'Yobs' and 'Snobs': Embodying Drink and the Problematic Male Drinking Body

by **Thomas Thurnell-Read**
Coventry University

Sociological Research Online, 18 (2) 3
<<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/2/3.html>>
10.5153/sro.3000

Received: 17 Dec 2012 Accepted: 19 Mar 2013 Published: 31 May 2013

Abstract

The cultural linkages between the drinking of alcohol and the assertion of masculinity have been well explored. In particular, drinking alcohol is still assumed to be a site where masculinity can be tested and proved. However, equally, drinking can be seen to undermine and discredit the male body. Further, older men's drinking practices are commonly overlooked. Through exploring two examples of cultural stereotypes relating to male drinking bodies, the lager lout and the real ale enthusiast, the article argues that persistent cultural assumptions about the appropriate way to embody masculinity. Both the lager lout and the bearded ale snob represent two alternative discourses of how alcohol undermines the bounded male body. Both cases exhibit a lack of control and restraint which is assumed to be desired of masculine bodies and, therefore, both become problematic and subject to social sanctions and cultural policing in the form of negative caricatured depictions. Finally, it is suggested that such stereotypes offer vivid examples of problematic male drinking bodies from which other embodiments can be normalised.

Keywords: Alcohol, Drunkenness, Embodiment, Masculinity, Media Representations, Real Ale

Introduction

1.1 The last fifteen years has seen a greater sense of urgency in tackling aspects of male embodiment which, particularly in relation to health, can result in detrimental outcomes as measured in lower life expectancies, higher suicide rates and greater risks of coronary heart disease (Watson 2000). It has, for example, been noted that socially constructed ideals of masculinity relating to autonomy and strength can act as barriers to men eating healthily (Gough & Conner 2006). In this respect, the cultural linkages between the drinking of alcohol and the assertion of masculinity are of particular interest. As this article will explore, such links are characterised by ambivalence in that alcohol simultaneously supports and threatens the enactment of socially ascribed ideals of masculinity. Notably, then, drinking practices and settings are sites where notions of appropriate and inappropriate masculinity are negotiated (Leyshon 2005; Peralta 2007).

1.2 This paper aims to make some comparisons about two cultural stereotypes of drinking men; the lager lout, or in its more recent incarnation the young 'binge drinker', and the middle aged 'real ale' enthusiast. While these terms are defined and explored below, the article suggests that in both cases the male drinking body is the locus of various concerns relating to masculinity. Although the ale drinker is a more prosaic and certainly less controversial cultural figure than the lager lout, both these stereotypes raise questions about how drink is embodied and how alcohol consumption is linked to socially constructed ideals of masculinity as relating to autonomy, independence and bodily composure and strength. Drinking can, it seems, both support and challenge these ideals. It can offer a source of validation for masculine identity and an array of drinking spaces which are often coded as masculine in which to perform masculinity (Campbell 2010). It can, however, also undermine masculinity; the embodiment of drunkenness can threaten the male body which is typically identified as being associated with control and boundedness.

1.3 Drinking alcohol and becoming drunk is an inherently and inescapably embodied action. It is therefore unsurprising that various norms and prejudices about bodies should be played out through an arrangement of perceptions of and responses to drinking bodies. Further still, this article will suggest that

wider concerns about societal changes and, in particular, reconfigurations of gender relations can also be read from concerns expressed about inappropriate male drinking bodies. Following Fiona Measham and Kevin Brain's (2005: 264) suggestion that 'the "lager lout" was identified as a symbol of changing times in late 1980s Thatcherite Britain', this article seeks to argue that wider implications can be drawn; the various scares and prejudices relating to the male drinking body can be made to speak for wider concerns about masculinity, class and age. As such, although this article deals primarily with media representation of concerns about embodied male drinking, it does so as a means of informing wider discussions relating to the regulation and governance of alcohol and drunkenness in modern Britain (Hollands 2002; Plant & Plant 2006).

1.4 Drawing on a selection of examples drawn from British mainstream print media and more recent online materials such as blogs posts, this article will use the lager lout as a foil to discuss another socially constructed stereotype of drinking masculinity, the real ale enthusiast. Both, it is argued, reveal significant assumptions about embodied masculinity and its relation to the consumption of alcohol. The problematic male drinking body is therefore seen as a matter of social concern which gives rise to a proliferation of cultural images which serve to condemn the inappropriate embodiment of alcohol and, by turns, reinforce long held ideals about masculinity and drinking.

Drinking alcohol and masculinity

2.1 The centrality of gender to concerns about alcohol consumption and public drunkenness is not new (see, for example, Gutzke 1994). Indeed, historically the concerns about drunkenness and the unruly male body have been readily linked to wider fears about society. In the closing decades of the 19th century, sport was seen as a healthy and 'proper' use of the male body yet also, in the perfusion of alcohol available at sporting events and the often riotous behaviour of the drunken sporting crowd, as a threat to the social and moral order (Collins & Vamplew 2002). In Victorian Britain excess alcohol was linked through emerging medical discourses of insanity and genetic degeneracy to the perceived moral failures of both bodies and minds of, invariably, working class men (McCandless 1984).

2.2 The relationship between socially condoned practices of drinking alcohol and the social construction and performance of masculine identities in the 20th century is well noted. Geoffrey Hunt and colleagues have noted that 'to drink is to be masculine, and to drink heavily is to be even more masculine' (Hunt et al. 2005: 227). The consumption of alcohol and the successful enactment of drinking and drunkenness is, it seems, a quintessentially masculine practice and a means of supporting masculine identity (Lemle & Mishkind 1989). Further, alcohol can play a key role in facilitating male bonding rituals through which masculinity is enacted (Gough & Edwards 1998; Thurnell-Read 2011; Thurnell-Read 2012). Drinking practices have, as such, often been seen as an important means for the enactment of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) informed by pervasive ideals of masculine strength, competitiveness and autonomy. More recently, research has shown discourses of gender propriety to regulate drinker's attitudes to and patterns of alcohol use (de Visser & McDonnell 2012). Men, it is suggested, will learn to read and enact codes of not just appropriate drinking but specifically masculine drinking practices which will condition their relationship to alcohol and to drunkenness.

2.3 Men should be able to drink large quantities without loss of self-control (Gefou-Madianou 1992). Michael Leyshon (2005) similarly identifies the imperative for men to be able to drink heavily yet always maintain composure in holding conversations, holding their bladders and playing pub sports without impairment. Hugh Campbell (2000), in his work on drinking in rural pubs in New Zealand, has coined the term 'Pub(lic) masculinity' and highlighted the importance of disciplining the drinking body, maintaining composure and even the importance placed on infrequent urination. Further still, in both Leyshon and Campbell's work the public house emerges as an implicitly masculine space within which masculinity can be enacted.

2.4 Relating this observation to embodying masculinity through drinking alcohol, we can further see how the male body can be tested by drinking and drunkenness. Robert Peralta's work (2007), for example, shows drinking as the 'doing' of masculinity through competition in the quantity and pace of alcohol consumption and, notably, the management of physical symptoms as 'holding' your drink. The idealised male drinking body is therefore one that freely consumes alcohol, in doing so, demonstrates restraint and control in relation to the potential detrimental effects of drunkenness on bodily composure. Here, slurring speech, losing coordination, falling sleep or 'passing out' would all be seen as a sign of weakness.

2.5 Borrowing the distinction made by Demetrakis Demetriou (2001) between internal hegemonic masculinity and external hegemonic masculinity as dominance over other men and over women respectively, drinking capabilities can be seen to test and prove hegemonic masculinity on two levels. First, through drinking faster, more heavily or for longer than male drinking companions a man might, it is assumed, test and prove his masculinity over that of other men. Second, complicity with common assumptions excluding women from drinking spaces and practices can serve to enforce and in turn reinscribe the masculinised nature of much drinking practice.

2.6 However, there is also a growing range of research which has questioned this equation between drinking and controlled masculine embodiment. Hank Nuwer (1990, 2002) observes the predominant use of alcohol in physically degrading initiation or 'hazing' rituals through which willing participants gain acceptance to American college. Likewise, in my own work on stag tourism there was a clear celebration of the loss of bodily control associated with heavy drinking (Thurnell-Read 2011). Michael Kimmel, in his far reaching study of the masculinity of young American men, cites one of his participant's description of the drinking rituals enacted in celebrating a friend's 21st birthday: 'Fun was had, memories were made, but more importantly...he puked. His friends can rest easy; a job well done' (Kimmel 2008: 96). Again,

here there is a clear celebration of the loss of bodily control which suggests that, for younger drinkers at least, the ties between drinking and maintaining a bounded, controlled, male body might not be so clear.

2.7 Under this conception, rather than a chance to test and prove bodily composure, drinking allows for a pleasurable release from the imperative to control the male body. Thus, the apparently chaotic behaviour of the night-time economy is also a setting where 'extensive disorderly behaviour is valued for sharpening the subjective sense of release and rebellion experienced by drinkers' (Tomsen 1997: 96). Christine Griffin et al (2009) have noted that for many young people the loss of control and loss of memory associated with heavy drinking is actually a desired and consciously pursued aspect of drunkenness which is seen to build social bonds between friends who get drunk together. Likewise, ethnographic fieldwork into young people and drinking on the tourist island of Ibiza has found that heavy drinking in the holiday context is valued by young people as a time of release from the pressures of daily life at home (Biggs et al 2011).

Masculine embodiment

3.1 Extending this discussion of the links between masculinity and alcohol, the notion of gender embodiment can add to our understanding of the ways in which drinking can by turns support and threaten masculine ideals. Thus, it has been observed that there remains a long held assumption that the ideal male body is one that is controlled, rational and bounded (Dutton 1995; Dyer 1997; Seidler 2007). As such, 'men have been understood as rational, autonomous, less connected to and controlled by their bodies; masculine bodies have been constructed as stronger, less liable to dysfunction; they are bounded and individual; and embodiment is seen to have impinged less on men' (Sheldon, 2002: 16). How then might drunkenness and the potential for the loss of bodily control associated with it encroach upon this ideal of contained masculine embodiment?

3.2 As David Morgan has noted, the male body which is viewed as having lost control is seen as grotesque; 'the grotesque body is uncontrolled, unappealing according to dominant aesthetic standards, and constructed as being much closer to nature' (Morgan 1993: 82). The fat, 'out of shape' body is readily linked to lack of self-discipline (Grogan & Richards 2002) and feeds into common assumptions and prejudices which read the fat body as an indication of a deeper moral failure (Lupton 1996). Karen Throsby (2011: 9), for example, notes 'the familiar characterisation of fatness is of uncontained appetites; a shaming designation that attributes the fat individual a moral incompetence that is literally given away by the body itself'.

3.3 There are also other difficulties in the sense that ideals of masculine embodiment encourage strength, control but also masculinity dictates that it is important not to be seen to care too much for one's appearance and body (Grogan & Richards 2002). This is 'a delicate path' between obsession and control (Gill et al. 2005: 55). Thus, the 'double-bind' of masculine embodiment (Bordo 1999) makes correct bodily comportment essential to asserting and maintaining a viable masculinity while at the same time requiring that to be seen by others as overly concerned with one's body. Hegemonic ideals of masculinity are informed by notions of masculine bodily competence yet many aspects of embodiment such as pain, emotions and sensory stimulation are denied. Likewise, it has been suggested that in the consumption of luxury, drink and food there is a double logic of consumption. Power and taste can be asserted through consumption but such also is seen as a threat to masculine embodiment resulting in bodily atrophy and gluttony (Forth 2007). Again, the spectre is that of a loss of self-control and discipline. The importance of normality in negotiating the double-bind of masculinity is therefore based on being neither too embodied or not embodied enough (Norman 2011).

Masculinity and age

4.1 One observation of much of the social science literature on alcohol consumption and drunkenness in general, and on gender and alcohol in particular, is that the full range of the life course is rarely considered. In the rush to identify the intriguing and undoubtedly salient changes in youth drinking practices, it might be argued that older drinkers are frequently overlooked. Indeed, with the notable exception of Jayne Valentine and Holloway (2011), who include an interesting intergenerational comparison in their geographical study of drinking practices and spaces, attention has seldom been given to how drinking varies between generations and across the life course. The construction of stereotypes around lager louts and binge drinkers are inescapably about adolescent and young adult drinkers. The larger lout and the real ale enthusiasts are, generally speaking, associated with young and old drinking masculinities respectively. Such is reflected in the evident interest in uncovering how younger drinkers are socialised into normalised or deviant drinking practices; it is commonly assumed that the drinking behaviour of older drinkers, in contrast, is already fixed and, therefore, unproblematic.

4.2 More generally, there is a sense that academic research has failed to give due regard to older men's lives and experiences (Spector-Mersel 2006). While there is a wealth of work on younger men's lives, older men are notably absent from developing studies of men and masculinities. It can be argued that we need to give more regard to how masculinity changes across the life course. Spector-Mersel describes how 'hegemonic masculine scripts' dictate what acceptable and unacceptable masculinity is across a range of life stages. She describes these as 'cultural exemplary-plots that draw social clocks for masculinity, determining diverse contents of desired manhood at different points in a man's life' (Spector-Mersel 2006: 71).

4.3 In relation to masculinity and embodiment this means that older men might be seen as less embodied than younger men or might struggle to maintain the embodiment which characterised their youth. For example, Jonathan Watson's (1998) research with Scottish men in their thirties and forties identified youth as being focused on embodied roles where as older age shifts towards social roles such as marriage and

fatherhood. Very little attention has been paid to how masculine drinking changes with age. In particular, the hyperactivity of youth drinking and associated potential violence and aggression is linked to age; older drinkers are seen to literally 'grow out' of such excess (Mullen et al. 2007).

4.4 However, several recent studies have indicated how the drinking experiences of older men may be qualitatively different from those of younger men. Janelle (2012) has explored how drinking is a central feature of the conviviality surrounding the Caribbean men's cricket spectatorship in Toronto, Canada. The consumption of alcohol allows older men, by turns, to mask and compensate for the effects of aging on the male body and, thus, to maintain their social status based on the ideals of patriarchal and hegemonic masculinity. Further, Hollands (2002) has suggested that the emphasis on youth culture of the leisure spaces of post-industrial towns means the mainstream night-time economy may marginalise older drinkers.

4.5 How, then, do expectations of men's drinking practices change across the life course? The remainder of this article will now explore in turn how the cultural stereotype of the lager lout and the ale enthusiast offer two distinct representations of problematic drinking masculinity. It is suggested that these representations retain their salience and cultural power due to their relevance to concerns about the relative means of embodiment of drunkenness by younger and older men respectively.

The lager lout as problematic male drinking body

5.1 The cultural stereotype of the 'lager lout' emerged during the 1980s and 1990s as a means of labelling the perceived errant drinking of an increasing number of young British men. Central to this was the concerted drinking for the sake of drunkenness and resulting antisocial behaviour in British towns and city centres. The image of the lager lout is irrevocably linked by the media to violence and aggression and a threat to public safety. As such, 'the long standing "moral panic" concerning the "evils of drink" has resurfaced in the UK around city-centre drinking cultures, initially through concern over "lager louts" and more recently in the figure of binge drinkers' (Jayne et al. 2011: 20).

5.2 While it is debated as to what extent the lager lout was based on an empirical reality rather than a media-led moral panic, it is here important to note the social function of the cultural image of the lager lout in providing a conduit for various latent and emergent concerns about the way young men do their drinking. Thus, Plant and Plant (2006: 23) observe that during the 1980s the lager louts were portrayed as in the British media as 'intoxicated young men whose aggressive behaviour, both at home and abroad, became a symbol of unsavoury behaviour and national shame'. Implicit in media debates around the lager lout is the sense that young men have lost control of the disciplined drinking of the past. The media handwringing concerning the lager lout did not, as such, seek to censure the fact that men drink. Rather, the emphasis was and still is on young men whose use of alcohol leads to a loss of control and self-discipline.

5.3 In the mainstream media, lager louts have been depicted as 'big crowds of violent youths' needing to be 'dispersed' and 'vanquished' by authorities (Evans 1989). The central image is one of a flagrant lack of control. Thus, one commentator (Martin 2001) observed that:

Any pub on a weekday is now full of people boasting about what they did when they were last 'out of it' (or whatever euphemism they employ), and during the weekends you see the exploits that generate the stories [...] Take the buses or the Tubes on weekend evenings, and people all around you are being sick in a splashily exuberant way.

Here the emphasis on the unbounded body, manifest through a lack of control and, particularly, vomiting in public, is read as symptomatic of a wider lack of concern for social propriety.

5.4 The evident media fascination with the work of Maciej Dakowicz, a Polish photographer who has for several years documented the Cardiff night-time economy, is an indicative example of this concern with gendered fears about drinking bodies (Salkeld 2009). Through the gaze cast upon carnivalesque drinking bodies, women are portrayed as sexually promiscuous and by turns threatening and vulnerable while men are depicted as aggressors lacking self-control and prone to violence towards others or, more commonly, against themselves through self-destructive hedonism. Prominent attention is given to the excesses of appetite evident in the night-time economy, Dakowicz's images abound with mounds of takeaway packets, scattered chips and dropped kebabs; an iconography that speaks of the lack of restraint and of a hedonistic letting go.

5.5 Dakowicz's images, although taken with consummate skill, nonetheless ask the viewer to pass critical judgement on the images of drinking bodies. Prominent are men who have failed to control their body in passing out, vomiting or in being perpetrator or victim of alcohol fuelled aggression. The presence of and evident fascination with bodily fluids in the form of the pervasiveness of vomit and blood, alongside the disrobing of both male and female bodies, attests to the act of extreme drunkenness that speaks directly to our specifically gendered understandings of how alcohol works upon the body.

5.6 Putting aside the significance of nationality ('readers comments are replete with expressions of indignation' that a 'foreign' photographer should depict and therefore comment upon 'our drinking cultures'), the groundswell of media interest in Dakowicz's images reveals a fascination with drinking bodies as symbols of macabre interest. Recently, Chris Hackley and colleagues have contributed a lively discussion of the drinking narratives of young people as analysed through the Bakhtinian lens of the carnivalesque (Hackley et al. 2012). Thus, an importance is placed on the inversion of social order and transgression of rules. Further still, the presence of fancy dress in Dakowicz's images also reveals a fascination with the ways in which the body is, through drunkenness, read as spectacular and as a

carnavalesque transgression of the everyday.

The Ale Enthusiast as Problematic Drinking Body

6.1 While the lager lout or, more recently, binge drinker has received significant academic interest and, it must be said, copious media coverage, the less prominent though equally intriguing cultural stereotype of the real ale enthusiast provides further illustrations of the complex expectations of the male drinking body. Although never occupying the prominent position as a 'moral panic' as the lager lout/binge drinker, the real ale enthusiast has come to be a readily recognized yet seldom challenged representation of drinking masculinity.

6.2 Since its formation in 1971, the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has led a consumer campaign to ensure the protection of traditional British beer, conditioned through secondary fermentation, in resistance to decades of rationalization and commercialization in the brewery industry. Throughout the four decades of its existence, a stereotype has emerged which depicts the typical real ale drinker as male, in his late forties or older, overweight, poorly dressed and quintessentially bearded. One typical headline in the early 1990s referred to CAMRA as 'the boys with the beards' (Faulks 1992). Likewise, another article asked: 'Do men join Camra [sic] because they've got beards and bellies, or are the beard and belly conferred upon them by the Beer Fairy when they pass out at their inauguration bevvy?' (*The Times* 1994).

6.3 Even a largely congratulatory article on the campaign ahead of the 1993 flagship Great British Beer Festival invoked the stereotype:

'You are what you drink. Anyone who visits the Great British Beer Festival next week will discover that. There is a sort of train-spotter element among those who sup nothing but real ale: the carrier bags and anoraks, beer bellies and beards give this annual festival an atmosphere somewhere between a student union do and a folk festival' (Downes 1993).

Such stereotypes are not limited to national media. Indeed, one posting on the official CAMRA blog noted that:

'I was talking to someone in the trade recently and they encapsulated the issue beautifully: "If there's a bloke with a beard standing in a pub and telling the licensee that his beer's no good, and refusing to hear anything to the contrary, most licensees mutter "bloody CAMRA member" under their breath - the fact he might not be doesn't really matter.'

This was then followed by a comment suggesting that:

'The stereotype exists for a reason, and that reason is unfortunately the loud pompous types who announce [sic] their membership at any given opportunity in order to add merit to whatever point or argument they're trying to make. A disproportionate amount of times the person doing this does fit the beard and belly stereotype I'm afraid.'

6.5 One blog suggests that 'such creatures are easy to spot in places like The Evening Star and The Nelson – on account of their wiry beard-growth, veiny noses, and bulging beer-guts. These physical characteristics are invariably brought on by the peculiarities of their diet' (Bailey n.d.). Another blog provides a detailed expansion of the beard and belly image of ale drinkers in a post titled 'Stamping Down on Real Ale Drinkers and the Causes of Real Ale Drinkers' (Manuel 2008). The blog then goes on to detail a nine point guide to identifying real ale drinkers including: beards ('All Real Ale Drinkers have facial hair, women included'); clothes ('lots of greens and browns. Corduroy still swings with these people as do arm patches and grey duffle coats'); and friends ('they are only friends with other Real Ale Drinkers [...] Chances are they will be joined by a brown green mass of fellow Real Ale Drinkers. They gather in packs for safety, much like a nocturnal animal that is scared of it's own shadow').

6.6 Relating the above examples to the earlier discussion of dominant expectations of masculine embodiment, an emphasis seems to be placed on the ways in which the 'beard and belly' caricature of the ale enthusiast is a body that fails to conform to idealised notions of masculinity as bounded and controlled. This apparent fascination with the ale drinker's body being a failed male body is evidently a central facet of the stereotype. An illustrative example is evident in coverage of the 2000 Great British Beer Festival in *The Times* which, in describing the festival, noted that:

'there have also been moments when the hall suddenly seemed like one vast maternity unit full of men in varying stages of pregnancy. They perambulate slowly about, their stately tummies protruding over slight hips and spindly legs' (Steiner 2000).

Here, the failure of the ale drinkers to comply with gendered bodily expectations is evident. They are, in the juxtaposition of protruding tummies and 'slight' and 'spindly' legs, simultaneously failing to conform to the male body which is controlled and strong. Further still, the comparison to the maternal female body again serves to brand the ale drinker's body as remiss of its obligation to gendered bodily standards.

6.7 Jonathan Watson (2000: 118) has argued that 'the endomorphic body is perceived to indulge in excessive appetites whilst ignoring the presentational demise of male gender identity'. The overweight male body is therefore depicted as incapable of controlling appetites. As such, invoking the Cartesian binary split between mind and body, the overweight body of the ale drinker is depicted as *both* a weakness of body and a failing of mind in the inability to exercise control of bodily and sensory desires. Returning to Morgan's (1993) observation regarding the grotesque male body, the emphasis on these

perceived failings are used to position the ale drinkers body as a worrying act of negligent masculinity.

6.8 The past two decades have seen periodic attempts by CAMRA to shed the 'beard and bellies' image (*Bristol Evening Post* 1998; Benady 2001; Prynne 2007). For example, the appointment of Paula Waters, CAMRA's first female chair, in 2003 was observed to have the potential to 'go a long way towards dispelling the belief, held by some, that Camra [sic] is the private preserve of bearded, sandal-wearing men with large beer bellies' (Young 2003). However, often the stereotype is invoked, and therefore reinforced, by journalists to signal an apparent departure from it. One report in *The Independent* (Goodwin 1997) marked CAMRA's twenty-fifth anniversary by noting that: 'once characterised as a sort of mutual support group for men with beards and beer bellies, Camra [sic] has proved itself a strikingly successful consumer campaigning organisation'. Indeed, the presence of female ale drinkers is often interpreted as the ideal antidote to the stereotype. One journalist noted that, of CAMRA membership at the time, '30 per cent of the supposedly hirsute, pot-bellied membership is female' (Lay 1998).

6.9 More recently, media commentaries have been more willing to concede a shift in the image of real ale and those who drink it. Thus, an article covering the Great British Beer Festival acknowledge that while 'traditional bitters were more often seen as the drink of middle-aged men with pipes, beards and the occasional chunky jumper', this image was being forced out by 'the growing interest in locally made food and drink from small and independent producers' which has given real ale greater kudos amongst a younger range of drinkers (Prynne 2007). Similarly, an article in *The Independent on Sunday* notes that 'the words "real ale" are normally associated with beards, Arran sweaters and tankards dangling from utility belts. No more. Women and younger people are leading the charge as a new breed of drinkers press considerably slimmer bellies up to the bar' (Youde & Letley 2010). In a general sense, such attests to the difficulty with which long held stereotypes are dispelled. More specifically, such discursive assertions reinforce the significance for both gender and age in cultural assumptions about drinking practices. This position assumes that for women to take an interest in real ale the overtly masculine image of the stereotypical real ale drinker is in need of rehabilitation.

6.10 A further dimension to the ale enthusiast stereotype is the notion of the ale snob. The ale drinker's emphasis on taste and obsession with drinking beer is here characterised as snobbishness or smugness. The ale drinker as overly obsessed with the details of for what is to most other people merely a drink. Again, the two blogs noted above also parody the apparent obsessiveness of the ale enthusiast. One asks 'how can you ensure that your night in the pub isn't ruined by the tut tutting of a Mr Smuggly know it all as he looks down his nose at you and your "fizzy" beer?' (Manuel 2008). While the other warns that the ale drinker 'will sit atop his perch for hours at a stretch, slurring animatedly about the respective merits of Kentish Bitters [...] The best way to provoke them is to go up to the bar and ask for a pint of Stella or Fosters' (Bailey n.d.).

6.11 Returning to Forth's (2007) observation that the potential gluttony and related atrophy of the body through sustained consumption can mean that food, drink and luxury threaten to undermine masculine identity, the stereotyping of the ale drinker as a fat, slothful body, serves to stigmatise the male body over which sufficient control is not exerted. The older male drinking body is here demonised as being *too* embodied through not demonstrating enough restraint to appetites and pleasures of food and drink. The obsession with consumption coupled with lack of care taken over bodily comportment is depicted as a failure to negotiate the double-bind of masculinity. Indeed, it might be suggested that the stereotype of the ale drinker is invoked as an inversion of the double bind; rather than maintaining bodily control and comportment without appearing to care about doing so, the ale drinker is maligned for his perceived indifference to expectation to present a tough, strong, body whilst being overly-preoccupied with what he drinks.

6.12 In relation to whisky connoisseurship, Karl Spracklen (2011; 2013) has observed that through an emphasis on the appreciation of taste and style, whisky aficionados may offer an impression of sensible drinking where drunkenness is not the aim (although may occur as an at times welcome side affect). Likewise, the image of the real ale connoisseur has, since the inception of CAMRA, been suggested as exhibiting a more socially acceptable relationship with alcohol where quality is desired over quantity and beer is appreciated primarily for its taste and only secondarily for its intoxicating capabilities. However, as seen above, there is a ready overlap within the depiction of the bearded and beer-bellied ale snob between the letting go of the male body and the solipsistic pursuit of tastes and pleasures.

'Letting go' and 'letting yourself go'

7.1 Evident in the above discussion is that the lager lout and the bearded ale snob represent two alternative discourses of how alcohol undermines the bounded male body. In the case of the lager lout, the male body is overtly mobile, aggressive and lacking self-discipline (Plant & Plant 2006). In the case of the ale drinker the body is sedentary and languid, forever 'perched' on their stool propping up the bar and unashamedly sporting the physical signs of the indulgence of appetites. While the lager lout is typified by an explosive lack of bodily control manifest in physical aggression and transgressive acts of vomiting, urination and passing out, the ale drinker is seen to exhibit a slow decline and is subjected to parody and social disapproval for a perceived indifference to performing culturally dominant ideas of masculine embodiment. The unashamed beer belly, as well as perceived lack of hygiene and lack of social awareness all seen as typifying the male body that is allowed to lose control and become undisciplined.

7.2 We can also locate these stereotypes in relation to public drinking spaces and drinking cultures. As noted earlier, the fact that drinking spaces have often been constructed as masculinised public spaces has evidently assisted in establishing the links between masculinity and drinking. The lager lout is generally seen on the public street, literally spilling out of one drinking den into the next one and, all the

while, representing the potential for disorder and the transgression of propriety. The ale drinker is alternatively generally located in the semi-public space of the pub. Both therefore relate to spatialised debates about the night-time economy. The young male body represents spatial inhabitation of new restructured drinking spaces and the older male body that of 'traditional' spaces.

7.3 Both the lager lout and the ale beard and belly images are examples of 'the visual policing of the body within late capitalism' (Evans & Lee 2002: 10). This article has suggested that such cultural representations could serve a social function in 'book-ending' notions of accepted male drinking bodies. The body of the younger man who lets go to drunkenness is, at the opposite end of the life course, paralleled by the older man who lets his body go to sedentary pleasures and no longer upholds or attempts to uphold a neat and controlled body. The larger lout and ale drinker might both be viewed critically by non-drinkers but they are also viewed with suspicion by 'normal' drinkers who can adopt the discourses surrounding these cultural stereotypes as a means of distancing and establishing their own correct drinking; not too boisterous, not too obsessive. Both stereotypes therefore must be seen to have a normative function in that they offer a well established figure of how not to drink.

7.4 On one level, these representations can be invoked in an ongoing process of distinction *a la* Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984; Gronow 1997). In a general sense, those who drink alcohol in a sensible manner can distinguish themselves from those seen to lack control. More specifically in relation to gender, both representations of the male drinking body explored here allow the formation of an audience to position others as men who through their lack of control lose their embodied restraint through drink. Thus, the role played by invoking the lager lout or the ale drinker is to normalise those who more successfully balance their own drinking embodiment. Richard de Visser and Jonathan Smith (2007) found that many participants draw on perceptions of the drunken violence or anti-social behaviour of others as a prompt for their own management of their drinking practice. If drinking heavily and losing control is what 'other' men do, then images of male drinking bodies may serve a function in normalising more middling enactments of drunkenness.

7.5 Reactions to depictions of grotesque drinking bodies can be likened to the 'ambivalent repulsion and attraction' felt towards depictions of monsters and 'freak shows' outlined by (Shildrick 2002: 25). Thus bodies which transgress accepted ideals of what the human body should look like and how it should behave do in turn serve to reinforce those ideals. Specifically, in relation to the prevalence of and evident widespread interest in depictions of problematic drinking bodies there is a sense that the demonization and parody of people who fail to control their bodies in relation to alcohol consumption illuminate long running concerns with how drunkenness can threaten to undermine the stability of both the individual and of wider society. Returning to the Bakhtinian analysis of young people's drinking narratives cited above, the grotesque carnivalesque body is one that 'protrudes, bulges, sprouts and branches off' (Bakhtin in Hackley et al 2012). In both cases explored in this article, the problematic drinking body is seen as indicative of wider trouble in society. Henry Yeomans (2009) has identified the similarities between contemporary and historical public debates about alcohol regulation by exploring how a morality informed by the legacies of Protestant asceticism underwrites contemporary attitudes to drunkenness. Ultimately, therefore, it is worth acknowledging the utility of such depictions of unruly drinking bodies in the cultural regulation of alcohol and drinking practices.

Conclusion

8.1 The admittedly small sample of media representations discussed has served to highlight important issues about how stereotypical images of drinking bodies reflect concerns about the loss of control of the male drinking body. Such is evidently bound up with deeply entrenched and long held assumptions about the competent male body being one that is disciplined and controlled. The concerns expressed in regard to problematic male drinking bodies are indicative of tensions in how gender expectations are played out in relation to alcohol. The apparent failure of both young and old male bodies, represented by the lager lout and the ale snob respectively, to comply with this expectation gives rise to cultural stereotypes which depict both examples, albeit for different reasons, as grotesque and troubling.

8.2 Rather than being simply about the governance of public order and of expectations of bodily control, the article indicates how a range of pertinent and ever shifting social concerns can be explored through the sociological study of alcohol and drunkenness. Gender, age and embodiment are here the main themes but such are invariably situated in a shifting terrain of spatial, political and cultural reconfigurations relating to the post-industrial landscape of modern Britain. Perhaps the two images discussed here draw interest at an academic and popular discursive level precisely because they highlight the precarious balance of gender embodiment. Although there has not been space to do so in any depth here, they are also illustrative of wider changes in the relationships between individual and society, between release and control, between social propriety and, by turns, pleasurable and troubling carnivalesque transgressions.

8.3 In spite of the evident academic interest in the embodiment of alcohol it is important that the drinking body does not become, as it has at times in media driven public discourses, detached from social processes. Rather, while drinking is evidently a terrain through which both normalised and problematic embodiments of masculinity are enacted and policed, it is also through social interaction and relations that alcohol, drinking and drunkenness emerge as a topic of significant sociological inquiry. While this article has restricted its focus to the descriptions of male drinking bodies found in popular media in order to more closely analyse the ways in which reactions to images of drinking bodies are implicitly gendered, it is worth noting that embodied drinking practices should not be seen as removed from wider social and cultural aspects. The article therefore aims to initiate further discussions in relation to both representations and the empirical realities of drinking and gender embodiment. Friendship, for example, is central to many drinking practices and, as such, should not be overlooked in favour of a focus solely on the

individual body of the drinker (Törrönen & Maunu 2011; Thurnell-Read 2012).

8.4 While the empirical realities of how bodies are affected by the drinking of alcohol call forth a multitude of responses, not least the cultural responses as identified here, it is the social aspects of drinking which continue to require the attention of both reasoned public debate and academic inquiry. While this article has principally concerned itself with purely cultural depictions, it does however suggest areas for future research which might explore further the various embodied drinking practices of older drinkers.

References

- BAILEY, B. (n.d.) 'Brighton Bestiary: The Real Ale Drinker', *The Brighton Hussey*: <http://www.thehussy.co.uk/brighton-bestiary-1/02/>
- BOURDIEU, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- BENADY, D. (2001) 'Can This New Advert Turn Real Ale Sexy?'. *The Times*, 02/08/2001.
- BIGGS, D., TURNER, T., DAVID, K. AND DE COURCEY, T. (2011) 'British youth abroad: some observations on the social context of binge drinking in Ibiza', *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 11(1) p. 26–35.
- BORDO, S. (1999) *The Male Body: a new look at men in public and in private*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- BRISTOL EVENING POST. (1998) 'CAMRA's bid for new image', *The Bristol Evening Post*, 15/01/1998.
- CAMPBELL, H. (2000) 'The Glass Phallus: Pub(lic) Masculinity and Drinking in Rural New Zealand'. *Rural Sociology*, 65(4) p. 562–81.
- CONNELL, R. AND MESSERSCHMIDT, J.W. (2005) 'Hegemonic Masculinity: rethinking the concept', *Gender and Society*, 19(6) p. 829–59.
- COLLINS, T. and VAMPLEW, W. (2002) *Mud, Sweat and Beers: A Cultural History of Sport and Alcohol*. Oxford: Berg.
- CONNELL, R.W. (1995) *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity.
- DEMETRIOU, D. (2001) 'Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A critique'. *Theory and Society*, 30(3) p. 337–361.
- DE VISSER AND SMITH, J. (2007) 'Young Men's Ambivalence Towards Alcohol'. *Social Science and Medicine*, 64 p. 350–362.
- DE VISSER, R. AND MCDONNELL E.J. (2012) 'That's OK. He's a guy': A mixed-methods study of gender double-standards for alcohol use', *Psychology and Health*, 27(5) p. 618–639.
- DUTTON, K.R. (1995) *The Perfectible Body: The Western ideal of physical development*. London: Cassell.
- DOWNES, S. (1993) 'The real pull of a good pint'. *The Times*, 31/07/1993.
- DYER, R. (1997) *White*. London: Routledge.
- EVANS, M. AND LEE, E. (2002) *Real Bodies: A sociological introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- EVANS, P. (1989) 'Town curbs the lager louts', *The Times*, 06/04/1989.
- FAULKES, S. (1992) 'Only Here for the Beer: Sebastian Faulks joins the boys with the beards to celebrate 20 years of CAMRA'. *The Guardian*, 06/07/1992.
- FORTH, C. (2007) 'Manhood Incorporated: Diet and the embodiment of "civilized" masculinity', *Men and Masculinities*, 11(5): 578–601.
- GEFOU-MADIANOU, D. (1992) *Alcohol, Gender and Culture*. London: Routledge.
- GILL, R., HENWOOD, K. & MCLEAN, C. (2005) 'Body Projects and the Regulation of Normative Masculinity', *Body & Society*, 11(1) p. 37–62.
- GOODWIN, S. (1997) 'Beards and beer bellies left in the past as real ale gurus come of age'. *The Independent*, 16/10/1997.
- GOUGH, B. & CONNER, M.T. (2006) 'Barriers to Healthy Eating Amongst Men: A qualitative analysis', *Social Science & Medicine*, 62(2) p. 387–395.
- GOUGH, B. & EDWARDS, G. (1998) 'The Beer talking: four lads, a carry out and the reproduction of masculinities'. *The Sociological Review*, 46(3) p. 409–435.

- GRIFFIN, C., Bengry-Howell, A., Hackley, C., Mistral, W., & Szmigin, I. (2009) 'Every time I do it I absolutely annihilate myself': Loss of (self-)consciousness and loss of memory in young people's drinking narratives'. *Sociology*, 43(3) p. 457–476.
- GROGAN, S. & Richards, H. (2002) 'Body Image : Focus Groups with Boys and Men', *Men and Masculinities*, 4(3) p. 219–232.
- GRONOW, J. (1997) *The Sociology of Taste*. Routledge, London.
- GUTZKE, D.W. (1994) 'Gender, Class, and Public Drinking in Britain During the First World War', *Social History* 27(54) p. 367–391.
- HACKLEY, C., Bengry-Howell, A., Griffin, C., Mistral, W., Szmigin, I. & Hackley nee Tiwsakul, R.A. (2012) 'Young adults and 'binge' drinking: A Bakhtinian analysis', *Journal of Marketing Management*, Online First.
- HOLLANDS, R. (2002) 'Divisions in the Dark: youth cultures, transitions and segmented consumption spaces in the night-time economy', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5(2) p. 154–171.
- HUNT, G., Mackenzie, K. & Joe-Laidler, K. (2005) 'Alcohol and Masculinity: The Case of Ethnic Youth Gangs', in *Drinking Cultures: alcohol and identity* T.W. Wilson (ed). Oxford: Berg.
- JAYNE, M., Valentine, G. & Holloway, S.L. (2011) *Alcohol, Drinking, Drunkenness: (Dis)orderly spaces*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- JANELLE, J. (2012) 'Around the boundary: alcohol and older Caribbean- Canadian men', *Leisure Studies*, 31(2) p. 147–163.
- KIMMEL, M. (2008) *Guyland: The perilous world where boys become men: understanding the critical years between 16 and 26*. New York: Harper Collins.
- LAY, P. (1998) 'Battle for Britain's beer belly', *The Times*, 09/05/1998.
- LEYSHON, M. (2005). 'No Place for a Girl: Rural youth, pubs and the performance of masculinity' in Little, J. and Morris, C. (eds), *Critical Studies in Rural Gender Issues*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- LEMLE, R. & Mishkind, M.E. (1989) 'Alcohol and Masculinity'. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 6(4) p. 213–22.
- LUPTON, D. (1996) *Food, the Body and the Self*. London: SAGE.
- 'MANUEL'. (2008). 'Stamping down on Real Ale Drinkers and the Causes of Real Ale Drinkers', *Well Done Fillet* [Online]:
- MARTIN, A. (2001) 'We like drinking too much, so why do we do it so badly?' *The Observer*, 09/12/2001.
- MCCANDLESS, P. (1984). 'Curses of Civilization': Insanity and drunkenness in Victorian Britain', *British Journal of Addiction*, 79(1) p. 49–58.
- MEASHAM, F. & Brain, K. (2005) 'Bing drinking, British alcohol policy and the new culture of intoxication', *Crime, Media and Culture*, 1(3) p. 262–282.
- MORGAN, D. (1993) 'You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine: Reflections on the male body and masculinities' in S. Scott and D. Morgan (eds) *Body Matters: Essays on the sociology of the body*. London: Falmer Press.
- MULLEN, K., Watson, J., Swift, J. & Black, D. (2007) 'Young Men, Masculinity and Alcohol', *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, 14(2) p. 151–165.
- NORMAN, M.E. (2011) 'Embodying the Double-Bind of Masculinity: Young men and discourses of normalcy, health, heterosexuality, and individualism', *Men and Masculinities*, 14(4) p. 430–449.
- NUWER, H. (1990). *Broken Pledges: The deadly rite of hazing*. Atlanta: Longstreet Press.
- NUWER, H. (2002). *Wrongs of passage: Fraternities, sororities, hazing, and binge drinking*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- PERALTA, R. (2007) 'College Alcohol Use and the Embodiment of Hegemonic Masculinity Among European College Men'. *Sex Roles*, 56(11) p. 741–756.
- PLANT, M. & Plant, M. (2006) *Binge Britain: Alcohol and the national response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PRYNN, J. (2007) 'Giant beer festival opens as real ales lose beardy image'. *The Evening Standard*, 07/08/2007.
- SALKELD, L. (2009) 'Welcome to binge Britain: Polish photographer documents four years of drunken revelry in Cardiff', *The Daily Mail*, 16/05/2009.

- SHELDON, S. (2002) 'Reproducing the Masculine Body', in Evans, M. and Lee, E.J. (eds) *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction*. Palgrave, Basingstoke
- SEIDLER, V. (2007) 'Masculinities, Bodies, and Emotional Life', *Men and Masculinities* 10(1) p. 9–21.
- SHILDRICK, M. (2002) *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the vulnerable self*. London: SAGE.
- SPECTOR-MERSEL, G. (2006) 'Never-aging Stories: Western hegemonic masculinity scripts'. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 15(1) p. 67–82.
- SPRACKLEN, K. (2011) 'Dreaming of drams: authenticity in Scottish whisky tourism as an expression of unresolved Habermasian rationalities', *Leisure Studies*, 30(1) p. 99–116.
- SPRACKLEN, K. (2013) 'Respectable drinkers, sensible drinking, serious leisure: single-malt whisky enthusiasts and the moral panic of irresponsible Others', *Contemporary Social Science*, 8(1) p. 46–57.
- STEINER, S. (2000) 'A Belly and a Beard and a Pint of the Best'. *The Times*, 05/08/2000.
- THE TIMES. (1994) 'Cracking It With The Men Who Know (Part XXX)', *The Times*, 08/01/1994.
- THROSBY, K. (2011) 'Obesity Surgery and the Management of Excess: Exploring the body multiple', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 34(1) p. 1–15.
- THURNELL-READ, T. (2011) 'Off the leash and out of control': masculinities and embodiment in Eastern European stag tourism', *Sociology*, 45(6) p. 977–991.
- THURNELL-READ, T. (2012) 'What Happens on Tour: The premarital stag tour, homosocial bonding and male friendship'. *Men and Masculinities*, 15(3) p. 249–270.
- TÖRRÖNEN, J. & Maunu, A. (2011) 'Friendship and Social Emotions in Young Adult Finns' Drinking Diaries'. *Sociological Research Online*, 16 (1) 4.
- TOMSEN, S. (1997) 'A Top Night: Social protest, Masculinity and the Culture of Drinking Violence'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 37(1), p. 90–102.
- WATSON, J. (1998) 'Running around like a lunatic: Colin's Body and the case of male embodiment' in S. Nettleton and J. Watson (eds) *The Body in Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
- WATSON, J. (2000) *Male Bodies: Healthy, culture and identity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- YEOMANS, H. (2009) 'Revisiting a Moral Panic: Ascetic Protestantism, Attitudes to Alcohol and the Implementation of the Licensing Act 2003'. *Sociological Research Online*, 14(2) 6.
- YOUDE, K. & Letley, R. (2010) 'Real ale shakes off its beardy image', *The Independent on Sunday*, 01/08/10.
- YOUNG, R. (2003) 'Woman to Champion Real Ale Drinkers'. *The Times*, 08/03/2003.