

LOSING INHIBITIONS? YOUNG WOMEN, ALCOHOL AND LOSS IN THE NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY

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I am walking just outside Vodka Revolutions on the street and it's packed – [people] everywhere either milling around, walking or in the queue which snakes out onto the street exposed to the elements. [...] I join the back of the queue, it's a heady mixture of chatter, taxis hooting, silk skirts, white shirts, aftershave and shivering skin. I see a few guys staggering from the front of Vodka Revs – lots of people look out of curiosity over to the bouncers who guard the entrance door like hawks. Clearly off their face [drunk] these two guys are helped on their way (rather forcefully) by the two burly bouncers. Two female students are stood in front of me clinging together arm in arm and are also looking at the guys leaving the venue. Two of their friends are in front of them, also arms linked, all wearing very high heels, shuffling ahead cautiously as the queue begins to move. One of them almost wobbles over and falls as the queue moves forward and the other one hoists her up, "don't let go of me", both giggle hysterically, "God I just want to get in" "come on come on I need a drink!" and I too just want to get in to the warm...and have a drink.

(first author's field diary extract, in Stepney, 2014a: 110)

Take a wander around the night-time economy of a UK city on a Friday or Saturday evening, and there soon becomes a sense that for many this is an urban space where the 'normal' cultural codes and social rules of daytime life become inverted. Raymond Williams (1973) neatly captured this ambiguity and complexity of urban life, to counteract the earlier romantic and comforting image of social progress, by portraying it graphically in terms of cities of darkness and of light. When light falls there is something about the darkness and the warm glow of city bars and clubs that invites both a sense of playfulness, anticipation and excitement but also reminds us that behind the seductive ambience lies the possibility of danger and risk. It is a place which deliberately invites

disconnection from the daily woes and pressures of life, whether that is financial or personal, through a variety of means. In the night-time economy of the city, drinking alcohol has become central to this. The transient dynamics of the city allow encounters, growth and opportunity to live alongside conflict, tension and loss. Even a transformation of consciousness is possible, leading to the loss of “reality,” albeit just for a few hours.

When young women (and men) go out at night, arguably there are likely to be a number of intended and unintended losses: some will lose their inhibitions intentionally, whilst others will do so accidentally. Others may lose their words or themselves, a wallet, a drink, a friend, a lover, only to remember what they lost – perhaps when they wake up the morning afterwards. Memories, jokes, shared stories are recovered. Others may be intentionally forgotten. However, some experiences of loss can be more traumatic and leave psychological wounds that may take considerably longer to get over. Nonetheless, even the more mundane, unspectacular and less eventful stories suggests that drunkenness is far more complex than just wanting to feel “out of it.” The loss of identity and control, and the various potential traumas associated with drinking, as this chapter will explore, inhabit a precarious and ambiguous space. Ideas about how young women and men should behave on a night out reveal how gender identity has to be consistently negotiated, and for many young women drinking is about losing just the right amount of control. Moreover, it is the ever-present *fear* of loss which is sometimes more acutely felt than loss itself and can result in emotional trauma. Research suggests that enjoyment and “fun” sought by young women on a night out can often be overshadowed by many underlying fears, in particular the fear of losing one’s friends and losing self-control (Stepney, 2014a). The latter manifests from an underlying fear of crime – whereby young women utilize a number of strategies to reduce risk and deploy safety measures such as “sticking together,” sharing taxis and texting one another.

In focusing on young women, alcohol and loss, this chapter challenges the common assumption in popular debate and the media that young women’s engagement with the night-time economy is purely about having a good time, often presented as having “fun.” In the space which women inhabit in the night-time economy we will argue that, below the surface, something else is going on: that there is also a sense of *collective* loss and grieving alongside the fun and enjoyment, even if this is unrecognized, disapproved of and thus “disenfranchised.” Young women’s lives are marked by competing pressures and contradictions, as their internal world collides with external pressures concerning looking or behaving in particular ways. Failure to live up to a social norm or ideal creates many losses – identity loss, loss of self, loss of control. At the same time, McRobbie (2009) suggests that young women are consistently subject to a celebratory discourse of equal opportunity that champions new forms of

freedom and success both in leisure and the workplace. It is young women's relationship with alcohol and especially "binge drinking" which represents one significant response to these changes, both socially and economically. Drawing on the work of McRobbie (2009) and Bion (1961) and Doka's notion of "disenfranchised grief" (1989, 2001) we will suggest that drinking in groups represents a collective response to these contradictions and the traumas associated with being a young woman.

The concept of trauma is relevant here and may be defined as a psychosocial wound (Thompson, 2009), accompanied by an emotional shock usually resulting from acute stress that exceeds the person's ability to cope. However, it may take many forms, and includes witnessing an event, as much as direct experience, perhaps a "near-miss" by being close at hand. Although commonly associated with accidents, abuse, disasters, etc., traumatic events that unexpectedly occur on a night out can also lead to a wounded identity which damages a person's self-esteem. However, the effect of trauma will depend on how the event is experienced and clearly not all people who experience a potentially traumatic event will become traumatized. Research suggests that in the United States between 70 and 80 percent of the population will experience a traumatic event at some stage in their lives (Resick, 2001). As we shall see, the uncertainties of globalization, structural changes to the economy and their impact within the urban spaces of the night-time economy may greatly increase the risk of loss and trauma.

Globalization and the Creation of the 24-Hour Night-Time Economy

The globalization of the economy, changes to the labor market and modernization of the welfare state have had a dramatic impact in the community, and young women have very much been in the forefront of this. Globalization may be marked by partial, contradictory and highly conflictual tendencies (Clarke, 2000), accompanied by efforts to constrain public spending, even before the current global financial crisis. If we examine the demand side of European economies we find a concomitant trend toward growing casualization and insecurity in the labor market. This has created an expanding sector of low-paid, part-time, casualized "junk jobs" with a disproportionately high female workforce (Esping-Andersen, 1999), supplemented by migrant workers from across the globe. Alongside this has been a growth of the super-rich with their conspicuous lifestyles and wealth (Piketty, 2014). Overall, the attribution of freedom and success that women may enjoy will be experienced differently across boundaries of class, ethnicity and sexuality (McRobbie, 2009).

Demographic changes, especially a rise in Europe's aging population, particularly the very old, mean that demand for welfare is set to rise along with the increasing fragmentation of local communities. This is placing a greater

burden on informal carers, many of whom are women, at a time when they are subject to competing pressures in the labor market, the family and community (Stepney and Popple, 2008). The number of informal carers willing and able to care is also likely to fall, due to increasing mobility, family poverty and divorce rates and carers growing older (Cousins, 2005). The result is growing alienation and division and new patterns of exclusion, together with the increasing feminization and racialization of poverty.

The impact of these socio-economic changes has left many communities with scars that intensify existing social divisions. In Britain these have been gilded with the artifacts of the 24-hour night-time economy, as large tracts of former industrial land in cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and London's dockland became prime sites for redevelopment (Roberts and Eldridge, 2012). The Mailbox area of central Birmingham provides an illuminating example. This was once a busy canal-side area of warehousing and commerce at the height of the Industrial Revolution that subsequently fell into disuse and dereliction. The regeneration of the area led to the creation of new mixed-tenure housing, smart high-rise apartment blocks, new bars, night clubs, hotels and so on, which has given the area a substantial makeover. However, the transformation of the urban wastelands has been achieved at a substantial social cost, for, while the young and affluent have become active participants in the night-time economy, poorer sections of the community have experienced the transformation in terms of alienation, exclusion and loss (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2004).

Young women have been at the forefront of this dramatic cultural shift but have experienced participation in the night-time economy in contradictory ways. Pubs and bars were once the sole domain of men, yet with the development of night-time economies in British towns and cities, these spaces began to change dramatically. Women have been key to this regeneration with the targeting of female drinkers through drinks promotions, thereby attracting women into previously masculine spaces. Alongside this was the revalorization of city centers during the development boom, which remodeled them as places in which to live, work and be entertained (Roberts and Eldridge, 2012; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). For policy makers the adoption of a 24-hour, livable city was central to this vision of revitalization and reflected increasing competition between cities across the globe (Yeo and Heng, 2014).

Concurrent with these changes the city center became a zone of transition and change. The simultaneous centralization and suburbanization of jobs, depopulation and the domestication of leisure had not only left cities with some physical disrepair, but also resulted in widespread unemployment, social decay and crime (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). Lovatt and O'Connor (1995) suggest that the city center, a liminal urban space, was associated not only with regeneration but also with fear and crime – home to so-called “residual” groups that

became pathologized: youths, prostitutes and drug addicts. The complexities of the night-time economy presented new flows of economic and employment opportunities, yet the flexible, irregular and casual nature of much employment in the night-time sector meant that workers were often exploited or economically and socially invisible (Hobbs *et al.*, 2000). The “pathologization” of the city center was accompanied by surveys showing that many women and older people feared crime and (male) violence in city centers at night (Lovatt and O’Connor, 1995).

It did not take long before participation in night-life economies became spatially and temporally “a concern” particularly with regard to conflicts between social groups. Indeed, issues of antisocial behavior, littering, crime and drunkenness have meant that some authors have suggested the growth of a “domo-centric” (“domo” meaning “home”) population that fear night-time “yobbery” and “beermonsters” (Hubbard, 2005, p. 118; Sparks *et al.*, 2001, p. 894). For Chatterton and Hollands (2002, p. 97), increases in violence in city centers at night are in part due to an increased individualization and globalization of society which have fueled a “complex array of youthful and not so young lifestyles and identities.” Bars and clubs typically have drinks promotions and design layouts specifically targeting young people, and offer alcohol as a form of intoxication rather than a stimulus toward “entertainment” through social interaction (Tiesdell and Slater, 2006). In exploring the night-time economy and women’s participation in this urban space further, we will now address how theories of loss and trauma provide illumination for the empirical data which follows.

Psychoanalytic Theory of Loss and Trauma

Considerable psychoanalytic theory pays attention to loss, in particular the loss of objects (namely people and things). Loss of the object is something which is emphasized time and time again in psychoanalytic theory, from Freud to Klein and Mahler (Bollas, 1995). From the losses of one’s past to losses that alter our own very being and history, the loss of one’s youth to loss of loved ones and the loss of “futures,” our very being and existence are punctuated by continual loss (Bollas, 1995, p.119). The pain of losing objects never entirely goes away as all change represents some sort of loss. Indeed, as Bollas (1995) remarks, this is intrinsically related to memory and our past. We continue to eradicate our lived experiences by forgetting them and turning them into a globally recognized notion: “the past.” He suggests that it is the passing of time that is intrinsically traumatic (Bollas, 1995).

Loss theory has its theoretical roots in the work of Freud and others writing in a broadly psychoanalytical tradition. The classic study of loss is Freud’s (1957) *Mourning and Melancholia*, but it can also be found in the work of Klein (1948) and Bowlby (1980). According to Payne (2014) loss may unlock hidden

feelings from the inner world, which surface and cause anxiety. So in many ways loss may be perceived as a particular kind of crisis. Traditional theorists such as Kübler-Ross (1970) and Murray Parkes (1986) identified the various “stages” of grief associated with loss and the kind of complications that might arise. However, according to Thompson “there is now a convincing body of theoretical research evidence to confirm that, despite the predominance of this idea, people do not grieve in stages” (Thompson, 2009, p. 16).

Since the 1980s a number of theoretical developments have taken place that can help us better understand the experience of young women in the night-time economy, in particular the notion of “disenfranchised grief” for groups that do not generally receive social approval (Doka, 1989), the societal implications and ways loss are managed and the recognition that women may adopt more masculine styles of grieving (Martin and Doka, 2000). The notion of drinking as a form of “displaced grief” may also apply in some situations. What we have now is a more complex social model of loss and trauma with greater emphasis on cultural and structural factors (Thompson, 2002, 2009).

McRobbie (2009), drawing on the work of Judith Butler, suggests that current female freedoms (in the workplace and in leisure) are in fact marked by copresent losses: that of a radical sexual politics and a loss of feminism. She argues that this manifests in both individual and collective melancholia, which is expressed through things like binge drinking, self-harm, self-regulation including eating disorders and body dysmorphia, all of which have been normalized as “female complaints.” In other words, phenomena such as binge drinking signal a privatization or internalization of discontent, with the prospect of long-term psycho-social trauma and harm; for McRobbie (2009), this is in the absence of a feminist rebellion that would challenge the heterosexual and patriarchal matrix and question female identity and consumer culture. Instead, drinking may provide young women with an avenue for expression and recognition when other opportunities and avenues (such as feminism) seem limited, illusory or even reviled (Brown and Gregg, 2012; Stepney, 2015).

Whilst there are enormous variations in the spectrum of “female complaints,” like self-harm, low self-esteem, binge drinking and body image issues, achieving and maintaining female identity is highly problematic and can make women and girls unwell (McRobbie, 2009). Here, psychoanalytic theory contributes to our understanding of not only the repetition of traumas and loss, but also how this might be “played out” in a group setting. For example, the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion is most noted for his understanding of group behavior as well as his theories on thought processes and mental functioning. Bion’s (1961) book *Experiences in Groups* had a profound effect within psychoanalysis and, later, more widely on those interested in understanding the unconscious and group dynamics.

Bion aimed to describe and explain a number of processes that lay beneath the emotional interaction in groups (Riesenberg-Malcolm, 2001). He posited that there were two main modes of mental activity or functioning identifiable within group life. On the conscious level, groups meet for a purpose, or a reason. This he called the “work group” function (also referred to as the “sophisticated group”), which describes a number of people that gather together for a task or for some motive, for example a night out. Thus, “[e]very group, however casual, meets to ‘do’ something; in this activity, according to the capacities of the individuals, they co-operate” (Bion, 1961, p. 143). However, Bion (1961) in his observation and work noted that there was another layer to this, in that the “work group” was “sometimes hindered, occasionally furthered by emotional drives” (p. 188). This could result in the undermining or breakdown of the group or, in the case of it being harnessed toward the work group, helpful. We may further posit that when groups of young women enter the night-time economy this is often the case – in terms of loss and trauma (and repetition of trauma), whereby the group cohesiveness is undermined and quickly breaks down. Drinking may allow wounded identities from previous unresolved traumas to resurface and be acted out unconsciously in the group. In the next section, we will draw on empirical data to flesh out some of these ideas on loss and trauma in individuals and groups.

Empirical Data

This section draws on research conducted with a sample (N=47) of young female university students in Reading (UK) and Groningen (the Netherlands). This was part of doctoral research which took a qualitative approach, employing both in-depth interviews and participant observations in both night-time economies.

Participants in both countries talked about the different stages of drunkenness and a desirable stage of drunkenness that they wanted to reach (see Figure 22.1). In the interviews, students in both localities were asked to describe how they felt when they were most recently drunk, what motivated them to drink and how they knew they were drunk. The definition and interpretation of “drunk” was left to the participant, as this opened up new possibilities for understanding conceptions of drunkenness (rather than limiting discussion within government guidelines) and also because, as the interviews progressed, it became clear that many participants were unsure of the exact amount they drank on a night out. What seemed important here was this provided a starting point for a more in-depth discussion about embodied feelings and interpretations of these experiences.

Participants in both localities sought an “ideal” drinking identity: as such, there was a desire to be drunk enough (which involved being not too sober, but not too drunk). Getting “tipsy” was seen as the “ideal” level of drunkenness, which



Figure 22.1 Stages of drunkenness (as discussed in collaboration with participants, Groningen and Reading)
 Author's own image (2016).

included balancing control with some loss of control. British participant Kim and Dutch participant Marijke described these different stages of drunkenness:

You've got like sort of just feeling it a little bit. And then you've got like the merry stage and then you've got the pleasantly drunk sort of thing, where you've got a little bit more confidence and then you can go too far and you're in the "dodgy stages" you know that if you have one more then that's it, you're probably going to be not really knowing what you're doing and wake up with blank pauses in your memory the next day [...] unless that's what you want [laughs]!

(Kim, 21-year-old UK participant, in Stepney, 2014b, p. 311)

[M]y favourite stage is the second, just when you've begun [...] that's the best bit, when you can feel it working in a bit [...] a bit warm, a bit happy, almost as if you're feeling a bit loved up like [...] but not really of course

(Marijke, 19-year-old Dutch participant, in Stepney, 2014b, p. 312)

Kim highlights the precarious nature of drunkenness with her “one more then that’s it” – however, paradoxically, she talks about this sometimes being desirable (“unless that’s what you want!”); thus drunkenness is both dangerous (“dodgy”) as well as desirable (“more confidence; a bit warm, a bit happy”). It also has an ideal (“my favourite stage”). Psychoanalytically we can postulate that there is an accompanying anxiety that the “good” aspects of drinking (“feeling a bit loved up,” as Marijke comments) are always in jeopardy or in danger of becoming too much, or even not enough (feeling too sober).

Drawing on Bion (1961), there is a sense that the “good” work function of the group always has a shadow: the possibility of things going awry. Loss is of course central to this story: finding the right level of drunkenness could always be lost (intentionally and unintentionally). Losing oneself and one’s inhibitions is something that can be measured and observed, and this, it seemed, was often based on past *bad* experiences. In fact, whilst it is difficult to gauge the extent of a traumatic experience, participants clearly recounted “wounds” – stressful and emotional experiences which influenced their self-esteem and future behavior. Participant Vivian told me about an incident when she got so drunk she ended up in hospital. She conveyed how she felt disappointed in herself but also her friends, who had contributed to her getting so drunk:

Probably just (.) over a year ago I (.)well one of my friends thought it’d be really funny to top up my drink all the time (.) and I hadn’t realised and I got more and more drunk [quietly][...]I was on the floor in the girls’ bathroom cos I’d collapsed and someone had to draaag me out (.)I got taken to hospital. They just hooked me up to things to check that I was fine (.) and I was fine (.) but there was just too much alcohol in my system [...] it was the most humiliating thing in my life.

(Vivian, UK participant, in Stepney, 2014a, p. 109)

Vivian told me that her friends had added extra measures of alcohol to her drinks and that she lost track of how much she was drinking. Whilst her friends had helped her out of the girls’ bathroom, there was a deep sense of humiliation and disappointment as she told me her friends thought it was funny to top up her drink. Similarly, 19-year-old participant Lisa told me about an incident when she was extremely drunk:

Well I was at my friend John’s halls (.) and we were really late getting dressed so we only had about an hour or something before we went out and my friends were really like ‘oh you’re nursing your drink, you’re nursing your drink!’ so I drank faster (.) and it just hit me really bad (.) we went out and I was too drunk to even get into

the club (.) uhm and they turned me away (.) uhm and I don't remember anything from that (.) and people were just telling me about the things that went on and I couldn't believe it [embarrassed] I was being sick [...] I fell over onto bins and I was in KFC and I couldn't eat because I was too drunk [...] everyone was like 'it was really funny' and stuff (.) but I didn't like being the butt of the joke.

(Lisa, UK participant, in Stepney, 2014a, p. 109)

Both participants expressed their embarrassment and feelings of shame in talking about these incidents. Both were clearly very upset, not only about their frightening experiences, but also about their disappointment at being betrayed – for Vivian by her friends topping up her drink and for Lisa by the encouragement from friends to drink faster and their subsequent shaming of her drunken behavior. It would seem that both participants had endured traumatic experiences that had caused deeper anxiety, leaving psycho-social “wounds.”

Many of the students, particularly the British students, talked about traumatic incidents including accidents or serious mishaps: losing wallets, falling over, being sick, waking up with hangovers or ending up in hospital. British student Emily told me about falling when drunk and getting a black eye and broken tooth; Dutch student Inge recalled being extremely drunk on a boat party and missing the whole night through falling semi-conscious behind the bar; Tanya recalled a traumatic incident where a housemate had stopped breathing due to too much alcohol and how she suddenly became extremely stressed and scared when the ambulance arrived. These stories of traumatic incidents were retold with a mixture of embarrassment, humor and considerable anxiety. The stress of the event quickly came flooding back, indicating a certain level of psychic disruption that had been suppressed. Female students in both Groningen and Reading also mentioned having “blackouts” or periods of time during the night when they could not remember anything. White (2003) suggests that, physiologically, the more alcohol is consumed the greater the magnitude of (fragmentary) memory impairment including sometimes complete memory loss. This was often accompanied by the feeling of guilt, especially in relation to losing control:

There are a few bits of the journey home on my bike that I can't remember. I find that terrible (.) I find it awful to lose control and so now (.) like when I feel it (.) like that tingling (.) that feeling of being a bit lighter (.) I don't know how to describe it but you can think more easily about things (.) that's when I think, right I'll drink some water, and then I might have another drink after that and then stop (.) [...] I want to remain in control.

(Mariela, 20-year-old Dutch participant)

This calls attention to how memory, drinking and control interconnect. It was found that highly stressful experiences of excessive drinking often served as a marker for future drinking. The anxiety and stress of a traumatic experience clearly impacted on many participants and served as a reprimand for future behavior. However, whilst many participants talked about such traumatic incidents, this did not mean that they did not drink again. In fact, quite the opposite – where the memory of incidents appeared to be pushed away and “temporarily lost” when out again with friends. We may argue, therefore, that, for some participants, they repeatedly opened up and “relived” their psycho-social wounds. There was a cycle of loss, trauma and regret which was repeated. For Freud and others, this is not unusual, with the perpetual recurrence of the same thing representing a desire to return to an earlier state of being. So what are we to make of the empirical findings in the context of external influences (labor market, fragmented communities and city center night-time economy), psychoanalytic theory and the internal world of young women characterized by hidden conflicts and contradictions? This will be the central concern of our discussion next.

Discussion

The night-time economy is a rapidly transforming sector in the global economy. Previously a masculine space, regeneration has actively promoted new opportunities and modes of feminine citizenship based mainly on consumption (particularly of alcohol). On the face of it, young women’s drinking accords with feminist “girl power.” Yet these new-found freedoms are contradictory and highly unequal as not all women participate in the night-time economy in the same way. The labor market is increasingly casualized and flexible and so “youthful femininity” takes different forms across boundaries of class, ethnicity and sexuality (McRobbie, 2009). Further, women are subject to ongoing moral scrutiny, observation and surveillance when drinking. For many of the participants interviewed there was a careful watching of the self and specific self-reprimands and management techniques employed, which suggest that such new-found freedoms operate within unstated social boundaries and particular parameters. It also became apparent that, whilst different self-management techniques were attempted, frequently the group’s cohesiveness would quickly break down – for example, Lisa and Vivian found that their friends let them down. Such evidence from participants indicated that behind the “fun” and enjoyment and below the surface something else was going on.

The creation of fragmented identities and the “gains” which women have made in the labor market come at a significant social cost and, as we discovered, frequently involved associated loss. As we have noted young women’s lives are marked by competing pressures and contradictions, and the night-time

economy has tended to reinforce these. On the surface the “fun” from their participation in the night-time economy is seen as confirmation of opportunity and freedom. On the other hand, failure to live up to society’s expectations by looking and behaving in particular ways can be viewed in terms of crisis and loss – significantly loss of an avenue in which to question wider gender expectations. As McRobbie (2009) suggests, this loss and melancholia in part reflect a particular rage in young women which is turned in on the self; from self-harm to excessive dieting and binge drinking, these “female complaints” have become normalized. Discourses of empowerment and freedom suppress any disquiet young women may feel. So, paradoxically, alongside the “fun” and enjoyment there is also a sense of *collective* loss and grieving even if this remains largely unrecognized, unacknowledged and without social approval. It is precisely this social disapproval which provides some sort of recognition. However, young women’s relationship with alcohol, and especially “binge drinking,” represents one significant response to this collective loss, which may be considered a new manifestation of “disenfranchised grief” (Doka, 2001).

Young women who engage in binge drinking are a stigmatized and particularly disenfranchised group. Any loss and trauma resulting from a night out, by implication, becomes disenfranchised – a judgment reinforced by media condemnation that they have brought all this upon themselves. So the possibility of young women grieving for their losses is quickly discounted and might seem quite bizarre. However, Doka (2001) suggested that the way people grieve may become disenfranchised especially when, in the case of young women, their grief is misunderstood and largely unrecognized. According to Attig (2004) people may become active participants and contribute to their own disenfranchisement, a situation which could certainly apply to young women who drink and behave in a perceived masculine way. It was found from the research data that this was more pronounced among the British young women, while the Dutch participants revealed greater political awareness of the contradictory position of women in society. However, we argue that the night-time economy is a source of disenfranchisement for all young women even if it is rarely spoken about in these terms

On examining the traumas associated with something going badly wrong, as in the cases cited from the empirical data, this may lead to a form of displaced grief where the event is initially blanked out and seemingly lost but then reappears when subject to a sometimes painful self-appraisal. It became apparent during the research that the young women had probably experienced a variety of traumas associated with drinking. Drinking may help to bring some of these traumas back to the surface even if they have been suppressed or reinterpreted as positive “learning experiences.” For some participants there was significant repetition and reliving of a psycho-social wound associated with drinking. Clearly, this is an area that requires more research. In the long term it may either result in more

responsible behavior (“I’m never going to drink like that again”) or can lead to further incidents that push the boundaries of convention about what is socially acceptable behavior. As we have suggested earlier, such responses to loss may be seen as a new form of “disenfranchised grief” (Doka, 2001), where the behavior of young women who binge-drink has been met with widespread social disapproval.

The current crisis in Britain’s city hospitals, particularly accident and emergency departments at weekends, is sometimes blamed on young people drinking who turn up and expect to receive emergency treatment. From participants’ stories of their own traumas associated with drinking, there was particular evidence of shame and humiliation. A minority may experience prolonged symptoms indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder, though none of the participants alluded to this. What was evident from the research was that a number of traumas were being repeated. We suggest that the repetition of trauma signals a far wider and collective loss. For many of the participants in the 24-hour night-time economy, the new modalities of femininity were difficult to inhabit. For McRobbie (2009) this loss is the absence of any feminist movement or avenue to critique gender relations. This instead has been superseded by a gender-aware discourse which celebrates opportunity and freedom for young women. If young women are seeking forms of recognition through drinking, then it may be no surprise this is continually repeated.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to explore the ways in which the night-time economy highlights the contradictory conditions of youthful femininity. Whilst considerable “gains” and discourses around opportunity and freedom exist, participation in the night-time economy is tempered by conditional expectations. As these expectations are difficult to manage, losses and trauma occur as young women negotiate their identities in public spaces. These become very apparent with drinking alcohol, as young women self-manage, self-reprimand and attempt to maintain a socially approved identity. For McRobbie (2009) loss is central to this story, whereby coming forward has coincided with the fading away of the women’s movement and feminism, as women are consistently told they have never had it so good. In these ways, there is a collective grieving on the part of young women – that binge drinking represents one path of recognition even if this meets with widespread social disapproval.

Note

Quotes reprinted from *Emotion, Space and Society*, 10 (2014), British women’s experiences of drinking alcohol: Dynamics of emotional proximity and distance, 105–112, with permission from Elsevier.

Quotes reprinted from Stepney, M. (2014b), What does it mean for young women to get drunk? A Kleinian perspective on young women's relationship with alcohol. In: Kingsbury, P., and Pile, S. (eds), *Psychoanalytic Geographies*, Farnham: Ashgate, 307–321, with permission from Ashgate/Taylor & Francis.

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