – Rachael Green, Christine Siokou, Monica Barratt, and Nicola Thomson, who have always been overly generous with their stories, advice, or even helping out with job applications or emergency accommodation. This talented bunch created a dynamic and interesting space that Aaron and I inherited together in early 2012. I'll always be grateful to Aaron for his support in the early days, and I'll remember his conference travel booking skills with particular fondness. Aaron's always inspired me with ability to convey extremely complex ideas in concise and accessible ways, and I'll be following his career closely. Since then we've been able to add Adrian Farrugia, Renae Fomiatti, Eliana Sarmiento Guerra, Liz Normand, and Shelley Walker, with many other special guests along the way. Adrian and Renae have always filled the place with energy, enthusiasm and a sense of fun, whether that's away at conferences, in the Turning Point annex, or at the pub.

I look forward to chatting to Adrian about the dogs without the stress of a PhD clouding our discussions, and witnessing Renae turn into the person, thinker and writer she has become has been an unexpected but extremely pride-filling aspect of doing this PhD. I've rarely come across people with the level of talent, work ethic and internal motivation that these two possess, and I can't wait to see the work they produce in the future.

To Eliana, Liz and Shelley, thanks for always being legends. It hasn't always been easy for any of you, but every time you have come into the office it has been like a refreshing breeze. You're all inquisitive, hard-working, gifted and down-to-earth people and it has been a pleasure to get to know all of you, and your insights into the world. Never stop asking questions, stay positive and keep everything in perspective.

To change direction, getting involved in the Young Australians Alcohol Reporting System project in 2014 was one of the best things I've ever done. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to build relationships with three of the best mentors a struggling PhD student could hope for, and gain the valuable exposure to different methods, ways of thinking and personalities that I so desperately needed. Tina Lam showed confidence in me at a very early stage and allowed me the freedom to explore qualitative data in my own way. Her insights, matter-of-factness, verve and belief in other people have been crucial to the researcher I have become, and I always eagerly look forward to our discussions.

Without YAARS, it is unlikely I would've had much to do with Agatha Faulkner either. I was lucky enough to have Agi as a supervisor at Turning Point, and she taught me everything from how to take care of my knees to how to plan weddings, with the occasional dash of work-related talk in between. More than that, her support, pragmatism and willingness to discuss anything (at length) came into my life at a crucial time, and I will never be able to thank her enough.

Finally, Rowan Ogeil has been an overly ridiculous source of support, advice, coffee, and opportunities. The amount of time he has spent listening to me whine about my own shortcomings and the difficulties of my PhD should have been more than enough for him to blacklist me years ago. However, Rowan never wavers in his

generosity, regardless of the circumstances, and his constant striving to help others to grow, and become proud of themselves, has been invaluable.

These three helped smooth my transition into life working at Turning Point, where I started in March 2016. There, the Population Health coding team, led by Belinda Lloyd and Sharon Matthews, have kept me sane, well looked after, and entertained, while also allowing me the opportunities to work on my research, analytical and writing skills wherever possible. I must specifically acknowledge the YAARS team – Agi, Rowan, Cass and Melissa - who provided so much fun during the early part of 2017.

Mum, Dad and Bunno ‘Flard’ Wilson have also been integral elements of putting this thesis together, and I would never have been in the position to do a PhD without them. You’ve always supported me in following this unique and foreign thread, and I couldn’t be more appreciative.

Ultimately, this thesis would not have been possible without the participants, whose stories and experiences have shaped how I understand drinking and the world around us. The four ‘gatekeepers’ I explore in depth in Chapter Four were fundamental to collecting the data for this project and inspirational to the ideas I’ve teased out in this thesis. Beyond that, however, they are all fantastically dynamic people and invaluable friends who made the particularly challenging move to Melbourne both possible and enjoyable. Without them I would never have established the broader network of participants I ended up engaging with during fieldwork, but beyond that, at various times they also provided me with meals, a bed to sleep in (sometimes for months), part-time jobs, and countless memorable experiences. This thesis is first and foremost for you.

Finally, to my partner Alice. First of all Ali, I’m sorry. Now that’s out the way, the production of this thesis can be attributed just as much to your efforts as it can be to mine. You’ve been through so much over the last few years – we’ve lived a whole life together around this one constant, this PhD. I’m very much looking forward to that not being the case! Words will never be enough to explain how you’ve supported me – the complaints you’ve listened to, the hope you’ve created for me

when I thought there was none, the lunches and dinners, the hugs, the hours and hours of isolated boredom. Beyond the strength and inspiration you uncompromisingly provide, you are also the most dynamic, diverse, hilarious, grounded and marvellous person to spend time with, and putting this thing together would not have been possible without the uncountable ways in which you enrich me, and our lives together.

Preface

The data and preliminary analysis for this thesis has informed several publications led by other authors. These publications include:

Murphy, D., Wilson, J., & Moore, D. (2016). Playing hard: Young men's experiences of drinking in inner-city Melbourne. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(2), 398-412.

Scott, N., Hart, A., Wilson, J., Livingston, M., Moore, D., & Dietze, P. (2016). The effects of extended public transport operating hours and venue lockout policies on drinking-related harms in Melbourne, Australia: Results from SimDrink, an agent-based simulation model. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 32, 44–49.

Scott, N., Livingston, M., Hart, A., Wilson, J., Moore, D., & Dietze, P. (2016). SimDrink: An agent-based NetLogo model of young, heavy drinkers for conducting alcohol policy experiments. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 19(1), 1-10.

No changes to this thesis were made as a result of the development of these publications.

Abstract

This thesis explores the intersection between young adults, alcohol and morality. Rather than reify the existing moral frameworks that typically dominate academic, media and policy discourses on alcohol use in Australia, this study combines ethnographic methods with a relational approach to ‘morality’. There are two major reasons for taking this approach. First, a popular strategy evident in health promotion and government policy addressing alcohol use and related harms is to ascribe simplistic and reductive moralised relationships between individuals, alcohol and broader societal outcomes. These imbue the practice of heavy drinking with elevated importance on the basis of, for example, its capacity to contravene desirable neoliberal values such as responsibility, productivity, safety and restraint. The second premise, then, follows the first. These moralisations of alcohol use also limit the capacities of policymakers, and the research that informs them, to adequately account for the contingent and contested moral complexities involved in performing prescribed practices and ways of living, and the challenges they present for young moral subjects. Lacking an explicit focus on morality, I argue that the existing alcohol research literature has been left reliant on a range of moral terminology (e.g. norms, responsibility, values, attitudes), but without a coherent and workable theory for first, understanding how these concepts are related, and second, how they might be operationalised to enhance our understanding of youth alcohol use.

In response, this thesis adopts a ‘moral assemblage’ approach, inspired by the work of anthropologist Jarrett Zigon. Assemblage thinking has enabled drug researchers to move beyond a primary focus on the individual-substance relationship, and towards thinking about drug events, subjectivities and practices as co-constituted by and emerging from a network of social, material, discursive, embodied and affective forces. Following Zigon, this thesis rejects understandings of morality as stable, transcendental or abstracted from everyday practices, and instead seeks to trace the associations formed between young adults, drinking, moral discourses and other phenomena during ethnographic fieldwork. Pushing this understanding further, this thesis also examines the moral implications of these entanglements, particularly for the participants’ abilities to ethically work on themselves and form desirable moral subjectivities. In this thesis, my sensitivity to the moral dimensions of youth alcohol

use is grounded by three research questions:

1. What kinds of forces are active in shaping how young adults engage in alcohol use?
2. How do participants negotiate these various forces, and what can be understood from this process in terms of their ethical orientations and priorities? and
3. How might different conceptualisations of ‘morality’ contribute to, or enhance, our understanding of heavy drinking practices among young adults?

To explore these questions, I draw on data generated through participant observation in the inner suburbs of Melbourne over 12 months in 2012–13. Ethnography enables researchers to become immersed in the field of enquiry, and to build intensive relationships with participants in order to develop a phenomenological understanding of their practices ‘first-hand’. In all I attended over 200 drinking events in over 100 different locations, including private homes, pubs, bars, restaurants, sporting events and festivals, regularly interacting with approximately 60 individuals, as well as conducting 11 in-depth interviews and generating over 150,000 words of typed field notes and interview transcripts.

The analyses I undertake elucidate two key features of alcohol use that remain under-explored in the research and policy literature: its moral complexity and its significance. I demonstrate that the events in which participants used alcohol involved dynamic and convoluted entanglements of forces that produced unique moral experiences, and I analyse these experiences across four empirical contexts. First, I investigate the interactions between university college discourse, the practice of beer skolling, the lack of institutional concern for safety, and a desire for belonging. These forces co-constituted one young woman’s experience of a college drinking moral assemblage that encouraged ‘disgusting’, masculine-embodied performances. Second, I examine the contingent relationships between licensed venues, alcohol, young adults and the notion of picking up, and the ways in which these forces shaped experiences of gender and sexuality in the Melbourne night-time economy (NTE). Third, I explore participants’ everyday lives, and how associations between work, health, finances and friendship galvanised already entrenched drinking norms, and provided the grounds for cultivating new, more flexible moral

dispositions. Fourth, I analyse the impact of children on moral assemblages and participants' imagined futures to explore the non-conscious and reflective aspects of moral experience, and the effects of the highly gendered discourses that surround notions of adulthood, parenthood, and indeed, public health-endorsed forms of drinking, on moral subjectivity.

These analyses foreground the participants' acute awareness of, and attunement to, the intimate, valued relationships that co-constitute moral assemblages, and the ways in which they manoeuvre through them while attempting to maintain fidelity to their desired moral trajectories. As such, I document the vulnerable, morally significant aspects of investing heavily in moral assemblages and, moreover, the skill, acuity and moral dispositions required to manage them. Ultimately this thesis positions heavy drinking practices as both generative and transformative, where one's cultivated moral way of being in the world, even that world itself, is always at risk of being fundamentally altered, enhanced or dismantled. Illuminating these intertwined processes of ethical subject formation on the one hand, and the co-constitution of local moralities on the other, this thesis offers a sympathetic and relational understanding of how young people use and understand alcohol that, I argue, better reflects their morally complex and significant experiences.

In sum, by combining ethnographic methodology with a theoretical perspective oriented towards the moral dimensions of youth alcohol use, this thesis elucidates a register of experiences, affects, interactions and attunements that has previously been difficult to apprehend, or adequately theorise, in alcohol research and policy, reliant as it is on abstracted and reductive understandings of morality. Beyond contributing a detailed ethnographic analysis that might inform the development of future alcohol research and policy, this thesis also argues that harm minimisation endeavours need to be more closely attuned to the complex and significant moral worlds that are brought into being when young people drink.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Heavy drinking is routinely depicted in the media, and in wider public discourse, as detrimental to one's health and wellbeing. Indeed, the young adults who are the focus of this study expressed such a view on several occasions during my ethnographic fieldwork. In the days following a night out, it was all too common to hear remarks on alcohol's capacity to induce hangovers, fatigue and damaging arguments, or to deplete already scarce financial resources. In the arena of policy and health promotion, heavy drinking tends to be understood as an irresponsible, unhealthy and sometimes irrational practice, as it inevitably increases the risk of experiencing these harms. Regardless of the focus, from these standpoints, heavy drinking, and its by-product, intoxication, are routinely ascribed negative moral valences (Room 2011) that can intensify even further depending on the salience of other factors, such as the age or gender of the drinker.

Undoubtedly, however, perspectives on alcohol use are multiple and contested. Indeed, while the participants in this study frequently lamented the various downsides of heavy drinking, they also recognised its capacity to be productive, therapeutic and pleasurable, and engaged in the practice regularly despite acknowledging the well-documented risks. In considering the perspective of these participants, this thesis will also draw upon the plethora of existing research that highlights the myriad personal, social and sensorial benefits that can emerge from heavy drinking. In light of these competing, more positive interpretations of heavy drinking, narrow moralisations of alcohol use as contravening public health or neoliberal values, for example, fail to match up well with how drinking is practised and understood in social contexts.

At its heart, this thesis also rests on the premise that the consideration of the moral dimensions and implications of youth alcohol use is important. Without taking these elements seriously, researchers, commentators and policymakers risk overlooking the register of practices, attunements, interactions and experiences that could enhance our understanding of how alcohol use emerges for young adults. In this sense, this thesis problematises simplistic, deterministic understandings of morality by

examining how fine-grained local moralities come to be assembled, and how these ‘moral assemblages’ affect the young adults that become entangled within them. At a micro level, this involves unpacking the range of effects that heavy drinking can distribute, and the litany of cognitive, bodily, emotional or linguistic adjustments made by the young adults of this study in response.

As I will explain later in this chapter, the theoretical perspective I adopt does not presume that morality is somehow abstracted from these micro practices, nor are moralities considered transcendental or totalising. Rather, like the moral opinions pervading the alcohol discourse, moralities themselves are multiple, aspectual and complex, and those struggling through them require flexibility, attunement and moral acuity, as their very moral subjectivities – who they are morally, and the selves and worlds they strive to create – are always at stake. The participants in this study routinely invested themselves in networks of relations in which alcohol use was almost always implicated in some way, whether this was with their friends, at work, at university or in establishing relationships to issues of health, gender or sexuality. In this sense, the moralities assembled in participants’ drinking practices often held profound and intimate value, and were sites in which they could maintain or strengthen important relations, or disrupt or disentangle themselves from them altogether. Following this, the value of the ‘moral assemblage’ approach I take is that it underlines the need to consider the relationality and contingency of alcohol use as it emerges as deeply entwined with the significant moral investments young adults make in these assemblages. As a result, pre-judging their alcohol use negatively, without taking these moral complexities into account, ignores the processes of making, re-making or maintaining these relations, and the building of more comfortable moral worlds, that young adults are likely to prioritise over political or public health prescriptions.

This more emergent, flexible approach to the study of alcohol use, enabled through the notion of the assemblage, has become more visible in the alcohol and other drug research literature over the last decade (e.g. Bøhling 2015; Demant 2013; Duff 2014; Farrugia 2014; Malins 2004; Poulsen 2015; Race 2011). Significantly, this research has pushed understandings of alcohol and other drug use beyond narrow conceptualisations that either foreground the relationship between a specific

individual and a specific substance, or presume that the risks and benefits of substance use are determined by the individual's orientation towards notions of 'health' (Malins 2004; Rhodes 2009). This work also highlights that effects of substance use are widely variable and contingent on a dynamic network of interactions occurring between different actors and forces. The unit of analysis for assemblage researchers, then, becomes the processual series of associations between human and non-human forces that collaborate in unique ways to form provisional wholes or 'assemblages' that either limit or enable specific drug-taking practices and subjectivities (Bøhling 2015; DeLanda 2006; Duff 2014; Farrugia 2014). One advantage of this approach to studying alcohol and other drugs is that it is inherently more sensitive to the embodied, affective and sensorial dimensions of substance use that have previously received limited attention in alcohol and other drug research (Bøhling 2015; Jayne, Valentine et al. 2010), and affords researchers the opportunity to investigate how these aspects are circumscribed by other forces in the assemblage.

In this thesis I operationalise assemblage thinking in tracing the networks of moralising discourses, moral subjects and other phenomena that came to assemble local moralities experienced during ethnographic fieldwork. Following anthropologist Jarrett Zigon, I argue that this approach leaves the analysis more open to exploring the moral dimensions and implications of heavy drinking among young adults that remain under-studied and under-theorised. I will outline my specific approach to morality later in this chapter; however, for now, I will provide an overview of how alcohol has been used, understood, problematised and addressed in Australia in recent years.

Alcohol in Australia

In Australia and internationally, alcohol has been routinely produced in various discourses as a causal factor contributing to many of contemporary society's most dominant concerns, including those relating to the economy, law and order, and in particular, public health. One study (Collins & Lapsley 2008) quantified the 'social cost' of alcohol use in Australia in 2004–05 to be \$15.3 billion measured in terms of crime, lost productivity, road accidents and the burden on the health system. More recent research (Manning, Smith et al. 2013) estimates this figure as closer to \$20

billion when accounting for the ways in which individual drinking can negatively affect others in the community. Significantly, these costs more than doubled the \$7.075 billion in tax revenue derived from alcohol sales received by the Commonwealth in 2010 (Manning, Smith et al. 2013). These figures also suggest that vast numbers of Australians continue to use alcohol despite these concerns. In Australia, as in many other countries, alcohol is the most widely available drug, and its use is a normative aspect of everyday life (Lindsay 2005: 6). In 2016, nearly 80% of Australians aged 14 or older reported drinking alcohol in the previous twelve months (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017).

Some population-level studies, however, suggest that per capita alcohol consumption has broadly declined in recent decades (e.g. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017; Livingston 2008; Livingston, Matthews et al. 2010). The most recent National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), undertaken in 2016, highlights that more Australians are abstaining from alcohol use than in previous years, fewer are drinking daily, and even the number of those drinking at ‘risky’ levels has also declined (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). In such a climate, those exceeding the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC) ‘single occasion risk guideline’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009)¹ – or consuming five or more ‘standard drinks’ (defined in Australia as a beverage containing 10mg of alcohol) in a single session – have drawn much of the recent political, community and public health attention (Room 2011). Approximately 26% of the 2016 NDSHS’s respondents reported exceeding this guideline at least monthly, equating to nearly 5 million people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). Young people, particularly those aged 18–29 years old, are the most likely to exceed the single occasion risk guidelines, and males are more likely than females to drink above these levels (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). The NDSHS also suggests that ‘risky’ forms of alcohol use, particularly

¹ These official guidelines will be referred to at several points in this thesis. The first of the *Guidelines* stipulates ‘the lifetime risk of harm from drinking alcohol increases with the amount consumed [...] for healthy men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury’ (NHMRC 2009: 2). Guideline two focuses on reducing the risk of acute harm: ‘on a single occasion of drinking, the risk of alcohol-related injury increases with the amount consumed [...] for healthy men and women, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion’ (NHMRC 2009: 3).

heavy sessional drinking, are widespread, and the proportion of ‘risky’ drinkers has remained stable across the most recent iterations of the study (e.g. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, 2014).

In contrast to broader declines in consumption, the rates of Australians experiencing alcohol-related harm has increased in the last two decades, particularly in terms of hospitalisations, ambulance presentations, acute intoxication, as well as the rate of night-time public and domestic assaults (Livingston 2008; Livingston, Matthews et al. 2010). However, the relationship between alcohol consumption rates and harms is complicated and non-linear, with harms differentially distributed according to structural factors such as gender and socio-economic status.

Despite Australian research suggesting those experiencing disadvantage tend to drink less on average, and less frequently, than those in full-time employment or with post-school qualifications (e.g. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017), the international literature demonstrates that lower socio-economic status (SES) groups tend to consume greater amounts on single occasions (Huckle, You et al. 2010). However, lower SES groups also tend to experience greater rates of alcohol-related harm even when drinking similar amounts to those consumed by higher SES groups (Mäkelä & Paljärvi 2008). In Australia, some scholars have argued that this divide is exacerbated by the over-concentration of packaged liquor outlets in more disadvantaged areas, undergirding heavy episodic use amongst lower SES groups, whereas less disadvantaged areas are more likely to have a higher concentration of licensed pubs and bars (Foster, Hooper et al. 2017; Jiang, Callinan et al. 2017).

Similarly, in Australia alcohol use and related harms are gendered. Men and women often prefer to drink in very different spaces and amongst different company, and their consumption and intoxication patterns also differ (Erol & Karpyak 2015). Australian men are still far more likely to drink daily compared to women, and to exceed both the official single occasion and lifetime risk guidelines (NHMRC 2009). Males also tend to drink large amounts of alcohol more regularly than women, with 19% of males exceeding the single-occasion risk guidelines at least weekly in 2016, compared to just 7% of females (AIHW 2017).

Over the same period, males were almost twice as likely as women to have taken part in at least one potentially harmful activity while under the influence of alcohol, such as operating a vehicle or verbally abusing someone (22% vs 12%). Women were far more likely to be victims of verbal or physical abuse as a result of the drinking of their intimate partners, whereas men are more likely than women to experience abuse at the hands of strangers who have been drinking (AIHW 2017).

Despite variations in how Australians use and experience alcohol, epidemiologists have tended to focus on the ways in which increases in harms seemingly align with high-risk drinking rates amongst particular subsets of the population (Lam, Lenton et al. 2017; Lensvelt, Gilmore et al. 2016). Those who officially fall into the ‘very high alcohol consumption’ category by consuming 11 or more standard drinks on a single occasion are of particular concern from a harm reduction perspective (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017: 40). Fifteen percent of NDSHS respondents had exceeded this amount at least once in the last 12 months, and around seven percent had done so in the month prior to the study (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). Very high consumption has also remained stable across recent iterations of the NDSHS, and this group appears to disproportionately experience and perpetrate various harms (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). When compared to low-risk drinkers, for example, those consuming 11 or more standard drinks at least monthly were five times more likely to have injured themselves or someone else due to their drinking, ten times more likely to have missed work, four times as likely to have elicited concern in others about their drinking, and three times more likely to have required medical attention for their alcohol-related injuries in the last 12 months (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017).

Another large-scale study undertaken in the state of Victoria (Victorian Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council 2010), where data collection for this thesis was also conducted, stated that 42% of respondents aged 16–24 years reported consuming in excess of 20 standard drinks – five times higher than recommended amounts – at least once in the previous 12 months, representing a sharp increase on previous editions of the study. Research conducted by Dietze and colleagues across metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria’s capital, also drew attention to the growing ‘intensity of episodic heavy drinking’, with their participants, aged 18–25 years old,

typically consuming an average of 13 standard drinks on recent ‘big nights’ (Dietze, Livingston et al. 2014: 6). Indeed, this focus in the Australian literature on the heavy sessional consumption of alcohol and related harms, with an emphasis on youth populations, echoes concurrent international narratives around similar ‘binge drinking’ practices (see, for example, Thurnell-Read 2016).

With these major studies linking alcohol use to the undermining of economic prosperity, public safety, and the health of both individuals and communities, it comes as little surprise that the Australian population perceives excessive alcohol use to be a significant ‘concern to the general community’ (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017: 118). Moreover, research also suggests this perception has gained momentum over the last few decades as some problematic aspects of alcohol use, particularly public intoxication and related ‘bad behaviour’ (Room 2011), have become increasingly visible in print and television media (Azar, White et al. 2014; Fogarty & Chapman 2012). This growing public concern over the dangers of heavy drinking and acute intoxication can be read as instigating a broader response oriented towards changing the drinking patterns of individuals themselves. Almost half of recent drinkers who participated in the 2016 NDSHS had taken some form of action to reduce their alcohol consumption in the previous 12 months, either by capping their use on a particular occasion or attempting to reduce the frequency of their alcohol use over the longer term (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017: 45). The vast majority of these participants listed concerns over their health, or other ‘lifestyle’ factors, as primary motivators for altering the way they consume alcohol (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017: 45).

Current Approaches to Addressing Alcohol Use in Australia

This introduction has so far described not only the pervasive use of alcohol in Australia but also the propensity for specific segments of the population to use alcohol in ways that exceed official recommendations, and by extension, increase their risks of encountering harm. As several major Australian studies suggest, the groups most likely to engage in heavy drinking sessions are young adults, particularly those aged in their late teens and early twenties. Moreover, the list of harms understood to be linked to alcohol are ever-expanding beyond the individual

to include property, other members of the community, and even to the various economic, social, political, and public health interests of the nation at large.

The National Drug Strategy (NDS) frames the approach to addressing these concerns at the federal level. Formulated by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia 2011), the NDS involves the design and implementation of a multi-faceted, integrated harm minimisation program that is rolled out across multiple platforms. The element of the NDS concerned specifically with alcohol use, for example, includes establishing regulations for sporting and other community clubs, media presentations, advertising regulatory bodies, the development of mobile applications, and collaborations with other ‘alcohol behaviour change’ movements, as well as the development of treatment services, legislation, more formalised policy documents and published guidelines for reducing ‘risky drinking’ patterns (Commonwealth of Australia 2015).

The 2010–2015 iteration of the NDS (Commonwealth of Australia 2011), which was in operation at the time of my ethnographic research, also articulates the assumption that ‘the excessive consumption of alcohol’ is a ‘major cause’ of an extensive list of health and social harms, including (among others): road accidents, domestic and public violence, vandalism, chronic disease, brain damage, birth defects, disability, unemployment, family breakdown, the reinforcement of social disadvantage and broader social dysfunction (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 2). Shaped by a primary commitment to minimising these harms since its inception in 1985, the NDS is underpinned by the ‘three pillars’ of demand reduction, supply reduction and harm reduction (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: ii; see also the current Commonwealth of Australia 2017). Some of the more visible actions of the NDS have been in the area of mediating the supply of alcohol, particularly through amending taxation, changing licensed venue trading hours, restricting the proliferation of liquor outlets and modifying specific drinking contexts (Hart & Moore 2014; Howard, Gordon et al. 2014).

There has, however, also been growing concern over whether such regulatory controls can effectively reach the vast numbers consuming alcohol in more private spaces, where there is significantly less media and research attention (Dietze,

Livingston et al. 2014; for a UK example see Thurnell-Read 2016). In this context, tools such as *The Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009) play an important role in the NDS framework by defining, in quantifiable terms, how alcohol use ought to be regulated at the individual level. The *Guidelines* are designed to provide ‘universal guidance’ for all healthy adults in the process of making decisions ‘regarding the amount of alcohol that they choose to drink’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 1). Based primarily on epidemiological research, this document suggests that the risks of experiencing harm, both immediate and longer-term, increase with each standard drink consumed. Indeed, these guidelines have become widely recognised amongst the population, albeit often with some inaccuracy (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017), and are frequently utilised in major studies to categorise sections of the population according to varying degrees of ‘risky’ drinking, including some of those mentioned so far in this chapter.

These guidelines are also supplemented by governmental attempts to shape the less tangible ‘rules, values and habits of individuals, families and communities’ (State of Victoria 2012: 10). Given the majority of Victorians consume alcohol in the home, where the effects of government regulation are more ambiguous, the Victorian Department of Health’s *Reducing the AOD Toll* policy document suggests that by ‘instilling sensible values and individual responsibility in our culture, and specifically among young people, government can best assist people to make different, healthier choices about their drinking’ (State of Victoria 2012: 11). This state-level framework has been designed to facilitate ‘enduring change in the community’s behaviour, values and responses to alcohol and drugs’ (State of Victoria 2012: 8), beginning with dismantling the cultural approval of ‘irresponsible’ drunken behaviour, and encouraging individuals to modify their own problematic substance use.

In sum, the alcohol media, policy and research landscape continues to be dominated by associations made between alcohol use and broad, population-level problems, particularly those relating to the economy, public amenity and safety, and physical health. As such, the most visible actors in this context are public health specialists, advocates and researchers who in many ways act as arbiters of normative health

standards and appropriate public behaviour (Callinan, Room et al. 2014; LeBesco 2011; Lupton 2015; Yeomans 2013). Thus, beyond mere concerns with individual and public health, drinking and intoxication have become focal points for broader debates around notions of responsibility, discipline and risk, ensuring the context in which people consume alcohol is contradictory, and laden with complex messages and demands (Duff & Moore 2015; Moore & Fraser 2006; Room 2011).

Epidemiological research highlighting how some subgroups are far exceeding drinking recommendations on a regular basis, and experiencing disproportionate amounts of harm at a time when alcohol consumption in general is on the decline, suggests the effects of these mixed messages are also varied. While exploring disjunctures between official prescriptions (and proscriptions) on how young people ought to act, and how young people themselves conceive of their lived experiences, is not new ground for qualitative research, taking an approach that explicitly examines the moral complexities and significance of this discrepancy is novel in this field. Approaching this task, I argue, first requires further consideration of how we might better operationalise the concept of morality.

This Study: Re-assembling ‘Morality’

This thesis synthesises an ethnography of heavy drinking among young adults in Melbourne with a theoretical engagement with broader social-science conceptualisations of morality. Put simply, this project begins with the familiar premise that young adults do not consume alcohol in a vacuum, nor is alcohol use ever merely about the ingestion of a psychoactive substance or the pursuit of intoxication (Bøhling 2015; Sheehan & Ridge 2001). Rather, by exploiting the sensitivities enabled by assemblage thinking, this thesis will demonstrate that alcohol use emerges in situations dense with complexity and co-constituted through a range of heterogeneous phenomena. Moreover, this thesis highlights the moral dimensions of these ‘assemblages’, and examines their effects on young people’s capacities to craft desirable moral subjectivities, ethical practices and moral worlds more broadly.

‘Morality’ itself has historically been a challenging concept for social science researchers (Hitlin & Vaisey 2013; Laidlaw 2002; Zigon 2007, 2009b). It is a slippery, vague term that has a long history of bleeding into or being conflated with

other objects of enquiry, such as kinship, religion or studies of ‘culture’ (Zigon 2009b). As such, Zigon (2009b) argues that its usage in social science discourse still relies heavily on traditional moral philosophy for its conceptualisations, stretching back to thinkers such as Aristotle, Kant and Durkheim. In Zigon’s own discipline of anthropology, these moral philosophies, and their subsequent conceptual vocabularies primarily concerned with what might be considered ‘good’ or ‘right’, are often imposed on ethnographic research subjects to evaluate action without nuanced consideration of whether their ethnographic interlocutors share the same perspectives (Zigon 2013; see also Bourgois 1998).

A similar disjuncture has emerged in the alcohol field, where efforts to ‘promote politically desirable forms of drinking’ – typically its reduction or eradication – sit in tension with ‘populist conceptions of acceptable drinking’ (Yeomans 2013: 59), opening up something of a moral battleground over what constitutes appropriate health practices and citizenship (Keane 2003, 2013). Indeed, the alcohol discourse in Australia is noticeably inflected with moral terminology – norms, responsibilities, values and attitudes. The policies in operation at the time of conducting fieldwork (e.g. Commonwealth of Australia 2011; State of Victoria 2012) also explicitly outline their projects to overhaul community values and shape the moral sensibilities of individuals in terms of rationality, restraint and altruism, and to uphold the priorities of health, safety and economic prosperity (Keane 2013; Rhodes 2009; Room 2011; Zajdow 2010).

Despite these clear moralising tendencies to link individual conduct to broader societal-level problems (Hunt 1997; Törrönen, Simonen et al. 2015), explicit engagement with notions of morality has largely been avoided in the alcohol field. This is particularly the case for health promotion documents such as the NHMRC *Guidelines* that insist their recommendations are somehow removed from ‘public debates’ over ‘standards of conduct’:

These guidelines are concerned with risks to health, and *not with moral or normative standards about drinking*. Various groups in Australian society differ about what they consider to be ‘responsible’ drinking, and about when they consider drinking to be appropriate or acceptable. There is a need for

continuing public debate about these standards of conduct. (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 6, emphasis added)

The argument applied here is that official prescriptions of ‘health’ are unquestionably ‘appropriate’ or ‘acceptable’ values for orienting individual behaviour, so much so that they lie beyond the concerns of everyday morality (Metzl 2010). Indeed, this understanding of health and morality is consistent with the broader Australian commitment to a harm minimisation paradigm thought to be an amoral, technical approach to addressing substance use and related harms (Keane 2003). However, as Keane (2003) points out, value-neutrality is itself a moral standpoint, and can never be perfectly divorced from moral investments (see also LeBesco 2011; Lupton 2015). Regardless of their pronouncements, discourses such as the *Guidelines* further complicate the already heavily moralised world of alcohol and other drug use. Indeed, government and public health promotion messages also contend with commercial demands to express one’s identity through the pleasures found in the market (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Fry 2011; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2010), and cultural discourses reinforcing associations between heavy drinking and friendship, sport and national identity (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Crocket 2014; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009). Over the last two decades in particular, a rich body of qualitative research has elucidated the ways in which young adults negotiate these complex, often contradictory, sets of demands. Several Australasian studies following this thread are explored in the literature review in Chapter Two.

The aim of this thesis, then, is to explicitly engage with that which is often overlooked, and sometimes intentionally avoided, in alcohol research and policy (Lupton 2015): the concept of morality itself. As this chapter has already forecasted, this thesis approaches the moralisation of alcohol use not as a straightforward process or one without implications, but as a complex and contested process that both shapes, and is shaped by, the ways in which individuals understand themselves, the constitution of broader normative ideals, and the intersections and interactions between them. As I will explore further in the next section, this perspective on morality differs greatly from that implied in the moralising discourses that pervade alcohol research and policy, particularly those emanating from governments and

public health institutions. I argue that the versions of morality imagined in these discourses reflect the ongoing salience of traditional moral philosophy, as Zigon (2013) has suggested. For instance, morality is understood to be transcendental and totalising in that these discourses encourage practices, orientations and values that are purported to be desirable and achievable, regardless of circumstance (Lindsay 2010). They also presume that individual desires and sensibilities, and their (limited) contingency on other factors, can be entirely overridden by new sets of values or priorities. As such, this static, rigid version of morality is intended to be unproblematically accepted by all, and ultimately deterministic of individual action and its effects. Indeed, this thesis will go on to demonstrate that not only does this reductive understanding of morality poorly reflect the experiences of young adults who use alcohol, but beyond this, such conceptualisations also limit the possibilities for new understandings of both alcohol use and morality to emerge (Bourgois 1998; Malins 2004; Zigon 2013).

Theoretical Approach

What an assemblage theory does allow for, however, is recognition of more possibilities for resonance that permit individuals to comfortably live, reflect, and ethically work on themselves. Thus, it provides a way for us to understand how, oftentimes, seemingly incompatible moral discourses and dispositions exist rather comfortably in the same situation. (Zigon 2013: 202)

To address the under-theorisation of morality in the context of alcohol use in Australia, in this thesis I consider morality, or *moralties*, as assemblages, inspired by the work of anthropologist Jarrett Zigon, quoted above. Over the last decade, Zigon has developed a multi-faceted theoretical framework designed to better comprehend the nuances of moral life that emerged in his own ethnographic research on drug rehabilitation programs run by the Russian Orthodox Church (Zigon 2010a, 2011, 2013). Zigon's approach brings 'assemblage' thinking to the study of morality, positing that social situations are best understood not as characterised by one specific, transcendental morality, but rather as constituted in unique ways through the interactions between various moral discourses, subjects and other phenomena. For Zigon, moralities do not pre-exist the coming together of these agents but instead are made and re-made in practice, ensuring the nature of local, 'moral assemblages' is

always contingent, relational and emergent. Zigon's approach to studying and theorising morality adopts a commitment to inductive ethnographic enquiry, as opposed to pre-evaluating action according to individual beliefs or dominant philosophical systems (Zigon 2013, 2014b). In this sense, Zigon's theory of moral assemblages enables researchers to address shortcomings in the use and definition of relevant moral terminology, while also accounting for subtle shifts and complexities in moral experience. How these complexities vary, and the tools moral subjects use to navigate them, offer insights into how multiple moral discourses and dispositions can coexist in the same situation. To apply this to the context of heavy drinking, I argue that Zigon's work provides unique and valuable analytical tools to explore first, how notions and experiences of morality are implicated in heavy drinking practices among young people; and second, how these experiences contend with policy, research and media discourses that seek to moralise youth alcohol use in specific ways. A more in-depth exploration of Zigon's theory is undertaken in Chapter Three.

Aims and Objectives

Following from the issues outlined above, this thesis aims to present and analyse data collected through ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with members of a network of young adults in inner-suburban Melbourne who regularly engage in heavy drinking. In analysing these data, I explore the moral assemblages that emerge in the heavy drinking experiences of this network, paying particular attention to how heavy drinking shapes, and is shaped by, individualised processes of ethical self-formation. By exploring the analytical utility of the concept of morality in this field, this thesis fulfils the need for theoretical innovation in the face of some specific subsets of Australian young people engaging in the heavy sessional consumption of alcohol, and experiencing related harms at unprecedented rates. Such an approach, I argue, can also develop our theoretical understanding of morality more broadly.

At its core, this thesis pursues three key research questions:

1. What kinds of forces are active in shaping how young adults engage in alcohol use?

2. How do participants negotiate these various forces, and what can be understood from this process in terms of their ethical orientations and priorities?
3. How might different conceptualisations of ‘morality’ contribute to, or enhance, our understanding of heavy drinking practices among young adults?

Methodological Approach

To investigate these questions, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, for approximately 12 months, from October 2012 to October 2013.² This ethnographic element forms part of a larger mixed-methods project, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), aimed at developing the capacity to model the impact of interventions targeting high-risk youth drinking (see, for example, Scott, Hart et al. 2016; Scott, Livingston et al. 2016). Ethnography privileges ‘first-hand’ encounters as researchers become immersed in the research ‘field’ through a prolonged presence, with the aim of developing a phenomenological understanding of local practices, while minimising disruptions to the flow of social life (Bourgois 1999; Bryman 2016; Moore 1992). Participant observation is often supplemented by in-depth interviews in order to develop a coherent account of local practices and understandings from the perspective of the participants themselves (Payne & Payne 2004).

As a participant observer, I attended over 200 different events involving the use of alcohol at over 120 venues during fieldwork. These events typically took place in the local government areas of Yarra, Stonnington and Melbourne, three culturally and economically diverse locations with high concentrations of youth and thriving night-time economies. The process of establishing myself in this field was aided by becoming a resident in a share house in the City of Yarra, and mediated by close relationships with four core participants that enabled me to interact with their extended networks of friends and acquaintances. Primarily through these four ‘gatekeepers’ (Payne & Payne 2004), I was able to interact regularly with a network of approximately 60 young adults at different stages throughout fieldwork, observing and conversing with them on nights out. During the latter stages of fieldwork, I also conducted 11 in-depth interviews with a proportion of these participants in order to

² The project received ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 9 October, 2012 (Approval Number HR 107/2012).

contextualise the detailed field notes I had collected through participant observation. Interviews afforded me the opportunity to collect socio-demographic information, but also to ascertain an understanding of individuals' sense of their biographies, trajectories and perspectives on alcohol use, as well as their moral dispositions, concerns, worries, desires and hopes. In all, I was able to compile approximately 150,000 words of ethnographic field notes and interview transcripts. Further detail on the four core participants, the extended network of 60 participants who meaningfully contributed to this study, and the processes of conducting participant observation and interviews will be provided in Chapter 4.

Thesis Outline

This section briefly describes how the rest of the thesis will unfold. The next three chapters will involve a review of the relevant literature (Chapter Two), a more in-depth exploration of Zigon's theoretical framework (Chapter Three), and a description of my methodological approach and early fieldwork experiences (Chapter Four). Chapters Five to Eight constitute the substantive data chapters where ethnographic material is presented and analysed, and Chapter Nine concludes the thesis.

Chapter Two contains my review of a recent selection of qualitative research concerning alcohol use amongst young people in Australia, New Zealand, and other comparable contexts. The range of studies I present provides a comprehensive depiction of how, when, where and why young people use alcohol in the ways that they do. I examine some influential projects detailing different drinking environments, the breadth of situational drinking 'styles' one can engage in, and how young people's nights out are organised and staged. Similarly, I highlight how these studies demonstrate young people's acute awareness of the risks involved in heavy drinking, and the competing discourses that shape both their drinking practices and experiences, but also their harm minimisation techniques.

By attempting to elucidate how personal motivations shape how young people negotiate the complex and contradictory drinking landscape, this research also points out the temporal dimensions of youth alcohol use. Several studies, particularly in the

United Kingdom, have illustrated the ways in which youthful drinking practices are bounded and controlled by the temporal rhythms of everyday life that circumscribe where, when and with whom young people can drink. These dynamics also mix with broader cultural discourses emphasising that young maximise their youth through consumption and pleasure, ensuring alcohol use is always implicated in temporal processes oriented towards more adult responsibilities on the horizon.

While these aspects of youth alcohol use illuminate models of moral personhood, the situational negotiation of social norms, and the production and emergence of personal motivations, specific engagement with the notion of morality has curiously been left absent from these accounts. In concluding this chapter, I examine the work of two ethnographers who, in studying drug use themselves, provide unique ways of orienting researchers towards the moral dimensions of drug-taking practices, and inspire the approach I have taken in this thesis.

In Chapter Three I will unpack Zigon's theoretical framework and how it will be used in this thesis. In doing so, I examine several of the conceptual tools to be utilised in data analysis, beginning with Zigon's understanding of a 'moral assemblage', his distinction between 'morality' and 'ethics', and his formulation of the moral subject.

In Chapter Four, I explicitly detail the methodological processes, strategies and practices undertaken for this project. I begin by exploring my early immersion in the research field site of inner-suburban Melbourne, and the challenges associated with locating an appropriate social network of participants. As part of this process I introduce this network in more general terms, before detailing my relationships with four key 'gatekeepers' who became vital to the success of this study. Following this, I describe the City of Yarra, where the majority of data collection took place, and detail the processes involved in taking field notes and conducting in-depth interviews. Finally, I provide a reflexive commentary on my experiences as a novice ethnographer and how my own biography has shaped how data has been collected, analysed and presented.

Chapter Five is the first of four chapters that analyse ethnographic data collected

during fieldwork. The first data chapter acts as a case study exploring Hannah's memories from two heavy drinking events she experienced as a university college resident prior to our interview in 2013. As well as unfolding a fine-grained analysis of how the moralities shaping Hannah's first 'skol session' and 'ski week' came to be assembled, this chapter highlights the series of unexpected interactions that young people engage in when using alcohol that shape the possibilities for action, which in this case included material environments, established college discourses, and the prioritisation of masculine drinking practices and bodily comportment. This chapter also more explicitly introduces how I intend to apply some of Zigon's key concepts in unpacking field notes and interviews in the remainder of the thesis. Reflecting on these events retrospectively in our interview together, Hannah was able to articulate her 'attunement' to the complex network of relations that underpinned the college experiences she described. In doing so, she makes explicit the moral investments she made in these assemblages as a new and uneasy college resident seeking pleasure, memorable experiences, meaning and belonging. In this sense, her experiences were generative and productive, shaping her desired life trajectory, and the extent to which she was able to enact 'fidelity' to these personal desires. While the 'skol session' was remembered positively, the 'ski week' moral assemblage was interpreted as confusing, discomfoting, but nonetheless ethically significant, as it forced Hannah to re-think her sensibilities and preferences.

Chapter Six traces the significance and agency of the concept of picking up as a framework for motivating and organising interactions and drinking practices in licensed venues. Broadly, this chapter is concerned with interrogating simplistic associations between the availability of alcohol in licensed venues, and the various negative outcomes observed in the licensed night-time economy (NTE) including acute intoxication, unwanted sexual attention and violence. The ethnographic data presented in this chapter illuminate how licensed venue moralities are co-constituted through the gendered and sexualised discourse of picking up that participants used frequently to either orchestrate or make sense of their experiences. In doing so, it questions the lack of engagement with issues of gender and sexuality in relevant policy frameworks given how participants in this study routinely experienced licensed venues as gendered and sexualised subjects and thus spent much of their time re-orienting their spatial positioning, bodily movements and drinking practices

in line with these unique demands.

Chapter Seven tackles the complex task of conceptualising how participants understood alcohol as integrated into their everyday lives. This integration, I argue, is central to how participants themselves use and understand alcohol, while simultaneously being a key site of moralisation in the various institutional discourses shaping alcohol use in Australia. First, I analyse how major national and state-level alcohol policy documents and guidelines, in operation at the time of my fieldwork, scrutinise elements of daily life and promote specific, desirable modes of living to which individuals are encouraged to adhere. Unsurprisingly, this idealised version of everyday life does not make room for alcohol use beyond the rigid prescriptions of the NHRMC *Guidelines*, for example. This static, simplistic, and deterministic understanding of everyday life contrasts starkly with how the participants of this study understand their own daily lives, and particularly the role alcohol plays within them. The moral assemblage analysis I undertake attends to how participants negotiate emergent moralities produced through interactions between the different domains of their lives, and illustrates the complex and dynamic strategies they pursue in order to muddle through life with a sense of comfort and agency.

Chapter Eight, the final data chapter, responds to the complexities of the previous three chapters by unpacking what is broadly considered in family and parenting research to be a rigid, non-negotiable moral imperative, putting the needs of children before one's own. I explore two incidents that occurred during fieldwork, both of which involved interactions between participants in this study and young children, typically the children of friends. In both cases, these interactions produced a cascade of effects that appeared to mobilise specific courses of action that in some cases included how participants used alcohol. Inspired by this finding, I then analyse several interviews where participants consider themselves, their futures and the worlds around them in vastly different ways when confronted with the prospect of parenthood from how they had at other times during fieldwork. Echoing the findings of Chapter Five and Chapter Six, the analysis also draws attention to the gendered elements of moral assemblages – that is, how processes of ethical self-formation, and even the imagination of possible moral selves and futures, are circumscribed by gender. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates the ongoing process that these young

adults endure, of shifting between ethical reflection and inhabiting non-conscious moral dispositions, and how this process is routinely shaped by unanticipated forces. More specifically, this analysis demonstrates how the physical or imagined presence of children has the capacity to co-constitute moral assemblages centred on an ethic of care that, in some cases, had observable implications for how participants used alcohol.

I conclude in Chapter Nine with a reflection on the moral complexities and significance of heavy drinking among the young people I studied. I contrast these with some of the ways in which alcohol use is dominantly portrayed, particularly by relevant public health institutions, epidemiological research and governments. I will also retrace the register of nuances that, I argue, a moral assemblage approach elucidates that has so far been overlooked or at least under-theorised in the existing qualitative research literature. In doing so, this chapter also revisits the utility of Zigon's theoretical framework, and summarises the findings of each of the main data chapters. To conclude, I assess how my work might be situated amongst established research more broadly before reflecting on how this thesis has addressed the aforementioned key research questions.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review – Drinking Practices, Contradictions, Motivations and Everyday Life

A primary aim of this thesis is to contribute to the existing Australian and international qualitative research literature on alcohol use among young people. In this chapter, I will critically review this research literature, which has shaped and informed the production of this thesis, with a view to drawing out key themes, in particular, the need to take more seriously the moral dimensions of youth alcohol use. Much of the research literature reviewed in this chapter alludes to these moral aspects but only vaguely and ambiguously, and as yet there has been little attempt to synthesise a cohesive moral framework for use in the analysis of drinking. The theoretical approach I advocate for in this thesis is in large part inspired by the existing alcohol research, in that it seeks to account for the wide variations in young people's drinking experiences, the significance of their drinking events, and the complexity and contradiction inherent in the Australian landscape of alcohol use. However, my approach differs from these studies in that it explicitly outlines, and later operationalises, an understanding of morality that emphasises its relationality, contingency and emergence, encapsulated in the Zigonian concept of the 'moral assemblage'. In doing so, this thesis establishes a novel way of thinking about morality that helps us make sense of the seemingly disparate and theoretically challenging aspects of alcohol use that, I argue, are held at a distance by the loose and under-examined use of moral terminology, and understanding of morality more broadly in alcohol research.

This chapter is organised into several sections. Initially, I will briefly explore how the role of qualitative research in the alcohol field has often been defined in relation to the major assumptions routinely articulated through quantitative research. From there, I intend to explore how qualitative research, primarily conducted in Australia and New Zealand over the last two decades, has added layers of complexity to understanding how young people drink. For instance, this body of work has illuminated the range of environments in which heavy drinking can occur, the variety of situational drinking styles young people engage in, the safety practices and lay

harm reduction techniques young people employ, individual motivations for heavy drinking, and the cultural, political, economic and gendered discourses that compete for attention in the NTE.

The middle sections of this chapter are concerned with analysing some of the specific themes that emerge from these studies. These themes, I argue, lay the platform for exploring the potential of engaging with a contemporary conceptualisation of morality as way of thinking through how and why young people use alcohol. The aim of this chapter, then, is to critically review the literature that has paved the way for this current study, both methodologically and theoretically, and to further substantiate my advocacy for exploring the relationship between morality and alcohol more closely. In concluding the chapter, I identify the need for a set of analytical tools with which to examine this relationship, and these are detailed more explicitly in Chapter Three.

The Growing Visibility of Qualitative Alcohol Studies

As mentioned in the previous chapter, much existing research on alcohol use employs epidemiological methods to aggregate individual drinking patterns, and analyse their outcomes at the population level (Hart & Moore 2014). These studies rely on large-scale survey methodologies to obtain per capita data on average volumes of alcohol consumption, and various temporal patterns of use, in order to estimate the impact of alcohol use on disease, illness and injury (Hart & Moore 2014; Ogeil, Room et al. 2015). Given this approach presumes close associations between individual alcohol use and broader population-level health concerns, epidemiology's positioning on alcohol use is largely determined by the extent to which it could be said to increase one's risk of experiencing adverse health outcomes (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Lindsay 2009). As more moderate levels of drinking have historically been associated with less harm, this research often illuminates the various patterns of alcohol use thought to be excessive or risky, either to one's short-term or long-term health. Both heavy episodic drinking, and sustained drinking over the lifetime, are statistically associated in epidemiological research with compromised physical health, the economic burden of injury and disease, lost productivity, and increases in crime and road accidents (Australian Institute of

Health and Welfare 2017; Ogeil, Room et al. 2015; Roxburgh, Miller et al. 2013).

Proponents and advocates of epidemiological research, as well as the terminology and logics they routinely use, circulate widely in media, policy and research discourses relating to both alcohol use and public health (Lindsay 2006; Yeomans 2013). However, its default position holds in place a relatively narrow view of alcohol use as merely a practice capable of compromising individual health, and by extension, the fortitude of the nation's own wellbeing, even at relatively low consumption levels. This reliance on a public health framework in alcohol research and policy, then, supports the notion that drinking involves ingesting a drug with pharmacological properties that erase the user's capacity for reason, awareness and rationality. Given these capacities are crucial to upholding the duties of contemporary citizens to self-govern one's own health risks and make healthy choices, they render the practice of alcohol use as largely irrational and without benefit (Fry 2011; Hart & Moore 2014; Measham 2004; Moore 2008; Moore & Fraser 2006; Room 2011).

The qualitative research on alcohol use that I will review in this chapter contests this view by demonstrating that the 'primacy of public health', or any other such narrow understanding of how alcohol use might be motivated, can often become fragmented or displaced in the various complex situations in which people drink (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Duff & Moore 2015; Grace, Moore et al. 2009). Indeed, as several qualitative researchers have argued (e.g. Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Duff 2011; Fry 2011; Northcote 2011), reducing our understanding of youth alcohol use to the relationships between frequencies, volumes and pre-determined health measures oversimplifies how personal decisions around alcohol use are made *in situ*, and forecloses potential insights into the complex array of actors, objects, spaces and technologies implicated in the enactment of events of alcohol consumption.

The value of the expanding qualitative research literature partially lies in the acknowledgement of those who use alcohol as 'lay experts' who formulate their own knowledges and philosophies to frame and organise their drinking practices (Lindsay 2009, Moore 2010). Indeed, the attributes and practices of youth are often presupposed, or at least selectively deployed, in policy and media discourses,

rendering their own perspectives, experiences, knowledges and philosophies largely absent (Barker 2010; Moore 2010). Over the last two decades in particular, innovative and influential work in sociology, anthropology, feminist studies, youth studies, cultural studies, and science and technology studies has sought to address this disjuncture.

A decade ago, Roche and colleagues (Roche, Bywood et al. 2007) produced an extensive review of the Australian and international literature published up until 2007, with the aim of elucidating the range of perspectives on how ‘culture’ influences youth alcohol use. Their review explored all facets of the alcohol discourse, ranging from epidemiological research on patterns of use, to relevant policies and legislation, and the effects of local and global advertising and marketing communications. This work was also valuable in collating a broad array of qualitative research studies that offer insights into the dynamics of entertainment and leisure contexts, the interplay between social networks and the characteristics of individuals, and how these shape drinking understandings and practices.

Given the wide scope of Roche et al.’s (2007) review, the examination of the literature I undertake in this chapter centres primarily on studies published in the years since. In addition, my review is also comparable to theirs in that it focuses on research produced in Australia and New Zealand. However, to further contextualise these more recent studies, my review also draws on research conducted in similar contexts outside Australasia, such as the United Kingdom and Scandinavia in particular. By the same token, I have also drawn attention to several studies published prior to Roche et al.’s review that have been particularly influential in shaping later research. Research based in contexts far removed from the experience of the participants in this Australian study, such as those in Islamic, Asian or African countries, have not been included (Roche, Bywood et al. 2007: 23).

Australasian Qualitative Research on Youth Alcohol Use

Qualitative research on youth alcohol use in Australasia has expanded significantly over the last two decades. Since the late 1990s, there have been several major projects aimed at examining the social and cultural elements of alcohol use amongst

young people, utilising a range of methodologies. These have included interviews (Armstrong, Watling et al. 2014; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Nairn, Higgins et al. 2006; Smith 2015), group discussions (Armstrong, Watling et al. 2014; Barker 2010; Hutton, Griffin et al. 2016; Lyons & Willott 2008; Niland, Lyons et al. 2013; Sheehan & Ridge 2001; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011), and observational techniques or various forms of ethnography (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Brown & Gregg 2012; Crocket 2014; de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2005; Palmer & Thompson 2007; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011). Such approaches aim to resist foregrounding the individual-drug relationship that is characteristic of the epidemiological research that has dominated alcohol policy research, and instead seeks to document the diverse routines, rituals and concepts young people themselves use to define their experiences and the worlds in which they drink (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010).

In these qualitative research accounts, however, young people do echo some of the concerns expressed in the public health literature. For instance, many young Australians consider heavy drinking to be an ‘essential’ or ‘normal’ aspect of their socialising and leisure pursuits (De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lyons & Willott 2008), and moreover, the majority report drinking above recommended levels on a regular basis, with the intention of becoming intoxicated (Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2005, 2006; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009). Such findings reinforce the view that young people consider heavy drinking to be a highly valued practice laden with various social, experiential and cultural benefits, and hindered by few meaningful deterrents (Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009). It follows, then, that to do otherwise – that is, to engage in more politically desirable forms of alcohol use, such as moderation or even abstinence – is rare, and an exercise fraught with its own risks (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Nairn, Higgins et al. 2006). Although sections of these qualitative research findings might overlap with some of the more dominant epidemiological claims, detailing the contextualised nuances and complexities of alcohol use as it emerges in the worlds of young adults can only help to enhance these understandings.

Key Alcohol Consumption Venues

With this point in mind, a significant proportion of the Australian qualitative research

literature has focused on how alcohol is used in the various ‘key alcohol consumption venues’ (Lindsay 2006: 30) frequented by young Australians, including pubs, clubs, sporting venues, festivals and other leisure spaces. Several major research projects have been conducted over the last twenty years with the aim of elucidating the sociocultural dynamics of such spaces across Australia’s state capitals, including Adelaide, Perth and Melbourne.

This research suggests that not only is drinking considered an important part of young people’s lives, but the spaces in which young people drink also figure as equally integral (Lindsay 2006). One study conducted in Adelaide, South Australia (De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999), suggests that on average young people consume over half of their weekly alcohol intake in licensed venues, such as local pubs or clubs. In keeping with the alcohol research field’s quantitative findings, De Crespigny et al’s (1999) participants reported drinking approximately 12 standard drinks over the course of a typical week, with approximately seven of those consumed in a licensed venue. These findings have been supported by Lindsay’s (2005, 2006) Melbourne-based research, where the participants in her studies consumed an average of 7–8 standard drinks but up to 10–11 standard drinks on ‘big’ nights and sometimes as little as 3–4 standard drinks on ‘quiet’ nights. Beer, wine and spirits were popular beverage choices for young Australians, with these choices often being gendered, with men preferring beer and women preferring wine or spirits (Lindsay 2005). However, these researchers, and others reviewed below, point out that less tangible forces, such as class, also play meaningful roles in mediating beverage and venue choices in the Australasian context. Research conducted in Perth, Western Australia by Grace et al. (2009) notes that those who are employed are more likely to drink cocktails, 30mL shots and bottled wines than those with less financial resources, such as students. Indeed, young adults on tighter budgets tend to seek out cheaper ways to achieve intoxication, including ‘pre-drinking’, taking up venue promotions or consuming inexpensive drinks such as cask wine (Northcote 2011). These findings are supported by research in other sites (e.g. Lindsay 2005, 2006).

Lindsay’s work depicts licensed venues themselves as heavily regulated environments, with minimal violence and other drug use, and strong (if not

universal) compliance with responsible service of alcohol legislation (Lindsay 2005). Given licensed venues provide young adults with potentially safer, more surveilled spaces compared with other locations in which young people drink, such as parks, beaches or private homes, these spaces unsurprisingly figure as significant sites for alcohol research, policy and intervention (Dietze, Livingston et al. 2014). Although illicit drug use is common in licensed venues – approximately 40% of study participants in Lindsay’s (2005) Melbourne-based research reported recent illicit drug use (e.g. marijuana, ecstasy and methamphetamines) – such practices are rarely observed by other patrons. According to Lindsay (2005: 36), the embodiments of other drug intoxication are also understood to be typically less obvious than those relating to alcohol use.

This research also highlights that young people’s nights out rarely involve the consumption of alcohol in a single space. Research in Perth (Northcote 2011), Victoria and South Australia (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010) suggests young people’s nights out evolve as they become mediated by different factors, constituting a complex process in which young adults are always reflexively engaging with their environments (see also Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011). Depending on one’s physical state, the affective environment of the venue they have chosen or the attitude of their friends, one may seek new venues during nights out that might provide a better atmosphere or experience (Northcote 2011).

In later sections of this literature review, I will explore some of these points in more depth. However, for now it is important to recognise that some of the most significant contributions to the qualitative research literature point to complexities that are potentially obscured by the epidemiological preoccupation with the prevalence or frequency of alcohol use. As some of these Australasian studies suggest, these measurements only provide a relatively narrow perspective on how young people use alcohol. Although young people engage in regular heavy drinking to the point where they might consider it taken-for-granted or ‘normal’, the ways in which heavy drinking is practised, and the environments in which heavy drinking can emerge, often vary significantly (De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Lindsay 2005, 2006; Northcote 2011).

Drinking Styles

One way in which these variations have been conceptualised is through the notion of ‘drinking styles’ (e.g. De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Harnett, Thom et al. 2000). For De Crespigny and colleagues (1999), a drinking style refers to a specific pattern of use, or series of choices made around alcohol, that is primarily shaped by unique combinations of first, the individual’s motivations and intentions for drinking on that occasion, and second, the environment in which the drinking occurs. De Crespigny et al.’s (1999) ethnographic research with young, female, regular drinkers in Adelaide, South Australia, established three distinct ‘styles’. The ‘pub style’ of drinking appeared to be the most favoured and central part of their participants’ social lifestyles, typically involving collective drinking practices such as ‘shouting’ rounds, in a relaxed atmosphere where the night’s costs could be reduced by drink promotions and ‘happy hours’. The ‘club’ drinking style occurred in larger venues where patrons were encouraged to fill dark, crowded dance floors, often consuming a wide range of cocktails and spirits. Typically the patrons at such venues were younger (mostly 18–22 years old), and the venue characteristics often increased the risks of losing track of one’s friends, becoming grossly intoxicated, and venturing home alone. The ‘restaurant/home’ drinking style was seen as associated with older people (22 years and older), and was characterised by drinking smaller amounts of higher quality beverages at home with friends in a way that was not considered to be ‘unsafe’ (De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999: 450). Indeed, this research highlights the ways in which the widespread practice of heavy drinking can fragment into different forms when mediated by other forces such as the space in which one drinks, one’s available financial resources, as well as their age, gender, friendship or desire for safety.

De Crespigny et al.’s research also helped lay the groundwork for Lindsay’s (2005, 2006) later research on the classed and gendered distinctions of different ‘niche’ and ‘commercial’ licensed venues in Melbourne (2005, 2006). In Lindsay’s (2006: 39) work, commercial venues offered participants predictable, ‘safe’ experiences such as those associated with branded pubs or large suburban dance clubs. Typically, these venues catered for a younger, broader, more ‘mainstream’ crowd that included manual workers and tradespeople, those who lived in the parental home and those with fewer financial resources. As such, drink promotions helped reduce costs for

their more 'price sensitive' patrons, in turn encouraging forms of drunken comportment that might be less tolerated at niche venues, despite a typically strong security presence (Lindsay 2006: 47). Commercial venues were also considered strongly heterosexual spaces (Lindsay 2006: 51). The meeting of potential sexual partners was typically more overt than in niche venues, as crowded dance floors provided opportunities for sexualised approaches and close dancing. Although many of Lindsay's female participants found this aspect of commercial venues enjoyable, others recognised the lack of intimate space for young women themselves to interact, away from the typically male-dominated central bar spaces. In many cases, female patrons reported being more vigilant about their personal and group safety in commercial venues, often consuming less alcohol, travelling in larger (predominantly single-sex) groups and relegating themselves to periphery areas of the venue.

In sum, commercial venues were valued for their lower prices, predictability and sexual opportunities, but also a sense of non-judgement and egalitarianism (Lindsay 2005, 2006). In contrast, Lindsay depicted 'niche' venues as less culturally accessible, catering to a more alternative crowd, with a more stylised, artistic aesthetic than that characteristic of commercial venues. For example, niche venues typically thrived on word-of-mouth promotion, with a generally older, middle class, and tertiary-educated clientele, who live independently, and are drawn towards non-commercial, independent music and a more diverse range of alcoholic products (Lindsay 2006: 40). Despite heavy drinking practices remaining normative in niche venues, overt displays of drunkenness were generally less favoured in comparison to commercial venues (Lindsay 2006: 41–42). The groups in niche venues were also more likely to be mixed gender, involving more subtle social, gendered and sexualised interactions. Where the boundaries between groups were fluid in commercial venues, allowing for more sexualised approaches between strangers, in niche venues Lindsay observed that it was often understood to be somewhat transgressive to engage with others outside of one's group (Lindsay 2006). Lindsay's (2005, 2006) work suggests that in an era where urban nightlife has become increasingly segmented and profit-driven, gender and class differences continue to shape alcohol use.

While the work of Lindsay and De Crespigny et al. highlight the situational

differences between using alcohol across venues marked by different gender norms and classed relations, other researchers highlight the various stages involved on a typical night out that can elucidate a further set of complexities. According to Borlagdan, Freeman et al. (2010), young people arranged their nights according to three particular stages. The first, preparatory stage of a typical night out reflected the strong, social bonding components that alcohol use often involves; getting ready or pre-drinking offered participants opportunities to socialise, establish expectations of the upcoming event, and map out social networks and possible opportunities for sexual interaction (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 40). This planning stage was also used to set the parameters for the second stage: the group experience ‘during the event’ that was to follow, enabling members to agree ‘on the stakes they were playing for and the degree of intoxication they wished to achieve’ (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 42). Indeed in this sense, friends were able to establish uniform expectations to which individuals could be held accountable; excessive drunkenness, or sobriety, would have repercussions as to the extent to which one could be considered to ‘belong’. It was important during the event, then, to contribute positively to the broader group, and more significantly, to not be a physical or emotional burden on others through deviations from the established drinking norms. The third stage, ‘discussion after the event’, enables those involved to generate further social opportunities out of their experiences, and also to re-frame their night out in terms of the party lifestyle, by drawing attention to the fun and spontaneity of the event through humorous re-tellings (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 45; see also Brown 2013; Brown & Gregg 2012; Sheehan & Ridge 2001). Post-event discussions were also considered spaces where relations between alcohol use and broader interests and values could be reinforced, such as those linking gender, mateship, partying and national identity, in turn shaping the wider public discourse on alcohol use (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 45).

This small sample of qualitative studies, at the very least, provides fine-grained empirical data on how young people consume alcohol in licensed venues, and elsewhere, throughout Australia’s major cities, including Melbourne, where my study took place. Together, these studies highlight, for example, that drinking is a fluid and situational practice that can emerge in a range of identifiable ‘styles’ depending on individual motivations, the people involved, or the venue chosen,

among myriad other factors. They also remark on the spectrum between ‘quiet’ nights and ‘big’ nights, and the phases one might experience between getting ready for a night out, through to group discussions following the event. This brief review also demonstrates how innovative and collaborative research approaches have provided a more nuanced appreciation of the social, gendered, classed and sexualised aspects of youth alcohol use.

I will organise the remainder of this literature review according to three further themes that emerge as common concerns for both qualitative alcohol researchers and the research participants they studied:

1. the need to account for how young people understand and negotiate the complexities and contradictions inherent in the practice of heavy drinking;
2. the need to acknowledge how alcohol use comes to be embedded in the broader temporal processes associated with living everyday life; and
3. in the face of critiques of young people’s alcohol use as irrational and irresponsible, the need to examine the motivations underpinning regular heavy drinking.

I will argue further that these themes in turn underpin my motivation to more explicitly engage with the concept of morality in this thesis. Indeed, the approach I have taken has also been profoundly shaped by my prevailing curiosity over why the existing literature has left this concept predominantly unexplored. As this chapter has indicated so far, the qualitative research literature on youth alcohol use largely resists engaging with notions of morality despite reporting myriad elements of youthful drinking that might be usefully explored using the concept. For example, some studies hint at notions of developing selves negotiating complex decisions and environments as they wrestle with idealised models of what it means to be a successful consumer, citizen, family member or student. More broadly, this research also examines gaps developing between public health and political discourses that encourage young people to behave in specific ways on the one hand, and the nuances of how young people themselves experience their worlds on the other. In the final sections of this chapter, I will further develop the case for mobilising a conceptualisation of morality in order to enhance understandings of youth alcohol

use. I begin with the first theme: how young people understand and negotiate the complexities and contradictions inherent in the practice of heavy drinking.

Complexities and Contradictions

Beyond the mere practicalities of negotiating the NTE, it has also routinely been made clear in the qualitative research literature that young people's efforts to control their alcohol use are highly contested. The state, popular discourses and the individual sensibilities of young people combine to produce a web of ambiguous and often contradictory messages. This ambiguity and contradiction has been the focus of much qualitative research both in Australia and overseas (e.g. Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2005, 2006, 2009; Measham & Brain 2005; O'Malley & Valverde 2004; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). On the one hand, there are the attempts by governments and public health institutions to regulate 'risky' behaviour through media campaigns or legislation that emphasises the primacy of caution and restraint. On the other hand, such attempts are subverted by ongoing processes of economic deregulation, enabling the extensive promotion of alcoholic products and venues, and the liberalisation of licensing regimes, which encourage citizens to express their identity through consumption. Amidst this tension, young people in particular are routinely positioned as the primary targets of both public health interventions encouraging moderation and marketing strategies seeking to shape and increase consumption.

As Waitt et al. (2011) elaborate, much of the institutional and public discourse on alcohol use relies on a public health framework that suggests drinking problems begin with the wide availability of alcohol itself, and thus preventing or at least mitigating the uptake of alcohol is routinely articulated to be a paramount priority. Lindsay (2010) contends that this position invites the relevant institutions to promote specific forms of individual self-regulation as a means of mediating the availability of alcohol, an invitation that has in the past manifested in the development of both standard drink definitions and official guidelines (e.g. NHMRC 2009). By setting these authoritative recommendations for alcohol consumption in terms of frequency and volume, institutions are in essence engaging in what Waitt et al. (2011: 255) call a form of 'passive education' for young people on 'how they should behave', more

specifically, how they should negotiate the abundance of drinking opportunities available in the market. In turn, a key technology in this approach is the distinction made between moderate forms of drinking on the one hand, and more problematic forms on the other. While one is continually linked to more favourable health and social outcomes, the alternative – problem or ‘binge’ drinking – risks marginalisation and demonisation (Lindsay 2009; Room 2011). At its most extreme, this distinction has been played out sensationally in news and media campaigns that perpetuate imagery of ‘night-time city-centre streets awash with disorderly young binge-drinkers’, which further fuel moral panics focused on youth, alcohol, and the vulnerabilities of health, law and order (Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011: 255; see also Brown & Gregg 2012; Zajdow, Lindsay et al. 2010;).

Several researchers in Australia (e.g. Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011) and the United Kingdom (Harnett, Thom et al. 2000; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008) have argued that the demands placed on young people to exercise responsibility and restraint in the name of health and broader community interests are at odds with other cultural representations of alcohol use that position it as integral to a range of valued pursuits. These authors have identified that discourses that surround acts of socialising, celebrating, national identity, friendship, sport and education, as well as its associations with family relations, major life-course transitions, and the process of becoming an adult, serve to uphold the cultural normalisation of heavy drinking.

Not to be outdone, alcohol industry and venue marketing communications also jostle for alcohol’s right to be considered the ‘essential accompaniment to young people’s social life’ (Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008: 361). Young people are routinely made the primary target of multi-platform marketing strategies seeking to promote the pleasures of intoxication and the symbolic value of alcoholic products and venues (Atkinson, Ross-Houle et al. 2017; Brodmerkel, Carah et al. 2013; McCreanor, Lyons et al. 2012). Indeed, print and television advertising have a long history of drawing upon associations between drinking, youth, play, sex and the perception of social success, in encouraging young people to experiment with a variety of different beverages, venues and actions, seemingly in the pursuit of unique and memorable experiences (Brodmerkel, Carah et al. 2013; Measham & Brain 2005; Szmigin,

Griffin et al. 2008: 361).

Over the last decade, however, online media, and more specifically social networking platforms, have added extra dimensions to how young people engage with the alcohol industry, providing a unique and volatile space in which alcohol branding, products and symbolism can be incorporated into consumer practices and identity formation (Atkinson, Ross-Houle et al. 2017; McCreanor, Lyons et al. 2012). With influence on young people's social networks, pro-alcohol messaging can proliferate through social media, and enjoy widespread distribution to large audiences with minimal active involvement by alcohol companies, and thus, with little formal regulation (Brodmerkel, Carah et al. 2013; McCreanor, Lyons et al. 2012). As such, social media has become a space in which the alcohol industry at large makes significant commercial investment in order to shape and reinforce a specific culture of intoxication that is perceived as pleasurable, valuable and symbolically appealing to younger consumers in the process of establishing their leisure and consumer identities.

Problematically, social networking platforms have also evolved at a rate that has often far exceeded the development of official regulatory frameworks, while such technological advancements have ultimately achieved forms of alcohol marketing engagement with young people that are ongoing and iterative (Brodmerkel, Carah et al. 2013). Indeed, some scholars have argued that such interactions have served to further entrench and intensify norms of heavy drinking and intoxication, subverting harm reduction efforts at a time where consumption is declining amongst the broader population (Brodmerkel, Carah et al. 2013; McCreanor, Lyons et al. 2012). This clouding of alcohol-related messaging is also undoubtedly exacerbated by state efforts to fund and develop night-time entertainment precincts and employment within the alcohol industry (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2009). Ultimately, young people emerge in this contradictory discursive landscape as formative subjects in a hegemonic neoliberal world where they are routinely made the primary targets of consumer messaging seeking to both encourage and suppress their desires (McCreanor, Lyons et al. 2012; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008).

Several researchers have articulated concerns over the extent to which the nuances of young people negotiating these complexities and contradictions are often overlooked, particularly in mainstream media representations of youthful heavy drinking (Crocket 2014; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011). Indeed, young people themselves have been reported as rejecting such simplistic misrepresentations of their leisure practices as media ‘hype’ (e.g. Lancaster, Hughes et al. 2012; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011). According to Grace and colleagues (2009: 54), such narrow framings ignore young people’s ‘fundamentally experiential’ understanding of alcohol use that, in many cases, includes their acute recognition of the various competing political, economic and public health discourses that shape their drinking experiences.

Recognising Risks and the Controlled Loss of Control

Following this, one particular acknowledgement of the qualitative research literature is young people’s acute awareness of the complexities associated with heavy drinking, and particularly its risks. Grace et al.’s (2009) participants, for example, articulated an array of practical concerns they considered when drinking heavily, such as their own physical safety, financial expenses, fatigue and health effects (see also Northcote 2011). Several other researchers have also pointed out young people’s recognition of how alcohol use can affect their social relationships (e.g. Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011; Niland, Lyons et al. 2013; Sheehan & Ridge 2001) and their capacities to fulfil other work, study or familial responsibilities (Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Northcote 2011). As such, qualitative research highlights the range of strategies employed by young people to limit potentially undesirable outcomes. In some cases, this could mean avoiding certain practices such as drink-driving, or engaging in arguments or physical fights, or where possible, guarding against the loss of personal items, passing out in public, staying out too late, vomiting or experiencing hangovers (Grace, Moore et al. 2009). Grace et al. (2009) also articulated several other strategies in which their participants, particularly young women, were more active, including: organising effective transport, mutually relying on social networks, consuming food and water during nights out, avoiding or attending specific venues,

and establishing certain values among friends (e.g. disapproving of drink-driving) (see also Armstrong, Watling et al. 2014). Indeed, such overt strategies are often enacted alongside those that are more subtle, such as merely reflecting on and discussing aspects of the night out as it progresses, and weighing up the probabilities of achieving a good time against the given circumstances (Northcote 2011).

The literature also highlights the importance of recognising how these strategies, and one's sense of self-control, can be mediated by various other forces, particularly gender (e.g. Armstrong, Watling et al. 2014; Brown & Gregg 2012; De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Fileborn 2011, 2012; Hutton, Griffin et al. 2016; Lyons & Willott 2008; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011). De Crespigny et al. (1999) explored some of the 'situational factors' taken into account by young women when considering nights out, particularly their own physical safety and the risks associated with their proximity to potentially violent or untrustworthy men. Leaving licensed venues early due to the risks involved, de-prioritising their own enjoyment while emphasising a mutual reliance on friends to ensure safety, and choosing safe and friendly venues were common themes when exploring strategies for negotiating Adelaide's nightlife. According to De Crespigny et al. (1999: 448), the exclusive responsabilisation of young women to guard against the behaviour of men in licensed venues was also encouraged by the drinking environments themselves, with some venue staff stating that young women were more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol, and thus need to develop enhanced personal vigilance. For these young women, nightclubs and dance venues were understood to be particularly problematic given the propensity for patrons to consume stronger alcoholic drinks, poor lighting, limited parking and transport options, and the higher ratio of males to females than smaller pubs or restaurants (see also Fileborn 2011, 2012). As such, as these young women became older, they found themselves more likely to engage in alcohol use in the home or at more relaxed, friendlier venues.

Grace et al. (2009: 36) also draw attention to the gendered nature of risk avoidance practices. In their research, young women were more circumspect about engaging in risky behaviour, and therefore less likely to be in physical danger. However, in many cases, their concern for their own physical safety extended to protecting others from harm, including male friends. Although the male participants in the study were

generally less concerned about staying together on a night out, they were also understood to mostly play protective roles for their friends and partners, by attempting to avoid physical conflicts, defusing inflammatory situations and generally being 'friendly' (Grace, Moore et al. 2009: 38). Grace et al.'s (2009) interviews with local venue managers in Perth also highlighted the significance of licensed venues as social, gendered and sexualised spaces, with managers voicing their concerns over gender imbalances where men might be competing for the sexual attention of a limited number of women. Venue managers reported responded to these concerns by supporting environments that facilitated a sense of relaxation, friendliness and diversity, through different spatial arrangements and a range of music, in the hope that these measures might reduce tension and conflict (Grace, Moore et al. 2009: 44–45). In addition, managers remarked on the need for skilled, experienced and non-aggressive venue security staff to assist in the creation of safer venues for young women.

These studies emphasise the ongoing need to consider young women's alcohol use not as narrowly defined or 'fixed' into a specific pattern such as 'binge drinking' but rather as having aspects that are deliberate, situational, experimental and flexible. Moreover, this work highlights an element of control in young people's consumption in the Australian context that is often overlooked in the popular discourses. Indeed, this sense of control often materialises in decisions young people make over when, where and who to drink with, and by extension, also implies their capacities to choose when not to drink heavily (Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008: 362). These particular readings of youth alcohol use have prompted numerous scholars, particularly in the United Kingdom, to explore various conceptualisations of how youthful drinking is often experienced as bounded and controlled (e.g. Crocket 2014; Measham 2004; Measham & Brain 2005; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). Railing against popular representations of the 'utterly unbridled excessive consumption' of youth, Measham (2004: 319) notes that young people's alcohol use is not only constrained by macro structural factors such as age, gender, ethnicity or class, but also, at the very least, circumscribed by local conditions such as time (e.g. predominantly the weekend), space (e.g. licensed venue or house party) and company (friends). What emerges from this depiction is a hedonism that is understood as significantly more situated, and indeed, 'calculated' (Measham 2004;

Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). Measham and Brain (2005) term their participants' drinking style as a 'controlled loss of control', designed to enable consumers to 'let go': to experience pleasure while simultaneously minimising impairment to one's finances, health or social and cultural credibility through extreme intoxication (Grace, Moore et al. 2009).

To elaborate further, Grace et al.'s (2009: 34) participants rarely felt themselves to be in any form of danger during nights out, and none required medical attention as a result of their alcohol or other drug use during data collection. Similarly, De Crespigny et al. (1999) found that their participants understood themselves to be largely in control of the process of achieving desired levels of intoxication. Their participants also reported having the capacity to recognise when such levels had been reached, and to reduce consumption in combination with drinking soft drinks or water. In both cases, forms of intoxication that were considered to be excessive were reported as being rare, often unintended, yet memorable. De Crespigny et al. (1999) quantified this understanding as occurring approximately once every two months, and perhaps better defined by the extent to which their participants visited multiple venues, engaged in dancing, or stayed out later than usual on these 'big' nights.

Through this literature, young people demonstrate a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of themselves, the practices and processes involved in heavy drinking, and the complex environments in which they typically use alcohol. In light of the complex realities depicted by qualitative research, the idea that young people ought to restrict their drinking to medically defined, politically desirable, 'responsible' or 'low-risk' forms at all times lacks relevance and applicability (Lindsay 2010). Indeed, this work demonstrates that their interpretations of the various risks associated with alcohol use and the broader NTE can, at times, differ significantly (Lindsay 2009, 2010). Rather than attempting to channel their attitudes and practices towards official prescriptions on how to use alcohol, Szmigin et al. (2008: 366) contend that young people who use alcohol tend to articulate a 'discourse of compatibility' that reflects the challenges of negotiating myriad conflicting demands and possibilities as a matter of daily life. As one grapples with balancing their social and cultural credibility, work and study commitments, and having fun with friends, for example, it follows that the association between individual drinking practices and

long-term health consequences in particular is likely to be relegated to the background (Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2009, 2010; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). Ironically, as Lindsay (2010: 484) points out, this individualised determination of what might constitute personal health and ‘moral self-management’ in relation to heavy drinking could in many ways be understood as the very product of the health promotion discourses that routinely emphasise the importance of individual responsibility in governing health risks.

Temporalities, Transitions and Trajectories: Alcohol Use and Everyday Life

The second key theme to emerge as a common concern for both qualitative alcohol researchers and the research participants they studied is alcohol use and temporality. Notions such as the enactment of a ‘discourse of compatibility’ offer valuable insights into how young adults understand themselves as entangled within wider webs of relations and demands that shape their heavy drinking practices. Indeed, the qualitative research literature depicts alcohol use as deeply embedded within myriad aspects of everyday life for young Australians (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Grace, Moore et al. 2009). This perspective is also supported by the UK and European literature (e.g. Demant & Østergaard 2007; Harnett, Thom et al. 2000; Measham 2004; Measham & Brain 2005; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). Such research helps us to move beyond existing understandings of alcohol use as mere accompaniment to major events or celebrations – where it often indeed remains integral (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Grace, Moore et al. 2009) – to a more inclusive understanding that situates heavy drinking as an important aspect shaping the rhythms of young people’s lives. Vast numbers of young adults, both in Australia and elsewhere, from weekend to weekend, gravitate towards the pubs and bars of city centres for leisure, almost in ritualistic fashion (De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Demant & Østergaard 2007; Lindsay 2009; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008; Tutenges & Rod 2009).

For young people with access to the necessary social, economic and cultural resources, leisure in general, and alcohol use in particular, can provide relief from the trivial, mundane routines of everyday life (Brown & Gregg 2012; Lindsay 2009). In the UK, Szmigin et al. (2008) have conceptualised drinking as a form of planned

'letting go' that provides a counterpoint to the rigid structures and constraints of work, school or family life. Going out or partying, then, provides opportunities to meet people and spend time with friends in environments, and with substances, that are ultimately designed to enhance pleasure. Understanding partying as deeply enmeshed in everyday life, however, does not diminish its importance or transformative power (Brown & Gregg 2012). Rather, researchers (e.g. Crocket 2014; Northcote 2011; Sheehan & Ridge 2001) argue that combining sociality with alcohol use can open fertile, experimental spaces in which young people can play with different aspects of their everyday lives in such a way that new meanings and identities can be developed. In this sense, partying can tread a line between extraordinary and mundane.

Brown and Gregg (2012), for example, illustrate how young women's use of Facebook to articulate carefully considered temporalities of preparation, anticipation and revision, can help even extraordinary nights out retain a certain mundane quality when considered in context. In another way, however, Facebook enabled young women to extend drinking events into the working week where humorous anecdotes can be used to punctuate the general banality of everyday life (see also Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Sheehan & Ridge 2001). Brown and Gregg (2012: 364) argue that this aspect of heavy drinking could be explained by participants' acknowledgement of the need to situate the pleasures of heavy drinking – including Facebook updates – within the broader web of neoliberal imperatives constituting much of their daily lives (see Kelly 2006). Indeed, the pleasures of heavy drinking figure as just one pursuit among others such as demonstrating one's capacity for accruing educational capital, flexibility and capacity in the labour market, and to avoid professional or educational failure (Brown & Gregg 2012). For Brown and Gregg (2012: 364), young women implicated in neoliberal discourses pursue weekend hedonistic opportunities as an important counterpoint to day-to-day mundanity, even if they compromise governing imperatives for sobriety and proper comportment. Moreover, the young women of their study took pride in their abilities to perform 'fun' and liberate themselves from the confines of fixed selves and rigid relationships, and seamlessly return to work the following week.

Despite widespread recognition of alcohol's potentially therapeutic benefits in the

contemporary neoliberal context, in the qualitative research literature young people also understood heavy drinking as a practice carrying inherent dangers. These dangers required conscious management not just within singular episodes but over the longer term. For instance, several researchers have looked beyond the week-to-week timeframe and towards how alcohol use might be implicated in major transitions across the course of one's life (e.g. De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009). Many young people participate in these qualitative research projects during a dynamic phase in their lives – typically from the teenage years into the early twenties. This phase is characterised by transition, such as going from education to professional employment, entering into committed relationships or moving into independent housing outside the parental home (Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Harnett, Thom et al. 2000). As Grace et al. (2009: 29) point out, young people in this period might have their leisure pursuits curbed by increasing work responsibilities, feeling the effects of alcohol use more acutely as they age, becoming more fatigued or enduring more intensified hangovers. For Lindsay (2005, 2006), these 'life stage elements' could help explain drinking biographies that were commonly articulated amongst her participants, such as infrequent heavy drinking episodes amongst younger drinkers, sustained heavy drinking by those in their late teens and early twenties, and 'safer' drinking patterns by those aged over thirty (Lindsay 2005: 31; see also Harnett, Thom et al. 2000; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009). Similarly, Lindsay (2006: 55) also suggests that one's life stage plays a significant role in determining how, when and why young people might shift their beverage or venue preferences as they age and build professional careers. Authors concerned with drinking biographies (e.g. Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009) have also argued that alcohol use can be a particularly valuable resource for young people at such times of major transition, particular for its socialising capacities and ability to aid acclimatisation to new and unfamiliar situations. Beyond helping establish a sense of belonging in these new environments (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Harnett, Thom et al. 2000), alcohol was also understood by Lindsay, Kelly et al.'s (2009) participants to relieve some of the anxieties produced by these transitions.

Despite many participants articulating an awareness that their heavy drinking

practices were likely to moderate in the future as they incurred more responsibilities or experienced the changes to socialising patterns that might come with marriage or having children, Lindsay, Kelly et al.'s (2009) research also elucidates the stubbornness of the social imperative to use alcohol, particularly in such times of uncertainty, that can often extend patterns of regular heavy drinking beyond normative trajectories (see also Advocat & Lindsay 2015; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009). One significant finding of this analysis is the ongoing demand and desire of young people to maximise the present, and focus on the immediate pleasures of intoxication, in the knowledge that they will likely have to moderate their future consumption (Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009: 16).

Again, Lindsay, Kelly et al.'s (2009) research points to the influence of neoliberal discourses in shaping how young adults understand alcohol use in particular, and motivate consumption practices in general. According to Lindsay (2010), the contemporary world in which young people live has emerged from the dominance of the older structures such as tradition, class and gender, into one that strongly emphasises personal responsibility, self-management and self-actualisation as dominant aspirations. In their daily lives, young people are called on to craft themselves into flexible, resilient consumers who must engage in ongoing training, self-monitoring, risk management and assessment, orientated towards continual improvement and ultimately, the exercise of one's sense of profitability and entrepreneurialism in the free market (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Brown 2013; Kelly 2006; Lindsay 2009, 2010). Under this regime, individuals face daily demands to enact a sense of control, rationality, discipline, self-awareness and reflexivity in a process of ethical subject formation in line with these dominant Western cultural, political and economic values (Brown 2013: 72; Kelly 2006; Room 2011).

This perspective positions young people as heavily invested in their heavy drinking practices, as not only is their health or social wellbeing understood to be at stake when they drink, but also the formation of their moral selves and their aspirations for the future. In Lindsay's research, young people routinely stressed this heightened awareness of the importance of learning self-control, and establishing personal 'boundaries' on the basis of following their own established 'values' (2009: 377). As has been already established, many young people take carefully considered steps

towards enhancing the pleasures of nights out while limiting the potential for experiencing the painful aspects of alcohol use. In the short term, this might emerge in intricate plans and timetables around drinking that were considered by many young people to be an integral and pleasurable part of going out (Brown 2013). However, more broadly, the qualitative research literature depicts young people as engaging in an ongoing educational process with regards to alcohol use, intoxication, pleasure and self-control, which relies heavily on the vast range of first-hand experiences that regular heavy drinking provides (Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Kelly 2006; Lindsay 2009). Undoubtedly, as Borlagdan, Freeman et al. (2010: 81) have argued, successfully managing this process is ‘no easy task for a young person’. This is particularly the case considering how the discourses of self-development must be negotiated among myriad other forces that ensure that the teeming complexities characterising heavy drinking are unlikely to be merely overridden by mere personal desire, responsibility or individual will to enact a ‘controlled loss of control’ (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 78).

Motivations

The third key theme to emerge as a common concern for both qualitative alcohol researchers and the research participants they studied is motivations for drinking. According to Sheehan and Ridge (2001: 357), young people rarely use alcohol ‘for the sole purpose of feeling inebriated’. Following this, Borlagdan et al. (2010) suggest that qualitative research offers broader insights into ‘why’ people drink than those available in descriptive statistics on the prevalence or frequency of drinking. Indeed, the majority of the literature reviewed in this chapter has been oriented towards elucidating the ‘intentions’ and ‘decisions’ made around alcohol use that might be overlooked by quantitative approaches (de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011).

Some studies have focused on ‘drivers’ that help promote or facilitate young people’s engagement in alcohol use. Lindsay, Kelly et al. (2009), for example, found that their participants were able to quickly identify the influence of friends, the availability of alcohol itself and the relative price of alcoholic beverages as the three most significant factors, which in turn point to the social and classed elements of

alcohol use. Elsewhere in the literature, however, young people have articulated a wide range of other forces that motivate their alcohol use that are potentially more challenging for policymakers to address. One such consistent finding in qualitative research is that young people tend to emphasise the pleasures of alcohol use as underpinning the decisions to engage in heavy drinking. Indeed, this point is routinely omitted from other arenas of alcohol discourse, with its absence reinforcing the dominant understanding of alcohol use as a malevolent, irrational and harmful practice without benefit (Brown & Gregg 2012; Duff 2004, 2008; Fry 2011; Keane 2009; Measham 2004; O'Malley & Valverde 2004). In contrast to these messages, young people's accounts of drinking and intoxication are often constituted almost entirely positively (Lindsay 2009; Niland, Lyons et al. 2013; Sheehan & Ridge 2001; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). Participants in Australian and international research recognise alcohol's mood-altering and social enhancement capacities (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Lindsay 2009; Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011; Niland, Lyons et al. 2013), as well as its ability to facilitate a sense of fun (Sheehan & Ridge 2001), relaxation, and 'escape' from everyday life (de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999). The pleasures of drinking can also extend to discussing and joking about nights out in the days following, allowing young people to 'access shared intimacies between friends' (Brown & Gregg 2012: 361), and to explore the 'possibilities for greater interdependence' among their networks (Sheehan & Ridge 2001: 360). According to Szmigin et al. (2008: 365), pursuing drunkenness itself is also often underpinned by a motivation to enhance stories and memories through the 'mischief making' that can accompany intoxication (Brown & Gregg 2012; Workman 2001).

Beyond the more corporeal, sensorial sense of pleasure that can emerge from alcohol use (Bøhling 2015; Jayne, Valentine et al. 2010), other qualitative research has also explored the extent to which young people's drinking is shaped by the perceived imperative for social contact, and the desire to achieve a sense of acceptance or 'belonging' (e.g. Armstrong, Watling et al. 2014; Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Brown & Gregg 2012; de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Fry 2011; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011; MacLean 2016). Borlagdan et al.'s (2010: 33) research, for instance, elucidated the importance of recognising how young people's decisions around alcohol use are closely entwined with the negotiation of group membership. Participants of their study understood the 'imperative to be sociable' as

ongoing and ‘unrelenting’, and viewed alcohol as a key resource in facilitating smooth, successful social integration (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 70). These authors make the point that social groups, not just individuals, often engage in heavy drinking on a regular basis together in order to maintain or enhance cohesion among their members in a process they conceptualise as pursuing ‘belongingness’. Other researchers (e.g. Advocat & Lindsay 2015; Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011; MacLean 2016) have also pointed out that engaging in heavy drinking can ensure young people’s actions are commensurate with their peers, as well as affording them meaningful, legitimate social roles, and, by extension, help to protect them from social sanctions or exclusion. In the example of Borlagdan et al.’s (2010) research, membership suitability was often measured by the extent to which one could be said to enact shared values of fun, irresponsibility, spontaneity and sociality. In this social process, the authors argue, alcohol use carries significant symbolic capital (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 35–37).

Lunnay, Ward et al. (2011) contend that young people are aware of the capacity for their alcohol use to generate social capital, and to enable social mobility, and are often active in these processes. This conceptualisation of the interactions between sociality and alcohol use opposes popular descriptions of young people as ‘passive subjects who simply absorb external pressures to drink’ (Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011). These researchers draw attention to the complex system of monitoring, recognition and reproduction that holds dominant drinking practices in place, and how their participants demonstrated their capacities to exploit these social dynamics in order to either influence their positions in group hierarchies, or even shape arrangements around group inclusion or exclusion (Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011: 432). Part of aligning oneself with socially ‘correct’ or ‘legitimate’ forms of drinking, however, involves distinguishing between oneself and other lesser individuals; while Lunnay, Ward et al. (2011: 432) suggest that can be advantageous to some young people, it presents challenges for others, such as those who abstain from alcohol.

Indeed, such perspectives mean that non-drinkers, or those who do not conform to local drinking standards, operate on the peripheries of these social dynamics. Such is the dominance of heavy drinking norms among young people, that non-drinkers often feeling compelled to explain their decisions through the construction of

alternative leisure identities that might help legitimate their abstinence, while saving face with the broader group (Advocat & Lindsay 2015; Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Nairn, Higgins et al. 2006). Indeed, the suggestion that abstainers are defined by actions in which they do not engage highlights the significance of this point (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010: 33). In keeping with the ways in which those who use alcohol prefer to understand themselves as autonomous and agentic, non-drinkers also re-framed these pressures in ways that kept their sense of individuality intact. Ultimately, these studies of the social dimensions of alcohol use draw attention to the complex, situated nature of negotiating the dual tasks of heavy drinking and striving to 'belong' (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010). As Danish researchers Demant and Østergaard (2007: 533) put it, young people often understand the process of getting intoxicated together as an enactment of the ongoing commitment to a 'mutual way of reassuring attraction to one another'.

The qualitative research literature has also recognised how young people understand alcohol as productive and self-formative, and as a significant milestone on the path towards adulthood, similar to voting or entering the workforce (Crocket 2014; de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Fry 2011; Harnett, Thom et al. 2000; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008; Workman 2001). The participants in Fry's (2011: 68) study, for example, recognised the youthful period of sustained heavy drinking as merely a transitory phase in their life courses that would inevitably be curbed by future adult responsibilities relating to family or employment. Given the cultural messages around alcohol use, consumption and youth, Fry (2011: 68) suggests that young people often feel pressure to maximise this particular period of their lives, which in turn undergirds experimental behaviour. Indeed, this is a finding that is well supported in the broader research literature, particularly in the work of Lindsay and her colleagues (e.g. Advocat & Lindsay 2015; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009). Lindsay and Kelly (2009: 18), for example, found that their participants recognised a significant challenge to negotiate the present, characterised by regular heavy drinking, ensuring they have an adequate 'time to shine' while also ensuring they come into their future responsibilities 'unscathed'. Again, such analyses situate youth alcohol use within a social milieu and direct attention to the links between individuals, not only to the various economic and social transitions that have come to define the contemporary period, but also how

individual motivations might be implicated in broader discussions about pleasure, sociality and adulthood.

In sum, recent research illustrates some key developments in the Australasian literature in theorisations of youth motivations for heavy drinking. Indeed, this body of work includes an increased focus on the corporeal, sensorial, therapeutic and social benefits of alcohol use, particularly those that underpin the pleasures associated with intoxication. Indeed, this has been a fairly recent and significant contribution to the field. Not content with merely elucidating alcohol's pleasures, however, this research has also begun to examine the dialogical interactions that occur between young people and this array of forces – for example, social networks, shared experiences, and various consumerist and cultural discourses – and how young people are not only aware of these interactions, but may also manipulate them to their social, bodily and developmental advantage. Indeed, it is in these complexities, made visible by open, sympathetic qualitative research approaches, that some of the moral dimensions and implications of youth alcohol use have begun to emerge in this literature. In what remains of this chapter, I speculate on how these aspects might be developed and synthesised, drawing on some specific ethnographic studies of drug use that have been particularly inspirational to the approach I take in this thesis. I highlight how these studies might re-orient researchers towards a more open and flexible understanding of morality in light of some of the obvious implications associated with simply resting on existing frameworks.

Towards Thinking With Morality: Moral Economies and Worlds of Alcohol

Through tracing these key themes, I have drawn attention to how much Australasian and international qualitative research on youth alcohol use has foregrounded the intricacies of how young people become entangled in complex environments laden with confusing, contradictory and indeed moralising messages, which in turn demand self-reflection, the exercise of good judgement and ongoing ethical work. Given these dynamic complexities, it is perhaps little wonder that there is almost universal recognition in this literature that existing interventions and strategies designed to address problematic alcohol use and related harms could be more sympathetic to the complexities of young adult life. As Lindsay, Kelly et al. (2009) argue, authoritative

approaches that assume young people will merely act on health promotion advice in appropriate and desirable ways betray not only institutional emphases on the importance of individual choice, but also ignore young people's own motivations for drinking, the complexities they deal with and the ongoing processes constituting their daily lives.

Such approaches also largely ignore how moral worlds, those in which alcohol (and other drug) use occurs, come to be assembled. In contrast, some ethnographic studies of drug use have been particularly illuminating on this score. Bourgois' (1998) ethnographic research among heroin users in San Francisco, for example, suggested that the barriers preventing public health researchers, outreach workers, or governments from understanding the local moralities of drug use, not only hinder the development of effective policy and interventions, but in some cases, can actually exacerbate harm. In his work, Bourgois (1998, 2002) took the over-reliance on epidemiological modalities in particular, and the psychological, behaviourist paradigm of public health in general, as his primary concerns. In his view, traditional public health research tends to seek out discrete behaviours that can be counted and measured in order to foreground the responsibility of the individual in governing health risks. At the very least, Bourgois (1998) argues, preoccupations with individual behaviour ignore the roles played by the criminal justice system, drug legislation, the ongoing marginalising processes of mainstream discourse, and the structuring of networks and practices by race, class, gender or sexuality in shaping the lives of San Francisco's 'dope fiends'.

Bourgois (1998) conceptualised his participants' predicaments as a complex 'moral economy' co-constituted by the users' mutually dependent colleagues, as well as a range of other physical spaces and materials, such as shooting 'encampments', syringes and cash. These 'addicts', as Bourgois called them, were obliged to make emotional, economic, biological and moral investments in this local economy, primarily in order to stave off impending drug withdrawal, but also to cultivate respect amongst their peers based on the accrual of street-wisdom and cultural capital. Respect was most visibly developed through the enactment of successful income generation practices and often defined in relation to other users who had been less prolific in sourcing money for dope. By extension, this meant that actions such

as ripping off peers, stealing and sharing syringes, or owing others money, the types of practices that had been frequent targets of intervention, could be understood as valued and legitimate practices in the context of this particular moral economy. Put differently, where engaging in such practices might at times be understood by harm reductionists or public health researchers as symptomatic of broader moral failings, to the heroin users themselves, these actions were considered integral to their survival, and moreover, to their status as ‘righteous dope fiends’.

This perspective on life as a heroin user in San Francisco suggests that imposing specific moral worldviews, either through research methodologies, treatment practices, legislation or discourse, without deference to the intricacies of these local moralities, can further distance users from the very messages authorities seek to convey (Bourgois 1998; Lindsay 2010). On one level, Bourgois recognised that many of his ethnographic colleagues had internalised normalising judgements routinely made about heroin ‘addicts’. For his participants, this process could exacerbate feelings of depression, shame and confusion about their drug use, given the conflicts they can experience between successfully performing the role of a ‘dope fiend’ while simultaneously being marginalised from the mainstream on the basis of their perceived failings. More pragmatically, Bourgois also identified that interventions such as supplying users with clean syringes would have not only deflated their local market value, and limited needle sharing and theft, but had been prevented by what he described as ‘puritanical paranoia’ (Bourgois 1998: 2336).

Indeed, the primary aim of Bourgois’ participant-observation research was to illuminate the inherent relationality and contingency of the realities in which ‘dope fiends’ had become entangled. Such characterisations of everyday life are indeed obscured when seemingly objective ‘facts’ regarding drug use are reified. Referring to the discipline of anthropology in particular, but history in general, Bourgois (2002) contends that at different stages such moralising techniques have been used by powerful institutions to forge colonies, wage conquests and engage in genocide, for example, and as such, these enactments of power on the basis of moral truth claims must be held to account.

In his ethnographic research with ‘alcoholics’ attending Alcoholics Anonymous

meetings, treatment centres and detoxification programs in the United States, Denzin (1987) also developed a perspective on alcohol use that rails against simplistic, individualising depictions of drinking and its related problems. Such approaches, Denzin (1987: 193) argued, overlook the fact that how people are taught to drink in their social worlds, how they learn about drunkenness, or how to identify markers of problematic alcohol use (and of problematic drinkers), and are offered a variety of interpretations as to how or why such practices might be understood as problematic.

Pre-empting Bourgois' (1998) later work, Denzin suggested that modern behavioural scientific perspectives played an influential role in orchestrating a simplistic, and indeed divisive, discourse around alcohol use. For example, scientific texts offer evidence of 'normal' drinking patterns, as opposed to more problematic drinking patterns, while providing causal explanations for how problem drinking emerges, as well as prescriptions for how to relieve individuals of their failures should they fail to enact 'normal' drinking (Denzin 1987). What is ignored by the individualising paradigm, however, is that perspectives on alcohol use are multiple and contested; the alcohol discourse is highly contradictory, producing not only a variety of opinions, but an ambivalence on behalf of users (Denzin 1987). Indeed, even the capacity for institutions to ascribe negative valences (Room 2011) to specific forms of drinking over others has emerged from this inherent contradiction and competition that characterises the messaging around alcohol use, not only in the US but also in Australia (Lindsay 2009; Room 2011).

In response, Denzin positioned his own research as a phenomenological study of both 'biography and society', recognising the contingent relationships entangling 'the private problems of alcoholics with the public discourse and the public experience that surrounds alcoholism's presence in American society' (Denzin 1987: 15–16). Denzin argues that the combination of the individualising public health paradigm, together with the ethos of self-responsibility and self-control that characterises the neoliberal era, produces the 'alcoholic' in specific ways, most notably by comparison with what Denzin (1987: 18) calls the 'mythical social drinker who drinks normally'.

This collision between public consciousness, discourse and the opposing figures of

the ‘normal drinker’ and the ‘alcoholic’ creates an added moral distinction between those who possess the capacities to practise drinking ‘normally’ (or ‘responsibly’ or ‘healthily’) on the one hand, and the moral failures who do not possess those capacities on the other. In Denzin’s view, and indeed in Bourgois’, blindly accepting this discourse of individual responsibility shifts critical attention from the various political forces involved in producing and perpetuating this understanding, which in turn fosters stigma and shame (Denzin 1987).

Denzin’s point is that alcohol is implicated in how people experience and relate to the worlds around them, and thus must be considered ‘interactionally and interpretively as a structure of experience that is produced and reproduced’ (Denzin 1987: 18). For Denzin’s participants, this relational understanding of alcohol use registered most poignantly in their experience of forms of temporality and emotionality that differed significantly from those considered by the mainstream to be ‘normal’ (Denzin 1987: 18). For alcoholics seeking support and treatment, the presuppositions organising the ‘normal’ world, such as how to organise one’s time or emotions, lack a certain relevance. In the lived experience of alcoholism, Denzin (1987: 18) argues, the composition of the world of alcohol ‘shatters’ everyday assumptions, rendering them meaningless.

Conclusion

The analysis that unfolds in the rest of this thesis most closely aligns with the perspectives articulated by scholars such as Bourgois (1998, 2002) and Denzin (1987), who have, along with shortcomings identified in alcohol research, policy and health promotion discourse, and my own personal experiences of drinking with young adults, inspired my interest in interrogating the relationship between morality and alcohol use. Indeed, alcohol (and other drug) use is already a particularly salient category invoked in discussions of contemporary morality, and vice versa (Rasanayagam & Heintz 2005; Room 2011), and certainly moral terms and concepts already pervade the qualitative research discourse. Lindsay’s (2005, 2006, 2009) participants, for example, readily used ‘new health promotion’ vernacular, including notions of ‘responsibility’, ‘risk’ and ‘control’, while Brown & Gregg (2012) echo Bourgois when they refer to the ‘moral economy’ of television advertising around

alcohol use that often affords currency to some voices over others, affecting the perceived distribution of ‘responsibility’. Furthermore, reports of group ‘norms’, ‘rules’, ‘values’, ‘motivations’, ‘justifications’, ‘standards’, ‘judgements’ (e.g. Barker 2010; Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Crocket 2014; de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999), and even ‘ethics’ (e.g. Crocket 2014; Duff 2004; Zajdow 2010) and ‘morality’ (Room 2011; Yeomans 2013), litter both the qualitative research literature and contemporary Australian policy discourse (e.g. National Health and Medical Research Council 2009; State of Victoria 2012).

While these terms might be useful footholds for academic analysis, without examining how they might fit together as part of a coherent framework that is applicable to the experiences of ethnographic participants, we risk foreclosing the field to new concepts and ways of thinking about the intersection of alcohol use and morality (Zigon 2008, 2013). There have been some brief, tentative attempts. De Crespigny, Vincent et al. (1999: 443), for example, observed that alcohol use varied ‘systematically with implicit norms about situational requirement’, in a way that implies a combination of both order and fluidity. Lindsay, Kelly et al. (2009: 6) suggested something similar when they argued that deliberately heavy drinking amongst their participants was considered ‘normative’, yet still highly situational and ‘contingent on context’. The following chapter of this thesis (Chapter Three) is dedicated to exploring and detailing a novel way of thinking about morality that might more adequately fill this gap in how we understand alcohol use amongst young people. At the very least, this process begins in the vein of the qualitative research literature I have reviewed in this chapter, with what Duff (2011: 405) calls the ‘laborious empirical task’ of documenting the various social, material and discursive forces collaborating to produce local drinking moralities. However, I argue, Zigon’s framework also offers alcohol researchers a way to apprehend the moral significance of these entanglements to young people themselves, and more importantly, to how they use and understand alcohol.

Chapter Three:

Morality as Assemblage

In this chapter, I introduce a novel way of thinking about morality, derived in the main from the work of anthropologist Jarrett Zigon. In response to his recognition of the ubiquity and vagueness with which moral terminology has historically been deployed in his own discipline of anthropology, Zigon has spent the last decade developing a theoretical framework and conceptual vocabulary based on his own ethnographic research on local moralities in Russia and the United States. Zigon's framework diverges from previous anthropological approaches to the study of morality, particularly in his introduction of 'assemblage' thinking.

Since its initial development in the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), the notion of assemblage has become a highly visible and influential conceptual resource in the social sciences (Marcus & Saka 2006). It has evolved significantly in recent decades through its application in science and technology studies (STS) in both the development of actor-network theory (Latour 2005) and other projects in ontological politics, particularly those in the health arena (e.g. Mol 2002). These experimentations with assemblage in STS have laid the platform for much recent qualitative research in the alcohol and other drug field that takes assemblages of drug use as the unit of analysis as opposed to specific drugs or specific users (e.g. Bøhling 2015; Duff 2014; Farrugia 2014; Malins 2004). The assemblage has been deployed as an analytical tool uniquely equipped to describe how alcohol and other drug use emerges in situations dense with complexity and co-constituted through a range of heterogeneous phenomena.

AOD research has increasingly used the concept of assemblage to integrate the shifting elements and formulations of what is normally considered 'background' or 'context' into the activity of consumption itself, thus increasing its engagement with non-human agencies that ultimately mediate the agential capacities of those who use drugs (Farrugia 2014; Malins 2004; Marcus & Saka 2006). In doing so, this non-discriminatory, non-hierarchical approach illuminates the multiplicity and contingency of elements that can co-constitute drug use experiences, simultaneously enabling the description of a broader network of distributed agency and the

displacement of the individual-substance relationship as the primary focus of analysis (Farrugia 2014). In this thesis, I operationalise assemblage thinking in a similar way in order to apprehend the complexities and significance of youth alcohol use from a moral perspective. To be specific, I aim to trace the ways in which moralities, or moral *assemblages*, emerge in interactive events between young people and alcohol, guided by Zigon's analytical tools, many of which I will describe more fully later in this chapter.

The moral assemblage analysis I undertake in this thesis departs from assemblage-based AOD research through a subtle shift in focus intended to elicit entirely different data on the moral dimensions and experiences of youth alcohol use. I am specifically interested, first, in the ways in which moral assemblages emerge primarily through unique interactions between different moral discourses and embodied moral dispositions, and second, in the different effects of these interactions on young people's capacities to craft desirable moral subjectivities, ethical practices and moral worlds more broadly. I argue that such elements of alcohol use have been overlooked or under-theorised in the existing literature, reliant as these approaches have been, to this point, on abstracted and reductive understandings of morality.

Zigon's assemblic version of morality, I argue, enables my analysis to locate the moral dimensions and implications of alcohol use within the very complex assemblages in which drinking and young people emerge. The use of assemblage in this sense provides opportunities to explore how competing moral discourses and dispositions conflict with and slide past each other, or how they come to exist comfortably in the same situation. This manoeuvre is particularly vital to the process of examining the differences between young people's lived experiences of drinking, and the various moralised injunctions pervading the official alcohol discourse, such as those embedded in risk guidelines. At a more concentrated level, Zigon's conceptualisation of the moral subject offers an additional framework for understanding the local motivations and aims shaping participants' heavy drinking practices, while his concerns for how moral experience is primarily concerned with the ethical maintenance of valued relations in accordance with desired life trajectories, I argue, offers a unique window onto the moral significance and complexity of heavy drinking for young adults.

These aspects of Zigon's theoretical framework, and its potential utility in this thesis will become clear as the discussion in this chapter unfolds. Initially, however, I intend to revisit the roots of Zigon's theory which derive from his own ethnographic research.

Towards a Flexible Anthropological Theory of Moralities

The anthropology of moralities project Zigon has developed over the last decade has embraced some significant challenges that might help us to make sense of the convoluted moral worlds in which young people drink. The first is the development of a 'critical hermeneutics'; that is, engaging with ethnographic interlocutors in the process of re-conceiving the range and meanings of the moral concepts we currently have available. As Zigon (2014b: 751) explains, 'this is not to consider how the people we study act good or rightly, but rather to ask if good and rightly are the most appropriate concepts for articulating what these people are saying and doing'.

In Zigon's (2013) view, anthropologists and indeed other social scientists continue to unconsciously adopt well-held assumptions about the nature of morality, in particular the various terms and concepts inherited from Western moral philosophy. However, while shared 'ethical norms', 'standards', 'values' or 'ideals' may provide comfortable categories for organising the 'messiness' of everyday life in official documents and research articles, equating morality with normative social behaviour is often analytically inadequate for comprehending the range of life's conflicts, ambivalences and struggles (Zigon & Throop 2014). This also applies to thinking about morality in terms of orienting action towards what is normatively considered to be 'right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad', terminology historically associated with the concept.

Despite disciplinary concerns over reflexivity, and indeed the broader crises of representation that anthropology has endured over the last forty years or so (see Clifford & Marcus 1986), anthropologists themselves have long resisted defining the concept of 'morality', at least in any formal sense. The ongoing currency of Abraham Edel's 1962 definition, quoted below, in subsequent publications devoted to the study of moralities (e.g. Howell 1997; Rasanayagam & Heintz 2005), reflects this

point:

A morality is thus taken to contain: selected rules enjoining or forbidding (e.g. a set of commandments), character-traits cultivated or avoided (virtues and vices), patterns of goals and means (ideals and instrumental values); a bounding concept of the moral community and a set of qualifications for a responsible person; a more or less distinctive selection of linguistic terms and rules for moral discourse; some patterns of systematisation; some selected modes of justification; some selection from the range of human feelings which in complex ways is tied into the regulative procedures; and, involved in all of these, some specific existential perspective or view of man, his equipment, his place in nature, the human condition and predicament. (Edel 1962: 69)

Edel's definition substantiates the conceptual complexity of morality, the constituents of which are 'partly types of content, and partly features of the way the content is organised in the life and consciousness of a people' (Edel 1962: 69).

Following this, it is not difficult to anticipate how such a definition allows morality to bleed into other fields of anthropological enquiry. Moreover, as Zigon (2007: 132) would protest, there is often no indication that locals being studied would share the same conceptualisations or even necessarily label their practices as 'moral' or 'ethical'.

The vagueness and lack of explicit theoretical engagement with the notion of morality in anthropology laid the foundations for the development of Zigon's theory. Zigon and Throop (2014: 3) argue that paying critical attention to ethnographic description of moral experience without an established framework for recognising what counts as moral ensures that when it comes to interpreting research data, anthropologists are forced to lean on these traditional philosophical systems or terminology or, more problematically, individual moral assumptions. If, as Zigon (2013: 202) argues, this is not acceptable in other fields of anthropological analysis, why should it suffice for the study of morality? Indeed, Zigon (2014b: 754) has posed this question more explicitly himself:

Is it unreasonable to consider the possibility that a very particular set of moral

concepts that have a very particular history would not entirely or even adequately cover the range of possible moral/ethical concerns, problems, anxieties, or ways of being-in-the-world?

Anthropological Approaches to Studying Moralities

In order to sidestep conceptually defining the ‘moral’, contemporary anthropological approaches have tended to foreground the ‘everyday’ ways in which forms of morality can be experienced, discussed and lived (Heim & Monius 2014). These attempts have tended to branch into two lines of enquiry: the first focuses on processes of individual moral reasoning in extraordinary moments of dilemma, and the second involves a more contextualised examination of how specific dispositional capacities are crafted with the aim of becoming virtuous.

According to Howell (1997: 14–16), approaches to studying morality concerned with moral reasoning tend to focus on specific moments of dilemma, where individuals are forced to make choices between alternative possible actions. Robbins (2007), for example, suggests that societies are organised into different spheres that can be characterised by specific values. As such, these spheres ordinarily operate to encourage the reproduction of socially approved behaviours. Dilemmas arise when these spheres come together and clash in problematic ways, such as in times of significant social upheaval. These moments can stimulate reflection and illuminate broader ranges of moral viewpoints that may, in turn, problematise previously taken-for-granted acts of reproduction. In this sense, Robbins’ understanding of morality provides some room for considering how reflective individuals might enact a degree of agency in shaping the path ahead (Robbins 2007: 311).

As degrees of reflexivity and the availability of alternative evaluations vary widely across and within societies, a moral analysis must enquire first, after the kinds of reasoning individuals, or their social groups, are engaging in when justifying or condemning acts and decisions, and second, the extent to which they possess the freedom to enact their moral desires (Howell 1997: 14–15; Laidlaw 2002; Robbins 2007). This particular approach has its root in Kantian interpretations of moral action, as that which is not the result of habituated virtue but of reason, where one must act in accordance with an innate, transcendental morality in spite of one’s

natural inclinations (Mahmood 2005: 25).

Alternative approaches, such as attempts to examine dispositional or virtue ‘ethics’, consider how persons make themselves into ‘properly attuned moral persons’ through engagement in a set of specific ethical practices (Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2005; Zigon 2007). Inspired by Foucault, Mahmood asserts that this approach enables an understanding of ethics as ‘always local and particular, pertaining to a specific set of procedures, techniques, and discourses through which highly specific ethical-moral subjects come to be formed’ (2005: 28). The goal of such ethical procedures is to cultivate and achieve a particular state of being, happiness or truth (Mahmood 2005: 28).

In his ethnography of Islamic cassette-sermon auditions in Egypt, Charles Hirschkind explored the sensibilities required to live as devout Muslims in the increasingly secularised conditions of contemporary Cairo. The sermon listeners with whom Hirschkind worked sought to reconstruct their own knowledge, emotions, and sensibilities in accord with their models of Islamic moral personhood set down by the teachings of the Quran. They did so through engaging in specific practices in order to craft perceptual habits that incline one toward certain virtuous acts, discourses and gestures, defined by Hirschkind as an ‘ethics of listening’ (Hirschkind 2001: 641). In light of this work, Hirschkind suggested that the pedagogy of religious traditions, long thought of as authoritative and commanding, might need to be re-imagined by anthropologists as ‘founded upon such embodied capacities of gesture, feeling, and speech, rather than in terms of an obedience to rules of belief in doctrine’ (Hirschkind 2001: 632).

Indeed, these two approaches have expanded anthropological and ethnographic conceptualisations of morality. However, the notion that ‘morality’ is reserved for conflicts or dilemmas that one must consciously work through in accordance with ‘truths beyond the immediate interests of the individual’ (Rasanayagam & Heintz 2005) remains central to anthropological understanding. According to Zigon (2007), this assumption is, to some extent, implicit in both the dispositional approach and the reasoning and choice approach. Although Zigon is perhaps more sympathetic towards the former, he finds both frameworks somewhat restricting in the sense that

they understand moral dispositions as cultivated only through the ethical practices of very specific, isolated cultural domains such as religious contexts. Given this relatively inflexible vantage point, Zigon argues that existing approaches to studying morality are seemingly obstructed from adequately exploring how dispositional training can be transferred and translated across varied social contexts (Zigon 2007: 133). In light of this impasse, and inspired by his original ‘critical hermeneutics’ project, Zigon has spent much of the last decade attuning his own analytical sensibilities to the situational struggles, stresses and anxieties associated with living through and across life’s multiple domains (Zigon 2009b: 256). Indeed, his own ethnographic research experiences have been crucial to shaping his inductive, sympathetic approach to the study of morality that lends itself to a characterisation more akin to flexibility or ambivalence than anything more definitive. I will explore Zigon’s framework and terminology in more detail in the next section.

Moral and Ethical Assemblages: Zigon’s Theory and Concepts

The aim of this section is to clarify and define some of the key Zigonian concepts that will be used throughout this thesis. Specifically, I will look at Zigon’s deployment of ‘morality’, ‘ethics’, and moral ‘assemblages’, as well as the concepts of ‘attunement’ and ‘fidelity’ that relate to Zigon’s notion of moral subjectivity as introduced in some of his more recent work (e.g. Zigon 2014a). Indeed, this battery of analytical tools has evolved in relation to Zigon’s own experiences of conducting ethnographic research, and the need to formulate a more open, flexible perspective on morality capable of capturing the intricacies of living through multiple domains and situations. To reiterate, Zigon’s framework considers any attempt to impose or reify a static, transcendental or enduring understanding of morality on ethnographic data to be unhelpful and misleading. Rather, Zigon’s treatment of morality as assemblage, inspired by his own research, posits that social situations are best understood as unique conglomerations of heterogeneous and disparate phenomena that become assembled and re-assembled processually. In his ethnographic studies, and subsequent articles articulating his theoretical developments, Zigon focuses on the co-constitution of local moralities through three aspects in particular. The first involves two types of moral discourses – public and institutional, which proclaim the

truth or rightness of particular moral positions (Zigon 2009b: 258–9), while the second, what he calls ‘embodied moralities’ (Zigon 2010b: 12), concerns the ways in which individuals themselves cultivate and articulate their own moral dispositions. I will explain moral discourses first in the section below.

Zigon’s ‘Morality’: Institutional and Public Discourses

According to Zigon (2009b: 258), part of being an institution, such as a government, organised religion, workplace or charity, involves being an authoritative moral voice, and routinely laying claim to the ‘truth or rightness of a particular kind of morality’. Although the moral positions of various institution may be internally debated, they are typically articulated as though they are unquestioned, and as such, exert significant influential power on the vast numbers of people who engage with them as a matter of course (Zigon 2009b, 2014c). As I will demonstrate in the following section, much of Zigon’s ethnographic research in Russian drug rehabilitation programs has been focused on the Russian Orthodox Church discourses that shaped and underpinned the daily running of treatment programs, and how these overlapped with the more ‘public’, political, neoliberal-leaning discourses emerging in post-Soviet Russia at the time.

Although some public moral proclamations might be closely related to institutional positions, for the most part the public discourse of morality offers an alternative voice that emerges from ongoing dialogues between *non*-institutional sources such as the media, philosophy, or beliefs and opinions articulated in everyday conversation (Zigon 2009b: 259). In Zigon’s deployment, these various discursive traditions collaborate in moral assemblages, enabling a wide range of possibilities for how moral messages might resonate with those entangled in them (Zigon 2011). Moreover, these complexities ensure that moral assemblages are also able to be transformative and generative of new moral assemblages through articulations that might also shape the public discourse on morality (Zigon 2009a). Indeed, as Zigon (2009b, 2011) points out, group therapy sessions, or even ethnographic interviews, can be implicated in re-assembling moral worlds. In the following section, I will explore an example from Zigon’s own fieldwork to clarify his use of these concepts and how they might be applied in ethnographic research.

Moral Discourses in a St. Petersburg Drug Rehabilitation Program

Across 2006 and 2007, Jarrett Zigon conducted eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork in multiple venues constituting a drug rehabilitation and HIV prevention and care program run by the Russian Orthodox Church in the St. Petersburg area of Russia. In a later article discussing his findings, Zigon (2011) argued that this particular program was rooted in the view that rehabilitation is, in essence, a process orientated towards the complete overhaul of one's moral personhood, and set about ethnographically studying the possibilities for, and discursive influences on, the process of working on the self in the context of drug treatment. (Zigon 2011).

In doing so, Zigon (2007, 2009a) developed his phenomenological understanding of the social uses of moral discourses, embodied modes of moral life, and the reflective and potentially transformative practices he calls 'ethics'. From this point of view, Zigon (2011: 31) argues, morality cannot be considered as a total or unified concept because any force claiming a particular truth or rightness is only experienced by individuals partially and aspectually. For example, although the church-run program Zigon studied claimed to propagate and teach only Orthodox morality and ethical practices, a closer analysis elucidated a more complex, overlapping, 'assemblage' of diverse therapeutic and moral discourses (Zigon 2011: 31).

According to Zigon (2011: 34), the psychologists overseeing group therapy sessions continually emphasised the need for rehabilitants to 'do work on themselves', which would initially require the crafting of humility and patience. It was made clear to participants that this would not be a 'quick fix' that might cover over their addiction, but a time-consuming, laborious, self-reflective task that would ultimately measure its success by the extent to which they could cultivate entirely new, 'unaddicted' persons (Zigon 2011: 34). Indeed, those interested in the program were encouraged to engage in manual labour, form strict, meaningful relationships with time from the outset, and keep weekly appointments with administrators prior to admission, in order to demonstrate their dedication to the task of rehabilitation.

Although such techniques would be familiar to those cognisant of 12-step programs, for example, Zigon's main focus is the diverse range of discursive traditions that informed these therapeutic techniques and influenced their practice. He argues that

these included, for example, institutional discourses such as the Russian Orthodox Church, and public discourses emerging in the post-Soviet era that, Zigon (2011) suggests, overlap with the discourse of neoliberalism. Together, these various discourses supported each other in undergirding the legitimacy of these techniques and the broader aims of re-making moral persons as a way to approach drug rehabilitation.

Believing ‘the full potentiality of human nature is to become like God’ (Zigon 2011: 37), the Russian Orthodox Church had broader intentions to morally and spiritually renew society through education and social welfare programs designed to change moral persons at the individual level. This doctrine dictated that each human inherently carries the intellectual, emotional, and ethical capacities to struggle against the sins of the world and work towards moral perfection, projecting a developmental model of moral personhood that can be enhanced by hard, ethical work (Zigon 2011: 37). According to Zigon (2011: 37), this not only includes enacting the ‘good’ towards others, but also fostering the development of morally good intentions, motives, thoughts and emotions, and importantly, the desire to maintain these qualities through constant work on the self.

The motivations of the Russian Orthodox Church are also echoed in post-Soviet discourse that emphasises the obligations of contemporary citizens to make themselves into proper moral persons in order to re-make their society more broadly, in the wake of the Soviet era. Indeed, both discourses also acknowledge a long-term perspective on this rebuilding process that will ultimately take shape ‘one person at a time’, beginning with each citizen ‘cultivating the particular characteristics of a moral individual such as responsibility or discipline’ (Zigon 2011: 39).

With its ‘hyperemphasis on individuals taking responsibility for their entire way of being’, and particularly their own self-development, neoliberalism is the ‘unmarked discourse in the assemblage of the church-run programme’ (Zigon 2011: 45–46). As Zigon remarks (2011: 46), the influences of neoliberalism added a layer of contradiction to the rehabilitation program, in that the Church claimed to be fighting global changes emerging from the effects of neoliberal discourse. Ironically, by offering a decentralised welfare program emphasising the importance of personal

responsibility, the program aligned neatly with the very form of governance it sought to counter (Zigon 2011: 46). The product of this contradiction, however, was that those emerging from the rehabilitation program left ‘better prepared to live in the flexible, self-responsible, and hyper-self-aware world’ (Zigon 2011: 46).

Zigon’s work drew specific attention to how these various discourses were active in the ways in which therapeutic techniques in the rehabilitation program were accepted and practised. One example he gave was the significance of public confessions in group therapy sessions. In both religious and earlier Soviet discourse, the confession is seen as a public, critical ethical process that ‘endows one with personhood’ (Zigon 2011: 40). Curiously, however, in group therapy both the staff and participants believed they were engaging in a practice based on psychology that was entirely unrelated to the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In these sessions, rehabilitants were encouraged to publicly list several personal qualities they wished to develop or discard, and then asked to articulate their progress to the rest of the group on a weekly basis (Zigon 2011: 42). Their assessment would often then be put to the group whose members could give the individual their own rating in a process of subjectivisation and individualisation akin to ‘public shaming’ (Zigon 2011: 42). This technique was devised so that individuals could come to recognise themselves through the eyes of others, and integrate those critical perceptions into their self-understanding. In the main, critiques were aimed at barriers that might prevent the individual rehabilitant from successfully working on themselves, including specific bodily practices, such as smoking, as well as emotional responses, such as apathy towards failures or lapses (Zigon 2011: 42). In this process, Zigon (2011: 44) argues, the moral subject – the rehabilitant – is partly constituted through the technique of public shaming and the ongoing disciplinary discourse that encourages the enactment and embodiment of self-control. This experience flows out towards the rest of the group with the intention of influencing their own self-perceptions and analyses, ultimately encouraging ‘one person at a time’ to reveal their sinful selves, create new moral persons and, even minutely, alter the public moral discourse.

These experiences highlight the church-run program as not simply a place for

individuals to overcome drug problems or even to cultivate an Orthodox morality. Rather, as rehabilitants they become entangled in a moral and ethical assemblage ‘uniquely constituted by the influence of distinct and particular sociohistoric trajectories, religious traditions, and problematics’ (Zigon 2011: 47). In doing so, Zigon paints a more nuanced picture of both the program and the nature of morality, arguing that social situations cannot be defined by one or more totalising moral discourses, such as the Russian Orthodox Church, but are instead experienced through the traces of myriad discourses and practices, and produce emergent, unexpected consequences. Far from understanding this complexity as inherently problematic, Zigon instead attributes the appeal of the program to the assembled nature of its teachings and techniques. This is because, in Zigon’s view (2011: 47), assemblages ‘provide more possibilities of resonance that allow different individuals to comfortably live, reflect, and work on oneself’.

Embodied Moralities

There is another aspect of local moralities with which Zigon is primarily concerned, morality as ‘embodied dispositions’ (Zigon 2009b: 260). According to Zigon, for most of our everyday lives, we embody moral dispositions that have been cultivated throughout our lifetimes, crafted by the social situations we have experienced, and these enable us to act in ways that are mostly acceptable to the others around us, most of the time (Zigon 2009b: 260). Given we enact these moral dispositions while entangled in complex moral assemblages constituted through a range of different discourses, they are not necessarily attuned to what we might think of as a consensual ‘good’ or ‘right’ ways to live. Reaching any such conclusion is of course impossible given the partial, aspectual perspective we have on moral assemblages; rather, we enact our moral dispositions in a way that might enable a sense of comfort and familiarity in a demanding world. This form of morality, Zigon (2009b: 260) argues, is ‘one’s everyday way of being in the world’, a conceptualisation that differs from thinking about morality as rule-following or conscious reflection during times of dilemma in that ‘it is simply done’. Indeed, ‘it is this ability to be nonconsciously moral most of the time that allows humans to be social beings’ (Zigon 2009b: 260). To consider Zigon’s understanding of embodied moralities in the context of his ethnographic research, Zigon (2009b) argues that his ‘interlocutors’ in St Petersburg recognised their own abilities to act in ‘morally appropriate’ ways most of the time

and without considering their actions. Indeed, this is despite being aware of the ongoing ‘cacophony of moral questioning’ done by the Orthodox Church, governments, the media, or in everyday conversations, which characterised life in post-Soviet Russia (Zigon 2009b: 260).

Ethics

Zigon’s conceptualisation of embodied moralities allows him to make a distinction between morality and ethics, a difference that he (2009b: 257) recognises as crucial to the development of a workable anthropology of moralities. ‘Ethics’, for Zigon, are performed in particular moments where one’s sense of familiarity and comfort is called into question, forcing one to turn their attention towards their embodiment of their own personal sense of morality. Evocatively, Zigon (2009a, 2009b) describes this ethical moment as one of ‘moral breakdown’.

During a ‘breakdown’, one shifts from an unreflective mode of being in the world into a state where self-awareness is acutely heightened, allowing one to perform specific ethical tactics to work through the moment of self-reflection (Zigon 2007, 2010b). The process of rehabilitants engaging in public confessions as part of drug treatment programs, as explored earlier, provides a good example of how one’s sense of personal morality can be disrupted by other moral beings or discourses, and the ethical practices (such as talking, self-analysis and intersubjective negotiation) required to re-form the moral self into something more desirable (Zigon 2011).

Indeed, the ‘availability’ of such practices is entirely contingent on the moral assemblage in which the person in question has become entangled, ensuring it is a unique endeavour that is particularly fertile ground for anthropological analysis (Zigon 2010b). The ultimate aim of this ethical work, then, is to re-make the self into a more morally appropriate or acceptable social person for oneself, and others, in order to slip back into an unreflective, embodied dispositional mode of being, and once again assume a sense of comfort in the world. Although performing ‘ethics’ can be an uncomfortable, unnatural process, it can also be profoundly generative and transformative in that it brings one’s place in the world into view, during which time new moral ways of being can be explored and experimented with. In this sense, the

‘ethical moment’ is always open-ended and situational (Zigon 2007, 2009a, 2009b: 261). It is also a ‘creative moment, for by performing ethics, persons create, even if ever so slightly, new moral personhoods and enact new moral worlds’ (Zigon 2009b: 262).

Assemblages

The notion of ‘assemblage’ is undoubtedly fundamental to Zigon’s aim to give form to the complexities and possibilities for moral life evident in his ethnographic research. Indeed, thinking about morality through ‘assemblage’ has been a novel development in the anthropological theorisation of morality that aligns the discipline with recent theoretical developments in other social scientific fields, most notably sociology (Bialecki 2012). His depiction of morality as emergent, relational and singular, as opposed to pre-determined and totalising, profoundly undermines what ‘traditional theories would have us believe is characteristic of moral experience’ (Zigon 2013: 202). Rather, Zigon’s conceptualisation caters for the diversity and magnitude of possibilities available to individuals for living comfortably, reflecting, and ethically working on themselves, and offers a vantage point from which to understand how often seemingly incompatible moral discourses and dispositions coexist in a single location or situation (Zigon 2013: 202).

Manuel De Landa, who has inspired Zigon’s (2014a: 8) use of the concept, suggests assemblage thinking promotes an ontological position that treats all phenomena as existing interdependently and non-hierarchically, and constructed through specific and recurrent processes (De Landa 2006). When these phenomena become entangled with each other, they can form provisional wholes or ‘assemblages’ that exhibit identities and distribute various properties to its components (De Landa 2006; Duff 2014; Farrugia 2014). Assemblage thinking resists attempts to reify entities assumed to be pre-determined, enduring or static, instead understanding reality as multiple, ‘made in practice’, and constituted from inherently unstable, network-like phenomena (Fraser, Moore et al. 2014: 29). As such, assemblages enable an understanding of social life as inherently infused with instability, movement and transformation, as always ‘becoming,’ in the process of being made and re-made, rather than merely providing a static backdrop or ‘context’ for human activity (Duff

2014). In their article exploring the varying uses of ‘assemblage’ in the social sciences, Marcus & Saka (2006) draw on the most notable crafters of the concept, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), to interpret the term as appealing both for its aesthetic qualities and its technical capacities. They argue that while one aspect traces the ‘intractably unpredictable and contingent’ nature of contemporary life, the other approaches an understanding of ‘the structural principle of order (and disorder) within the play of events and processes’ (Marcus & Saka 2006: 103).

As assemblages are contingent wholes, the properties of which emerge from the interactions between their constitutive components, De Landa (2006) contends they can be used to conceptualise entities of any form and scale, from simple tools and machines to institutions and community networks. Thus, assemblages provide a solution to the historical difficulties of making sense of the connections between micro and macro levels of analysis by asserting a ‘relational logic of emergence, association and ordering,’ which dissolves this distinction and undermines the reification of ‘structure’ and ‘context’ as coherent, distal or remote entities intervening in human action (Duff 2014: 634). Assemblage thinking, then, motivates a research ethic to elicit the complex mechanics of social life that produce its emergent entities and effects. De Landa (2006: 11) argues that properties of an assemblage cannot be entirely reduced to that of its parts, as assemblages are not aggregations of its components’ properties, but rather are produced through the exercise of their capacities. These capacities do indeed depend on the properties of the component but they cannot be entirely reduced to them since the exercise of those capacities always involves reference to the properties of other interacting entities in the assemblage (De Landa 2006: 11). For this reason, the ontological status of assemblages is always that of unique, singular individuals – a ‘flat ontology’ that contains nothing but differently scaled individual singularities – and thus its effects are always emergent and unpredictable.

The emergent, indeterminate character of assemblages does not mean, however, that the possibilities for the elements entangled within them are limitless. As Bøhling (2015: 133) points out, even drunken subjects caught in the relational web of alcoholic assemblages have their capacities circumscribed by various political, social, spatial and economic forces. ‘Territorialisation’ is the concept that allows

assemblage researchers to strike the necessary balance between being sensitive to the animated, processual nature of assemblages, and also to how they are circumscribed by durable ‘patterns’ (Bøhling 2015: 133, De Landa 2006).

According to De Landa (2006: 13), ‘territorialisation’ can define or sharpen the boundaries of assemblage territories, while ‘deterritorialisation’ refers to those processes that destabilise these boundaries, or increase the internal heterogeneity and dynamism of assemblages. Territorialisation is thus a synthetic process, involving the stabilisation of certain material or expressive articulations of an assemblage’s components that ultimately gives it an identity, and potentially affords the assemblage durability or permanence. For example, the identity, intensity or aesthetics of nightclub assemblages can be stabilised or territorialised through the distribution of different regulatory controls, door policy, music and decor (Bøhling 2015; Demant 2013). However, as assemblages are unstable ‘becomings’, their permanencies are only ever provisional since other deterritorialising processes can destabilise assemblages at any point. Again, this appeals to sociological enquiry, as it makes room for the distribution of agency beyond individual human beings. Assemblages imply that persons are not the only individual entities involved in social processes, but rather the elements that may participate in social processes are diverse and heterogeneous. Indeed, assemblage thinking necessarily avoids prioritising any specific agent over another, whether human or non-human (Bøhling 2015; De Landa 2006; Demant 2013; Farrugia 2017; Malins 2004; Race 2011).

Assemblages in Alcohol and Other Drug Research

The use of assemblages problematises the primacy of individual-level risk factors in describing alcohol and other drug use, and the encouragement of individual behavioural change, in addressing problematic use. More specifically, it undermines the highly rational perception pervading political, economic and health discourse that harm, particularly to one’s health, is *the* primary determinant of individual action and responsibility (Demant 2013; Duff & Moore 2015; LeBesco 2011; Lupton 2015; Rhodes 2009). As Race (2011: 410) explains, from within assemblage thinking, ‘drug effects no longer stem entirely from the distinctive properties of the substance, nor the particular disposition of a human subject, nor even the social meanings attached to the practice, but from the contingent ways in which a multitude of

elements come together in a particular encounter’.

In a practical sense, assemblage theory enables alcohol and other drug researchers to take the ‘real conditions of consumption’ as their object of analysis; that is, paying close attention to the contingencies of culture, environment, physical settings, socioeconomic conditions, surrounding practices, regulatory regimes, techniques and available equipment that previous social scientific research has shown to actively participate in the production of alcohol and other drug use and its effects (Race 2011: 411). Ultimately, as Duff (2014) has argued, the empirical task facing researchers is to trace how these heterogeneous elements might interact in ways that either promote or diminish harm.

The detour I have taken here to the use of assemblage in alcohol and other drug research, while relevant for this thesis, also illuminates the potential utility for this concept to be used in the study of contemporary morality. Indeed, I argue that Zigon’s theorisation of morality via the use of assemblage is motivated by the ways in which his ethnographic informants characterised their moral worlds, not as stable, pre-determined in advance of action, or enduring beyond it, but rather as relational, affective and emergent (Zigon & Throop 2014).

As Malins (2004) contends, transcendental moral codes or laws are inherently reductive in that they limit the capacities and possibilities for the types of assemblages and relations one can form. Indeed, moral codes tend to reduce multiplicity to simplistic, often singular, relations and evaluate action through this narrow framework. In exploring alcohol and other drug discourse, Malins (2004: 99) demonstrates how moral judgements around heroin use are assembled through different combinations of bodies, drugs, and effects: for example, body+heroin = overdose (evil), body+morphine = pain relief (good). Zigon’s (2011) work in the St Petersburg rehabilitation program also unpacked the political, national and religious investments in how moralities can come to be assembled. In Zigon’s case, the effects of such an assemblage is to cast drug users as failures in the eyes of the government, God and the nation, who are in desperate need of self-reflective ethical work. As Malins argues, such ‘discursive dichotomies’ judge drug users ‘guilty in advance’, and force them to work their way towards the privileged branch of the binary (Malins

2004: 100). This form of moralism never fully succeeds in eliminating the complexities involved in local moralities, but rather only obscures and reduces them temporarily (Malins 2004: 100). Zigon's use of assemblage to explore moralities necessitates that the type of *a priori* moral judgements Malins talks of are deferred, and redirects a broader and more flexible open approach to how moralities emerge from assemblages (Zigon 2014a).

Moral Subjectivity: Attunement and Fidelity

As I have established so far, Zigon characterises his theoretical framework as a 'phenomenological approach' to the study of moral discourse, non-conscious embodied modes of moral life, and reflective, transformative ethical practices that emerge during breakdowns. The phenomenological approach appeals because of its apparent synthesis with assemblage ontology, in that the 'central analytical tool of phenomenology is the focus on various aspects of an assemblage that come to *count* as a whole' (Zigon 2014a: 18). By employing the assemblage framework, Zigon (2014a: 19) argues that research can more clearly elucidate how localised moral and ethical experiences differ from the ways in which the same experiences are represented or intervened in by the other moral discourses constituting that assemblage.

In order to pursue this line of enquiry, however, Zigon first outlines what he considers to be the 'kind of being that can live in assemblages' (2014a: 19). In his view (Zigon 2014a: 20), most dominant historical approaches to studying alcohol use tend to assume 'an individualised and/or rational human being who stands over and against the world in which it finds itself as well as those other human beings who also happen to live in that world'. Zigon's conceptualisation of the moral being rejects the dominant conception of the human being found in these dominant moral philosophies, as well as in the natural sciences and often in the social sciences, in that it foregrounds 'the primacy of being-in-the-world as always already entangled in a multiplicity of relationality' (Zigon 2014a: 21). Zigon's moral beings only emerge relationally, existing only as a product of their relationships, and are therefore primarily affective rather than rational or contemplative beings. If this is our starting assumption, Zigon (2014a: 21) argues, 'then morality and ethics need not necessarily

be conceived in terms of judging, evaluating, and enacting the good or rights, but instead to be about the making, remaking and maintenance' of those constitutive relationships.

For Zigon, moral beings possess a particular fundamental capacity, an 'ontological condition' he calls 'attunement' (Zigon 2014a), which enables its constitutive relationships to assemble. Essentially, being attuned to the relationships it values is an existential imperative for Zigon's moral being, and it manifests itself in the potentialities associated with becoming entangled in a diverse range of relationships – and assemblages – which enable the vast range of possibilities for how we can live in our social worlds. Moral subjects can be attuned towards other subjects, physical objects, ideas, imaginations and discourses, among other phenomena, forming endless relationships that can be articulated through a sense of anxiety, hope, love or hatred (Zigon 2014a: 22–23). Given that moral beings cannot exist without the relationships to which they are attuned, the form these relationships take are inherently matters of concern and intimately valued.

While 'attunement' is the condition that enables the beings who live in moral assemblages to become moral subjects through their multiple, valued relationships, 'fidelity' is the ontological condition that shapes the life trajectories of moral subjects (Zigon 2014a: 24). Following Zigon's logic, maintaining one's relationships ensures that a moral subject also maintains itself, thus enacting 'fidelity' to the life it feels comfortable living. In the ethical moments of 'moral breakdown' that I described earlier in this chapter, however, one is essentially also working to repair and rebuild the valued relationships that enable the moral subject to live comfortably or, potentially, to construct new relations, re-attuning themselves to a different array of things or people that matter to them (Zigon 2014a: 24). In this sense, assemblage theory highlights moral life as an ongoing process that is inherently temporal as 'one pulls in various pasts and hoped-for futures in the process of always being concerned with the relationships of value in which it is entangled' (Zigon 2014a: 25).

The ontological conditions described above underpin Zigon's view of morality as 'best understood as an existential imperative to maintain relationships and not about the judgment of such relationships' (Zigon 2014a: 26, see also Zigon & Throop

2014). This ongoing maintenance, Zigon argues, is motivated by a need to ‘dwell’ in a sense of existential comfort, an affective state where the anxieties of problematic relations are reduced and, as Zigon (2014a: 27) puts it, one’s ‘existential ground is firm’. Put another way, there is a moral imperative to continue to feel ‘okay’ in one’s world, to continue in the way one has come to affectively sense is the right way to live, where ‘right’ means ‘feeling at home’ or ‘natural’ (Zigon 2014a: 27). By exploring the notion of fidelity, and attempts to dwell comfortably in one’s world, Zigon seeks to avoid equating moral experience with mere psychological adjustments or the pursuit of desire, for example, but rather to demonstrate that moral beings are always first and foremost affective and relational beings, situated in inherently complex worlds that have significant value (Zigon 2014a: 27).

In sum, the concepts of ‘attunement’ and ‘fidelity’ enable researchers to analytically locate a moral subject within complex moral assemblages, and to elucidate the ways in which they become relationally entangled with other elements in the assemblage, as well as the forms those relations take. Compressed within this approach is an examination of agency, as Zigon’s framework makes room for studying how moral subjects are able to enact their desired life trajectory through the ethical maintenance of their constitutive relationships. In engaging with the young adults who participated in this study, Zigon’s theory offers an opportunity to explore how they assembled their moral worlds, and where alcohol use might be situated in its various manifestations. Importantly, through a moral assemblage approach to the study of youth alcohol use, we might be able to better conceptualise the relationship between specific drinking practices and events, and the pervasive moral discourses which potentially mediate their outcomes.

Young Adults, Drinking and Moral Assemblages

The objective of this chapter has been to trace in detail the theoretical framework used to generate and analyse my ethnographic data. I have argued that a review of the existing literature on youth alcohol use, particularly Australian qualitative research, encourages a more thorough examination of how morality might be implicated in the drinking practices of young adults. In responding to a historical lack of explicit engagement with the concept of morality in this literature, this

chapter also highlights some of the ways in which Zigon's theoretical framework might address these oversights particularly through his understanding of morality as assemblage, a theoretical perspective which has already provided crucial insights in alcohol and other drug studies elsewhere.

The conceptual battery Zigon provides, particularly his deployment of 'morality', 'ethics', 'moral assemblage', 'attunement' and 'fidelity', will form the primary tools for data analysis in this thesis. From this perspective, phenomena encountered in ethnographic research will be treated as assemblages. More specifically, I will be looking at how moralised discourses, moral subjects and alcohol in particular interact with other discourses, practices, ideas, technologies, objects and spaces in localised moral assemblages, from which 'moralities' emerge. Following Zigon, these moralities cannot be pre-defined or evaluated through an enduring, abstract moral framework. Rather, I will be examining how these moralities are assembled in practice, and how they affect the moral subjects entangled within them; that is, how the possibilities and capacities for being relationally attuned to things and people of value are shaped by moral assemblages, and in turn, how these relations affect (and are affected by) individual fidelity to desired life trajectories. I argue that by adopting Zigon's broad and open framework for exploring the possibilities for moral life, this ethnographic research is able to be sensitive to the concepts and experiences the young people of this study themselves articulate as meaningful in their negotiation of alcohol use. Furthermore, I argue that approaching the study of youth alcohol use from a moral perspective might provide not only insight but potential impetus for both the study of how and why young people drink, and the theorisation of contemporary morality.

Chapter Four:

Doing Ethnography:

Relationships, Learning and Self-formation in Fieldwork

This chapter outlines the ethnographic methodology I employed to study alcohol use and morality amongst the network of young adults who participated in this study. Ethnography aims to document shared perspectives and social meanings amongst participants through a prolonged ‘immersion’ in the research field (Agar 1997; Bryman 2016; Moore 1992). Participant observation, ethnography’s primary technique, involves observing and, where possible, participating in local practices in order to experience them first-hand while minimising disruptions to the normal flow of local social life (Bourgois 1999; Bryman 2016; Moore 1992). This approach is typically fleshed out by in-depth interviews designed to help develop a nuanced and coherent account of local practices and understandings from the perspective of the participants themselves (Payne & Payne 2004).

I conducted twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, a process that was facilitated through relationships built with four core participants. Through these gatekeepers, over time I was able to regularly interact with over 60 young adults, observing them, talking with them, sharing a drink with them, and writing detailed field notes recording my observations and conversations. I also conducted eleven in-depth interviews with twelve different participants in order to dialogically collaborate with them on how best to conceptualise and contextualise the drinking practices I had witnessed during fieldwork. In this chapter, I will detail the phases of this project from a methodological perspective, exploring recruitment, data collection, and analysis, while interweaving a reflexive commentary on the research process itself. The aim of this commentary is to account for the ways in which my personal circumstances and sensibilities as a doctoral student and novice researcher have shaped this research.

Lived Experience and Concept (Re)development: Ethnography in Studies of Alcohol and Other Drugs and Morality

Ethnography seeks an ecological depiction of alcohol use as grounded in the shared

experiences and perspectives of those engaging in drinking practices. In the context of alcohol and other drug research, ethnography therefore avoids reducing the analytical lens to merely the relation between agent (human) and substance (alcohol), instead focusing on how participants themselves define situations in which alcohol and other drug use emerges. According to Spradley (1980: 30–31), ethnography does not fit the traditional linear model of social scientific research, but is rather better thought of as cyclical, beginning with the identification of a general problem, and then elucidating the local knowledge people use to organise their actions and interpret their experiences. The ethnographer's task is then to follow what their participants themselves identify as important, and to describe in detail the diverse routines, rituals and concepts the research participants utilise in order to explore the meanings given to their social worlds and experiences (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Rhodes & Moore 2001; Spradley 1980). The process of shifting between rich, fine-grained documentation and ongoing analyses is iterative, and often generates further research questions (Spradley 1980). Necessarily, this means that the concepts and relationships that constitute these local worlds emerge from this iterative engagement as opposed to being determined *a priori*. In terms of drinking, this research design enables the elicitation of plural, and perhaps competing, interpretations of alcohol use, potentially disrupting the more simplistic, dominant depictions of alcohol use pervading existing alcohol and other drug discourse, and providing compelling, coherent accounts of local universes (Bourgois 1999; Rhodes & Moore 2001).

In the previous chapter, I provided a detailed analysis of the theoretical approach I take in the thesis but it is useful here to reiterate Zigon's two major imperatives. First, he encourages the re-configuration of our conceptual vocabulary via the terminology used by ethnographic participants themselves, and second, he makes clear the need to explore locally situated, phenomenological experiences of morality from participants' perspectives, as opposed to pre-judging action documented through ethnographic enquiry according to the ethnographer's personal beliefs or to existing philosophical systems (Zigon 2014b). For Zigon, ethnographic methodology was a crucial element of his own efforts to explore such moral concepts and experiences in drug rehabilitation programs in Moscow (see Zigon 2011, 2013), while elsewhere, other scholars exploring contemporary notions of morality have

also employed this methodology (e.g. Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2005; Robbins 2007).

The remainder of this chapter traces my own experiences as a novice ethnographer exploring the relationship between morality and alcohol use among young adults in Melbourne, while also providing a detailed account of the processes, strategies and practices that have constituted the methodological approach taken in this project. Adopting an ethnographic methodology to study alcohol use has particular political implications for how research samples and field sites take shape, and my efforts to negotiate these aspects during fieldwork are attended to in this chapter. I begin by outlining the overarching mixed-methods study which shaped the contours of this ethnographic project. Following this, I explore my early immersion in the field, and the challenges associated with recruiting participants and establishing an appropriate 'sample'. Using an early fieldwork example, I demonstrate the centrality of relationship-building to gaining ethnographic access that might be overlooked by projects that pre-determine their ideal research participants. In recognising this valuable point, I revised my recruitment strategy and focused on building intensive relationships with four core 'gatekeepers'. In all cases in this thesis, I refer to participants using pseudonyms. These 'gatekeepers,' for example, who will feature significantly in the analyses that follow, have been named Tim, Lucy, Justin and Luke, and I briefly introduce these participants in this chapter.

In the next section, I describe the 'field site', the City of Yarra, and contrast this pre-determined demographic characterisation of what a suitable field might look like, with what my participants were able to map out through cultural and classed judgements and logics, and diverse, mobile drinking styles, spaces and practices. Following this, I discuss how I conducted participant observation and interviews for this project, before exploring the ways in which a Zigonian approach has shaped the process of data analysis, and some of the key themes that have emerged through this framework. In the final sections, I offer a reflexive analysis of my own position within the field, and elucidate some of the challenges and insights drawn from my experience as a doctoral student, novice ethnographer and a young adult attempting to make his way in the world. In particular, I look at how balancing one's social and emotional needs with an academic requirement to 'get the job done' has implications

for how this project has shaped my sense of self, and vice versa. This final discussion highlights ethnography as a personal experience that impacts the social life and mental wellbeing of researchers, an aspect of academic enquiry that has received little attention in the literature (O'Toole 2002).

The People: Early Fieldwork Strategies, Recruitment and Sampling

This doctoral project forms a qualitative component of a larger, mixed-methods study on the heavy sessional consumption of alcohol amongst Melbourne youth (see Dietze, Livingston et al. 2014). As a member of this multidisciplinary initiative, my task involved conducting an ethnographic study of heavy drinking practices amongst youth in the inner-Melbourne local government area (LGA) of Yarra. To this end, my task was to recruit and research a sample of 'high-risk' drinkers (defined as those drinking at least 2–3 times per month and consuming 11+ (for females) or 20+ (for males) standard drinks in a session at least once a month during the year prior to participation), aged between 18 and 24 years. A fellow doctoral candidate, who was also a member of the larger project team, conducted concurrent fieldwork in Broadmeadows, in Melbourne's outer-suburban north, in order to compare different geographical, demographic and cultural ecologies, and their relationship to alcohol-related issues.

Proceeding from this well-defined research design, my initial immersion into ethnographic 'fieldwork' appeared to entail little more than establishing a position in the Yarra local government area, and seeking out potential participants. Indeed, in advance of fieldwork, I trialled this approach on several occasions by attending local pubs alone, taking observational field notes, and embodying an open, sociable demeanour, while sizing up and hoping to connect with anyone who might be interested in talking about alcohol use. However, the possibilities for this mode of participant observation seemed to be restricted. I often found myself conducting research in this way on mid-week afternoons or early evenings, and at quieter venues, where sitting alone for prolonged periods taking notes felt at least relatively acceptable. Even then, I often perceived curious eyes on me asking why I was there, drinking and writing notes alone, making the experience not only ineffective but uncomfortable. Perhaps my appearance was uninviting – at the time I was a short,

stocky young man with thinning hair, and while being inwardly laidback and relaxed, I had been known to unwittingly give off a salty and inhospitable air. Indeed, one participant early on during fieldwork described me as looking like a ‘brawler’ despite the activity of brawling being far removed from either my personality or experiences. Nevertheless, casting myself in the figure of the solitary drinker seemingly seeking solace and potential companionship amongst fellow - predominantly male - drinkers only appeared to further alienate me from the aims of my research. That being said, my position as a lone male drinker, while occasionally discomforting, went largely unquestioned, and I am sure a novice, female ethnographer would have had far different experiences in those early stages. In any case, it quickly became clear that this particular approach to participant observation was hindered by both rigid cultural and gendered norms around attending pubs alone, and also by my lack of appropriate ‘gatekeepers’ (Payne & Payne 2004) who might mediate the distance between researcher and prospective participants.

According to several ethnographers, participant observation requires a commitment to defining samples and research sites ‘emergently’ (Agar 1997; Bourgois 1999: 2159). Although the pre-established research parameters set by the larger project were clear and directive, early fieldwork experiences suggested that it had assumed a version of local reality, and of the ethnographic research process, which did not unfold as expected in practice. I felt the rigid research criteria potentially took for granted many of the apparent nuances of both participants’ drinking practices, and the relationship-building that facilitates rich ethnographic research. For example, it became clear quite soon after commencing fieldwork that the successful evolution of this project would rely more heavily on my capacity to engage with potential participants on a personal level, than by quantifying how often and how heavily they drank. Indeed I, like my participants, was forced to adopt the project’s standard drink-related criteria for inclusion as a guide only. Here, I compare myself to the participants as they themselves recognised the existence of the NHRMC guidelines, even if they often misunderstood, misinterpreted or recalled them inaccurately in my discussions with them. As I will explore in later chapters, the notion of standard drinks, and their attachment in discourse to specific categories of risk, seemed to lack applicability in the lives of many participants, who were more likely to judge heavy drinking episodes by other criteria such as money spent, the level of one’s hangover,

or the amount of fun a night out had produced. To be clear, however, the majority of participants far exceeded the project's aforementioned parameters (20+ standard drinks in a single session at least monthly for men, and 11+ for women). The point I also wish to make here is, however, that they were decidedly unconcerned with counting drinks, official notions of 'standard drinks' or risk categories in general. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Harrison, Kelly et al. 2011; Lindsay 2010), such technologies were rarely used by participants to understand, organise, recall or interpret their drinking experiences. To expand on this point, I will elaborate on one specific example from my early fieldwork experiences that, I argue, aptly demonstrates the centrality of social relationships to the complex and challenging endeavour that is ethnographic research.

Accessing the Field Through Relationships: An Example from Fieldwork

In early 2012, Byron, a close friend with whom I was staying at the time, had asked me to occupy myself for a few hours in the early evening so he could interview potential housemates. Observing his need for privacy, I took my notepad down to a local pub to enjoy a beer, read and make some observations. After purchasing a fresh pint of Carlton Draught, I found an outside table suitable for the warm but overcast February day, and began observing the surrounding patrons. I watched as a group of what appeared to be 'professional' men in their late 20s to early 30s claimed the table opposite mine and set about drinking pints of beer, smoking and talking, as I sat by, attempting to eavesdrop on their conversations about family and business. On a couple of occasions, the bar staff came out to interact with the group, once offering a water bowl for a dog that belonged to one of the patrons, and another just to have a laugh and a chat with a level of comfort that suggested they were established friends. Throughout the afternoon I also noticed that staff had begun to set up the interior for some sort of event, which I guessed was a charity fundraiser. I tried to obtain information from other bar staff who came to collect my empty glasses, but I wasn't able to find out anything, or any staff eager to converse beyond what their work duties would typically require.

After a couple of hours of scratching down notes and unsuccessful attempts at sparking up conversation with bar staff, I was joined by Byron just in time for dinner. While we ordered \$12 steaks at the bar, we again asked about the event, which

seemed to be starting imminently. The young waitress didn't know, but promised to get back to us. As a regular at this bar, Byron assessed the surroundings and guessed that they were probably setting up for the usual trivia night, which had been on temporary hiatus, although it was slightly unusual that someone he didn't recognise appeared to be hosting the event, and the spatial arrangements were not what he was used to. However, he was correct; within minutes a woman in her late 20s began introducing the event and blaring out music-related questions over the PA system. As we chewed through our steaks over a jug of beer, Byron and I tried to work out the answers together and laughed at the old songs. After dinner, we bought another jug and ventured outside for a smoke, finding an empty table on the edge of the footpath. Within minutes, two men of similar ages to Byron and me asked to join our table, before immediately enquiring if I 'happened to have a spare dart [cigarette]'. I gladly offered him one, and in return he began chatting about his need to cut back on mid-week drinking, as his appreciable thirst for a big night had recently begun to affect his ability to function properly at work. This nexus of drinking and work evolved into other conversations through which it eventually emerged that our two new friends worked only a cubicle or so away from one of Byron's former housemates. This mutual friend had recently performed a few drunken antics at a work function, which Byron confirmed was consistent with his reputation as a 'bloke who loves his beer, loves his footy' and likes to get 'pretty loose'. We sat out at the table drinking and smoking until approximately 11pm, at which point all of our pot glasses were being filled from the same jug, and my cigarette packet had become communal.

Embedded in this early field experience is both the motivation for changing my initial recruitment strategy, and a demonstration of the vitality of relationships in participant observation. On this particular occasion, my friendship with Byron was able to turn a likely fruitless exercise into one where I was able to explore different spaces of the bar, engage in different practices, stay out later, and importantly, connect with young adults willing to talk about their drinking practices. Without him, I was relying on interpretations made from a distance, struggling internally to assess the meanings of conversational topics and pub events, while outwardly closing off potential interactions by, unintentionally, displaying a desire to sit alone. Together we were able to come to an understanding of what the event was about, to prolong the night through jugs of beer and conversation, and to display our common

sociability to others in need of a seat, a cigarette and conversation. It took some time to become aware of the importance of these close relationships to the research process, as I struggled with my own form of ‘naive consciousness’ (Rabinow 1977), inheriting the assumptions from the larger project that the reality ‘out there’ was relatively concrete and accessible. Although this naivety is initially essential, through experience I soon became aware that those assumptions were largely inadequate, and this became particularly evident the more I built relationships with crucial informants.

The ‘Sample’: Core Participants in this Project

The experience described above represents one of the initial conceptual frictions between the ethnographic process and the overarching research agenda that ran throughout the life of this project. Following these early experiences, I decided that my recruitment approach required revision if the ethnography was to be at all successful. However, this was also partly motivated by my uncertain and unstable personal circumstances at the time. Prior to commencing this project in 2012, I had spent the previous two years abroad, and returned home to difficult financial circumstances, without fixed accommodation, and to a social network that had evolved and dispersed in the intervening years. When I pursued the opportunity to undertake this project in Melbourne – a city new to me, having grown up in Adelaide, South Australia, and having spent the previous two years living in the United Kingdom – I was undoubtedly excited, but also emotionally and mentally unsettled, and a little daunted by the task ahead.

It wasn’t until January 2013, two months into fieldwork, that I was able to secure my first long-term, rent-paying accommodation since moving to Melbourne – a large, old house in the inner-eastern suburb of Richmond shared with four housemates. Moving into this house was representative of the two significant demands concurrently orienting my life at that point – the need for personal stability and social networks, and the need to position myself in a location relevant to the research. This project would ultimately be shaped by these dual processes in many different ways. At times, this conflation complicated both processes independently, while other decisions and actions served both purposes. Reconfiguring the recruitment strategy

was one such moment, and was intended to both produce richer data and to improve my social wellbeing in a new city by prioritising intensive relationships with local informants and adopting an authentic social role within the city of Yarra.

Paradoxically, my challenging personal circumstances at the time of commencing fieldwork were also ultimately quite conducive to these aims. The experiences I had recently endured, returning to Australia with a distinct lack of stability, despite my access to some significant structural resources (such as being well educated and having a cohesive, affluent family, albeit one located overseas), were particularly vital to establishing relationships with potential participants. Many of the challenges I had faced in 2011-12 in particular were common to those I met during the early recruitment stages of the project, and of course, to many others beyond it.

Throughout fieldwork I spent considerable time developing ‘deeply contextualised and intensive relationships’ with four ‘purposefully socially related’ people in particular (Bourgois 1999: 2159), largely on the basis of these shared experiences. In time, this particular quartet ultimately enabled my access to their extensive set of friends and contacts, as well as a range of different environments, practices, ideas and discourses that would later become the focus of my analysis. Payne and Payne (2004) contend that ‘entry’ or ‘acceptance’ into a social group often flows from personal contact and the establishment of a legitimate social role, which should be reproduced consistently throughout fieldwork in order for that acceptance to endure. In this particular context, I would suggest that my social role was legitimated through the ‘powerful bond’ of common experiences, histories, preferences and worries (Moore 1992). In the vein of previous Australian research by Fry (2011) and Waitt, Jessop et al. (2011), for example, my position as a single, 25-year-old male – with a flexible timetable, seemingly few formal commitments such as long-term relationships, parenthood or the temporal constraints of full-time employment, and my willingness to listen, learn and be diplomatic – was crucial to these relationships, and ultimately, to the success of the project. However, following O’Toole (2002), it would be naive to think that having similar experiences in some way qualified me as either an expert on the structural challenges of young adulthood, or able to readily understand others’ experiences. Rather, these shared trials and concerns merely provided a starting point for crucial research relationships to evolve.

Where possible, I began developing networks of relationships through existing contacts. I arrived in Melbourne in early 2012 with only one strong relationship already set up, with Byron. Although we had grown up together in Adelaide, we had, however, spent some of the intervening years living either in different states or different countries. As such, despite our shared history, we had re-connected on very different terms, and entered into what was almost an entirely new relationship. Byron's hospitality in the first few months of fieldwork was warmly appreciated, offering me space on his couch to stay for a night or weekend, often without hesitation. Byron was also one of the first 'locals' to introduce me to the Melbourne pub scene, and welcomed me into his established friendship network. I use the term 'local' tentatively because Byron's network largely comprised his male friends and their female partners, most of whom had originated interstate and who now lived in Melbourne's inner suburbs.

As such, finding common ground on the basis of non-Melbourne origins was a theme that ran throughout participant observation, particularly in my attempts to extend my network of participants. This also meant that alongside developing my social network ran the closely related process of exploring the geography of Melbourne, as the pursuit of new relationships often took me to the diverse regions and suburbs that fan out from those few inner-city areas with which I had become familiar, such as the CBD and Fitzroy. Some six months or so after moving to Melbourne, a friend visiting from interstate (re)introduced me to Tim and Will, two of his friends who lived together in the inner, south-eastern suburbs. I had met both of these men as a teenager, but had not seen either for at least the last ten years prior to having a beer with them on Chapel Street in late 2012. Tim, in particular, was quick to invite me over to enjoy a glass of red wine and a roast with Will, his slightly more reserved housemate. Soon after, both began regularly including me in their social plans and events. Because Tim and Will had both worked in Melbourne for several years, they had established their own group of friends who had themselves grown up in Melbourne. However, being less familiar with the outer suburbs of Melbourne, and both working in either the CBD or inner east, they both spent the majority of their time in the inner-eastern area of Melbourne, shopping on Chapel Street, eating in Hawthorn's Glenferrie Road, or drinking in Richmond. Indeed, for those like Tim, Will and even Byron, venturing to the northern parts of the Yarra LGA, such as

Carlton or Fitzroy, was typically considered part of a purposefully novel night out, and not particularly routine. During fieldwork, however, Tim began dating a woman who lived north of the Yarra River, and as such, began spending more time in the Brunswick Street precinct. Tim and Will were also an informal source of accommodation for friends travelling from interstate, primarily Adelaide, and hosted frequent visitors over different weekends throughout the year. These ‘non-locals’ added an extra dimension to both our regular nights out and fieldwork for this project, as their presence was often the impetus for a ‘big night’, or to go out multiple times across a weekend.

When Lucy returned towards the end of 2012 from overseas, where we had attended university together, she not only provided me with temporary accommodation but also introduced me to an extensive range of her friends and family members. Having originated in Melbourne herself, the majority of Lucy’s network had also grown up primarily in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, where they had all attended school. In contrast to the social groups that had largely grown up interstate, Lucy’s network (and her willingness to invite me to her events) therefore enabled me to occasionally travel to suburbs further from the CBD including various places along the Mornington Peninsula. Often, we took these trips together, or with some of Lucy’s other close friends, in order to attend house parties or visit wineries, or to retrieve vehicles from obscure destinations after big nights out.

Lucy, and the other gatekeeping individuals, helped me significantly with both my personal challenges after arriving in Melbourne, and with this project. Together we discussed mounting financial debt, adjusting after periods of living overseas, or facing months of uncertainty through unemployment or unstable housing arrangements, and we were often able to negotiate these concerns and strategise responses together. Later, in fieldwork conversations or more formalised interviews, we were also able to express our more positive shared desires for travel, to seek new experiences and meet new people while also deepening our roots, and finding some semblance of stability at this particular time in our lives.

At this point I will introduce in more detail the four core participants who feature heavily throughout this thesis: Tim, Justin, Lucy and Luke.

Tim

Fieldwork re-united me with Tim, who I had met years earlier in Adelaide through a mutual friend. Tim is a likeable, energetic, contradiction of a young man, with a quintessentially Australian appetite for a story and a loud laugh which belies his shortish, stick-thin, dark-skinned frame and occasionally thick beard derived from his Sri Lankan heritage. During fieldwork, Tim faced ongoing health issues, occasionally considerable debt, and a death in the family. However, his personality was such that he rarely outwardly acknowledged aspects of his life that others might perceive negatively, and thus is regarded by his friends as positive and resilient. He possesses an extensive knowledge of alcohol products, having spent considerable time working in hospitality and retail, and is always willing to recommend or offer different wines or beers, despite his own sporadic alcohol use. For Tim, drinking is typically negotiated around work and his health. He is always eager to try new drinks but also wary of potential over-reliance on alcohol and prescription medicines to alleviate his ailments, and particularly conscious of the relationship between drinking and his physical health.

Outside work, where Tim had become a retail manager, he engages in hobbies such as photography and biking, although these passions are often subject to regular and dramatic change. Towards the end of fieldwork, Tim's immediate networks had evolved, and we saw less of each other, although he remains a valuable source of support and advice whenever we get the opportunity to catch up.

Justin

Justin moved to Melbourne in June 2012, aged 24, after two years in London, with the promise of employment with a family friend. When the job didn't materialise as expected, Justin found himself in trying circumstances, with a lack of networks and resources, and spent many uncertain months seeking appropriate employment and frequently toying with the idea of returning overseas. We often talked at length about his longing to move back to London where he had recently experienced some of the best years of his life, including success in work, friendship, leisure, travel and romance.

It took three months living in a small bedroom in a friend's house for him to find his

own accommodation in a large St Kilda share house overseen by two heavy party-goers in their early 30s, and an aspiring singer aged 20. The novelty of living in a vibrant yet carefree and party-focused household soon wore thin with Justin, as did the logistics of travelling to and from St Kilda to his job in the CBD. Despite being fond of a drink himself, Justin was worn down by the drug use and unreliable behaviour of his housemates. This culminated when Justin was woken one morning by a violent stranger rampaging through the house searching for his housemates who were out of town. Justin and another of his more career-focused housemates moved out within 24 hours, plunging back into uncertainty. Following this, he briefly moved into the apartment of a woman he had just started casually dating. Having returned to Melbourne two months later, he found another share house near mine, with two new housemates, Ross and Katie, who also became good friends. During fieldwork, Justin changed jobs three times, struggled consistently with the costs of setting himself up and visibly battled with his desires for a more comfortable life, and particularly his longing to return to Europe.

Lucy

I originally met Lucy whilst studying in the UK in 2010–11. Before fieldwork, she returned home for a holiday, where we briefly re-connected on a few nights out, which proved to be a blessing. I was still struggling to find accommodation, and during her trip, Lucy invited me to stay with her until she returned to the UK to finish her studies, unsure whether or not she would eventually settle there. When she left, her mother kindly invited me to stay on until I found somewhere more permanent, and her family provided me with crucial support throughout this project.

After a number of UK opportunities fell through, and with restrictions on her ability to work overseas, Lucy decided to return to Australia in October 2012. For the next few months, we spent time together at gigs, festivals and sporting events, catching up for meals, and attending pub trivia nights. I was introduced to her friends, we started a weekly movie group, and as a local, she helped me explore the Melbourne nightlife. Lucy helped me to move house, was one of the first to agree to an interview, and was always willing to help with the project – by accompanying me on nights out, putting me in touch with other contacts or events, or simply by talking through ideas.

After Lucy's return to Australia, it took another four months for her to find employment, during which time she grew increasingly restless. Like Justin and me, Lucy had returned home to an altered set of relationships and employment uncertainty. She eventually accepted a demanding role in social services, working an hour from the city, meaning early starts and late nights, and her diligence in approaching the logistics of the job and the challenges of helping disadvantaged families to access social services was admirable.

Luke

While I was living in a Richmond share house during 2013, our house rotated through five different housemates. I was perhaps closest to Luke, a 23-year-old who rented the room opposite mine, and who had also had the final say on whether I won the spare room over other applicants in early 2013. Luke is an enthusiastic and multi-faceted character. On the one hand he was a stickler for organisation, a trait he blamed on his German ancestry (which he also loved wholeheartedly), but this was also a source of frustration for some housemates, and a welcome relief for others less intent on cleaning up or taking out the garbage. Luke's tendency for meticulousness and thoroughness was also reflected in his work ethic, as he combined full-time employment with full-time study during 2013, a demanding workload that, he believed, came somewhat naturally to him. On the other hand he had a flair for hobbies, particularly cultural and artistic pursuits, including regular attendance at comedy shows, city centre pop-ups, dancing classes and yoga. If his organisational traits emerged in his work ethic, then his flair was typically represented by loud shirts and a mildly offensive caterpillar moustache he seemed intent on maintaining. Some people found Luke's willingness to thrust himself into anything, and his brash appearance, as slightly confronting; indeed, he was often characterised as weird and unusual, which may have been exacerbated by what I would describe as a complete inability to experience social awkwardness. This particular quality at times proved to be his strength, while at other times it tended to land him in difficult situations.

Although Luke would often come across as carefree, in our regular discussions – and our interview – he revealed some of the darker stages of his youth and recent paths that he was still emotionally coming to terms with. Central to this was the tenuous relationship he had with his young son, who he rarely saw given that they lived in

different states. When I met Luke, he was also still reconciling his past alcohol use, understanding drinking as central to a former life of regularly going out to ‘pick up girls’. As he developed a long-term relationship during the period of my fieldwork, he grew less and less proud of his former pursuits, but also aware of the cultural expectations placed on young people to pursue pleasure through drinking, going out, and engaging in sexual experiences while one has the opportunities to do so.

These exceptionally brief summaries characterise these young adults as both dynamic research informants and valuable friends. I describe these four young adults as ‘core’ to the ‘sample’ because they were the people with whom I spent the most time, and it is predominantly through Lucy, Tim, Justin and Luke that I came to interact with the other individuals I encountered regularly during fieldwork. In this sense they acted as ‘cultural brokers’, vouching for my authenticity and legitimacy in penetrating their complex social worlds (Moore 1992: 314). As I had established varying levels of connection with these four participants at the beginning of fieldwork, my initial task was to strengthen existing relationships while actively pursuing new connections that might be facilitated by this core group.

The Broader ‘Sample’: 60 Ethnographic Collaborators

Through these four core participants in particular, I was ultimately able to interact regularly with a network of approximately 60 people over the course of fieldwork. By ‘interact regularly’, I mean that I was able to spend time with them on more than one occasion. While I was only able to interact with a proportion of these participants a handful of times, others I saw weekly or even more frequently between October 2012 and October 2013.

This network was constituted in large part through six distinct groups, mediated either by the aforementioned gatekeepers, or through other familiar contacts. Over the course of fieldwork, however, these groups rarely interacted, save for the odd occasion where one or two individuals from one group would be incorporated into an event dominated by another group, often at my invitation. The times when I would bring a friend along to a birthday party hosted by a member of another group provide one such example. As my ethnographic project evolved, however, it became

increasingly clear that these distinct groups, while sharing some apparent similarities, were quite different and unlikely to get along smoothly. As I will detail later in this chapter, the growing frictions between these groups, and particularly key individuals within them – both of which were crucial to this project’s success – became an ongoing and tiring source of personal angst and frustration.

As such, my weekly schedule during fieldwork was often organised around events involving at least one or two members from a specific group. Being committed to each different group, however, meant that I would attend such events multiple times per week, whereas the participants themselves might only attend one or two of these events. A typical night out during fieldwork would typically involve attending a participant’s house for pre-drinks and food while watching television or listening to music, before venturing out to a designated region of Melbourne for the remainder of the night to explore different licensed venues, or to attend sporting matches or concerts. These nights were often shaped by the participants present, particularly the area in which they lived, but also their specific tastes and preferences for food, music, entertainment, timing or transport. Indeed, these tastes and preferences differed, often significantly, from participant to participant, and between the groups constituting the wider sample, further exacerbating the challenges of integrating these distinct social networks that appeared to me to be both very similar while also starkly different.

The origins of the 60 participants were mixed. There were many who had grown up in and around the suburbs of greater Melbourne, while many had been born overseas and more still had recently moved to Melbourne from interstate. This was indeed reflective of the cosmopolitan nature of Melbourne itself. The housemates I acquired by moving into a Richmond share house, for example – none of whom I’d met prior to fieldwork – hailed from four different countries, across three continents, while the two who were born in Australia, Luke and I, had both grown up in other states and had also spent recent time living overseas.

Most participants were of a similar age to me when I started fieldwork in late 2012, with the majority aged 20-30 years old, and a large proportion clustered around age 25, with only a handful beyond this bracket. The ages of the participants involved

were also reflective of the ages of the core gatekeepers, who were all slightly younger than me at 23-24 years old.

The gatekeepers also shaped the wider sample in terms of gender. Across the twelve months of fieldwork, the 60 participants I interacted with were predominantly male as opposed to female, at a ratio close to 2:1. As such, the majority of my interactions with participants occurred in spaces dominated by males – such as the homes of male friends, sporting venues, or niche pubs and bars that favoured the provision of beer and were conducive to watching sport, or where possible, interacting with female patrons. Fieldwork at events thought to appeal to feminine sensibilities were often instigated by female friends and core gatekeepers such as Lucy, who features heavily throughout this thesis, but also others such as Lauren, Olivia and Rachel, with whom I was more likely to spend time in more private, exclusive settings away from the members of the more masculine-dominant groups of participants.

Five participants reported that they were from Sri Lankan, Indian or Tibetan backgrounds, while there were also those born in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Sweden and Colombia among the 60 fieldwork participants. Despite this significant proportion of participants who originated overseas, however, the vast majority of the participants I interacted with regularly were of Anglo-Australian background.

This network was also largely well educated, with the majority having finished secondary school (many at private institutions), and gone on to complete bachelor degrees or beyond at university. A minority engaged in other forms of tertiary education while I conducted fieldwork, obtaining diplomas and certificates in IT, accounting or photography, for example, and several others were undertaking university master's programs alongside full-time employment. The emphasis placed on education by these participants was reflective of the fact that many came from affluent families, had been educated at private schools, and were also acutely aware of being on the cusp of significant employment opportunities, and as such identified the need for ongoing professional self-development. This is not to say, however, that these participants did not face their own challenges when it came to finances, employment prospects or housing. On the contrary, several spent long periods unemployed during fieldwork, and many others struggled to find adequate and stable

accommodation at various times. Nonetheless, the majority of participants were often able to lean on a wealth of resources in such moments, including their well-educated intelligence, often wealthy families, and adequately equipped social networks. Together these demographic attributes also meaningfully shaped the geography of this project in particular, as I often found myself frequenting licensed venues and people's homes located in Melbourne's inner suburbs, close both to major areas of employment such as the CBD and to the areas where many of the participants had grown up or attended school. These areas were also those where one could find many similarly-aged affluent, educated, and employed individuals who had originated from interstate and overseas, as well as thriving shopping, dining and night-time entertainment precincts.

Sexuality played a significant role in shaping nights out with participants, as well as the day-to-day rhythms, worries, priorities and desires that permeated our interactions beyond drinking events. Through phone calls, text messages or face-to-face conversations with participants, plans for nights out often formed around desires to facilitate specific relationships between participants and members of the opposite sex, or merely to create chance encounters to 'pick up' at licensed venues, particularly for the male participants. Although the sexualities discussed and performed during these interactions, and fieldwork more broadly, were indeed diverse and variable, the majority were overwhelmingly heterosexual, and given the gendered composition of the participant network, I was largely witness to more masculine performances of heterosexuality. The sexualised moralities of Melbourne's licensed venues will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six of this thesis.

In the next section I will describe the nuances of tracing a field site that was both meaningful to the project agenda and these participants, and I begin detailing the process of conducting participant observation.

The Place: Doing 'Fieldwork' in the Yarra LGA

The larger project under which I was to conduct this ethnography identified the City of Yarra as an ideal research location (and sufficiently different from outer-urban

Broadmeadows for purposes of comparison) due to its demographic characteristics, particularly its diverse, well-educated youth population and its historical patterns of problematic alcohol and other drug use. Yarra is positioned approximately five kilometres to the east and north-east of the Melbourne CBD, and is one of Australia's smallest, yet most vibrant, inner-city municipalities. Over 90,000 people live in Yarra, of varying ages, occupations and levels of advantage (City of Yarra 2017b). Approximately 29% of its residents were born outside Australia, 22% speak a language other than English at home, and households are diverse, with half housing families and the others comprising share houses and single-occupancy dwellings (City of Yarra 2017a, City of Yarra 2017g). While 40% of houses are rented, 9% of Yarra residents live in social housing (City of Yarra 2017e).

Additionally, Yarra is a site where many young, educated professionals work, with an estimated 81,000 employed within the region (City of Yarra 2017j). 64% of Yarra residents aged 15 and over hold post-school qualifications, and 43% hold jobs in education and training, health and social services, retail or hospitality (City of Yarra 2017f, City of Yarra 2017h). It has one of the nation's highest concentrations of young people, with 41% of the residential population aged between 15 and 35 years (City of Yarra 2017c), with just over 8000 inhabitants, or nearly 10% of Yarra's population, aged in the relevant category for this study (18–24 years old) (City of Yarra 2017i).

A diverse range of vibrant entertainment precincts are also dispersed throughout the NTE of the Yarra LGA, where one can find more than 500 licensed venues and over 50 packaged liquor outlets. Alcohol-related problems in this area have been a focus for local and state governments in recent years, as Yarra has the third-highest prevalence of alcohol-related ambulance attendances of any LGA in Victoria, contributing approximately 6% of all state alcohol-related attendances between 2008 and 2011 (State Government of Victoria 2011). In addition, Yarra consistently ranks highly in the recorded numbers of non-fatal heroin overdoses, and in the number of ambulance attendances related to stimulant use in particular, among all Victorian municipalities (State Government of Victoria 2011).

Locating the Field – Tracing the Geography of Participant Drinking Practices

Although I had followed the research agenda quite closely by locating myself within the administrative boundary of this particular local government area, I was yet to establish how participants themselves mapped out their own drinking geographies. My initial strategies aimed at gaining access and rapport involved, first, setting myself up in a share house in Richmond, one of the larger suburbs in Yarra and only a few kilometres east of the city centre, and second, merely accepting any and every invitation offered to me. Not only did I assume this would position me as reliable and supportive for people needing to attend social events alone, for example, but this would also potentially expose contexts and events that might have otherwise been excluded by a study focused on a specific drinking practice or location. Furthermore, attending a diverse range of activities and environments would potentially facilitate a more nuanced contextualisation of drinking practices when they did occur.

Participating in and observing action in a range of settings also enabled me to trace the movements of a highly mobile and diverse population. Despite my earlier intentions to limit the geographical focus to the Yarra LGA, I found that the increasingly relational approach I had been taking to recruitment and sampling had in turn mapped a much more extensive range of locations. While I spent a significant time in the Yarra suburbs of Richmond and Fitzroy where I lived, worked (part-time) and studied, I would also regularly go out drinking with participants in the CBD, St Kilda or the Chapel Street district, as well as other suburbs across Melbourne, albeit less frequently. An appropriate and meaningful research ‘field’ thus evolved that, in a way, was difficult to reconcile with the pre-defined parameters of the study. For these participants, the Yarra LGA was little more than an administrative region that only occasionally became meaningful when applying for parking permits or anticipating hard rubbish collections.

In terms of drinking practices and styles, study participants were more likely to characterise several main areas of Melbourne in terms of their subcultural or classed traits, while acknowledging that their tendency to travel widely across most of these regions at one time or another. Melbourne’s drinking geography was often discussed in terms of a classical local divide between the grungy, hipster, aloof North

(predominantly referring to Fitzroy and Collingwood), and the rich, pretentious South (again, typically narrowed to the suburbs of Prahran and South Yarra in particular). Richmond, where I was situated, as were a number of my participants at the time, was often described as the ‘best of both worlds’, which was apt given it is located approximately equidistant from both the imagined North and South. I spent a lot of nights during fieldwork out in the pubs, bars and restaurants of Richmond, which also happens to be home to the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and a number of well-known live music venues, which were also significant sites for alcohol use during fieldwork. However, this does not necessarily mean that Richmond was the only or even the preferred destination for going out due to its proximity to participants’ homes. On the contrary, designated nights out would often take place in areas of Melbourne which were selected for their difference to the middling, more inclusive vibe of Richmond. For this and many other reasons, study participants might regularly live and drink in the Yarra LGA but also cut across town and back again to other drinking events, often on the same night, complicating the geography of alcohol use imagined in the overarching study, as well as the ideal ethnographic sample and recruiting strategies.

Across twelve months of participant observation, I attended close to two hundred occasions where alcohol was involved, and visited over 120 public and private venues across the city. These included all manner of private parties, pubs, bars, nightclubs, restaurants, public areas, sports matches, wineries, music festivals, community events, taxis, public transport and private homes across Melbourne. A non-exhaustive list of suburbs (and surrounding areas) I visited during fieldwork would include: Abbotsford, Balaclava, Brunswick, Camberwell, Carlton, Collingwood, Elsternwick, Fitzroy, Hawthorn, Malvern, Northcote, Parkville, Prahran, Richmond, South Melbourne, South Yarra, St Kilda, West Melbourne, Windsor and the CBD. These occasions and venues were diverse in patrons, circumstances and drinking (and other drug) practices. In keeping with a more open ethnographic strategy, I also attended myriad other leisure activities that did not necessarily involve drinking either by the participants themselves or others on the periphery, including going to the cinema, having brunch in local cafes, kicking a football in the park or meeting for dinner.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is the technique I employed to study drinking practices ‘first-hand’ during fieldwork. While the concept of ‘fieldwork’ may appear outdated, as a term most readily associated with early cultural anthropological endeavours, Payne and Payne (2004: 95) suggest it maintains relevance in its ability to represent the ‘adventure and uncertainty’ of ethnographic research. Some of the trials and experiences I have already described demonstrate the applicability of Payne and Payne’s conceptualisation of fieldwork to this particular project. Following this, I use the term ‘fieldwork’ in this thesis to delineate the data collection stage of the research process from ‘ethnography’, the overarching research methodology and product.

Participant observation is a contradictory and complex research method which, according to Sluka and Robben (2007: 2), hinges on the ‘dynamic and contradictory synthesis’ of insider and outsider: ‘As an insider, the fieldworker learns what behaviour means to the people themselves. As an outsider, the fieldworker observes, experiences, and makes comparisons in ways that insiders can or would not’ (Sluka & Robben 2007: 2). This definition is useful in thinking about participant observation as oriented by two interrelated agendas. The first – learning what behaviour means to the people themselves through experience – is the participatory side of this approach. Much of how this process unfolded in my own experience has already been documented in this chapter. That is, I attempted to build nuanced and deep relationships with a small number of people, and embodied a non-judgemental, open and diplomatic subjectivity, so that I could share experiences with participants, and in addition, so that they could comfortably engage in those practices and experiences while I was around, and later be able to openly talk about their interpretations of those experiences (O’Toole 2002). Undoubtedly, this process was enhanced by the personal disposition I had been able to craft over the decade prior to commencing fieldwork. This was largely spent living, working and studying in different places and situations, as has been documented earlier in this chapter. However, throughout this process I was also able to hone my analytical sensibilities in the notoriously open, non-reductive discipline of anthropology across multiple universities, and more recently, my readings of Zigon’s open-ended, non-

essentialising theory of moralities had rendered my own understanding of morality softer and more flexible.

Coupled with this disposition was my own active participation in the practices, rituals and spaces I was able to observe, from which I could record what I did and how I felt about it. This leads to the second agenda Sluka & Robben describe – the researcher's ability (and responsibility) to observe, describe, compare and interpret. This involved a multiple-step process that typically began by engaging in routine practices during fieldwork with a critical, analytical gaze, and then making attempts to retain the observations I had made long enough to put them down as either handwritten, typed or audio-recorded field notes.

During fieldwork, I would typically find myself attending some form of event four to five times per week. The majority of these events would occur across the weekend and often for some particular reason of varying significance – it was someone's birthday, someone had the day off the following day, there was a football match to watch or a music gig to attend. I rarely had to initiate nights out, although I certainly did on a number of occasions. Typically, plans for a night out would formulate over the course of a day or multiple days, and primarily via text messages. Given that I had established a fairly willing, open and reliable identity in the early stages of fieldwork, several participants would often assume that any invitation they would extend to me would be accepted, and they were usually correct. As such, during this time I was considered by several participants to be a valuable resource. However, this would also provide me with the personal challenges of having first, to decide on which events to attend, and second, to negotiate the demands of multiple people seeking my presence simultaneously. On any one day I could have numerous offers of parties, dinners or visits to the pub in different areas of the city. I then needed to make a conscious choice as to which invitation I would accept, which would undoubtedly have flow-on social implications for the participants and their extended networks. Where possible, my primary strategy was to accept the first invitation offered, and then work other plans around that event.

Once the parameters of the evening or event had been set, I would usually journey by public transport to a core participant's house for pre-drinks. As the night unfolded, I

would make a determined effort to avoid drinking too much, or, heeding Palmer & Thompson's (2010) advice, I at least tried to drink slowly enough so that I could make observations with little impairment. However, if such days started early in the afternoon and continued for eight hours or more, as was often the case, this would become difficult, at which point I would have to make a decision as to when to conclude the observation. Occasionally, to circumvent such decisions, I would refrain from drinking at all but this strategy often did not benefit the research process. I was often called upon by participants as someone who would more than likely say 'yes' to an invitation and was therefore considered to be a likely 'drinking partner'. They perceived (correctly) that I wished to be out and about in drinking environments as much as possible. Not only did avoiding drinking compromise my legitimate social role, the entrenched normative nature of heavy drinking (Advocat & Lindsay 2015; Nairn, Higgins et al. 2006) among this particular network was such that it could have also potentially curtailed the research process itself. Indeed, if I wasn't likely to be drinking, I often wouldn't be needed by participants, and often, the night's events would not proceed at all. Negotiating this professional dilemma highlights that 'conducting fieldwork in a legal drinking subculture is far from clear cut' and required a particular kind of image management that necessitated, in the very least, that my alcohol use be visible, at least some of the time, to participants (Palmer & Thompson 2010: 435).

My early assumptions about what ethnographic research would entail – primarily that 'fieldwork' includes every possible interaction, practice or observation (Candea 2007; Rabinow 1977) – led to the constant pursuit of observations and experiences beyond what I would usually engage in outside research. This willingness to pursue research opportunities can be measured in terms of how many days a week I would go out (usually four or more), and how long I would stay out for (usually until 2am or later, beyond the typical length of most participants' nights out). Coming home late with a fatigued and potentially intoxicated body ensured that the process of taking detailed field notes on the same night was often unrealistic, or at the very least, mentally and physically challenging. On occasion, I would dictate thoughts into a digital device while I walked or rode the tram home, or take down notes using a word processing program on my mobile phone, which I could then use as a memory aid. The following day, I would usually spend 1–2 hours writing detailed

field notes, journal entries and memos to facilitate the interpretive process (Ezzy 2002). By the completion of fieldwork in October 2013, I had compiled notes on over 150 different fieldwork episodes, often documenting multiple events on the same day. These were covered across a total of approximately 50,000 words of typed field notes, ranging from a few sentences on some days, to 2000 words for more complex events.

Interviews

The ethnography also involved in-depth qualitative interviews. Twelve young adults (five men, seven women; average age 24.25 years, age range 22–27 years) participated in 11 interviews, with one interview conducted with two participants. Those who participated in interviews emerged from the wider ethnographic sample of approximately 60 individuals. All identified as regular drinkers, with the majority frequently drinking at risky levels as defined by national guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009). Of the interview sample, nine were university educated (one to master's level), and all others had completed either diplomas or certificates or were undertaking career pathway programs or part-time tertiary study. All identified as Victorian residents (although many had originated interstate) living in Melbourne's inner suburbs, and all but one identified with an Anglo-European ethnicity. At the time of being interviewed, eleven participants were employed full-time, and one part-time, although as has already been demonstrated, employment status was often subject to change through the fieldwork period. Interviews were conducted in a diverse range of locations across the city including private homes, cafes, pubs and bars, and lasted an average length of 68 minutes (range 51–90 minutes). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and participants were reimbursed \$40 for any expenses incurred, in line with standard practice in Australian alcohol and other drug research (Fry & Dwyer 2001). In two cases, informal follow-up conversations were also recorded on other occasions.

While largely unstructured, the interviews were underpinned by theoretical and subject-specific orientations, seeking participant perspectives on their drinking practices, and using the Zigonian framework for questioning and analysis. I followed previous Australian qualitative studies utilising interview methodology (e.g. Grace,

Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2005) in pursuing questions that directly related to participants' current drinking preferences, patterns and practices such as: who they regularly drank with, preferred venues and beverages, the possibilities for other (illicit) drug use, various alcohol effects, drinking histories and narratives relating to recent nights out. Theoretical sensibilities shaped by Zigon's morality theory led me to pose more general questions aimed at contextualising drinking-specific responses pertaining to participants' upbringing, current participation in activities beyond alcohol use, plans for the future, interpersonal relationships, and also questions directly relating to their understandings of the nature of morality, identity and personhood.

Data Analysis

Field notes and interview data were transcribed and recorded electronically as they emerged, and were read intensively between fieldwork events. The close-reading process was vital to the interpretation and development of key thematic categorisations aided by the use of NVivo software. From that point, these data were analysed and contextualised using both the existing qualitative alcohol research literature and Zigon's theoretical framework in particular. Despite undergoing multiple evolutions throughout fieldwork – as is characteristic of inductive research - this synthesis of the relevant research literature and Zigon's conceptual battery produced three research questions that ultimately drove the analysis and presentation of key themes in this thesis:

1. What kinds of forces are active in shaping how young adults engage in alcohol use?
2. How do participants negotiate these various forces, and what can be understood from this process in terms of their ethical orientations and priorities? and
3. How might different conceptualisations of 'morality' contribute to, or enhance, our understanding of heavy drinking practices among young adults?

Research of any form entails a sophisticated theoretical orientation about which aspects should be studied and how (Payne & Payne 2004). Thus, the purpose of this section is to delineate more explicitly how Zigon's work has motivated the choices made in generating and analysing data. The process of analysis began during

fieldwork in order for this project to be fundamentally shaped through collaboration with the participants themselves (Agar 1997; Ezzy 2002). In the same way that the research sample and field site were established through nuanced relationships with core participants, the theoretical questions used to generate and engage with the ethnographic data have been iteratively revised and adapted through ongoing dialogue with the participants of this study (Ezzy 2002; Moore 1992).

In his own ethnographic work in a Moscow drug rehabilitation program, Zigon (2011, 2013) focused his attention on participating in and observing the various therapeutic and religious practices in which rehabilitants engaged, and on documenting informal conversations, support group talks and art or film-related activities, in order to depict how complex local moralities might be assembled through various discourses, practices and subjects. Following his lead, I also made attempts to pay close attention to the ways in which participants assembled meaningful sets of relations over the course of drinking events in both speech and practice. In settings where alcohol was involved, this process would typically emerge through the interplay between alcohol use, friendship, spatial contexts, sexual interaction, the demands of neo-liberal individualism and personhood, and as such, these are some of the key themes explored in the thesis. Theoretically, I utilised Zigon's framework to trace the ongoing assembly of these localised moral assemblages, and the modes of morally being in the world they make possible. Zigon's approach thus necessitated attending to a range of potentially unanticipated elements that emerged as meaningful to participants in shaping moral assemblages and their effects. For example, in this thesis I explore this by tracing the agency and effects of various elements of college drinking (Chapter Five), the concept of picking up in licensed venues (Chapter Six), the complex and multi-faceted demands of 'life-assemblages' organising regular alcohol use and other pursuits (Chapter Seven), and the physical and imagined presence of children (Chapter Eight).

In-depth interviews with rehabilitants and staff were also crucial to Zigon's research process as interviews often facilitate reflexive 'moral breakdowns' where participants disrupt their non-consciously embodied moralities and shift into a state of moral and self-questioning (Zigon 2009a). In interviews, participants are able to articulate their moral experience and researchers are able to intersubjectively

approach more nuanced definitions of relevant concepts. Furthermore, researchers gain access to moments that emerge as central to the cultivation of the interviewee's moral way of being, and can potentially witness the construction of new moral ways of being by means of the 'dialogical negotiation that is part of the interview process' (Zigon 2009a: 86). While moral articulations may remain somewhat elusive and fragile in fieldwork conversations, interviews enable these to be followed up and contextualised amidst the complex webs of various intimate and institutional pressures that meaningfully shape the lives of participants (Garcia 2014).

Analysis of interview data was predominantly guided by the use of key Zigonian concepts outlined in the previous chapter, such as 'morality', 'ethics', 'assemblage', 'attunement' and 'fidelity'. Using this terminology attends to the relationships of value to which participants are affectively 'attuned'. This involved giving consideration to the unfolding narratives offered by participants throughout interviews, and the various elements they would draw upon to recount their experiences with both alcohol and in their everyday lives, some of which might otherwise be taken for granted or overlooked entirely in the existing alcohol discourse. These ranged from the norms of university colleges, vomiting and sport, to travel, daily routines and family, and served to both complicate and enrich established, dominant understandings of the lives of young adults and their drinking practices.

In addition, I focus on the ways in which moral assemblages limit or enable the capacities and possibilities for how participants enact 'fidelity' to desired life trajectories amidst complex moral entanglements (Zigon 2014a). Zigon's framework enables a methodological focus on how participants assemble their moral worlds through relational and affective entanglements and where alcohol use might be situated in its various manifestations, so that we might better conceptualise the relationships between specific drinking practices and events, and the pervasive moral discourses that potentially mediate their outcomes. The assumption here is that ongoing projects of moral personhood are always in some way implicated in local drinking events, and vice versa. The later chapters of this thesis, particularly those concerned with how alcohol use was understood by participants as situated within their complex daily lives, and with how the presence and possibilities of children re-

made otherwise stubborn assemblages, provide crucial data and analysis for this important aspect of alcohol use.

Being both a Researcher and a Young Adult who Uses Alcohol

O'Toole (2002: 171) argues that reflection on ethnographic research practice requires an awareness of how the process can impact one's identity, and how one's sense of self can shape field relations and data collection. In concluding this chapter, I will draw on a few experiences to highlight the self-formatting process of conducting ethnographic fieldwork amongst a network of young adults who use alcohol, while simultaneously performing my own version of a young adult who uses alcohol. Both processes have meaningfully participated in the production of this thesis.

An obvious difference between Zigon's research endeavours in Russian treatment clinics and my own relates to the extent to which we could be considered 'insiders' by our participants. Whereas in Zigon's case he entered a world that was only loosely familiar, many of the drinking practices, people and contexts that I encountered during fieldwork were already well known to me. Although this conflation of insider-outsider had its benefits, some of which have been described so far in this chapter, at other times I found the overlap to be mentally, emotionally, physically and professionally challenging. For example, throughout fieldwork, I found it particularly difficult to delineate personal leisure time from the demands of the ethnography, as the times and spaces previously reserved for leisure and play had now become, to some extent, professionalised. This required a significant shift in attitude, comportment, alcohol consumption, use of language, forms of social engagement and the overall motivations and aims for engaging in drinking settings, oriented towards data collection over relaxation, sociality and enjoyment. It took some time to identify a framework for the research that would enable the fulfilment of my research obligations, while pursuing my own interests – including making new friends, managing my finances, pursuing romantic relationships and maintaining my physical and mental health. Despite preserving a day or two per week to return to the 'normal life' of a doctoral student, immersion in the field otherwise allowed little room for personal interests, desires and emotions. As O'Toole (2002: 166) argues, ethnographic immersion often means that everyday ways of listening and observing

in social settings become constantly shaped towards one's research interests. Personally, this aspect of fieldwork was exacerbated by the conflicting sense that the spaces in which I would typically relax had now become spaces of observation and critical analysis, where I felt continually 'on-duty' (O'Toole 2002). At some point during the process, I had to abandon the notion of a neat separation between my research and personal (in particular, leisure) lives, and instead had to conflate the two. Practically, this meant keeping to the schedules of my participants, and conducting data collection and analysis in a more fluid, iterative way, which lacked any identifiable organisational structure or separation between student and participant observer that might historically have been maintained in previous alcohol research using specifically delineated times and spaces for observation (e.g. Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Lindsay 2005, 2006). Rather, I adopted more closely the role of participant observer, and de-formalised my scholarly duties of reading and taking notes, fitting these processes around fieldwork where possible, instead of at my allocated office space at the National Drug Research Institute in Fitzroy. In several ways, this may have increased my workload, but it ensured it became diversified and manageable enough for the sake of my own personal wellbeing.

However, this position was not without its challenges, beginning with the establishment of a sample. Although key relationships were crucial to data collection, they required significant work. To begin with, the snowballing recruitment strategy ensured that I was less able to make more discerning social choices on the basis of mutual interests or the potential for enjoyment. Across the course of fieldwork, the participants of this study became *the* significant elements of my life, and possessed great power in shaping, organising and emotionally affecting it. Throughout this period, it became particularly evident to me that there were fundamental differences that existed between myself and the participants, and between the participants themselves, and I eventually grew tired of negotiating the social dynamics of a needlessly complex social network with their own unique worldviews, concerns and habits, the majority of whom rarely seemed to get along.

O'Toole (2002) asserts that the effort to continually be sociable within an unfamiliar social network, while negotiating the strains of being a novice researcher, is an often stressful but necessary requirement of fieldwork. In my experience, I found this

additionally challenging because of the in-group conflicts that would frequently and unexpectedly emerge on nights out. With most lacking long-standing roots in Melbourne, and operating amongst unstable conditions, as I did, the participant networks of this study mutated and evolved with a high level of fluidity throughout fieldwork. This meant that participants moved in, out and through the field site, forming relationships which soon after would inexplicably fizzle and often break down entirely. Occupying a central position linking these networks, I found these dynamics confusing, tedious, draining and at times demoralising. For some periods during fieldwork I would spend three to four nights a week with one person and their network, and then by way of an argument, or stylistic preference, or unintentionally offensive comments, go months without seeing him or her. As such, maintaining continuity with participants in general, but organising specific events such as interviews in particular, became an ongoing and consuming task. A significant amount of research energy was spent negotiating the challenges of pleasing several disparate and often incompatible networks of friends, a task made more difficult by my reluctance to take sides in keeping with my non-judgemental, middling researcher identity. In project terms, this ultimately reduced the number of interviews from the 25 I had originally intended, as the objective of actually organising a time to meet face-to-face for an hour or more for reasons other than merely a social catch-up, and then successfully conducting the interview, was often a bridge too far.

Insider/Outsider – Gaining Informed Consent

Despite its challenges, this insider–outsider dichotomy was also frequently beneficial to facilitating social and research relationships, particularly with regards to obtaining informed consent. On several occasions, when introducing myself, I was asked what I did for a living. After explaining that I was ‘studying’, I was inevitably pressed for more detail. These conversations almost always ended with those present in a slightly disbelieving, jovial mood, expressing amusement if I responded with ‘I’m studying drinking’, or the more elaborate, ‘I’m looking at how young people use and understand alcohol’. Often this would invoke a tongue-in-cheek admission – ‘Well, you’ve got a great case study right here!’ – or another question: ‘So, you’re at work right now? What a job!’ The extension was that through such discussions I often created a memorable persona for myself as someone seemingly intelligent, who had a

fortunate, ‘cushy’ job studying a universally interesting, relatable and amusing topic (Moore 1992; Palmer & Thompson 2010). This not only enabled me to quickly neutralise potentially awkward introductions with humour, but importantly, offered me an obvious opportunity to be upfront with potential participants about what I was studying, from which perspectives, and how I intended to conduct the research, and discussing the potential for an interview.

However, over the course of fieldwork, many of those I had been introduced to, sometimes months earlier, tended to forget about my researcher identity, or misinterpreted it in the first place, were uninterested in the project, or simply did not fully grasp the concept of my pursuits. I regularly gauged that some were under the impression that I studied somewhere else, looking at a different group of people – perhaps in a lab, looking at ‘alcoholics’ or the medical effects of drunken bodies, or I was simply writing a thesis somewhere, as several suggested. Despite often reiterating my position as a researcher, several maintained the notion that I couldn’t possibly be studying *them*, at that time, under those circumstances.

There was one particular occasion where I was out with Lucy and her friend Rachel, having a fun night dancing at a bar in Carlton. After Lucy went to the bar, Rachel and I were left chatting about my PhD progress. Although I had explained it to her before on several occasions in the previous six months or so, Rachel enquired again after my methodology. ‘It’s called ethnography,’ I explained, ‘so I basically just hang out and talk to people and take field notes. So, like, tonight I’ll go home and tomorrow I’ll write a few notes on everything that’s happened tonight’. Rachel looked mildly surprised, but her shock was short-lived. She responded, ‘Really ... well, I’ll make sure I’m aware of that in the future!’ Her response would indicate that in future social interactions, she would likely modify her behaviour now she was aware of my note-taking. I’m not sure she ever did, and if she did make such a conscious effort I wasn’t aware of it and her wariness of my research was never explicitly articulated again. As per my other experiences, it’s likely that the idea of taking notes of her behaviour on a particular night out did not trouble her after that night, or she simply forgot about it. Sometime later I was able to interview Rachel, prior to which I reiterated my research process and what I was hoping to explore with her during the interview, and during fieldwork more generally. She willingly

consented to the interview and her participation in the project, having had the process explained to her to the best of my ability.

The strategy described for Rachel is the primary method I employed to obtain informed consent from those wishing to participate in this study. The majority of participants who I interviewed emerged out of networks established through fieldwork relationships. Interviews were conducted at irregular intervals, predominantly towards the latter stages of fieldwork, and in some cases, after the delineated twelve-month period. This afforded me the opportunity to identify those who had emerged as key participants in the data collection process. Using this method, I was able to approach them to give informed consent for both an interview and their participation in the wider ethnographic project simultaneously, digitally recording their verbal consent at the beginning of formal interviews.

I was able to conduct this process with more confidence that the thoughts, words and actions of these key participants would end up forming a significant contribution to the final thesis, than if I had attempted to coerce potential participants into signing consent forms on the first meeting. In contrast, the strategy I employed appeared more logical and reliable. As mentioned earlier, although I attempted at all times to be transparent regarding my identity as a researcher, I would anticipate that including the idea of obtaining consent during first introduction would have significantly altered the mood from one mostly of humour to counter-productively producing confusion and apprehension. Furthermore, gaining consent from all individuals I encountered throughout fieldwork would not only have been impractical and socially problematic, but also ethically unnecessary given that the vast majority of the fieldwork data reproduced in this thesis involves those participants who gave their informed consent. This element of the research process is representative of the learning process of becoming an ethnographer; by the latter stages of fieldwork, this emerged more clearly, and I was in a better position to analyse which data, emerging from which participants or events, might be best suited to the development of a thesis.

Conclusion – Research Method and Personal Experience

At the time, of course, things were anything but neat and coherent. At this time, I have made them seem that way so as to salvage some meaning from that period for myself and for others. This book is a studied condensation of a swirl of people, places, and feelings. It could have been half as long, or twice as long, or ten times as long [...] anyone who had such a set of progressively coherent encounters while in the field, and was fully conscious of it at the time, would not have the kind of experience which I have reconstructed here.

(Rabinow 1977: 6)

The Paul Rabinow quotation above eloquently summarises what has been explored in this chapter, and the methodological character of my project. Indeed, the lack of coherence and consistency central to my personal and research relationships and experiences throughout fieldwork has emerged as a key theme in this thesis. In a practical sense, the divergences that opened up between my own assumptions I carried with me into fieldwork, and the seemingly formless complexity of the action that unfolded before me, served as the daily, miniature tests and puzzles that are characteristic of ethnographic research. Agar (1997: 1157) insists on viewing these slippages as the ‘rich points’ that ultimately form the units of analysis for ethnographers. What follows in this thesis is an effort to trace how these frustrations and divergences were produced, and to describe them in a convincing manner while relating them to theoretical and policy concerns (Bourgois 1999; Moore 1992). Importantly, these ‘rich points’ help begin the fundamental reconceptualisation of social, and in this case moral, categories that the shortcomings of existing attempts to understand alcohol use and morality demand (Rabinow 1977).

Ethnographic research is laden with occasionally baffling complexity, which requires a significant amount of skill, resources and energy if one is to make sense of it. Early fieldwork experiences were educational in this sense, beginning with my attempts to ‘access’ a research site and social networks of participants that I had previously imagined were stable, accessible and forthcoming entities. However, the relationships with participants and their networks, and the geography of inner-suburban Melbourne, that constitute this project were not exactly what I had anticipated, and thus were necessarily traced *in situ* as fieldwork unfolded, in what

was a complicated and convoluted process. I persisted through a year of fieldwork, negotiating fluid and testing social dynamics, compiling field notes and conducting less-than-expected, and organisationally difficult, in-depth interviews. The ongoing, iterative data analysis that has ultimately evolved into this thesis very much echoes Moore's (1992: 321) characterisations of fieldwork as a mix of 'dead-ends and frustrations interspersed with fleeting moments of lucid understanding' (Moore 1992: 321).

Throughout this chapter, I have made attempts to interweave these moments of reflexive realisation with a more pragmatic depiction of how this project was implemented. In the existing literature, there appears to be little attention given to the emotional demands of ethnographic research on researchers, and my own experience was indeed a test of my 'emotions, confidence, and mental tenacity' (O'Toole 2002: 160). There is no doubt that ethnography was a personal experience that has meaningfully shaped my sense of self, and it is just as certain that this ongoing self-formation has in diverse ways influenced both the research and its participants along the way. Indeed, the ethical status of any ethnographer is always imbued with ambiguity, as one manages the roles of being part of people's lives, and gaining their trust and confidence, while simultaneously engaging in a politicised project in order to further one's career (O'Toole 2002; Rabinow 1977). The aim of this particular chapter is to make these processes explicit and potentially educational, both personally and for other novice ethnographers. In addressing this ambiguity, the central project for the remainder of this thesis is to illuminate the lives and experiences of study participants in a thorough, contextualised and respectful way so as to enhance our understanding of the relationship between young adults, alcohol use and morality. In the following chapter, I begin this venture by tracing the moral complexities of the drinking experiences of a 23-year-old university college student, and how these intricacies ultimately fed back into her own project of moral personhood.

Chapter Five:

‘I don’t regret it but like that was that time in my life’: Moral complexity and subjectivity in the experiences of a college drinker

The aim of the following four chapters is to give a theoretically informed account of my fieldwork and interview engagements with the specific network of young adults who use alcohol described in the previous chapter. Using Zigon’s theoretical framework, I argue this account elucidates a nuanced and comprehensive perspective on the drinking practices and experiences of this network, while simultaneously providing a critical exploration of how the proposed interrelationship between morality and drinking might further advance our understanding of youthful alcohol use more broadly. Specifically, this thesis questions what an analysis of young people’s experiences with alcohol would look like if we did not rely on rigid, abstracted and de-contextualised moral assumptions determined prior to engagement with local moralities. This question proceeds not only from the chosen theoretical standpoint but also from ethnography’s ethical obligation to take the moral experiences of interlocutors seriously and to find more nuanced ways to analytically frame them. The approach taken in this thesis to synthesise Zigon’s theory with ethnographic sensibilities necessarily defers the evaluation of youthful drinking practices according to official interpretive frameworks, for example, and rather begins instead with accepting that, whether it is desirable or not, this is the life that many young adults in Melbourne are living (Zigon 2013: 213). To categorise their actions according to pre-determined, stringent moral philosophies, or worse, to utilise such frameworks unquestioningly, would, according to Zigon (2014a: 25), be ethically and intellectually ‘untenable’.

This chapter is the first that looks explicitly at ethnographic data. It will also introduce several key Zigonian concepts, using an interview I conducted with a young woman named Hannah as an initial case study through which to explore them. I was introduced to 23-year-old Hannah by a mutual friend at a function towards the end of fieldwork, and she immediately expressed interest in being involved in the project. We met in a café in December 2013 and talked for over an hour about her

drinking history, current engagements and hopes for the future, among many other topics. At the time, Hannah was experiencing a period of significant change, coming to the end of her part-time university course, while still working substantial hours in marketing, and pursuing another imminent job opportunity. As such, I was only able to see Hannah a handful of other times as our networks changed, and our lives took different directions. However, the conversations I had with Hannah, over the months we saw each other regularly, were invariably jovial and memorable. As a matter of course, Hannah would draw from her large and diverse history of drinking experiences to narrate illustrative and dynamic stories providing amusing insights into her personality, life and relationship with alcohol.

I intend to analyse my interview with Hannah in a way that illuminates two particular aspects of Zigon's theory that might help us think differently about morality – his understandings of moral complexity and moral subjectivity. Zigon's theoretical framework rests on the idea of eschewing 'totalising moralities' that might be understood to characterise or organise any particular social situation (Zigon 2013: 202). Given the breadth of possible human experiences – the type of variety one would encounter in ethnographic fieldwork, for example – this narrow conceptualisation of morality leaves little room for complexity. In Zigon's own research, he describes the local moralities he encounters as 'unique conglomerations of diverse and often contradictory discourses as well as diverse and sometimes incompatible embodied moral dispositions' (Zigon 2013: 202). Central to Zigon's project is understanding how these conglomerations of discourses and moral dispositions come together to form local, moral and ethical 'assemblages'. This process is undoubtedly grounded by the extent to which it can capture the nature and effects of social life's inherent fuzziness, fragmentation and contradiction (Zigon 2013, 2014a). In this sense, whereas previous scholars and philosophers might have presumed the meaningful existence of pre-determined, static, moral totalities, Zigon's framework is designed to account for the intricate moral complexities that more closely characterise everyday life. In doing so, Zigon's theory also allows for diversity. Given the myriad different ways in which one's moral subjectivity can be shaped by the complexities inherent in moral assemblages, Zigon recognises the breadth of ways in which people can live, reflect and ethically work on themselves (Zigon 2013, 2014a). Indeed, while one of Zigon's primary aims is to document the

assembling of local moralities, another of his central concerns lies with how moral subjects themselves also become assembled.

Inspired by these foundational tenets of Zigon's work, in this chapter I will unpack some of the moral complexities of college drinking that Hannah and I explored together in our interview, while tracing the various demands her dynamic drinking experiences have placed on her moral subjectivity. Many qualitative researchers have critiqued dominant accounts of youth drinking that frame young adults who regularly drink heavily as lacking adult moral capacities (e.g. Moore 2010; Wyn & White 1997) or as hedonistic, irrational, irresponsible and neglectful of health, social, professional or familial obligations (Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2005; Measham 2004; Measham & Brain 2005; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). This analysis departs from these depictions by emphasising the level of moral acuity, flexibility and awareness Hannah must enact in order to negotiate her desired life trajectory amidst these ethical challenges.

In the analysis, I will employ two concepts in particular – 'attunement' and 'fidelity' – that Zigon considers to be ontologically fundamental to his understanding of moral subjectivity. Through these analytical tools, I will present an analysis of Hannah's account that promotes thinking about moral beings as first and foremost relational and affective beings, as opposed to reducing them to the kind of sovereign, rational and contemplative beings assumed in traditional understandings of young adults and their drinking practices (Lindsay 2010). This is not to say that Hannah in any way lacks the capacities to successfully enact notions of 'rationality' or 'responsibility', but rather, I question whether these concepts are the most relevant or useful in understanding her (and others') experiences (Zigon 2013). Indeed, following Zigon, my focus is not necessarily on the evaluation or judgement of Hannah's actions on the basis of rigid moral dichotomies. Rather, by situating Hannah's experiences amidst the complex local moral assemblages in which alcohol use has emerged for her, I intend to unfold an understanding of her experiences as primarily concerned with the 'making, remaking, and maintenance of affective relationships' between the various moral subjects, objects, physical activities, ideas, imaginations and discourses she encounters (Zigon 2014a: 21). This approach, I argue, offers an opportunity to examine how young people come to be co-constituted through these

various relations, including the ideas, objects or practices they value. Moreover, the moral assemblage approach invites us to consider how engagement with complex relations can potentially reconfigure moral subjectivities and offer new ways for morally being in the world (Zigon 2013, 2014a). In doing so, where some perspectives might frame Hannah's heavy drinking experiences as self-defeating and broadly irresponsible, this analysis highlights them as morally productive, generative and transformative.

Drinking at College – Expectations, Calculations and Ritual

Given the interview's prescribed focus on alcohol consumption, I could sense shortly after meeting the gregarious Hannah that she was eager to talk about her years living at college. Hannah moved into a college residence to begin her first year at a Melbourne university early in 2009, following her parents' relocation overseas. Hers was one of several on-campus dormitories that house students throughout the academic year, particularly those who usually live abroad or in regional areas of Australia. These 'colleges', as they are known, provide accommodation, kitchenette facilities, catered meals and official events while students are also able to organise their own social events, plays and concerts, and participate in inter-collegiate sporting competitions. Hannah lived at one such college in 2009 and 2010.

The literature suggests that the period following secondary education is considered to be distinctively transitional, with many young people undergoing substantial changes to their bodies, living arrangements, social networks and activities (Lorant, Nicaise et al. 2013). Expectations about young people's behaviour and priorities also change, relationships with peers and parents are likely to alter, and one becomes exposed to new social practices and modes of experience (Tutenges & Rod 2009). In this period many young adults also deepen their familiarisation with alcohol consumption and intoxication through a sustained phase of regular heavy drinking, and often experiment with, transgress and transform existing rules and norms around alcohol use, under novel conditions (Cronin 1997; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Tutenges & Rod 2009).

Despite substantial efforts to prevent and reduce risky consumption among university

populations, heavy alcohol use remains particularly prominent (Caudwell & Hagger 2014; Cronin 1997; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Tan 2012). One study of student drinking at an Australian university (Hallett, Howat et al. 2012) found that 90% of students had consumed alcohol in the last 12 months, and 48% reported exceeding the single occasion guidelines (four standard drinks) at least once in the previous month. Men were significantly more likely than women to drink at these ‘hazardous’ levels, and also reported a much higher average typical consumption over the preceding 12 months (8.7 versus 5.1 standard drinks on a typical occasion). A significant portion of Hallett et al.’s (2012) participants also reported having experienced ‘second hand’ effects as a result of excessive alcohol use. While some outcomes were comparable across genders, including experiencing disrupted sleep, engaging in arguments or being insulted, others were differentiated significantly by gender. Males were almost twice as likely to have been assaulted, for example, while women reported much higher rates of experiencing unwanted sexual advances (Hallett, Howat et al. 2012: 5). In addition, those in the early part of their university careers (ages 17–19) were more likely to experience harms than their older counterparts (Hallett, Howat et al. 2012).

Responding to the prevalence of heavy drinking and related harms in higher education institutions, substantial qualitative research has emerged in the last two decades exploring universities, and particularly residential colleges, as complex social environments where frequent heavy drinking, and ambivalence towards its potentially negative outcomes, has become normalised (Cronin 1997; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lorant, Nicaise et al 2013; Polizzotto, Saw et al. 2007; Tan 2012; Workman 2001). The assemblage of independent living, reduced parental control, increased social homogeneity, the wide availability of alcohol-related products and activities, and the existing student folklore at tertiary institutions, are understood to have established frequent heavy drinking as a ‘normative expectation’ (Lorant, Nicaise et al. 2013) or ‘imperative’ (Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009).

Qualitative research has illuminated some of the nuances in how such conditions shape choices around drinking. Findings from Lindsay, Harrison et al (2009), Polizzotto, Saw et al. (2007), Tan (2012) and Workman (2001) suggest that heavy drinking at college comes imbued with functional and developmental meanings, and

significant social benefits. As well as strengthening interpersonal bonds, Tan's (2012) research indicates that college drinking is also often motivated by its capacity to facilitate sexual encounters, and to relieve study stress and social anxiety. More broadly, Tan's participants also recognised the centrality of alcohol use to student and college identities, and wider university cultures and national imaginaries. While the continuing pervasiveness of heavy drinking in university populations would suggest their prioritisation of these benefits over alcohol's well-documented health and social risks, this work also highlights a nuanced awareness of the complexities of college drinking that extend from interpersonal dynamics to national discourses. Recognising the indeterminacy of this period of their lives, an uncertainty assembled through this array of contradictions, the challenge for most young adults, argues Lindsay, Harrison and colleagues (2009), is to successfully have one's 'time to shine', and to ultimately emerge unscathed (2009: 50).

Hannah and her First 'Skol Session'

One of the first stories articulated by Hannah while recounting her drinking biography concerned a ritualised drinking game. 'Skol sessions', pronounced 'scull sessions' in the Australian lexicon as a term representing events involving the downing of a drink (usually beer) in one swallow, were a long-held tradition at her own college, and several others, as I was told informally during fieldwork. In Hannah's case, these sessions involved the directed heavy consumption of alcohol with the primary aim of inducing intoxication and vomiting, and are typically celebratory events held for students having recently participated in a sports team, or played a role in a college theatre production or social committee. According to Hannah, 'skols' were held at various intervals throughout the academic year, as major events or competitions came to a close, and took place at specific pubs proximate to the university that also hosted college-only nights. The occasion Hannah described related to her first skol session, which followed her first inter-collegiate competition as part of the college's female softball team.

Hannah recounted her first skol session in detail, and with a mixed sense of fondness and mild disbelief. She remembered clearly feeling apprehensive and 'scared' immediately prior to the event, as she 'didn't know what was going to happen'. This feeling intensified when she was confronted with the function space the pub staff had

laid out for the students, featuring a long table with large buckets positioned in front of each individual seat. Hannah went on to describe the space:

There'd just be like a table lined up with chairs around it and buckets on the table. And you had to sit, like, in the order of your seniority. So like, the captain and coach were up the head of the table and then the rest of the table, you were sitting opposite each other [...] so you start, like, sitting down the back.

Once seated, the coach collected \$30 from each team member and returned to the table with jugs of beer for each of the female participants. Despite using the somewhat demystifying term 'skol session', it was only at this point that Hannah, at the time only a novice beer drinker, began to truly realise the purpose of the event. The captain directed her subordinate team members to seat themselves along the table, in front of their empty buckets and full jugs of beer, in order of seniority, at which point all were ordered to fill their glasses and skol in unison. From that point on, the drinkers were called out in certain categories – one for 'freshers' (first-year students), one for those studying history, and one for those who had dropped a catch that day, and so on. Those who identified as part of the announced category would have to skol 'as fast as you can, obviously' while the rest of the participants chanted raucous encouragement. According to Hannah, the first-year students bore the brunt of the allocation of designated beers, with their under-developed constitutions making frequent use of the buckets that Hannah soon realised were there 'for you to vomit into if you needed it'. The team's coach would be responsible for keeping a tally of how many beers everyone in the team had been allocated. This was not in order to minimise the risks of gross intoxication, vomiting or passing out, as I had initially, and naively, assumed. Rather, records were kept for economic purposes; each person had donated \$30, and to unevenly distribute the beer would be financially unfair. Once the game had commenced, participants were also denied permission to leave the table, while speaking out of turn, taking photos and using mobile phones were also prohibited for the duration of the event. In the all-female events, such as the one Hannah described, participants were allowed bathroom breaks at various points throughout the night. However, at 'guys' sculls', remembered Hannah, 'there's no bathroom breaks. It's buckets for everything'.

Hannah consumed in excess of three jugs herself across the session, constituting over three litres of full-strength beer, approximately three times the amount of standard drinks recommended for single occasion consumption by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2009). She also ultimately vomited, as did the majority of her teammates. However, Hannah most clearly recalled the novel, enjoyable and provocative nature of this ritualised drinking practice, which she described in a contradictory mix of descriptors including ‘fun’ and ‘disgusting’:

’Cause I remember, like, after the first four pots which were pretty rapid-fire, because I was a fresher, you’d have your team skol and then you’d get your fresher skol, and then if you were doing a first-year subject skol, and then, you know, I probably got something else along the way. Because like, they just take note of stupid things you did or good things you did and you have to skol. It was really fun, I had a lot of fun, but I was so, so drunk. And then, because it was a Monday night, we went out to our college pub that we went to on a Monday after that, which was about a five-minute walk away. Like, and we just had to have like our coach pretty much had to corral us, like, the coach was just a girl who used to live at the college who’d come back and coach, yeah. She had to like shepherd us down, like, [the street], umm, to [a nearby pub] and we were in a disgusting state, and I just remember – this is the other thing I thought was just like ... we should not go out at that point. We were all barely able to walk and you know, we’ve been vomiting and it’s disgusting, we’ve got like stuff written all over us because, like, there’s always a pen around and, umm, and then you kind of like – but it was again, I think it was a part of that tradition, like, you’d have skols and then that night, the rest of the college would know that your team had had skols and would expect to see you out. And it was kind of like a ... you’d be paraded around.

Although Hannah made it quite clear that skol sessions had a long history at her college, and were held not once but several times throughout the year by its various teams and committees, during my own fieldwork I had only rarely witnessed such organised, ritualised and conspicuous drinking practices. It is worth noting that, according to Hannah, the proprietors and employees of the local, college-affiliated pub that had hosted this particular skol session had indeed participated in the full

knowledge of Hannah's college's 'traditions'. By her own admission, towards the end of the night Hannah had become so intoxicated that in retrospect she questioned why a group of college students exhibiting the sort of behaviour they did would be desirable patrons for pub-owners or venue staff. Hannah was even mildly ashamed of her conduct, leaning forward to whisper part of the following quotation out of earshot of those around us, and admitted that she was guilty of vomiting in sinks and on tables:

Seriously, I wouldn't have been able to, like, have a conversation. And that was the thing, like, all these college bars, they all – I think – knew the deal. Like, and it was disgusting, like, I don't know why they'd want to have us, because you know [lowers her voice] we would clog the sinks with vomit, we were vomiting on the tables.

Despite remembering the event fondly, Hannah frequently referred to the 'disgusting' character of the event, most poignantly inscribed on the unruly, drunken bodies of the participants, and in the pub sinks that had become clogged with vomit. Given popular tendencies to describe such outcomes as 'negative', I enquired after how Hannah might have become persuaded by such an event, and moreover, how a group of young, female, inexperienced beer drinkers came to participate so wholeheartedly:

James: So did anyone ever, like, put their hand up and go 'I can't do this anymore, I'm done. Like, I can't drink this'?

Hannah: No ...

James: Oh really?

Hannah: Yeah. And that was the thing, like, at the start of a skol session – and like, the college administration knew that these things happened – and at the start of every skol session, the captain or coach would say, you know, 'If you ever feel uncomfortable or whatever, it's fine, you can stop, you don't have to participate'. But no-one would ever ...

James: You don't want to be seen like that.

Hannah: No. Yeah, I think especially in like sporting teams as well, yeah.

In the above quotation, Hannah echoes existing research on college drinking by indicating the coercive power of the college's traditions, such as 'skol sessions', as well as its authority figures, and more generally, the perceived normative expectation to drink heavily while attending university events (e.g. Cronin 1997; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lorant, Nicaise et al. 2013; Polizzotto, Saw et al. 2007). However, Hannah's dynamic description of the event also affords us the opportunity to examine how this particularly persuasive situation came to be assembled. Significantly, as this chapter will go on to explicate, Hannah understood 'skol sessions' (and other situations at college) to be unique, and governed by standards and expectations that differed from those of 'normal society'. Beyond this interpretation, however, a closer analysis of Hannah's experience enables an exploration of the specific mechanics of the 'skol session' moral assemblage. In the next section, I have drawn out a heterogeneous set of elements to which Hannah refers in presenting her account of 'skol sessions', the complexities of which, I argue, would be left unexplored and un-theorised by ceasing the analysis at simplistic notions of coercive pressure.

Indeed, it is only by attempting to capture the complexities Hannah describes that we can more aptly embrace the 'fuzzy, fragmentary, and oftentimes contradictory moral milieu' (Zigon 2014a: 17–18) of 'skols'. In the next section, I follow the range of moral subjects, objects, physical activities, ideas, imaginations and discourses that Hannah herself valued both at the time of the skol session and in our interview. In doing so, I intend to illuminate the relational world of value Hannah articulates as an 'attuned' moral subject, a moral subject that is always co-constituting and co-constituted by her entanglements within this web of multifarious relations (Zigon 2014a: 23). How these relations are ethically made and re-made in accordance with Hannah's desired life trajectory – a condition Zigon (2014a) calls 'fidelity' – will be the focus of the final section of this chapter.

College, Tradition, Sport, Skolling, Vomiting: Elements Constituting a Skol Session Moral Assemblage

In her first skol session, Hannah described herself as entangled within a complex

arrangement of heterogeneous forces including (among others): her relation to alcohol, college traditions, sport, beer and skolling, the physical space and the practice of vomiting. In keeping with Zigon's inductive approach to apprehending local moralities (e.g. Zigon 2014b), one aim of the following analysis is merely to avoid pre-evaluating Hannah's experience by way of dominant, existing framings. Simply reifying the assumption that 'skol sessions', and the ways in which they affect participants, are a result of the coercive college environment in which heavy drinking is normalised, would be one such example of this approach. Instead, I take a different route in presenting a fine-grained examination of some aspects of Hannah's first skol session that, while she herself articulated them as meaningful, may have been obscured by a narrow understanding of her moral world.

The College

Hannah entered the pub for her first skol session scarcely a month after becoming a college resident. Indeed, her revelation that she felt 'scared' in the lead-up to the event suggests that this was still a time of new experiences and relative uncertainty. In the midst of this indeterminacy, she found herself surrounded by trusted friends, acquaintances and institutions that all promised assimilation and belonging (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010). It is important to point out that throughout her account, Hannah routinely drew attention to the lack of institutional intervention not only in her own experience, but in the practice of 'skol sessions' generally. Indeed, the common understanding among college residents that administrators were aware of these practices, and remained silent, acted to support the idea that 'skols' were an accepted element of college life itself, and by extension, that participating in skol sessions was unlikely to result in official reprimands. Hannah's description of how her college was implicated in skol sessions went well beyond their tacit approval, however.

Having been exposed to the cultural eccentricities, stories and rituals of her college prior to the skol session, Hannah was able to learn that such events were intimately valued by generations of college students, and that she now found herself with the opportunity to add to the history of skol sessions in collaboration with her fellow 'freshers'. As a former college student herself, Hannah's coach served as a physical and symbolic link between previous generations and the most recent additions,

assisting in holding the skol session institution stable long enough for the new intake to latch onto it, while also reassuring uncertain participants. Indeed, her coach helped shape Hannah's (and the others') sense that failure to uphold this particular tradition would be ultimately failing her new community, and moreover, undermining the college's broader identity. Hannah managed to capture this sentiment in the following quotation:

I look back on these and, like, I did at the time, I had fun, but then I look back and I'm like 'This is just so stupid', and so, like, such bad behaviour. But because you're in a group doing it like that, you don't think you – and because it's tradition as well, you know. It was like, 'Well, you have to be a part of it'.

Rather than interpret this position merely as one of coerced subordination, Hannah instead understood her first skol session as generative and productive, preferring to highlight the sense of freedom and pleasure she experienced as representative of the college's wider drinking 'culture'. According to Hannah, to frame the college's relationship with alcohol as one involving a strict, simple imperative for students to become routinely and determinedly intoxicated would be misleading. Rather, her college assembled a morality around drinking that emphasised togetherness and non-judgement, particularly in regards to experimentation with heavy drinking: 'You drank quickly, you drank a lot and you got retarded [extremely intoxicated] and no-one cared if you were really drunk. There was no judgement; it was what you did' (Hannah).

The Pub

As a college-affiliated pub with weeknights, meal and drinks promotions, and spaces specifically designated for college students, the skol session venue was likely to already be a familiar space for many of those present, despite the novelty of the skol event. For this reason, it can perhaps be assumed that the parameters for acceptable behaviour in the pub, with which students were already familiar, only further mounted the case *for* their participation. Given that students understood pub staff and owners to be aware of skol sessions appeared to increase Hannah's confidence that participation was a legitimate and appropriate course of action, and further served to neutralise the anxieties over potential repercussions.

In her narrative, Hannah spent considerable time detailing the physical environment. The table, set up with buckets in front of each seat, was initially incomprehensible to the nervous Hannah, and progressively became a powerful tool for imbuing her story with a sense of extraordinariness, vulgarity and fun. Similarly, the positioning of the team members along the table according to age and college competition experience, and the prohibition on speaking, using mobile phones, taking photos or even going freely to the bathroom, all contributed to a complex yet intentional spatial organisation of bodies and objects. Ultimately, this spatial arrangement further stabilised the sense among participants that the central reason for their invitation to the skol session was to drink heavily.

Sport, Beer and Skolling

Elsewhere in our interview, Hannah explained her extensive background of contributing to sporting teams across various codes. She had played volleyball for her school, university and various clubs in inner-suburban Melbourne, and during her time at college played a variety of sports in inter-collegiate competitions. Throughout our interview, Hannah referred to the group participating in this skol session not as her fellow students or friends, but exclusively as her ‘team’. As mentioned previously, her female softball team was also coached by a returning former (female) student who was responsible for orchestrating the celebratory skol session itself, including positioning the participants, collecting money, calling out the categories and instigating the singing while subordinates skolled their pots of beer. The association between sport and heavy drinking has been well documented in the alcohol research literature (e.g. Crocket 2014; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Palmer & Thompson 2007, 2010). Sporting teams typically attempt to foster a selfless, team-first attitude amongst their members and, at times, can encourage trust in and commitment to the leadership and decision-making of authority figures such as captains or coaches. Indeed, Hannah drew on these sporting tropes to partially explain the participation of all those present at the skol session, and the lack of questioning regarding the event’s legitimacy.

The emphasis Hannah placed on the significance of beer and skolling also illuminates the role of gender in shaping skol sessions. As Hannah described them, skol sessions, and more specifically the practice of skolling itself, also reflected the

sport-related elements of physical competition and prowess, as well as avoiding weakness or selfishness, and overcoming thoughts of quitting that are typically ascribed to masculine forms of drinking. Indeed, Hannah remarked on her lack of experience with beer several times during her account, which is perhaps unsurprising given the literature suggests men consume more beer than women at a ratio of approximately 3:1 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). Although Hannah pointed to some minor differences between ‘girls’ skols’ and ‘guys’ skols’, namely the relative possibility of bathroom breaks, Hannah’s account illustrates the way in which skol session moral assemblages seemingly prioritise the performance of stereotypically masculine drinking practices. Around the use of beer, and the practice of skolling, the skol session custodians had assembled a discourse of camaraderie, selflessness and physical strength, the type that surrounds notions of team participation, and these unsurprisingly resonated strongly with Hannah, given her sporting background. In essence, however, the skol session moral assemblage was active in limiting the range of possibilities for performing gendered drinking practices, and ensured masculine drinking appeared a more comfortable course of action. By extension, this specific mobilisation of gender both strengthened the appeal of the event itself to potentially uneasy participants on the basis of its sporting associations, and thus mitigated the chances of anyone dropping out.

Vomiting

Finally, vomiting was both expected and prepared for as an accepted and routine part of the event. Various readings would suggest that inducing participants to throw up, and thus performing an unruliness well beyond the norms of everyday life, was *the* primary achievement of a skol session. The term ‘vomit’ was itself one of the most frequently employed terms Hannah used to describe her experience, and particularly to enhance its ‘disgusting’ characterisation. The mixture of shame and mischievous humour this term implies was perhaps most poignantly articulated by Hannah when she lowered her voice to discreetly admit that she had damaged the pub’s plumbing with her vomit. Across the night, Hannah consumed three and a half jugs of beer, but ultimately ‘vomited up the first two’.

Again, the significance of vomit in the situation described by Hannah is inflected by gender. In much of popular discourse, excessive intoxication to the point of vomiting

has long been considered a masculine behaviour (Atkinson & Sumnall 2017). When women, who face more social judgement for their drinking, engage in such practices, it is considered symbolic of the women's inherent susceptibility to alcohol's dangers, and of poor feminine performance more generally (Atkinson & Sumnall 2017; Brown & Gregg 2012; Keane 2013; Palmer 2013). In this sense, practices such as vomiting offer young women a vehicle through which to experiment with, and potentially transgress, these rigidly gendered drinking norms. Recent qualitative research, however, has sought to critique simplistic notions of young women as merely transgressing established drinking moralities, instead exploring how such experiences are potentially transformative and generative of new gender relations and new ways of thinking about alcohol use. Several Australian studies have demonstrated how networks of young women engage in an array of stereotypically masculine practices while using alcohol in order to strengthen interpersonal bonds (e.g. Brown & Gregg 2012; Palmer 2013; Sheehan & Ridge 2001; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011). In this research, young women find pleasure and meaning in enacting sexual assertiveness and confidence, raucous singing, physical fighting, defecating in public and indeed vomiting. These actions both satiate a desire for transgression and reflect women's increasing engagement in a wider range of public practices that were previously only within the purview of men (Lyons & Willott 2008). In the contemporary era, these experiences can then be dissected and re-imagined in post-event discussions (or interviews), while poring over Facebook photos, for example, in an effort to mitigate gendered discourses emphasising the dangers of such antics, and in its place elicit a sense of pleasure and belonging (Brown & Gregg 2012; Sheehan & Ridge 2001).

Moral Analysis: Complexity, Relationality, Attunement and Fidelity

To this point of the analysis, I have unpacked Hannah's account into a set of recognisable components – her college, the physical space of the pub where the skol session took place, the typically masculine combination of sport, beer and skolling, and the practice of vomiting. In doing so, I have also demonstrated the limits of any attempt to categorise the moral complexities and significance of Hannah's experience in terms of pre-existing concepts such as the 'social pressure(s)', 'imperatives' or 'normative expectations' of the university context (Cronin 1997;

Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009b; Lorant, Nicaise et al. 2013). More broadly, the dynamic assemblage Hannah traced would also undermine assumptions pervading health promotion discourse that these coercive forces merely overrode her instincts and obligations to act rationally, responsibly and with restraint as a good neoliberal consumer (Duff & Moore 2015; Lindsay 2009, 2010; Lupton 2015; Moore 2010). As I have demonstrated, such framings fail to apprehend the complex assembling of social, material and discursive forces that Hannah has described, and moreover, the emotional, physical, gendered and ethical investments she made in her first skol session. Together, I argue, her participation in this unique moral assemblage renders an understanding of her experience as a convoluted, confusing struggle aimed towards achieving belonging, pleasure and a sense of comfort in a new and somewhat daunting environment.

To be sure, Hannah's decision to participate in her first skol session is unlikely to qualify as the kind of moral or ethical 'dilemma' that has typically been the focus of studies of morality (Howell 1997). Indeed, such understandings of morality, like some dominant framings of college drinking, do not adequately map onto the experience Hannah described in her interview. Rather, apprehending the nuances of Hannah's account requires a more open and flexible understanding of morality, one that also pays close attention to the contingency and relationality of local moral assemblages. More specifically, the analysis highlights that moral experiences cannot be separated or abstracted from the complex and competing demands placed on moral subjects themselves. This is evidenced by the intricate ways in which Hannah engaged in various acts of perception and attention; was emotionally affected by and attuned to her teammates, coach and the physical space around her; was acutely cognisant of the permissive institutional and public discourses on the moralities of drinking that swirled around the event; and the thoroughly entangled, intersubjective negotiation of the experience itself (Heim & Monius 2014: 385–387). Indeed, many of these aspects are rigid, stubborn continuities of a long history of skol sessions that act to 'territorialise' the moral assemblage in specific ways, sharpening its fluid boundaries and rendering it more identifiable and understandable (DeLanda 2006). By extension, this approach provides a vantage point from which to comprehend how the participants' range of possibilities for action, particularly in terms of gendered performances, are circumscribed by these more enduring elements of the skol session

moral assemblage (Palmer 2013).

I Don't Look Back and Regret It; I Look Back and Sometimes Think Like, 'That Behaviour was Really Stupid' – Ski Week and Moral Subjectivity

This analysis also illuminates how moral experiences are first and foremost emotional, affective and visceral; it is only later that it becomes rationalised, in this case through the medium of an ethnographic interview (Heim & Monius 2014; Zigon 2009a, 2010). As a guiding aim of this thesis, I argue that this process also offers insights into the ongoing crafting of participants' moral subjectivities. As Zigon (2014a) argues, the kind of being that can live in assemblages is necessarily a relational and affective being in that its existence is contingent on the relationships of concern and value to which it has become intimately 'attuned' (Zigon 2014a). In Hannah's case, it is clear that she is enthusiastic about contributing to college life, to its folklore and tradition, as well as upholding her personal sense of what makes a cohesive sporting team, and having her 'time to shine' (Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009). In this sense, her participation in the skol session can be understood as an ethical action in that by maintaining or re-making these valued relations, a moral subject also maintains or re-makes oneself. The degree to which the subject enacts these relationships in line with one's desired life trajectory is reflective of what Zigon calls performing 'fidelity' to the life one wishes to live.

Ultimately, Hannah phrased her skol session narrative in a way that suggested it was not something she was entirely happy nor upset about, but rather she understood the experience as a meaningful point in the process of becoming the moral subject she is today, and thus, hers was an experience with which she had become relatively comfortable in the intervening years. Zigon argues that in such ethical moments one's sense of life's relationality becomes more heightened, and this encourages people to repair, rebuild or potentially construct new relations, and re-attune themselves to what they consider important (Zigon 2014a: 24). As moral subjects entangle themselves in new assemblages, negotiating pasts and imagined futures in the myriad daily encounters one has with new phenomena, they are always cultivating new moral subjectivities – new bodily, emotional, and cognitive sensibilities for being in the world (Zigon 2013: 206). This interplay between the

dynamics of a specific situation and the ongoing crafting of a desirable trajectory of moral subjectivity will be one of the primary focal points for analysis throughout this thesis. To elaborate on this point further, however, I will draw on another example Hannah detailed during our interview, involving her participation in her college's annual ski week.

There were several other situations in which Hannah felt ill at ease with the practices of her fellow students, compared to the relative comfort she eventually felt with regard to skol sessions. One particular incident materialised during her college's annual ski week some months after her first skol session. Hannah resided in a large university college with a population of over 300 students. According to Hannah, those who typically participated in ski week were a smaller, more homogeneous subset of around 40 from within this diverse population, comprised mostly of 'sporty' types and those 'who went out heaps', containing several members who were influential in the college's 'heavy drinking culture'. Hannah went on to describe this network as generative of 'crazy stories' due to their preferences for pushing the boundaries, that is, 'the stupid things that people were willing to do'.

Hannah's demeanour and tone of voice shifted noticeably when discussing ski week, to an embodiment of agitation, a sort of restless disappointment, or perhaps a 'discomfort', akin to how Zigon has described moral breakdowns. Sensing this, I prompted her: 'Sounds like you got a bit sick of it [the college drinking culture] by then'. Hannah, however, did not wish me to misunderstand her and replied:

Hannah: Well, no, I had so much fun, like, I really enjoyed it. But I think, like, ski week was where – because it was an intense group of [...] people, it went a bit too far a lot of the time, and there was a lot of drugs on ski week, which like, I don't have an issue with ... like everyone's big enough and old enough to make their own decisions, umm, but that combined with all the alcohol, like, led to people doing stupid things. Like, umm ... apparently someone like threw the fire extinguisher, like, off the balcony, and like, all these dishes off the balcony and like did all this damage, and like, one of the guys, like, peed on two beds and just, like stupid things where it just, it's just disgusting behaviour, and I think [laughs] ... I saw a guy have a seizure because, like, oh, it was full

on. Like, ski week just got out of hand. Yeah, yeah ... it was kind of crazy.

James: And you just wanted to hit the slopes!

Hannah: Yeah! I just wanted to ... I wanted to drink because I love, like ... coming off the slopes and having a beer is awesome, that is like such a good feeling.

Here, Hannah again brings together a number of different elements to describe ski week, including the people present, alcohol and other drug use, skiing, the physical space, the lack of authoritative supervision, and her own accumulated body of knowledge and experience. In this particular conglomeration, Hannah became entangled in another unique moral assemblage where forms of behaviour different from those on display at skol sessions were possible, even if they weren't necessarily desirable. Hannah was present largely to ski with her friends but was also, to an extent, open to constructing outlandish narratives through drinking, but only when they could be made somewhat intelligible or positive. Where skol session assemblages were understood as making space for freedom, creativity, indeterminacy and belonging, enabling Hannah to engage in a fun, memorable, yet occasionally 'disgusting', event, the ski week assemblage enabled possibilities that were difficult for her to experience, participate in, understand or support because of the way they conflicted with her moral disposition.

Ski week was clearly a point where Hannah was struggling through the process of working out her position in regards to, for example, drug use, and her compatibility with the moral dispositions of the others who attended ski trips. For example, not comfortable categorising drug use as either 'good' or 'bad' behaviour, Hannah reached a conclusion that rendered both the decision to engage in drug use in general, and her personal decision not to participate in particular, as appropriate in their own ways. However, the 'crazy' and 'full on' courses of action that emerged out of this assemblage went 'too far' in her eyes, and this was also shaped by gender.

Previously Hannah had found the masculine 'disgustingness' of skol sessions intelligible, and even pleasurable, in the context of her sporting team, and the need to establish her place within the college community and folklore. In contrast, the 'stupid' urinating on hotel beds, and other wanton destruction of property by the

males in the student group, and the confronting experience of witnessing a fellow student – another male – have a seizure, were features of ski week that Hannah clearly found discomfoting.

At the point of describing her skiing experience, Hannah embodied fatigue and a sense of disappointment with her realization that the indeterminacy and unpredictability that she loved so much about college life could also have very unpalatable outcomes. In recounting these two stories, Hannah was able to articulate how these experiences helped her carve out a moral subjectivity with increasing nuance and definition as she lived through her time at college. Indeed, this process was shaped by the extent to which she grew discontented, particularly with some less intelligible, more masculine forms of behaviour that were being endorsed within the college, and also the way she identified with others that she was decidedly more comfortable with, such as drinking in the context of sport – either in skol sessions or after a day's skiing. This moral complexity and significance is perhaps no more evident than in the following quotation, recorded as Hannah attempted to make sense of her time as college as part of her own life history and trajectory more broadly:

But like, oh man, at college – I don't ... I look back on it now and I'm really glad that I'm not there any more, and I'm glad that I had my two years. And I enjoyed, I definitely enjoyed it. I don't look back and regret it, I look back and sometimes think like, 'That behaviour was really stupid,' and like, it's kind of really unacceptable in a normal society, but at the time, like, that was the sort of community you lived in and so it was just so normalised. It was like the culture of the place. Umm, and like, I don't regret it but like that was that time in my life, and now – I'm not saying I don't get really [drunk] because, like, I do.

Conclusion

It must be recognised that the interview analysed in this chapter was conducted some three years after Hannah had left college, and was in many ways motivated by my own research agenda to elicit Hannah's perspectives on her alcohol consumption both at the time of the interview and the years prior. As recognised earlier, our mutual, knowing engagement in an interview focused on alcohol use prompted

Hannah to begin recounting her college drinking experiences, including the skol session and ski week accounts. Undoubtedly her memories and understandings of these experiences are likely to have changed significantly in the intervening years, and it is possible Hannah self-edited several of the stories in order to influence my perception of her, and particularly my sense of her drinking practices and history, and this is a common theme in the related literature (e.g. Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Palmer 2013; Sheehan & Ridge 2001; Tutenges & Rod 2009).

However, this thesis is more concerned with the opportunity these stories provide for Hannah to critically reflect on herself and her past experiences, and the way she makes sense of them, in particular how she understands alcohol use and its place in her imagined future (Tutenges & Rod 2009). If we are to approach these particular incidents from the perspective of minimising potential harms, exploring the ways in which one recounts past drinking experiences is important in understanding the possibilities that are open to future action. As Hannah's ski week description highlights clearly, 'a past incident can only be recollected from the perspective of the present; thus, the story becomes interwoven with the narrator's expectations of the future' (Tutenges & Rod 2009: 359). In this sense, Hannah's narratives help assemble nuanced interpretive frameworks that, for her, carry wider existential implications (Tutenges & Rod 2009).

Recognising this element of alcohol use amongst young people, however, would not be adequately achieved without the use of a theoretical perspective that allows for an understanding of how local moralities, and the moral subjects entangled within them, come to be assembled. In this chapter, I have argued that a Zigonian moral analysis of Hannah's two narratives demonstrates that alcohol use is enmeshed within complex, unique, local, moral and ethical assemblages. These assemblages are only partially co-constituted by alcohol use and young adults, and focussing on these two elements alone – as is characteristic of much of the academic, media and policy discourse around alcohol use in Australia – potentially leaves myriad other forces unaccounted for. Therefore, a significant focus for this chapter has involved tracing some of the other heterogeneous elements that were understood to participate in and shape the drinking practices Hannah described when recounting her first skol session and her experience on ski week. As this chapter has demonstrated, for Hannah these

included the physical, non-human material environments of the local college pub and the ski week hotel room. Similarly, Hannah also highlighted specific practices she engaged in that permitted new understandings of the moral assemblage in which she had become entangled, such as vomiting or drinking beer after a hard day's skiing. These also included the various college discourses that shape how social networks within the college environment become assembled and identified, such as those concerning the college's 'traditions' or those identifying the more volatile group that attended ski week. Finally, Hannah's two vignettes also illuminated the significance of gender relations within her college, and the durability of the gendered college discourses that upheld the endorsement of unruly, disgusting, masculine behaviour, and the promotion of traditionally masculine drinking (and other drug use) practices.

These unique and dynamic assemblages also highlighted the personal implications they had for Hannah, and moreover, her ability to enact her desired moral disposition. Both experiences on some level disrupted her mode of being and, in response, Hannah set about re-configuring her moral subjectivity – moving ahead with a new set of valued relations, and a more nuanced sense of her desired life trajectory. For the purposes of this thesis, the two experiences Hannah recounted enabled me to operationalise several of Zigon's key concepts, including the notions of 'moral assemblage', 'attunement' and 'fidelity', which will be used prominently throughout this thesis.

Research on drinking in the university context has suggested that frameworks capable of accounting for the social and developmental motivations for college drinking could make a significant contribution towards theorising why students continue to drink heavily despite multiple, pervasive efforts to reduce, or at least discourage, such practices (e.g. Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Tan 2012). Indeed, as Tan (2012: 133) contends, a 'one size fits all' approach to addressing college drinking is unlikely to be palatable or sustainable, and problematising alcohol use in all its forms can often prove counterproductive, creating resentment amongst student populations who believe they aren't being met halfway.

The moral assemblage analysis offered in this chapter – drawing on an interview I conducted with a former college student – demonstrates how our understanding of

university drinking experiences might be re-conceptualised via a range of theoretical tools primarily deployed to apprehend the complexities and significance of local moralities. What emerges from this analysis is not only a unique register of attunements, affects, sensibilities and ethical manoeuvres previously unaccounted for in research on college-based drinking, but also a more flexible, nuanced and sympathetic grasp of the ways in which students themselves recount and interpret their drinking experiences. Such an approach can only minimise the gaps between existing approaches to addressing college drinking and the lived experiences of using alcohol in an educational context.

The analysis that has unfolded in this chapter also sets the tone for the remainder of the thesis. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, the premise of this thesis begins with taking the moral experiences of young adults seriously. This requires attending to the complex composition of local moral assemblages in which alcohol is consumed, and analysing the ways in which those assemblages affect the valued relations of the moral subjects who inhabit those worlds, and the possibilities for how they might enact the lives they wish to live. I will continue to explore how these assemblages unfolded during ethnographic fieldwork, and interviews, in the following three chapters. The next chapter presents an exploration of interactions between young adults, alcohol, and the notion of picking up in Melbourne's licensed venues.

Chapter Six:

‘You just assume that their only aim for the night is ‘I’m going to get laid tonight’’: Picking Up in Licensed Venues

The previous chapter – the first of four substantive data chapters – took the form of an extended case study that embodied the primary aim of this thesis. That is, my analysis of Hannah’s college experiences reflected my specific focus on attending to the composition of the local moral assemblages in which participants in this study often found themselves consuming alcohol. In doing so, the previous chapter also explained several key Zigonian concepts: ‘territorialisation’, ‘attunement’, ‘fidelity’ and ‘moral assemblages’. These concepts will be used in the following chapters to analyse not only how local moralities emerge, but also how they affect the valued relationships of the moral subjects who are constituted within them, and finally, the possibilities they create for how individuals might enact the lives they wish to live. In this chapter, I apply this approach to a different environment. The vast majority of my fieldwork encounters took place in licensed venues – pubs, bars, and nightclubs – across Melbourne. As this chapter will demonstrate, these licensed venues were spaces in which unique moral assemblages also took shape. Through field notes and in-depth interviews, I was able to trace how local gendered and sexualised moralities shaped participants’ experiences of licensed venues.

Australian research examining singular ‘risky heavy drinking occasions’ (Callinan, Livingston et al. 2014) suggests that although many young people start their night off in their own or someone else’s home, almost half of this group move on to drink on licensed premises (see also Dietze, Livingston et al. 2014). Similar studies also highlight the tendencies for drinking in licensed venues to contribute to the production of adverse outcomes such as excessive intoxication, violence, crime and social disorder in the NTE, which continue to prompt both public health and community concerns (Callinan, Livingston et al. 2014; Coomber, Pennay et al. 2016; McFadden, Young et al. 2015; Miller, Droste et al. 2016). Alcohol use in licensed venues has also been understood as a common feature in young people, primarily young women, experiencing unwanted sexual attention and sexual assault (Fileborn 2012; Wall & Quedara 2014). Indeed, at the time of producing this thesis, many of

these concerns extended beyond alcohol research to permeate news media more broadly (see, for example, Owler 2014; Valentish 2015; Yoffe 2013).

By way of explaining these outcomes, research routinely focuses on the presumed problematic nature of young people's exposure to alcohol availability and promotion (e.g. Coomber, Pennay et al. 2016; McFadden, Young et al. 2015; Miller, Droste et al. 2016). As such, quantitative research often calls for policy changes such as reduced venue trading hours, restricted marketing and promotional practices, or reduced packaged liquor outlet density, in order to curb the issues of drunkenness, aggression and youthful disorder assumed to plague local NTEs. Indeed, such recommendations imply that reducing alcohol use in the NTE would necessarily limit the prevalence of these harms. However, as I will argue, in the context of licensed venues it is often difficult to draw firm conclusions about the causal role of alcohol in these outcomes (Wall & Quedara 2014). Therefore, the central concern of this chapter is to explore how moral assemblages in licensed venues are constituted, with the aim of accounting for the various heterogeneous forces that might be involved in generating the types of experiences I either observed during fieldwork or discussed with participants in interviews. Specifically, I ask the following question: given that established understandings foreground the agency of alcohol as a problematic substance, and young people as vulnerable to its dangers, what else might contribute to young people's experiences of drinking in licensed venues and its effects? I argue that an examination of the moral complexities and significance of consuming alcohol while entangled within the moral assemblage of a Melbourne pub or club elucidates a range of experiences perhaps best characterised as the negotiation of competing discourses. An overwhelming proportion of my fieldwork experiences in licensed venues involved observing participants wrestle with myriad ideas concerning not only how one ought to perform alcohol use and intoxication, but more significantly, their gender and sexuality.

As such, my approach takes as its primary focus one key element of participating in the Melbourne NTE, which pervaded many discussions, plans and interpretations relating to a night out: picking up. Although picking up (or its variants, such as hooking up) has often been narrowly defined in the research literature as merely the achievement of sexual activity (see Owen & Fincham 2011, for example),

participants in this study understood picking up as significantly more complex. In its frequent and often evocative use by both males and females, picking up came to house a diverse range of discourses, terms, expectations and practices, the intricacies of which exceed simplistic, instrumental interpretations. Many of my fieldwork experiences in licensed venues involved engaging with participants while they conflated leisurely drinking practices with the articulation or enactment of romantic desires and strategies. As such, these experiences were almost always co-constituted through the discussion, negotiation or critique of the concept of picking up.

In the pages that follow, I argue that both the salience and utility of picking up in participants' lives, within and beyond licensed venues, provide a unique vantage point from which to apprehend the moral complexity and significance of patronising Melbourne's pubs and clubs. In the process of unpacking this concept, I intend to trace how licensed venue moralities come to be assembled, and examine some of the effects produced by such arrangements. In particular I draw attention to how participants experienced licensed venues as gendered and sexualised bodies moving through complex, and at times, uncomfortable terrain, primarily in the pursuit of pleasure and intimacy. Indeed, to this point, issues of gender and sexuality have been left conspicuously absent from the national (Commonwealth of Australia 2011) and state (State of Victoria 2012) policies and health promotion documents (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009) that address drinking (see also Keane 2013; Manton & Moore 2016). I conclude by arguing that the nuanced consideration of gender and sexuality in licensed venues is integral to understanding the moral worlds inhabited by young people and the lives they lead.

The Entanglement of Young Adults, Alcohol and Sex in the NTE

Qualitative alcohol research illuminates the ways in which alcohol has become embedded in the interactions people share with each other, particularly in the ways in which they experience entertainment and express themselves socially (Fileborn 2012; Lindsay 2006; Wall & Quedara 2014). As part of this process, Wall and Quedara (2014: 10) contend, alcohol use has also become a socially sanctioned and legitimate aspect of interactions between genders, and can often play a significant role in 'the pathway to consensual sex'. Historical associations between alcohol and sex have

imbued the practice of drinking with expectations that it can increase both the likelihood and pleasure of sex (Markos 2005). By extension, the prospect of sexual interaction often acts as motivation for both men and women to use alcohol. The Australian literature suggests that young people often select venues based on the type of socialising they desire, and this can include the perceived increased likelihood of meeting sexual partners (e.g. De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Fileborn 2012; Lindsay 2006; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011). It follows, then, that some venues more explicitly market themselves towards specific audiences as providing sexual opportunities (Lindsay 2006).

The relationship between alcohol and sexual interactions is, however, complex and shaped by myriad forces, particularly gender. Undoubtedly, the experience of participating in the NTE is knotted with the enactment of different gazes and judgements made on the basis of one's gendered or sexual sensibilities, and indeed this was the case for this study's participants. As Wall and Quedara (2014: 14) have argued, social interactions involving the potential for sex are often 'interlaced with ambiguous cues and non-verbal messages between the parties'. In spaces such as licensed venues, where different motivations collide with marketing and promotional messages, the added dimension of sexual opportunity can increase this inherent ambiguity.

The social stereotype that positions women who get drunk as sexually available, for example, has rigidly persisted over time, ensuring that historically, women's drinking has been significantly more restricted than men's. Wall and Quedara (2014) argue that male perpetrators of unwanted sexual advances and sexual assault tend to be motivated by such stereotypes (see also Fileborn 2012). Perpetrators often see female drinking as a sexual cue symbolising willingness to participate in sexual activity (Wall & Quedara 2014). As such, women often report feeling an increased sense of vulnerability around alcohol use, particularly in licensed venues, and recognise a need to be hypervigilant about the 'signals' they send (Fileborn 2011, 2012; Valentish 2015; Wall & Quedara 2014: 17). Therefore, women are likely to play more socially passive roles in licensed venues, acting as the 'sexual gatekeepers' and taking responsibility for saying 'yes' or 'no' (Masters, Norris et al. 2006). Conversely, women are less likely to assert overt sexual intent, and largely consider

men to be the pursuers and initiators of sexual interaction (Wall & Quedara 2014).

According to Fileborn (2011, 2012), the interplay between the material conditions of specific venues, and their marketing and aesthetic preferences, can create ‘hyper-sexualised’ environments that contrast starkly with other day-time domains such as cafes or cinemas. They thus offer possibilities for different forms of social interaction. In her research in Melbourne, Fileborn (2012) acknowledged that specific dress codes, music, decor, as well as the appearance and behaviour of staff, were often strategically employed to facilitate sexualised interactions between patrons and occasionally staff (see also Valentish 2015). As such, Fileborn’s research suggests ‘unwanted sexual attention’ and other forms of harassment, such as staring or persistent attempts at conversation, are ‘almost humdrum in [their] inevitability’ (Valentish 2015, para. 5) for young women. Armstrong and colleagues (2014) call such spaces ‘high tolerance environments’, and point to the combinations of lighting, crowdedness, and relaxed regulation or security as underpinning the tacit permission of unwanted sexual attention. Indeed, a significant amount of qualitative research has been dedicated to exploring how young women respond to such environments through the implementation of elaborate safety practices, including the enactment of a heightened self-awareness, staying in groups or avoiding specific venues (Armstrong, Watling et al. 2014; De Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Lindsay 2006).

These qualitative research perspectives frame licensed venues not as mere backdrops for youth alcohol use, but as complex spaces traversed by sexualised and gendered bodies, infused with evocative, competing discourses, the combinations of which appear to limit or enable specific possibilities for action. Moreover, these analyses complicate the causal relationships presumed to undergird outcomes typically attributed almost solely to alcohol use in licensed venues (Wall & Quedara 2014), and direct policy attention towards the significance of gender and sexuality in these spaces. It is my intention in this chapter to further develop this line of enquiry by examining the conceptualisation and distributed effects of picking up.

‘That’s what nightlife is’: Uses and Conceptualisations of Picking Up amongst Participants

In the existing research literature, ‘hooking up’ is often defined as ‘a sexual encounter ranging from kissing to intercourse that occurs on one occasion and where the partners do not necessarily expect future physical encounters or a committed relationship’ (Owen and Fincham 2011: 321). The variation on the term used most readily by study participants, ‘picking up’, emerged as a more complex and diverse concept that covered a range of ideas, discourses, strategies and motives, and was assumed to play a significant role in shaping nights out. As such, like hooking up, the following analysis depicts picking up as a complex physical, psychological and social experience that can have significant and varied implications for how young adults understand and relate to themselves and the world around them (Paul & Hayes 2002). Over the course of this project, events that were co-constituted through the articulation or enactment of picking up – often those involving interaction considered sexual either in nature or intent – created some of the more emotive and potent moral scenarios (Zigon 2008). Indeed, such episodes were laden with emotion – excitement, desire, hope, despair, remorse, shame – as well as considerable ethical reflection.

I employ the term ‘picking up’ in this chapter as it was frequently used and recognised by study participants. However, it was also often used interchangeably with a variety of other terms such as ‘casual sex or dating’, ‘talking to girls (and boys)’, ‘getting laid’, ‘having a crack’, or ‘going home with someone’. Undoubtedly, the use of these terms had both situational and gendered elements, with the female participants more likely to use the more conservative terms such as ‘meeting’ or ‘going home’ with someone, while more broadly the majority of participants tended to soften their language for in-depth interviews. The more colloquial and overt phrases such as ‘getting laid’ or ‘having a crack’ were typically used by men, and the examples I use in this chapter derive mainly from field notes.

It must be noted at this point that the sexualised interactions described and interpreted in this chapter were exclusively heterosexual. As noted in Chapter 4, the vast majority of participants with whom I spent time during fieldwork identified as

heterosexual, and indeed their willingness to frequently use terms such as ‘picking up’ further reinforces the idea that mainstream licensed NTE experiences are shaped by rigid understandings of sexuality and resist notions of sexual fluidity.

There were only a few participants that were same-sex attracted, and in the main, they acted on the peripheries of the networks I engaged with, ensuring that building strong relationships with these participants was challenging. Over the course of fieldwork, however, I was able to establish a close friendship with one female participant who was same-sex attracted, and we spent many nights out together in Melbourne’s pubs and bars talking about dating, relationships and sexuality. She was acutely aware that the mainstream night-time entertainment precincts in Melbourne are overtly heterosexual and did not adequately accommodate the wide range of sexualities and sexual preferences in the broader population. This was particularly the case in many of the night-time spaces that the participants and I would frequent during fieldwork such as the Chapel Street district, Richmond, or much of the CBD. Although there are indeed many licensed venues scattered across Melbourne that accommodate the spectrum of sexualities, such venues are often either not well integrated into entertainment precincts, located in more marginal areas within these precincts or, more simply, the Melbourne nightlife has not yet found broadly successful ways of ensuring people of all sexualities feel comfortable pursuing pleasure, intimacy and intoxication beyond spaces exclusively designated to specific sexualities, such as ‘gay bars’. Following this, those few same-sex attracted participants I spent time with largely preferred to designate specific nights out during which they would attend ‘gay bars’ with a contingent of same-sex attracted friends (often male *and* female). In contrast to many of the heterosexual participants in the network, these designated nights out were predominantly underpinned by a desire for fun and comfort as opposed to any overt intentions to seek out potential sexual partners. Ultimately, the same-sex attracted participants of this study largely felt their romantic or sexual possibilities were somewhat closed off in the mainstream, night-time leisure arena, that was overwhelmingly set up to facilitate (hetero)sexualised interactions between men and women. This apparent barrier to inclusion was undoubtedly held in place by the entrenched use of terms such as ‘picking up’ that rely heavily on the dominance of heterosexuality in the NTE, and moreover, the gender roles designated by stereotypical forms of heterosexuality.

'A Constant Struggle': Male Perspectives on Picking Up

In general, the male participants in this study considered picking up as a largely taken-for-granted, acceptable and almost expected aspect of nights out drinking in licensed venues. At the time of commencing fieldwork, mobile dating apps such as Tinder were still very much in their infancy in the Australian context, and several participants considered other forms of online dating to be unappealing. As such, several male participants remarked on the difficulties they had experienced meeting potential intimate or sexual partners in person in settings other than licensed venues. Aiden, for example, remarked that he had never met a 'girl on a train, or anything like that'. Justin also considered the prospect of introducing himself to women in settings other than licensed venues as culturally inappropriate, suggesting 'It's a bit awkward when you're at a coffee shop and you're like "Hey girl!" and she's like "Rape!"' Aside from the enjoyment picking up can produce, then, many male participants also thought of licensed venues as the only realistic place they could meet women in ways that might be conducive to facilitating sexual encounters or romantic relationships. These participants contended that they were more likely to experience sexual interactions with women late on nights out, typically in nightclubs, after drinking. As Aiden explains: 'The last couple of girls I've sort of seen [...] I've met them and I've been pretty drunk, and like we'd have a bit of a pash and we'd exchange numbers and then we'd catch up but I can't even remember what they look like [...] That's not a good thing'.

This quotation from Aiden suggests a level of reflection that accompanies the notion of picking up, particularly on how it shapes alcohol use. Several other males supported Aiden's recognition that excessive intoxication is likely to hinder the possibility of picking up, and that clear thinking should be enacted where possible. Aiden himself suggested that he often aimed to maintain a 'tipsy' level of intoxication because he found picking up in conjunction with his 'mates' to be one of the more pleasurable aspects of nights out, and thus did not want it compromised. Justin was more forthright regarding the likelihood of intoxication undermining sexual success: 'I mean, after you've had about, I don't know, fifteen beers, it's probably not a good thing to go and talk to girls because you're probably a disgrace'.

During our interview, Luke also reflected quite deeply on his history of pursuing

sexual partners through the NTE, both in Melbourne and elsewhere. He described his desire for 'getting laid' as a 'constant struggle', a 'lifestyle' and a 'natural bad habit' that had led him into several 'silly' situations in 'clubs and bars'. In doing so, Luke pointed to a competing set of discourses at work in licensed venues that territorialise expectations of young men to pursue women sexually, and encourage them to practise drinking in different ways, often at the expense of their individual dispositions, creating a complex moral terrain for them to negotiate.

The understanding of picking up as a compulsive, natural, and distinctly masculine 'need' was also supported by other male participants. While Luke invoked evolutionary terminology to assert that the primary male purpose was ultimately to seek a mate for reproduction, another male participant, Justin, jokingly suggested that if men didn't feel compelled to pick up girls, then no-one would go out at all. This perceived compulsion, or the expectations placed on men to pick up, was an aspect of the male participants' lives that they often raised and examined during interviews. Luke, for example, insisted that sexual interactions and possibilities are of equal importance to youth, play and indeed alcohol and other drug use in constituting Melbourne's nightlife:

Nightlife has grown to incorporate drinking and those aspects of life. The drugs, the drinking, the sort of flirting. That's what nightlife is [...] I mean, imagine right now if nightlife just meant you go out, sit at a restaurant, eat some food. Sit at a bar, then go home, that's all it was. Like, there's that vibrancy, there's that youthfulness [...] people want to have a play, you know?
(Luke)

Meanwhile, Justin typically measured nights out based on whether or not he had picked up, often setting specific goals such as 'We're not leaving until we pick up chicks'. In contrast, Aiden considered picking up to be just one of many elements constituting the pleasures he typically found in licensed venues, and recognised that if he had adopted Justin's criteria, he would likely be 'depressed the whole time':

I wouldn't say it's about picking up. It's more about, it's just, it's *one aspect* of the four or five aspects of going out. And if it happens, it's a bonus. There are

definitely a lot of nights where I don't look for it [...] but there are also other nights where I kind of like [...] I remember like last year, I went through a period where I was like, hadn't dated [...] and I was like 'Fuck, I need to do something about this' [...] then I like sort of focus that on going out [...] I'll concentrate on that. (Aiden)

To summarise, male participants often positioned picking up as central to maximising the pleasures of intoxication and their experiences in licensed venues. Other leisure events, where sexual interaction was not a primary focus, were therefore often considered somewhat inferior, or auxiliary, and thus were more likely to be relegated to a more suitable time, such as mid-week or occasionally Sundays.

For the majority of male participants, engagements with picking up were oriented towards achieving sexual intercourse at some point during the process, if not immediately then soon after, as existing definitions in the research literature have foreshadowed (Owen & Fincham 2011). However, these male participants were also eager to point out that achieving these ends was not always entirely crucial, but rather a 'bonus'. Such perspectives suggest picking up might be better thought of as a shared, yet unique, set of strategies and interactions aimed towards achieving intimacy and new relationships that could also be generative of novel and unexpected experiences. As nights out typically involved small groups of two or three males attending a licensed venue – and preferably, as Justin suggested, without female friends – an added benefit of picking up involved the fostering of connections between male friends that could often override the disappointment of failing to pick up. Ultimately, these male participants articulated and engaged with the concept of picking up in ways that traced how it could be related to an extensive range of phenomena.

Kalish (2013) suggests that male sexuality is traditionally understood to be agentic, assertive, unproblematic and largely without emotional investment. Certainly, the male participants of this study considered themselves to be the main architects of sexualised interactions in licensed venues, and often articulated their nuanced understandings of specific non-verbal cues and gendered stereotypes, the types of which were mentioned earlier by Wall and Quedara (2014). Luke, for example, even

explicitly equated female drinking with sexual desire, and female sobriety with platonic friendship: ‘if girls want to get laid, they won’t mind having a drink’. However, as the reflections of Justin, Aiden and Luke in particular have demonstrated, picking up for these men is not necessarily without its problems or emotional complexities.

‘It Can Be Fun Meeting New People’: Female Perspectives on Picking Up

In the main, the young women of this study attended licensed venues less frequently compared to the male participants, with their nights out tending to involve drinking and dancing with a large group of close friends, and negotiating male approaches and gazes where it was considered either pleasurable or necessary. Females generally did not understand picking up to be an integral part of their nights out, unlike many of their male counterparts, nor was it considered a particularly important aspect of their lives more broadly. However, several female participants still recognised the potential pleasures associated with the novelty, excitement and unpredictability of interacting with unfamiliar men in licensed venues. Lauren, for example, considered exposure to ‘interesting people’ in general to be a positive by-product of patronising licensed venues:

It can be fun meeting new people [...] and obviously a big part of like, if you’re out drinking, and out meeting new people, you’re often meeting someone of the opposite sex [...] I mean, sometimes it just, you know, you miss that.

Having somewhat reduced her participation in the NTE as a result of being in a long-term relationship, at the time of being interviewed Lauren acknowledged that these forms of social interaction were aspects of attending licensed venues that she missed. Her friend Joanna, who I also interviewed, also supported Lauren’s affection for these novel social interactions, particularly with men, suggesting ‘It used to be that, you know, if you got hit on, that was a, you know, a good thing’. Lauren and Joanna’s perspectives highlight the complex nature of female sexuality in licensed venues. Although it is heavily scrutinised, significantly more than male sexuality, there were certainly moments – and several during fieldwork – where females interacted with unfamiliar men on the basis of sexual interest or opportunity that

were not necessarily considered inherently problematic or ambiguous (Kalish 2013).

Lauren also stated that receiving sexual attention from men at times made her feel ‘validated’ in a way that she had not recently experienced in the months prior to our interview. Aside from going out less often, she also felt she had been receiving less attention as, Lauren presumed, she was getting ‘a bit older’ and perhaps ‘dressing differently’. Lauren’s age added another layer of complexity to interactions in licensed venues, as attention from older males was generally considered by most female participants to be undesirable; as Lauren explained: ‘It depends on the person who’s doing it and a lot of the time it’s just a bit sleazy, and you just want to get away’. Lauren’s concerns over how she performed specific enactments of sexualised femininity reflects existing research suggesting women’s anxieties over the signals they send to men in licensed venues, and their ongoing encouragement to accept responsibility for the approaches they subsequently receive (Fileborn 2011, 2012; Wall & Quedara 2014). In turn, Lauren highlights how her lack of agency in the context of licensed venues has in some ways curbed her desire for some forms of sexual attention, and stubbornly upholds well-entrenched gender stereotypes (Masters, Norris et al. 2006; Valentish 2017).

In contrast to the male participants, women rarely, if ever, articulated desires to seek an unknown male partner for immediate sex. Although several female participants had suggested that they had engaged in ‘one-night stands’ in the past, most strongly resisted discussing definitive plans to sleep with someone on any particular night during the period in which I conducted fieldwork. Many actively avoided interactions with men in licensed venues that could be interpreted as possessing sexual opportunity, and displayed a sense of guardedness. In the quotation below, another female participant, Rachel, refers to her lack of self-trust, and vulnerability to her own flaws, as being among the primary motivators for avoiding sexualised interactions with men in licensed venues:

If someone approaches me at a bar or a club, I immediately get quite defensive and [say] ‘I don’t want to talk to you’, you know, [that] kind of thing. And I immediately want to push them away [...] because I feel like, especially if I’ve been drinking, that they’ll take advantage of my lowered inhibitions [...]

[although that's] probably more on what I think I may or may not do.

Despite some 'disastrous' experiences emerging primarily from meeting men at music gigs, during our interview Rachel claimed that, on the whole, it is 'easier' for women to realise their sexual desires in licensed venues – to successfully pick up – than it is for men. Rachel's perspective is based on her assumption that sexualised interactions in licensed venues typically require less explicit action by women and that such approaches are primarily a male responsibility (Masters, Norris et al. 2006; Wall & Quedara 2014). Moreover, it illuminates the way in which the notion of picking up is understood to be active in first, assembling the local moralities characterising licensed venues, and second, meaningfully shaping interactions between licensed venue patrons of both genders. This particular element of participating in the licensed NTE, the type that might be obscured with a narrow focus on young people and the availability of alcohol, for example, teases out some of the moral complexities, and indeed the moral significance of drinking in licensed venues. Rachel, for example, suggests that her accumulated knowledge and experience of how picking up situations routinely play out have specific implications for how she experiences different bars or clubs, and the various forms of sexualised femininity that she feels comfortable performing in those spaces. In Rachel's case, she reported often enacting a sense of apprehension, intentionally locating herself in certain spatial positions, and embodying a defensive approach to interacting with men. By contrast, other female participants, such as Lauren, fondly remembered her more overt approaches to negotiating male attention. Either way, it emerged clearly during fieldwork and interviews that when discussing the notion of picking up, both male and female participants spoke of a diverse range of related feelings, knowledges and embodiments that denote their recognition of the complex local moralities they inhabit when patronising Melbourne's licensed venues.

Some Implications of Picking Up Beyond Licensed Venues

Fieldwork experiences and participants themselves emphasised that the demand for young people to participate in these aspects of Melbourne's nightlife – that is, the pursuit of sexualised interactions with members of the opposite sex in licensed venues – is a normative expectation. While this process was largely understood to be complex and not without its pitfalls, it was mostly considered an enjoyable aspect of

young people's lives. However, these sentiments were not left unquestioned. Rather, a narrative of critique, assembled around the dominance of rigid gender stereotypes and the heteronormativity of contemporary nightlife, ran through many nights out and discussions during fieldwork. Indeed, several participants – both male and female – recognised that sexualised interactions in the NTE are spaces where issues of power, gender, social responsibility and morality can intersect problematically and dangerously.

Tim contended that it is common to see men out 'getting on the turps [drinking] on a Friday night and you know, just eyeing off females as if they're something less than what they are', gazing at women in licensed venues and remarking, 'Oh gee, I like the look of her, yeah she'd go off in the sack. Fuck, she's got a nice rack'. Tim attempted to distance himself from this more overt, vulgar articulation of carnal desire; he argued that such enactments of masculinity are 'not called for' and can occasionally produce damaging outcomes. In our interview Tim described once witnessing a 'guy backhand his girlfriend because she got him the wrong kind of beer at the bar'. Despite feeling obligated to confront the man, he reasoned it was not worth getting involved in someone else's business only to 'wake up in the ER [emergency room] of the Alfred [Hospital]'. Another night, he and a male friend witnessed a man 'yelling at the girl he's with', using 'disgusting names' such as 'slut', 'whore' and 'slag', and regularly 'dropping the f-bomb and the c-bomb'. This time, Tim's friend decided to intervene because 'no-one deserves to be treated like that'. After requesting that the perpetrator finish his drink and leave, 'this guy turned around and you know, thumped him [Tim's friend]. Just wound up and belt[ed] the living daylight out of him'.

Narratives like Tim's stoked debate between the participants around gender relations and sexualised interactions in the Melbourne NTE, and indeed, such perspectives have contributed to the public discourses of morality that co-constitute licensed venue moral assemblages. These concerns intensified just as I was preparing to embark on fieldwork. In September 2012, just weeks before I began data collection, journalist Jill Meagher was abducted from outside a Brunswick hotel on a Friday night, and brutally raped and murdered. This horrific story dominated news media for the first weeks and months of fieldwork, and permeated many discussions I had

with participants during fieldwork. It (and other similar incidents) played a significant role in framing and motivating specific safety practices employed on nights out, particularly for female participants.

Although some issues of safety related to sexualised interactions in licensed venues will feature later in this chapter, on the whole, I observed such incidents only rarely, and reports from participants regarding their experiences of unwanted sexual attention during the period in which I conducted fieldwork were scarce, yet significant when they did emerge. For the purposes of this thesis, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the potential implications of such interactions, and thus, their moral complexity and significance.

To this point, much of the data presented and analysed in this chapter has been derived from in-depth interviews with participants held in the relative comfort of living rooms or cafes. In the sections that follow, I will explore the constitution and effects of the concept of picking up in more detail, by attending to specific accounts drawn from my fieldwork in the Melbourne NTE. I trace the ways in which picking up meaningfully participated in and shaped the licensed venue experiences of my participants. I argue the deployment of this concept simultaneously reflects the teeming complexity and proliferation of phenomena that characterise licensed venues (Bøhling 2015), while also grounding such complexities through the rigid gender relations and stereotypes its articulation seemingly holds in place.

Licensed Venue Moral Assemblages: ‘Are You Being a Dickhead?’

The field note below was recorded following a night out on Chapel Street, a popular NTE precinct, to introduce my good friends Lucy, Aiden and Rachel to the new housemates I had acquired by moving into a large Richmond share house. On this evening in February 2013, we sat at an outdoor table in the beer garden adjacent to the large interior dance floor and central bar of this particular first-floor venue. The beer garden was the busiest of the three main spaces; soft lighting overlooked a smoke-filled area buzzing with the sounds of laughter, conversation and the clinking of glasses. Our newly formed group was seemingly enjoying each other’s company, conversation expanding over glasses of rum, vodka, and cigarettes, and, as the bridge

between the two networks, I was actively, and unreflectively, attempting to embody all the energy, enthusiasm and positivity I could muster:

As we were slightly short [of seating] at the end, we moved another unused table to join ours and I sat at the end of that. However, in the reorganisation of tables, another group of about four or five people crowded around the one vacant table about two or three metres from ours with a couple of people sitting down and the rest standing. I caught the eye of one woman standing around the table and said to her, 'Would you like this table? We don't really need it'. She replied with, 'What?' It was loud in the crowded beer garden, so I spoke up further: 'Would you like this table!?' She didn't reply instantly but instead looked at me with a look of contempt slapped across her face, one almost of disgust. After a few seconds, with her body half turned away she asked me, 'Are you being a dickhead or what?' I was thrown back at this and didn't really know what to say. I looked around, bewildered and returned, 'No ... I was just asking if you wanted an extra table'. She didn't even respond, just fully turned her back to me and continued talking with her boyfriend.

This incident fuelled our table's conversation for the next ten or so minutes, with many calling her a 'bitch' or a 'slut' in response [both men and women]...No-one could really fully understand what just happened, but Luke took the opportunity to get stuck in and every time her boyfriend would walk past our table, the taller Luke would get into his face and ask loudly, 'Oh, how's it going ... MATE?' [...] The incident continued to punctuate conversations throughout the rest of the night and over the next couple of days and became a source of introspection for me. (Field notes, Friday 15 February 2013)

The above incident disrupted both my enthusiastic disposition and the ongoing familiarisation of the group who had only recently met. Personally, I was thrown as much by the woman's apparent misunderstanding of my actions and words as I was with her curt responses. In the moment the field note describes, I experienced a sensation akin to what Zigon would conceptualise as an ethical moment of moral breakdown; once characterised as a 'dickhead', I searched inward for the reasons as to why this unfamiliar woman had used such a term. I reflexively scrutinised my

looks, choice of clothing, posture, tone of voice and accent, to elicit some explanation for how my offer of a free table could be mistaken for the actions of a ‘dickhead’.

Of course, it is quite feasible that I was merely misheard or misinterpreted. However, my immediate reaction was to engage in an introspective analysis of the ways in which patrons of licensed venues relate to each other, and to the potential filters or blockages that might strain or shape the multiple possible understandings of social occurrences. Like Lauren, Rachel and the other participants described earlier, I engaged local knowledge, personal experience and relevant memories to make sense of the incident, and talked it through with those around me. Lucy provided a confident and concise explanation: ‘Oh, she thought you were trying to pick her up’.

Lucy’s reading of the situation was confirmed by several other friends at the time, and indeed, experiences such as this were not particularly rare during fieldwork. On many occasions throughout 2012 and 2013, picking up emerged as a key conceptual device that helped give form and clarity to the complex and relational situations that I and many other fieldwork participants, found ourselves in. More specifically, the field note illustrates the swirl of forces circulating around this particular bar, and how this complex assemblage of forces can become territorialised – in this case, through certain arrangements of space, young adult bodies, alcohol and the concept of picking up – and how such assemblages distribute readily identifiable effects. In the case of the above field note, however, these effects are clearly differentiated by gender, including the woman’s distaste towards me on the basis of her misinterpretation of my intentions, Luke’s intimidating assertion of his height and physical masculine stature, or the more discreet, verbal critiques (e.g. ‘bitch’, ‘slut’) from the women of the group towards this particular woman’s seemingly poor feminine performance. In the next section, I explore similar experiences shared or discussed with Katie, another female participant, in order to further probe how the concept of picking up can gender and sexualise experiences of licensed venues.

Katie

During 2013, I would often meet up with Justin and his housemates Ross and Katie

on Friday or Saturday nights at one of the pubs near their house in Richmond. Frequently, these drinks were followed by more, stopping off to pick up a ‘slab [carton]’ of beer (for the men), some vodka cruisers (for Katie), and heading back to their place to spend the night listening to music and watching *Seinfeld* DVDs. Over this time, I came to know Katie quite well, and would eventually interview her. At the time, she was 22 years old, working full-time in finance, and was engaged in an on-and-off relationship she described as ‘hanging out’ with a man approximately her own age. Katie considered regular alcohol use to be a ‘social norm’ and that her participation in drinking was routinely expected by housemates, friends and work colleagues, although these social demands are not to be mistaken for reluctance on her part. On the contrary, she acknowledged the pleasures she had often experienced socialising and dancing, and as she put it simply: ‘The only way you can do all of those things is when you’re drinking’. In her interview Katie echoed Lauren and Joanna’s thoughts, asserting that for her, drinking allows her to experience ‘fun’ in a conventionally feminine way (Atkinson & Sumnall 2017):

I like to wear high heels. I like to dress up. I don’t know, I like to meet new people, I like to have ridiculous, hilarious stories and they become more ridiculous and hilarious the more people drink.

With the earlier field note in mind, I interviewed Katie about licensed venue ‘environments’, and the negotiation of sexual availability via the use of ‘pick-up lines’, to which Katie replied: ‘I’ve never sort of participated in that game, I find it so funny’. Her conception of picking up as a game, a term that simultaneously implies fun, play and competition bounded by certain rules and expectations, becomes perhaps more significant when considering the following field note recorded a few months before our interview:

Overlooking the dance floor and using the happenings there as inspiration, I enquired after what it was [Katie] felt she had to do when she was out at bars to attract guys. She hosed down the question straight away, clarifying that she ‘never has one night stands’. She had one once, after she broke up with her last long-term boyfriend, who mistreated her, cheated on her and subsequently ended the relationship quite badly. However, the ‘rebound’ one night stand was

retrospectively a mistake and from then on, she only hooks up with people she knows relatively well. Still, she admits that it is significantly easier for girls to attract guys than the other way around. For her it is simply a matter of making yourself look 'nice' and walking into a populated area, like a dance floor or the bar, assessing the guys around and smiling at one that you are interested in. That is usually enough for the guy to come over and initiate a conversation. While we were having a few drinks as a group, she was 'hit on' several times, mostly during her runs to the bar. On one occasion, a guy at the bar caught her eye and suggested to her that they play a game of 'rock, paper, scissors' to see who would be served next. She declined because she 'wasn't interested' so she 'didn't want to give him the wrong idea'. Despite this, she said it was a 'clever line' to use on a girl. (Field notes, Saturday May 4, 2013)

This field note again characterises licensed venues as a swirl of ideas, histories, gazes, strategies, embodiments and moods that many of the participants of this study have spent years negotiating and understanding, to the point where those like Katie can instantly recognise a cheesy, thinly-veiled sexual advance. Understood as an active constituent of licensed venue moral assemblage, the notion of picking up here plays a conspicuous role in shaping Katie's experience of this particular venue. Together with alcohol, the physical space, and the interactions between young adult bodies, the nexus of ideas housed under the notion of picking up acts to territorialise the assemblage's inherent complexity in ways that meaningfully shape how interactions unfold (DeLanda 2006). In the above field note, for example, it emerges that there are two spaces within this particular licensed venue where sexualised interactions are permitted or considered appropriate: the dance floor and the bar (Boyd 2014). Our position on the edge of the dance floor was a place for private conversation between platonic friends, and for gazing at those on the dance floor and elsewhere. In contrast, the dance floor is a space of sexualised interactions occurring in the form of intimate dancing and kissing, while the bar provides a space where individuals spend time waiting in line, or for drinks, and are thus more likely to be open to conversation with other patrons. As such, Katie's movement from the edge of the dance floor to the bar, and her subsequent exchange with another patron, became a course of action that was in many ways accepted and predictable, given the specific territorialisation of the licensed venue assemblage that organises the

movements and flows of its constituent elements in specific ways.

This particular assemblage clearly affected Katie, and her experience of that particular venue, in specific ways that called on her to engage in ethical reflection and to tweak her embodied moral disposition, a process she explained further in our discussion on the night. Musing on the various complexities associated with my rather crude question regarding ‘attracting guys’, Katie invoked past experiences and memories involving ex-partners, for example, from which she has learnt valuable lessons that have continued to inform her conduct in the NTE. These form part of an extensive body of local knowledge that enabled her to recognise the competing discourses and desires co-constituting licensed venue moral assemblages, and the probabilities and possibilities for engaging with men that they limit or enable. In turn, through a series of these experiences, she has been able to craft a disposition and enact specific strategies in order to feel a sense of comfort in such complex spaces, the type that is borne out in the field note above. This same embodied knowledge informed her interaction with the man at the bar who offered a game of ‘rock, paper, scissors’. Although his approach was perceived as humorous, what Katie understood to be his authentic intentions were, to her, misplaced. There was no mistaking that his was an attempt to pick her up, and her personal history, in combination with gendered discourses, warned her of the dangers of displaying inviting body language, engaging in conversation or simply the potential outcomes of yielding to a ‘clever line’ (Wall & Quedara 2014). As such, the moral dimensions of engaging with another licensed venue patron on a night out revealed such entanglements of youth, alcohol, gender and sex to be a complex assemblage of forces capable of producing emergent effects that cannot necessarily be explained by reference to one particular aspect of the assemblage, such as the mere availability of alcohol use. While recognising that these forms of interaction are pervasive elements of participating in the NTE, which might inform the development of relevant policies, it also demonstrates the significance of Katie’s awareness of these complexities, through the various moral investments she makes when patronising licensed venues, in order to feel comfortable as a sexualised and gendered moral subject.

More pragmatically, Katie described moral assemblages co-constituted by the notion

of picking up as carrying implications for how she dressed, drank, organised her nights out, enacted her sexual preferences and related to normative standards of femininity. In the following quotation, Katie reflected the perspectives of other female participants of this study, and the ongoing discourse that implores women to be hypervigilant around issues of alcohol and sex in the NTE (Fileborn 2011, 2012; Wall & Quedara 2014). In doing so, Katie also expressed the nuanced moral disposition she has crafted through years of patronising licensed venues, in her careful planning of sexual activity:

Katie: This is going to sound terrible, but if I plan to drink, I've already planned who I'm going to go home with before I've left the house. So I'll wear something that I know that that person is going to like.

James: So you don't find, you don't specifically ever go out and find random dudes.

Katie: Well, if I ever liked somebody, I don't think that they'd think that I was a nice girl if I went home with them the day I met them. So if I ever really, really like somebody, I'd happily chat with them all night, have a few drinks, get their number, sleep with the person I *planned* to sleep with ...

In this quotation, Katie also begins to unpack the significant differences between licensed venue assemblages and others found outside of drinking, particularly in terms of the types of relationships she would be willing to form or initiate. In her words, 'If you see someone at a bar, you just assume that their only aim for the night is "I'm going to get laid tonight"'. From Katie's perspective, this is an entirely different assumption compared to that governing interactions with a work colleague over coffee on a Tuesday morning. Given her history, Katie had cultivated a preference for avoiding picking up in licensed venues entirely, choosing instead to meet men through other avenues where picking up might not emerge as explicitly. Katie's thoughts reinforce Fileborn's (2012) findings that licensed venues are uniquely 'hyper-sexualised' environments that create different moral possibilities from those available in other domains. Ironically, however, Katie's perspective is at odds with some male participants, who admitted finding it difficult to meet women in settings other than licensed venues. This disjuncture seemingly adds another

gendered tension in the moral assemblage of licensed venues.

Significantly, Katie, and indeed several other participants, suggested the mere assumption that most people patronised licensed venues with the intention to pick up was enough to affect her in certain ways and to instigate reflections (or moral breakdowns) on how she wished to dress and organise herself in this space, and how she felt during nights out. In the context of broader discussions on sexualised interactions and violence in the NTE, it becomes important to make sense of how such ephemeral, immaterial aspects of nights out participate in local moral assemblages.

Given the analyses undertaken in this chapter, perhaps the case could be made for understanding picking up as a ‘public discourse of morality’ – that is, as articulations of moral frameworks from non-institutional bodies that delineate sets of socioculturally specific modes of ethical action (Zigon 2010b). In Zigon’s deployment, these can include ‘everyday beliefs and opinions’ and those articulated through the media, literature and other stories (Zigon 2010b). In discussing the meaning of picking up with my participants, I was able to collaboratively trace an elaborate and diverse discourse that organises, governs and indeed attempts to moralise how sexualised interactions in licensed venues should unfold, often in highly specific ways.

The Duke

On one occasion during fieldwork, Justin, Katie and I had been to a football match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and decided to venture out to a pub after the game, settling on a venue I will call ‘The Duke’. The Duke is a curious contradiction of an establishment, simultaneously described by both men and women as a mixture of ‘seedy’ and ‘fun’. The security staff are often liberal regarding entry, standards of dress or intoxication, and appear to frequently ignore capacity regulations. On Friday and Saturday nights they typically allow entry to hundreds of patrons who fill up the interior standing areas that circle a large square bar. The bustling crowd also lines the vacant spaces and walkways of the adjacent beer garden, where there is also a small bar located in the far corner near arguably the city’s most poorly maintained

bathrooms. Unlike other nearby venues, the Duke is often open past 2am, although entry is typically denied well before then, once the venue's physical capacity has been exhausted. As a result, the dance floor and beer garden are often packed by midnight as the raucous band belts out dated rock classics from the interior stage. By the early hours of the morning, the dance floor is swarming with drunken bodies and flailing limbs of varying ages, styles and appearances. From within the oppressive heat and traffic of the dance floor, brief introductions and snippets of conversation slide past as the waters of sexual availability are tested, often with little discernment, sometimes more forthrightly than others. It is well understood by those who frequent the Duke that if you desire a partner for the evening, the dance floor is the place to be.

When Katie described The Duke as 'sleazy' and 'dodgy', she wasn't alone; indeed, many other participants often added an unofficial prefix, calling it 'The *Dirty Duke*'. Undoubtedly the sticky barmats, regular broken glasses and spillages, uneven lighting, run-down bathrooms, soaked carpet floors and diverse clientele contributed to this characterisation. However, more often, participants were referring to the ways in which the space is experienced as gendered and sexualised in unique, and at times undesirable, ways. For example, Katie asserted that behaviour routinely categorised as anywhere from transgressive to harassment in other venues is considered commonplace at The Duke. Indeed, The Duke-as-moral assemblage contrasts starkly with other bars and is certainly far removed from non-licensed venues.

Like several other female participants (and some males), Katie often felt it necessary to avoid places like The Duke, particularly due to the increased likelihood of being physically touched by unfamiliar (male) patrons. In contrast to the agency with which she described the processes of finding partners and dressing up in our earlier discussions, for example, she understood her agency to be impeded in places like The Duke, in a way that largely made her feel uncomfortable:

Katie: Just certain places are like, like fair enough, if you're wearing a short skirt or you're wearing something and someone grabs your arse, it's fine [...] if I've got my tits out or something and someone touches me, I'm like, 'Well, I put them out there. If someone outside of my target audience decided to have a

look.’

James: I guess, but it doesn’t really make it OK for them ...

Katie: OK, well, I will get very upset if I feel like I’m wearing jeans, flat shoes and a hoodie and someone grabs my arse. If I’m not the slightest bit dressed up and I’m not showing any sort of skin and someone still decides they want to grab me on the arse then I get very upset.

As Katie explained later in our interview, the extent to which she could feel comfortable interacting with men in licensed venues was dependent on what she was wearing, as well as ‘what the environment is and what the situation is’. Indeed, The Duke represented the ‘sleazier’ end of the spectrum of licensed venues that can vary widely in terms of the forms of sexualised interactions they deem acceptable (Armstrong, Watling et al 2014; Fileborn 2011, 2012). Katie herself largely interpreted this ‘sleaziness’ through the prism of gender, and one of the more conspicuous forces shaping her gendered experiences of places like The Duke was the presumption that the majority of the patrons were there to pick up.

This was particularly evident when Katie characterised herself as a marketable commodity with an imagined ‘target audience’. Although the specific arrangements at The Duke had the capacity to make her feel uncomfortable, even distressed, they were not dismissed as entirely transgressive or wrong, but rather more complex. According to Katie, the distribution of agency and responsibility for how to dress and interact with members of the opposite sex, for example, became a confusing negotiation at The Duke, involving an intersubjective dialogue between Katie and her ‘target audience’ that is undoubtedly underpinned and shaped by the notion of picking up.

The discomfort Katie can often experience at The Duke also complicated her desire to hang out with her male friends, who could often derive enjoyment from the same ‘dodgy’ or ‘sleazy’ venues Katie preferred to avoid. Katie described herself as having a penchant for stereotypically masculine activities such as watching ‘footy’ and patronising pubs, and as such, derived more enjoyment around her male friends compared to her female friends. Given she rarely attempted to pick up herself,

amongst this network Katie found a meaningful role as a ‘wing-woman’, using her personality and conversational skills to talk to women in bars in order to introduce them to her male friends. In this way Katie creatively carved out a social role with which she felt more comfortable, while simultaneously circumventing the gender stereotypes embedded in the notion of picking up in licensed venues. In turn, her role strengthened her relationships with her male friends, who were then free to approach women seemingly without having to address this assumption.

By elucidating a complex public discourse of morality (the concept of picking up) with Katie’s moral disposition (a cultivated aversion to picking up), and the range of practices Katie engages in while in sleazy venues (playing the role of ‘wing-woman’, for example), we are able to understand Katie’s experience in more detail. More specifically, it becomes possible to draw out the differences between Katie’s experience of The ‘Dirty’ Duke, and the various gendered assumptions and projections inherent in the discursive elements of The Duke’s moral assemblage. In the case of picking up, these constituent elements create the specific possibilities for how Katie perceives she ought to act in a licensed venue as a gendered and sexualised body (Zigon 2014a). However, Zigon’s approach also understands Katie as a relational and affective moral subject capable of enacting creative manoeuvres to ensure a sense of comfort. Zigon (2014a: 20) argues that if we proceed with this idea of the moral subject – that one is primarily relational and affective, as opposed to a contemplative being making decisions on the basis of conventional rationality, then morality itself need not be understood as a static, evaluative framework, but as the process of making, remaking and maintaining relationships.

Katie’s description of The Duke as ‘sleazy’ or ‘dodgy’ is not to be confused with notions of ‘wrongness’ or ‘badness’ produced by traditional moral binaries. Rather, Katie highlights that arrangements of alcohol, licensed venues and young adults are experienced as morally complex, contingent and relational, and capable of affecting her in a way that shapes and reconfigures her emotional, psychological, physical, social and sexual capacities (Bøhling 2015). Certainly, there are some aspects of ‘sleazy’ places she enjoys, particularly spending time with, and playing a meaningful, empowering role among her male friends, while just as certainly, there are other aspects she can find distasteful and uncomfortable, particularly being

physically touched by strangers without her consent. Her response is to creatively work through this morally complex situation in order to enact a moral subjectivity that affords her a sense of comfort in terms of how her valued relationships are managed, and the extent to which her practices resonate with her desired life trajectory (Zigon 2014a). In the following section, I explore some of the moral investments male participants often made when patronising Melbourne's licensed venues, with a particular focus on Justin.

Justin

One Friday night in January 2013, I caught up with Justin for a post-work beer at a Richmond pub. After two pints, a cigarette and a productive discussion about the frustrations of looking for a new job, we both felt the urge to extend our night further and visit some other bars. First, however, Justin wanted to return home to St Kilda to get changed, eat a quick meal, and have a few 'pre-drinks' with his housemate, Rich. We ordered from his local Thai takeaway, and while waiting, Justin approached the entrance of a nearby bar to talk to the security guard with whom he had struck up a recent relationship. When asked for Friday night bar recommendations, the bouncer suggested a busy 'upper class' venue in the CBD which often had, what he called, 'the best girls in Melbourne'. Much to Justin's delight, he also proposed to put a small group on the guest-list. Enthused by this plan, Justin and I ventured to a local liquor store to purchase a bottle of vodka and a six-pack of cider.

Once back at Justin's share house, we sat around the living room eating Pad Thai. Justin and Rich, however, were adamant that they ought to delay drinking until 'about 20 past [eight]. Can't be too drunk, man'. Rich eyed me shiftilly after his statement, insinuating that too much alcohol would diminish his ability to effectively talk to girls once at the bar. He had previously discussed his theory with me that intoxication can hinder picking up, as it becomes more difficult to string words together smoothly, and as such, typically escalates the likelihood of saying something embarrassing. To support Rich's perspective, a few days later, my female housemate at the time, Hayley, said she had recently had a night out ruined by men 'swaying around' and 'slurring their words' while trying to engage her in conversation. Despite describing her own level of intoxication as 'loose' [meaning

highly intoxicated], Hayley did not often find the attention of intoxicated males to be particularly enjoyable.

After a couple of pre-drinks, we arrived at the aforementioned 'upper class' bar at approximately 10pm, and were granted entry. This was despite another of Justin's friends, Simon, who had joined us in the city, arriving without the correct attire. Simon was assured by the security staff that those wearing sneakers were typically denied entry, however, on this occasion they made an exception for Simon on the basis that 'the rest of him looked alright' [field notes]. The rest of our group had, however, dressed up in relatively expensive shirts and chinos in contrast to Simon's neat yet distinctly casual apparel. Not feeling particularly comfortable in what I was wearing myself, I quickly grew envious of Simon's relaxed flannel shirt and jeans. The same was true when ordering drinks, with Rich and Justin opting for vodka with soda and lime, and Simon for a beer, which was, again, what I felt like. Indeed, it soon became clearer through these aspects of dress and beverage choice that Simon had attended the bar for slightly different, more relaxed reasons compared to Rich and Justin, who were intent on embodying their more refined tastes to appeal to the so-called 'best girls in Melbourne'. It wasn't long before a woman I described in field notes as 'youngish' approached our group, initially to engage Justin in conversation, but ultimately secluding Rich away for a private chat. After ten minutes Rich returned. 'How'd you go?' asked Simon. Rich shrugged off the question nonchalantly, replying 'Yeah, OK [...] I got her number, for later. And I got a kiss too' [field notes].

For significant periods throughout fieldwork, especially in the first few months, going out with Justin, Rich and Simon often followed a similar pattern. That is, their nights out typically consisted of pre-drinks at their house, followed by attending licensed venues either in St Kilda, the Chapel Street precinct or the CBD. Their preferred places were predominantly those characterised by a high standard of dress, exclusivity, queues, entry fees, a strong security presence, elegant lighting, attractive staff, expensive drinks and house music. Simon's slightly different preference were at times enough to drag the group to Melbourne's inner north or west, typically to the suburbs of Fitzroy, Brunswick or Footscray, although such trips were less common. Indeed, for this particular trio, the prospect of strengthening their existing friendships

through humour and shared pleasurable experiences often figured as the motivational backdrop for nights out together. Clearly, however, the bundle of practices that make up such drinking events were also often equally shaped by the complexities of picking up, particularly the allure of attractive women. As Justin asserted concisely in our interview, ‘I just go out with my mates all the time. We always go to meet girls’. The ethnographic data above illuminate some of the effects of these motivations, from the way these three, single men dressed and carried themselves, to their preferences for different bars and beverages, and ultimately their nuanced strategies regarding how best to incorporate alcohol.

These aspects of their experiences came more clearly into view later, on the same night I began describing earlier, when my housemate Luke and his girlfriend Jas arrived nearer to midnight. I had introduced Justin and Luke a few times previously, however, they were essentially cultural opposites – Luke with his Germanic passion for organisation mixed with his flair for dancing (which he shared with his girlfriend), and Justin with his more corporate, commercial outlook and his conspicuous preference for upmarket aesthetics. My efforts to re-integrate the two parties fizzled out quickly, as both Luke and Justin set about establishing their particular desires for the evening. This meant that Luke and Jas established an impromptu dance floor adjacent to the main bar, engaging with each other exclusively and enthusiastically, while Justin and Rich took ritualised ‘laps’ of the broader dance floor, looking for opportunities to talk to women, before intermittently returning to the bar for another vodka. Soon after, Justin and Rich gained the sense that the bar itself was not reaching its typical heights, particularly in terms of the number of patrons, and therefore, picking up opportunities were becoming limited. Combined with the fragmentation of the group after Luke and Jas’s arrival, Justin decided to move to another bar in search of more fertile ground. Luke, Jas and I decided to follow soon after. However, when we arrived at the second bar and were greeted with a request for a \$20 cover charge, we decided it might be best to continue the night at home, leaving Justin, Rich and Simon to continue on their own trajectory.

For several of the male participants, such as Justin, one of the primary ways in which one can experience pleasure in the NTE is through interactions with unfamiliar

women. When interviewed, Justin combined picking up together with the music, proximity of others, comedic interactions between male friends and the use of alcohol. In his view, this assemblage of forces was capable of producing a distinct and pleasurable counterpoint to the travails of the working week. Indeed, the experiences of Justin, and his friends, also illustrate more specifically that the concept of picking up acts in licensed venue moral assemblages to infuse cross-gender interactions with a sense of excitement and uncertainty. In response, negotiating such interactions requires the embodiment of specific values – particularly for Justin, expensive tastes and confidence – and the enactment of nuanced strategies often developed over years of going out, and shaped by broader gendered discourses.

Going beyond the event-level minutiae of picking up, however, in his interview Justin also described his understanding of sexualised interactions in licensed venues as crucial sites for both honing and expressing desirable personal qualities. Ultimately, the challenges presented by the demand to pick up motivated Justin in his broader life – either at work, in the gym or talking with his friends, for example – helping him develop a form of moral personhood to which he could aspire. Primarily, this aspirational model was built on the cornerstones of physical health, dynamism, intelligence and the possession of various forms of capital:

If you're a guy who's confident, who's articulate, who is – I'm not going to say 100% well groomed, but I'd say I'm pretty well groomed. Yeah, you know, it makes a big difference rather than the guy who's fat, overweight, unintelligent, has no money. You know, it makes a big difference, he doesn't dress ... he dresses in footy shorts and a singlet, you know?

In this sense, the way in which Justin performed sexualised interactions in licensed venues simultaneously acted as a means of individualisation. That is, Justin's specific mode(s) of picking up also helped to differentiate his moral disposition from other, less successful peers or friends, on the basis of their inability to progress through education, acquire cultural and economic capital, and interact with women in the way that he can. When I pressed him on this in his interview, Justin contended that his success with business, life, romance and sex can be attributed not merely to some

intangible talent, but rather to his work ethic, his ability to set high standards, and most importantly, his motivational drive to achieve them. This is not to say, however, that Justin's pursuits aren't without their difficulties. As he suggested, one's confidence can become shaken when you 'meet a girl and she doesn't call you back [...] you're always going to have hits. But it's just the person themselves. How they cope with those things, the mechanisms they have'. Ultimately, for Justin in particular, but for many other male participants in general, he understood his capacity to successfully negotiate the complexities of picking up in licensed venues as reflective of his entire way of being.

Conclusions: Assembling Gendered and Sexualised Moralities in Licensed Venues

In this chapter, I have drawn on fieldwork experiences and interview data to illustrate how the concept of picking up, and all it entails, can often become powerfully implicated in the assembling of licensed venue moralities. Indeed, as several participants have pointed out, at times the guiding assumption that patronising licensed venues is primarily motivated by sexual desire acted with such force that even speaking about it became entirely unnecessary. Although gendered performances are not always intended to suggest a desire for heterosexual relationships, disentangling these performances from the discourse of sexuality in licensed venues emerges as clearly challenging, particularly for young women (Boyd 2014). This characterisation of what it means to participate in the Melbourne NTE suggests that young adults know the gendered and sexualised schemas set in place so intimately that they can largely organise their conduct on the basis of these assumptions. To borrow a phrase Zigon has used when describing how moral dispositions are enacted, the negotiation of a complex set of gendered discourses and the concept of picking up while in Melbourne's licensed venues is not 'noticed when it is performed. It is simply done' (Zigon 2009b: 260).

To offer another brief example, in his interview Luke suggested that experiencing and negotiating licensed venues through non-verbal communication certainly applies to louder, busier, more commercial nightclubs (Lindsay 2006) where it can be difficult to hold conversations. In his experiences, Luke asserted that the implicit

assumption that the majority of patrons are there either to drink more, dance or ‘get laid’ is often palpable, and sexual availability, desire and consent is negotiated largely without verbal engagement. In the absence of articulation, such negotiations rely heavily on the reading of body language (Wall & Quedara 2014). Indeed, Luke suggested that he once went home with a young woman after catching her eye from across a nightclub dance floor. He remembered wordlessly communicating via a series of facial expressions and looks, identifying that she was stuck in a conversation with an older, undesirable man from whom she wished to escape. Through a series of directed nods, Luke met up with the woman near the venue’s exit and they left together, only finally beginning to talk on the way home.

These experiences lend themselves to thinking about licensed venues in a way that elucidates some understanding of my own experience of being called a ‘dickhead’, described earlier. More specifically, the concept of picking up, and the assumptions, practices and discourses it proliferates, might be understood as an active constituent of licensed venue moral assemblages that distribute observable effects throughout the various patrons and elements making up their surroundings. For the participants of this study, at various times these effects could manifest in their dress, choice of beverage or venue, location in space, or their level of comfort interacting with strangers (Bøhling 2015).

Undoubtedly, these experiences were often differentiated by gender. My earlier in-depth exploration of how participants of both genders understand the concept of picking up highlights the ongoing rigidity of normative gender roles in licensed venues, particularly that men are understood to possess significantly more agency (Kalish 2013; Masters, Norris et al. 2006; Wall & Quedara 2014). The fieldwork data examined in later sections of this chapter in many ways upholds this assumption, although there were also occasions where female participants or other female patrons took on a more active role in negotiating sexual availability. One such event was described in my account of a night out with Justin, Rich and Simon, where a young woman approached our group, ultimately leaving with Rich’s phone number and a kiss.

Such data suggests that while gendered assumptions continue to operate within

licensed venue moral assemblages, often in very problematic ways, such assumptions are not static, nor are their effects entirely predictable. In short, there are no perceived hard and fast rules on how young men and women ought to respond to the concept of picking up in practice, but rather, understanding licensed venues as moral assemblages ensures that there is sufficient room for creativity and innovation in how such demands are negotiated. By extension, manoeuvring through the complex gendered and sexualised spaces of licensed venues is a dynamic and individual pursuit. As the participants of this study can attest, patronising Melbourne's pubs and clubs involves making significant personal moral investments in precarious, relational moral assemblages that, at times, can have durable effects on one's cultivated moral disposition and life trajectory.

More specifically, this chapter highlights the processes young adults undertake in licensed venues that relate to the maintenance, management or reparation of relations of value (or Zigon's (2014a) 'attunement'), in accordance with envisioned models of moral personhood (Zigon's (2014a) 'fidelity'). Zigon argues that the ontological status of moral assemblages is such that 'they can never be essentially defined or rendered static since each entails an inherent range of possible potentialities' (Zigon 2014a: 17). They are potentially transformative, of persons, situations, trajectories or the more extensive moral assemblages that they co-constitute. Through moments of breakdown, whether instantaneous or elongated, one can attune to the relational assemblage constitutive of one's sense of existential comfort, and ethically work to maintain, expand, repair, disentangle or indeed transform those relations as required.

This relational way of thinking emerges as clearly relevant and useful for participants in my study, such as Katie and Justin. Katie referred to how previous transformational experiences, producing a range of interactions and outcomes (primarily negative, however), now inform how she engages with unfamiliar men. Declining an invitation to a game of 'rock, paper, scissors' in this way can be viewed as a distinctly ethical practice aimed at stabilising her sense of comfort under the pressure of potentially anxiety-inducing scenarios. In addition, Katie highlighted the dynamic nature of moral assemblages by exploring the ways in which different situations call for different modes of interaction and different expressions of gender and sexuality. Justin also made significant, yet vastly contrasting, investments in

picking up. Approaching unfamiliar young women in bars not only afforded Justin great novelty and excitement when compared to his job, but it also enabled him to both express, and ethically work on, himself. Having ultimately imagined himself as a commercially successful, intelligent, well-groomed and articulate man, engaging in picking up offered Justin the opportunity to strive towards that ideal, and to craft the sensibilities and skills necessary to achieve that desired moral disposition.

As Katie and several others suggested, the precariousness of licensed venue moral assemblages also means that negative experiences are possible. Although I was not witness to any particular act of physical or sexual assault during fieldwork, casual interactions shaped by the concept of picking up were certainly capable of affecting participants in negative ways, either through unsuccessful attempts or simple misunderstandings. As existing research suggests, licensed spaces are laden with a complex array of gendered and sexualised judgements and gazes that often require vigilant management (Fileborn 2011, 2012; Wall & Quedara 2014). In response, people can often become confused, sapped of confidence, demoralised or angry, outcomes that cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the moral investments these young people make in licensed venue moral assemblages.

More broadly, this chapter illuminates the point that we are unable to adequately account for how young adults experience licensed venues in these ways, and make decisions around alcohol use while in them, without reference to the issues of gender and sexuality that emerge in light of salient concepts such as picking up. My treatment of young adults as first and foremost relational and affective moral subjects is unique in this field of research, and therefore, has engendered an added dimension to our understanding of how they experience the NTE.

To be sure, the ways in which aspects of gender and sexuality shape interactions in licensed venues are likely to vary from venue to venue (Fileborn 2011, 2012; Lindsay 2005). By extension, the moral assemblage approach I undertake in this thesis highlights that the emergent complexities of the NTE cannot be reduced to the effects of any single constitutive element, but rather it is experienced, and more usefully understood, as an assemblage of a vast range of forces, both human and non-human (Bøhling 2015; Demant 2013). In light of this understanding, together with

the wealth of epidemiological research suggesting the significance of gender differences when it comes to understanding alcohol use, not to mention alcohol marketing and education (e.g. Erol & Karpyak 2015), the absence of gender and sexual considerations in contemporary Australian alcohol policies is both conspicuous and curious (Lindsay 2012; Manton & Moore 2016). In this chapter, I have ultimately argued that overcoming this conceptual blind spot could begin with a nuanced consideration of how licensed venue moralities are constituted and experienced.

In the chapter that follows, I broaden the analytical perspective beyond drinking events themselves, and venture towards an examination of how the young adults of this study incorporate alcohol into their everyday lives. Specifically, I explore how they conceive of daily life as a rolling mass of entangled moral assemblages that push and pull at their attempts to establish the lives they desire and to be the people they wish to become.

Chapter Seven:

‘She’ll be Right’: Exploring the Intersection between Alcohol Use and ‘Everyday Life’

Previous qualitative research has established that in Australia alcohol use is thoroughly interwoven into many different aspects of people’s lives (e.g. Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Grace, Moore et al. 2009). Indeed, one key way of addressing alcohol-related problems in Australia has been to moralise the relationship between alcohol use and everyday life in specific ways, particularly through idealised notions of what it means to engage in a ‘healthy lifestyle’ or to ‘live well’. Reflecting the limitations of some more tangible policy interventions, such as taxation or licensing laws, at the time of conducting fieldwork, Australian governments and public health institutions had assembled a network of interrelated documents emphasising the importance of closely managing the place of alcohol in one’s everyday life at all times and regardless of the situation in which drinking might occur. In this chapter, I examine three such documents that were in operation during data collection for this project in 2012–13: one state-level policy text published by the Victorian Department of Health, entitled *Reducing the AOD Toll* (State of Victoria 2012); the *National Drug Strategy 2010–2015* authored by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia 2011); and the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (2009) *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* (herein referred to as the ‘*Guidelines*’).

This ‘institutional discourse’ (Zigon 2009b) primarily seeks to ensure the visibility of alcohol’s short- and long-term (negative) effects to individuals, and to mediate any decisions they might make around drinking. However, I argue that these documents overstep their remit of mitigating drinking practices to moralise specific modes of living in order to align the conduct of individuals with broader national interests such as increasing productivity, relieving the health system, and minimising one’s effects on others in the community. In this chapter, I examine the extent to which this all-pervasive attempt to position individual behaviour change at the forefront of the harm reduction project, and to orient personal practices and desires towards official, idealised versions of ‘health’ (Duff & Moore 2015; LeBesco 2011; Malins 2004;

Rhodes 2009; Room 2011), maps onto the experiences of this study's participants.

Ethnography enables researchers to gauge the rhythms of their participants' lives, and to examine how the bundle of concurrent processes that make up a life shifts and evolves over a substantial period of time. During fieldwork, I spent as much time with participants in their homes, or at cafes or cinemas, outside of drinking events, as I did in pubs and bars. This allowed me not only to discuss other topics of concern with participants at various points during data collection, but we were also often able to help each other through challenging or demanding circumstances such as finding employment or housing, the dynamics of romantic relationships, seeking new health regimens or conflicts with friends. These moments between instances of heavy drinking provide the basis of the analysis in this chapter, as I attempt to make sense of the relationship between alcohol use and the participants' daily lives.

As the analysis unfolds, the relationality and mutability of participant's everyday lives becomes particularly evident. In this sense, they were able to conceive of their lives as a rolling mass of relations that formed associations across major domains or concerns, including employment and finance, social networks, and their physical and mental health. As a day-to-day matter of course for the participants, these domains often collided with each other, but all at various points throughout fieldwork existed in some form of relationship with alcohol. In my exploration of how these different domains interacted with alcohol, I will also elucidate the extent to which these different interactions shaped how they understood and practised heavy drinking. Following this analysis, I argue that narrow, simplistic prescriptions on how one ought to live, such as those perpetuated by the institutional discourses I will examine, ignore not only the vast range of factors that circumscribe one's capacity to enact desirable lifestyles (Korp 2008; Lindsay 2010), but also whether such lifestyles are considered desirable, or deterministic of positive outcomes, by those they seek to target.

Drawing on Zigon's notion of moral subjectivity, I conclude this analysis by developing an understanding of how participants negotiated life's varied demands grounded by a fidelity to a particular form of moral personhood. A common theme that emerged in fieldwork and interviews related to participants valuing a realistic,

open and positive outlook on life, that emerged as a result of constantly negotiating the individualistic discourse of neoliberalism across multiple domains, but particularly in relation to their leisurely drinking practices, while also attempting to grapple with the inherent complexity and relationality of their daily lives. This embodied positivity was depicted as an ethical capacity in itself, and one that enabled participants to be flexible and perseverant through difficulties, and to limit the effects of negative events. Contrasting starkly to institutional projections of daily life, for the participants these daily, ethical processes were considered ongoing, open-ended and infused with momentum, while being aimed at developing the bodily, cognitive, emotional and technical skill to craft the moral subjectivities and worlds they desire.

Concerns over Everyday Life in Institutional Discourse

In Zigon's conceptualisation, moral assemblages are constituted through the entangling of individual moral subjects and the various moral discourses that proclaim the truth or rightness of particular moralities (Zigon 2009b: 258–259). Institutional discourses figure heavily in Zigon's ethnographic work (2011, 2013), which illuminates Russian drug rehabilitation programs as sites where both the traditional Russian Orthodox Church discourses that underpin the daily running of treatment programs, and the political discourses emerging in post-Soviet Russia, which wrestle with new ideas about what might constitute good citizenship, converge. In his deployment, Zigon differentiates institutional moral discourses from the 'public discourse of morality' emerging from *non*-institutional sources such as the media, philosophy, or beliefs and opinions articulated in everyday conversation (Zigon 2009b: 259). Zigon's research highlights how moral assemblages of all kinds emerge intimately entwined with and profoundly influenced by multiple institutions, including public health bodies and governments.

In the context of alcohol use in Australia, the institutional discourse is constituted in the main by government documents outlining views on how alcohol ought to be supplied, regulated and consumed, discourses primarily supported by a combination of epidemiological research and the authority of objective, scientific knowledge (Keane 2013: 156). The three documents I analyse at times overlap and reference each other, repeating key findings and relevant terminology. Broadly, they support

each other in establishing the ‘orthodox position’ that views alcohol use as a dangerous substance associated with far-reaching harms if left unregulated, a perspective that has also been widely adopted in other Western countries (Haydock 2015; Yeomans 2013). The *Guidelines* in particular perform a significant role in this discourse in defining how alcohol use ought to be regulated in quantifiable terms, and have become widely recognised amongst drinking populations despite not always being applied correctly (see also, for example, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017).³ This recognition highlights the ability of these major institutional discourses to permeate the consciousness and daily practices of the public.

The analysis in this chapter, however, proceeds from the tendency for these institutional discourses to repeatedly extend their focus beyond drinking practices and towards unified attempts to establish prescribed modes of ‘living well’ (State of Victoria 2012). Indeed, if these voices are to discourage individuals from problematic relationships between alcohol and daily life, they require the rhetorical deployment of a balanced, disciplined, moderated life that is presumed to be ‘the happy condition of its more conformist citizens’ (Walton 2002: 38). In the following sections, I will draw more specific attention to the ways in which institutional discourse routinely problematises the relationship between alcohol and several of what Sztompka (2008) argues are the ‘defining traits’ of everyday life. These include: ‘relationships with others’ exploring concerns over the social influences on alcohol use; ‘crafting dispositions’ looking at how institutional discourses seek to regulate specific practices and promote desired values; and ‘flows, rhythms and durations’, which highlight the concerns of this discourse with matters of temporality. As I will demonstrate, these aspects of daily life figure as targets for institutional regulation, reflecting the scope of governmental and public health discourses to shape much more than mere alcohol consumption (LeBesco 2011; Lupton 2015).

³ The 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey estimated that approximately 60% of its 26,000 respondents were able to recognise the existence of some official recommendation about how much one should drink both in a single session and over one’s lifetime (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011: 68).

Relationships with Others

Sztompka (2008: 31) understands everyday life as the ‘observable manifestation of social existence’, and thus, the daily lives of individuals are inextricably linked to the relationships they form. Notions of individual responsibility are central to the institutional discourse on alcohol use in Australia (see State of Victoria 2012 for a clear example), however, the effects of one’s individual conduct on others in the community is also presented as equally vital. In the opening statement on the federal government’s website for alcohol information and policy (<http://www.alcohol.gov.au>), for example, concerns are expressed over alcohol’s capacity to ‘disrupt’ the family lives of ‘everyday Australians’:

In everyday use, alcohol usually refers to drinks such as beer, wine, or spirits containing ethyl alcohol – a substance that can cause drunkenness and changes in consciousness, mood, and emotions. It is these intoxicating and psychoactive effects that lead to so many accidents, injuries, diseases, and disruptions in the family life of everyday Australians. (Australian Government 2015)

While tracing an extensive web of ‘flow-on’ consequences attributed to ‘harmful’ substance use (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 1), the *National Drug Strategy 2010–2015* (NDS) also draws attention to the tendency for alcohol use to diminish the performance of important social, familial and professional roles that ultimately uphold social cohesion, public order and other national interests (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 16). Indeed, this sentiment is further reinforced in the NHMRC *Guidelines* that argue alcohol-related harm is not exclusively the domain of drinkers themselves, but also that of ‘families, bystanders and the broader community’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 12). When put together, these publications articulate the vitality of altruistic individuals to their broader harm reduction aims. Given we all negotiate daily lives made thick through encounters with other individuals and networks, by focusing on how those relationships come to be grounded by specific ‘rules, values and habits’ (State of Victoria 2012: 10) – to use Victorian policy as an example – Australian governments believe they have identified an important space for regulation (Keane 2013).

Crafting Dispositions

People choosing to drink must realise that there will always be some risk to their health and social well-being [...] this site is designed to give Australians a basic knowledge and understanding about alcohol and its consequences in order to make informed decisions so they might minimise the risk of alcohol-related harms. (Australian Government 2015)

As well as restricting the availability and affordability of alcohol, another key strategy designed to shift normative attitudes around drinking is the provision of ‘factual, credible information’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 11). The government website quoted above, for example, outlines a project to educate all Australians on the ‘basic knowledge’ of alcohol’s dangers to one’s health and wellbeing. Moreover, it implies that once rational individuals come to terms with these indisputable facts, they will inevitably make better, more ‘informed decisions’ around alcohol use given the obvious undesirability of its many consequences (Lindsay 2009).

Shifting attitudes through education has in part been mobilised via the development of a set of recommended guidelines, based primarily on epidemiological research, that suggest the risk of experiencing harm increases with each standard drink consumed. As a reminder, the first of the national *Guidelines* stipulates ‘the lifetime risk of harm from drinking alcohol increases with the amount consumed [...] for healthy men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 2). Guideline two focuses on reducing the risk of acute harm: ‘on a single occasion of drinking, the risk of alcohol-related injury increases with the amount consumed [...] for healthy men and women, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 3).

According to the NHMRC, the *Guidelines* provide ‘universal guidance’ for all healthy adults in the process of making decisions ‘regarding the amount of alcohol that they choose to drink’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 1).

The primary aim of these guidelines is to encourage individuals to engage in desirable drinking ‘patterns’ that can be re-visited on a regular basis, in turn reminding individuals of the links between seemingly mundane, daily health practices and health outcomes (Cockerham 2005). The notion of ‘drinking patterns’, however, is a vague and slippery term, the complexities of which give some indication as to how public health institutions conceive of the relationship between alcohol use and everyday life. The *Guidelines* define ‘drinking patterns’ as:

Patterns of drinking may refer to several aspects of drinking behaviour, including the frequency of drinking occasions, variations in drinking over time and the number and characteristics of ‘risky’ drinking occasions. It also includes the settings where drinking takes place, the activities associated with drinking, the personal characteristics of the drinkers and their drinking companions, the types of beverage consumed, and the clusters of drinking norms and behaviours often referred to as ‘drinking cultures’. (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 35)

The above quotation implies that in practice, a vast yet vague array of forces threaten the successful enactment of the NHRMC’s drinking guidelines. Indeed, these threats emerge as various timings, spaces, practices, dispositions, other subjects and discourses that can potentially cloud the decisions one makes around alcohol use. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that the *National Drug Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia 2011) promotes models of ideal personhood that embody natural human ‘resilience’, positing that its educational framework is designed to assist individuals to access their innate, ‘internal resources’, such as the necessary coping and management strategies for negotiating such a complex set of demands. Once revealed, these capacities will assist the individual to better anticipate potential problems associated with alcohol use, and ultimately, motivate ‘healthier choices’ in future (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 10). Put this way, the NDS understands ‘resilience’ as a natural human attribute that is available to all (Lindsay 2010), and can be measured by the extent to which one can adapt to life’s negative changes and can neutralise various stressors that may encourage problematic forms of drinking (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 13).

In this sense, engaging in prescribed drinking patterns, or ‘lifestyles’, is not necessarily just a matter of avoiding certain behaviours considered to be damaging to one’s health, but rather adhering to a nexus of attitudes, practices and timings, the type of which is imagined in documents such as the *Guidelines*, that are simultaneously presented as health-promoting (Duff & Moore 2015; Korp 2008; LeBesco 2011; Lupton 2015). This holistic, transferable understanding of individual health as always-at-stake requires citizens to develop a ‘practical sense’ of how to achieve these health aspirations, positioning the cultivation of a specific, desirable habitus capable of embodying ‘healthy’ attitudes in particular as highly important (Korp 2008: 23–24). By revering the ‘healthier choices’ enacted by ‘resilient’ individuals, these persuasive documents not only encourage the regulation of a specific practice – alcohol use – but also the internalisation of these desirable values, attitudes and embodiments (Lindsay 2010, Room 2011).

Flows, Rhythms and Duration

As part of this moralising approach, the encouragement of individuals to form meaningful, structured understandings of time figures as a central mechanism at work in institutional alcohol discourse. In the *National Drug Strategy*, the Commonwealth Department of Health make a distinction between those harms caused by ‘single episodes’ of heavy drinking – including road accidents, acute injuries, domestic and public violence, and crime – and chronic harms associated with long-term heavy drinking, which include several diseases and brain damage as well as family breakdowns and ‘broader social dysfunction’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 2). This distinction is explored more explicitly in the NHMRC *Guidelines*, where one guideline focuses on alcohol consumption on a single occasion – defined as a 6-hour period – and the second guideline is concerned with the ‘cumulative’ effects of alcohol use over one’s ‘lifetime’, defined by a period of ‘many years’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 11).

Sztompka (2008: 32) argues that in daily life, episodes bleed into one another; life ‘flows’, often unreflexively, as we follow routines, habits and established customs that shape the temporal duration of social events. In light of this, I would argue that the development of drinking guidelines across multiple temporalities – in this case, involving a simplistic distinction between the short and longer terms – embodies the

institutional concern over how the ‘flow’ of everyday life relates to alcohol use. Indeed, this concern emerges even more clearly on the government’s alcohol website, mentioned earlier, where the authors explicitly describe how alcohol use can cause ‘disruption’ to aspects of daily life.

Existing qualitative research on alcohol use has recognised that for young people, drinking events are enmeshed within ongoing, dynamic trajectories that might help individuals to contextualise those events in ways that could potentially dilute the significance of the health risks of alcohol use, particularly in the long term (Lindsay 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008). In response, the *Guidelines* articulate a double layer of risks that draws in the significance of both the immediate and the future. By tying everyday health-related practices, including forms of alcohol use, to both acute and longer-term chronic outcomes, these institutional discourses enact a moralising perspective on the array of daily routines, habits and practices that make up everyday life, that imbues them with a sense of ‘life and death’ (Cockerham 2005). By extension, this approach is designed to help strengthen the case for institutional intervention and regulation.

Summary: Promoting Individualism, Regulating Everyday Life

To this point, I have unpacked some key institutional documents that provide a sense of the institutional moralities in operation at the time of fieldwork, in order to draw attention to the ways in which ‘everyday life’ routinely emerges as being at stake in this discourse. In particular, I have elucidated some of the ways in which this discourse exhibits concern over the social influences on individual alcohol use, ‘patterns’ of alcohol use that occur in spaces and frequencies that are understood to be excessively risky, and the temporal flows that help enmesh drinking events in broader trajectories and rhythms that might enable such dangerous ‘patterns’ to stabilise and endure.

Reflecting its neoliberal inspirations, this discourse emphasises (and re-emphasises) the primacy of the relationship between individuals and alcohol, and makes repeated attempts to frame how individuals should make their alcohol-related decisions, across multiple platforms such as websites, policy documents and health promotion

guidelines. In this sense, these discourses are moralising in that they identify a target for regulation (individual alcohol use), and associate it with broader, societal level outcomes that are continually discursively produced as undesirable (e.g. failure to uphold responsibilities, damage to social relationships, lost productivity and the individual burden on the collective public health system) (Hunt 1997; Törrönen, Simonen et al. 2015). By intervening in these aspects of everyday life, this moralising project simultaneously moves beyond the regulation of individual alcohol use in isolation, and towards a more sustained influence both in the short-term and across the lifecourse.

In what remains of this chapter, I will position this institutional discourse as a platform for exploring how study participants conceive of the relationship between alcohol use and their own everyday lives. As well as attending many fieldwork events involving the consumption of alcohol, the ethnographic methodology I employed also provided me with the opportunities to understand how these events were situated within the complex worlds of the study participants. On a day-to-day basis, negotiating these worlds involved responding to a wide range of demands, concerns and hopes, but also crafting a keen sense of the rhythms of daily life that can manifest in peaks and troughs of intensity and activity.

Echoing previous research in this context (e.g. Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Brown & Gregg 2012; Tutenges & Rod 2009), the days between drinking events often involved reflecting on recent social developments, as well as presenting opportunities to organise oneself for the immediate future. I typically used this time to tidy my field notes, exchange text messages with participants, draw up plans for the weekend or compensate for the past weekend's excesses with rest, exercise or home cooking. These mid-week demands would frequently bleed into and influence the happenings of the forthcoming weekend, as one pays more attention to one's bank accounts, relationships, bodies or happenings at work. In this sense, regular alcohol use and 'going out' formed part of a dynamic complex of trajectories, a rhythm that was experienced as both mutable and repetitive, and which continued beyond the moments and spaces assigned to leisure.

With this in mind, I argue that it is impossible to fully comprehend how young adults

use and understand alcohol without considering how heavy drinking interacts with, and is shaped by, the other elements constituting their lives. In the analysis, I explore how participants articulated their understandings and experiences of the relationships between drinking and work, health and social networks. In these data, the distinctions between these elements (such as drinking and work) at least partially dissolve, with the entangled relationships re-making their constituent elements involved into new, fertile and productive aspects of their lives. Indeed, this analysis highlights the durability and integrity of alcohol use to aspects of daily life such as employment relationships and mobility, sociability and honesty, and stress management, while also elucidating the limits to which these pursuits could be imagined or practiced *without* alcohol. Throughout these domains, the spectre of neoliberal individualism also looms, encouraging these young adults to focus on their own self-interests while their day-to-day lives routinely illuminate life's relationality, contingency and emergence. This is a central tension that weaves through the ethnographic data I will present and, moreover, has a significant effect on participants' ethical orientations.

Later in this chapter, I intend to develop a conceptualisation of this process as constituting ethical work involving 'shifts in moral consciousness' (Zigon 2009b: 256) between the unreflective, embodied moralities, and the conscious reflection of ethical breakdowns. These ethical moments are significant in that they highlight the moral dimensions and implications of the seemingly mundane events that are understood to make up one's everyday life, including the development of financial strategies, crafting an impressive persona at work, repairing or changing problematic relationships, or considering the health impacts of regular alcohol use. Inspired by Zigon, and fellow anthropologist James Laidlaw, I treat these moments as 'ethical', which Laidlaw defines as 'whenever and in so far as people's conduct is shaped by attempts to make of themselves a certain kind of person, because it is as such a person that, on reflection, they think they ought to live, to that extent their conduct is ethical' (Laidlaw 2002: 327).

The Integration of Alcohol into Complex, Relational Lives

Drinking and Work

Through discussions with participants it became clear that, although significant,

alcohol use was understood as merely another aspect of their already complex lives. For many, alcohol use constituted its own domain, accompanied by a complex history, discourse, and nexus of ideas and practices that, as a whole, could be conceptualised as qualitatively different from life's other domains, yet as also inextricably linked to and shaped by them. One such domain that emerged frequently in conversations was that of employment. Although several participants changed jobs or endured periods of unemployment throughout fieldwork, all of the young adults who participated in the project were employed at least in some capacity at some point during the fieldwork period. The majority of participants worked full-time, typically a nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday format, while some worked the early morning starts, late finishes and weekends that come with employment in retail and hospitality.

For many participants, the relationship between drinking and employment was understood to be a unique yet evolving relationship, capable of producing experiences that are perhaps unavailable to those who have not yet entered the full-time workforce. For Aiden, the combination of work and drinking shifted his typical forms of alcohol use towards unusual times of the day and week, different venues and dress codes, and different drinking companions:

Incorporating drinking and work [...] all of a sudden, you know, at four o'clock on a Friday, we'd all go and you know, the corporate guys, the big wigs [...] they'd buy you drinks, and then that was like a different kind of situation because like [...] you're wearing a suit and tie and you're in a nice place as opposed to some dingy place where you used to hang out. And you're [...] not buying any drinks, and you're getting pissed, and you're like, 'This is awesome'.

For others, the novelty of such occasions soon evolved into a routine 'expectation', as Katie termed it, where a specific time of the week, Friday evenings, signalled a move into leisure time. Another participant, Luke, agreed with this sentiment: 'at 4.30 ... everyone just goes "Another week gone! Sweet, let's have beers in the office or let's go to the pub", and that's what people do'. Participants such as Aiden, Luke and Katie, who all worked full-time in corporate organisations, understood post-work

drinks on Fridays to provide a relaxing, fun counterpoint to the stresses, anxieties and monotony associated with the professional tasks of weekday work. Engaging with colleagues over a drink marked the beginning of the ‘reward’ part of the week differentiated from the ‘crazy hours’ spent undertaking the duties and expectations of paid employment, but also investing in hyper-rationalised forms of conduct and self-development:

I work so hard during the week, I work crazy hours [...] I feel like I’ve earned it [...] I really feel like the harder I work, the more I need to like, umm, sort of unwind, unleash a little bit and just go a bit crazy. And not like do anything stupid but just like, you know, get the boys together and hit up a couple of bars, maybe a club, and just do some stupid stuff. (Aiden)

In this sense, post-work drinks straddles the two domains that Aiden describes, his professionalised world, characterised by rationality and toil, and the ‘stupid’ and ‘crazy’ cluster of experiences typical of going out drinking with friends. Importantly, Aiden understood this liminal sphere to be a space of creativity where the interplay between these domains offers the possibility of re-making alcohol use into a therapeutic and professionally productive practice. Aiden described this convergence as generative in his re-imagination of alcohol use as a facilitator for career development, but also of his employment as a ladder to be climbed through fostering personal relationships over beers, as opposed to perceived professional success.

If you go out with a whole lot of [...] work people and they’re all drinking, that gives you an in [...] If you’re having a beer, then you’re one of the boys, and you’re a good bloke. That’s what it is like at our work. You know, you’ve got to be in that. Sometimes I don’t even feel like drinking, but it’s amazing what people say, it’s amazing how work relationships are made around a drink. A bit like being on the golf course, do you know what I mean? It’s like, I’m not crazy about golf, but I sure as shit know how to play golf because what it gets me is time in front of people that I work with that can help me develop my career, can help me earn more money.

This situation that Aiden described is unique in that the importance of achieving a therapeutic, even ‘crazy’ release from work, or merely his desire for pharmacological

intoxication, is diminished in favour of recognising a complex, unique assemblage that requires careful consideration given its possible career implications. Aiden's final point in the above quotation regarding the closely related capacity for earning money was also a common theme in interviews. At a time when many participants were adjusting to regular, substantial pay cheques, as well as attempting to save for travel, or to pay off university debts, 'money' in itself constituted its own domain that frequently pervaded fieldwork conversations. While out with his housemate Rich at a pub one Sunday afternoon, Justin, for example, described how he considered the financial toll of his nights out:

They [Justin and Rich] felt they needed to cut down on their drinking, as going out multiple times a week was taking its toll [...] They had both imposed financial limits on their weekends now – they were not to spend in excess of \$250 across a weekend, after realising that previously they had made a habit of spending upwards of \$350 a weekend. Although his housemate had managed to come in under budget [the previous night], Justin admitted that he was 'throwing pineapples [\$50 notes] around' at the Oktoberfest, and as such, had exceeded his budget. (Field notes, 21 October 2012)

Like drinking and work for Aiden, the above field note helps elucidate how Justin imagines money and drinking to be closely entangled in a relationship that requires regular reflection. As implied in the above field note, for the most part Justin and Rich do not consider the financial implications of regular heavy drinking to be problematic to the point of necessitating conscious reflection, articulation or alteration. Indeed, this is testament to the salience and influence of alcohol marketing discourse (McCreanor, Lyons et al. 2012; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008), and particularly its success in establishing alcohol as a valued and seldom questionable weekly expense that often exceeds the amount young people spend on rent or utility bills. At the same time, however, this field note also demonstrates Justin's capacity to reflect on the anxieties that emerge when the different domains of his life interact in problematic ways. In this sense, Justin can be seen to understand the domains of drinking and money as co-constitutive of each other – drinking shaping money as something to be considered, monitored and restricted, and in turn, money highlighting his alcohol use as not solely the carefree pursuit of pleasure, but also a

substantial financial expense. The monetary aspects of his recent nights out ultimately figured as the catalyst in evaluating his leisure preferences and practices within the broader scheme of his life, asserting that ‘the only real negative impact [of his alcohol use] is probably [on his] bank balance’. While elsewhere he noted that he was happy to shout his mates drinks at the bar, throwing ‘pineapples’ around in displays of sociality and generosity, excessive spending marked the development of a problematic pattern for Justin, and ultimately, cause for reflection.

In a related way, Lucy also remarked on the significance of money in her interview, contending that she was far more likely to ‘get absolutely smashed’ if someone was to offer her free drinks on a night out, highlighting how these two domains can adjust to each other situationally. Will also understood money as something to be protected and valued. Often concerned with the considerable financial cost of drinking in licensed venues, Will once contended over a drink at a Richmond pub that he was unlikely to go out ‘unless there is something worth going out for’. In his view, the worth of an event was measured in part by its financial cost, providing the example that he often found it more desirable to attend a local football match where he could consume alcohol at his own pace and the cost of entry was \$20, as opposed to rare music festivals that, while attractive, were also likely to incur surplus costs relating to high ticket prices (often in excess of \$150), expensive drinks and the perceived need to purchase illicit drugs. According to Will, these financial costs needed to be weighed against the potential for novel, enjoyable experiences, and the more practical difficulties of negotiating transport and bar queues.

For these participants, alcohol use frequently emerged in relation to demands placed on them by work or their finances. Significantly, these data also highlight that drinking events are not only sites of intoxication, pleasure or stress relief, but also spaces where other interests and trajectories become articulated, reflected upon, shaped and re-integrated back into one’s day-to-day disposition. Indeed, this analysis is not intended to dispel entirely the relevance of price or the gendered cultural expectations around drinking on the fringes of the workplace. Rather, I argue this analysis elucidates how employment, money *and* alcohol use are simultaneously valued by these participants, and understood to exist in relationships that are more complex than institutional discourse might suggest. Tracing the regularity with which

they must manoeuvre through these confluences ethical challenges indeed paints a comprehensive picture of the moral complexities and significance of everyday life.

Drinking and Social Networks

Several of the institutional documents analysed earlier in this chapter depict an image of social life determined by the actions of individual citizens, who are simultaneously both responsible for their own conduct and for their effects on other family and community members around them. Following this, it can be said this relevant institutional discourse identifies the need to shape ‘rules, values and habits’ (State of Victoria 2012: 10), or ‘clusters of drinking norms and behaviours’ (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 35), that encourage altruism and social responsibility.

Undoubtedly, study participants also understood their friends and acquaintances to be significant influences on their alcohol use. ‘A lot of it is like, who you’re with’, explained Lauren in her interview, who remembered her most treasured drinking experiences as those involving her closest friends. Comments such as these situate sociality at the heart of participants’ drinking motivations and experiences. Lucy, for example, asserted that she enjoys drinking because it is ‘social’, and that in specific environments, choosing alternative beverages can signify a lack of sociality, particularly when drinking something like water. Most participants understood that the pace or regularity with which they consumed alcohol, as well as the venues or types of event they chose to attend, were often largely shaped by preferences and norms shared amongst networks of friends. Indeed, these extended to expectations over comportment that often differed significantly from other contexts, such as drinking with work colleagues: ‘For your friends, yeah, it’s more about enjoying being a little bit drunk. I don’t give a shit about impressing my friends’ (Aiden).

However, the ways in which sociality is related to alcohol use in institutional discourse leaves little room for exploring how young adults recognise and utilise the complexities of this relationship. Instead of understanding their alcohol use as influenced by their friends in a narrow, uni-directional way, several participants articulated different ways in which alcohol use could be generative and transformative, in the sense that it often enabled social networks to be established,

reinforced or redefined. When asked about the social implications of going out drinking on a regular basis, Justin argued that going out drinking was one of the few spaces people his age could conceivably be introduced to strangers:

Networking, it's meeting people. I mean, you think about it these days, how ... when you work busy hours and you go to the gym ... where are you supposed to meet people?

Somewhat differently, Katie used alcohol as a means to re-make her social networks and to repair, or at least address, valued relationships:

Drinking's sort of my excuse to bring a whole lot of things up [...] if there's a discussion that I've wanted to have with someone for some time, then when I'm drunk, I won't think 'Oh no, I don't want to have this fight now, I don't want to bring it up, I'll let it go'. When I'm drunk, anything that's bothering me, anything, it'll come out.

Remembering her college experiences, Hannah remarked that the best nights were those spent fostering close relationships by drinking exclusively with 'mates' in intimate settings:

I never had the best nights there [a Melbourne venue] [...] usually because it was packed and it wasn't just your mates. Like, I think that was the good thing about 'Jimmy's' or 'The Shack', like, when you went there on a Monday, you knew it was just you and people you knew.

These quotations help elucidate the range of possibilities that can emerge from the relationship between drinking and sociality, and importantly, how these possibilities are recognised and utilised by these young adults, despite their apparent complexities. Where some understood alcohol use to facilitate the establishment or growing of social networks through meeting new people in pubs and bars, others viewed drinking as the means or 'excuse' to clear the air over contentious issues between friends, while participants like Hannah simply preferred to spend nights in the comfort of familiar friends as opposed to a more heterogeneous crowd that might demand a wider range of social and emotional effort.

Echoing institutional concern over problematic ‘drinking cultures’, several participants did remark on the deep embeddedness of some norms around alcohol use that they felt were partially responsible for their participation in the types of drinking patterns outlined in documents such as the NHMRC *Guidelines*. In my interview with Katie, she described how her two housemates, Justin and Ross, would often ‘peer-pressure’ her into going out by claiming that it ‘wouldn’t be the same’ without her, questioning what was ‘wrong’ with her, and calling her a ‘pussy’. Here, Katie’s male housemates reflect Aiden’s description of drinking around the ‘big wigs’ at work by articulating their efforts to maintain masculine drinking norms and standards that play on gendered notions of selfishness, strength and moral worth.

Indeed, these variations risk being obscured by the vague definitions of ‘drinking cultures’ found in institutional documents that are preoccupied with the dangers of social interaction while drinking. Such conceptualisations also do not account for the ways in which these norms are negotiated or resisted, for example. In an environment laden with mixed messages, demands, embodiments and emotions, local cultural expectations rarely possess the capacities to be fully implemented, leaving space for creativity and choice (Lindsay 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009). Even the concept of ‘peer-pressure’, as Katie described it, seems to revolve around a sense of closeness and intimacy between friends, and an ethic of care and belonging, perhaps as a way of providing relief from the heavily individualised routines of daily employment. In the following field note, Tim resists the encouragement of his friend Sean, who in turn demonstrates that any attempt to convince another to exceed their desired limits was often lighthearted and fleeting:

It became evident to everyone that Tim had stopped drinking [...] Instead, he was carrying around a large drink bottle filled with water [...] at about midnight he started saying that he was ‘going to go to bed’. Sean replied, ‘No you’re not, you’re going to grab a bloody beer and drink with us. Look at us, we’ve all got one’. Tim wasn’t having it – ‘No! I’ve got a headache!’ (Field notes, 28 January 2013)

Field notes such as these go some way towards developing an understanding of the relationship between individuals, alcohol and their social networks as dynamic and

variable. It is also important to note that participants were well aware of the potential for their social networks to shift and mutate over time. Participants were quick to point out that the conflation of sociality and alcohol use is situational, producing emergent effects and conditions that leave room for individuals and myriad other factors to exercise their agency. Indeed, as Tim's housemate Will demonstrated one sunny Sunday afternoon during fieldwork, young adults often choose to remove themselves from social situations altogether:

We spent the next couple of hours soaking up the sunshine and drinking ciders in the front garden of Tim's house [...] Tim's housemate Will declared earlier that he was having an 'anti-social Sunday' and didn't show any interest in participating in drinking with us or even engaging in much conversation. Rather he just sat relatively silently in front of the TV watching a local cricket match. (Field notes, 28 October 2012)

Drinking and Health

One's health – both physical and mental – was also a topic that frequently arose in discussions with participants regarding their alcohol use. Like several other participants, Aiden took a holistic perspective on his health, in many ways echoing the imaginaries inherent in important institutional concepts such as 'lifestyle'. Aiden closely associated his alcohol consumption with other health-related practices such as sleeping, food intake, physical exercise, and other changes such as increased anxiety or weight loss, which formed a framework through which he could assess the 'damage' done through 'partying'. Remembering a recent trip to South America, Aiden described how this holistic framework can be unsettled by excess partying:

When I was, ahh, working and studying full-time [...] I was going through anxiety then – then I started going through anxiety when I was travelling! Because like it was meant to be like a trip and I was meant to be like all relaxed, but I was partying so much, I wasn't sleeping right, I was eating badly, I wasn't exercising and I was just worn out. I lost like eight kilos.

Indeed, many participants found the idea of implementing a highly regimented lifestyle to be helpful in organising their daily pursuits in way that was also understood to enhance health. After enduring a period of unemployment through the

earlier part of my fieldwork, Lucy relished her re-acquaintance with the ‘routine’ of full-time employment that offered her a sense of ‘stability’ across a range of daily practices:

Lucy: I think getting stability [...] in healthy lifestyles [...] in sleeping patterns, in working, in eating, in everything really [...] I quite like order and I like structure. I like things to go exactly how I think they’re going to go.

James: So once you get stability, you reckon that will give you a bigger opportunity to do ... what?

Lucy: Absolutely nothing [laughs]. No, I have no idea.

Lucy’s thoughts reflected a wider acknowledgement amongst participants that their health was likely to be shaped by some ordering of diet, sleep and exercise in particular, the type of which is imagined in her use of the institutionally-endorsed ‘lifestyle’. Indeed, Lucy understands that health practices ought to be regulated in prescribed ways, lest one should risk having poor habits ‘catch up with you’, usually in the form of excessive fatigue or illness. The potential to disrupt this pattern was often a major factor influencing her drinking decisions and events, including decisions to abstain from drinking for periods ranging from a week to a month at a time. Again, this understanding highlights the salience of institutional, particularly biomedical, concepts and frameworks in everyday conversations (and ethnographic interviews) regarding drinking and health. However, the latter part of Lucy’s quotation undermines its determinism, given she is unaware how exactly a ‘healthy lifestyle’ might indeed influence her life.

This deterministic link between heavy drinking and health risks was a contested point during fieldwork and interviews. On one occasion while watching television with Tim over a glass of wine, he remarked ‘I wish I didn’t drink, it’ll be the death of me, the alcohol’, his admission brought on by a scene from a program in which one of the characters, an abstainer, declines an offer of a drink. I wrote about this incident in my field notes that evening:

I didn’t think he drank all that much. He assured me that he was usually going

through a bottle of wine a night. As he had a day off from work the following day, I asked him if he was going to get on it [drink] again but he said that he wasn't, that he was intending to have an 'alcohol-free day'. The next day he sent me a message in the evening alerting me that he was 'hopping into a bottle of scotch [whiskey]'. Not particularly surprised, I replied with 'You said you were having an alcohol-free day'. He responded with 'With a bottle of scaaaartch [scotch]'. (Field notes, 12 November 2012)

Tim also introduced me to another of his friends, Sean, who had recently been receiving medical attention for his health issues, which he understood to be related to his pattern of heavy drinking. On another occasion at Tim's house, Sean reminisced about his time living in the United Kingdom, the year prior to fieldwork, where he was employed as a bartender, soaking up the vibrant local music scene in Nottingham. He admitted that after months living in the city he felt compelled to decide on his future after one particularly excessive night out drinking, realising that the time had come for him to return to Australia. According to Sean, he booked a flight immediately following this incident and returned home within days. Although vague on the details, Sean admitted having medical treatment in the months since for reasons related to alcohol use, but had recently missed a follow-up appointment after the last time he was in hospital. Despite his doctor's instruction not to drink, or to at least drink very little, Sean admitted sheepishly, and with a wry grin, that he 'was on the piss' the very next night – his health concerns (or at least those of his doctor) mitigated by his love of indie rock music gigs, where he always ended up 'getting on it' [consuming large volumes of alcohol].

This would suggest that despite recognising its significance – if only fleetingly – the male participants of this study, in particular, were less willing to consider the relationship between alcohol and health, as vitally important or even exceeding other demands or activities. The complexities involved in contextualising drinking, and health, amongst a range of other pursuits, appeared to somewhat diminish the importance of this relationship. In the following quotation, Katie deploys traditional moral vernacular to describe drinking as 'bad' for her health, but also valuable in other ways.

I *know* drinking's bad for me [...] that's not a question. I'm well aware that it's bad for me. Because drinking has always been associated with something good, some sort of celebration [...] you know it's not good for you, you know you don't feel great the next day, but you never have more fun than when you are drunk.

Here, Katie again describes a relational link where alcohol use and specific types of event, such as 'celebrations', are co-constitutive of the pleasures associated with celebrations. As demonstrated in relation to social networks, this does not mean that alcohol use is always integral to events or always overrides one's health concerns but rather, as Lauren argues in the next excerpt, it depends on the ways in which alcohol use can contribute to 'the situation':

It is, just empty calories. Like, if I'm just drinking just for the sake of having a drink and you know, it's not going to *add anything* to the situation, then well yeah, I might not drink it because of the waste of calories or just because it isn't good for you.

Reflecting the reach of the moralising public health discourse, participants were more willing to use traditional moral categories such as 'good' or 'bad' when discussing the health implications of heavy drinking compared to social, financial or employment implications. However, it is important to note that despite widespread recognition that this practice was 'bad' from a health perspective, this 'badness' required contextualising within the other effects drinking can produce, and within the other domains of everyday life containing their own elements that can often be considered equally as 'bad'. This notion was explicitly reflected upon by Will, who said during our interview:

Everything fucks with your health [...] too much meat is bad for you, not enough is bad for you. Too much fast food is bad for you. Too much alcohol is apparently bad for you, but apparently also a glass of red a day is good for you [...] a bit of sun is good for you, [a] bit of sun can also causes skin cancer.

Moral Beings in Relational Worlds

The preceding section examined how alcohol use emerged in complex relationships

with the myriad other demands constituting participants' everyday lives. It also draws attention to how alcohol use might be understood as enmeshed within a series of ongoing trajectories and processes that relate to a vast range of interests, responsibilities and relationships that extend far beyond the mere practice of ingesting alcohol. Focusing research attention on the alcohol use of young adults appears always to simultaneously reveal further complexities relating to the negotiation of one's finances, employment, social networks, health and myriad other phenomena.

In many ways, the presented data helps validate institutional concerns over how alcohol use relates to various defining traits of everyday life, including the significance of social influences, the capacity for individuals to internalise established norms and values, and by extension, the potential for problematic drinking patterns to become entrenched in the lives of 'everyday Australians'. However, this analysis does so in a way that emphasises the relationality of these concerns, and the complexities they produce when they become entangled. Although these effects were varied, in the three aspects of daily life examined – work, social networks and health – aspects of these relationships emerged that seemingly held the primacy of heavy drinking in place. In the case of the relationship between drinking and employment, for example, participants illuminated the gendered, hierarchical discourses that maintained alcohol's integrity to the building of professional relationships and the activation of professional mobility. Participants also identified an apparent lack of meaningful opportunities for social interaction beyond drinking events, particularly those that fostered a sense of intimacy, comfort and pleasure. At the same time, participants such as Katie highlighted the rigidity of some social conventions that seemingly prevent honest confrontations from taking place without alcohol. In terms of health, participants pointed to the combination of their own personal experiences and overly restrictive health promotion discourses as evoking ambivalence towards alcohol's health effects and a broader distrust of moralising messages, particularly those emanating from public health sources. Moreover, the moralising discourse of individualistic lifestyles permeated all of these domains, again with varying effects; while some found regimented health regimes to be comforting, others found them limiting or unintelligible. Indeed, the diverse and fluctuating effects of these moral impositions serves to undermine the credibility of

officially prescribed modes of living, and ultimately encourages young adults to find their own ways of organising their daily lives and moral trajectories (Duff & Moore 2015; Lindsay 2010).

I would also argue this analysis illustrates the potential value of pushing this understanding of everyday life further, to account for the participants' skills, their local and situated knowledge, and heightened sense of awareness of how these different forces emerge together, and furthermore, the potentialities that might provide opportunities for re-making themselves and the world around them. It is only by taking these elements seriously that we can begin to develop an understanding of the moral dimensions and implications associated with engaging in alcohol use as a regular and routine part of one's daily life, whereas institutional discourse has explicitly avoided such considerations. The point I intend to make here concerns contemporary policymaking around alcohol use; that if the project of changing attitudes, norms and values around alcohol use is to proceed with success – the stated intentions of documents such as *Reducing the AOD Toll* (State of Victoria 2012) – then more needs to be done in terms of unpacking daily life and analysing how such values emerge and take shape. Developing more nuanced understandings of what daily life entails, based on the perspectives of young adults themselves, would go some way towards addressing this gap, and establishing a firmer base from which to proceed with a project that has such apparent moral implications.

Shifting Between Morality and Ethics in Everyday Life

In this thesis I have analysed ethnographic data largely through Zigon's moral assemblage framework, drawing in particular on his delineation of the concept of 'morality' from that of 'ethics'. These conceptualisations are also particularly useful, I argue, in thinking about the ways in which these young adults conceive of their alcohol use as entangled with other parts of their lives.

According to Zigon (2007), 'morality' is predominantly enacted on behalf of individuals through their embodied dispositions, crafted through one's endurance of life's struggles, stresses and anxieties. In the main, one's moral disposition is embodied without explicit reflection, it is 'simply done' as we go about our daily activities and duties (Zigon 2007: 137). Moral dispositions are characterised by a

sense of familiarity, to ourselves and to those around us; indeed, as Zigon (2009b: 260) explains, 'it is because all persons are able to embody morality in this unreflective and unreflexive way that most persons most of the time are able to act in ways that are, for the most part, acceptable to others in their social world seemingly naturally'.

By describing how alcohol emerges in participants' daily lives relationally, my analysis performs a dual function. It highlights the mundaneness of alcohol use as a routine leisure activity and shows how participants' capacities for negotiating the complexity and emergence of their lives become deeply internalised to the point where life is 'simply done' as a matter of course. Undoubtedly, as the data explored in this chapter suggest, this is not always the case. Zigon reserves his conceptualisation of 'ethics' for those moments where the embodied disposition becomes disrupted, forcing a less comfortable, less natural, 'stepping-away' for reflection. These moments, Zigon (2007: 138) argues, are brought on through a combination of the situation at hand and the individuals involved, and demand that individuals figure out how to respond to the ethical troubles they face. These 'breakdowns' are moral experiences derived through processes of memory, recollection and hope, desire and anticipation for the future ahead, creative moments where new moral persons and worlds become possible, as subjects attempt to reformulate new dispositional ways of being in the world (Zigon 2009a, 2009b). Zigon argues further that these breakdowns are characterised by a demand requiring the moral subject in question finds a way to struggle through that moment, to 'keep going!' (Zigon 2007: 140), and return to inhabiting the comfort, familiarity and 'everydayness' of one's unreflective moral disposition.

As an indication of its inherent complexities, Zigon (2009b) views these 'shifts in moral consciousness' (p. 256) between morality and ethics, as he conceptualises them, as a 'regular and normal part' (p. 263) of what makes up a human life (see also Zigon 2009a). Indeed, living life across multiple domains in itself demands that these participants cultivate the capacity to recognise when their moral worlds become problematic, and a unique moral flexibility crafted to neutralise those anxieties. To relate this back to the institutional discourse examined earlier in this chapter, it is in the moral complexities of negotiating these multiple demands that young adults, such

as the participants in this study, find the tools to cultivate a sense of moral flexibility, the type of which is not imagined in the values of ‘resilience’ this discourse promotes. In its institutional usage, ‘resilience’ refers to an idealised version of moral personhood that is grounded by an unwavering commitment to the priorities of public health and neoliberal citizenship, regardless of the varied situations one might encounter. Many participants found such an approach to life to be unrealistic and untenable, particularly in the long term, and favoured a more open-ended, situational and flexible outlook in order to negotiate life’s demands, as I will demonstrate later.

At its heart, I argue that this demand is not solely practical, or even health-related, but ethical in nature. It is a call to continually ‘remake oneself’ over the course of negotiating the multiple forces of everyday life. This process not only involves times of conscious reflection, but active engagement in the cultivation of new bodily, emotional and cognitive sensibilities for being in the world that might help one dwell more comfortably in that world (Zigon 2013, 2014b). To give an example, when asked about what he held most dear to him, Aiden said that ‘going out with friends’ was on a par with his career, money, the ability to travel, managing his physical and mental health, and looking after his family. These things he considered intimately ‘valuable’ and ‘important’. In Zigonian terms, these aspects of his life help trace the multifarious relations to which he is morally attuned. In turn, following Zigon’s (2014a) framework, if these domains are some of the elements of Aiden’s life that he holds most dear, they could be understood as constituting a broader ‘life’, or perhaps more appropriately, a life-assemblage; a rolling mass of multiple assemblages held together through relations and demands that at times require conscious ‘ethical’ reflection, and at other times require that he just simply ‘keep going’, enacting his cultivated embodied ‘morality’.

These nuances of living through daily life as a young adult drinker in Melbourne are the sort of idiosyncrasies that are absent from relevant institutional documents that are concerned with moralising everyday life. Furthermore, in what appears contradictory, my analysis here demonstrates that the intentional avoidance of engaging in moral debates or, at the very least, considering the implications of such processes of moralisation, has in many ways foreclosed the development of a moral understanding of daily life that may actually prove useful to the project it seeks to

enact. In what remains of this chapter, I aim to develop this understanding further by drawing attention to how participants attempt to ground their efforts to negotiate the moral complexities of their daily lives.

‘She’ll be Right’: Moral Personhood amongst Young Adults

For some participants, the process of negotiating multiple moral assemblages as part of everyday life was grounded by an idea of what constitutes a ‘good’ person. Justin, for example, is always trying to ‘push’ himself to ‘learn more’ and make himself into a ‘better person’:

I guess, outside of the gym, outside of work, it’s more like just feeling good about who I am [...] being the best person I can be, so whatever that [might] be. Being nice and helpful to people as well as someone people can rely on, I guess that’s very important to me [...] just being that sort of person, that when someone has a problem, I’m happy to be there to talk to them about it, or if they need help moving a couch or something, you know [...] I really value my friends. Things like that, I’m a person like that, so you know, I guess that’s important outside of work, like friendships that I’ve made.

Justin reflects the values widely held by many other participants, including caring for close friends and family, being open, reliable, approachable and sociable, and ‘giving back’ to others in the community, simultaneously displaying their attunement to a range of valued relations in a world that they care for (Zigon 2014a). In these quotations, they understand themselves as only partially constituting this world, contextualised within a complexity that diminishes their self-importance and emphasises the needs of others. Throughout fieldwork, however, this ethos routinely clashed with more individualised, neoliberal demands for self-development and self-fulfilment, often at the expense of others. Katie, for example, talked in highly individualised terms of her recent move to Melbourne from regional Victoria to begin her career.

Katie: I wanted to earn money. I wanted to move out of home. I wanted to do exactly what I wanted to do and not consider anyone else and be totally independent.

For Katie, this independence has enabled her to enact her consumer desires autonomously and without consideration of others:

Katie: I want to book a flight and have no plans. I want to be totally selfish and do whatever I want and know that it doesn't impact anybody at all.

These sentiments were echoed by Aiden, who struggled with the idea of entering a significant romantic relationship when I asked how he imagined his future:

Aiden : My attitude on life and the way that I view life, it's not compatible with ... because with a relationship you've got to give a shit about someone else [...] because you've got to take into account other people's feelings and emotions and what they want to do, and so you *can't* necessarily dedicate your life to work, or you can't necessarily go and fuck off to London, or quit your job spontaneously and go to the US, or you know, spend an unreasonable amount of time with your mates.

The tension between an eagerness to care for others and the world around them, and a 'hyperemphasis' (Zigon 2011: 45) on the individuality involved in living across various domains in the contemporary neoliberal era, characterised many fieldwork experiences, and was well recognised by participants. As Justin suggested: 'You do need to rely on people ... absolutely! I don't deny that at all. But you know, you've, you've got to look out for yourself as well'. This central tension between a desire for selflessness and the necessities of self-interest in an era where the individual has become increasingly responsible for their 'entire way of being' (Zigon 2011: 45) adds yet another layer of moral complexity characterising the lives of these young adults. In response, they strive to perform a particular kind of moral disposition, cultivated through their wide and varied experiences of negotiating this complexity, and continually crafted through engaging with emergent practices, discourses and other moral subjects. This disposition was one that predominantly oscillated between ambivalence and positivity, exhibiting a confidence that would consistently mitigate life's stresses, anxieties and emotional troughs. Indeed, this disposition was borne out of their crafted capacities for contextualisation, particularly their abilities to recognise their relative importance but also the temporality of their lives.

There was a keen sense amongst participants that they were in a unique period that needed to be maximised wherever possible. Justin, for example, insisted he lived according to a ‘philosophy’ underpinned by the notion that ‘you’re only young once ... there’s plenty of time to be married, and have kids and stuff like that’. Katie also suggested something similar in her interview, asserting that she goes out regularly now ‘because she can’ – she doesn’t want to be the person in her thirties with family responsibilities regretting that she ‘didn’t really get to party ... I missed out’.

The imagined safety, routine and restriction of future family life significantly influenced how many participants shaped their daily lives in the present, and reflects a common theme in the existing qualitative research literature (e.g. Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009). In many ways it related to the perceived need to maximise one’s youth. As Aiden put it, ‘life’s too short’ to ignore opportunities to ‘experience new things’. However, he also reasoned that eventually, ‘you’ve got to just be comfortable with what you’ve got’. Echoing Justin and Katie, Aiden later returned to the idea of his youth, explaining that achieving this comfort is more desirable at a later age but is ‘sure as shit not in your twenties’.

Following the participants’ recognition of the fragility and brevity of their youth, the dispositions they had crafted often leaned themselves to finding humour amongst the trials of everyday life wherever possible. To demonstrate, despite the earlier analysis elucidating how Justin considers his financial outlay on nights out, and particularly on reflection over the ensuing days, he makes this admission:

Justin: [I’ve had] a few moments in life when we’ve sort of opened up the wallet and gone ‘I’ve got heaps of money!’ and there’s nothing in there. Like, oooh, shit! You just ... look, at the end of the day, you’ve just got to look back and laugh.

Part of finding the humour in such situations involves this act of contextualisation that helps override the negative effects that might emerge from, in this instance, running out of money. As Justin, continues: ‘There’s been times when it gets tough. Everyone experiences the same thing. But you’ve just got to keep persevering and ... good things happen to good people’. Several participants asserted that this ‘she’ll be

right' attitude, as Katie calls it, was useful in negotiating the complexities of everyday life, and for neutralising the anxieties that emerge when it inevitably becomes problematic.

However, it also reflects participants' awareness of the precariousness of life that reduces the importance of clearly defined goals or ends in one's desired trajectory. While some participants had ideal professional positions in mind, or places they would ultimately like to live, participants were generally happy, when speculating on future plans, to leave their trajectories open and undefined. Katie, for example, doesn't 'have a defined path, step by step, what I'm going to do for the next ten years, but I've got a very broad, vague plan and don't mind if it changes'. Luke also found well-defined plans 'silly', 'because life changes, it's flexible, it's not rigid. It's ever-evolving, ever-changing. So, I think it'd be very silly to have a definite plan'. This approach to life, however, constitutes a desired trajectory in itself. This trajectory is open-ended and situational, rather than defined by ends or goals, and echoes the process of ethical self-cultivation described by Zigon (2009b) and Laidlaw (2002). With recognition of the flexibility of life and the precarious of well-defined trajectories, the focus for many participants shifted, as Aiden suggested, to seeking out new experiences, excitement and education. Indeed, Aiden takes this further, by claiming that he's 'more interested in having an interesting and exciting life than having a happy life'. By the same token, what is 'interesting' or 'exciting' is left open to interpretation; what is important for Aiden is the 'test' of pursuing that open-ended 'exciting, amazing, whatever life' – as he explains:

Aiden: You want to see if you can do it. And if you fail or if you go through anxiety, and you know, it's a detriment to your health, yeah that's bad. But it's more important that you fucking do that thing.

Aiden's comments suggest a sense of ambivalence, particularly towards one's health, that is underpinned both by this pursuit of what is exciting and interesting, and by a lack of faith in the determinism associated with everyday life. Justin also admits that drinking 'doesn't really help' him in regard to his health, but at the same time he considers himself to be 'not that serious' because he likes to 'enjoy life'. Similarly, another participant, Olivia, characterises as 'unrealistic' the recommendations that

‘women should only drink like two standard drinks a day or whatever’. She justified her position by exclaiming that ‘it’s just ... two! That’s, like, a pre-drink, you haven’t even sat down for dinner yet!’ It follows from these quotations that participants recognise that engaging in any practice - alcohol use included – is so laden with moral complexity that seeking to moralise such practices in overly simplistic ways, or to restrict them to specific patterns, ignores these inherent complexities. Perhaps Lauren explains this most eloquently when contextualizing the ‘badness’ associated with alcohol use within the complex world that other participants have described, while also drawing attention to the potential lack of engagement with institutional discourse:

It’s not like a simple, it’s not ... there isn’t one right or wrong answer. It’s obviously different for every person. Like, maybe some people, yeah, do drink to be more confident and to be able to socialise more. Umm, maybe some people do drink because they think that it will help them you know, like, forget about their problems and that sort of thing. Like it’s ... alcohol’s not the only bad thing. Like, I look around these days and I think ‘Why do people still smoke?’ Like, how can I see, you know, people my age smoking, when I think my entire life, I’ve always, you know, we’ve always grown up with stuff everywhere about how bad smoking is.

Following the analysis in this section, I argue that the participants of this study live in a moral world that they recognise as precarious, provisional and laden with complexity. In response, they negotiate the moral complexities and ethical moments of moral significance, the types of which I have analysed earlier in this chapter, while attempting to keep these qualities in mind. Many adopt a ‘she’ll be right’ attitude that seeks to contextualise misfortune and other challenging events within this complex world, while grounding processes of ethical self-cultivation in the pursuit of exciting, interesting experiences, and learning more about themselves and the world around them. Undoubtedly this approach to everyday life is shaped by structural aspects such as class. As a network of highly-educated, well-resourced and employed young adults, these participants downplay the attractiveness of well-defined goals, leaving the possibility open for their trajectories and moral subjectivities to be co-constituted by whatever lies ahead. Those without this

cultural, educational and financial capital may not necessarily be attuned to these aspects of everyday life. Nevertheless, the young adults of this study understood alcohol use as an important aspect of their lives that enabled them to shape their realities, while also activating critical awareness of not only their own lives but the worlds around them (Walton 2002: 34–35). In this sense, the use of alcohol (and at times, other drugs), was understood as an integral catalyst in infusing their lives with a sense of agency, hope, and positivity that many valued highly. As such, alcohol use became implicated in the processes of moral subjectivity that these young adults continue to live through on a daily basis, and became representative of the need to leave open a ‘space of imperfection’ where contradictory impulses can be reconciled, and ambivalence about normative standards and expectations can be cultivated (Deeb & Harb 2013: 20).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that in the context of how these, and other, young adults use and understand alcohol, the moral dimensions and implications of living complex daily lives should be taken seriously. This is because focusing on these dimensions and implications helps us to better understand how young adults respond to institutional moral discourse, and in turn to elucidate the moral complexities and significance that co-constitute local drinking assemblages. I began the analytical sections of this chapter by exploring how drinking always emerges as shaped by the demands of life’s other domains, whether they be financial concerns, career development, intimate social relationships, or one’s health. In contrast to how the relationship between alcohol use and everyday life is depicted, and moralised, in relevant institutional discourse – that is, as something that ought to be simplified, regimented and individualised – this analysis highlights the relationality, contingency and emergence of young adults’ lives and, moreover, the local knowledge and skills required to creatively manoeuvre through them. This complexity intensifies further when you consider that drinking assemblages are unique, provisional and liminal phenomena held together through entanglements of specific spaces, times of day or social groups; when one leaves the pub, a whole new way of negotiating these aspects might emerge in a different assemblage. In daily life, these assemblages are not necessarily experienced or understood as distinct but rather bleed into each other,

with different ethical demands permeating different assemblages, calling on young adults to work on their cultivated moral dispositions in order to assemble a familiar, comfortable, exciting world around them through valued relations (Zigon 2014a).

In latter sections, I have argued that this process is grounded first, by a recognition of life's moral complexities, and, second, by fidelity to a life trajectory characterised by openness, to new experiences and people, and to inevitable change. Indeed, these perspectives work against the idea of epidemiologically prescribed frequencies or volumes of alcohol consumption recommended in relevant institutional discourse, particularly as they relate to static, 'aggregate' lifestyles that are presented as logical, desirable, deterministic of positive outcomes, and readily achievable by all (Bourgois 1998; Cockerham 2005; LeBesco 2011; Lindsay 2010; Lupton 2015). In contrast, these participants recognise the limits to which health, social, or economic outcomes – indeed any definition of how to *live well* – can be determined by any one mode of living. By the same token, they recognise prescribed lifestyles as largely restrictive, unrealistic or unnecessary when translated into the exigencies of everyday life.

Negotiating this rolling mass of relations that form the making and re-making of the moral assemblages of everyday life simultaneously involves negotiating a central tension between caring for valued relations and catering to the self-interested demands of upholding the responsibilities for one's entire way of being in this neoliberal era (Petersen, Tanner et al. 2014: 177). This struggle is not necessarily reflected with the same level of nuance in the policy documents and guidelines analysed earlier in this chapter. Indeed 'struggles' or 'hardships' are those to be avoided at all costs as they signify either pathological problems, structural disadvantage or the consequences of poor consumption choices, particularly in relation to alcohol. The analysis of ethnographic data in this chapter suggests an alternative view: that these struggles are indeed generative, transformative and driven towards becoming more diverse, interesting and capable moral subjects rather than orientated towards specific outcomes.

Ultimately, I argue that these findings pose potential problems for policy-makers in that they highlight the emergence and indeterminacy of alcohol use in everyday life and the ambivalence that, at times, characterises participants' consideration of

neoliberal values, particularly those relating to health. Indeed, the complexities of moral life in particular ensure that actions related to alcohol use, or health, money, social networks, or any other domain, are likely to be tenuous and inconsistent, as they are negotiated situationally. Again, for policymakers, this is potentially problematic, given the apparent proclivity for institutional discourses to prescribe strict patterns of alcohol use that are intended to be durable over one's lifetime, as a primary technology for delivering enhanced health and wellbeing to individuals, families, communities and the nation (Lindsay 2010).

Chapter Eight:

Producing and Imagining Care: The Effects of Children on Drinking

By exploring how the study participants conceive of their ‘lives’ and of alcohol’s place within them, the previous chapter drew attention to the relationality, emergence and precariousness of everyday moralities. Through ethnographic analysis, I demonstrated how these young adults were not necessarily preoccupied with defining clear life trajectories or establishing deterministic links between practices and their outcomes – whether they related to social networks, employment, health or alcohol use. Rather, their primary ethical concerns were with managing the complexities that inevitably emerge when these various demands intersect. Going further, I described some of the ways participants responded to this broader ethical demand by crafting flexible, dynamic moral subjectivities better equipped to deal with a world characterised by frequent and unexpected shifts between the mundane and the extraordinary.

The analytical framing I have developed throughout this thesis challenges existing approaches to addressing problems relating to alcohol use in Australia. First and foremost, it rejects the notion of a pre-defined, transcendental, consensus version of morality that might, in theory, provide an identifiable, stable target for intervention. Second, I have advocated for replacing this idea with multiple, emergent *moralities*, made and re-made through the interactions between moral subjects, practices and discourses. Indeed, while my approach may go some way towards capturing the moral nuances associated with struggling through everyday life, this perspective also leaves prospective policymakers with ever-expanding layers of complexity that require further critical attention, analyses and responses. Indeed, this state of affairs in many ways reflects my own fieldwork experiences as a novice ethnographer, where I found myself continually frustrated with the analytical difficulties of drawing out any sort of moral framework I presumed to lie beneath the surface of everyday social existence. After examining field notes and interview transcripts, or talking with participants, I routinely struggled to make sense of a moral world that did not seem to be symmetrical, stable or predictable, and often vastly different from one day

to the next.

From within the muddy complexity of ethnographic fieldwork, then, the few rare moments of coherence and clarity that did emerge, did so conspicuously. Throughout 2012-13, I was able to observe a handful of occurrences where specific moralities were produced, primarily in response to some deeply entrenched moral imperatives in ways that appeared to share some form of continuity. By this I mean that, on a few occasions, I was witness to moral assemblages emerging that in turn orchestrated a relatively predictable, recognisable assortment of effects, ranging from familiar processes of reflection on the state of the world and the ethical demands placed on its individuals, to various forms of bodily and linguistic comportment, or the discussion or imagination of entirely different moral worlds and futures. One example relates to how participants engaged with and responded to ideas of war and military service, particularly through the medium of television. During a night spent at a friend's house watching the gritty World War II drama *Band of Brothers*, for instance, those present discussed the horrors of conflict, the comparative luxury of our own lives, and the respect they harboured for those they knew who were, or had been, an active part of the defence force. Other, similar events materialised in response to this particular topic throughout fieldwork, and their effects often extended beyond shaping themes of conversation, to how people located themselves in space, shaped their bodies, used their eyes and their speech, or how they re-articulated recognisable tropes regarding the unfathomable sacrifices made by brave servicemen and women. The apparent consistency across these particular situations points to first, the rigidity of the imperative to respect those involved in armed conflict, and second, the ways in which this particular ethic has been written into the majority of participants' moral dispositions.

In this chapter, I intend to follow this thread further in examining a set of different, yet related situations to propel forward our understanding of participants' moralities. I will begin by exploring two ethnographic 'scenes' adapted from field notes or reflections recorded during fieldwork. These scenes provide rich detail on how specific moralities take shape in local settings around the primary moral imperative of caring for children, or more simply, putting the needs of children before one's own. In both scenes, I describe the ways in which this central demand produced a

cascade of bodily, linguistic, emotional and interpretive effects, and, in the second scene in particular, how this demand shaped drinking practices. In doing so, I aim to highlight that local moral assemblages are not always or entirely characterised by inconsistency and incoherence, but rather they can also be subject to rigidity, durability and a lack of questioning, particularly when they are co-constituted through a distinct and well-recognised moral imperative, such as the ethical demand to respond to the presence of children.

In this second part of the analysis, I will draw on interview data to demonstrate the participants' moral flexibility. In interviews, participants routinely described themselves as implicated in moral assemblages that were always being operated on at their peripheries by discourses regarding ageing, biological development and parenthood. In examining how they negotiated these aspects of their moral personhood, I will also explore the ways in which thinking about having children can produce temporary moral imaginaries that invoke unique processes of ethical reflection that, for some, extend to considerations of their alcohol use. This close investigation into the processes of shifting between forms of moral consciousness – from unreflective dispositions to conscious ethical reflection – highlights that moral questioning and imagination is a constant and experimental element of these participants' lives, and moreover, is vital to understanding participants' relationships with alcohol. However, it also elucidates the extent to which these processes are shaped by various moralising discourses that implore young people to conform to specific developmental trajectories that are often heavily gendered.

Put simply, the analyses in this chapter are intended to highlight the effects children can have on moral assemblages in order to draw out the mechanics of ethical work, and the crafting of moral subjects and their worlds more broadly. In doing so, this chapter also demonstrates the extent to which moral possibilities and imaginaries can come to be circumscribed by rigid moral discourses pertaining to life trajectories or the vulnerability of children, and structural forces such as gender. While these aspects of youth alcohol use might have only rarely fallen within the traditional purview of alcohol research, the combination of ethnographic methods and Zigon's theoretical framework has uniquely positioned me to describe and analyse what happens in the moral lives of young adults beyond the physical ingestion of alcohol

use. As I will demonstrate, drinking events, and the moral subjects that emerge within them, soon find themselves bleeding into other events and other assemblages as they interact with different forces. The specifics of how this process unfolds from a moral perspective is, I argue, vital to the broader project undertaken in this thesis to deepen our understanding of the relationship between young adults, alcohol and morality.

I will begin unravelling this thread by examining one early-morning hungover trip to the cinema I took during fieldwork, accompanied by one ethnographic participant and one bubbly, bug-eyed toddler.

Part One: The Physical Presence of Children in Re-making Local Moral Assemblages

Scene One: Taking Abby to the Cinema

The potential for children to shape local moralities was first brought to my attention during an outing to the cinema in June 2013. On the previous weekend, Lucy had offered to help me transport some furniture that had been donated to me by some old friends, Bryan and Carla, a couple in their early thirties. In a sense, I was returning the favour by helping the couple clear space for their growing family, including a newborn son and older daughter Abby, then nearly three years old. After loading a chest of drawers and large rug into the boot of Lucy's hatchback, the four of us chatted about movies while Abby buzzed around our ankles. Having seen the first instalment of the *Monsters Inc* film series in our early teens, Lucy and I nostalgically expressed interest in seeing the latest instalment, entitled *Monsters University*. Coincidentally, Bryan was planning to take Abby to see that very film the following weekend and asked if Lucy and I would like to attend. Despite Bryan's plan to catch an early screening – we were informed that the most opportune time to take young children to the cinema was before 10am on weekends – we gladly pencilled in a date to meet up at a theatre in Melbourne's inner south-east the following Saturday morning.

On the Friday night prior, however, Lucy and I didn't return to our respective homes until well after 2am, having spent the evening partying in Carlton. In fact, this

particular night out had eventuated after our numerous discussions over the monotonous, formulaic nature of going out and drinking with the same people and in the same places. In response, Lucy and I ventured to Melbourne's inner north to a bar located in an historic, former government building permeated by a dynamic mix of gender and sexual identities, and policed by a far more relaxed security staff than one might find in venues in the CBD or on Chapel Street. Although our experiences at this bar had indeed succeeded in alleviating our dissatisfaction, by Saturday morning any relief had become temporarily masked by a pair of hangovers.

Despite our fragility, Lucy and I were determined to keep our promise to Bryan and Carla and, particularly, to Abby. After waking later than expected, I quickly shuffled my way down to the nearest tram stop a couple of blocks from my house. After a brief scan of the timetable revealed that the next tram was some half an hour away, I decided to walk. Twenty minutes later (and without sighting a tram), I arrived at the cinema to find Lucy slumped on a couch, playing on her phone, her wry smile admitting to me that she now found the idea of two hungover twenty-somethings seeing a children's film 'early' on a Saturday morning a little ridiculous. Clearly she had also barely slept and, by her own admission, felt 'a little worse for wear'. Somehow, we managed to beat Bryan to the cinema, who arrived a few minutes later with his young daughter perched on his hip, also a little bleary-eyed, with her typically incessant chatter unusually absent. Such tranquillity, however, was short-lived.

If the previous night's partying had partially reinvigorated my waning motivation for fieldwork and stale social life, then the experience of seeing a film at 9.50am on a winter weekend morning, surrounded by thoroughly entertained children, left me utterly refreshed. Lucy and I became quickly besotted with the charmingly clever Abby, spending the majority of the film crouched alongside her, staring, smiling, babbling, and laughing along hysterically with our new friend and the surrounding toddlers. The humour of the film rejuvenated our fatigued, hungover bodies, cleansing them of the previous night's alcohol, in a process accelerated by the perceived innocence and joy of the space. Gently and subtly we oscillated between re-imagining ourselves as children, and consciously adjusting our movements in accordance with Abby's intuitions and reactions, adapting ourselves primarily in the

hope of enhancing her enjoyment of this particular experience. This is not to say that our bodily and linguistic performances were inauthentic. On the contrary, the space, its actors and forces, affected both Lucy and me in ways we hadn't experienced in some time – having not recently interacted with children – and the overwhelmingly refreshing and pleasurable results were clearly inscribed on our bodies. The children around us were the most powerful factors, both as sources of entertainment, and as mirrors onto our own actions and attitudes. Their antics threw both Lucy and me into states of reflection and processes of adjustment in order to become more seamlessly absorbed into the vibrant space that was essentially created by, and for, the young children around us, and to maximise its pleasurable offerings.

At a minimum, this event is remarkable merely for its capacity to force two hungover bodies out of bed at 9am on a cold, Melbourne winter morning, pushing through rapidly intensifying headaches, to invest their time and energy in the happiness of a friend's two-year-old daughter they both barely knew. Indeed, this is also significant in the context of understanding how drinking events are always enmeshed within other ongoing activities and processes, and how they can bleed into each other as sobering bodies become entangled in new spaces, practices and moral assemblages. In my personal experience I felt this both immediately and profoundly. I emerged from the theatre with a sense of the unfiltered pleasure of the experience and a rejuvenating sense of relief. My anxieties over the banality of recent social experiences, and the frustrations of fieldwork, had been temporarily soothed by the vivid illustration of the diversity of spaces, actors and forces that lay beyond the seemingly rigidly defined boundaries of my daily life.

As I will argue further in this chapter, this event, and those similar, also offer depth to the theoretical descriptions of the moral lives led by the young adults of this study that I have so far developed in this thesis. Beyond its pleasurable and therapeutic benefits, the cinema event forced a reflexive assessment of my own immediate priorities, beginning with merely choosing punctuality over conceding to my fatigued body. Where typically I might have indulged in a sleep-in, on this occasion I bounded out of bed, fearful of being late, and strode quickly towards the cinema, forcing my unwilling legs into action, refusing even to wait for the (relative) comfort of public transport. Once at the cinema, I experienced my body differently in the

novel space, adjusting accordingly by pasting on a broad smile, shrinking my frame to ensure it was less intimidating to the smaller cinema-goers around me, and engaging in strange hand gestures or an unfamiliar, babbling language to suit the audience of toddlers. Further, I was able to relax my critical sensibilities and open myself up to the humour of a film targeted to children, and at frequent intervals, I reflected on vastly different concerns, interests and amusements to those I might usually consider. Ultimately, this two-hour period shocked me into a different state that I could not describe as merely sensorial, but rather intimately moral, necessitating the conscious alteration of my language, tone, presence, speed and direction of physical movement, all in the act of ensuring, and enhancing, the happiness of an Other. Strangely, these minute alterations seemed to come to me organically as I became entangled with the space, as if at some point previously I had cultivated a sensibility for how to act in such situations. Perhaps the only surprising element of the event, from a personal perspective, was the level of enjoyment and relief I derived from such a unique moral assemblage.

‘Not much in the way of ambiguity’: Putting Children’s Needs First as a Non-negotiable Moral Imperative

Months later, while analysing field notes and considering the broader significance of the cinema event, I became interested in how the range of linguistic, bodily, attitudinal and interpretive effects that were variously distributed throughout the cinema moral assemblage also seemed to begin with a key relationship, the bond shared between adults and children. Research on parenting and families has highlighted how adult–child relationships are shaped by certain expectations, standards, norms and moral imperatives (e.g. Morgan & King 2001, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000, Zeiler, Guntram et al. 2010). According to Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards and colleagues (2000), the power and durability of these relationship rests on dominant constructions of ‘the Adult’ and ‘the Child’ as social categories. In their research on families in the United Kingdom, these authors found that children in that particular context were understood to occupy qualitatively different roles in the world compared to adults, excluded from the trials of paid employment, for example, and restricted to specific, age-differentiated spaces and activities, particularly in the home or the playground (see also Hagestad & Uhlenberg

2005). This separation from the ‘real world’ is also supported by major institutions that underline the definition of children as dependent, vulnerable and incompetent, in turn intensifying the responsibilities of parents (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000).

In the main, the separation from the ‘real world’ is constructed positively, particularly through depictions of childhood as a time of freedom and spontaneity, where a child’s only responsibilities are to experience and enjoy this unique time in their lives, and to pass appropriate developmental milestones (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000: 788; Vincent & Ball 2007). Romanticising childhood helps stabilise the notion that children are outside moral agency and accountability. It also shifts responsibilities onto parents and other care-givers to act as mediators between children and the worlds around them (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000).

These two powerful, durable categories – the child as institutionally, spatially and morally distinct, on the one hand, and adults with the capacities for, and the burden of, exercising responsibility for those in their care, on the other – allow for a rigid moral imperative to form, namely that adults ‘must seek to put the needs of children first’ (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000: 789). Ribbens McCarthy et al. found that this ‘overwhelming moral consensus’ (p. 791) overrides parenting status, leaving little room for ambiguity: ‘this is not merely a guideline for action, nor is it open to negotiation; it is an unquestioned and unquestionable imperative’ (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000: 789). According to these researchers, the rigidity of this particular moral imperative betrays the apparent moral ambiguities and complexities of contemporary moral life more broadly. I would argue that this phenomenon is also clearly evident in the cinema scene depicted earlier in this chapter. At the cinema, the entanglements of adults and children, together with unique spaces and temporalities, produced seemingly familiar and recognisable responses in both Lucy and me, more specifically, embodiments of relief, joy and sensorial engagement. Furthermore, I argued that this range of effects emerged from a central ethical demand to displace personal desires (to sleep in, for example) and physical limitations (such as fatigue or hangovers), and to instead dedicate ourselves to young Abby’s enjoyment. Ribbens McCarthy et al. suggest that moral imperatives as distinct and persuasive as putting children first may be a relic of a bygone era as

we develop a more acute sense of the plural, ambiguous and piecemeal moral world in which we live:

We are not clear as to what extent our interviewees are post-modern moral subjects who are exercising agency based on recognition of ambiguity and dilemmas, and negotiating their responsibilities, within a plurality of social practices and moral orientations. When it comes to parenting and step-parenting, the categories of Adult and Child seem to be constructed in such a way that, to a large extent, we still appear to be living in a modernist, morally absolute, society. The moral imperative around taking responsibility for putting children's needs first may be one of the few remaining unquestionable moral assertions. (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000: 800)

I have used much of the previous three chapters of this thesis to detail the complexities facing study participants as they struggle through their daily lives, and to explore how they manoeuvre through challenging situations, particularly as they relate to alcohol use. Generally speaking, the multi-layered complexity of local moral assemblages routinely produced even more complex arrays of effects and responses rendering the task of discerning any sort of consistent, coherent moral framework that could be said to shape how drinking events unfolded exceedingly difficult. As I have aimed to demonstrate throughout this thesis, these moral complexities were necessarily negotiated situationally, highlighting both the singularity of the multiple moral assemblages with which one can become entangled, and the futility of any attempt to categorise any event or experience as relating to some form of consensus morality. As the fieldwork episode described earlier and the work of Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards and colleagues might suggest, this characterisation of the moral lives of the young adults was almost completely reversed in the presence of children. This highlights not only the salience and power of the moral discourses proclaiming this particular moral imperative as non-negotiable in the lives of these young adults, but also the depth with which such values can become embedded within the make-up of individuals' moral dispositions. Indeed, the rigidity of this children-first imperative is an example of territorialisation, where the assemblages co-constituted through interactions between adults and children are acutely defined or sharpened compared to other looser, more fluid moral assemblages (De Landa 2006). The

romantic discourse of the distinction between the responsible adult and the innocent, vulnerable, unaccountable and formative child is particularly active in the process of territorialising or crystallising the moral imperative of putting the needs of children first (De Landa 2006; Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000; Vincent & Ball 2007). As Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. (2000) point out, such moments are indeed becoming rarer as the moral worlds we live in become more mobile, diffuse, open and flexible.

In the following section, I will explore another fieldwork experience that occurred some six months before my trip to the cinema with Lucy, Bryan and Abby. Indeed, it was only while reflecting on the cinema episode during data analysis that I came to consider the relevance of a night spent at the home of two good friends – and participants – Tim and Will, in January 2013. In this particular scene, the non-negotiable imperative of putting children's needs before one's own had quite visible effects not only on how their bodily movements or speech, but also how they used alcohol. In the main, the moral assemblages I encountered during fieldwork were closer to those Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. (2000) describe – fluid, indeterminate and mutable. In the section that follows, the assemblage that I describe emerges in contrast, as familiar and relatively predictable, and with a recognisable distribution of effects. Ultimately, this section highlights how drinking assemblages are co-constituted through discourses that may, in theory, have no obvious association with alcohol use, but nevertheless act on young people's alcohol use, often in well-defined, territorialised ways.

Scene Two: Dinner and Drinks at Tim and Will's with Duncan, Anita and their Daughter

Across the latter part of 2012 and early 2013, while finding my feet as both a Melbourne local and an ethnographer, Tim and Will were unwavering in their generosity, frequently having me over for meals, drinks, to watch sport and other television programs, or simply to hang out. Although I had been previously acquainted with them through mutual friends years earlier whilst growing up in Adelaide, it wasn't until I moved to Melbourne that we began spending significant time together, primarily in the living room of their exposed brick, two-bedroom rental in Melbourne's inner south.

One particular Saturday night in early 2013, I arrived at their house for dinner and a few casual drinks. While walking up to their house, I mentally prepared for what I had become accustomed to over the previous few months – perhaps Will watching over a chunk of meat on the Weber in the courtyard, maybe on his second or third can of Heineken, with Tim inside on his laptop, finishing off an assignment for his photography course. I presumed I would hop into a beer and relax on the couch watching whatever was on Foxtel, and we would spend the night ribbing each other about the various happenings in our lives. Visualising this scene in my mind, I pushed through the front door boldly, carrying myself weightily and making myself audibly known through the use of myriad expletives. As I rounded the corner into the living area, however, I was confronted with a scene quite different from what I had expected. Seated on the brown sofa was Will, in his customary corner position nearest the remote controls on the side table, with Duncan, an old friend of Tim's, seated next to him. On the ottoman opposite sat Anita, Duncan's wife, who looked up at me, smiling sheepishly, and there, on the floor space between the two guests, sat a younger, dark-skinned girl, playing with toys at the feet of her mother, topped by dark hair and draped in a white, frilly dress, perhaps all of eighteen months old.

After making my greetings, and with the shock of how I had just entered the house still written on my face, I quickly shuffled into the kitchen where I found Tim, cooking something on the stovetop. 'Jeez, I wish you'd told me we'd be having *kids* around tonight!' I stressed, trying not to be overheard by those in the living room. Tim cackled and asked 'Why is that?' 'Because I probably wouldn't have walked in, swearing the whole way down the hallway,' I replied. Tim half-heartedly apologised for failing to inform me that we would be having other guests for dinner. He explained that because he had intended to cook a large roast dinner for himself and his housemate, perhaps his friends – the young family sitting in the next room who he presumed to be short on time, money and novelty – might also appreciate an invitation.

After getting myself together, I re-emerged from the kitchen, only to notice a curious, different feel about the place, particularly in the way Tim and Will were acting. Will's body language had stiffened and slowed, for example, becoming more measured. He had lowered the volume of the television, as well as his speaking

voice, and all present were beaming with broad grins, discussing conversational topics well outside the norm for this particular living room, and expressed in unusually conservative language. Those who had decided to engage in drinking alcohol – in this case, exclusively the men – were doing so slowly and discreetly, only picking up nearby beers to sip briefly before replacing them on tables or other surfaces out of view. Without a formal dining table to accommodate this larger-than-usual group, the six of us gradually moved to the outdoor setting in the backyard to have dinner, an arrangement that was, in itself, out of the ordinary. Typically, on a Saturday night in, if we had ordered takeaway or even if someone had cooked, one would be likely to find Tim, Will and anyone else present, seated on the brown sofa, eating off their laps, in between slurps of beer, and watching TV. On this particular occasion, the focus shifted towards the consumption of a multi-faceted meal, enjoying bottled craft beer, and engaging in conversations on topics such as Duncan and Anita's tentative plans to relocate to a more affordable regional area where they might potentially buy a house.

In relation to what I had experienced at the cinemas a few months later, something similar, albeit not identical, was seemingly unfolding on this particular evening. The presence of Duncan and Anita, and perhaps more significantly, their young daughter, had altered a setting that had become so familiar that I had completely taken it for granted when I entered the house. Their presence in the space necessitated some form of readjustment on my part, to reflect on my own bodily movements, language and attitude reflexively, and this was also partially negotiated via Tim and Will's movements in particular, but also by bouncing off the actions and topics of conversation that Anita and Duncan were willing to engage in. Offshoots from this intersubjective negotiation included the ways in which we carried our bodies – quite still and calm, and at times, crouching low to the ground to engage with their daughter; the topics of conversation we pursued – for example talking about purchasing houses, or dealing financially with the strains of family life; and importantly for this project, the ways in which those present were using alcohol. The 500mL cans, so often a staple in Tim and Will's house, were replaced by smaller, glass bottles of craft beer or cider, which were kept well out of sight of Duncan, Anita and their daughter.

From my own perspective, there was also a palpable feeling of respect not just for their daughter, but also for Anita and Duncan themselves, produced from an empathetic assessment that suggested if either Tim, Will or I were in their position, we would be struggling quite significantly with the responsibility, commitment and the financial, physical, mental and emotional demands of having a young child. On this occasion, I again felt the need to manoeuvre my body in specific ways through tone, language, slowness of movement and spatial positioning that would present a sense of this respect to their family, and I witnessed similar actions from Tim and Will. In particular, I was eager to prevent adding further disappointment for Duncan and Anita to that potentially already caused by my earlier entrance, knowing intrinsically that such an outcome would also ultimately affect their young daughter in a negative way.

Producing Care: The Co-Constitution of Moral Assemblages by Children

Parish (2014: 33) argues that morality is ‘experienced in passages of intersubjectivity that register an inescapable challenge: how is one to respond to the existence of another person?’ In the two episodes explored in this chapter so far, undoubtedly a central force demanding a specific form of response was the presence of a child, first Abby, then Duncan and Anita’s daughter. The relationships that form between adults and children, like any other relationships, also emerge in relation to complex arrangements of heterogeneous forces that shape how such interactions unfold. Like the other arrangements explored so far in this thesis – in relation to college drinking, picking up, or negotiating the multiple demands of everyday life – adults and children relate to each other not only in practical ways that promote some forms of bodily conduct over others, but also in ways that are morally complex and significant.

To begin with, adult-child relationships are shaped by ‘disparate discourses and imperatives’ offering differing versions of what constitutes good or necessary care-giving (Vincent & Ball 2007: 1074). Reflecting Zigon’s notion of the ‘moral assemblage’ as simultaneously constituted through unique conglomerations of institutional, public and personal discourses or embodiments of morality, Vincent and Ball (2007) illustrate the complexities of negotiating the demands of the state and the market, as well as various media and literature sources that face prospective

care-givers or parents. Following this depiction, parenting itself has become a dynamic and contested sphere where the knowledge of normative behaviour and associated sanctions combines with various forms of coercion often designed to encourage parents to enact the non-negotiable moral norm of putting the needs of children first (Morgan & King 2001; Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000). Ultimately, from this complex moral assemblage emerges a cloud of moral panics that swirls around issues such as children's health, education and wellbeing, which make it appear as if 'almost everything' is bad for children while placing a weighty burden on care-givers to become informed, flexible, responsible consumers in order to enact their duty of 'doing the right thing' for children (Vincent & Ball 2007: 1074).

It is unsurprising, then, that parenting discourse can stimulate anxieties amongst those imagining or planning parenthood, particularly with respect to its potential consequences. For the female participants of Perrier's (2013) study, entering parenthood was understood to be made possible by the synthesis of several disparate processes, including various biographical, psycho-social, relational and biological circumstances, and rarely purely the outcome of choice. For women in particular, the timing of parenthood is imbued with gendered moral expectations that ultimately prescribe a very narrow 'right' time to have children (Perrier 2013: 77). The difficulties of synchronising these various processes can create a disjuncture between those thinking about parenthood and the dominant discourse that can be a source of great stress (Perrier 2013). Moreover, other studies suggest the practicalities of having children can complicate the pursuit of other forms of self-development, either stopping, disrupting or shifting them, or potentially creating new opportunities. Either way, parenting discourse routinely calls for a vast overhaul of the self that involves self-reflection, and the crafting of new capacities and sensibilities (Emslie, Hunt et al. 2012; Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000).

In the alcohol discourse, parenthood is also widely understood to be a catalyst for propelling one from apprentice to mature, responsible drinker (e.g. Emslie, Hunt et al. 2012; Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009). Building the capacities of parents and families has also become a key pillar of alcohol and other drug policy in Australia. Several major policy documents have routinely articulated causal relationships

between dysfunctional parenting – often defined by the extent to which a parent uses alcohol or other drugs, or their attitudes towards them – and not only problematic alcohol and other drug use in children and adolescents, but also their broader biological, social, educational and professional development (e.g. Commonwealth of Australia 2011, State of Victoria 2012).

The following analysis moves beyond examining the effects of the physical presence of children on moral assemblages, and towards exploring how prospective parenthood formed an ongoing concern for many study participants. In particular I will examine how responding to this demand, produced through the complex web of competing, gendered discourses relating not only to parenthood but also to other markers of transition into adulthood, might be understood as an ethical process. My analysis will highlight that, for these participants, imagining parenthood not only involves establishing a meaningful relationship with one's future, but also coming to understand the relationship between self, others and society as a mutable and contingent temporal process. Going further, I also aim to demonstrate how, for some participants, imagining parenthood through the medium of the ethnographic interview can have added implications for how they understand their past, current and future engagements with alcohol use.

Shifts in Moral Consciousness, Imagining Responsibility and Alcohol Use

Zigon (2009a) places interview methodology at the heart of his approach to studying contemporary morality because of its ability to produce insightful moments of ethical breakdown during which moralities are brought into question. In his conceptualisation, Zigon (2009a: 82) understands 'ethics' as the process of how individuals reflect on themselves, and how they embody their own personal sense of morality. Although this can be an uncomfortable, unnatural process, it is also generative and transformative in that it enables an awareness or consciousness of one's place in the world to become available to individuals, during which new moral ways of being can be explored through a 'dialogical negotiation' with the interviewer (Zigon 2007, 2009a: 86). Not only does focusing on this fluid, dynamic intersection between everyday moralities and ethical practice enable researchers to observe how interviewees work through certain ethical dilemmas, in these moments it also

‘becomes possible to see how morality plays a role in the everyday lives of the people we study’ (Zigon 2009a: 83). Moreover, interactions between interviewers and interviewees, and the translation of that engagement into publications and doctoral theses, also contribute to shaping the public discourse on morality, ensuring that each interview carries moral significance (Zigon 2009a).

As I explained in Chapter Four, the in-depth interviews I conducted with participants were often initially shaped by questions relating to their own drinking histories and wider biographies. Inevitably, this line of questioning led to discussions about how participants imagined their futures, often making projections about their professional development in particular, but also imagining living in different locations, or considering how their bodies might change, based on how they felt at the time of interview. In the previous chapter, strategies characterised by an active avoidance of making considerable investments in future hopes or plans were often understood by participants to be broadly advantageous in the process of managing the emergence of everyday life. Throughout in-depth interviews, participants were also reluctant to formulate detailed imaginings of what their lives might look like beyond their professional pathways or where they might like to reside. In such cases, I often asked how they might consider the prospect of parenthood. I was interested in pursuing this line of questioning as it was a topic that arose sporadically throughout fieldwork. However, discussion of this topic emerged most often in a nonchalant, tongue-in-cheek or speculative fashion (e.g. ‘Perhaps I’ll start wearing a shorter hairstyle when I have kids’), and largely without any sort of critical engagement between those I spent time with. I found this intriguing given that, when pressed, most understood parenthood to involve significant changes with the capacities to affect all manner of elements in one’s life.

Lucy

Lucy, who wished for her own family one day, anticipated that parenthood ‘might’ encourage her to ‘become a little bit more responsible’ as ‘most people who end up with kids kind of mellow a little bit’. A ‘mellower’ life was indeed something Lucy was looking forward to at the time of our interview in early 2013, in part because she felt that her lifestyle did not match up well with official definitions of ‘responsibility’, particularly in terms of her alcohol use. Lucy imagined that over the

next five years her drinking would ‘probably stay at a similar level’, typically drinking a few glasses of wine at home two or three nights per week and having a ‘big’ night out ‘probably every few weeks’. Like many other participants, during fieldwork Lucy consumed alcohol at a rate that placed her amongst the 26% of Australians who exceed the NHMRC single occasion risk guidelines on a monthly basis (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017; National Health and Medical Research Council 2009). Despite exceeding these recommendations, however, Lucy did not understand her drinking patterns to be problematic, nor did she understand that making the change towards becoming more ‘responsible’ – as in someone whose drinking practices align more closely with official guidelines – as an immediate concern. Rather, the enactment of this specific form of ‘responsibility’, one at least partially based on drinking, was considered by Lucy to be something that lay ahead, requiring the stimulation of some future catalyst such as parenthood.

In her interview, Lucy articulated the messiness characterising the relationship between drinking, her imagined future, health, and responsibility, in a way that also suggests that these aspects of her life are in some way associated as part of her idealised model of moral personhood. Her recognition of, and her contentment with, having not yet reached this idealised model, or the standards set by official discourses of responsibility, does not, however, suggest that she lacks the moral flexibility or capacity to ultimately enact these ideals if she so desired. On the contrary, Lucy keenly recognised that the enactment of a particular version of a ‘responsible’ moral disposition – one that adheres to official risk guidelines – might indeed become more desirable in future, as her life trajectory evolves. It is clear from Lucy’s perspective, then, that such notions of ‘responsibility’ are understood as fluid, open-ended and situated within the precariousness of everyday moral life, and its winding, unpredictable trajectories. Under such conditions, efforts to perform official ‘responsibility’ wholeheartedly would indeed be just as inadvisable as performing reckless abandon. However, Lucy also articulates the persuasiveness of the discourses linking parenthood, ageing, responsibility and the subsequent limiting of alcohol use, and their potential to become implicated in the way she understands her own life trajectory and alcohol use. Indeed, this understanding diverges significantly from her relationship with alcohol at the time of our interview, which she was more likely to characterise as loose, unproblematic and comfortable.

Rachel

Another participant, Rachel, also illustrated how ambivalence towards idealised forms of moral personhood does not necessarily include the avoidance of ethical self-reflection. At first, Rachel was taken aback by my line of questioning regarding morality and personhood, struck mute when I asked if she ever gave thought to what type of person she wished to become. Following a brief explanation of the reasoning behind my question, Rachel began to open up:

I can't say that I've ever really thought about it that much. I've never really felt like I've needed to change, umm, who I am in that way. I've certainly thought, 'Oh, I need to lose weight', or I need to, you know, cut my hair or something, but I've never thought that I need to be more moral or more ethical. I'd like to think I'm fairly, umm, moral ... and ethical. Is that something that you think you can change?

Beyond her consideration of the interactions between morality, health, and gendered norms regarding appearance, Rachel was unable to accept that she ever engaged in reflexive consideration of her own moral subjectivity. Echoing Lucy, Rachel believed she never 'really thought about' whether or not she was striving to become a specific type of person, instead claiming she was 'pretty happy'. However, this initial assessment regarding how she considered herself and the world around her contrasted significantly with the deep reflexivity she articulated when discussing the prospect of motherhood:

Rachel: Yep. I would say [parenthood] is something I think about. Umm, I have never been a particularly maternal person. So I just never thought I would ever have children, maybe because I never thought I would find anyone that would want to have children with me. I would say that I haven't found anyone. I just never thought that I would have children. But I think that now as it's getting into the kind of age where if it's going to happen it kind of needs to happen, I kind of think 'Ahh, is it something that I'd always regret?' I don't know. I feel almost as if it's selfish to have children just for the sake of ... I don't know, this could get really umm ... I don't know that I want to bring a child into the world right now as it is. Obviously I can't care for anyone at the

moment.

James: What, bring one into the world, into *this* world?

Rachel: Yeah. There's certain things about this world that ... I don't know, a lot of wars out there! A lot of strife. I certainly couldn't care for a child at the moment.

James: But it's something that enters your mind every now and then.

Rachel: Yeah, definitely.

Here, Rachel articulated her awareness of the gendered discourses that shape the idealised models of female, maternal personhood to which she would hypothetically aspire, should she consider becoming a parent. These discursive forces include reference to reproductive biology ('the kind of age where if it's going to happen it kind of needs to happen'), by extension the expectation to pursue motherhood at any cost given the potential to 'regret' not having children, as well as Rachel's own internalisation of her lack of 'maternal' instinct and its equation with her inability to attract an adequate partner. Rachel's broader critique on the current state of the world suggests an unrealistic level of wisdom and worldly responsibility attached to notions of motherhood that, at the time of our interview, seemingly exceeded her capacities and imagined trajectory. While the assemblage of these moral discourses could induce anxiety for Rachel at times, the point here is to illustrate how the idea of parenthood can promote moral breakdowns in ways that differ from those ethical moments that might emerge in other assemblages, in response to different demands. Whereas earlier Rachel contended that she rarely examined her moral self, when she imagined her future in relation to the possibility of having children, she exhibited the sort of critical questioning of the relationship between herself, others and society that is indicative of moral experience (Parish 2014).

Interviews with Rachel and Lucy highlight their struggles with some moral terminology, and moreover, the lack of relevance of some traditional moral concepts to the study participants. When Rachel referred specifically what it meant to be 'moral' or 'ethical', she conceived of these terms as occupying the ends of some form of transcendental spectrum, going as far as to assert that, as a moral subject, she

lies somewhere along that spectrum in a position that she considers to be relatively appropriate. Lucy's suggestion of her own contentment also achieved something similar. However, these terms by themselves, and the theoretical implications they have become imbued with over the course of philosophical history, offer little in the way of understanding their own moral experiences (Zigon 2009b). In Rachel's case, it is only when we compare her two quotations – the first where she is unable to understand her moral experience with reference to traditional moral vernacular, and the second where she explores a complex moral assemblage laden with gendered discursive framings of how she ought to understand her social, biological and moral obligations and trajectories – that a nuanced perspective on her 'actual life-experience' of 'struggling-through' processes of 'moral questioning' becomes possible (Zigon 2009b: 256).

This comparison more specifically highlights how Rachel embodies a personal morality on a day-to-day basis that has been moulded by her ongoing entanglements in various moral assemblages over her lifetime to the point where she enacts it unreflectively, and in a way that, in the main, causes very few problems for her or those around her (Zigon 2007). In the second quotation, my invitation for Rachel to consider the prospect of parenthood produces a completely different moral assemblage that throws her into an ethical breakdown where her own moral subjectivity becomes disconnected from its taken-for-granted relations, thus becoming an object of reflexive scrutiny (Zigon 2007: 138). This approach highlights how everyday life on a broader scale, the type that is observable through ethnographic enquiry, for example, eschews narrow definitions and exceeds much of our available terminology for conceptualising moral complexity and significance. As the ethnographic data explored in this chapter have demonstrated, ethical moments often emerge in unanticipated ways – in cinemas, living rooms or in-depth interviews – and one's cultivated knowledge of this ensures that moral subjectivity is always understood as 'a temporal process that continually pulls in various pasts and hoped-for futures' (Zigon 2014a: 25). This process can also, at times, extend to how they think about and use alcohol.

Olivia

In late 2013, Olivia and I also worked through a hypothetical situation similar to the

one I had discussed with Rachel. Over the course of our interview, Olivia articulated how she understood her alcohol use to be an intrinsic element of socialising, particularly with her family, and a practice that was deeply rooted in her valued relationships. As she explained in the following quotation, she typically ‘manages’ her drinking based on how she feels at the time, a process that largely undermines the feasibility of applying the recommended levels in her daily life. She went on to describe this processual and open-ended approach to alcohol use as part of a trajectory open to disruption by major changes in her life, such as pregnancy:

Olivia: For me the idea of two standard drinks [per day, as recommended] is just never going to compute – oh, it might. However, in terms of guidelines around, like, if I decide to have children and I, umm, become pregnant, I’ll imagine that I’ll just go nine months without alcohol. Like, that, for me, where it’s like you can actually hurt someone that’s not yourself ... that sort of messaging has a much greater impact than like ...

James: But a lot of the, umm, you know, research and advertising around drinking would suggest that people who do drink are putting themselves at risk of a whole bunch of things.

Olivia: Yeah but ... it’s more of a personal thing. Like, I manage my own drinking based on how I feel. And so, some nights I will only have three drinks because I’m not feeling great and I don’t feel like drinking alcohol, you know. I know what the effects are going to be. Umm, whereas you just don’t know what the effects are going to be if you’re drinking when you’re pregnant. I mean, I think there’s *some* degree, but ... I don’t know, I just feel like you can severely impact the development of someone that has no choice in the matter. Whereas for me, drinking alcohol is a choice thing – I like doing it, I know what happens.

Here, Olivia demonstrates how she might reconsider the ‘guidelines’ should she fall pregnant, and entertains the idea of abstaining from alcohol as per official recommendations (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009). In this case, Olivia highlights the activity of this messaging in her consideration of pregnancy and parenthood during our interview. Although the NHMRC *Guidelines*

aim to provide ‘universal’ recommendations for individuals who use alcohol, their messages are clearly gendered, and women are routinely addressed on the basis of their perceived biological, social and moral vulnerabilities (Keane 2013). This is particularly evidenced by the large proportion of the *Guidelines* dedicated to recommending that ‘not drinking is the safest option’ for those who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning pregnancy (National Health and Medical Research Council 2009: 5). Olivia’s reasons for her hypothetically adhering to such recommendations extend far beyond mere concerns over minimising health risks. Rather, she considers this approach to alcohol use in relation to the effect her actions can have on the development of an unborn child. Olivia’s willingness to accept the non-negotiable moral imperative – to put the needs of the more vulnerable, less morally agentic child, before her own (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000) – is reinforced by these gendered discourses around alcohol and pregnancy, and more specifically those foregrounding the vulnerability of the developing foetus or breastfeeding baby (Keane 2013). As Keane (2013: 157) points out, this stringently conservative approach to framing drinking while pregnant or breastfeeding is at odds with the document’s aim to draw attention to the probabilistic ‘risks’ of alcohol use more broadly. In this sense, the *Guidelines* act to perpetuate gender inequalities, and in the case of Olivia, limit her imagination of her future to one that inevitably includes the consideration of her naturalised, maternal responsibilities.

Olivia’s perspective on alcohol, parenthood, and her imagined moral trajectories, in many ways overlaps with those of Lucy and Rachel. It also helps one distinguish between the unreflective moral dispositions Olivia embodies throughout her daily life, and those moments, or breakdowns, where she might be thrown into states of ethical questioning and reflection. Although Olivia indicates that elements of official alcohol discourse are influential, such as the NHMRC *Guidelines*, these forces act largely on the periphery of her engagements with alcohol, diminishing their power, applicability and relevance. In the mess of the everyday ethical demands to situationally negotiate socialisation, work obligations and her physical state when drinking, for example, Olivia suggests that rigid prescriptions such as two standard drinks per day do not necessarily ‘compute’. Rather, like Lucy and Rachel, she trusts the experience she has cultivated over some years as a drinker to the point where she feels she intimately ‘knows’ her relationship with alcohol, and its capacities.

It is in referring to these more familiar drinking situations that Olivia's initial interview response emerged, ultimately providing the grounds for her to claim that the idea of restricting her alcohol use to two standard drinks per day is *never* going to be a legitimate course of action. However, from that point on, Olivia shifts significantly. Upon considering her life trajectory, the prospect of parenthood throws Olivia into a different state where she becomes suddenly aware of a novel, hypothetical situation requiring conscious ethical reflection. This process undermines the comfort and certainty that accompanied her earlier depictions of how she manages her alcohol use, and replaces it with anxieties over her capacity to interfere, and negatively alter, the natural, proper development of a human child.

Imagining Family and Parenthood: Gendered Futures

The entwined moral concerns of Lucy, Rachel and Olivia emerged in in-depth interviews when I asked them to imagine their futures and the prospect of potentially starting families. As forecast earlier, this line of questioning also highlighted the gendered discourses that co-constitute the moral worlds inhabited by these young women, and the messages that come clearly into view when they consider their anticipated futures, and the role of alcohol use within them. While the ethnographic vignettes detailed earlier in this chapter demonstrated the capacity for the physical presence of children to affect men's moral embodiments in specific ways – including my own – the ways in which men typically imagined their futures differed starkly from their female counterparts.

When I asked Will about his desires for the future, for example, his only response was to say – tongue firmly in cheek – ‘hopefully not die’. When pressed further for a more sober response, Will articulated aspirations that aligned closely with those of several other male participants, particularly a desire to spend time overseas and to earn more money. In response to my questioning regarding his hopes for a relationship, marriage or a family in the future, Will, in his own style, replied ‘nup [no]’.

Aiden offered slightly more detail on his imagined future, including a desire to ‘be quite wealthy’ and an interest in eventually moving to the United States. In the

quotation below, Aiden also reflected the understanding of life as tenuous and open to change offered earlier by some female participants. Perhaps the main point of divergence between Aiden's imagined future and those of Rachel, Lucy and Olivia is his unwillingness to consider marrying or settling down:

You're always sort of evolving. Like, you're always changing. Like the type of person I wanted to be when I was 15, probably not the type of person, like, I wanted to be a footballer for Christ's sake. You know, like now I clearly have got different directions [...] money's pretty important to me. [...] I guess, in ten years ... I can't imagine myself being married in ten years [...] I still want to have like a cool social life, I still want to like, have all my friends, and like, I'm really worried the older I get, I'm worried my friends are going to settle down and they're not going to want to go out with me in like five years and shit. I'm going to be like that loser guy that's left being single [...] [I just want to be] working towards you know, want to be a good person. (Aiden)

Here, Aiden articulates not only how he imagines his future but also what he considers to constitute an ideal form of moral personhood as he ages. For Aiden, the aspects of his life that are put at stake by the ageing process include his 'cool social life', primarily involving his detachment from romantic relationships and the pursuit of money, pleasure and international experiences that might be curbed by marriage. It is important to note here, that this perspective is vastly different from that of Rachel, for example, who imagines her future to include the consideration of motherhood, and therefore, the articulation of a wide, and at times unrealistic, range of capacities she feels she must develop. Without these concerns, the spectre of age looms over Aiden, not as a source of potential regret for him, as it does for Rachel, but rather for those others around him who have settled down and thus missed out on the 'cool' opportunities Aiden has kept viable.

Despite having a child of his own at the time of conducting fieldwork, Luke's imagining of his future during our interview also overlapped with Aiden's in many ways. Some years before I became Luke's housemate in early 2013, he had fathered a son at the age of 17. Then aged six years old, the son lived with his mother interstate, and therefore only saw Luke at sporadic intervals. Although I did not ask

Luke directly about his son during our interview, it emerged clearly that his son formed a significant aspect of Luke's future plans:

Luke: Obviously having a son, who's now six, was not part of my plan. It's not how I perceived my life to go. I do like the idea of the American model. I do like the idea of a family, a house [...] a wife, kids, a dog [...] now because my life has gone down this particular route, particular path, I would think that at some point I would live with my son or close to my son. So that would definitely be a direction I'm heading. The idea is to meet a girl who I can date for, yeah, a year, two years, and know that I want to be with them [...] marry them, eventually buy some sort of house [...] I like the direction I'm going in, in terms of you know, meeting that girl, starting a family with the girl. I don't know if my current situation is necessarily like that, I'd like to think that but I'm not going to, that's not how I'm going to live my life. I'm not going to say 'I'm with this girl, I'm going to stay with her for two years, I'm going to marry her and do this and do that'. I'm going to, I'm just [...] when it comes to relationships I've realised I've done a lot of things bad in the past. With my first girlfriend – that's who I have the son with – it was so, it was my first love, things were silly [...] everything went to shit after we broke up [...] the next girlfriend I had, I was with her for about a year. She broke up with me *because* I had a son, and I was still too young and naïve and I didn't fully, you know, we fought a lot. Mainly about that topic [the son], so we never really had a great relationship [...] I've decided now I'm not going to go into a relationship expecting too much. So, I'll see what comes of it, my current situation. But yeah, at some point it may be that I'm with her and that whole sort of life-plan unfolds with her.

Here, Luke demonstrates the significance of having a family and becoming a parent to the way his imagined futures have been shaped over time. Beginning with a confidence reflective of Aiden, Luke echoes Vincent and Ball (2007), by referring to the distinctive 'American' model of following an accumulative pathway that ends with the acquisition of seemingly obtainable, desirable phenomena. Whereas for Will and Aiden, these consisted of increased financial wealth and international travel, for Luke, these desires manifest in a hypothetical wife, family, kids, house and dog, a list

that he constructs without any sense of the anxieties the female participants exhibited earlier in regards to their own futures.

However, as our interview unfolded, Luke described how this ideal pathway had become disrupted and diluted by the particularly significant twist of having a child at a younger age than he had originally anticipated, in turn dramatically upsetting his ideal sequence. However, rather than focusing on the positive or negative outcomes of this upheaval, Luke describes how he has learned that fatherhood has been, and continues to be, a generative force in his life. On reflection, he was able to unpack the various elements of the model he once considered ideal, ultimately readjusting his approach to each aspect. Part of this process undoubtedly involved critical self-reflection, with Luke articulating his recognition that after two difficult relationships he felt compelled to shift his expectations ('I'm not going to go into a relationship expecting too much') and adopt a more relational, open-ended model when thinking about his future ('at some point it may be that I'm with her and that whole sort of life-plan unfolds with her').

The Effects of Imagining Parenthood: Assembling Moral Selves, Trajectories and Moral Worlds

In this chapter, I have presented ethnographic data demonstrating the ways in which seemingly rigid, predictable and gendered moral assemblages emerged when participants either interacted with children or imagined themselves as parents. As illustrated through the earlier ethnographic 'scenes' and later, excerpts from in-depth interviews, these moral assemblages contrasted starkly with the thick ambiguity that characterised the majority of my own experiences during fieldwork. This chapter has followed a thread, then, inspired by some unique fieldwork experiences in which these more stable, seemingly unquestionable moralities emerged in the physical presence of young children. As this thread has unravelled throughout the analyses, I have been able to explore and grasp the mechanics at work in these moral assemblages, aided by Zigon's conceptual tools. At the heart of this examination we find young, aware, morally flexible individuals with the capacities for making subtle, yet occasionally significant 'shifts in moral consciousness' (Zigon 2009b: 256) around a central ethical demand to respond to the presence of children, either

physical or imagined. Indeed, these ethnographic vignettes act as exemplars of Zigon's conceptualisation of moral experience. More specifically, they involve shifts from the unreflective, largely unproblematic embodiment of moral dispositions in everyday life on the one hand, and ethical moments of breakdown on the other, where one must work through challenges and fold whatever is learned or discovered back into one's disposition as to somehow get on with life.

A recurring theme emerging in the interviews conducted with Lucy, Rachel and Olivia in particular, was the sense of contentment they exhibited over how they understood themselves, and particularly, their patterns of alcohol use. Lucy's assertion that she was 'pretty happy' with her life at the time, and how she was consuming alcohol, is perhaps representative of the tone of these interviews. Indeed, all three exhibited strength and confidence when articulating this contentment over their modes of living, with Olivia even going as far to suggest that epidemiologically-recommended levels of alcohol use do not fit in with her cultivated sensibilities and desires.

The tendency for male participants to forecast less anxiety-provoking futures characterised by a simplistic pursuit of desirable phenomena that were, importantly, considered realistically obtainable, highlights the gendered differences between how participants in this study imagined their futures and prospective parenthood. This is not to say, however, that notions of parenthood did not shape how such futures were imagined for the male participants, but simply that they were affected by the prospect of starting families in different ways. For Aiden, 'settling down' did not fall within the model of moral personhood he was seeking to follow, and thus, he actively set about establishing a life trajectory that avoided the notions of marriage or parenthood. Luke, on the other hand, had had his imagined trajectories disrupted multiple times in recent years as a result of having a son while still a teenager himself. In many ways echoing the perspectives of the female interviewees, Luke articulated his sense that his original plans to acquire a house, wife and family in a seemingly straightforward fashion had since become punctured and fragmented. At the time of our interview, Luke now found himself in a moral world that had been partially assembled through his attunement towards his son, an intimately valuable part of his life that shaped how he imagined future living arrangements and romantic

relationships.

These analyses highlight the salience of gendered normative understandings and imperatives around the notions of pregnancy and parenthood that abound in both the moral worlds of these young adults, and the official alcohol discourse. Indeed, this is most conspicuously the case for the female participants of the study. While Lucy, Rachel and Olivia opened themselves to various possibilities, hopes and hypothetical selves while imagining parenthood in interviews, they also opened themselves further to the influence of these specific gendered discourses.

However, through these processes of ethical reflection, participants of both genders were able to work through the complex dilemmas of prospective futures and parenthood, and re-integrate what they had learned into their dispositional way of being (Zigon 2009a: 85). As these interviews have demonstrated, these shifts need not be dramatic; even reiterating one's belief in their inability to care for a child involves self-reflection and the verbalisation of one's cultivated disposition (Zigon 2009a: 96). In an added layer of moral implications, by sharing this ethical process through the medium of an ethnographic interview, they are also engaging in a public, social re-shaping of the moral worlds they inhabit (Zigon 2009a).

Beyond the confines of the ethnographic interview, the capacities for children to act on moral assemblages were more dynamic and diverse. On the few occasions that both the male and female participants of this study interacted with children, I was able to witness and experience palpable shifts in bodily movements, tone of voice, demeanour, spatial positioning and language, which were qualitatively different to those I had become accustomed to throughout fieldwork. Once again, I deploy the concept of ethics here, following Zigon, to make the case that during their engagements with children, these participants experienced some form of moral breakdown – just as I did – ultimately recognising a need to enact care for the younger individuals in their presence, and weaving this realisation into various forms of embodiment. In sum, these ethnographic vignettes and interview excerpts provide the grounds for suggesting the power of the non-negotiable moral norm of putting children's needs before one's own – a notion that is itself a complex of ideas and discourses with its own socio-political history (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al.

2000) – in assembling local moralities around a specific ethic of care.

These analyses have also provided unique insights in thinking about how young adults use and understand alcohol. As Lucy's earlier interview quotations suggest, although the majority of the participants consumed alcohol at epidemiologically 'risky' levels, and moreover, were content to continue doing so, this form of alcohol use was also practised in the knowledge that it was malleable and open to change under specific conditions. At the very least, these data would suggest that children can facilitate the emergence of moral assemblages that are both unique, and particularly desirable from a harm reduction perspective; that is, they appear to demand conscious, ethical reflection, and promote forms of awareness and care that align with potentially less harmful drinking practices.

This suggestion, indeed, stands in stark contrast to the ambiguities characterising the vast majority of this project. In the previous chapter, I suggested that existing approaches to addressing the problems relating to alcohol use in Australia rely heavily on processes of moralisation and moral terminology that appear to lack relevance to some young adults as their frameworks make little room for the moral complexities and significance associated with alcohol use in particular, and everyday life in general. Throughout fieldwork, it was almost exclusively when in the presence of children, or discussing children and the idea of parenthood in interviews that the existing moral imperatives of governments and public health institutions seemed to overlap with those of the participants. While this highlights the enduring power of some aspects of the institutional discourse on alcohol use to hold specific moralisations of drinking stable, the accounts of the female participants in this study also illuminate the ways in which these discourses can intermittently provoke anxieties over women's perceived maternal capacities and how they might affect one's future.

Beyond overcoming disjunctures in existing moral terminology and conceptual frameworks between institutions and their targets, these analyses also warrant further critical reflection on the significance of cross-age interactions in the context of alcohol use. Indeed, the majority of participants who featured in field notes or interview data in this chapter were not parents themselves, but rather were interacting

with the children of friends, or hypothetically imagining themselves as parents. As such, situations involving children were also significant for their novelty, as throughout fieldwork it was also rare to engage with others belonging to other age brackets, particularly in the leisure context.

Conclusion

On a broader level, these analyses highlight the ways in which the drinking events I have documented as part of the primary focus of this ethnographic study are always enmeshed within ongoing processes of assembling moral subjects, assemblages and worlds. Put simply, entanglements between moral subjects and alcohol do not cease at the last sip of an alcoholic beverage on a night out; rather, moral assemblages frame life as relational, mutable and transient. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, partially intoxicated, hungover bodies can soon find themselves sliding into early morning cinema sessions with toddlers, while those seemingly comfortable with their health and leisure practices can find these quickly disrupted by the mere consideration of becoming parents. By extension, the situations explored in this chapter illustrate that moralities are continually operated on through moments of ethical reflection – moral breakdowns – and the practice of imagining the different trajectories one's life and moral personhood might take.

While these ethical moments, and ambiguous shifts between assemblages, may not be observed directly at all times by researchers focused on the specifics of drinking practices and events, the temporal and social dimensions of ethnography have enabled me to explore relationships between morality and alcohol in other, unexpected areas of the participants' lives, including when playing with young children or discussing the prospect of parenthood in in-depth interviews. In an effort to provide a detailed and contextualised picture of the moral lives and worlds of participants, it would be remiss of me not to pursue these particular lines of enquiry under the broader project of deepening our understanding of the relationship between morality and alcohol use. As such, the analyses undertaken in this chapter add further depth to discussions initiated in previous chapters. They do this by prompting thinking about moralities as relational, contingent and emergent assemblages, and by simultaneously calling into question simplistic, moralising understandings of how

young people use and understand alcohol.

Chapter Nine:

Conclusion

Over the last decade, epidemiological studies have drawn attention to a subpopulation engaging in ‘very high’ alcohol consumption (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017) and experiencing escalating levels of harm at a time when alcohol use in Australia is generally declining (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017; Dietze, Livingston et al. 2014; Livingston 2008; Livingston, Matthews et al. 2010; Victorian Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council 2010). This heavy-drinking subpopulation is constituted mainly of young adults, particularly those aged in their late teens to mid-twenties (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). In recent times researchers and policymakers in Australia and overseas have focused their attention primarily on these youth populations in order to better understand and address heavy episodic drinking practices (Room 2011; Thurnell-Read 2016).

Recognising the limits of policy and legislative intervention in terms of reaching this particular group (Dietze, Livingston et al. 2014), I, like others (e.g. Haydock 2015; Keane 2003, 2013; Room 2011; Yeomans 2013), have argued that contemporary state and federal governments in Australia (and elsewhere) have increasingly turned to the imposition of moral views as a key strategy in addressing harms relating to drug use in general and alcohol use in particular. Some of the key institutional discourses in operation at the time of my fieldwork articulated concerns over the need to change vaguely-defined entities such as ‘rules’, ‘attitudes’, ‘responses’ and ‘habits’ in order to instil ‘sensible values and individual responsibility’ (State of Victoria 2012: 10–11) and to promote ‘healthy lifestyles’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 10).

To use Zigon’s (2009b) phrasing, these discourses proclaim a truth or rightness to a particular version of morality that does not necessarily map neatly onto the lives of young adults. At the very least, these discourses already presuppose a specific vocabulary with which to discuss how these moral alterations might be made. Beyond that, they also assert specific neoliberal ideals to which action ought to be orientated (e.g. personal health, entrepreneurialism, rationality, responsibility) and

authorise specific voices that ought to be listened to (e.g. public health institutions, governments, moderate drinkers), while making claims about the way in which individual practice relates to broader societal concerns and manifestations (e.g. *Guidelines* that suggest associations between varying levels of alcohol use and acute and chronic health risks). That these discourses are widely disseminated across a variety of policy, practice, media and research platforms allows them to accumulate a sense of authoritative force (Keane 2013; Zigon 2014c), while simultaneously silencing the range of possibilities for how young adults themselves might produce and engage with their own moral worlds (Duff & Moore 2015; LeBesco 2011). In response, this thesis has taken up the challenge of taking seriously the moral complexities and significance of young adults engaging in heavy drinking so that we might better understand the relationship between alcohol use and morality, and that this understanding might inform future attempts to minimise alcohol-related harms (Commonwealth of Australia 2011).

According to the literature, the majority of study participants fell into the population age bracket with the largest proportion of drinkers who exceed the single occasion risk guidelines, and those most likely to be the victims of alcohol-related physical or verbal abuse, injury or hospitalisation (e.g. AIHW 2017). Indeed, the participants of this study conformed to these ‘risky’ drinking expectations, and undoubtedly reports of hangovers, vomiting, illness or fatigue after nights out were both frequent and widely shared among the participants and their networks. Throughout this thesis, I have also described the myriad effects regular heavy drinking have had on the participants’ finances, social and romantic relationships, mental and physical health, and sexual encounters, as well as on their understandings and experiences of safety in the night-time economy, and inequalities in sexual and gender relations. In contrast to the broader alcohol discourse, however, these concerns emerged sporadically throughout fieldwork, predominantly punctuating and inflecting its rhythms and processes rather than dominating them.

It must also be said that some of the more severe harms often attributed to heavy drinking, such as encounters with violence or injury, were conspicuously rare during fieldwork. Again, while narratives abounded on nights out regarding physical fights participants had witnessed or been involved in, or those relating to personal safety –

particularly in the months after the murder of Jill Meagher in Brunswick in September 2012 – these worries and anxieties also formed only aspects of the participants’ daily lives. Although such discussions may have become more heightened while drinking in Melbourne’s pubs and clubs, for example, such concerns were, in the main, relegated to the periphery, while others such as stress-relief, pleasure and intimacy were foregrounded. At no point during fieldwork did I witness a participant become engaged in a physical fight, or experience a significant injury during, or as a direct effect of, alcohol use.

I can only speculate on the extent to which the moral awareness, flexibility and acuity participants routinely demonstrated in fieldwork and interviews contributed to their harm minimisation. Indeed, the majority of those who participated in this study were of Anglo-Australian background, heterosexual, well educated, and for the most part, held full-time employment and stable housing. As such, these participants held positions of relative social privilege, and thus were well-resourced, knowledgeable, and well-organised when it came to engaging in alcohol use, the Melbourne night-time economy, and with their related risks. However, the approach I have taken in this thesis also develops an understanding of participants’ moral dispositions as prioritising, or valuing, performances of sociality, sexuality, drinking and intoxication. In many ways these performances resisted, even rejected, forms of violence, recklessness, excessive engagement in epidemiologically defined risks, and at times, specific enactments of masculinity and femininity.

Some participants also referred to their ability to grasp life’s complexity and emergence as a safeguard against alcohol dependency and addiction, phenomena that were also understood to exist on the peripheries of their daily lives, or even well beyond them. Problematic alcohol use emerged as a topic of discussion infrequently throughout fieldwork, often stimulated by news or television programs, for example, and occasionally invoked as a throwaway punchline used to make fun of someone who had made a recent habit of getting regularly and excessively intoxicated. Otherwise alcohol addiction did not concern the vast majority of participants. As explored in Chapter 7 in particular, most participants shared the sense that they had cultivated the dynamic moral disposition capable of recognising and adjusting to problematic levels or forms of alcohol use, should they accumulate or emerge at

some point in the future. Indeed, this understanding of these potentially more problematic forms of alcohol use is reflective of participants' broader conceptualisation of themselves as attuned moral subjects situated within relational, contingent and emergent moral worlds that are always in flux.

The methodological and theoretical approach I have taken in this thesis, then, began with the process of situating youthful alcohol use amidst these complex moral worlds that simultaneously co-constitute, and are co-constituted by, drinking itself. Across 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork, I was fortunate to develop close relationships with several unique and dynamic young adults, and engage with a larger number of their friends and contacts. As such, on a personal level, I have been heavily invested in the way their words and experiences have been represented in this thesis. While ethnography enabled me to elucidate an intensive, contextualised understanding of what life entails for these young adults, Zigon's theoretical framework discourages the judgement of their actions and perspectives prior to engaging with them during fieldwork, and prevents one from allowing traditional moral philosophy to determine what might count as 'moral' or 'ethical'. From these methodological and theoretical necessities, I have explicitly attempted to unfold a fine-grained depiction of the fuzzy, fragmentary nature of morality, its intersubjective negotiations, and the way it manifests in conflicts, paradoxes, slippages and the very distinctive range of ways that these young people live in their worlds. This is the very 'stuff' of moral experience that has long eluded both Australian alcohol research and policy and, according to Zigon & Throop (2014: 7), traditional studies and theorisations of morality.

In the introductory chapter, I framed this research by posing three questions:

1. What kinds of forces are active in shaping how young adults engage in alcohol use?
2. How do young adults negotiate these various forces and what can be understood from this process in terms of their ethical orientations and priorities? and
3. How might different conceptualisations of 'morality' contribute to, or enhance, understandings of heavy drinking amongst young adults?

In this conclusion, I summarise my attempts to address these questions and consider the potential significance of my analysis, both for the study of alcohol use and of morality more broadly.

Attending to the Range of Elements Active in Drinking Moralities

Research that takes seriously moral assemblages, and the various elements that co-constitute them, requires an innovative, flexible framework with which to analyse ethnographic data, and an equally nuanced language with which to discuss their complexities. Zigon's theory is, first and foremost, inspired by the complex and repetitive nature of moral experience, and is designed to provide a way of understanding how multiple, even conflicting, viewpoints can coexist, and to trace the myriad ways in which individuals live, reflect and ethically work on themselves (Zigon 2013). In doing so, Zigon's approach rejects the idea of an enduring, abstract, transcendental understanding of morality. Rather, his moral assemblage framework conceptualises moralities as contested, plural and aspectual, from which it follows that dominant discourses are never able to fully impose their moral perspectives on those whom they seek to influence. At various points throughout this thesis I have examined multiple moralising discourses that seek to frame youthful alcohol use with reference to its risks, both to the individual drinker and to society at large. Indeed, these messages have routinely emerged throughout the analyses as crucial to understanding the moral worlds in which participants operate.

In Chapter Five I explored the discourse around drinking in educational contexts, particularly university colleges. In Chapter Six, my analysis was framed in terms of discourses regarding youth behaviour and its outcomes in the NTE. Chapter Seven examined the implications of official prescriptions on how one ought to 'live well' and Chapter Eight elucidated the gendered discourses of parental responsibility and the vulnerabilities of children that influence both how participants used alcohol and imagined their futures. Indeed, Zigon's analytical tool of the moral assemblage, and particularly its capacity to elicit the significance of moral discourses, has been an important element in the analysis, allowing me to illustrate how local drinking moralities took shape during fieldwork. However, this approach also opened up fertile ground to explore how other discourses, forces and participants themselves

responded or adapted to, problematised or contested, these dominant discourses.

Following another of Zigon's conceptualisations, this thesis is also concerned with the formation of moral subjectivity. One aspect of Zigon's approach involves investigating the 'kind of being that can live in moral assemblages' (Zigon 2014a: 19). Therefore, a primary aim has been to highlight the relationality inherent in the worlds co-constituted and inhabited by young people, and their acute awareness of, and attunement to, their other constitutive elements. Throughout this thesis, whether in college drinking events, licensed venues, cinemas, private homes or even in-depth interviews, my analytical lens has been moulded by this relational, contingent and emergent perspective on morality. I have examined how moral dispositions, ethical assumptions and other discourses shape what participants notice, how they react, how their motives and desires move them to act, and the myriad situations, relationships, activities and orientations they habitually take up (Zigon & Throop 2014: 8). More specifically, the field notes and interview data have been carefully presented and analysed to highlight the considered processes engaged in by participants in order to establish, maintain or re-work valued relationships that in turn co-constitute their own selves as moral subjects (Zigon 2014a). As Zigon suggests, many of these kinds of moral experiences are embodied and enacted habitually in the course of daily life (Zigon 2009b). In some cases, however, the analyses in this thesis have also brought into prominence specific moments where participants have engaged in ethical reflection on their modes of being, and importantly, the ways in which they considered how to transform, re-think or reinterpret their experiences in order to re-position themselves in relation to life's various demands and forces (Zigon 2009b; Zigon & Throop 2014). By extension, this research highlights the vulnerabilities of these young adults, not necessarily in the sense that they might be considered incomplete, not-yet-developed adults lacking specific neoliberal capacities (McLeod 2012), but rather as moral subjects with intimate, valued investments in the world around them. Each situation, then, has the capacity to be both generative and transformative, where one's cultivated moral way of being in the world, or that world itself, is at risk of being fundamentally altered, enhanced or lost.

In doing so, I have been able to illuminate the entwining processes – ethical subject formation on the one hand, and the co-constitution of the local moral worlds on the

other – that both characterise moral life for young adults and establish the very environments in which these widely scrutinised heavy drinking practices unfold.

In the following sections, I briefly revisit the key arguments in my ethnographic analysis in order to elucidate what they might mean for understanding the ethical orientations and priorities of the participants

'Disgusting': Memorable and Gendered College Drinking Moralities

In Chapter Five, I analysed Hannah's college experiences as a case study through which to begin exploring the utility of Zigon's moral concepts. In the earlier parts of the chapter, I treated Hannah's first college skol session as a unique moral assemblage co-constituted through a range of heterogeneous phenomena. These included (among others): the established discourse of her new college, her love for sport, the absence of different forms of institutional intervention, vomiting and the college's encouragement of masculine beverage types (beer) and drinking practices (skolling). Ultimately, this assemblage seemingly established the parameters Hannah, and her fellow teammates from the college's female softball team could identify as legitimate courses of action. Indeed, positioning the practices of beer skolling and vomiting as central to a situation involving uneasy newcomers attuned to the need to establish their own sense of belonging within the college ensured that heavy drinking and intoxication emerged as a likely outcome. Moreover, this particular assemblage limited the range of possibilities available for performing gender, in that female skol sessions differed only slightly from how the all-male sessions were orchestrated. However, Hannah did not suggest that her first skol session, or those she subsequently participated in, was overly restrictive or lacking in pleasure and memorability. Rather, as my analysis highlighted, skol sessions were understood as significantly more complex, at once bemusing and problematic, while simultaneously novel and socially productive.

Hannah's entanglement in this unique assemblage attuned her to the other memorable, while at times unfathomable, collective drinking experiences that her college could offer, and the subsequent opportunities for social, sporting and other forms of participation in college life. In this sense, I argued that Hannah illustrated how she crafted a specific, desired moral subjectivity that made room for perhaps

previously unintelligible, even ‘disgusting’, heavy drinking practices. For Hannah, working through the complexities of her college experiences required considerable ethical reflection and ultimately proceeded on the basis of her capacity to recognise the relationality of the situation, and to establish a specific mode of being in the world in which she could find comfort. At various times throughout her college life, however, the moral disposition she had crafted became uncomfortable, throwing her into a state of ethical breakdown. This was demonstrated when Hannah attempted to make sense of the seemingly irrational, reckless and destructive actions of her fellow (male) students on an annual ski trip. In light of this later experience, Hannah articulated a sense of the emotional complexity with which she remembers her first skol session, as emblematic of a unique, memorable, bygone time in her life that has both negative and positive elements. Ultimately, this analysis problematises moralising discourses that position young people who drink heavily as irresponsible and irrational, in keeping with their not-yet-adult vulnerabilities and capacities. In contrast, my interview with Hannah highlights the range of institutional, cultural, social and gendered forces that circumscribe the available possibilities for enacting moral desires, while also elucidating the intricate processes of ethical reflection and the agentic crafting of moral subjectivities that coincide in these already highly complex moral assemblages.

The Gendered and Sexualised Moralities of ‘Picking Up’ in Licensed Venues

In Chapter Six, I explored the effects of the notion of picking up as they emerged in licensed venues. I framed this particular chapter by arguing that the outcomes observed in night-time economies, such as intoxication, violence and hospital presentations, are routinely presumed to be the result of young people’s vulnerability to alcohol availability and promotion. Indeed, as several researchers have argued (e.g. Keane 2013; Manton & Moore 2016), this narrow assumption has meaningfully shaped Australian alcohol policy, while issues of gender and sexuality have been ignored or downplayed.

In my experience collecting ethnographic data in over 100 pubs, bars and other licensed premises in inner-suburban Melbourne, I found the focus on young people’s susceptibility to the promotional discourse of the commercial NTE to be simplistic, and unable to account for the ideas, discourses, affects, subjects, materials and bodies

co-constituting nights out. In Chapter Six, I argued that one significant aspect of patronising licensed venues involved encounters with the cultural category of picking up. Throughout fieldwork, it soon became apparent that interactions with other patrons in licensed venues – particularly in the larger ‘niche’ and smaller ‘commercial’ bars frequented by participants (Lindsay 2005) – also involved the negotiation of the range of discourses, concepts, orientations and embodiments housed under the term picking up. Following Zigon, I treated the category of picking up, typically referring to the pursuit of sexual activity in the literature (e.g. Paul & Hayes 2002), as its own gendered and sexualised public moral discourse as it routinely appeared to encourage licensed venue patrons to perform certain physical movements or strategies, to employ particular terminology and to enact specific gender roles. In this sense, the public moral discourse of picking up heightened participants’ sense of their gender and sexuality in ways that differed from, or exceeded, their experiences in other spaces (Bøhling 2015; Boyd 2014; Fileborn 2011, 2012).

The male participants largely understood themselves to be active in assembling local moralities around the notion of picking up, and to be responsible for approaching unfamiliar women in licensed venues (Kalish 2013). In describing their understandings of picking up and what it entails, these men illustrated a range of related moral discourses that territorialised the value and normativity of enactments of male sexuality in licensed venues. In contrast, women echoed existing research literature (e.g. Masters, Norris et al. 2006; Wall & Quedara 2014) in considering themselves to play a more passive, gatekeeping role in the negotiation of sexual interactions, ultimately being held responsible for saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Practising this role, however, was not straightforward, and involved a finely-honed local knowledge of licensed venue interactions and the enactment of a variety of strategies designed to successfully manoeuvre around these rigid gender norms. While these strategies mostly sufficed, many of the female participants recounted narratives of discomfort, and occasionally sexual harassment, while negotiating the gendered and sexualised moralities of licensed venues.

This analysis of picking up ultimately highlights licensed venues as complex environments where moralities are often intersubjectively assembled on the basis of

non-verbal cues, aesthetic performances, spatial positioning and prevailing public moral discourses. As such, this moral assemblage theorisation of participants' licensed venue experiences advances our understanding of the ways in which young adults traverse night-time economies, and the (negative) effects that their heavy drinking is routinely understood to produce, while also further developing existing research examining young people's safety practices (e.g. Brown 2013; Brown & Gregg 2012; de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Fileborn 2011, 2012; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2005, 2006; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011), and the 'attitudinal and behavioural norms' (Fileborn 2012) of licensed venues. It follows then, that policymakers require greater sensitivity towards issues of gender and sexuality as they are active constituents of licensed venue moral assemblages. This analysis demonstrates that the pubs and bars in which young adults seek leisure are also dynamic spaces for the performance of ethical creativity, flexibility and transformation, as they shape their actions around the gendered discourses of sexual violence in the NTE, or masculine pressures to regularly and successfully pick up, for example, in ways that often differ between individuals. As is reiterated throughout this thesis, these moral dimensions and implications of understanding drinking as emerging in assemblages with other phenomena is poorly understood both in contemporary Australian alcohol policy, and much of the epidemiological research that underpins it. This chapter argues that the path to a more comprehensive understanding of local moralities lies in the adoption of a more relational, inclusive moral framework that looks beyond the mere relationship between youth and alcohol.

Learning to Live Through Entanglements

Chapter Seven aimed to develop an understanding of the frameworks routinely assembled by participants in order to make sense of their 'everyday lives'. Whereas Chapter 6 examined an aspect of what Zigon would call 'public' moral discourse, Chapter Seven emerged as a response to tendencies identified in the relevant 'institutional' discourse, which leans toward moralising the relationship between alcohol and daily life itself in order to orient individuals towards politically desirable health practices and outcomes. I explored three major institutional documents that were in operation at the time of fieldwork in order to draw attention to how their concerns over problematic alcohol use had seemingly spilled over to encompass

several other facets of everyday life, from managing one's relationships with others to crafting one's dispositions and organising one's time. The result is a powerful discourse that proclaims not just appropriate ways to drink, but rather prescribes a regimented lifestyle moralised as the embodiment of living 'well'.

In light of these institutional forces, I used ethnographic data to explore how participants themselves came to understand their own lives, and the role of alcohol within them. Again, the inherent relationality of daily life came clearly into view, with several participants articulating concerns relating to the difficulties and challenges of negotiating the various aspects of their lives, such as employment, finance, physical and mental wellbeing, and friendship networks. Rather than simplifying these complexities and attempting to commit to regimented, officially defined 'healthy' lifestyles, these young adults were preoccupied with finding ways merely to manage and balance the range of demands and relations constituting their existence. Beyond the practical difficulties these complex lives present, this chapter also demonstrated how this process involves frequent shifts in moral consciousness (Zigon 2009b), between unreflective modes of being and conscious moments of ethical reflection, as a regular and normal part of everyday life. At frequent points throughout fieldwork, the intersection of alcohol use with these particular domains – work, social networks and health – provided participants with the grounds to ethically reflect and work on themselves, allowing for their re-attunement to the productive possibilities of these various entanglements. For instance, some participants highlighted the centrality of alcohol use to establishing working relationships and enabling professional mobility and advancement, while others suggested that alcohol increased their capacities to have honest conversations with friends. At the same time as elucidating the moral complexities of living across these domains, this analysis also drew attention to the ways in which these interactions also territorialised assemblages that encouraged regular heavy drinking. Put simply, the same participants who acknowledged the role alcohol could play in scaling the corporate ladder or clearing the air amongst friends, also implied that achieving such outcomes was less likely without alcohol.

The latter sections of the chapter attended more closely to the effects of living through the series of entanglements that make up a life, highlighting the ethical

orientations of this network of participants who, while engaging in regular heavy drinking, were simultaneously striving to become the kinds of subjects who could live comfortably in these complex, convoluted and relational worlds. A common theme throughout interviews and fieldwork was the need to engage in regular ethical reflection, and to re-attune oneself to a life trajectory both defined by the recognition of life's complexities and characterised by openness, adaptability and positivity. This chapter suggests that when considered as part of the nuanced, intimate web of concerns and relations that make up everyday life, heavy drinking cannot be adequately understood by reference to merely betraying 'healthy lifestyles' or failed attempts to live 'well'. Nor do these simplistic, deterministic and regimented prescriptions match up with the various ethical challenges that these young adults endure. Instead, this analysis illustrates some of the profound effects of neoliberal discourse when it collides with the dynamism and contingency involved in the practices of everyday life. While some participants indeed found health-focused regimens to be comforting, this sense was typically short-lived, as other priorities inevitably took over. Others found highly organised lifestyles to also be capable of producing a sense of monotony that could at times induce anxiety. Ultimately, their recognition of the wide variation in effects that can emerge from engaging in specific lifestyles seemingly undermined the credibility of neoliberal discourse, and their prescribed modes of living, thus promoting the notion of embodying an open, ambivalent and flexible moral disposition.

Child-friendly Moral Assemblages and Gendered Futures

The first three ethnographic data chapters presented and analysed fine-grained descriptions that respect the messiness associated with young moral subjects engaging in heavy drinking. Indeed, this sense of incoherence and emergence characterised the vast majority of my experiences in the field. By way of contrast, Chapter Eight describes several instances where clearly organised moralities emerged in either the physical or imagined presence of children, and I subsequently explored the significance of these events further in analysis of interview data.

The capacities for children to be one of the forces co-constituting moral assemblages were dynamic, and their effects widely distributed. On the few occasions participants personally interacted with children, I witnessed and experienced palpable shifts in

mood, bodily movements, tone of voice, spatial positioning and language. These shifts were qualitatively different from those I had become familiar with during fieldwork. The rarity with which these instances emerged seemed to throw these young adults into varying states of ethical breakdown, where they quickly reconfigured themselves in order to enact a sense of care and positivity for both the children and their parents. This analysis reflected the salience of the discourses around the difficulties of parenthood, but more specifically the vulnerabilities of children that have long held in place the moral imperative of putting the needs of children first (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards et al. 2000). I also highlighted one particular episode from fieldwork where this imperative had observable effects on how the young adults present at the time used alcohol, from choosing different products to leaving their bottles in safer areas, out of the reach of the child present.

From these ethnographic vignettes, I suggested a link between the ethics of care instigated by the physical presence of children in moral assemblages, and a similar effect on participants imagining their futures in general, and prospective parenthood in particular. During in-depth interviews, participants expressed the view that the idea of having children helped them imagine a different, more complex world than the one they engaged in day-to-day, in which the valued relations constituting their existence would be radically altered. These imagined futures were, however, clearly marked by gender. For the young women in particular, this world mediated by pregnancy, children or parenthood was one they imagined on a regular basis as they engaged with discourses targeting women on the basis of their 'biological clock' and natural maternal responsibilities, for example, including alcohol-focused health promotion documents such as the national drinking guidelines (Keane 2013; Perrier 2013). In contrast, the male participants were less likely to include thoughts of children or parenthood in their imagined futures, which were more likely to be shaped by masculine discourses of career progression, the accrual of financial capital and the seeking of novel experiences. Even the sole male participant who was a father imagined his future in terms of a level of freedom and agency absent from the accounts provided by female participants, none of whom had yet had children. For some participants in particular, such as Olivia, these gendered discourses shaped their relationship with alcohol, as she understood it to be flexible and open to change, particularly if she was to become pregnant and become responsible for her

vulnerable unborn child. Not only does this analysis highlight stark gendered inequalities in the alcohol discourse, but it also elucidates that moral subjectivities are always in flux, and constantly shifting between unreflective modes of being in the world and periods of conscious ethical reflection. Indeed, imagining one's future through the medium of an ethnographic interview, only to again re-inhabit a comfortable moral disposition where having children may not be an immediate concern, can indeed be understood as an ethical tactic in itself.

Situating this Research Within the Existing Literature

This research builds on existing qualitative research in this field, while also making some novel contributions. For example, it aligns with those studies that highlight the situational, relational and dynamic nature of alcohol use among young people (e.g. de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Lindsay 2005, 2006), and particularly those that illuminate how drinking practices shift and evolve across a night out in relation to venue, time and company (e.g. Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011; Northcote 2011). By extension, this thesis also contributes to the array of innovative Australasian studies to have emerged in the last two decades that trace the range of forces that young people themselves articulate as active and meaningful in constituting their drinking experiences. More specifically, my research shares similarities with those studies that illustrate how aspects of class (Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay 2005, 2006), gender (Brown 2013; Brown & Gregg 2012; de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Lindsay 2005, 2006, 2012; Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011), sexuality (Waitt, Jessop et al. 2011), social wellbeing (Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Lunnay, Ward et al. 2011; Niland, Lyons et al. 2013; Sheehan & Ridge 2001), and perceived risks and harms of alcohol use (de Crespigny, Vincent et al. 1999; Grace, Moore et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al 2009; Northcote 2011) can mediate youth alcohol use.

This thesis also draws on conceptualisations of youth drinking as bounded and controlled by various temporal, spatial and social forces, in contrast to popular descriptions of young people's alcohol use as unbridled and excessive (Measham 2004: 319). Concepts fostered in the United Kingdom literature, such as 'controlled loss of control' (Measham 2004; Measham & Brain 2005) and 'calculated hedonism' (Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008) understand heavy drinking practices as more situated

and contextualised within the complex worlds in which they emerge, and have inspired much Australasian qualitative research on alcohol (e.g. Crocket 2014; Fry 2011). Of these conceptualisations, this thesis in some way overlaps with Szmigin et al.'s (2008) 'discourse of compatibility' in particular. These researchers argue that health and education institutions often aim to present specific practices as inevitably leading to particular (and negative) outcomes, such as injury, illness and crime. Szmigin, Griffin et al. (2008: 365) argue that this simplistic, deterministic view of alcohol use overlooks myriad elements that mediate heavy drinking practices and outcomes, for instance, the commercial context of alcohol use, marketing communications, social dynamics and other 'key discourses' more generally. Unsurprisingly, Szmigin, Griffin et al.'s (2008) participants eschewed narrow understandings of alcohol in favour of articulating a 'discourse of compatibility' that 'presents a range of different and apparently contradictory possibilities of life which have to be managed' (Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008: 365). These findings provide a conundrum for public health institutions and policymakers in that the complexities associated with negotiating one's social and cultural credibility, the desire to have fun and the bonds of friendship often mean that the demands of the present outweigh the considerations of the longer-term health effects of alcohol use that these institutions routinely articulate. Indeed, Szmigin, Griffin et al. (2008: 365) acknowledge that this debate has stagnated, and this sense of compatibility requires more nuanced consideration if it is 'to move on'. In many ways, this thesis takes up this challenge.

Like those in Szmigin, Griffin et al.'s (2008) study, the participants in my research also demonstrated a keen awareness of the complexities characterising their worlds, and moreover, a desire to learn about them, and understand them, in turn hopefully crafting a more diverse, interesting and comfortable moral subjectivities. In this sense, my research also adds to studies illuminating the complexities associated with re-framing the negative aspects of drinking as positive and pleasurable, particularly in discussions after the event (Niland, Lyons et al. 2013; Sheehan & Ridge 2001; Tutenges & Rod 2009). Similarly, it adds further detail to understanding how such re-imaginings also seem to prevent the emergence of negative feelings of regret or remorse that might theoretically mobilise change in 'riskier' drinking practices (Brown & Gregg 2012). Ultimately, this thesis aligns with these studies in

demonstrating that alcohol use, and its effects, is rarely motivated or experienced in such narrow ways, but rather these aspects are always in flux, and contingent on a range of other factors that are complex to negotiate, but also generative and productive.

The thesis goes beyond the analyses offered in existing qualitative research literature on youth alcohol use in two significant ways – first, through its explicit focus on morality, and second, through its use of assemblage thinking. As I have made clear throughout this thesis, the literature hints at the moral dimensions and implications in various ways without making a concerted effort to integrate them into a cohesive, workable theory with which to study how young people use and understand alcohol. Beyond the mere pervasiveness of moral terminology in the alcohol research discourse, there have also been several analyses that highlight how young people experiment with moral boundaries, transgressive actions and fluid identities when drinking (e.g. Borlagdan, Freeman et al. 2010; Szmigin, Griffin et al. 2008; Tutenges & Rod 2009), while others draw attention to the relationship between alcohol use and the shaping of individual life trajectories (e.g. Lindsay, Harrison et al. 2009; Lindsay, Kelly et al. 2009).

Indeed, definitions of ‘morality’ are multiple and contested, and it is a concept with a long, convoluted philosophical history. This history has in many ways undermined its distinctiveness to the point that it often overlaps with other lines of social scientific enquiry, such as ‘culture’ (Zigon 2007, 2009b). This thesis has not only intended to bring the moral dimensions of youth alcohol use into explicit focus, but also to theorise them in a way that might promote thinking about (and with) morality in future research on alcohol, and in other fields. I have sought to achieve this primarily through the mobilisation of an assemblage framework, which has been increasingly deployed in alcohol and other drug research in recent years (e.g. Bøhling 2015; Demant 2013; Duff 2014; Farrugia 2014; Malins 2004; Poulsen 2015; Race 2011). This innovative approach to studying drug use pushes understandings beyond the focus of the individual and the substance, and towards a conceptualisation of drug use as emerging from networks of different actors and forces, both human and non-human (Bøhling 2015). In this sense, assemblage thinking is more sensitive to the embodied, sensorial, affective and non-human

dimensions of drug use that have historically been under-explored in drug research, and moreover, how these elements shape drug-taking practices, subjectivities and assemblages in events of consumption (Bøhling 2015; Duff 2014; Jayne, Valentine et al. 2010; Malins 2004). Given the wide variety of effects that can emerge from enactments of drug use, and the different ways drugs can be taken, assemblage frameworks emphasise the logic of contingency, relationality and emergence in producing more comprehensive analyses of the ways in which episodes of drug use are repetitively made and re-made through series of associations between various unpredictable forces (Bøhling 2015; Duff 2014; Farrugia 2014).

Research utilising assemblage thinking has been valuable in moving theories of drug use beyond those preoccupied with individual behaviour or guided by the assumption that health, and a particular vision of health, is the primary determinant of action and responsibility (Demant 2013; Duff & Moore 2015; LeBesco 2011; Malins 2004; Race 2011; Rhodes 2009). This thesis contributes to these developments through the analysis of ethnographic data and the application of Zigon's notion of the moral assemblage. Indeed, Zigon's motivations lie primarily in his desire to resist relying on potentially outdated moral philosophies to frame ethnographic studies of morality, and rather to attend to the range of forces that contribute to the intricate assembling of local moralities (Zigon & Throop 2014). As other scholars have suggested, the imposition of moral theories, values or practices, either on research subjects or the targets of health interventions, such as those who use alcohol or other drugs, is inherently reductive and limiting given they are typically determined *a priori* on the basis of different priorities and sensibilities (LeBesco 2011; Lupton 2015; Malins 2004). While these attempts can at times be well meaning, they also serve to prevent further understanding of these local moral worlds, and can potentially exacerbate harms in the form of shame and stigma, and the de-valuing of specific practices and ways of life more generally (Bourgois 1998; Denzin 1987).

Zigon's synthesis of the notion of the moral assemblage has been developing over the last decade, beginning with his recognition of discursive influences on morality (Zigon 2007, 2011), and his delineation of moral experience from periods of ethical reflection (Zigon 2009b, 2010b), to his later work, which concentrated on the workings of moral assemblages and the types of moral subjects that can live within

them (Zigon 2014a). Not only have these analytical tools enabled me to integrate the concept of morality into the study of youth alcohol use, but they have also been able to elucidate the moral complexities and significance of heavy drinking that has largely been absent from existing research accounts.

By highlighting the various moral complexities and significance of seemingly mundane moments and situations in social life, I have drawn attention to a range of concerns and experiences that relate to the vulnerabilities of moral subjects as they become entangled with moral assemblages that could, potentially, reconfigure their lives and worlds in significant ways. In turn, this approach has elucidated the vast range of bodily, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and psychological manoeuvres that young adults feel compelled to make as part of this process. These aspects have been marked out clearly in the chapter summaries earlier in this chapter, but more importantly, throughout the range of analyses I have conducted. I have also argued that these aspects are less likely to be comprehended by those methodological and theoretical approaches unwilling to engage explicitly with the notion of morality.

Concluding Remarks

To reiterate, this thesis is an attempt to synthesise a novel conceptualisation of morality with ethnographic enquiry in order to enhance our understanding of alcohol use amongst young people, and to inform future research directions and policy development. Throughout I have argued that overlooking the moral complexities and significance of heavy drinking risks obscuring aspects of young people's lives that they themselves articulate as important to understanding how they experience their worlds and how they drink (Bourgois 1998; Zigon 2008). Whereas the moral dimensions and implications of alcohol use have often been left implicit and taken-for-granted in the research literature, and even intentionally avoided in institutional discourse, this thesis represents an attempt to coax the relationship between alcohol and morality out into the open.

The approach I have taken in this thesis has enabled me, and the participants of this study, to articulate an extensive range of heterogeneous forces that can be active in shaping heavy drinking practices. For the most part, following Zigon, I have chosen

to focus on various aspects of public and institutional moral discourses in operation at the time of my fieldwork, while also paying close attention to the processes of cultivating embodied moral dispositions. However, I have also referred to myriad other human and non-human forces that have co-constituted the events and experiences documented in this thesis: college tradition and the practice of vomiting, the notion of picking up, licensed spaces, a lack of faith in official prescriptions of 'healthy lifestyles', and gendered perceptions of the innocence of children and their need for care. The range of forces I have traced throughout the analysis highlights the importance of continuing to utilise theoretical frameworks and research methodologies that elucidate the elements deemed meaningful by young adults, as opposed to determining them *a priori*.

The list of ways in which these forces can be negotiated is endless. What I have tried to develop throughout this thesis, however, is a way of thinking about and conceptualising the moral complexities in these negotiations as well as highlighting their significance. Over the course of 12 months, I was able to observe the participants engaging in conscious efforts to make and re-make themselves and their worlds into something they desired, and of which they could be proud. That the vast majority of participants understood regular heavy drinking not as undermining this process, but rather as deeply implicated in their desired life trajectories and worldviews, is a significant finding that warrants consideration in future research.

Indeed, my research rejects the validity of simplistic prescriptions on how young people should engage in alcohol use, and live their lives more generally, and argues that researchers and policymakers must recognise the challenges faced by young adults and the extensive range of skills and knowledge they have developed in order to deal with them. Not only would this enable more comprehensive understandings of how and why young adults use alcohol to emerge, but undoubtedly, this could meaningfully attune harm minimisation endeavours to the complex and significant moral worlds that are brought into being when young people drink.

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