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ORIGINAL PAPER

Geographies of alcohol and generation: Examining the decline in youth drinking in England through a spatial lens

Laura Fenton[1] | Hannah Fairbrother[2] | Victoria Whitaker[2] | Madeleine Henney[1] | Abigail Kate Stevely[1] | John Holmes[1]

[1]School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
[2]Health Sciences School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

Correspondence
Dr Laura Fenton, School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, 30 Regent Street, Sheffield S1 4DA, UK.
Email: l.m.fenton@sheffield.ac.uk

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Abstract

Introduction: While international literature addresses the links between youth culture and the decline in youth drinking, little research has engaged with scholarship on youth geographies to more fully disentangle these links. This article explores how the decline is connected to shifts in where young people access and drink alcohol.

Methods: Qualitative interviews were conducted with young people aged 12–19 ($N = 96$) and 29–35 ($N = 17$) years in England. The interviews explored the place of alcohol in everyday life, with younger participants discussing the present and older participants discussing their youth in the late 1990s to early 2000s. Data were analysed thematically.

Findings: Buying alcohol in shops and licensed premises was a common experience for older participants when they were teenagers but few younger participants discussed buying alcohol from commercial settings. Older participants also reflected positively on drinking in outdoor public spaces whereas younger participants, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, regarded this as morally suspect. Young participants instead accessed alcohol from parents and siblings, and often consumed it in their or others' homes in supervised or moderated ways, seeing this as positive and normative.

Discussion and Conclusion: Spatial shifts in young people's drinking away from public spaces and toward the home appear an important part of a wider trend that renders youth drinking as increasingly moderate, risk-averse, incidental and mediated by parents, rather than excessive, transgressive and integral to youth culture.

KEYWORDS
alcohol, home, public space, youth

1 | INTRODUCTION

Young people's alcohol consumption has fallen sharply in the United Kingdom (UK) and several other high-income countries since the early 2000s, including the United States, Australia and several European countries [1]. In England, the decline has been particularly striking: between 2003 and 2018, the proportion of

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11–15-year-olds who reported ever having drunk alcohol dropped from 61% to 44%, while the proportion of those who reported drinking in the last week fell from 25% to 10% [2]. Survey data further suggest that in England the decline in youth drinking is persisting as members of recent youth cohorts enter adulthood, with the proportion of 16–24-year-olds who report drinking alcohol in the last week falling from 67% in 2002 to 41% in 2019 [2].

An emerging international literature explores reasons for the decline in youth drinking, with key studies focussing on the links between changes in different aspects of youth culture and shifts in young people's alcohol consumption. By youth culture, we mean heterogenous sets of practices (e.g., leisure and consumption practices), values and modes of expression shared, in varying degrees, by young people, historically rooted in the socio-economic changes of the post-war period (see [3, pp. 26–28]). Qualitative research on low and non-drinking young people in Australia has examined the role of changing norms around health, arguing that 'cultural pressures to achieve and maintain health have made being healthy an imperative', resulting in young people drinking less [4, p. 494]. Drawing on the same study, other work has explored how the development of a 'reflexive habitus' means that young people feel they have access to a wider range of consumption practices [5], with drinking figuring as a less appealing option because of the imperative to use time productively in a neoliberal society [6]. Similarly, Torronen et al. [7] explore a variety of 'interacting social mechanisms' that may explain reductions in Swedish adolescents' drinking, including increasing parenting control and the advent of social media. They argue that 'the cultural position of drinking may have changed among young people so that drinking has lost its unquestioned symbolic power as a cool activity and rite of passage signalling entry to adulthood' [7, p. 19]. The significance of the emergence of social media and internet-based technologies has been explored in greater depth elsewhere in the qualitative literature [8–10], as has the importance of changing gender identities in the cultural performance of drinking and non-drinking [11]. Overall, these studies suggest that sobriety and moderation may have taken on positive values for young people in the context of the developments described above, while intoxication may be losing its cultural status as a marker of adulthood.

1.1 | 'Placing' the decline

Across a similar timeframe as the decline, there has been an intensification of longer-term changes in children and young people's relationships to public and private spaces [12]. Geographers have demonstrated how public spaces have come to be understood as 'risky' or otherwise undesirable places for children and young people to spend time. This has involved dramatic reductions in self-initiated, unsupervised outdoor play/socialising, and increases in adult-supervised and organised play/socialising [13–15], often in commercial settings such as dance or sports classes. There is also evidence that this shift has become more pronounced over time in some countries, like Norway [16]. The movement out of public spaces extends to adolescents, who some argue have been 'excluded' from public space [17], a development that has been contested (e.g., [18]). In other words, just as public space has been cast as 'risky' so too have some of the young people who use it. The policing of young people's use of public space has intensified alongside the increased privatisation of such space [19], including rises in the number of shopping malls and private housing estates, where young people are often regarded by some adults and security personnel as a problem to be removed [20, 21]. At the same time, children and young people have been increasingly drawn into homes and commercial spaces, like shopping malls, for leisure, reflecting changes in both consumption practices and technology, including the rise of home entertainment and internet-based technologies [21, 22].

Like the decline in youth drinking, these developments are argued to have taken place in several high-income countries to varying degrees. In the UK, the introduction of anti-social behaviour orders* (ASBO) by the New Labour government in the late 1990s is paradigmatic of the way that young people in public have been increasingly defined as a problem to be managed, with controlling their independent access to public spaces seen as a key part of the solution [21]. Indeed, young people's use of public space has consistently been central to the construction of youth policy [21, 23], and young people in public spaces are often 'perceived as unproductive, potentially threatening and unruly, and at risk of getting up to no good' [20, p. 1000]. New Labour's policies reinforced these ideas, as did wider 'police culture' [24], with its distinctions between 'roughs' and 'respectables' [21, 25].

Changes in young people's relationships to public and private space are reflected in how they access alcohol and in where they drink [12]. Young people in England who drink are less likely to buy (or try to buy) alcohol from commercial sources, and more likely to drink in private, domestic spaces. Between 2008 and 2014, the proportion of 11–15-year-olds who were current drinkers who reported buying or attempting to buy alcohol decreased from 52% to 40% [26, p. 129], with only 12% saying they were mostly likely to buy it from an off-licence and only

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11% saying a shop or supermarket in 2014 [26, p. 130]. Between 1996 and 2014, the proportion of current drinkers who said they usually drank at their own or someone else's home increased from 52% to 74%, and the proportion of this same group who reported usually drinking at parties with friends increased over the same period from 23% to 46%. Between 2006 and 2014, drinking in outdoor spaces (e.g., streets, parks) decreased from 31% to 13% among current drinkers [26, p. 130]. Thus, in England, the decline has broadly coincided with decreases in young people purchasing alcohol and drinking it in outdoor spaces and increases in drinking in domestic spaces among those young people who drink. Moreover, the shift toward home drinking for young people may be linked with the shift toward a denormalisation of intoxication, as homes are less likely than other drinking locations to be sites of intoxication [27].

To date, research exploring the complex social and cultural reasons (e.g., [6, 7]) for the decline in youth drinking has not engaged in depth with literature on shifts in young people's relationships to public and private space (e.g., [28]), or how these shifts are reflected in changes in how they access alcohol and where they consume it. Moreover, a growing body of research on space and place in youth drinking has focussed on young people's agency as 'co-producers' of drinkscapes (e.g., [29]), including their roles in crafting convivial atmospheres in spaces beyond urban nightlife such as homes (e.g., [30]) and outdoor spaces (e.g., [31]). Studies within this approach have highlighted some young people's negative views on drinking in outdoor public spaces, with drinking in such spaces argued to be perceived and experienced in classed and gendered ways (e.g., [12, 30, 32–34]). In general, the growing body of research on space and place has tended not to address change over time in youth drinking. While Ander and Wilińska [29, p. 428] note that a decline has occurred, Holdsworth, Laverty and Robinson [12, p. 750] go further and suggest that the decline might be connected to young people's restricted access to public space. However, the authors do not explore different generations' experiences of the intersection of alcohol and spatial practices. The relative neglect of space and place on the one hand, and the lack of attention to the decline on the other hand, leave gaps in our knowledge. In the present article, we draw on young people's accounts to address the question: how do spatial shifts in many young people's lives intersect with the decline in youth drinking in terms of where young people access and consume alcohol, and the meanings they attach to these practices? This article explores this question by contrasting accounts of alcohol, space and youth from two age-groups separated by roughly 20 years.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Data collection

In this article, we draw on qualitative interviews that were conducted in 2018–2019 as part of the Youth Drinking in Decline project, a mixed-methods project exploring the nature of, and reasons for, the decline in young people's alcohol consumption. Data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants resided in or near Sheffield, a post-industrial city in the North of England. The project's qualitative component adopted a multi-cohort design to investigate continuities and changes in youth drinking. This study focuses on interview data from cohorts of young people aged 12–19 years ($n = 96$) and adults aged 29–35 years ($n = 17$). Interviews with the younger cohort were conducted in friendship groups of 2–4 people, as interviewing young people in pairs and groups has been found to foster atmospheres in which they feel more confident [35]. The interviews used a semi-structured format alongside creative and participatory techniques, including a relationship map and an image elicitation exercise, to explore the role of alcohol in young people's relationships, and leisure and health practices (see [36] for more detail). Interviews with the older cohort were conducted individually. They were also semi-structured and used a timeline technique that involved asking about relationships of significance between the start of secondary school up to when the interview took place in 2019. This provided a basis for discussing how they spent their time, the places they went and what was important to them.

The younger cohort consisted of 50 (52%) girls and young women, and 46 (48%) boys and young men. Seventy-three (76%) participants were White and 23 (24%) participants were from ethnic minority backgrounds. Participants had a range of (non-)drinking styles, including abstinence, light drinking and heavy drinking. Light drinking refers to typically drinking no more than once a month and rarely drinking more than one to two drinks at a time, while heavy drinking refers to drinking more often than once a month and drinking more than two drinks on a typical drinking occasion. Participants were recruited from socio-economically and geographically contrasting schools (two affluent, one deprived and two rural schools that were socio-economically similar to the deprived school), two further education colleges (i.e., institutions offering academic and vocational courses for those aged 16 and over) and a university. The university students ($n = 7$) were recruited using internal university email distribution lists and advertisements on social media. The affluence or deprivation of schools was established by consulting publicly

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available data on the proportion of students entitled to free-school meals.

The older cohort consisted of 10 women and 7 men. Fifteen participants were White and two were from ethnic minority backgrounds. Fourteen were heavy drinkers, two were light drinkers and one did not drink. Participants were diverse in relation to their levels of educational qualifications and their employment histories. At the time of the interview, eight participants were in further or higher education (including graduate studies) following previous periods of employment, seven were in full-time employment, one was self-employed and one worked part-time alongside looking after her young children. They were recruited using targeted, paid-for advertisements on social media. Recruitment was limited to people who had spent their adolescence in the UK to ensure that they had insights into youth culture in the UK. No participants identified as transgender or non-binary. Participants were not asked about their sexual orientation. Ethical permission was granted by the University of Sheffield. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

2.2 | Data analysis

The age cohorts were selected for the present analysis to provide two contrasting timepoints for an examination of the spaces of youth drinking. Participants in the younger cohort were born between 2000 and 2006, and entered adolescence after the decline in youth drinking was well established, whereas participants in the older cohort were born in the 1980s, and entered adolescence in the late 1990s and early 2000s, prior to the beginning of the decline in England. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Analysis was aided by the qualitative analysis software, Nvivo 12. In 2019–2020, members of the research team independently reviewed a subset of the data to agree an initial set of codes and to facilitate analysis. These codes were largely descriptive in nature, with several codes mirroring topics covered in interview guides. There were no significant points of disagreement and reviewers refined codes through discussion and sharing ideas. For the present analysis, transcripts of interviews with members of the older cohort were re-read closely in their entirety by the first author, and were analysed manually using thematic analysis [37, 38] in 2021–2022. This separate process of manual coding was undertaken to better understand the accounts of members of the older cohort through the prism of change over time, with a focus on what they said about how they accessed alcohol, where they drank and the meanings they attached to these experiences. Interview data from transcripts with the younger cohorts were then analysed through identifying several codes in nVivo that were relevant to the themes identified in the manual coding for the older cohort data, including codes concerning access to alcohol, public spaces, home and parents, in an iterative fashion.

3 | RESULTS

According to the literature on space discussed above, contemporary children and young people tend to have less independent access to public spaces than preceding generations. This movement away from public space can be seen in changes to how and where young people access alcohol, where they drink and the meanings they ascribe to drinking spaces. While many participants from both the younger and older groups in our study discussed drinking at house parties as teenagers, usually unsupervised by adults, the two groups diverged in their descriptions of how they acquired alcohol and the other kinds of spaces in which they consumed it. In what follows, we contrast the accounts of the study's oldest participants with its younger participants. We do so firstly in relation to if and how they accessed alcohol from shops (including 'off-licences') and secondly, in relation to where they drank. We then consider the significance of young people's home life, specifically the role of their parents in enabling, monitoring and/or constraining their drinking.

3.1 | From public to private: Key changes in where young people access alcohol

Buying alcohol in off-licences was a common experience among older participants when they were teenagers, although it could require careful negotiation. This is despite laws that make it illegal to sell alcohol to young people under the age of 18, to buy alcohol on their behalf, or for anyone under the age of 18 to attempt to buy alcohol. While some off-licences were described as flouting the rules, in most participants' accounts appearing to be above the legal purchasing age of 18 was important, as was selecting the right premises and being open to the possibility of rejection. Access to fake identity documents was not widely discussed in depth by members of either cohort. In the accounts of older participants, it was often not participants themselves who made purchases, but their taller or 'older-looking' friends. The task of going up to the sales counter to make the purchase was assigned to those in the friendship group who were believed to be most likely to 'pass' as 18. However, some

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participants' accounts pointed to exceptions. In her account of friends buying alcohol when she was around 14 or 15 in the late 1990s, Andrea (35) points out that, at that time, young people did not necessarily need to pass as 18 in order to buy alcohol:

> '… we'd go out to a newsagent and get that and bring it to the park. […] never me because I was always small. [Laughs] […] a couple of friends who were taller, and they never had a problem getting served, which is ludicrous, because they clearly did not look 18.'

While people attempted to pass as 18, they were aware that some shops will sell to them despite knowing they are not 18. Local knowledge about which shops were willing to sell to those under-18s was shared within friendship and peer groups. As 32-year-old Alan explains, 'we went to this shop that everyone got it from [laughs]. That you knew they were serving to under-age kids basically.'

Being served alcohol in pubs, bars, and nightclubs prior to the age of 18 was also described as a common experience among older participants. For most, being served was a possibility from around age 16 or 17, and not usually before this point. Similar to their experiences with buying alcohol in shops, some mentioned having to be particular about where they went if they wanted to be served:

> '… there was a pub by college that we used to go to because we never got ID'd! […] [You went to] places where you knew that you could go. There was clubs […] where you'd never get ID'd. I never went to them because they weren't really my sort of thing, but yeah, it's what everybody did!' (Ivy, 30).

Some types of venues were more likely to serve under-18 s than others, with pubs identified by some participants as the least likely to have served them alcoholic drinks. For Michael (34), getting served at concerts when he was under-18 was far more likely than being served at pubs:

> '… I remember I never had to use the fake ID whenever I went to [a music venue], when we went to see the gigs I was never asked for the ID […] Whereas the pub always seemed a lot harder […] we would inevitably kind of stick together in a way, in the beer garden kind of doing our best to avoid regular kind of eye contact with members of staff and it was far more common to be turned down for a drink ….'

Other participants found they were reliably able to be served in pubs as 16- or 17-year-olds, as well as in bars and clubs.

Participants in the younger cohort rarely reported attempts to purchase alcohol in shops or licensed premises, likely because they did not deem it possible to be successful.[†] However, where they did attempt it, they describe similar tactics for reducing the risk of rejection. For example, Josh (16 y) spoke of buying alcohol from 'the shop down the road' for get-togethers with friends. Tellingly, Josh repeatedly makes references elsewhere in his interview to his 'grown-up', athletic physical appearance. He explained that he and his friends were able to buy alcohol at either shops or pubs because 'we all look right old, like, my mate, he literally looks like a full-grown man, like, he actually looks older than my dad! So he pretty much just gets served everywhere. […] I'm quite tall so just get served in most places'. Similarly, 16-year-old Nasha pointed out that: '… if you look older you could probably get away with not being ID'd […] there's people my age that I know can go and buy a drink, whereas if I went, I mean, they'd laugh in my face, they'd be like "where's your ID?"'. These exceptions aside, most younger participants did not report finding alcohol to be reliably available to under-18s through purchasing it directly from shops or licensed premises. As described below, it was instead accessed through other sources, typically one or more of a combination of parents, older siblings and friends who were 18 or over.

3.2 | From pleasant past-time to 'deserving of an ASBO': Shifting practices and meanings of drinking in outdoor public space

Participants' narratives highlight how the reduced ability to purchase alcohol directly from shops or licensed premises has had important implications for the spatial organisation of youth drinking. Older participants who bought alcohol in shops as young people described how they often then went to parks and other outdoor spaces to drink together in small groups. In contrast to their or their friends' houses, such spaces were more likely to be free of adults and thus adult supervision. Drinking outdoors in public spaces was presented by most as a routine way that they and their contemporaries socialised. Scenes of outdoor drinking were described by some as pleasant and convivial: '[my town] had a nice river, river front.

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[…] there was a rock night on every Saturday and we all used to congregate there […] everyone just kind of took their own drink and drank outside' (Ellen, 31). Others emphasised the ease and low cost of outdoor drinking relative to drinking in pubs and other types of settings: 'it's a lot easier and a lot cheaper to just all meet on a field on a Friday and drink there and do whatever we want than go and, like, see whether or not you get ID'd in the pub and it's expensive' (Michael, 34). For older participants, outdoor drinking was seen as a routine practice imbued with positive associations. In practical terms, it was also closely tied to the capacity to buy alcohol independently from shops.

By contrast, outdoor drinking in public settings was imbued with different meanings by some younger participants. Several of them spoke in negative terms about drinking in parks, presenting it as morally and socially deviant. This was particularly the case for young people from the urban deprived and rural schools, who are mostly from working-class backgrounds. For example, Luke (17) stated that when he drank he tended to do so at 'others people's homes, I'm not going to go out and drink in the park!'. Asked why not, he describes drinking in the park as 'deserving of an ASBO'. His friend, Liam (18), elaborated: '… that's not something that like my friends do and nothing that I've ever done or even thought of doing, just why? Like, we have houses!'. Asked why they do not drink in outdoor spaces like parks, Paul (17), Theo (16) and Harry (17), explained to the interviewer that:

> Paul: 'It's just unsafe'.
> Theo: 'It's where kids are'.
> Harry: 'Yeah, there's that as well'.
> Theo: 'Don't do that'.

Outdoor drinking in parks is associated here with the breaching of symbolically charged boundaries between young people on the one hand and children on the other, casting it as morally deviant. Participants from the rural school similarly expressed disdain for outdoor drinking in public by associating it with 'naughty' classmates, who misbehave and who are believed to be less likely to do well at school or succeed in life. The practice of outdoor drinking was repeatedly constructed in gendered as well as classed terms, that is, as something socially undesirable young men do (see also [11, 12]). Thus, in contrast to the accounts of older participants that presented it as routine and sociable, several younger participants understood outdoor drinking as morally deviant and 'unsafe', and distanced themselves from it. The fact that it was mainly young people from working-class backgrounds that expressed these views suggests that they may have been engaging in 'identity work' by attempting to distance themselves from classed and gendered stereotypes [11].

3.3 | A family affair: The homification of youth drinking

Our interview data suggest that the movement of young people away from drinking in public space has occurred alongside other developments that have drawn them into the private space of the home, including what appears to be the increased involvement of parents in enabling and monitoring their children's drinking, which at times involved forms of monitoring and surveillance that are facilitated by digital communication technologies [8]. Parenting practices have been identified as important factors in the decline, with rises in both stricter parenting styles and intimacy between parents and children argued to have contributed to reductions in adolescents drinking over time [7, 39]. In this section, we contrast the role of parents in the accounts of older and younger participants.

While older participants often spoke about how their first sips of beer or other alcoholic drinks were from a parent's glass, they rarely described drinking at home with family, during family celebrations or with alcohol provided by parents or other family members as teenagers. Ellen (31) is one of a small number of older participants who mentioned asking a parent to buy her alcohol. She described her mother as reluctant to do so: 'whenever I asked my mum to buy me a drink for like a party, she kind of wasn't too keen, but then she'd kind of cave and maybe get a couple of alcopops or something'. Moreover, parents of older participants were generally portrayed as not having kept track of their children's movements when they were teenagers, especially the closer they came to turning 18. Overall, they were presented as more detached in relation to discussions about alcohol. As Ellen went on to say: 'I'm sure she was aware that we'd go out drinking at the weekends—but until they had to be called once—I don't think she thought it was anything to be concerned about, or she never mentioned it …'. Asked if her parents ever gave her advice about drinking, Ivy (30) commented: 'Not really, the attitude always was "well you're better off testing your limits now so you might as well give it a go!" They always had quite a relaxed attitude to drinking …'. For the majority of older participants, drinking was not something that involved their parents or that was associated with their life at home.

Speaking in more general terms, some older participants believed that young people are inherently rebellious, and that one of the ways that this manifests itself is in drinking to excess:

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> 'I don't think parents are really that influential [on young people]. […] I think your friends and your social life is much more influential than your parents. Maybe for some you know, isolated cases […] but I think it's almost like innate for young people to rebel against their parents'. (Julie, 32)

For Andrea (35), going out and drinking to excess outside of the home was key to what it meant to be a teenager when she was younger: 'that's what we're doing as teenagers, we swig cider'. Ivy (30) made a similar point in her interview: 'for us it was really cool to go out and get messed up'. Drinking with family members was not usually part of the picture of youth drinking culture painted by most older participants.

Younger participants painted a notably different picture of how their parents and their home lives figured in their drinking. This involved scenarios in which parents provided alcohol for young people to drink at social gatherings (both supervised and un-supervised) at friends' homes, as well as in their own homes. In relation to the former scenario, Henry (19) explains how his mum bought him alcohol for such occasions, but imposed limits on how much she would purchase: 'obviously she didn't want me going out and drinking loads, which was why she was like "I'll buy you this much but no more"'. In relation to the latter scenario, Alexa (18) described how her parents kept wine in the refrigerator for her to drink with visiting friends, presenting this as a practice of enabling hospitality: 'mine would have alcohol in, the'd make sure that they had it in the fridge so that if I had friends round then I could [give them drinks]!'. Others, like Josh (16), described drinking moderately at meals or celebrations in the family home: 'l[if] we're having like a meal for someone's birthday or, like, loads of come to my house to have a curry or something like that, I might have a drink but I would't, like, drink too much, I'd only have like one drink or two drinks in the house'.

Younger participants whose parents allowed them to drink tended to emphasise how their parents monitored their drinking, along with their related movements. As Greg (19) explained:

> '… my parents always made sure they knew what I was drinking […] even when I was 16 and 17 […] I was only ever given enough to maybe get me just about drunk and, even then, I always had to make sure I had a safe way home […] there was always someone I knew, someone safe, I had the taxi booked or a lift organised or something like that to get home.'

As we see in this example, some parents were described as actively monitoring their children's movements, encouraging them to avoid both intoxication and the risks to personal safety that intoxication was perceived to entail. When parents are described as either providing drinks for consuming at friends' homes or as allowing drinking in the space of the family home or beyond, their actions tend to be portrayed as normative, involving the avoidance of intoxication for Henry, the facilitation of hospitality for Alexa, inclusion in rituals of celebration for Josh, and a safe return home for Greg.

Whether parents enabled their children's drinking appears to depend to a great extent on the age of the children, with the youngest participants (i.e., those under 15) reporting less permissive attitudes and practices among their parents. For example, Charlotte and Jill (18), described how their mothers were part of a group of parents who communicated about their children's whereabouts through a messaging platform when they were 14, and how Charlotte's mother tried to prevent other parents giving Charlotte alcohol:

> Charlotte: '[…] the parents had the group chat and my mum was like "no I don't want Charlotte drinking" but—'.
> Interviewer: 'So your parents have a group chat—'.
> Jill: 'Yeah, when we were like year 9 [age 14]—'.
> Charlotte: '[…] there was like a house party and one of our friend's mum was like "'m going to buy the girls drink, is that OK with everyone" and my mum was like "no"…'.

We can see here how parents' involvement in providing their children with alcohol was contingent on their children not being deemed to be 'too young', which in most cases meant more than a few years away from the age of 18. Unlike older participants, who described their parents' role in their drinking as limited or non-existent, several younger participants' accounts suggest that their parents took an active interest in their drinking, often facilitating access, although within what the young people constructed as reasonable limits, usually with careful attention to avoiding intoxication and its perceived negative consequences. Overall, the contrasting accounts of the older and younger cohorts suggest (as previously established) that not only do many young people appear to access and drink in the context of domestic spaces, as opposed to commercial or outdoor spaces, but also that the meaning of drinking may have shifted. Rather than expressing rebellion or resistance, youth drinking practices may have become more intertwined with wider

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family practices [40] (see also [41]). These include marking special occasions, as in Josh's example, or in term of alcohol emerging as a topic of ongoing communication between young people and their parents, as we see in the examples of Henry and Greg.

4 | DISCUSSION

In line with quantitative surveys demonstrating change in where young people access and consume alcohol [26], our results suggest that there have been changes in the meanings attached to drinking in outdoor public spaces and to the intersections of drinking and home life. While several older participants reported having been able to purchase alcohol (subject to negotiation) in the off- and on-trades, this was usually not the case for younger participants, with alcohol instead accessed via parents, siblings or friends who were 18 or over. Drinking in outdoor public spaces held contrasting meanings for older and younger participants. The former largely saw it as a suitable site for socialising and drinking, conveniently positioned beyond the purview of adult supervision, while several of the latter equated drinking in such spaces with classed and gendered stereotypes of socially undesirable 'others'. The results also suggest changes in how home life and parenting figure in adolescents' drinking. While older participants described limited intersections between their home life and their drinking, including little parental involvement in their drinking practices, younger participants discussed such intersections, with many giving accounts of how their drinking was embedded in wider family practices of celebration and day-to-day communication.

The cross-cohort comparative method used in this article is both a strength and limitation. It is a strength because comparing accounts of accessing alcohol, inhabiting spaces of youth drinking, and parents' involvement in young people's social lives provides a framework for exploring theories about change over time. It is a limitation because asking adults for accounts of past practices produces different kinds of data than asking young people to describe their present lives and recent pasts. One's past is inevitably re-encountered from one's position in the present [42], with at least some of the complexity and detail of everyday life lost to time. Therefore, the data generated through interviews with younger and older participants cannot be compared as if they were identical forms of data. For this reason, the transcripts of interviews with members of the older cohort were read with considerable care in order to distinguish between descriptive statements about one's personal past (e.g., where and with whom one spent time, etc.) and statements of opinion that were likely formed over more recent years from the vantage points of hindsight and adulthood. A few further limitations are worth noting. First, the older cohort was much smaller and less diverse in terms of ethnicity than the younger one. There are therefore a more limited range of experiences reflected in our results. Second, friendship group interviews and individual interviews produce different forms of data, with the latter generally allowing less scope for individual reflection on the topics discussed.

The results suggest that in considering the interacting social mechanisms giving rise to the decline [7], shifts in the spatial organisation of youth leisure are worthy of closer consideration. While changes in alcohol policies are generally seen as having had limited influence on the decline in the international literature, largely because there have been so few in the relevant countries and time period (e.g., [39]), it is worth investigating further the interaction between wider systemic changes and the impact of pre-existing or self-regulatory policies restricting the sale of alcohol to under 18s in certain countries. This is particularly true in the UK, where the off-trade is now dominated by major supermarkets [43, p. 5], which have a stronger interest in being seen to act within the law and greater control over the use of age verification policies than some smaller or independent retailers. Future research might also consider whether young people in other countries construct outdoor spaces as 'unsafe' and undesirable, as well as the potential implications of this construction for young people who drink in such spaces. Previous studies have suggested that when young people who drink in public places experience marginalisation as a result of responses to this practice, their drinking may become more central to their identities [29, 44]. Future research might also investigate whether alcohol appears to have become embedded in wider family practices for young people in other countries.

The construction of outdoor public spaces as not suitable for socialising with alcohol suggests a different sensibility about where young people belong. Space is imbued with power [45], and 'always under construction' [46, p. 9], with public space often constituting a site of contestation between young people and adult society [18]. Many of the young people in this study appear to be ruling themselves out of attempts to lay claim to spaces that were previously important to the older cohort in their efforts to socialise with alcohol beyond the gaze of adults. This suggests changes in where alcohol sits in intra- and inter-generational relationships and how these relationships are spatialised. Rather than a means of enacting resistance and rebellion, drinking for some young people appears to be an extension of home life. Homes appear to play a greater role in shaping and providing both a spatial and relational context for young people's leisure.

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5 | CONCLUSION

To conclude, this article has argued that wider spatial changes in young people's lives are an important backdrop to the decline in youth drinking. Attending to changes in the spatial organisation of youth drinking and the changing meanings of spaces allows for greater insight into the interacting social mechanisms producing the decline. A shift away from purchasing and consuming alcohol in public and commercial settings has occurred alongside a shift toward the home as a space for accessing alcohol, via parents and siblings. Parents' involvement in enabling and monitoring their children's drinking appears to have helped to produce a context in which young people's drinking is less a marker of independence and rebellion, and more an occasional practice that is perceived to require advanced planning to reduce risks to personal safety.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Each author certifies that their contribution to this work meets the standards of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

ORCID

Laura Fenton https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8747-9960
Hannah Fairbrother https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9347-8625
Victoria Whitaker https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7883-3852
Madeleine Henney https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2368-6677
Abigail Kate Stevely https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5637-5245
John Holmes https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9283-2151

ENDNOTES

* Antisocial Behavioural Orders were civil orders designed to penalise behaviours such as intimidation and public drunkenness by prohibiting or restricting access to particular places or by restricting behaviours like drinking in public. Despite being repealed in England and Wales in 2014, they remain a shorthand for youth delinquency.

† The perceived lack of success may be related to measures encouraging greater compliance with laws banning the sale of alcohol to under 18s in the UK. Examples of such measures include 'Challenge 21' and 'Challenge 25', in which customers are asked to provide proof of their age if the retailer believes they look under 21 or 25. The scheme started on a limited scale in 2006, initially on a voluntary basis, with similar compulsory, legally enforceable schemes introduced in the years that followed (Retail of Alcohol Standards Group [47]). Some members of the younger cohort were aware of such measures (see Whitaker et al. [48]).

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