

**Alcohol consumption as symbolic capital:  
Understanding how young women's drinking shapes  
and is shaped by social relations**

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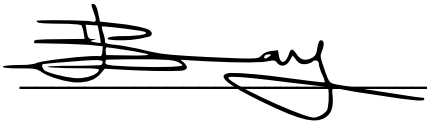
# SUMMARY

In this thesis I provide an understanding of the complex social conditions that produce and are produced by young Australian women's alcohol consumption. This gives insight into the social mechanisms that generate and regulate alcohol-related practices and make drinking alcohol meaningful for young women. Current understandings of young Australian women's alcohol consumption are dominated by biomedical approaches that individualise and misrepresent drinking behaviour. Limited attention has been given to the socially constructed, symbolic and gendered meanings of alcohol consumption from the viewpoints of young women themselves, occupying different social status positions. To explore these meanings, I used Bourdieu's theory of social relations and his concept of symbolic capital. Data about drinking practices and attitudes were collected from 32 South Australian women aged 14–17 years through interviews, focus groups and photo elicitation, with the social media platform Facebook® used to facilitate communication with participants. For these young women, alcohol consumption was a means to enact practices through which legitimisation of identity and social gains were obtained. Social groups were symbolised and differentiated by their consumption practices. Forms of drinking conduct congruent with valued ways of consuming alcohol brought a sense of social ease through the accrual of symbolic capital, while incongruence caused tension and risked jeopardising social status. The embodied, performative practices associated with consuming alcohol reflected participants' interpretation of broader societal expectations to drink and were emblematic of pre-existing social distinctions. Young women's ability to accrue alcohol-related symbolic capital was determined through aspects of opportunity pertaining to the possession of economic, cultural and social capital, and gendered social power. By interpreting these Bourdieusian themes alongside postfeminist philosophy, I understood drinking as symbolically meaningful

through the specific ways young women consumed alcohol within gendered fields of power that linked to their patriarchal expressions of femininity. Alcohol provided these young women with opportunities to experiment with non-traditional femininities as only temporal transgressions enacted within socially-regulated boundaries. Its consumption remained a site for the reproduction of traditional versions of femininity and patriarchal power differentials stemming from gender. This thesis captures the diverse ways young women consume alcohol in dissimilar social contexts. The range of alcohol-related values reflected in young women's drinking indicates that young women should not be considered a homogenous collective when designing public health policy.

# Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Belinda Lunnay', written over a horizontal line.

Belinda Lunnay

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I provide an understanding of the complex social conditions that shape and are shaped by young Australian women's alcohol consumption. I identify how, through social relations, young women's drinking becomes symbolic and meaningful. Pierre Bourdieu's relational concept of symbolic capital is used to understand these symbolisms and meanings (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990a). By theorising alcohol consumption as symbolic capital, I illustrate that drinking is a communicative practice young women engage with that symbolises a desirable *way of being* relative to social values, and this makes drinking symbolically meaningful. I demonstrate that behaving in concordance with drinking-related social values affords young women social power, while incongruence compromises their social status. The interpretations of young women's own drinking-related accounts in this thesis contribute new insights about the generative social mechanisms that produce and regulate young women's drinking practices. They indicate how these mechanisms are reflected in the embodied social practices and gendered relationships young women encounter in drinking contexts. There is a need for research into understanding *how* and *why* young women consume alcohol in socially constructed and gendered ways, particularly in relation to understanding how these expressions differ across individuals and groups of young women.

A theoretical framework derived from Bourdieu is used to probe particular aspects of the social context, by linking young women's alcohol-related practices to how they are positioned socially in relation to their peers. Alcohol consumption is seen as a symbolic and powerful activity that young Australian women engage with by consuming alcohol in

particular socially valued ways. However, the fact that alcohol-related values differ between social groups of young women adds complexity. The diversity in styles of alcohol consumption portrayed in young women's accounts and presented herein demonstrates how alcohol-related practices differ between young women, relative to their social contexts and access to economic, cultural and social capital. Accordingly, young women situate and negotiate their subjective perceptions of alcohol consumption from pre-existing social status positions. This highlights the irrelevance of considering young women as a homogenous gendered collective (Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, Mistral, & Szmigin, 2009; Kolind, 2011), as is common in public health research.

## **1.1 Young women's alcohol consumption**

Heavy episodic alcohol consumption has traditionally been seen in young men (Jonas, Dobson, & Brown, 2000), but epidemiological research shows that over recent decades there has been a gendered *convergence* in alcohol consumption (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW], 2005, 2014). Patterns of alcohol consumption at potentially harmful levels are being seen more frequently in young women than young men.

Research has also shown that Australian women are consuming alcohol at younger ages than seen in previous generations (Chikritzhs et al., 2003). Of particular interest is that the purported gender convergence in drinking represents *changing patterns* of young women's alcohol consumption, specifically characterised by *increases* in alcohol consumption among young women (AIHW, 2005, 2014) rather than decreased consumption by young men.

Young women appear to be consuming alcohol at levels previously only seen among young men. By 2011, the Australian Bureau of Statistics health survey data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013) indicated young women's alcohol consumption was converging with that of young men, and it was argued that a lessening of the gender gap

in young Australian's alcohol consumption was evident (Yusuf & Leeder, 2015). Of course, it is possible that Australian women have always consumed alcohol in some form, but because women were omitted from most empirical public health research on alcohol conducted before 1970 there is no epidemiological data to confirm this. What is apparent is that in the last twenty years, the changes in alcohol consumption among young Australian women shown in these data have become publically visible and germane to understanding contemporary connections between young women, gender and alcohol. Specifically, the changing social perception of young women's drinking-related practices is relevant to understandings about how contemporary drinking links to expressions of gender.

The use of qualitative sociological research in this thesis, with a focus on young women's own accounts, enables a critical examination of *why and how* young women might consume alcohol in similar ways to young men, and the significance of this in terms of their constructions of a legitimate feminine self. This allows for an exploration of the meaningful new ways in which young women consume alcohol and which are incorporated into *their* postfeminist notions of femininity. Furthermore, if young women's alcohol consumption is a function of the increasing equality with young men displayed in other areas of life, does this reflect acceptance of postfeminist discourses, and what is the role of alcohol in such expressions of gender?

I began work on this thesis in 2008 and few in-depth studies of the socially constructed, gendered nature of young women's alcohol consumption existed at the time. At present, the social processes concerning *how* young Australian women's alcohol consumption relates to their expressions of femininity remain poorly understood. This is despite a growing interest in the notion that alcohol consumption is gendered, reflected in Australian and international literature (Epstude & Roese, 2008; Leyshon, 2008; Lindsay,

2009; Lyons & Willot, 2008; Ostergaard, 2007; Peirce, 1983; Peralta, 2008; Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & Darcy, 2005), and despite research that specifically indicated young women's alcohol consumption is regulated by gendered social relationships and reflected in embodied social practices (Ettore, 2004; Lyons, Emslie, & Hunt, 2014).

Australian researchers addressing alcohol consumption have called for further studies containing young women's *own* meaningful accounts of alcohol consumption (Lindsay, 2009). In the United Kingdom, research has examined young women's narratives to explain the ways they construct alcohol consumption as a gendered activity (Rolfe, Orford, & Dalton, 2009), although the transferability of these findings to the Australian context is compromised by recent research that identified differences between the consumption practices of young women in Australia and the United Kingdom (Zajdow & MacLean, 2014). However, the methodological focus of Rolfe et al's study is relevant to contemporary Australian research. By interpreting young women's own accounts of drinking it is possible to obtain greater depth in understanding how aspects of social opportunity conferred through social relations shape the alcohol-related accounts of different young Australian women. These sociological interpretations also allow a more nuanced understanding of gendered health statistics.

## **1.2 Alternative understandings: qualitative sociological approach**

Research methods using sociologically informed qualitative approaches are valuable in exploration of the socially and symbolically meaningful aspects of young women's drinking and the differences in alcohol consumption across groups of young women. However, there has been little sociological or theoretically informed public health research into the influences in the social context that shape young Australian women's alcohol consumption. Despite the known advantages of sociological perspectives for

scrutinising the social aspects of alcohol consumption, such approaches have not been well integrated in Australian public health research (Moore and Rhodes, 2004). As I discuss herein, the broader analysis of alcohol consumption as a sociological phenomenon is comparatively more advanced. The knowledge produced through this thesis and the prominence given to the social influences that shape young women's alcohol consumption contrast with biomedical or psychological approaches that dominate public health and which individualise and misrepresent drinking behaviour (Bell, Salmon & McNaughton, 2011; Miller, Strang, & Miller, 2010; Moore and Rhodes, 2004; Rhodes, Stimson, Moore, & Bourgois, 2010).

The medicalisation of young women's alcohol consumption, in which their drinking is considered as a problem that might be prevented, is an oversimplification of the complex social reality that underpins young women's alcohol-related practices. Without a basis for understanding the symbolic meanings that underpin young women's drinking, less suitable approaches will be used to inform public health policy, resulting in approaches that victimise young women and stigmatise their practices<sup>1</sup>. Concomitantly, an approach that positions young women's drinking as socialised and structured entirely by external social forces does not account for how young women actively engage with, produce and reproduce alcohol norms or drinking cultures. Using Bourdieu's theoretical approach, this thesis strikes a balance between research that views alcohol consumption as attributable to the individual, as evident in developmental psychology models (e.g. rational action theory, theory of risk or deviance), or entirely explained by external social

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the national binge drinking campaign *Don't turn a night out into a nightmare* (see: <http://www.drinkingnightmare.gov.au/internet/DrinkingNightmare/publishing.nsf>) that ran from 2008 until 2010 admonished young women to make rational responsible choices and to maintain control in drinking situations. More recently, the *Hello Sunday Morning* campaign (see: <https://www.hellosundaymorning.org>) aims to 'assist' individuals to improve their relationship with alcohol and change their drinking habits.

structures encountered within alcohol consumption settings (e.g. cultural theory). It offers an alternative way of understanding the complexity of young women's alcohol consumption that previous public health approaches have not achieved by interpreting alcohol consumption neither as the singular result of an individual's independent decision-making nor as entirely determined by their surroundings, but as both.

Australian public health researchers have only relatively recently employed sociological approaches for producing insights into the social aspects shaping alcohol consumption among young Australians (for examples see Advocat & Lindsay, 2015; Borlagdan, J., Freeman, T., Duvnjak, A., Lunnay, B., Bywood, P., & Roche, A. M, 2010; Lindsay, Harrison, Advocat, Kelly, & Hickey, 2009; Zajdow & MacLean, 2014), and there have been calls for more socially-oriented research (Moore & Rhodes, 2004; Rhodes et al., 2010; Zajdow, 2005; Zajdow & Lindsay, 2010). Even where social theory *has* been included in alcohol research, the translation of sociological concepts has generally been piecemeal, except for some well-conducted studies that used a complete theoretical framework (for examples see Borlagdan et al., 2010; Lindsay, 2009; Lindsay et al., 2009). The lack of overarching theory compromises the interpretive validity of study findings. The reduction of theory to 'component parts' results in de-contextualised theorising that separates concepts from their epistemological and theoretical roots – that is, from “the ways we come to know things as well as how we demonstrate the legitimacy of that knowledge” (Rhodes et al., 2010, p. 442) and reduces the explanatory power of analysis (Daly et al., 2007; Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998).

Furthermore, a fragmented approach to social theory makes the application of results to contexts and groups outside of the study setting impossible. The first of three papers published from my PhD argued that using a sociological framework such as Bourdieu's theory of social relations has utility for conduct of rigorous research with trustworthy,

transferable findings (Lunnay, Ward, & Borlagdan, 2011) (see Appendix 1). Meyer and Ward (2014) devised a systematic guide for integrating theory into research design, which is used in this thesis. The process entails identifying gaps for empirical investigation together with relevant explanatory social theories, and then designing research to investigate these research gaps. Following this process, for this thesis I devised a series of propositions that were explored through data collection and analysis, and the results of this theory-driven process comprise my findings. I illustrate how I moved through this process at the beginning of each chapter.

A socially-oriented approach enables important *how* and *why* questions surrounding the subjective meanings drinking alcohol has for young women in the context of their social lives to be answered herein. I delineate the powerful role of social relations, shaping and being shaped by young Australian women's alcohol consumption. Specifically, I identify how alcohol consumption distinguishes and differentiates within and between social groups, how young women use alcohol consumption to symbolise personal and group identity relative to positions in social space, and how young women's social position influences and is influenced by their forms of conduct while consuming alcohol.

### **1.3 Symbolic femininities and alcohol**

The social relations that shape alcohol-related values and the means by which young women appropriate distinctive alcohol-related practices to negotiate symbolic capital are also underpinned by differences in their expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption. I contend that the symbolic meanings and social codes that produce and are produced by alcohol-related practices are different for young women than for the young men in their social contexts. This is not to argue that young women should consume alcohol in ways similar to young men for the sake of gender equality. Rather, I seek to understand how, for young women, the gendered power-laden rules that

surround their alcohol-related practices might lead them to consume alcohol in ways that are socially profitable while potentially harmful to their health.

It is important also to consider contemporary young women's subjective accounts of social, gendered drinking norms. Bourdieu's theory of social relations and power has utility for understanding socially constructed and gendered experiences when interpreted alongside a postfeminist philosophy. For the young women who participated in my research, alcohol consumption provided a way to experiment with and enact versions of femininity that potentially could subvert stereotypical gendered norms. However, when interpreted alongside postfeminist theory, Bourdieu's theory of social relations and his construct, symbolic violence, indicate that young women's scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms is socially defined and socially limited. Previous studies focussed on greater social equality thus provide only a simplistic explanation for why young women are developing similar alcohol consumption practices to those of young men (for examples see: Bloomfield, Gmel, Neve, & Mustonen, 2001; McPherson, Casswell, & Pledger, 2004; Ostergaard, 2007; Roche & Deehan, 2002).

A contextualising approach to understanding alcohol consumption presents young women's drinking practices as expressions of postfeminist femininity within gendered fields of social power, thus understanding contemporary young women's alcohol consumption presupposes elements of postfeminist ideology. This posits that if women can combine both masculine and feminine traits (for example, by young women consuming alcohol in ways historically deemed masculine), they would have displayed the power to accomplish gender equality (Parkins, 1999).

Of particular relevance to contemporary understandings is the manner in which young Australian women's expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption differ in



various social contexts. By combining Bourdieu's theory of social relations with postfeminist ideology, I propose in this thesis that ways of being feminine embodied by young Australian women are linked to reproduced classed dispositions or ways of being in the world, according to value systems in which consumption practices are paramount. This captures the diverse ways young women consume alcohol in dissimilar social contexts according to heterogeneous alcohol-related values. The use of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to explore the supposed strategic ways for postfeminist young women to 'destabilise' alcohol-related social expectations by drinking in powerful ways that undermine or reproduce traditional gender identities is particularly novel, given criticism over the supposed lack of attention Bourdieu gave to gender when he considered social relations (detailed herein).

In this thesis, I present an alternative view to previous research that claims alcohol provides a socially legitimated departure from gender expectations (Peralta, 2008), by clarifying that experimentation with subversive gender displays through alcohol-related practices is subject to close social monitoring. Findings presented in this thesis show the existence of socially defined boundaries to contemporary expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption that limit the extent to which young women can adopt drinking patterns similar to those of young men.

#### **1.4. Outline of thesis**

Following this Introduction (Chapter 1), I have organised this thesis as follows.

In Chapter 2: *Literature review* I synthesise the empirical and theoretical literature that informed this thesis. I provide the context of the research methodology through identifying gaps in the understanding of the social aspects of young Australian women's alcohol consumption. Next, the conceptual framework is described that combines

Bourdieu's theoretical perspective with postfeminist ideology to understand the socially symbolic, gendered nature of contemporary young women's alcohol consumption. Four theoretical propositions devised from gaps in the literature are stated, which I address in this thesis through empirical research.

In Chapter 3: *Methodology* I outline the research design and my use of Bourdieu's insights on reflexive research practise to understand young women's alcohol consumption. I detail the deductive methodology within the context of Bourdieu's theory of social relations and forms of capital that comprise social power or symbolic capital, and I outline specifically how my approach was situated in social constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology.

In Chapter 4: *Methods* I describe the qualitative methods used to collect personal accounts from young South Australian women aged 14–17 years about consuming or *not* consuming alcohol. I describe the process of data collection that used focus groups combined with photo elicitation with pre-existing friendship groups and in-depth individual interviews, and the method of communicating with participants with social media platform, Facebook®. I also describe sample characteristics and the methods used to recruit participants from different social class and status positions. I finish the chapter by outlining ethical considerations, particularly those that arose from using innovative contemporary technology for research.

In Chapter 5: *Data analysis* I elucidate the analytical approach that I used to interpret participants' accounts. I detail how I generated my findings by comparing and contrasting participants' accounts to explore whether they fulfilled my thesis propositions. I then outline how deductive logic was employed to facilitate use of Bourdieu's theory to interpret findings. I indicate how I arrived at possibilities for

improved understanding following deductive logic and identified theoretical limits through abductive logic, thus generating novel, improved understandings of young women's alcohol consumption.

In Chapter 6: *Findings* I provide the findings of my research and how they address my thesis propositions. This chapter features excerpts from participants' stories and some of the photographs they took to depict their social lives and the part played by alcohol consumption. I indicate how alcohol consumption was a symbolic and powerful activity young women engaged with to gain social prestige by consuming alcohol in particular valued ways, to form distinctions and to demonstrate positions in social hierarchies.

In Chapter 7: *Discussion* I interpret my findings and relate them to Bourdieu's theory of social relations. Specifically, I consider my findings in the context of research published after the initial literature review, noting the prominence of social media in contemporary young women's sociality, and contribute to emerging research that conceptualises Facebook® as a reflection and extension of the structural constraints experienced offline (Hutton, Griffin, Lyons, Niland, & McCreanor, 2016). I identify research strengths, limitations and theoretical insights, and reflect on the process of conducting the study that informed this thesis and of applying Bourdieu's theory of social relations, particularly his methodological insights for reflexive research practice. I show how my research achieved standards of quality and rigour.

In Chapter 8, *Conclusion* I conclude my thesis by summarising the contribution it makes to public health, by offering an alternative to approaches that individualise and stigmatise young women's drinking practices through understanding their drinking within subjective symbolic and meaningful social positions. As Popay and Williams (1996) state, improved public health requires improved access to lay understandings of the public health issue.

Elements of this thesis have been published in three papers shown below and this will be indicated at appropriate points herein. These papers are included as appendices.

1. Lunnay, B., Ward, P., & Borlagdan, J. (2011). The practise and practice of Bourdieu: The application of social theory to youth alcohol research. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 22(6), 428–436.
2. Meyer, S., & Lunnay, B. (2013). The application of abductive and retroductive inference for the design and analysis of theory-driven sociological research. *Sociological Research Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/1/12.html>
3. Lunnay, B., Borlagdan, J., McNaughton, D., & Ward, P. (2015). Ethical use of social media to facilitate qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25, 99–109.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter there is a synthesis of the empirical and theoretical literature that informed this thesis. It provides the context of my research methodology by identifying shortfalls in understanding how young Australian women's alcohol consumption is structured by and structures social relations. Next, it gives the context for my use of Bourdieu's theory of social relations to understand the generative social mechanisms underpinning young Australian women's alcohol consumption. I consider how Bourdieu's theory of social relations fits with postfeminist ideology, to understand better contemporary young Australian women's alcohol consumption. This is particularly relevant given criticism over the lack of attention Bourdieu gave to gender when he considered social relations. I outline the conceptual framework I devised for this thesis that combines Bourdieu's theoretical perspective with postfeminist ideology to explore the socially symbolic, gendered nature of contemporary young women's alcohol consumption.

My PhD candidature was part-time and commenced in 2008, and the literature reviewed in this chapter was published prior to 2009. Using this, I identified gaps in research around which my study was originally designed. Literature published between 2010 and 2016 is included in Chapter 7, where its relevance to my research findings is considered.

As I outlined in the Introduction chapter, social theory in qualitative research can help to access 'alternative truths' (Moore, 2002). These offer ways of understanding alcohol consumption that provide an alternative to positivist approaches limited by individualistic,

moralistic, taken-for-granted or problematised assumptions (see section 1.3). Meyer and Ward (2014) have designed a seven-step process for integrating theory into research design and conducting research that will contribute to further development of theory, and this process guided my approach (see Table 2.1). In Steps 1–4, a literature review is used to identify gaps for empirical investigation and relevant explanatory social theories, and the findings from this are described in this chapter. I address Step 5 (design the research with the aim of investigating empirical and theoretical research gaps) in Chapter 3, Methodology and Chapter 4, Methods; Step 6 (conduct data collection and analysis) in Chapter 5, Data Analysis; and Step 7 (write up the research results) in Chapter 6, Findings and Chapter 7, Discussion.

Table 2.1: *The integration of theory into research design steps1-4* (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

Step 1: Systematically search the literature in the area of empirical and theoretical interest and identify gaps for empirical investigation.	<b>Literature Review</b> (Chapter 2)
Step 2: Identify social theories (potential and those that have been used in the area previously) in your research area.	<b>Literature Review</b> (Chapter 2)
Step 3: Critically analyse the social theory(ies) of interest. This involves identifying any empirical gaps in the theory, relevant critiques of the practical application of theory in the area of interest, and developing your own critiques of the practical application of specific areas, contexts and settings.	<b>Literature Review</b> (Chapter 2)
Step 4: Develop a conceptual framework to operationalise the theory in research methods.	<b>Literature Review</b> (Chapter 2)
Step 5: Design the research with the aim of investigating both empirical and theoretical research gaps.	<i>Methodology</i> (Chapter 3)
Step 6: Conduct data collection and analysis.	<i>Methods &amp; Data Analysis</i> (Chapters 4 & 5)
Step 7: Write up the research results.	<i>Findings and Discussion</i> (Chapters 6 & 7)

**Step 1:** Systematically search the literature in the area of empirical and theoretical interest and identify gaps for empirical investigation.

In line with Step 1, I reviewed Australian and international empirical literature that considered the importance of young people's social context in shaping their alcohol consumption practices.

Epidemiological data from 2004 and 2007 indicated that young Australian women's alcohol consumption was typically weekly or less than weekly consumption patterns rather than daily, but these data do not explain why young women drink in this way or how social relations underpinned alcohol-related practices. To develop an understanding of the more complex social, symbolic reasons *why* young women consume alcohol I proceeded to identify and explore socially oriented explanations for young people's alcohol consumption. I focused my review on qualitative studies that explored gender and the influences encountered in the social context of alcohol consumption. This included Australian and international studies where researchers from different disciplines and theoretical perspectives attempted to understand the social influences (norms, values and practices) shaping young people's alcohol consumption. From this process, I uncovered several gaps or limitations in understanding social influences and alcohol consumption within the areas of peer influence (section 2.1.3.), social norms (section 2.1.4.), alcohol expectancies (section 2.1.5.), and social networks (section 2.1.6.) of alcohol consumption, which I address in this thesis. These are referred to as 'research gaps' throughout my review below.

## 2.1 Extant Literature

### 2.1.1 Search strategy

First, I searched literature for research pertaining to alcohol consumption and the social norms, values and practices that influence alcohol use among young people, extending the search to capture literature on drug use and other risk-taking behaviour that also explores alcohol-related practices. The search included Australian literature and international studies where the research was conducted among cultures considered similar to Australia, for example New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States, and Scandinavian research on young people and alcohol because of the insight such research provided on understanding gendered drinking through a sociological lens. The electronic databases PubMed, Web of Science, Social Science Citation Index and CINAHL and websites were searched for peer-reviewed papers and reports published by reputable organisations or universities, from 1991 to 2009. Search terms used were: *Alcohol* (drink\*, binge drink\*, intoxicat\*); *Drugs* (drug\*, drug-tak\*); *Risk-taking* (risk\*, risk-tak\*); *Young people* (teenager\*, youth\*, adolescent\* student\*); *Social* (leisure, entertain\*, recreation, lifestyle\*, group participation, collective behavior/behaviour, social behavior/behaviour, interpersonal influence, group dynamic, group membership).

Next, I scanned the contents of key drug and alcohol journals distributed through the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol (<http://www.kettilbruun.org>) list serves, namely *Addiction*, *Contemporary Drug Problems*, *Drug and Alcohol Review*, *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, and the *International Journal of Drug Policy*, because their focus and scope matched my research topic. Reference lists of relevant literature and web pages of identified experts in the field were searched for additional sources. Because the research was not a



systematic review (in the Cochrane Review sense), I did not rigorously apply quality assessment criteria to determine the validity or reliability of each study.

### **2.1.2 Social influences**

Australian and international research consistently demonstrated the importance of social context in relation to young people's alcohol consumption. However, a research gap pertains to understanding how social structures and individual decisions *concomitantly* produce alcohol-related outcomes. A number of studies have explored the social context as a form of influence on alcohol consumption rather than simply a literal setting for consumption. Some studies indicated that alcohol consumption provided prosocial outcomes for young people, including heightening group cohesion and solidarity among friends, and easing awkwardness in social interactions (Kirkby, 2003; Midford, 2005). More specifically, it appears that in some social settings and contexts, the consumption of alcohol served as the primary purpose for young people gathering (Measham, 2004). Several studies found that young people varied their alcohol consumption (e.g. which beverages they consume and in what quantities) according to norms implicit within and specific to certain social settings (de Crespigny, Vincent, & Ask, 1999; Moreton, 2003). In terms of understanding how social relations within social contexts influenced alcohol consumption, various Australian studies positioned alcohol consumption as embedded in the structural and social origins of consumption (for examples, see Duff, 2003; Shanahan, Wilkins, & Hurt, 2002; Spooner, Hall, & Lynskey, 2001). Few explored this in any detail, however, with most taking a more reductive approach and focusing on individual behavioural responses to the social aspects of drinking.

There was little research into the processes of social influence and how social influences generate drinking-related practices. While some studies explored the social influences that shaped alcohol consumption, the literature is replete with psychosocial studies

focused on individual-level responses to peer influences to consume alcohol (for examples see Andrews, Tildesley, Hops, & Li, 2002; Bot, Engels, Knibbe & Meeus, 2007; Jaccard, Blanton, & Dodge, 2005; McCrady, 2004; Rolfe et al., 2009). These studies investigated themes such as persuasion and risk-response, while others identified alcohol consumption as a reaction to expectancies generated by peer influence or the selection of friendship groups. Research conducted in Australia, the US, Scotland and Ireland indicated that patterns of consumption and the meanings young people ascribed to alcohol were linked to the social context of consumption (Guise & Gill, 2007; Pavis, Cunningham-Burley, & Amos, 1997; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001). This research highlights the importance of bringing together the social and the individual aspects of consumption, although this has not been a characteristic of public health research on alcohol to date.

Under the broad theme of social influences, there are three key topic areas in the extant literature that centre on peer influences, social norms and peer groups, alcohol expectancies and social networks. These topics will be used to identify shortfalls in the literature in understanding young women's alcohol consumption, starting with literature on peer influence and social norms. Social networks are considered because they provide another perspective on the role of social influences to consume alcohol that is addressed in the literature, including the role of social ties and network structures like friendships or cliques in producing alcohol-related styles of life.

### ***2.1.3 Peer influences***

A number of studies found that alcohol consumption was an individual response to peer influences encountered in the social environment (Guise & Gill, 2007; Pavis et al., 1997; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001). Urberg, Goldstein, and Toro (2005) showed that individual young people adopted alcohol consumption patterns that closely resembled those of

their peers. Several studies demonstrated that the influence of social peers was the most salient influence on young people's alcohol consumption, behind other important factors including parental and sibling influence (Hayes, Smart, Toumbourou, & Sanson, 2004). These studies are limited to superficial links between peers and individual alcohol consumption and do not provide insight into how social influences affect young people's alcohol consumption, particularly which types of social or peer influences have the greatest impact on consumption. Several researchers have critiqued the utility of approaches that focus on peer pressure models of understanding drug (and alcohol) use. For example, Pilkington (2007) argued that an individual's alignment with a collective practice does not necessarily equate to pressure from peers to consume drugs (or alcohol). She writes that

rather than as a source of pressure, the peer group is better understood as providing a set of reference points underpinned by bonds of emotionality and mutual accountability about acceptable and unacceptable drug use and a secure and supportive environment in which to enact the ensuing drug decisions (p. 222).

It seems that the definition of the term 'peer pressure' is contestable, rather than its meaning in relation to understanding sources of social influence. Pilkington's claim that the notion of peer pressure to consume has been displaced by a focus on the social and cultural meanings of consumption practices further demonstrates the need for research that explores both agency and structure as connected influences on alcohol consumption. The processes of social and peer influence and how these influences generate practices are not well understood and are explored in this thesis.

### **2.1.4 Social norms**

The relationship between social norms, peer groups and alcohol consumption featured strongly in the extant literature as an explanation for peer influences on young people's commencement of and ongoing alcohol consumption. This research suggested that young people's primary concern when consuming alcohol rested with the immediate social consequences of not complying with social norms rather than with health impacts of consumption. The literature is marked by debates surrounding young people's responses to social norms and how some young people might resist norms while others comply. This gap in understanding will be considered in the review of theoretical literature on the normalisation thesis (see section 2.2.5). Approaches to understanding young people's alcohol consumption based on alcohol expectancies or the normalisation thesis refer to the notion that alcohol consumption is normalised among young people and is therefore an expected way of socialising. Mandelbaum (1965) in his seminal paper *Alcohol and Culture*, identified drinking practices as rule (or norm)-governed and thus integral to social order, and perhaps this accounts for the social significance of alcohol.

Several studies explored the connection between individual alcohol consumption and social similarities or peer selection, as a means of shifting the focus from peer influence at an individual level to consider the notion of broader social norms. However, much of the social norm research still focused on individualised behaviour. For example, Kirke explored the similarities between young Irish people's cigarette, alcohol and drug use and suggested that patterns of alcohol consumption reflected peer selection as a form of peer pressure. There was a chain reaction whereby "peer networks contribute to similarity by providing a pattern of peer ties in which peer influence can flourish" (Kirke, 2004, p. 3). Other researchers in the United Kingdom supported Kirke's theory, finding

that young people exhibited behaviour that was congruent with a socially accepted norm when engaging in what is often termed 'risky drinking' (Coleman & Carter, 2005). Overall this research used risk discourse to frame young women's alcohol consumption within a risk (Beck, 1992) or deviance perspective (Becker, 1963). Once again, this tends to problematise and individualise alcohol consumption by focusing on the agency of individuals to make good or bad choices without due consideration of the social aspects that influence choice.

Building on the social norms and peer influence approaches, I sought to explore the idea that young women use alcohol consumption as a way of aligning themselves with a perceived way of being, relative to social and cultural stereotypes. Pilkington (2007, p. 222) termed this alignment "collective practices". Pilkington studied drug use among young Russian people to develop an understanding of how their consumption synthesises structural and cultural explanations by situating consumption within drug availability and broader socio-economic processes. In the following section I consider studies that focus on peer influences in shaping young people's expectations of how alcohol can and should be consumed through alcohol expectancies.

### ***2.1.5 Alcohol expectancies***

Alcohol expectancies are intentions to consume alcohol and normative beliefs about consuming alcohol and its effects. Research into these expectancies allows exploration of the subtleties of social influences by linking alcohol consumption with a person's perceptions of normal behaviour. Studies have concluded that the social acceptance a person expected to gain from consuming alcohol typically outweighed any potential harms (Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Grossman, & Zanakos, 1997; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Rimm, 1995; Wechsler, Dowdall, Maenner, Gledhill-Hoyt, & Lee, 1998). Furthermore, many studies found that

young people often overestimated the volume of alcohol normally consumed by their peers, and consequently drank at higher risk levels to fulfil their misperceived expectation of normal alcohol consumption (Borsari & Carey, 2003; Kypri & Langley, 2003; Neighbors, Dillard, Lewis, Bergstrom, & Neil, 2006; Oostveen, Knibbe, & de Vries, 1996; Wild, 2002). Other research tended to confirm these findings and showed the need to focus on social context as a way of better understanding alcohol consumption. A study of the effects of alcohol on behaviour of young Danish people in party contexts found that consuming alcohol was important in creating a “consumption atmosphere” that increased young people’s alcohol intake at parties (Ostergaard, 2007, p. 143). There is a gap in knowledge about how the social context might be conducive to alcohol consumption, and specifically how social conditions generate such an environment and this is an area of exploration for this thesis. Therefore, I sought literature that explored the effect of social networks as a central aspect of the social context of young people’s alcohol consumption.

### **2.1.6 Social networks**

Research studies in China, Italy, Brazil, Scotland and Russia all found that young people’s primary motivations for consuming alcohol were pleasure and enjoyment. These included being sociable and extending social networks, despite realising the potential for harmful consequences such as unplanned sexual activities and violent behaviour (Martinic & Measham, 2008). Some literature used the concept of social networks to refer to the relationships between people that organised them into positions in social space of varying social status (Gatrell, Popay, & Thomas, 2004). Studies that focused specifically on alcohol consumption sought to understand the influence of social networks on young people’s alcohol consumption. Such studies typically distinguished between peer selection (people seek others similar to themselves) and peer influence or

pressures to conform (Cottrell, 2007; Valente, Gallaher, & Mouttapa, 2004). One social network analysis of adult alcohol consumption found both peer selection and peer influence affected alcohol consumption (Bullers, Cooper, & Russell, 2001).

Researchers have also explored whether social network influences were positive or negative, and suggested that, among adults, friendships could have beneficial effects for recognising problem drinking while the presence of others drinking alcohol could be destructive for moderating alcohol consumption (McCrary, 2004). Other researchers used social network analysis (Scott, 2013) to quantify social structures and postulate links between alcohol consumption and social status positions, for example from the perspective of preventing alcohol consumption (Valente et al., 2004). This research indicates an important link between people's social status position relative to others in social contexts and their practices. Specifically, social network research indicates that people positioned in similar social spaces behave similarly. This shows the importance of contacts among and between members of groups as temporal spaces that shape practices. However, while social network research is amenable to settings with obvious boundaries like schools, sports and communities, it is limited for understanding contexts with less defined social boundaries such as events, parties or gatherings where young people might encounter a mix of existing and new peers. The nature of young people's social relations in different kinds of peer groups – different social structures and different social relations – is poorly understood. This points to the need to understand how young women are positioned socially in relation to their peers. The structure of social positions and how this links to the complexity of interpersonal relations would provide a more complete understanding of the mechanisms of social influence configuring the social context of alcohol and is a gap in understanding that I address.

### **2.1.7 Summary of empirical research**

Many young Australians have a propensity to consume alcohol in ways that jeopardise their health. The definition of what constitutes harmful alcohol consumption is different for men and women (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009), as are the precursors of consumption (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW], 2014).

Young Australian women's alcohol consumption in particular is a complex problem of public health significance that is not well understood (Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, 2004). National epidemiological data provide a quantitative picture of consumption (i.e. who consumes alcohol, how often and what types) (AIHW, 2005) but cannot provide insight into *how* or *why* young women consume alcohol. Existing qualitative research emphasises the salience of social factors such as peer influence, social norms and drinking expectancies in influencing young women's alcohol-related accounts, views and perceptions but tends to focus on or give greater emphasis to the individual rather than the social. As a result, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of how social influences are created and maintained, and how they function among young women to shape alcohol-related practices. Specifically, a psychosocial approach to peer influence cannot account for young women's interactions with others within their social environment. An approach that focuses only on the individual agent is highly reductive. It implies a cause–effect relationship whereby young women are exposed to certain influences that directly and inadvertently shape their alcohol-related behaviour, and does not attend to the ways objective structures like social norms to consume alcohol produce subjective dispositions to drink. In the literature there is a notable lack of studies that capture the complex nature and processes of social influences that exist around alcohol consumption. Subjective dispositions to drink in turn influence alcohol-related practices and outcomes, and potentially *reproduce* the objective structures or social norms that began the process. The symbolic and gendered nature of these processes is poorly



understood. Subsequently there is a lack of explanatory information on which interventions can be based. In the following section I follow Steps 2 to 4 of Meyer and Ward's process (2014) exploring how sociological concepts extend understanding of young women's alcohol consumption.

**Step 2:** Identify social theories (potential and those that have been used in the area previously) in your research area. **Step 3:** Critically analyse the social theory(ies) of interest. This involves identifying any empirical gaps in the theory, relevant critiques of the practical application of theory in the area of interest, and developing your own critiques of the practical application of specific areas, contexts and settings. **Step 4:** Develop a conceptual framework to operationalise the theory in research methods.

In line with Step 2 of Meyer and Ward's process (Meyer & Ward 2014), I identified sociological texts to inform my literature review on the social aspects of alcohol consumption. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the literature on sociological conceptualisations of social norms, consumerism, consumption, identity, youth and gender, the social nature of alcohol consumption and the symbolic aspects of contemporary leisure experiences during which time many young women consume alcohol. Earlier I outlined a gap in the empirical literature about understandings of how both social structures (i.e. norms) and individual decisions (i.e. expectancies) produce alcohol-related practices. Bourdieu's perspective on the primacy of structure or agency in shaping human behaviour suggests they mutually affect behaviour, with both structure and agency mutually operating to shape alcohol consumption. This suggests that social structures influence drinking practices, while individuals interpret and alter the social structures within which they behave.

In line with Step 3, I reviewed literature that critiques Bourdieu's ideas. A key critique of Bourdieu's theory of social relations that is most relevant to this thesis concerns the contribution of his theory to understanding gender as a social construct and, specifically, to understanding gender power relations. Adkins (2004), Lovell (2000) and Skeggs (2004) provide summaries of how Bourdieu's theory contributes to and is lacking in applicability to feminist understandings. In her work on appropriating Bourdieu's theory for feminist purposes Moi asked whether Bourdieu's concepts could be applied to gender or if they needed to be reconceptualised to be applicable (Moi, 1991). She embraced the malleable approach he intended for the application of his concepts through empirical enquiry (Bourdieu, 1997a), and I draw on this view when using Bourdieu's concepts to interpret gendered alcohol practices in this thesis.

Step 4 involves outlining *my interpretation* of Bourdieu's theory of social practice that acknowledges the potential limitations of his theory for understanding gendered social processes, as identified under Step 3. In line with Step 4, I designed this research to address the empirical and theoretical gaps identified through Steps 2 and 3. As I indicated earlier, with the exception of a few studies that adopted a theoretical framework (e.g. Borlagdan et al., 2010; Lindsay, 2009; Lindsay et al., 2009), the translation of sociological concepts into alcohol research has often been piecemeal. This results in decontextualised theorising that separates concepts from their epistemological and theoretical roots (Lunnay et al., 2011; Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). Such a piecemeal approach to theory integration reduces the explanatory power of analysis (Daly et al., 2007; Popay et al., 1998).

## **2.2 Theoretical Literature**

### **2.2.1 Search strategy**

The purpose of reviewing theoretical literature was to identify sociological concepts or social theories used to understand youth alcohol consumption, specifically young women's alcohol consumption, so as to gain a deeper understanding of the social context of alcohol consumption, and the symbolic and gendered nature of consumption. The electronic databases APAIS, Sociofile/Sociological Abstracts and Expanded Academic Index ASAP were searched using the search terms: identity (youth, femininity, identity formation, meaning), symbols; symbolisms, consumption, consumerism, and, commoditisation. These search terms were combined with the term 'alcohol' and associated terms (i.e. drink\*, risk-tak\*, binge drink\*, intoxicat\*). The search for empirical literature (section 2.1.1) also located studies that employed sociological concepts to explore alcohol consumption, and the reference lists of these were scanned to identify additional sources.

To identify work that used Bourdieu's theory as a framework for understanding alcohol-related practices, the search terms used previously (section 2.1.1) were used in combination with symbolic capital (symbolic behav\*), identity or identification (ident\*), Bourdieu, distinction (distinct\*). To identify critiques of Bourdieu's work from a feminist perspective I used the terms 'feminism' and 'Bourdieu', then scanned the reference lists of works by key contributors to debates on the utility and synergies of Bourdieu's theory for understanding gender. I searched the electronic databases ADCA drug database, CINAHL, ERIC, MEDLINE, Ovid, PsychINFO, and Sociological Abstracts for all references to symbolic capital and associated key terms: distinction, ex-/in-clusion, peer influence, prestige, social network\*, reputation. Bourdieu's sociological texts were identified via Bath Information and Data Services (BIDS) International Bibliography of the

Social Sciences and Google Books. Jenkins' critical reader on Bourdieu was a key resource (Jenkins, 2002). There were no limits placed on publication dates for theoretical literature because date is not an indicator of currency or relevance.

### **2.2.2 Social context of alcohol consumption**

It is well documented that Australian public health studies of alcohol consumption conducted over many years have focused almost exclusively on clinical or epidemiological concerns; for summaries see Borlagdan et al., 2010; Moore, 1990, 2002; Roche et al., 2008; Roche et al., 2009; Zajdow & Lindsay, 2010. Historically, studies of alcohol consumption have concentrated on its obvious effects and objective physiological consequences, with little attention given to its social context. Goode describes the social context of alcohol consumption as *that which makes alcohol consumption social*:

how socialisation, culture, social interaction, social inequality, deviance, and group membership play a central role in the use of psychoactive substances; what people do under the influence; and what societies do about the control of – or why they tolerate or accept – drug [and alcohol] use (Goode, 2006, pp. 415–416).

Few public health studies reflect the ways in which alcohol consumption is integral to the Australian way of life, how it is involved in the ways Australians socialise, and how social context, as defined by Goode above, generates variability in the social and symbolic meanings attached to alcohol. The analysis of alcohol consumption as an anthropological and a sociological phenomenon is comparatively more advanced. Mandelbaum (1965) recognised that the social significance of drinking practices reflects the values of cultures. Further to this MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) identified that

people's conduct when intoxicated is determined by such cultural values, stating "not by alcohol's toxic assault upon the seat of moral judgment, conscience, or the like, but by what their society makes of and imparts to them concerning the state of drunkenness" (p. 165). However, Room (2001) believed MacAndrew and Edgerton's propositions were of limited use in determining the reasons *behind* variability in consumption.

Subsequently, Room's approach to identification of variability in alcohol social norms was criticised for overlooking the relational nature of social norms (Abel & Plumridge, 2004). Regardless, MacAndrew and Edgerton's overarching focus on interpreting drinking as a social construction is useful for understanding contemporary alcohol consumption. More recently, Jarvinen and Room (2007) commented on youth drinking cultures in Europe, and understand that although young people's alcohol consumption typically reflects adult cultural norms, youth drinking has its own particular characteristics, which they attest is culturally determined and socially significant.

Despite the virtues of a sociological approach, alternative truths or ways of knowing about the social context that influences alcohol consumption are presently limited. In a seminal paper, Moore (1990) offered critical observations about the trends in Australian research literature on alcohol and other drug use among young people. He remarked that drug and alcohol researchers often overlooked major theoretical developments in youth sociology that explain the social context of consumption, and instead emphasised pathological explanations for drinking practices. Moore extended his initial commentary and critique a decade later but found that the Australian drug and alcohol research landscape was largely unchanged, with studies on alcohol consumption dominated by biomedical and psychological approaches (Moore, 2002). Moore and other Australian researchers (Miller et al., 2010; Rhodes et al., 2010; Zajdow & Lindsay, 2010) caution against ignoring the social context of consumption. They believe this may lead

researchers to overlook theoretical advances in critical approaches to comprehending subjectivities and power relations that are crucial to the development of understandings about how and why people consume alcohol, and how alcohol-related practices vary. As I indicated in the introduction, Moore's (2002) synthesis of alcohol research in particular calls for sociological understandings of the social context of phenomena rather than the specific, explicit actions of individuals, to allow researchers to access "alternative truths" (p. 50) or ways of understanding the context of individual alcohol consumption practices.

Identification of aspects of the social structure and social organisation that comprise the social context of consumption is important. Duff (2007) summarised theoretical perspectives on the social contexts of drug use in Australia and proposed that understanding the social production of space, what he termed "assemblages of space" (p. 507), should be a focus of contemporary drug (and alcohol) research. He suggested that studies of how people are assembled in social space should incorporate modes of embodiment and how these are related to practice, because these key factors generate the social and symbolic meanings attached to consumption. Similarly, Tigerstedt and Torronen (2007) conducted research on alcohol with Finnish youth and indicated that a contextual approach to understanding alcohol consumption must encompass young people's identity formation processes. They argued that studies of alcohol consumption contexts must consider how young people orientate themselves and how they "act" in drinking situations. This is determined by what Tigerstedt and Torronen (2007, p. 461) termed "behavioural repertoires" which encompassed identities and social roles that are culturally defined, contradictory and changeable depending on the social context. A shortcoming of these conceptualisations of context is that they do not reveal how cultural discourses and social values, rules and regulations are intrinsic to making consumption meaningful. Building on this need to expand context to consider rules and regulations, I

consider literature on alcohol consumption norms from a macro-level overarching societal perspective.

### ***2.2.3 Socially produced and reproduced norms***

It is widely accepted that young people produce and reproduce the alcohol consumption norms of the wider society they live in (Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991). Young people's practices when consuming alcohol may be socially or culturally reproduced but they are also situational and continually interpreted, and at times adapted to suit new social conditions (Tigerstedt & Torronen, 2007). For young Australian women particularly, the complexity of influences encountered in the social context of alcohol consumption is not well understood by researchers.

The socialised and reproduced nature of norms seems to be linked to the social value of consumable products and leisure experiences (Featherstone, 1991). In 2009, in research separate to this thesis, my colleagues and I applied a sociocultural perspective to examine the culture of young Australians' alcohol consumption. We found that early initiation to alcohol consumption and excessive alcohol consumption has become the dominant norm among young people (Borlagdan et al., 2010). We also observed that young people maintain traditional cultural practices through the ways they consume alcohol. In cultural contexts similar to Australia, young people are also replicating ways of consuming alcohol that they have seen demonstrated by wider society. For example, research in New Zealand showed that intoxication resulting from heavy episodic alcohol consumption or binge drinking occasions were part of young New Zealanders' sociocultural environment (the study did not specify the proportions of Pakeha and Maori young people in the sample) (Nairn, Higgins, Thompson, Anderson, & Fu, 2006).

#### ***2.2.4 Group cohesiveness and drinking collectives***

In what he termed the collectivity of drinking cultures, Skog (1985) identified social and drinking collectives in his study of the population distribution of alcohol consumption and in particular the mechanisms that caused skewed distributions. In extending Skog's theory, Hodgkinson (2002) and Moore (2004) showed the importance of group cohesiveness and commitment to a collective identity through group consumption practices. Different interpretations of Skog's work are possible depending on methods used for empirical testing, and ambiguities surround how to define subgroups and the group processes that underlie changes in alcohol consumption practices (Gmel & Rehm, 2009). The premise that alcohol consumption signifies or distinguishes collective identities is relevant to understanding young women's alcohol consumption, yet the contextual differences that might result in different groups of young women behaving differently (as social collectives) while consuming alcohol are poorly understood. I address this through an approach that explores how young people might reproduce dominant social and cultural norms through consumption. In the next section I consider literature on the normalisation of alcohol consumption, which is also an essential aspect of the social context of alcohol consumption that links social norms to normalised, 'expected' alcohol practices.

#### ***2.2.5 Alcohol consumption, young people and the normalisation thesis***

Building on the empirical literature on social norms, this section considers theoretical literature that explains young people's alcohol consumption as a response to social norms and specifically as a normalised behaviour. The said 'normalisation thesis' was underpinned by the idea that consumption of alcohol results from adherence to social norms, and it contributes to an understanding of how social structures might link with



individual decisions. When applied to alcohol consumption, it might explain how drinking alcohol has become normalised to the point where it is an expected behaviour enacted uncritically (or without critical reflection). The normalisation thesis might usefully extend the notion of alcohol expectancies as a source of social influence, discussed earlier in section 2.1.5, in as far as alcohol consumption might be assumed as natural or a taken-for-granted way of socialising. Several iterations of the normalisation thesis have been developed in recent years (Measham & Shiner, 2009). The normalisation thesis was first proposed in the mid-1990s and initially described an approach to understanding the normalisation of young people's consumption illicit drug use in terms of lifestyles (Measham & Shiner, 2009; Parker, Aldridge, & Measham, 1998). The term lifestyle incorporates "the sensibilities employed by the individual in choosing certain commodities and patterns of consumption and articulating these cultural resources as modes of personal expression" (Bennett, Emmison, & Frow, 1999, p. 607). Proponents of the original normalisation thesis saw alcohol consumption as the product of an informed decision (for example see Wibberley & Price, 2000). This differs from previous work that considered consumption to be an uninformed response to peer or social pressure. Other researchers argued that the original normalisation thesis focused too much on a model of youth drug (or alcohol) use that was based on individualised, rational action (otherwise termed rational choice) (Blackman, 2004; Caulkins & MacCoun, 2003). This reinstates the necessary focus on both structure and agency as mutual influences on young women's alcohol consumption espoused by my research.

The normalisation thesis might be usefully applied to alcohol consumption as far as understanding how alcohol expectancies operate as reflections of influencing forces. However, we need a position that reflects attempts to understand the interplay between social structures and human agency in shaping young people's alcohol consumption.

Measham and Shiner (2009) claimed a more nuanced understanding of the original normalisation thesis was needed because it understated the role of structural influences. An emphasis on the role of structural influences is particularly relevant to this thesis because of the intersection between gender as a broader social structure and as an embodied individual way of acting. Giddens' structuration theory emphasises that while social structures are said to make social action possible, they are themselves reproduced through social action (Giddens, 1984). The ramifications of Giddens' structuration theory for research on alcohol consumption is that exploring accounts of alcohol consumption warrants analysis of both structure and agency, without giving primacy to either. Measham and Shiner (2009) emphasised that social structures, which enable actions, are visible through normalisation and reflect a "contingent process negotiated by distinct social groups operating in bounded situations" (p. 222). This expands the original normalisation thesis by suggesting that normalisation is differentiated. That is, different types of consumption and different modes of consumption are normalised for different groups of young people, an understanding that echoes Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social relations and people's differing positions within social fields (Bourdieu, 1985). The expanded conceptualisation of the normalisation thesis reflects the notion of structured action and helps to understand the structural inequalities young people encounter when they make choices, which is congruent with Giddens' structuration theory. Furthermore, rational action prioritises individual choice and agency in the context of a consumer society that increasingly emphasises the individualisation of both risk and responsibility, and this emphasis reinforces "the individualistic morality of our consumer culture" (Garland, 2001, p. 198). Research that presents young women's accounts of their rational choice to consume alcohol suggests that young women *actively construct* alcohol consumption and this points to a gap in research containing young women's *own* accounts of consuming alcohol (Lindsay et al., 2009) that my research addresses.

### ***2.2.6 Alcohol consumption and pleasure***

In their extension of the normalisation thesis, Measham and Shiner (2009) also recognised the role of individual agency through pleasure-seeking, and situated this within broader structural frameworks. Research on the pleasure of consumption indicates that pleasure gained from alcohol consumption has social origins; that is, the pleasure of alcohol consumption appears to be located in consumption occasions with friends and in various alcohol-related performative practices that are embodied in social contexts (e.g. dancing together) (Duff, 2008; Szmigin et al., 2008). However, it is unclear in these studies how pleasure seeking not only reflects but also shapes the social context of alcohol consumption. Moore (2007) commented on the problematic marginalisation of considerations of pleasure-seeking as a framework for understanding drug use. His work suggests that understanding the “subjective motives” (p. 353) of drinking like pleasure is a necessary yet likely subjugated theme in alcohol discourse, as it is in understanding drug use. Building on this, I sought theoretical literature on consumerism as a lens through which to explore the social processes that make alcohol consumption pleasurable, enjoyable, and meaningful, and therefore a worthwhile aspect of young Australian women’s social lives.

### ***2.2.7 Consumerism and contemporary young consumers***

Consumerism is considered to be the repertoire of practices, attitudes, and values associated with the consumption of material items (Singh, 2011). Theoretical literature on contemporary consumerism documents an important shift from production to consumption in the structure of society, which has increased the salience of material goods (including products for consumption) in people’s search for meaning and satisfaction (Featherstone, 1991, 2000; Hogg & Banister, 2001; Miles, 2003). The term ‘consumer culture’ describes how consumption has become a central focus of modern

Western social life and cultural values (Chaney, 1996). For example, contemporary leisure is a profitable industry, most leisure activities now require the purchase of goods and the leisure experience is 'sold' to consumers (Haworth & Lewis, 2005).

Consumerism provides a context for understanding how alcohol consumption is made meaningful and symbolic for young women. Contemporary Australian society is seen as experiencing:

An emerging leisure milieu, reflecting the changing economic, cultural, technological and social environment that has been described as 'postmodern'. The increased commoditisation of leisure, rapid changes in working environments, 'telecommuting' and other features of the 'postmodern' world suggest that leisure has been, or will be, adapting accordingly (Veal & Lynch, 2001, p. 24).

Featherstone's (1991) work on postmodern consumer culture indicates that the consumer culture within which young Australian women socialise emphasises the consumption of products for what they symbolise. Further to this, Chaney (1998) suggests consumption practices are meaningful, symbolic, and an important element in shaping social dynamics. He considers that traditional economic class- or gender-based structures may no longer be the sole determinant of young people's social identities or lifestyles. Consumption contributes to identity formation in young people because consumer societies depend upon "constantly stimulating wants and needs, generating a constant search for sensation and excitement, and producing a proliferation of styles, fashions and consumer identities" (Brain, Parker, & Carnwath, 2000, p. 7). The symbolic aspects of alcohol consumption must be considered as a means of understanding how alcohol might be consumed in socially meaningful ways and are envisaged as generative social mechanisms that shape young women's drinking-related practices.

The intangible aspects of consumerism can be seen in contemporary societies where young people are targeted by commercial interests not only for their increasing power as consumers but as representatives of the ideals around which commodities are focused (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). The concept of 'youth' is itself a consumable item, in that the "superficial trappings of youth are now part of the consumer market" (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 86). This suggests that when young people interact within contemporary consumer societies they might seek to consume goods (like alcohol) that are congruent with particular ways of being in the world. Thus the consumption of alcohol might be used to express significant messages about the social self. However, these theoretical perspectives on consumerism fall short of explaining how the incorporation of alcohol into young people's leisure activities functions as an identity resource, specifically how alcohol comes to be recognised as a symbol, and how the process of identity formation is socially legitimated. The increasing emphasis on consumerism in leisure contexts is coupled with changes in the way consumer products are packaged, marketed and sold. It is suggested that through the purchase and consumption of particular types of alcohol beverages, young people can buy an image for themselves (Brain et al., 2000). Lindsay (2006) describes this as the recommodification of alcohol products. She suggests that alcohol is a differentiated product of which there are many varieties marketable in certain ways and which thus become representative of a particular consumer. Specifically, the constantly changing range of alcohol products might also reflect the various identities young people adopt. Although a thorough exploration of the impact of marketing on young people's alcohol consumption is outside the remit of my research, it is pertinent to consider the importance of alcohol product type identification on consumption so as to understand how social processes produce symbolic practices.

In their review of research on consumer behaviour, Hogg and Banister (Hogg & Bannister, 2001) found that what people choose *not* to consume is an important facet of both individual and group identity. Dislikes, distastes and the ways in which these distinguish oneself from an 'undesired self' also contribute to the creation of meaning through symbolic consumption. In sum, theoretical literature on consumer behaviour suggests forms of symbolic interaction exist to shape social interactions (Chaney, 1998). Young people living in contemporary consumer societies might use their consumption of material objects to represent social categorisation and social affiliations (Featherstone, 1991) and to reject lifestyles to which they do not relate (Miles, 2002). Consumption may serve to distinguish young people, acting as both a marker of particular social groups and simultaneously as separate from another (Campbell, 1987). The notion that collective identities may be constructed through alcohol consumption can be explained by the relational nature of lifestyles, and in this way leisure choices like alcohol consumption are not simply the result of personal tastes (Chaney, 1996). Interpreting this literature, it seems that lifestyle preferences and consumption patterns are linked, wherein consumer practices young people engage in, like drinking alcohol, become meaningful as important elements in forging social relationships (Chaney, 1998). This theoretical literature does not explain how consumer practices are meaningful aspects of social relations in the context of alcohol consumption, and this is a point I take up in this thesis.

To summarise this section, the literature on contemporary consumer society points to the meaningful nature of alcohol consumption, through indicating that the types of alcohol products consumed, the context in which drinking alcohol occurs and the context of alcohol consumption are all markers of identity and socially symbolic. The literature reviewed so far indicates a shift in approach among researchers interested in the

sociology of youth, from a cultural studies perspective that emphasised individual fluidity and flexibility in understanding youth cultures and alcohol (e.g. Bennett et al., 1999; Muggleton, 2000) towards an approach that emphasises how material circumstances impact on the ability of different sociodemographic groups to participate in certain styles of social practices (e.g. Blackman, 2004; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). This might also explain why alcohol consumption is rarely an isolated individual behaviour but a practice constituted through social relationships and cultural interactions that structure behaviour, perceptions and status positions of young people. In the next section, I discuss the literature linking consumerism, identity and symbolism, as a way of informing my study.

### **2.2.8 Symbolic consumption**

The theoretical propositions on consumerism and social identity indicate that alcohol consumption is likely to have a highly symbolic role among young women. This includes particular alcohol consumption styles, ways of interacting when consuming alcohol, practices that accompany consumption, the company kept while consuming alcohol and how this may differ from company kept while not consuming alcohol. The use of alcohol as a socially symbolic practice, particularly among young women, remains unexplored in the Australian alcohol research literature. My review identified the need to explore the connection between alcohol consumption and social status or *symbolic capital* to understand better the social underpinnings of young women's alcohol consumption practices, and this became an area for exploration for my research. In the next section I explain the selection of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual framework on social relations and relational capitals – specifically the concept of symbolic capital – that was used to frame my research and interpret my findings (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985). I also outline what Bourdieu's theory of social relations offers in terms of uncovering the social processes that make alcohol valued and symbolic, and the social mechanisms that operate that

make these symbols socially recognisable. Finally, I explore how Bourdieu's writing on classification and classifying practices bridges a gap in understanding how lifestyles develop and how preferences or tastes distinguish actors and groups of actors from others.

### **2.2.9 Bourdieu's theory of social relations and symbolic power**

In the first paper emanating from my PhD (Lunnay et al., 2011) (see Appendix 1) I detailed Bourdieu's theory of social relations and critically examined how his concept of symbolic power or *symbolic capital* applies to understanding the socially symbolic practice of young people's alcohol consumption. This work is summarised in the sections that follow. Bourdieu's theory of social relations and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989) supplements the limited attention given in the extant literature to understanding the social context of alcohol consumption from the points of view of individual agents who occupy different social positions within the social context. It also helps explain the notion that there may be various symbolisms comprising and reflected in alcohol consumption. Bourdieu (1989) developed a relational way of thinking about social reality, believing that people's locations in social space led people to classify each other in various ways. For him, social space referred to positions of power rather than geographical space, although he suggested that "spatial segregation" (p. 16) remained relevant to understanding links between people's practices and their position in social space. Bourdieu's theory of social relations is relevant to young women's alcohol consumption because it aids understanding of how social and peer relations might be established. In turn, Bourdieu's writing on *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984) suggests how such social relations are relations of power, and likely affect the ways young women might respond to dominant alcohol norms and the social conditions that generate an atmosphere conducive to alcohol consumption. Bourdieu's writing on symbolic power and symbolic



capital (Bourdieu, 1989) might also allow for a nuanced understanding of the processes of social and peer influence that generate young women's alcohol consumption. Such an understanding might include an elucidation of how these influences generate practices (i.e. what makes certain peers influential in relation to alcohol consumption) and how exposure to new peers might affect how young people consume alcohol. It seems Bourdieu's theory of social relations might assist in identifying the complex social processes that make alcohol consumption meaningful, which is crucial for developing public health policy and practice relevant to young women's accounts of alcohol-related experiences.

In the next section, I provide a description of Bourdieu's conception of social space and his theory of power relations that shape and are reflected by social space, indicating how these ideas might better explain the social context of young women's alcohol consumption (Bourdieu, 1989, 1991, 1997a). In particular, I draw on Bourdieu's theoretical construct of symbolic capital and show how this fits within his broader theory of social relations (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1989), as a way of better understanding how social contexts and spaces are also symbolic spaces, and how young women might use alcohol consumption as a symbolic way to strengthen or alter their position in social space. I then outline how Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power can be applied to envisage young women's alcohol consumption as symbolic capital and used to better account for the differences in consumption practices among young Australian women who are situated in different social status positions. Bourdieu (1989) theorised that "as with any form of performative discourse, symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital" (p. 23). Following this, I consider studies where researchers have used symbolic capital to understand difference, inequality, marginalisation and power within social situations. I summarise these studies and

highlight differences in interpretation of Bourdieu's concepts that result from the ways it has been adapted to the context of each study. This adaptability of Bourdieu's concepts for use in different research contexts provides a springboard for discussion about how feminist critiques of Bourdieu's work may represent misappropriation of his theory, rather than an inability of his theory *per se* to assist in understanding gender (see Discussion chapter, Chapter 7).

### **2.2.10      *Social structure and individual agency: their concomitant influence on the social context of alcohol consumption***

Bourdieu contributed to the long-existing sociological debate about whether social structures or human agency determine an individual's behaviour by emphasising an interaction between the two (Bourdieu, 1984). He was part of a broader movement in which social theorists tried to move beyond the structure/agency binary that had emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (see, for example, the structuration theory of Giddens, 1984). Bourdieu's account of the interaction between structure and agency (Bourdieu, 1977) in shaping practices is fitting for alcohol research. It provides a contextual rationale for individual alcohol-related decisions that might be useful for improved understandings and better public health strategies. It bridges the divide between approaches where the alcohol consumption is either attributed to the individual (agent) as evident in developmental psychology models (e.g. rational action theory, theory of risk or deviance), or to external social forces encountered within the alcohol consumption setting (structure) (e.g. structuration theory, cultural theory. Bourdieu's perspective indicates that personal preferences and differences in alcohol-related practices might be linked with wider structural factors that shape and regulate these choices. This is shown in his theory of social relations and his perspective on how social

classes are structured social status positions that locate agents in social space based on their access to resources that he termed capital.

Bourdieu expanded the Weberian notion of class to include non-economic, socially determined aspects of 'opportunity' like social and cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985). In my research, Bourdieu's focus on social class as positions that classify people into social status positions within social space, and sampling by Bourdieu's 'relational' approach to class, is highly suited to exploring differences in health experiences, including alcohol consumption practices. Gattrel et al. (2004) established the utility of this approach to sampling and demonstrated the existence of 'spaces' that are different to literal geographical spaces and which represent determinants of health. In *Practical Reason* Bourdieu (1998) discussed social space and fields of power, and explained that the notion of space implies a relational understanding of the social world. His interpretation of social class was as a 'collective' defined by 'difference'.

Bourdieu's theoretical insights about the relationship between people's practices and the social context in which practices occur might provide a foundation for understanding the social dynamics of people's identities or the ways that people use their affiliations with groups to come to an understanding of themselves as individuals. He offered a view of social class based on social positions within social space, and argued that social space is comprised of people with different properties who are linked to form social groupings. Often the link is geographically spatial. Understanding alcohol consumption necessitates some consideration of the behavioural response of individual agents comprising such linked positions within broader social structures comprising social space.

Bourdieu explained that the positions individual agents take within social fields or space determine actions for control of capital. The term 'capital', in addition to economic capital, was used quite broadly by Bourdieu to describe attributes of value for particular social groups, including social capital and cultural capital. He also used 'capital' to label intangible attributes such as prestige, status and authority, which he termed 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, symbolic capital is translatable to anything recognised by social agents as having value in a social context that affords the individual prestige, honour and an enhanced social status (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Symbolic capital thus translates to social power. Capital (social, economic, cultural) may operate as symbolic capital once it is perceived or recognised as a positive sign of what a social group appreciates and when those who hold this capital are admired (Webb et al., 2002). Bourdieu explained:

Here it is necessary to bring in everything that touches on the symbolic: symbolic capital, symbolic interest, symbolic profit...I call symbolic capital any kind of capital (economic, cultural, academic or social) when it is perceived according to the categories of perception, the principles of vision and division, the systems of classification, the classificatory schemes, the cognitive schemata, which are, at least in part, the product of the embodiment of the structure of the distribution of capital in the field being considered (1998, p. 85).

An understanding of young women's alcohol consumption generated from Bourdieu's ideas would acknowledge that young people actively and reflexively interpret their environment. This approach is methodologically suited to my research into understanding the symbolic meanings of alcohol consumption from the point of view of young women themselves. Bourdieu contends that external structures are internalised

while the actions of the agent externalise interactions between actors into the social relationships in the social field. Habitus is young women's socially constructed view of the world. It reflects the "embodiment within individuals of systems of social norms, understandings and patterns of behaviour...ensuring that individuals are more disposed to act in some ways than others" (Bourdieu, 1997b, p. 3). This would suggest that young women both internalise or take on external structures (i.e. dominant alcohol-related norms) and reproduce them by externalising (or acting out) internal structures within the confines of a social space. For Bourdieu, the construction of habitus through fields of cultural production also comprises the schema of perception through which people make distinctions and categorise, and value things (like alcohol consumption) and ways of being (like intoxicated practices) (Bourdieu, 1993). In the next section I consider how the process of attributing value to alcohol consumption might be explained by Bourdieu's theory of social relations through the concept symbolic capital.

### **2.2.11      *Social relations and symbolic power***

Through his theory of social relations, Bourdieu suggested that human agents are positioned in certain roles and relationships in social fields or spaces according to resources that he termed capital. According to Bourdieu, people's view of reality is taken from a relational standpoint and he theorises that the main cause of variations in perception emanate from one's position in social space according to their access to different types and compositions of capital (Bourdieu, 1989). People's perspectives of their social world depend on their individual positions within social space. These perspectives are not shaped as discrete individual reflections, however, but are subject to social structural constraints. People classify themselves (or are classified) by selecting different lifestyle attributes (e.g. friends, beverage types) that suit their social position and reflect their tastes. In other words, people choose things based on the homogeneity

of the social space those things occupy coupled with the position they themselves occupy, because “nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 132). In Western societies, economic and cultural factors have the greatest power of differentiation, but people can also be organised on the basis of other principles of division such as age, gender, religion or ethnicity. Bourdieu proposed that the social world could be understood as different principles of division beyond economic, cultural or social divisions. Bourdieu suggests that the effects of classification depend on the volume of symbolic capital afforded to individuals and their subsequent power and authorisation to classify. Consumption choices are therefore based on popular regard, and power in a Bourdieusian sense describes one’s ability to classify others, making this classification dominant (Jenkins, 2002). Hence a phenomenon like peer pressure might be understood through Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989). As I outlined earlier, Bourdieu (1989) theorised that “as with any form of performative discourse, symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital” (p. 23).

The relational nature of Bourdieu’s ‘capitals’ – that is, the interplay of economic, cultural, social capital that amount to symbolic capital (i.e. social power) is essential to understanding peer pressure as social or symbolic power. Adopting Bourdieu’s framework it might be said that young women’s access to status-defining alcohol consumption practices is likely defined through an interplay of economic, cultural, social capitals, and linked to their position in social space. Specifically, it might be interpreted that young women obtain symbolic capital from particular ways of either consuming or abstaining from alcohol. Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital appears useful for understanding the relationship between the social structures young women encounter and their individual actions like alcohol consumption. It suggests all young women

occupy positions within a broader social structure where there exists an inherent societal acceptance of alcohol consumption as a valued social activity, that is, a source of symbolic capital. To understand symbolic capital and the exercise of social power, it is necessary to consider the concepts of a field in combination with capital. Bourdieu envisaged society as comprising 'fields' of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993). Within social fields, agents act and compete for different types of capital, making social fields also fields of power, as they are hierarchical, and reflect class relations. According to Bourdieu, attitudes and practices are learned and socialised through interpretation of the external social environment. Social reproduction, therefore, occurs through decisions and choices made within broader societal constraints. Hence, it is likely that young Australian women will reproduce within their friendship groups the dominant practices of wider society, giving value and power to heavy drinking as a habitual expectation and an intrinsically 'natural' way to socialise. Using Bourdieu's terminology, alcohol consumption is part of and reflects young women's 'habitus', that is, their tastes and dispositions. Applying Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital transforms alcohol into socially symbolic and value-laden products capable of reflecting dispositions but also communicating and shaping social identities and distinctions. A key facet of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital and the process of social classification is that it requires social recognition, and I discuss this next.

### **2.2.12      *Consuming alcohol for social recognition***

Bourdieu demonstrated how inherent recognition is to symbolic capital through the following analogy of interactions with royalty:

Symbolic capital which makes one bow before Louis XIV – that makes one court him, that allows him to give orders and have his orders obeyed, that

permits him to demean, demote, or consecrate, etc – only exists inasmuch as all the small differences, the subtle marks of distinction in etiquette and rank, in practices and in dress, which make up the life of the court, are perceived by people who know and recognise practically (they have embodied it) a principle of differentiation that permits them to recognise all these differences and to give them value, and who are ready, in a word, to die over a quarrel of hats (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 85).

The above quote shows the means by which symbolic capital is recognised and given value, a process Bourdieu indicates becomes apparent through visual displays and practices. This might explain the performative nature of young women's alcohol consumption practices described in the social identity literature reviewed above. It also highlights the requirement that alcohol consumption practices must be validated and appreciated by the friendship network to become sources of symbolic capital. Bourdieu's concept symbolic capital offers an avenue toward understanding how through affirming congruence with socially sanctioned alcohol consumption practices young women might align their behaviour according to what is deemed socially correct or legitimate, or to highlight unacceptable practices. The young woman can use this strategy to create distinctions between her social position and that of lesser others. Bourdieu (1989) termed this a symbolic struggle over capital. His theory about struggles for recognition of the accrual and display of symbolic capital is likely to be particularly relevant to understanding young women's alcohol consumption.

### **2.2.13      *Alcohol research employing symbolic capital***

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital was applied in a small number of health and consumption-related studies published prior to 2009 and situated within various



disciplines. There was only one study conducted into youth alcohol consumption that applied Bourdieu's concept symbolic capital while others used symbolic capital as a framework to explore housing policy, school hierarchies and secondary school associations, disclosure of HIV status, sex workers' vulnerabilities and health concerns. Several studies used symbolic capital to understand social relations in an array of settings related to social determinants of health. Because of the interpretative characteristics of the concept of symbolic capital, literature on its use is not cohesive. However, despite variations in topic, the empirical studies that use symbolic capital all shared key themes of classification, (mis)recognition, legitimisation and distinction. They all demonstrated that the concept of symbolic capital has interpretive utility for researchers seeking to improve their understandings of social situations where difference, inequality, marginalisation, and power are factors in shaping practices, which is relevant to this thesis. I now provide a brief summary of this research.

Researchers used symbolic capital to understand social reactions toward women who were HIV positive. Grove, Kelly, and Liu (1997) identified the attributes 'White, heterosexual, married, middle class' as signs of social respect and suggested that the symbolic capital obtained through possession of one or more of these protected HIV positive American women from stigma. Symbolic capital was also employed to understand the increasingly commodified nature of housing in the United Kingdom. Flint and Rowlands (2003) explained how social housing was a degraded form of housing choice and those who 'consumed' it were marginalised. Petersson (2004) used the concept of symbolic capital to understand the formation of social hierarchies within Swedish secondary schools and to explore the social dynamics of membership of school associations, including the symbolic appropriation of space by members within the school. The dominance that resulted from group membership of elitist school

associations was a reproduction of broader social distinctions arising from class and educational aspirations, as a form of symbolic capital. Lastly, symbolic capital was used to interpret the structure of social dynamics based on racial and ethnic identities of various types of sex workers in the sex work field in Madagascar (Stoebenau, 2009).

Symbolic capital was used in one study exploring the salience of alcohol consumption in Danish young people's lifestyles. Jarvinen and Gundelach (2007) used Bourdieu's theory of social relations to help explain the normative position of heavy drinking among Danish young people within a culturally derived pattern of drinking (alcohol) to intoxication. They posited that lifestyles function as a form of distinction (or distinctiveness) and, therefore, experience with consuming alcohol was a form of symbolic capital that contributed to group cohesiveness versus dissociation. The researchers investigated whether patterns of alcohol consumption among Danish young people could be used to identify particular lifestyles, that is, a system of classified and classifying practices (Bourdieu, 1984). They explored the company young people sought and their degree of integration in the peer group to determine if and how alcohol consumption patterns were embedded in the formation of social groups. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital was used to understand how lifestyles were demarcated and to indicate how different drinking patterns led to social cohesiveness or dissociation. Jarvinen and Gundelach's work provides a foundation for understanding the group dynamics or causal processes that create group memberships structured around drinking practices, and highlights how legitimated drinking lifestyles might operate as forms of distinction. Importantly for this thesis, the study indicated that 'drinking *experience*' is a form of symbolic capital, which means the symbolic capital gained from alcohol consumption pivots on the *practice* of consumption.

There is difficulty with the way Jarvinen and Gundelach (2007) used Bourdieu's theory to show that consuming alcohol is considered a form of symbolic capital. They identified three alcohol consumption lifestyles: cautious drinkers, mainstream drinkers and experienced drinkers, with experienced drinkers (i.e. active drinkers who initiated early into consuming alcohol) being the lifestyle that was most socially valued. Without consideration of Bourdieu's complete theory of practice, specifically his notion of habitus, it is difficult to ascertain whether consuming alcohol 'distinguished' this lifestyle or whether the lifestyle was socially valued for other attributes, making all its practices including consuming alcohol also valued. Jarvinen and Gundelach identified cautious drinkers as 'at risk of social condemnation' although it was unclear what led these drinkers to be cautious at the outset. It is possible they did not have the symbolic capital to consume alcohol like others within or outside their social networks. It seems possible that abstaining from alcohol can be a legitimate lifestyle if adhered to by a person who is valued for other reasons (i.e. has accrued capital from other sources). For example, research conducted by Nairn et al. (2006) in New Zealand found that young people could adopt alternative positions to the prevailing norm of alcohol consumption if these were legitimated by factors such as religiosity or illness.

Jarvinen and Gundelach (2007) found the youth lifestyles that were most legitimated were centred around experience with consuming alcohol, which is logical given how much young Danish people's society functions around a heavy drinking culture. They concluded that non-drinkers were likely to experience pressure to adopt a drinking-related lifestyle, though did not uncover the social *processes* of peer pressure. In my research, I extend the notion that experience with consuming alcohol is a form of symbolic capital by considering other alcohol-related practices that may function to reinforce or create symbolic capital. Building on Jarvinen and Gundelach's study, I

explore the symbolic aspects of social influence that underpin how alcohol-related practices come to be socially valued. I also consider the possibility of a counter positions to dominant drinking lifestyles as a way of further delineating the processes of social influences.

In the next section of this chapter, I consider how gender, as one form of social difference, is linked to symbolic alcohol consumption. A key area of debate surrounding Bourdieu's theory is the extent of his contribution to the understanding of gender power relations (I discuss this further in Chapter 7, Discussion).

#### **2.2.14      *Gendered, symbolic alcohol consumption***

As outlined in section 1.1, the apparent convergence in alcohol consumption patterns between young women and young men is evident in Australian epidemiological data. Despite this, the theoretical literature on symbolic capital reviewed above indicates that young women and the young men they socialise with might perceive different symbolic meanings and social codes and limits that produce and are produced by alcohol-related practices. Research suggests that the collectiveness of consuming alcohol is equally important to young women and young men (Ostergaard, 2007), with both genders having the desire to share the experience of alcohol consumption by drinking alcohol with friends.

Alcohol consumption has long been a symbolic way by which societies have differentiated and regulated gender roles (Holmila & Raitasalo, 2005). Wilsnack and Wilsnack (1997) argue that the ways societies symbolise and socially define gender roles can be seen through recognising the *differences* in alcohol consumption that are identifiable by gender. It is thus relevant to consider how young women's alcohol consumption might be explained when the differences in alcohol consumption that

previously demarcated them from young men are reduced or disappear entirely. Despite the convergence in alcohol consumption levels and patterns between young women and young men, it is possible that gender differences in the meaning of alcohol consumption might remain. For example, Ostergaard (2007) showed that for Danish young men and young women, alcohol consumption was influenced by the composition of the social context. Notably, the social boundaries for *how to act* when consuming alcohol were different for young women and young men. Alcohol-related social activities expected of young women were distinct from those expected of young men. In the Australian context, these findings might suggest that young women who consume alcohol are regarded differently to young men who enact the same behaviour. This reflects a gendered disposition deeply engrained in Australia's history and ethos that permits intoxication for men but not for women (Kapferer, 1988; Roche et al., 2008).

Much of the literature on young women and alcohol consumption refers to alcohol consumption as being gendered, specifically that consuming alcohol is a way of 'doing gender' (Lindsay, 2006; Lyons & Willot, 2008; Measham, 2006). However, as a way of doing gender (Measham, 2002), alcohol consumption is undermined by the continual reassertion of gender norms (Borlagdan et al., 2010). This speaks to the pervasive social norms that constitute appropriate femininity and masculinity in relation to alcohol across time. It also reflects the performative nature of gender as an enactment of embodied cultural capital that moderates the social appropriateness of consumption-related practices (Butler, 1999). This deems some alcohol-related practices like intoxication or drunkenness dishonourable for women while still revered for men (McCall, 1992).

Traditionally, differences in alcohol consumption between Australian women and men were obvious. Consumption of alcohol was a symbol of masculinity and sobriety

representative of femininity (Eriksen, 1999). In concert with these socially prescribed symbols, men's drinking was socially sanctioned while public consumption by women was socially prohibited (Wright, 2003). Greater social equality might provide a simplistic explanation for the development of alcohol consumption practices and practices among young women that are similar to those of young men (Roche & Deehan, 2002), and some postfeminist literature suggests contemporary young women are liberated in this way (Harris, 2004). For example, Sweeting and West (2003) argue that greater public visibility in relation to alcohol consumption and increased risk-taking practices among young women indicate that social expectations around gender and alcohol are changing. It has been postulated that the convergence of young women's and young men's alcohol consumption has occurred because of changes in the gender stereotypes surrounding alcohol, specifically, the increased societal acceptance of women consuming alcohol (Ricciardelli, Connor, Williams, & Young, 1997; Ricciardelli & Williams, 2001).

In considering the symbolisms associated with gender and alcohol consumption, it is useful to understand the evolution of the social acceptability of alcohol consumption among young women relative to young men, that is, the traditional association between gender and alcohol and how perceptions have changed. Some writers challenge the idea of convergence by arguing that young women still operate within social boundaries and alcohol-related norms are reproduced according to traditional gender symbols and expectations. Historically, views on male and female alcohol consumption in Australia were dichotomised, in that women were discouraged from participating in the type of alcohol consumption practices that were endorsed for men. This was seemingly to preserve their femininity and was both socially and legally sanctioned (Eriksen, 1999; Kapferer, 1988; Wright, 2003). Just as political and social changes have altered the role of women in Western society, over time social perceptions of what constitutes

appropriate or acceptable alcohol consumption for women have also altered (McPherson et al., 2004; Plant, 1997; Roche, 2001; Ricciardelli & Williams, 2001; Young & Powers, 2005). Abbott-Chapman, Denholm, and Wyld (2008) concur that gender differences in risk-taking between young Australian men and women have been diminishing over time and they attribute this to an increased sense of agency among young women. Today, consuming alcohol to reach intoxication is a behaviour enacted and sometimes revered among *both* young men *and* young women in Australia.

Bourdieu's theory is applicable to exploring gender by situating men and women as two distinct subject positions within social space. This allows social and power relations between young men and women to be analysed in the same way as relations between any dominant and dominated group or class jostling for positions of power. For Bourdieu, rather than male domination *per se*, it is the social construction of masculinity and masculine values that are dominant (Bourdieu, 2001). Building on Bourdieu's position that gender domination is a social construction, in this thesis I explore the contribution of gender to social positioning and the symbolic power struggles between young women (femininity) and young men (masculinity), and propose that young women and their female peers use the ways they consume alcohol to respond to dominant expressions of femininity.

I use Bourdieu's theory of social relations to understand gender as socially constructed and therefore conceivable as a social category. Given the combined effects of class and gender that shape classed femininities (Skeggs, 2004), I propose that Bourdieu's theory on social power needs to account for social inequalities stemming from gender in addition to or as components of social class (noting my earlier comments that he intended the characteristics of concepts to be malleable). I interpret gender as an inextricable component of the socially determined aspects of opportunity, similar to the

social and cultural resources that Bourdieu argues operate as social divisions (Bourdieu, 1984,1985). As he contends:

[S]exual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of lemons is inseparable from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 107).

This socially constructed view of gender as a classed category and thus as emblematic of social opportunity would suggest that the position of women in social space is not fixed (I discuss the implications of this in relation to criticism that Bourdieu's notion of habitus is overly deterministic in the Discussion chapter, Chapter 7). According to Lindsay (2006), contemporary young women are at the forefront of a shift in the acceptability of alcohol consumption among women in Australian society. Research suggests that alcohol consumption reflects the social divisions that arise through gender and represents a shift in these divisions, and this is evident in the feminisation of venues licensed to sell alcohol (Lindsay, 2006). In Denmark, Ostergaard (2007) argued that equality in other areas of young men's and women's lives might result in women developing lifestyles and consumption practices similar to men's. However, the scope young women have to transgress gender divisions fully and reshape alcohol consumption norms is debatable, and this tension is inherent in the literature (Borlagdan et al., 2010). Furthermore, emancipation from traditional gender stereotypes (either fully or in part) would mean young Australian women could consume alcohol like young men and it would be socially acceptable to act like young men while drinking. In the next section I consider theoretical literature on alcohol-related gender norms and how contemporary young Australian women respond to those norms.



### **2.2.15      *Transgressing alcohol-related gender norms***

Alcohol consumption might allow young women to experiment with subversive gender displays (Peralta, 2008). A central theme of Peralta's research is that alcohol provides a legitimate "excuse for gender deviation" (2008, p. 379), a socially legitimate departure from gender expectations. Peralta suggests the excuse of being drunk can "counteract deviance associated with gender norm violation and ease the shame associated with inappropriate gender displays" (2008, p. 379). This argument aligns with postfeminist ideology, which posits that women who are able to combine both masculine and feminine attributes have accomplished power and equality (Parkins, 1999). In contrast, Rolfe, Orford, and Dalton (2009) suggest that moral discourses around alcohol consumption continue to be highly gendered. Their research suggested that women positioned *themselves* in relation to discourses of self-control, and they did this to justify their alcohol consumption by constructing it as a rightful activity in keeping with the notion of gender equality. The women they interviewed either resisted or negotiated gendered identities aligned with consuming alcohol by employing a discourse of alcohol drinking as masculine and subsequently preserving their feminine identity by consuming alcohol in feminine ways, or by overtly resisting any form of gendered norm. For example, the 'ladette' discourse explored by Jackson and Tinkler (2007) signified troublesome feminine identities embodied by young women who became a feminine version of 'lads' and consequently were negatively framed as needing reform. They suggested this indicated young women's continued inequality with young men in relation to alcohol consumption. Evidently, contemporary understandings of young women's experiences of alcohol consumption and of the gender symbols attached to alcohol consumption require further exploration. Specifically, this thesis addresses the under-researched link between gender and contemporary young women's experiences of

alcohol consumption and expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption as called for by Lindsay (2009).

Understanding social aspects of the convergence of young women's and young men's alcohol consumption presupposes elements of postfeminist ideology. I envisage postfeminism as new expressions of femininity resulting from an intersection of social, cultural, theoretical and political areas that diverge from traditional feminism (Genz & Brabon, 2009). I do not intend to contribute to a definitional debate over the term postfeminism. Rather I seek to engage with gender-sensitive research that revises expressions of femininity constructed in a 'postfeminist' era, which presupposes gender equality, to determine how drinking reflects continued inequality and is used as an expression of gendered identities. Previous research suggests that alcohol might provide a socially legitimated departure from the expectations of gender (Peralta, 2008), although an important condition is that not all young women have social permission to subvert traditional gendered norms, and a distinction between determined and unintentional gender deviation is relevant when young women consume alcohol. Lyons and Willott (2008) suggest that particular types of women may be exempt from traditional social sanctions, but they do not consider the particular contexts and conditions in which the transgression of gendered alcohol norms is permissible, such as their duration, nor do they consider the temporal and spatial conditions associated with gender deviation through alcohol consumption.

### **2.2.16      *Application of Bourdieu's concepts***

There have been many attempts to apply Bourdieu's theoretical work (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1993; Swartz, 2003; Swartz & Zolberg, 2004) but the flexible way in which he intended his concepts to be deployed is often overlooked (Jenkins, 2002). As Webb et al. (2002, p. 49) suggest, Bourdieu's concepts are not "theoretical filters which process

social practices; rather they are technologies, which are transformed". A strength of Bourdieu's theory of social relations is that he tested his concepts through empirical research, thus his theoretical writing also contains advice on the *process* of applying his constructs. Bourdieu's empirical reflections are considered in Chapter 3, Methodology, where I elaborate on how his ontological stance shaped the methodological and epistemological underpinnings of my research, but noteworthy here is his ontological focus which I briefly consider by way of introducing my interpretation of his theory of practice. Extending from a realist research approach that focuses on revealing the causal mechanisms that generate practices, Bourdieu sought explanations of social practices through revealing their social and symbolic undercurrents. The subjective nature of society renders it impossible to predict outcomes. An approach like Bourdieu's which delineates the social and symbolic undercurrents of behaviour and, specifically, the impact of social relations on this process enables an informed discussion about the potential consequences of social influences that operate in different social contexts.

### **2.2.17      *Summary of theoretical literature***

Building on the theoretical literature reviewed in this chapter, I propose that there are limitations in framing alcohol consumption as a purely individual behaviour rather than seeing it as part of an intricate web of social relationships that structure practices.

Several studies suggest that for many young women, the socially significant practices associated with alcohol consumption transform alcohol into a symbolic and value-laden commodity, yet how these symbolisms operate to reinforce certain alcohol consumption practices is still poorly understood. The theoretical literature reviewed in this chapter indicates the concept of symbolic capital has utility for understanding the social influences on young women's consumption, and the ways in which social influences

function to generate and maintain alcohol consumption practices. Using Bourdieu's ideas of symbolic capital and distinction, I propose that alcohol consumption is interpretable as a symbolic and powerful activity engaged in by young women to influence their position in social hierarchies. This activity has the potential to change women's social arrangements through inclusionary and exclusionary distinctions made according to what is valued by the social group in a given context. I propose that Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital offers a framework for understanding how young women may define themselves socially and/or use alcohol-related practices as a social signifier, and this approach has not been used previously to understand young Australian women's alcohol consumption. Within this theoretical frame it seems possible to understand the role of alcohol consumption practices and outcomes in the formation of social groups; the meanings attached to alcohol (including product types, consumption patterns, etc.) as representative of social identities that may be negotiated to form distinctions between and across groups of young women; the use of alcohol as a source of power to gain acknowledgement and enhance reputation; and the social dynamics in how this is played out. The meanings attached to alcohol are also symbolic of gendered identities and it seems alcohol is used by young women as a way of expressing versions of femininity, though the specific ways femininity is enacted through drinking warrants exploration.

Using Bourdieu, it is likely that through the practices associated with alcohol consumption, young women enact social identities, specifically gender identities, and potentially change social configurations by acting in accordance with or disrupting the distribution of social power attributed to certain subject positions (i.e. masculine or feminine). I also propose that young Australian women's scope to transgress gender divisions and reshape gendered alcohol consumption norms is socially defined and

socially limited. I acknowledge that social gains might be made through the accumulation of symbolic capital when young women consume alcohol in a form that is legitimised by social norms, an action that confers upon them a sign of distinction among an audience of those predisposed to recognise such distinctions. Consequently, I propose that young Australian women who conform with gender-related alcohol norms accrue symbolic capital and thus express social power. However, the socially constructed display of classed dispositions is also likely to dictate the forms of conduct or decorum while drinking alcohol and hence influence styles of consumption (Bourdieu, 1997a), so that gender-related alcohol norms differ across social reference groups. Similar to alcohol consumption styles, femininity may also be conceived as a classed sign and therefore imbued with different types of power, meaning young women enact different expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption and the social desirability of these feminine identities aligns with social class, which Skeggs termed intersectionality (Skeggs, 1997).

Combining Bourdieu's theoretical position on class and social power with postfeminist ideology, I argue that young Australian women's proximity to the most dominant and revered signs of femininity (that is, the best way to be a young woman in postfeminist, contemporary society including such attributes as body comportment while drinking) is an avenue for constructing distinctions between themselves and others, enacting what Bourdieu termed symbolic violence. This is "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 p. 168) that reflects the symbolic power of the dominant to characterise and distinguish. For my research, symbolic violence might operate through the characterisation of alcohol-related tastes and femininities as being of greater value and as accruing rightly to those deserving of such distinctions, specifically, to other young women of higher social class (when we consider intra-gender relations), and to young men over young women (when we

consider gender domination). Women who display incongruence with idealised classifications and significations of postfeminist femininity while drinking alcohol risk social exclusion. Using the concepts of social power, symbolic capital and symbolic violence to explore the notion of gendered alcohol consumption, I question the scope contemporary young Australian women have to consume alcohol freely in ways that might subvert stereotypical gendered norms, specifically in ways thought to be masculine.

## **2.3 Thesis propositions**

The following four thesis propositions arise from empirical gaps identified in the extant and theoretical literature reviewed above:

### **Proposition 1:**

Alcohol consumption is structured by and structures social relations

### **Proposition 2:**

Young women use alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups

### **Proposition 3:**

Young women use alcohol consumption to symbolise personal and group identity relative to positions in social space

### **Proposition 4:**

Young women's scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms is socially defined and socially limited.

Proposition 1 allows for an understanding of the complexities of young women's social context that shapes and is shaped by their alcohol consumption. Propositions 2 and 3

probe particular aspects of the social context of drinking (proposition 1) by linking young women's alcohol-related practices to their position in social space and in relation to others. Proposition 4 focuses on understanding contemporary young women's subjective accounts of gendered drinking norms and the ways in which they interact with these norms. I designed my research to explore these four propositions in line with various methodological considerations that are detailed in the next chapter, including the methodological implications of Bourdieu's work and the advice Bourdieu provides for reflexive research. This is in line with Steps 4 and 5 of Meyer and Ward's guide for integrating theory into the research design (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have provided a detailed review of the empirical and theoretical literature relevant to understanding *why young Australian women consume alcohol*, and *how social context forms the basis of their alcohol consumption*. In this literature review I identified a number of deficits in previous understandings. In the next chapter on Methodology I detail my methodological approach to exploring my thesis propositions and filling the research gaps identified herein.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methodology underpinning my approach to understanding young women's alcohol consumption within the context of the social, cultural and economic capitals that comprise Bourdieu's social power or symbolic capital. Kaplan states "methodology is the study – the description, the explanation, and the justification – of methods, and not the methods themselves" (Kaplan, 1964, p. 18). Hence this chapter concerns my research approach in terms of my philosophy on the generation and interpretation of knowledge. To address the propositions identified in section 2.3, I used social constructivist ontology, an interpretivist epistemology and a qualitative methodology, informed by Bourdieu's insights on reflexive research practice. To understand the social and symbolic meanings of young women's alcohol consumption, my research was theory-driven and deductive in logic. Deductive logic, a process of reasoning from premises, for this thesis entailed reasoning from propositions developed from previous research and sociological literature. In their guide for integrating theory into research design, Meyer and Ward conceived of theory "as a logical deductive system consisting of a set of interrelated concepts from which testable propositions can be derived deductively" (Meyer & Ward, 2014 p. 2). This process to uncover subjective meanings is distinct from the methodology of deductivism, which is moored in positivist approaches that test hypotheses and assume that the truth about a phenomenon exists.

In a previous paper (Lunnay et al., 2011) I provided an explication of Bourdieu's practice, or his epistemological contributions, and offered a methodologically grounded example to researchers seeking to attain more complete understandings of the social processes



underpinning youth alcohol consumption. I expand these ideas in this chapter. I

conclude the chapter with a summary of my research design.

This chapter represents step 5 of Meyer and Ward's guide for integrating theory into the research design (Meyer & Ward, 2014) (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. *The integration of theory into research design step 5* (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

Step 1: Systematically search the literature in the area of empirical and theoretical interest and identify gaps for empirical investigation.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 2: Identify social theories (potential and those that have been used in the area previously) in your research area.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 3: Critically analyse the social theory(ies) of interest. This involves identifying any empirical gaps in the theory, relevant critiques of the practical application of theory in the area of interest, and developing your own critiques of the practical application of specific areas, contexts and settings.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 4: Develop a conceptual framework to operationalise the theory in research methods.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 5: Design the research with the aim of investigating both empirical and theoretical research gaps.	<b><i>Methodology</i></b> (Chapter 3)
Step 6: Conduct data collection and analysis.	<i>Methods &amp; Data Analysis</i>  (Chapters 4 & 5)
Step 7: Write up the research results.	<i>Findings and Discussion</i>  (Chapters 6 & 7)

### 3.1 Description of the research

The overarching purpose of this thesis was to better understand *why* young Australian women consume alcohol, and to explore *how social influences forms the basis of their alcohol consumption*. In Chapter 2, the Literature review, I outlined that much of the previously published empirical research located young women's alcohol consumption within approaches that individualise consumption (see section 2.1.4). Such approaches do not account for the influence of social context on consumption. In contrast, the extant theoretical literature indicated that it is simplistic to see alcohol consumption as a response driven by a perceived need to adhere to social norms. Rather the perspective I take in this thesis is that alcohol consumption is part of a web of social relationships that structure practices and social hierarchies by shaping or reinforcing distinctions among groups/individuals. I also proffer that for many young women, the symbolic and socially significant practices associated with alcohol consumption transform alcohol into a value-laden commodity. These potential symbolisms that surround alcohol consumption, particularly within and across different social groups of young women, are not well understood. Thus my research is designed to provide a sociological alternative to available public health explanations for drinking alcohol that are typically situated in epidemiological, psychological or behavioural philosophies (Lunnay et al., 2011; Moore, 2002; Zajdow & Lindsay, 2010). This builds on France's (2000) earlier critical examination of various explanations of youth and risk taking including alcohol consumption (i.e. biological, psychological and developmental influences on behaviour), which found most value in a sociological approach in terms of improved understanding of the diverse and complex social processes that affect young people's practices. More recently, Australian researchers have found benefit in using a sociological approach for producing insight into the social aspects shaping alcohol consumption among young

Australian women and called for more sociologically-based research of this kind (Fry, 2011; Lindsay, 2005, 2009).

### **3.2 Theory-driven alcohol research**

The use of theory is essential to arrive at generalisable research findings (Popay et al., 1998), while most theorists would insist their ideas be tested empirically (Seale, 2004). Bourdieu summarised this when he said “theory without empirical research is empty; empirical research without theory is blind” (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 774–775). Theorising converts purely descriptive research into an endeavour where an issue can be examined, compared and understood, rather than simply described:

The purpose of social enquiry is to produce enhanced and more accurate renderings of particular groups, milieu, or social problems under study than has hitherto been the case...and is reflected in the drive to develop ever more powerful explanations of social phenomena (Layder, 1998, p. 9).

Using deductive logic, Bourdieu’s theory of social relations provided interpretive structure, and research questions were inspired by both the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and developed from his theoretical concepts as a way to understand young women’s alcohol consumption. This approach aligns with Layder’s (1998) perspective that theorising is a continuous feature of the research process. Aspects of Bourdieu’s theory were incorporated into each aspect of the research design, from the interview questions through to data interpretation. My purpose in using Bourdieu’s theory was to move from description to an explanation of the subjective and meaningful experience of alcohol drinking as a symbolic practice.

While the research design was theory-driven, it was also theory-verifying in that opportunities to extend theoretical understandings and Bourdieu’s theory of social

relations were sought, particularly where the findings were not explained by his theory. Bourdieu and Wacquant believe that researchers who seek to contribute new knowledge must “transcend the circumscribed intellectual context and empirical terrain of its initial enunciation and to produce novel propositions, but to think itself and even to out-think itself”, that is, to think beyond the constructs (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. xiii). The process of deductive logic and the theoretical and methodological insights obtained from it are considered in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 7).

Meyer and Ward (2014) suggest that the extent to which conclusions drawn can be extrapolated to other studies (i.e. the interpretive validity of the research) rests on how social theory is applied, as does the justification for using findings to inform policy and practice. As I indicated earlier, it is problematic that Bourdieu’s forms of capital (social, cultural, economic and symbolic) are often treated as distinct concepts rather than as related capitals that comprise part of a greater whole, in a field of power and of social relationships and positions that constitute a social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1997a; Lunnay et al., 2011). To ensure valid representation of Bourdieu’s theory and improve the validity and typicality of my findings, I set his sociological concepts within his broader theoretical frame. Instead of employing the individual construct of symbolic capital, I incorporated elements of the theory that bring this specific theoretical component together with the concepts in which it is moored, including other forms of capital, habitus, the notion of the field of power, and his other symbolisms such as symbolic violence. This is detailed in the Methods chapter (Chapter 4), where I outline my research sample and the theoretical underpinnings of the interview questions.

### **3.3 Research ontology**

An explanation of how methodology informs research design begins with ontology. My ontology was social constructivist and reflected a perception that young women’s alcohol

consumption is a subjective and symbolic behaviour that is socially constructed. It also reflected my focus on gaining some contextual understanding of *why* young women consume alcohol with particular people and to fulfil specific social intentions/outcomes. A social constructivist approach to understanding participants' social actions requires the capture of subjective meanings, through attending to the subjective social context in which young women's alcohol-related practices emerge and noting differences in gender and class. Meaning is thought to be constructed by/for young women out of the practice of consuming alcohol in relation to the social context of consumption (e.g. the social context of gendered fields of power). The philosophy of critical realism aligns with this focus on understanding human experiences, by concentrating on social norms, values, symbols, and social processes viewed from a subjective perspective rather than adopting positivist approaches to knowledge. Bourdieu's methodological stance was situated in a critical realist paradigm and this underpinned the conception of his theory of social relations (Archer, 1995, 2010; Bourdieu, 1991; Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002; Reed 2008).

### **3.4 Critical realism**

Critical realism views society as "inseparable from its human components because the very existence of society depends in some way upon our activities" (Archer, 1995, p. 1). The central tenet of critical realism is that the explanation of subjective social phenomena is achieved through revealing the generative social mechanisms that produce individual outcomes (Archer, 2010). Identifying this link between society and the individual is essential to any research that seeks to understand the lived experience, for example of being a young woman who encounters social influences to consume alcohol. Building on critical realist ontology, an epistemological consideration for my research design was *through what process might I as researcher access the 'real' reasons for*

*young women's alcohol consumption practices?* Bhaskar's (1978) work on developing contemporary critical realism identified researchers' empirical data as the findings they produce through attempting to understand participants' lay accounts of their behaviour (i.e. their experiences). He distinguished between 'actual' and 'real' accounts in empirical data, defining the 'actual' as social phenomena as they actually happened, as distinct from how the phenomena were *experienced*, which he termed the 'real'. The real delineates the natural structural and social contexts and conditions of an experience, through which an understanding of practices might become accessible.

This can also be understood as a process of double hermeneutics, where the researcher interprets participants' interpretations or their versions of reality (Sayer, 2000). Using Bhaskar's version of critical realism to frame my understanding of the socially-oriented mechanisms underpinning young women's alcohol consumption, my empirical data comprised young women's experiences of the social contexts and conditions that involved 'actual' experiences of alcohol consumption (e.g., organised social gatherings where alcohol consumption occurs). To achieve my research purpose it was important to reach the 'real' social conditions that led to consumption of alcohol or abstention. By this I do not refer to pragmatic preconditions for alcohol consumption, such as whether parents facilitated alcohol consumption through permission and/or purchase of alcohol, but the deeper precursory conditions to alcohol consumption, such as the desire to exhibit alcohol-related behaviour in line with socially desirable norms.

Explanations of alcohol consumption necessitate some consideration of the 'actual' behavioural responses of young women who drink, but deeper understanding of the 'real' reasons for consuming alcohol requires an understanding of the generative mechanisms of this practice. For example, it seemed fruitless to ask young women why they drank alcohol as an avenue to understanding the social influences on their alcohol

consumption, because the accounts they would most likely give of their ‘actual’ consumption behaviour (i.e. for fun) would differ from the ‘real’ theoretically informed reason for that behaviour I would infer (i.e. because it is socially expected for a woman of her age to drink). I do not wish to enact sociological imperialism (I discuss this in section 3.8. below), but the realist process of understanding I detail indicates the differences inherent in lay and academic reasoning. A process for separating the actual from the real is required if deeper sociological understandings of alcohol consumption are to be reached. This process of separating the actual from the real requires providing social or structural explanations for alcohol-related outcomes must not obscure the role of individual agency in decision making surrounding alcohol consumption, and I discuss this next.

### **3.5 Concomitant influence of structure and agency**

A realist approach to understanding participants’ versions of reality (the ‘actual’) that determines behaviour enables the influence of structure and agency to be analysed concomitantly (Bourdieu, 1977; Dobson, 2001). This is relevant given the disjuncture in the empirical literature between research into the influence of social structures on alcohol-related outcomes and research into individual agency in shaping alcohol consumption practices (see Chapter 2). Although my focus is on understanding young women’s alcohol consumption as an inherently social practice influenced by various structural aspects of the environment, the behavioural responses of individual agents who consume alcohol are also relevant, given that Bourdieu postulated that agents actively interpret, produce and reproduce social norms (Bourdieu, 1993).

To understand how young women’s alcohol consumption is a product both of social structures and individual agency, using Bourdieu’s theory I interpreted alcohol consumption as a symbolic and powerful activity *individual* young women *agents* actively

engage in to achieve social gains within a social environment *structured* around consuming alcohol as a normative revered practice. This includes, but is not limited to, young women's use of symbolic capital attributed to alcohol to influence their position in social hierarchies (be they characterised by gender, economic capital, cultural capital or other) and with the potential of changing the social arrangement through inclusionary or exclusionary distinctions. I interpreted the distinctions made by young women as dependant on the particular alcohol-related practices valued by the social group at a given time. Using this theoretical frame, I sought to identify relationships between influences in structure and agency, and explored the dual influence of each on the meaning-making practices evident in alcohol consumption outcomes. This research process provided a way to understand and provide insight into the duality of structure and agency in shaping the role of alcohol consumption practices and outcomes in the formation of social groups; the meanings attached to alcohol (including product types, brands, etc.) as consumption practices that were representative of social identities and which could be negotiated to form distinctions between and across groups of young women; the use of alcohol as a source of power within a given social field to gain acknowledgement and enhance reputation; and the social dynamics in how this is 'played out'. Next, I outline my epistemological perspective on how knowledge is created about the meaningful, symbolic nature of young women's alcohol consumption.

### **3.6 Epistemological approach**

A social constructivist ontology links to an interpretivist epistemology which is required to develop an understanding of young women's alcohol consumption *from their own points of view*. A focus on understanding participants' version of social reality, interpreted through how they act in/upon their social world, would allow me to discover the symbolic social meanings *they* ascribe to alcohol consumption. Importantly, I aimed to be reflexive



about how knowledge is socially constructed, for example through the interactions and relationships I had with participants in the particular research context. Bourdieu offered strategies for improving epistemological integrity, including participant objectivation and researcher reflexivity (particularly in relation to my interpretation of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts) and I outline these next.

### **3.7 Epistemological integrity: the authority of knowledge**

In addition to his theoretical contributions, Bourdieu provided a methodology to promote reflexivity and heightening objectivity and move beyond problems associated with positivism.. In their work on justifying knowledge, Carter and Little (2007) asked: *what are the fundamental facets of qualitative research that justify knowledge and can subsequently be used for evaluating the quality of the research output?* This question brings to light ways in which the research setting might construct rather than elicit responses and meaning from research participants. Bourdieu's key ideas about the construction of social space can also be applied to the process of conducting research. Bourdieu regarded researchers as agents negotiating relationships within the field of research. He believed the principal cause of variations in perception was people's positions in social space (Bourdieu, 1989). As researchers, our views of reality are primarily constructed and differentiated through economic and cultural factors that position us in social space. Researchers typically occupy a position of power superior to their research participants (Hollands, 2003). This might make it difficult to understand the conditions that produce alcohol-related outcomes from the perspective of young women and has important ramifications for the validity of research findings. Bourdieu offered guidance to those wishing to undertake reflexive sociological research, as did other social theorists who employed a variety of interpretations and uses according to their discipline and philosophy of science. For example, Garfinkel's use of reflexivity was

based in ethnomethodology and was centrally concerned with reflexive accountability of action (Garfinkel, 1967). In terms of the preconditions for reflexivity in modern society, there is some debate in the literature in relation to conceptions of agency (Akram & Hogan, 2015; Farrugia & Woodman, 2015). For this thesis, I adopt Bourdieu's interpretation of reflexivity as a form of consciousness outside of the individual and not focused on individual action (Bourdieu, 1990b). Bourdieu's version of reflexivity focuses on the social and intellectual unconscious, and on increasing the scope of sociological knowledge. His work inspires reflection on the research process, and he argues that *epistemological integrity* (and authority of knowledge) necessitates a *reflexive* encounter with the known. Wacquant (1989, p. 33) documented the methodological intent of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, specifically the process of participant objectivation which was intended to:

overturn the natural relation of the observer to his universe of study, to make the mundane exotic and the exotic mundane, in order to render explicit what, in both cases, is taken for granted and to offer a very concrete, very pragmatic, vindication of the possibility of a full sociological objectivation of the object and of the subject's relation to the object.

In the research conducted for this thesis, I attended to reflexivity at two levels. First, I used reflexivity at the level of participants' narratives, through prompting critical thought about why they consumed alcohol (or abstained) and in other ways to access the subjective, symbolic meanings associated with alcohol consumption. There is debate over how achievable reflexivity at this level is and I outline methods and techniques I used to prompt reflexivity in Chapter 4, Methods and the outcomes of this approach in Chapter 7, Discussion. Second, I sought to use reflexivity at the level of research practice and the researcher's interpretation. Next, I discuss the techniques of participant

objectivation and reflexive bracketing through which this was achieved.

### **3.8 Participant objectivation**

Bourdieu's participant objectivation approach was a way for me to privilege participants' *subjective* meanings by *reflexively* bracketing my own subjectivities (Ahern, 1999; Tufford & Newman, 2012). To improve transparency and validity, I needed to be reflexive about the assumptions and preconceptions I brought to the process of formulating my research, including selecting the theoretical framework and identifying techniques for interpreting the findings (Bourdieu, 1990a). The scrutiny involved in describing young women's social schemata and in seeking explanations of their alcohol consumption negates objectivity. The inherent subjectivity of qualitative analysis necessitates acknowledgement of ontological aspects of social life that are experienced by the researcher but distinct from those researched. Aspects of social life not interpreted with social theory might be accepted without question by the researcher; equally a researcher's selection and interpretation of a social theory rests on their own values and preconceptions (Meyer & Lunney, 2013). For this reason, my discussion with participants covered two main aspects of young women's alcohol consumption: alcohol consumption and associated behaviour (e.g. where, when, what and with whom they drink). Through these aspects I investigated the 'actual' and the theoretically-driven questions aimed at understanding the social and relational aspects of alcohol consumption, that is, the 'real' (see section 3.5 for an earlier outline of this critical realist approach). I retained the authenticity of participants' accounts by seeking to understand the complexity of participants' practices while attempting to avoid a disposition toward biasing sociological conceptualisations, which Bourdieu warned against but for which, ironically, he was criticised (Jenkins, 2002) (see Chapter 2). Given my research used social theory and produced sociological knowledge, according to Bourdieu's work,


*objectification of the act of objectification* was required to *scrutinise the scientific stance* (Bourdieu, 1990b). By this, Bourdieu was suggesting that theory-driven research produces a certain type of knowledge (or scientific stance) that is sociological. He proposed that the stance could be examined by analysing data that were unexplained by the theory, and thus where the necessary conditions of the theory are identifiable (see Chapter 5). In the Chapter 5, Data analysis I discuss a technique of abductive logic that I used to scrutinise the scientific stance and ascertain the utility of Bourdieu's concepts for interpreting my findings.

It is impossible for me as researcher to separate myself from my interpretations, but Bourdieu's notes on reflexivity prompted me to acknowledge that my sociological worldview produced a certain type of understanding (Ahern, 1999). I used reflexive bracketing to bring participants' unique insider knowledge to the fore, thus strengthening epistemological integrity (Popay et al., 1998). Further to objectification of objectification, another aspect of epistemological integrity I attempted to address pertains to sociological imperialism. Bourdieu warned against positioning reflexivity as high cultural capital and therefore attributing superiority to the researcher as "more knowing" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 47). Ward used the term stratified reflexivity to identify this tendency to over-privilege the notion of reflexivity (Ward & Coates, 2006). Assuming a position of detachment from the social world under study suggests an inherently authoritative standpoint. As a young Australian woman, I engaged with social structures similar to those experienced by my participants and was cognisant of this during data collection and while interpreting findings.

### 3.9 Summary of research methodology

In this methodology chapter, I outlined the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of my research approach. As I have demonstrated, these philosophical positions on the existence of reality and how knowledge can be obtained link to the theoretical framework I adopted, that is, Bourdieu's theory of social relations. This contextualises my selection of qualitative data collection methods outlined in Chapter 4. A visual summary of my research methodology is outlined in the following diagram, which indicates how my research approach encompassed what I wanted to research (*propositions*), how I conducted the research (*methodology*), how I collected information (*methods*), and how I interpreted the data in my research (*data analysis*).

Table 3.2. Summary of research approach

Propositions (Chapter 2)	Methodology (this chapter)	Methods (Chapter 4)	Data analysis (Chapter 5)
Proposition 1: Alcohol consumption is structured by and structures social relations	Social constructionist ontology		
Proposition 2: Young women use alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups	Interpretivist epistemology	Photo elicitation interviews undertaken with individual and groups of young women with the aid of the social media platform, Facebook®	Deductive logic (theory-verifying)
Proposition 3: Young women use alcohol consumption to symbolise personal and group identity relative to positions in social space	Deductive Theory-driven Qualitative		Abductive logic (theory-expanding)
Proposition 4: Young women's scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms is socially defined and socially limited.			
			

## CHAPTER 4: METHODS

This chapter outlines the methods used to collect data to explore my thesis propositions (see section 2.6). The use of social constructivist ontology, an interpretivist epistemology and a deductive methodology required qualitative methods of data collection. I

conducted focus groups and individual interviews using a photo elicitation technique, which I carried out in person and with the social media platform Facebook®. While doing so, I wrote fieldnotes that contained my reflexive insights on the interview process, viewing the interview as an active, creative endeavour where meaning is conveyed through participants' responses but also constructed through the dynamic interaction between the researcher and those researched. In this chapter I detail recruitment, sample composition, methods used and the reasons for them, strategies used to achieve reflexive research, and ethical considerations.

This chapter aligns with step 6 of Meyer and Ward's guide for integrating theory into the research design (Meyer & Ward, 2014) (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. *The integration of theory into research design step 6* (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

Step 1: Systematically search the literature in the area of empirical and theoretical interest and identify gaps for empirical investigation.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 2: Identify social theories (potential and those that have been used in the area previously) in your research area.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 3: Critically analyse the social theory(ies) of interest. This involves identifying any empirical gaps in the theory, relevant critiques of the practical application of theory in the area of interest, and developing your own critiques of the practical application of specific areas, contexts and settings.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 4: Develop a conceptual framework to operationalise the theory in research methods.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 5: Design the research with the aim of investigating both empirical and theoretical research gaps.	<i>Methodology</i> (Chapter 3)
Step 6: Conduct data collection and analysis.	<b><i>Methods &amp; Data Analysis</i></b>

	(Chapters 4 & 5)
Step 7: Write up the research results.	<i>Findings and Discussion</i> (Chapters 6 & 7)

## 4.1 Data collection methods

The social conditions young women encounter in various fields might influence their alcohol consumption and these were explored to understand the various ways that alcohol-related practices function as symbolically significant practice. I sought young women's accounts of their experiences of consuming alcohol within and beyond their original social group. Participants' stories about drinking-related practices also functioned as shadowed data. Morse (2000) uses this concept when discussing determination of sample size in qualitative research, describing it as data collected by participants reporting on others' accounts. Stories of peers' drinking were common in my participants' explication of their own drinking-related practices, and although such shadowed data required verification for it to comprise useable findings, it was important in shaping theoretical sampling by situating young women's drinking-related practices in social contexts.

### 4.1.1 *Rationale for methods*

To understand the meanings young women attributed to their alcohol-related experiences, interactions and actions/outcomes from their viewpoints I used focus groups, individual interviews and the photo elicitation technique. Danermark et al. indicate, "the nature of the object of study determines what research methods are suitable and also what kind of knowledge it is at all possible to have of different phenomena" (2002, p 41). Research suggests that using several techniques is more likely to elicit in-depth responses than conventional interviews alone (Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Torronen, 2002).



Given the paucity of published research about young women's own accounts of consuming alcohol (Lindsay, 2009), I wanted to capture participants' accounts of their everyday experiences that, in turn, gave these experiences meaning, a unique position that Popay and Williams (1996) termed experiential expertise. I could then use these stories to illuminate the interaction between social context and actions that shaped young women's alcohol-related practices.

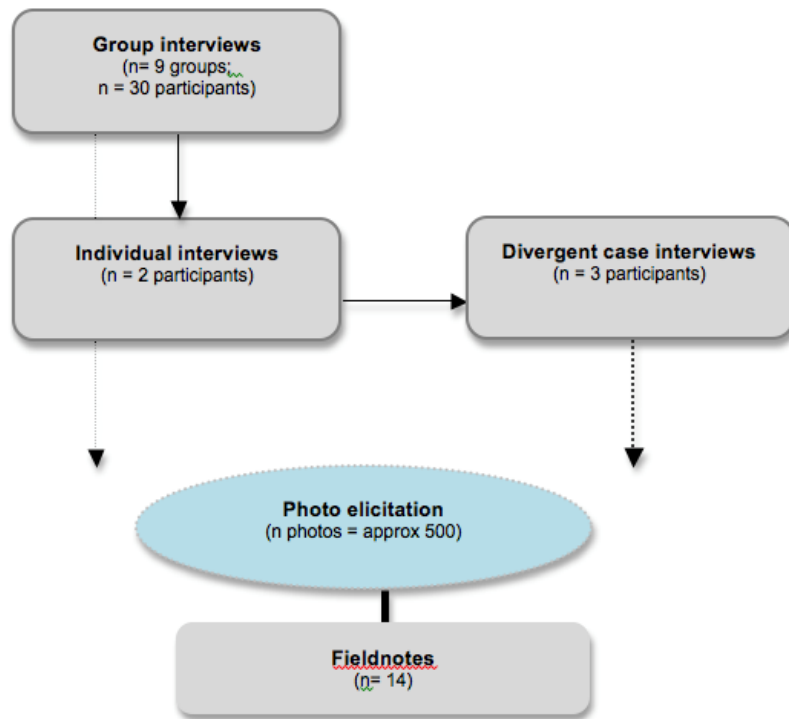


Figure 4.1: Data collection methods and techniques

The methods I used were developed in response to the communication preferences of participants, and I elaborate on this below.

Table 4.2: Data collection steps

<b>Focus groups</b>	
Step 1: <b>Initial contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I recruited one young woman interested in participating.</li> <li>○ I provided information about my research including a Letter of Introduction, Consent Forms and Information Sheets for participants and parent(s)/carer(s) that outlined the purpose of the research and the requirements of participation</li> <li>○ I asked this first participant to invite her friends to participate, and this comprised the next group I spoke with.</li> </ul>
Step 2: <b>First group meeting</b> (approximately 30 minutes)  Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ When I first met a participant I provided her with further information about the purpose of the research, her role, the use of photographs and instructions about what to photograph. I gave her a digital camera and instructions for its use.</li> <li>○ During this meeting, participants provided written consent to participate. With their consent and that of their parent(s)/carer(s), I asked them to 'friend' me on Facebook® and invited them to access the research project page with details of future meetings and research-related information.</li> </ul>
Step 3: <b>Participants' photographs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participants were given 2–3 weeks to take photographs. They were asked to keep a caption in mind when they took each photograph, that captured their feelings about it (e.g. why they took the photograph, how they felt about what was in the photograph, what the photograph represented).</li> <li>○ Participants took 5–50 photographs per person/group.</li> </ul>
Step 4: <b>Focus groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ I held a focus group with participants 2–3 weeks after the initial meeting, in their existing friendship groups. Each lasted approximately 2 hours.</li> </ul>
Step 5: <b>Photo elicitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Initially, participants brought the digital cameras that contained their research photographs to the focus group and I downloaded the photographs onto a laptop computer to be viewed and discussed as a group.</li> <li>○ Once I incorporated Facebook® into my method, participants used this as a means for sharing and photographs.</li> </ul>
Step 6: <b>Individual interviews</b> (approximately 2 hours' duration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ At the end of the focus groups I recruited one young woman from each of two groups for an individual interview. She was not always the first participant recruited but was selected because of her unique subject position or perspective that may have been apparent from her perceived social status position within the group during the focus group. The three divergent cases were also interviewed individually.</li> </ul>
Step 7: <b>Fieldnotes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extensive fieldnotes were written following all interactions with participants.</li> </ul>

I was in contact with each group or individual for approximately two months from the first meeting to the individual interview, including the time needed to take a variety of

photographs including at social events. Data collection commenced in 2009 and concluded in 2013.

#### **4.1.2        *Focus groups***

Participants were recruited for focus groups within their pre-existing, self-selected friendship groups (3–6 members) (Kitzinger, 1994). My rationale was to retain the social structure wherein alcohol-related decisions are made and actions result, in line with literature that indicates group interviews are social enactments (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Halkier, 2010). To capture young women's own subjective accounts (Popay et al., 1998) I used unstructured brainstorming sessions for focus groups, whereby participants voiced their opinions to guided content when/if they had something to contribute. I explored new directions as these emerged rather than attempting to re-focus tangential discussions that may have diverged from my pre-determined schedule.

This conversational method for conducting focus groups seemed to encourage participants to speak with each other rather than respond to me (essential for observing how they might interact with each other and as a group). I enquired about the norms and values of the group, how young women distinguished themselves and their group from other groups and about the formation of the social group within alcohol-specific contexts. Kitzinger (1994, p. 300) notes a potential drawback of group dynamics within focus groups is that "the articulation of group norms may silence individual voices of dissent". However, rather than a drawback, where I sensed a silencing of some individuals over others in the group, this became relevant to understanding young women's position-taking and classification within group hierarchies. Focus groups were social enactments in themselves and assisted me to observe the types of competitive social exchanges that occurred in the group, which might have been similar to the hierarchies that operated in the context

of alcohol consumption.

The conversational nature of group discussion allowed insight into the group dynamics and struggles for status positions within participants' group hierarchies. Some of Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts like symbolic violence were observable as participants achieved group consensus on alcohol-related topics, whereby young women of lower status in the group hierarchy consistently concurred with the perspective of more dominant members without realising it or did not share their opinion at all, especially when describing the group's alcohol-related values.

#### **4.1.3      *Focus group locations and logistics***

Participants chose locations comfortable for them (typically a local café) and times that fitted in with school and employment commitments, mostly during school holidays. For the group recruited through a youth centre, the focus group was conducted at the centre during their usual program time. Each focus group ran for approximately two hours, sometimes longer. Often, participants stayed beyond the allocated time to chat and ask questions of me, including curiosity about which other young women I had spoken with, what these other young women had told me, why I chose to do research on young women and alcohol, and what my personal views were on alcohol consumption. Participants were offered a \$30.00 shopping voucher to compensate for their time and resources.

#### **4.1.4      *Attrition***

One early group with three participants (group 2) (see Table 6.2) was lost through attrition. Before using Facebook® to manage my research, the photo elicitation technique necessitated several meetings and/or telephone calls with participants to provide and

collect research material (e.g. consent forms, digital camera, download and view photographs). A weakness of this method was that participants would use these meetings to share material with me that should have been reserved for the formal photo elicitation interview. Using Facebook® to facilitate engagement with participants and co-ordinate meetings helped to maintain participants' energy and enthusiasm for data collection, and I believe this helped lessen participant attrition thereafter.

#### **4.1.5      *Focus group schedule***

To facilitate focus groups, I devised an interview 'running sheet' that included a 'getting-to-know-you' exercise where I asked participants to create their own group name and pseudonyms; cues for discussing photographs; theoretically-derived theme lists which served as general topical prompts; general questions that had theoretical relevance; and a list of underpinning theoretically-driven questions (for my reference only). Pre-determined codes identified from the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and Bourdieu's theory of social relations became the foundation of my interview schedule rather than the coding frame I used to commence data analysis. My rationale for using a list of pre-determined codes for my interview schedule was to improve interpretive validity (Popay et al., 1998). This acknowledged that asking theoretically driven questions produces self-fulfilling or circular responses, and assisted me to focus first on participants' responses discrete from Bourdieu's theoretical frame (Chapter 6, Findings), I then used Bourdieu's theoretical frame to *interpret responses* (Chapter 7, Discussion).

#### **4.1.6      *Refining data collection***

To clarify, I initially generated the coding framework for analysis using Bourdieu's theory of social relations. I anticipated this would lead to a predictable theory-fulfilling outcome whereby the question asked might be based, for example, on symbolic alcohol consumption, which would lead to a response based on symbolic alcohol consumption

and consequentially, and the coding and themes that emerged would also centre on symbolic alcohol consumption. To refine my data collection, I used Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to develop a 'start list' of codes based on previous research and Bourdieu's concepts. I developed the pre-determined codes and categories outlined in Table 4.5 below *a priori* based on Bourdieu's central theoretical ideas on social relations. I translated Bourdieu's theoretical concepts and key themes identified through the literature into interview question prompts, which enabled me to explore my thesis propositions. I did not pilot the question prompts, rather as I collected and analysed data I added new areas to explore depending on the themes that emerged (Carter & Little, 2007). As the research and data analysis progressed, I added additional codes (or areas to explore) to the interview schedule. I refined the start list of existing codes, added new questions and asked these of different young women until categorical and thematic saturation was reached (Green et al., 2007). Coveney (2007, p. 239) refers to the final theoretically saturated list of codes as a "stabilised" interview schedule where no new codes/concepts are added.

Table 4.3: Focus group schedule of question prompts: *first version*

Pre-determined codes	Pre-determined Categories	Theoretical rationale	Examples of question prompts
Age Gender Geographical location of residence School Parents' occupation Values / interests Markers of economic / cultural capital Strategies of accumulation of symbolic capital	<b>Economic and cultural capital; social capital / social networks*</b>	BOURDIEU'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you come to know each other?</li> <li>• What activities do you typically engage in / obtain most enjoyment from?</li> <li>• What activities do you gain a sense of being a 'group' from?</li> </ul>
Descriptors for friends / friendship group(s) Commonalities among friends Friendship history / foundations Group activities (weekends, spare time) Group membership(s) <u>Sub-codes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changes (how; why; timelines)</li> <li>- Distinction (differences) between groups</li> <li>- Feeling of belonging to a</li> </ul>	<b>Symbolisms; tastes, lifestyles, cultural capital, group composition</b>	ROLE OF CONSUMPTION IN THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is your group known for anything?</li> <li>• What other types of groups of young women do you notice at school?</li> </ul>

group - Perceptions			
<u>Codes:</u> Drinking experience <u>Sub-codes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drinker / Non-drinker</li> <li>- Friends drinkers / non-drinkers</li> <li>- Importance attributed to drinking</li> </ul> Drinking practices <u>Sub-codes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Likes / dislikes about drinking</li> <li>- Drinking / non-drinking settings</li> </ul> Drink type / brand of choice <u>Sub-codes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reference to / knowledge of / familiarity with drink types</li> <li>- Individual preference</li> <li>- Group preference</li> <li>- Rationale / reasoning</li> </ul> Drinking-related activities Company when drinking	<b>Social distinction; <i>tastes</i>, social identity; group identity, group membership, social class</b>	MEANINGS ATTACHED TO PRACTICES NEGOTIATED TO FORM SOCIAL IDENTITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How important is drinking alcohol to your group?</li> <li>• Do/how do you plan for alcohol drinking occasions?</li> <li>• Does everyone in your group drink at the same level / in the same way / the same drinks?</li> <li>• Do you think the party would be the same without alcohol?</li> </ul>



<u>Sub-codes:</u> - Friends - Others  Drinking perceptions / expectations			
<u>Codes:</u> Role(s) within the friendship group Group leader Group-only activities Perceptions of peer-pressure Group values Group dispositions Distinctions <u>Sub-codes:</u> - Within friendship groups - Across / between friendship / social groups Associations made with drinking experiences Memories of drinking experiences <u>Sub-codes:</u> - Positive - Negative Popularity Perceptions of people who drink alcohol and their practices	<b>Distinction, prestige, honour, symbolic power, status, reputation; social inclusion / exclusion; hierarchies; acknowledgement, intimidation, confidence</b>	GROUP DYNAMICS SHAPE ALCOHOL-RELATED PRACTICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there things you do with your friends that you wouldn't do otherwise?</li> <li>• What would it be like to be <i>not</i> drinking alcohol while others in your group were?</li> <li>• Is drinking alcohol spoken about afterwards?</li> <li>• Is there anyone in your group that people seem to look up to? Or anyone in other groups that people admire?</li> </ul>

Table 4.6 outlines the additional areas of exploration progressively added to the focus group schedule. These include iteratively developed codes and categories that emerged from concurrent data analysis and which were ‘checked’ with other participants in subsequent focus groups. Consequently, no two groups were the same.

Table 4.4: Interview schedule of question prompts: *additional areas of exploration*

Progressively developed codes	Progressively developed categories	Theoretical fit	Examples of question prompts
<p><u>Codes:</u> Flexibility in ways of being</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing friendship groups</li> <li>- Meeting new people</li> <li>- Friends from other schools</li> <li>- Cousins/family influence</li> <li>- Changing schools / moving interstate</li> </ul> <p>Popularity defined by who you party with</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sets who you are</li> <li>- Jeopardise your position in the group</li> </ul>	<p><b>Multiple or fragmented identities, different person in different contexts, social mobility</b></p> <p><b>Ownership of style</b></p>	<p>PERFORMATIVE DIMENSION OF IDENTITY EMBODIED CULTURAL CAPITAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you know who you are?</li> <li>• How do you fit in?</li> <li>• What role does your family play? Your school peer group?</li> <li>• Do you fit in best in particular settings than in others?</li> <li>• Is it OK to be different?</li> <li>• Are there any changes that happen in social life?</li> </ul>

<p>Style</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Following trends</li> <li>- Individual is cool</li> <li>- Copying styles</li> </ul>			
<p><u>Codes:</u></p> <p>Endorsement from the boys</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boys dictate</li> <li>- Boys are in control</li> <li>- Drinking to impress the boys</li> <li>- Boys hold parties</li> <li>- Boys decide who gets invited to parties</li> <li>- Boys judge more than girls do</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <p><u>Codes:</u></p> <p>Endorsement from the boys</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boys dictate</li> <li>- Boys are in control</li> <li>- Impress the boys</li> <li>- Boys hold parties</li> <li>- Parties are the only way to socialise and be sexually involved with boys</li> <li>- Boys decide what is popular</li> </ul>	<p><b>Gendered identity, masculine and feminine identities, expressions of femininity, performativity of gender, gender displays, feminine decorum in public places, active male sexuality; passive female sexuality,</b></p> <p><b>Alcohol as a way of doing gender, gender stereotypes, gender norm violation, socialised nature of gender norms, gendered social power, hegemonic masculinity, social criticism</b></p>	<p>SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE</p> <p>MASCULINE DOMINATION</p> <p>CULTURAL REPRODUCTION</p> <p>PERFORMATIVITY</p> <p>POSTFEMINISM</p> <p>INTERSECTIONALITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you ever drink alcohol only with girl friends?</li> <li>• Is your drinking always the same regardless of who is present?</li> <li>• Are there differences between the ways boys/girls behave in the drinking context?</li> </ul>

<p><u>Codes:</u> Double standards according to gender</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drunk boys are funny; drunk girls are trashy</li> <li>- Drinking rules (for girls) are inhibitive and restrictive</li> <li>- A girl being too drunk is disgusting</li> </ul>			
<p><u>Codes:</u> Social media used to identify groups</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More confident on Facebook than in real life</li> <li>- Never get a break from social life</li> <li>- Keeping up to date with social life</li> <li>- Posting photographs on Facebook</li> <li>- Night clubs post photographs on Facebook</li> <li>- Party invitation lists are posted on Facebook</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contemporary modes of socialising, new ways to interact with peers, new technologies that increase avenues for social influences to consume alcohol, expanded forums for social reflection and critique</b></p>	<p>SOCIAL FIELDS NETWORK CAPITAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How important is it to be part of Facebook?</li> <li>• What role does Facebook have for you and your friendship circle?</li> <li>• How would it feel if your friends were on Facebook but you weren't?</li> <li>• In your mind, what is Facebook good for?</li> <li>• Are you aware of Facebook when you're out?</li> <li>• Is it of interest to you what other people do when they're at parties?</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What sorts of things are put on Facebook compared with what is not?</li> <li>• Is there anything similar to Facebook that you use to know what is going on in social life?</li> <li>• How much opportunity do you have to use Facebook?</li> </ul>
<p><u>Codes:</u> Drinking alcohol is expected of you</p> <p><u>Sub-codes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peers want you to know they drink; peers want you to see them drink</li> <li>- You don't think peers are cool but you're expected to think they're cool</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dispositions</b> <b>Creative license</b> <b>Consciousness</b> <b>Reflexivity</b></p>	<p>HABITUS REFLEXIVITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What new life experiences do you get exposed to?</li> <li>• Are there ways of acting around your family or your family friends that you wouldn't act around other people?</li> <li>• Do you seek opportunities to broaden your horizons? Does this relate to alcohol in any way?</li> <li>• Do you feel like there</li> </ul>

			are opportunities for shaping who you are or who you want to be?
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#### **4.1.7        *Adaptive theorising***

Using an approach Layder (1998) termed adaptive theorising, I asked participants questions about their group dynamic based on Bourdieu's theory but without *directly* enquiring about alcohol and prestige. This is reflected in the interview schedule of question prompts (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6), where I outline the topics (pre-determined codes and categories) of questions and the theoretical rationale of these topics.

Although I encouraged conversation within focus groups I was conscious of managing the tension between open dialogue and collecting information relevant to my research propositions. Layder's (1998) adaptive theorising approach helped me to do this. I asked participants seemingly conversational questions that had critical theoretical underpinnings. For example, I asked young women questions about the commonalities of the group like:

- How do you come to know each other?
- What activities do you typically engage in / obtain most enjoyment from?
- What activities do you gain a sense of being a 'group' from?

These had theoretical underpinnings, based on Bourdieu's theory of social relations, and yet were questions answerable by participants. Another example was the way I investigated whether or how particular young women distinguished themselves and their group from other groups, by framing this as a casual conversation topic:

- Is your group known for anything?
- What other types of groups of young women do you notice at school?

This enabled me to situate participants in a social space, and identify the values of the group and relevant forms of cultural capital from which symbolic capital might be

converted. It also helped me to ascertain when I had reached theoretical saturation with my sample.

#### **4.1.8        *Individual interviews***

I used individual interviews to explore how young women constructed the meaningful place of alcohol consumption in their social lives and how this might link to their social role as young women. Qualitative research should be flexible and responsive in acknowledging the social context in which lay knowledge is constructed and this allows for understanding subjective meaning (Popay et al., 1998). Privileging young women's subjective meaning and thus ascribing value to their lay knowledge was essential to ascertain the subjective social context in which their drinking-related practices occurred (Popay & Williams, 1996). Specifically, I focused on how participants formed and expressed their alcohol-related conceptions, decisions, and practices and how they felt these might be socially moderated by those in their immediate social context (young men or young women), or through broader social influences.

Two individual interview participants had previously been part of focus group interviews while others had not. Initially I purposively recruited participants for individual interviews from focus groups, to allow me to explore alcohol-related perceptions from the young woman's individual perspective. In these cases, I linked the narrative provided in individual interviews to my observations about the dynamics and status positions that comprised the group. Building on the information I gained from the focus group, I asked each participant recruited from focus groups about whether her group had a leader, and asked her to describe things they did as a group but would not do alone (and *vice versa*). Data collected from individual interviews produced more nuanced understandings of social aspects of alcohol consumption behaviour than emerged in focus groups. To begin individual interviews, I asked foundation questions that



investigated social, cultural and economic capital, such as: who are your friends? (i.e. what age, what gender); where do you live? Where do you go to school? What do your parents do for work? Do you play sport, or music? What are your pastimes? Do your friends participate in these same activities? Then, using prompts similar to those in focus groups I collected data until I reached theoretical saturation.

Participants who comprised the three divergent cases did not take part in focus groups and were interviewed separately. Individual interviews allowed exploration of unique perspectives, for example, the experiences of young women who abstained from alcohol. I raised areas for discussion similar to those used for previous participants with the focus group schedule as a foundation, and was interested to note differences in participants' responses.

My aim to explore expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption was not adequately addressed initially. The young women I interviewed complied with stereotypical gendered alcohol norms and described other young women who did not comply as undesirable. To obtain another perspective, I recruited a young woman with experience of managing expectations about ways to enact a feminine identity in the context of alcohol consumption. I explored how she developed a socially legitimate feminine identity and the role that alcohol played in this. I also clarified perceptions about being 'slutty' and 'trashy' while they consumed alcohol; who in the social setting defined such labels and how she felt to be labelled in such a way. I began by asking this participant to tell me about how boys drink alcohol. Then asked questions like:

- Do you drink alcohol in similar or different ways to young men?
- What particularly ways are different or similar?
- Do other young women you know do the same?

- How do your friends react to the ways you drink?
- How do others at school react to the ways you drink?

#### **4.1.9      *Individual interview locations and logistics***

I conducted the individual interviews in public spaces selected by participants. Interviews were lengthy, lasting up to two hours. I also had multiple contacts with participants through Facebook®, telephone calls and text messages, which developed rapport and provided important contextual background that assisted me to position young women in social space.

#### **4.1.10      *Interview technique***

My interview technique was informed by Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) description of the "active interview", as being the co-production of interview data in the interaction between the researcher and the participant. The epistemology of active interviewing is that meaning which emerges in the context of the interview is actively constructed within the interview interaction and developed cooperatively between the researcher and the researched, rather than extracted from an individual or group of participants. The focus of this technique is on how the interaction of the interview shapes the response, acknowledging that knowledge is relative to time and place and the researcher is intrinsically involved in creating the meaning that might unreflexively be considered as knowledge about participants' lives and experiences (Silverman, 2006). It was important to be aware of the ways in which the research interaction was articulated and how it shaped participants' stories, and this was an important aspect of my analysis (Jarvinen, 2000) which produced methodological insights detailed in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 7). The use of active interviewing ensured the reflexive sociology outlined in the Methodology chapter (Chapter 3). It acknowledged that every person (researcher, participants, and any others present during the interview) were involved in meaning-

making within the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). For example, the presence of youth workers or parents waiting nearby, along with participants' perceptions of me as the researcher and the research task itself were all likely to affect how participants interpreted questions and the information they divulged. In this way, the exchanges that comprised my research interviews and the knowledge constructed therein were meaningful as social interactions.

The strategies of interpretive inquiry applied to understand the social accomplishment of meaning for young women in the context of alcohol consumption also applied to the process I used to collect and interpret their narratives. As such, Bourdieu's (1984) theorisation of how classification struggles operate to form hierarchies and position people in social space as they vie for positions of social power applied to the context of my interactions with participants. Riley, Schouten, and Cahill (2003) indicated that the power dynamics created through the subjective positions of power between researchers and participants were evident through the interview process and formed the content of the knowledge produced. Adopting a reflective approach to my interviews allowed me to acknowledge my subjective position as a researcher (Roulston, 2010), and this was a strategy I used to attempt to retain focus on participants' lay understandings and to respond to situational power dynamics. I sought to create a climate of mutual reciprocity with research participants (Douglas, 1985). Oakley (1981) identified the benefits of developing a reciprocal relationship between interviewer and interviewee and advocated that:

The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship (p. 41).

According to Oakley, rapport is typified by an interview where the participant is cognisant of the researcher's goals in conducting the interview and provides useful information.

Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein (1965) also suggest the quality of participation has a direct impact on the quality of information produced in a research relationship.

Techniques I used to gain participants' respect for the task included:

- Honouring participants' experiences with alcohol (whatever they were, despite my obvious interest in the practice of consumption)
- Reiterating that there was no right/wrong way to 'be'
- Reinforcing that every participant had a different narrative and each was valuable.

To develop rapport and reiterate reciprocation, I encouraged participants to ask me questions. Traditionally, researcher self-disclosure was discouraged for fear of leading participants' responses. In light of this, I moderated the information I shared by keeping certain information private yet sharing information ('I'm also the middle child') that was conversational and personal but not related to the topic of alcohol and hence less likely to shape participants' responses to the research-related questions. I also allowed participants access to my personal Facebook® page to facilitate communication but also to signify and build trust. I was conscious of how participants' responses may be shaped or constructed by their perceptions about my perspective. I was also aware of Oakley's caution that for ethical reasons, professional competence should be maintained and friendliness needs to be tempered with detachment to avoid unwarranted involvement (Oakley, 1981). There is further discussion of privacy and ethical considerations below.

To foster conditions where participants were communicative and willing to share the social aspects of alcohol consumption, I gave participants free rein over the opening

discussion topic. My logic was that naturalistic exchanges would be useful for engaging with participants' subjectivities (Kitzinger, 1994). Often the conversations began with comments on the food we shared, which segued into describing the activities they had recently engaged in. I aimed to encourage participants to assume a 'story teller' role that did not rely on me asking questions. I hoped this might offset the power dynamics of the interview inherent in the researcher–researched relationship, including discouraging participants from assuming a passive role (despite being socialised into the role of 'respondent'). My approach privileged lay knowledge by communicating respect to participants as experts in the subject matter (Popay et al., 1998; Popay & Williams, 1996).

#### **4.1.11      *Photo elicitation***

I used a photo elicitation technique with all participants in focus groups and individual interviews. Photo elicitation originated in visual anthropology (Collier & Collier 1986) and involves participants visually recording their social context and their own social relations, environment and practices, and then reflecting on these (Schwartz, 1989). Typically, participants take photographs of specified topics then discuss them with researchers. I asked participants to photograph aspects of their social lives linked to consuming alcohol (or abstaining). I used these photographs as a tool to encourage participants to offer narratives of their alcohol-related experiences (Harper, 2002). Advantages of the photo elicitation method when used with young people include that it aids the articulation of difficult responses and triggers recall (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008), and provides the researcher with insights into the otherwise unobservable first-hand context of interactions (Pink, 2001), like youth alcohol consumption. Photo elicitation also allowed me to become attuned to young women's constructions of meaning through embodied practices that produce and are produced by alcohol consumption (Croghan et

al., 2008), responding to a dearth in research on young women's own accounts of drinking (see Chapter 2).

Participants' photographs were typically the first points of discussion during interviews, and participants referred back to them throughout the interviews. Each participant would show photographs and explain the story behind the images. I asked questions about the photographs, probing what they might symbolise and what made the images meaningful. I encouraged participants to depict the good, bad and ugly aspects of drinking alcohol. My intention was to encourage participants to show obscure aspects of consuming alcohol that may be difficult to introduce verbally (Croghan et al., 2008). The photographs would also show aspects of the alcohol consumption experience that might contradict or contravene socially accepted norms, particularly in relation to gendered expectations and the aspects that might be afforded low symbolic capital. My focus was on participants' lay explanations of the meanings attributed to alcohol consumption.

Figure 4.2 shows cues used when discussing participants' photographs.

- Choose one or more photograph that symbolises some aspect of friendship
- Think about writing captions or making speech bubbles for the people or things in the photographs – what would they say? Why?
- If you were asked to think of three words to describe the photo, what would they be?
- Choose a photograph that you like best? That symbolises friendship?
- Can you explain to me what the photograph you have taken is of (who is in it, what is their relationship to you?)
- Can you recall why you took the photograph?

Figure 4.2: Cues for discussing photographs

To my knowledge, at the time my research was designed, photo elicitation had not been used before with young people to explore the social influences apparent to their consumption of alcohol, although it has proven to be a valuable method of data collection among young participants in other topic areas. In particular, researchers found photographs to be useful aids for prompting recall and talking about past events (Hurworth, Clark, Martin, & Thomsen, 2005). This is particularly so when the research topic centres on difficult and abstract concepts, and where the conditions of an event or experience have become normalised, as has excessive alcohol consumption within Australian culture (Curry & Straus, 1994).

#### **4.1.12      *Theoretical rationale for photo elicitation***

There was a theoretical rationale for using photographs in my research that pertained to the symbolic meanings of images and what they represent about the young woman taking the photograph. As Robbins states:

The practice of photography and the judgments made of photographs were particularly amenable to sociological analysis because both were the expressions of the class ethos of those involved (Robbins, 1991, p. 119).

Rhodes and Fitzgerald advocate for visual methods in alcohol research because of their capacity to capture symbolic meaning relating to “bodily appearance and gesture as well as aspects of the physical environment and unpacking these is an element of understanding how meaning resides in context-based interaction” (Rhodes & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 352). Bourdieu (1990c) also postulated that photography performs social functions. His focus extends beyond the literal meaning of what is depicted to the aesthetics and tastes that are revealed through the process of selecting what to photograph. Vromen (1992) interpreted Bourdieu’s theory about class attitudes toward

photography as an examination of the French social stratification system as expressed through photography. According to Vromen (1992), Bourdieu wrote about photography because “it [photography] offers a privileged way of understanding the aesthetics that dominate the discourse and the practices of different classes” (p. 157). Bourdieu believed photography to be symbolic of the hierarchy of cultural expression, which is also very relevant to my research.

#### **4.1.13      *Tastes and aesthetics of the photographer***

Photographs depict the tastes and aesthetics of the photographer and provide unspoken insight into the values of the person who captured the image. Importantly for my research, photographs provide a clue to social judgements made, objects valued and the forms of symbolic capital operating around the practice of alcohol consumption. How participants determined what was worthy of photographing as well as the photographs per se, were intrinsically linked to the capital-based definition of social class provided by Bourdieu. Photographs thus could capture social hierarchies, power differentials and distinctions inherent in young women’s everyday social lives and practices. This helped me to gain a sense of participants’ position in social space as distinguishable from other groups, specifically according to cultural capital, their tastes and/or aesthetics. In his work *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, Bourdieu (1990c) observed that photography is lead by norms of what is photographable and described the social functions of photographs to capture events and experiences. Photographs reflect socially approved and socially regulated practices that are “already solemnised” (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 2004, p. 605). What is socially legitimate within a group, its norms of ‘good taste’, is reflected in photographs. In this way, it could be said that photographs are expressions of young women’s ways of being that are socially endorsed by the social group in question.



It can be difficult for participants to articulate explanations and experiences of the social world. When using photo elicitation, the pictures prompted discussion about the social influences that guided what was considered worth photographing. Through participants' photographs I gained an indication of their social and cultural reference systems, albeit contextual and specific to the social group or circumstance in which the photographs were taken. This provided an important platform for me to question the meanings inherent in alcohol consumption and the social conditions in which participants' alcohol-related experiences and decision-making took place. Underpinning this was my interest in how the decision to photograph is manifest around judgment and value. I asked participants questions like:

- What influences your choice of what to photograph?
- Do different people take different types of photos?
- Do people photograph drinking occasions? And do they post these on Facebook?
- Is anyone allowed to take photos of drinking occasions and post them Facebook?
- What kind of comments do photographs with alcohol-related content get?
- What does it feel like to be photographed while you are drinking alcohol?

The notion of using photographs for research also corresponds with the importance of participant observation and objectivation that I outlined in Chapter 3, Methodology. As Back explained, “[photography] portrays the social world, and betrays the choices made by the person holding the camera” (Back, 2009, p. 474).

#### **4.1.14      *Fieldnotes***

The data that emerged from my methods included my researcher fieldnotes. I made fieldnotes directly following each interaction with participants while still in the research context, and these largely comprised handwritten jottings. Fieldnotes can take many forms and fulfil various purposes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). I used a “salience hierarchy” approach detailed by Wolfinger (2002, p. 89) to focus on the most noteworthy or theoretically salient observations, rather than sequentially or systematically detailing the passage of the interview within a particular timeframe. Emerson et al. suggest that understanding unfolds through writing fieldnotes. My most salient observations, recorded in my fieldnotes, centred on where participants’ accounts and the social dynamics I observed fulfilled my thesis propositions or appeared to be anomalous with Bourdieu’s theory. This assisted my progressive data analysis by prompting further investigations. I also took note of aspects of participants’ lives that were revealed through conversation outside of the formal interviews and this assisted me to position each young woman in social space during sampling and to identify types of young women for further recruitment.

By noting observations selectively that were relevant to my propositions and to the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my research, my observations resonated with my background knowledge and generated what Wolfinger (2002) termed tacit knowledge. My fieldnotes were also self-critical and contained my experiences of, and reactions to, the interactions I had with participants and hence they were a key form of reflexive research practice. In this way, my fieldnotes were useful for contrasting how I felt about what participants were saying with what they said. I documented the ways I as researcher influenced the data I generated in my fieldnotes and I attempted to bracket

my own subjectivities when interpreting participants' accounts using the objectification techniques detailed in the Chapter 3, Methodology.

## **4.2 Sampling strategy**

My criteria for recruiting participants were based on age, gender and class (Lindsay, 2009). The sample was drawn from young South Australian women aged 14–17 years, i.e. who were under the South Australian legal drinking age of 18 years. This was because I sought to capture the perspectives of young women at the most heightened period of exposure to social influences to consume alcohol, that being when they first commence alcohol consumption or abstain while others their age typically begin drinking (AIHW, 2011). When I designed my research, the most recent *National Drug Strategy Household Survey Data* (AIHW, 2005) indicated the majority of young Australian women had consumed a full serve of alcohol by age 14 years, while Roche et al. (2008) found the age of initiation to alcohol consumption was decreasing.

### **4.2.1 Purposive and theoretical sampling**

I used purposive and theoretical approaches to select participants who were most likely to provide insights to assist my exploration of the thesis propositions (Popay et al., 1998; Silverman, 2005). Purposive sampling was used to identify participants by age, gender, and alcohol-related experience. Theoretical sampling (Mason, 1996) was used to construct a sample that was meaningful theoretically, by including young women from various different status backgrounds based on Bourdieu's conception of social class as a relational position in social space and constituted according to the interplay and possession of economic, cultural and social capital. For example, participants were sought whose social positions were characterised by high economic and cultural capital (for example, young women from wealthy backgrounds who attended a prestigious private school for girls and achieved academically, and whose parents bought them

alcohol), and others who possessed low cultural capital yet high social capital (for example, young women who attended State public high schools, who worked part-time to afford alcohol and socialised within broad social circles). I categorised young women into groups occupying different social positions within a 'social field' or a social arena within which struggles take place over access to resources, because it is these social conditions, according to Bourdieu's theory, that influence participants' alcohol consumption. This sampling approach was designed to allow me to capture the diverse social factors relating to alcohol consumption that link to situational and social position differences experienced by young women, and to locate the specific interests of the social group within social spaces and physical places where values and expectations around alcohol consumption likely varied considerably.

### **4.3 Recruitment**

Recruitment was flexible and progressive, driven by emergent understandings in relation to the conceptual framework whereby findings from one group informed the recruitment and data collection of the next group (Tuckett, 2004). Morse believes an inverse relationship exists between the quantity of usable data gained from each participant and the number of participants (Morse, 2000), so to increase the quantity of data I limited the number of participants. This ensured my sample would provide the type of in-depth knowledge necessary to understand the structures and processes by which my participants constructed their alcohol consumption practices. Such responsiveness and adaptability is a marker of good quality qualitative inquiry (Popay et al., 1998).

#### **4.3.1 Recruitment sources**

Initially, participants were sought in Adelaide, South Australia, on the basis of their economic capital by using the school they attended (public, private, Catholic, other) as a proxy measure for socioeconomic status (see Table 4.5). Thereafter, I used the

contextual information I collected about participants' lives to position young women in social status positions and hierarchies, interpreted as education and knowledge, and social capital interpreted as social connections and popularity (Bourdieu, 1985).

Table 4.5: Participant characteristics, school type and geographical location as proxy indicators of economic capital

		School type				Total
		Private college (co-education)	Private college (girls only)	Public High School / other	Catholic	
<b>Economic capital</b>	High	6	4		4	14
	Middle			11		10
	Low			10		9
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>35</b>

I initially identified participants through my existing social and professional networks and then developed other contacts for the purposes of the research. Recruitment from my existing social networks produced a homogeneous sample who used alcohol as symbolic capital to maintain congruence with the alcohol-related social norms of their broader, school-based peer group. My initial sample reflected participants from middle- to high-income, tertiary-educated family backgrounds and who attended private schools. To meet the requirements of theoretical sampling, opportunities were then sought to recruit other participants. Sample diversification also enabled me to address new concepts that emerged during data analysis and was essential to determine whether data fulfilled my thesis propositions. I followed this recruitment strategy until I reached theoretical saturation, to allow a deeper understanding of the variety of experiences relevant to the social influences that shape young women's alcohol consumption.

- Sporting clubs
- Church youth group
- Youth counsellor with connections to a public high school
- Local council youth centre program for young women
- A woman who provided private musical tuition to young women

Figure 4.3: Examples of recruitment sources

To recruit young women from backgrounds of low economic capital, participants were sought through avenues such as local council youth services and programs aimed at supporting young women to complete their education (see Figure 4.3 above). I distributed a research flyer to networks with potential contacts that fitted my sampling frame. Snowball sampling (i.e. where participants suggested others for participation) also aided recruitment. At the outset of my research, I established contact with key gatekeepers in the youth public health and education fields who provided stakeholder contacts, for example, a youth participation project officer at a State government youth agency and a colleague who had worked with a wide range of schools in the southern region of South Australia to promote access and equity to the tertiary sector. I provided gatekeepers with an overview of my project and details of the type of participant I was seeking, and they provided my contact details to stakeholders they considered potentially helpful. Stakeholders then shared my information with potential participants who subsequently contacted me through text messages, Facebook® or by telephone.

#### **4.3.2      *Recruiting difficult-to-reach participants***

To establish and maintain access to certain participants I needed to locate key contacts or gatekeepers who could advocate for my research and who potential participants knew and trusted. Gatekeepers also provided insight into the structural aspects of participants'

lives that were difficult to ascertain through speaking with young women themselves (Marvasti, 2004). When engaging with difficult-to-reach participants I would meet them at formal organised activities (e.g. youth group, training) and in some cases I participated in their activities. For example, I attended a program designed to help young Aboriginal people to continue schooling, and with their invitation I attended a celebration (a picnic lunch in a local park) that marked their graduation from the program I spoke with them here about my research.

### **4.3.3        *Divergent cases***

To avoid only selecting cases that supported my argument, I sought negative instances that enabled a broader exploration of my thesis propositions. Becker (1998) outlines the goal to:

insist that nothing that can be impossible, so we should look for the most unlikely things that we can think of and incorporate their existence, or the possibility of their existence, into our thinking (p. 85).

I recruited disconfirming or divergent cases (Wolfinger, 2002), specifically young women who abstained from alcohol, to deepen my understanding of the reasons why young women drink, through juxtaposing this with why they do not. Additionally, I interviewed a non-drinker about the experience of abstaining while her peers consumed alcohol. I also recruited one participant who did not attend mainstream schooling but rather a program for senior students linked to vocational education and training. This was relevant given the importance participants had placed on the school peer network and parties with school friends, and friends from other schools, as opportunities to socialise and to consume alcohol (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Divergent cases, individual interviews

<b>Case 1:</b>	Non-drinker with friends who drink alcohol
<b>Case 2:</b>	Non-drinker with friends who do not drink alcohol
<b>Case 3:</b>	Drinker not attending mainstream school

#### **4.4 Use of social media to facilitate research**

The social media platform Facebook® was used to facilitate research interactions, including recruitment, follow up, feedback, and as a temporary repository for research data that were shared online through Facebook® but discussed offline and in person during research interviews. This is an example of what Bruckman (2002) terms situated research. She reminds researchers that the Internet rests within a particular social context and therefore, online research should have an offline component. I used Facebook® in my research as an iterative improvement because participants identified it as their preferred mode of communication. Participants interacted daily in a globalised and networked world, characterised by growing use of technologies that blur the lines between people's public and private lives (Elliott & Urry, 2010). Using social media was a normalised practice in their everyday communications (according to their accounts), as it is for many young Australians (Australian Interactive Media Industry Association, 2013). Furthermore, as the research progressed I realised that I was spending an inordinate amount of time on administration and the logistics of coordinating group meetings. The distribution of photographs for the photo elicitation technique was also cumbersome and I was concerned about participant fatigue *before* focus groups or individual interviews had begun. To increase the feasibility of my research method, I sought permission to use Facebook® to facilitate communication with participants through an amendment to the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. The ethics of using Facebook® for my research is described next.



## **4.5 Ethics**

The Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee approved the research. In this section of my thesis I outline how I used the ethical principles of respect, integrity and beneficence as set out in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013) to guide my research. I also discuss the ambiguity surrounding potential risks intrinsic to the use of social media, specifically risks to privacy and confidentiality that could hinder ethical conduct and which lie outside of traditional ethical principles. These issues are discussed further in a published paper (Lunnay, Borlagdan, McNaughton & Ward, 2015) (see Appendix 2) that highlights key areas of concern to human research ethics committees, such as the use of social media to facilitate research interaction and the sharing of material for research analysis. My focus was on using social media as a tool to manage interactions for research purposes rather than to contribute to ongoing debates on the ethics of studies that use social media for data collection (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Orton-Johnson 2010; Ward, Henderson, Coveney, & Meyer, 2012).

### **4.5.1 Participant consent**

Written information about the research was provided to all participants before they gave written consent to participate. They could withdraw from the research at any time, and the information they provided was anonymous and confidential. However, I told participants that I would be legally obliged to disclose information relating to illegal activity if requested by relevant authorities. The written consent also covered the use of Facebook® for research management and the sharing of photographs. Because of the sensitivity of information about underage young women drinkers, and the ability on Facebook® to share, view and 'tag' photographs of oneself and others taken during participation in social settings for my research, I did not consider participants' action of

'friending' me on Facebook® was adequate to constitute consent. The visual aspects of Facebook® pose substantial room for risks to privacy and the potential manipulation of research participants.

#### **4.5.2      *Parent/carer consent***

Parents/carers of participants provided informed consent for the young woman in their care to participate in the research. They were given an information sheet that outlined what the study would entail. I was cognisant that young women's participation in the research might prompt their parents/carers to ask questions about their social life including alcohol. I asked parents/carers to respect the privacy of the participant in their care and advised that they would not have access to research materials including photographs or recordings of group or individual interviews. Consent was not given for one potential participant to participate and a gatekeeper explained that her parent was an alcoholic who was concerned that this might be discussed during the research.

#### **4.5.3      *Photograph release form***

In addition to gaining formal written consent for interviews I asked participants to sign a photograph release form giving consent for me to use the photographs they provided in the photo elicitation technique. I designed this form specifically for my research and it allowed participants to give different levels of consent for the use of their photographs in the research: not for display/background analysis only, display in thesis materials, or display in academic articles and presentations. Participants maintained ownership of their photographs. I managed the potential risk of unauthorised publication of participants' photos in this way. I discouraged participants from taking photographs of illegal behaviour, nudity or other inappropriate practices.

## **4.6 Use of social media**

I used Facebook® to improve my access to, and communication with, participants on three levels: 1) engagement, 2) retention, and 3) facilitation of data sharing. I gained ethics approval to create private Facebook® pages for the project using the 'events' application of the software. This allowed creation of unique Facebook® pages, which were accessible by invitation only and only to those involved in the research. They were not visible to other Facebook® users. Unique Facebook® project pages were created for each of the focus groups and for each individual who was interviewed. All members of each focus group had access to the same Facebook® page but individual pages were only accessible to that person. Group members were advised to maintain the confidentiality of fellow members, and I wrote a statement about confidentiality as part of instructions to participants on using the page. These Facebook® pages were used to facilitate all research-related interactions.

The project pages were created within my private Facebook® profile. Because of the emphasis on the value of self-disclosure through research practice (Grbich, 2004) to achieve reciprocity, participants had full access to my personal Facebook® page, as I had to theirs. I shared with them my personal photographs, comments from friends posted on my 'wall', and so on. Sharing was reinforced through statements I made to participants during research interviews such as 'You'll notice on my wall...' I was conscious that in choosing to be completely reciprocal, open and inclusive, all personal content on my Facebook® page that could reveal any aspects of my personal life was likely to be seen by research participants, and I noted that my safety warranted as much consideration as the safety of participants. As Morse (2007) asserts, researcher safety is one of the least addressed yet most important considerations in qualitative inquiry.

#### **4.6.1      *Privacy settings***

Facebook operates with various levels of privacy. Users can nominate their privacy settings to control who has access to various aspects of their profile page. To ensure my research project page was secure and private, a fellow student attempted to view the page using a pseudo profile and confirmed that privacy settings ensured access was not permissible to anyone other than the participants and me as the researcher. Selecting this privacy setting also meant that other Facebook® ‘friends’ of the participants could not see their membership of, or activity on, my project Facebook® page. As previously indicated, I asked each participant to be my Facebook® ‘friend’ using my private Facebook® profile. Although I was keen to foster rapport with participants, I was transparent about the purpose of the Facebook ‘friendship’, that it was purely for research purposes rather than a social connection, and I removed the ‘friendship’ from Facebook® at the conclusion of the research process. Given all relationships on Facebook® are labelled ‘friendships’ I considered it important to make clear to participants the difference between social friendship and friendship for the purposes of research at the outset, to ensure their expectations of the research ‘friendship’ aligned with this. I managed the risk of friends who happened to be mutual to the participant and the researcher but not known to each other through my research project (i.e. private friendships) by customising the privacy settings of Facebook®, which allowed my friends list to be ‘blocked’ and thus it was inaccessible to participants.

#### **4.6.2      *Engagement***

I used Facebook® to discuss the logistics of meetings with participants and posted details on the Facebook® project page about meeting and interview times and locations. The ‘events’ application enables a Facebook® user (i.e. the researcher) to create and ‘host’ a virtual ‘event’ and ‘invite’ Facebook® friends (i.e. the research participants) to

attend. A virtual event can contain details of a literal event, meaning that invited guests can discuss online the logistics of an in-person meeting or can be a repository page for sharing data.

### **4.6.3        *Retention***

The ease of contact with participants facilitated through Facebook® seemed to encourage participants to maintain contact with me for the duration of the data collection phase of my research. Facebook® also assisted me with data analysis because ongoing contact enabled me to seek clarification about items participants raised (e.g. slang terms specific to group names or alcohol or consumption practices). It also enabled me to check with participants that I had interpreted their responses accurately. I made it clear to participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time and I gave this option at the outset of the project through the initial process of seeking consent. In addition, I also made participants aware by verbal instruction that the process of ‘de-friending’ me would ensure Facebook® contact ceased at the end of the research.

### **4.6.4        *Information sharing***

I used Facebook to facilitate the sharing of information and research materials and Facebook® functioned as a temporary repository for research data. Participants used the Facebook® project page to upload photographs with their captions, and share them with me, and fellow group members. I told participants that, wherever possible, their photographs should not include people not known to the participant and who were not aware of the research project. If such people were included, I encouraged participants to seek verbal permission from them.

## **4.7    Applying traditional ethical principles**

The following section details how I used traditional ethical principles of respect, integrity

and beneficence (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013) to guide my research. It explains the ethical risks of research communication undertaken online and shows how I attempted to ameliorate these. The concept of respect in human research ethics maintains that participants' welfare is paramount and acknowledges that any interaction has the potential to harm. Further, a researcher's level of compliance with integrity is a marker of research merit. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure research is conducted ethically, especially when using innovative approaches like the use of modern communication technologies where maintaining integrity can be challenged by factors that appear outside of the researcher's control. The ethical notion of beneficence measures whether the benefits of the research justify or outweigh the potential burden to participants of undertaking it. Social media use, like any online method that blurs the line between public and private domains, could qualify as an ethically risky domain (Nind, Wiles, Bengry-Howell, & Crow, 2012).

#### **4.7.1      *Respect***

In terms of traditional ethical principles, the concept of respect was particularly pertinent to research with young women, given their age and the sensitivity of the topic of alcohol and the practices often associated with drinking. I used various measures to demonstrate respect for participants and recognise their essential role in generating the research outputs. I sought to empower participants through the research process by allowing them control over the conditions of the research interactions where possible. I gave consideration to participants' preferred way to communicate and engaged with Facebook® in response to their requests. The aim of this approach was to create conditions conducive to participants' comfort to enable them to share aspects of their social life. This form of interaction provided me with insight into the values of their social group related to alcohol consumption, and to aspects of their sociality that may affect

drinking decisions. In line with the interpretivist epistemology of my research approach, achieving participant autonomy through data collection required that I positioned participants as equal data gatherers rather than subjects (Popay & Williams, 1996) and this also improved the validity of my research (Popay et al., 1998).

Using Facebook® brought me closer to achieving participant autonomy by allowing participants to choose what material they wished to upload to Facebook® for discussion during interviews. Participants also had the flexibility afforded by the functions of Facebook® to withdraw material at any time from the research. I also aimed to achieve participant autonomy by allowing participants to choose where and when they interacted with me, and the flexibility of social media meant participants could engage in the research at a time that respected their pre-existing commitments (e.g. school, work, sport, leisure). This approach acknowledged the highly compartmentalised nature of young people's time (Borlagdan et al., 2010). I allowed participants to choose which photographs to take and share as a way of upholding the principle of autonomy. The positive impact on rapport development and the demonstration of respect shown by allowing participants control over what they provided as research material was considered to be a major benefit in the research.

#### **4.7.2      *Integrity***

During all interactions with participants I endeavoured to act with integrity and discretion. This ensured that it was not obvious to outsiders that a Facebook® user was involved in a research project, or even that I was using Facebook® as a research communication tool. I was particularly cognisant of the potential for personal information to be taken out of the private context, perhaps unintentionally. To avoid this, I did not use the public spaces of Facebook® for contact with participants and used only the private project page, despite having access to participants' personal pages. I did this to avoid exposing

participants' identities and to ensure their Facebook® friends could not see that they were involved in a research project.

### **4.7.3        *Beneficence***

Practising beneficence was a challenge in my research. The photo elicitation technique entered areas that are often perceived to be ethically risky, including the Internet, visual content, and illegal consumption of alcohol (Nind et al., 2012). Combining these with social media made my research potentially a high-risk undertaking. As Nind points out, being both innovative and responsible is a complicated process for researchers to manage. Ethics is more than the avoidance of harm, but a balance of risk, efficacy, justice and respect (Rhodes et al., 2010) and promotion of integrity, quality and transparency (Nind et al., 2012). There has to be a reasonable rationale for engaging with anything risky that links back to improved understanding, and which has some benefit to the community beyond the researcher. To increase the chances of practising beneficence in my research approach, I became proficient in the functions and applications of Facebook®, particularly the privacy functions. I created the Facebook® project pages in the ways previously mentioned to lessen the chances of jeopardising the confidentiality of participants. I also sought to ensure participants understood the difference between public and private material on the Internet as far as was required to uphold privacy for the purposes of research and fostering a respectful research relationship, even if participants did not demonstrate the same practice in their personal communications with friends.

## **4.8    Privacy and confidentiality issues**

With new technology like social media, there are considerations in addition to the traditional ethical principles outlined above, for protecting privacy and limiting risks that are removed from conventional notions of these concepts. These considerations relate



to the hazy spatial boundaries of social media pages (Elgesem, 2002) and to the production of 'private' material within 'public' cyberspace that can be dispersed rapidly and in unsolicited ways (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Orton-Johnson, 2010). Social media privacy settings provide only limited protection if not set correctly. This caution is as relevant for protecting researchers from acting unethically as it is for protecting participants, because of the reciprocal nature of the social media relationship, or in the case of my research, the Facebook® 'friendship'. As previously indicated, many social networking services, including Facebook®, provide users with a choice of who can view their profile page. This prevents unauthorised user(s) from accessing their information. Using Facebook® to facilitate interaction with research participants requires the researcher to request a virtual 'friendship' with the participant and at the same time, commits the researcher to sharing their own Facebook® profile page with participants, although some aspects of the page can be kept private.

Facebook® pages can be set up for specific purpose such as a research project. However, a reflexive researcher would be unlikely to take this depersonalised option because the reciprocal nature of the sharing involved in the social media platform is conducive to the type of rapport that is key to good quality research. It is also worth noting that the privacy settings of Facebook®, for example, are not straightforward and are constantly changing as new features are added. Guidelines about the level of privacy on default settings, and how users are informed when settings change, can be confusing. To maintain privacy and confidentiality I needed to be actively using social media and knowledgeable about the intricacies of privacy settings. Furthermore, I did not rely on the privacy settings as a safety measure.

When using social media, there are difficulties inherent in seeking to protect against unethical behaviour. There is ambiguity surrounding whether particular information is

public or private, and it is possible for supposedly private information to be made public, rapidly and unwittingly. This includes, but is not limited to, issues of hacking, identity theft, privacy, and data ownership. For example, my participants owned the data (information, photographs) they loaded as material to my research project Facebook® page, and they could access and download their own material from Facebook®. With group participation, individual members had access to other participants' material and I had limited control over how this information was used, with the risk it could be passed to others without consent. In my experience, the ethical complexity of social media centres on this notion of publically available private information. I agree that traditional expectations of privacy need to be updated to account for the unclear distinction between public and private domains that is encapsulated in social media (Zimmer, 2010). To limit personal information placed on Facebook® for research purposes from spreading through public channels I had to build my knowledge of Facebook® functions. The division between private and public when conducting research using Facebook® was not readily identifiable (Elgesem, 2002). For example, to edit information on a Facebook® account, the sites are password protected and while this prevented unauthorised user(s) from adding, changing, or removing personal information, the pictures or other data posted on the Internet still entered public (virtual) space.

There were also issues surrounding data and image storage or destruction. I was diligent with removing all research material from Facebook® when the research was completed. Even so, there are about uncertainties whether information loaded to the Internet can ever truly be removed. I further discuss the experience of undertaking research using social media including the methodological benefits in Chapter 7, Discussion.

## **4.9 Chapter summary**

In this chapter I discussed the methods and techniques used that I reflexively adapted and refined to ensure they would elicit quality data capable of enhancing my understanding of young women's alcohol consumption. I then detailed the sampling rationale and the process I followed to recruit participants. This was underpinned by a reflexive approach to sociology that Bourdieu advocated, whereby my subjectivities underlined every aspect of the research process. The reflexive process of 'interpreting the interpreted' influenced not only my choice of methods, but also my interpretation of the accounts they produced, which I discuss in the next chapter on data analysis.

## CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter outlines the analytical approach I used to interpret my findings. In line with deductive logic, each aspect of data analysis was theory-driven. I generated my findings using deductive logic by comparing and contrasting data with Bourdieu's theory to explore whether they fulfilled my thesis propositions. I was interested in the possibilities for improved understanding (following deductive logic) but also the limits of this (in line with abductive logic). Specifically, using abductive logic, I analysed data that were not congruent with Bourdieu's framework to generate novel, improved understandings of young women's alcohol consumption. Elements of this chapter are derived from a paper I co-authored which demonstrated the utility of these critical realist analytical tools – deductive and abductive logic - for developing theoretical understandings (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013) (see Appendix 2).

This chapter comprises step 6 of Meyer and Ward's guide for integrating theory into the research design (Meyer & Ward, 2014) (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. *The integration of theory into research design step 6* (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

Step 1: Systematically search the literature in the area of empirical and theoretical interest and identify gaps for empirical investigation.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 2: Identify social theories (potential and those that have been used in the area previously) in your research area.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 3: Critically analyse the social theory(ies) of interest. This involves identifying any empirical gaps in the theory, relevant critiques of the practical application of theory in the area of interest, and developing your own critiques of the practical application of specific areas, contexts and settings.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 4: Develop a conceptual framework to operationalise the	<i>Literature Review</i>

theory in research methods.	(Chapter 2)
Step 5: Design the research with the aim of investigating both empirical and theoretical research gaps.	<i>Methodology</i> (Chapter 3)
Step 6: Conduct data collection and analysis.	<i>Methods &amp; Data Analysis</i> (Chapters 4 & 5)
Step 7: Write up the research results.	<i>Findings and Discussion</i> (Chapters 6 & 7)

## 5.1 Deductive logic

Deductive research is limited to established theories – in the case of my research this would be to presuppositions about the social and symbolic aspects of young women’s alcohol consumption derived from Bourdieu’s theory. No new conclusions about reality might be gained from deduction beyond what is already known (Danermark et al., 2002). Using *deductive logic* (as distinct from deduction), I explored the capability of Bourdieu’s theory for aiding my interpretation of my findings. The emergence of novel ideas rested on my critical use of Bourdieu’s theory and my exploration of findings that were *anomalous* with the theory. Meyer and Ward (2014) also indicate that the use of social theory to move from data description to interpretation requires that inferences be made *outside* the data, using deductive logic.

Bourdieu’s concepts have been criticised for their tautological properties (Blackshaw, 2013). He left his constructs open to interpretation, claiming they were visible through their application. Thus, the utility of Bourdieu’s concepts is contingent on researchers populating its propositional variables with social values, and researchers’ capacity to translate between the theoretical meanings of empirical data. The concept symbolic capital is particularly and purposefully defined by Bourdieu only as the *summation of other capitals*, taking its form from other capitals once they are recognised and legitimised (Bourdieu, 1998). Researchers are required to interpret the cultural

conditions that produce recognition and symbolic capital within the context of their unique research. In consequence, Bourdieu's theory is 'true' in every interpretation. Where my findings were not explained by his theory, this indicated 'new' areas for research, leading to novel ways his theory could be applied.

The utility of Bourdieu's concepts also depends on researchers' interpretation of his purpose in developing theory. Bourdieu interpreted theory as providing questions for research, rather than answers (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He seemed to believe that if researchers employed his concepts as explanations of behaviour then they were being tautological, but if researchers viewed concepts as an opening to question behaviour they were being productive. Accordingly, Bourdieu described his concepts as thinking tools, and it was from this viewpoint that I looked to his theory for how to use these tools to better understand young women's practices. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu provides an entry point to understanding why people *do what they do* in a certain cultural field by identifying their practices in the context of their values or forms of cultural capital recognised by their social group (Bourdieu, 1993). Using deductive logic, I could use Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to determine how each participant's alcohol-related values related to the values and interests of the friendship group, and link these to the strategies of accumulation of symbolic capital employed by those within the group. I could also explore how these values and interests reflected or became sources of symbolic capital. As noted above, researchers must establish the interests of the cultural field and the strategies of capital accumulation employed by agents in that field.

## 5.2 Abductive logic

I used abductive logic to analyse data that did not verify Bourdieu's theory (Danermark et al., 2002). Abductive logic entails using data to ascertain the interpretive capacity of theory. The process of abductive analysis prompted questions such as: *are there practices young women enact that structure their relationships and create distinctions that are not explained by Bourdieu's theory?* The value of drawing abductive inferences from data is that these hold the possibility of creating innovative ways of understanding connections that were not obvious between the social conditions of consumption and young women's practices (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013).

The concept of abduction developed by philosopher Charles Peirce was markedly different to the way it is now conceived in contemporary social sciences. For Peirce, abduction was used to generate theories (abduction without logic) or explanatory hypotheses that might be subsequently explored (Peirce, 1932). Contemporary uses of abduction are more concerned with the verification of theories (abduction with logic) and this is how I have used abduction, or rather abductive logic, in this thesis. Specifically, I used Bourdieu's theory as logic for inquiry and abduction (with logic) or abductive logic to analyse my data. Given Bourdieu's concepts were purposively malleable and his theory is open to interpretation, rather than refute his theory and develop an alternative, as might be the result of abductive logic in other research circumstances (for example, see Meyer & Lunnay, 2013), my research provided an opportunity to *expand* it. For example, in cases where participants encountered opportunities to consume alcohol but did not have their social group as a reference point (following abductive logic), I identified the social conditions under which it might be socially acceptable for young women to drink alcohol *freely* or to abstain (see Chapter 6, Findings). I studied anomalous cases to explore the conditions that made drinking-related outcomes socially

symbolic, valuable and in some cases, 'necessary'. This included attempting to understand what happened when participants consumed alcohol in ways that contravened socially prescribed ways of drinking alcohol, or did not consume alcohol at all. Another example of the utility of using abductive logic was in exploring participants' expressions of femininities through alcohol consumption. Through deductive logic I verified Bourdieu's theory of social power evident in socially reproduced codes of femininity, which impinged on participants' agency to consume alcohol in certain ways. Then, through abductive logic I considered cases where young women *could* legitimately experiment with subversive gender displays through the ways they consumed alcohol, albeit with social limitations. Using abductive logic prompted me to consider the types of young women and the social conditions that might *increase* opportunities to reshape expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption. Here, I employed counterfactual thinking (Danermark et al., 2002), or alternatives to events, actions or states (i.e. what might have been or what might be) (Epstude & Roese, 2008) to consider how young women's expressions of femininity through alcohol might be different if there were differences in gendered alcohol norms. To elicit counterfactual thinking, I used question prompts including gender norm stereotypes, normative gendered identities and enquired about expected feminine decorum in public places while drinking.

Through abductive logic I explored anomalies within the methodological aspects of Bourdieu's theory. Eco (1984) discusses abductive logic as creative, in that it produces unique or innovative findings, whereby a researcher opposes conventional interpretations (Danermark et al., 2002). According to Eco, interpretive decisions about symbols especially (in the case of my research, symbolic practices) involve a phenomenological type of creative abductive logic. Pierce's thinking about abduction (or abductive logic) also had phenomenological roots (Peirce, 1983). An interpretation of



Bourdieu's theory might suggest that participants' symbolic distinction-asserting strategies in the context of alcohol consumption (as a product of the habitus) were not based on conscious calculation. Rather, Bourdieu's theory suggests these symbolic practices resulted from unconscious dispositions toward a particular way of being. Using abductive logic, propositions based on his theory that were not fulfilled were evident in participants' narratives around *why they did the things they did* that seemed to follow 'agendas'. I built into my data collection techniques that encouraged participants to become aware of their supposedly subconscious motivations (I discuss these techniques and the outcome of using them in Chapter 7, Discussion). In this way, using abductive logic enabled me to identify findings *not* verifiable by the concept of habitus and *extend* Bourdieu's theory that dispositions to act are not conscious.

### **5.3 Data and transcription**

I transcribed fully all individual interview and group interview data, listening to audio files many times. I analysed the narrative and captions given to photographs in the photo elicitation aspect of the interviews as part of the interview data but the visual content of the photographs was not analysed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), because the purpose of photo elicitation was to elicit the meanings in photographs, hence the narrative was important rather than the images (see section 4.5.1 for the theoretical rationale for using photo elicitation). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and key parts of what participants said (related to thesis propositions) were documented in fieldnotes, where I reflected also on the construction of meaning in the interview and focus group contexts (Hammersley, 2010). Active listening during the process of transcribing contributed to theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and increased familiarisation by bringing me closer to the data and provided opportunities to reflect on and refine interview techniques. Hammersley (2010) suggests that in the process of transcription,

researchers slow dialogue from its more rapid speed as in typical social interactions thus increasing reflexivity and allowing them to “hear what people are saying, and hearing means understanding what they mean” (p. 564).

## 5.4 Manual coding

Data were entered into NVivo 10, which was used for organising and familiarising myself with the large volume of data and for open coding, the first stage of analysis. NVivo aided the process of generating codes from the first interview and applying these codes to the second interview (and so on), and identifying where data fitted into existing codes. New codes were created for data that did not fit into existing codes. I undertook manual content analysis in the latter stages of analysis, where coding was focused and analysis followed deductive logic. Given my research purpose was to ascertain *what* young women experienced and *why/how* they experienced it a certain way, I considered coding as a creative process rather than a technical task (Basil, 2003), and using a computer seemed to create distance from the data (Bourdon, 2002; Welsh, 2002). Instead I generated handwritten summaries of coding as a tool for analysis (Bazeley, 2009), which involved printing transcripts, highlighting key phrases and excerpts, and handwriting notes in the margins to identify emergent themes. These summaries were checked for reliability by supervisors and through peer review (Lunnay et al., 2011; Lunnay et al., 2015; Meyer & Lunnay, 2013) (see appendices 1-3). Processes used to analyse data were documented, which entailed identifying relationships between categories to create themes, describing the characteristics and boundaries of the data, comparing differences in the characteristics and boundaries and contrasting across different contexts for different data, and relating this to existing research (Bazeley, 2009). For example, I identified a relationship between the categories *performativity of identity* and *embodied cultural capital* and the category *gender norms and femininities*, which

enabled me to explore and understand data within the theme of classed and gendered alcohol consumption.

## 5.5 Stages of analysis

I used a three-phase process to analyse my data: 1) open coding, 2) conceptual and thematic categorisation of coding, and 3) theoretical categorisation.

### 5.5.1 *Open coding*

Open codes were determined by what emerged from the data, not necessarily derived from the theory. This provided a platform for employing deductive logic during analysis. In this phase I 'disassembled' the data to create a description of what participants said and this was a way of privileging participants' subjective meanings (Popay et al., 1998). Some open codes provided a broad context for understanding young women's drinking, while others could be linked directly to Bourdieu's theory, as I demonstrate below in Figure 5.1.

Example of an open code that pertained to social relations as structuring alcohol consumption: **Don't drink alone (code)**

Example of an excerpt of transcript coded at 'don't drink alone':

Belinda: If you went to Schoolies and none of your mates were drinking, but you still wanted to, would you still drink?

Carrie: Yep

Sam: Yeah

Charlotte: I wouldn't

Belinda: You wouldn't? (to Charlotte)

Charlotte: Not if I was, if I was just going out with a group, that one group, and I wasn't seeing anyone else for the whole night I wouldn't get drunk by myself

Sam: Yeah I suppose

Figure 5.1: Example of open coding

At the open code 'drinking like the boys' some accounts indicated that to 'drink like the boys' was socially undesirable and contravened dominant and preferred versions of femininity, thus verifying Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power. For example, the following account (Figure 5.2) suggests an expectation that the participant would 'drink like the boys'. She describes concern about not being able to 'drink like the boys' and strategies for appearing to 'drink like the boys'. This example reveals the cultural contradictions inherent in young women's drinking whereby expressions of femininity are bound by dominant masculine drinking norms.

Examples of an open code that verified the theory: **Drinking like the boys**  
**(code)**

Example of an excerpt of transcript coded at 'drinking like the boys':

Destiny: used to play with my friend down the road, we'd play dodgy dice  
(drinking game) and the guys passed out and we were still standing

Belinda: And if the roles were reversed, how would the girl be treated?

Destiny: Basically like she can't hold her alcohol and the fact that we can't hold  
our alcohol how are we supposed to drink around males, how are we supposed  
to act around males? If the girl goes home with a random at a bar, then she's  
classified as a slut.

Belinda: So what do you mean by that? How are you supposed to hang around males? Can you tell me more?

Destiny: If you're drinking, OK in a female's eyes, if you're drinking around males, you don't drink as much and you slowly drink and you try to drink your alcohol instead of having 50–50 you have 30–70 or something

Belinda: OK, is that a ratio?

Destiny: Yeah a ratio of alcohol to soft drink

Belinda: OK so this is when you're mixing your own?

Destiny: Yeah um no when the bar mixes them you go to 'em, 'hey can you make mine 30–70 or 40–60' make sure it's less than the males so you can still drink and look like you're having the exact same amount as them but not end up having as much alcohol as them so that when they pass out, you don't.

Belinda: Right so because if you pass out that's not OK?

Destiny: You would be classed as a weakling and umm they can do anything to you if you pass out. That's why every female should learn the rule of 40–60 to 50–50 percent; you never have the same amount as a male in terms of alcohol, if you drink too much you can pass out

Figure 5.2: Example of open coding with theory verification

Open coding was iterative. I coded each interview transcript directly after it was conducted. This enabled me to review, modify and add interview questions according to emergent findings, to add exploratory techniques to my method of data collection in line with the process for making abductive inferences outlined above, and to sample for divergent cases (see Chapter 4).

### **5.5.2      *Conceptual and thematic categorisation***

The second stage, conceptual and thematic categorisation, involved using deductive logic to organise open codes into concepts related to my thesis propositions. During this stage, I generated analytic concepts from open codes. Whereas in the previous stage I ‘disassembled’ the data to create a description of what participants said, in this stage I ‘reassembled’ or re-grouped the data into explanatory concepts and thematic categories. Immersion in the data (Green et al., 2007) alongside familiarity with the extant theoretical literature and Bourdieu’s theory was key to this process.

The following examples show how the codes identified above link into themes.

Example 1: Drinking like the boys (code) > **Gendered drinking styles** (category)

Category: **Gendered drinking styles**

Examples of codes:

- Drinking like the boys
- Different drinking styles acceptable for boys/girls
- Boys get violent when drunk
- Girls who drink every weekend are disgusting
- Girls who are too drunk cry
- Judging others according to gender norms

Example 2: Don’t drink alone (code) > **sociality of drinking alcohol** (category)

Category: **Sociality of drinking alcohol**

Examples of codes:

- Don’t drink alone
- Parties are the only way to socialise

- Pre-drinks with best friends
- Drinking alone is a waste
- Drinking with parents is a waste
- Meeting people through being out drinking
- Drinking gives confidence to meet new people
- Levels of drinking are socially moderate

### **5.5.3        *Theoretical categorisation***

In the third stage, theoretical categorisation, I examined the extent to which my research propositions were fulfilled or adequately explorable through the data (Coveney, 2007). I restructured the conceptual codes I identified in the previous stage into themes, which allowed me to test the fit of my concepts to Bourdieu's theoretical framework. I used the abductive logic technique of data analysis (described above) during this stage. Data that were anomalous with the theory illuminated participants' subjective meanings around the social conditions that make young women's alcohol consumption meaningful. I categorised such anomalous data into thematic areas that expanded Bourdieu's theory (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013).

The following outlines examples of some theoretical categories, indicating how themes evolved from codes and concepts:

Example 1: Drinking like the boys (code) > Gendered drinking styles (category) >

**Alcohol consumption has gendered boundaries (theme)**

Theme: **Alcohol consumption has gendered boundaries**

Examples of categories:

- Gendered drinking styles

- Double standards
- Boys dominate
- Gender stereotypes
- Girls who resist gendered norms are censured
- Levels of drinking are moderated by gender

Example 2: Don't drink alone (code) > alcohol consumption is social (category) >

**alcohol is a product instilled with social value (theme)**

Theme: **Alcohol is a product instilled with social value**

Examples of categories:

- Alcohol consumption is social
- Classification of drinks
- Alcohol enables social disinhibition
- Drinking alcohol is socially desirable
- Drinking alcohol builds social confidence
- Girls define social groups by alcohol

## 5.6 Memos

Memos were a critical link between the data and the creation of codes and categories, and the relationship between them. Memos were handwritten notes I made during and after transcription that contained reflections about the research design, methodological insights, my analytical thoughts (my interpretation of the data rather than what participants said *per se*), and indicated where something thematically 'new' arose, which contributed interpretive validity to my findings (Popay et al., 1998). Memos helped with



recall of nuances in body language related to conversational tones and interpersonal cues. Memos also prompted reflexive consideration about how interactions with participants 'felt'. The focus was on the context in which themes emerged. Memos were essential for developing abductive inferences. In the memos, I flagged thematic areas or theoretical anomalies where employing abductive logic was necessary to improve understanding. For example, I used memos to document where there seemed to be tensions or contradictions in participants' accounts regarding their previous explanations or to Bourdieu's theory. The following excerpt indicates the first type of contradiction, where participants' accounts seemed contradictory:

Carrie: Nah, I don't really throw up, that was really unintentional. You just can't plan what happens sometimes

Belinda: Yeah but obviously you can feel yourself getting to the point where you think 'Yep I'm going to pull up a bit shabby tomorrow, I should stop.'

Charlotte: Umm

Carrie: Umm it depends, like sometime it doesn't hit you until heaps later, sometimes you drink more because you can't feel it and then all of a sudden...

Sam: Yeah you think why aren't I getting drunk, it's been like 10 drinks

Belinda: And that surprises you when you get like that?

Carrie: Yeah...and then you're just like, why aren't I...and then all of a sudden bam! Drunk all of a sudden...you know when to stop though, like I reckon you can physically stop yourself.

*Memo: Here Carrie's initial explanation of a sudden, unplanned outcome of becoming intoxicated is contradicted by her statement that indicates she can control how much alcohol she consumes. The contradictory nature of her explanation makes the seemingly 'unintentional' intoxication she described seem more likely than unlikely and*

*prompted me to explore the complexity of control as a theme.*

An example of where participants' accounts contradicted Bourdieu's theory is indicated in the following excerpt:

Belinda: What is it like usually though, so say you have a party and there's no alcohol there...

Kit: Boring

Belinda: OK, why would it be boring?

Violet: Because no one would have the confidence to do anything

Madison: People would be all quiet

Kit: People would be normal like really normal, it's just not fun

Belinda: Yeah OK

Madison: If you see people [inaudible 13:40] ...like when you're drinking

Kit: I mean it's good to catch up with people like without alcohol like, I love seeing friends like if it's just like a catch-up session without alcohol then all good

Violet: It's fine when you're with your friends [without alcohol] and you know you can be yourself around them but then like if it's a big party...then with alcohol if you secretly like them or even if you just want to be friends with them then you can like talk to them.

*Memo: Reading this excerpt alongside Bourdieu's theory I expected to hear that participant's immediate social group provided an important reference point for shaping alcohol consumption. Instead, it seems from this excerpt, that consuming alcohol is not necessarily featured within these participants' immediate friendship group, but necessary while socialising with different young women from different social groups, and attempting to broaden social networks. Perhaps alcohol consumption is not a form of symbolic capital for intergroup relations, only for intragroup relations. Further, alcohol*

*consumption in this participant's social context seems to break down hierarchical social boundaries rather than symbolically maintain them.*

Through comparing my previous analysis with current analysis and my memos, I realised that areas I initially considered to be contradictions were theoretical anomalies and thus opportunities to apply abductive logic during analysis. Examples of contradictions between participants' narratives and the theory included participants' accounts that alcohol *breaks down* social barriers, that everyone drinks different amounts and different drinks, that drinking was an excuse for maladapted social practices, and drinking alcohol made participants feel less self-conscious. Bourdieu's theory suggests all of these aspects of alcohol consumption are socially structured and socially reinforced.

## **5.7 Chapter summary**

In this data analysis chapter, I described my use of the critical realist tools deductive and abductive logic to produce new ways of understanding connections between the social conditions of consumption and young women's practices. I outlined the three-stage process of data analysis I used to interpret the data, including examples of themes from generating codes and categories. In the next chapter, I provide the findings of my research.

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

This chapter provides the findings of my research that provides an understanding of the generative social mechanisms underpinning young Australian women's alcohol consumption. My findings address the four theoretical propositions devised from gaps in the extant literature (see Chapter 2). These propositions bridge the gap between the micro level individual factors and structural influences on alcohol-related practices. I have ordered this chapter according to my thesis propositions. In an earlier publication, I demonstrated the applicability of Bourdieu's framework for a more theoretically informed account of young women's drinking behaviour, using some of the research findings I provide herein (Lunnay et al., 2011) (see appendix 1).

The content of this chapter aligns with step 7, the final step, of Meyer and Ward's (2014) guide on integrating theory into the research design.

Table 6.1. *The integration of theory into research design step 7* (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

Step 1: Systematically search the literature in the area of empirical and theoretical interest and identify gaps for empirical investigation.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 2: Identify social theories (potential and those that have been used in the area previously) in your research area.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 3: Critically analyse the social theory(ies) of interest. This involves identifying any empirical gaps in the theory, relevant critiques of the practical application of theory in the area of interest, and developing your own critiques of the practical application of specific areas, contexts and settings.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 4: Develop a conceptual framework to operationalise the theory in research methods.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 5: Design the research with the aim of investigating both empirical and theoretical research gaps.	<i>Methodology</i> (Chapter 3)
Step 6: Conduct data collection and analysis.	<i>Methods &amp; Data Analysis</i> (Chapters 4 & 5)
Step 7: Write up the research results.	<i>Findings and</i>

## 6.1 Context of findings

My empirical findings are derived from my interpretation of 32 young women's accounts of alcohol consumption obtained through qualitative methods. Table 6.2 provides details of participants, including their alcohol consumption practices, attitudes and values, aspects of economic capital (i.e. disposable income), and markers of cultural capital (i.e. parent occupation, academic achievement, sporting accomplishments) that shape their styles of conduct and subjective perceptions of drinking alcohol. Nine groups were recruited but Group 2 was lost through attrition before data collection commenced. The original plan to do individual interviews with one person derived from each focus group was discontinued after two interviews because data saturation had occurred and no new insights were obtained from individuals I had already spoken to within a group context. For the subsequent three individual interviews, participants were recruited independently of a friendship group.

This chapter features excerpts from their stories and some of their photographs (anonymous and de-identified) that depict their social lives and the role of alcohol consumption.

Table 6.2: Participant characteristics

Groups	
<b>1</b>  Carrie Charlotte Sam	Carrie, Charlotte and Sam (aged 16–17 years) were family friends. They consumed alcohol only on weekends, only with friends, although sometimes with their parents at social events. They attended the same local private secondary school, they did not play sport but valued being able to dance well at parties. They lived in outer metropolitan Adelaide, in the same neighbourhood, in homes with both parents and siblings. They enjoyed baking and baked muffins for me when I interviewed them at Carrie's home.
<b>2</b>	Jasmine, Lara and Kiara (aged 15 years) were friends who met through a State government program that they attended together designed to assist

Jasmine Lara Kiara	young Aboriginal people to stay in school. They identified as drinkers and lived in southern Adelaide in a low socioeconomic area. They each had transient living situations, often living with extended rather than immediate family members. This group was lost to attrition.
3  Grace Kym Suzi	Grace, Kym and Suzi (aged 16 years) were friends through a surf lifesaving club and Suzi swam competitively. They identified as drinkers and attended the same inner suburban private secondary school, although living in different suburbs. They liked the casual beach lifestyle. They described their parents as strict parents who limited alcohol consumption and confiscated their mobile phones as punishment. They all had positive extended family relationships, with grandparents living nearby. Grace liked looking at homewares and sewing clothes.
4  Amelia Ella Bonnie Rose	Amelia, Ella, Bonnie and Rose (aged 17 years) were school friends. They liked attending school in the city because they could be 'part of the action'. They were dressed in fashionable clothes congruent with popular culture, they liked spending time at shopping centres, and they were pleased we met at a particular well known franchised coffee shop in a high socioeconomic suburb in eastern Adelaide. They lived with their families in the Adelaide hills. Amelia's father owned a finance business. She described participating in my research as 'easy', given that talking about 'drinking on the weekends' and 'bitching about people she does and does not like' is something she 'does all the time anyway'.
5  Zoe Sophia Britney Abby	Zoe, Sophia, Britney and Abby (aged 17 years) were friends who met through the inner Adelaide all-girls private college they attended together. Zoe was school captain and all girls spoke about being friends with the teachers. They identified as social drinkers; each achieved high grades and played different sports (lacrosse, netball and dancing) at a high competition level. They lived in different suburbs, although all in high socioeconomic areas and all their parents worked full time. They spoke of their siblings as people they were compared with and key influences in their lives. They were experienced at drinking at nightclubs, although still under age.
6  Madison Violet Kit	Madison, Violet and Kit (aged 16) were school friends and attended a local State high school in a high socioeconomic suburb, although were not in the same year level. Madison had a driving license and a brand new car. They were 'hungover' on the day we met and said they had also been smoking marijuana the night before but did not smoke often. They enjoyed eating at McDonalds. They all had casual jobs in hospitality.
7  Rose Mikayla Ashley Alexis	Rose, Mikayla, Ashley, and Alexis (aged 16 & 17) were school friends and attended a local State high school in a beachside suburb of Adelaide. They described themselves as not the popular group but almost the popular group. They were part of a much larger social group of girls. They looked forward to opportunities to attend interschool parties. They had ambitions to study at university. They attended the 'schoolies' festival and had been out to nightclubs, although still under age.
8  Taylor Sarah	Taylor and Sarah (aged 14 years) were friends through a State high school. They identified as non-drinkers and their parents did not consume alcohol at home. Both girls played competitive volleyball for their school and had just been away on a volleyball camp. They described girls who drink as having 'nothing better to do'. They talked about the importance they placed on being fit for matches and having a match the morning after a party led

	them to leave early so they weren't tired. Sarah described herself as 'still a baby' and although she had a boyfriend she said she wouldn't consider having sex like some girls her age.
9 Tara Tahlia Taylah Kiara	Tara, Tahlia, Taylah, and Kiara (aged 15 years) were friends through a local community centre's after-school program for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people. They lived in the same low socioeconomic neighbourhood in State government housing. They described frequent intoxication and alcohol-related violence in their neighbourhood and their homes. They caught the bus to school and shared the bus ride with young people from a local private Catholic school, and they spoke about hating their lack of a school uniform in the context of the bus ride. Each girl talked about loving pop music band One Direction, and made reference to the actions of pop music singer Miley Cyrus as a yardstick for things they would and would not do.
<b>Individuals</b>	
1 Carrie	Carrie (aged 17) previously participated in a group interview (group 1). Carrie identified as a 'follower' and a victim of bullying and bitching. She talked about having her heart broken by a boy from school. She was looking forward to starting university to begin afresh. She attended social events with her parents and family-based friends and drank alcohol in these contexts as well as with her peers.
2 Violet	Violet (aged 17) previously participated in a group interview (group 6). Violet identified as the leader of her social group and a popular young woman admired by others. She worked casually at a coffee shop. Her father was a dentist and her mother was a receptionist, which she described as a typical middle class setup. She was interested in fashion and being fashionable. She didn't copy other girls and the guys endorsed her physical appearance. She said she would definitely be invited to parties and described herself as a 'mean girl', which she explained was a title given to her. To receive this title a girl needs to be 'hot' (attractive). She was not into drugs, but occasionally smoked marijuana and said she was never sober when she went out.
3 Tess	Tess (aged 17) was a divergent case. She had just finished year 12 at an inner suburban public secondary school and was attending Orientation Week at university when we met. She identified as a non-drinker and a Christian, who socialised with friends who were all drinkers. She played music in a Christian band but commented that at school she didn't want to play the 'daggy' instruments like clarinet and preferred the guitar. Her best friend didn't go to school with her but attended the same church.
4 Destiny	Destiny (aged 16), another divergent case, used to attend a state high school in a low socioeconomic area before being 'kicked out of school'. She then began attending a special needs school for 3 hours per week. She defined herself as a Tomboy Goth with purple hair. Her immediate and extended family live in same neighbourhood and surrounding suburbs. She recalled her first experience of consuming alcohol at age 5. She described drinking at family gatherings as common and her mum purchased alcohol for her. She was not in contact with her Dad and lived with her mum who was on a disability pension and received family tax benefit. She described her family as bikers. She worked part-time at a fast food restaurant. She described having depressive tendencies. Destiny doesn't need to ask her

	mum for permission to consume alcohol and her mum purchased spirits for her. She linked alcohol with violence and feeling unsafe.
5 Cheyenne	Cheyenne (aged 16) was a divergent case. She attended a program for year 11 and 12 students that linked to vocational education and training rather than high school. Her friends attended State high schools in the southern suburbs of Adelaide and she described them as 'alcoholics'. She suggested other girls might describe her as a slut. She lived with her mum and sister, and visited her Dad on weekends. She worked part time at a fast food restaurant. She talked about drinking every weekend, smoking cigarettes and feeling more confident when she drinks.

N.B. All names are pseudonyms

## 6.2 Findings in relation to thesis propositions

The next section of this chapter contains the findings of my research, ordered in line with my thesis propositions 1–4. I identified these propositions in response to gaps in the understanding of young Australian women's alcohol consumption (see Chapter 2).

Proposition 1 allows for an understanding of the complexities of young women's social context that shapes and is shaped by their alcohol consumption. Building on proposition 1, propositions 2 and 3 probe particular aspects of the social context by linking young women's alcohol-related practices (i.e. what young women do) to their position in social space and in relation to others. These findings indicate the complexity of the social aspects of young women's alcohol consumption and respond to two key gaps in the extant literature discussed in Chapter 2, by showing how young women might respond to dominant alcohol norms, and how they contribute to the social conditions that generate an atmosphere conducive to alcohol consumption. Proposition 4 focuses on understanding contemporary young women's subjective accounts of social gendered drinking norms. Finally, the last section of findings synthesises the previous findings and focuses on the gendered symbolic meanings of alcohol consumption for young women.



## **6.3 Findings that address proposition 1: Alcohol consumption is structured by and structures social relations**

### **6.3.1 *Social relations structure alcohol consumption***

The first part of proposition 1 is that social relations structure alcohol consumption. This proposition suggests that social structures such as peer groups and the sociality of drinking shape drinking. Participants' accounts indicated alcohol consumption occurred only in social situations, and in dynamic social contexts that provided opportunities to relate with others. It was the social interactions while consuming alcohol that constructed drinking-related practices as meaningful and worthwhile, or futile. The following excerpt provides an example:

Belinda: Is drinking something that you do quite a lot?

Charlotte: Only on occasions, I wouldn't just have like a drink for the sake of it, I'd make it occasions...

Belinda: ...to celebrate?

Charlotte: If you're just going out... like parties.

The imperative to drink alcohol is captured by the following excerpt:

Madison: I haven't spoken to anyone who doesn't drink so... which makes sense because I want to speak to people who are drinking but it makes me wonder whether those girls (non-drinkers) exist or does everyone drink?

For Madison, who questioned the existence of young women who did not drink, not drinking was incomprehensible; her statement also captures her alignment and her want to socialise with other young drinkers only. Drinking only in social situations seemed to

be coupled with a pursuit to engage with and reap benefits from increased sociality through alcohol consumption. For example:

Belinda: If none of your mates were drinking, but you still wanted to, would you still drink?

Charlotte: Not if I was... if I was just going out with a group... like that one group and I wasn't seeing anyone else for the whole night I wouldn't get drunk by myself.

Violet explained that “drinking at home [alone] is pointless” and “it won't benefit me”, and she discussed the benefits of alcohol in terms of opportunities to socialise and the potential to improve her social reputation. Participants commonly used the term “waste” in their drinking-related narratives. For example, drinking outside of a social context, without peers and with no opportunities to form and negotiate social relationships, was deemed a “waste” of the effort involved in obtaining alcohol and preparing for the drinking occasion by getting “dressed up”. Becoming too intoxicated to continue drinking or participating was also termed a waste; a wasted chance to engage in the socially meaningful practices that alcohol consumption entailed, and this was depicted in the narrative that surrounded Figure 6.1 below.



Figure 6.1: Caption: “Waste of a night”

The worth and meaning of alcohol consumption was reflected by participants’ expressions of needing to become part of the social scene through consuming alcohol. As Madison said “I feel out of it when I don’t drink”, while Violet explained “It’s hard to get involved” when she did not drink. The ramifications of not participating in drinking occasions were contextualised by participants with respect to social relations. The following example indicates how a sense of separation ensued when participation had not occurred; the loss of opportunity to engage in social status-defining activities was also noted:

Mikayla: It’s shocking not going [to a drinking occasion].

Rose: You feel left out.

Mikayla: And you think ‘Oh, what are they talking about?! I wasn’t there!’ and I guess it is about social status as well.

Rose: And you feel out of it, and they’re like ‘Oh this happened’ and everyone is laughing and you’re like ‘Whaaaaat?!’

Further to the exclusion experienced by not participating, the next excerpt suggests a social expectation to participate that aligns with social relations (i.e. being a member of a particular group):

Belinda: Yeah, I know what you mean, yep. So for example if you were at school with these girls and on Monday they start talking about this party you hadn't gone to [over the weekend] how do you feel about not having gone?

Madison: You wouldn't be able to say anything.

Kit: If I was in [Violet's] group ... and I didn't go that would be really weird

Madison: Yeah, same with me. I probably wouldn't even go to school on the Monday.

The outcome of missing a party or other social drinking occasion for these participants was avoidance of attending school, where discussion about parties often happened and non-attendance would have been noticeable to peers. Participants' negative feelings that resulted from not participating in the drinking occasion point to the important sense of social inclusion obtained from alcohol consumption; not drinking in this context leads to social exclusion.

For participants, abstaining from alcohol without a socially acceptable reason was not a valid behaviour. This was captured by Cheyenne who said:

...if you say [to your peers] I'm not going out [and drinking] because of netball, you'll like cop a bit of flack for that...because they [peers] don't understand the pressure to perform...and your performance would be like totally affected [if you drank]...there's been a few times where we've gone out not intending to drink and have ended up drinking.

In this example, sport was not considered a valid reason for not drinking. Madison, who typically consumed alcohol, defined the prospect of attending a party and not drinking as “pointless” and “horrible”. Her rationale was that the “night would be long” and “awkward” because of her inability to engage with people who were drunk. It was evident that young women might reproduce within their friendship groups the dominant practices of wider society, giving value and power to heavy episodic alcohol consumption as a habitual expectation and a “natural” or intrinsic way to socialise. Violet concluded, “if it [drinking] were socially unacceptable we wouldn’t do it”.

A subtle, potentially subconscious, social pressure to consume alcohol became apparent through analysing participants’ descriptions of peer interactions. The phenomenon of social pressure to drink was obvious when participants described feeling that not drinking in a social setting with their peers was not a valid, socially acceptable option. This was evident in Carrie’s statement:

Carrie: It feels like, when I didn’t (drink) it felt...I had one night where no one even said anything but you just see everyone drinking and you feel really out of it.

Some participants labelled this social pressure to drink as peer pressure. In response to the questions “Do you feel peer pressure to consume alcohol” or “Do you think pressure exists?” most participants replied “Yes”. When prompted to explain how, participants often responded that they “Don’t know” and were unable to articulate the social conditions or expectations they felt as pressure to consume alcohol. Some participants replied that “No one pressures you to drink, you just want to” or “If you don’t drink you feel left out”. By contextualising the conditions of peer pressure within broader social fields of power it seemed peer pressure was manifested in social expectations to

consume alcohol. Peer pressure to consume alcohol was clear in various ways in participants' accounts, through their expressions of wanting to achieve a sense of *camaraderie* with peers, feeling like one should drink because others were, fear of missing out, and the loneliness of not drinking. In the following excerpt participants recognised that through their verbal encouragement they applied pressure to others to consume alcohol, although they denied feeling pressure and explained that pressure was not required because the intention to drink was already present (i.e. subconscious pressure).

Maddison: I've never felt pressure to drink.

Violet: I probably kind of say to people 'Oh just drink'.

Maddison: Yeah I've said it to people but I've never felt pressure.

Kit: I usually feel like drinking so I don't need to get pressured.

In this example, pressure was not recognised because participants' behaviour conformed to the seemingly natural, social expectation to drink. Compliance with the dominant drinking norm remained a form of peer pressure even though it was not recognised as such.

### **6.3.2      *Alcohol consumption structures social relations***

The second part of proposition 1 is that alcohol consumption structures social relations. This proposition suggests that young women's practices in drinking-related contexts have implications for social relations. The most common implication was the enhancement of social connections from which social relations extended. Participants comprising Group 7 explained how making friends was easier in the context of alcohol consumption, and it was clear that having friends was a sign of popularity. The following excerpt indicates how symbolic capital is accrued through expanding social connections

(social capital) which in turn is achieved through the social practice of consuming alcohol at a party (cultural capital):

Rose: Me and [Mikayla], say we weren't friends, [Mikayla's] from a different group, we drink...we don't really talk at school but we come to a party and we're drunk, we are more likely to talk because you have more confidence and I don't know how to explain it...

Mikayla: You feel like you can just say things...

Rose: You're drunk, you have drinking as an excuse, so we'll talk and the next day at school or the next week we'll come to school and we can see each other and be like 'Oh do you remember when we, I dunno like we stole the...or we did something' and we're making social connections through drinking and then we'll slightly develop a relationship...you do that with people you wouldn't ordinarily speak to.

Alcohol consumption communicated sociability among participants through indicating to others that they shared drinking-related inclinations or attitudes, and this led to openness to explore and develop new social relationships with peers. For example, Amelia described how alcohol consumption encouraged social interactions: "If you're drunk you're more willing and people see you as more approachable". Another participant, Mikayla, explained her perception of "cooler" peers when they discovered she also consumed alcohol, she imagined they would have said something like "Oh, they're drinking, that's surprising, I didn't think they drank, oh okay they're cool now, I'll talk to them". In these examples, consumption of alcohol functioned (or was perceived to function) as a social lubricant that compensated for young women's different social status positions.

Active participation in social contexts where alcohol was consumed also allowed for the partial removal of social barriers between young women. For example, Madison explained that parties without alcohol consumption segregate people: “Everyone would be more separate, like everyone would be in groups that they’re comfortable with”, which suggests that alcohol functions as a social enabler. Similarly, Alexis remarked, “If you don’t drink you’re limiting your social circle”. It was common for participants to describe feeling less intimidated about interacting with others in social contexts while they were drinking, and this also aligns with the theme that alcohol consumption breaks down social barriers. Notably, however, a level of temporality was a condition to the breaking down of social barriers that resulted from young women drinking together. For example, Ella explained that the partial removal of social barriers depended upon more than drinking at the party and in doing so reiterated that alcohol was not an *entirely* determining factor in breaking down social barriers:

Just going to the party is not enough to be ‘in’ with girls from other schools.

You need to go to their house beforehand to get ready, and have a sleepover after.

Participants described how friendships formed through common drinking experiences remained specific to the drinking context and that although cross-group social boundaries were transcended, this did not transfer to everyday life. For example, Bonnie and Maggie spoke about how they would interact with new friends from other schools while drunk and in the drinking context, but if they saw the same young women on a weekend while shopping they might wave but not say hello. When compared with normal, day-to-day life, drinking occasions represented opportunities for participants to engage in practices where the social hierarchies and status positions built up during normal life could be suspended for manipulation and negotiation through social



interactions. One example concerns social boundaries imposed by the structure of the school as a social field. Participants described feeling limited by their school relationships and spoke about looking forward to leaving, while others said they looked forward to university to change or escape their social realm.

Participants' perceptions of their peers were affected if these peers misread or downplayed the impact of behaviour that was not consistent with socially valued drinking expectations. For example, group 7 described how their preferred way of consuming alcohol had shifted from drinking at friends' houses and parties to consuming alcohol at a nightclub or licensed venue. They spoke negatively of a friend who had misread the new social expectations:

Ashley: But getting back to your point about is anyone not comfortable, there's one girl and I think she still, I think it's just a phase, hopefully it's just a phase, but I think she's still stuck in the thing where if you drink you're cool...

Alexis: (interrupts) I think we've got some girls from our group that are kind of...

Ashley: Yeah, it's just they're still in the mode that if you drink you're cool and if you do this you're cool and we're sort of like 'Aww we're kind of past that' but hopefully she just gets out of it.

In another example, participants Sophia and Britney described a peer who downplayed the impact of her drinking-related behaviour by "bad mouthing" a friend publically while drunk, being scornful in seriousness when others present were only teasing. In this example, the young woman who "bad mouthed" someone in seriousness misread the social code that being drunk excuses teasing but serious slander is not permissible. The

outcome of the young woman's misreading this social code was that her peers, the participants who provided the story, formed a negative impression of her.

Britney: Umm, but yeah, she was like lying down on the stage.

Sophia: She got absolutely paro [intoxicated].

Belinda: On Saturday night?

Britney: Yeah and she...someone said something I think it was [Tina]...she was like on the stage as well and said to this boy 'Come and dance with me' and he was like 'No' but like joking around and she was like 'Why?' and he was like 'I don't know, [be]cause I hate you' and she was like 'Oh whatever' and like walked off but they were just joking [be]cause they were friends and then this girl who was really drunk she sat up and was like to him, who is her friend, and was like 'I hate her too'

Britney: She was bad mouthing her to her friend!

In the above examples, specific aspects of participants' alcohol consumption practices were assessed through social relations according to a social system of monitoring and recognition.

While drinking-related practices represented an opportunity for participants to display and seek/attain recognition of symbolic capital through acting out socially valued drinking practices, the important symbolic social functions of alcohol relied on a forum in which they could be confirmed. Several participants made reference to the "gossip stream" as a forum for peers to confer and to validate others' constructions of drinking-related practices. The following excerpt provides an example of the ways participants discussed and judged each other through gossip-type narratives:

Ella: One of the girls in year 11 had a whole bottle of vodka like before she got to the party, at like pres [pre-party drinks], and she got to the party and then like passed out, and she had to leave the party straight away and that was in the gossip stream and everyone was talking about how that was silly.

This example reiterates how it is through social relations that alcohol-related practices are judged, and again illustrates how alcohol-related practices can be considered a waste of effort if misappropriated. Notable in this example is the focus on social outcomes and the detriments to social reputation rather than health consequences of excessive drinking.

Finally, the way that alcohol consumption structures social relations is particularly well illustrated by the experience of being a non-drinker among those who drink. Tess described it being “usual” for people not to speak to her at parties, while Madison, who was a drinker, explained “You don’t bother speaking to people if they don’t drink”. Participants’ stories of parties attended by drinkers and non-drinkers showed that alcohol consumption defined how and where people socialised within the party space. Non-drinkers typically clustered together and drinkers did not socialise with non-drinkers, which contrasts with the earlier claim by participants that alcohol breaks down barriers to talk to those you normally would not, this did not extend to non-drinkers. Drinking-related practices disconnected young women who did not align with socially valued drinking expectations.

The findings above that explore proposition 1 show how social relations structure young women’s alcohol-related practices but also that young women construct and deconstruct social relations through alcohol consumption. Meanings were associated with alcohol consumption through a process whereby young women interpreted and communicated

congruence with drinking-related social expectations. Propositions 2 and 3 probe particular aspects of the general findings that link social relations with alcohol consumption, identified through proposition 1. Participants' accounts of the social imperative to consume alcohol, discussed in relation to proposition 1, suggest that for young women, alcohol is a product imbued with social value. In the next section I explore the notion that alcohol is symbolically valuable, to understand how drinking alcohol reflects the power to distinguish and differentiate individuals and groups of young women (proposition 2), and how drinking-related practices demarcate identities (proposition 3).

## **6.4 Findings that address proposition 2: Young women use alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups**

### **6.4.1 *Differentiation***

For participants, the social context of alcohol consumption relied on accrual and use of capital (e.g. an invitation to a party where alcohol consumption occurred required access to social networks) and engagement in symbolic struggles to improve social positioning. Participants defined prestige and asserted distinction through the exclusion of young women who exhibited practices that were incongruent with dominant and legitimated ways to drink socially. This was evident when participants discussed engaging in risky sexual conduct or what they termed “slutty” practices while intoxicated (drunk). Using the insult “slutty” was a strategy of distinction by young women who attempted to impose their point of view. Here, young women were recognised and alienated through a process of othering for consuming alcohol and then exhibiting sexual practices deemed inappropriate by more dominant peers.

Cheyenne: Normally I'm pretty drunk anyway, like just at a good level...but I've seen girls who end up crying because they are being told 'Get away from me you're so drunk' and boys don't get it, they'll just push girls away if they're too drunk...I think a lot of the girls don't care...they go out and go 'I just wanna get so drunk' but that's when they end up crying or end up like walking off and everyone has to find them and all of that, like that sort of stuff.

Participants socialised others' drinking-related practices by a process of monitoring, recognition and reproduction. The use of insults to define drinking-related behaviour that was not congruent with the culturally valued norm provides an example. Participants' use of symbolic language to distinguish alcohol-related practices demonstrates how alcohol practices were not value free but were loaded with symbolic meanings for participants. Congruence with the popular aesthetic through ways of acting while consuming alcohol brought a sense of social ease, and incongruence jeopardised social status. In the following focus group excerpt, Carrie's symbolic capital was compromised through a shift in her priorities away from those of the dominant peer group:

Charlotte: They [the popular girls] just separate themselves from everyone and that's why everyone looks at them.

Belinda: How do they achieve that? Aside from the way they look obviously?

Carrie: They just won't talk to people.

Sam: Yeah, they're snobs.

Carrie: They snob you off, they....

Sam: They do snob you off.

Carrie: They go out every weekend, they talk about it, and...loudly.

Belinda: That must be quite frustrating in many respects, is it? Because you're sort of thinking 'You're not that great?'

Charlotte: A lot of people have a problem with it, but we kinda just get over it, just ignore it.

Sam: Yeah but you just like...I still just want to be like...

Carrie: I find that situation hard because they used to be my best friends, so...

Belinda: Yeah, okay, so you just distanced yourself from that?

Carrie: Yep, they were just different people to what I was.

Sam: They have different priorities in a way, I guess.

Carrie: Exactly.

Belinda: What would you say their priorities are?

Carrie: Getting drunk, boyfriends.

This excerpt captures the status-defining techniques used by the more popular young women that manifested in frustration and tension for socially dominated participants because the strategies used to distinguish relied on their recognition of the power of more dominant practices.

#### **6.4.2      *Recognition***

Distinction and differentiation relied on recognition. The accrual and display (activation) of symbolic capital in drinking contexts and the means by which symbolic capital was recognised and given value so it can be exchanged for desired outcomes was also relevant. The notion of recognition is linked to the performative nature of the alcohol consumption practices described by participants and reiterates that alcohol consumption practices must be validated and appreciated by the friendship network to become sources of symbolic capital. Ratification by an audience was essential for the accrual of

symbolic capital among participants. For example, Madison explained that “Everyone always takes a camera to parties”, which suggests that evidence was required for recognition. The necessity of recognition for the accrual of symbolic capital was also linked to the popularity of Facebook® amongst participants, because it seemed to provide an expansion of their offline lives. Participants distinguished between real life, in-person socialising, and socialising through Facebook®, which provided an opportunity to display personal information in a public forum. It was common for participants to post photographs of themselves in drinking contexts for their extended peer network and others to view and (hopefully) form a (positive) perception. For example, Violet indicated “There are heaps more photos of us drinking on Facebook...we can show you”. The necessity to capture, record and communicate displays of drinking through Facebook® was a strategy to assert distinction used by socially popular young women, perhaps to legitimise their social status. For example, during the focus group interview with group 6, Madison received text messages from her friends requesting she upload photographs taken on the night before:

Madison: (reads SMS aloud) Upload the photos.

Belinda: Is that your friends pumping you to upload the photos [from Saturday night]?

Madison: Yeah and she’s already written a message on my [Facebook] wall saying ‘Can you upload the photos’.

Violet: That’s her there [pointing to the photos]...the blonde one.

Belinda: Really...

Madison: Ah, look at me there, I’m licking alcohol off my hands!

Kit: I loved you in that dress, [Madison]!

Belinda: Yeah, so can we just have a quick chat about that [the SMS

message requesting photos are loaded on Facebook]...so in this situation...why do you think she's so keen to have the photos [from Saturday night] on Facebook?

Madison: She wants everyone to see...like she wants to see if there's any good photos of herself.

Violet: Yeah to upload...a good photo.

In this example, the young woman requesting photographs of the night out drinking was keen for a "good" photograph of herself, likely to be perceived positively by relevant others. The use of photographs and Facebook® posts as a distinction asserting, exclusionary strategy is also reflected in the feelings of intimidation or insecurity expressed by Maggie in the following excerpt:

Maggie: On Facebook there's like hundreds of photos from parties and I reckon that's where my insecurities come from [be]cause you see what they did on the weekend....

It seemed only photographs of parties attended by popular people were posted on Facebook®, as indicated by the following discussion with group 8:

Belinda: Do people post photos from parties much?

Taylor: Depends what kind of group they are.

Sarah: Yeah.

Taylor: The popular group goes to more parties and stuff where they upload lots of photos.

As previously indicated, part of participants' process of affirming congruence with socially sanctioned drinking practices and aligning their behaviour with what was



deemed socially legitimate was to highlight unacceptable practices and use this to distinguish themselves from those they deemed to be lesser others. The following excerpt illustrates how lack of recognition affected social status negatively:

Maggie: I think because we do stuff on the weekends like just our school stuff and the only reason we feel like we're not as cool as them or whatever is because we're doing it as an isolated group and it doesn't show, like it's not shown off to the world and so... we're still doing stuff and we're still having as much fun but it's just not as public...

Bonnie: But on Facebook they have hundreds of photos from parties.

Maggie: And I reckon that's where your insecurities come from because you're like 'Oh look what they did on the weekend' and like.

Further to the notion of recognition, Facebook® also provided leverage for misrepresentation:

Mikayla: When photos from that party went on Facebook we had a drink in our hands and they were like 'Oh wow they think they're so cool like...'

Rose: They think they're so cool like finally drinking and it's just like, because there's no or minimal photos of us with drinks on Facebook does not mean we haven't had a drink, like that was our first time drinking.

Some participants indicated they were "addicted" to Facebook®, but that they wished they could break with using it, because Facebook® meant there was "no escape" from social life. Non-drinkers Taylor and Sarah also discussed Facebook® as a medium for conveying drinking-related practices. They discussed how photos were captioned and that this often happened while the person posting the photo was "out drunk", so some of the photos are captioned in slurred "drunk voice" and they used their tone of voice as a

framing device to imply they thought this was ridiculous. They said they thought this was another way for girls who drink to show people they're out drinking and to show off. Taylor and Sarah also commented that the girls were "begging for compliments". In doing so, Taylor and Sarah attempted to validate their counter position to drinking by denigrating young women who consumed alcohol.

In exploration of proposition 2, my findings indicate that through processes of differentiation and recognition, specifically through documenting their drinking through photographs and on Facebook® and displaying this to other young women, participants used alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate themselves from other young women. The particular drinking-related practices enacted and how they demarcate identities is explored next under proposition 3.

## **6.5 Findings that address proposition 3: Young women use alcohol consumption to symbolise personal and group identity relative to positions in social space**

For young women, the social practice of alcohol consumption and the practices associated with drinking transformed it into a socially symbolic practice. The following excerpt captures how alcohol product types were less important than actions to participants:

Maggie: It's more to do with the people and what's going on...

Bonnie: I think it's just...the alcohol thing is mostly exactly the same.

Belinda: So if I asked you how you felt about drinking at out-of-school things or you're in school things...and you talk about talking about the party next day what would be the things you talk about the most?

Maggie: Probably the relationships, it's not so much about what you're drinking, it's more about how you act...there never really is a focus on the alcohol, I don't reckon.

Bonnie: Yeah, cause so much stuff happens.

For participants, their interpretation of broader social expectations combined with group values, and how they translated these to embodied actions, legitimised their alcohol consumption and made it a source of symbolic capital. Alcohol consumption was also in some circumstances, a behaviour from which no social gain could be made, reflected in the instances where participants described feeling disappointed with their drinking performance. Consuming alcohol was not the goal itself, but rather a method for activating practices through which social gains might be obtained. For participants, drinking alcohol provided a vehicle toward other socially symbolic practices, meaning that access to this valued commodity was the primary objective, regardless of the form of alcohol (product type or brand). Although product-related aspects were not ignored (for example, participants recognised pre-mixed spirits as “classier” drinks than cheap cask wine). For most participants, product-related factors were either outweighed or excused by the value placed on having access to alcohol, and for some participants, the volume of alcohol available for consumption. These were the means to gain symbolic capital. For participants, aged 14–17 years, the symbolic value of alcohol is that it gave leverage to other valued social practices like dancing well, interacting with the opposite gender and conversing with strangers.



Figure 6.2: Caption: "Dancing yeah"

For example, group 1 valued dancing well, they spoke about liking the atmosphere for dancing that consumption of alcohol enabled. Sam's explanation that "You wouldn't see us sitting down, you'd see us turning the music up" indicated how dancing while drinking was a symbolic identifier for her group. Dancing well was a way they distinguished themselves from other, less capable dancers in the drinking context, as the following excerpt indicates:

Charlotte: Some crowds do and they think they're fully into it but really they look shocking!

Carrie: (Laughs)

Charlotte: Shocking!

Belinda: So what about them looks shocking, is it the way they are dancing, or?

Charlotte: They think that they're... I dunno they're a bit clueless.

Carrie: They think they're sexy.

Charlotte: Like if I danced like that going out to a club, I'd never dance like that.

For Cheyenne, the behaviour from which symbolic capital could be gained that was facilitated by alcohol consumption pertained to interaction with boys. She explained:

Cheyenne: Most of the time it depends on how drunk we end up getting, like if it's just the girls and we're all extremely drunk the chances of us calling the boys will be higher than if we were sober. If we were sober we'd maybe call the boys we were close mates with because we were comfortable around them and don't feel the pressure to be 'good enough'. Even with close guy mates I tend to feel self-conscious unless I'm drunk.

In this example, Cheyenne's confidence to invite young men to join drinking occasions is explained by her obtaining a desired level of intoxication in the context that consuming alcohol was a requisite for new sexual relationships. She explained:

Cheyenne: Normally if I was to hook up with a boy sober I would definitely have hooked up with him drunk first, or at least talked to him and met him drunk before meeting him sober.

As previously indicated, many participants spoke about feeling more comfortable in social situations when consuming alcohol. Specifically, alcohol facilitated interactions with strangers and expanded the opportunities to create social capital; as Ashley explained "You just feel more at ease with talking with new people and like meeting new people".

The complexity uncovered through applying the concept of symbolic capital to understand the social context of alcohol consumption shows that while alcohol was a

highly important component of the social context, it was largely part of the social backdrop. It was through the valued, embodied and performative practices associated with consuming alcohol that alcohol became a symbolic, communicative tool used by young women to create and modulate distinctions within and across social groups. In this way, consuming alcohol in a particular way was a power-laden means for participants to produce (or reproduce) ways of being that maintained or negotiated their position within social hierarchies. For participants, the symbolic capital afforded to alcohol-related practices was contingent on age, according to the symbolic power attributed to age by underage young women. The photograph of glasses of champagne (Figure 6.3) prompted participants to explain how they did not see themselves doing the same things when they were older, and distinguished certain drinking-related practices through age-related distinctions.



Figure 6.3: Caption: “We’ll drink champagne when we’re older”

The symbolic capital obtained from alcohol-related practices seemed to vary with age. Younger participants aged 14–15 years described it as highly desirable to be seen with

alcohol (in any form, at any occasion), while for participants aged 16–17 years such as Alexis, being out at a nightclub, in the context of alcohol service and consumption, was described as “high social status”.

It seemed that particular alcoholic drinks and product types might be relevant as sources of symbolic capital to young women aged 18 and over, but less relevant to the younger participants in my research. Social practices linked to age also moderated how alcohol consumption functioned as a form of symbolic capital for participants. Madison explained that “Everyone just wants to be older, people want to go to town and like go out all the time”. In the context of describing how alcohol is socially desirable, Ella explained, “Drinking alcohol is an older person thing to do”. Linking these narratives suggests age was a condition of the symbolic capital young women might gain from alcohol consumption. It was also evident in participants’ accounts that the older young women protected, sanctioned and defined age-related socially appropriate drinking practices, as Cheyenne explained:

If underagers go to it they’re just like ‘Underagers wait your turn, we waited our turn...’ and then when we go to underage events they’re like ‘Oh my god you’re so gay for going to an underage thing that’s so lame like’ and what are we meant to do?

Symbolic language was used here to seek recognition of the social power afforded by their age. The use of language as a marker of distinction became apparent in participants’ use of the term “sober” to distinguish an undesirable and disadvantageous outcome of not drinking. Language also concomitantly attributed symbolic power to alcohol consumption and intoxication. For example, Ashley said:

If it’s an out of school thing [social gathering] it’s the worst thing ever to be

sober, like if you don't know anyone then it's awful [not to be drinking] and like I reckon with friends at school it wouldn't be as bad.

Another example of how social power was revealed through young women's symbolic language surrounding alcohol is participants' use of stereotypes as both self-identifying labels and othering labels. For example, young women who valued consuming alcohol to intoxication termed their drinks "hard core", "heavier" drinks, while young women who valued moderate alcohol consumption referred to their drinks as "girly", "lighter" drinks. These same identifiers were used as othering labels by some participants to indicate difference and distinction reflected in broader classifications of social status and struggles for social power. For young women who did *not* value drinking to intoxication, heavier drinks were negatively framed as "trashy" or "dero". In each instance different connotations were attached to loaded terms, and this points both to the use of alcohol as a communication tool and also how different social meanings were associated with alcohol.

The following excerpts from an interview with group 5 illustrates how capital can be accrued through consuming alcohol but only if the alcohol-related practices were legitimised:

Belinda: Are there things people do when drinking that you don't like?

Zoe: Oh, umm, yeah, like just being annoying when they're drunk...like...pretending to be drunk.

Abby: This friend of ours will be like 'Oh my god babe, like I've drunk so much...'

Britney: It's annoying and it's just like shut up...because you know that they're not truly drunk, like this one girl...



Belinda: Why's that a problem?

Zoe: Because they're trying to be cool...

Abby: ...and confident.

In this instance, a certain way of being intoxicated or “drunk” was a means of capital accumulation. It seemed that a young woman might gain prestige through being “truly drunk”, displaying confidence and therefore “being cool”, but faking or acting drunk was unacceptable and limited for accruing symbolic capital. Later in the same interview, Abby outlined how alcohol was a vehicle for capital accumulation through other social relationships and practices:

Belinda: So...you talk about talking about the party the next day, what are the things you talk about most?

Abby: Probably the relationships...it's not so much about what you're drinking it's more about how you act...there never is a focus on the alcohol.

The examples also highlight the requisite that alcohol consumption practices must be validated and appreciated by a young woman's friendship network to become symbolic capital. The need for authenticity in drinking-related practices provides another instance where the validation of alcohol consumption practices is a requisite for symbolic capital, for example:

Cheyenne: If you're obviously taking like a mirror shot and you've got your drink like obviously in your hand like that is so lame like you're going to get a lot of abuse for that because it's so obvious what you're doing. If you're with a group of girls and like a few of you have your drinks in your hand you're not obviously holding it out to the cameras, then that's OK.

This example also highlighted the importance of consumption in social groups rather

than alone, if drinking was to be legitimised, and this reiterated how social relations structured drinking-related practices (see proposition 1).

The findings in line with proposition 3 described above demonstrate how social groups were symbolised and differentiated by their drinking related practices. They indicate how participants used strategies such as the use of symbolic language and identifiers around alcohol to demarcate social positions. In the next section I account for differences in processes of distinction and identification relative to differences in social class positioning (proposition 4). Differences in alcohol consumption across young women stemmed from differences in categories of perception and gendered alcohol-related values.

## **6.6 Findings for proposition 4: Young women's scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms is socially defined, and socially limited**

Proposition 4 focuses on understanding participants' subjective accounts of *gendered* drinking norms and how they interact with these norms. The embodied and performative practices associated with consuming alcohol reflected participants' interpretation of broader societal expectations and were emblematic of pre-existing social distinctions. Marked differences between young women that made alcohol consumption meaningful were evident in the data. That is, for participants who came from backgrounds of low economic and low cultural capital, the schemas of perception that produce and are produced by alcohol consumption arose from markedly different origins than those of young women from backgrounds where alcohol was consumed in celebratory settings and only on weekends while in the company of a large peer network. In this way, social spaces operated as symbolic spaces, and the spaces of status groups were characterised by different lifestyles. The descriptions of alcohol consumption from group

9 were framed around themes of violence, symbolic language describing drinking as heavy, intoxication as a valued goal, and access to alcohol obtained by selling possessions, stealing or through commandeering alcohol from family members. In contrast, most of the other groups spoke of having alcohol provided by their parents and/or using their earnings from part-time work to purchase their own alcohol. The social lives of the young women within group 9 were focused around family gatherings that included extended family and smaller social networks of family friends. Initiation to the consumption of alcohol began at a very young age, for example Kiara indicated that children consumed alcohol at a child's birthday party:

It would be like a little kids' (family) birthday party, as again with the age thing...you got like 8 and 5 year olds drinking at that age.

Another participant, Destiny, described her initiation to alcohol as a child, with family:

The first drink I had was at a New Year's Eve party, I was about 4 or 5 and my sister Tiahna came over from our next door neighbour's house who was also having a party and my sister gave me a sip of what she was drinking.

It seemed participants comprising group 9 did not accrue symbolic capital from drinking alcohol because it was assumed that everyone drank and drinking was normal across various age groups. As one participant in group 9 summarised, "It's quite common to drink" and "It just happens these days". Another participant referred to alcohol consumption as though it was one of various adult practices that she engaged in, stating it was "normal to do the things adults do". A link between alcohol and violence was also apparent; participants spoke of witnessing their parents engaging in violent practices while drunk, or seeing their parents "pass out" (lose consciousness) at the family home while intoxicated. Violence was not a valued behaviour but rather evoked fear in drinking

settings among some participants. Destiny described where she lived as unsafe, and explained that:

Destiny: Normally there is a party nearly every night [in her neighbourhood].

There's a lot of gatecrashers [uninvited people] around our place, there's a lot of people carrying weapons on them, there's a lot of dickheads that carry date rape drugs on them.

There was tension evident in participants' narratives between liking alcohol consumption but sometimes not liking how they internalised or embodied drinking practices. Alcohol consumption practices were regarded as a performance measured against socially determined values. For example, group 3 described liking the way they felt when drinking alcohol but sometimes not liking whom they became. In this example, deemed their drinking "performance" inadequate because it did not comply with social norms or to how she interpreted and responded to dominant ways of drinking alcohol, and this was evident through her self-reflection on drinking practices. Zoe also referred to nights spent drinking alcohol where "You feel disappointed in your performance". Bonnie spoke about herself in the second person to explain the self-assessment that accompanied drinking-related "performances" and imagined berating herself: "You had a bad night, you drank too much the other night, you're a dickhead and you embarrassed yourself". Similarly, Suzi explained, "I let myself down on Saturday night". These examples reiterated how external structures are internalised into drinking-related dispositions. That is, participants internalised external structures in the form of socially-defined drinking expectations and embodied/performed alcohol consumption practices. A point that complicates this process is that participants did not always act consciously while making drinking-related decisions. Participants did not appear reflexive about what drove their interactions with others in the context of alcohol consumption. In the following excerpt,

Cheyenne describes having trapped herself but she did not recognise the role of social structures, which in this case were the judgements of her peers based on their perceptions of how she should act to meet drinking-related social expectations:

When you're at a party you don't want people to see you crying so you try to walk away from everyone but then you feel alone and so you've like trapped yourself in this position which makes you even more emotional.

My findings also indicated that even if young women were aware of such social structures, as indicated in the following except, they believed they were powerless to change aspects of their social environment. For example,

Rose: It's almost like you want the attention and respect that they get. Those girls, if they fell over (drunk) everyone would be like 'Oh my god that's so funny' but if I fell over everyone would just be 'Oh my gosh...'

Ashley: Yeah, 'You're so drunk, you can't even stand up'.

Rose: Yeah, that's what it's like, they get a respect and an attention thing, do you know what I mean?

A tension is captured in the following excerpt, where Maggie began by explaining a desire to not know about her peer's drinking accounts, though I sensed from her a reluctance to feel left out by not knowing, and this explains her seemingly pocerurante attitude about "not wanting to know". In the following excerpt this tension is evident in the narrative between friends wanting to "know" but not wanting to "hear" from the friend herself and give their friend recognition that would confer symbolic capital:

Bonnie: [Be]cause our friend, that's what she did, she had a boyfriend and was going to all these parties.

Maggie: With our other friend and they would come to school and they would talk about it.

Bonnie: The whole time!

Maggie: And we didn't ask about it and we didn't even want to know about it... obviously we're happy to know about it but when they decide to talk about it all the time...

Belinda: How does it make you feel when they talk about it?

Maggie: We don't care...

Bonnie: I don't want to...

Maggie: We don't want to be a part of it so it's not like we really feel...

Bonnie: I think it's because she thinks she's being really, really cool about it and all the boys...

Maggie: And she thinks we want to hear about it and we don't care.

Bonnie: She's like 'Oh my God I had like the best weekend of my life, I met blah blah blah and they introduced me to all these people...and they knew who I was' and...she texts them all the time and talks to them on Facebook, like really pushy and wants to be really good friends with them.

Maggie: It's not really...it's not natural at all and it's kind of just...

Maggie and Bonnie described feeling excluded as a result of their friend accumulating new social capital in a field they were not part of. This example also showed how social gains were made through the accumulation of symbolic capital by consuming alcohol in whatever form was legitimised by the dominant social group. This conferred upon the participant a sign of distinction within a wider habitus and audience of those predisposed to recognise such distinctions, yet struggles for power ensued in this process of positioning in social hierarchies. The following excerpt describes how a participant felt

socially ostracised and therefore reluctant to mobilise the symbolic capital accruable through identifying with an older age category and going to town although under age:

Belinda: When a photo is taken for the clubs, are you aware of it? Is that something people try to get involved in?

Madison: I don't really like it because the girls in my year will judge you...they think it's slutty.

Belinda: What, going?

Madison: To town. Under age. But if they could they would...it's kind of jealousy. They've made up groups for...'cos we have the popular group, the main girls have made up groups inside our group and it's the norms, normal groups, this is just what they've labelled it, the Indie girls and the Sluts.

Guess what group I'm in?...I reckon it's a jealousy thing 'cos if they had ID (identification), if they were allowed to, they'd do it but that they can't makes them judge everyone else who can.

Madison's use of the term jealousy in this example also indicated how symbolic struggles occurred through the jostling for positions within peer group hierarchies, and the use of symbolic labels demarcated social status positions that distinguished young women from one another.

In the next section, I consider the ability of participants to engage consciously or subconsciously with symbolic struggles for recognition of a preferred way of socialising and drinking or not drinking in ways that opposed dominant social drinking expectations.

### **6.6.1      *Opposing dominant social drinking expectations***

The proposition that young women reproduce dominant social and cultural norms through alcohol consumption (proposition 4) is not *entirely* fulfilled in the instance of

young women who do not consume alcohol. The accounts from young women who did not consume alcohol provided a counter perspective on how social and cultural norms around alcohol were perceived. In the instance of young women who abstained from alcohol in a group of others who also abstained, a distance from alcohol norms and a subversion of dominant norms was evident, but the experience of being a non-drinker among a group of drinkers was markedly different (I discuss this below). However, it was seemingly difficult to create a counter position to drinking alcohol and to resist reproducing social norms, and abstinence was not a valid succedaneum to drinking.



Figure 6.4: Caption: “We just dance and have fun. No alcohol is needed for us to have a good time...but I still was weird and managed to climb the basketball hoop in the background”.

There were examples in my findings of instances where young women attempted to create counter positions and construct their own symbolic order. They may have



reproduced norms that were naturalised dispositions in alternative social contexts (i.e. within families who do not consume alcohol while socialising within church networks) that legitimated their practices within their immediate peer group, and which were not transferrable to contexts outside of that group. In describing their counter position, young women still referenced dominant alcohol norms, making the conditions for cultural reproduction even more observable.



Figure 6.5: Caption: “Sarah and I attended a party last weekend for two of our friends’ birthdays. Alcohol was not involved. At parties we basically just dance to really loud music and take funny photos of everyone. Here are some of the photos they look a bit crazy”.

Sarah and Taylor provided a narrative to the photographs (Figures 6.4 & 6.5) and explained they “still do weird things” and “look crazy” despite not drinking. Sarah also explained that they “Can dance all night without the help of alcohol”. In this example, the fun they described that was produced in social settings without alcohol was juxtaposed

against the social norm of consuming alcohol. Participants who did not drink used strategies of distinction by slandering girls who drink, calling them no-hopers with no ambitions and suggesting they had “let themselves go”. Despite this, it seemed that young women who consumed alcohol retained symbolic power to classify non-drinkers. In the following example, participants detected the tactics used by a non-drinker to attempt to validate not drinking, and rendered these invalid through use of the word “try” and suggested an alternative negative reason for not drinking, namely fear:

Rose: Some people try to make themselves look good by not drinking, like Kate...

Mikayla: Some people try to look healthy by not drinking.

Rose: Yeah like ‘Yeah, I’m x, I’m sophisticated...I’m not going to drink’ instead of just saying ‘I’m not going to drink, I’m scared’...It’s like ‘I’m not going to drink because I want to be a bit different to you guys’.

Mikayla: Yeah, it’s weird that it’s turned into something instead of like ‘I’m going to drink’, it’s like ‘I’m not going to drink’ (said in a tone that positions drinking negatively).

Young women also sought to protect friends from damaging their social reputation and that of the social group, and this was evident in the following account from Violet:

Violet: Yeah at a nightclub last Thursday night she got drunk and she was pursuing a guy and she was hitting him and punching him and I thought it looked bad because we were out in public, all these people are going to be seeing you and the whole reputation is at risk. And then I like pushed them apart, I was doing her a favour and then she was like ‘Fuck you’, ‘You’re a bad friend’ like, and her words to me were ‘If you’re a good true friend you

would have let me punch him’.

Belinda: You should have said ‘I’m a good true friend [be]cause I didn’t let you punch him’.

Violet: Yeah, that’s what I thought and she hated me. She was screaming and she was pushing me.

Belinda: Was she drunk?

Violet: She had no recollection...supposedly.

The process of protection also operated as a way for Violet to assert her social authority to sanction the behaviour of her peers and it demonstrated the social regulations that surrounded young women’s drinking-related practices, some of which were imposed by immediate peers (as in the example above).

In the next section of this chapter I indicate how participants reproduced patriarchal gendered norms that produce and are produced by alcohol consumption and were not at liberty to behave in alcohol-involved contexts as they might choose to, or at least, not in enduring ways and not without risk of social denigration. My findings demonstrated how social codes of femininity constructed through young women’s alcohol consumption impinged on how liberated young women were to consume alcohol freely despite drinking alcohol in parallel with young men, creating a more complex understanding of the gendered nature of alcohol consumption than is evident in national public health epidemiological statistics. In the sections that follow I outline the social conditions that define and limit young women’s scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms, from their point of view.

### **6.6.2      *Gender and socially controlled consumption***

A tension was evident in young women's accounts between controlled and uncontrolled alcohol-related practices through their contradictory explanations of levels of intoxication. In the following account, the participant explained she had more drinks because she was unsure whether she was becoming drunk. She then described becoming *suddenly drunk* although this contradicts her subsequent claim that she *knows when to stop drinking*.

Carrie: ... Sometimes you drink more because you can't feel it and then all of a sudden...

Sam: Yeah, you think, why aren't I getting drunk it's been like 10 drinks.

Belinda: And that surprises you when you get like that?

Carrie: Yeah...And then you're just like, why aren't I...and then all of a sudden bam! Drunk all of a sudden...you know when to stop though like I reckon you can physically stop yourself.

Participants described feelings of liberation, confidence and relief when control was maintained, as signified in the caption Alexis provided for the photograph below:



Figure 6.6: “Best time out I’ve had, because I regret nothing from the night. I hadn’t drunk too much that I wasn’t in control, but I had had enough to feel confident”

Conversely, when a sense of control and thus ‘respectable femininity’ was lost, participants’ narratives of drinking occasions “gone wrong” conveyed a sense of failure, disgrace and rejection, as the following excerpt suggests:

Belinda: So the boys are calling the shots, so do they say what particular types of drinks you should be drinking or...?

Cheyenne: No not really.

Belinda: So they don’t care as long as its alcohol?

Cheyenne: Yeah, it’s just a lot more so, if you’re too drunk, they’ll let you know, if you’re not drunk enough...

Belinda: What do they say if you’re too drunk?

Cheyenne: ‘You’re so drunk, it’s disgusting’, ‘Go home, you’re too drunk’,

'Get away from me', that kind of stuff.

Belinda: Yeah.

Cheyenne: And if you're not drinking enough they'll be like 'Why aren't you drunk', like 'Get drunk'.

Belinda: And how does it feel when they say those things?

Cheyenne: Normally I'm pretty drunk anyway, just at a good level...but I've seen girls who end up crying because they are being told 'Get away from me you're so drunk' and boys don't get it, they'll just push girls away if they're too drunk.

Inconsistencies in social judgment around what constituted acceptable levels of loss of control underlined an important caveat inherent in participants' ability to drink alcohol like young men. For example, Madison's dialogue around Figure 6.7 (below) described how a young man "passing out" from alcohol was "funny" while a young woman in the same situation would be a "disgrace", demonstrating double standards in alcohol-related actions and outcomes identifiable by gender.



Figure 6.7: Caption: “Boys pass out from drinking too much [alcohol] and it’s funny, girls [if they did the same] get classed as trashy”.

In discussing the above photograph comprising Figure 6.7 participants also explained feeling pressure to embody a version of femininity within the narrow bounds of social acceptability. While discussing the photograph above they indicated how confusion and stress was evoked by the response of others to the perceived adequacy of her embodied expressions of femininity.

Themes of confusion and stress experienced alongside expressing a version of femininity was also indicated in Cheyenne’s narrative around the photograph of herself displayed below as Figure 6.8.



Figure 6.8: Caption: “Show more boobs, show less boobs”

In discussing the above photograph (Figure 6.8), Cheyenne described feeling she was exposing too much of her body, and I understood her uncertainty about how to express her femininity and feeling that her expression of femininity was illegitimate, in turn exacerbated her alcohol consumption:

Cheyenne: Boys make statuses [on social media] like ‘Girls who show their boobs all the time, it’s obviously for attention, it’s always about your boobs not about your face la la la’ and then they’ll inbox you and be like ‘So you have really nice boobs, can I see them?’ so I’m like ‘Why not’.

Belinda: Bit kind of confused about...

Cheyenne: What am I meant to do here? Like, turtleneck or...

Belinda: And how does alcohol fit into that? Do you feel more confident? I mean obviously if you’re getting constant critique about everything you do, with your body...



Cheyenne: Yeah like it's a lot, like a lot of the time...it's like let's go out and get drunk and if I've had a bad week like I need to forget everything, I need to go out and get drunk type of thing. And like this has happened that's kind of how it is, it won't just be like 'Oh getting drunk will be fun' there's like a reason...bad week, or problems with boys or whatever, where you have to get drunk kind of thing.

As is interpretable from Cheynene's explanation above, participants identified a feeling of social surveillance from both female and male peers in how they managed their behaviour in response to social expectations, for example:

Tara: Yeah [be]cause like if a guy got naked and then ran around the house that's just normal but for a girl to do that they'd be judged so much and you know.

Kiara: Like girls get judged a lot more for the stuff they do than guys do

Belinda: Is that for all practices?

Tara: Most.

Kiara: Umm yeah, most.

Belinda: Like not just alcohol?

Tara: Yeah not just alcohol but like a lot of stuff if they do it like, you know guys don't get as judged as girls do.

The above example indicates that consuming alcohol was liberating yet it had gendered conditions, specifically, the liberating potential of alcohol was gendered and heavily circumscribed. Importantly, it seems the judgement participants described is experienced *post hoc*, and the social acceptance of their experimentation with modes of femininity modelled on traditionally masculine lines was temporal and relative to the

immediate drinking context only, for example:

Cheyenne: When girls are violent and drunk it's kind of encouraged at the time, but everyone always ends up saying how filthy and disgusting the girls who are fighting look, but when boys fight it's always the winner... [who's] idolised and nothing bad said about either boy.

Furthermore, actions and practices participants' enacted in the drinking setting that experimented with new expressions of femininity, such as consuming alcohol "like young men", seemed contextual, and unlikely to be sustained (and as suggested by the above example, not required to be sustained) beyond the alcohol-consumption setting. I understood this to mean the power or symbolic capital accrued was temporal and could not be transferred across fields. As Tara explained:

Tara: Yeah [be]cause with some girls they can be all sweet and innocent and so they just don't want to talk about it after they've had the alcohol and you know have kind of got their memory back from the night before, so they leave it out and say 'Yeah, I had a couple of drinks'.

The above examples also captured the ways alcohol-related activities expected of young women and young men are distinguishable as discrete social categories.

### **6.6.3      *Alcohol consumption, symbolic power and the reproduction and regulation of gender roles***

From participants' point of view, in the context of alcohol consumption young men had power to veto alcohol-related practices based on their own interests, and thus reinforced a heterosexual version of femininity characterised by interest in being aesthetically sexually attractive, subordinate, and available to young men. In the following excerpt,

Suzi and Kym discuss young men “having their back” as a protective feature, reflecting how insidiously powerful and engrained masculine domination is:

Suzi: The boys always have your back.

Kym: Yeah.

Belinda: The boys do? In what context?

Kym: Like at parties maybe.

Belinda: Yep.

Suzi: Like if you’re doing something stupid they’ll be like ‘Put the bottle down, like that’s enough alcohol’.

Kym: They’ll take it off of you and like...

The distinctive and unequivocal social boundaries participants described as double standards around how to act when consuming alcohol among young women and young men underline this gendered power, and the symbolic violence enacted on young women in the context of alcohol consumption reinforced gendered inequality. An example of gendered power enacted by young men on young women was made clear in stories of young men “sending young women home” or “removing their alcohol”, whereby helping a young woman out of a vulnerable situation effectively excluded her from participating in opportunities to express her feminine self through alcohol consumption. For example, Ashley described:

I ended up in a tent where you’re passed out or whatever, you go there. I don’t remember it at all, I was laying there and the guys just happened to walk past and they’re like, ‘Oh my god that’s Ashley’ and before I passed out I’d told them to call my friend Kate, so they called her and it was Schoolies so there was no phone reception and they couldn’t contact her and I couldn’t

get home and like these guys said they could take me, so that's them, taking me home in a taxi. I'm so embarrassed.

The photograph shown in Figure 6.9 captures this example of a young man escorting a young intoxicated woman home, and the self-described embarrassment that ensued for the young woman at having lost control.



Figure 6.9: Caption: "This photo is me being taken home in a taxi to my hotel at schoolies. I'd had a fight with my best friend the night before and I was feeling angry and hurt and just wanted to have a good night. I ended up having about 16 shots [of alcohol] just before I left for the festival, half of which were poured for me by a guy to see which of us could hold our liquor better...clearly not me. I was turned away from the festival, left by my friends, and somehow ended up at the tent where the event organisers look after you. My friends in the picture happened to walk past and recognise me and get me into a taxi and to my room, one of them said to me later 'I thought we should have called an ambulance instead'. It's not a moment I'm proud of, in fact I hate talking about it, but pretending it didn't happen doesn't erase it, it's just a mistake I've had to learn from".

In describing their own alcohol consumption, participants bolstered the symbolic value inherent in their expressions of femininity by distinguishing themselves from others, using exclusionary statements such as:

Zoe: I'm not a fan of girls who get really drunk and then do things [of a sexual nature] with guys and then blame it on the fact that they were drinking...I really don't like that because I kinda... well I'd never get to that point.

In identifying a loss of control as undesirable, not only do such statements subordinate other versions of femininity but also symbolically reinforce masculine power through linking feminine identities to sexual relations with young men. The following excerpt illustrates the dominance of a heterosexual femininity:

Belinda: Are there 'tom boys' around still?

Suzi: Yeah...like lesbian status.

Here, a certain socially defined drinking-related decorum was embodied that was tied in to heterosexual values, and the desire to be attractive to young men and receive attention from them was valued. This example also reiterates that participants used their own embodied drinking practices to treat other young women as subject positions, and they classified each other based on their own subject position.

From participants' narratives I gained a sense that consuming alcohol might provide an opportunity for only temporary resistance to gender norms or new expressions of femininity. It seems any equality gained by participants through moving towards consuming alcohol like young men was more circumscribed. Participants' descriptions of how boys dictated opportunities to socialise and the social license young men had to judge young women and modify how they should consume alcohol reflected the symbolic power of young men to classify young women. This theme of masculine domination which was evident in young men casting judgement over young women, and

was reflected in various photographic images of drinking situations provided by participants, such as that in Figure 6.10.



Figure 6.10: Caption: “Boys dictate opportunities to socialise”

The ways young men might regulate and moderate young women’s expressions of femininity were also reflected in the way participants spoke about consuming alcohol in ways that might impress boys. A thematic relationship between self-confidence, alcohol and the presence of young men evolved out of this symbolic masculine power, and is reflected in the following interview excerpt:

Interviewer: So why would you wait until you’re drunk for the boys to join?

Cheyenne: It’s because we’re all shy.

Interviewer: So the drinking gives you confidence?

Cheyenne: It’s like ‘Aww the boys are going to be here, we’re going to have to care what we look like and what we’re doing’ but if you’re drunk, it’s like ‘I don’t care, whatever’ yeah, so it’s lots a confidence thing.

Interviewer: Is it about what you think the boys will be thinking of you, or do they say things that will make you think they...

Cheyenne: Most of the boys are good, they won't say anything but it's a lot about what you think they're going to think of you more so than what they do or say but boys like get hell rude lately, if they think something's 'wrong' they'll tell you...

In this example, Cheyenne and her friends timed their alcohol consumption according to the presence of young men because of knowing in advance they would judge her, and she used drinking to distance herself from the judgements associated with traditional forms of femininity.

For participants, alcohol consumption was not only symbolic of gender identities, but a power-laden activity they engaged in that regulated and reinforced their position in gendered hierarchies. The social power attributed to masculinity that subordinates feminine identities was reflected in their descriptions of their demeanour while consuming alcohol. Participants' accounts showed evidence of young women having limited agency to use alcohol consumption to subvert gender norms. Generally, they told me stories of compliance with, or failure in not aligning with, dominant expressions of femininity. It seemed that alcohol consumption remained a context for the enactment of gendered symbolic violence and for the reproduction of traditional discourses around alcohol and femininity. Here, patriarchal power differences were reproduced among contemporary young Australians in the drinking context. Participants' accounts indicated that consuming alcohol might allow for the temporary transgression of traditional gender norms and new expressions of femininity but these carried negative social consequences. Gendered restrictions around young women's alcohol-related behaviour were evident in the data. They also became apparent through interpreting participants'

judgements around self-control that indicated they believed heavy alcohol consumption remained natural for contemporary young men but not for contemporary young women, who relinquished their 'feminine' identity when consuming alcohol in 'masculine' ways. Participants' accounts also indicated that proximity to the most dominant and revered sign of femininity – the ideal way to be a young woman in postfeminist, contemporary society – was an avenue for constructing distinctions between herself and others. Idealised signs of femininity included modes of drinking but also bodily comportment while drinking and this extended to poses for photographs while in the drinking setting. They did this by defining themselves against what they are not, using symbolic language and othering labels more than self-identifying labels, and focusing on the significance of visual identity. While alcohol was a powerful gender symbol, from the point of view of participants, contemporary young women's scope to mobilise this power and use drinking-related practices to change the social arrangement through consistency with or disruption to the distribution of social power attributed to male or female practices (by consuming alcohol in certain ways) had significant social boundaries.

## **6.7 Summary of findings**

My findings contextualise young women's drinking into a complex set of social relationships and classification schemes. They provide insight into the social mechanisms that generate and regulate alcohol related practices and make drinking meaningful for contemporary young women. In line with my thesis propositions, I interpreted alcohol consumption as a symbolic and powerful activity young Australian women engage with to gain social prestige by consuming alcohol in particular valued ways, to form distinctions and to demonstrate positions in social hierarchies. The young women who participated in my research formed such distinctions through inclusionary and exclusionary differences identifiable by the values imbued in their frame of reference



– the broader social schema, their social class and their habitus, at a given time. For participants, social gains were made through the accumulation of symbolic capital by consuming alcohol in a form that is legitimised by social norms, conferring upon young women a sign of distinction among an audience of those predisposed to recognise such distinctions.

My findings also indicated that young women with the ability to accede to gender-related alcohol norms accrued symbolic capital and expressed social power. However, the socially constructed display of classed dispositions shaped drinking-related behaviour, meaning gender-related alcohol norms differed across groups represented in my research. Similar to alcohol consumption styles, femininity also seemed to be a classed sign and was therefore imbued with different types of power. For the young women who participated in my research, alcohol consumption also provided a way to experiment with and enact versions of femininity that concur with or subvert stereotypical gendered norms, although transgressions were only temporary. My findings indicated that a young woman's proximity to the most dominant and revered sign of femininity, that is, the best way to be a young woman in postfeminist, contemporary society, was an avenue for constructing distinctions between herself and others. This produced limited and contradictory alternatives to patriarchal versions of femininity; meaning identifying with dominant gendered expressions was complex and difficult for participants to navigate. Participants who demonstrated incongruence with idealised classifications and significations of feminine ways to drink alcohol risked social exclusion and critique.

In the next chapter, I discuss the above findings in relation to my thesis propositions and consider how these extend previous research on the social context of young women's alcohol consumption and align with emerging research to identify areas for further research.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

In this chapter I reflect on the implications of my research. First, I discuss the relation between my thesis propositions and my research findings, and show how my findings extend previous research on the social context of young women's alcohol consumption. Alongside this discussion, I position my findings relative to new research published between 2011 and 2016, after the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I identify areas for further research where relevant, and outline the relevance of my research to public health policy makers and to public health researchers using social theory.

Following this, I reflect on the process of conducting the study. Specifically, I recount the process of applying Bourdieu's theory of social relations and his methodological insights for reflexive research practice. This section identifies research strengths, limitations and theoretical insights. I indicate the quality and rigour of my research and the trustworthiness of the findings I generated.

This chapter presents step 7 of Meyer and Ward's guide for integrating theory into the research design (Meyer & Ward, 2014) (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: *The integration of theory into research design step 7* (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

Step 1: Systematically search the literature in the area of empirical and theoretical interest and identify gaps for empirical investigation.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 2: Identify social theories (potential and those that have been used in the area previously) in your research area.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 3: Critically analyse the social theory(ies) of interest. This involves identifying any empirical gaps in the theory, relevant critiques of the practical application of theory in the area of interest, and developing your own critiques of the practical application of specific areas, contexts and	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)

settings.	
Step 4: Develop a conceptual framework to operationalise the theory in research methods.	<i>Literature Review</i> (Chapter 2)
Step 5: Design the research with the aim of investigating both empirical and theoretical research gaps.	<i>Methodology</i> (Chapter 3)
Step 6: Conduct data collection and analysis.	<i>Methods &amp; Data Analysis</i> (Chapters 4 & 5)
Step 7: Write up the research results.	<i>Findings and Discussion</i> (Chapters 6 & 7)

## 7.1 Alcohol consumption as symbolic capital: Understanding how social relations shape young women's drinking

In Chapter 6, Findings, I compared and contrasted participants' accounts to explore whether they fulfilled my thesis propositions stated in Chapter 2. In this section, as is consistent with deductive logic I use Bourdieu's theory of social relations to interpret my findings. I demonstrate how the processes of social relations function as generative mechanisms that shape and are shaped by young women's drinking-related practices. As I previously outlined, Bourdieu (1984) defined social relations as the relationship between positions in social space occupied within the distribution of different resources (or capital). I indicate where I arrived at possibilities for improved understanding using Bourdieu's theory of social relations through deductive logic, and where I identified theoretical limits in line with abductive logic (see Chapter 5 for descriptions of these data analysis techniques). Abductive and deductive logic used in combination allowed me to generate novel, improved understandings of young women's alcohol consumption contained herein. Elements of this chapter are derived from a paper I co-authored that

emanated from my PhD, which demonstrated the utility of critical realist analytical tools for developing theoretical understandings (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013) (see Appendix 2) and were discussed in Chapter 3. I have ordered this section according to my thesis propositions as done in the Findings chapter (Chapter 6).

There are points of intersection in my discussions of propositions, because my objective is to produce a more comprehensive understanding the social processes of how young women's drinking shapes and is shaped by social relations than has previously been provided, which requires exploration of interrelated facets of social processes. In addition, some cross-referencing between propositions was inevitable because Bourdieu's concept symbolic capital, which I used to interpret my findings, must be operationalised within his broader theoretical framework of social relations for it to be a useful interpretive construct, and I explore this further in this chapter.

## **7.2 Interpretation of findings relative to Proposition 1: Alcohol consumption is structured by and structures social relations**

Proposition 1 allows for an understanding of the complexities of young women's social context. The two components of this proposition suggest social factors shape but *are also* shaped by young women's drinking. This proposition suggests that ways of drinking alcohol are social. It also indicates that young women's sociality shapes alcohol consumption. Inherent in this proposition is that through drinking, young women form social relationships and at the same time, alcohol consumption reflects and affects their interactions with others. The two parts of this proposition respond to an overarching shortfall in public health research that acknowledges the mutual influence of individual choices and social forces in shaping alcohol practices (see Chapter 2). It also helps to

distinguish the actual from the real reasons why young women drink; a methodological way to privilege young women's lay understandings of their alcohol consumption, whilst allowing an interpretation of this meaning.

Previous research has indicated that alcohol provided prosocial outcomes for young people, including group cohesion and solidarity among friends (Kirkby, 2003; Midford, 2005). This created a social imperative to drink, to ease awkwardness in social situations. These research findings supported only the first part of my proposition 1, that *alcohol consumption is structured by social relations*. Other research that showed how ways of consuming alcohol and the meanings young people ascribe to alcohol were linked to the social context of consumption supported only the second part of proposition 1, that *alcohol consumption structures social relations* (Guisse & Gill, 2007; Pavis et al., 1997; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001). Studies that explained young people's alcohol consumption as a social expectation or a normalised behaviour also supported only the second part of Proposition 1 (see, for example, Wechsler et al., 1997; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Rimm, 1995; Wechsler et al., 1998).

I designed my research to fill this gap in existing research, and my findings fulfil proposition 1 in the ways shown below, presenting a novel and more complete picture of *how* and *why* young Australian women consume alcohol. This view balances individual choice with external social forces, an approach that demonstrates structure and agency as joint influences on human practices as espoused by Bourdieu in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977). The use of proposition 1 to understand how young women's drinking might structure and is structured by social relations requires an understanding of the social value attributed to alcohol consumption. I take social structures to be social *processes* that generate, and are generated by, practices, and in

the context of my research social structures include, for example, peer group hierarchies (explored through proposition 2) and symbolically identifiable practices (explored through proposition 3).

### **7.2.1        *The social value of alcohol consumption***

A key finding of my research was that drinking alcohol was a socially valuable aspect of young women's lives. Participants' accounts of consuming alcohol were of drinking *only* in social contexts that provided opportunities to relate with others (see Chapter 6). My findings also indicated that it is through social relations that young women knew when to drink alcohol, what to drink, and in what ways to drink. In turn, young women used these ways of drinking as communicative signals to align themselves with other young women, improve their sociality and engage with new social relationships, thus fulfilling proposition 1.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital is useful for understanding *how* alcohol is socially valued by young women, and specifically *how* participants used the social value of alcohol for social gains. As I previously indicated symbolic capital is an amorphous concept that can be understood as anything recognised by social agents as having value in a social context that affords the individual prestige, honour and increased social status (Webb et al., 2002). To understand how symbolic capital and the exercise of social power relates to the meanings participants attached to alcohol consumption, it is necessary to consider the concepts of field and habitus. Bourdieu's conception of society as various 'fields' of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993) can be used to identify the positions of different individual participants within the social realm. Participants are positioned differently in certain roles and relationships and have differential access to the resources that Bourdieu termed 'capital' (social, cultural, economic and symbolic) within

these social spaces or fields (for example, school peer groups, sporting teams, friends at work). This enables an understanding of how the structure of the field reflects various levels of accumulated capital, resulting in different drinking-related practices, and how it determines actions for control of capital through drinking.

It is important to clarify the social 'levels' referred to when interpreting Bourdieu's concept symbolic capital in the context of participants' alcohol-related practices. The symbolic social relations that extended from social relations in the school context (or field) provide an example of how social struggles for symbolic capital and the conferral of symbolic capital occurred at two levels, macro and micro. For participants, symbolic capital was contested at the macro social level when power struggles occurred *between* social groups of young women based on the schools they attended. Social power was dependent on school grade, school type (public, private, catholic or coeducational) and location, school uniform and reputation, and aspects of the school environment such as perceived attitudes of students and teachers. At the micro level, power struggles took place *within* school-based social groups, and I discuss below how such struggles were reflected in social hierarchies that characterised group dynamics. Drinking occasions were highly valued (i.e. had high symbolic capital) by most participants and I interpreted this value as emanating from the symbolic capital gained at the two levels, macro and micro.

Drinking occasions, particularly interschool parties, allowed participants to transgress social boundaries defined by the economic and cultural capital of their school (i.e. school groups), although Bourdieu's conception of the fluidity of social fields indicates such transgressions are likely to be only temporary (Bourdieu, 1985, 1993). Parties offered young women opportunities to use alcohol as a key resource to demonstrate their aesthetic tastes and potentially achieve ascendancy in their social group. Drinking

occasions also allowed participants to demonstrate cultural capital through “dressing up” and “showing off” and this was particularly relevant for gaining symbolic capital from enacting socially-valued ways of being sexually attractive. Dressing up for parties reiterated the temporary nature of transgressing social boundaries of school across social groups, and also indicated the performativity and classification of drinking-related practices for gains within social groups. Drinking occasions were the means for participants to mobilise the symbolic capital they had previously accrued to access the party and potentially gain further social status by expanding social networks. School provided a field for struggles “for the production and imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 22) based on success in academic performance. However, it was devoid of opportunities for broadening social networks or exploring the romantic relationships and interactions, which are unique to social drinking contexts with activities described by participants such as dancing, laughing and hugging each other.

According to Bourdieu (1993), individual attitudes and practices are learned and socialised through interpretation of the external social environment. That is, young women reproduce broader social drinking norms because their decisions and choices are made within societal constraints. My findings suggest participants internalised external structures such as dominant alcohol consumption norms, and this aligns with research by Coleman and Carter (2005) that showed young people typically exhibited drinking behaviour that was congruent with a socially accepted norm. However, my research findings bring into question the level of active choice young women had about conforming to dominant drinking-related practices. My findings expanded the idea that acting in congruence with social norms was an individual pursuit free from enabling or confounding social factors. I found participants reproduced norms (or variations of norms) by externalising these internal structures within the *confines* of their social space,



which in turn conferred alliances with (or rejection of) other young women who engaged with the same social processes. This fulfils proposition 1 that alcohol consumption is structured by and structures social relations. The deeper understanding of how social norms function as generative mechanisms that shape but are also shaped by social relations reflects my understanding of how social values are produced through Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital. This is relevant to understanding *how* and *why* young women drink alcohol, because it is only when practices are valued that they become meaningful and worthwhile. Furthermore, the findings discussed above that confirm proposition 1 also suggested that young women's drinking practices were made meaningful within or from their particular social position; that is, how young women were related to one another, and this is explored below in relation to propositions 2 and 3.

In fulfilling proposition 1 my findings extend previous conceptualisations of drinking as a 'normalised' behaviour (i.e. the normalisation thesis). I explain normalisation as situated in the social structures that enabled and underpinned the social expectations to drink that were evident in participants' accounts. This position on normalisation extends the work of Measham and Shiner (2009), whose approach to normalisation sees it operating through structural influences outside individual adoptions of ways of drinking that have become normalised by young women. Another notable finding about the social expectations to drink relates to the role and function of alcohol as a social leveller. This was evident from participants' accounts of being perceived as open to engage socially with young women from other social circles while drinking. Participants' narratives described how drinking at interschool parties provided opportunities to break away from the social position imposed through their school showed the important potential of alcohol consumption to moderate the distribution of symbolic power among young women (explored further in proposition 2).

There was also a subtle, potentially subconscious (Bourdieu, 2002) social pressure to consume alcohol that became apparent through participants narratives of peer interactions in drinking contexts. It was seen when participants described feeling that *not* drinking in a social setting with their peers was *not* a valid, socially acceptable option. This subtle pressure also became evident in situations where participants denied feeling pressure and explained that pressure was not required because the intention to drink was already formed. Using Bourdieu's theory of social relations to interpret findings enables an extension of previous conceptualisations of peer pressure to encompass broader social influences that reference dominant norms, and it seemed that these were felt by participants as pressure to drink.

### **7.2.2        *The social complexities of peer pressure***

Participants discerned social expectations as pressure. Bourdieu's theory of social relations and symbolic power captures how social influences operate as generative mechanisms that shape practices rather than unilateral forces acting upon individuals, as is implied by the term "pressure". The processes of social influence that create peer pressure to consume alcohol are not well understood especially the ways that peer pressure *generates* and *regulates* practices. Pilkington (2007) conceptualised peer pressure as a set of reference points underpinned by mutual accountability about acceptable and unacceptable consumption, but my findings extend this and show such reference points as socially defined rather than the result of an individual's 'responsible' behaviour.

An understanding of how social relations structure and are structured by alcohol consumption requires scrutiny of the complex social processes that shaped the experience of pressure to drink. This would enable a more detailed understanding than previous studies that focus on pressure at the individual level. A key gap in explaining

the action of peer pressure was lack of understanding about what made peers key sources of influence to consume alcohol. Using Bourdieu's perspective on social relations I interpreted participants' reflections about their experiences of feeling peer pressure to consume alcohol as processes of social influence that are generative mechanisms shaping drinking-related practices. I used this to understand how some participants expressed feeling peer pressure to consume alcohol while others denied its existence. In doing so, I used abductive logic to explore the coexistence of feeling both pressured and not pressured within a single explanation to engage with the subtleties of young women's accounts and particularly to probe the notion that "no one pressures you to drink".

Within the context of Bourdieu's concept symbolic capital, I captured the subjective meanings that shaped participants' actions. My findings suggest peer pressure is not a force enacted upon young women but something they mutually enable (i.e. their peers also feel peer pressure to drink alcohol). The pressure to consume alcohol that participants described was felt in the context of peer interactions, through social relations and through the social organisation of alcohol consumption. In other words, the importance placed by participants on engaging in social situations where alcohol is consumed revealed the meaningfulness of alcohol consumption.

As I progressively obtained participants' accounts of peer pressure and engaged with Bourdieu's reflexive practice of objectivation (Bourdieu, 2003) where sociology is turned upon itself to attempt to objectify the subjective process of interpretation (see Chapter 3), it became apparent that my expectation of what peer pressure to drink entailed was different to the meanings participants attributed to peer pressure. This echoes work on the semantic distinctions between sociologists' conceptualisations of terms and the lay meanings attached to the same terms (Meyer & Ward, 2009), and it prompted me to

interrogate and interpret the meanings of peer pressure. As data collection progressed, I began to observe differences in my academically informed conceptualisation of the notion of “peer pressure”. I realised early in the research process that among my research participants there was not a single uni-dimensional force exerted from one individual to another to “force” a young woman to drink. Rather, an insidious, underpinning social pressure that was manifested in peer interactions during social engagements made participants feel as though not drinking in a social setting with their peers was an invalid choice. Participants labelled this overarching social pressure as peer pressure, so when asked if they thought peer pressure existed the response was “Yes”. When prompted to think critically about why or how this was so, participants were unable to articulate a response, often replying that they “didn’t know”. My findings showed drinking-related practices disconnected young women who did not align with socially valued drinking expectations. This aligns with research that explored the role of alcohol consumption in belonging which found young people in the United Kingdom constructed not being part of drinking practices as social exclusion (Griffin et al., 2009).

Using Bourdieu’s theory as an interpretive framework allows a more detailed contextual understanding of the feelings described by participants. It explains how their negative experience of exclusion generated drinking-related practices that enabled them to achieve inclusion. Peer groups had a regulatory function that was evident in participants’ narratives of the negative social effects when young women misread or undermined the effects of practices that were not consistent with socially valued drinking expectations. Returning to Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital, the social power of demonstrating socially inclusive practices underpins the experience of peer pressure.

### 7.2.3 *Summary of proposition 1*

Proposition 1 is fulfilled by my research findings. I have shown that alcohol consumption is not purely an individual behaviour, as commonly suggested in the extant literature, but part of an intricate web of social relationships that structure and are structured by practices. Previous studies indicated a lack of knowledge about how drinking is made meaningful, although such knowledge is essential to understand young women's drinking. My findings demonstrated that it was through social relations that social values were attributed to alcohol and particularly to alcohol-related practices, and drinking was made meaningful. By producing insight into the relational aspects of social networks, I conceptualise the social context of alcohol consumption as encompassing social values, rules and regulations through which drinking-related meanings emerge. Using my findings to probe proposition 1 allowed me to explore the processes of peer influence that reflect, generate and regulate young women's drinking practices.

Where previous approaches focused on peer pressure as a unilateral force that drives drinking, the use of Bourdieu's theory of social relations to interpret my findings indicated a more complicated process where those who felt pressure were implicated in creating the conditions through which pressure to drink was felt, fulfilling proposition 1 that alcohol consumption is both *structured by* and *structures* social relations. The social processes that generate alcohol consumption and related practices and which encompass motives and values are explored in this thesis and provide insight into how young women respond to dominant alcohol norms and drinking expectancies. For participants in the Australian social context, their subjective dispositions to drink in turn *produce* alcohol-related practices and outcomes, and *reproduce* the objective structures or social norms that began the process. This extends previous research by showing how

both social structures (i.e. norms) and individual decisions (i.e. expectancies) produce alcohol-related practices, where previously these have been considered discrete areas of inquiry.

### **7.3 Interpretation of findings relative to Proposition 2: Young women use alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups**

In proposition 2 I suggest that by consuming alcohol in certain ways young women can differentiate themselves and each other relative to dominant and socially legitimated ways to drink. I also suggest that through drinking young women can bolster their social status and can use this status to negotiate and maintain their position in social hierarchies. This proposition provides a more detailed understanding of the ideas developed in proposition 1 by prompting exploration of the processes of social influence that underpin how social relations shape and are shaped by alcohol consumption. While proposition 1 suggests young women use alcohol to *form* social relationships, proposition 2 indicates that young women use alcohol consumption to *negotiate* and *maintain* social relationships.

#### **7.3.1 *Classification, differentiation and exclusion or inclusion***

Previous research indicates an important link exists between alcohol consumption and people's position in social hierarchies relative to others in that space (Bullers et al., 2001). Specifically, in attempting to delineate the role of social networks in alcohol consumption, Valente et al. (2004) have shown that people positioned in similar social spaces behave similarly in drinking contexts. This indicates the importance of contacts among and between members of social groups in shaping practices, and led to the development of proposition 2. Applying this proposition to my findings allows an

exploration of how the similarity of practices that was evident across and within social groups could be explained when the social boundaries of participants' drinking contexts such as events, parties or gatherings were ill defined, and where they encountered a mix of existing and new peers.

The nature of young women's social relations in different kinds of peer groups in different social structures and different social relations is not explained by the extant literature. Using proposition 2 to explore my findings addresses this research gap. My findings suggest that the structure of social positions and the way in which it is linked to the complexity of interpersonal relations provides a more complete understanding of the mechanisms of social influence occurring in the social context of alcohol. Proposition 2 posits that the use of alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups captures a process of classifying others and being classified through drinking, and this was apparent in participants' narratives. Classification processes entailed judgements that resulted either in social inclusion or exclusion. Participants' accounts suggested that prestige was defined and distinction reasserted through the exclusion of particular individuals or groups of young women who exhibited practices that are *not* congruent with legitimated ways of consuming or not consuming alcohol. As a reading of Bourdieu (1984) suggests, consumption practices such as the consumption of alcohol are not value-free but are loaded with cultural and symbolic meanings. Furthermore, a participant's social status was affected if she misread or underestimated the impact of behaviour that was not synchronised with culturally valued norms. In this sense, specific aspects of alcohol consumption behaviour were socialised according to a system of monitoring, recognition and reproduction that was constantly in flux. Thus alcohol consumption behaviour was used to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups, meaning that proposition 2 is fulfilled.

Using Bourdieu's theory to interpret my findings, it appears that consuming alcohol in a certain way conferred symbolic capital upon participants. Specifically, symbolic capital was accrued from subscribing to a way of being that represented the popular aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu (1991) explains "all consumption is conspicuous, whether or not it was performed in order to be seen, it is distinctive" (p. 237). He states further "Every practice is bound to function as a distinctive sign and when the difference is recognized, legitimate and approved as a sign of distinction" (p. 237). Applying this perspective to young women's drinking suggests that the way drinking becomes meaningful through social relations (proposition 1) is embodied in the distinctive practices associated with consuming alcohol. This aligns with recent research that supports a link or 'class patterning' between drinking patterns or styles and social status differences (Jarvinen, Ellergaard & Larsen, 2014).

This way of interpreting participants' experience of social ease also extends previous research on pleasure-seeking through alcohol consumption, specifically studies that link drinking among friends and as a social collective to pleasure (Duff, 2008; Lindsay, 2009; Measham, 2004; Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, & Hutton, 2013; Szmigin et al., 2008).

Conceptualising pleasure-seeking as a social process reinterprets the pleasure gained through achieving an 'alternate state of consciousness' through intoxication and locates pleasure in the sociality of drinking (Duff, 2008). Australian research undertaken by Fry (2011) acknowledges the effects of pleasure on young adults' alcohol consumption and calls for greater understanding of the experience of pleasure and enjoyment as benefits of alcohol consumption. I contribute such an understanding through my findings that unpack the social origins of alcohol-related pleasure. I argue that pleasure was located in the sense of social ease participants experienced when they remained in control while drinking. This process is explained by the prosocial effects of consuming alcohol, when



participants demonstrated synergy with the most socially desirable and dominant ways of drinking. This is consistent with Australian research indicating that there are boundaries to the loss of control young Australians seek through alcohol consumption (Zajdow & MacLean, 2014). Lindsay's concept of 'staging of intoxication' (Lindsay, 2009) describes how young people regulate their drinking to maximise pleasure. Extending this idea that young people stage their intoxication, I suggest that intoxication is *also staged by others*, and within social boundaries. For young Australians, the *management* of their intoxication and enactments of the embodied state of intoxication are culturally sanctioned (Zajdow & MacLean, 2014). I suggest that these are also socially sanctioned and regulated by those with sufficient symbolic capital, first to decide what is socially acceptable, then to have others adopt these symbolic practices. Lindsay (2009) suggests that part of the pleasure obtained from drinking comes from managing the risks it entails. Building on findings explored under proposition 1, I understand these risks to be predominantly social. In particular, there is the risk of social exclusion that comes from not achieving a socially acceptable standard of drunkenness, and not enacting drinking in socially satisfactory ways.

My findings not only support proposition 2, that young women use alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups, but go further to show that the application of this proposition also leads to new conceptualisations of pleasure linked to control and the social regulation of young women's drinking practices.

Participants described the relaxation and relief they gained through acting in socially acceptable ways as maintaining control, and this underpinned the pleasure gained by participants from drinking. My findings extend Zajdow and MacLean's (2014) research that found the ideal state of drunkenness is such that ease of sociality can be achieved, and Lindsay's argument that through staging intoxication young people seek to enhance

the pleasure of drinking. This understanding that the notion of control is socially constructed and socially regulated reveals the symbolic dimensions of alcohol-related pleasures and will be discussed further in relation to proposition 3.

### **7.3.2        *The validity of not drinking as a counter position***

Proposition 2 is not entirely fulfilled in relation to the validity of opposing dominant social norms. Applying Bourdieu's theorising on symbolic power and symbolic capital to my findings suggests the legitimacy of the counter position of being a non-drinker *is challenged* at a macro social level. This is reflected in my findings, when young women who provided accounts of not drinking used practices typically associated with intoxication to indicate the enjoyment gained from their non-drinking activities. In so doing, they subtly and unknowingly reinforced the symbolic power of dominant drinking norms. It was notable, however, that at a micro group level *not* drinking was *not challenged* but was legitimated. This is another example of the different social levels at which symbolic capital operates. Although Bourdieu's theory of social relations suggests that alignment with drinking-related norms affords symbolic capital, my findings indicated that there were other valued practices participants engaged with that were allocated higher symbolic capital than drinking.

The validity of the counter position to drinking was evident only *within* and not *across* social groups. This finding supports other research showing that construction of an alternate subject position is possible through credible identity positions beyond intoxication, termed by Fry as 'resistance consumption' (Fry, 2010). However, my findings suggest that there are boundaries to the legitimising of such positions. Advocat and Lindsay (2015) also noted the limited range of *legitimate* counter positions for not drinking which reinforce the dominance of the social imperative to drink in Australian

contexts is also relevant. My findings differ from research into young Danish people's counter-cultural practices, which suggested that the struggle for social power brings about resistance (Kolind, 2011). In contrast, I found that domination still occurred despite resistance.

### **7.3.3        *The necessity of recognition for distinction***

Bourdieu's theory of social relations and his view on struggles for recognition explains how the ratification of a witnessing audience was an essential strategy for participants' accrual of symbolic capital while drinking. For example, the need to capture, record and communicate displays of drinking was a distinction asserting strategy used by participants to legitimise their social status, as proposed in proposition 2. The necessity of recognition for the accrual of symbolic capital is one reason for the popularity of Facebook® among participants, because it allowed them to share evidence of drinking. My findings align with more recent Australian research that shows how Facebook® provides a way to 'see' and understand the pleasures of alcohol consumption that are moored in the sociality of drinking (Brown and Gregg, 2012). Young women's offline social bonds that might be strengthened through shared drinking occasions are reflected and reinforced, but also potentially compromised through online commentaries on social media. Social media seemed to provide an expansion of their offline lives, with participants making a distinction between real life, in person socialising and socialising via Facebook®, and it also provided opportunities to display personal information in a public forum. This finding aligns with recent research conducted with New Zealander young women, which found presentations of young women's drinking online are affected by offline social constructions of idealised feminine identities (Niland et al., 2014; Hutton et al., 2016). As indicated in my findings, Facebook® gave participants increased opportunities to see the lives of others, and without it they would not have been aware of

these. Facebook® facilitates social interactions by allowing users to respond to postings by simple actions such as 'press like on photos' or 'check in' at events. Through this process of observing other people's interactions, information is made public that once went unnoticed, or was seen or described only by those present.

The prominence of social media in young women's sociality was clear in my findings, and contributes to emerging research that explores the links between Facebook® and the sociality of young women's drinking (Huang, Soto, Fujimoto, & Valente, 2014; Lyons, Goodwin, McCreanor, & Griffin, 2015). My findings are also consistent with research which postulates that social media has created a new environment in which young people are exposed to and influenced by alcohol-related content. Other researchers have conceptualised Facebook® as a reflection and extension of the structural constraints experienced offline (see, for example, Hutton et al., 2016), and explored the use of social media to signify identities (see, for example, Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, & Hutton, 2014; Ridout, Campbell, & Ellis, 2012) and I suggest these areas warrant further research in light of my findings. For participants, aspects of their social life were made public through Facebook®. Because of the ease with which items could be posted, young women were able to see aspects of their peers' and even strangers' drinking-related accounts to which previously they would not have had access. Furthermore, the communicative functions of Facebook® provided a unique forum for the symbolic processes and strategies used to seek recognition of or moderate reactions, and which are either opprobrious or reinforcing.

The use of social media, specifically Facebook®, by young women has expanded exponentially since the inception of my research. In consequence, some findings are left as premises and areas for further research rather than explanations within the scope of this thesis. Using Bourdieu's theory of social relations and his conceptualisation of social

power, it seems that Facebook® could be envisaged as a field of social interaction that expands existing fields, and a field in which participants became consciously aware of their dispositions by reflecting on themselves relative to others, and on themselves as if they were someone else. It has been argued that the interpretive capacity of Bourdieu's theory does not extend to individuals' interactions with structural pressures of emerging technology and contemporary avenues for communication (Calhoun, 1995; Couldry, 2005), while Elliott and Urry's concept network capital (2010) simply appears to extend Bourdieu's social capital. Extending Bourdieu's theory, it could be suggested that social media *reinforces and reproduces* offline social distinctions, and this is an area that warrants further research.

#### **7.3.4        *Disorderly symbolic order***

An important caveat needs to be noted in relation to proposition 2 and the interpretive use of Bourdieu's concepts. Social position, or the symbolic order of social groups, is, ironically, disorderly in the sense that not all participants had access to equal social standing. Participants brought various levels and different types of capital to any social encounter, and as I previously mentioned, these forms of capital and their relative weight were in a constant state of flux. It is also important to clarify the social levels referred to when interpreting Bourdieu's theory in relation to participant's alcohol consumption.

Employing Bourdieu's concepts suggests that among young women, competition for social status occurs at two levels: at the macro social level in which social power is dependent on school type, location and reputation (i.e. cultural capital) and at the micro level, in which power struggles take place within social groups (i.e. social capital).

My findings suggest symbolic capital from drinking alcohol might be accrued both *within* and *across* social groups. However, for participants, changing one's social status was not a game open to chance. From the outset, the competition for social status was

unequal, the stakes and opportunities for accumulation of symbolic capital were not evenly distributed, and participants brought a 'social history' (a history of success or loss in capital accumulation) to each new social context. It seemed there was a limited range of possibilities for self-identification and young women were symbolically constrained with their drinking preferences, which were underpinned or articulated within specific social and cultural dispositions. Specific to this thesis, it is relevant to note how classed distinctions and differences in alcohol consumption manifested through participants expressions of femininities. It was clear in my findings that there were marked differences in how alcohol consumption was made meaningful across different young women and different groups of young women. A reading of Bourdieu's work on social space and symbolic power might explain this as differences in 'schemes of perception' that emanate from differences in their position in social space (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19) and is discussed below.

In a utopian society, individuals could renew their social history with a fresh start for each social encounter. Instead, according to Bourdieu, the accumulation of capital is intrinsically linked to previous social encounters and, therein, opportunities for the accrual of capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory of social relations would suggest that the school and its unique social structure imposes social boundaries. Building on these ideas, explains how alcohol consumption occasions were highly valued by participants for the opportunities they provided to transgress these boundaries. Alternatively, alcohol consumption might reveal or emphasise differences in young women's position in social space. Attempts to transgress other social fields might result in participants subscribing to other dominant norms around alcohol consumption that make alcohol consumption normalised and which link to the idea that alcohol consumption can concomitantly be both liberating and constraining. It is also worth noting that consumption of alcohol may

not be something from which young women directly accrue symbolic capital. The process could be more involved, in that consumption of alcohol functions as a source of symbolic capital because it gives leverage to other avenues for capital accumulation. Alternatively, the accrual of symbolic capital may derive from the practice of consumption and the drinking-related practices it entails. This can be linked to the notion that certain ways of consuming alcohol are acceptable and revered and are therefore a means of capital accumulation, thereby reinforcing the centrality of social influences on young women's alcohol consumption outcomes evident in my findings.

### **7.3.5        *Drinking is emblematic of social distinctions***

My findings suggest that while alcohol-related experiences *create* distinctions between or within groups of young women, they are also *emblematic* of social distinctions. Young women participating in my research inherited a 'social history' largely attributable to their parents' economic background but that also emanated from the dispositions of their parents (from school choice to decisions surrounding alcohol provision or allowing a party to be held at their home, and including smaller scale decisions such as monitoring communication by confiscating their daughter's mobile phone as punishment). These parental dispositions shaped part of the young women's social position, or at least, provided the footing for their social position. Bourdieu's theory of social relations suggests from this social footing, young women built a social status position, while often still using resources available from the repertoire set up by their parents. For example, participants discussed how they accessed alcohol and this differed markedly across groups of participants. Some participants' parents purchased alcohol for them, others stole alcohol from their parents, and other participants' parents prohibited alcohol consumption entirely (see section 6.6.).

Furthermore, differences in social distinctions emanated from differences in the resources available to participants and the ways they interacted with and translated these resources into drinking-related practices to manipulate their social status position. For example, hosting a social occasion where alcohol was permitted and/or supplied by parents was considered popular, and reflected a way young women might mobilise social capital by appropriating their parents' economic capital. Young women also brought different levels and different types of capital to any social setting. Using the drinking setting of a party as an example, social and cultural capital enabled participants' entry to a party or drinking environment. Without social networks young women would not be permitted to enter this social field. For some participants, however, parties with peers did not feature in their social lives at all and alcohol consumption occurred in the context of family events and the social networks that stem from family. For these participants, the conferral of alcohol-related meanings occurred through relationships with family and smaller circles of family-oriented social relations, meaning the symbolic capital many participants accrued from hosting or attending a particular party did not apply to young women where such ideals were not valued, or perhaps were unattainable. In some cases, family relations were more prominent than social peer relations, meaning there are some exceptions to the utility of Bourdieu's theory for explaining my findings within proposition 2. The use of abductive logic within analysis allowed me new ways of understanding the social conditions that shaped young women's practices that fell outside of the dominant drinking norm. Using abductive logic during analysis entailed a close examination of data to ascertain the practices young women enacted that structured their relationships and created distinctions that were not explainable by Bourdieu's theory (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013) (see Chapter 3). I found that differences in social distinctions arose from differences in the resources young women had available to them, and the methods they used to interact with and translate these



resources into drinking-related practices to manipulate their social status position. The differences in participants' alcohol consumption highlighted that social conditions like limited capital affected young women's ability to enact dominant drinking-related practices, in particular their ability to comply with consumer society's consumption ideals. This finding is supported by recent Danish research that found differences in young people's ability to reference mainstream culture when dominant alcohol consumption norms were applied to non-mainstream young people from lesser social status positions (Kolind, 2011). I argue that that the diverse ways different young women consume alcohol, in different social contexts and with reference to dissimilar value systems within broader contemporary Australian cultural ideals calls into question currently popular concepts such as 'controlled loss of control' (Measham, 2002, 2004) and 'calculated hedonism' for *some* young women. Such notions are only relevant where the attainment of these intoxicated states is valued and/or attainable.

### **7.3.5        *Summary of proposition 2***

My findings make clear that diverse young women drink differently in dissimilar contexts, fulfilling proposition 2. Most young women who participated in my research formed distinctions through inclusionary and exclusionary differences pertaining to alcohol. These differences were identifiable by the values imbued in their frame of reference – the broader social schema, their social class and their habitus – at a given time, but this frame of reference also imposed restrictions on how participants were expected to behave while drinking. However, proposition 2 was not entirely fulfilled in instances where participants adopted a valid counter position to dominant social drinking norms. While at a macro social level, the legitimacy of being a non-drinker was challenged (congruent with Bourdieu's writing on the distinction of elites within broader society), at a micro level within groups of non-drinkers, *not* drinking was a socially legitimated identity.

The use of proposition 2 also facilitated a novel way of conceptualising pleasure. Using Bourdieu's theory, I interpret the social ease participants expressed through maintaining control of drinking outcomes relative to social expectations was manifested as pleasure. Probing my findings relative to proposition 2 and applying Bourdieu's theoretical stance on distinction suggests that through particular drinking-related practices (that might be interpreted as strategies), alcohol is transformed to a socially symbolic and value-laden object capable of communicating social difference. Participants used symbolic language as a key strategy of distinction to impose points of view and distinguish themselves and their drinking practices from others (Bourdieu, 1985) and this leads to a discussion of proposition 3, which explores the use value of alcohol as a symbolic identifier.

#### **7.4. Interpretation of findings related to *proposition 3*: Young women use alcohol consumption to symbolise personal and group identity relative to positions in social space**

Proposition 3 builds on proposition 2 to examine *how* young women's drinking practices create and maintain social differentiation, and it indicates this process of classification is symbolically significant. The premise that alcohol consumption signifies or distinguishes collective identities is relevant to understanding young women's alcohol consumption, yet the contextual differences that might result in different young women behaving differently whilst consuming alcohol are poorly understood. Proposition 3 also extends proposition 1, which indicates that for young women alcohol is a product instilled with social value, and prompts understanding of the meanings underpinning young women's alcohol consumption through a focus on how literal social spaces and practices might also be symbolic spaces where symbolic practices are played out. It also entails considering how young women might use their alcohol consumption as a symbolic way to strengthen or alter their position in social space. Knowledge about how young women

use alcohol consumption and related practices to classify one another facilitates an understanding of how drinking-related practices demarcate social identities, and this is explored herein.

#### **7.4.1      *Alcohol as embodied symbolic capital***

My findings demonstrated complexity by conceptualising alcohol as symbolic capital and this provides a way of understanding the social context of alcohol consumption. Although it is a highly important component of the social context, alcohol remained largely part of the social backdrop. It was through the valued, embodied and performative practices associated with consuming alcohol that alcohol became a symbolic, communicative tool used by participants to create and modulate distinctions within and across social groups. In so doing, the consumption of alcohol in particular ways was a symbolic, power-laden means for participants to produce (or reproduce) ways of being that maintain or negotiate their position within social hierarchies, thus fulfilling proposition 3 and reiterating proposition 2.

According to Bourdieu's writing on symbolic capital, differentiation of the drinking-related practices of young women only becomes possible once they are appropriated and embodied by individuals who occupy particular positions within a social hierarchy, according to the processes of differentiation and classification outlined under proposition 2. In this way Bourdieu's theory is useful to understand my findings and explain how they fulfil Proposition 3, although in different ways to what I originally anticipated. I expected that the different forms of capital (social, cultural, economic and symbolic) would be easily recognisable in relation to young women's selection of drink types or brands. Using Bourdieu's concept of distinction, I initially expected alcohol consumption, the types of product consumed, the practices entailed, and importantly, the context in which alcohol drinking occurred would be markers of individual and group identity and a means

by which some young women assert their social status, and therefore a highly symbolic activity (Bourdieu, 1984). In contrast to these expectations, I found that asking participants about drink types and preferences (cultural capital) and seeking to make parallels between participants' responses and their socioeconomic background (economic capital) limited my understanding of the *processes* of social influence and young women's drinking practices (I further discuss the process of applying Bourdieu's theoretical framework below). It became evident that linking young women with alcohol product types, or in other words seeing symbolic capital as attainable through young women's selection of certain alcohol products over others, produced a superficial account of alcohol consumption practices. For participants, the accumulation of symbolic capital obtained through consuming alcohol in legitimised forms conferred signs of distinction within a wider audience of those predisposed to recognise such distinctions. This allowed insight into the processes of social influence that made drinking meaningful. The agency of the drinker in terms of product consumed was balanced by the social influences that gave drinking-related practices symbolic value and legitimised drinking, further demonstrating the relevance of attending to both structure and agency to understand processes of social influence identified through proposition 1.

These findings also extend proposition 2, which indicated recognition is crucial to the distinction afforded by alcohol. They enable understanding of how the ratification of a witnessing audience is essential for the accrual of symbolic capital among young women who consume alcohol, and demonstrate the performative nature of alcohol consumption identified in the literature and discussed previously. To summarise, consuming alcohol was *not* something from which participants directly accrued symbolic capital. Rather, symbolic capital was accrued through other status-defining practices that drinking

alcohol allowed. Notably, drinking-related practices were afforded high or low symbolic capital based on how they were interpreted and received by the social group.

Participants' critiques of their own practices that accompanied drinking-related 'performances' further demonstrate Bourdieu's theory that external structures are internalised into the habitus. While the actions of the agent externalise interactions between actors into the social relationships in the social field, young women internalised external structures and the embodied and performed alcohol consumption practices. However, a complicating factor is that according to Bourdieu's concept habitus, young women did not consciously act while making drinking-related decisions. It seems young women were not *a/ways* reflexive about what drove their interactions with others in the social context while consuming alcohol. I note the caveat 'always' here in light of my discussion below regarding the emerging literature that presents contemporary interpretations of habitus and my reflection on the methodological techniques I used that seemed to make conscious participants' seemingly unconscious drinking and social dispositions. In light of participants' self-deprecating narratives, the absence of reflexivity was evident, particularly where participants assumed individual responsibility for 'bad' drinking practices or did not recognise the role of social structures, such as how peer judgements were formed from societal perceptions about how young women should act while drinking. Participants interpreted broader social expectations (noting that some young women had limited possibilities for this) and when combined with group values, their interpretations translated to embodied drinking-related practices or ways of consuming alcohol that were either legitimised and a source of symbolic capital, or practices from which no social gain could be made (i.e. such as those instances where participants described feeling disappointed with their drinking performance).

Participants' narratives suggested that 'natural' embodied displays were recognised as symbolic capital rather than "obviously" staged alcohol consumption. For example, one participant explained how faking intoxicated behaviour and "pretending to be drunk" is "uncool" and I interpreted such fabricated practices as lacking symbolic capital.

Interpreting young women's alcohol consumption accounts using Bourdieu's theory suggests that the sense of fun, relaxation and confidence participants attribute to drinking arises from the feeling of acceptance and belonging that is achieved through emulating social competencies in alcohol-related practices. Acting in congruence with drinking expectations which are verified by more popular peers who have the social authority or cultural capital to know what is in vogue and who possess symbolic capital to dictate the actions of others seemed to alleviate discomfort in alcohol consumption settings. The requisite displays of authenticity while enacting drinking practices were essential for the validation of drinking practices and the accrual of symbolic capital. The use of Bourdieu's theory to interpret my findings suggests that the sense of fun, relaxation and confidence participants attributed to drinking arose from the feeling of acceptance and belonging that is achieved through emulating social competencies in alcohol-related practices. Acting in congruence with drinking expectations which were verified by more popular peers who had the social authority or cultural capital to know which drinking practices were socially desirable and the power to define this social desirability seemed to alleviate discomfort in alcohol consumption settings.

#### **7.4.2      *Summary of proposition 3***

Proposition 3 prompted exploration of how the social value of alcohol translates to symbolic practices. It unpacks the social structures that give alcohol social value, prompts consideration of how the social value of alcohol is communicated and

appropriated by young women in symbolic ways. Using my findings to explore proposition 3 demonstrated that for young women, the social practice of drinking and the practices associated with alcohol consumption transformed it into a socially symbolic practice, thus fulfilling this proposition. This extends the understanding of the processes of recognition and differentiation delineated through proposition 2 to create a framework for understanding young women's drinking that envisages alcohol as having the social power to distinguish and differentiate, making drinking alcohol symbolically valuable as an identifier for different types of young women. This also aids an understanding of the differences in alcohol consumption across young women that stem from differences in categories of perception and alcohol-related values.

### **7.5 Interpretation of findings relative to proposition 4: Young women's scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms is socially defined, and socially limited**

With proposition 4, I infer that a young woman's ability to change drinking-related norms by acting in ways different to socially prescribed norms while drinking is determined by social factors, and also suggest that young women's social positions influence their forms of conduct while consuming alcohol. This proposition extends previous understandings of the ways in which social norms shape and define young women's drinking practices by showing how social norms are dynamic social processes that young women interact with, either through conformity or disregard.

My findings do not entirely fulfil proposition 4; rather they suggest that young women *can* transgress drinking norms but that this has social consequences resulting in the loss or gain of symbolic capital. This develops my understanding generated through proposition 2, that a young woman's social position is influenced by her ways of acting when drinking, which can change her position in social hierarchies while keeping it *within*

*social bounds*. My exploration of proposition 2 (section 7.3) indicates that young women are each differently constrained by the uneven distribution of symbolic capital, and knowledge of how individuals are structured into social positions helps to demonstrate how drinking practices are shaped.

The effects of classification rest on possession of symbolic capital that has within it power and authorisation to classify. Bourdieu explains this as “the ability to classify successfully, the capacity to make one’s definition of the situation as the situation” (Jenkins, 2002, p. xiii). Young women who were able to concur with dominant gender-related alcohol norms accrued symbolic capital and expressed social power. However, as I explained in relation to proposition 2, the socially constructed displays of drinking dispositions also dictated the forms of conduct or decorum while drinking alcohol and influenced styles of consumption, consequently alcohol norms were different across groups represented in my research. Similar to alcohol consumption styles, femininity also seemed to be a classed sign and was therefore imbued with different types of power.

Building on foundational understandings of alcohol as a power-laden gender symbol (Erikson, 1999; Ettore, 2004) and using Bourdieu’s perspective to interpret my findings, an exploration of proposition 4 suggests that young women’s ability to mobilise this power and use drinking practices as a vehicle to change social norms has significant social boundaries. In the following sections I discuss my findings that show young women’s social position influences and is influenced by their forms of conduct while consuming alcohol. I then combine Bourdieu’s theory of social relations with postfeminist ideology to indicate the gendered social conditions that surround contemporary young women’s drinking practices. I outlined earlier in this thesis that a tenet of postfeminist philosophy is that women who can combine both masculine and feminine traits display



the power needed to accomplish gender equality (Parkins, 1999). An application of this tenet to alcohol consumption might imply that young women drinking in ways previously sanctioned only for young men were legitimately signifying a new version of femininity in contemporary society, and I explore this idea below.

### **7.5.1      *Young women's social position influences and is influenced by forms of conduct while consuming alcohol***

Bourdieu's explanation that the representations of agents vary with their position, the values and interests associated with it, and with the "system of schemes of perception" and "appreciation of practices" acquired through social position (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19) can be used to account for differences in participants' alcohol-related practices. An awareness of these differences may contribute to an understanding of why some young women consume alcohol to excess and in ways that place themselves at harm, while other women in similar situations take less obvious risks or never engage with such situations in the first place. In this way, my findings extend previous social network studies that indicated an important link between young women's position in social space relative to others in that space. Previous research on social norms could not account for such contextual differences and generally overlooked the relational nature of social norms in determining the reasons behind variability in consumption (Abel & Plumridge, 2004; Room, 2001).

Bourdieu's writing on the concept habitus indicates that a young woman's acquisition of dispositions is structurally determined by her position in social space. This position can be understood as the conditions of her life, comprising inherited capital and the resources she accumulates through everyday social struggles (economic capital, cultural capital and social capital, the summation of which is symbolic capital). The habitus

subconsciously dictates action and prohibits alternative courses of action by constraining her practices to the ways she is predisposed to act. Bourdieu's theory provides a framework for understanding the normalisation of alcohol consumption as the reproduction of dominant social and cultural norms. This process becomes valued and symbolic because symbolic capital or social power is accrued from subscribing to practices that represent the popular aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1984). According to the theoretical literature on consumption reviewed in Chapter 2 the desire for symbolic capital has become a greater imperative to young women than ever before, because all aspects of social life and particularly the drinking realm are becoming increasingly commodified.

### **7.5.2      *Alcohol consumption, symbolic power and the reproduction and regulation of gender roles***

Bourdieu's social logic on the subtleties of domination, specifically the social power deployed by those in dominant positions to legitimate their positions, enabled me to understand the social conditions that limit young women's free expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption. Participants' perspectives revealed that in the context of alcohol consumption young men had the power to veto women's alcohol-related practices, based on their own (male) interests. In so doing, they reinforced a version of femininity that was heterosexual, interested in being aesthetically sexually attractive, subordinate, and available to young men. The distinctive and unequivocal social boundaries that participants described as "double standards" around how young women and young men should act when consuming alcohol underline this hegemonic power.

While discussing findings related to proposition 1, I indicated how participants' accounts verified Bourdieu's notion of inherited cultural dispositions. Applying this to gendered

alcohol practices suggests that any re-envisioning of femininity through alcohol consumption (specifically, consuming alcohol like young men do) is likely to be limited by gendered power differentials that are reproduced from historical conceptions. My data indicated that 'classed femininities', recognisable decades ago in Australia when women had only just gained entry to public drinking contexts, still operate today. This supports Skeggs' conceptualisation of the intersectionality of class and gender (Skeggs, 2004) and the work of Adkins (2004). Legitimations of inequality and hierarchy that reflect social positions (i.e. classed femininities) and gendered power, in this case masculine hegemony, were evident in participants' accounts. My findings suggest young women's agency to use alcohol consumption to subvert gender norms is limited. Participants' narratives contained many stories of either compliance or failure to align with dominant expressions of femininity. My findings echo recent research that investigated young women's alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom, within a widespread culture of intoxication in relation to recent debates about contemporary femininity. Bailey, Griffin, and Shankar, (2015) found that young women were obliged to negotiate femininity alongside drinking, and thus their drinking was characterised by themes of restraint and management. Bourdieu's writing on habitus (2002) can be used to explain young women's conformity with gendered drinking norms, not as obedience to social norms *per se*, but rather as unconscious dispositions or misrecognised symbolic violence. It seems that alcohol consumption remains a context for existing conventions of gendered drinking, for the enactment of gendered symbolic violence and the reproduction of traditional discourses around alcohol and femininity.

The concept of symbolic capital can be used to extend understanding of how drinking practices are socially regulated, beyond a simplistic reliance on social norms. By using Bourdieu's notion of cultural reproduction to interpret participants' stories I developed an

understanding that resistance to gendered drinking norms does not achieve social change in terms of gender equality. This brings into question the extent of young women's agency to transgress gender divisions and subvert gender norms (aligning with proposition 4). Rather, Bourdieu's perspective on structure and agency as concomitant influences that produce actions indicates that change might be located in a shift in the conditions of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977). Adkins (2004) referred to this as a 'release from gender' and indicated that it is likely occurring not to create social change but rather to rework the social categories of gender. From a public health perspective, the notion that resistance to norms is apparently not possible might ensure the development of informed policy and practice that include awareness that alcohol has different meanings and significance for different young Australian women, according to the social and symbolic values attributed to alcohol within their social contexts.

Participants' accounts verify Bourdieu's notion of inherited cultural dispositions. The discursive language used by participants to describe alcohol consumption practices that have gendered connotations results from traditional gendered perceptions. For example, young men may refer to moderate alcohol consumption as 'soft', a feminine connotation in contrast to the idealised 'hard drinking' demonstrated by the quintessentially Aussie bloke (Borlagdan et al., 2010). Restrictions on alcohol consumption were founded in ideological conceptions of the weakness of women, specifically, their physical inability to hold 'strong stuff' (Kapferer, 1988).

Alcohol consumption has long been a symbolic way by which societies differentiate and regulate gender roles (Holmila & Raitasalo, 2005). Wilsnack and Wilsnack (1997) argue that it is through recognising the *differences* in alcohol consumption identifiable by gender that the manner in which gender roles are socially symbolised and socially defined can be seen. Hence, the convergence of drinking patterns noted in the

Introduction might suggest a reduction in the differences in socially defined gender roles between women and men. However, this does not appear to be the case. The public concern expressed about young women's drinking suggests acceptance of the socially symbolic and gendered nature of drinking in Australia and reflects a gendered disposition deeply engrained in Australia's history and ethos that permits intoxication for men but not women (Kapferer, 1988; Roche et al., 2008). As a way of 'doing gender' (Measham, 2002), specifically for young people experimenting with gender identities (Hammersley, 2010), drinking is undermined by the continual reassertion of gender norms (Borlagdan et al., 2010). This speaks to the pervasive social norms that constitute appropriate femininity and masculinity in relation to alcohol across time. It also reflects the performativity of gender as an enactment of embodied cultural capital that moderates the social appropriateness of consumption (Butler, 1999), deeming some alcohol-related practices dishonourable for women while revered for men (McCall, 1992).

My findings build on research that indicates alcohol consumption is regulated by gendered social relationships and reflected in embodied social practices among women who consume alcohol (Lyons et al., 2014). For participants of my research, the gendered restrictions placed on their alcohol-related behaviour were evident in their discourse around self-control that indicated they relinquished their 'feminine' identity when consuming alcohol in 'masculine' ways (Kapferer, 1988). The process of managing the boundaries inherent in consuming alcohol and how these are delineated differently according to gender is relevant (Lindsay, 2009). Changes in the social conditions that shape gendered alcohol outcomes are more likely to result from the transformation of the processes that shape gender norms rather than through overt resistance to traditional gender norms (Bourdieu, 1993), which supports proposition 4.

This is akin to McLeod's theoretical work on postfeminist identities that indicates "gender identities and relations are changing or being re-articulated in new but familiar ways" (McLeod, 2005, p. 13). The process of cultural reproduction requires consideration of Bourdieu's ideas around the construction and shaping of habitus, through which fields of cultural production and reproduction comprise young women's schema of perception through which they act, make distinctions, categorise and value things, people and ways of being (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu suggests that habitus "is history turned into nature" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). Thus, to think about how femininity and prevailing gender norms might be re-envisioned or reproduced through alcohol consumption and thus allow or restrict new contemporary expressions of femininity necessitates consideration of how drinking alcohol has evolved for Australian women over time.

### ***7.5.3 Postfeminism and contemporary young women's drinking***

As previously indicated, consuming alcohol and becoming intoxicated has long been accepted as entirely natural for young Australian men (Kapferer, 1988). Juxtaposed to this, consumption of alcohol by young women seems somewhat unnatural and an unacceptable emblem of their acquisition of masculine behaviour. It has been postulated that contemporary postfeminist young women are leading a shift in the acceptability of alcohol consumption among women, or at least, a shift in gendered drinking styles and these changes are reflected in the increasing feminisation of venues licensed to sell alcohol (Lindsay, 2006). A Scottish study documented increased public visibility of female drinkers (Sweeting & West, 2003), and more recent work has documented the feminisation of products and alcohol labelling (Schultz, 2011) and contemporary nightlife (Staddon, 2015). Another recent study in the United States also linked the stronger pressure placed on young women to drink alcohol (in comparison with young men) to the changing social contexts of alcohol consumption (Polcin et al., 2014).

The visibility of women's drinking in Australia has changed markedly. Wright explored what public drinking entailed subjectively for Australian women in the 1940s and found that the partitioning of conventional gender boundaries was reflected in physical divisions in public drinking spheres, whereby bars were designated for men and 'Ladies' Lounges' set aside for women (Wright, 2003). Once it had become prosocial for women to drink alcohol publically and visibly, women were seen to be on equal footing with men at the level of access to and occupation of public drinking spaces, and visibly drinking within these spaces. However, as I previously outlined, inequalities remained in the gendered social rules for acceptable alcohol-related behaviour embodied within those public spaces (Wright, 2003). These social complexities point to important differences inherent in young women's and men's alcohol consumption in terms of social expectations and moral judgements. They suggest patriarchal gender expectations might prevail, thus restricting or disempowering new ways of being feminine through alcohol consumption.

Young women's alcohol consumption represents a potential disruption of the distribution of social power between masculine and feminine identities and might provide a logical explanation for the convergence of young Australian women's alcohol consumption with that of young men. Ironically, an approach to understanding alcohol consumption as a socially constructed, gendered practice might indicate that when postfeminist young women subvert hegemonic masculinity by 'drinking like the boys', they are more likely to *reinstate* rather than unsettle the value and power of masculine domination (Lyons & Willot, 2008), what Bourdieu (2001) termed *la domination masculine*. According to Bourdieu's theoretical stance on cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1993), I propose that patriarchal versions of femininity are reproduced in postfeminist expressions of the divisions of both class and gender in alcohol consumption practices.

The moral regulation of young women's drinking is particularly relevant to contextualising Australian young women's alcohol consumption and in shaping interventions that acknowledge the complex social processes delineated in this thesis. Social anxiety arising from young women's symbolic gender transgressions while drinking seems to be the root cause of concern over the drinking levels of young men and women (Jackson & Tinkler, 2007). This underplays the significance of social meanings and the gendered boundaries and limitations experienced around drinking.

My findings suggest that a new perspective is needed on young Australian women's alcohol consumption that may be more fruitful in ameliorating alcohol-related harms. Its success would depend on moving beyond limited methods that compare and contrast volumes and frequencies of consumption across each gender and inadvertently pigeonhole young people into reproduced gendered stereotypes (McPherson et al., 2004; Ricciardelli et al., 2001). The social complexities that form the conditions of young women's alcohol consumption mean there must be a re-focusing if policy is to be relevant. Specifically, an approach is needed that acknowledges the extent to which young Australian women's scope to transgress gender divisions through alcohol consumption and reshape alcohol consumption norms is socially defined and socially limited (Harris, 2004). These power-laden social conditions placed on young women's alcohol consumption, specifically the risk of social criticism through non-conformity to gender stereotypes or an illegitimate expression of femininity whilst drinking alcohol, are strong enough to likely override any potential physical health consequences.

Through applying Bourdieu's theory of social relations combined with postfeminist ideology to understand the socially symbolic, gendered nature of contemporary young women's alcohol consumption, I found that patriarchal power differences are reproduced among contemporary young Australians in the drinking context. Participants' accounts



indicated that consuming alcohol might allow for only temporary transgression of traditional gender norms. Gendered restrictions around young women's alcohol-related behaviour were evident in my data, and became particularly apparent in participants' judgements around self-control. They indicated that, according to young women, alcohol consumption remains 'natural' for contemporary young men but not for contemporary young women who relinquish their 'feminine' identity when consuming alcohol in 'masculine' ways.

My participants' accounts also indicated that proximity to the most dominant and revered sign of femininity – the ideal way to be a young woman in postfeminist, contemporary society – was an avenue for constructing distinctions by defining themselves against what they are not. This supports Holmes' supposition that young women are constrained into certain ways of being feminine (Holmes, 2007). The 'stylized repetition of acts' associated with consuming alcohol is part of a broader gender repertoire enacted by participants and these acts are largely reproduced patriarchal versions of respectable femininity (Butler, 1990; Wright, 2003). Skeggs' work on the respectability within femininity as a signifier of social class is also relevant (Skeggs, 2004), and might explain Griffin's observation that young women in the United Kingdom distanced themselves from 'unfeminine' irresponsible drinkers through 'othering' (Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013). The young women who participated in my research also used symbolic language and 'othering' labels to define femininity, more often than they used self-identifying labels, and they focused on the significance of visual identity. For example, participant's description of younger women as 'gay', used in conjunction with the term 'lame', is a "strategy of condescension" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 16) used to denigrate younger women symbolically. By belittling *younger* young women through the symbolic use of language young women could construct a distance between themselves

and other young women.

While alcohol is a powerful gender symbol, from the point of view of my participants, contemporary young women's scope to mobilise this power and use drinking-related practices to change the social arrangement through consistency with or disruption to the distribution of social power attributed to male or female practices has many significant social boundaries.

#### **7.5.4      *Summary of proposition 4***

The symbolic and gendered nature of the social processes that generate drinking practices evident in my findings overall fulfils proposition 4. Previously, it was unclear how young women might interact with social and cultural norms to develop versions of femininity. In particular, the role that consumption of alcohol might play in these gendered expressions of self was particularly uncertain. For the young women who participated in my research, alcohol consumption provided a way to experiment with and enact versions of femininity; femininities that potentially subvert stereotypical gendered norms (not entirely fulfilling proposition 4). However, when interpreted alongside postfeminist theory, Bourdieu's theory of social relations, and his construct symbolic violence, my findings indicate that young women's scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms is socially defined, and socially limited (ultimately fulfilling proposition 4). The boundaries to contemporary expressions of femininity through alcohol consumption create limiting conditions that make young women's drinking practices symbolic of gendered power.

In the following section of this chapter I reflect on the process of conducting my research. I discuss the process of applying Bourdieu's theory and his methodological insights for reflexive research practice, and outline the strengths, limitations and

theoretical insights of my research. I indicate the quality and rigour of my research that instil trust in the findings I discussed above.

## **7.6 Reflections on the process of conducting the study and applying Bourdieu's theory of social relations**

In a paper derived from this thesis (Lunnay et al., 2011) (see Appendix 1) I explained that in addition to his theoretical contributions, Bourdieu provided a methodological toolbox (his way of practice) that can be usefully applied to overcome contentions between structure and agency when understanding alcohol consumption, to promote reflexivity and heighten objectivity, and move beyond problems associated with positivism. In the paper, I provided a reflexive discussion of how Bourdieu's epistemological arguments can be used to gain access to participants' lay understandings and lead to more complete understandings of why young women consume alcohol. I also provided a unique demonstration for public health researchers on how to use social theory rigorously to arrive at more nuanced understandings of the social context of consumption. The next section of this thesis contains elements previously published in this paper (Lunnay et al., 2011).

In Chapter 3, Methodology, I outlined how my research approach reflected aspects of a realist paradigm which, as critical realist and sociologist Margaret Archer argues, views society as "inseparable from its human components because the very existence of society depends in some way upon our activities" (Archer, 1995, p. 1). The virtue of qualitative research for this thesis is that it allowed understanding of the human components of society that shaped young women's drinking-related activities. However, the nature of society as an open system makes it impossible to make predictions, as can be done in natural science. Uncovering the reasons why young women consumed

alcohol in certain ways was not a linear process whereby I, as researcher, could ask participants why they acted in certain ways or for what cause. As Bourdieu claimed, people are not aware of the factors affecting their behaviour, nor the implicit logic underpinning that behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977). In this section I outline the methodological approach I took and techniques I used to obtain some understanding of the social conditions that shaped participants' alcohol consumption. My approach was inspired by Bourdieu's own approach to conducting empirical sociological research. It *extended* his approach to the contemporary Australian setting, thus advancing the applicability of his theoretical constructs.

## **7.7 The socially constructed sphere of research**

Bourdieu's key tenets about the construction of social space (Bourdieu, 1989) can also be applied to the process of conducting research, and this suggests the research setting is a social field that constructs rather than elicits meaning from participants. Bourdieu regards researchers as agents negotiating relationships within the field of research, with the principal cause of variations in perception being one's position in said social space (Bourdieu, 1989). Thus, the symbolic dimensions of my research with young women required examination and consideration. As researchers, our views of reality are primarily constructed and differentiated through economic and cultural factors. To address this, I adopted a research strategy used by Bourdieu in his own research for *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al., 1999) where he advocated for "the development...of a particular form of sociological habitus, through which they [are] able to help respondents deliver up their truth, or, rather, . . . be delivered of it" (p. 621). In exercising reflexivity about the unequal relationship between the researcher and the research participant, I allowed participants to select the setting of all interactions and they had access to my contact details and social networking page, which achieved a

sense of reciprocal sharing of information that I believe encouraged rapport. Participants also dictated the narrative according to which photographs they selected to take and show as part of the photo elicitation method detailed in Chapter 4.

## 7.8 Theoretical insights

In this section of the Discussion chapter, I reflect on the process of applying Bourdieu's theory of social relations and his methodological insights for reflexive research practice, including the methodological complexities I encountered when applying Bourdieu's concepts.

Earlier in this thesis I outlined Bourdieu's intention that his theoretical insights be made useful through practical application to the "puzzles encountered and generated in the effort to construct a phenomenally diverse set of objects in such a way that they can be treated, thought of, comparatively" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 160). Bourdieu stressed that quality research marries theory and empirical investigation, so his concepts come to life through application. For this thesis, I took advice from Webb et al. (2005, p. 49) who stated that "Bourdieu's concepts are not simply theoretical filters which process social practices; rather they are technologies, which are *transformed*, and need to be *re-thought* as they are applied". Applying Bourdieu's concepts to understand the social context of young women's drinking required me to apply his concepts in their original format first, after which they could be re-thought as they were applied. Applying Bourdieu's theory empirically requires that researchers "construct the objects of their research" (Silva & Edwards, 2004, p. 4). As I indicated earlier, applying Bourdieu's suite of concepts was an important part of the process of constructing the object of research, thus it is essential to locate the concept of symbolic capital in broader theory. For the

research informing this thesis, I applied Bourdieu's concepts fully and in appreciation of this flexibility. The action of acknowledging and analysing theoretical disjunctures extends Bourdieu's theory, and captures the flexible characteristics Bourdieu intended of his ideas. The malleability of Bourdieu's concepts means his theory is not falsifiable. However, instances where the explanatory value of Bourdieu's concepts in the context of my research was limited (e.g. in the instance where participants did not socialise and drink with peers but primarily with family) presented opportunities to extend his theory or his methodological approach and alternative ways for his concepts to be interpreted. Hence, I applied all components of Bourdieu's theory, including theoretical complexities and nuances, to determine its applicability to young Australian women and alcohol. This offset the tendency in public health to include explanatory constructs in a selective fashion, and improved the explanatory validity of my analysis (Daly et al., 2007; Popay et al., 1998). This enabled the complexity in the concept symbolic capital to be realised; in turn, revealing nuances and complexity in young women's drinking.

To ensure rigorous representation of Bourdieu's theory and improve the validity and typicality of my findings, I set his sociological concepts within his broader theoretical frame. Instead of employing the individual construct of symbolic capital, I set it against his interrelated concepts of cultural and social capital, habitus, the dynamics of the field, and his other symbolisms such as symbolic violence (this is reflected in Chapter 4, Methods, where I outline my research sample, and the theoretical underpinnings of the questions I asked participants). By elucidating the practise of Bourdieu, that is the process of applying Bourdieu's theoretical constructs, I showed that when applied in a rigorous format and accompanied by empirical data, the concept of symbolic capital and the theory of social relations within which it takes shape help to provide a more complete understanding of young women's drinking.

In an editorial for a special issue of *Theory and Society* dedicated to the *Memoriam of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002)*, Swartz claimed there is “ample testimony to the importance of how Bourdieu’s work has inspired further sociological research; yet [there is] criticism that suggest gaps in or ways to elaborate portions of Bourdieu’s work in different areas” (Swartz, 2003, p. 519). A commonly cited gap is the alleged inattention he gave to understanding gender. Such criticism is misconstrued given that gender is represented in his theoretical work, most evidently in *Masculine Domination* (Bourdieu, 2001) but his intention that his theory to be “polymorphic, supple, and adaptive rather than defined, calibrated, and used rigidly” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 23) is not always considered in attempts to scrutinise and critique his theoretical work (for a précis see Calhoun et al., 1993; Swartz & Zolberg, 2004). By envisaging gender as a social construction and an aspect of social opportunity similar to how Bourdieu theorised other social categories pertaining to class, I show in this thesis that his theory is applicable to improving our understanding of gender.

Public health researchers have criticised studies of health behaviour for “overestimating the significance of conscious health considerations in everyday life” (Katainen, 2010, p. 1088). I note that one of Bourdieu’s key epistemological critiques of the research process focused on the inability of study participants to reflect critically upon their behaviour, because as humans our ‘practical logic’ – the inherent association between what people do and their location in social space – is limited (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a). Bourdieu suggested “The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation and cannot even be made explicit” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 94). In contrast, Sweetman (2009) through his methodological work on ‘revealing habitus’ suggests that some forms of contemporary dispositions or habitus might be more reflexive than others. My

research findings support a *re-conceptualisation* of Bourdieu's habitus, with a conceptualisation that is characterised by less structured or modifiable conditions (Friedman, 2011; Ingram, 2011). In my research experience, participants are not completely unaware of their habitus, as Bourdieu theorised, but researchers need ways to access this. Next I outline the techniques I used to stimulate participants to articulate unconscious practices.

### **7.8.1        *Making the unconscious conscious***

The application of Bourdieu's theory might suggest that young women's distinction-asserting strategies (as a product of the habitus) are not based on conscious calculation but rather result from unconscious dispositions towards a particular way of being. In my research I found that young women can be made aware of certain aspects of their habitus or 'why they do the things they do' through discussions about the values of their immediate social group relative to those of young women from other social class positions. Bourdieu theorised that dispositions that are embodied become naturalised or second nature; that is, they are not (initially) recognised let alone questioned (Bourdieu, 1990a). This makes it difficult for participants to reflect on and articulate the social influences behind their drinking, yet not impossible. Participants could be made aware of aspects of the taken-for-granted habitus through interviews, for example. Participants of my research did not initially recognise that Facebook® posts were used by peers to improve their social reputation, by seeking recognition of their drinking and activating the symbolic capital attributed to drinking-related practices. My prompting of discussion of the power dynamics behind these virtual social interactions assisted participants to make conscious their previously taken-for-granted peer group distinctions. The use of photographs in the research methodology also aided the unveiling of the unconscious. This occurred by triggering discussion about how decisions on what to photograph are



manifest in value judgments and the social and cultural influences that guide photograph-taking. Participants then observed their photographs through conscious eyes and undertook a 'double distancing' or objective detachment from themselves as the subjects under investigation (Jenkins, 2002). This reflected the objectification technique that Bourdieu recommended to researchers as a process of standing back from the subject to get as close as possible to reaching objective reflection, that I outlined earlier in Chapter 3 on Methodology, and which I applied to participants and to myself as researcher.

### **7.8.2        *A contemporary interpretation of Bourdieu's notion of habitus***

There are calls that a contemporary interpretation is required of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, in that dispositions to act might not be unconscious. Sayer (2005) argues for a more fluid use of habitus. Ingram (2011) suggests that in contemporary life habitus is not fixed; dispositions are reproduced and new ones generated through new life experiences, and participants can manipulate the habitus causing a 'habitus tug'. Ingram seems to concur with Bourdieu's perspective that individuals experience life in groups. She argues that they acquire schemes of perception in accordance with the groups they belong to; so people who share similar backgrounds share similar habitus (e.g. attending the same school or participating at the same sport club). Her approach questions the assumption that Bourdieu's concept habitus is part of a straightforward theory of social reproduction. Ingram's research explored the complexities associated with identities developed in social fields different from those in which the agent originated (using the case of working class boys who were educationally successful) and from this, she asserted that habitus might be generated in two incompatible fields. She termed these 'the field of origin' and the 'peer groups' and described a 'destabilising' of the habitus as

it is 'tugged' between these potentially conflicting yet coexisting fields.

Such ideas seem congruent with Bourdieu's writing in *Pascalian Meditations* (1997b), where he identified that conflicting external forces may exist and operate on the habitus, causing structural double binds and a subsequent misalignment between habitus and field, resulting in the habitus accepting the conditions of the newly encountered field's structure. Bourdieu rationalised that while a modification of the habitus can result, the field of origin remains the dominant focus of the habitus. He posited that the structuring forces of the field of origin constrain the habitus (Bourdieu, 1997b). According to Bourdieu, this results in a conflicted individual who feels assured of their identity in *neither* field.

Bourdieu's 'structural double bind' concept does not acknowledge that although habitus may be fluid (resulting from a constant interaction between field and habitus), a contemporary use of the concept would suggest it does not always develop neatly from one field but is constructed by multiple influences from co-existing fields. This notion of 'multiple selves' is reflected in the different social groups the young women who participated in my research aligned with simultaneously (e.g. school friends, sport friends, family friends, work friends). There may be some, but often limited, crossover between such groups, and this is combined with dispositions young women may acquire through socialisation, including, for example, through exposure to media depictions of ways of being and of consuming that may or may not inspire, or through attending schools with young women from different social classes.

Furthermore, Lahire (2003) suggests that contradictory social experiences can co-exist in the same body, with one retreating while the other takes precedence according to the social field the individual operates in at a given time. This idea of multiple identities is not

well explained by Bourdieu. For example, he talks about the family as being one of the most important sites of accumulation and transmission of capital (Bourdieu, 1996), and while this may be true for contemporary young Australian women, seemingly central to the formation of habitus are the peer groups emanating from school, the workplace, or the sporting environment that also operate as key sources of influence. Additionally, by the very nature of youth, participants' access to social resources (i.e. networks, friendships) is ever changing and unstable. Consequently, young women's position within peer group hierarchies (i.e. popularity) constantly fluctuates.

Ingram (2011) offered three typologies for exploring the processes involved in negotiating the structuring forces of multiple fields: *habitus tug* when pulled by the forces of different fields simultaneously, *destabilised habitus* when no one knows who you are, and *disjunctive habitus* when the divided habitus causes division – the habitus is characterised by internal conflict causing a disjunction between habitus and field and the subsequent adoption and rejection of identities. I built these forms into my analysis around Bourdieu's idea of habitus, particularly as an avenue for understanding the generative social mechanisms that may result in participants' describing a feeling of pressure to consume alcohol, because this is an important alternative to the linear understandings offered by behavioural peer pressure approaches. The emotion work or symbolic struggles associated with operating within various fields concomitantly, experiencing a 'habitus tug' and consequent 'destabilised habitus' described by Ingram (2011, p. 290) that purportedly results in a 'disjunctive' sense of self may provide insight into the alcohol consumption outcomes of young women according to different social fields, and this is explored in Chapter 6, Findings.

## 7.9 Research strengths

The strength of this thesis is that I focus on young women's own accounts of how and why they drink alcohol. Current public health research presents only limited insights into understanding *how and why* young women consume alcohol in socially constructed and gendered ways, and particularly in relation to how these expressions differ across individuals and across groups of young women. This thesis provides a more complete understanding of the *processes* of social influence and how social influences *generate* (produce and reproduce) drinking behaviours, filling a significant gap in understanding in public health literature. Specifically, I provide an understanding of *how* alcohol is socially valued. I expand the well-established claim that social relations make drinking meaningful giving insight to the processes underpinning how participants used the social value of alcohol for social gains using Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. I generated some particularly novel findings including the notion that drinking in contexts where no social profit would or could be gained was deemed a "waste" or more broadly, a "wasted night".

Previous attempts to delineate the social aspects of young women's drinking have fallen short of achieving a complete understanding of the symbolic processes that structure and are structured by young women's alcohol consumption. Some studies have not used social theory rigorously, others have adopted methodologies that generate descriptions rather than facilitate interpretations, or use methods that depict young women as a homogenous collective or social category rather than giving primacy to *individual* young women's distinctive perspectives.

Because of my focus on young women's own accounts of how and why they drink, my research provides an understanding of young women's subjective drinking-related meanings and their social values pertaining to alcohol consumption. Qualitative methods of data collection were most useful in obtaining in-depth narratives from participants that

captured their drinking-related subjectivities from their nuanced perspectives. These methods also allowed me to acknowledge that the social theory I was using to interpret the data also applied to the research context. The content of participants' narratives was constructed through the process of the research and in relation to me as researcher. By applying Bourdieu's theory of social relations as a conceptual framework I improved the interpretive validity of my findings, thus increasing their utility and transferability to other public health research contexts. With this thesis, I contribute much needed theoretically-driven contemporary public health research that captures the social and subjective meanings entailed in alcohol consumption and which may be useful for other groups of people not captured in my sample.

## **7.10 Research limitations**

Several limitations to my study pertain to the young woman excluded by the research task and the method used to collect data.

### **7.10.1      *Digital divide***

The perceived gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not, the so-called digital divide (Warschauer, 2004), highlights a major ethical issue pertaining to inclusion and accessibility for social media use and research. In a paper based on this thesis I detail the ethical issues involved in using social media in research, arguing that practically and ethically, the use of social media in research should not unduly skew the research sample. In this paper I noted that the lure of new technology does not wash away existing inequalities (Lunnay et al., 2015). There is a burgeoning literature on the nature of digital exclusion as a sign of disadvantage, for examples see (Helsper, 2008; Martin, 2005), and critiques of research approaches that use social media in terms of their suitability and ethics for the demographics of the participant

cohort (Tavani, 2003; Warschauer, 2004). Conversely, there is also scepticism surrounding the existence of any such digital divide, particularly given the rapid diffusion of the Internet worldwide and subsequent reduction of disparities in access to 'new' media (Compaine, 2001). It is not within the remit of this thesis to explore or contribute to this debate, but I flag the issue of access to digital media such as Facebook® as a potential limitation of my research methods that relied on digital access. My research method does not accommodate diversity in digital citizenship but assumes young women have access to digital technology, thus my sample is swayed toward young women with access to social media technology and digital literacy.

### **7.10.2      *Voiceless young women***

Aspects of my research methodology and methods potentially excluded some young women and limited the scope of my research. Young women who were potential participants needed considerable access to resources including familial support, cultural capital in terms of language to vocalise complex aspects of their sociality pertaining to alcohol, technological literacy and access to a digital communication device that included Facebook®, economic capital and time to physically meet me, and for those who participated in focus groups, social capital and friends they could trust to arrive and participate.

In the next section, I use markers of quality qualitative research as articulated by Popay et al. (1998) to justify the quality and rigour of my research and the findings it generated.

## **7.11 Research quality**

Definitions of qualitative research quality differ across the disciplines that comprise the broad field of health research (Santiago-Delefosse, Gavin, Bruchez, Roux, & Stephen, 2016). The markers of quality (Popay et al., 1998) pertain to ontology (ways of knowing

about a research subject) rather than to the techniques used for collecting information, and are therefore relevant standards for my theory-driven research. In the following section I outline how my research achieved markers of quality, instilling validity and trustworthiness in the findings outlined in this chapter. While there are more recent checklists available (see, for example, Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007) the criteria of Popay et al. were most relevant to the focus of this thesis and to assessing the rigour of my ways of knowing about subjective drinking experiences.

### **7.11.1      *Evidence of responsiveness to social context and flexibility of design***

Ideally, qualitative research illuminates the subjective meanings that underpin practices. Privileging subjective meaning and thus ascribing value to lay knowledge is essential to attend to the subjective social context in which practices occur (Popay & Williams, 1996). Accordingly, good qualitative research flexibly and responsively acknowledges the social context in which lay knowledge is constructed and this allows for understanding subjective meaning (Popay et al., 1998). Popay et al. questioned: *Is there evidence of the adaption and responsiveness of the research design to the circumstances and issues of real-life social settings met during the course of study?*

Through my study design I privileged the subjective meaning of drinking alcohol for young women who came from various social reference groups and different positions in social space, in terms of their access to economic, cultural and social capital. From these social positions, participants situated and negotiated their subjective perceptions of alcohol consumption. I demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness to participants' social context by tailoring the questions I asked participants rather than using a standard schedule (see Tables 4.5. and 4.6.). As the research and data analysis progressed, I added additional codes (or areas to explore) to the start list or 'interview schedule'. I

refined the meaning of existing codes, added new questions and asked these of different young women until I reached thematic saturation. I also developed my sample progressively in line with emergent findings that reflected the variability of participants' social contexts and their drinking-related practices. To suit participants' diverse social contexts, I adapted my avenues of recruitment. For example, I experienced difficulty retaining participants from positions of low economic and cultural capital to my study (group 2 were lost to attrition) so I recruited group 9 through a life skills program they attended at their local youth centre. I designed my study methods to generate data most likely to reveal the social processes by which my participants formed their alcohol consumption practices. In response to participants' preferred ways to communicate and share information, part way through my study I adapted my method to include Facebook®. My access to participants' Facebook® pages and ability to view their photographs allowed me insight into the diversity in their styles of conduct that reflected the performative aspects of their drinking that I would not have gained through standard interviews.

### **7.11.2      *Evidence of theoretical or purposeful sampling***

Sampling by relevance is fundamental to a qualitative study to obtain participants' subjective meanings of a phenomenon. Sampling for relevance requires that the researcher identify participants with information necessary to understand the subjective meaning surrounding a phenomenon (Popay et al., 1998). Popay et al. questioned: *Does the sample produce the type of knowledge necessary to understand the structures and processes within which the individuals and situations are located?* I used purposive and theoretical approaches to identify participants according to their alcohol-related accounts and who were most likely to provide helpful insights to explore my research propositions (see section 2.3) (Silverman, 2005). To identify information-rich cases, I used key



informants (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). In addition to purposively sampling by the attributes age, gender, and alcohol-related experience that were the topic of my study, my sample was also theoretically defined. I constructed a sample that was meaningful theoretically by sampling women from different socio-economic status backgrounds using Bourdieu's notion of social class as a relational position in social space. Sampling participants in line with Bourdieu's ontology allowed me to situate various young South Australian women in different social spaces, and to reveal differences in their alcohol consumption practices accordingly.

### **7.11.3      *Evidence of adequate description***

The depth of understanding that qualitative research produces defines the quality of the interpretation that comprises study findings (Popay et al., 1998). Popay et al. questioned: *Is the description provided detailed enough to allow the researcher or reader to interpret the meaning and context of what is being researched?* I located my interpretations of the generative social mechanisms that shape young South Australian women's alcohol consumption in the data, using participants' narratives and personal accounts of alcohol-related practices, the captions they gave to photographs and excerpts from in-depth interviews, and in relation to research conducted by others and Bourdieu's theoretical framework. In doing so I moved my interpretations from description to a rich explanation of the subjective and meaningful experience drinking alcohol had for participants as a symbolic practice.

### **7.11.4      *Evidence of data quality***

The researcher's transparency in detailing the processes of data collection, interpretation, and synthesis is essential when judging the quality of qualitative data (Popay et al., 1998). Popay et al. questioned: *How are different sources of knowledge about the same issue compared and contrasted?* I used multiple ways to capture, give

ascendancy to and collate participants' subjective meanings, instilling quality in my data. I repeatedly consulted with the same participants, I combined photo elicitation with interviews, and I spoke to young women in both group and individual situations, which was relevant to understanding the processes of social influence that classify, categorise and generate young South Australian women's drinking practices (see Chapter 4, Methods). My approach to understanding young women's alcohol consumption as a subjective, symbolic behaviour that was socially constructed was itself a social construction. I was reflexive about the ways I, as researcher, influenced the data I generated. I documented this in researcher fieldnotes and attempted to bracket my own subjectivities when interpreting participants' accounts, using the objectification techniques detailed in Chapter 3, Methodology, and I discussed the outcome of these reflexive processes herein.

#### **7.11.5      *Evidence of theoretical and conceptual adequacy***

The interpretive validity of qualitative research pertains to the theoretical and conceptual adequacy of the findings. The process of how meaning is made from the data is key to determining adequacy (Popay et al., 1998). Popay et al. questioned: *How does the researcher move from a description of the data, through quotation or examples, to an analysis and interpretation of the meaning and significance of it?* My research was theory-driven and used Bourdieu's theory of social relations as a framework to understand the generative social mechanisms that shape young South Australian women's alcohol consumption. As I outlined at the beginning of Chapters 2 through to this Chapter 7, I followed a systematic process for integrating theory into the research design that instilled rigour in my application of Bourdieu's theory of social relations to interpret the meaning inherent in participants' accounts of alcohol-related practices (Meyer & Ward, 2014). For my thesis I generated four theoretically-driven propositions

that emanated from gaps in previous understandings of young women's alcohol consumption. The validity of my findings rested on my interpretation of how the data fulfilled or did not fulfil these propositions. I interpreted participants' narratives with Bourdieu's writing on symbolic language in mind, and this aided my interpretation of the meanings, significance and power-laden ways participants constructed their subjective accounts during interviews.

#### **7.11.6      *Potential for assessing typicality***

Generalising from qualitative research is enabled through identifying the typicality of understanding to other similar cases and contexts (Popay et al., 1998). Popay et al. questioned: *What claims are being made for the generalisability of the findings to either other bodies of knowledge or to other populations or groups?* Applying theory to interpret a phenomenon, as I have done through using Bourdieu's theory of social relations, was a fundamental way for my qualitative findings to become generalisable. Applying Bourdieu's theory allowed for cases of theoretical typicality (i.e. logical generalisations in the instance where young women valued social alcohol consumption) but also allowed theoretical atypicality to become identifiable (i.e. divergent cases where social alcohol consumption was not a part of young women's social lives). Both of these advanced understandings of the generative social mechanisms that shape young women's alcohol consumption.

In the final chapter, I detail my new contributions to public health research and reflect on the alternative truths to understanding the social underpinnings of young women's drinking arising from my research.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The overarching purpose of this thesis was to develop an understanding of the social mechanisms that generate and regulate young Australian women's consumption of alcohol. I achieved this through exploring four propositions (see section 2.3.) derived from gaps in the empirical and theoretical literature relevant to the social aspects of drinking among young women. These propositions included *Alcohol consumption is structured by and structures social relations* (proposition 1); *Young women use alcohol consumption to distinguish and differentiate within and between social groups* (proposition 2); *Young women use alcohol consumption to symbolise personal and group identity relative to positions in social space* (proposition 3); and, *Young women's scope to transgress and reshape drinking-related norms is socially defined and socially limited* (proposition 4). They balance individual choices that produce and are produced by alcohol consumption with external social forces that shape drinking-related practices, representing a nuanced and previously lacking approach in public health to understanding the influence of both macro- and micro-level social factors as mutual influences on drinking practices. Using Bourdieu's conception of structure and agency as dichotomous influences on human behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977), I have demonstrated how broader social structures pertaining to gendered drinking expectations and young women's decisions mutually operate to produce and reproduce alcohol-related outcomes. Social structures influence drinking practices while individuals interpret and alter the social structures within which they behave.

## 8.1 Bourdieu's interpretive lens

Bourdieu's theory provided a lens through which I could interpret and understand participants' own accounts of alcohol consumption in social situations and in dynamic social contexts that provided opportunities to relate with others (Bourdieu, 1984) as well as reflecting on my own assumptions. Understanding the complex social meanings attributed to drinking allowed me to explore the symbolisms and subjectivities that produce and are produced by young women's alcohol consumption that in turn, make their drinking symbolically meaningful and their meanings more accessible to others. The findings also temper macro structural level approaches that envisage drinking as driven by external social forces or homogenise young women's drinking practices by demonstrating how, in their ways of consuming alcohol, young women did not reflect and reproduce social norms but changed the structural dynamics that moderated their expressions of femininity. In this way, young women's alcohol consumption is *both* structured by and structures social relations, which is the relationship between positions in social space. A particular virtue of using Bourdieu's sociology to understand young Australian women's drinking was the realisation that young women are differently constrained in their ability to appropriate and reproduce socially dominant ways of drinking. This reflects the uneven distribution of social power, or "social importance" (Bourdieu, 1997b, p. 241). This difference means assumptions of homogeneity are irrelevant when understanding young women's drinking. Bourdieu demonstrated through his own empirical research the multidimensional "space of points of view" (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 3), and it is this symbolic space that both reflects and informs young women's drinking-related perceptions. This complexity in the symbolic space of viewpoints has important ramifications for public health interventions, within which young women are often considered a discrete and uniform social category and a problematised

or 'risky' social group.

## **8.2 New contributions to public health research**

The new contributions to public health research achieved through this thesis, and the three papers published from it (Lunnay et al., 2011; Lunnay et al., 2015; Meyer & Lunnay, 2013) (see appendices) is that through social relations, young women's drinking becomes symbolic and meaningful. Bourdieu's relational concept symbolic capital provides a framework for understanding the processes of social influence that produce and reinforce drinking-related symbolisms and meanings. In this way, drinking is a communicative practice young women engage with which symbolises a desirable *way of being* relative to social values. In the context of social values, drinking is made worthwhile for young women. Through socially defined codes, young women know how to behave while drinking and they use various strategies to achieve recognition from significant others. The result of this search for recognition mediates their drinking performance. I have also shown how behaving in concordance with drinking-related social values affords young women social power, while incongruence compromises their social status. These mechanisms are reflected in the embodied social practices and gendered relationships young women encounter in drinking contexts.

Reflected in these learnings is a demonstration of the utility of Bourdieu's theory of social relations for exploring the specifics of young women's gendered drinking practices, and it has not previously been used in this way. The only limitations of Bourdieu's theory pertain to contemporary aspects of my research, specifically the use of social media as a key mode of communication and a signifier of sociality among young women and the degree of consciousness of habitus within changed social conditions and contemporary contexts that reproduce social practices, such as social media. Further research is

required into how drinking practices are conceptualised as symbolic capital and how this is developed through the use of social media both to reflect and structure young women's social positions. Improved understanding of the role of Facebook® as an online extension of offline struggles for social power would deepen knowledge of the complexity of how interpersonal relations shape young women's drinking, and would provide a more complete picture of the mechanisms of social influence that operate within contemporary social contexts.

### **8.3 An alternative truth**

Early in this thesis I noted Moore's challenge to public health to infuse 'alternative truths' into ways of knowing about the social context that influences Australians' alcohol consumption (Moore, 2002). Moore posed this challenge because, at the time, research on the topic was limited despite theoretical advances in sociology that had the potential to offer a critical understanding of how and why people consume alcohol. Later, researchers (Lindsay 2006, 2009; Miller et al., 2010; Rhodes et al., 2010; Zajdow & Lindsay, 2010) noted that the research landscape remained largely unchanged, with researchers continuing to overlook sociological perspectives when seeking to understand the social aspects of alcohol consumption. In this thesis I provide an alternative truth that Moore requested; an alternative to biomedical approaches that focus on biological determinism or reductionist developmental psychology that privileges theories of agency and subversion, to describe and develop the discursive, complex social constructions of alcohol consumption.

The need still exists for nuanced sociological understandings of the context of consumption, specifically the complex ways gender is enacted through alcohol consumption (Hunt, Frank, & Moloney, 2015; Lindsay, 2006). While issues of gender are

becoming more prominent in public health research on alcohol and drug use than when I commenced this thesis, there are still contentious omissions of gender issues in emerging research on alcohol (Radcliffe & Measham, 2014); for example, see Tutenges and Sandberg (2013). In contrast, there are salient examples of the gendered nature of alcohol consumption (Fry 2010, 2011; Lindsay 2012; Zajdow & MacLean, 2014) that reinstate the relevance of gendered practices to understanding young Australians' drinking practices. This thesis provides another such example. While the focus of this thesis is on young women, the same theoretical perspective could be applied to explore ideals of masculinity enacted by young men while drinking. This thesis demonstrates the extent to which young women's practices result from contemporary processes of gender, social reproduction and masculine dominance, which place young women in structurally unequal positions to their male counterparts, yet also underlines the distinct social expectations young men face in drinking contexts.



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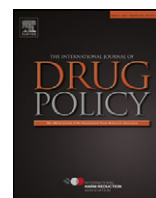
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

Lunnay, B., Ward, P., & Borlagdan, J. (2011). The practise and practice of Bourdieu: The application of social theory to youth alcohol research. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 22(6), 428–436.

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## Research paper

## The practise and practice of Bourdieu: The application of social theory to youth alcohol research

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Some years ago Australian anthropologist David Moore criticised the predominant form of understanding youth alcohol consumption for residing with biomedical approaches that individualise and ultimately stigmatise drinking behaviour and 'ignore' the social context of consumption. Of interest here is the ongoing insufficient integration of alternative approaches to understanding young people's drinking.

**Methods:** This paper presents theoretically informed qualitative research that investigates why young Australian females (aged 14–17) drink and how social and cultural context form the basis, rather than the periphery, of their drinking experience.

**Results:** We demonstrate the utility of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework for delving beyond the dichotomy of young people's drinking decisions as either a determination of their cultural environment or the singular result of a rational individual's independent decision-making. The paper is presented in two parts. First, we provide the interpretation, or 'practise', of Bourdieu's concepts through an outline and application of his complex theoretical constructs. Specifically, the concept of symbolic capital (or social power) is applied. Second, our explication of Bourdieu's 'practice', or epistemological contributions, offers a methodologically grounded example to other researchers seeking to attain more complete understandings of the social processes underpinning youth alcohol consumption.

**Conclusion:** A sociological approach to exploring the complex relationship between drinking and contextual social factors amongst young Australian females is an uncharted area of enquiry. We contribute new theoretically supported insights to create a more complete picture of young females' drinking behaviours.

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## Introduction

A seminal paper published some years ago in the *Drug and Alcohol Review* (Moore, 1990) offered critical observations about the trends in Australian research literature on alcohol and other drug use amongst young people. Anthropologist David Moore remarked that Australian research on young people's drug and alcohol use favoured epidemiology, an approach he criticised as implicitly individualistic in 'ignoring' the social context of drug and alcohol use. Moore noted that drug and alcohol researchers overlooked major theoretical developments in youth sociology and instead emphasised pathological explanations for drug use or drinking behaviours. Following from this initial review Moore revisited his former obser-

vations and extended his critique of research published pre 1990s to find the Australian drug and alcohol research landscape largely unchanged:

'Despite calls from within and without psychology to find a place for the social and cultural context in theories of human development, such a context rarely finds adequate expression in psychological work, and when it does, it appears 'added on'; the social and cultural environment is seen to 'shape' or 'colour' processes seen as being 'internal' to humans' (Moore, 2002, p. 16).

This insufficient integration of sociological approaches to drug and alcohol research is of interest. In this paper, we take up the question 'how might alternative truths be infused more fully into the [alcohol] field?' (Moore, 2002, p. 50). Here we show how French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu's sociological approach helps us to tap into the 'alternative truths' Moore referred to – that is, to go

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beyond the dichotomy of young people's drinking decisions as either a determination of their cultural environment or the result of a rational individual's independent decision-making.

### *A sociological approach to youth alcohol research*

Sociological thought facilitates more complex understandings of the social organisation of drug and alcohol consumption. France (2000) critically examined explanations of youth and risk taking and emphasised the value of a sociological approach to understanding the diverse and complex social processes that influence young people's risk taking, including excessive drinking. Despite this known potential, there remains a disjunction between alcohol research and sociological theoretical frameworks (Rhodes et al., 2010). Zajdow and Lindsay (2010) question why, if recreational alcohol consumption is inherently a social practice shaped by the immediate social context, does sociology not have a stronger presence in alcohol research? Perhaps the emphasis sociology places on wider social processes as shaping drinking does not readily fit with the typically individualistic and problematised approach to understanding alcohol use. For sociologists to contribute to the alcohol field, they must be prepared to ground their explanations in theory. Public health academics advocate the use of theory to arrive at credible research findings (Popay et al., 1998); and similarly most theorists would insist their ideas be tested empirically (Seale, 2004). Theorising takes purely descriptive research further so that a drug and alcohol issue can be examined, compared and understood rather than simply described:

The purpose of social enquiry is to produce enhanced and more accurate renderings of particular groups, milieu, or social problems under study than has hitherto been the case...and is reflected in the drive to develop ever more powerful explanations of social phenomena (Layder, 1998, p. 9).

Moore's challenge to Australian alcohol researchers to infuse 'alternative truths' into youth alcohol research goes beyond the use of 'alternative methods'. We take up Moore's challenge by addressing the utility of Bourdieu's concepts as a means of translating sociological ideas to youth alcohol research at two levels<sup>1</sup>: first, the *practise* of Bourdieu's concepts through an outline and application of his theoretical constructs to youth alcohol research using our research on young females and alcohol; second, the *practice* of Bourdieu or his epistemological contributions to reflexive sociological research practice. Our work provides an example that researchers in the alcohol field can draw on to attain more complete empirical understandings of the complex social processes underpinning youth alcohol consumption.

### *Lost in translation*

With the exception of some well-conducted studies that adopt a theoretical framework (e.g. Borlagdan et al., 2010; Lindsay, 2009; Lindsay et al., 2009), the translation of sociological concepts into alcohol research is often piecemeal. The reduction of theory to 'component parts' is common and results in decontextualised theorising that separates concepts from their epistemological and theoretical roots. Such a piecemeal approach to theory integration reduces the explanatory power of analysis (Daly et al., 2007; Popay et al., 1998). Critically absent from alcohol literature is

practical guidance and an example of how to achieve theoretically informed research findings. This paper addresses this absence by offering a socio-cognitive framework for conducting empirical qualitative research. We draw on our experience with applying Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic capital* situated within the framework of *distinction* (the *practise* of Bourdieu), to understand the social mechanisms that underpin young females' alcohol-related behaviours. We turn to Bourdieu for guidance with our endeavour to undertake reflexive sociological research (the *practice* of Bourdieu); that is, how we develop an understanding of young female's drinking and what the nature of understanding might be. By virtue of elucidating the *practise* of Bourdieu, that is the *process* of applying Bourdieu's theoretical constructs, we show that when applied in a rigorous format and accompanied by empirical data, the concept of symbolic capital and the theory of social relations in which it takes shape helps to gain a more complete understanding of youth drinking.

### **Approach**

Bourdieu provided hints on how to apply his concepts to understand people's choices and behaviours. He suggested an entry point is to first, identify their behaviours in the context of their values, then determine how individual interests relate to the interests of the friendship group, and to the strategies of accumulation of capital employed by people within the group (i.e. how these interests reflect or become sources of capital) (Johnson, 1993). The researcher establishes the interests of the 'field' and the strategies of capital accumulation employed by the agents in that field. For this research, young females were purposively recruited within their existing friendship groups to give insight into the group dynamics and struggles for position-taking within the group hierarchy. This is observable as participants achieve group consensus whilst they depict their alcohol-related values and interests. Bourdieu's model necessarily involves different levels of analysis that account for different aspects of practice including the relationship between the friendship group and the broader field of power to the strategies employed by different young females in their social drinking settings. Using an approach Layder (1998) terms 'adaptive theorising', questions about the group dynamic based on Bourdieu's theory were asked. Information was sought about the commonalities of the group (e.g. how they come to know each other; what activities they typically engage in, obtain most enjoyment from and gain a sense of being a 'group' from). Also of interest is how young females distinguish themselves and their group from other groups (e.g. are there things the young females would do in their group but not alone; is their group known for a particular characteristic or image). Questions about the formation of the social group were framed within alcohol-specific questions on the importance of drinking, the identification of drinking occasions, the group's drink preferences, and the experience of not drinking whilst others in the group drink.

There exist other sociological approaches, similar to Bourdieu's, that focus on how people act towards things based on the meaning those things have for them; and how people generate meaning from social interactions (e.g. symbolic interactionism). Bourdieu's concepts, however, also deal with social structure and macro sociological issues by revealing the interrelationships and degrees of importance between systems and actors. They reveal that young people do actively and reflexively interpret their environment. New understandings generated through his concepts challenge the notion of peer pressure, which provides some philosophical foundation for current Australian alcohol policies. Young females are not passive subjects who simply absorb external pressures to drink.

<sup>1</sup> The *practice/practise* distinction is used to distinguish the practical methodological and/or empirical application of Bourdieu's work (*practise*) from the guidance he offers for rigorous research conduct (*practice*).

## Methodology and methods

This ongoing research is undertaken in metropolitan South Australia with groups of young females aged 14–17 (below the South Australian legal drinking age of 18<sup>2</sup>) who have experience with drinking alcohol and who come from familial backgrounds with varying levels of economic and cultural capital (see below for an explanation of these terms). Ethics approval to conduct this research was granted by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. An interview guide, with open-ended questions derived from key themes identified through the literature is used to direct group discussion. Questions about drinking relate to the following themes: group identity (composition and membership), symbolisms, tastes, lifestyles, cultural capital, social status, prestige, symbolic power, reputation, social inclusion/exclusion. Following the group interview one young female from each group participates in an in-depth semi-structured interview. Individual interviews allow exploration of drinking perceptions from the young female's perspective and insight into the dynamics and status positions comprising the group. Participants also take photographs they consider to be symbolic of their social drinking experiences (Pink, 2001; Prosser, 1998). A *photo-elicitation* method rooted in visual anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1986), enables photographs to be triangulated with verbal data collected through interviews to elicit a response from participants and explore how they construct their worldview. There is a theoretical rationale for using photo-elicitation. Bourdieu postulated that photography performs social functions. In *Photography: a middle brow art* (Bourdieu, 1990b) Bourdieu's focus extends beyond the literal meaning of what the photographs depict to the aesthetics and tastes that are revealed through the process of selecting what to photograph. Participant's photographs and how they determined what is photograph-worthy is intrinsically linked to their social class. Photographs capture the social hierarchies, power differentials and distinctions inherent in young female's everyday social lives and practices. The narrative participants give to their photographs is key to our analysis more so than the images themselves.

## Sample

Young females known to drink alcohol in social contexts were identified through BL's existing networks (e.g. through settings frequented by youth such as sporting clubs and youth organisations, and through friends of friends) and recruited within self-selected friendship groups (3–5 members) in which they naturally socialise to retain the social structure in which drinking-related decisions are made. Sampling is theoretically and purposively driven. Participants are drawn from different socio-economic status backgrounds using the notion of social class embedded in Bourdieu's ontology. Bourdieu expanded the Weberian notion of class to include non-economic, socially determined aspects of 'opportunity' like social and cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985). Theoretical sampling was initially undertaken on the basis of economic capital (financial resources) using 'place' as a guide (e.g. school attending, geographical area of residence). Once Bourdieu's theoretical insights can be applied to the social group, the forms of capital used to generate economic capital including *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1985): forms of knowledge and skills that for young females is largely derived through upbringing and education and *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1985): social connections, used to position young

females in a social class, can be observed. This helps to locate the specific interests of the social group within social spaces and physical places where culture differs/varies quite dramatically. Of the participants discussed in this article, all were from middle to high income familial backgrounds, residing in metropolitan Adelaide (Adelaide CBD, Brighton, Springfield, Mitcham, Unley, Daw Park) and outer metropolitan Adelaide (McLaren Vale) and attend private schools. All participants represent middle to high levels of cultural capital, and use alcohol as symbolic capital to maintain their popularity within the broader, school-based peer group.

Ongoing research is responsive to the emerging research findings and is driven by the need for in-depth understandings of the complex and varied social meanings young females attribute to their drinking. Recruitment is iterative and guided by emergent findings to ensure the sample produces the knowledge necessary to understand the structures and processes within which research participants from differing social positions form their alcohol-related behaviours. Further recruitment will identify young females with lower economic capital, attending public schools, and from less "socially privileged" positions (i.e. less popular young females with a smaller network of friends). Critique of the theoretical and conceptual adequacy and applied reflexivity of the methodological approach in generating research findings and ensuring interpretative validity will occur as recruitment continues (Popay et al., 1998).

## Data analysis

The approach used for data analysis is based on the framework analysis method designed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994), which involves identifying key issues, concepts and themes for data analysis *a priori* through review and critique of the alcohol literature. Data was then analysed deductively within the frame of Bourdieu's theory by looking for both consistencies and inconsistencies with the theory. Whilst photographs taken by participants are not analysed, the surrounding discussion and the captions participants give to their photographs is a core element of the interviews and of the methodology underpinning the interviews. Group and individual interview discussions are recorded, transcribed and coded using NVivo qualitative analysis software. Data excerpts provided hereupon are derived from these transcripts. The objective of analysis is, using Bourdieu's concepts, to reveal the specific interests of the friendship group, identify how individuals are positioned within the social field comprising the friendship group and the sources of symbolic capital that exist amongst young females. Also analysed are the ways that symbolic capital can be won, lost or negotiated to gain insight into the role of alcohol in this process (e.g. where does alcohol sit as a source of symbolic capital? Do different groups use or perceive alcohol in different ways? What are the ramifications of this on whether the drinking leads to the accrual of symbolic capital?).

## Theoretical perspective

This research is situated in a critical realist paradigm which, as sociologist Margaret Archer argues, views society as 'inseparable from its human components because the very existence of society depends in some way upon our activities' (Archer, 1995, p. 1). This view is largely consistent with Bourdieu's ontology (Bourdieu, 1991; Danermark et al., 2002; Reed, 2008). Central to critical realism is that the explanation of social phenomena is achieved through revealing the causal mechanisms that produce them (Archer, 2010). The nature of society as an open system makes it impossible to make predictions as can be done in natural science. By basing this research on the analysis of the causal mechanisms of behaviour, it is possible to arrive at an informed discussion about the poten-

<sup>2</sup> By the Australian legal drinking age of 18 years, almost all young Australians have consumed a full serve of alcohol (data from 2007 NDS Household Survey). This data set also indicates that young Australians who have consumed a full serve of alcohol at age 14 years represent the majority rather than the minority.



tial consequences of mechanisms that operate in different settings. But, uncovering these causal mechanisms is not a linear process whereby the researcher can ask their participants why they act in a certain way or for what cause. Previous work has critiqued studies of health behaviour for 'overestimating the significance of conscious health considerations in everyday life' (Katainen, 2010, p. 2). According to Bourdieu's *practice*, people are not aware of the factors affecting their behaviour, nor the implicit logic behind that behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 18). One of the Bourdieu's key epistemological critiques of the research process was the inability of study participants to critically reflect upon their behaviour because as humans our 'practical logic' – the inherent association between what people do and their location in social space – is limited (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a). Bourdieu suggested that 'the principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation cannot even be made explicit' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 94; Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466). Difficulties with this concept are raised by Sweetman (2009, p. 494), who through his work on 'revealing habitus', suggests that some forms of contemporary dispositions or *habitus* that is a 'socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures in which the agents' interests are defined and with them the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 76) are more 'reflexive' than others. Other contemporary uses of Bourdieu provide evidence for less 'structured' or 'modifiable' conditions of an individual's *habitus* (Friedman, 2011; Ingram, 2011). Further, it seems possible that research participants can be made consciously aware of aspects of the *habitus* through the process of the research. Custers and Aarts (2010) argue that although motivations and 'will' are seemingly unconscious and subliminal, the research process allows people to reflect and 'make conscious' such motivations, allowing participants and researchers 'access'. In the section on *practice* below we share techniques for stimulating participants to articulate 'unconscious' behaviours. Explaining risky drinking necessitates some consideration of the behavioural response of individuals who drink. Using Bourdieu's ideas (or his *practise*) around symbolic capital and distinction, drinking is interpreted as a symbolic and powerful activity young people engage in to influence their position in social hierarchies, with the potential of changing the social arrangement through inclusionary and exclusionary distinctions made according to what is valued by the social group at a given time. Within this theoretical frame, we can test hypotheses on: the role of drinking behaviours and outcomes in the formation of social groups; the meanings attached to alcohol (including product types, brands, consumption patterns, etc.) as representative of social identities that may be negotiated to form distinctions between and across groups of young females; the use of alcohol as a source of power to gain acknowledgement and enhance reputation; and, the social dynamics in how this is 'played out'.

### Findings: the practise of Bourdieu

#### *The influence of both social structure and individual agency on drinking decisions*

Bourdieu contributed to the long existing sociological debate over whether social structures or human agency determine an individual's behaviour by emphasising an *interaction* between the two (Bourdieu, 1984). He was part of a broader movement in which social theorists tried to move beyond the structure/agency binary (see also structuration theory proposed by Giddens (1986)). This account of the dualism between structure and agency in shaping behaviours is fitting for alcohol research. It bridges the divide between approaches where the cause of drinking is either

attributed to the individual (agent), as evident in developmental psychology models, or to external social forces encountered within the drinking setting (structure). The individual agent expresses a strong sense of being an active part of the social scene, the need for social contact and group inclusion is coupled with drinking alcohol. The prominence of drinking only in social situations is consistently reiterated by young females in our study. The following excerpt from a group interview with Carrie and friends, age 16, provides an example:

Interviewer: Is drinking something that you do quite a lot?

Carrie: Only on occasions, like I wouldn't just have like a drink for the sake of it, I'd make it occasions

Interviewer: ...to celebrate?

Carrie: If you're just going out...like parties.

Applying Bourdieu's understanding of structure and agency to young females' alcohol consumption drinking is informed by a range of complex and constantly changing individual and social processes. Young females recognise they occupy a position within a social structure (or peer group) where there exists an inherent societal acceptance of drinking as a valued social activity, that is, a source of symbolic capital. The following excerpt indicates a social imperative to drink: "all of our school drinks alcohol. Every teenager drinks...its just part of it [being a teenager]" (Emma, young female participant, age 15, group interview). This is coupled with an infixed individual pursuit to engage with and reap the benefits from being an active participant in the social realm, as indicated from our discussion with Charlotte, age 17, during a group interview:

Interviewer: If none of your mates were drinking, but you still wanted to, would you still drink?

Charlotte: Not if I was...if I was just going out with a group...like that one group and I wasn't seeing anyone else for the whole night I wouldn't get drunk by myself.

Young females consistently reject the notion of peer pressure, as one participant explained "no one pressures you to drink, you just want to" (Holly, young female participant, age 15, individual interview). Despite a concerted decision not to drink made before entering the social setting, once amongst their drinking friends, young females' depict the social imperative to drink: "you'll say you're not drinking and you'll end up drinking" (Dani, young female participant, age 16, group interview) she further explains "you just want to be a part of like being crazy and having a good time". If not peer pressure, what then, can account for the incongruity between a young female's stated attitude and decision not to drink versus their actual drinking behaviours?

Bourdieu referred to this phenomenon as the sociology of symbolic power. His concept *symbolic capital* is demonstrably useful in understanding the relationship between young females' social structures and how their individual actions like drinking, respond to and interact with these structures. Symbolic capital is translatable to anything recognised by social agents as having value in a social context that affords the individual prestige, honour and a bolstered social status (Webb et al., 2005). To understand symbolic capital and the exercise of social power, it is necessary to consider the concepts of *field* and *habitus*. Bourdieu envisaged society as various 'fields' of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993). A field can be defined as a social space in which agents are positioned in certain roles and relationships and with given resources that he termed 'capital'. He explained that the positions individual agents take within the social realm, or the structure of the field, determines actions for control of capital. According to Bourdieu, attitudes and behaviours are learned and socialised through interpretation of the external social environment. Social reproduction therefore occurs through decisions and choices made within broader societal constraints and influences. The social fields our research participants operate in espouse a way of socialising that is derived from broader societal norms where abstaining from alcohol, without a socially

acceptable reason, is not a valid or valued behavioural pattern. This is captured by 17-year old Laura during a group interview:

“like if you say [to your peers] I’m not going out [and drinking] because of netball, you’ll like cop a bit of flack for that. . . because they [peers] don’t understand the pressure to perform. . . and your performance would be like totally affected [if you drank]. . . there’s been a few times where we’ve gone out not intending to drink and have ended up drinking”.

Evident here is that young females reproduce within their friendship groups the dominant practices of wider society, giving value and power to heavy drinking as a habitual expectation and a ‘natural’ way to socialise: “if it [drinking] were socially unacceptable we wouldn’t do it” (Kelli, young female participant age 17, individual interview).

Using Bourdieu’s terminology, social drinking is part of and reflects our participants’ ‘habitus’, or in other words, their tastes and dispositions. The habitus is young females’ socially constructed view of the world. It reflects the ‘embodiment within individuals of systems of social norms, understandings and patterns of behaviour. . . ensuring that individuals are more disposed to act in some ways than others’ (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 3). Bourdieu contends that external structures are internalised into the habitus whilst the actions of the agent externalise interactions between actors into the social relationships in the social field. Young females both internalise or ‘take on’ external structures (here we mean dominant drinking norms) and reproduce them by externalising (or acting out) internal structures within the confines of a social space. One group of young females aged 17 years talked about liking the way they feel when they drink but sometimes not liking who they become. For example, a young female (Tammy, age 17, during a group interview) spoke of nights spent drinking where “you. . . feel disappointed in your performance”. This complicated *précis* is important to understanding how drinking behaviours are a source of dominance in young female’s social fields. For Bourdieu, the construction and shaping of ‘habitus’ through fields of ‘cultural production’ also comes to comprise young females’ schema of perception through which they make distinctions, categorise and value things and people (Bourdieu, 1993). For young females, drinking is a habitual expectation and a sought after pattern of behaviour that provides opportunity for accrual of high volumes of symbolic capital. Social gains can be made through the accumulation of symbolic capital by consuming alcohol in whatever form is legitimised by the dominant social group – conferring upon the young female a sign of distinction within a wider habitus and audience of those who are predisposed to recognise such distinctions. These key forms of symbolic capital: social recognition and distinction are discussed next.

#### *Drinking for social recognition*

Of particular relevance to understanding young females drinking is not just Bourdieu’s theory on struggles for recognition through the fit for, accrual and display (activation) of symbolic capital in drinking settings but the means by which symbolic capital is recognised and given value so it can be exchanged for desired outcomes (Webb et al., 2005). The notion of recognition helps explain the “performative” nature of the alcohol consumption behaviours young female participants describe above. It also highlights the requisite that drinking behaviours must be validated and appreciated by the friendship network to become sources of symbolic capital. The ratification of a witnessing audience is an essential strategy for the accrual of symbolic capital amongst our young females participants. This explains the popularity of social networking sites like Facebook amongst participants, which provides an expansion of their “offline” lives and an opportunity to display

personal information in a public forum. During the photo elicitation component of a group interview, a young female (Tammy, 17 years) explained that “there are heaps more photos of us drinking on Facebook. . . we can show you”. Common amongst our research participants was to post photographs of themselves in social and drinking contexts for their extended peer network and others to view and form a (positive) perception. The necessity to capture, record and communicate displays of drinking is a central distinction asserting strategy. Part of the young female’s process of affirming congruence with socially sanctioned drinking behaviours and aligning their behaviour according to what is deemed socially ‘correct’ or ‘legitimate’, is to highlight unacceptable behaviours and use this to create distinctions between their social position and that of ‘lesser’ others. Bourdieu termed this a ‘symbolic struggle’ over capital (Bourdieu, 1989). Prestige is defined and distinction reasserted through the exclusion of particular individuals or groups of young females who exhibit behaviours that are not congruent with the dominant and legitimated ways to drink socially. This was evident when the young females discussed engaging in risky sexual conduct or what they termed “slutty” behaviours whilst drunk. The following excerpt from a group interview illustrates this process of ‘othering’:

“I’m not a fan of girls who get really drunk and then do things [of a sexual nature] with guys and then blame it on the fact that they were drinking. . . I really don’t like that because I kinda go, well I’d never get to that point” (Laura, age 17).

Here, young females are recognised and alienated for drinking and exhibiting sexual behaviours deemed inappropriate by more dominant peers. This description of ‘slutty’ behaviours demonstrates that alcohol behaviours are not value-free but are loaded with cultural and symbolic meanings. Misreading or undermining the impacts of behaviour that is out of sync with the culturally valued norm affects participant’s status in the field. In this sense, very specific aspects of drinking behaviour are socialised according to a system of monitoring, recognition and reproduction that is constantly in flux. Evident through the research presented here is that drinking behaviours can be interpreted as symbolically significant activity with the potential to create and maintain social differentiations amongst young females (Bourdieu, 1984).

#### *Drinking for distinction and inclusion*

Understanding how individuals are structured into social positions in a field helps to understand how drinking behaviours are shaped. Bourdieu explained that dominance works through utilisation of the forms of capital, and because young females’ access to capital (disposable income, friendship networks, social connections) is ever changing by the nature of development and youth, so too is a young female’s position within social hierarchy. When young females engage in social practices like drinking, they enter a game-like scenario where they draw on their capital to make social gains or ‘wins’. Participation in the ‘game’ of drinking relies on previous accrual and use of capital (e.g. an invitation to a party where drinking occurs requires access to social networks) and knowledge of the rules and engagement in ‘symbolic struggles’ to improve social positioning. By consuming a certain alcohol product or adopting a particular drinking behaviour, young people express their affiliation to a social group (Featherstone, 1991) or rejection of lifestyles or groups to which they do not relate or do not wish to be perceived as related (Miles, 2003). In this way, drinking behaviours are more complex than they appear at the outset; they are also meaningful, figurative, and an important element of social dynamics (Chaney, 1998). Drinking alcohol is not an end in itself, but a means to activating behaviours through

which social competencies can be demonstrated and symbolic gains or capital can be achieved according to what is valued by the social group. Jarvinen and Gundelach (2007) used Bourdieu's theory to help explain the normative position of heavy drinking amongst Danish young people described as a culturally derived pattern of drinking to intoxication. They focused on whether patterns of alcohol consumption can be used to identify particular *lifestyles* using Bourdieu's conception of 'lifestyle', that is, a system of classified and classifying practices (Bourdieu, 1984). Jarvinen and Gundelach explored the company teenagers seek and their degree of integration in the peer group to determine if and how drinking patterns are embedded in the formation of social groupings amongst teenagers. To this end, they introduce Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to understand how *lifestyles* are demarcated and to indicate how different drinking patterns lead to social cohesiveness or dissociation. This work provides a foundation for understanding the group dynamics or causal processes that lead to group memberships structured around drinking behaviours, and highlights how these legitimated drinking lifestyles operate as a form of distinction. Using Bourdieu's theoretical frame and based on BL's research with young females, we argue that the sense of fun, relaxation and confidence young females attribute to drinking arises from the feeling of acceptance and belonging achieved through emulating social competencies in drinking behaviours. Acting in congruence with the behaviours displayed by dominant social norms, which is verified by more popular peers who have the social authority or 'cultural capital' to know what in vogue and who possesses symbolic capital to dictate, alleviates discomfort in drinking settings. For example, one group of young females (age 16) said:

"if its an out of school thing [social gathering] it's the worst than ever to be sober, like if you don't know anyone then it's awful [not to be drinking] and like I reckon with friends at school it wouldn't be as bad" and "you just feel more at ease with talking with new people and like meeting new people".

For some participants, gaining entry to drinking contexts such as parties hosted by young people outside of their immediate peer or school group, entering the night time drinking economy whilst underage and participating in a party where free alcohol is supplied, is a source of symbolic capital. Here, alcohol is transformed from a commodity with literal utility, to a socially symbolic and value-laden object capable of communicating social distinctions. As in the above example, drinking confers upon the young female symbolic capital accrued from subscribing to a way of being that represents the 'popular aesthetic' (Bourdieu, 1984) and subsequently brings a sense of social ease. This is more of an imperative to young females than ever before as all aspects of social life and particularly the drinking realm is becoming increasingly commodified. Alcohol advertising and popular culture aesthetic encourages young females to demonstrate endorsement of product branding (McCreanor et al., 2005). Products are embodied with particular meanings and associations and young females adopt what the branding symbolises and build it into part of their identity repertoire. For example, many of the young females who participated in this study identified with "classy" and "sophisticated" drinks like pre-mixed vodkas. One young female participant explained:

"drinking is promoted. Ad[vertisment]s for Smirnoff are really classy and you really want to drink them cause they look awesome. Because everyone's doing it [drinking Smirnoff] you want to do it too" (Kelli, young female participant age 17). Another participant suggested "when I get older I'll start drinking beer

and wine. . . I think they're classy drinks like they're drinks you'll have at a restaurant rather than the one that like you drink at a party" (Summa, young female participant age 15).

Simultaneously, participants distinguished themselves from undesirable drinks as indicated by this statement:

"the dero group they would drink like goon [cheap cask wine] and they would drink like Jim Beam and like and heavy like cheap drinks that will get them easily, easily drunk" (Holly, young female participant age 15, group interview).

Here we see that drinking behaviours are not simply the result of differences in taste. The effects of classification rest on the volume of symbolic capital afforded to individuals and their subsequent power and authorisation to classify. Taste therefore is based on popular regard, and power in a Bourdieuan sense is 'the ability to classify successfully, the capacity to make one's definition of the situation as the situation' (Jenkins, 2002, p. xiii). Participants reveal this in their distinction between 'dero' less-desirable drinks (e.g. cheap cask wine, Jim Beam) and more sophisticated, less 'cheap' drink types.

An important caveat needs to be made in relation to the deployment of Bourdieu's theory here. Social positions or the 'symbolic order' of social groups is, ironically, disorderly in the sense that not all young females have access to equal social footings. Young females bring different levels and different types of capital to any social setting. Using the drinking setting of a party as an example, social and cultural capital enables the young female entry to the party. Without social networks young females would not be permitted to enter this social field. It is also important to clarify the social 'levels' referred to when interpreting Bourdieu's theory in the context of young female's drinking behaviours. Amongst participants, competition for social status occurs at two levels: at the macro social level in which social power is dependent on school type, location and reputation; and, at the micro level, in which power struggles take place within school-based social groups. Thus, changing one's social status does not occur by chance. From the outset, the competition is unequal, the stakes and opportunities for accumulation of capital are not evenly distributed, and young females bring a social history of success or loss in capital accumulation to each new social engagement. A utopian society would renew social history allowing the individual a fresh start for each social encounter. In reality, the accumulation of capital is intrinsically linked to previous social encounters and therein, opportunities for the accrual of capital. Further, social boundaries are imposed by the school structure. Drinking occasions are highly valued and commandeered by young female participants for the opportunity they provide to transgress these boundaries. In attempting to transgress other social structures/fields, the participants end up subscribing to other dominant norms around heavy drinking representing a nuance of how liberating versus constraining drinking is. The following excerpt from a group interview with 16-year-old friends Summa and Bella discussing an intra-school eighteenth birthday party indicates this:

Summa: "At an eighteenth [birthday party] one of the girls in year 11 had a whole bottle of vodka like before she got to the party, at like pres [pre-drinks] and she got to the party and then like passed out

Bella: And she had to leave straight away and that was in the gossip stream and everyone was talking about how that was silly

Interviewer: So it wasn't something where people thought that was cool?

Summa: No, no everyone thought what a waste of a night

Interviewer: So by waste of a night do you mean she missed out on the opportunity to socialise?

Bella: Yeah. . . yeah she wasted a whole night. . . like it was an eighteenth as well, like lots of people it was a good thing to go to

Summa: Yeah a high status social event.



Drinking alcohol may not be something from which young females directly accrue symbolic capital. It does seem though, that *through* drinking alcohol functions as a source of symbolic capital because it gives leverage to other avenues for capital accumulation. The following excerpts from an interview with 15-year old friends Jenna and Jessica illustrates how capital is accrued through drinking, only if drinking behaviours are legitimised:

Interviewer: are there things people do when drinking that you don't like?  
 Jenna: Oh umm... yeah like just being annoying when they're drunk... like... pretending to be drunk  
 Jessica: This friend of ours will be like 'oh my god babe like I've drunk so much...'  
 Jenna: It's annoying and it's just like shut up... because you know that they're not truly drunk, like this one girl...  
 Interviewer: Why's that a problem?  
 Jenna: Because they're trying to be cool  
 Jessica: ...and confident.

In this instance, a certain way of being drunk is a means of capital accumulation. Through being 'truly drunk', displaying confidence and therefore 'being cool' prestige can be gained, but faking or acting drunk is unacceptable and a dead-end for accruing capital. Later in the same interview, a statement from 15-year old Jenna outlines how alcohol is a vehicle for capital accumulation through other social relationships and behaviours:

Interviewer: So... you talk about talking about the party the next day, what are the things you talk about most?  
 Jenna: Probably the relationships... it's not so much about what you're drinking it's more about how you act... there never is a focus on the alcohol I don't reckon.

These findings emphasise the centrality of social influences on young female's drinking outcomes.

## Discussion: the practice of Bourdieu

### *A methodological toolbox*

In addition to his theoretical contributions, Bourdieu provided a methodological toolbox (his way of *practice*) that can be usefully applied by youth alcohol researchers to overcome contentions between structure and agency, to ameliorate researcher bias through promoting reflexivity and heightening objectivity and move beyond problems associated with positivism. This brings to light how the research setting can construct rather than elicit responses and meaning from research participants. Here we provide a reflexive discussion of how well Bourdieu's epistemological arguments can be used to gain access to young female's voices and lead to more complete understandings of why young females drink.

### *How we used Bourdieu's thinking tools*

Bourdieu intended for his concepts, which he coined a set of 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 50) visible through the results they yield, to be applied in this way:

The ground for these tools lies in research, in the practical problems and puzzles encountered and generated in the effort to construct a phenomenally diverse set of objects in such a way that they can be treated, thought of, comparatively (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 160).

In spite of the scrutiny and many attempts to apply Bourdieu's theoretical work (Calhoun et al., 1993; Swartz, 2003; Swartz & Zolberg, 2004), the way in which he saw his 'thinking tools' being deployed is often overlooked. We take on advice from Webb et al. (2005, p. 49) who stated that:

Bourdieu's concepts are not simply theoretical filters which process social practices; rather they are technologies, which are transformed, and need to be re-thought as they are applied.

He intended for his concepts to have malleable characteristics, and stressed that good quality research marries theory and empirical investigation so that his concepts come to life through application. We have applied Bourdieu's concepts fully and in appreciation of this flexibility. For example, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic capital focused on enduring outcomes (e.g. long lasting dominance of elites in political systems), whereas the overlapping nature of the social fields contemporary young females engage in and the transitory nature of friendships suggests opportunities for accrual of symbolic capital is ever changing. This means the social status earned by an agent is never fixed. This may explain why parties and other drinking occasions represent such revered opportunities for our participants to engage in symbolic struggles compared to other settings (e.g. school and sport). Parties offer young females a chance to use alcohol as a key resource to demonstrate their aesthetic tastes and potentially achieve ascendancy in their social group. Acknowledging and analysing these 'ill-fits' helps to develop the theory, and captures the flexible characteristics Bourdieu intended of his ideas. Hence, we applied all components of Bourdieu's theory, inclusive of theoretical complexities and nuances, to determine its applicability to young Australian females and alcohol. To ensure our sample produced the type of knowledge necessary to understand the structures and processes within which participant's formulate their drinking behaviours we sampled according to Bourdieu's notion of social class. That is, according to categories of people who occupy positions within a social field (a social arena within which struggles take place over resources and access to these resources). It would be at odds with Bourdieu's ontology of social collectives to define classes as constituted through aggregate statistical data or classified according to occupation identity (e.g. social stratification research). Access to status-defining drinking practices relies on the possession of a mixture of economic, cultural and social capital. Acknowledgement of the relational nature of Bourdieu's 'capitals' (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) is essential to *making the theory work*. This enabled us to capture the detailed and diverse drinking-related views, perceptions and experiences that may be attributed to situational and social positional differences experienced by the different young females.

### *Reflexivity and participant objectification*

Bourdieu's key tenets about the construction of social space (Bourdieu, 1989) can also be applied to the process of conducting research. Bourdieu regards researchers as agents negotiating relationships within the field of research, and according to Bourdieu, the principal cause of variations in perception is one's position in social space (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19). As researchers, our views of reality are primarily constructed and differentiated through economic and cultural factors. In terms of research into young people and alcohol, researchers typically occupy a position of power superior to their research participants. This has important ramifications for the research outcomes and the validity of analysis. Failing to reflexively construct the social space of positions that comprises the research 'game' (researcher, research participants), makes it difficult to understand the conditions and factors that produce drinking outcomes from the perspective of independent young females acting within the constructed sphere of the research. To remedy this, a research strategy used by Bourdieu in his own research for *The Weight of the World* was adopted. In this approach, he advocated for 'the development... of a particular form of sociological habitus, through which they [are] able to help respondents deliver up their truth, or, rather, ... be delivered of it (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 621).

In exercising reflexivity of the unequal relationship between the researcher and the research participant, control over the conditions of the research interactions was relinquished as much as possible. Young female participants selected the setting of all interactions; they had access to BL's contact details and personal social networking page, which achieved a sense of reciprocal sharing of information that encouraged rapport. Participants also dictated the narrative according to what photographs they chose to take and show.

#### *Techniques for encouraging participants to reveal what is 'unconscious'*

As earlier outlined, Bourdieu suggested young females' distinction asserting 'strategies' (as a product of the habitus) are not based on conscious calculation but rather results from unconscious dispositions towards a particular way of being. The experience from this research is that young female's can be made aware of certain aspects of their habitus or 'why they do the things they do' through discussions of the values of their immediate social group relative to young females from other social class positions. The following excerpt from a group interview with 16-year old Mel and Ellie indicates this:

Interviewer: Facebook has really changed the way people socialise compared with when I was growing up

Ellie: Yeah it has

Interviewer: It's full on; do you ever feel like having a break?

Ellie: I wish we did

Mel: and if you don't go on there you feel like you're missing out on stuff

Ellie: Yeah I just reckon I wouldn't know any... like three quarters of the stuff that I see about other schools [if not for facebook]... it's all the out of school stuff...

Mel: It just feels like inadequate; they [girls from other schools] just look cool

Interviewer: So how do you see what girls from other schools are doing? Do you just become their facebook friend?

Mel: Yeah they add you

Interviewer: So they invite you, so they want you to see?

Ellie: Yeah, yeah... I never really thought of it like that.

Here we see that as Bourdieu theorised, 'dispositions' that are embodied become naturalised or 'second nature' that is, not (initially) recognised let alone questioned (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54). This makes asking participants to reflect on and articulate the social influences behind their drinking difficult, yet not impossible. This was evident when young females were made aware of aspects of the taken-for-granted *habitus* through the interview. As shown in the above excerpt, the participants did not initially recognise that Facebook posts are a form of symbolic capital used by peers who wish to bolster their social status. Prompting discussion of the power dynamics behind these virtual social interactions assisted participants to make conscious previously taken-for-granted peer group distinctions.

The use of photographs in the research methodology also aided the unravelling of the unconscious will by prompting discussion about how deciding what to photograph is manifest in value judgments and the social and cultural influences that guide the photograph-taking. Participants are encouraged to look at their photos through 'conscious' eyes. Young female research participants undertake a 'double distancing' or an objective detachment from the subject under investigation (Jenkins, 2002, p. 50). This is an objectification technique that Bourdieu recommended researchers use as a process of standing back from the subject to get as close as possible to reaching objective reflection.

## Conclusion

Sociological explanations offer 'alternative truths', which argue that drinking is entwined in a complex, diverse and dynamic model of social structures and relationships where social groupings and

strategies are important. In this paper we contextualise the broad reach of alcohol into a complex set of relationships, classification schemes and social dynamics that Bourdieu discusses in his work on the social field through the concept of symbolic capital or social power. In doing so, a balance is reached between the role of alcohol-related structures and the role of the young agent in achieving the end point—drinking behaviours. By explicating our use of Bourdieu theoretically (his *practise*) and methodologically (his *practice*) to understanding alcohol consumption we concomitantly offer guidance on the process of conducting theoretically informed youth alcohol research to facilitate a more robust use of Bourdieu and indeed, of social theory, in alcohol research. Through our outline of a reflexive process of applying social theory to further understandings in youth alcohol research, some important 'alternative truths' come to light surrounding the social and symbolic aspect of drinking.

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## Appendix 2

Meyer, S., & Lunnay, B. (2013). The application of abductive and retroductive inference for the design and analysis of theory-driven sociological research. *Sociological Research Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/1/12.html>

<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/1/12.html>

## **The Application of Abductive and Retroductive Inference for the Design and Analysis of Theory-Driven Sociological Research**

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### **Abstract**

Abductive and retroductive inference are innovative tools of analysis which enable researchers to refine and redevelop social theory. This paper describes and demonstrates how to apply these tools to strengthen sociological theory-driven empirical research outputs. To illustrate how abductive and retroductive inference work for the benefit of enhanced qualitative analysis we present the findings of a qualitative study that investigated heart disease patients' trust in medical professionals (n=37). We outline the research process using a six-stage model developed by Danermark et al. (1997) that will guide researchers doing exploratory research in how to use abductive and retroductive inference in qualitative research design and analysis. A snapshot of the study findings are provided for illustration purposes. The reader will learn how the application of these under-utilized methodological tools provides a novel way of analyzing sociological research.

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**Keywords:** *Theory-Driven Research; Qualitative Analysis; Qualitative Research; Sociology; Theory Development; Critical Realism*

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### **Introduction**

**1.1** Deductive inference is commonly used in the analysis of qualitative theory-driven research. However, we argue that applying solely deductive inference in qualitative data analyses may be limiting to researchers interested in theory development. For example, in theory-driven research, deductive analysis requires the researcher to compare data back to the initial theoretical framework. Data that are not part of the initial framework are often excluded from the analysis. We argue that abductive and retroductive inferences are complementary tools which allow for a more comprehensive analysis of theoretically-driven data. Similar to deduction, abduction and retroduction require the researcher to move between theory and data. However, data that are not in keeping with the initial theoretical framework become significant to the discussion of the findings. This paper will demonstrate how research outputs differ when using a purely deductive approach rather than a combination of analytical methods. It is recognised that in social research, some researchers do in fact use abductive and/or retroductive inference, albeit unconsciously, and investigate data that fall outside of the initial theoretical frame. However, this paper provides a 'how to' for researchers interested in strengthening the methodological design and analysis of theory-driven research.

**1.2** The following section provides an overview of the methodological tools. To illustrate the utility of these tools, we present the design, findings and analysis of theory-driven sociological research. Empirical findings from a qualitative study investigating heart disease patients' trust in medical professionals (n=37) are used to illustrate these methodological tools in practice. The purpose of including these findings is to provide a 'how to' and 'for what gain' illustration of the abductive and retroductive approaches to qualitative analysis. We briefly discuss the methods of the above-mentioned empirical research as a case example. This includes a six-stage model for designing and guiding explanatory research (Danermark et al. 1997). We demonstrate that these under-utilised methodological tools produce novel insights about known phenomena and render more comprehensive theoretical explanations of events or experiences.

### **Abduction and Retroduction**

**2.1** In brief, abduction involves analysing data that fall outside of an initial theoretical frame or premise. Retroduction is a method of conceptualising which requires the researcher to identify the circumstances without which something (the concept) cannot exist. Used in conjunction, these forms of inference can lead to the formation of a new conceptual framework or theory (Danermark et al. 1997). Both abduction and retroduction are analytical tools used in critical realism (Danermark et al. 1997). Consequently, we feel that an outline of the components of abductive and retroductive inference necessitates a brief description of the critical realist philosophy (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2002; Reed 2008). Critical realism is anchored in the critique of positivist approaches to the social acquisition of knowledge. Critical realism is based on the premise that research centered on understanding human experiences should concentrate on human cultural norms, values, symbols, and social processes viewed from a subjective perspective. Contemporary critical realism is largely attributed to the ideas of British philosopher Roy Bhasker (1978: 13) whose primary question for 'understanding reality' was 'what properties do societies and people possess that might make them possible objects for knowledge?' An ontological focus on what produces events (or in this case, experiences) rather than events per se is central because as critical realist researcher Margaret Archer (1995: 1) explains, critical realism views society as 'inseparable from its



human components because the very existence of society depends in some way upon our activities.' Central to critical realism is that the explanation of social phenomena is achieved through revealing the mechanisms that produce them (Archer 1995). When seeking to understand the experiences and behaviors of humans, uncovering the mechanisms that underlie such experiences and behaviors is required.

**2.2** Revealing the multi-faceted causes of behavior is a complex aspect of research analysis that requires interpretative tools capable of unpacking the association between what people do, and the individual or structural factors encountered in their environment that shape behavioral responses. It is argued that deductive inference is limited in the guidance it provides on how we can gain knowledge about what makes events, lived experiences or phenomena possible (Danermark 2002). Deductive inference is beneficial for identifying findings and subsequent conclusions that follow from specific research premises. However, abductive and retroductive inference are complementary to deductive inference, moving the analysis of data beyond the original research premise. Both forms of analysis facilitate the emergence of knowledge that cannot be gained through deductive inference (Ayim 1974; Kapitan 1992). Habermas (1972: 113) explained these inferences in terms of 'thought operations' and therefore as 'different ways of reasoning and thinking in order to proceed from something to something else.'

**2.3** Critical realists acknowledge that the perspectives of research participants are often fallible. We disagree with the notion that participants are fallible. While lay accounts often differ from sociological conceptualisations, it does not mean they are incorrect but rather, they offer potential for sociologists to understand and interpret lay accounts and unveil a distinction between the lay and sociological understandings; adding to the refinement of concepts and identifying the need for a more critical approach when analysing sociological research. Nonetheless, the underlying argument of critical realists is the importance of the analysis of lay accounts. This is largely based on the premise that the 'empirical' is the experience of the participant, and is distinguishable from the 'actual' and the 'real' (Bhaskar 1975). In contrast to the 'empirical', the 'actual' is defined as the events as they actually happened (not necessarily as they were experienced), and the 'real' are the generative mechanisms (structural and social contexts) that naturally exist (Angus et al. 2006). It is important for theory development to be able to separate the empirical from the actual and the real and it is the role of the researcher to do so, whilst being cognitive that in analysing lay accounts, there is potential for the analysis to be seen as sociological imperialism. This is not our intention and we sympathize with Schuetz (1943: 147) who suggests, 'What makes it possible for a social science to refer at all to events in the life world is the fact that the interpretation of any human act by the social scientist might be the same as that by the actor or by his partner.' To mitigate this, the research must use robust methodological tools when distinguishing between the actual and the real. We demonstrate the utility of two such robust tools: abduction and retrodution in providing a more rigorous form of analysis capable of distinguishing the actual from the real through 'understanding' the complex processes of research participants.

**2.4** Prior to moving on to a discussion of the two forms of inference, it must be acknowledged that the originator of these two terms, Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), used them interchangeably (Chiasson 2005). Whilst we recognise Peirce's contribution to developing these terms, our discussion is based on modern accounts of these terms which recognise them as distinct. Our account of these terms, and practical application, clearly identifies their distinction for readers.

### **Abduction**

**2.5** Abductive inference was characterised by Peirce as being the basis of scientific inquiry, and one of the three fundamental modes of logical reasoning (in addition to induction and deduction) (Kapitan 1992). Habermas (1978) suggests that abduction is a mode of inference used to broaden knowledge and stimulate the research process. It is through abduction that new ideas are introduced. The crucial difference between abduction and deduction (Curry et al. 2009; McEvoy and Richards 2002; Popay and Williams 1996), is that abduction shows how something might be, whereas deduction proves that something must be a certain way (Habermas 1978). For example, when doing theory-driven research, the findings might or might not fit the mould of the theoretical frame. When using deductive inference, the theory is proved or disproved. However, findings that are outside of the initial theoretical premise may remain unanalysed. Fundamentally, abduction is a means of forming associations that enable the researcher to discern relations and connections that are not otherwise evident or obvious. This allows the researcher to formulate new ideas, think of something in a different context, and to 'see something else' (Danermark et al. 1997). The aim is to identify data that are beyond the initial theoretical premise.

**2.6** Unlike abductive inference, deductive inference informs only discoveries that are part of a general or universal context or structure. For example, a researcher may test a theory that all patients trust doctors they are familiar with and find that based on participant responses, this is not the case and the theory is refuted. Abductive inference is required to discover circumstances and structures (the actual and the real) that are obscured in empirical data because abduction is not logically rigorous like deduction (Collins 1985) – hence, they are complementary. Following deductive analysis, the researcher looks to analyse knowledge that cannot be reduced to the empirical experience described by participants (Danermark et al. 1997). With regard to the above example, the researcher might look at the reasons why an individual does not trust, the language they use, and consider data that fall outside of the original theoretical premise. Abduction is a way of (re)interpreting data and used in conjunction with retrodution, often leads to the formation of a new conceptual framework or theory (Danermark et al. 1997). Retrodution is a way of conceptualising by identifying the circumstance without which something (e.g. trust) cannot exist. The utility of abduction and retrodution in the development of theory is demonstrated in the discussion section of this article.

**2.7** We argue that abductive inference is fundamental to theory-driven research. The defining characteristic of theory-driven research, that it uses theory a priori (Montgomery et al. 1989), forms the basis of its perceived weaknesses. A central critique is that given the structured nature of the research, the researcher cannot logically identify the unintended artefacts of empirical data - the experiences of the participants are filtered through the theoretical lens (Coryn et al. 2010). The use of abductive inference enables researchers to address this critique by moving the analysis beyond the theoretical frame. Additionally, theory-driven researchers have been accused of conducting empirical research for the sole purpose of testing theory, rather than the empirical outcomes (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield 2007). The application of abductive inference assists the researcher to overcome this potential bias and to give theory-driven research greater transparency. The iterative process of analysis using this form of inference expands the initial theoretical assumptions and extends the research beyond a deductive analysis. The researcher further investigates the traditionally unexplored findings throughout data collection and analysis, revealing a more comprehensive understanding of the theoretical frame, while pursuing quality empirical outputs.

### **Retrodution**

**2.8** In his account of retrodution, Peirce noted that every new idea or concept which has led to progress is derived solely from retrodution (Ayim 1974). Retroductive inference is built on the premise that social reality consists of structures and internally related objects but that we can only attain knowledge of this social reality if we go beyond what is empirically observable by asking questions about and developing concepts that are fundamental to the phenomena under study. Danermark, et al. (1997) argue that in the social sciences, retrodution is a mode of inference that is essential. Retrodution is a means of knowing the conditions fundamental to the existence of phenomena.

**2.9** Retrodution differs to deduction in that it is not 'logical'. In the analysis of research, retroductive inference will not move a researcher from a basic premise or hypothesis to a conclusion (Danermark et al. 1997). Moreover, unlike abductive inference, the researcher must bring assumptions to the research when employing retroductive inference. It is the a priori knowledge which allows the researcher to move beyond, and to begin to question and clarify the basic prerequisites or 'conditions' for a priori assumptions or theoretical frameworks. Danermark et al. (1997) suggest that the use of the term 'conditions' refers to the circumstance without which something cannot exist. For example, if we are interested in investigating a specific concept (X), we as researchers need to ask, what are the conditions under which X occurs? What makes X possible? In the case of the research presented in this paper, one moves beyond theories of trust, towards a more comprehensive understanding of the actual and real conditions under which patients' trust in practitioners occurs. Similar to abductive inference, one moves away from the theory. However, unlike abductive inference, the theoretical frame is the starting point at which retroductive inference can be employed.

**2.10** Retroductive inference is often employed in social sciences research because it is, although not often defined, central to the analysis of social science research. "Social research, in simplest terms, involves a dialogue between ideas and evidence" (Ragin 1994: 55). The researcher moves between knowledge and observable events, recognizing that knowledge cannot be reduced to observable events. Evidently, the term retrodution is an instinctive mode of inference and it has been argued that all discoveries fall within the retroductive stage of inference (Ayim 1974). However, when writing about qualitative research methods, it is often difficult to explain the processes in how qualitative analysis is actually conducted. It is difficult to describe the process of developing an idea. Retroductive inference is a label which assists researchers in explaining their method of analysis. There are five strategies that can be used to facilitate the employment and description of retroductive inference, regardless of whether the research is in line with critical realism (Danermark et al. 1997): Counterfactual thinking, social and thought experiments, studies of pathological cases, studying of extreme cases, and comparative case studies.

### ***Counterfactual thinking***

**2.11** In counterfactual thinking, we use our stored knowledge and experience of social reality to explore questions such as 'could one imagine X without Y'?

If we consider presence and absence, the necessary and the contingent, the constitutive and the non-constitutive as opposites, we can say that counterfactual thinking is at the same time, dialectic, since in this reasoning we examine something in relation to its opposite (Danermark, Ekstrom et al. 1997:101).

**2.12** The use of counterfactual thinking is central to social sciences research and is unavoidable in any field where researchers cannot perform controlled experiments (Tetlock and Belkin 1996). As researchers, we often have to consider how something may be if the situation were to be different, in the absence of a control. Individuals use counterfactual thinking on a daily basis when reflecting upon a decision they have made and how the outcome may have differed had they made an alternative choice (Coricelli and Rustichini 2010). Similarly, researchers must use counterfactual thinking when considering how the outcomes of their research might differ according to the conditions under which their investigation occurred. However, these processes are often difficult to explain. Counterfactual thinking requires the researcher to identify the constitutive factors under which concepts exist, and to differentiate between constitutive factors and accidental circumstances.

### ***Social experiments and thought experiments***

**2.13** When using social and thought experiments, researchers are asked to imagine and work through the detailed implications of hypothetical worlds (Tetlock and Belkin 1996). Similar to counterfactual thinking, both methods aim to get researchers to identify the constitutive factors of everyday conversations. Unlike counterfactual thinking, social and thought experiments focus on constitutive social interactions and conversations.

### ***Studying pathological circumstances and extreme cases***

**2.14** Studying pathological circumstances and extreme cases are methods which assist researchers in specifically identifying the conditions under which X is possible. There are conditions under which specific research interests are more obvious: 1. Those where the mechanisms are disturbed and conditions are challenged; 2. In extreme cases where mechanisms appear in an almost pure form (Danermark et al. 1997). The method used within this research was studying extreme cases. Extreme cases refers to the study of specific cases where the mechanisms under investigation exist in a "purer" form than usual (Danermark et al. 1997). For example, we can study trust in medical professionals in situations where risk is very high such as emergency or life threatening situations (an 'extreme' case) to understand the mechanisms that characterize trust (potentially in a 'purer' form). We can then examine and compare if the same mechanisms also characterize trust in medical professionals in low risk situations such as check-ups (a 'normal' pathological case). Studying extreme cases allows the researcher to learn about the conditions for the 'normal' area under investigation, by researching the extreme or manipulated (the abnormal).

### ***Comparisons of different cases***

**2.15** In designing research that will utilize retroductive inference in the analysis, researchers may also consider using a method of data collection which entails comparing their case study to an additional case study and examining the differences. Danermark et al. (1997:105) describe:

The researcher chooses to study a number of cases which are all assumed to manifest the structure she wishes to describe, but which are very different in other aspects. If the researcher wants to develop a theory of the ritual element in social interaction, she will preferably endeavour to compare several completely different interaction situations in order

to be able to discern the structure all these cases have in common.

In comparing different cases, the researcher can determine what (X) is, and the mechanisms that must be in place for it to occur, by identifying the different qualities and structures that are involved in different situations.

**2.16** The above demonstrates five strategies that can be used to facilitate the employment of retroductive inference. Each can be combined in different ways depending on the nature of the research project (Danermark et al. 1997). The research presented in this article employed the studying of extreme cases and counterfactual thinking. These strategies are best demonstrated in the section on research design (stage 4) and more importantly, the discussion section of this article.

### Demonstrating the Application of Abduction and Retroduction: Background to the Empirical Results

**3.1** To illustrate how abductive and retroductive reasoning works for the benefit of enhanced qualitative analysis, we demonstrate with findings from a qualitative investigation of heart disease patients' trust in medical professionals. Critical realism as a methodology has been previously used in qualitative research regarding heart disease (Angus et al. 2007; Clark et al. 2007; Clark et al. 2008; Clark et al. 2011). Our research is distinct in that the guiding epistemology of this research is not critical realism but rather, constructivism (Crotty 1998). Constructivists argue that meaning is constructed by humans as they engage with the world they are interpreting; meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty 1998). The focus is on the manner in which researchers constitute theories in the act of describing them (Mir and Watson 2001). Mir and Watson (2001: 1169) quote the following to capture this distinction:

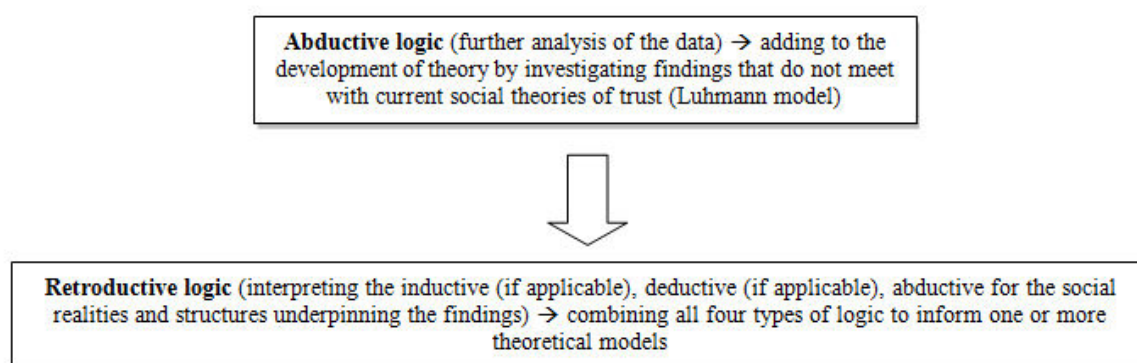
While critical realists indeed focus on the contingent relationships between phenomena and structures, they still subscribe to the realist notion that the inherent order of things is 'mind-independent' (Tsang and Kwan 1999: 761). On the other hand, constructivists attribute structures not to a mind-independent reality, but rather to the generative (and therefore constructive) act of researchers and theorists (Latour and Woolgar 1989).

While this research is constructivist, we have employed abductive and retroductive inference because we recognise their utility as comprehensive tools that are both rarely mentioned in social research (Danermark et al. 1997).

**3.2** Trust may be seen as "the mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit the other's vulnerability" (Sabel 1993: 1133), with the *truster* being required to 'accept the risks associated with the type and depth of the interdependence inherent in a given relationship' (Shepard and Sherman 1998: 423). The research presented was driven by a critical analysis of Niklas Luhmann's social theories of trust (Meyer et al. 2008). This initial critical analysis formed the basis of the inquiry into heart disease patients' trust in medical professionals. In brief, Luhmann addresses the concept of trust in terms of its function in society (Luhmann 1988). He argues that trust occurs in situations of familiarity (but not complete knowledge), and is the glue that holds everything together in social life because it reduces the complexity of how individuals think about the world around them, providing them with the capability to actively make decisions (Pearson et al. 2005). The decision to place (dis)trust reduces complexity in society because both decisions function as ways to pursue individual actions rationally (Luhmann 1979). Luhmann argues that if there is no risk considered, there is confidence or expectation rather than trust (Luhmann 2005). The awareness of risk is what moves an individual's decision from the assumption of confidence to one where trust is required (Luhmann 1988). Additionally, Luhmann argues that trust is a reflexive choice – one makes a conscious choice to trust and accept the associated risks of trusting. As such, *risk* and *choice*, from a Luhmannian perspective are defining characteristics of, and necessary preconditions for, trust.

**3.3** Luhmann never tested his theories empirically and as a means of further investigating the role of risk in trust, the research presented in this article examined the nature of heart disease patients' trust; specifically how the riskiness of their heart disease impacted their choice to trust in medical professionals. As this article will demonstrate, analyzing the role of risk using abductive and retroductive inference is beneficial for making and generating novel analytical thought (Figure 1); in this case, by suggesting a distinction between the concepts of trust and dependence. Before we do this however, a brief<sup>11</sup> outline of the empirical methods and findings we used in this case study is provided to delineate the application of abductive and retroductive inference and show readers how these analytical tools might be used.

**Figure 1.** Depicting the application of the two lines of inquiry; abduction, retroduction



### Research Design and Methods

#### The Research Design

**4.1** Danermark et al. (1997) outline a six-stage model for explanatory research which was utilized in the design of this research. Below we outline how each of these six stages has been used to inform the study design and consequently, drive the research method (in-depth exploratory interviews).



**4.2 Stage 1: Description.** An explanatory social science analysis usually starts in the actual or real, and researchers identify the event or situation they intend to empirically research. An important part of the description stage of the study is to acknowledge the role of the researcher in describing, and consequently, designing the research and interpreting the findings (Danermark et al. 1997). In line with constructivism (Crotty 1998), the description stage involved acknowledging the assumptions that the researchers brought to this research. Sociologists must be reflexive and consequently aware of the effects their position and prejudices have on the interpretation of the research material. Although this research is theory-driven, we acknowledge that the preconceptions of the researcher do inevitably have a place in the formulation of the theoretical frame and hence, the research design. For example, SBM collected the data for this research. SBM's previous experiences with the medical system and prior critical analysis of the notion of trust shaped the lens through which the data were analysed (Bourdieu 1990). To mitigate this, we employed a technique referred to as 'bracketing' which is used to ameliorate some of the potentially deleterious effects of the preconceptions of the researcher that might be seen to taint the research process (Tufford 2012). Additionally, it must be acknowledged that the dynamic way in which SBM interacted with the research participants and interpreted the data, is a reflection of SBM as the researcher (Bourdieu 1990). For example, given the subjectivity present in the analysis of qualitative research, it cannot be overlooked that in adding to, or redeveloping social theories of trust based on empirical observations, aspects of the social world that are not subjected to empirical falsification might be taken for granted by the researcher (May 2001) – in critical realist terms, the actual and the real.

**4.3** There is a pragmatic point that needs to be considered; we often assume that the theories we derive from the social world are independent of our preconceptions based on our values. It is for this reason that, throughout this research, the claim is not made that social theories of trust are falsified by the empirical evidence. Rather, within this research abductive and retroductive inference provided a means of identifying distinctions between trust and other concepts such as dependence. Kuhn (1996: 10) argues that theories are not falsified but become the subject of continuous research and that evidence which does not support theories should be regarded as only a temporary problem towards which future research is directed: 'Normal science means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice' (Kuhn 1996). The theory is never falsified because there will always be evidence that both supports and refutes it (May 2001). As Kuhn (1983: 564) argues choosing a theory to explain scientific findings should not be seen as a "puzzle-findings enterprise" – it is irrational to explain scientific findings using a theory that best fits the data (Kuhn 1983). The process of description guides the researcher to acknowledge their role in the design and analysis of empirical research.

**4.4 Stage 2: Analytical resolution.** In stage two, the phenomenon (trust) was deconstructed by distinguishing the components of trust. We identified the components by critiquing theory and isolating specific areas of interest to be used for theoretical inquiry (risk) (Meyer et al. 2008). The qualitative methodology was employed to investigate specific components of the social theories of trust and relevant critiques.

**4.5** Interviews (n=37) were conducted between October 2008 and September 2009. Ethics approval to conduct this research was granted by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. Individual semi-structured interviews were chosen to encourage participants to disclose information regarding their relationships with doctors and engage in open discussion. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes or at locations of their choice (e.g., two interviews took place at a shopping mall, one at a café and another over a picnic).

**4.6** The interview guide consisted of 32 open-ended questions but the interviewer SBM probed based on responses. Each interview question was developed based on Luhmann's theories of trust. The content of the questions was specifically in relation to participants' trust in doctors and the medical system. After ensuring that each of the questions served the purpose of either investigating aspects of the theory or would be used to build rapport, the interview guide was piloted. After the pilot the order of the questions was altered slightly, as was the wording. Interview lengths varied from 30 minutes to 2 hours depending on the nature of the participant and on the inter-subjectivity in the interview context.

**4.7** All respondents were asked identical questions in the same sequence. The interviewer probed based on responses (Guest et al. 2006). The interview questions specifically asked participants about their level of trust in doctors and the medical system, which has obvious implications for the use of the word 'trust' in participants' responses. However, the researchers' reflexive acknowledgement of this was taken into account when analysing the data by employing abductive inference which is evident in the discussions below.

**4.8 Stage 3: Abduction/theoretical redescription.** The third stage involves abductive inference, a means of interpreting and redescribing different components/aspects from hypothetical frameworks and theories. As noted above, Luhmann did not test his theories empirically which presented a gap for critique and empirical exploration (Meyer et al. 2008). Within this research, alternative theoretical models were compared and integrated with Luhmann's model, thus shaping the research design, by studying his original ideas and relevant critiques (Alexander 1996; Lupton 1997). As a result, relevant critiques were integrated as part of the interview guide in addition to components of Luhmann's theories (as noted above, risk). For example, with regards to this research Lupton argues that not all individuals have the capacity to question medical advice (also known as stratified reflexivity (Ward 2006)) and that reflexive trust differs across socioeconomic status (SES). Although for the purpose of this article we do not discuss differential findings according to SES, in addition to theoretical sample (discussed below) we expanded our initial sampling strategy to include a range of SES participants to further explore Lupton's critiques which involved theoretical redescription.

**4.9 Stage 4: Retroduction.** The process of retroduction was undertaken using extreme case sampling. An intrinsic case study (Stake 2003) with heart disease patients was undertaken to investigate social theories of trust. Whilst the case study was of value because it highlighted important components of doctor–patient (dis)trust, theoretical development was the focus. Conducting a case study with a group of participants who were confronted with situations where they chose to (dis)trust provided a means of investigating the factors affecting trust at a conceptual level. This approach to sampling may also be understood as theoretical sampling (Layder 1998) because the sampling strategy was designed to specifically investigate aspects of Luhmann's social theories of trust and relevant critics.

**4.10** Participants were sampled from 33 different postcodes around Adelaide, Australia. As the aim was to add to the refinement of Luhmann's conceptualisation of trust, the sampling strategy was designed to investigate risk and choice. As such, participants were sampled based on the level of risk inherent in their CHD. Participants who had been prescribed a statin (a medication used to lower cholesterol for the prevention of CHD) were identified as lower risk, and participants who had experienced some form of cardiac event (heart attack or heart surgery) were identified as higher risk.

**4.11** As noted above, participants were also sampled on the basis of SES. Individuals were identified as lower SES if they had an annual household income of less than \$30,000 (Australian dollars). In situations where income was not stated by participants, education and IRSD (Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage) were used to estimate SES. Participants with high school education living in disadvantaged areas were identified as lower SES in relation to participants in more advantaged areas with TAFE (Training and Further Education) or university education.

**4.12** Extreme case sampling allowed the researchers to specifically target aspects of the theoretical frame under investigation. Participants were recruited through South Australian cardiac rehabilitation programs and general practitioner surgeries. Additional participants were recruited via snowballing in cases where participants referred their friends or family to the study. Potential participants were given an information sheet, a letter of introduction, consent form, and a demographic survey. No financial incentives were offered for participation in the study. Participant demographics are available in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Participant demographics

	<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Sex (Male/Female)</b>	<b>Level of CHD risk (Higher/Lower)</b>	<b>SES (Higher/Lower)</b>
<b>M1</b>	68	M	H	L
<b>F1</b>	65	F	L	H
<b>F2</b>	57	F	L	H
<b>F3</b>	73	F	L	L
<b>M2</b>	77	M	L	L
<b>M3</b>	66	M	L	H
<b>F4</b>	66	F	L	H
<b>F5</b>	72	F	H	H
<b>M4</b>	80	M	H	H
<b>F6</b>	76	F	L	H
<b>M5</b>	65	M	H	H
<b>M6</b>	69	M	H	H
<b>F7</b>	62	F	H	H
<b>F8</b>	71	F	H	L
<b>M7</b>	50	M	L	L
<b>M8</b>	58	M	H	L
<b>M9</b>	61	M	H	H
<b>F9</b>	72	F	L	L
<b>F10</b>	73	F	H	L
<b>M10</b>	75	M	L	L
<b>F11</b>	77	F	L	L
<b>M11</b>	76	M	L	L
<b>F12</b>	73	F	L	L
<b>F13</b>	82	F	L	L
<b>M12</b>	52	M	L	H
<b>M12</b>	52	M	L	H
<b>M13</b>	45	M	L	L
<b>M14</b>	52	M	L	H
<b>M15</b>	76	M	L	H
<b>F14</b>	32	F	H	H
<b>F15</b>	73	F	H	L
<b>M16</b>	60	M	H	H
<b>M17</b>	68	M	H	H
<b>M18</b>	74	M	H	L
<b>M19</b>	65	M	H	H
<b>M20</b>	62	M	H	L
<b>M21</b>	61	M	H	H
<b>M22</b>	69	M	H	L
	<b>Mean: 66 Median: 68</b>	<b>22Male/15Female</b>	<b>18Lower/19Higher</b>	<b>18Lower/19Higher</b>

**4.13 Stage 5: Comparisons between different theories and abstractions.** Abductive and retroductive inference allow for the elaboration and estimation of the explanatory power of a given theory in the analysis of data. This could mean concluding that one theory, unlike competing theories, describes the necessary conditions for the phenomena under study (trust). In other cases, the theories might be seen as complementary. Deduction was used to identify data that were in fitting with the initial theoretical frame. However, abductive and retroductive inference were employed via an iterative process of coding. The coding system was initially derived from a priori theoretical critiques and knowledge of the literature on patient trust (Meyer *et al.* 2008) and evolved throughout the analysis. The acknowledgement in this approach, which is in line with abduction and retroduction, is that all observations and interpretations are theory-laden, rejecting the notion that data speak for themselves (Layder 1998). The analysis was conducted using pre-coding (or provisional coding) and memo-writing (Layder 1998).

**4.14** Pre-coding is an iterative process that involved highlighting or pulling out words or sections of text

that appeared significant, despite the fact that some segments of data did not trigger an association with theory. We argue that pre-coding employs abductive inference because it allows researchers to identify findings external to the original theoretical lens for further exploration and interpretation of the data (beyond the original theoretical premises). Pre-coding "may give rise to provisional codes which are subsequently firmed up and 'validated' by ongoing data collection and analysis and may eventually be adopted as core codes and categories" (Layer 1998: 55). In this sense, emerging data that is not in keeping with the original theoretical frame is not overlooked – the theoretical frame is fluid, rather than rigid. Within this research many of the findings did not fit within Luhmann's social theory of trust. For example, Luhmann argues that 'choice' is an element of trust and as discussed below, when participants said they had 'no choice' but to trust, abductive inference provided a means of thinking beyond theory. Rather than interpreting participants' comments as being something other than trust (according to Luhmann), more consideration was given to the lay use of the word trust – does it differ to academic conceptualisations? In this sense, rather than refuting the theory, a more nuanced analysis of the findings presented an alternative theory. Lay conceptualisations may differ to sociological conceptualisations of trust. Abductive inference was essential for the emergence of this finding. Additionally, the use of abductive inference in the iterative process of pre-coding led us to further explore what participant 'trust' may be understood as theoretically. The process of identifying the notion of dependence began using abductive inference but was further explored using retroduction during memo-writing.

**4.15** Memo-writing requires the researcher to write notes to themselves, asking questions, identifying problems and suggesting connections about how the data has revealed concepts or categories via coding: 'Memo-writing therefore is meant to generate discussion and self-dialogue which fashions a conjunction between theoretical reflection and the practical issues surrounding data collection and analysis' (Layer 1998: 59)<sup>[2]</sup>. The process of memo-writing involves retroductive inference, and specifically, counterfactual thinking. Counterfactual thinking is a means of trying to understanding the conditions under which something occurs, and requires the researcher to reflect on and question their interpretation of the data, identifying how concepts emerged in a practical setting (beyond classical theory). According to Luhmann, the preconditions for trust are risk and choice – in the absence of choice, trust cannot exist. What exists in the absence of choice but the presence of risk in a medical situation? Asking these questions using retroductive inference led us to theorize that these conditions created a situation of dependence. Upon this discovery, we went back to the empirical and theoretical literature, to further refine and interpret the findings (Meyer and Ward 2009, forthcoming). This is discussed in greater detail in the discussion section of this article.

**4.16 Stage 6: Concretisation and contextualisation.** The importance of collecting data under specific conditions was stressed in this research. The aim was to interpret the meanings of certain mechanisms of trust as they came into view in a certain context. For example, trust in situations of risk. This is a means of contributing to *explanations* of concrete events and processes. Using this extreme case allowed for the discovery of the structural conditions of trust. However, the context in which the research is conducted is important to the analysis of the research. It is for this reason that we suggest that the research findings cannot be generalised but need to be further explored in different clinical settings. This stage is also important because it guides the researcher to distinguish between structural conditions and accidental circumstances. For example, a person with heart disease might have trust in any doctor in an emergency situation, which might suggest that risk plays a substantial role in trust. However, it is imperative that the researcher further examines the findings because the data might suggest that this specific participant has generalised trust in all doctors, no matter what the risk. In this case, it might not be risk that influences trust.

## Findings and Discussion

**5.1** The data presented herein are given only to provide a snapshot of findings useful for demonstrating the benefits of abductive and retroductive inference.

### Abduction

**5.2** Addressing participants' use of the word trust demonstrates the usefulness of abduction. As noted above, fundamentally abduction differs from deduction in that it builds on creativity and imagination as a means of forming associations that enable the researcher to discern relations and connections that are not evident or obvious (Habermas 1978). In the case of the research presented in this article, many of the findings fitted the mould of Luhmann's social theories of trust. The findings did, or did not prove to be trust based on Luhmann's conceptualisation. However, taking the analysis a step further and making abductive inferences revealed a previously unexplored distinction between trust and dependence. When asked about their trust in specific healthcare professionals, namely their GP and other doctors they receive information from regarding their heart disease, the notion of dependence (interpreted in this study from a sociological standpoint) emerged. This was particularly so when participants spoke of situations where they felt they had no choice but to trust doctors. For example, M2 said that you have to trust doctors because:

They're [doctors] the ones that have the knowledge and they're the ones that are in control of medicines and things like that. Where else are you going to go? I mean, you just have to do that. You've gotta have trust in – there are some people you know you've gotta have trust in.

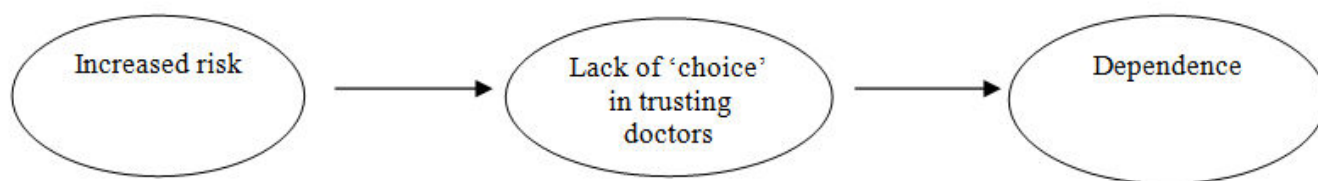
**5.3** Similarly, F11 also discussed her lack of choice in trusting doctors in emergency medical situations:

You haven't got any choice [to trust] though because I mean, you know, you're given a pre-med while you're in bed. Somebody wheels you down and then when you open your eyes you're back in your bed and for all you know, the bloke sweeping the floor could have done the thing. You don't know (F11).

**5.4** F11's response does not indicate she necessarily trusts the doctor who is performing the operation but rather, suggests that she has no agency or control in emergency situations. Her comment indicates that she recognises the level of vulnerability inherent in trusting but nonetheless, still places trust regardless of this vulnerability. Whilst she might indeed be trusting, her comment might also be interpreted as one which suggests that in times of vulnerability, some patients cannot afford to 'choose' to distrust and request a second opinion, they 'have' to 'trust'.

**5.5** Luhmann's conceptualisation suggests that trust requires an element of choice and hence, the comment that participants had "no choice but to trust" cannot be interpreted as trust. This finding was consistent across many of the participants who used the word 'trust' in the absence of what Luhmann would argue, is a precursor for trust, choice. The employment of abductive inference is evident in the analysis of the participant responses provided above. These findings do not mean that Luhmann's theory

of trust is false. The findings produce a new frame from which to view or interpret trust: 'The conclusion provides new insight as an outcome of our interpreting or explaining something' (Danermark, *et al.*, 1997: 90). If we were to use solely deductive inference and analyse the 'empirical', the theory would have been refuted – choice is *not* necessary for a patient to trust. However, the use of abductive inference led us to question whether patients are in fact trusting in situations of no choice. Two conclusions can be drawn: 1. Lay individuals may conceptualise trust differently than sociologists; 2. Luhmann's theory is not incorrect but rather, the concept to which participants are referring is not trust. Our reinterpretation (along with the use of retroductive inference) led us to develop a preliminary theory of dependence (Figure 2). The findings suggest that a lack of 'choice' in trust may play an influential role in patient dependence (Meyer and Ward 2009, forthcoming). Although the theory of dependence is in need of further investigation, it remains a useful framework for future applied research and would not have been identified in the absence of abductive inference.



**Figure 2.** A model of dependence

**5.6** Figure 2 is a preliminary model of dependence that is in need of more investigation. Whilst suggesting this distinction, we remain conscious of Scheutz's (1943: 149) postulate of adequacy whereby he suggests that the "construction of the scientific world is not an arbitrary act of the scientist which he can perform at his own discretion" and that the 'typical construction [of the scientific world needs to] be compatible with the totality of both our daily life and our scientific experience.' That is, we must also be conscious of our role as the researcher in the interpretation of data, and also that of the participant and the forces that shape their descriptions. This is facilitated by stage one of the research design whereby we reflect on our role in the analysis. In the case of this analysis, abductive inference has led us to also reflect on the use of the word 'choice' in lay accounts of trust. We recognise that participant descriptions may be inaccurate or that, contrary to Luhmann, trust can occur in situations of no choice, as is identified by other social theorists (Barbalet 2009). Deductive analysis led us to identify the findings that were in fitting with the theoretical framework – trust in situations of choice (Meyer and Ward 2009, forthcoming). Abductive analysis led us to identify findings outside of the theoretical frame – trust in situations of no choice. However, retroductive inference is required to reflexively question our analysis and subsequent construction of participants' use of the word trust, our theoretical interpretation, and to critically analyse the initial theoretical framework in daily life. As noted earlier, retroduction can be used to move beyond theories of trust, towards a more comprehensive understanding of the actual and real conditions under which patients' trust in practitioners occurs.

### **Retroduction**

**5.7** Retroduction is a means of seeking to clarify the basic prerequisites or conditions of social relationships, reasoning, knowledge, and people's action. In essence, retroduction is a form of analysis that provokes the researcher to identify the circumstance without which something cannot exist. Two strategies outlined by retroductive inference provide a means of investigating the prerequisites and conditions under which trust exists: counterfactual thinking and studying extreme cases.

**5.8 Counterfactual thinking.** Counterfactual thinking uses our stored knowledge and experience of social reality to explore questions such as 'could one imagine trust without X (e.g. risk)?' For example, with regards to investigating social theories of trust, Luhmann would argue that in order for trust to exist, there needs to be an element of risk involved (Luhmann 2005). In this case, the fundamental element of retroduction is trying to attain knowledge about what internal relations make X (trust) what it is. What makes trust possible? What properties must exist for trust to exist and be what trust is? A way of answering these questions is to address the fundamental conditions or structures involved in trust. What are the concrete and transcendental preconditions for trust? Without the use of retroductive inference, we would not have recognised the potential for a distinction between trust and dependence. The amount of risk evident in a patients' medical condition has an impact on their perception of whether or not they can choose to (dis)trust. The absence of "choice" from a Luhmannian perspective would negate trust. Using retroductive inference, we continued our analysis to try to understand what X is in the presence of risk, but the absence of choice – this led us to make the argument that from a social science perspective, patients in situations of no choice are dependent rather than trusting (Meyer and Ward 2009, forthcoming). For example, F4 said that if she was sick enough she: '... wouldn't care who [what doctor] it was as long as they could help' and that she would not have a choice when she needed immediate medical advice. She is suggesting that in situations of high risk, the capacity to reflexively trust might be removed. Regardless of (dis)trust, dependence is the outcome.

**5.9** F7 noted that as the level of risk and vulnerability decrease, patients become more reflexive and less dependent:

In an emergency, in the initial stages which has just happened to me I do whatever they say because I'm scared, I'm you know, I'm vulnerable and all the rest of it. When you just start getting over that as it happened to me, then you start 'hey hang on!'

**5.10** F7 is suggesting that as the level of risk decreases, patients' reflexive capacity to 'choose' increases. Her comment suggests that the level of risk inherent in a medical situation ultimately impacts whether or not the patient trusts and/or is dependent. By using counterfactual thinking, we were able to ask the question 'how much risk is needed for trust to occur and at what point are the risks so high that dependence is the outcome?'

**5.11** In application to this research, Danermark, *et al.* (1997: 101) might suggest:

If we consider presence and absence [of choice], the necessary and the contingent, the constitutive and the non-constitutive as opposites [trust and dependence], we can say that counterfactual thinking is at the same time, dialectic, since in this reasoning we examine something in relation to its opposite.

Although one might suggest that trust and dependence are not in essence, opposites (Barbalet 2009), this quote still provides insight suggesting that if we can differentiate between two similar concepts, we can more easily identify these concepts in empirical research.

**5.12 Studying extreme cases.** In order to answer questions regarding the nature of trust we can study various cases where the preconditions for trust appear more clearly than in other cases. It is for this reason that patients with heart disease were chosen as a vehicle for theoretical investigation. To investigate trust, cases where (dis)trust occurs were required for examination. Given the inherent risk involved in heart disease, Luhmann would argue that situations of (dis)trust would occur because risk has substantial influence over an individual's decision to trust (Meyer *et al.* 2008). Danermark *et al.*, (1997) among others (Tetlock and Belkin 1996), argue that there are two cases where the preconditions of X [trust] will appear much more clearly, one of which is extreme cases where mechanisms appear in an almost pure form. Carrying out this as a social experiment involves challenging the conditions of normality. For example, in researching people who have heart disease, certain mechanisms have been removed to provoke others to appear – that is, we specifically chose to interview people who have been in emergency situations, as well as individuals who only have experiences with doctors in routine medical visits. It has been argued that within routine medical appointments, 'the 'information rich' may have the means to investigate alternative therapies or seek forms of self healing when they mistrust their physician' (Meyer *et al.* 2008: 183). However, in situations of risk (when people with heart disease present at hospital in emergency situations), conditions for seeking alternative forms of help are challenged and this choice may be removed. Controlling the conditions under which people have been faced with the decision to (dis)trust allowed for the observation of cases where the preconditions for trust might differ between higher or lower risk situations. The selected case study presented suggests that patients' medical risks might define whether patients trust or are dependent. Thus, retroductive inference permitted a better understanding of hidden structures and mechanisms.

**5.13** Retroductive analysis also requires the researcher to consider the use of the word trust in everyday contexts. While the meaning of the word 'trust' in lay accounts may at times be regarded by sociologists as something other than trust, we must also recognise that lay conceptualisations of trust in everyday contexts may differ. Hardin (2001: 55) refers to differential lay uses of the word (e.g. trust in the absence of choice) as 'conceptual slippages'. It may be that in the everyday context, trust does not require choice. However, as social scientists we recognise that in the research context, our analysis and interpretation must remain consistent. Resultantly, we recognise that the use of the word 'choice' in lay accounts of trust is in need of further exploration.

## Conclusion

**6.1** Employing abductive and retroductive inference in the process of analysis makes it possible to explain events and the social processes that cause events. As outlined by Danermark *et al.* (2002: 74) this includes describing and conceptualizing the properties and mechanisms that make an 'event' happen, and then, describing how different mechanisms are apparent under different conditions. Re-description and re-contextualization, key features of abduction, give new meaning to already known phenomena and help social scientists to understand previously taken-for-granted phenomena in a novel way. The different and creative ways of relating research phenomena to new frames of reference, possible through abduction and retroduction, enables the researcher to make connections and form new ideas about something that is previously known but can be *identified* or *understood* in a different context. This expansion of knowledge is fundamental to progress in sociological research methodologies and theory.

**6.2** The use of abductive and retroductive inference is beneficial for the interpretation of qualitative data, providing a more nuanced analysis than solely deductive inference permits. As this article has demonstrated, the use of these underexplored forms of inference is beneficial for theory development, and for identifying findings that may remain unanalyzed in the absence of these forms of inference. The methods of abduction and retroduction may also be used to extend the analysis of research that is not theory driven and may add clarity to methods of analysis. For example, many researchers in the social sciences use methods of analysis borrowed from grounded theory. A criticism of constant comparative analysis is that researchers employing this method of analysis are often vague in their account of the analysis (Boeije 2002). In this way, the extension of the analysis which employs abductive and retroductive logic may be used for explanatory purposes.

**6.3** The tools borrowed from critical realism have not been applied previously to research investigating social theories of trust. This article provides evidence of the benefits of these forms of inference, and outlines a six-stage model for designing qualitative sociological research for academics interested in further exploring these tools. This article provides a detailed account of how abductive and retroductive tools are applicable in social research. Additionally, we highlight benefits of the application of this tool in terms of theory refinement, novel ways of analysing data, detailing previously uncultivated insight, and potential for generating new theories.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The empirical findings of this research serve the purpose of demonstrating the use and utility of abductive and retroductive inference in qualitative analysis. As such, the methods and findings sections are minimal and the researcher can be contacted for additional publications of these findings.

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed account of Layder's methods of analysis, see Layder (1998) Chapter 3.

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## Appendix 3

Lunnay, B., Borlagdan, J., McNaughton, D., & Ward, P. (2015). Ethical use of social media to facilitate qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25, 99–109.

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# Ethical Use of Social Media to Facilitate Qualitative Research

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## Abstract

Increasingly, qualitative health researchers might consider using social media to facilitate communication with participants. Ambiguity surrounding the potential risks intrinsic to social media could hinder ethical conduct and discourage use of this innovative method. We used some core principles of traditional human research ethics, that is, respect, integrity, and beneficence, to design our photo elicitation research that explored the social influences of drinking alcohol among 34 underage women in metropolitan South Australia. Facebook aided our communication with participants, including correspondence ranging from recruitment to feeding back results and sharing research data. This article outlines the ethical issues we encountered when using Facebook to interact with participants and provides guidance to researchers planning to incorporate social media as a tool in their qualitative studies. In particular, we raise the issues of privacy and confidentiality as contemporary risks associated with research using social media.

## Keywords

alcohol/alcoholism; ethics / moral perspectives; Internet; young adults; sociology

The endeavor to develop a methodologically rich relationship between researcher and research participant is leading qualitative health researchers to methodological innovations like social media. However, a lack of clarity surrounding the ethical issues of using social media could hinder ethical research conduct and discourage the use of social media in research practice. We suspect that both researchers and institutional regulatory bodies, which we term *Human Research Ethics Committees* (HRECs), err on the side of caution when using social media and risk missing out on the varied benefits of engaging with it. In general, researchers no longer rely solely on traditional forms of communication. Research communications have progressed toward social media, expanding the research repertoire in terms of recruitment and building rapport.

This expansion of repertoire partly addresses the communication preferences of today's research participants, who, like other citizens, interact daily in a networked world characterized by the increased use of technologies that blur the lines between public and private (Elliott & Urry, 2010). The use of social media in particular, is becoming a normalized practice in many people's everyday communications (Australian Interactive Media Association [AIMIA], 2013). In 2012, Google's "Our Mobile Planet" surveyed 1,000 Australian adults aged 18 to 64 and found that 78% liked to spend time on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, with 49% checking

their social media accounts at least once a day (Google, 2012). Furthermore, 52% owned a smartphone, and 83% used their smartphones for personal communication on social media (Google, 2012).

Globally, people's access to smartphones is commensurate to the high access level witnessed among Australians. The Allied Business Intelligence Research's Mobile Application Technologies Research Service predicted that by the end of 2013, the number of active smartphones worldwide would be approximately 1.4 billion (Allied Business Intelligence Research, 2013). This research service, which explores new technologies, also noted that the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the world population to be approximately 7 billion on March 12, 2012 (Goodkind, 2011). Of course, levels of access and engagement vary across populations, and we acknowledge that some groups use social media more moderately, if at all (Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

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If social media is so pervasive in many everyday relationships, what are the implications for researchers seeking to communicate with participants? A recent report of Australian Internet users revealed that although young people were strong social media users, Australians of all ages were beginning to engage in online communication, suggesting that social media might be fruitfully used to communicate with participants of varying demographics (AIMIA, 2013). People with ready access to social media also have access to new opportunities for communication, and most relevant to this article, expanded avenues for mediating relationships (Richardson & Hessey, 2009).

In this article, we use our research as a case example for researchers planning to incorporate social media in their qualitative studies. We designed our research using social media around the traditional ethical principles of respect, integrity, and beneficence. The process that we followed is detailed in the methods section. By designing our research with proven, relevant ethics guidelines (The National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 2013), we increased our chances of counteracting potential known risks.

In attempting to maintain these principles, we encountered challenges, which are worth exploring, to upholding privacy and confidentiality specific to social media. The section that details the benefits of using social media contains the key issues that arose when we used Facebook for research communication. Research data comprising interview excerpts and field notes illustrate how ethical human research might be compromised and highlight contemporary ethical dilemmas specific to social media.

We demonstrate our efforts to remedy these ethical dilemmas and provide guidance for other researchers on how to ethically use social media. Our practical ideas can help researchers to assure HRECs that they are using social media in ethically sound ways. Concomitantly, our insights might broaden HRECs' "social media literacy" and understanding of contemporary ethical issues.

For groups with limited access to social media, there might be more suitable ways to communicate than those that rely on technology. Social media offers a relatively unrestricted way to interact with participants, uninhibited by fiscal resources or time, but only if participants have ready access to digital media such as computers and smartphones with Internet connections. Admittedly, accessibility does not necessarily equate with ability. These caveats of accessibility and digital literacy could exclude groups from participating in research facilitated by social media. The lure of new technology does not wash away existing inequalities. Practically and ethically, social media use should not unduly skew the research sample. The gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not, described as the "digital

divide" (Warschauer, 2004), highlights the major ethical issues of inclusion and accessibility.

A burgeoning literature engages with digital exclusion as a sign of disadvantage (see, for example, Helsper, 2008; Martin, 2005). Literature also critiques research approaches that use social media for their suitability and ethics relative to the demographics of the participants (Tavani, 2003; Warschauer, 2004). Conversely, there is skepticism surrounding the existence of a digital divide, particularly given the rapid diffusion of the Internet and subsequent lessening of disparate access to "new" media (Compaine, 2001). It is not within the remit of this article to explore or contribute to this debate, but we flag this issue for consideration by researchers who employ methods that require digital access. For participants with Internet access, social media like Facebook might enhance communication beyond what is possible without the aid of technology.

## Background

We wrote this article in response to researchers' inquiries because they wished to gain insight into our experience using social media to facilitate research interactions. These inquiries were initially directed to our institution's HREC, the Flinders University Social and Behavioral Research Ethics Committee. In turn, the Committee referred questions to us because we had demonstrated ethical research conduct when innovatively using Facebook for our research communications. We had developed more practical knowledge of the particular ethical issues of using this social media than the HREC members, so we became a source of advice for fellow researchers.

For this article, we gathered that advice and responded to some areas of likely concern to HRECs, for example, facilitating research interactions and sharing material for analysis. Our experience lies with using Facebook, although some of our advice might apply to other social media with Internet interactions (Queensland University of Technology, 2013). We focus on guiding the ethical use of social media as a tool to facilitate interactions for research purposes rather than contribute to ongoing debates on the ethics of studies that collect social media-related data (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Orton-Johnson, 2010; Ward, Henderson, Coveney, & Meyer, 2012). By "facilitating interactions," we refer to using social media to contact participants for recruitment, follow-up, mutual feedback, and sharing research data.

Separate ethical issues arise in using social media for data collection, including the collation of its publicly available information and researching Internet-based phenomena. In conjunction with the Association of Internet Researchers' ethics working group, researchers

Markham and Buchanan (2012) are developing guidelines for these circumstances in *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research*. The research we undertook differs because we used social media to facilitate interactions with participants and as a temporary repository for research data shared online but discussed in person offline. This is an example of what Bruckman (2002) calls “situated research,” reminding us that research using the Internet occurs in a particular social context, and therefore, online research should have an offline component.

## Research Case Study

We used Facebook to facilitate in-depth explorative photo elicitation research with 34 young women, who had some experience with drinking alcohol. They were aged 14 to 17 and resided in metropolitan South Australia. We sought to capture their perspectives on varying levels of drinking experience at the highest exposure period to social influences to drink, that is, when they commenced drinking (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2011).

We asked participants to photograph aspects of their social lives that they considered relevant to drinking. The photographs were then used as a methodological tool to encourage them to tell their stories (Harper, 2002) and elicit a deeper response than from a conventional interview (Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Torronen, 2002). Using this method undertaken in person (not online), we explored how participants constructed the meaningful place of drinking in their social lives and how they formed and expressed their alcohol-related conceptions, decisions, and behaviors.

We adopted an interview format using various topical prompts rather than a more structured schedule of questions; we could then respond flexibly to the situational dynamics and create the kind of mutual reciprocity that Jack Douglas (1985) described in *Creative Interviewing*. Using NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012) qualitative analysis software, we recorded, transcribed, and coded interviews. In this article, we have provided excerpts derived from these transcripts and the researcher’s field notes. The use of pseudonyms preserves participant anonymity. A previous article contains more in-depth details of the study (Lunnay, Ward, & Borlagdan, 2011).

## Sample

Given the focus of our research was to elucidate the social influences of drinking, we initially recruited participants from self-selected friendship groups (2–6 members) to retain the social structure in which alcohol-related

decisions are typically made and to gain insight into the group dynamics that affect drinking outcomes. We also conducted some individual interviews to capture abstainers’ experiences. For recruiting participants, we used nonprobabilistic sampling to identify respondents according to their experiences of a phenomenon (Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998). Participants came from various socioeconomic backgrounds according to the Weberian notion of class embedded in Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984, 1985) ontology that includes noneconomic, socially determined aspects of opportunity, like social and cultural resources.

## Ethics Approval

**Project approval.** We received ethics approval from the Flinders University Social and Behavioral Research Ethics Committee to conduct our research. The inclusion of Facebook was an iterative improvement to our method. We initially did not use Facebook to facilitate participant interactions but included it partway through our research when we realized that we were spending considerable time on administration, that is, on just implementing our method.

The logistics of coordinating group meetings with participants and organizing photographs to be shared became cumbersome, and we risked participant fatigue before the research had begun. When we queried the suitability of our processes with a participant, she responded, “Why don’t we just use Facebook? We use it all the time anyway.” Another suggested, “You might not think it’s appropriate but you can be my friend on Facebook if you want, just ask me.” Similarly, when we discussed our sample with a participant to ascertain whether she thought we had omitted a particular type of young woman, she replied, “You can be friends with me on Facebook if you like, add me, I can link you with people.”

To make our research method more feasible, we submitted an amendment to our institution’s HREC and sought permission to facilitate our research communication through Facebook. This complicated process involved various queries from our HREC and several revisions to our initial ethics application before it was approved. The HREC’s queries pertained to uploading visual material to Facebook, specifically, whether participants could see other participants’ photographs and whether a participant could repost another participant’s potentially compromising photograph. Other concerns centered on what would happen to the Facebook “friendship” and “page” after we completed our research. Here, we explain how we remedied these concerns and how researchers can make a case for ethically using Facebook.

**Participant consent.** Given the sensitivity of information the underage participants shared for our research, the

participant simply accepting the researcher's friend request and allowing entry to their social media pages (to access the "message" function and the "events" calendar where the research page was created) did not constitute consent. The exchange of photographs warranted detailed written consent, as we will discuss shortly. Obviously, a raft of separate, although related, ethical considerations for the photo elicitation method exist. Visual researchers have addressed these elsewhere (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001; Wiles et al., 2008). However, some ethical considerations for using photographs cross over because of the social media function to share, view, and "tag" photographs of oneself and others taken in social settings. Facebook's visual aspects pose substantial risk to privacy and research participants' potential manipulation.

In addition to formal written consent to take part in interviews from both participants and their parents/caregivers, we gained consent from participants to use their photographs through a release form that we specifically designed for our research. On this form, participants opted to give different levels of consent for the use of their photographs: (a) not for display/background analysis only, (b) display in thesis materials, or (c) display in academic articles and presentations. Participants maintained ownership of their photographs. The potential risk of unauthorized publication of the participant's photos was circumvented using this release form.

Although we assured participants that all information provided to the researcher would be treated in the strictest confidence, we outlined that the researcher was legally obliged to disclose information related to illegal activity if requested by relevant authorities. For this reason, participants were given instructions on what to photograph and were discouraged from photographing illegal behavior, nudity, or other inappropriate behaviors. Participants were encouraged to seek verbal permission from people not involved in the research whose photograph might be visible to research participants in the group but preferably not to submit photographs that included people not known to the participant or the researcher and not aware of the research project.

**Parents/caregivers consent.** Parents/caregivers provided informed consent for the young women in their care to participate in our research. We provided an information sheet that outlined what the research would entail. We were aware that the young women's participation might prompt their parents/caregivers to ask questions about their social lives, including alcohol consumption. We asked parent/caregivers to respect the participants' privacy and advised them that they would not have access to research materials including photographs or recordings of interviews.

## How Facebook Was Used

For our research, we had approval to create a private Facebook page with the "events" function. The unique page was accessible only to those involved in the research, and this private event page was accessible by invitation only, that is, it was not visible to uninvited Facebook friends who searched the Facebook pages of invited "guests." We created a unique Facebook project page to facilitate all research interactions per participating group for group interviews or per participating individual for individual interviews. When a group participated in the event, all its members had access to the same Facebook page, and we advised them to maintain the confidentiality of fellow group members.

We used the primary researcher's private Facebook profile and created the project page within this profile. We followed Ann Oakley's guidelines for designing qualitative research with the benefit of a reciprocal relationship between interviewer and interviewee. She advocated for an approach to interviewing where the interviewer invests their own personal identity in the research relationship (Oakley, 1981). Building on this emphasized value of self-disclosure through research practice (Grbich, 2004), to achieve reciprocity, participants in our research had full access to the primary researcher's personal Facebook page, as she had to theirs. This meant that the participants could see her personal photographs and read personal comments from friends posted on her "wall" and so forth.

However, researchers using social media need to be cognizant that if they choose to be completely reciprocal, open, and inclusive, all personal content on social media will be seen by their research participants, including comments made by others on the researcher's social media page that could reveal aspects of the researcher's personal life. Researcher safety warrants as much consideration as participant safety. As Morse (2007) asserts, the researcher's safety is one of the least addressed, yet most important, considerations in qualitative inquiry. Researchers could create a Facebook account solely for the purpose of their research as an alternative to using their personal Facebook account. However, this depersonalized option would not likely be undertaken by a reflexive researcher who would see the reciprocal nature of sharing involved in social media as conducive to the rapport that is key to high-quality research.

Although we were keen to foster rapport with participants, we were transparent about the purpose of the Facebook friendship. We ensured participants knew the "friendship" was purely for research rather than for social connection, and we "unfriended" them at the conclusion of the research. Because all relationships on Facebook are labeled "friendships," we considered it



necessary to clarify the difference between social friendship and friendship for research purposes. Participants needed to understand this so that their expectations of the research friendship aligned with our purposes.

**Privacy settings.** When users create profile pages on Facebook, they can nominate privacy settings to control who can access their profiles. To ensure our research project page was secure and private, a colleague attempted to view it using a fake profile. This action confirmed that privacy settings effectively prevented access by anyone other than the researcher and the participants. The privacy setting also meant that the participant's and the researcher's other Facebook friends not participating in the research could not see a participant's membership or activity on the project page. In addition, the researcher did not disclose to her friends that she was using her Facebook account for research. We accounted for the risk of friends who happened to be mutual to the participant and researcher but not known to each other through the research project (i.e., private friendships), by customizing the privacy settings to "block" the researcher's friends list and making it inaccessible to participants. We used Facebook to improve our access to and communication with participants on three levels: (a) engagement, (b) retention, and (c) facilitation of data sharing.

**Engagement.** We used Facebook to discuss the logistics of meetings with participants. Using the Facebook events function, which enables a user (i.e., researcher) to create and host an event and invite Facebook friends (i.e., research participants), we "posted" interview times and locations. A virtual event can contain details of an actual event; this means invited guests can discuss online the logistics of an in-person meeting or share data on a repository page.

**Retention.** Through Facebook, we could readily contact participants to seek clarification on items they raised (e.g., slang terms specific to groups, alcohol, or consumption practices). Using Facebook also assisted our process of data analysis and enabled us to check with participants that we had interpreted their responses accurately. Through the initial consent process, we clarified to the participants their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Information sharing.** The events page functioned as a temporary repository for research data, which was subsequently downloaded for analysis pending participants' permission, which was obtained through the aforementioned photograph release form. Participants could upload photographs with captions to share only with the researcher and fellow group members.

## Research Design: Applying Traditional Ethical Principles

The following section describes our research design to demonstrate how the traditional ethical principles of respect, integrity, and beneficence, as set out in the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (The National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 2013), can be used not only to inform contemporary research but also to reveal the particular risks of online research communication.

In human research ethics, the concept of respect idealizes the participant's welfare and acknowledges that any interaction has the potential to harm. Furthermore, a researcher's level of compliance with integrity is a mark of merit. The researcher is responsible for conducting studies ethically despite using innovative approaches that can challenge integrity because of factors seemingly outside the researcher's control—as in modern communication technologies. The last ethical issue is beneficence, that is, whether the benefits of the research approach justify or outweigh the potential burden to participants. We acknowledge that a level of bias is inherent in a researcher's assessment within this ethical domain. Social media, like any method that blurs the line between public and private, could qualify as an ethically risky research domain (Nind, Wiles, Bengry-Howell, & Crow, 2012).

We took various measures to respect our participants and recognize their essential role in generating the research outputs. During the research process, we sought to empower them by letting them control the interaction conditions whenever possible. As mentioned, we considered participants' preferred communication methods and used Facebook in response to their requests because we wanted participants to be comfortable sharing aspects of their social life (e.g., who their friends were, what they looked like when they went out to a party, what types of drinks they consumed, who they were with when drinking). This provided insight into their social group's values relative to alcohol consumption and to aspects of their sociality that might affect alcohol consumption decisions.

In addition, achieving participant autonomy through data collection requires participants to be equal data gatherers, rather than subjects. First, we facilitated participant autonomy through Facebook because participants freely chose the material they wished to upload. Conversely, participants could withdraw material from Facebook to prevent us from using it in our research. Although there were limitations to this flexibility because what participants said was influenced by how they wished to be perceived. This iteratively changed during participation given our

research involved repeat consultations. Regardless, our aim to demonstrate respect was inflected by a desire to develop rapport, and giving participants' control over their research material was therefore our priority.

Participants could complete the research task at times convenient relative to their existing commitments (e.g., school, work, sports, leisure). This was important, given the highly compartmentalized nature of young adult's time (Borlagdan et al., 2010). Furthermore, participants commonly responded that they enjoyed the research task. We believe that the familiarity and convenience of using Facebook helped determine their enjoyment and benefited our research quality.

Second, during all Facebook interactions, we endeavored to act with integrity and discretion so that outsiders were unlikely to know that a Facebook user was involved in a research project or that we were using Facebook as a communication tool. We were particularly cognizant of the potential for personal information to be taken out of a private context, perhaps unintentionally. To prevent this, we restricted ourselves to the private project page, although we had full access to participants' personal pages.

Using only the project page avoided exposing participants' identities; specifically, it ensured that participants' Facebook friends could not look at the "activity" on their personal "walls" and see that they were involved in a research project. Friends could communicate on walls by writing messages or posting links, photographs, or images generally viewable to other Facebook users. We also avoided the very popular status updates, which provide short public messages on what the Facebook user was doing or thinking.

Third, practicing beneficence was challenging, given that the photo elicitation research with underage women drinkers entered realms often perceived as ethically risky—the Internet, social media, visual content, and illegal consumption (Nind et al., 2012). Research innovation and responsibility is a potentially high-risk endeavor and is a complicated process that researchers must carefully manage. Ethical research must not only avoid harm but also balance risk, efficacy, justice, and respect to promote integrity, quality, and transparency (Nind et al., 2012). Researchers need a reasonable rationale for engaging in risky studies to improve understanding and benefit the community beyond just proving or disproving their hypothesis.

To practice beneficence, we became proficient in the functions of Facebook, particularly the privacy functions. As mentioned, we set up the project page in a way that reduced chances of jeopardizing the participants' confidentiality. We also sought to ensure that participants understood differences between public and private material on the Internet (e.g., a private Facebook message is more private than posting a message to a friend's

Facebook wall). Even if the participants did not use these practices in their personal communications, we upheld privacy for the purposes of our research and for fostering a respectful relationship with and among participants.

## The Benefits of Using Social Media

The benefits of using social media as a research tool included improved facilitation and development of rapport through reciprocal information sharing with participants. We believe that this enabled us to produce richer data and deeper analysis; although we observed these results, they were not an outcome of process evaluation. Specifically, we used Facebook to ease the repeated online and offline interactions necessary for interpretative validity. This method helped us to facilitate high-quality research verifiable against a social theory, rather than a simple description of the phenomenon.

On a logistical level, using Facebook to facilitate engagement with participants made coordinating face-to-face meetings simpler, and we believe this mitigated participant attrition because only 3 participants of 34 withdrew from our study. Prior to using Facebook, the photo elicitation method required us to repeat interactions with participants (i.e., two, sometimes three meetings), plus additional telephone conversations just to arrange sharing research material (e.g., to provide and collect consent forms, exchange a digital camera, download and view photographs). This original approach was weak in that participants conveyed important information when we met to exchange research materials (e.g., a hard drive of photographs). The information they gave at such times would have been ideal for the more formal photo elicitation interview. Using the Facebook project page to exchange research materials enabled us to bypass in-person data "swap meets" and to reserve the participants' energy and enthusiasm for the main event.

Despite these improvements in communication, we encountered challenges pertaining to privacy and confidentiality specific to social media that are worth exploring to inform future qualitative research. Data excerpts are included in the explanation below only for illustration. To reiterate, we used pseudonyms in the data excerpts to preserve anonymity. With new technology such as social media, there are considerations in addition to the traditional ethical principles outlined above; these additional considerations are to protect privacy and limit risks that diverge from conventional notions of these concepts. The considerations relate to the aforementioned hazy spatial boundaries of social media pages (Elgesem, 2002), that is, within "public" cyberspace, "private" material can be dispersed rapidly in unsolicited ways (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Orton-Johnson, 2010).

We found that social media privacy settings can provide only limited protection if not correctly customized. This caution is as relevant to protecting the researcher from unethical conduct as it is to protecting the participants. The privacy settings of Facebook are not straightforward and always fluctuate because of new features being constantly added. The level of privacy a Facebook user can achieve when they set their Facebook page using the default privacy settings (i.e., selecting access for “friends only”) offers a basic level of security but does not suffice to protect information. The settings require some customization for securing research information. Prior to initiating a study, researchers need to actively use social media and learn the intricacies of these privacy settings. In any case, researchers should not assume that privacy settings are fail safe, especially if they are “luddites” to the medium.

In using social media, there are inherent difficulties encountered when seeking to protect against unethical behavior. These difficulties relate to ambiguity surrounding selective information disclosure, that is, what information is public and what information is private. This includes, but is not limited to, issues of hacking, identity theft, privacy, and data ownership. As previously outlined, our participants owned the data (e.g., photographs) they uploaded to the project page, so they could rightly access and download their material from Facebook. In participant groups, individuals also had access to others’ materials, and the researcher had limited control over its further use. There was a risk that participants could share material with Facebook users outside the group, and it could then be used to intimidate, bully, or humiliate.

In our experience, from both the perspective of conducting research using social media and as serving members of HRECs, the ethical complexity of social media centers on this notion of publicly available private information. We agree that traditional expectations of privacy need to be updated to account for the unclear distinction between public and private domains that is encapsulated in social media (Zimmer, 2010). To limit the risk of the private information participant’s loaded to Facebook from being publicly spread, we improved our knowledge of Facebook’s privacy functions. Even so, for conducting research in online contexts, we found that the division between private and public is not readily identifiable (Elgesem, 2002). For example, to edit information on a certain social networking service account, the social networking sites are password protected. This prevents unauthorized user(s) from adding, changing, or removing personal information, pictures, and/or other data. Despite this, researchers and participants must be aware that any information posted on the Internet enters a virtual public space.

The following excerpt from an interview with 17-year-olds Zoe and Kiara showed how participants might forget the public aspects of social media:

Kiara: The other day, we were writing so everyone could look at my [Facebook] wall, and Zoe was like, “Oh, wow! I forget these things are public.”

Zoe: I just say, whatever, like everyone who’s reading this, please stop.

Although participants willingly offered to share information, they did also consider the privacy issues associated with Facebook. Fifteen-year-old Tayla, whose consideration of “appropriateness” prior to our gaining HREC approval for using Facebook, was detailed in our field notes:

Tayla had an iPhone [smartphone] and showed me photographs of her friends drinking Passion Pop [cheap, sweet sparkling wine] and eating blancmange, each holding a full bottle and posing for the photo, with the bottle in full view like a trophy. She asked if that’s the sort of thing I want to see in the photographs participants take for the research, and then she said, “you might not think it’s appropriate but you can be my friend on Facebook if you want, just ask me, there are heaps of these types of photos on there I can show you.”

Needless to say, we did not take up Tayla’s offer. We did not have informed consent from her friends, but her willingness to share is notable. It was evident that as adult researchers, our definition of privacy might differ from that of a younger participant. According to Livingstone’s (2008) research on young adult’s use of social networking sites, their definition of privacy is “not tied to the disclosure of certain types of information, rather a definition centered on having control over who knows what about you.”

We believe that the researcher is responsible for making participants aware of the privacy expectations that specifically pertain to using social media for the purposes of research. These expectations are likely to differ greatly from young participants’ usual understanding of information sharing and privacy on social media. We suggest that researchers educate participants about different interpretations of privacy and the diverse ways in which information can be gathered and publicly disseminated through the Internet, despite best efforts to uphold ethical practice.

In addition, ethical issues surrounding data and image storage or destruction remain. Researchers must be diligent in removing all research material when their project is completed and their ethics approval ceases. Even so, whether information uploaded to the Internet can ever truly be removed is uncertain. We encourage researchers to investigate the social medium’s particular

terms of service and parties' rights pertaining to uploaded information.

Using social media for research that might benefit participants requires tailored approaches, for instance, reflecting the preferences and interaction modes characteristic of an individual or a group. Sometimes these are not traditional, for instance, use of social media, to retain participation and appropriately provide findings to participants. Research participation can be empowering for participants when researchers use creative methods that allow participants to express their voices in ways that suit them (Nind et al., 2012). We achieved this by using Facebook because our participants were already proficient at using social media for communication. In fact, we included Facebook in our research process only because the participants named it as their preferred mode of contact. Nevertheless, our success in using social media ethically depended on ensuring participants understood that the Facebook friendship was solely for research purposes. Researchers must maintain this essential ethical boundary. For example, 16-year-old Janella posted self-deprecating status updates to which we would have responded, had we been friends offline. The researcher expressed this tension in the field notes:

It is difficult not to respond to Janella's negative comments that convey feelings of worthlessness and low self esteem, but I need to maintain the level of respectful distance we agreed on as part of the terms of the Facebook friendship, that being one for research only. That said, it was made clear to participants that we were legally obliged to disclose information relating to illegal activity if requested by relevant authorities and that we had a moral duty to report any belief that abuse or harm was occurring in a participant's life.

As this example indicated, we had to reaffirm the terms of the research-only relationship throughout the process.

## Discussion

Our anecdotal experiences suggest that researchers are concerned about what to include in their applications for permission from HRECs regarding the use of social media. This might be because of concern that they will not be able to protect privacy and anonymity or that it will be difficult to convince HRECs that this is possible because of the existing viewpoint that social media is too risky. In *Risk Society*, Ulrich Beck (1992) contends that modernization and innovation inherently bring risks and insecurities. Therefore, we suggest that researchers assess ethical risks according to the three aforementioned traditional human research principles that HRECs are familiar with. Then, researchers must present a nuanced case for

approval to use social media. Their case must account for risks that might not be captured by these principles, as we did by acknowledging the issues of privacy and confidentiality.

Because using social media for research is ethically unproven, the burden of proof of ethical practice lies with the researcher. Concomitantly, "progressive" research methods and processes will likely become increasingly popular. Besides the researcher, HRECs as a whole and their individual members should become familiar with ethical issues arising from the use of social media, particularly as they relate to traditional concepts, and prepare themselves to respond suitably to researcher's ethics applications. In addition, researchers should be realistic and transparent about the risks inherent in online research.

We must also mention the interactions among methodological innovations, ethics, and the potentially constraining role of institutionalized research ethics. According to Zygmunt Bauman's (2006) notion of "liquid fear," human fear often derives from the uncertainty that regulates behavioral responses even in the absence of a direct threat or imminent danger. If researchers and HREC members know little about the ethical risks of using social media, they might develop irrational fears that distract attention from the actual, possible risks. Situating modern research approaches within traditional ethical frameworks can expose contemporary risks, as we have demonstrated herein. Regulation in relation to social media use needs to be considered. Given the innovation in using social media as a research tool, researchers might want to help HRECs increase their social media literacy; subsequently, researchers must practice in an ethically appropriate way to build trust among all parties. We recommend this in line with Niklas Luhmann, who believes that only in cases of reduced risk and increased familiarity can we build trust (Luhmann, 2000; Ward et al., 2012).

The term *ethics creep* describes the trend toward intensification within institutions or systems for regulating ethical research conduct (Haggerty, 2004). Researchers Guta, Nixon, and Wilson (2012) have expressed concern that the increasingly formalized structure for managing risks and protection in research ethics might position researchers as innately unethical academics whose practice needs to be monitored. The default position of some HREC members might be a presumption of negligence until a researcher can provide compelling evidence of a plan for ethical conduct. Arguably, this has to be the case, given the relative newness of social media, to ensure ethical conduct and the protection of all involved parties. Scrutiny to avoid an issue would likely be magnified in relation to any new practice or one that differs from mainstream methods or forums for research.

We believe that the researcher should provide evidence of knowledge of the capacity, reach, and privacy



functions of the chosen social media for HRECs to endorse researcher's use. Researchers might, and probably should, be apprehensive in applying for ethics approval without this understanding. In addition, if the researcher does not convey this understanding in an ethics application, HREC members are unlikely to be convinced that social media can be used "safely." In our experience, the researcher can make HREC members aware of the social medium's functions, so they can be confident of the privacy protection capabilities and uphold their responsibility to monitor ethical research conduct. Such assurances also mean that an HREC might be less likely to rebuke a researcher's application to use social media. At least, it prompts dialogue for outlining the possibilities of ethically incorporating social media as a research tool.

Given the potential risks to privacy and confidentiality intrinsic to the Internet, researchers must be clear on the benefits of engaging with social media and avoid following trends or being enticed by the popularity of an innovative method. Innovative research is not necessarily good research (Hammersley, 2008). Instead, good research methods capably address relevant research questions in an ethical manner. Similarly, the approaches to recruitment and subsequent participant interactions, which achieve the necessary depth of contemporary qualitative research, require new practices responsive to the use of technologies, specifically, social media.

It is also essential to ethical conduct that the use of social media is integrated into the research process rather than just a novel way to access data for analysis. For example, it was essential to our research methodology that participants captured, then viewed, and discussed photographs as a group. The capabilities of Facebook helped us to engage with the groups. For our research, it was important to see the photographs that arose from group situations because they reflected the social hierarchies within that particular group.

In summary, we suggest that qualitative researchers should be encouraged to use social media as part of an ethically sound research process, but only if the benefit of this innovative method outweighs potential burdens to privacy and confidentiality. We found social media to be a practical research tool, adaptable for interacting with participants who already engage with social media for everyday communications. As demonstrated herein, using social media offers an innovative platform to facilitate the complex, detailed level of interaction with participants that is required in good qualitative research (Horsburgh, 2003; Popay et al., 1998) but can be difficult to achieve using traditional not digital methods. We hope the guidance offered here encourages qualitative researchers and HRECs to engage with, rather than shy away

from, using social media to facilitate ethical research relationships.

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