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## **“Drinking definitely wasn’t something that we’d seen anybody do”: The relevance of childhood experiences of family drinking for parenting strategies of alcohol-socialisation**

The importance of inter-generational relations in informing adolescents’ socialisation with alcohol is well recognised (Bremmer et al, 2011). Various studies in different national contexts have confirmed the contribution of parental behaviour and advice in shaping adolescents’ awareness of drink and alcohol consumption, though how parental influence can be effectively channelled in intervention programmes is less clear (Foxcroft and Lowe 1991 and 1997; Ledoux et al, 2002; Randolph et al, 2010; Shucksmith, 1997). A recent European wide study challenged central assumptions that ‘tough love’ authoritative parenting styles (Birdwell et al, 2012), characterised by both discipline and warmth, are the most effective way through which parents should seek to influence children’s alcohol consumption into adulthood (Calafet et al. 2014). Instead, Calafet et al (2014) found that it was parental warmth, rather than discipline, that was important. Yet while parental behaviours and strategies may present politically expedient and cost-effective ways of tackling social problems associated with young people’s drinking, little consideration has been given to how parents themselves draw on their own childhood experiences of alcohol as a guide to inform their children’s behaviour.

One of the most important unknowns that might go some way to developing a working model of socialisation strategies is the relevance of parents’ own childhood experiences of family drinking. Our proposal is that to understand how parents may influence adolescents’ drinking behaviours it is relevant to consider how they themselves grew up with and learnt about alcohol consumption. In this paper we present an analysis of 21 parental narrative accounts of family drinking to examine the relationship between parents’ childhood

experiences and their own attempts to socialise their teenage children around drinking. Our analysis considers how parents remember their childhood experiences and second, how these memories are relevant in their adult lives. Our interpretation of parental strategies is underpinned by our understanding that parents do not necessarily seek to reproduce their own experiences when parenting their own children.

In order to develop a more dynamic account of socialisation our account of drinking across generations draws on two important theoretical approaches to family and life course. The first is that of personal life (Smart, 2007), which draws on the conceptualisation of family practices to emphasise what family actually does and is imagined to do, or be, and thus widens the remit of family beyond the immediacy of parent-child relationships, to include other family members and friends and how these relationships are mediated within specific contexts. The second approach relates to time, which is intrinsic to debates about socialisation yet one that is rarely explored. Our analysis considers how memory is essential to socialisation over the life course through considering how parents remember their own childhoods. This approach seeks to contextualise drinking across generations and to reveal the varied and non-linear ways in which family relationships are remembered and consolidated through narratives of drinking and alcohol. This paper begins with a review of theorisations of personal lives and memory and recent empirical evidence on family socialisation to alcohol to outline the significance of the inter-generational context of family drinking behaviours. The analysis of empirical material uses biographical-narrative accounts of parents' drinking stories to reveal the variability of drinking biographies over time.

### **Family practices, time and memory**

One of the limitations of existing research on family socialisation of alcohol is that the family is assumed to adhere to an isolated nuclear model that prioritises relationships between parents and dependent children (Barker and Hunt, 2004) and there is little evidence about the importance of wider family relations. Yet in other areas of family research, on-going debates about the importance of family versus relationality retain a sense of family that cannot be reduced to specific closed relationships, such as those between parents and dependent children. As Ribbens McCarthy (2012) suggests the family is more than a constellation of relations, but rather takes its form in how these connections are realised and experienced. Smart (2007) develops these ideas in writing about personal life, which embraces the variability of different personal connections, including those that are imagined as well as those that are realised.

The importance of family rituals and memories in shaping family practices are referred to by Gillis (1996) as the 'family we live by', which may be distinguished from the family we live with. Family memories and shared practices may be used as a way of framing what the family should be and how this ideal might be realised through practice. Memories are also selective, as family members and events may be variously forgotten or recalled for distinctive purposes. From a family practices perspective, how and what children learn about alcohol should to be conceptualised as a dynamic process and not one that is determined by static family characteristics or fixed behaviours. Socialisation is an active and contingent process that does not happen in a vacuum and for parents, the resources that they draw on will include their own memories of family drinking practices. In other words parents themselves have been exposed to drinking behaviours and we suggest that these experiences are relevant in shaping their current practice.

The recall of past events is often incomplete. Memories might be both vague and vivid, that is the actual event may be blurred but the feelings associated with it may be very vivid. We should not assume that memories are fixed entities in the same way that family practices are not taken as given ways of doing, but are contingent on family resources and moral identities (Reavey and Brown, 2006). Thus our interest in documenting how parents remember their own family socialisation to alcohol is not directed towards identifying verifiable memories, but rather, following Haaken (1998), is concerned with the processes of transformative remembering. From this perspective it is not the validity or truth of memory that matters, but the narrative structures that are created through the act of remembering. In other words it is how we remember and the meanings ascribed to the recall of events that are important, rather than what is remembered.

This interpretation of remembering also necessitates a theorisation of time and family practices. Rather than linear and deterministic interpretation of time, Grosz (1999) considers how time can be more usefully theorised as difference. Grosz's conceptualisation of becomings brings together writers, such as Nietzsche, Bergson and Deleuze, who have 'insisted on the fundamental openness of time to futurity' (ibid.; 3). She argues that these theorists share a commonality in their approach to the creative force of time; 'a force whose movements and operations have an inherent element of surprise, unpredictability, or newness' (ibid.: 4). This creativity contrasts with interpretations of time that emphasizes progress, accumulation and development. The conceptualisation of becomings does not therefore dismiss the relevance of memories of past events, but recognises that these may be utilised in varied and creative ways, and they are not deterministic.

Probyn (1996) develops this theorisation of becomings in her re-examination of childhood through queer theory. She defines her task as being to free childhood from its moral boundaries, and in doing so offers a different conceptualisation of time, memory and childhood. She argues that childhood should not be assumed to be fixed in origin but is more appropriately conceived of as 'suspended beginnings'. She suggests that:

'images of childhood, from childhood, pull us back to a space that cannot be revisited; they throw us into a present becoming, profoundly disturbing any chronological ordering of life and being' (1996: 103).

Probyn considers how, if childhood is theorised as suspended beginnings, earlier experiences and memories are not fixed in time. The significance of Probyn's approach is that it challenges the assumption that childhood experiences have a direct and fixed outcome on future events. This suggests a very different way of conceptualising family socialisation across generations, particularly that parents' evocation of memory is not necessarily about the persistence of practices and accumulation over time, but is as much to do about freeing parents of the necessity of having to act in a certain way. Theorising childhood as suspended beginnings can be productive if it succeeds in unhinging childhood from its moral structure, that is childhood should be more than a time for shaping future adult behaviours. At the same time it can reveal different modalities of doing (in our case drinking) and different possibilities of learning about and being socialised to drink. Moreover this rethinking of childhood raises the possibility that the recall of memory has less to do with how and what parents think their children should learn, but involves parents revisiting their own drinking identities. Socialisation can be a multidirectional process, it is not just children that learn from parents (see van der Vorst et al, 2006), but challenges

parents to interrogate their own drinking practices and how these reconcile with their own childhood experiences.

### **Family and alcohol**

There is considerable academic and policy interest in the family context of adolescents' drinking and in documenting the resources that parents can draw on to support children's awareness of responsible drinking. Young people's drinking is central to alcohol awareness strategies not only because of the amount of alcohol that young people consume (Measham, 2008) but also because adolescence is a time in which formative behaviours are developed and bringing about cultural change has been a mainstay of UK alcohol policy (Nicholls, 2012). Yet, existing research demonstrates variation in both parental approaches to socialisation and the effectiveness of parental supervision of adolescents' drinking. This variation relates to family structure, parental income and education (Brown and Rinelli, 2010; Hansen and Chen, 2007; Ledoux et al, 2002; Melotti et al, 2011; Seljamo et al, 2006; Velleman et al, 2005;). However there is less evidence on the reasons for this variation in how and what children learn about alcohol in the family.

What parents do and how they communicate with their children, have been shown to influence children's drinking behaviours and other risk behaviours, though there are no consistent patterns as to how parental strategies influence children's drinking behaviours (Luk et al, 2010). Parental problem drinking has been shown to impact on children's lives, with children growing up with parents who abuse drugs and/or alcohol more at risk of engaging in similar risky behaviours as adolescents (see for example: Bancroft and Wilson, 2007; Hartman et al, 2006). Yet parents' behaviours are not just limited to their drinking behaviours, and it is necessary to consider overall parenting strategies (Sherriff et al, 2007;

Urberg et al, 2005). Existing research highlights contradictions in parental strategies to control teenagers' drinking. Quantitative analysis of Danish teenagers found a positive association between lenient parent attitudes and lower levels of teenage drinking (Järvinen and Østergaard, 2009); yet similar research for Dutch teenagers found that strict parental norms was also associated with lower levels of teenage drinking (Van Der Vorst, 2006). Danish parents and teenagers agreed that regulating underage drinking is more complex than setting rules, as the belief that rules are ineffective is very persuasive (Järvinen and Østergaard, 2009).

Yet it is not just inconsistencies within families that are of interest here. Parental control does not take place in a vacuum, as parents and adolescents draw on other resources that originate from outside of the immediate family, in particular children's own friendship groups. Parents are aware that peer socialisation might nullify their own strategies to educate children about responsible drinking (Valentine et al, 2010a). Recent contributions to debates on alcohol have sought to theorise the relationship between parents and children in recognition of the wider social context in which socialisation occurs. Valentine et al (2012) consider how the social distance between children and parents has reduced as part of a wider social process of 'demoralisation'. In late modernity the logical extension of neo-liberalism into family and intimate life is associated with a preoccupation about how parents should ensure the best start for their children. This process, while bringing about closeness between parents and children, has also rendered parental actions to greater public scrutiny. For example, parental failure to guide and supervise children is increasingly blamed for anti-social behaviour, such as the 2011 riots in English cities (Gillies, 2011). Yet Valentine et al (2012) argue that the guidelines that parents might draw on in order to do



the 'right thing' by their children are not necessarily influenced by defined moral codes but are bound up with more contingent and pragmatic rationalisations. They stress the importance of pleasure and the centrality of drinking in family celebrations in shaping parental judgements about supervising children's drinking. These changes in parenting culture underline the fact that parents are developing their own strategies in very different political and social contexts compared to when they were children.

Our analysis of parents' approach to socialisation does not seek to define a fixed line between parental practices and their own experiences on the one hand, and children's outcomes on the other. Rather, our focus in this paper is how parents recall earlier experiences of growing up and how these memories are used to reconcile their own strategies to inform children's awareness of alcohol and initiation to drinking practices.

### **Methodology**

This paper uses Biographical Narrative Interpretative Method [BNIM] interviews with 21 people (17 mothers and 4 fathers) that were collected as part of a multi-method research project on adolescents' attitudes to alcohol consumption (Wengraf, 2001). The participants all had at least one teenage child (aged 12-17 years) and were aged between 35 and 51. Most participants were employed in routine and manual (13) or intermediate (7) occupations. The research was conducted in Liverpool, a port city in the North West of England, in three neighbourhoods that were chosen to be similar in composition. The interviews took place in respondents' home, office, or community venue of their choosing. Problems with antisocial behaviour related to alcohol and young people were identified as a

priority for intervention in the neighbourhood agreements<sup>1</sup> produced by Liverpool County Council for all three localities. Posters inviting parents to take part in a study on adolescents' drinking called "Talking to Teens" were displayed in a range of community settings in the three neighbourhoods including libraries, Citizen Advice Bureaus, children's centres, doctors' surgeries, and youth centres. Participants were also recruited through local parenting groups formed as part of the extended school services in Liverpool. Where appropriate, participants were provided with information on support groups and services. The study was approved by the University of Liverpool's Research Ethics Committee.

As this research project was designed to examine the different influences that shape adolescents' socialisation to drink, the BNIM approach enabled us to explore how parents drew on their childhood experiences when developing their own strategies to socialise their children. As the interviews were biographical all parents were interviewed on their own. The researcher opened the interview by asking a narrative-inducing question, inviting participants to 'reflect on the place of alcohol in your life and the life of your child(ren), giving examples of any specific incidents along the way'. After participants had told their initial narrative, they were then asked to reflect further on some of the issues in their narrative to provide additional depth and to clarify particular experiences. In the final part of the interview, the researcher had the opportunity to ask any additional questions that may not have been mentioned during the interview. Though the structure of the interview did not explicitly ask for parents to talk about past experiences all but one parent responded to the opening question with reference to their own childhoods and it is these accounts that

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<sup>1</sup> Neighbourhood Agreements are voluntary agreements between local service providers and residents. They have been introduced to improve local neighbourhoods and increase public satisfaction with local services.

we draw on here. Analysis of the interviews used a thematic approach (Silverman, 2012) and in this paper we present the analysis of inductive themes identified in the transcripts of how parents constructed and interpreted their own drinking biographies and reconciled this with their own strategies and relationships with their children. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the anonymity of the participants.

## **Analysis**

### *Inter-generational drinking practices*

Our analysis begins by considering how parents articulated the inter-generational dynamics of drinking behaviours. All but one (a father) framed their experiences as parents with reference to their own childhoods, it is therefore appropriate to start by considering how parents compared their attempts to inform their children about alcohol with their own parents' strategies. Of the 20 participants who talked about parental drinking, six participants described their parents as either non-drinkers or could not remember their parents drinking when they were children. An additional five participants described their parents as regular social drinkers who drank but not usually at home, and as such their parents' drinking was not an important part of family life. In contrast, six participants described problematic parental drinking behaviours (either one parent or both) and a further three participants' parents had run a pub. Hence there is polarisation between participants whose parents did not drink, drank very infrequently or drank outside of the home compared to those who had regular and sometimes problematic exposure to alcohol when growing up.

It is important to put these parental experiences into context and not compare these directly with present-day drinking practices. The parents in this study were born in the 1960s and 1970s and since this time alcohol consumption per capita has increased particularly among women and older people (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009). The interaction between social class and alcohol consumption has been more consistent over time (Elliott and Dodgeon, 2007), and most respondents come from manual/routine occupational backgrounds among whom consumption is less compared to more advantaged groups. Yet there has also been a shift in geography of drinking, with a trend towards home drinking (Foster and Ferguson, 2012; Holloway, 2008). In contrast to present-day drinking behaviours our participants did not talk about their parents as 'moderate' drinkers at home. This absence does, to some extent, reflect changes in drinking cultures over the last 20-30 years. For the time and place in which the participants grew up in, having parents who did not drink, drank occasionally or only drank outside of the home was not atypical. However, the current generation of children are more likely to witness alcohol consumption within the home. In our parental sample childhood exposure to drinking in the home was mostly associated with hazardous and/or dependent drinking.

Yet despite this variability in childhood experiences of drinking a common theme across participants is that only a few sought to reproduce their own parents' attempts to educate about alcohol. This is not surprising, given both generational shifts that have occurred in drinking behaviours and the current emphasis on personalising rather than positional parenting styles (Birdwell et al, 2012). Current forms of parenting that are based on dialogical intimacy are often framed in opposition to more closed disciplinary parenting that people might have experienced when growing up (Valentine et al, 2012).

A few parents did acknowledge the transference of drinking practices over generations, though this was associated with avoidance rather than excessive drinking. For example Mairi described how her parents took the pledge<sup>2</sup> and as such she regarded herself as having a 'zero' experience of alcohol, as a child. When she was younger she was aware of adults drinking, especially at Christmas, but generally she was 'quite horrified at the state that people used to get in'. For Mairi her parents' non-drinking meant that drink was simply not a part of her childhood. Imogen described similar memories:

Drinking definitely wasn't something that we'd seen anybody do. There was never alcohol in the house. Just because it wasn't something that me mum and dad done. So of course when I got older and all my sisters and me brother it wasn't anything that they done either, we're not really drinkers, we'll socialise if we go out we'll have a drink but it's nothing I'd say is a problem in the house or the family which is then reflected on my two children, they can't bear it. If we go to family parties or if there's an occasion and the boys are with me, one lad is 20 and he doesn't touch it.

Imogen described the inter-generational transfer of non-drinking not so much as the promotion of prohibition but more that it was not a feature of family life, thus non-experiences or absences can be as persuasively described as re-lived episodes. Both Imogen and Mairi acknowledged the absence of alcohol in their childhoods and as adults have not sought to do anything differently.

Yet other participants rejected or consciously chose to reverse their childhood experiences, in particular participants who recalled growing up with alcohol abuse did not want their

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<sup>2</sup> Signing the pledge refers to swearing allegiance to the temperance movement and resolving to abstain from alcohol.

children to have similar experiences (Valentine et al, 2010b). For example Evan described his father as an alcoholic, who was violent towards his mother and who still drinks 'a crate of lager a night'. Yet Evan was very clear that he did not want his children to have 'to see what I've seen me dad do and stuff like that'. Evan's need to protect his children from witnessing what he did as a child was also driven by a fear of losing his children, for example he described a friend who was an alcoholic:

And he's [friend] just split up with his missus now over it [drinking] and the kids are made up, the kids are absolutely made up that the dad has gone because the way he is when he's drunk and stuff like that. I think it's just scary to think that your kids hate you that much just because you're drinking cans of lager all night and ranting and raving at them and they can't move over the door and they're stuck in their bedrooms. Definitely wouldn't want that for my kids.

Evan's fear, expressed through the account of his friend, reveals the inter-subjectivity of drinking practices. Evan also expressed a common feeling of hating the way his father drank and used this as a way of orientating his own drinking and parenting practices. Hatred of parental drinking was not restricted to those who experienced domestic violence as a result of family members' drinking. For others it was the sense of being abandoned by parents whose priorities were more directed towards drinking than spending time with their children, as Kay described:

My mum and dad were separated so that meant on a Saturday dad would pick me up and he would take me to the pub after we'd been out somewhere, to a children's room, so I grew up and I can remember as a child thinking I would never do this to my children because I hated it. When I grew up and got married and had my

children I kept to that promise and I never took my children into pubs 'cause I just didn't really feel that it was appropriate to take children into pubs and it wasn't their place to be there.

In Kay's account the lines linking the past to the present are inverted, her memory of the past anticipates herself in the present. Other participants also remembered the shame of parental drinking. Valerie, for example, described the embarrassment she felt for her mother when she was drunk and cited this as a reason for her non-interest in alcohol:

I think because of the way my mum was with drink I was always worried that I would be judged like that, you know people were being polite just saying yes to her when she was being a pain and not wanting to engage in conversation with her when she had had a couple of drinks, so I think that's why I have never really bothered with it.

Valerie's memory of her mother recalled worrying about how people will judge her and she has transferred her feelings about her mother to her own competencies as a parent.

Kay's and Valerie's memories recall Bergson's account of memory as always being switched on, so that 'the totality of past experience may be "cut out" and fitted into the present' (Reavey and Brown, 2006: 190). The practice of reconciliation between past and present is key to Bergson's dynamic interpretation of time and memory and how the latter 'can give *useful work*' to make sense of present situations (Bergson 1911: 5). Thus as Reavey and Brown discuss, in Bergson's reading of memory recollections are partial in that they serve to reconcile past and present agency through the taming of the past. This is also evocative of Steedly's (1993) research with the Karo in North Sumatra who interpret memory as an imagined past that stretches out in front while we are moved into a future that lies unseen

behind us. This openness of memory allows for the possibility of interpretative revision which many of our participants utilise in their narrative. For Kay and Valarie their memories of the past are used to frame desires of what *not* to be or do in the present. The usefulness of memory can avert us away from particular practices and behaviours.

In summary, participants' recall of childhood experiences did not necessarily predict how they chose to socialise their children around alcohol, rather they made their own judgements of appropriate drinking practices and acted accordingly, often in opposition to their own family experiences. In this study, the most pertinent examples of inter-generational transference of behaviours occurred when parents did not drink, but this was not recalled as a deliberate strategy, rather a habitual avoidance of alcohol that participants continued into adulthood.

#### *Non-parental family practices*

While the narratives suggest that initial encounters and experiences of alcohol are very much centred around parent-child dynamics this simple observation masks a complex and dynamic process. Despite contemporary policy concerns with parent-child relationships our data demonstrate the possibility of being open to a more diverse and holistic definition of 'family' (Smart, 2007). In the interviews family relationships provided the context for individuals' drinking narratives and these extended beyond their parents' generation to include older and lateral kin. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings, step-parents and friends all featured in participants' accounts of drinking, for those with both drinking and non/low drinking parents. For some the distance of generation or lateral kin (e.g grandparent or uncle/aunt) provided a more neutral context in which drinking behaviours were remembered and re-worked in their own relationships with their children. The



potential for past practices to influence future generations is illustrated in Phoebe's account of drinking. In her interview she described her grandfather as a 'high functioning alcoholic', who held down a job as a master stonemason, but became violent when drunk and as a consequence her grandmother suffered a lot. Her mother's reaction to the drunken violence of her childhood had been complete abstinence:

So that had a big influence on my mum so when it came to her own children, there were like seven of us, alcohol wasn't allowed in the house at all. It was a complete and utter ban, she was terrified of our reaction to it so we never had anything in the house at all.

However Phoebe went on to describe how she felt that 'her' generation, including her brothers and sisters, had reversed their mother's prohibition of drink:

We've all got kids so we've all done the complete opposite with our children because we've all thought the way we were brought up was wrong, sort of total abstinence and then suddenly you're let loose and you go a bit crazy, and then you've got to learn to sort you're self out after that and learn your limits ... so we've all done the opposite, we've all let our kids have moderate drinks at home and every single one of us has done the same and that's what we do with our sons.

Phoebe did not completely reject her mother's prohibition and described how at the time she had understood her mother's restriction, which was supported by her father. However as a child she was aware that other families in the village where they lived were not so strict and she did not think that her upbringing had prepared her to be responsible when she was old enough to make her own choices.

The drunken uncle or grandfather is a potent morality tale that is evoked through and across generations to symbolise the dangers of drink in undermining family relationships. Wendy talked about her Uncle Owen whose presence could ruin a family party:

But the one person that used to ruin it for everyone, was my Uncle Owen because everyone was ... no I don't think anyone really wanted to invite him but, because it was my dad's brother naturally you know ... but you just knew he was going to get absolutely rotten and spoil it. He'd end up being sick. He kept falling over.

Wendy's Uncle Owen was a figurative black sheep: he was part of the family but not really accepted because of his drinking. This suggests that inclusion in the wider family group may be contingent on appropriate drinking behaviours. Wendy's depiction of her uncle as a peripheral and unwelcome member of the family reveals how moral identities are mediated by drink. She contrasts her uncle's behaviour with that of her late partner who drank a large amount but did not become drunk or violent and whom she did not regard as having a problem with alcohol. Wendy's moral identities of drinking in families were associated with changes in behaviour associated with drinking rather than the quantity of drink consumed.

Young people's experiences of drinking, and how their parents respond to these, are not just contained within the immediate family but are also shaped through peer groups within specific localities. Parents were aware of the limited influence that they had over their children's behaviours with respect to their friendship groups in their neighbourhoods. For example Phoebe was worried about her son hanging out with the wrong crowd:

That's the young lads, the teenagers he was getting all involved with...Got the gangs there and it is what you see on the telly, it's the young lads who get sucked into helping by the older ones and it all just builds up from that.

Phoebe and her family had recently moved away from this neighbourhood and she described how she was less worried about her son where they lived now, even commenting that his clothes had changed from wearing all black to 'nice clothes and everything because it's a completely different group of friends which is good'. Not all parents could choose to move their children away from more challenging situations, and were concerned about how to influence their children in the face of peer pressure to drink. For example Mairi reflected on the difficulty of denying her daughter alcohol as 'you can't say "No" because everyone is doing it'. Even though Mairi herself did not drink, the lack of alcohol in the house did not mean that her daughter was not exposed to alcohol. The importance of wider family, community members and friends in providing teenagers with both opportunities to drink and alternative drinking role models, can undermine parental influence and the efficacy of 'tough love' parenting. Parents have to set boundaries for both their children's behaviour and their children's interactions with friends.

### *Moving on*

A dominant theme among our participants is that parental views on socialisation to alcohol were reversed over generations. Yet the assumption of reversal is too simplistic as this can be interpreted as a mirror of the inheritance of behaviours. Rather we suggest that parents rework and revisit memories of childhood with reference to their own behaviour and

relationships with their children, in order to reconcile the past with the present and justify their own strategies, often on the basis of what practices did *not* work in their own childhoods. Yet for some participants, the reconciliation of childhood memories with the present is not possible, and the only way that the past can be remembered is through the metaphor of 'moving on'. Their childhood memories of drinking are not forgotten, but they are not resources that participants can necessarily use to guide their own behaviours.

Trevor is one such participant who talked about his childhood memories of family drinking, but was adamant that these had not influenced his own drinking practices. In his interview, he described how his father would come home from work drunk and was violent towards his mother, and how he sometimes had to protect his mother from his dad and also suffered his father's violence. Trevor also described his aunt as someone who turned 'very violent' when drunk, thus the association between violence and drink was a recurring family memory.

Despite his childhood, alcohol played a significant role in Trevor's life and he described how he enjoyed drinking and socialising around drink. While he agreed that his childhood was scarred by drink he was comfortable both about the amount he drank and his ability to advise his children about alcohol. Yet he admitted that his sister was troubled by her childhood:

But as an adult I mean my sister has got real issues around how we were brought up, and issues you know what she needs to deal with but for me, I can look back and say it was a different time, yes it wasn't nice, I am not saying it was nice, I am not forgiving of the actions that went on, but you have got to appreciate that it was a completely different time in life.

For Trevor his memories of his violent family were a point of departure. Trevor took the view that his sister, who did bring up the past particularly after a drink, should also be able to deal with what happened. Moreover he kept these accounts of his childhood hidden from his partner and his children. During the interview he did not discuss the violence in his opening narrative, and only when asked if there was anything else that he wanted to talk about did he start to describe his childhood experiences in more detail and his recall of particular violent encounters was vivid and clear. Yet for most of the time, his childhood is not something that he thinks about in relation to his current drinking practices.

A key question is how Trevor could move on, while his sister could not. What is distinctive about Trevor's account is that his memories were not suppressed, but they were latent and therefore not acknowledged to be deterministic, while his sister was more open about the past but struggled to come to terms with it. Trevor's drinking narrative recalls Haaken's observation that 'transformative remembering refers to the creative use of the past in defining the self' (1998: 15). When talking about his family he recalled witnessing 'both sides' of drinking, by which he means the violence and the euphoria of alcohol and it is the learning experience of both encounters that matters. Trevor's moving on is possible because he acknowledged the variability of remembered experiences from his childhood. Moreover he believed that his teenage son also had to learn through experience:

almost that living by experience, some people may say that's wrong, but to me that's, that is fine, you know you have got to learn by experience.

Trevor's creative use of the past is not dependent on forgetting but rather through acknowledging the authenticity of events that happened and which he lived through.

Though his son's experiences of family drinking were quite different to his own, he did not

want to deny his son from being exposed to the consequences of drinking, both good and bad.

## **Discussion**

Public health messages that are directed towards children and young people are bound by anticipatory logics (Evans, 2010). That is policy is not directed towards what is happening to children and young people's bodies in the present but what is being stored up for the future. The problem with this approach is that it assumes the intransigence of learned behaviour over time. Our analysis suggests that parents are able to make an immediate impact on children, and recent research on socialisation and young people's drinking confirms this (Bremmer et al, 2011; Valentine et al, 2010). Yet the anticipatory logic of socialisation also assumes deterministic outcomes in adult life based on childhood experiences. However what we find is that as children grow up and become parents, their childhood experiences are mediated by social, political and cultural changes as well as their own adult experiences. Given the changes in both drinking and parenting styles that have occurred over our participants' life courses, it is not surprising that parents are not directly influenced by their childhood experiences when it comes to making their own their parenting decisions, yet neither does this mean that childhood memories are not important.

This observation makes sense, if as Probyn argues, we take childhood as suspended beginnings rather than a fixed point of origin. In our research most parents sought to do things differently from *their* parents, and this holds for those who grew up in families of abstinence as well as those who experienced problematic drinking. Most parents were able to reject how they were brought up, without the kind of moral vacuum that might be supposed from socialisation theory. Socialisation theory predicts that parents have a duty to

ensure the future wellbeing and character of their children, yet our participants did not, for the most part, suggest that their own parents had achieved this, but this was certainly not regarded as a failure on the part of their parents.

What then does this imply for assumptions of family socialisation? The participants in our research framed their approach to advising and educating children about drinking in general with reference to their childhood experiences, though very few suggested that they intended to guide their own children in the same way that their parents had done. Yet this refutation of experiences was not, in the part, negative, rather it provided a resource against which parents could contrast their own strategies. As Bergson (1911) suggests in writing about duration, memory is constantly 'on', but this does not mean that it provides a blueprint of how to act; rather memories are reworked to fit the present, and in many cases provide a way of how *not* to be or do. Thus while memories and experiences are cumulative and on-going, this does not imply that they are proscriptive.

Thus in querying the teleological premise of socialisation we are not under-playing the significance of childhood memories. In fact our data point us in the opposite direction as parents recalled memories of family drinking or non-drinking, we are though, following Probyn, querying the moral determinism of childhood. The small number of participants in our study reveals the variability of childhood experiences and how these are not tied to logical outcomes; the line of travel between the past and the present is not fixed and unidirectional. Parents recalled family practices and rejected these, not as unreal memories, but as examples of inappropriate behaviour. Having a resource of how not to do family can be as valuable as a blueprint for family practices. This suggests a limited and reduced capacity for affective parental action over time. Yet this does not limit parents' desire to set

an example for their own children and in doing so to reconfirm their relationships with their children. As Curtis et al (2010) discuss in relation to food, parents' attempts to influence children's consumption is as much to do with the construction of moral identities as it is about children's health. Likewise, parental concerns about children's drinking are influenced by the recognition that drink is a vital conduit for negotiating and expressing family relationships.

Yet as a number of participants observed they grew up in a different time, when social mores about parenting and drinking were distinctively different, and their parents took a more authoritarian position in relation to their children. Thus while practitioners and policy makers, such as the think tank *Demos*, might advocate 'tough love' parenting as the most effective way on instilling responsible adolescent drinking (Birdwell et al, 2012), this parental approach is different from that which parents themselves experienced when growing up, as the respondents in this study describe. But to assume that parents can now get it right and mediate childhood outcomes in a way that their own parents did not appear to do, is also to assume an essentialist reading of family - that there be *one* way of getting family 'right'. Yet the experiences of parents in our study illustrate that a variety of childhood experiences are associated with a diversity of adult behaviours and these experiences are not deterministic. Moreover, our research suggests that parents might reject the tough love message through rationalising how little *their* parents did to guide and monitor their own drinking. Finally our research demonstrates the importance of not just focussing on parents, but that we also need to locate drinking practices within a more active conceptualisation of family that recognises the contribution of different family



members, as well as friends and neighbours, to the varied and highly complex experiences of drinking and family life.

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