

# Alcohol use by student athletes: Culture, Hierarchy and Habit

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## **Abstract**

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There is a deeply embedded drinking culture in sport and a need for a greater understanding of the individual and cultural mechanisms which create and sustain it. This thesis sought to understand this drinking culture (or ethos) by examining the alcohol-related experiences of athletes prior to, and throughout, university. This focussed on the group level dynamics, power relations and perceived value of alcohol, and the environmental contributors to drinking. To develop a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena, this thesis focussed on student rugby players in particular and both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. In study one, an online alcohol survey was distributed to students attending a single university in Wales, and in study two, participants were invited to provide follow-up data at three time-points (Term 1, 2 and 3). In study three, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with male (n=9) and female (n=6) university rugby players. In study four, a season-long case study of a male student rugby club was undertaken which utilised data from a variety of sources including observations (across multiple leagues and teams), traditional media reports, social media, conversational interviews, and semi-structured interviews with male players, a director of rugby and director of student services. This thesis provides novel evidence that a considerable proportion of athletes may be inducted into problematic alcohol use during adolescence and enter university with established drinking habits. Despite this, alcohol use is likely to increase further during university. Several factors may support this increase. Firstly, alcohol use and intoxication had symbolic value (capital) in sport, allowing individuals to negotiate a better position within a social hierarchy. Second, consumption was embedded within a rigid social calendar as tradition. Third, a plethora of environmental factors, such as alcohol availability, pricing and marketing may have normalised a heavy drinking culture. Collectively these factors may interact to prepare athletes for a heavy drinking culture prior to their arrival at university and normalise this experience thereafter.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

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### **1.1 The research problem**

An abundance of cross-cultural research has associated participation in sport during university with increased alcohol use (Zhou & Hiem, 2014; Partington et al., 2010). Alcohol use at the levels reported by university athletes<sup>1</sup> may have a detrimental impact on health (World Health Organisation, 2018), wellbeing (Tembo et al., 2017), academic performance (Ruthig, 2011, Tembo et al., 2017), athletic performance (American College of Sports Medicine, 1982), student retention (Liguori & Lonbaken, 2015) and may contribute to a life-long habit of problem drinking (Jennison, 2004, Tivolacci, 2019). Universities have a duty of care for students and should therefore seek to minimise the potential harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption.

### **1.2 Sport participation and alcohol use**

Sport is considered a positive, health enhancing lifestyle choice. It reduces depression, anxiety, and emotional distress (Mammen and Faulkner, 2013; Anderson & Shivakumar, 2013; Byrne & Byrne, 1993; Eime et al., 2013), improves self-esteem, self-concept, and wellbeing (Ekeland et al., 2005; Joesph et al., 2014; Ahn & Fedewa, 2011; Harris, 2018) and improves physiological health (World Health Organisation, 2018). Despite the positive biopsychosocial benefits of participation in sport, there is evidence that many athletes engage in harmful levels of alcohol use (Mays et al., 2010; Scholes-Balog, 2016; Poortinga, 2007). Despite the well-established consensus that excessive alcohol use is detrimental to sporting performance and overall health (American College of Sports Medicine, 1982), there is a close connection between alcohol consumption and playing sport (Green et al 2001). Reports stretching back to the sixteenth century highlight the interconnectedness between sport, alcohol use and the drinking environment (Collins & Vamplew, 2002). Sporting events were often held in public houses, sports teams were sponsored and, in some cases, owned by local breweries and a wealth of organised sport was offered by public house landlords to attract customers (ibid.). Socialising with alcohol continues to be an important component of the sporting experience of many of those that take part. This typically involves athletes congregating in large groups following training sessions, competitive events and end of season excursions or celebrations. According to Palmer (2011: 175)

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis 'athletes' define anybody who plays organised sport.

Sport is peppered with examples of this determined drunkenness where the explicit intention is to get rapidly and heavily intoxicated. End of season drinking trips, booze cruises, pub crawls, drinking safaris, “skulling” competitions and “boat races,” alcohol fuelled celebrations and commiserations.

Alcohol use and excessive drinking (heavy episodic drinking or binge drinking) during these social gatherings have become normalised through decades of traditions and rituals (Collins and Vamplew, 2002). Today, sport remains intertwined with alcohol use. Athletes at all levels drink to celebrate, relax, relieve stress and bond with teammates (Jones, 2016). As such, it is argued that in most cases, alcohol use in sport is now a social rather than a sporting issue (Ibid.).

### **1.2.1 Negative consequences**

Studies into the drinking habits and patterns of elite athletes are difficult to obtain for several reasons. However, anecdotal evidence, informal conversations with athletes, biographies, autobiographies, fly on the wall documentaries, the press, and images posted on social media provide some evidence of the presence of alcohol in the lives of professional athletes in some sports (Jones, 2016). A former Welsh rugby union international, Gavin Henson, in his autobiography, described how intoxication was used by a previous coach as strategy for building team cohesion.

Rugby and drinking have always gone together, but I’ve never found it an easy mix. The summer of 2000 when I joined Swansea, John Plumtree decided we needed a ‘bonding session’ to pull the whole squad together before the season started. The bonding consisted of a drinking marathon down the seafront from St Helen’s to Mumbles, a village where the pubs and bars are all within easy staggering distances from each other. Dean Thomas, the Swansea flanker at the time and a hard player, grabbed me and insisted I start off matching him round for round. I was even more of a hopeless drinker then than I am now and it wasn’t long before I was completely leathered. I may have ‘bonded’ with Dean but I don’t remember much about it. Too smashed to go on, I rang my parents and my father drove 30 miles from Bridgend to come and pick me up. I spewed all the way home, but Dad didn’t seem too shocked. I think he understood. (Henson, 2005:101-102, in Jones, 2016).

This anecdote provides insight into the apparent drinking culture in elite rugby at that time. It demonstrates how drinking was normalised within social activities and used a

strategic activity to build unity among players. On the other hand, it shows the individual struggle which may arise from using an addictive and debilitating substance in this manner. Throughout his playing career, Gavin Henson had a problematic relationship with alcohol and featured in the media on several occasions for his drunken mishaps. In these instances, the culture of heavy drinking to celebrate or bond with team-mates within Welsh rugby was not the issue called into question. This problem stemmed from the individual and that he could not 'hold his drink' (Jones, 2016).

### **1.2.2 Sport, alcohol, and addiction**

The effect of alcohol on judgement and decision making may have a short-term impact on the reputation of individuals within this culture. However, the addictive properties and the normalisation of frequent alcohol use to socialise and celebrate may have long-term consequences. David Cotterill, a former Welsh football international, took to Instagram to disclose his personal battle with alcohol, which led to him seeking professional help to control his addiction. In a follow-up interview with BBC Sport Wales, David elaborated on how alcohol was a means of helping him to cope with the emotional stress of football, although when under the influence he had limited personal control of his actions.

Two days ago I finally got home from three of the hardest but most beneficial and productive weeks of my recovery so far.... I have been staying at Sporting Chance clinic battling alcohol dependency which has arisen from mental health issues. Finally admitting I'm powerless over alcohol. (David Cotterill, via Instagram, 2019).

Footballers are on a rollercoaster ride - one minute you're putting one in the top corner then you're missing a penalty. There are so many emotions going on and I thought drinking was helping my situation, but it made things a lot worse. I was heavily drinking at one stage. But it's not really about me drinking every day, it's what I was doing when I had alcohol in my system. I was a complete and utter nightmare and I need to seek that advice and help. (David Cotterill, via BBC Sport, 2019).

The personal reflections of both Gavin Henson and David Cotterill demonstrate the problems which can arise when potentially vulnerable individuals are exposed to a culture which normalises and encourages alcohol use.

There are countless other incidents of elite athletes struggling to cope with this uneasy relationship and the media spotlight of their celebrity status. In 2015, Aston Villa footballer Jack Grealish was pictured lying unconscious in the street while on holiday in Tenerife. In 2011, England rugby union international Manu Tuilagi received a formal warning for jumping off a ferry in Auckland at the 2011 World Cup and again in 2015, a drunken assault on two police officers, cost him his place at the 2015 World Cup. In 2016, MK Dons footballer Samir Carruthers and Northampton Town footballer James Collins, were banned from the Cheltenham festival for alcohol related behaviours and more recently a string of footballers have been caught driving under the influence of alcohol. In 2019, Derby footballers Tom Lawrence and Mason Bennett were convicted of drink driving after a crash which left club captain Richard Keogh with career threatening injuries, and several weeks later Sheffield United footballer Oli McBurnie was charged with the same offence.

### **1.2.3 Alcohol use by amateur athletes**

There has also been lack of research into the drinking patterns of athletes taking part in community sport in the United Kingdom. Recent research, however, has suggested those taking part in amateur rugby in Wales were drinking more frequently and excessively than those in the general population (cf. Harris et al., 2018). This research found only 4% of players reported abstaining from drinking alcohol, whereas 46% reported binge drinking weekly. National prevalence data for males aged 16-44 in Wales, collected during the same period, suggested 45% were abstaining from alcohol and 20% were binge drinking weekly (National survey for Wales, 2018). Of further cause for concern, Harris and colleagues also found 24% of amateur rugby players in Wales reported initiating weekly binge drinking prior to age 18, the legal age requirement for alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom.

International research corroborates this study, suggesting a culture of excessive alcohol use may be commonplace throughout community sports clubs. High levels of drinking have been found amongst athletes in England (Poortinga, 2007), Ireland (O'Farrell et al., 2010), Australia (Black et al., 1999; Crundall, 2012; Kingsland et al., 2013; Rowland et al., 2015), New Zealand (O'Brien et al., 2005; 2007), and Brazil (Bedendo et al., 2013). Alarmingly, amateur sports clubs may play an influential role in inducting young athletes into alcohol use and reinforcing their drinking habits thereafter. According to Jones (2016), in the UK a young athlete's first pint typically takes place at a community

sports club as a 'coming of age' ritual. Crundall (2012) argues many clubs have an established drinking culture where excessive drinking is a major focus of club and member events through strategic activities such as 'ritual binge drinking', 'performances rewarded with alcohol', 'end-of season trips', 'drinking competitions' and 'all-you-can-drink functions'. Excessive drinking appears to be a cultural requirement of participation.

#### **1.2.4 Alcohol use by university athletes**

Most of the research which has examined alcohol use by athletes has been conducted on university and college students. In the UK, research has identified student athletes consumed greater quantities of alcohol than their non-athlete peers. Partington et al. (2010) found student athletes across seven universities in England reported higher alcohol use and were more at risk of alcohol related harm than non-athletes. The authors discovered 79.6% of athletes reported hazardous drinking (Alcohol Use Identification Test (AUDIT) score of 8 or more), compared with 54.5% of non-athletes. Further, team athletes reported heavier alcohol use than individual athletes. In the USA, Liechliter and colleagues (1998), in one of the earliest attempts to map student-athlete drinking, found number of drinks consumed and frequency of consumption increased as level of sporting involvement increased from non-participant to member to leaders. Whereas Nelson and Wechsler (2001) found athletes reported more binge drinking, heavier alcohol use and a greater number of drinking related harms than non-athletes, supporting a previous study (Wechsler et al., 1997). A more recent large-scale investigation showed excessive drinking remained abundant throughout university sport a decade following the earliest attempts to systematically explore the relationship (Ford, 2007). The authors identified those involved with sport were significantly more likely to report binge drinking, and that social norms (how much students perceived other students were drinking) had the strongest association with individual consumption (Ford, 2007).

Elsewhere, a large national survey of 39,305 Canadian students discovered a curvilinear relationship between frequency of participation in sport and frequency of drinking, with moderately involved players showing greater levels of drinking (Kunz, 1997). In France, a study found those participating in sport demonstrated a greater frequency of intoxication, and frequency of intoxication was unaffected by competitive level (Lorente et al., 2003). Martha et al. (2009) also discovered participating in team sports

within a competitive setting (club/institution) was a significant risk factor for excessive usage. In Australia, O'Brien et al. (2011) found hazardous drinking was more common in athletes (60.2%) than non-athletes (55.5%), and greater rates of binge drinking were reported by athletes (41.4%) than non-athletes (34.8%). In New Zealand, research has found hazardous drinking differed across levels of ability, with elite-provincial athletes showing the highest rates of hazardous drinking, club/social athletes the next highest and elite-international athletes the lowest (O'Brien et al., 2007). This suggests the social processes and pressures which facilitate a drinking culture in sport may vary between individuals and teams of differing levels of ability.

### **1.3 The current thesis**

This thesis provides an original contribution to knowledge by addressing three gaps within the literature and approaching this phenomenon from an alternative theoretical and methodological direction. Firstly, this research focusses on understanding where and how athletes begin consuming alcohol within sporting environments. Secondly, this thesis seeks to reveal the underlying values associated with drinking practices and how these values position athletes within the group. Thirdly, this research aims to understand the environmental context in which drinking practices exist, focussing on the direct pressures (i.e., alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and availability) and indirect pressures, such as the characteristic tone or sentiment towards alcohol use (described as the ethos). Addressing these three significant gaps in the evidence base requires a methodological and theoretical approach which provides a holistic understanding of student athlete alcohol use. As such, an explanatory mixed methods approach, which begins by providing a descriptive understanding of patterns of behaviour (through quantitative methods), before explaining why patterns exist (through qualitative methods) is deemed to be most suitable for providing the required knowledge across the three areas identified above (outlined in greater detail in Chapter 4). Further, a theoretical approach is needed which can explain the interrelatedness between oneself, their position within a group and the environment surrounding them. As a result, the theoretical approach of Pierre Bourdieu shows significant promise (outlined in greater detail in Chapter 3). This holistic approach to the student athlete alcohol relationship can help identify the critical moments where interventions could achieve greater success than has previously been achieved (See, for example, Foxcroft et al., 2015; 2016; Partington & Partington, 2021).

## **1.4 Personal research goals**

Maxwell (2008) argues that it is vital to have a clear sense of the goals of one's research. This helps guide key decision making processes throughout the research process (i.e., what design to use, what methods to employ, what analytical techniques are most suitable, what theoretical framework to apply to interpret data, and so on), and can make a researcher aware of their own biases which will need to be dealt with throughout the research process. I am a public health researcher who uses data to understand what drives behaviours which can harm individuals, those around them, and wider society. I undertake research to understand the practical changes which could be made at an individual, interpersonal, organisational, community, or policy level to change harmful behaviours. University athletes are among the heaviest consumers of alcohol in society (Public Health England, 2016; Harris, Jones & Brown, 2019) and the widespread harms associated with excessive alcohol use are well documented (Public Health England, 2016). My research goals during this study were to understand aspects of the student athlete drinking culture which could be targeted to reduce consumption.

## **1.5 Thesis aims**

Given the published and anecdotal evidence of the central role alcohol plays in student sport culture, the aim of this thesis was to gain a greater understanding of the individual and cultural mechanisms of student athlete drinking. By approaching this phenomena from an alternative theoretical perspective and drawing on the influential insights of Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis sought to explore when and how drinking habits start, how they are sustained and maintained, and how they are transmitted and reproduced. In doing so, this thesis aimed to provide a more well-rounded understanding of student athlete drinking cultures than has previously been achieved. In order to gather the required information, a mixed methods approach was used, with each method chosen to answer specific questions and improve our understanding.

## **1.6 Thesis objectives**

The specific research objectives of each study conducted for this thesis were as follows:

Study 1 (quantitative) – A retrospective survey of student drinking habits:

- i. To describe patterns of alcohol use by student athletes compared to a control group of student non-athletes
- ii. To explore past drinking patterns among student athletes and non-athletes

Study 2 (quantitative) – A longitudinal survey of student drinking habits:

- i. To understand how patterns of alcohol use fluctuate throughout each Term of one academic year, for student athletes and non-athletes

Study 3 (qualitative) – An interview study with male and female university rugby players:

- i. To investigate the social and cultural factors within university-rugby which influence alcohol use.
- ii. To explore pre-university behaviours, expectations and experiences surrounding alcohol use and how they influence current drinking patterns.

Study 4 (qualitative) – A season-long case study with male rugby players:

- i. To investigate, in-real-time, the social processes which may be influencing drinking habits.
- ii. To provide a rich, holistic understanding of the views and actions of male rugby players within the natural environment in which they occur.

## **1.7 Thesis structure**

Chapter two presents a review of past studies that explored alcohol use by student athletes and offers a critical account of the quality of evidence available. Gaps in current understanding which this thesis aims to address are identified and several key questions of interest are presented.

Chapter three presents a theoretical framework that helps makes sense of the diverse research findings discussed in the previous Chapter and offers the conceptual and methodological resources to understand better the drinking culture among student athletes. The Chapter introduces and explains Bourdieu's (1977) theory of social practice. It explains the relationship between the individual and their cultural environment in general, and in relation to alcohol in particular.

Chapter four provides a detailed overview of the research design and methods adopted in this thesis. A detailed description of the data collection, research settings, measures, sample, and analytical techniques is provided for each of the four studies conducted during this program of research.

In Chapter five the findings of the first and second empirical studies are presented. It provides a descriptive account of the drinking patterns of student athletes and non-

athletes, whilst considering the impact of gender, age, sport participation, degree stage and living arrangements. This Chapter offers new insight into relationship between past alcohol use (age which alcohol use and binge drinking began) and current drinking habits (during Term 1 of university). In addition, this Chapter outlines how alcohol use changed over-time (at Term 1, Term 2, and Term 3).

Chapter six discusses the findings of 15 semi-structured interviews, used to gain a better understanding of some of the patterns of consumption revealed in Chapters 1, 2 and 5. It reports how participants initiated potentially problematic drinking practices prior to university, which appeared to increase during university. It describes the prevailing expectation that heavy drinking was widespread throughout university rugby and how a social hierarchy made behaving against the dominant social norm difficult. Finally, it argues that the structure of university and athlete culture may be sustaining and reproducing a harmful drinking culture within university rugby overtime.

In Chapter seven, the findings from a season-long case study of a male university rugby club are presented. The Chapter explains how alcohol use was embedded within everyday practices of playing and watching sport. It describes how specific roles and responsibilities were used to enforce compliance with the drinking culture. Further it explains how athletes used alcohol to show off and gain status. Finally, this Chapter argues that institutional factors are likely to have contributed to the drinking culture.

Chapter eight concludes this thesis by offering a summary of findings from Chapters 5, 6, and 7 and outlining how these add to current body of evidence. This Chapter culminates by offering several cultural changes which could reduce alcohol use and related harm at this university and similar institutions in need of reduction and prevention efforts.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

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### **2.1 Introduction**

This Chapter presents a detailed and critical discussion of relevant literature concerning the apparent drinking culture in university sport. The objective of this review is to assess the current level of understanding of the individual and cultural mechanisms of student athlete drinking. First, this Chapter describes the sociodemographic factors which have been found to correlate with alcohol use. Second, the potential role pre-university experiences and attitudes have on current alcohol use is discussed. Third, the influence of social experiences, norms and pressures are outlined. This Chapter culminates by outlining a need to understand the individual and cultural mechanisms underpinning student athlete alcohol use more systematically and in greater depth.

### **2.2 Factors associated with consumption**

Research examining alcohol use by student athletes has identified several factors associated with usage, including gender, year of study, age and living arrangements.

#### **2.2.1 Gender**

The available evidence suggests that in general males typically consume alcohol at greater levels than females (Brenner and Swanik, 2007; Ford, 2007; Yusko et al., 2008; Tewksbury et., 2008; Lewis and Paladino, 2008). This pattern was thought to be similar in student populations (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004; Wilsnack et al., 2000; Kenney et al., 2015). However, a growing concern of academics and public health advocates is the phenomenon known as ‘gender convergence’ in students’ alcohol use (Bloomfield et al., 2001; McPherson et al., 2004; Lawrence et al., 2010). In the general student population, some research has found no differences in the drinking levels of male and female students (Granville-Chapman, Yu & White, 2001), whereas other studies have suggested females are consuming more alcohol than males (Pickard et al., 2000; Underwood & Fox, 2000). One multi-institution UK study found evidence of no statistically significant difference in drinking levels between males and females across several outcomes, including degree of alcohol related risk, frequency of drinking and frequency of binge drinking (Partington et al., 2010). This pattern remained regardless of whether the students played sport. At present, it cannot be concluded with confidence that the gender convergence phenomena is an accurate observation. This stems from a fundamental weakness of attempting to compare between studies which have utilised different measures of drinking and with diverse sampling techniques. Partington et al.

(2010) speculate, however, that if gender convergence is true, it may reflect a general societal process of ‘emancipation’ whereby women increasingly adopt previously ‘male’ lifestyles including drinking behaviour. This process may be particularly relevant to sport, where visibility, participation and value of female sport has increased over recent years.

### **2.2.2 Year of study, age, and accommodation**

The available evidence for alcohol use between students at different stages of their degree is mixed. In one study which utilised both a longitudinal and cross-sectional design, Bewick et al. (2008) found first year athletes were the heaviest consumers and consumption decreased as students progressed through university. Elsewhere, however, Partington et al. (2010) found that whilst first year students were the heaviest drinkers, a significantly higher average alcohol score was reported by third, compared to second year students. The drinking prevalence data for more mature students is mixed, although, there is a general consensus that alcohol use among the student population, and within the subgroup of student athletes, steadily decreases with age (Black et al., 1999; Ham and Hope, 2003; Partington et al., 2010; Zhou and Heim, 2014). This may reflect a process of maturation – growing up and having less time and freedom to drink (Vik, Cellucci & Ivers, 2003; O’Malley, 2004) or less pressure to drink as one moves through the student culture.

There are several life factors which may support the development of a drinking culture among younger students. Firstly, during the first year of university students often move out of their family home, which may provide a long-awaited sense of freedom (Fromme, Corbin & Kruse, 2008). Second, first year academic performance has a lower impact upon a student’s final degree grade than second or third year. Third, the many events and advertising campaigns featuring alcohol, aimed at this new student cohort, may legitimise individual alcohol use, and strengthen a perception that indulging on alcohol is a key social activity during university (Brown, 2016, Riordan et al., 2017; Van Hal et al., 2018). Fourth, the type of accommodation provided to first year students with many, like-minded individuals living in proximity, may reinforce a heavy drinking culture (Smith et al., 2019). Collectively, these factors may normalise and legitimise a culture of excessive drinking. This idea, however, is speculative and there is a need for research into the structural and social pressures to consume by different age cohorts of

the student population. These factors will be explored in greater detail later in this thesis.

As students' progress through university these structural factors will change. They will often have to take on greater responsibilities (such as employment commitments, and the growing importance of academic achievement), which may subsequently lead to decreased consumption (O'Malley, 2004; Schulenberg et al., 1996). Students tend to move to a new house regularly during their time at university, therefore their immediate drinking environment and its influences change. The number of people living in each student house, the general make-up of personalities within the household, the proximity of such accommodation to on-licence and off-license alcohol outlets shape student drinking patterns.

Several studies have explored patterns of alcohol use between students living in different types of accommodation. There is a general consensus that living in on-campus residency is a considerable risk-factor for greater alcohol use (Kypri et al., 2002; Turrise et al., 2007; Tewksbury et al., 2008; Partington et al., 2010). In one multi-institution UK study, Partington and colleagues (2010) found students living on-campus had almost a 2-fold increase in alcohol use compared to those living with family or in other accommodation. Kypri et al. (2002) argue that the plethora of social events aimed at this new influx of students, in which alcohol plays a significant and central role, are likely to greatly increase the social pressure to consume. Students may feel pressured to buy rounds, to undertake 'drinking dares' or 'forfeits' and as such feel compelled to consume alcohol to fit in with the dominant social norm (Kuntsche et al., 2004; Faulkner et al., 2006). Johnson et al. (2007) described halls of residence as a type of community, with individuals living together in family settings, and that this type of unique living arrangement created a sense of belonging. The 'on-campus' drinking ethos is particularly powerful, making it very difficult for individuals to challenge or resist temptation and expectation (Johnson et al., 2007; Partington et al., 2010).

### **2.3 Pre-university attitudes, behaviours, and experiences**

There is no doubt that personal and social circumstances at university influence a student's alcohol use. It is less clear to what extent experiences prior to university play a role in consumption. Marcelo et al. (1989) found student-athletes arrived at university with pre-formed positive perceptions and attitudes towards alcohol. In other words, they were already drinkers. Hildebrand et al. (2001) discovered college students who were

athletes in high school (regardless of whether they had ceased or continued to take part in sport), consumed more alcohol, began drinking earlier, and engaged in alcohol-related risk behaviours more frequently, than students who had never been involved in sport. More recently, studies have shown age of first drink was among the strongest predictors of consumption by student athletes (Lewis and Paladino, 2008), whereas age of onset of drinking had the strongest impact on current use (Lewis, 2008).

In a cross-sectional study of 24,799 students, Green et al. (2014) found students who were an athlete in high school but not in college showed higher rates of binge drinking (51.4%) than students who were not an athlete in high school but were in college (39.5%). In comparison, those who were never an athlete reported the lowest levels of binge drinking (35.2%), whereas those who were an athlete in both high school and in college (58.1%) reported the highest. More students (15%) who had been involved in sport, but had ceased participation, binged on alcohol in college than those who never took part in sport. A prevalence rate which was almost identical to those who continued in sport through their collegiate years. Green et al. (2014) offer several hypotheses to explain why bingeing continues despite cessation of sport involvement. First, withdrawing from participation and its protective effects (such as time commitments, supervision, and responsibility) may leave former athletes vulnerable to later usage (Peretti-Watel, 2009). Second, sport participation and alcohol/drug-use may fulfil certain thrill-seeking intentions, provide an outlet for the expression of masculine traits, or help cope with anxiety or stress. Moreover, increased alcohol and substance use may serve as a compensatory mechanism for stopping sport (*ibid.*). Third, involvement in sport may develop habits (alcohol and relaxing, bonding, celebrating, socialising) that put participants 'at risk' for alcohol use that persist long after they stop playing sport. It is difficult to draw concrete conclusions about the specific mechanisms involved from this quantitative study, however, the general principles of social learning tells us that role models, positive reinforcement, peer pressure and so forth will be operative.

Research which has tracked athletes and their drinking patterns over time has provided evidence that both pre-university factors and the university sport culture itself have a powerful influence on current drinking patterns. In a longitudinal study of 900 adolescents, Barber and colleagues (2001) found participation in sport during high school predicted higher rates of drinking by age 24. Elsewhere, research has shown the university environment also has a potent influence on levels of drinking. Cardigan et al.

(2013) found students who became athletes' part-way through university showed greater increases in heavy drinking than those who ended their participation. Additionally, individuals who later became athletes engaged in a pattern of heavy drinking similar to those who were already athletes. By senior year they were consuming more alcohol than individuals who were athletes throughout university. These studies highlight a clear need for more research which examines student drinking patterns in relation to a student's behaviours and experiences prior to university, and as they progress through university.

## **2.4 Social Processes**

The notable drinking practices of university athletes are often explained in terms of socialising with peers (team-mates) and cultivating cohesion or a sense of belonging (Evans, Jackson & Weinberg, 1992; Martin, 1998; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Orloff, 1974; Wilson et al., 2004; Martens et al., 2011). Recent studies identify long-standing drinking traditions in sport that involve drinking with team-mates and opponents (Lawson and Evans, 1992; Stainback, 1997; Black et al., 1999). It is clear student athletes view drinking as important for building unity (Zhou & Heim, 2014), and that social/enhancement motives are important predictors of individual drinking patterns (O'Brien et al., 2008).

### **2.4.1 Social Norms**

Several studies which have attempted to understand and change alcohol use by student athletes have been underpinned by social norms theory (Cf. Perkins et al., 1999; Borsari and Carey, 2001; Perkins, 2002). The research shows misperceptions of others' drinking are predictive of one's own consumption (Ford, 2007; Dams O'Connor et al., 2007; Lewis & Paladino, 2008; Hummer et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2008; Martens et al., 2006). Social norms theory postulates that individuals are inherently driven to evaluate oneself against others. Moreover, if there is a disparity between one's perception of their own, and others' behaviour, then individuals are driven to change their own behaviour to conform with those around them (Festinger, 1954; Miller & McFarland, 1991; Prentice & Miller, 1993). Research has shown student athletes believe their teammates consume more alcohol than they do. The desire to conform to the misguided belief led to heavier drinking (Thombs, 2000; Turrisi et al., 2007; Hummer et al., 2009). The more intimate the relationship (teammates and friends), the greater the influence on individual consumption, (more than any other reference group, such as non-athlete peers

or the general student population) (Martens et al., 2006; Dams-O'Connor et al., 2007; Lewis & Paladino, 2008).

Social norms interventions have been the most frequently applied approach to reduce alcohol consumption among students (athletes), and have sometimes been described as a 'silver bullet' (Drug and Alcohol Findings, 2017). These interventions aim to change individual behaviours by drawing attention to the actual norms of specific groups, in an attempt to correct the misperception and show 'everybody is not doing it' (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986). Such interventions, however, have produced mixed results and not least because of poor methodological designs (Thombs and Hamilton, 2002; Perkins and Craig, 2006). More recent interventions which utilise interactive technology (LaBrie et al., 2009, 2010) and provide personalised feedback have achieved greater success (Dumas & Haustveit, 2008; Dumas et al., 2010; Martens et al., 2010).

However, a recent review of evidence concluded that at present "the results indicate that no substantive meaningful benefits are associated with social norms interventions for prevention of alcohol misuse among college/university students" (Foxcroft et al., 2015).

At present, there is a need to better understand the social, cultural, and personal factors that drive athletes to consume harmful levels of alcohol. Others have gone further and questioned whether athletes are drinking to conform. Zhou and Heim (2014) argue there may be an underlying weakness of social norms theory when applied to athletes, where it is assumed that group norms are negatively imposed. In support of this argument, research has shown conformity motives were not positively associated with individual drinking (O'Brien et al., 2008; Hummer et al., 2009). Whereas qualitative research suggested drinking practices among athletes were strategic activities which served to provide a positive sports experience (Zhou and Heim, 2016). Zhou and Heim (2016) argue more research is needed which explores individual's engagement in normative behaviours as an avenue for achieving positive feelings of self-worth and sociality, rather than fear of ostracization.

#### **2.4.2 Beyond Social Norms and Motivations**

The evidence presented above points to certain key factors that explain why student athletes drink more. The published literature suggests the drinking culture in sport is a social phenomenon. What the evidence does not tell us is what are the precise mechanisms involved in the production and reproduction of the drinking culture. Some researchers have tried to get beyond identifying general patterns, relationships, or

connections between drinking and other variables. Using qualitative methods, some researchers have sought a more fine-grained understanding of precisely how individual and collective drinking habits are established and maintained. Sparkes et al. (2007), for example, have identified the way student athletes' drink, and other 'athletic identity' habits could be explained in terms of certain 'unwritten rules' or 'commandments'. These are tacit and/or explicit expectations transmitted in several ways which provide the student athlete with a 'template' for behaviour. These commandments (Sparkes et al. identified 12) included 'be committed to the social life', 'excessive alcohol consumption and associated behaviours are obligatory', 'attend socials regularly' and 'attend post-match drinking sessions' (Sparkes et al., 2007, p.305). Alcohol use and related behaviours were found to be a cornerstone of measure of social acceptance. These un-written rules encapsulate the 'jock culture' on campus. The power of the 'jock culture' on campus is significant. Sparkes et al. (2010) found the spaces different groups (such as the jocks, sport scholars and anti-jocks) occupied interweaved to construct a field of struggle. The 'jock culture' operated to construct a range of identity positions, with groups positioned according to their ability to meet the combined sporting and social requirements (or 12 commandments) of this culture.

Elsewhere, ethnographic research with football players found drinking was a strategic social activity providing group acceptance and belonging as 'one of the lads' (Clayton & Harris, 2008). Willingness to engage in ritualistic events (e.g., initiation ceremonies), high alcohol tolerance (e.g., being able to consume excessive volumes of alcohol) and visible presence in shared social spaces (e.g., student bar) were highly valued. Zhou and Heim (2016) add that drinking practices were strategic activities used to create a collective positive ambience for the whole group. The authors speculate that social identification with a particular group (i.e., a team or sport) provided value, meaning and an underlying rationale for drinking behaviours in this context. Drinking was driven to a greater degree by factors at the level of the group (for instance, showing commitment to the club and drinking for enhanced cohesion and improved sporting performance) rather than by individual attitudes, beliefs, expectations, or motivations. Zhou et al. (2014) found heavy drinking in sport culture appeared to be attached to a strong sense of positivity, wellbeing, and enjoyment by those involved, and sport related drinking may be an important facilitator of group identification and in turn positive mental wellbeing (Zhou et al., 2016).

Ethnographic research with Canadian ice hockey players provided novel insight into how socialisation into drinking happened at a very young age (Roy & Camiré, 2017). Young hockey players, aged 13-14, were consuming alcohol in the presence and with the approval of coaches. By the time the players reached junior hockey (aged 18-21), a culture of excessive drinking was valorised and well established. Players revealed a deep sense of pride in being highly intoxicated and drinking episodes were carefully planned, taking place at set times (post-match), in certain social spaces (locker rooms) and with a certain alcoholic drink (beer). Some players felt collective beer drinking was symbolic of team unity. The study also pointed to the importance of status in relation to alcohol consumption. Roy & Camiré (2017) found the status of players strongly influenced the level of pressure to drink they experienced. Individuals high in ability but low or no consumers of alcohol experienced much less pressure to consume. In support, Haslam and Platow (2001) explained abstinence for highly talented players was desirable when in the interest of team performance. However, players with lower ability needed to contribute to the team in other ways, by consuming alcohol, for instance. These in-group dynamics, such as perceived player status, may have a powerful impact on consumption by group members, however, this area of investigation remains predominantly unexplored. If certain characters within this environment do possess substantial resource or social capital, such esteem among peers could be utilised to foster a healthier sporting environment, which is not characterised by excessive alcohol use.

## **2.5 The alcohol ethos in sport**

According to Jones (2016), the evidence presented above illustrates a particular ‘alcohol ethos’ associated with sport. Although perhaps obscure and intangible, the ethos tone, atmosphere, or climate of a given culture is a familiar and perhaps taken-for-granted phenomenon (Jones, 2016). Jones (2016) draws on McLaughlin’s educational conception of ethos:

At the most general level, an ethos can be regarded as the prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit or sentiment informing an identifiable entity involving human life and interaction (a ‘human environment’ in the broadest sense) such as a nation, a community, an age, a literature, an institution, an event and so forth. An ethos is evaluative in some sense and is manifested in many aspects of the entity in question and via many modes of pervasive influence. The influence

of an ethos is seen in shaping of human perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, dispositions and the like in a distinctive way which is implicated in that which is (in some cases) established. (McLaughlin 2005: 311-312).

The concept of ethos can help characterise and explain the relationship between sport and alcohol in various contexts at various times (Jones, 2016). There is clear evidence, as outlined in this and the previous Chapter, of a pro-alcohol ethos in university sport and suggests individual drinking habits both shape, and are shaped by, the ethos. A given ethos is not static, uncontested, or homogenous. One way an ethos might be contested is captured by McLaughlin's (2005) distinction between an 'intended ethos' and the 'experienced ethos'. The former describes the tone, feelings, or attitudes towards alcohol that a given group would like to characterise its practice. Perhaps those in positions of power (such as coaches) actively encourage a 'sensible' or a 'professional' alcohol ethos. The latter describes the actual feelings, opinions, beliefs, and behaviour of a given community. Jones (2016: 48-49) argues:

The experienced ethos need not be related to the intended ethos in any meaningful way. Where alcohol is concerned, certain members of the practice community (sponsors, governing bodies, players, associations, journalists and coaches) might espouse or aspire towards an ethos characterized as 'professional' (whatever that might mean) in relation to alcohol. The message is unequivocal, that there should be no behaviour involving alcohol (or otherwise) that reflects badly on the sport. The experienced ethos might differ significantly where the use of alcohol is encouraged, particularly on certain occasions, such as pre-/post-season tours, celebrations and so forth.

According to McLaughlin (2005: 134) the experienced ethos influences the behaviour of individuals, groups, and communities "in an indirect and sometimes non transparent and even unconscious way". Social norms theory, discussed in 2.4.1 provides evidence of this influence in practice, where students subconsciously mis-perceive their peers as consuming more alcohol than themselves, and are motivated to address this inaccurate cognitive imbalance. Jones (2016, p.49) further differentiates that "the intended ethos might not have a generative force because it does not resonate or appeal to the practice community or goes against the grain" and that change on an individual and collective level requires parity between the intended and experienced ethos, which "require significant changes in habits, routine behaviour and attitudes, and may take a long

time”. It is difficult to interpret previous research in respect to the congruence or incongruence between the intended and experienced ethos. At present, little research has explored the institutional mechanisms, such as alcohol policies and practices, which may either normalise the perception that alcohol use is widespread throughout university (sport) or discourage this belief.

## **2.6 Chapter summary and conclusions**

This Chapter has demonstrated that there is a heavy drinking culture in student sport. Previous research has recognized that several social processes may be perpetuating this drinking culture, although scholars are yet to generate sufficient understanding of how this culture is produced and reproduced. At present, more research is needed into the drinking patterns of students prior to, and as they progress through, university. Further, very little is known about how psychological, social, and cultural factors produce and reproduce individual drinking habits. Previously, arguments surrounding student’s apparent eagerness to consume alcohol to ‘fit in’ have been negatively framed and recent research suggests such motivations may be positive in nature. The fact that students are drinking for social reasons is well-established, however qualitative research examining the mechanisms underpinning this process is sparse. Research into group and power dynamics within sport culture is very limited and a recent study suggests this is a worthwhile topic of inquiry. Finally, little is known about the impact of environmental factors (such as university policies and practices) and role modelling effects (from peers and figures of perceived authority and importance) on individual alcohol use. Insightfully, alcohol use among student athletes remains remarkably consistent throughout different countries with varying sport and student cultures. With this in mind, understanding this body of evidence through an alternative theoretical lens, which acknowledges how social structures impact upon individual drinking habits, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomena.

## **Chapter 3: A bourdieusian approach to athlete alcohol-use**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous Chapter, evidence that there was a close relationship between sport and alcohol consumption was presented. Jones (2016) argued that one might usefully think of sport as having an alcohol ‘ethos’ – a set of alcohol practices, values and beliefs (which differs between and within sports). Some sports have a typically ‘pro-alcohol’ or ‘pro-binge drinking’ ethos. The aim of this Chapter is to present a theoretical framework that helps us gain a unique understanding of how any given ethos arises in general, and how an alcohol ethos is created, sustained, and perpetuated in particular. To do this, Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social practice is ideally placed because (*inter alia*) it explains the complex relationship between the individual (agent) and their (cultural) environment (structure) in general.

### **3.2 Bourdieu’s Theoretical Framework**

Chapter 2 illustrated some of the cultural factors that play a decisive role in the drinking habits of individuals. Drinking alcohol is a cultural activity, or habit, or the manifestation of an ethos. The work of Pierre Bourdieu has been widely employed in the social sciences to explain how cultural or sub-cultural habits are produced and reproduced. Bourdieu was a French sociologist, philosopher, and anthropologist, who lived between 1930 and 2002. Bourdieu developed his own theoretical perspective as he tackled a diverse set of empirical topics (including art, ritual, kinship, religion, science, intellectuals, language, social classes, and political institutions). He felt that disempowerment (which many of those belonging to the working class experienced) was produced and reproduced by education, art, and culture. Bourdieu argued for an alternative paradigm in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), where he explained how repetitive action leads to changes to one’s internal thoughts and feelings, which increase the likelihood of such actions being displayed in similar environmental conditions in future. Bourdieu (1984: 101) provided a formula for explaining how human behaviour, or practices, are expressed. The formula includes three crucial explanatory concepts

$$[(\text{habitus}) (\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}]$$

This formula posits that practice is the expression of a) an individual’s habitus (ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions) and b) one’s social position, expressed by the amount of capital they possess (economic, cultural, or social) within a given field (a particular social space).

### **3.2.1 Habitus**

Habitus is central to Bourdieu's theory of human behaviour. He described habitus as

A system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures or perception, conception and action (Bourdieu, 2005: 43)

A disposition is a standing *tendency* to see, think, feel, and act in certain characteristic ways. The disposition of honesty, for example, means that an individual is disposed or tends to act honestly. For Bourdieu (1977), honesty might be one disposition among many (a system) that includes curiosity, determination, and integrity. For Bourdieu (1977) these dispositions are durable – they are not a passing phase or whim. One can make reasonable predictions about one's future action based on beliefs about one's dispositions (evidenced by past actions). If a footballer makes a bad tackle (breaks an opponent's leg), a familiar defence is that 'he/she is not that kind of player'. They are not *disposed* to violence or causing harm. The dispositions are also transferable. Evidence that one has the disposition of honesty partly relies on durability and partly relies on transferability. To say that someone is disposed to honesty requires that they display the habit in different situations. One who is honest in one's tax affairs, but wholly dishonest in all other situations could not be said to have the *disposition* of honesty.

The more challenging aspect of habitus is the idea that dispositions are both part of the agent and at the same time part of a system or structure (others who we share our habitus with and learn from) that shapes individual and collective beliefs, attitudes, and action (Grenfell, 2008). Habitus is shaped by one's past and present experiences (such as education, upbringing, or vocation), and it shapes one's future behaviours. Bourdieu explained that habitus was "instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automaton that leads the mind unconsciously along with it, and as a repository for the most precious values" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53,68). In essence, the habitus can help explain how alcohol use patterns developed in adolescence can have a longstanding influence on drinking throughout an athlete's life (see Chapter 2). This concept illuminates how the apparent ritualist induction into alcohol use during adolescent sport may function to formulate a distinct way of behaving, which guides athletes' actions in future, and makes clear why this tradition may be problematic.

Habitus provides people with the instinctive ability to adapt to different situations and environments. However, given the habitus is shaped by past experiences, an individual's degree of compatibility with a situation can vary. If, for example, an athlete was inducted to heavy alcohol use at a young age within a sport environment and encounters a heavy drinking culture in future, they will understand what is expected and appropriate. If, on the other hand, an athlete did not possess this prior knowledge they may struggle to adapt to the new situation. This process develops and reproduces the habitus over-time (Bourdieu, 1977). A high degree of fit with a social group or environment will strengthen the habitus, whereas incongruence with the group norms (ethos) will result in conflict. As Bourdieu explains "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.5). In such a situation the habitus will need to change, or the individual will need to withdraw from the situation and find an environment or ethos more compatible with their dispositions. This filtering process can elucidate how micro-level drinking cultures, such as exist in halls of residence or student shared housing, are sustained.

Habitus does not produce individual or collective action or cultural patterns in a deterministic way. Habitus is, but one part of the equation. There is a context (field), and practice is the expression of the interconnectedness between one's habitus and the relevant social field. The relationship between habitus and field is a complex relational and reciprocal one.

### **3.2.2 Field**

The notion of 'field' refer to "a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97), or put simply, a social space. The field is the place where the habitus is displayed. Crucially, however, Bourdieu argued that there were "general laws of fields" (1993, p. 72). According to Bourdieu (1998p. 40-41), a field is:

A structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies

This perception of the world, based on hierarchy and social conflict, is central to Bourdieu's view of human behaviour. In his view, people are constantly jostling for position within an unequal field. Swartz (1997, p. 117) elaborates,

Fields denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize different kinds of capitals.

Bourdieu constructed his theoretical framework through intensive, mixed methods studies of various social spaces, including fields of law, art, education, science, and religion. He helped shape public policy by demonstrating access to essential services, such as education, was achieved through privilege and access to resources. Bourdieu argued that the school system functioned to reproduce a society where elites continued to occupy dominant positions, achieved by filtering children through several educational or vocational pathways in accordance with their social and economic resources (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; 1979; Bourdieu et al. 1994).

This model of human segregation, or competition, transcends macro-level structures, such as education, and is observed throughout society. This notion of social conflict is explained in greater detail below, however, the field dynamics which shape them warrant comment. Sport is often an environment of social hierarchy. Experienced players are perceived to possess wisdom and authority, developed through years of commitment to the club. Novice players, however, are not endowed with such symbolic traits and therefore must earn their place in the field. This struggle for status requires individuals to negotiate their position with a recognisable currency within the field. Bourdieu defines the breadth of exchangeable currency people use to negotiate their social position as capital.

### **3.2.3 Capital**

We have seen how habitus and field operate in relation to social practice. A key determinant of the kind of practice(s) that prevail is power. For Bourdieu, power is described or conceived in terms of capital. In simple terms, the more capital one has the more power they possess to favourably shape and influence their social relations. Bourdieu (1984) argued that there were several sources of power or capital, in addition to the traditional economic forms. These include social capital (i.e., relationships and networks) and cultural capital (i.e., education, intelligence, class, and language). Sources of capital have exchangeable value and can be converted and used to negotiate

one's place within and beyond any given field. Bourdieu (2006) believed that "it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory."

In *The Spirit Level* (2009), Wilkinson and Pickett explained how social status and hierarchy are inextricably linked with perceived economic status, and how this relationship leads to inequalities in a breadth of health and social problems (such as alcohol and substance use, mental health and life expectancy). Wilkinson and Pickett drew upon the work of Bourdieu to explain how social differences in economic capital were overlaid with cultural markers of social difference. People draw upon these cultural markers, such as their clothing, the food they eat, and appreciation or possession of artwork or music to maintain or enhance their social position. Thus, economic capital can be exchanged with cultural markers of status and power.

Capital can be defined as accumulated labour, where one's status and network are built over-time. The value of this accrued capital, whether esteem among peers, prowess in a particular field, or one's character and dispositions can be transferred into other forms of capital in certain situations. Thus, individuals lacking in one type of capital (i.e., skill or ability) can call upon a wealth of other capital (i.e., an extensive social network, or personality and behavioural characteristics) to maintain or gain position within a given social setting. To explain how capital functioned as a source of power which established and maintained social hierarchies, Bourdieu (1986) developed the concept of four forms: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic.

### **3.2.3.1 Economic Capital**

Economic capital refers to physical assets, such as money, property or other physical assets that are "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242). Given that economic capital is readily exchangeable into other types of capital, Bourdieu (1986, p.54) perceived it to be "the root of all other types of capital". For instance, economic capital can be used to purchase access to private education (like Eton and Harrow in the UK), or to join elite and exclusive sports and social clubs (such as The Chelsea Arts Club or the South Kensington Club). This privileged access and elite education can provide access to prestigious Universities, which in turn can generate economic capital through well-paid employment. Similarly, the status, connections and networks

established at exclusive or elite institutions afford unique opportunities (such as a business venture or ‘inside’ knowledge) to generate economic capital.

### **3.2.3.2 Cultural capital**

Cultural capital is a less visible form of currency and refers to forms of knowledge, educational achievements or credentials, skills, and abilities. These cultural resources and tendencies have entered general public discourse and have been used to differentiate seven social classes in the United Kingdom (cf. BBC News, 2013). This report drew upon a study published in *Sociology* by Savage and colleagues which measured cultural capital through a nationally representative sample survey of 161,400 UK residents.

Savage et al. (2013) used cultural markers such as leisure, musical, eating and holiday preferences to help explain the several social classes in the UK population. Those in the ‘elite’ social class, for example, scored very high on ‘highbrow’ social capital (meaning those attracted to classical music, attending stately homes, museums, art galleries, jazz, theatre and French restaurants), whereas those in ‘new affluent workers’ had moderate ‘highbrow’ capital but good ‘emerging’ capital (meaning they engaged with video games, social network sites, the internet, playing sport, watching sport, spending time with friends, going to the gym, going to gigs and preferences for rap and rock).

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital exists in three states – embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Capital which is embodied is embedded within one’s habitus, represented by physical predispositions such as body language, dialect, stance, or lifestyle (for instance the physique they possess, the clothes they wear or sport they watch). In its objectified form, capital is represented in a physical state, such as works of art, books, music, or sports equipment. This type of capital is interwoven with individual taste, preference, or possession which distinguishes individuals and groups from others without such fortunate predilections. For instance, the type of drink an individual chooses to have, or reject, may signify their social standing, or the possession and ability to use specialist sports equipment (i.e., skis, golf clubs or fishing gear) can be used to differentiate people from others without such possession. In its final, institutionalised form, capital is represented by qualification or credentials, such as a university degree, or by knowledge, such as the ability to interpret artwork or appreciation of a style of music.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 119) described cultural capital as “the informational capital”, where the knowledge of the rules which allows social groups to distinguish

themselves from others are transmitted through generations. In traditional male team sports, for example, alcohol use traditions which appear to be passed through generations at a young age (see Chapter 2) will ensure novice players have the cultural inclinations to differentiate themselves from others, and to keep the traditions going.

Bourdieu drew upon a wealth of empirical evidence to differentiate, or provide distinction, between the tastes (an individual's personal and cultural patterns of choice and preference, such as styles, manners, consumer goods, and works of art) of those with a wealth of cultural capital (such as education) and those with a lack of such assets. Bourdieu argued that lifestyles were a representation of the habitus, expressed in and through taste (Carlisle et al., 2008). He explained that the different aesthetic choices which people make are forms of *distinction* – or choices made in opposition to those made by other classes or status groups (Bourdieu, 1984; Carlisle et al., 2008).

According to Bourdieu, everyday tastes are not unencumbered choices but are manifestations of power and positions within the social hierarchy of society. Bourdieu (1984: 57) argues “Aesthetic stances in cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert ones’ position in social space, as a rank to be upheld, or a distance to be kept”. In the social hierarchy of sport, tastes such as the clothing worn, the venues attended post-match, the drinks that are chosen, and the manner in which they are consumed will filter individuals within a social hierarchy. As Sparkes et al. (2007) showed, these everyday tastes are displays of power which showed commitment to club values and identity. This enabled groups to position themselves higher within the social ladder of a university campus.

### **3.2.3.3 Social Capital**

Social capital defines the value of one’s social networks. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 119) defined social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual, or a group, by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition”. For example, membership of a particular group, such as voluntary associations, trade unions, political parties, secret societies or even sport or social clubs will provide a wealth of social capital. The amount of social capital available to an individual “depends on the size of the network of connections that he or she can effectively mobilize” (Bourdieu, 1986, 249). Bourdieu (1986) argued that social capital serves a purpose, to enhance one’s position within a given field where an individual possessing a

substantial volume of social capital is better placed to maintain or enhance their social position.

According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital functions to produce or reproduce societal inequalities, where individuals can call upon their “old boy’s network” (their social capital) to achieve a certain goal and maintain personal or collective social advantage. This strategic societal segregation will enable individuals at the top of the social ladder to maintain or enhance their collective resource, leaving less for groups at each step down the social gradient. There is considerable evidence that one’s social position within this social gradient is related to health and social outcomes, with those at the bottom suffering the worst (Marmot et al., 1991; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). In support of Bourdieu’s concept of social capital, a systematic review of 618 studies in this area, concluded there was strong evidence that people with a lower socioeconomic status generally had lower levels of social capital, and that lack of social capital was related to socioeconomic inequalities in health (Uphoff et al., 2013). The authors drew upon evidence that suggested disadvantaged groups or individuals were restricted in their opportunities to obtain and use social capital.

Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of social capital is well suited to macro-level issues, such as societal inequalities in health. There are, however, micro-level processes where high levels of social capital (rather than low levels as detailed above) may worsen health outcomes. For instance, in a social group (such as a workplace or rugby club), where an unhealthy practice is a form cultural capital and provides distinction, one would expect high levels of social capital, achieved through participation in the culturally appropriate behaviour, to be related to unhealthy choices. In sport, for example, where alcohol use is a symbol of belonging to a particular group (i.e., beer drinking within a sports club) and provides distinction from others outside of the club environment, greater social capital (achieved through connection with the club) may increase drinking. In support of this argument, research suggests gaining social capital and enhancing status is a key motivator to alcohol use (MacArthur et al., 2017). Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital can help explain how a desire to enhance one’s status could lead to problematic health behaviours, such as increased alcohol use as reported by MacArthur and colleagues.

### **3.2.3.4 Symbolic Capital**

Symbolic capital is not a distinct form of capital but rather represents economic, cultural, and social capital that is transferred into reputation, honour, prestige, or status. In the scientific field for instance, symbolic capital may represent an individual's combined achievements within a particular area of expertise (i.e., the combined value of their academic output). In business, an individual's symbolic capital may represent their ability to generate profit, or economic capital. In sport, symbolic capital may be derived from a career of exceptional achievements (by, Pele or Sebastien Coe, for example), sex appeal (for instance David Beckham), or recognised off the field accomplishments (such as Tony Adams who battled with alcohol addiction or Raheem Stirling who has been praised for speaking out against racism).

Symbolic capital is subject to the same power dynamics and social hierarchy processes as other forms of capital. According to Swartz (2013, p. 103) symbolic capital is “a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others”. The noble prizes, for instance, are decided by a handful of ‘esteemed’ individuals who each have a particular view on what is worthy of such an accolade. Similarly, funding bodies are comprised of a panel of experts who each assign a value to an academic, or research proposal, in relation to what they perceive as valuable and worthwhile, or as possessing cultural capital.

Moore (2008) explains that forms of symbolic capital possess several features. Firstly, they are objectified or embodied (such as a noble prize or Tony Adams' battle with addiction). Second, they are acquired over time and through a process of inculcation (as it takes time for other forms of capital, for instance sporting performances, to be legitimated and recognized). Thirdly, they differ in terms of their transposability across fields (for example, David Beckham's career credentials may not be worthy to the scientific field of health promotion, whereas the lessons which can be learned from Tony Adam's personal battle with addition, will. On the other hand, David Beckham's aesthetic power will be transposable to the field of advertising and marketing, whereas Tony Adam's personal endeavours will not). Thus, the value of symbolic capital reflects the rules, or *doxa* of any given field (Walther, 2014).

### **3.2.4 Doxa**

Bourdieu's theory of practice assumes there are a set of rules which govern any given field. These unwritten and taken for granted principles which guide what is appropriate

to say, think or do in any given social arena are defined as doxa. Bourdieu (1977) explains doxa as the “quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization [with which] the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (p.156), whereby “what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying” (p. 167). For example, if a novice rugby player attending a club setting for the first time was handed a pint of beer, a quick glance of their surroundings, with many peers engaging in similar practices, would quickly confirm that such behaviour is a common practice of the community within this field.

Over-time, Bourdieu defined a process of misrecognition where social actors forget, or are unaware of, the social structures which they are caught up in or governed by, where individuals feel at ease in their societal position and forget the processes which have led them to become the type of person they are. A novice rugby player, for instance, would overtime become accustomed to having a pint of beer whilst in a club setting and forget, or not challenge, the processes which initiated their alcohol use. This process of frequent repetition leads to a change in the individual, where “the agent engaged in practice knows the world... too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 142–3). Thus, the once novice rugby player has been structured by the field and doxa to which they have been repeatedly exposed. Beer drinking, particularly within a sport social setting, is now part of their habitus, which further increases the likelihood of beer consumption in this field in future. A reciprocal process which will strength the existing doxa of the sport social club environment.

Navarro (2006) argues that “all forms of power require legitimacy and culture is the battleground where this conformity is disputed and eventually materialises amongst agents, thus creating social differences and unequal structures” (p. 19). For instance, a young athlete entering a social club may not have been previously exposed to alcohol use, or may have come from a familial environment where drinking was actively shunned (e.g., for religious reasons). This athlete might reject the doxa. Such an act of resistance is not welcome, and power might be marshalled in an attempt to bring an individual into line. Bourdieu (1992) describes the strategies and actions employed to maintain the social order (and in this example, protect the drinking ethos) as a form of *symbolic violence*.

### **3.2.5 Symbolic Violence**

Symbolic violence is a non-physical form of social dominance which explains how social hierarchies are maintained and reproduced. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.167) describe symbolic violence as “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” such as limits to social mobility, aspiration, and resource, but where the violence is misperceived as “the natural order of things” (Bourdieu 1979, p. 198). For example, an athlete may know that an act (i.e., rapidly consuming alcohol) or event (such as an initiation ceremony) are morally wrong or unlawful, but continues to engage. In contrast to systems (i.e., political regimes) in which force, or physical violence, is needed to maintain social order (i.e., with police or military control), symbolic violence reflects an unrecognised form of violence, in which those in dominant social positions “let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 190). For example, a coach categorising players as “good” or “bad” and players accepting these definitions as fact (Cushion & Jones, 2006), or an experienced player allowing a novice player the privilege of washing their boots. Schubert (2008) argues “symbolic violence may in some ways be “gentler” than physical violence, but it is no less real.

Symbolic capital (presented above) provides social actors with the “social authority” or perceived status within a given field, which allows them to exert dominance over others lower down the social ladder (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 138). Symbolic violence, in comparison, is the exertion of such authority over others with the consent of those on the receiving end. A coach, for instance, must possess the symbolic capital which enables them to make respected decisions on what constitutes a “good” or “bad” player if their categorisation is to be accepted by the players themselves. This, however, will not always be the case, and in situations where those in dominant positions are not perceived to possess the required symbolic capital, or where the doxa does not fit with the field conditions, conflict, or *hysteresis*, will arise.

### **3.2.6 Hysteresis**

Hysteresis describes the lag between cultural change and the behaviour of individuals and groups. This Chapter has thus far focussed on social practices where the habitus is well suited to the doxa of a given field. Bourdieu argued, however, that in some cases ‘hysteresis’ occurred where the habitus is out of pace with the social arena. For example, footballer Raheem Stirling speaking out against the racist media coverage of black athletes in the United Kingdom, or England cricketers Adil Rashid and Moeen Ali

walking away before champagne celebrations following their world cup win in 2019. Bourdieu explains that there are “critical moments when it [habitus] misfires or is out of phase” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 162), and in these situations “dispositions become dysfunctional and the efforts they make to perpetuate them help to plunge them deeper into failure” (Bourdieu 2000, p.161). Such moments may occur when the field undergoes a process of change and where, in such conditions, actors are unable to generate practices which fit with the new way of doing things. For instance, the Football Spectators Act of 1989, which saw several new laws introduced which gave police and courts more powers to crack down on football-related violence (i.e., stricter rules around alcohol consumption) represents a sudden change to the field conditions. In this instance, individuals and groups needed to adapt to the new environmental conditions, or find a new avenue for exercising their ingrained behaviours.

Bourdieu articulates the stable, gradual changing nature of the habitus, however, in some circumstances (such as the introduction of new fan control measures in English football), the habitus must respond to a sudden change to the field condition. There are certain strategies which may be used by individuals and groups when there is a rapid change to the field and doxa. Actors may choose to change their behaviour to suit the new norms and expectations (for instance, football fans may behave less antagonistically following stricter measures). Others, however, may attempt to circumvent the new rules by hiding the disapproved behaviours (such as an athlete continuing to use a banned performance enhancing drug), or adapting their practices (for example, an elite athlete who no longer consumes alcohol throughout the season, but drinks excessively during the off-season).

Bourdieu (1977) argues that the lag between the sudden shift in field conditions and the gradual changing nature of the habitus will cause an individual to become out of sync with their situation, where:

As a result of the hysteresis effect necessarily implicated in the logic of the constitution of habitus, practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted (p. 78).

Bourdieu (1977) accepts that the changing field conditions provide opportunities for field actors to occupy new field positions. However, given the nature of habitus and its building blocks of well-established dispositions and practices, accrued gradually

through past experiences, it is those with relevant forms or power who will be best placed to recognise and grasp the new opportunities of the changing field. Bourdieu (1996) argues “in a general manner, it is the people who are richest in economic capital, cultural capital and social capital who are the first to head for new positions (p. 262)”. For example, modern academia is a challenging environment with many universities within close proximity competing for student numbers and research funding. In such conditions, many institutions are forced to undergo periods of rapid and considerable field change, such as merging schools of thought or re-prioritising resources to different areas of research and teaching. During these situations, established lecturers may suffer greatest from the hysteresis effect where their accrued capital (cultural and symbolic) has diminished value within the new field. These senior academics will need to resolve the disparity between their habitus and the new social arena by adapting or expanding their academic output and thus accruing more suitable forms of capital, or by seeking out a new field (or university) with greater compatibility with their own dispositions, attributes, and capital. Bourdieu himself experienced this hysteresis effect within academia and chose the latter solution, to switch to a new field position. Describing his switch from philosophy to social sciences, Bourdieu (1988) wrote

The peculiar force with which I felt the need to gain control over the disappointment felt by an ‘oblate’ faced with the annihilation of the truths and values to which he was destined and dedicated (p. xxvi).

The hysteresis effect arguably has the greatest practical implications, particularly concerning targeted behaviour change. It demonstrates that Bourdieu’s theory of social practice is not simply deterministic, where one’s behaviour is pre-determined by their past experiences, but where individuals can, in certain circumstances, reject the status quo (such as England cricketers refusing to celebrate with alcohol) or where the status quo changes and individuals need to adapt (such as the introduction of hooligan prevention measures in English football). On a national and international scale, the choice by 52% of United Kingdom voters in 2016 to leave the European Union was a prime example where the changing field conditions experienced locally in communities, caused by gradual expansion of the European Union, resulted in a rejection of the new doxa by the long-standing habitus. This example of the consequences of hysteresis, at such scale and across a number of fields, shows how any attempt to change behaviour, whether by national or international policy change or through targeted interventions,

needs to be carefully managed to enable individual actors the time and resource to adapt to the new field conditions and doxa.

### **3.3 A Bourdieusian approach to drinking cultures**

Studies have shown there may be an alcohol ethos (a set of alcohol practices, values, and beliefs) in various groups and cultures. For instance, research with adolescents has found the desire to drink and fit in with the drinking ethos of their peer group was more powerful than the wishes and requests of their parents (Percy et al., 2011). Bourdieu's theory of practice has been applied to understand how this drinking ethos evolves and is sustained. MacArthur and colleagues (2017) explained the drinking ethos of adolescents was underpinned by a desire for social and symbolic capital, acquired through drinking with peers. However, wider cultural and peer norms played a more prominent role in shaping behaviour, by generating a shared habitus among young people that constructed heavy alcohol use as normative in the field. The continual interaction between the habitus and this field generated and sustained such practice (MacArthur et al., 2017). Further, whereas cultural capital has been shown to act as a defence mechanism against other health risk behaviours (such as eating and smoking patterns), for alcohol use, it had the reverse effect and was associated with both the higher probability of consuming alcohol and the frequency of consumption (Oncini & Guetto, 2018).

Others have shown how the drinking ethos of different groups provided distinction from each other. Jarvinen, Ellergaard and Larson (2014) found specific drinking styles and preferences (or tastes) were associated with specific positions within a particular social space (a middle-sized Danish company). An omnivorous drinking style, characterised by a broad variety of beverage types, drinking contexts and drinking companions was associated with high positions in the firm, combined with specific types of drinks and specific reasons for drinking. A more restricted drinking style concentrated to a small number of drink preferences, and with little variation in drinking contexts and drinking companions, was observed in those occupying lower positions in the space. Further, an open-minded attitude to alcohol was adopted by the upper classes in the firm, which focussed on the pleasures of drinking, tastes of alcohol and alcohol as a means to achieve a light intoxication. In the lower classes, however, these reasons were rarely reported and the primary motive for consumption was to "to ease social relations". Others have found that, among middle class occupational groups, there were two distinct alcohol habitus: a 'home drinking' habitus and a 'traditional drinking' habitus.

Those of the home drinking habitus used wine as a source of cultural capital and a means of distinction, whereas those in the traditional habitus consumed lagers, beers, and spirits to have fun in social settings, primarily at weekends. A small minority belonged to a third, omnivorous habitus where a wide range of alcoholic drinks were consumed in a variety of contexts (Brierley-Jones et al., 2014).

This process of distinction appears prominently in adolescent research, where different forms of consumption have been shown to help construct identity, ensure belonging within one's peer group and to ostracise others as being 'different'. Such research showed young people had embedded drinking norms or dispositions, and the symbolic value attached to drinking was important to maintain group acceptance (social capital) and provide distinction from other social groups (Scott et al., 2017). Supporting these findings, Jarvinen & Gundelach (2007) found drinking patterns, onset of use and experiences of intoxication were used by Danish teenagers to identify distinctive lifestyles. This experience with drinking/partying provided symbolic capital which was crucial for individual position and prestige in the peer group. Whilst this process of distinction and group identification facilitated group cohesiveness, it also fuelled social dissociation and potential marginalisation of some youngsters.

### **3.4 A Bourdieusian approach to student athlete drinking cultures**

These recent applications of Bourdieu's theoretical framework, to the study of drinking cultures, demonstrate the usefulness of these interpretative concepts for understanding how drinking cultures are produced and reproduced, and across different cohorts of the population. This theoretical approach may help better explain and draw together the diverse findings discussed in Chapter 2 and provide the conceptual toolkit to better understand the drinking culture among student athletes.

The first body of evidence presented in Chapter 2 demonstrated several factors which were related to alcohol use by student athletes. These factors provide insight into the fields which may be more prone to (excessive) drinking. There is a considerable amount of research which implies that younger students, those in the early years of their study, and those living in student accommodation (i.e., halls of residence or student shared housing) consume more alcohol. This descriptive evidence suggests there may be important facilitators to alcohol use within these fields. For instance, student accommodation may function to reinforce a certain doxa of excessive drinking. This may partly explain why drinking is greater in younger students who predominantly

occupy these field positions. At present, however, little is known about the specific social processes which function to reinforce this doxa, or if students enter the university system with a well-formed drinking habitus, developed prior to this. The second body of evidence presented in Chapter 2 suggested student athletes may arrive at university already consuming alcohol excessively, thus having already developed an alcohol habitus. More research is needed to substantiate this argument, however, if found to be commonplace, athlete culture may prepare students with the doxa required to easily adapt to the field conditions of their university experience. More in-depth qualitative research (c.f. Roy & Camire, 2017) with Canadian hockey players supports this suggestion, with the finding that the athlete environment reinforced alcohol use in players as young as 13-14.

Several studies identified in Chapter 2 showed athlete culture at university was dictated by several unwritten rules, or doxa. In one study, Sparkes et al. (2007) discovered ‘social survival’ on a sporting campus was dependent upon commitment to several commandments which were embedded into the campus culture itself. Elsewhere, Clayton and Harris (2008) found abiding by the athlete doxa, by drinking alcohol and occupying a particular field (such as the student union bar) facilitated group membership. More recently, scholars have revisited this theme and in doing so have found showing commitment to the club and thus drinking to facilitate club cohesion provided meaning to alcohol use (Zhou et al., 2016), and more explicit doxa guided individual tastes and cultural capital (such as drinking a specific type of alcohol, and consuming alcohol at set times in set spaces) (Roy & Camire, 2017). These studies, across a number of years and sport settings, reveal the prevailing doxa guiding athlete drinking and also expose the perceived cultural value this behaviour carries (for instance, showing commitment and demonstrating distinction).

Several studies presented in Chapter 2 provide further evidence that (excessive) alcohol use provided cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Sparkes et al. (2007), for example, showed being committed to social life, drinking alcohol excessively, and attending post-match drinking sessions were all strategic activities enabling group acceptance. Whereas others have demonstrated alcohol tolerance was a key marker of esteem from peers (Clayton and Harris, 2008). More recently, scholars have elaborated that such strategic social processes were related to group identity and in turn, individual wellbeing (Zhou et al., 2016). This suggests that, in an environment which values

alcohol use and intoxication, personal mental health may be linked to cultural participation. Bourdieu's theory of social practice may help explain how engaging in these cultural activities (i.e., drinking heavily) is related to personal wellbeing. It demonstrates the potent relationship between the habitus and a given field, where individuals feel at ease when the habitus is closely matched to the field and doxa, or where conflict (hysteresis) arises when both become incompatible.

A final body of research presented in Chapter 2, on social norms, may reflect another social process facilitating athlete drinking, when interpreted through Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Previous research suggests student athletes believe their teammates consume more alcohol than they do, and thus increase their own drinking to achieve parity with others. One possible explanation to explain this observed relationship is that student athletes may be competing with others for status, or symbolic capital. In an environment where excessive drinking is commonplace, valued, and praised, it is plausible that drinking practices may be strategic activities used to build reputation. However, there is a need for more research examining this idea in greater depth.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

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### **4.1 Introduction**

This Chapter provides a description of the methodology underpinning this thesis. It offers a rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach and details each of the four studies which were carried out. It describes the rationale for each study, the collection of data, how populations were sampled, and explains the statistical analysis of quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative data. This Chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical implications of this research and how these were managed.

### **4.2 Research Questions**

The purpose of this thesis was to gain a novel understanding of the individual and cultural mechanisms of student athlete drinking. The research was divided into four specific studies (each covered in greater detail below): a retrospective survey of student drinking habits (Study I), a longitudinal survey of student drinking habits (Study II), an interview study with male and female university rugby players exploring the social processes related to alcohol use (Study III), and a season-long case study investigating the wider group and environmental pressures related to alcohol use in male university rugby (Study IV). Based on the guidance of the theoretical framework (Chapter 3) and empirical literature (Chapters 1 and 2), the following research questions were developed to guide the study design, data collection, and data analysis.

1. What is the prevalence of (excessive) alcohol use among different sporting cohorts of a single university (Bayfields)?
2. What structural factors (i.e., past drinking habits, living arrangements, age, and gender) are related with alcohol use?
3. Does alcohol use among student athletes change over the course of a season?
4. What are the social processes and group dynamics which create and sustain a drinking ethos in university rugby?
5. Do rules, rituals and expectations normalise and legitimise a drinking ethos in male university rugby?

### **4.3 A mixed-methods approach**

Mixed methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative methods in a way where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, described as the  $1 + 1 = 3$  framework (Fetters & Freshwater, 2015). This framework challenges researchers to scrutinize what synergy can be gained by using both qualitative and quantitative methods and

what value can be added to research by pushing the integration of theory, conceptual models, design, methods, analysis, interpretation, visualization, presentation, and publication (Ibid.). Mixing methods can benefit research by offsetting weaknesses, supporting triangulation, achieving a more complete picture, developing and testing hypotheses and/or instruments, assisting sampling and enhancing generalisation (Sparkes, 2015; Doyle, Brady, and Byrne, 2009; Moran et al., 2011; Hagger and Chatzisarantis., 2011; Horn, 2011; Hesse-Beber, 2010). Despite this, Mason (2006) argues mixing methods without a strong reason can produce unfocussed and disjointed research. As a result, researches applying mixed methods should have a clear sense of the logic and purpose of their approach (Ibid.). In this thesis, quantitative and qualitative methods were used in conjunction as both were needed to achieve a holistic understanding of the alcohol use patterns of student athletes. For instance, to uncover how much student athletes were drinking, and the relationship between past and current drinking habits required quantitative methods, whereas understanding why and how consumption occurred needed qualitative methods. The decision to adopt a mixed methods approach for this thesis was underpinned by three factors, 1) a pragmatic philosophical position, which recognises the strengths and synergy between quantitative and qualitative methods, 2) a practical need to acquire specific types of knowledge about the alcohol sport relationship at specific moments in time, and 3) the theoretical basis of thesis, with an emphasis on staying true to the methodological and philosophical stances adopted by Pierre Bourdieu.

#### **4.3.1 Pragmatism**

A paradigm is “a way of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the real world” (Patton 2002, p. 69). Mixed methods research challenges traditional approaches as two competing worldviews are in conflict with one another (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). Pragmatism attempts to resolve this conflict by accommodating the philosophical assumptions of both qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). Pragmatism offers several ways to bridge the qualitative/quantitative dichotomies in research (Shannon-baker, 2016). Biesta (2010) argues pragmatism breaks down the hierarchies of positivist and constructivist ways of knowing and acknowledges what is meaningful from both. Pragmatism uses the process of abduction, where one moves back and forth between observations, theories, and assessing theories in action (Morgan, 2007). Pragmatism emphasises research questions, communication, and shared meaning making and

integrates methods through the theory which underpins a particular phenomenon (Shannon-baker, 2016).

The methodological approach used in this thesis was guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework presented in the preceding Chapter. Understanding a complex phenomenon like a particular drinking culture requires a different means of inquiry, and therefore this thesis utilised the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research to provide the best understanding of each research question (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Cresswell, 2014). This research adopted a pragmatist paradigm position, as the aim was not to debate the positivist position of quantitative data, or constructivism of qualitative accounts, but rather use both approaches as the most suitable means to address the research questions outlined above. According to Hammersley (2013, p.10):

abandoning the qualitative-quantitative distinction does not mean denying that there are important differences in research strategy, or fundamental and difficult methodological issues to be faced by social science. Far from it. Instead, it involves recognizing that the qualitative/quantitative distinction does not capture, and does not enable us properly to comprehend, these differences.

Hammersley (1996) argues that choosing between qualitative and quantitative approaches “requires judgment according to the situation and purpose, rather than judgment based on a commitment to one or another competing philosophical view of the world” (p.164). Pragmatism has been suggested as the most appropriate approach for mixed methods research (Shannon-Baker, 2016). This perspective focusses on solving a problem, where the research questions guide the design of the research, rather than a focus on specific methods for philosophical reasons (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Pragmatism aims to find middle ground between philosophical dogmatisms (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), “sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality” (Feilzer 2010, p. 8), and “focuses instead on ‘what works’ as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 713).

#### **4.3.2 Practical rationale**

Mixed methods approaches have been described as advantageous over a study with solely qualitative or quantitative research, as both methods alone are insufficient in capturing the details and trends of a situation (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006).

Johnson and Christensen (2017, p.33) outline the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research as:

First, the quantitative research approach primarily follows the confirmatory scientific method because its focus is on hypothesis testing and theory testing. Quantitative researchers consider it to be of primary importance to state one's hypotheses and then test those hypotheses with empirical data to see if they are supported. On the other hand, qualitative research primarily follows the exploratory scientific method. Qualitative research is used to describe what is seen locally and sometimes to come up with or generate new hypotheses and theories. Qualitative research is used when little is known about a topic or phenomenon and when one wants to discover or learn more about it. It is commonly used to understand people's experiences and to express their perspectives.

Mixed methods research has been increasing in popularity since the 1980s and in recent years has been applied by a growing number of researchers (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Dunning et al., 2008; Creswell, 2015). Despite this, there remains significant debate around what constitutes mixed methods research (Hesse-Biber, 2015). According to Creswell (2015) mixed methods research involves a researcher collecting, analysing, and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two approaches in various ways, and framing the study within a specific design. Alcohol use among student athletes is a complex phenomenon. This multifaceted nature of health issues, such as student athlete drinking, means researchers must find innovative strategies to unpick the complexities (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Andrew and Halcomb, 2006). Recently, researchers (cf. Zhou, 2015; Hallinberg, 2014) have been drawn to mixed methods approaches to understand alcohol use by athletes in a more comprehensive way than can be achieved by either qualitative or quantitative research alone (Andrew & Halcomb, 2012; Simons & Lathlean, 2010).

Studies which have examined the value of mixed method research have argued this approach added worth by increasing validity in findings, informing the collection of a second data source, and assisting with knowledge creation (Hurmerinta-Peltomaki & Nummela, 2006). Some argue that studies which adopt this approach gain a deeper, broader understanding of a phenomenon, when compared to purely quantitative or qualitative research (ibid.). Combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and

analysis allows researchers to capitalise on the strengths of both approaches, whilst reducing their limitations, to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the research question(s) (Morse, 2015; Scammon et al., 2013, Wisdom et al., 2012; Andrew & Halcomb, 2009). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that mixed method research allows the simultaneous generation and testing of theory, enables the research to answer a broader set of research questions through a range of research designs with specific strengths and weaknesses, and generates insights that go beyond the use of single research methods.

The assumption that mixed methods research is inherently better than a mono-method approach has been challenged (Sandelowski, 2014). Others argue a mixed methods design should only be adopted if it provides added value over a single method (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, Scammon et al., 2013). For example, when seeking to understand alcohol use by a particular group (i.e., athletes), quantitative data can reveal who is drinking and how much is being consumed, but is less able to uncover why or how drinking takes place. A mixed method approach enables a researcher to understand drinking patterns at a descriptive level (through quantitative data), and to explain the social and individual level processes which underpin these patterns (through qualitative data). Researchers have argued mixed methods designs are best suited to issues in which multiple perspectives of the problem provide a greater understanding than a single perspective (cf. Andrew & Halcomb, 2012; Simons & Lathlean, 2010). For instance, a survey of alcohol use among athletes will provide a macro-level understanding of drinking patterns (i.e., between particular sports, or changes in drinking over-time). However, may miss the factors which are driving increased usage by a particular group or over-time. Qualitative research investigating drinking practices as they occur, or reflecting on the lived experience of athletes, can significantly enhance ones understanding of these problems.

Wisdom et al. (2012) explain several benefits of mixed methods research. Firstly, it allows researchers to use the results derived from one method to corroborate findings from another. For example, quantitative data can explain if qualitative findings (i.e., of excessive drinking habits) are more widespread among a particular group, or if a sample may be biased in a particular way. Secondly, one method can be used to compliment another, by elaborating, illustrating, enhancing, or clarifying results. For instance, quantitative research could be used to examine hypotheses generated through qualitative

research. Thirdly, the results of one method can be used to inform the development of another. For example, qualitative research can inform the development of a quantitative survey instrument, or quantitative research can help identify a sample of interest (i.e., those with greater alcohol use or associated problems). Fourthly, one method can be used to uncover paradoxes or contradictions in findings from a separate method. For instance, observations can help explain why uptake to a particular service (i.e., alcohol support group) are declining over-time. Finally, different methods can be used to expand the depth and breadth of the study by focussing on distinct components.

### **4.3.3 Theoretical Rational**

A mixed methods approach was adopted by thesis as it provided the most suitable tools to answer the research questions (Feilzer, 2010; Bishop, 2015). Further, the methodological approach was guided by the theoretical framework (Chapter 3). Notably, Bourdieu used a diverse range of research methods, including in-depth interviews, photographs, and large-scale questionnaires as he developed his theoretical perspective. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, pp. 226-227) argued “we must try, in every case, to mobilize all the techniques that are relevant and practically usable, given the definition of the object and the practical conditions of data collection”. Bourdieu (1990) was reluctant to interpret large-scale datasets without reference to the power relations that structure an individual’s attitudes and behaviours. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.104) argued data collection should be ordered through “three necessary and internally connected moments”, where:

First, one must analyze the field position in relation to the field of power.

Second, one must map the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions and who compete for legitimate form of specific authority. And third, one must analyze the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 104–105).

Utilising this methodological framework, to understand alcohol use by student athletes, it is first necessary to identify the specific field(s) or social context(s) in which (excessive) alcohol use exists. Bourdieu (1985, p.725) argued “statistical analysis . . . is the only means of manifesting the structure of the social space” (1985, p. 725).

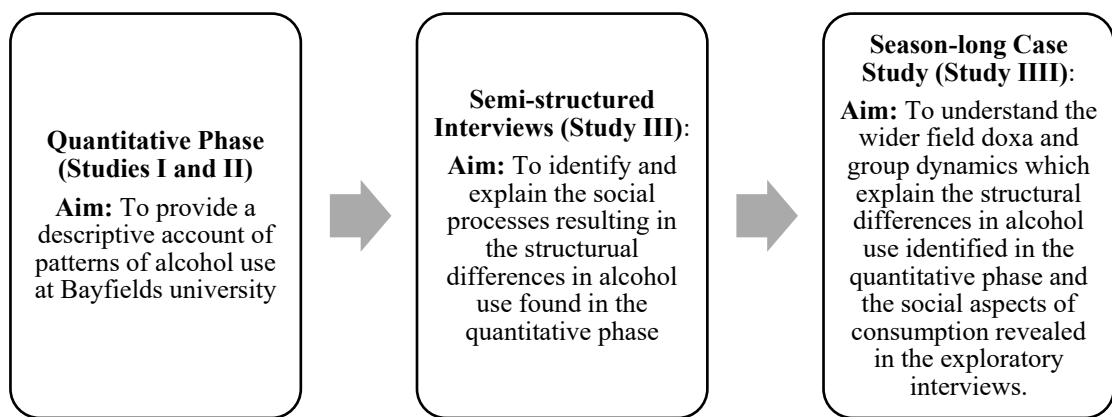
Secondly, one must understand the power relations occurring within the field(s). Such as the agents (athletes) or institutions (university or sport club) with varying field positions (experienced, novice, or elite athletes). Thirdly, the researcher must investigate the relationship between the habitus of actors (athletes), their capital (social networks or performing ability) and position within the field. To fulfil these steps, Bourdieu (1977, p. 72) explains it becomes “necessary to pass . . . from statistical regularity to the production of this observed order”. According to Wacquant (1998, p. 219), Bourdieu achieved this by “typically combining statistical techniques with direct observation and the exegesis of interaction, discourse, and document”, using qualitative data (such as in-depth interviews, photographs, and observations) to interpret quantitative data (such large-scale surveys of occupation, class and capital). Adopting a methodological approach which Bourdieu (1996) advocated and used himself, this thesis utilised quantitative analyses to examine how structural factors (such as age, gender, living arrangements and sporting involvement) influenced behaviour (alcohol use), and used in-depth interviews, documentation, and immersive observational techniques to unpack the social processes which manifest in macrolevel differences.

#### **4.3.4 Choice of mixed methods design**

There are three frequently used main types of mixed method designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The *convergent design* is used to address one main overarching research question and achieve a more complete understanding of the phenomena (Doyle, 2015). This approach involves collecting quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, but independently, and merging results during the interpretation of findings (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The *exploratory sequential design* initiates with a qualitative phase, aimed at developing instruments, identifying variables of interest, or generating theory or hypotheses (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The qualitative phase is followed by a quantitative phase and aims to test the new instrument or theory/hypotheses, or to generalise findings to a wider population (Creswell, 2015). The *explanatory sequential design* begins with a quantitative phase, aimed at identifying overall patterns of behaviour, followed by a qualitative phase, which attempts to explain why patterns exist (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This design is often used by researchers who have a quantitative background or when investigating fields which have sparsely been studied through qualitative methodologies (Creswell, 2014).

This thesis adopted the latter, explanatory sequential approach (see figure 1), where a quantitative phase guided and informed the design of qualitative methods, and the qualitative data helped unpack and further elucidate the quantitative findings (see Creswell, 2015). This type of mixed methods design was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, it was well suited to the theoretical framework and the methodological approach taken by Bourdieu (as detailed above). Secondly, it enabled structural similarities or differences in alcohol use among student athletes to be identified, before attempting to provide a comprehensive understanding of why similarities or differences exist. Thirdly, this design was useful for guiding the sampling approach for the qualitative phase, where there was a need to identify particular groups with greater alcohol use (Creswell, 2015).

*Figure 1. Explanatory sequential mixed methods approach*



The first phase of the research involved undertaking two quantitative studies – Study I, a cross-sectional survey of alcohol use among students, and Study II, a longitudinal survey of alcohol use among students. This phase served several purposes for the thesis. Firstly, it identified structural similarities or differences (such as past drinking habits, living arrangements, age, and gender) in alcohol use among the student (athlete) population. Secondly, it informed whether patterns of alcohol use changed, or remained the same, throughout an academic year. Thirdly, it helped to identify the most appropriate group (i.e., those with the heaviest drinking habits), for further, in-depth study in the qualitative studies that followed. This ensured that the intensive resource required to undertake qualitative research was best utilised.

In contrast to the quantitative phase, where describing alcohol use patterns was the focus, the first qualitative study (semi-structured interviews) allowed a deeper

understanding and interpretation of the structural similarities and differences in alcohol use (Bryman, 2008). Specifically, it explored what social aspects of sport were facilitating drinking among athletes and how early life experiences may have shaped future habits. Interviews alone, however, could not supply the level of data required to provide a holistic explanation of how a heavy drinking culture was produced and reproduced. They could not account for the wider field doxa and group dynamics which structured the habitus and shaped behaviour. To achieve this level of understanding, it was necessary to study this drinking culture in further depth and through a range of innovative data collection techniques (including field observations, documentation, and additional targeted interviews). Table 1 presents an overview of the methodology of each sub-study of this thesis. Each of these sub-studies are covered in greater detail below.

*Table 1. Overview of Research*

Phase	Study	Research Design	Recruitment	Participants	Data collection	Data analysis
Quantitative	I	Cross-sectional survey	Bayfields student population	N=286 students (N=163 athletes and N=123 non-athletes)	Questionnaire of alcohol use (past and present) and participant demographics	Descriptive, between group comparisons, and analyses of variance and correlation
	II	Longitudinal survey	Bayfields student population	N=286 students at Term 1, N=82 students at Term 2 and N=43	Follow-up questionnaire to Study I participants measuring current alcohol use	Descriptive, between group comparisons, and analyses of variance

				students at Term 3		
Qualitative	III	Exploratory study	Bayfields male and female ruby players	N= 15 players (N=9 male and N=6 female)	Semi- structured interviews	Thematic analysis
	IV	Case study	Bayfields male rugby club	Whole male club setting.	Field observations, documentation, and semi structured interviews.	Thematic analysis

#### 4.4 Setting

The aim of quantitative research is to provide data, which are generalisable to, and representative of, a specific population (in this instance, a university which has been given the pseudonym Bayfields). To assess this, it was necessary to understand the demographics of the population under study. During the data collection period of this research, routinely collected data by the university indicated a greater number of females (55%) than males (45%) studied at Bayfields, a majority of students were aged under 21 (55%), 14% identified as Black or of a minority ethnic group and 12% reported having a disability. See Table 2 for a detailed breakdown of student demographics.

*Table 2. Publically available data on the demographic breakdown of the Bayfields student population*

Student Demographics	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	54.7%
Male	45.3%
Other	<1%

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Undergraduate/Postgraduate</b>
<21	55.4% / 0.5%
21-25	30% / 44.7%
26-30	5.6% / 20.8%
31-35	2.8% / 12.9%
36+	6.3% / 21.1%

<b>Level of Study</b>	<b>Male/Female</b>
Undergraduate	45% / 55%
Post-graduate	54% / 46%

<b>Religious/belief</b>	
Jewish	<1%
Sikh	<1%
Buddhist	<1%
Hindu	<1%
Spiritual	<1%
Any other religion	1%
Information refused	37%
Muslim	4%
Christian	18%
No religion	39%
Not known	<1%

<b>Race</b>	
White	73%
Black or minority ethnic group	14%
Not known	13%

<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	
Heterosexual	90%
Information refused	4%
Bisexual	2%

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Other	2%
Gay Man	1%
Gay Woman/Lesbian	1%
<b>Disability</b>	
Disability	12%
No known disability	88%

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## **4.5 Quantitative Phase (Studies I and II)**

A strength of quantitative research is that it allows a researcher to collect generalisable data for a large population in a systematic way (Neale, 2008), and to test a particular belief or theory about a phenomena (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Prior to this research, most studies on this topic (alcohol use by student athletes) were conducted outside of the United Kingdom (Zhou et al., 2014), therefore little was known about the structural factors related to alcohol use among UK student athletes. Further, research examining the influence of past drinking habits on current use was contested (see Chapter 2), and the relationship between these factors was un-tested in the UK. Given these issues, and to gain a greater understanding of the individual and cultural mechanisms driving student athlete drinking, it was first necessary to investigate the factors which were related to usage at a university-wide level. The specific research objectives of this phase of the research were: 1) to describe patterns of alcohol use by student athletes compared to a control group of student non-athletes, 2) to explore past drinking patterns among student athletes and a control group of non-athletes, and 3) to understand how patterns of alcohol use fluctuate throughout each Term of one academic year, for student athletes and non-athletes.

### **4.5.1 Study I: Cross-sectional survey**

Study I was a cross-sectional survey of the student population at Bayfields University. A cross-sectional study involves taking a “snapshot” of the behaviours (i.e., alcohol use) of a population (i.e., student athletes) at a single point in time (Carlson & Morrison, 2009). Cross-sectional surveys have the advantage of being a relatively quick and inexpensive method for generating descriptive data on a large number of people (Wang & Cheng, 2020), and for generating hypotheses for further research (Sedgwick, 2014).

This approach was selected as it was necessary to generate data on a large number of student athletes to be able to make meaningful comparisons between different groups (i.e., sport types, demographics, and consumption patterns) within a short period of time (given the time-limited nature of the research funding and need for more time intensive data collection methods in studies 2, 3 and 4). Further, a cross-sectional study was a suitable first step in generating more insight led hypotheses about behaviours (i.e., the influence of past drinking habits on current consumption) than could be achieved through the literature review (in Chapter 2). These hypotheses were necessary for developing the methodologies of the qualitative studies that followed. This cross-sectional study utilised a retrospective, self-report survey which was distributed online. Alcohol use by students is a behaviour subject to social critique and judgement (Robertson & Tustin, 2018; Zhou & Heim, 2016). As such, an anonymous self-reported online survey was used to reduce the risk of participants providing socially desirable responses (Duffy et al., 2005; Harris, Jones & Brown, 2019).

#### **4.5.1.1 Data collection**

An online survey using the Qualtrics software was distributed through three avenues. First, a blanket email was circulated to students via the official university mailing list. Second, the head coaches of each sport at Bayfields were approached and invited to share the survey among networks of players. Third, a link to the survey and the incentives for participation were advertised on physical university notice boards and online via social media platforms. To enhance recruitment, all participants had the opportunity to be included in a prize draw for £50 worth of Amazon vouchers. Data were collected during Term 1 of the academic year between October 1st and December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. This period was chosen to remove the possibility of abnormal alcohol use during the ‘freshers’ (first two weeks of the academic year) and festive period (Christmas and New Year).

#### **4.5.1.2 Questions and measures used in the study**

The structured questionnaire was divided into three major sections: demographic characteristics, current alcohol use, and past alcohol use. The following sub-sections of the questionnaire are presented in the order in which they appeared in the survey. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.

**4.5.1.2.1 Demographics**

There were three sub-sections within the block of demographic indicators. The first section related to the individual and included gender, age, post-code, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and parent's marital status. These questions followed guidance provided by the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019). The second section related to the individual's university degree and included type of degree, length of course in years, stage of degree, term-time accommodation and club or society membership status. The third section concerned each individual's sporting commitments, where applicable, and asked whether or not they played sport, which sport(s) they played, when they started playing sport, the highest level they had competed at, how many hours they trained per week, if they were currently injured, if their parents play or had played sport, and what age they first attended a sports club. This block concluded with two questions directed to respondents who did not play university sport, and enquired if they had played sport before university and if so, why they did not continue this participation at university.

**4.5.1.2.2 Questions related to current alcohol consumption**

Current alcohol use was measured using the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT). The AUDIT is a 10-item measure developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to assess alcohol consumption, drinking behaviours, and alcohol-related problems. The first three items refer to high-risk consumption, the following three examine potential dependence symptoms, and the final four explore hazardous use (Carretero et al., 2016). The AUDIT has been extensively researched to determine its effectiveness for measuring hazardous drinking in a variety of diverse settings (Reinert & Allen, 2007). The scale has been found to perform "outstandingly" in a general population sample (Lundin et al., 2015), and is considered the gold standard for identifying risky drinking patterns among respondents across different cultural and age groups, including college students (Kokotailo et al., 2004; Fleming, Barry & Macdonald, 1991). The tool has been found to demonstrate a high degree of internal consistency (median reliability coefficient of 0.83, with a range of 0.75 to 0.97) (Reinert & Allen, 2007), construct validity (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient of 0.69) and test-retest reliability (0.98) (Bergman & Kallmen, 2002). Further, recent evidence suggests the AUDIT is a more useful measure of hazardous alcohol consumption than pre-existing laboratory tests (Fujii et al., 2016). Underreporting of alcohol use among participants cannot be ruled out when using self-report tools. This, however, was

mitigated against by using an instrument (AUDIT) with a high degree of validity and reliability. Additionally, self-report tools have been found to be more sensitive than observational and laboratory methodologies, and are cheaper, faster, and easier to administer (Wolford et al., 1999; Noorbakhsh, 2018). As such, the benefits of using of using this self-report tool largely outweigh the potential limitations

#### **4.5.1.2.3 Questions related to past alcohol consumption**

Onset of alcohol use and excessive drinking was assessed using two metrics: 1) age of onset of first consumption, and 2) age of onset of binge drinking. Age of onset of first consumption was measured by asking participants “At what age did you first consume a drink containing alcohol?”, and age of onset of binge drinking was measured by asking participants “At what age did you first consume six or more units of alcohol on one occasion?” Participants could respond openly via a free-text answer field to both questions.

#### **4.5.1.3 Participants**

In total, N=286 students completed the online survey. The sampling strategy was to gather data on more students from a single university, than less students across several locations, as achieved by previous studies examining alcohol use by students across several UK institutions (cf. John & Alwyn, 2014). Further, the sample was generally representative of the student population (presented in Table 2 above). Respondents to the survey were more likely to be female (54%), be aged under 21 (60%), to not have a religion (67%), to be of white ethnic background (89%) and be heterosexual (93%). The breakdowns of each individual demographic are provided in Table 3. 36%, 30% and 29% were in the first, second and third year of their degree, respectively, and most were living in off campus/student house accommodation (55%). See Table 4 for a breakdown of university demographics. In total, 163 respondents played university sport (57%). The majority played team sports (68%) and specifically rugby (25%). Most of the athlete sample started playing sport in school (71%), had competed at university (35%) or regional (34%) level and trained for between 3 and 8 hours per week (73%). 15% of student athletes were currently injured. See Table 5 for a detailed breakdown of sport demographics.

*Table 3. Demographic characteristics of Bayfields students who responded to the survey invitation*

<b>Individual Demographics</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
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<b>Gender</b>	
Female	54%
Male	46%
<b>Age Range</b>	
<21	60%
21-25	33%
26-30	2%
31-35	2%
36+	2%
<b>Religious/belief</b>	
No religion	67%
Christian	31%
Buddhist	1%
Zain	<1%
Zoroastrian	<1%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White	89%
Black and minority ethnic group	11%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	
Heterosexual	93%
Gay or Lesbian	2%
Bisexual	5%

*Table 4. University characteristics of Bayfields students who responded to the survey invitation*

<b>University Demographics</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>University</b>	
Bayfields	100%

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<b>Stage of Degree (year)</b>	
1	36%
2	30%
3	29%
4	3%
5	1%
<b>Term Time Accommodation</b>	
On campus/halls	23%
Off campus/Student house	55%
Family/Guardian	17%
Other	5%

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*Table 5. Sport characteristics of Bayfields students who responded to the survey invitation*

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<b>Sport Demographics</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Sport Participation</b>	
Yes	57%
No	43%
<b>Sport Type (General)</b>	
Individual	32%
Team	68%
<b>Sport Type (Specific)</b>	
Athletics	5%
Football	10%
Gymnastics	2%
Hockey	17%
Other ball sports	13%
Other individual sports	21%
Racquet Sports	7%
Rugby	25%

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**Length playing (Since)**

School	71%
Club (Under 16)	20%
Club Youth (17-18)	1%
College	2%
6th Form College	2%
University	5%

**Highest Competitive Level**

Club	9%
University	35%
Regional	34%
National	13%
International	9%

**Hours of Training per Week**

0-2	10%
3-4	28%
5-6	25%
7-8	20%
9-0	9%
>10	7%

**Injury Status**

Not currently injured	65%
Currently injured	15%
Injured within the last 2 months	20%

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**4.5.1.4 Statistical analysis**

Data were subjected to several statistical analyses. First, the mean AUDIT scores were calculated across several independent variables (i.e., gender, age, stage of degree, accommodation type, sporting status, general sport type, and specific sport type). Second, the frequency of participants falling within each AUDIT risk category (low, hazardous, harmful, and probable dependence) were calculated across several

independent variables (i.e., gender, sporting status and sport type). Third, Mann-Whitney U-tests were run to compare differences between groups of continuous variables for two groups, Kruskal-Wallis analyses were run to determine the variance between more than two groups, and Spearman rank-order correlations were computed to examine the cross-sectional relationship between the dependant variable (alcohol use) and the independent variable (pre-university alcohol use).

#### **4.5.2 Study II: Longitudinal Survey**

This research recognised the limitations of cross-sectional studies, where given a ‘snapshot’ of behaviour is taken, it is difficult to make causal inference and behaviours may change under a different timeframe (Levin, 2006). To address these concerns, Study II was a longitudinal survey which followed up with participants over the course of an academic year. A major strength of longitudinal research is that it enables a researcher to identify events which may be impacting upon a behaviour over-time (Caruana et al., 2015). Research suggests alcohol use by student athletes may change throughout the season (Martens et al., 2006), however, little research examining this has been conducted in the UK. As such, this longitudinal study sought to understand patterns of alcohol use over-time, to inform the qualitative studies that followed. The primary objective of this study was to make meaningful comparisons between data collected at different times. It was therefore necessary to replicate the data collection approach adopted in Study I, and use the same measure of alcohol use (AUDIT), distributed in this same way (via an online self-report survey).

##### **4.5.2.1 Data Collection**

Participants who took part in Study I, during Term 1, were sent follow-up invitations in Term 2 and Term 3 inviting them to take part in a similar but more concise survey. To mitigate against loss of participants at follow-up, at Term 2 and Term 3 participants were only asked to disclose data pertaining to certain demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, and sporting status), and current alcohol use.

##### **4.5.2.2 Participants**

There was a significant decrease in the number of participants completing the survey at each follow-up. This is a common problem of studies which attempt to track participants over-time (cf. Zhou et al., 2016; Harris, 2019). The sample size decreased from N=286 students during Term 1, to N=82 students during Term 2 and further to N=43 students during Term 3. However, the general make-up of participants remained

consistent. At Term 1, participants had a mean age of 21.1 which ranged from 18 to 55, were more likely to be of white ethnic background (89%), be female (54%) and play sport (57%). At Term 2, participants had a mean age of 21.2 which ranged from 18 to 42, were more likely to be of white ethnic background (84%), be female (54%) and play sport (57%). At Term 3, participants had a mean age of 20.3 which ranged from 18 to 27, were more likely to be of white ethnic background (78%), be female (61%) and play sport (56%). Sample characteristics are provided in Table 6.

*Table 6. Sample characteristics at each Term*

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Term 1 (n=286)</b>	<b>Term 2 (n=82)</b>	<b>Term 3 (n=43)</b>
<b>Age</b>			
Average (Range)	21.1 (18-55)	21.2 (18-42)	20.3 (18-27)
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	54%	54%	61%
Male	46%	46%	39%
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White	89%	84%	78%
Black and Minority ethnic group	11%	16%	22%
<b>Sport Status</b>			
Yes	57%	57%	56%
No	43%	43%	44%

#### **4.5.2.3 Statistical analysis**

As a result of the significant loss of participants at each follow-up, the level of analysis which could be conducted was limited. As such, data were subjected to several descriptive statistical analyses. First, AUDIT-C scores were calculated at Terms 1, 2 and 3 across several independent variables (i.e., past alcohol use and sporting status). Second, Kruskal-Wallis analyses were run to determine the variance between groups.

#### **4.6 Study III: Semi-structured interviews**

The qualitative studies aimed to provide a richer explanation of the structural contributors to alcohol use identified in the preceding quantitative phase (Studies I and II). The literature review, presented in Chapter 2, showed few studies had explored alcohol use by student athletes qualitatively, and those which had, provided a much deeper understanding of the relationship (Zhou & Heim, 2016; Roy & Camiré, 2017; Clayton & Harris 2008; Sparkes et al., 2007;2010). Qualitative research, in general, has several benefits over quantitative research. It allows a researcher to generate, expand or generalise theories (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004; Hyde, 2000), it enables a researcher to understand the context and meanings associated with a particular behaviour (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004; Gilbert, 1990), and is particularly applicable where a problem has a significant degree of complexity (Ritchie, 2003). As Shulman (1988, p.7) explains “there are times we wish to know not how many or how well, but simply how” (Shulman, 1988, p. 7).

This study used semi-structured interviews to understand the social and structural contributors to the drinking culture. Semi-structured interviews involve a researcher using a set of questions and themes to discuss with an interviewee, but using the freedom to alter or omit these if required (Saunders et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews are one of the most common qualitative data collection techniques, and have been described as “excellent for gathering in-depth accounts of personal experience” (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016; McArdle, McGale & Gaffney, 2012). This is an effective method for collecting data when the research question(s) require information on the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of people on a particular topic, and where there is a need to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). This approach allows the researcher to explore specific topics whilst giving the participant the opportunity to explain or expand their responses (Ibid.). Interviews build a holistic snapshot, analyse words, report detailed views of participants, and enable interviewees to “speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings” (Berg, 2007: 96).

There are a number of advantages to semi-structured interviews. Firstly, they allow the researcher to combine structure with flexibility, where the “interview is sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, to

allow responses to be fully probed, and to allow the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee” (Legard et al., 2003, p. 141). Secondly, semi-structured interviews are interactive in nature, and through encouraging two-way communication can help participants speak more freely, (Myers & Newman, 2007; Legard et al., 2003). Thirdly, interviews allow a researcher to prepare an environment which is more likely to elucidate the desired participant interaction. The researcher can use the most appropriate methods for contacting interviewees, obtaining consent, and recording the session, and can control the time and locations convenient for both the interviewer and interviewee (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, p.4). DeJonckheere & Vaughn (2019, p.4) argue that “careful planning, particularly around the technical aspects of interviews, can be the difference between a great interview and a not so great interview”. Mason (2002) adds that the strengths of interviews, which are sometimes lost from sight, are that they allow a researcher to explore the texture and weave of daily life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of research participants, how social processes, institutions, discourses, or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The interviews focussed on exploring the perceptions, attitudes and lived experiences of athletes and understanding the “experience as nearly as possible as participants feel it or live it” (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p.7). More specifically, they sought to understand how drinking within sporting settings had originated (the habitus development), and any social processes which functioned to maintain its presence. These processes included 1) whether drinking practices were used to build networks (social capital) and status (symbolic capital), and 2) what power dynamics or processes functioned to achieve this. This line of enquiry required a methodological approach which provided detailed insight into people's personal perspectives (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Face to face semi-structured interviews were considered critical for generating participant-driven information from key actors (rugby players), who have personal experience, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about the drinking culture in university rugby, and sport and rugby more broadly (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). They enabled a ‘thick description’ of the phenomena by probing the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of alcohol use (Minichiello et al., 2008).

This stage of the research was likely to have been guided and influenced by my own position within the research. I played rugby prior to university and had prior experience

of the drinking practices embedded within the culture. On one hand, this helped me build rapport with interviewees, as they may have felt I was similar to them in terms of identity and experience. On the other hand, athletes who felt similar to me may have been more forthcoming and willing to engage in this research as a participant. The word-of-mouth sampling technique, outlined below in 4.6.2, may have further encouraged certain athletes with similar characteristics to me to be interviewed. This self-selection bias may limit our understanding of low or non-drinkers within these cultures. The final Chapter of this thesis will discuss this issue in greater depth.

#### **4.6.1 Key themes of enquiry**

Each interview was designed to be exploratory and open-ended with the view of listening to each participant talk about their experiences. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) argue that, to obtain quality data, interviews should involve iterative interactions between the interviewer and interviewee, rather than a transactional question-answer approach. To best utilise the interview time, however, an interview guide was created to support this process, by prompting interviewees to discuss key elements. Interview guides enable a researcher to explore many respondents more systematically and comprehensively, and keep the interview focused on the desired line of inquiry (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Arthur and Nazroo (2003) emphasise the importance of careful preparation for interviews, and in particular the preparation of an interview guide. Arthur and Nazroo advocate structuring an interview guide with four sections, including an introduction, opening questions, core in-depth questions and closure. This approach helped to support participants who were reluctant to share their experiences or were naturally shy within the interview setting.

There were several sources which helped formulate the interview guide. Firstly, the literature review (Chapter 2) and quantitative phase of research (Chapter 5) indicated that when and how athletes initiate alcohol use may be an important milestone (Marcelo et al., Hildebrand et al., Lewis and Paladino, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Green et al., 2014; Barber et al., 2001). The theoretical framework (Chapter 3) further supported the idea that this experience may be influential in shaping an athlete's habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). Second, the literature review revealed a lack of previous research into the drinking experiences of athletes (Zhou & Heim, 2014). It was therefore necessary to understand the lived drinking experience of participants. This provided insight into the field and field actors which were shaping the drinking culture (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Thirdly, the theoretical framework presented a need to understand the social dynamics and power relations, such as the perceived value of alcohol use as a cultural currency, and how this may be exchangeable with social desires (such as friendships and status) (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 2006). For this reason, it was essential to understand what purpose alcohol served to the individuals and the group. Finally, the literature review revealed new evidence that certain field actors (i.e., elite players) may possess a level of status which provided desistance capital (an ability to refuse alcohol without judgement or consequence) (Roy & Camiré, 2017). As such, the interview guide prompted individuals to share any situations which stop them from drinking.

A pilot phase (detailed below) helped to explore this line of enquiry further, identify any gaps, and refine interview questions and prompts. The pilot phase broadly supported the interview guide and highlighted additional areas of interest. Firstly, early introduction into drinking appeared to be an important part of the alcohol-athlete relationship. Secondly, the way alcohol use was structured and repetitive warranted further interrogation. Thirdly, public humiliation and induction events were attached to positive and justifiable emotions. The pilot phase revealed a need to understand the purpose and experience of these strategic events in greater detail and from multiple perspectives (including novice and experienced players).

Based on these findings, the interview guide was segmented into six main sections. Firstly, during the introduction, participants were asked to share what course they were studying, the length of time they had played rugby, why they started playing, and if they had played any other sports. These questions helped to ease participants into the interview (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Secondly, participants were asked to describe and explain when they started consuming alcohol, in what context, at what prevalence and the reasons underpinning this initiation. Thirdly, they were invited to relate their past consumption with their current drinking, in terms of amount, context and reasons for alcohol use. Fourthly, participants were asked, in detail, the reasons they consumed alcohol, how they felt this differed, or was similar, to their team-mates and other students, if the reasons they drink had changed over time, if they felt their drinking was linked to their sport, and what role alcohol played in their sport. Fifthly, interviewees were asked to explain what, if any, factors (i.e., off season, training or playing schedule) stop them drinking alcohol. Finally, participants were invited to share any other comments which could help inform the research, or the interview process for

future participants, and ask any questions themselves. Talmy (2010) stress interviewees should be given the chance to control the ending of the interview by bringing up comments or asking questions.

#### **4.6.2 Procedures and participants**

Prior to this study, a pilot interview was conducted with a key rugby union 'insider' with substantial and wide-ranging experience of the culture, generated through extensive involvement as a player and coach at various clubs and at several levels. Creswell (2009) explains it is beneficial for researchers to have pilot session prior to interviews, which help to refine interview content and its feasibility and usefulness as a research instrument. The pilot interview served several purposes. First, it provided insight into the logistics of planning and delivering interviews on a busy university campus with several potential risks of distraction, and helped minimise these risks in the main interview stage. Second, the pilot interview provided the opportunity to explore key themes relating to alcohol use which emerged from a key insider. This aided the development of the interview schedule. The pilot interview was predominantly unguided and focussed on the interviewees extensive playing and coaching career and key influencers and achievements, before discussing the social and cultural aspects of the game (rugby).

The retrospective survey (Study I) showed rugby players were among the heaviest consumers of alcohol. For this reason, rugby culture became a prominent focal point of the research and analysis. As such, this study used a purposive sampling strategy, where individuals were targeted and selected based on their experience with a phenomenon of interest (rugby) (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Over the course of one academic year and student rugby season, male and female rugby union athletes were recruited to take part in a semi-structured interview. Flyers advertising the study were placed on notice boards throughout the university campuses, coaches of both rugby teams were asked to share an initial invite to all players, and word of mouth was used to stimulate further interest following the completion of each interview. A £10 Amazon voucher was offered to each interviewee to incentivise and compensate participation. All interviews were conducted face to face. This delivery method was chosen, over online or telephone techniques, to make use of the visual and non-verbal cues (facial expressions, gestures, body language) which can help contextualise the interview and responses (O'Connor et al., 2008; Curasi, 2001). These verbal and non-verbal cues also make it easier for the

interviewer to control the interview process and lead the conversation in a particular way (Vogl, 2013). Based on literature guidance, interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), and were audio recorded using a high-quality voice recorder. All interviews were transcribed following the completion of the data collection period verbatim. Fifteen rugby players (9 male and 6 female) were recruited to take part. Participants had a mean age of 21 which ranged from 18 to 23, all were of white ethnic background, and the sample included 1st year (n=3), 2nd year (n=2), 3rd year (n=5), Masters (n=2) and PhD (n=3) level students. The participants had a broad range of abilities, with 4 currently or having previously competed at national level, 5 having achieved university level participation, 1 at regional level and a further 5 feeling amateur level was the highest they had competed at. Sample characteristics are provided in Table 7.

*Table 7. Interview sample characteristics*

Indicator	Final sample n=15
<b>Demographics</b>	
<b>Age</b>	
Average (Range)	21 (18-23)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	9
Female	5
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White	15
<b>Highest competitive level</b>	
Amateur	5
Regional	1
University	5
National	4
<b>Degree stage</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup> year	3
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	2
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	5
Masters	2
PhD	3

### **4.6.3 Interview data analysis**

Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis and followed the principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2014). At a basic level, thematic analysis is “a method for identifying patterns (‘themes’) in a dataset, and for describing and interpreting the meaning and importance of those” (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016, p.192). Braun, Clarke and Weate (2016) note a strength of thematic analysis is that it suits a wide range of qualitative research questions – It can provide analyses of people’s experiences, identify processes which underlie or influence a behaviour, reveal patterns in people’s practices related to their views and perspectives, and can determine ways an issue or topic is represented. There were six stages to the analytical procedure. In step 1, the researcher collected, transcribed, read, and re-read the interview data. Throughout this process the researcher become familiar with the data and created notes of preliminary themes of interest throughout the process. Following this process (in step 2), the transcripts were systematically coded through a process of line-by-line reading and highlighting of interesting features within the data. Each transcript was read twice during the coding process. During step 3, codes were collated into themes and supporting quotes were attached to each emergent theme. In the following stage (step 4), each theme was reviewed and refined. Certain themes were retired if they did not possess adequate data to support their inclusion. During this process, the researcher listened to the audio recordings again to confirm if each theme accurately reflected the context in which they were discussed. At stage 5, each theme was further refined, provided a definition and given a name of reference within this thesis. Finally (in stage 6), each theme and supporting evidence (in the form of quotes) were shared among the research team for debate, further refinement, and confirmation. At this stage, leading quotes were selected which best elucidated the topic of interest, and these were used to explain and interpret each theme in this thesis. The 15-point checklist developed by Braun & Clarke 2006; Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016) was used to ensure quality in the analysis.

### **4.7 Study IV: A season-long case study**

This research culminated with a season-long case study, where the researcher was heavily immersed within the male rugby environment. The aim of this case study was to build on the previous three studies by understanding the degree of fit between the habitus of athletes, and the field, doxa and field dynamics upon their arrival at university. Further, this study explored, in a more immersive and natural way than study

III, if and how drinking practices were strategic acts of cultural exchange used to build social and symbolic capital. These lines of inquiry required a methodological approach which could capture group behaviours as they occurred, which could account for wider influences that are not immediately recognisable to the field actors themselves, and which could represent how both these factors develop over time. A case study was judged to be the most appropriate approach for capturing these behaviours and patterns. Given the time-consuming nature of the methodological approach needed to answer these research questions, and given the time-limited availability of funding to deliver this programme of research, it was necessary to narrow the focus of the research further. As such, the second qualitative study focussed solely on male rugby players, as it was likely that the researcher, a male, would have greater acceptance, co-operation, and comfort within a male rugby environment (Bernard, 1994; Kawulich, 2005).

A case study is the study of social phenomenon in its natural surroundings, during a specified period, that focusses on detailed descriptions, interpretations, and explanations that participants in a system attach to the social process (Swanborn, 2010). Harrison et al. (2017, p.4) explain case studies are “simple in theory yet complex in nature”, however, case study research has undergone substantial methodological development over the past 40 years. This has developed the planning, preparation, and execution of case study research into a unique, pragmatic, and flexible approach, capable of providing a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Ibid.; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Several definitions of case study research have been provided over the course of its evolution, and Flyvbjerg (2011) argues whilst some of these are useful, others are not, and a simple definition is more valuable. Flyvbjerg cites Merriam-Webster’s (2009) definition as a usefully straightforward description, where a case study is “an intensive analysis of an individual unit (a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment”. This definition is particularly useful within the context of this thesis, where the research was concerned with understanding the behaviours (alcohol use) of a community (rugby club) in relation to developmental factors, expressed through the habitus (Bourdieu, 2005). Flyvbjerg (2011) explains case study research should be guided by 4 principles. Firstly, the community may be studied in a variety of ways (i.e., qualitatively or quantitatively, analytically, or hermeneutically, or by mixed methods) and selection of a particular method is not decisive for judging whether or not it constitutes a case study. Second, case studies must be intensive, providing more detail, richness, completeness, and variance. Thirdly, they explore a case (individual or

community) as they evolve in time, often in relation to a string of concrete and interrelated events. Fourthly, they focus on the relationship between a case, and the environment.

Case study research shares similarities with ethnographic research, however, there are important differences. Ethnography is a study at first-hand about what people do and say in a particular context (Hammersley, 2006). Both approaches are “dynamic and have application to different contexts, sharing a variety of data collection techniques to answer a range of questions” (Parker-Jenkins, 2018, p.21). Ethnographic research, however, emphasizes the use of observational evidence and extended periods of time spent within the field, whereas case study research mainly uses interviews to compliment participant observations (Suryani, 2008). Harwati (2019, p.154) argue that, based on this fundamental difference, “although the two approaches have similar philosophical and methodological underpinnings, they produce different knowledge”. The main purpose of ethnographic research is to describe a culture or lifestyle, rather than seeking causes or explanations. Whereas case study research attempts to explain a particular phenomenon, which is “not readily distinguishable from its context” (Yin, 2003, p. 4; Harwati, 2019). Based on this difference, a case-study was deemed the most suitable technique for generating the (specific) information required to address the research questions. At this stage of the research, a breadth of existing ideas about the drinking culture (elaborated below) were established. This established knowledge may have jeopardised the data generated if an ethnographic approach, with the fundamental aim of generating a pure description of the culture, was undertaken. Existing beliefs and ideas may have biased the documentation, recording and interpretation of events and situations.

The rationale to use a case study approach was underpinned by the theoretical framework, and particularly the knowledge which was required to understand and explain the drinking culture in male rugby. Specifically, the need to know how drinking practices emerged, persisted, and decayed over time and their relationship with other social practices (Meier et al., 2018). Meier et al. (2018, p.212) argue for a shift from “individual drinkers to drinking practices, and from alcohol consumption to drinking occasions; specifically, how, when, where, why and with whom drinking and getting drunk occur and vary across time, place and population”. This approach focusses on the performances of routinized behaviours which are shared across groups of people, rather

than individual beliefs, expectations, or behaviours (Blue et al., 2016). A case study methodology, with periods of intense observations surrounding drinking events, complimented with interviews with key field actors, generated an in-depth understanding of the context of consumption.

There are several fundamental elements which characterise a case study which separate them from other forms of research (Harrison et al., 2017). They focus on a case (i.e., a program, individual, group, social situation, organization, event, phenomena, or process), in a bounded system (i.e., by time, space or activity) and are studied in-depth, in a real life setting or natural environment. Further, multiple sources of evidence (i.e., interviews, observations, focus groups, artifact and document review, questionnaires and/or surveys) are combed (or triangulated) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the case (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Creswell (2007, p.245) summarise case study research as:

A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes.

In line with this definition, the current case-study started with broad research questions, based on the theoretical framework and preceding studies, and remained attentive to new avenues for data collection throughout the study. The case-study exploited several sources of data (such as interviews with key field actors, existing documentation, and observation notes), which were, in certain circumstances, shared with studied participants for reflection and debate. These are covered in greater detail below.

My position within the research guided the case study approach taken. Specifically, a male rugby club was targeted as it was likely that I, a male, would have been granted greater access to the culture. My age, gender, and prior experience playing rugby and the drinking practices involved in the game helped me gain initial access to the club and build rapport with individual players. This enabled me to see first-hand the drinking practices of athletes and gain sufficient trust with individual members for them to discuss with me why they were engaging in specific practices. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) introduced the concept ‘researcher-as-instrument’ to describe how attributes of the researcher have the potential to influence what data is collected and

how it is analysed or interpreted. I was well aware of the drinking culture within rugby and sought to uncover opportunities or contradictions within the culture which could be used to introduce interventions aimed at reducing consumption or harm. It is plausible that this could have guided what I saw, and what I chose to discuss with individual athletes. On one hand, this could have strengthened the research, as I was actively looking for wider social pressures beyond the athletes themselves which may influence how (much) they drank (for instance, subtle messages, advertisements, or external pressures). On the other hand, this may have restricted the breadth of perspectives I observed and recorded. For instance, I may have been more drawn to a group of athletes behaving boisterously and engaging in extreme behaviours, and may have missed or under-appreciated the practices of more moderate consumers on the periphery.

#### **4.7.1 Research Setting – The case**

The case study was conducted on the male university rugby club. ‘Club’ was defined as the players, coaching staff, committee members, supporters and wider community that entered the field of study. These included opposition players and supporters, the wider student population that entered the environment (i.e., the student union bar or rugby stands) and student union staff. This broad definition of the research setting allowed me to develop a comprehensive understanding of the field and social processes which may be influencing consumption. There was, however, a key focus on the players. Teams competing at multiple levels (i.e., first, second, first-year) were observed prior, during, and following games throughout the season. This allowed me to gather data from multiple perspectives and explore how players of differing ability and experience interacted with the field and each other.

#### **4.7.2 Access**

Gaining access and building rapport are crucial when conducting studies which involve participant observation (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). To gain access, a face-to-face meeting with the first-team coach and director of rugby was arranged prior to the study to request access to the rugby club and invite them to participate in the research. In the meeting, the researcher explained the study’s focus and made transparent his intentions to participate as a researcher throughout the season. The Director of Rugby granted access to the rugby environment and acted as the ‘gatekeeper’ for the research. Working with a ‘gatekeeper’ (i.e., an insider) can be extremely helpful for gaining trust and access to a target group (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Throughout the season, the

gatekeeper introduced me to individual athletes and wider coaching staff, allowed me to travel with the club and socialise within the group environment. This was essential for making participants (i.e., athletes, coaching staff, and club members) aware of the research, and getting them to feel comfortable over-time. I built rapport with the rugby club through the process of ‘hanging out’ (Kawulich, 2005). Hanging out involves meeting and conversing with people to establish relationships over-time, and slowly moving from the position of a formal, ignorant intruder to welcome, knowledgeable intimate (DeMunck and Sobo, 1998). There are three stages to establish this relationship. The first stage requires the researcher to learn the social rules and language of the culture whilst making themselves known to the community. During the second stage, the researcher begins to merge with the group and stand out less as an intruder. During the third ‘intimate’ stage, the researcher has established relationships with participants and is comfortable with interactions (Ibid.).

#### **4.7.3 Key themes of enquiry**

At this stage of the research, important insights had been gained into the factors and processes which may be creating and maintaining a drinking culture in university rugby, and (university) sport more broadly. As a result, there were several areas of interest which required further examination and explanation. Whilst these guided the observations and conversations with participants, they did not restrict me from considering wider practices which may be important. A flexible and open-minded approach to understanding the culture was taken throughout the study.

##### **4.7.3.1 Player norms, perceptions, and expectations**

At the beginning of the season, the focal point of conversations was on drinking expectations, attitudes, and existing behaviours. These discussions evolved as increasing amounts of observational data were collected. In particular, there was a need to shed greater light on whether students were ‘learning’ the rules surrounding how, what, and in which way to drink during university, or if these had been developed prior to university (Marcelo et al., 1989; Hildebrand et al., 2001; Lewis and Paladino, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Green et al., 2014; Barber and colleagues, 2001; Cardigan et al., 2013; Jones, 2016). Further, it was crucial to understand how different groups (i.e., novice versus experienced, older versus younger and higher ability versus lower ability) interacted (Haslam & Platow, 2001), and whether a social hierarchy had formed within the culture. Finally, it was vital to investigate how the drinking culture was maintained

each year, despite a heavy and frequent turnover of students/players (Sparkes et al. 2007).

#### **4.7.3.2 Rituals and traditions**

At this stage of the research, it was clear that certain strategic activities (such as drinking rituals, traditions, and forfeits) functioned to maintain a drinking culture (Jones, 2016; Clayton, 2013; Sparkes et al., 2007). This case study was concerned with understanding why and how these operated. This focussed on the power dynamics at play within these situations and events, who dictated them and the level of buy-in from actors with different levels of experience and playing ability (Roy & Camiré, 2017, Jeckell et al., 2018).

#### **4.7.3.3 Coach expectations, norms, and beliefs**

In Chapter 2, literature (cf. Roy & Camiré, 2017; Pitts et al., 2017; Mastroleo et al., 2012) revealed coaches played an influential role in the drinking habits of their athletes. This influence went beyond accepting and encouraging alcohol use and raised important ethical questions. Coaches, through encouraging and engaging in (sometimes illegal and idiotic) behaviours, had diminished credibility as moral authority figures, and were in a difficult position to condone behaviours they often themselves participated in (ibid.). It was therefore important to understand the attitudes, expectations, and practices of coaches, from their perspective. The strong buy-in from the head coach (gatekeeper) enabled me to discuss these factors, at length, with the coaching team and capture in-situ data of drinking behaviours and alcohol management practices.

#### **4.7.3.4 University policies and alcohol management practices**

The final area of interest concerned the wider field pressures and influences that athletes were exposed to (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1998). Ingrained habits and group level dynamics are vital to explaining alcohol use (Jones, 2016). Behaviours and processes, however, do not exist within a vacuum, exempt from wider social pressures (Bourdieu, 1993; Brown, 2016). This case-study enabled me to understand the implicit and explicit alcohol ‘messages’ (such as advertising, promotions, and pricing) which athletes were exposed to (McFadyen et al., 2019).

#### **4.7.4 Data sources**

Case studies apply a flexible approach to data collection, where the researcher avoids pre-fixed procedures of data collection, remain attentive to new sources of valuable information, and adjusts the research steps throughout the research process (Swanborn,

2010). There are, however, several sources of information which are deemed crucial (for instance, informants, documents, and observation notes) (ibid.). Methods included observation (Kawulich, 2005), field-note taking (Willig, 2008), conversational interviews (Swain & Spire, 2020; Gray, 2009), and formal semi-structured interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) (see Table 8 for an overview of data collection techniques). In-situ data was captured in my diary and through audio recordings that were transcribed verbatim (Willig, 2008). To ensure the integrity of observational data, field-notes were written as close to the events witnessed as reasonably possible, and I did not attempt to recollect conversations and/or situations more than 24 hours after they occurred (Willig, 2008). Observational data collection was limited to rugby club settings only (e.g., training and match-day contexts, including changing rooms, team socials in the university student union and bus journeys to and from games). To respect the boundary between public and private behaviour and speech, I did not collect in-situ data in settings such as pubs, bars, or nightclubs where alcohol was consumed alongside members of the general public (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Instead, I listened to and probed players' recollections and reconstructions of social events that took place outside of the rugby club setting in the immediate days that follow. Over the course of the season, formal interviews were arranged with key members of the rugby team once substantive lines of inquiry had been identified following an initial period of observation (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Interviews were conducted in person, at a mutually agreed venue, and were recorded with a high-quality audio recorder (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

*Table 8. Overview of data collection techniques*

Method	Summary	Participants
Observations	Events surrounding fixtures were observed and documented throughout a single season.	Whole university rugby club.
Conversational Interviews	Conversations were held, and documented, with participants during observations.	Whole university rugby club.
Documentation	Written documentation was collected throughout the season and in certain cases, used to	Not applicable.

	question participants. These included written media reports, social media reports, advertisements, promotions, and pricelists.	
Semi-Structured Interviews	Athletes and other key field influences were interviewed in a formal setting throughout the season. This enabled a deeper probing of emerging areas of interest.	Nine rugby players, one director of rugby and one director of student services.

#### **4.7.4.1 Observations**

Participant (or case) observations involve “collecting impressions of the world using all of one’s senses, especially looking and listening, in a systematic and purposeful way to learn about a phenomenon of interest” (Given, 2008, p. 573). Observational research is exploratory, seeks to reveal unexpected practices, and uses inductive reasoning to account to for witnessed events and behaviours (Given, 2008). Bernard (2006) identifies five strengths of observational research, which underpinned the rationale to employ the method within this case-study. Firstly, they open up areas of inquiry to collect a wider range of data. Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013, p.80) explain “there are things that outsiders are simply not allowed to do, see, or know. You cannot collect data about these things if you aren’t on the inside as a participant”. Secondly, they reduce the issue of reactivity – That is, they reduce the risks of participants changing their behaviour (or reporting of behaviour) to outsiders. Thirdly, they enable researchers to know what questions to ask, and how to ask them. Fourthly, observations allow the research to gain a deeper understanding of collected data, by providing an intimate understanding of the community and by discussing in-situ findings with participants. Finally, they allow the researcher to address problems which are unavailable to other data collection techniques. Jorgensen (1989) describes observations as most appropriate when a research problem involves human interaction within an everyday setting. Observations allow a researcher to access the routinised nature of a particular behaviour (i.e., alcohol use). As Flick (1998, p.222) puts it: “practices are only accessible through observation; interviews and narratives merely make the accounts of practices accessible”.

I was immersed within the rugby club setting before, during and following several university matches throughout a season. These included 7 national university matches (2 away, 5 home), 3 national league matches (1 away, 2 home) and 1 first year match (home). This allowed data to be collected from multiple perspectives (home versus away, experienced versus inexperienced, and varying levels of ability), and enabled comparisons to be made between different groups who shared the same culture. My position (i.e., where I stood) during these events changed over time, as the team became more familiar with me, and trust and rapport grew. During the initial stages of the case-study I stood or sat near to the head coach (the gatekeeper), although with each subsequent observation I became more integrated with the team, individual members, and cliques. During matches and post-match, I moved around different groups to gather different perspectives and interactions. Despite the unique strengths of participant observations, observational research is often combined with other methods (i.e., interviewing and document analysis) to provide a fuller explanation of the community or issue (Given, 2008; Creswell, 2013).

#### **4.7.4.2 Conversational Interviews**

Conversational interviews have been described as controlled conversations where a researcher has an unstructured discussion with key informants within a field (Bernard, 2011). These discussions are skewed in the interests of the interviewer to gather in-depth information, but do not use a pre-planned set of questions (Gray, 2009). Burgess (1988, p.140) explain these conversations can range from a "chance encounter", a "brief word", a "short conversation", to a "long discussion". Nevertheless, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue these conversations are still a type of interview, albeit an informal one, which allow people to speak freely in a more natural and less artificial way than more formal interviews. As commonly practiced, this case-study used conversational interviews to compliment the observational method described above (Swain & Spire, 2020). These conversations allowed a deeper probing of behaviours, as they occurred, adding context to particular practices, and enriching the level of data obtained (ibid.).

#### **4.7.4.3 Documentation**

Documentation refers to the variety of written, audio, and visual artifacts that exist within natural contexts (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). O'Leary (2014) categorises documentation into three groups: public records (i.e., official statistics, mission statements or policy documents), personal documents (i.e., newspapers, social media

posts, or first-person accounts) and physical evidence (i.e., posters, flyers, or handbooks). Documents were interpreted to give additional context and meaning to the culture and observed practice (Bowen, 2009). During this case-study, documentation referred to a broad collection of useful data sources which evolved throughout the season long case-study. At the beginning of the season these included alcohol advertisements directed at students throughout the field (i.e., students union/rugby club) and the official social media accounts of the rugby club. These provided insight into the social pressures, expectations and doxa which athletes were exposed to (Sparkes, 2007; Bourdieu, 1977). Over the course of the season, the breadth of documentation evolved. During the period of this study, alcohol use by university rugby players in this geographical location featured in several news articles. The content within these media reports were analysed for similarities and differences with data collected directly through this study (Bowen, 2009). Further, they provided an additional line of enquiry in the formal interviews. Specifically, an interview with a director of student services, who had insider knowledge of the events surrounding one story, enabled the gathering of contextual information around the situation which preceded and followed the event. Over the course of the season, official social media accounts of the rugby club, student's union, and athletes within the field, were tracked and documented. Posts related to alcohol use were exported for later analysis, and provided data pertaining to the language used when talking about alcohol and the expectations regarding alcohol use before, during, and following rugby matches.

#### **4.7.4.4 Semi-structured interviews**

Once a comprehensive amount of observation and field-note data had been collected, 9 semi-structured interviews were conducted with male rugby players. As Cohen et al (2007: 29) explain, interviewing is “a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting”. The strengths outlined above in Section 4.6 underpinned the rationale to use semi-structured interviews, to provide a deeper understanding and interrogation of the themes identified through the observations, informal conversations, and documentation (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016; McArdle, McGale & Gaffney, 2012; Legard et al., 2003; Myers & Newman, 2007; Legard et al., 2003; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Mason, 2002; Edwards & Holland, 2013). Participants were probed on the themes outlined above, which included 1) perceived coach expectations, norms, and beliefs, 2) their own norms, perceptions, and expectations, 3) the roles, rituals, and traditions in rugby, and 4) the possible social

hierarchy and power imbalances within rugby. The interviews ranged between 35 and 55 minutes in length, were audio recorded using a high-quality audio recorder and were transcribed collectively following the completion of all interviews. All participants who took part in these interviews were aged between 18 and 22 (20.6 on average), were of white ethnic background, and different year groups were included (2 first year, 4 second year and 3 third year).

As the case study progressed, it became clear through the documentation collected that athletes were exposed to easily accessible, low-cost, and heavily promoted alcohol. It therefore became necessary to understand the alcohol management policies and practices from a key decision maker (Brown & Murphy, 2019). Thus, towards the end of the study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the director of student services. The interview lasted for 57 minutes, was audio recorded using a high-quality device, and was transcribed immediately following the interview. The focus of the interview was to explore the student unions approach to alcohol, the role they felt it played in the student experience, any issues they encountered with students in general, and certain student groups (such as those who play sport and those who play rugby), in particular.

To conclude the data collection, a formal semi-structured interview was conducted with the director of rugby, who provided access to the rugby environment and participants. This interview allowed a final, overarching perspective to be gathered from a key insider with substantial experience within the environment. The interview focussed on the coaches' perspective of the key emerging themes of the study, what role he felt alcohol played in rugby, and how he approached alcohol management (Roy and Camiré, 2017). The interview lasted for 48 minutes, was audio recorded using a high-quality device, and was transcribed immediately following the interview.

#### **4.7.5 Qualitative data analysis**

This case study adopted a similar, but more complex, inductive thematic analysis as outlined above in Section 4.6.3 (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2014). Terry et al. (2017) explain the flexibility of thematic analysis position it as a suitable technique for a wide range of data types. Thematic analysis can be used to analyse face to face interviews (as shown in Study III) (Niland et al., 2014), focus groups (e.g., Neville et al., 2015), qualitative surveys (Hayfield, 2013; Terry & Braun, 2016), diaries

(e.g., Leeming et al., 2013), story based methods (Clarke et al., 2015), online forums (Bennett & Gough, 2013), and other media sources (Frith et al., 2015). Terry et al. (2017) argue the most important deciding factor for the suitability of thematic analysis lies in the quality of the data, where “rich and complex data on a given topic are the crown jewels of qualitative research, allowing us deep and nuanced insights” (p. 22).

It is worth explaining why thematic analysis was deemed suitable for this specific case study, when this approach has been discouraged for other studies with a case study design. Terry et al. (2017) queried whether thematic analysis was a suitable method for interpreting case study data, or if previous case studies (i.e., Cedervall & Åberg, 2010), which applied thematic analysis, “really counted” (p. 35). The central difference between the current case study, and previous applications, lie in the number of participants and breadth of information collected. Previous case studies (i.e., Cedervall & Åberg, 2010) used thematic analysis to interpret interview and observation data from two participants. In contrast, the current case study combined interview data from 11 participants with observations, informal conversations, and documentation, from a whole rugby club. As Terry et al. (2017, p 35) explain “the theoretical and conceptual basis for identifying patterned meaning within single cases, is somewhat different to identifying and interpreting patterned meaning in and across data”.

In an identical manner to Study III, data were analysed via six stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which included: 1) collating, transcribing and repeatedly reading and familiarising oneself with data, 2) systematically coding all data through line by line reading of transcripts, documentation and observation field notes, 3) collating codes into themes and attaching evidence (quotes, notes or documentation) to each theme, 4) reviewing and refining themes, 5) further refining and defining themes, and 6) debating final themes and supporting evidence among the research team, before selecting the evidence which best represented the themes for presentation in this thesis (Chapter 7).

Given the complexity of this case-study, the analytical procedure was more complicated than undertaken in Study III. The analytical approach in this case study was more iterative and recursive than needed in the prior, semi structured interview study (Study III). During this case-study, there was a greater need to move back and forth as needed, throughout the phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006) given the wealth and breadth of data sources. Further, given the nature of case study research, where each data source guides the collection and interpretation of following sources, the analysis could be described as

beginning “with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read” (Merriam, 2009 p. 165) by “consolidating, reducing and interpreting in the process of meaning making” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). Creswell (2013, p.182) describes this approach as “moving in analytical circles”.

#### **4.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was granted by Bayfields Research Ethics Committee. In Studies I and II, the ethical risks were considered minimal, although there were potential risks of anonymity and right to withdraw which required careful management (Davis, 2020; Kervin et al. 2006; Tolich, 2016). Firstly, to enable the researcher to follow-up with participants, student numbers needed to be collected and used to email participants with follow up surveys. Data protection was an important issue as participant student numbers are unique identifiers which could trace back to each person’s personal information held by the university. Second, given participants were to be followed up by email, there was a risk that they may have been unable to withdraw from the study easily. Following detailed dialogue between the researcher and supervisory team, these risks were managed by briefing participants about the aims of the research to add relevance to the procedure from their point of view (O’Reilly, 2009; Kevern & Webb 2001; Kleiber 2004; Breen 2006). Further, participants were briefed and de-briefed with the knowledge that they could withdraw their data at any time for up to 3 weeks, which provided further reassurance (Bloor et al. 2001; Sherriff et al. 2014). During the brief and debrief and through informed consent forms, each participant was clearly informed that anonymity was a fundamental priority that would not be jeopardised at any stage (Hennink 2007; Lincoln 2009).

In Studies III and IV, there were further ethical considerations and risks which required careful management throughout the research. In common with generally accepted ethical practice in qualitative social science research, a range of considerations were built into this study. These followed the guidance provided by Plummer (2001) and centred on 1) intellectual property, 2) informed consent, 3) right to withdraw, 4) unintended deception, 5) accuracy of portrayal, 6) confidentiality and 7) financial gain. Connected to these were considerations specific to in-depth interviews, where taking a reflective approach on initiation into alcohol consumption may have been emotionally demanding for participants, potentially making them feel uncomfortable (Skeggs, 2001; Guest et al., 2017; Fahie, 2014).

Extensive and ongoing discussion between the researcher and supervisory team identified several strategies to minimise these potential risks. The procedures of good ethical practice identified by Plummer (2001), for the collection and handling of data, were practiced. Participants read and signed an explicitly worded informed consent form prior to each interview, which included a right to withdraw participation and all their data at any time (Doloriort & Sambrook, 2009; Faden & Beauchamp 1986; Beauchamp 2009; Sim 2010). The nature and purpose of the study was explained in written detail at the point informed consent was sought (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Nijhawan, 2013). Participants were asked to clarify any ambiguous aspects of their stories and the meanings underpinning them throughout the interview and during a debrief (Beauchamp 1997). All participants were given a pseudonym within this thesis and no part of their stories were or will be used for financial gain (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). Further, interview participants were given the opportunity to choose the location, day, and time of their interview, and whether or not the interview would be recorded (Sivell et al., 2019). In line with qualitative ethics procedures of the British Sociological Society's ethical guidelines, it was stressed to each participant (by way of the participant information sheet, consent form and finally once again prior to the interview) that interviews sometimes elicit a variety of emotions, including distress (Fahie, 2014). It was reaffirmed that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and that they could control what was said and how it was said, and they could request the recording of the interview to be paused, stopped, or terminated altogether, and this request would have been granted (Edwards, 2005). In addition, in line with common ethical practice for most qualitative projects, it was made clear that the researcher is an academic and not a medical doctor, counsellor, or a therapist, and therefore was not trained to engage in discussions of this kind. The Wales drug and alcohol helpline number: 0808 808 2234, was provided to all participants as a support option if they wished to seek further information about alcohol use. Finally, immediately prior to the interview having made this information explicitly clear, participants were reminded that participation was their choice and asked if they still wished to partake in the interview.

There were additional risks which stemmed from the observational data collection methods employed in Study IV. It is not always appropriate or feasible to gain consent in social research, and particularly observational research (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). The researcher conducted observations in the student union bar and focussed specifically on the behaviours of male rugby club members. However, all people who

entered the student union bar during periods of observation did not provide informed consent for their behaviour to be observed. To mitigate against this issue, the observational element of this study was guided by the principles laid out by the American Sociological Association Code of Ethics and Policies and Procedures of the ASA Committee on Professional Ethics (1999) which stipulated: “(c) Confidentiality is not required with respect to observations in public places, activities conducted in public, or other settings where no rules of privacy are provided by law or custom. Similarly, confidentiality is not required in the case of information available from public records” (p.19). The observations in this study were expected to take place in a public setting. Further, ongoing dialogue was undertaken with participants regarding consent, and much of the data collection focussed on observing and interviewing (conversational and formal) was conducted with actors who had provided informed consent (Measham & Moore, 2006; 2009). However, if at any time individuals who had not provided consent became the explicit focus of such observations, or if observation occurred in non-public settings, then the issue of consent could arise. In such circumstances, the ASA guidelines were practiced which state, “if...sociologists have any doubt whatsoever about the need for informed consent, they consult with institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, with another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research before proceeding with such research” (p.12). In preparedness for such circumstances, an observation consent form was created and was used if judged necessary.

There is a more challenging ethical dilemma associated with research of (student/athlete) drinking cultures. Research on student samples and cultures is extremely common in social sciences (Payne & Chappell, 2008; Arnett, 2008; Hanel & Vione, 2016). Students provide a convenient, familiar, and accessible population, as well as a convenient location (Jones, Brown & Harris, 2020; Brady, Nobles & Bouffard, 2017). Despite these advantages, research on student populations bring particular ethical difficulties (Jones, Brown & Harris, 2020). Jones, Brown & Harris (2020) argue that during the research process, particularly when using observational techniques to collect data, a researcher is highly likely to become aware of risks, harms, or wrongdoing. This issue may be even more prominent when researching a toxic psychoactive substance (alcohol), which itself carries risks to the individual consumer and others following intoxication and loss of control (e.g., risk-taking and violence) (Jones, 2016; Jones, Brown & Harris, 2020; Roy & Camiré, 2019). These observations may lead the

researcher to feel conflicted or guilty about how to proceed with this knowledge, where they “know of certain harms or wrongdoings and is torn between courses of action that attaches to the knowledge” (McNamee, 2001, p. 424). There are primarily two courses of action which can be taken by a researcher in this situation. He or she could intervene (by speaking out or removing alcohol from participants), which itself could cause participants to relocate and escalate their behaviours, or become physically intimidating. Both of which would jeopardize the research project. On the other hand, he or she might let the events unfold, seek or provide medical assistance (if required), and speak out when the opportunity arises (Jones, Brown & Harris, 2020). McNamee et al. (2007, p. 147) argue it is not “feasible or desirable to provide a set of ethical guidelines to cover all eventualities”, nor can we provide definite decisions about what to do in challenging, potentially risky situations (Jones, Brown & Harris, 2020). However, the health and well-being of the participants at risk is significant, and ultimately researchers must be prepared and willing to ‘blow the whistle’ if necessary (ibid.)

#### **4.9 Researcher Reflexivity**

Researcher reflexivity is a core component of qualitative inquiry (Burawoy, 1998; Reyes, 2020). There is value in acknowledging one’s own background and perspective within a given social context (Malcom, 2012; Kilminster, 2004). Elias (1978: 13) explains that “the person who studies and thinks about society is a member of it”. I played rugby regularly until I started university and had prior knowledge of some of the alcohol related practices athletes are exposed to in amateur and youth rugby. My prior involvement in rugby helped me know when and how to approach people, and who to approach. For example, I understood that prior to, or immediately following the game, players are unlikely to want to discuss their alcohol use but focus on the game, whereas after they had unwound, they may be more receptive and interactive. Further, I was not entirely surprised or conflicted by many of the extreme drinking practices I encountered. I was aware that these were commonplace in sport, and particular in rugby, as I had seen them in several club settings before. However, I was surprised and conflicted as a researcher by the dehumanising nature of some of the behaviours and I was alarmed by how structured and repetitive they were. Chapters 6 and 7 will describe in detail the extreme and dehumanising nature of practices within this culture. When observing and hearing athletes talk about these experiences, I was often unsure how I should react – whether I should let behaviours continue and collect as much valuable data as possible, or whether I should speak out against them (either internally with the

players themselves, or externally with senior leaders at the club/university). This latter course of action would have significantly reduced the trust and rapport between myself and the club and jeopardised my position as researcher. Throughout this case study, frequent meetings were held with my supervisory team to discuss what I was hearing and seeing and what course of action I should take. I decided not to speak out against any behaviours I witnessed as I felt it was more important to maintain access to them to be able to see what was going on and how athletes (post) rationalised their involvement. However, I was mindful that I might have to speak out if the situation worsened and behaviours became more extreme. The ethical and moral dilemmas associated with this position are outlined in a thought experiment published by Jones, Brown, and Harris (2020). The authors argue that in these situations a researcher should at least feel conflicted about what they are seeing or hearing and have very good reasons not to intervene. This moral confliction made me more determined to access the reasons and experiences of athletes with different social positions (i.e., novice versus experienced). Only by accurately documenting what goes on in these cultures and why, can we introduce interventions that are co-developed with athletes and therefore more likely to be effective.

I did not participate in sport during university, nor had I spent time on a sporting campus. I studied psychology and health and social science research methods and therefore had experienced the university drinking culture from the perspective of a non-athlete student. To this extent, I was unaware (directly) of the social processes and practices which athletes were exposed to and were a part of during university (for example, the social hierarchy and status seeking behaviours). Although I did have (direct) prior knowledge of the processes and practices which athletes were exposed to prior to university (for instance, drinking games, forfeits and pub crawls). This prior experience, combined with the literature review (Chapter 2), guided my approach to this research. I felt it was necessary to understand to what extent athletes merely entered the university sport system with established drinking habits, and whether greater alcohol use by athletes could be explained through mechanisms which influence general student alcohol patterns, or if distinct processes were at play. Further, I am not opposed to alcohol consumption, I currently drink alcohol, and during undergraduate study drank at a high level. To a certain degree, I knew how to talk about this subject with athletes and where to position myself to gather the richest data. I knew how heavy drinking events typically progressed and the manner in which people like to talk about their behaviours

during and after the event. This prior knowledge and experience enabled me to develop a bond with the team and individual athletes. However, this also may have biased what I saw, and who I spoke to, towards more heavier drinkers.

#### **4.10 Chapter Summary**

This Chapter has provided an overview of the methodological approach chosen for this research and the sequential mixed methods design. The four studies were outlined in detail: a cross-sectional survey, a longitudinal survey, semi-structured interviews, and a season-long case study. In Study I, N=286 students completed a self-report survey (including N=163 athletes and N=123 non-athletes). In Study II, the sample decreased from N=286 students in Term 1, to N=82 students in Term 2, and further to N=43 students in Term 3. In Study III, N=15 adults took part in in-depth semi-structured interviews (including 9 males and 6 females). In Study IV, a whole university rugby club was chosen for an immersive case study, which employed a range of complimentary methods (including field observations, conversational interviews, documentation, and semi-structured interviews). Finally, this Chapter discussed the ethical implications of conducting the research and what steps were taken to ensure the safety of the participants. The following Chapters present the findings from the four studies. These are presented individually for Study I and II (Chapter 5), Study III (Chapter 6) and Study IV (Chapter 7), and concludes with a summary of results and overall conclusion (Chapter 8).

## **Chapter 5: Patterns of Alcohol Use Among Student Athletes**

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### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative phase of research. This included Study I (a cross-sectional survey) and Study II (a longitudinal survey). It aims to identify the prevalence of (excessive) alcohol use among different sub-cultures of a single university. This served several purposes for the thesis. Firstly, it offered new insight into the structural factors (i.e., past drinking habits, living arrangements, age, and gender) which may be contributing to a drinking culture and ethos in sport. Secondly, it informed whether patterns of alcohol use changed, or remained the same, throughout an academic year and sport season. Thirdly, it helped to identify the most-appropriate group (i.e., the heaviest drinkers) for further, in-depth study in the qualitative studies that follow.

### **5.2 Patterns of alcohol use**

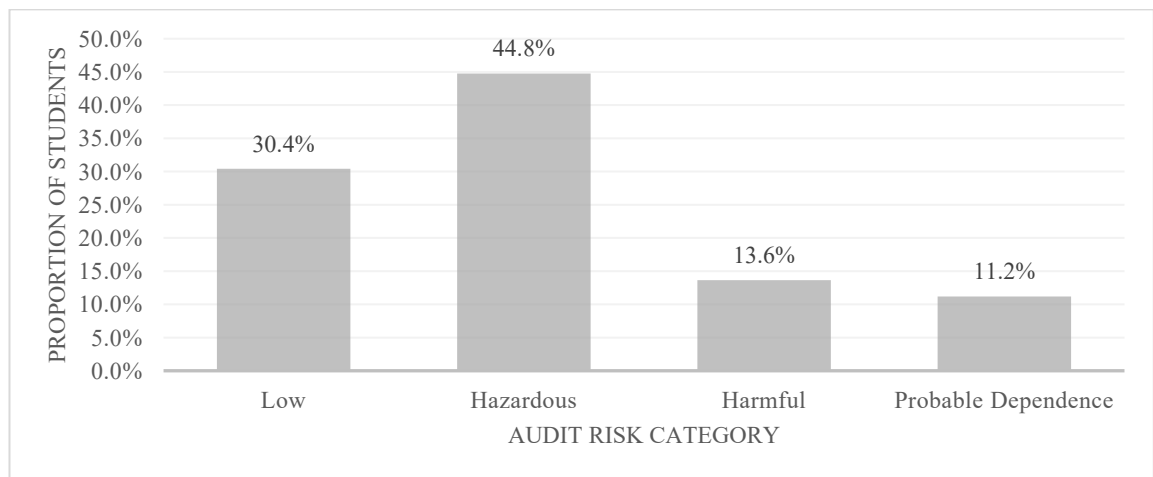
The results painted a rather worrying picture of the drinking habits of the population. It is clear that excessive alcohol use was widespread among student athletes at this institution. Complete data on alcohol use were available for 286 students across a range of sociodemographic indicators (see section 4.5.1). Within the sample of 286 students, 163 played university sport and 123 functioned as a comparison cohort of students who did not play university sport. The following sub-sections begin by describing the drinking patterns of all 286 students who responded to the survey. Following this, differences in consumption patterns between athletes and non-athletes are considered. Finally, structural factors (i.e., age, gender and living arrangements) related to alcohol use by the athlete population are identified.

#### **5.2.1 Alcohol use by students**

The student population involved in this study, regardless of whether or not they played sport, reported high levels of drinking. The World Health Organisation (2001) recommend that scores of 8 or more on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) are indicative of hazardous and harmful alcohol use, as well as possible alcohol dependence. Among the whole student population surveyed, participants had a mean alcohol use score of 11.82 (SD = 6.73) and 69.6% of participants scored above the threshold for hazardous drinking. This is higher than previous scores obtained across multiple English universities (cf. Partington et al., 2010). The World Health Organisation (2001) also provide more specific recommendations for interpreting

alcohol use scores obtained through the AUDIT. Scores below 8 are considered low risk. Scores between 8 and 15 are indicative of hazardous risk, and these individuals require advice for reducing their consumption. Scores between 16 and 19 are described as harmful drinkers, and these could need counselling and continued monitoring. Finally, scores of 20 or above may indicate alcohol dependence. Only 30.4% of participants were low risk drinkers, 44.8% were within the boundary of hazardous drinking, 13.6% were harmful drinkers and 11.2% were probably dependent upon alcohol (See Figure 2). Each of these latter 3 proportions were higher than have been found elsewhere (Partington et al., 2010).

*Figure 2. Percentage of students across each alcohol risk category*

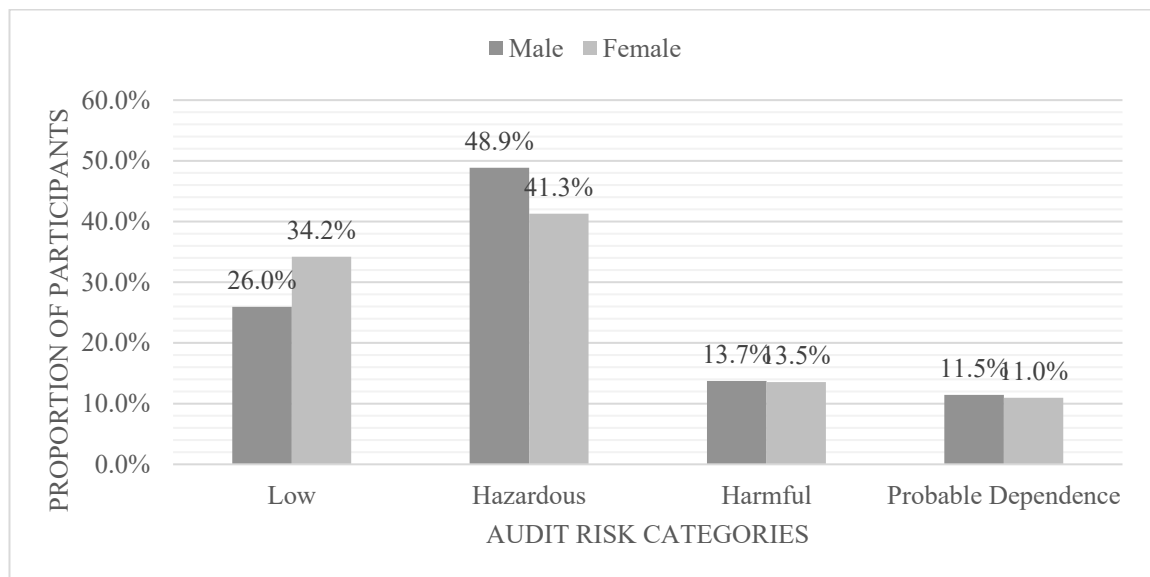


#### **5.2.1.1 Gender differences in alcohol use**

Alcohol use among male and female participants did not differ significantly. Both men and women scored above the threshold for hazardous drinking on the AUDIT. Men had a mean score of 12.59 (SD = 6.6), which was higher than women who had a mean score of 11.17 (SD = 6.79). However, this difference did not reach the predetermined criterion for statistical significance (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -1.879$ ,  $p = 0.060$ ). There was also no statistically significant difference between the proportions of men and women falling into each AUDIT risk category ( $\chi^2 = 2.652$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.448$ ) (see Figure 3). These findings support previous research (Partington et al., 2010) and add further evidence for the ‘gender convergence’ hypothesis. Gender convergence explains a trend in population level data where the difference in men and women’s alcohol consumption has been decreasing overtime (Bloomfield et al., 2001; McPherson et al., 2004). Partington et al. (2010) compared their study with Webb et al. (1996) previous investigation, and speculated how male and female drinking habits were changing. They

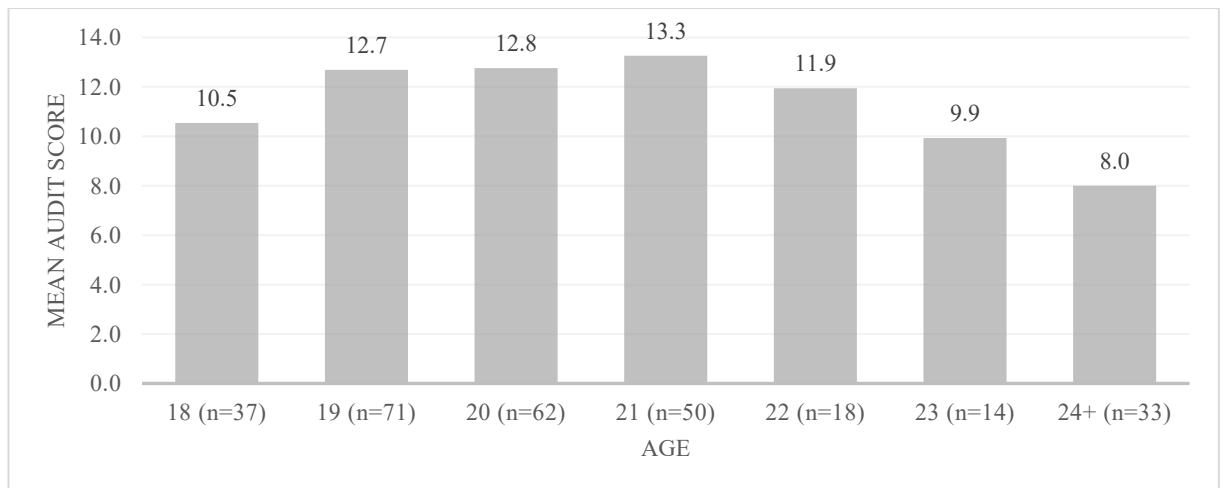
argued that between 1996 and 2010, gender convergence occurred by females drinking more, and narrowing the gap with males, rather than vice versa. The current study provides further support to this argument. Compared with Partington et al. (2010) research, this study shows a greater increase in the proportion of females reporting harmful or probable dependence drinking, than males.

*Figure 3. Percentage of males and females across each alcohol risk category*



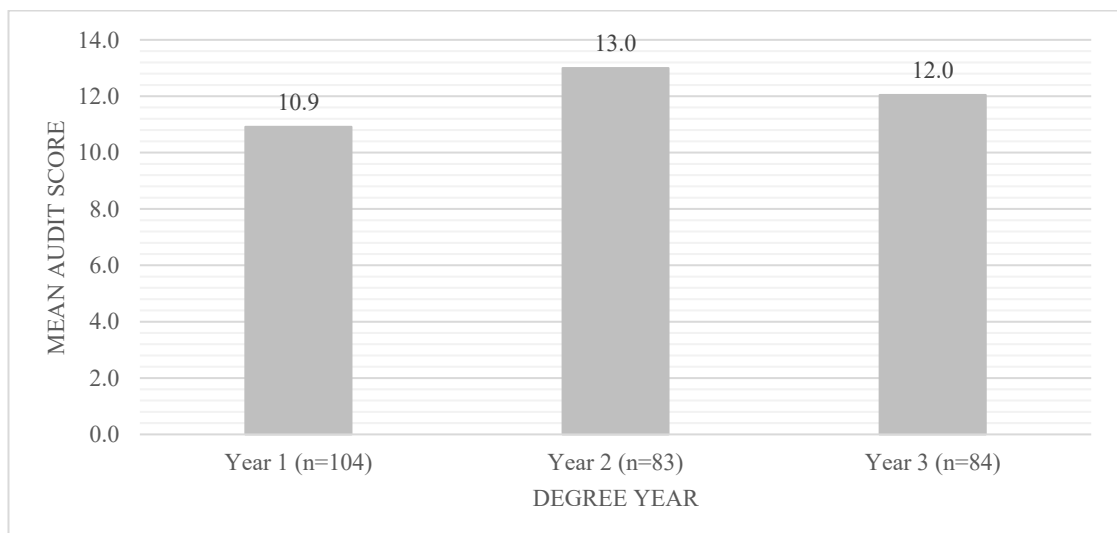
#### **5.2.1.2 Age differences in alcohol use**

The relationship between age and alcohol use was complex. Mean alcohol use scores increased with age from age 18, peaked at age 21, and decreased significantly thereafter (See Figure 4). Statistical analysis identified a significant negative relationship between age and AUDIT scores ( $\rho = -0.109$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), where, as age increased, AUDIT scores decreased. This was a similar, albeit weaker, relationship to previous research in this area (cf. Partington et al., 2010). Further analysis of the data, however, revealed a more complicated picture. When more mature students (those aged 22 and above) were excluded from the analysis, there was a positive association between age and AUDIT scores, where, as age increased, alcohol use increased. However, this correlation did not reach the predetermined criterion for statistical significance ( $\rho = 0.106$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, students aged between 18 and 21 did not differ significantly and had a mean AUDIT score of 12.4. From age 21, as age increased, alcohol use decreased significantly.

*Figure 4. Mean alcohol use score by age*

### 5.2.1.3 Degree stage differences in alcohol use

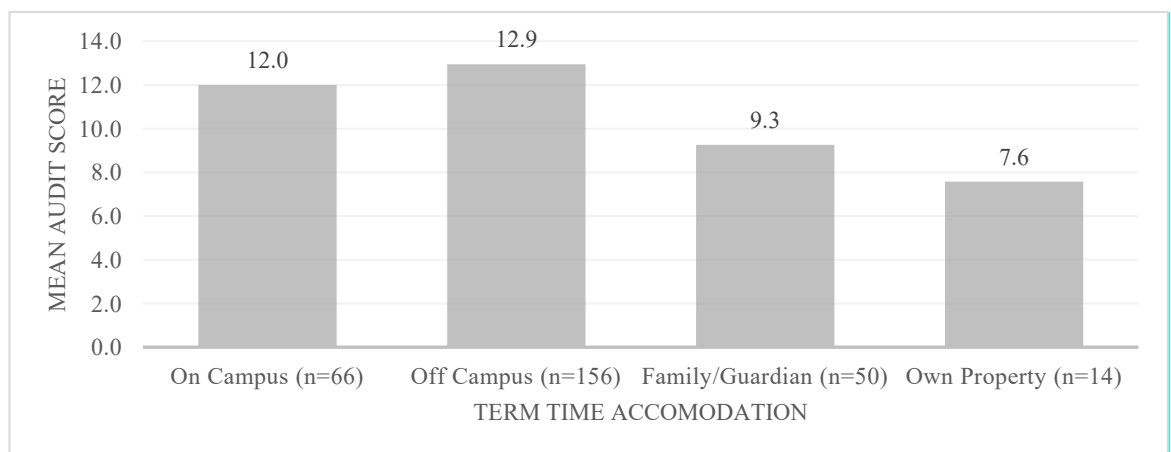
Alcohol consumption was lowest among students in the first year of their degree (Figure 5). Year 1 students had a mean AUDIT score of 10.9, compared with Year 2 students who reported a mean AUDIT score of 13.0. This difference was statistically significant (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -2.115$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). There was no statistically significant difference in alcohol use between Year 1 and Year 3 students (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -1.266$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), or between Year 2 and Year 3 students (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -1.016$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). These findings contradict previous research, which showed Year 1 students to be the heaviest consumers of alcohol (Partington et al. 2010). Thus, there may have been certain social and environmental factors at this institution which increased alcohol use over-time. Chapters Six and Seven will offer explanations for why alcohol consumption was greater among more mature students.

*Figure 5. Mean alcohol use score by year of degree*

#### **5.2.1.4 Accommodation type differences in alcohol use**

Alcohol consumption was greatest amongst participants living on campus (in halls of residence) and off-campus (in shared student housing) (Figure 6). Term-time accommodation had a significant effect on AUDIT scores (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 19.278$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ ). Those living on campus had a mean AUDIT score of 12.0, compared with those living off campus who had a mean AUDIT score of 12.9. These scores were not statistically significantly different (Mann-Whitney,  $z = -.492$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Both groups, however, scored significantly higher than those living with family or guardian(s) and those living in their own property ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings support previous research which found student housing (whether on or off-campus) was related to heavier consumption (Partington et al., 2010). However, the finding that alcohol use did not differ between student accommodation types, contradicts previous research which found higher alcohol in on-campus accommodation (Partington et al. 2010).

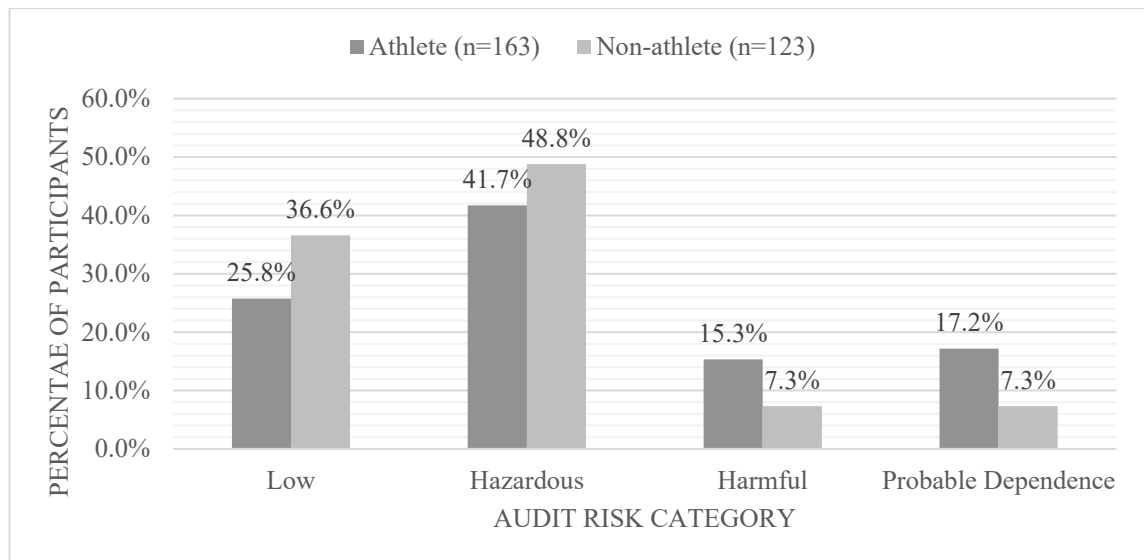
*Figure 6. Mean alcohol use score by type of accommodation*



#### **5.2.2 Alcohol use by student athletes**

Student athletes consumed substantially more alcohol when compared to non-athletes. Athletes had a mean AUDIT score of 13 (SD = 6.7), compared to non-athletes with a mean AUDIT score of 10.3 (SD = 6.5). The difference between means was highly significant (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -3.812$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). There was also a highly significant association between sports participation and level of alcohol related risk ( $\chi^2 = 12.541$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Figure 7). On average, 74% of athletes were classified as hazardous, harmful, or probable dependence drinkers, compared to 63% of non-athletes. Non-athletes were more likely to be hazardous drinkers, however, those who played sport were substantially more likely to be classified as harmful and probable dependence drinkers (see Figure 7).

*Figure 7. Alcohol risk categories between student athletes and non-athletes*

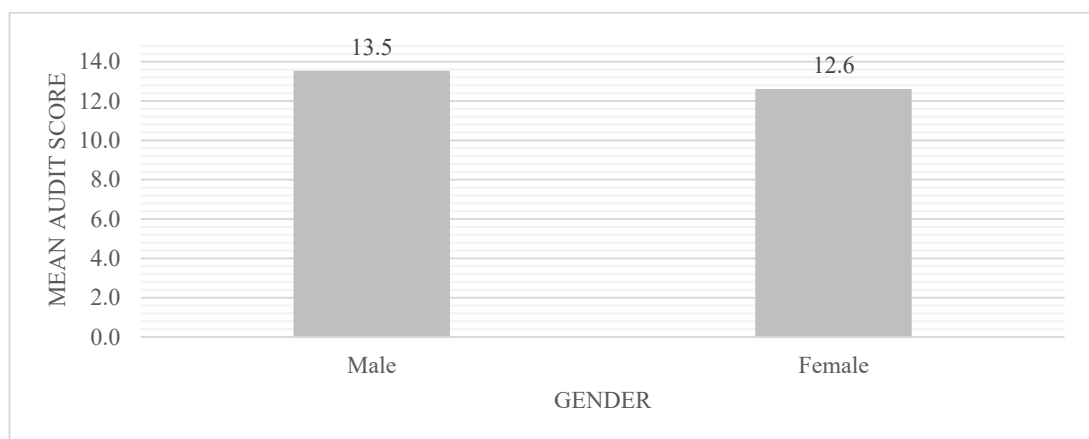


It is clear that a high proportion of student athletes were consuming alcohol at harmful levels. Furthermore, alcohol use among this sub-culture did not differ significantly between different sub-groups (i.e., by age, gender, year of study or accommodation type). The following sub-sections present the drinking patterns of athletes segmented by each of these demographic characteristics.

#### **5.2.2.1 Gender differences in athlete alcohol use**

Gender had no impact on the drinking habits of athletes. Male athletes had a mean AUDIT score of 13.5, compared to females who had a mean AUDIT score of 12.6 (Figure 8). This difference was not statistically significant (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -0.856$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference in mean AUDIT scores between male and female non-athletes (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -1.564$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

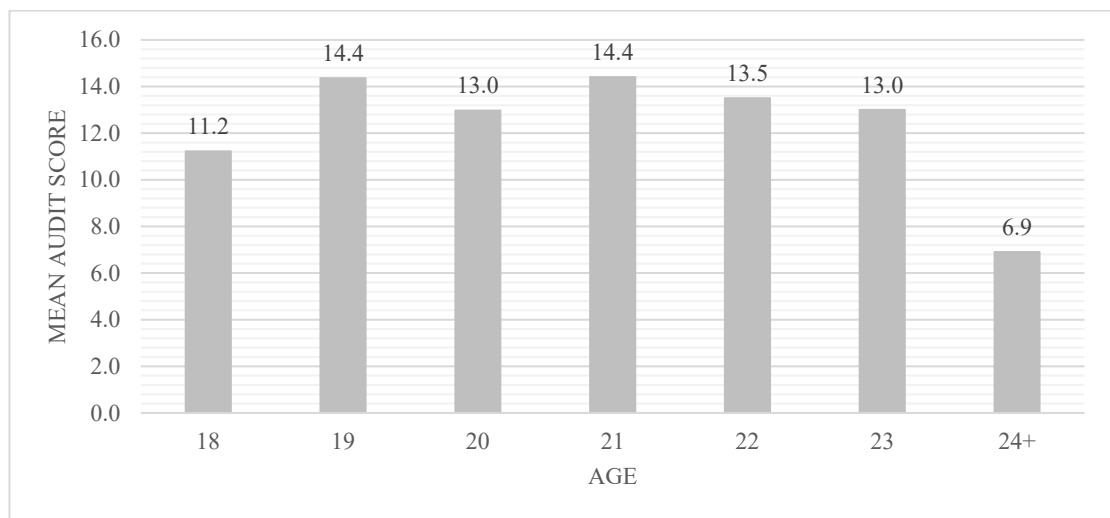
*Figure 8. Mean alcohol use score by male and female athletes*



**5.2.2.2 Age differences in athlete alcohol use**

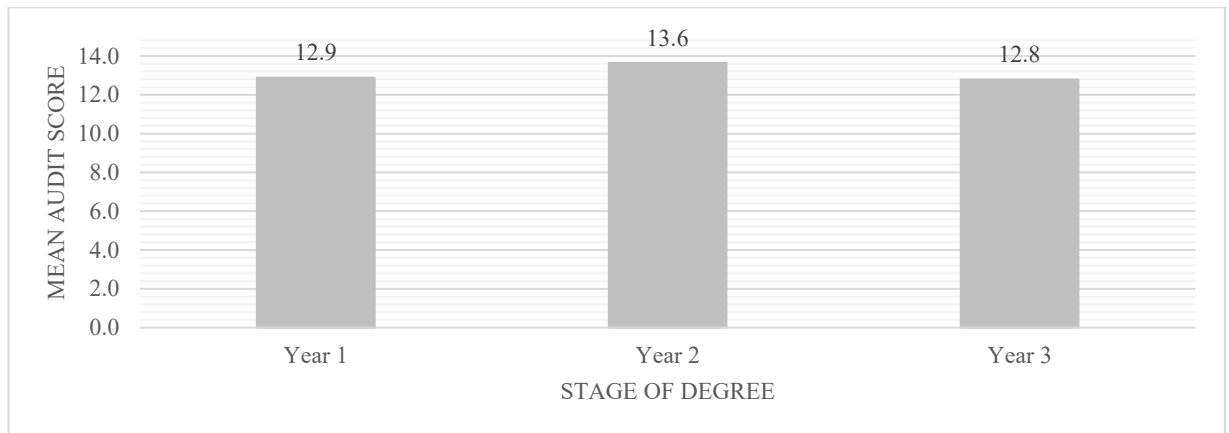
Age had no effect on the drinking habits of athletes (Figure 9). For athletes aged 18-24+, there was no significant association between age and AUDIT scores ( $\rho = -0.057$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). For athletes aged 18-21, there was also no significant association between age and AUDIT scores ( $\rho = 0.077$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). For non-athletes aged 18-21, however, there was a positive association between age and AUDIT scores ( $\rho = 0.197$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). As age increased, mean AUDIT scores also increased.

*Figure 9. Mean alcohol use score by athletes of different ages*

**5.2.2.3 Degree stage differences in athlete alcohol use**

Stage of degree had no impact upon athlete alcohol use (Figure 10). Athletes in Year 1 had a mean AUDIT score of 12.9, compared to 13.6 for Year 2 athletes and 12.8 for Year 3 athletes. These differences were not statistically significant (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 1.001$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). There was, however, a significant relationship between degree stage and alcohol use for non-athletes. (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 8.210$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Alcohol use was significantly lower in Year 1, when compared to Year 2 (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -2.228$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and Year 3 students (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -2.685$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Alcohol use between Year 2 and Year 3 non-athletes did not differ significantly (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -0.165$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that social and environment factors may increase alcohol use for non-athletes over-time. However, for athletes, alcohol use may begin high and remain high throughout university.

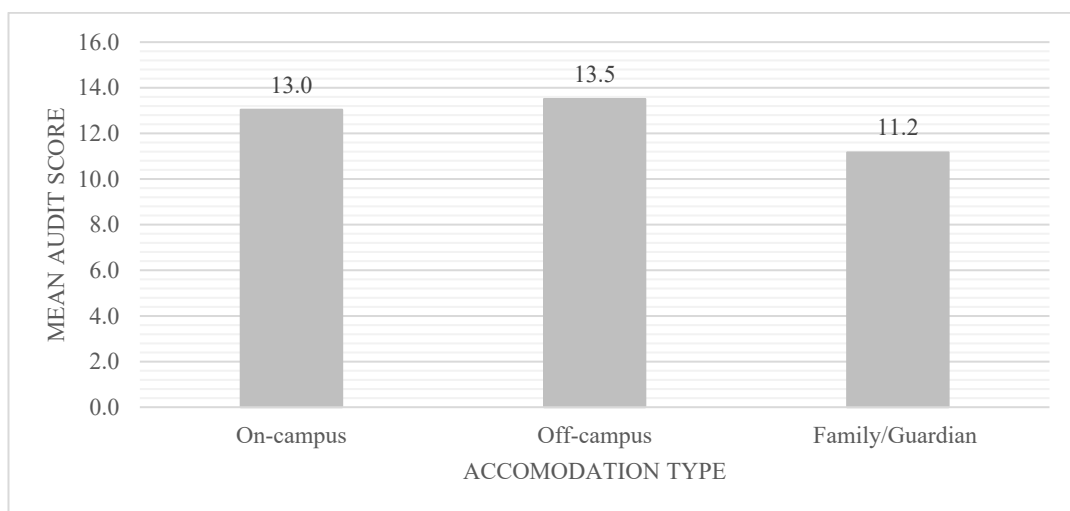
*Figure 10. Mean alcohol use score by athletes at different stages of their degree*



#### 5.2.2.4 Accommodation type differences in athlete alcohol use

The living arrangements of student athletes had no effect on alcohol use (Figure 11). Athletes living on-campus (i.e., halls of residence) had a mean AUDIT score of 13, compared to 13.5 for athletes living off-campus (i.e., in student housing) and 11.2 for athletes living with their family or guardian(s). These differences were not statistically significant (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 1.917$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Similarly, for non-athletes, there was no statistically significant difference in mean AUDIT scores between accommodation types (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 3.875$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

*Figure 11. Mean alcohol use score by athletes in different types of accomodation*

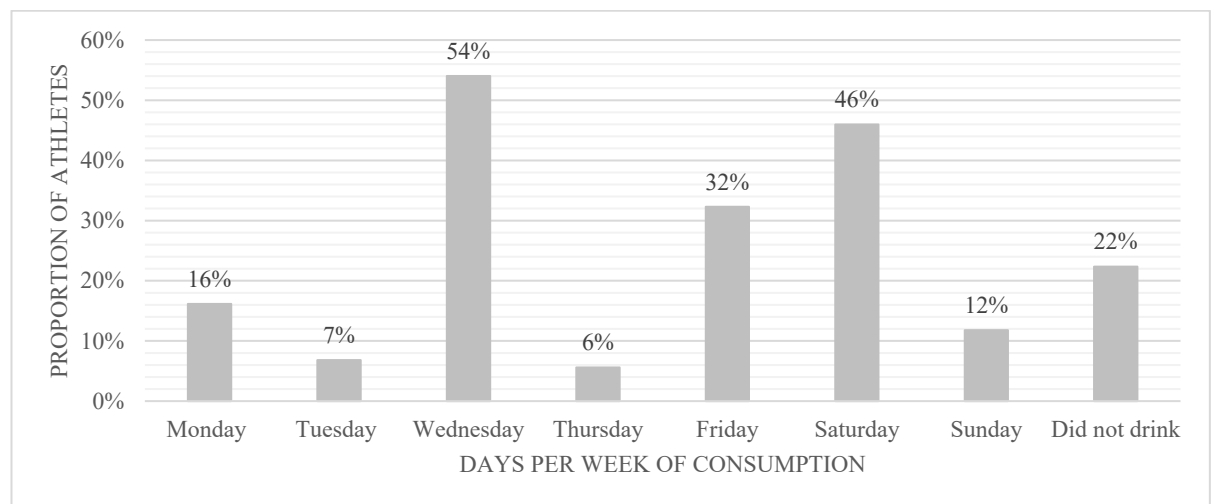


#### 5.2.2.5 Social context differences in athlete alcohol use

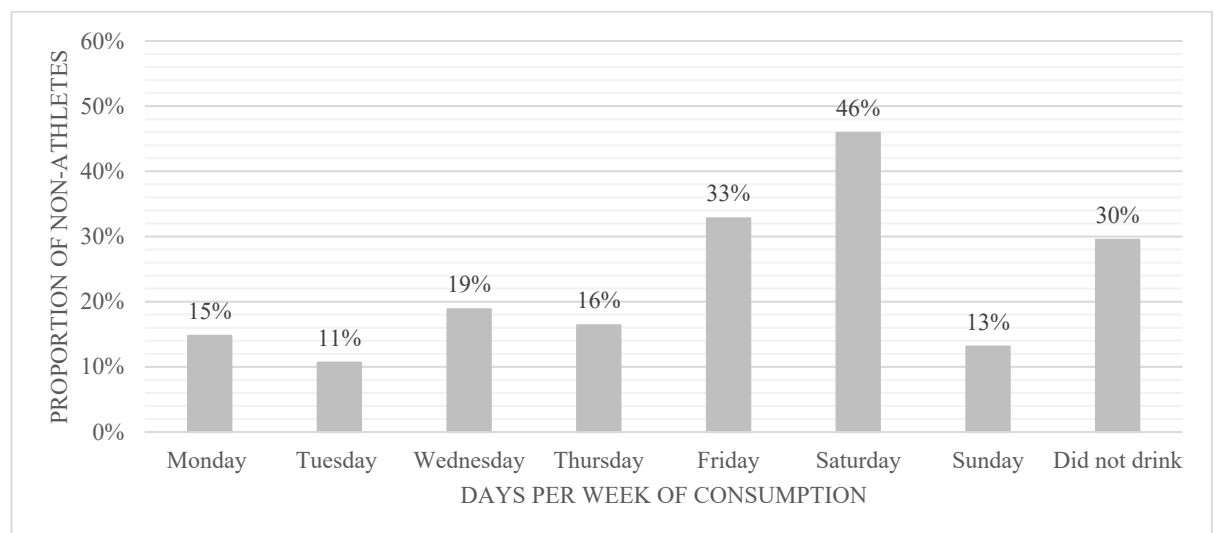
There was an intriguing difference in the alcohol consumption patterns of athletes and non-athletes. Both groups drank alcohol in a near identical pattern throughout the past week prior to data collection (See Figures 12-13). The proportion of students drinking only differed statistically significantly on Wednesday ( $\chi^2 = 35.965$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), where 54% of athletes drank alcohol, compared to 19% of non-athletes. This finding

alone is unsurprising, given that UK student sport takes place predominantly on Wednesday, and alcohol use is known to follow organised matches (Jones, 2016). However, the finding that alcohol use throughout the rest of the week did not differ significantly is intriguing. This might suggest student athletes have similar influences on drinking patterns as non-athletes throughout the week, and have a unique influence on Wednesday. This is examined further in Chapters 6 and 7.

*Figure 12. Days in the past week that athletes consumed alcohol*



*Figure 13. Days in the past week that non-athletes consumed alcohol*



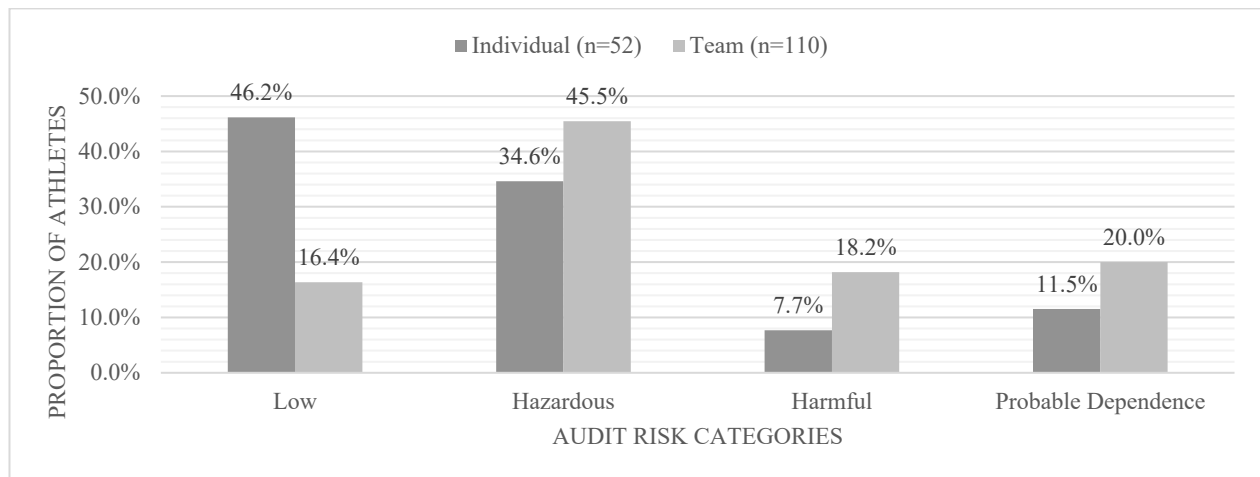
### **5.2.3 Sport type differences in alcohol use**

Athletes belonging to different demographic groups were consuming alcohol at similarly high levels. There were, however, wide-ranging differences in the drinking patterns of athletes of different sports. The following sub-sections present the differences in drinking patterns for athletes playing different types of sport.

### 5.2.3.1 Team and individual athlete differences in alcohol use

Athletes taking part in team sports consumed substantially more alcohol than individual athletes. Team athletes had a mean AUDIT score of 14.2 (SD = 6.5), compared to 10.3 (SD = 6.5) for individual athletes. This difference was highly statistically significant (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -3.458$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Thus, individual sport athletes were consumer similar levels of alcohol to non-athlete students. There was also a highly significant relationship between team/individual sport status and degree of alcohol risk (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 145.346$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In total, 83.6% of team athletes were classified as hazardous drinkers and beyond, compared to 53.8% of individual athletes (Figure 14). Team athletes were significantly more likely to be hazardous, harmful, and probable dependence drinkers.

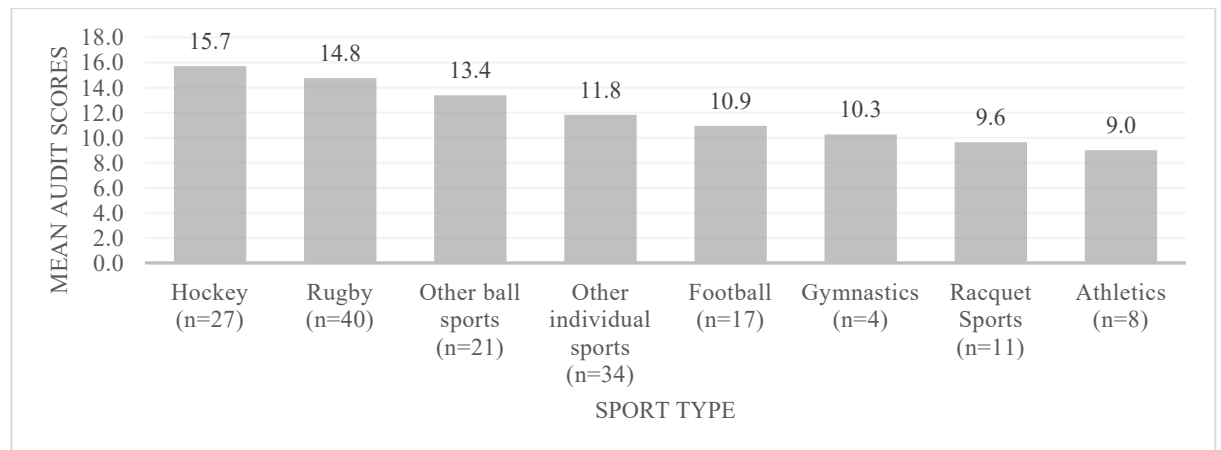
*Figure 14. Alcohol risk categories between team and individual athletes*



### 5.2.3.2 Specific sport differences in alcohol use

There were substantial differences in the drinking patterns of team and individual athletes, although, there were also large differences between types of sport (Figure 15). Hockey players had the highest mean AUDIT score of 15.7 (SD = 7.3), followed by rugby players with a mean AUDIT score of 14.8 (SD = 5.3) and other ball sport players with a mean AUDIT score of 13.4 (SD = 6.7) (Figure 12). The difference between these sports was not statistically significant (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 1.544$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Alcohol use decreased substantially thereafter, for football players and individual athletes.

Figure 15. Mean alcohol use score by athletes of different sports



### 5.3 The relationship between onset of alcohol use and binge drinking and alcohol use during university

The following section examines the relationship between pre-university alcohol use (initiation of (binge) drinking) and current drinking patterns. On average, students began drinking between age 14-15 and began binge drinking around age 16 (Table 9). The age which athletes and non-athletes initiated alcohol use did not differ. Athletes began drinking at a mean age of 14.85, compared to non-athletes with a mean age of 14.27. This difference was not statistically significant (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -1.900$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Similarly, the age which athletes and non-athletes initiated binge drinking did not differ. Athletes began binge drinking at a mean age of 16.22, compared to 16.09 for non-athletes. This difference was not statistically significant (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -1.362$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). See Table 9 for a breakdown of the age of onset of (binge) alcohol use for athletes and non-athletes.

Table 9. Age of onset of alcohol use among student athletes and non-athletes

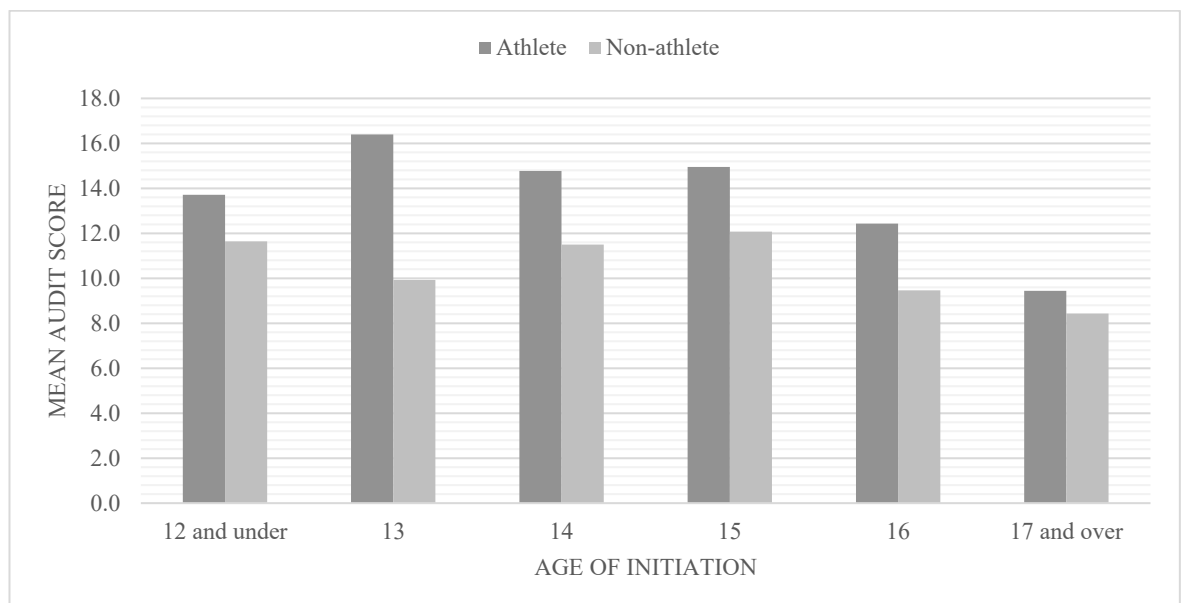
Measure	Age (Mean &SEM)
<b>Onset of Drinking</b>	
Overall	14.62 (.158)
Athlete	14.85 (.193)
Non-athlete	14.27 (.264)
<b>Onset of Binge Drinking</b>	
Overall	16.12 (.113)
Athlete	16.22 (.140)
Non-athlete	16.09 (.188)

These data showed athletes did not begin (binge) drinking earlier or later than their non-athlete peers. However, further analysis revealed the way athletes initiated alcohol use may be important. The following sub-sections investigate the relationship between onset of (binge) alcohol use and current drinking habits for athletes and non-athletes.

### **5.3.1 Onset of drinking and current alcohol use**

The age at which athletes started drinking alcohol was significantly related with their current drinking habits (Figure 16). For non-athletes, in contrast, there was no association between age of onset of alcohol use and current drinking habits. For students overall (irrespective of whether or not they played sport), there was a significant negative correlation between age of onset of alcohol use and current drinking habits ( $\rho = -0.163$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). That is, as age of onset decreased, mean AUDIT scores increased. There were, however, significant differences between athletes and non-athletes. For athletes there was a significant negative correlation between age of onset of alcohol use and current drinking habits ( $\rho = -0.277$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). For non-athletes, there was not a significant correlation between age of onset of alcohol use and current drinking habits ( $\rho = -0.112$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). See Figure 16 for the mean AUDIT scores of athletes and non-athletes segmented by the age they initiated alcohol use.

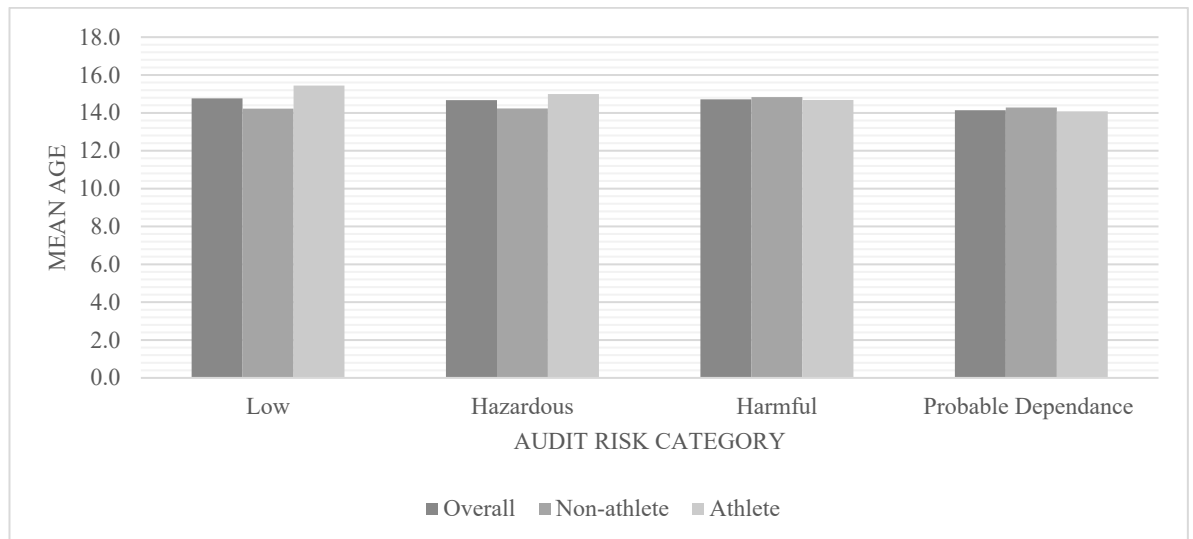
*Figure 16. AUDIT scores by age of onset of alcohol use.*



A similar pattern was identified when examining the relationship between age of onset of alcohol use and current alcohol risk (Figure 17). For students overall (irrespective of whether or not they played sport), there was not a significant relationship between age

of onset of alcohol use and AUDIT risk category (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 3.096$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Likewise, for non-athletes, there was not a significant relationship between age of onset of alcohol use and AUDIT risk category (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = .484$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p > 0.5$ ). However, for athletes there was a significant relationship between age of onset of alcohol use and AUDIT risk category (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 8.180$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed that mean age only differed significantly between athletes in the Low and Probable dependence categories (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -2.322$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). and Hazardous and Probable Dependence categories (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = 2.216$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). That is, athletes who were probably dependent upon alcohol had a significantly lower age of onset of alcohol use (Mean = 14.1) than those who were low (Mean = 15.4) or hazardous risk drinkers (Mean = 15) (See Figure 17).

*Figure 17. Age of onset of alcohol use across AUDIT risk categories*

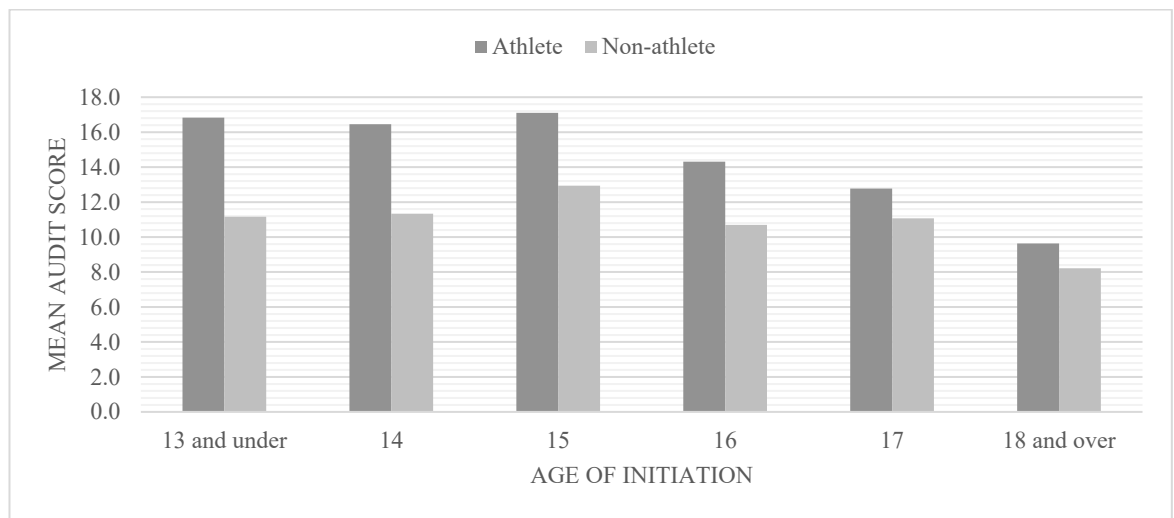


### **5.3.2 Onset of binge drinking and current alcohol use**

The relationship between the age students started binge drinking and their current drinking patterns followed a similar pattern to the preceding section. However, the relationship between both factors was significantly stronger. For students overall (regardless of whether or not they played sport), there was a significant negative correlation between age of onset of binge alcohol use and current drinking habits ( $\rho = -0.292$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). That is, as age of onset of binge drinking decreased, mean AUDIT scores increased. There were also significant differences between athletes and non-athletes. For athletes there was a significant negative correlation between age of onset of binge alcohol use and current drinking habits ( $\rho = -0.437$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Initiating binge drinking at age 15 or under was associated with a considerably higher AUDIT score

(Mean = 16.86) than initiating binge drinking at age 16 or above (Mean = 12.31) (Figure 17). For non-athletes, on the other hand, there was not a significant correlation between age of onset of binge drinking and current drinking habits ( $\rho = -0.165$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). See Figure 18 for the mean AUDIT scores of athletes and non-athletes segmented by the age they initiated binge drinking.

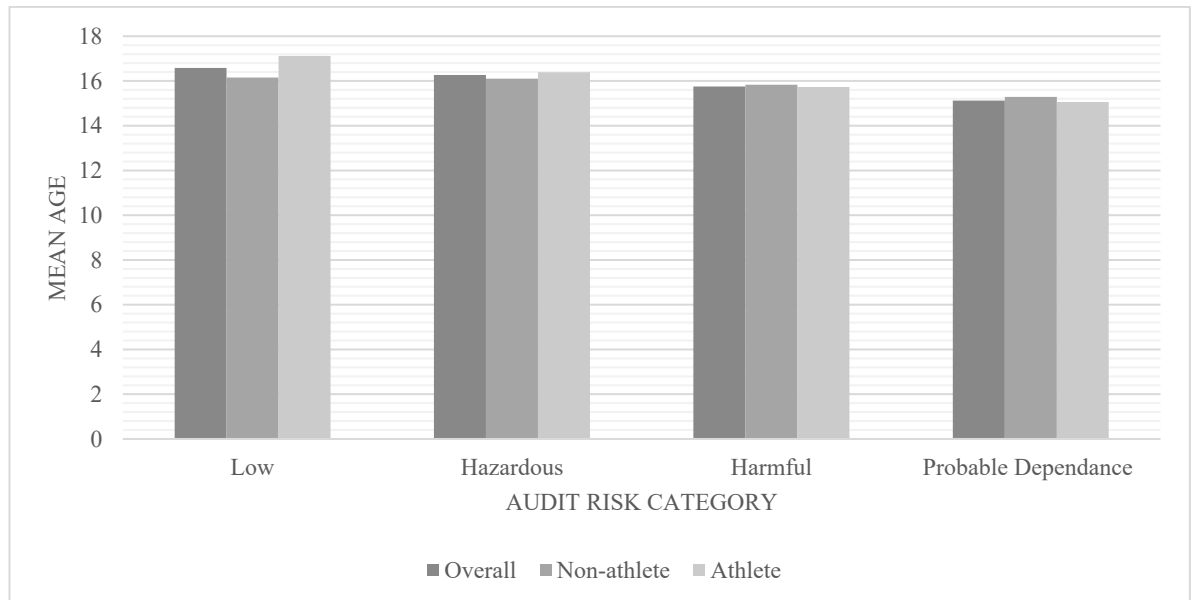
*Figure 18. AUDIT scores by age of onset of binge drinking*



When examining the relationship between age of onset of binge drinking and current alcohol risk, a similar relationship was found. For students overall (irrespective of whether or not they played sport), there was a highly significant relationship between age of onset of binge drinking and AUDIT risk category (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 1.242$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). For non-athletes, however, there was not a significant relationship between age of onset of binge drinking and AUDIT risk category (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 1.242$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p > 0.5$ ). In contrast, for athletes there was a highly significant relationship between age of onset of binge drinking and AUDIT risk category (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 22.061$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed age was significantly lower for athletes in the Probable Dependence category, when compared to those in the Low (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -3.765$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) and Hazardous (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -3.493$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) categories. Further, age was significantly lower for athletes in the Harmful category, when compared to those in the Low (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -2.973$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) and Hazardous (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -2.124$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) categories. That is, athletes who were probably dependent or harmful drinkers had a significantly lower age of onset of binge drinking (Mean = 15.06

and 15.73, respectively) than those who were low (Mean = 16.39) or hazardous risk drinkers (Mean = 17.12) (See Figure 18).

*Figure 19. Age of onset of binge drinking across AUDIT risk categories*



#### **5.4 Differences in alcohol use over time**

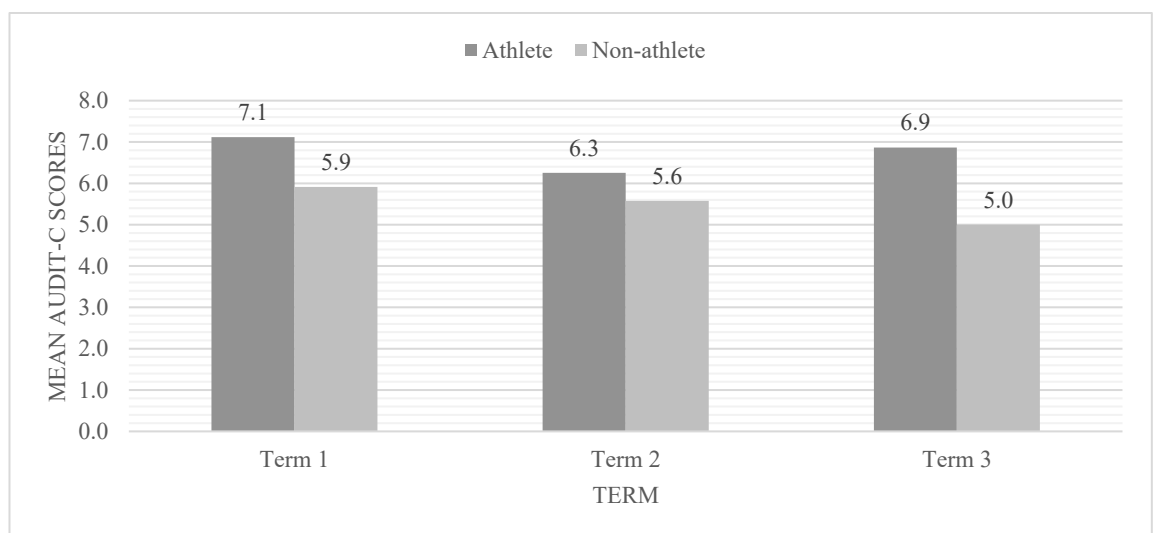
The final analyses in this Chapter explore differences in alcohol use over-time.

Specifically, they examine how patterns of alcohol use changed between Term 1, 2 and 3 of a single academic year for athletes and non-athletes. Four measures were used to understand how drinking patterns changed over-time. These were derived from the Alcohol Use Identification Test for Consumption (AUDIT-C) and focused on 1) how often students consumed alcohol, 2) how many units they consumed on a typical drinking day, 3) how often students binged on alcohol and 4) a score obtained by combining all three of these measures. The AUDIT-C was used rather than the full 10 item AUDIT as it offered greater sensitivity to changes in alcohol use within a relatively short time-period. The 7 remaining questions within the full AUDIT measure alcohol use over the 'past year', and therefore data collected at Term 2 and Term 3 may not have reflected behaviours which occurred during that period. Complete data on alcohol use was available for N=286 students during Term 1, N=82 students during Term 2 and N=43 students during Term 3. Whilst there was a significant decrease in the number of participants responding to the survey at each follow-up, the general make-up of participants remained consistent (See section 4.5.2). The breakdown of athletes and non-athletes remained stable over-time (57% versus 43% in Term 1, 57% versus 43% in Term 2, 56% versus 44% in Term 3).

### 5.4.1 Total alcohol consumption

Patterns of alcohol use between each Term of a university year differed between athletes and non-athletes (Figure 20). For non-athletes, alcohol use decreased over-time. For athletes, similar levels of alcohol use were reported during Term 1 and Term 3, although there was a decrease in consumption during Term 2. At Term 1, athletes had a mean AUDIT-C score of 7.1, compared to 5.9 for non-athletes. (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -3.079$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). At Term 3, the difference between both groups widened, with athletes reporting an AUDIT-C score of 6.9, compared to 5.0 for non-athletes (Mann-Whitney,  $Z = -1.995$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

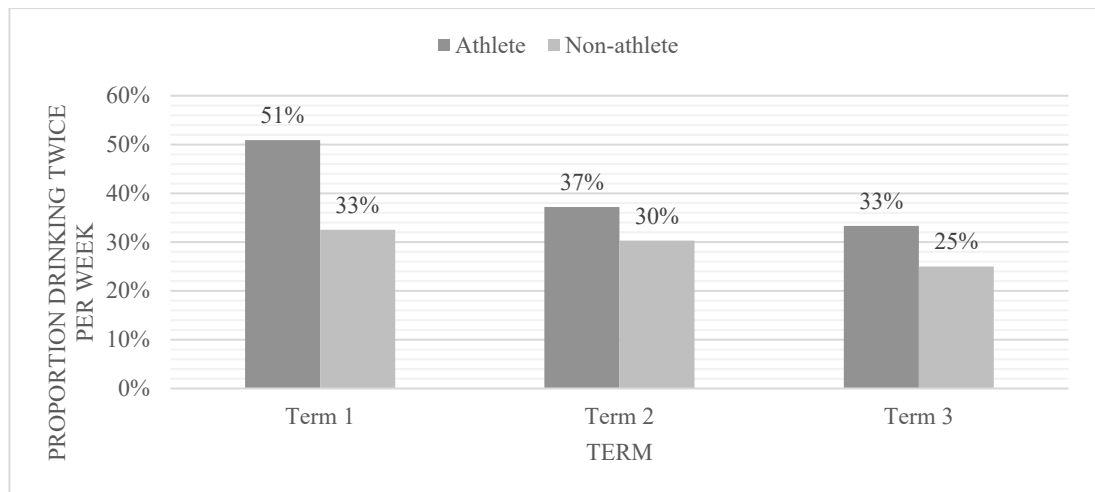
*Figure 20. Mean alcohol use scores over time between student athletes and non-athletes*



### 5.4.2 Frequency of alcohol use

There was a decrease in the proportion of athletes and non-athletes consuming alcohol highly frequently (twice or more per week) (Figure 21). At Term 1, 51% of athletes reported drinking alcohol on two or more occasions per week, compared to 33% of non-athletes (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 9.767$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.5$ ). At Term 3, the proportion drinking twice or more per week decreased to 33% for athletes and 25% for non-athletes (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 0.214$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > 0.5$ ).

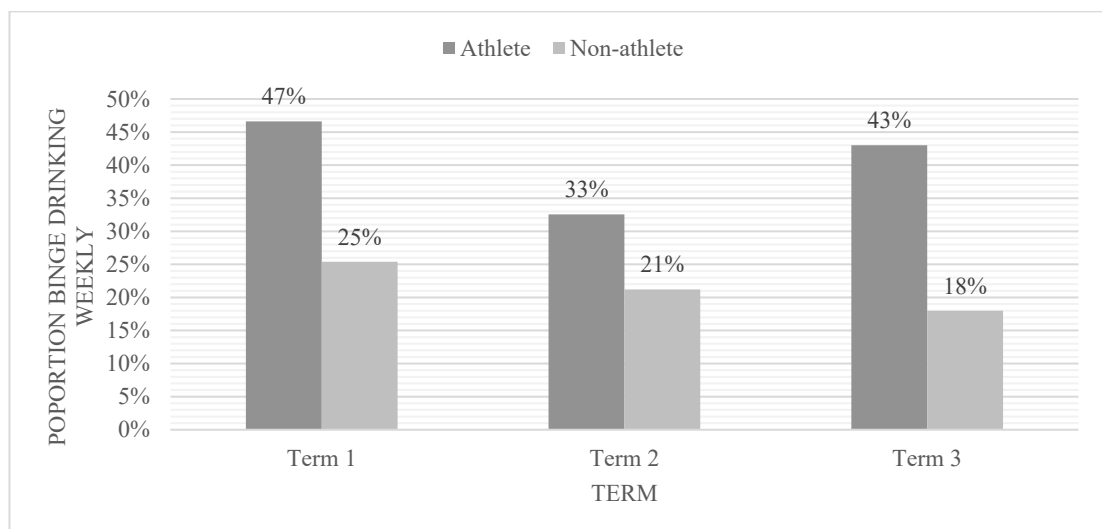
*Figure 21. Frequency of alcohol use at Term 1, 2 and 3*



### 5.4.3 Frequency of binge drinking

The proportion of athletes binge drinking on a weekly or more frequent basis was similar at Term 1 and Term 3 (Figure 22). However, the proportion of non-athletes binge drinking weekly or more frequently decreased over time. At Term 1, 47% of athletes were binge drinking at least weekly, compared to 25% of non-athletes (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 13.637$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). At Term 3, 43% of athletes were binge drinking at least weekly, compared to 18% of non-athletes (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 5.518$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

*Figure 22. Frequency of binge drinking at Term 1, 2 and 3*

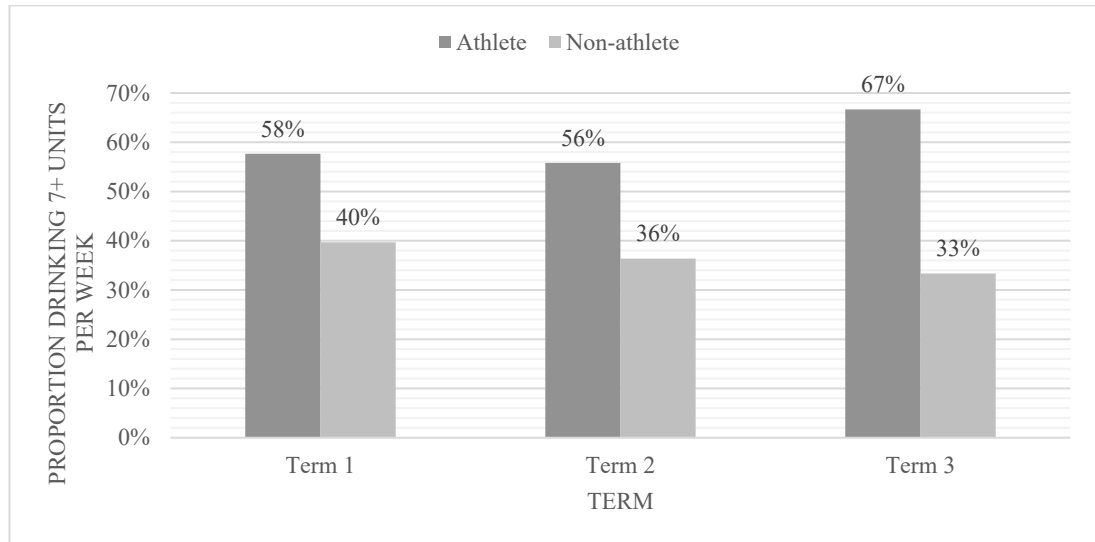


### 5.4.4 Units of alcohol consumed

The proportion of athletes consuming 7 or more units per drinking session increased over-time. In contrast, the proportion of non-athletes consuming 7 or more units on a

typical drinking session decreased over-time (Figure 23). At Term 1, 58% of athletes consumed 7+ units per session, compared to 40% of non-athletes (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 9.164$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). At Term 3, 67% of athletes consumed 7+ units per session, compared to 33% of non-athletes (Kruskal-Wallis,  $\chi^2 = 5.824$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

*Figure 23. Units of alcohol at Term 1, 2 and 3*



Taken together, these data showed alcohol use among non-athletes decreased over-time. They reported drinking less often, bingeing on alcohol less frequently and consuming less units on a typical drinking session. For athletes, however, the picture was more complex. On one hand, they reported drinking less often. On the other hand, they reported consuming more units per drinking session when they did drink.

## **5.5 General Discussion**

### **5.5.1 Patterns of alcohol use**

Overall, the findings presented above point to the presence of a heavy drinking culture in certain university sport environments (such as rugby, hockey, and other team ball sports). These data revealed university athletes at Bayfields reported consuming significantly more alcohol than their non-athlete peers. Further, rugby players were among the heaviest consumers, when compared to students who did not play sport or compared to other team sports (such as football) or individual sports. This corroborates recent research identifying a drinking culture in Welsh amateur rugby (cf. Harris et al. 2018). These findings support the idea proposed in Chapter 2, that there appears to be an alcohol ethos in sport and particularly team sports, such as rugby.

There were important structural differences in alcohol use between athletes and non-athletes. For non-athletes, alcohol use increased with age, until age 21, and decreased thereafter. Similarly, non-athletes in the first year of their degree reported consuming less alcohol. For athletes however, no structural characteristics (i.e., age, gender, degree stage or living arrangements) were related to alcohol use. Younger athletes reported similar levels of alcohol use to older athletes. Athletes in year 1, 2 and 3 of their degrees reported similar drinking habits. Athletes living on-campus, off-campus and with parents or guardians did not differ significantly in their drinking, and men and women reported similar patterns of consumption. Thus, there appeared to be more potent influences on the drinking habits of this student sub-group. These outweighed structural factors that typically impact upon the drinking habits of students (Partington et al. 2010). Chapters 6 and 7 identify and explain what these factors were and how they operate, however, further analyses conducted in this Chapter provided valuable insight.

### **5.5.2 Onset of alcohol use**

This chapter showed university athletes did not appear to start consuming alcohol earlier than their non-athlete peers, however, the relationship between past and current drinking was different for both groups. For those who did not play university sport, onset of (binge) alcohol use was not related to current alcohol use. However, for those who did play university sport, onset of alcohol use and binge drinking were both significantly associated with current alcohol use. This implies the way athletes are initiated into alcohol use may be more important than the age of initiation. Prior research has shown athletes are introduced to a particular style of drinking at a young age (Roy & Camiré, 2017). Young athletes are encouraged to drink alcohol by coaches and consumption is paired with excitement and celebration, often following tournaments (Ibid.). These practices may structure a habitus of heavy drinking, particularly surrounding organised matches, and tournaments. In other words, alcohol use becomes a ritual of the sporting experience. By the time athletes reach university level sport, they may instinctively associate matches and tournaments with celebration, excitement, and heavy drinking. Evidence of this habitus could be born out in the statistics presented above, showing no difference in the drinking habits of older and younger athletes. Novices may enter the university environment with established drinking habits and thus already consume alcohol at similar levels, and in similar ways, to their experienced teammates. These speculations are examined in further detail in the qualitative studies that follow (Chapters 6 and 7).

This Chapter presented new evidence that onset of alcohol use and onset of binge drinking were significantly related to current alcohol use for student athletes. However, there was not a strong correlation between both factors. There was a weak correlation between age of onset of alcohol use and current drinking behaviour. The relationship between age of onset of binge drinking and current alcohol use was much stronger, however, both variables were still only moderately associated. This tells us that the way athletes are introduced to binge drinking is more important than their introduction to alcohol in general. Cause and effect cannot be delineated from these cross-sectional data, although this study implies the university or sport environment may be more useful in explaining drinking patterns by university students (regardless of athlete/non-athlete status) than onset of alcohol use or binge drinking. There are certain introductory practices within sport which may contribute to the development of a heavy drinking alcohol habitus early in an athlete's career (for instance, coercion from team-mates or coaches and associating alcohol with positive emotional experiences). However, there must also be several other processes which strengthen the habitus over-time and ensure the drinking rituals and traditions live on.

### **5.5.3 Patterns of alcohol use over time**

Alcohol use among student athletes was maintained at a similarly high level between Term 1 and Term 3. This contrasts with decreasing alcohol use over time for non-athlete students. If this observation is an accurate representation of alcohol use by athletes and non-athletes over-time, it shows the potent effect the cultural milieu of athlete culture may have on sustaining individual drinking habits. The data presented throughout this Chapter support the argument that the social structures in sport strengthen the alcohol habitus of social actors. In comparison, non-athletes who are not exposed to these social pressures may not develop an alcohol habitus, or may develop a weaker alcohol habitus, without the same resistance to change, as athletes. Thus, non-athletes can reduce their consumption over-time. Conversely, there may be several strategic activities (such as social events, bonding sessions, and celebrations) within sport culture which are purposefully placed to maintain the heavy drinking culture. This would explain why frequency of consumption decreased over-time, but volume of alcohol consumed during drinking sessions increased substantially. The final study of this thesis (Chapter 7) examines these strategic activities throughout the season, and provides a more comprehensive and confident explanation of their impact on the drinking culture.

## **5.6 Chapter conclusions**

Excessive alcohol use appeared strongly embedded within athlete culture at Bayfields university. There were substantial differences in levels of consumption between athletes of different sports, with team sports (i.e., rugby and hockey) reporting significantly higher usage. Structural factors (such as age, gender, degree stage or living arrangements) were not related to consumption by athletes. This implies there may be social or cultural mechanisms within sport which maintain high levels of drinking, regardless of any demographic differences of individual players. Further, overall levels of drinking by athletes remained relatively stable over-time. This further points to the presence of social and cultural drivers which maintain consumption among group members. How athletes are inducted into alcohol use during adolescence may play an important role in consumption during university, however, the cultural milieu of university sport may exert a more potent force. The next Chapter examined the underlying social practices which help interpret the patterns of alcohol use identified throughout the current Chapter.

## **Chapter 6: Alcohol use by university rugby players: Initiation, hierarchy, and social reproduction**

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### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the first qualitative study of this research (semi-structured interviews). This study aimed to identify and explain the social processes which manifested in the patterns of alcohol use found in the previous phase of research (Chapter 5). The explanations offered in this chapter are framed using Bourdieu's theory of practice (Chapter 3). Three themes were identified that best represented the research findings, these were 1) Initiation of alcohol use, 2) Social hierarchy and coerced consumption, and 3) Social reproduction of drinking practices.

### **6.2 Initiation of alcohol use**

This theme describes the processes by which participants initiated alcohol use. It focusses on their first drinking experience and how this developed into more routine and excessive usage. These processes varied among the interviewees. Most of the athletes interviewed had started drinking within a sporting environment, however, others had begun drinking outside of a sport setting. Reflecting this important difference, the practices and processes which led to greater and more routine consumption also varied. Participants included in this study reported initiating alcohol use at an average age of 14 and bingeing on alcohol at an average age of 15. Previous research has found early (aged 12–14) to late (aged 15–17) adolescence may be a problematic period for initiating alcohol use, with multiple studies showing associations between age of first drink and the later occurrence of alcohol abuse or dependence (Marshall, 2014). Additionally, young people who start to drink before the age of 15 years are reported to be four times more likely to meet the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lives (Grant and Dawson, 1997). The interviews conducted for this study revealed original insight into the processes involved in this initiation of alcohol use and help explain why early initiation may lead to long-term alcohol misuse.

#### **6.2.1 Sport related introduction**

For most of the athletes interviewed, there was a clear link between involvement in sport and alcohol use, which started prior to university. The drinking ethos (the prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit, or sentiment towards alcohol) within sport normalised and routinised alcohol use from a young age (typically around age 14–15). In turn, the drinking practices which stemmed from the ethos helped further strengthen

it. There were multiple strategic events and practices that embedded alcohol use within club culture, including post-match and post-tournament celebrations, coming of age ceremonies (i.e., winning man of the match for the first time) and end of season tours. Firstly, drinking from an early age was intertwined with sport-related celebrations. Connor explained how his first experience with alcohol occurred at his rugby club, despite him being underage, and followed a successful tournament. This was encouraged by the coach.

It [first consuming alcohol at age 15] was at a rugby club, we had just won the regional championship and our coach came down to the changing rooms and said, “well done”, poured everyone a pint, and told us to see it off when we were stood up on the benches. – Connor (Male)

These early life events would have reinforced a message that alcohol use and specific ways of drinking (i.e., ‘seeing it off’ whilst standing on changing room benches) were appropriate cultural norms which were accepted and expected. Over time, the internalisation of these practices and dispositions into the habitus would be influential in shaping a particular way of being, seeing, and behaving. Thus, the habitus was a structure which guided thoughts, feelings, and actions in this field (i.e., the post-tournament changing room). Chapter 5 demonstrated a significant relationship between the age which athletes started consuming alcohol, and specifically binge drinking, and alcohol use during university. These interviews and the theoretical insight of Bourdieu can help illuminate why both are interconnected. By the time young athletes reach university, sport related celebrations with alcohol may ‘unthinkingly’ occur (Williams, 1995: 598). Williams argues that “most of us, most of the time, take ourselves and the social world around us for granted; we do not think about what we do because, quite simply, we do not have to” (1995: 582).

During this experience, Connor was surrounded by people that he perceived as role models (such as experienced players and coaches) and acceptance and encouragement to drink from these role models would bolster the perception that alcohol had value in this environment. Bourdieu explains that the habitus is interwoven with these indicators of value, or ‘forms of capital’ as he describes them. To feel comfortable within this environment, Connor must understand that ‘downing his drink’ following success shows commitment to the team and recognition of their achievements. These are the unwritten rules, known as doxa, which young athletes must learn. This entire

experience, including the drinking environment (the rugby club), the choice of drink (beer) and the manner of consumption ('downing' alcohol and standing on changing room benches) would have informed Connor of the doxa. By the time these young athletes reached university they would have an instinctive understanding of how to behave in these environments and the cultural value of these practices. They would have a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990).

Qualitative research conducted elsewhere supports these findings. In Canada, hockey players were drinking with coach approval and encouragement at age 13-14 (Roy & Camiré, 2017). Further, intoxication by these young athletes was structured into the game-day schedule and the locker room was the social space used to consume (Ibid.). The current study, combined with previous qualitative research, support the argument that young athletes may be vulnerable to a problematic drinking ethos. Closed social spaces, such as changing rooms, which are beyond the awareness of parents and regulators, may leave young players particularly at risk. Further, this unique vulnerability appears to be a cross-cultural and cross-sport issue. This initiation into alcohol use, at a young age, is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, adolescents are more inclined towards risky behaviour and risky decision-making (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). Secondly, peer acceptance is a crucial social reward during this period and peers with friends who drink, having older friends, and spending more time with friends who drink, have all been associated with greater personal alcohol use (Bremner et al., 2011). Thirdly, lower levels of parental supervision, easy access to alcohol and positive expectations of alcohol, reinforced through praise and encouragement, are all likely to increase personal use (Bremner et al., 2011). All these risks were present in this situation.

Connor and his university team-mate Harry grew up 80 miles apart in England but had near identical introductions to alcohol in a sporting environment, and at a very similar age. Both were consuming to celebrate, although where Connor was celebrating an end of season team achievement, Harry was celebrating a personal accomplishment - winning 'man of the match'. Harry's and Connor's descriptions of their introduction to alcohol demonstrate further how common and widespread these practices are.

I was definitely underage, because I was man of the match I had to stand up on a chair. That was when I played for colts. So let me think... I may have been 15 or 16 and had to down a pint. – Harry (Male)

Jones (2016) argues that sport cultivates the idea that celebration must involve (excessive) alcohol use. There are countless examples of athletes celebrating with alcohol. For instance, by spraying champagne following a successful football tournament or motorsport race, or by partying with alcohol in the nights the follow (cf. Jones, 2016). These events normalise the idea that binge drinking is a reasonable or encouraged way to celebrate, or drown one's sorrows. Others expand that such behaviour is praised as a tradition worth continuing in sport (Edwards et al., 2013). Bourdieu would argue that this yearning to keep the tradition going is evidence of the habitus and the capital which underpins it. During adolescence, these athletes were taught that 'downing a pint' was a noteworthy behaviour which was accepted and expected. The awareness that this practice had value increased the willingness of athletes to engage, which in turn reinforced the habitus in a perpetual cycle.

Finally, end of season excursions, or 'tours', played an important role in the initiation of alcohol use by the young athletes interviewed. Mathew discussed how his drinking began on rugby tours around age 16 or 17 and coaches valued and thus encouraged drinking in this environment.

It [starting to drink] would more likely be at the club, colts... under 18s.

Probably every 2 weeks, or 3 weeks. Actually, rugby tours, can't forget rugby tours. I'd say 16/17. They [coaches] were encouraging it. – Mathew (Male)

Rhian agreed that rugby tours played an important role in her early alcohol use, however, for her, alcohol use started much earlier at age 14 or 15. Rhian believed her drinking at this age may have been fuelled by the set-up of women's rugby, where the under 15 and under 18 squads spent a lot of time together. This access to alcohol, and the presence of others drinking around her, was perceived to have had a significant impact upon her own consumption.

In a rugby club environment, the first time I started drinking, I'd have a few with the girls, like 14/15 for sure. Especially when we go on tour and things. I think, because the girl's leagues, they didn't go up in years. We had the under 15s and the under 18s, so under 18s some of them were 18 but we were all one club. It wasn't the case that the year groups stuck together, we would just spend all our time with the older ones, and they would spend all of their time with the younger ones. I'd probably say that it massively impacted it [consumption], especially

the fact that they were doing it and they had access to alcohol more than we did  
– Rhian (Female)

Prior research has drawn attention to the prominence of end of season drinking trips in sport (Palmer, 2011; Jones, 2016). Palmer (2011, p.175) describes these trips as examples of “determined drunkenness” where the explicit goal is to get drunk rapidly. The age at which these started, however, was surprising. These alcohol fuelled excursions were a consistent event within the rugby calendar before participants were legally allowed to drink. The interviewees accounts of these events revealed two factors which would influence a young athletes drinking practices. Firstly, alcohol use on these tours was encouraged by coaches, and second, they combined more mature players with novices. Both these factors would have further informed youngsters how an athlete is meant to behave in these situations and the cultural value of these behaviours. In a similar way to individual and collective celebrations with alcohol, these practices and dispositions would become internalised into the habitus until they exhibit themselves as the determined drunkenness seen in adult sport (Palmer, 2011).

This theme has thus far focussed on specific events which inducted young athletes into the drinking culture. Over time, however, this consumption became more routine. The young athletes internalised the drinking ethos of the rugby culture into the habitus, and the habitus became a structure that produced tendencies which normalised alcohol use. Drinking practices became an almost instinctive part of the gameday experience. Players packed alcohol, like a kit item, ready for consumption post-match. This off-license consumption was complimented with several visits to on-licence premises on the way back to the club house.

When you travel away, you’d bring a few drinks on the bus and drink in the club after the game, drink on the coach, singing, dancing and all that sort of stuff, and then you’d do pub crawls. On the way back to the club, on the way back from the game, you’d stop off at 2 or 3 pubs and then go back to the club house, drink more, then we would go out. So, it would be not just the game it would be the whole day. – Connor (Male)

Connor’s description of a typical gameday is evidence of the drinking ethos of the rugby club, reproduced by the habitus. Packing alcohol, drinking on the bus, dancing, singing and pub crawls had become second nature, and frequent and repetitive drinking was integral to the matchday. These dispositions and practices had developed into social

instincts early in these athletes' sporting lives, and well in advance of university. These ingrained tendencies would guide how these young athletes think, feel and act in these settings throughout their lives, acting as a "living memory pad, an automation that leads the mind unconsciously along with it, and as a repository for the most precious values" (Bourdieu, 1990: 68). The habitus would enable these athletes to instinctively adapt to similar fields which value heavy drinking (i.e., university sport) in future.

### **6.2.2 Non-sport related introduction**

All participants had begun heavy drinking prior to university, however for a small cohort, this drinking was un-related to participation in sport. There has been a debate in the alcohol-sport literature concerning the extent to which sport encourages alcohol use (or creates heavy drinkers), or merely provides a socially acceptable environment for heavy drinkers, or 'sensation seekers' to practice their dispositions (Hallingberg, 2014; Zhou, 2016). The data presented above suggests that for many, sporting environments at the very least encouraged alcohol use among athletes (i.e., created drinkers). The following discussions, however, suggest that for some, sporting environments provided a suitable environment for individuals to develop on their existing drinking habits and preferences.

James, for instance, explained he was drinking alcohol frequently and excessively during sixth form and this consumption was impacting upon his studies, however this was not directly attributable to sport. For James, consumption did not increase during university as he was already drinking at a high level when he started.

I got to the end of school at 18, I'd be out twice a week. I'd go out to student nights or whatever because it was sixth form. I remember being in some absolute states in my classes at sixth form, got kicked out of a few for it. (How long in years did you drink quite heavily for?) About 5 years from 17 to 22. All through uni. It didn't really change during undergrad from what I was doing in sixth form, just in a different place. – James (Male)

Sophie echoed this relationship between student life and heavy drinking, which started prior to university. She, like James, was drinking twice per week prior to her arrival. Although, unlike James, Sophie felt her consumption increased as she commenced university and that this increase was largely attributable to the 'Freshers' events used to induct students during the first 2 weeks of term.

[Pre-university] I think I'd go out twice per week, Thursdays and Saturdays. (What's Thursday?) It became a student night kind of thing, it was designed for [Eastbrooke] Uni but it's not like here where there's a lot of students, so it ended up just being college students and everyone needed to go. I was drinking a lot anyway [pre-university], but in freshers I'd say I went out quite a lot. So, freshers week we did 10 days non-stop every day for the freshers two weeks and then we had a day off and did the rest. – Sophie (Female)

Some theorists would explain these findings through a psychological or identity lens. For instance, scholars have speculated that sport participation and alcohol use may fulfil certain thrill-seeking intentions (Green et al., 2014; Hallingberg, 2014). Others have expanded that people choose crowds or are filtered into groups through their behavioural choices (such as excessive drinking) and personalities (such as sensation seeking or risk-taking tendencies). The current study implies that, for a small proportion of university athletes, this may be the case. Certain individuals may be attracted to cultures known to have a drinking ethos, because the group behaviours match their habitus. For most, however, involvement in sport prior to university may mould individual drinking practices (as explained above).

### **6.2.3 University Transition**

The data reported above showed there was a heavy drinking ethos in youth sport. This resulted in athletes drinking excessively, and engaging in several strategic practices to achieve intoxication, prior to university. Despite this, there was a consensus among interviewees that drinking escalated during university. Participants felt the intensive social calendar during the first 2 weeks of term (known as 'freshers') inducted them into frequent alcohol use from the beginning. Ellie and Rhian, for instance, had never consumed alcohol at this frequency or intensity but adapted quickly.

When I first came, I was one of the first to move into my flat and we went out every night in the first two weeks of freshers. So that was a bit of a shock to the system because I'd never drunk like that, but that was fun, it's all part of the experience I feel. And then when I went to my first rugby social that was an experience, like I'd never experienced anything like that. – Ellie (Female)

Yeah, freshers was massive, it was a lot for me to deal with, because I had never really been that much of a drinker before. Like I had enjoyed it, but I hadn't

been going out all the time like some of my friends here were, so it was a big change for me. Yeah, it was a big hit. – Rhian (Female)

The heavy drinking habitus developed during youth sport would have helped athletes adapt to the new environment, with an apparent heavy drinking ethos itself. Bourdieu describes these social settings as ‘fields’ and argues there are “general laws of fields” (1993, p. 72). The stories presented above showed that in the youth sport field, these ‘laws’ were to drink heavily, celebrate with alcohol, and consume alcohol in a particular way (for instance, by singing, dancing, standing on benches and ‘downing’ beer). The data presented in preceding Chapter showed a similar heavy drinking culture was present in the university sport field. The internalised dispositions which helped young athletes feel at home in the youth sport field also provided them with the necessary knowledge of how to behave in the university sport environment. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 127) explain “when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a fish in water”. In this new field, however, the rules were more complex and there were several processes which helped educate new athletes of how to act. Firstly, the norms and expectations were transmitted through stories from students who had experienced the culture before them. Rhys, for instance, explained his brother attended university before him and told him to expect a heavy drinking ethos. Whereas Harry had heard stories passed down through previous generations of athletes.

Well, my brother went to Uni before me, So I always knew that coming to Uni was just a big drinking sesh – Rhys (Male)

I turned up to university and I honestly expected a lot worse than what happened. I expected much much worse because you hear stories from people. I’ve heard stories from people the year above me, who’ve heard stories from the year above them. Not just at this university, at different universities across the country. You build this image in your head and think “oh god this is going to be so shit” – Harry (Male)

There was a badge of honour attached to the lived experiences of athletes. Bourdieu defined the cultural value of these anecdotes as symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is not a specific kind of capital, but can be money (economic capital), friendships or networks (social capital) or tastes (cultural capital), for example. However, symbolic capital is ‘what every form of capital becomes when it obtains an explicit or practical recognition’ (Bourdieu (2000, p. 242). In the athlete fields, drinking practices were admired and this

provided those who practiced them status and recognition. These stories and myths allowed more mature athletes to portray themselves in a positive light and also ensured that the traditions, rules, and rituals of university sport were passed on to new generations of athletes.

Connor felt sport-related drinking for his home club (prior to university) was not dissimilar to sport-related drinking at university. Providing further support to the argument that athletes may be well-equipped for the drinking ethos at university ahead of their arrival. In other words, there is a drinking ethos that transcends different contexts and heavy drinking is commonplace in rugby wherever it is played.

Because back home playing for my club, the nights out we did, it was quite heavy drinking and that isn't too much different. – Connor (Male)

He did, however, reveal one important difference. Connor felt drinking for his home rugby club was a collective and mutually agreed action. Whereas consumption with university team-mates was pressured and intimidating, and where individual autonomy was removed from the decision to consume. The language used to describe this situation showed how deeply embedded and taken-for-granted this forced drinking culture was, where being told what to do was simply discarded as 'just the way it is'.

But it's more [pre-university] their drinking because they're like "do you want to get drunk?" but you don't have people shouting and stuff like that. It's more "oh down a pint" and you sing and stuff like that, but [at university] they're like "fresher, down a pint". Yeah, it's more intimidating on a Wednesday night but that's just the way it is. – Connor (Male)

Connor's description revealed the more complex laws governing the drinking ethos of university rugby. In this new setting there was a social hierarchy, and explicit exercises of power were used to reinforce the inferior and superior social positions. These group dynamics were absent in all interviewees reports of club and youth rugby and thus were seemingly unique to the university rugby environment. These dynamics are covered in greater detail below.

Prior to this study, the impact of pre-university alcohol experiences on current drinking practices was unclear. One body of evidence suggested university athletes were, in general, heavy drinkers prior to their arrival, and playing sport prior to university (regardless of whether or not sport participation continued) was a risk factor for greater

alcohol use in later life (Marcelo et al., 1989; Hildebrand et al., 2001; Green et al., 2014; Barber et al., 2001). Others went further and argued early introduction to alcohol use was amongst the strongest contributors to alcohol use by university athletes (Lewis & Paladino, 2008; Lewis, 2008). In contrast, more recent research has shown the university athlete culture exerted a strong influence on drinking patterns (Cardigan et al, 2013). Cardigan and colleagues (2013), for instance, found athletes without involvement in sport prior to university reported similar levels of alcohol use to others, despite not being exposed to the culture before university. This implied that prior involvement in sport, and the structuring alcohol practices which accompany it, may not be as significant as the processes which take place during university. The current Chapter provides greater depth to both these fields of thought. All participants involved in this study had begun drinking early and were drinking excessively before starting university. Youth sport played an important role in reinforcing the link between participation and intoxication. Post-match drinking sessions, celebrations, end-of season tours and encouragement from coaches ensured both went hand in hand. Despite already drinking excessively, most interviewees felt their consumption increased further during university. Specific events (such as ‘freshers’ and ‘socials’) and intimidation from more experienced team-mates functioned to reinforce alcohol use. The following section provides a deeper exploration and explanation of this culture of intimidation and forced consumption, which appeared distinct from drinking practices of youth club rugby.

### **6.3 Social hierarchy and coerced consumption**

This theme explains how honour, prestige, and status (defined by Bourdieu as symbolic capital) of certain players enabled them to coerce other, often more novice, teammates. Experienced players, such as Oliver, had control over other less experienced teammates, and this created and maintained a social hierarchy within the rugby environment. Those lower in the social hierarchy were forced to binge drink because they were new to the culture.

We say to the new boy, three to five vodka red bulls. – Oliver (Male)

The social hierarchy provided the authority to mature athletes to exercise power over those lower down the pecking order. As such, first year students bared the brunt of the public humiliation and pressure to drink, followed by second years who received some coercion and bullying but to a lesser extent, and third years who appeared to have a free pass against such pressure and influence. The exercising of this power and authority by

those in higher social positions maintained the social hierarchy in a perpetual cycle. This social hierarchy was portrayed by Sophie who recollected one drinking game, where if a third year did not want to drink, it was the second year's responsibility, and if both refused, the first year was required to take up the responsibility.

I don't know what it's like for the boys but for rugby you've got the first years which are freshers which are going to get absolutely hammered, like everything has got to be put on the freshers. Then second years, then third years they can just do what they want and there's not much "you need to drink this, you need to drink that". So, we did pub golf the other week. It's tradition, you have first, second and third years. The fresher goes in the middle and you're all handcuffed to each other, and if the third year doesn't want the drink you give it to the second year, and if the second year doesn't want the drink, they can pass it to the fresher. – Sophie (Female)

The language used by Sophie highlighted the dehumanisation and objectification of those in inferior social positions. First year students were not called by their names but rather given the label "fresher". Dehumanisation can have significant negative physical, social, and emotional consequences. For example, Bandura et al. (1975) found dehumanisation resulted in aggression and allowed individuals to avoid self-blame for harming others. Bandura argued that victims were regarded as sub-human and thus did not deserve the dignifying qualities typically afforded to human beings. More recently, research has linked dehumanisation with greater punishment for criminals (Bastian et al., 2013a; Viki et al., 2012), reduced concern for victims of police brutality (Goff et al., 2008), and increased tolerance of sexual assault (Loughnan et al., 2013). Throughout this and the following Chapter attention will be drawn to the (sexual) violence experienced by athletes within this culture. Dehumanisation of those in inferior positions may be a process which occurs early in the mis-treatment, which later frees those in dominant positions of moral concern. Research conducted by Riemer et al. (2019) linked alcohol use with dehumanisation, where drinking increased the likelihood that women were seen as less human. With this in mind, alcohol use, an aggressive social hierarchy, and the dehumanisation of those at the bottom of the hierarchy could lay the foundation for more serious adverse outcomes, as identified elsewhere (Bandura et al., 1975; Loughnan et al., 2013).

There appeared to be several unwritten rules within this culture (for instance, buying mature students drinks, consuming the unwanted drinking forfeits of older athletes, and drinking on request). Bourdieu defines these rules as *Doxa* and explains they guide what is appropriate to say, think, or do, in a given social situation or context. In the situation above, for example, novices were required to drink, simply because they were told to by older athletes. Research by Sparkes et al. (2007) outlined how athlete culture at university was guided by 12 of these *doxa* (or ‘commandments’ as they defined them). Four of these *doxa* (‘show commitment to student life’, ‘attend social events’, ‘attend post-match drinking sessions’, and ‘binge drink’) were related to alcohol use. These guiding principles were essential for being accepted by the group (i.e., teammates) and for gaining status on campus. This Chapter adds further evidence of these rules at a general level, and suggests they are cross-culturally prevalent given they have been found to exist at a separate university to Sparkes et al. previous study. This Chapter also suggests there are more specific rules within these general *doxa* which depend on one’s position within the hierarchy. For novices, social survival seemed to be dependent on obeying the *doxa*, whereas more experienced athletes had greater autonomy over their decisions.

Like the organised drinking events that Sophie articulated, initiation ceremonies played a central role in maintaining the social hierarchy. Jack, a first-year student, explained initiation ceremonies, nights out, and away games where all opportunities for older players to display dominance over him and other novices.

I think it’s a chance for the older lot just to take the micky out of the younger lot. It must have started off that it happened once and then everyone wants to wait their turn to be able to do it to the new people. It just becomes a sort of regimented thing where it happens to everyone that joins. – Jack (Male)

Several studies have examined the role of initiation ceremonies in student culture. These studies have shown how powerful these events are in generating extreme behaviours. For instance, students marching with plastic bags covering their faces in a Nazi style re-enactment, students running naked across sports pitches during live matches, and students drinking alcohol containing live goldfish (Groves, Griggs & Leflay, 2012). These behaviours are often perceived to facilitate team cohesion (Cimino, 2011; Waldron & Kowalski, 2009; Crow & MacIntosh, 2009; Kirby & Wintrup, 2002; Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011), however, several studies oppose this idea (Waldron &

Kowalski, 2009; Van Raalte et al., 2007; Lafferty, Wakefield & Brown, 2017). The data presented in this chapter support an alternative field of thought, that initiations are better explained through power, hierarchy, and social dominance (Holman, 2004; Waldron, 2015). These extreme challenges or forfeits are designed to test whether new members are loyal to the ethos of the group and they abide by the same values. The willingness of newcomers to want to be part of the group leads to compliance with these extreme behaviours. Jack highlighted an important process, where “everyone wants to wait their turn to be able to do it to the new people”. This provides insight into how this culture is reproduced over-time. Bourdieu (1990) explains that social systems are maintained by transmitting shared values, practices, and norms through generations. In this case, athletes were preserving the drinking ethos by educating newcomers that attending drinking events, drinking excessively, and respecting the hierarchy were valuable practices. This means that novice athletes had a desire to exert control of others in future, given the underlying capital associated with these practices. A fuller explanation of this process of cultural reproduction is presented later in this chapter.

Following the discovery that strategic events served to maintain the social hierarchy, there was a need to understand these power dynamics more broadly. Upon deeper probing, interviewees disclosed that displays of dominance extended beyond organised initiation ceremonies or drinking events to broader sport and student life.

**Interviewer:** Is it only a single occurrence?

**Participant:** Not necessarily. They might do it on nights out and stuff, and if you go on an away game, they might do it as well. The older players would have more dominance over the younger players and would tell them what to do. –  
Jack (Male)

Harriet elaborated that older players would still feel a sense of control over novice players in situations outside of the rugby environment. There was a contradictory tone adopted by interviewees when attempting to rationalise their (forced) alcohol use. Players appeared willing, and accepted, being forced to do things. Harriet felt being singled out and intimidated was a positive experience which showed her team-mates liked and approved of her. It is plausible, however, that this positive outlook resulted from a level of internal conflict. It is likely that actively accepting to do something that goes against individual autonomy and judgement creates a level of mental distress.

Describing being bullied as evidence of self-worth or being “the ones they kind of like” could help ease this distress. This internal conflict is covered in greater detail below.

I always enjoyed it. It was slightly intimidating at the time because even if you weren't in the rugby group and you were with your other mates they would still be like “oi fresher do this for me” sort of thing. Like, I remember sitting in the SU with my other friends and they just came up and said “fresher go get me a drink”. The seniors yeah. So slightly intimidating but I never didn't enjoy it because sometimes, me and my friend have talked about this quite a lot, but what we've found is a lot of the time the people they give the banter to is the ones they kind of like, and it's a way of showing and having a bit of fun between them. So, I kind of took it, not as a compliment but I didn't mind it. – Harriet (Female)

Individuals occupying different social positions (such as experienced or first year athletes) had widely varying perspectives of the purpose of this culture of intimidation. Bourdieu (1984) often used the analogy of a game (e.g., chess or football) to explain this. He argued that the game is unfair, and the rules are weighted in favour of certain players based on their capital (i.e., social networks or drinking habits) and habitus (i.e., ability to meet the requirements (such as heavy drinking) of the culture). Those with a strong ability and willingness to engage with the cultural norms (by drinking heavy) or with strong social networks and status among peers would have a favourable social position “like the aces in a game of cards” (Bourdieu, 1985b p.724). Those new to the culture would not yet possess the required capital (such as friends and reputation) and therefore occupy a less favourable position. Those occupying the dominant positions in this culture, as Bourdieu's (1998) suggests, were content with their favourable rank. Rhys, a second-year student, rejoiced in the control he now had over those in their first year after having to ‘obey’ others when he was in their position. The control which experienced athletes had over novices extended beyond alcohol use, to other displays of dominance, such as deciding where people sat and when they were able to leave the group.

Second year, we were the ones that had control and got to tell the freshers what to do. Being a first year they make you sit on the floor, you're not allowed to stand up to go to the toilet, you've just got to obey really. – Rhys (Male)

Interviewees with different positions within the social hierarchy used very different language when describing the culture of coercion. Less experienced players were perceived by mature athletes to be inferior and thus bullying and harassment was directed at them. Harry struck a downbeat tone throughout the interview, particularly when discussing the control older athletes had over him. He described the process as ‘tough’, although he also felt it was an unavoidable consequence of university rugby for first year students.

It’s particularly tough on freshers. I just think it’s always going to be like that all year, and I guess it’s fun for them. – Harry (Male)

Harry accepted his inferior position and viewed it as the “natural order of things” (Bourdieu 1979, p. 198). To him, being bullied and forced to drink alcohol was an unavoidable consequence if he wanted to play university rugby. Bourdieu (1992, p.167) describes this social process as symbolic violence, where non-physical violence is used to dominate an individual or group, with their complicity. For instance, Harry, by tolerating being “forced to down a dirty pint which contained tomato ketchup, milk, cider, carling, some fish guts” or by having to “lick this pint of the floor” was complicit in his domination by the senior athletes. In contrast, the experienced players, with higher social positions, did not need to use physical violence to maintain the hierarchy, rather they “let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 190). Harry accepted, or felt he had no choice to accept, the instructions to drink, and this compliance maintained the hierarchy. The dominated, such as Harry, viewed the domination from the perspective of the dominant (the experienced athletes) describing the experience as “fun for them”, which made the situation appear ‘natural’ (Bourdieu, 2001, p.35).

Despite speaking very negatively about the social hierarchy, those in subordinate positions saw positives in the process. They rationalised these practices as useful for helping them feel more comfortable around team-mates, given they had a mutual experience of being humiliated. There was a (perceived) benefit for those at the bottom of the hierarchy to engage in these behaviours and obey their elder teammates. Harry discussed one example of this public humiliation where he, and other first year students, were selected into “families” (groups of athletes from different year groups and ability levels). The process of being chosen by mature athletes to be part of their close-knit group might have felt like a positive show of acknowledgement or admiration, and

Harry admitted “it’s not something you dream about but it’s not as bad as being made to down about 16 pints and run naked around the pitch”. However, each novice was filtered into their new family through a dehumanising process which reminded them of their inferior place within the team. Each first-year was sold to the highest bidding family and the money raised was used to buy alcohol for the rest of the year.

It’s a good way to get us out of our shells I think and a good way to get us to feel more comfortable around them, because we’ve all done stupid shit. They put us into families. So, we were auctioned off as a group of freshers and a group of second and third years called families would buy us. So that money goes into a pot which goes towards beer for the rest of the year. – Harry (Male)

There is accumulating evidence throughout this Chapter of a demeaning and dehumanising culture. From being labelled ‘fresher’ to being ‘auctioned’ into ‘families’, novices were constantly reminded that they were not worthy of dignity and respect. There is substantial evidence that dehumanising attitudes and behaviours can lead to wide-reaching negative consequences, such as bullying (Obermann, 2011), harassment (Rudman & Mescher, 2012) and social rejection (Martinez et al., 2011). Harry, in support of this evidence, had experienced these consequences during a bus trip transporting the team from a drinking social at the university to the city centre. When travelling on the bus, novices were segregated from their mature team-mates and were required to sit at the back of the bus. This resembles the racial segregation in Montgomery, Alabama, where African Americans were required to sit in the back half of city buses until 1955. Harry described how he was physically and verbally abused and spat on by his more experienced team-mates.

All the freshers had to sit at the back of the bus, and somebody hit me on the back of the head, and I turned around and said “hello” and he said “fuck you fresher” and, obviously shit faced, I turned around, looked him in the eyes and said “fuck you to” and then he spat in my face and said “do you want to try that again?”. And I couldn’t believe that this guy, just because he had a drink thought he could spit and punch people, and the guy next to him looked like he was getting ready to spit and punch me because he said, “do you wanna try do this funny shit again?”. So, I just turned around and they still spat on me. – Harry (Male)

There is a clear need to root out this dehumanisation to protect newcomers to the culture from harm. A culture of intoxication combined with the dehumanisation of younger athletes may provide the environmental conditions for physical and emotional abuse. Alcohol intoxication leads to a lack of judgement, lowered inhibition and poor decision making (Osgood & Muraven, 2018; Goudriaan et al., 2007). Whereas dehumanisation reduces the moral worth attributed to the dehumanised and increases perceptions that they are less worthy of protection from harm (Christoff, 2014; Opatow, 1990; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Gray et al., 2007; Bastian & Haslam, 2011). In the athlete culture studied here, novices were repeatedly viewed as less worthy of respectful human treatment and drunkenness resulted in aggression and violence towards the dehumanised.

For those at the bottom of the social hierarchy the experience was often unpleasant. Harry explained his friends in halls of residence “just drink casually and I just drink because I’m forced to by about 80 different second years. Which is quite scary”. However, there were also incentives for abiding by the cultural norms and drinking heavily. There were social rewards, or so called ‘lad’ points (Phipps et al., 2017) to be gained from downing alcohol and engaging in notorious or “stupid” behaviours (such as drinking “a whole bottle of wine through a fresh salmon’s head” or “a pint through a straw with a cookie in our ass”). Bourdieu defined these as cultural capital, which are values associated with “culturally authorized tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills and awards” (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p. x). Within this environment, for example, being able to hold lots of beer or drink a pint particularly fast constituted cultural capital.

This cultural capital could be built over-time and exchanged for status, respect, and admiration from teammates. Bourdieu defines this as symbolic capital - a “degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 7), and “the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability” (1984, p. 291). Put simply, high status athletes possessed the knowledge that drinking practices were laudable and were rewarded with respect for their ability to practice them. Interviewees explained that expressing control over novice players provided the illusion of status, where players who may have been lacking in rugby ability were able to establish a position of power within the rugby system by using alcohol as a status symbol.

The first team, they're actually alright, all nice guys because they play at a higher level and they're probably not the biggest of drinkers. It's more the second and third team that will get in your face and tell you to drink and stuff like that. They're not playing firsts, so they have to do it in another way. I remember buying a pint and I had to go to the toilet, so I was in the toilet and this big guy with a beard was like "are you a fresher? Down a pint" and I was like "oh I just bought this" and I just necked it. – Connor (Male)

First team athletes were already respected amongst their teammates for their rugby ability and performances on the pitch, and were therefore exempt from pressures to consume. They did not need to prove themselves as big drinkers as they were already held in high regard at the top of the social hierarchy. This finding supports previous research. For instance, Roy and Camire (2017) found the particular status of players strongly influenced the pressure they were under from teammates to consume alcohol. For example, if a highly talented player abstained from drinking alcohol, they received less pressure to consume. They were able to contribute to the team's success on the pitch, by performing well. On the other hand, less talented players who contributed less to the teams' performance were required to contribute to the team in other ways. This often involved proving their commitment by complying with dominant team values (for instance by drinking heavily) (Haslam & Platow, 2001).

Connor's explanation showed alcohol use, or alcohol tolerance (cf. Clayton and Harris, 2008) functioned to maintain social divisions and convey dominance. Mathew, on the hand, felt drinking practices provided the opportunity for players to negotiate their position in the social hierarchy and climb to a higher standing.

They do it to climb the hierarchy, to prove that their worthy of being in the team. Being respected as a... it sounds stupid, it sounds stupid when you put it like that, it's just drinking for god's sake. I dunno, lad points. – Mathew (Male)

Participating in these drinking practices was key to one's position within the group. Novice athletes engaged in these to gain respect (or "lad points") and achieve a more prominent position within the hierarchy. On the other hand, there was a fear among players, particular younger athletes, that refusing to engage would leave them at the bottom of the heap. Harry described a culture of fear where he was "scared to say no I'm not drinking" and that he was "afraid to talk to people" about how he disliked the drinking culture. Harry feared losing "a bond with teammates". Bourdieu describes

these 'bonds' as social capital, and links it with the power and hierarchy dynamics which have been presented throughout this Chapter. To Bourdieu, social capital is one of several resources (such as reputation, as shown above) that actors can use to position themselves. Harry was afraid of losing this social capital as it would have left him at the bottom of the hierarchy.

You don't have to drink to play rugby but if you don't want to drink you've got to really be ballsy. I'd be scared to say "no I'm not drinking" to about 30 different 3rd years shouting around you. It's just what we're told to do and you kind of have to follow otherwise it's not going to put you in great stead for the rest of the year. I feel like now that I'm here and if I said to a 3rd year "I don't want to drink" he would shout some shit in my face and probably get a couple of others around him to egg me on to do something, because that's what the university culture is. I'm more afraid to talk to people about the fact that I'm not too keen on the whole drinking thing and I'm just going to go along with it because that seems to be the done thing. Because I'm aware that they're going to be like "oh you know so and so" and you feel like you're going to lose a bond with your teammates in a sense, which sounds really silly. – Harry (Male)

Novice athletes, such as Harry, appeared to be engaging in the culture of intoxication for social survival, rather than personal choice (Brown, 2005). Athletes, and younger athletes in particular, feared the prospect of opposing the pressure to consume alcohol. This fear centred not only on the consequences of standing up to the group but also the perceived ostracization which would follow. In an environment which ranked alcohol, getting drunk, or engaging in notorious acts so highly, it is unsurprising that athletes felt abstinence was a sign of weakness or inferiority. Connor, for instance, reported it was easier to obey the dominant ranks and portray himself as being strong, than refusing to abide by instructions to consume.

When you go on Wednesday, the socials sometimes can be a bit... some of the older like first team can get a bit rowdy in your face and stuff. When you've bought a pint at the front, and they call you up. I've never had a bad, bad experience yet, but it's like waiting for it. Some of the boys are overthinking it. When it's the first team shouting, telling you to neck or something like that I'd probably just do it anyway. Because if you didn't then you know... You don't

want to get shouted at. If you get shouted at you might think you're seen as a bit weak. So, you just try and keep up, so you don't get that. – Connor (Male)

Excessive alcohol use and alcohol tolerance was perceived to be a symbol of strength, within this culture. Connor explained that he “tried to keep up” to ensure he didn't appear as “weak”. These perceptions functioned to maintain the norms and rituals of the group and prevented athletes from challenging the status quo. Several scholars have argued that alcohol use, particularly by male team athletes, is designed to promote ‘hegemonic masculinity’ or typically masculine traits and tendencies (e.g., assertiveness, strength, or dominance) (Bem, 1981; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Anderson, 2009; Mullen, Watson, Swift, & Black, 2007; West, 2001; Locke & Mahalik, 2005). Those who choose abstinence or moderate alcohol use are allocated a subordinate gender identity (Hemmingsson et al., 1998; Janes and Ames, 1989; Kaminer & Dixon, 1995; Conroy & de Visser, 2013). The framing of alcohol use as a show of strength and dominance functioned to instil compliance with the drinking ethos and maintain the social hierarchy. Athletes could use the fear of looking weak and inferior to ensure others consumed their alcohol and did not oppose the culture.

The social hierarchy and the processes which served to maintain it (i.e., fear, intimidation, and bullying) have been presented thus far as predominantly negative. However, athletes also saw positives to the experience. Ellie, for example, felt the hierarchy and power dynamics ultimately promoted group cohesion, and this seemed a price worth paying.

There is that hierarchy, of freshers and seniors, and the seniors do try and... like most of the time the drinking and the banter they give you is just bonding, and you get on well with them in a couple of months' time, but initially they do give you a bit of shit. – Ellie (Female)

This perception, that intimidation and coercion bonded the team, was both a cause of the hierarchy and an effect which stemmed from it. Athletes wanted to maintain the culture to bring them closer together, and felt that having maintained the culture they were a more close-knit group. These perceptions are problematic as they make changing the culture more difficult. Several previous studies have shown athletes often (mis)perceive that behaviours used to enforce conformity facilitate the team by building cohesion (Cimino, 2011; Waldron & Kowalski, 2009; Waldron et al., 2011; Crow & MacIntosh, 2009; Kirby & Wintrup, 2002; Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011). However, a

mounting body of evidence suggests that perceptions, or arguments, that these practices build cohesion, unity, or develop bonds, are inaccurate (Waldron & Kowalski, 2009; Van Raalte, 2007 Lafferty, Wakefield & Brown, 2017). These findings make changing the culture more likely. It is plausible that actively accepting being dominated, despite perceiving the process as negative (as shown above), causes distress and conflicting attitudes (Festinger, 1957). Festinger (1957) explains that in these situations, individuals are moved to address the level of discomfort caused by either changing their behaviour or justifying it. Athletes may dislike certain behaviours (i.e., being sold, accepting sitting on the floor and not going to the toilet, or consuming alcohol without objection), but want to maintain their position within the group. In this situation, defending the practices as benefitting the whole group may be less risky to one's social standing, than speaking out against them. The following theme explains how the hierarchy, and the processes which functioned to maintain it (i.e., the exchange of symbolic, social, and cultural capital), reproduced the drinking ethos at this institution over-time.

#### **6.4 Social reproduction of drinking practices**

This theme explains how the drinking culture at Bayfields university was reproduced over-time. It expands on the data presented in the preceding theme and shows how intimidation, bullying and promoting oneself through drinking practices maintained the alcohol ethos. There were four processes which reproduced the drinking ethos over-time. These were 1) Notoriety - a desire to create one's own notorious story and to be seen as a 'legend', 2) Reciprocity - a need to ensure that everybody went through the same painful and humiliating experience, or in other words nobody got off lightly, 3) Revenge - the dominated feeling they deserved to become the dominator, or put simply, they had earned their stripes, and 4) Cultural capital – that is the (changing) value of alcohol use and related practices. Each of these is covered in greater detail throughout this sub-section.

##### **6.4.1 Notoriety**

Organised drinking events (such as socials and initiation ceremonies) provided athletes with recognition, status, and notoriety. Ellie, for instance, described how she could look back at her initiation ceremony with a sense of pride, and she had a story which she wore like a badge of honour. These stories set athletes, teams, and year groups, apart based on the notoriety of their behaviours. These anecdotes contained the evidence that athletes had endured the challenge, and acquired the knowledge and skills to be part of

the culture. It was proof that their ‘stripes had been earned’ or in Bourdieu’s terms – they displayed their cultural capital through these stories. Athletes had created a type of “informational capital” where knowledge of what was expected of rugby players allowed them to distinguish themselves from ‘outsiders’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 119). Bourdieu (1984) theorised that everyday tastes and lifestyles (such as clothing worn or the type and manner of alcohol use) were in opposition to those made by other status groups (Bourdieu, 1984; Carlisle et al., 2008). Ellie, for example, drank heavily to show she belonged to the rugby club, and she was different to other social groups around campus.

Now I can reflect back on my initiation and can be like “I did this, I did that” and it’s not something I’m proud of but it’s something I did. It’s stories and everyone does it and it’s interesting between the different years. – Ellie (Female)

These findings support previous research. Sparkes et al. (2007) for instance, found these practices showed commitment to club values and identity, and enabled athletes to position themselves higher within a social hierarchy of a university campus. Research which has focused specifically on initiation activities has found they provide the opportunity for newcomers to gain social approval, distinction, and recognition (Waldron & Krane, 2005). Further, completing extreme tasks was an indication of their commitment, desire to prove themselves as worthy, and willingness to give all for the team (ibid.). More recently, researchers have focussed on what athletes actually gain from taking part in these events. Johnson (2011), for instance, found newcomers who were successfully initiated felt part of something, whereas those who had a negative experience had failed to gain status. Lafferty and Wakefield (2018, p.22) suggest these events were educational, in that they enabled novices to learn “the rules of the group and the group structure” and this knowledge made them “identifiable to those in the wider university community as members of their specific team, subsequently increasing their social standing and status”. These previous studies demonstrate how initiation ceremonies and organised socials were an important and required part of gaining acceptance, where newcomers “have to tick each box” (Thompson, Johnstone & Banks, 2018). However, the findings from this Chapter go further and suggest there is a cultural reward for escalating these challenges or proving one’s credentials (i.e., ability to tolerate alcohol, drink particularly fast or act notoriously). In this sense, the more ‘wild’ the behaviours, the more cultural capital ascribed to them. James described how these

stories were used by athletes to portray themselves and their experience at university, in a positive, legendary way.

Essentially the people want a story to tell. They wanted to say “we did this, and it was wild” everyone wants that story. The people who set the initiation think “well we had to do it, you aren’t getting off”. – James (Male)

The interviewees recognised that behaving notoriously and telling others about their behaviour could be used to portray oneself in a positive light to peers. This led to them wanting to take part in organised drinking events, and succumbing to the bullying and harassment passed down through the social hierarchy, to create their own story and reputation. This finding, that initiations were perceived to benefit novices, supports previous research. For example, Keating et al. (2005) found students expressed enjoyment when being initiated, with those who had a more degrading and challenging experience enjoying it most. Others have found excessive drinking was perceived to be “a rite of passage that is integral to the experience” (Crawford & Novak, 2006, p.362), which can explain why students that receive an innocuous initiation ceremony express less enjoyment.

#### **6.4.2 Reciprocity**

The findings presented throughout this Chapter help explain why student want to obey orders and engage in humiliating and degrading behaviours. Such compliance is perceived to be a show of strength and rewards those who partake in the most extreme behaviours with elevated status and respect. These practices were widely praised among this community and therefore there was a need to ensure that everybody complied, and nobody got off lightly. Supporting previous research (cf. Crawford & Novak, 2006), athletes felt drinking practices, and initiations specifically, were a rite of passage. Senior players who had already been on the receiving end of the humiliation developed a sense of injustice if others did not go through the same experience.

I think it’s kind of like a tradition. So, it’s kind of everyone has done it before you and it’s your turn to do it and I think you do that, and you’re accepted into the team. I just think it’s more of a tradition and it’s always happened. – Ellie (Female)

Over-time, the cultural significance of engaging in these practices and telling others about one’s actions embedded drinking experiences (i.e., initiations) into the ethos as

tradition. These drinking practices were now deeply entrenched as rules and rituals of university rugby that they were simply accepted by newcomers and became ‘just one of those things’. As Bourdieu (1977) explains, “the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (p.156), because “what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying” (p. 167). Athletes, such as Harry and Ellie, had been taught to expect a heavy drinking ethos prior to their arrival at university and had learned that drinking practices were essential and valuable when they arrived. This process is defined as misrecognition (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), where agents forget the social structures they are caught up, feel at ease with their social standing, and forget the processes that have put them there. The athlete “knows the world... too well” and “takes it for granted, precisely because he (*or she*) is caught up in it, bound up with it” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 142–3).

It just seems to be what’s been passed down from generation to generation. I think it’s something that one day was started, everyone liked the sound of it and it’s just one of those things. – Harry (Male)

Anderson et al. (2012) argued initiation ceremonies occurred because they mirror the sacrifices and subordination that existing members expect, and test both the newcomer’s masculinity and their willingness to adopt a near agentic-less state determined by the power structures (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002). In other words, they test whether a novice athlete is strong and can be controlled. If the dominated accept their inferior role and behaviours, they are welcomed into the team as a worthy member (Bryshun, 1997; Young, 2008; Donnelly & Young, 1988). Kirby and Wintrup (2002) suggest the main purpose of these practices is to develop a group who are like-minded and share the same values, beliefs, and behaviours. Thus, the drinking practices adopted by athletes are a product of the hierarchy, and a mechanism which maintains it. In a perennial cycle, these behaviours were practiced to preserve the history and culture of the club, and novices were less likely to challenge the power structure because they were a product of it (Allan & DeAngelis, 2004; Johnson, 2011; Waldron, 2015).

### **6.4.3 Revenge**

Many of the male rugby players, particularly the younger players, explained they would remove this culture of coercion and pressure from the overall rugby experience if they had the choice. When probed on whether they would, or did, bully or humiliate others, however, the rhetoric changed. These behaviours and experiences which were

negatively framed minutes earlier, were now articulated with a sense of excitement and anticipation, at the thought of being able to exert power over other students when the time came.

**Participant:** I really don't mind drinking and I don't mind doing it all, but as soon as you put pressure on someone to drink a lot and as soon you start making them feel uncomfortable in a drinking environment, that's when it's no longer fun. – Harry (Male)

**Interviewer:** Can you see yourself next year doing the same to new freshers?

**Participant:** Honestly, I think I will, but truthfully, I don't want to. I'm not going to be spitting in the faces or punching any freshers next year. I just think it's vile and it's horrible. There's one guy in the family and he doesn't shout at people to drink and he doesn't drink a lot, hopefully I'll be like him. At the first social he was like "are you feeling OK? If you want to go have a tactical chunder back home I won't tell anyone. – Harry (Male)

**Interviewer:** Does he get any stick for that?

**Participant:** No because he's not really seen doing it, and it looks like we're just having a normal conversation. I'd dread to think what would happen to him [if somebody saw him doing it]. – Harry (Male)

Harry clearly felt negative about the practices (particularly the violence) that were directed towards first year athletes, describing them as "vile" and "horrible". Despite this, he was upfront that he thought he would engage in these coercive behaviours in the following year, despite his clear objections. Harry was unsure about the type of person he would become, merely "hoping" he would behave reasonable. Admittedly, however, Harry feared there would be a price to pay for acting supportive towards first year athletes, where he would face punishment if others noticed acts of kindness. The culture of fear and intimidation ensured compliance and guaranteed that each generation moved from a dominated to dominator position. Athletes used the fact that the power imbalance will soon shift in their favour to justify being on the receiving end of these rituals in the past or present. Rhys, a third-year student, described that he had to battle through the coercion in the past, and this vindicated the pressure he now placed on others.

Because we got given it, we had it done to us, so now they've got to be given it. They'll be able to give it to someone next year. It's like power over people. You wouldn't have power over them in any other situation, so you just shame them. – Rhys (Male)

At the other end of the social hierarchy, Connor, a first year, explained that the vision of him supplying the pressure to others was enough to appease his anxieties around currently bearing the brunt of the intimidation.

I'm not going to be an idiot, I'm not going to be one of the guys that literally shouts in your face and stuff like that but I think that's the way it is... like "oh we'll be able to do this to freshers next year when we're older". Yeah, technically it's a continued effect. – Connor (Male)

The male and female interviewees differed in their perceptions of the drinking ethos and culture of coerced consumption. The men perceived the drinking culture as a process they had to battle through, rather than something with value or purpose. In contrast, the women described the culture as character building, affectionate and bonding (elaborated further below). These varying perspectives are where the processes functioning to reproduce the alcohol ethos in male and female rugby diverged. Palmer (2015) argued there has been a considerable focus in the literature on whether heavy drinking among women has increased or whether rates of heavy drinking have converged (Bloomfield, et al., 2001; Holmila & Raitasalo, 2005). Palmer called for a shift in focus to the social meanings and cultural practices that surround consumption by women, as understood by women, and for a move away from viewing sport-related drinking as "wholly masculine preserves". The following sub-section explains how the cultural capital attached to drinking practices, expressed through the hierarchy, underpinned the drinking ethos in female rugby.

#### **6.4.4 Cultural capital**

The dominated male athletes disliked the culture of coercion but became a perpetrator themselves, nonetheless. This was caused by a feeling that they had earned the right to hold a position of power given the suffering they went through to get the opportunity. The females, on the other hand, felt the hierarchy and coercion was positive and empowering, and consequently felt it was a privilege to put pressure on novices when they attained positions of power. As such, the female athletes provided a more supportive environment than the male athletes. Harriet, for example, described how she

progressively increased the amount of pressure she put on younger players as she developed through the hierarchy. This gradual escalation was similar to the men, although Harriet explained “we’d look after them as well”. In contrast, Harry explained above that he would “dread to think what would happen” to a male athlete found providing support to others.

**Interviewer:** When you went into year two, were you starting to give it then?

**Participant:** Slightly more. I’ve never been massive. I’ve never been harsh. I’d sort of say “do this” but if they don’t want to that’s fine. I’d sort of give them a little bit of stick. – Harriet (Female)

**Interviewer:** What about year three then?

**Participant:** A little bit more harsh yeah, as expected. Our year group was pretty good in that we’d give them a little bit of stick, but we’d look after them as well. Worse stuff happened to us definitely. – Harriet (Female)

There has been a lack of research exploring the context and meanings associated with female athlete alcohol use, particularly in the UK. The interviews conducted for this Chapter, however, support the call for a move away from the popular discourses on female alcohol use epitomised by the “work hard, play hard “ladette” culture (Measham, 2003; Palmer, 2015, p. 492), and a focus on responsibility, restraint, pleasure, and enjoyment (ibid). The female athletes in this Chapter talked positively about the hierarchy and power structures. Darcey, for instance, explained that being singled out helped her feel valued within the team. She strongly argued that this culture helped to enhance team cohesion.

In my first year when I was a fresher, it was always like a matriarchal structure throughout the team, and I liked that because being fined or being told “fresher do this, or fresher do that” it made me feel quite valued throughout the team. In a weird way, but it made me feel with the other freshers like “Oh yeah, we have to do the rubbish stuff, we have to eat this”, but it made us bond because we both had to do it together, and we knew that the seniors liked us because they always had us do it all the time. – Darcey (Female)

This findings supports previous research examining initiation ceremonies in women’s university sport in the UK. Lafferty and Wakefield (2018), for example, found women

held positive perceptions of these events. Women felt these events helped them “get to know people”, feel “more involved with the older ones”, which helped “with team bonding and match performance” (Ibid, p. 130-131). As Palmer (2015) argues, these narratives contradict the popular discursive construction of female drinking as problematic and negative. Measham (2003, p. 22) explains women’s drinking is typically characterised “in one of two ways: women’s lives are worse than men’s and therefore they take drugs and use alcohol to make their lives better or, for younger women in particular recreational/celebratory that is bound up in a discourse of risk taking”. In contrast to the unwillingness and anxieties reported by the male athletes above, the female athletes appeared open and willing to engage in the culture of intimidation. Harriet explained the group perceived these practices as facilitating bonding.

Yeah, I’d say definitely. When my year group got here, we were all quite on board with it and we would take the banter and take the drinking games and saw it as a way of bonding. – Harriet (Female)

Recent research by Zhou and colleagues (2014;2016<sup>a</sup>;2016<sup>b</sup>) helps to explain these findings, and vice versa. Zhou and Heim (2016<sup>b</sup>) found drinking practices were strategic activities used to create a collective positive experience for the whole group. Alcohol use was perceived to show commitment to the club, to enhance cohesion and consequently enhance performance. As such, drinking was positively related with individual happiness and wellbeing (Zhou et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2016<sup>a</sup>). The data from female athletes reported throughout this Chapter supports these findings. In female sport, the perceived value of drinking practices, for creating bonds, showing affection, and increasing cohesion would underpin feelings of happiness and wellbeing, as identified by Zhou and colleagues. For this to occur, however, each new intake of students must share the same appreciation of the drinking practices, hierarchy, and power structures, as the existing members. Bourdieu’s theory explains the reproduction of practices when the norms, views, and behaviours of individuals and groups (the habitus) are well suited to the existing cultural expectations. For example, at the beginning of this Chapter, data showed athletes joined the university sport environment with pre-developed positive expectations of a culture of heavy drinking – The habitus was well suited to the drinking ethos. There are critical moments, however, when this is not the case – where individuals and groups enter a culture and disagree with the

existing rules and expectations. This situation is defined by Bourdieu (2000) as ‘hysteresis’. In this (female athlete) culture, a situation arose where newcomers entered the environment without existing predilections towards excessive drinking. Their habitus was misaligned with the norms and rituals of the culture, or as Bourdieu (2000) explains, the hysteresis effect had surfaced. Participants explained that new athletes joined the culture who did not value behaviours (such as eating raw fish or taking orders) as character building, but rather opposed their place in rugby.

Whereas in my previous year we found that funny, but in that year, they didn’t like being told what to do and being a bit demoralised. Or being told to drink your drink, or in initiation being told to eat that fish or stuff like that. Being made to feel vulnerable was how you showed your strength to the other players and that’s how your seniors respected you. – Ellie (Female)

In contrast to the male rugby players, reported above, who shared the same views but chose not to openly express them, these female players spoke out.

I think the year group after us didn’t see it quite like that [a bonding exercising] and a few of them weren’t interested and they were opposed, quite openly opposed. – Harriet (Female)

Harriet and Ellie explained that newcomers did not value drinking practices, intimidation and forfeits in the same way that the existing team members did. Bourdieu explains that during periods of disruption, such as this, the relative value of capital changes (Hardy 2008). Throughout this Chapter, athletes have described alcohol use and associated practices as having significant value within this environment. The newcomers did not view these practices in the same way and perceived them as negative and demoralising. In this situation, there was a need to address the conflict between the norms and expectations of the seniors and the opposing values of the newcomers. In the male rugby culture, presented above, opposition views were suppressed by greater enforcement and a culture of fear. In the female environment, on the other hand, certain aspects of the drinking culture changed to accommodate those with opposing views. The experiences of these female rugby players provided rich insight into the processes which could be crucial for changing the drinking ethos at this, and other universities. The females felt they had created a more restrained and supportive drinking culture over time. To understand why and how this perceived cultural change occurred, the

remainder of this section sets out the problem which led to a need to change the culture, the cause of this problem, and the solution.

#### **6.4.4.1 The problem**

The need for cultural change stemmed from a significant drop in player numbers between first and second year. In this instance, the drinking practices and intimidation pushed athletes who did not share the same values and appreciate the existing alcohol ethos out of the culture. As Sophie explained, this decrease in player retention spurred a collective decision between the coaches and players to address what they perceived to be the cause the problem – the existing drinking ethos.

**Participant:** I think we went through a stage where us as second years, there was a big drop in numbers from first year, so I think there were about 10 second years and we'd rather keep them than push them away, so we're like "if you don't want to do it then you don't have to". – Sophie (Female)

**Interviewer:** Who made that decision then?

**Participant:** It was more in pre-season, we all decided. (And were coaches involved?) Yeah ish, we had a new coach, so he didn't really know the ins and outs of what we get up to, but we've got a social committee and they sat down and said, "we need to make sure". – Sophie (Female)

In this situation, having a large group of players was judged as having greater value than the alcohol ethos. This, however, will not always be the case. For comparison, the male rugby club interviewed as part of this Chapter had six teams competing with considerable competition for places. The male club may not notice a small drop in numbers following these events, or more so the 'cost' of changing the culture may be greater than the 'cost' of losing a handful of athletes. Research conducted elsewhere has also found intimidation and coercion, and specifically initiation ceremonies, resulted in students not playing sport or socialising with the team afterwards (Lafferty & Wakefield, 2018). Johnson (2011) explained those who had a positive initiation were welcomed into the team and felt a sense of belonging. Whereas those who had a negative experience ceased their involvement. These studies, combined with this Chapter, can help explain the positive outlook held by athletes when discussing this drinking culture. The athletes included in these studies are likely to be those who had a successful initiation, and feel they have value and build team cohesion, because they

had a successful experience. Those who had a negative experience fall beyond the reach of these studies given they have withdrawn from the culture. There is therefore a need for future research which targets these withdrawers to understand the negative consequences caused by these cultural practices.

#### **6.4.4.2 The cause of the problem**

Harriet expanded on the reasons which may have led to this decrease in player numbers. According to her, several incidents occurred during organised drinking events (i.e., socials and initiations) where intimidation and forfeits were interpreted as bullying. Harriet recalled a specific incident where a first-year athlete was refused access to the toilet by her seniors and was told to urinate in a glass and drink it. She complied:

The whole rugby team got called in to basically say there has been allegations of bullying and things in socials. There was a couple of incidents. There was a night where everyone was sort of aggravated and everyone was scratching each other up the wrong way. Basically, we do this thing where if somebody wants to go to the toilet, they have to stand on a chair and do a sort of salute. It sounds ridiculous but you have to say “seniors of Bayfields I proudly salute you please may I go to the toilet” and most of the time they’ll say “no sit down” and if they say you can go you’ll have to jump, squat, roly poly, star jump to the toilet. And this girl wanted to go to the toilet, and they kept going “no, fresher sit down” and it’s usually a bit of a laugh but she was like “nah nah I really need to go”. And they said “no, go in your pint glass”, which she did, and somebody dared her to drink it, which she did”. – Harriet (Female)

Throughout this Chapter athletes have reported an extreme nature to their behaviours, with themselves confessing they would not be able to display this power and dominance “in any other situation”. This Chapter has also highlighted how novices were repeatedly dehumanised. This description from Harriet showed how the hierarchy and culture of coercion and intimidation could cross a line of what could be considered as ethically and morally acceptable. Further blurring the ethical and moral boundaries, Harriet did not perceive these acts to be evidence of bullying. This is perhaps unsurprising given that she and other senior athletes viewed them as character building and facilitating cohesion. There was a clear disparity between those in positions of power, with an alcohol habitus developed through years of experience within the culture, and those without such dispositions who were new to the environment. Harriet displayed a clear

resistance to change, unsurprisingly given that her, and other more experienced players, valued the role of these practices in rugby. However, such practices were not appreciated by more novice players who sought out change. To enforce this cultural change, the student union banned initiations and these types of coercive behaviours. The penalty for disobeying these orders was a removal from university competitions.

**Participant:** So that was one thing, which I wouldn't class as bullying. But yeah, it's all about context I suppose. If one of the players wasn't comfortable there and we didn't appreciate that then I guess it is bullying to a degree. – Harriet (Female)

**Interviewer:** Did they change, the years after?

**Participant:** Yeah, there's been a closer eye on them. I think they got called in well before and they said "if we hear anything, you're banned." So, they were going to get banned from BUCS. – Harriet (Female)

#### **6.4.4.3 The solution**

The conflict caused by these events may have been negative, and led to antagonism between players with different positions in the hierarchy, however, they had a positive impact on the conduct of players. According to Ellie, the players began to be more cautious with their approach to drinking events and initiations and placed more emphasis on player welfare.

So of course, when we sent out our PowerPoints of what we should wear, what the freshers should wear, someone told the SU and they basically told us if we did anything, if anybody came back with any complaints or if anybody ended up in hospital, then we would be taken out of our BUCS league. We just had to be more careful, we could see that they were getting quite drunk so we would say "come sit out here a sec", we'd give them water to drink. We just had to be a bit more mindful and be like "if you don't want to do anything, you don't have to, you do what you want to do, we're not forcing you". – Ellie (Female)

Despite a shift to a more supportive drinking culture, there remained some resistance to change and a yearning to "keep the tradition going". Bourdieu (1977) describes the habitus as a living memory pad which guides how people think, feel, and behave and which changes gradually over-time. Therefore, when there is a sudden shift to the environment (i.e., when athletes are punished for their drinking practices and need to

lighten their behaviours) the established habitus struggles to keep up. This causes individuals to become out of sync with their situation. In this situation, experienced athletes who have developed a habitus in-synch with the Bayfields alcohol ethos struggled to adjust to the new norms and expectations. As Ellie, a senior athlete, explained, it was still essential that initiation events went ahead despite being banned:

At the same time, we were trying to still keep the tradition of it going. The whole point of it, it's not glamorous, initiation, and we still tried making it fun and tried focussing on getting drunk more than having to do really disgusting stuff. And I think we got the balance quite well. It wasn't horrible, horrible stuff that they had to do. – Ellie (Female)

Others were more openly critical of the new culture. The more experienced female athletes saw the culture of coercion and intimidation as valuable for building character and cohesion (as explained above). It is therefore unsurprising that these individuals felt the cultural change had a negative impact on camaraderie and consequently team performance. Darcey, for example, felt the new culture had become “cliquey” where multiple closed groups had formed with club.

This year is nothing on what my first year was. In my fresher year team, I knew I could count on every single player in that team, and we knew we'd be having a social next week, and we'd be chatting about our costumes and saying “oh so and so did this last week so we're going to fine them for that” or “I've heard she's done that this so we'll bring that up”. Now I think sometimes it's got more cliquey. So, say somebodies done something really really bad at the weekend, in my fresher year, people would love that and celebrate it at socials, whereas now it's kind of “oh my god, I can't believe you did that”. I think that also resonates in our performance because in my first year we won everything, we won every game by 50+ points. – Darcey (Female)

Darcey's depiction of the new culture demonstrated how the value of alcohol use and related practices had changed. Throughout this Chapter, athletes have described that doing “something really really bad at the weekend”, like drinking a pint through a dead fish, was praised, and provided actors with respect and status among peers. In this new culture, however, these behaviours were greeted with shock and distaste by team-mates. The cultural capital - the value of thoughts and actions, had changed. Darcey, a senior athlete, struggled with this new culture, as the practices she had developed through

several years of experience were now valueless. If genuine, sustained change to the drinking culture in sport is to be realised, such perceptions (that bullying and intimidation increase team bonding, cohesion, and performance) need to be challenged, and an alternative strategy to increasing cohesion, which is not reliant upon alcohol and intimidation, needs to be implemented.

The nature of university, however, makes embedding cultural change difficult. Interviewees explained that in the year that followed, a group of new athletes joined the culture who were heavy drinkers. These novices had acquired a strong alcohol habitus prior to their arrival and anticipated a culture of heavy drinking. However, given the culture had undergone change and certain events (i.e., initiation ceremonies) had been relaxed, they were disappointed.

The year that come in then, the freshers that came in then, loved the drinking aspect. Loved being told what to do. So, in a more nurtured way we brought it back but in a way that they felt they were more supported. So, if they did think that was a bit too much then they could say, and we could think “oh we’ll let you off this time”. Although there are a lot less socials, they are still going out drinking, whether that’s after our games or going to watch a game, Bayfields City or something, and then going out. – Darcey (Female)

On the other hand, other players reported appreciating the new approach to alcohol, initiations, and socials. Some felt they had developed a more supportive environment with a more measured approach to alcohol, although the social hierarchy and power dynamics remained.

Yeah, I probably would [remove drinking from the culture]. I just think it’s always been there. Like it’s definitely a lot better now and I like the way it is now. In that, it’s only there in socials for that kind of period. Oh freshers can’t fine freshers and second years can only fine freshers and third years can do what the hell they want. I think now, because we’ve had it done to us and now as the 4th years and the 3rd years, they’ve had it done to them. – Rhian (Female)

These narratives from Rhian and Darcey reveal the conflict which is central to Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction. The university women’s rugby club could be defined as one ‘field’ with its own norms, rituals, and expectations. Bourdieu’s philosophy is underpinned by the argument that all fields are areas of conflict and

struggle with individuals jostling for better positions. Bourdieu (1993, p. 30) argues fields are made up of “competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize different kinds of capitals”. During this period of transition, the value of practices (i.e., drinking alcohol and behaving notoriously) changed. In the past, drinking heavily and behaving notoriously provided individuals with capital and allowed them to gain a better position within the hierarchy. The new athletes, as described by Darcey, would have fared well in this old environment given their heavy drinking habits. Rhian, on the other hand, values different qualities (such as rugby ability and performances), and therefore desires a culture which values these capitals instead. Bourdieu (1977) explains that changing field conditions provide the opportunities for field actors to occupy new field positions. However, given the gradually changing nature of habitus, those with the richest capital (i.e., social connections, drinking practices, notoriety, or rugby ability) will be best able to take advantage, and get a better position (Bourdieu, 1996). In an environment with a heavy drinking ethos, new athletes who join the team will be better placed if they have the appropriate cultural capital (such as heavy drinking habits). Conversely, in a culture less promotive of excessive drinking, those with different types of capital, such as sporting ability, or an extensive social network, may be more at home.

These data revealed the difficulties which arose when attempting to change the culture, with many complex factors contributing to the ethos, but also demonstrated that change is possible. For sustained change to be achieved, however, it is plausible that certain characters, who feel their earned retribution had been taken away, need to be grown out of the environment. In this instance, new players who have experienced a more supportive and measured drinking culture may come to occupy the dominant positions within the social hierarchy. Over-time, the reciprocal process which had established a heavy drinking culture, epitomised by bullying and intimidation, may operate to reproduce a more moderate drinking environment.

## **6.5 Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has identified several processes which created and maintained a drinking ethos in university rugby at Bayfields. Utilising a Bourdieusian theoretical framework, three themes were constructed which best represented the interview findings. These were 1) initiation of alcohol use, 2) Social hierarchy and coerced consumption, and 3) Social reproduction of drinking practices. This Chapter has provided new insight into

the role club rugby plays in developing a heavy drinking habitus, prior to athletes reaching university. These interviews shed greater light on the group level dynamics within rugby. Upon arrival, athletes were exposed to a social hierarchy, which was produced by the exchanging of cultural and symbolic capital, and a desire to maintain social capital. The social hierarchy was reproduced as athletes progressed through university, and acquired positions of dominance within this social hierarchy. This study had provided novel evidence that suggests the act of moving from an inferior to superior position fuelled a desire to ensure the culture of coercion continued. The value of practices varied among different groups and changed over time. This provides opportunities for changing the drinking culture, but also raises complexities for maintaining a more moderate and supportive drinking environment. The following Chapter seeks to explain the wider environment pressures which influenced the drinking ethos and the degree of fit between the environment and habitus. Further, it aims to understand, in greater depth, the group dynamics which created and sustained the drinking ethos.

## **Chapter 7: A season-long case study of alcohol use by male university rugby players**

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### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the second qualitative study of this research (a season-long case study). In the previous qualitative study (Chapter 6) interview data showed athletes had developed heavy drinking practices prior to their arrival at university, and the youth and club rugby culture played a pivotal role in shaping these practices. When athletes arrived at university, their drinking practices were further reinforced through rewards (by providing respect, status, and notoriety), enforcement (via senior athletes controlling novices) and punishment (through drinking forfeits and embarrassing challenges) for failing to comply. This Chapter provides more thorough and nuanced insight into the specific reinforcement mechanisms of the culture than has previously been acknowledged in the literature. This Chapter presents and interprets data from a range of sources (including observations, formal and informal interviews, and documentation) thematically. Four key themes are presented, including 1) Routine and ritualised consumption, where drinking was embedded within the everyday practices of playing and watching sport, 2) Enforcement and compliance, which explains how roles and responsibilities, punishments, and events, were used to ensure athletes complied with the drinking ethos, 3) Showing off and gaining status, where athletes used alcohol to make a name for themselves and build a reputation (symbolic and social capital), and 4) Institutional contributors to alcohol use, which describes how elements of the institution (i.e. alcohol price, promotion, and sponsorship) normalised and legitimised the alcohol ethos.

### **7.2 Routine and ritualised consumption**

Alcohol use was embedded within the weekly routine of athletes lives throughout the season. There were two ways in which drinking was ritualised into the culture. Firstly, consumption was structured around the first team playing schedule. Secondly, drinking was strategically organised around training and playing schedules to ensure it did not impact upon performance. Each of these is covered in greater detail below.

#### **7.2.1 Alcohol use and the first team**

Over the course of the season, I spent time observing and conversing with rugby players who were competing at various levels. These observations revealed that drinking practices were routinised around the first team playing schedule, regardless of whether

individual members competed at that level. First-year athletes rarely drank alcohol following their own matches but drank excessively when the first-team were playing. These first-team matches took place predominantly on a Wednesday evening, and generated an exciting atmosphere across the whole campus. In Winter, I observed the Bayfields campus over the course of a three week period. I spent several hours each evening documenting (via a notepad) the mood around campus and the behaviour of athletes, members of the coaching team, and the wider student population who watched the matched. During the match, I interacted with the athletes and documented key elements of their actions and conversations immediately following its conclusion. This helped me to fit in with the athletes and our discussions appear more natural.

Over this period, the male rugby first-team played home, followed by an away game, and returning for another home game in the final week. During both home games, the campus was crowded with students drinking heavily. Before the game, students were huddled in groups, drinking off-license and on-license alcohol, singing, and playing drinking games. As the kick-off time approached, these students slowly made their way down to the pitch-side to support their home team. There were hundreds of students gathered in support, however, a significant portion of the crowd were members of the rugby club. Around 50-100 rugby players congregated in the left hand corner of the pitch, with the Bayfields supporter stands to their right. Throughout the match, these players led the support of their first-team athletes with cheers, songs, and drinking challenges. Alcohol was a central part of the experience. For instance, each player carried a crate of off-licence purchased alcohol, or as many pints as they could carry from the student union bar. Each-time the first team played at home, there were several 'rules' which the rugby players were following. These were: 1) occupy a specific social space (in the left-hand corner of the pitch), 2) dress appropriately (by wearing ones smart Bayfields shirt, chino trousers, and shoes), 3) drink alcohol excessively, and 4) make a lot of noise. When the first-team athletes played away, however, the campus atmosphere was the polar opposite of the home game ambience. The campus was quiet and empty, only a handful of students were congregating in the student union bar, and there was a lack of visible alcohol use.

Midway through the season, I talked to athletes informally (following matches, for example) and during formal interviews, to understand in more detail *how* and *why* alcohol use was routinised around the first-team's playing schedule. I found that post-

match in the student union bar was a valuable period for interacting with the athletes informally as they were relaxed, high-spirited and in an environment where they felt comfortable. Lewis, a first-year athlete, underlined this link between the first-team playing schedule and his own consumption, highlighting he would only drink heavily on Wednesday if it were “an evening game and the firsts” were playing. If these conditions were met, Lewis felt it was a given that he would be drinking. The observations presented above revealed 4 rules or rituals that rugby players were following. Lewis added a further, more specific rule, which stemmed from his status as a ‘fresher’, where he was required to drink two pints per half.

If it was an evening game and the firsts play, you’d go out and get a pint or two and you walk over with two pints and then because we were freshers they’d be like “you’ve got to finish your pints before the first half and then go and get another”. But that was on the Wednesday, so you’d have the social after and you’d drink – Lewis (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

Athletes discussed these drinking practices with a feeling of certainty. These rules (i.e., drinking two pints of beer before half-time and heading to the bar for two more) were inevitable because the first team were playing and because of one’s status within the group (i.e., being a fresher). Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus can help explain how these behaviours had become second nature to these athletes. The habitus instils a world view of what is important, or has social significance, in specific contexts (Ibid, p.86). For example, Lewis was aware that abiding by the cultural norms of his rugby club (by wearing the right clothing, turning up to support the first team, and drinking two pints per half) showed he was committed and able to fit in with the group. The preceding Chapter (6) indicated athletes were taught to appreciate and abide by these rules early in their university rugby lives. As they repeatedly engaged in these practices, the behaviours become second nature, to the extent that watching the first-team was associated with a drinking session. They had developed “permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking” (Bourdieu, 2005, p.43) which were “common to all members of the same group” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.86).

On one hand, players were drinking to abide by these cultural rules, although on the other hand, they attempted to go beyond the rules to stand out from the group. When huddled in the left hand corner of the pitch, certain athletes attempted to out-do their team-mates by singing louder, leading chants, setting off air-horns, taking off clothing

and engaging in alcohol-related tasks or challenges. For example, one athlete removed his shoe, poured a pint into it, and consumed the contents before shouting to his team-mates “I drank a pint out of my shoe for no reason”. Other athletes attempted more prolonged drinking challenges by taping a 4 pint bottle of cider to both their hands and finishing it before there were allowed to use a toilet. Liam, a novice, contextualised these observations and explained that drinking requirements or challenges were dependent upon one’s position within the team. He explained that younger athletes were “told” to buy 2 pints before the game, and 2 pints for the second half (the enforcement of these orders are discussed later in this Chapter). More experienced athletes, however, engaged in more elaborate practices (by taping bottles to their hands, for example).

It’s the Wednesday nights when there is a home game that you drink the most because you’re told to get two pints and you’re told to get another two. You bring bottles and cans and the older guys, they strap a four pinter of Strongbow to someone’s hands and they have to finish it before the end of the game. But I think that’s more they give to the older guys. But home games are definitely more... like on the left-hand side of the pitch, that’s where we all go and that’s where we can be rowdy and drink and stuff like that. – Liam (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete)

The novices, such as Liam, appeared to be drinking because they felt they had to, or because they were being told to by experienced team-mates. The older athletes, on the other hand, required much less encouragement and actively engaged in these more extreme behaviours of their own accord. In Chapter 6, it was identified that notorious drinking practices provided a badge of honour to those who performed them. In Bourdieu’s (1993, p. 7) words, this “prestige, celebrity or honour” is defined as symbolic capital. The current Chapter builds on the findings of Chapter 6 and shows the awareness that these practices provided symbolic capital was developed as athletes progressed through university. Younger athletes, such as Liam, predominantly consumed alcohol within a sport environment to abide by the rules and rituals of the team. Through constant repetition, following the same rituals on a weekly basis (i.e., turning up to support the first team, drinking 4 pints during the match, and getting “rowdy”), novices learned that these practices had value to the group. As they got older, this understanding (that behaving notoriously and drinking heavily was valued) became an over-riding impulse which guided their behaviours. In short, athletes needed much less encouragement to drink because they had learned that drinking was praised and rewarded.

Bourdieu's theoretical framework helps to explain how these behaviours and rituals become instilled within one's habits and inclinations. According to Bourdieu's (1977) theory, the routines that Liam described above (i.e., congregating at the left-hand side of the pitch, or getting "rowdy") are evidence of doxa. Doxa is the so-called 'common sense' of what is doable and thinkable (or unthinkable) within society (Weigmann, 2017, p. 97). Over-time, these doxa become ingrained within what Bourdieu (1977) defines as the habitus. The habitus is developed through the social conditioning with which one perceives, judges, and acts in the world (Weigmann, 2017, p. 96). Liam, for example, was conditioned to get two pints before the match, and two more at half time. He was conditioned to meet his fellow athletes at the left hand side of the pitch and to behave boisterously. This repetitive conditioning shaped the habitus, which in-turn shaped how these athletes acted in these situations in future. The habitus remains extremely stable, with a fixed tendency to act in a specific way towards specific responses (Grenfell, 2004). These athletes developed a memory-pad which guided their thoughts, feelings, and actions, and therefore the need for enforcement mechanisms became diminished over time, as they progresses through the culture.

When the male rugby first-team played away, there was a lack of visible alcohol use around campus. I spent several evenings on-campus when the first-team travelled away and, on each occasion, only a handful of students were drinking alcohol in the student's union bar and around campus. This atmosphere changed each week the male rugby first team returned for home games, regardless of the time of year or importance of the match. This particular team appeared to create an environment which altered the drinking habits of the wider student population. A breadth of research has examined the links between spectatorship, sport, and alcohol use (Jones, 2016). These studies help explain, to a degree, how and why these home fixtures facilitated alcohol use throughout this campus. Jones (2016, p.27) argues that "watching 'the game' is an occasion which licenses harmful drinking by fans". Whereas Collins and Vamplew (2002: 69) add that "no matter what the sport or its level of popularity, the consumption of alcohol is almost an intrinsic part of the spectator experience". Watching sport and consuming alcohol have become an integral part of the game-day experience through decades of tradition, rituals, and marketing from the alcohol industry (Jones, 2016; Collins & Vamplew, 2002).

The data presented in this Chapter, however, provides new evidence that suggests the relationship between alcohol use and watching sport may depend on the type of sport and status of the team, to a certain extent. The effect of male rugby first team, on influencing the behaviours of a large number of students, was unique to this team. I spent time watching other university sports, and hockey, football, or gymnastics, for example, failed to generate this level of anticipation and excitement, nor did they attract the level of support and associated alcohol use. Thus, the tradition of consuming alcohol whilst watching sport depended on the status, or what Bourdieu called symbolic capital of the performing team. An ethnography conducted by Sparkes and colleagues (2007; 2009) help to further explain these findings. They found different groups on a single campus were positioned according to their ability to meet the combined sporting and social requirements of this culture (i.e., play at a high level, attend socials, and consume alcohol). Those who competed at a high level, attended drinking events regularly, or drank heavily, had higher status on campus than those who competed at a lower level, or did not drink heavily or frequently. The ‘performing jock’ occupied the central and most highly visible position, which all other bodies were positioned around. The male rugby first team at Bayfields also appeared to occupy the most prominent social position on campus. They had a dedicated social space in the student union bar and attracted significant support when they played. Other social groups on campus altered their behaviours around them. For instance, they occupied different, un-reserved social spaces in the student union bar and consumed alcohol when the male rugby first-team played home on Wednesday evening.

During away fixtures, the lure of the male rugby first-team was absent on campus. This impacted the behaviour of the students who would typically gather in support – they did not gather in the Student Union bar or congregate around campus drinking alcohol. This thesis is unable to establish whether these wider student groups drank less during male rugby first team away fixtures, or if instead they gathered and consumed elsewhere (i.e., off campus or in student accommodation). Discussions with members of the rugby club who did not compete at first-team level, however, revealed this latter group decreased their consumption when the first-team played away. According to these athletes, first-team away fixtures gave the wider rugby club, who would typically gather in support of their first team athletes, a night off from heavy drinking. In fact, for rugby players not competing at first-team level, drinking did not typically follow their own matches. I spent time with 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> teams, as well as those competing in 1<sup>st</sup> year (freshers)

competitions. These matches took place on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and on Friday evenings. During these fixtures, around 20 to 50 spectators would gather in support, but there was no obvious alcohol consumption. Similarly, neither players nor supporters consumed alcohol afterwards, or at least did not drink on campus or in the student union bar, and typically headed home without congregating. In comparison, these athletes drank heavily during and following first team home matches. Thus, the drinking practices of players and supporters differed significantly between first team matches and games at other levels. The drinking practices which were praised and rewarded, detailed throughout this and the preceding Chapter, did not attract the same praiseworthy response when the first team were not playing. For example, being able to tolerate large volumes of alcohol provided athletes with praise from fellow team-mates when performed on Wednesday evening. However, had little or no cultural value or significance following a match on a Saturday afternoon. The first team shaped the social space around them, they dictated how one was meant to behave and what behaviours were worthy of praise. Over-time, this ordering of space (cf. Löw, 2006) strengthened the habitus of athletes – they became conditioned to exercise certain praise-worthy practices when in these specific situations. The day and time of consumption (Wednesday before the first-team match begins), the physical spaces (left corner of the pitch and designated area in the student union bar), the type of alcohol (beer) and the drinking practices (such as 2 pints per half) were embedded as routine and tradition.

As the case study progressed throughout the season, it became clear through my observations that the alcohol use of players was highly regimented. From November onward I sought to confirm whether what I was seeing was accurate and if so, how this was (post)rationalised or explained by the athletes themselves. Throughout the season, I asked athletes to explain how their drinking was structured, and particularly the impact of the first-team. One first-year athlete explained he would abstain from drinking when the first-team played away and that his consumption largely stemmed from pressure from more experienced players.

**Researcher:** If the firsts are away, would you drink on a Wednesday?

**1<sup>st</sup> year Athlete:** No, I wouldn't.

**Researcher:** It's just to support the first team then?

**1<sup>st</sup> year Athlete:** Yeah, and it's because all the second and third years are around you pressuring you on to drink. If they do have an away game and none of my friends are going, I'd just stay here and try to get on with some work.

**Researcher:** Your drinking doesn't really surround your own rugby then?

**1<sup>st</sup> year Athlete:** Nope

**Research:** Why do you think that is?

**1<sup>st</sup> year Athlete:** I don't know, because alcohol is supposed to be consumed on a moderate level, drinking it every other day for an entire year is just going to ruin me and I've witnessed the effects of alcohol personally throughout my family.

Alcohol use by athletes has commonly been associated with celebration and unwinding following matches. Jones (2016, p.43) argues "sport cultivates and/or galvanizes the idea that celebration must involve the use, and preferably the excessive use, of alcohol. Winning at sport means that you deserve to get drunk". For these athletes, however, who were not competing at first-team level, alcohol use did not surround their own matches. Further, for novices at least, drinking was driven more by pressure from mature teammates rather than for pleasure or positive expectations. These athletes had developed deeply ingrained drinking habits, and these habits were closely aligned with the heavy drinking ethos of this culture. Additionally, each athlete accepted their role within the hierarchy. The first-year athlete above, for instance, turned up on Wednesday evening and drank excessively because "second and third years are around you". As noted in Chapter 6, these novice athletes, by allowing their mature teammates to pressure and control them, strengthened the hierarchy and drinking ethos. This nuanced insight into the experiences of individuals with different positions within a social group highlight the advantages of taking a holistic approach to understanding a phenomena (such as athlete alcohol use), which utilises data from several sources and viewpoints.

Given the nature of university, athletes belonged to several social groups (i.e., academic, housing, and part-time employment) and these differing identities provided several additional pressures to consume. Athlete alcohol use was structured consistently around Wednesday first team matches and other strategic events (discussed in greater detail below). However, participants were also vulnerable to the social and structural pressures which are characteristic of students and young adults more generally. For

instance, Liam, a third-year student, reflected on his time living in halls of residence and explained that he was under pressure to drink from several groups. Liam and other athletes would attend team drinking events on Wednesdays when his residential peers would predominantly not drink. These friends from halls of residence, however, had different patterns of consumption, and given that Liam was also immersed within halls of residence, he felt under pressure to consume with this different peer group.

In first year if there was a rugby social, I'd go out with them. Usually it would just be me, Lewis and a few other friends who played rugby at our halls would go out on a Wednesday, and then everybody else would just stay in on a Wednesday. Then on a weekend we would go off with our own mates. The Alexandra mates. In first year, I had my course mates, my Alexandra mates and then my rugby mates. – Liam (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete)

Benjamin, a first-year student, reiterated this point but elaborated how he was vulnerable to un-planned and impulsive nights out, when his non-athlete peers would invite him. This also stemmed from him belonging to multiple social groups with differing traditions and rituals dictating when and how to drink. The below discussion with Benjamin showed how the rules and rituals differed between the non-athlete and athlete fields. For athletes, alcohol use was planned and structured, whereas for non-athletes, drinking events were spontaneous.

**Benjamin (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete):** There are times when it comes out of nowhere, like last Thursday I come back from rugby training and the flat above, as I was putting my key card in, shouted down and they wanted me to go out. So, I thought I'd show my face and ended up going out

**Researcher:** and Wednesday?

**Benjamin (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete):** Yeah, I knew that was going to happen because it was the big charity shop social. – Benjamin

Leeroy, an experienced player, summarised that his sport-related drinking was fixed into his calendar of commitments at the beginning of the week, although he also anticipated “off the cuff” drinking with his non-athlete peers. These latter events were not routine and regimented.

**Researcher:** Do you know at the beginning of the week when you would be drinking?

**Leeroy (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete):** I knew that I would be drinking at least once a week at the start of the week. But then probably would have alcohol more than once a week. In fact, definitely. That was when most of the off the cuff drinking happened.

The quantitative data presented in Chapter 5 support these findings. Athletes and non-athletes had similar levels of alcohol use on each day of the week. There was, however, one noticeable outlier, where there was a spike in alcohol use for athletes on Wednesday. On its own, this is unsurprising given that university sport occurs predominantly on a Wednesday. However, when combined with data for the rest of the week, and in comparison with data provided by non-athletes, these data showed that athletes had a dedicated day of consumption unique to this student sub-culture, but also consumed alcohol at similar levels to other students at other days of week. This supports the argument that athletes may be particularly vulnerable to greater alcohol use given their exposure to multiple fields, with differing rules, rituals and traditions guiding drinking expectations and practices.

### **7.2.2 Training, playing, and drinking alcohol**

Over the course of the season, it became clear that athletes valued the drinking ethos and endeavoured to maintain it by embedding drinking traditions around first team matches. There was, however, a balancing act between maintaining the drinking ethos and maintaining rugby performance. Accordingly, alcohol use was structured around the team's training and playing schedule to ensure one did not negatively impact the other. When athletes drank, how much they consumed and in what way, differed over the course of the week. Aiden, for example, explained he had a good idea when and how much he would be drinking in the following week, before it began. Aiden felt confident he would drink one or two pints on Tuesday and Thursday following his training sessions, whilst potentially drinking moderately on Friday, and consuming more after he played on Saturday.

I know when. I know I'll be having one or two after rugby every Tuesday and Thursday. I'll have two after training, it's more for us to not all shoot off. And some on Friday maybe and Saturday after the match. I know those I will be. –  
Aiden (Post-graduate athlete)

Aiden elaborated that a key function of alcohol use following training was ‘for us to not all shoot off’ but to spend time in the student union bar. There appeared to be a need to ensure that alcohol was closely linked with all rugby sessions, whether training or matches. Aiden described a level of structure to his drinking, although, he also felt vulnerable to more general influences on his drinking, where he would ‘go out’ on a Friday to relieve stress or unwind if he had a demanding week. This adds to the evidence presented above, suggesting athletes faced multiple pressures to consume because they belong to a multitude of intersecting social groups (i.e., sport, education, part-time employment, housing, and wider friendship groups).

I spoke at length with Leeroy, a former social secretary at the club. His role used to be to arrange the social events for the team (discussed in more detail below). He provided further valuable insight into the ways in which drinking alcohol was a structured and organised activity. Drinking alcohol was an important part of the routine to sustain interest, enjoyment, and bonding. Visiting the bar after training and matches was an important obligation, but one players embraced. They enjoyed going to the bar to interact, engage in banter and be with their team-mates. Leeroy also explained that a balance was struck between performance and enjoyment. The team’s alcohol use was structured around their training and playing schedule, but was also strategic in an effort not to jeopardise performance. Leeroy explained how the team would abstain from drinking on a Monday if they had a game on a Wednesday. Although if not, a training session alone was enough to justify a heavy drinking session. Wednesday was reserved for heavy drinking, regardless of whether or not they played that evening, and the routine of this night out appeared pre-determined.

We train on a Monday, and we will always have a few soft drinks on a Monday night. Sometimes it will be soft drinks if we have got a game on Wednesday. If not, we will have a heavy [drinking] session on a Monday, but that’s just because we have finished training. Wednesday is a big sessions social after the game at half past seven. We start and then there are seven or eight places on a route before we go to Charlies (a city centre nightclub) – Leeroy (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete)

As individuals progressed through the culture these everyday rituals (such as drinking 2 pints following training sessions, or having a heavy drinking session on Wednesdays) became more ingrained within the habitus, and alcohol use became a taken for granted

part of rugby. The language used by athletes showed individuals at all levels of the social hierarchy had deep rooted ways of being, seeing, acting, and thinking about alcohol (Bourdieu, 2005: 43). On several occasions throughout the season, I asked players the open question “Why do you think they’re linked, alcohol and sport?”. I did this on several occasions and in a variety of settings (including formal interviews, pre-match, post-match and on the bus to away games). My aim was to encourage athletes to provide more impromptu answers to allow me to access their instinctive thought processes. Athletes of different ages, with different positions within the hierarchy, simply disregarded the relationship between playing sport and drinking alcohol as the ‘done thing’. In other words, to these athletes, alcohol and sport were inextricably linked. The rhetoric used by athletes implied the drinking ethos had no sport related function but rather functioned to serve and maintain itself. For example, Lewis, a first-year athlete, felt it was “tradition” to have a pint with his team-mates following the match. One of Lewis’s first-year team-mates added “I just think being with your mates and all the boys, it’s just what you do”. To these athletes, alcohol use functioned to build and maintain friendships. This association was strengthened by the view that they were masculine and outgoing.

You’re a group of friends. You play a game, and it is tradition to have a pint, that’s one way of hanging out together. Especially team sports, you’ve got a lot more extroverted characters, a lot more characters. – Lewis (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

The drinking ethos had fostered the idea that being an athlete, being masculine, and being extroverted meant one should drink often to build social relationships with those who share similar characteristics. They appeared to lack (the knowledge of) other group activities or interests which could be used to facilitate team cohesion and group bonding, and therefore heading to the bar was the instinctive choice following matches and training sessions. To build a more moderate drinking environment, a wider array of activities and events, which rely less on alcohol use, need to be structured into the teams playing and training schedule. For the more experienced players, however, drinking was less of a practice which served to build friendships and more of an embedded ritual. Elijah, Aiden, and Leeroy, for example, felt drinking was not an option, but the “done thing”. To these experienced athletes, drinking was a mandatory part of the rugby experience, which seemed to serve little purpose. These discussions help further explain the observations reported above, where older athletes actively engaged in more extreme

drinking practices (i.e., by taping a 4-pint bottle of cider to both of their hands) without encouragement from team-mates. Taken together, these data suggest as athletes spent more time immersed within the culture, they internalised the drinking rituals and traditions. As a result, drinking practices which began as helping to bring the team together and foster a more cohesive group evolved into a necessity which needed to be exercised, and they forgot the original purpose of their behaviours.

**Elijah (2<sup>nd</sup> year athlete):** Drinking isn't an option, it's more of a requirement for rugby, yeah, that's the way it would be summed up.

**Aiden (Postgraduate athlete):** It's what you do. It's the done thing. It is sort of expected. You've got the culture of initiation sessions as well. It's all very much based around alcohol.

**Leeroy (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete):** I think that's the mentality, you think of rugby, and you think drink.

In Bourdieu's (1977) words, over-time athletes become caught up in the rules and rituals (doxa) of their culture and forgot the processes which initially led to their drinking habits. For example, to Leeroy, who had spent over two years within the culture, "you think rugby and you think drink", but for Lewis, who was still in his first year, drinking was a way of "hanging out" with his team-mates. This strengthening of language between athletes occupying differing social positions (i.e., novices vs seniors) revealed how the alcohol habitus strengthened over-time, and where drinking became a stand-alone practice. Throughout the season, athletes dismissed their excessive drinking habits as the "natural order of things" (Bourdieu 1979, p. 198).

**Luke (post-graduate athlete):** Now I think it's part of the experience, part of the lifestyle. It's a way to socialise and it's what everyone does really.

**Elijah (2<sup>nd</sup> year athlete):** I think that because drinking has been such a big culture in rugby for so long now everyone seems to think that everyone has to get out of control drunk.

**Noah (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete):** Obviously with quite a lot of sports, and rugby in particular, you get initiations and drinking. So, I'd probably say rugby did link with me drinking alcohol. When you went out for a game, everyone would be drinking afterwards, and you'd be the odd one out if you weren't drinking.

These insights highlight the problematic nature of sport-related alcohol use. The structured and repetitive nature of drinking is likely to develop a problematic alcohol habitus, as observed throughout this and the preceding chapter. As athletes progressed into their second-year, third-year and beyond, drinking following training and matches became “part of the lifestyle” and getting “out of control drunk” was deemed to be essential. As Noah describes, “you’d be the odd one out if you weren’t drinking” and this might force individuals with less of an affinity to excessive drinking out of the culture, as outlined in Chapter 6. This process would further embed a culture of like-minded individuals who were abiding by the same rules and rituals, which further strengthen the alcohol ethos in a vicious cycle. The concern here is that these athletes must leave university after 3 or so years, and will take these habits with them. As Bourdieu (1990) argues, the habitus acts as a memory pad, that guides and shapes one’s future behaviours. These groups may leave university with a drinking habit, which is structured into weekly routine. As research suggests (cf. Barber & colleagues, 2001), it may be difficult to avoid excessive drinking in later life. For non-athletes, however, the un-planned and more relaxed approach to drinking is less likely to lead to ingrained dispositions. These latter students may therefore be better able to withdraw from these practices as they transition into life post-academia.

### **7.3 Enforcement and Compliance**

There were three enforcement mechanisms which maintained the drinking ethos in university rugby at Bayfields. Firstly, specific roles and responsibilities were given to certain team members. Their job was to ensure drinking events occurred throughout the season and athletes complied with the drinking culture. Secondly, punishments in the form of verbal exchanges, drinking forfeits, and related challenges, were used to discipline athletes who did not follow the rules. Thirdly, specific events (i.e., initiation ceremonies) were used to ensure athletes drank heavily, and novices were taught the rules and rituals of the team. These are discussed in greater detail below.

#### **7.3.1 Roles and responsibilities**

This Chapter has thus far provided unique insight into the rules and rituals (i.e., support the first-team, dress appropriately, behave rowdily and drink frequently and excessively) which athletes had to abide by. To ensure the players followed these guidelines, the team elected ‘social secretaries’ who were responsible for planning the team’s calendar of drinking events and rituals throughout the season. These individuals

had the authority to decide when, where, what, and how the team drank. One player explained “they are in charge, and you had to pretty much do whatever they say”. Elijah reflected on the differences between his ‘normal’ (non-rugby related) nights out, where he would go to a single on licence premise and drink one type of alcohol for the entire night. In contrast, on Wednesday (rugby-related), where his night, the several pubs he attended, and the drinks he consumed were decided for him by the club’s social secretaries.

We have two social secretaries who plan what we do and what drinks we have. (On a ‘normal’ night out) I would probably just go out to one place and stay in that same place and stick to the same drink. Whereas on Wednesday it tends to be from place to place. Everyone has their own route to get there, and everyone has their own drinks that they have. – Elijah (2<sup>nd</sup> year athlete)

At the beginning of each week, athletes received a group message via social media which dictated their calendar of drinking events for that week. They were told when they were drinking (i.e., Wednesday at the first team rugby match), when they needed to arrive (i.e., one hour before kick-off), what they had to wear (i.e., fancy dress or formal club wear), and any punishments for not abiding by these rules. For example, at the beginning of one week in late November, athletes were sent a message informing them that the ‘Charity Shop Social’ would take place on the following Wednesday. Athletes were required to spend a maximum of £10 purchasing a whole outfit from a charity shop, which they would wear that evening. When athletes arrived at 7pm on Wednesday evening, the social secretaries collected their receipts and issued punishments (in the form of alcohol related challenges) to any members who had arrived late, had spent over £10, or were not wearing an (entire) outfit purchased from a charity shop. Benjamin, a first year athlete, felt one of the key responsibilities of the social secretaries was to intimidate him and other novices.

Because people get voted in to be the social committee and they in turn, not pick on you, but make fun with you for all the other boys. – Benjamin (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

These observations and conversations with athletes reveal more insight into the practices identified in the previous Chapter. Chapter 6 provided evidence of a social hierarchy within the university rugby environment. This social hierarchy led to the dehumanisation of those at the bottom of the social pyramid and an unpleasant culture

of intimidation was pervasive. The current Chapter provides evidence that this social hierarchy and culture of intimidation was embedded within the rugby club through specific structures. For instance, through social secretaries with the power to impose poor treatment towards novices. Lewis, also in his first year, added that the dominant group ruled by size, and used their greater numbers to instil fear in the novices and ensure the rules and rituals were followed.

I probably prefer drinking in my flat because it's people I know. I just think when you go on a Wednesday or what not or initiation, you've got older boys who potentially could boss you around because its mass on number as well, there's a lot of them – Lewis (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

These discussions with athletes provide further evidence of what Bourdieu (1992) defines as symbolic violence – a form social dominance acted upon individuals or groups with their complicity. For example, the rugby club created a social structure which allowed experienced team members to set rules and issue punishments for those who did not abide. The wider club members then used these rules to display their own dominance of those lower down the social hierarchy, such as Lewis. Thus, the social structures were weighted in favour of the dominant group (the experienced athletes). Those higher up the social hierarchy chose who should set the rules, who in turn enforced the rules through punishments. The dominant group then used non-compliance with the rules they helped create to display their dominance. This process reinforced and sustained the social hierarchy and drinking ethos.

### **7.3.2 Punishments**

To ensure the team abided by the rules, the social secretaries were endowed with several enforcement methods. These extended beyond specific failures to comply (such as athletes not wearing an outfit purchased from a charity shop, as described above) to everyday non-compliance with the drinking culture. For instance, Benjamin explained the meeting point, clapping, and singing were obligatory, and if these behaviours were not practiced players would be singled out and “told off”.

Yeah, because we're told to meet in the student's union, have a pint and then go watch the game and clap the boys on from the side and here, if you're not singing, you're going to be caught out and told off. – Benjamin (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

The rules, and punishment for not following them, consistently fell most heavily on the novice athletes. As a researcher this was often difficult to witness and later encourage athletes to relive and explain their experiences. As Jones, Brown, and Harris (2020) explain, it is normal and morally right for researchers to feel conflicted in these situations and feel a need to intervene. However, these are aspects of the drinking culture which are under-studied, and researchers need to access these practices if we are to explain and change them. At social events athletes would meet at the student union bar and would congregate in the lower left hand corner - a large and partially enclosed space which was reserved for them. They would collect several jugs of lager, cider and beer from the bar and place them on tables which were spread around the edges of the room. First year athletes were made to sit on the floor in the centre of this room and their second and third year team-mates would surround them. Once all athletes were sitting or standing according to their position within the hierarchy, the social secretary would begin to hand out punishments to those who had broken the rules. Typically, these punishments involved “downing” a pint, and if athletes failed to “down a pint” as required, they had to repeat the punishment.

We sit down in the middle of all these second and third years and then they started with rugby core, where they punish people if they’ve done something bad. I saw one of my mates who I live with, Ben, he had to down a pint. There’s rules like no eating. In rugby there’s certain rules and if you don’t do them then they’ll give you another pint and you have to down it, and if that was me, I couldn’t down two pints off the cuff really. – Lewis (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

For others, however, the punishments were more severe than being ‘told off’ or having to ‘down a pint’. The severity of punishments, like the alcohol challenges described above, was greater for more experienced athletes. A conversation with one player, for example, explained that rather than having to “down a pint”, a third-year was penalised with a “dirty pint” which contained a mixture of cider, lager, sauce, soup and fish guts. The rule and punishment system, however, was always biased in favour of the those in dominant social positions. This third year athlete had the right to refuse his punishment, and redirect it to a first-year athlete if he wished.

**Researcher:** Can you remember any of the punishments?

**3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete:** Um, a third year got punished because he kept on telling freshers to buy him drinks and they had. So, any freshers that had bought him

drinks, he had to buy them drinks for the rest of the evening. And he was forced to down a dirty pint which contained tomato ketchup, milk, cider, carling, some fish guts and then a can of soup which was popped on top for good measure. And then the third year who couldn't finish a dirty pint would point at a fresher and they had to finish the dirty pint. Then there was a couple of people who would just start drinking it and they would open their mouth and just be so sick into the bin below them. It's unreal.

These anecdotes and observations provide further support for the argument that a social hierarchy existed within university rugby at Bayfields, and this social hierarchy was both a product of, and maintained the drinking ethos. This rule and punishment system appeared to exist to serve the drinking ethos. The rituals and traditions were so deeply entrenched within the habitus that athletes, particularly experienced athletes, felt a need to punish athletes who did not participate as expected. These punishments fell disproportionately on those who occupied the lowest level of the social hierarchy (so called "freshers"). By complying with the sub-ordination and dehumanisation (for example, by sitting on the floor, accepting the title of "fresher" or by completing the unwanted drinking forfeits of senior athletes), novices reinforced the hierarchy which dominated them.

### **7.3.3 Initiation ceremonies and 'socials'**

The traditions and rituals of the culture were continually reinforced through the rule and punishment system, enforced by the social secretaries, as described above. There were, however, significant events which occurred throughout the season which acted as stand-alone occasions to enforce the drinking ethos. These were drinking socials, end of season drinking events, and most notably the initiation ceremony. These strategic events were used by seniors to display dominance and instil the drinking ethos. Benjamin explained that pressure to consume was a weekly occurrence, following training sessions and matches. Organised drinking sessions (or 'socials'), were coordinated within the rugby schedule to ensure commitment to the drinking culture. The coercion and hazing rituals (i.e., verbal and physical abuse) were commonplace in these events.

You always feel under pressure to go out for a drink. After rugby or after you've played a game. It's more intimidating drinking with the rugby team than with anybody else and that's just a fact. I have never been as scared as I was at the first rugby social here. I have quite bad anxiety as well and I was sat on the

floor, surrounded by second and third years with just freshers around me. Shit being thrown at us, people spitting in our drinks, and we were just like ‘great, this is lovely, this is exactly what I signed up for’ – Benjamin (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

Initiation ceremonies, in comparison to routine drinking events, were a one-off attempt to “keep them [novices] in their place” (Jeckell et al., 2018, p. 561). During this study, initiation ceremonies were banned by the Bayfield’s student union, although the event nonetheless went ahead. I spent time with the rugby team observing the events leading up to the initiation ceremony, and spent time discussing this event with the athletes themselves. The ritual was held following a first-team home game in the middle of the season. One athlete explained the event was strategically placed mid-way through the season to minimise the potentially fall-out. Specifically, there was a fear among organisers, that holding the ceremony earlier in the season may have resulted in some athletes dropping out of the team, as was observed in female rugby (in Chapter 6).

**1<sup>st</sup> year athlete:** We’re the only sport not to have our initiation yet.

**Researcher:** Why is it delayed so much?

**1<sup>st</sup> year Athlete:** They said they’d do it after Christmas because of people who’ll drop out and things like that. Like if they did the initiation people might not come back and stuff like that.

It was evidently clear to mature athletes who organised the initiation ceremony that the event caused negative consequences which could force some novices out of the culture. However, rather than changing the event itself or stopping it altogether, the seniors attempted to mitigate the negative outcomes by holding it later in the season. Thus, there was a strong eagerness among seniors to ensure that this long-standing tradition was maintained, despite it being banned, and even though they were aware the event caused some athletes to withdraw from the group. In Chapter 6, evidence was presented that suggested a change in the way female athletes maintained and enforced their drinking ethos stemmed from having a smaller group of athletes taking part in rugby. In this situation, a small number of athletes dropping out of the culture was perceived to be of significant detriment to the team. It was speculated that this risk may be significantly less in squads which have substantially more players, such as existed in male rugby at this institution. The data presented in the current Chapter supports this assumption. The male rugby club went ahead with initiation ceremonies, and a wider culture of

intimidation as shown throughout this and the preceding Chapter, despite an awareness that these could cause athletes to withdraw from the team.

There was a high degree of secrecy surrounding the event given that they were banned. In the weeks prior to the ceremony, one athlete mentioned “It’s down in Bryn or Croesy, it’s in a venue because we’re not allowed to do it in the SU because it’s banned”. On the day of the initiation, the social secretary informed athletes where the event would take place, at what time, and what would be required. The rituals preceding the event followed the typical gameday experience. Players arrived at their designated social space (at the left hand corner of the pitch), dressed in their club clothing, with either bar bought pints or off-license alcohol ahead of kick-off. Throughout the game, they drank, sang, and chanted in support of their first-team athletes. Following the game, however, the typical routine changed and rather than congregating in their reserved space in the student union, the team left immediately following the match and went to a secret venue, off-campus. The players were attempting to circumvent university policies and mitigate against any consequences by holding the event off-campus. I was struck by the lengths athletes were willing to go to keep the ritual (initiation ceremonies) going and I was concerned about the lack of supervision or oversight at these events. This and the preceding Chapter have drawn attention to the competitive nature of behaviours by athletes. By restricting these events and pushing them off-campus policy makers may be inadvertently making them more problematic and riskier to those who continue to take part.

In the weeks that followed, initiation ceremonies were a key focus of conversations with players. These discussions revealed the extreme nature of these events but also the positive expectations among some players. Liam, for example, described he was well prepared for a challenging initiation ceremony because of “stories passed down through generations”. This is further evidence of the value which is attached to engaging in these practices, and crucially telling others about what one went through. These events were used to portray oneself in a positive light to peers, and therefore some athletes felt a desire to be initiated. This adds further evidence to the finding presented in Chapter 6, that some female athletes felt their initiation ceremony was “weak” once it had been watered down to foster a more moderate and supportive drinking culture.

I’ve always known initiation was going to be bad because of stories, but I was always looking forward to initiation because everyone just sees it as a massive

drinking sesh were everyone just gets messy. A couple of us got there late and you could just see everyone's face turn and "ooooo", and you see this massive fish guts and we had to drink a beer through a fish. Everything was alcohol related, if you were holding a pint and someone said down it, you had to down it, and there was a lot of vomit involved. Disgusting stuff. – Liam (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete)

Athletes, such as Liam (above) and Mason (below) drew attention to the extreme challenges which novice athletes had to go through. Alcohol use was central to the challenges, with athletes having to "down" pints of alcohol in different ways. However, these challenges often aimed to degrade newcomers through humiliating and sometimes sexualised acts, as Mason described:

My initiation, that was quite brutal. It was roman theme. We were late as well which didn't help. Basically, I had to drink a whole bottle of wine through a fresh salmon's head and then I got slapped with fish guts, so I stank for the rest of the night. Yeah, to be fair I got away lightly, some people got really picked on and I didn't get picked on too much. We got put in a line and every line had to do a challenge. Mine was we had to stay in a press-up position, we had to drink a pint through a straw with a cookie in our ass and whoever was last to finish the pint had to eat the cookies. I finished mine pretty quickly so. – Mason (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete)

Several studies have drawn attention to the ethical and legal complexities with these secretive events. For instance, Kirby & Wintrup (2002, p.50) argue "if we scratch the surface of athletes' experiences, we find that hazing is a relatively regular occurrence and that an assortment of physical, social, and sexual abuses form a major part of those experiences". Others argue that hazing is largely about sexuality, aimed at feminizing and homosexualizing less experienced players to reassert their own status of power and authority (Jeckell et al., 2018). Mason's experience revealed the blurred boundaries at these events, where athletes, because of a culture of intimidation, are willing to take-part. The spectrum of hazing rituals, from alcohol use, to violence, to sexual abuse, have been shown to have serious consequences (Waldron & Kowalski, 2009). These include a range of psychological and physical impacts (including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, loss of confidence and self-esteem, aggression towards self and/or others, dramatic weight change and substance use) and in some cases, death (Allan &

Madden, 2012; Nuwer, 2018; Srabstein, 2008). There is a need to challenge and remove this culture of power and intimidation (as explained in Chapter 6) to mitigate against the escalating practices which take place during these events.

The extreme nature of these events also point to a need for researchers to gain access to them. Despite being banned, this initiation ceremony still went ahead. Further, the secrecy surrounding the event made it more difficult to gain access to the ceremony and thus explain what went on and why. Lafferty and Wakefield (2018, p.132) argue “critically, research into initiation activities is both sensitive and difficult. We need to overcome the dome of silence in which these activities take place and build a level of trust with sport-team members and athletes so that stories can emerge in a supported environment”. Banning these events completely may not be the best policy for reducing the extremity of behaviours and potential harm to those who take part, as shown in this Chapter. This Chapter supports the argument that only by engaging with team members will we be able to develop successful interventions that are both culturally and context specific (Ibid.)

#### **7.4 Showing off and gaining status**

Drinking practices were used by athletes to show off and in-turn gain status and respect from team-mates. This thesis has provided considerable evidence that athletes valued and praised drinking practices (i.e., being able to drink a 4-pinter of cider during a rugby match). The awareness that excessive drinking was valued within this culture led to athletes using drinking practices to make an impression and build a reputation for themselves. This process, however, led to a graduate escalation of behaviours over-time, and in some cases led to serious and potentially harmful consequences. This section will firstly outline how and why athletes used alcohol to make a positive impression among their social group. It will then present evidence that shows the negative outcomes which can stem from a culture where individuals attempt to out compete each-other using a toxic and psychoactive drug.

##### **7.4.1 Making an impression**

Athletes used alcohol to portray themselves positively to peers. In Chapter 6, evidence was presented which suggested a social hierarchy existed within university rugby, which was partly sustained by athletes trying to create their own notorious stories and to be seen as a ‘legend’. Observations of, and conversations with, players, throughout this season-long case study provided further support that this desire to build a reputation

(through one's ability to drink in a particular way, or to tolerate alcohol well) maintained the drinking ethos. Aiden, for example, felt excessive drinking was integral to the social side of rugby. Award ceremonies, parties, and celebrating individual achievements (i.e., winning man of the match) all involved drinking alcohol and "everyone trying to out-do each other and impress each other".

It is common-place, normal to go to have a few there [student union/club house] post-match as well. You've also got things like award ceremonies and Christmas, Halloween parties... end of season parties. Usually you have to have a dirty pint if you've scored a hat-trick or a try, or you are man of the match. It's tied to being at university, it's everyone trying to out-do each other and impress each other. A rite of passage, you're in university now, you're expected to drink.  
– Aiden (post-graduate athlete)

Players attempting to out-do one another, by drinking more exuberantly, was a ritual embedded within the culture. Regardless of the occasion, athletes tried to show off more than their peers. For example, by taping a flagon of cider to their hands, or drinking out of their shoes. Bourdieu (1986) defined these behaviours as cultural capital. Across society, cultural markers (i.e., playing video games, enjoying classical music, or visiting French restaurants) enable groups to distinguish themselves from others (Savage et al., 2013). In rugby culture, wearing the club shirt and chinos, singing loudly, chanting, and binge drinking were cultural indicators that athletes belonged to the rugby club. Given these practices were a valued form of cultural capital within this culture, they provided status and respect to those who engaged in them. This status and respect is defined as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and this latter form of capital is what athletes were competing for.

These data can help explain further a substantial body of evidence on student athlete alcohol use. Research has shown student athletes believe their teammates consume more alcohol than they do and are driven to address this misperception by consuming more alcohol themselves (Thombs, 2000; Turrise et al., 2007; Hummer et al., 2009). Social norms interventions, which are based on this premise, have been the most frequently applied approach to reduce alcohol use among student athletes, however, the results have been mixed (Thombs & Hamilton, 2002; Perkins & Craig, 2006; LaBrie et al., 2009, 2010; Dumas and Haustveit, 2008; Dumas et al., 2010; Martens et al., 2010; Foxcroft et al., 2015). This Chapter provides an explanation for why athletes are driven

to address what they believe to be a gap between how much they are drinking, and how much their teammates are drinking. There is a positive reward, in the form of status and respect from their peers for not only matching their team-mates drinking, but drinking more. This finding also explains why interventions based on this theory have produced mixed results. These interventions assume that by informing athletes that their teammates are not consuming more alcohol than themselves, they will no longer be motivated to increase their consumption to keep up. This Chapter suggests, however, that athletes may still be motivated to out-compete their team-mates, given the benefits to be gained in status.

These arguments support Zhou and Heim (2014), who claimed there may be an underlying weakness of social norms theory when applied to athletes, where it is assumed that group norms are negatively imposed, and athletes are drinking to conform. Many of the Bayfields rugby players were drinking to build relationships and reputations, rather than to conform. As Zhou and Heim (2016) argued, drinking practices among athletes were strategic activities which served to provide a positive sports experience (by enhancing cohesion and facilitating performance, for instance). Athletes in this study were individually motivated to drink to gain a reputation. Leeroy, for example, was drinking because he “had to impress” his team-mates. Whereas Benjamin felt drinking was how you showed respect to those above you in the social hierarchy.

I’d say, I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t want to, but there was a point where you sort of had to do it. If I was pushed to a point then I would’ve said no, but I also felt like I had to impress everyone. – Leeroy (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete)

I just think it all comes down to the respect. I think if a third year tells you drink all your drink, you have to. – Benjamin (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

Alcohol tolerance was a show of strength within this field. Drinking on demand was how one showed respect to senior team-mates and this respect was rewarded with a better social position within the group. Clayton & Harris (2008, p.326) have shown previously that “the ability to hold one’s drink was a characteristic of maleness” within university football. Athletes were expected to get drunk and to continue drinking, without showing any adverse effects (Clayton & Harris, 2008; Jones, 2016). This Chapter supports these findings, and adds that athletes not only avoid social exclusion by showing they can ‘hold their drink’, but are also held in higher regard by team-

mates. This process, however, of athletes constantly attempting to out-do their team-mates, led to an escalation of behaviours over-time.

#### **7.4.2 Escalation of behaviours**

Throughout this and the preceding Chapter, observations and discussions with athletes have revealed the extreme nature of their behaviours (i.e., drinking their own urine and consuming a pint containing fish guts). Younger athletes were trying to make a name for themselves by tolerating more alcohol, however, seniors tried to keep them in their place. Mason, for example, tried to be ‘cocky’ and understate how drunk he was, although this was reciprocated with more extreme drinking challenges and ultimately ended in failure.

I was a second year as well and they all knew me, so they all tried to make it even worse for me. I was a bit cocky as well, so I was like “oh I’m not even drunk”, so I got given more drinks. So that didn’t end very well for me. – Mason (3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete)

This culture of competition led to an escalation of behaviours over-time and given that alcohol is a toxic psychoactive drug, athletes engaged in behaviours that put their lives at risk. Lewis, for instance, felt he was competing not only with his team-mates, but also with the stories of athletes who had been at the club before him. This resulted in an ethos where nothing was off-limits. Athletes would swim in lakes intoxicated just to “fit in”.

But there is no barrier or no “we’ve gone over the line now”. As soon as I came here and saw the first social and the stories, we are more pressured to do stuff to fit in. It’s definitely a big drinking culture, like being forced to swim in lakes and get out and down a pint – Lewis (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

Mid-way through the season there was a critical moment which drew attention to the alarming status-seeking practices of university rugby players. A national newspaper reported a story of a rugby player “filmed hurling himself through bus stop glass” (Owen & Hayward, 2017). This incident was described as “disgraceful and shocking” by local police but appeared to be glorified in a social media post by one of the team members, who dismissed it as “rugby socials summed up”. The student union stated that “such behaviour will not be tolerated” and banned the team from attending its events for four weeks (Jones, 2017). I conducted an interview with the student union director to

examine the perceived purpose of these events from the players perspective. Chris, the director, described the events surrounding the incident. He explained the students had watched a video of someone doing a similar act (charging through a glass bus-stop), earlier in the evening. The video gained cultural capital among the group, and they praised the behaviour. The individual elaborated that he was not getting picked for the team as frequently as he would like and that he ‘wanted to make a name for himself’. This athlete felt that breaking through a glass bus-stop was a behaviour worthy of getting picked more often to play for his rugby team.

It was the night of a Champions League fixture, three of our senior members had invited two of our freshers around their house to watch the football. They watched the Champions League, went their own ways and two freshers were walking to the kebab shop, referenced a conversation that the five of them had had earlier, where one of the senior members had said “I saw this really funny video of somebody charging through a bus-stop” and went “I’m going to do that”. Talking about him and why he acted that way, he was to say “I wasn’t getting much game-time, I’m a reasonable player but I wanted to make a name for myself in the club, and wanted to stand out as being somebody, and I thought doing something like that would earn myself some respect in the club.” – Chris, student union director

This one-off incident demonstrated the extremes which resulted from a desire for status among these athletes. However, the attitude and perceptions underpinning it was not isolated to this one event. In a separate event, later that season, an athlete posted on social media “Dunno if I’m the worst social sec in the world or the best with freshers ending up in hospital after last night”. These athletes felt charging through a bus-stop, swimming in lakes drunk, and landing their peers in hospital were noteworthy and promotable practices. The athlete who charged through the bus-stop, for example, perceived that the cultural capital attached to this behaviour would enable him to build his reputation. In turn, this cultural capital could be exchanged for symbolic capital and allow him to gain a better position within the team. This finding adds strength to the discoveries in Chapter 6, and previous published studies, which showed athletes lower in ability use alcohol and related behaviours to contribute to the team values (Roy & Camiré, 2017; Haslam & Platow, 2001; Sparkes et al., 2007). They also demonstrate the problematic nature of the drinking ethos, where individuals are willing to risk their lives

to achieve praise from their team-mates. There is a need to address the underlying values within sport. A culture needs to be developed which places less significance on alcohol and notoriety, and places greater value on performance and support. The final theme will outline how the environment may have contributed to a perception that excessive alcohol use was normal and legitimate at this university.

## **7.5 Institutional contributors to alcohol use**

The final argument presented in this thesis is that certain institutional elements normalised and legitimised the alcohol ethos and created an ‘intoxogenic drinking space’ – that is, environmental contributions that are likely to result in the maintenance of alcohol behaviour (Brown, 2016). Brown (2016) describes institutional factors as the rules and facilities developed by universities in relation to student alcohol use. These include the physical structure of organisational spaces and their impact on student conceptions of appropriate alcohol behaviour, as well as localised norms of alcohol use transmitted to new students entering these spaces. The current thesis identified three institutional elements which are likely to contribute to student conceptions of appropriate drinking behaviours. These were, 1) expectations and approval of player alcohol use, 2) alcohol pricing and availability, and 3) alcohol advertising and sponsorship. Each of these is covered in greater detail below.

### **7.5.1 Expectations and approval**

Alcohol use was, at the very least, expected and approved of by those who had significant roles in the club (these included coaches and social media administrators). Throughout the season, I travelled with the first team to three away games. These events revealed a difference in drinking cultures between the home club (Bayfields) and the away teams. At Bayfields, there was significant drinking ethos surrounding first team home fixtures. At away matches, however, there was a lack of spectator alcohol use (with exception to the Bayfields supporters, who transported their drinking ethos to away games). During one of these fixtures, a “party bus” transported supporters to the match. Around sixty supporters arrived at the away club intoxicated after a 2-hour journey consuming off-license alcohol. The practices of the travelling Bayfields supporters contrasted the home supporters. The former consumed alcohol throughout the match, drank out of their shoes, set off air horns and sang intimidating songs about the opposition club. In contrast, the latter were calm, and did not appear to drink alcohol throughout the match. This event revealed a significant disparity between the ethos at

two university rugby clubs. In the days that followed the away game, the head coach, Mike, praised the social secretary's efforts in getting a large number of students to the away game, explaining "Rich (the social secretary and "party bus" organiser), he was great, we had a bus full of 60 of us all having a laugh, bolluxed". Throughout the season, the coach reinforced the message that drinking was expected and to a certain extent, approved of. At times, this was more subtle, by greeting players after a match with "Hi boys, can I get you a round?" At other times, this was more direct. For example, Lewis, a first-year athlete, explained the coach put money behind the bar for first year athletes following a successful cup run.

The freshers got to the final and they did a big pub crawl after, and we had a load of free beer after the game. [The coach] put money behind the bar and that's what happens. Then there was a bar crawl which was 2nds, 3rds, and freshers – Lewis (1<sup>st</sup> year athlete)

I interviewed the head coach at the end of the season to understand what role he felt alcohol use played within the club. The head coach believed the drinking ethos was embedded within club and university rugby when he played around 20-25 years ago, and those social elements of rugby remained part of the culture today.

It was youth rugby; I was first exposed to the drink side of rugby. It was certainly embedded as part of the rugby culture. There was an expectation that you drink afterwards, drinking circles, drinking games. That translated to when you came to university, with initiations and at the time there was a fairly big drinking culture attached to rugby. There was a long transition from what traditional rugby was about and what a professional rugby player looks like. And now I think there are still remnants of that, that are still part of rugby culture now. - Mike, Head coach

Mike was a product of the same structures and processes which have been identified throughout this and the preceding Chapter. For example, when he played rugby there was an "expectation that you drink" and play drinking games. As head coach, Mike was trying to balance the embedded drinking traditions within rugby and university life, with student welfare and performance. For instance, he described that it was not his "job" to stop people drinking and that it wouldn't foster a "good environment" to do so. To him, it was better to support the drinking ethos, but do so "appropriately."

I'm not here to stop people drinking and it's not my job, it's not my role. I've got to be seen as being responsible and I've got to be trying to cultivate an environment which supports academic study and elite sport but where does your role stop and start. I think you've got to be careful in terms of the role you take. Does it serve a role, or do I recognise the social interaction as being important for the team? For me, I would rather not be somebody who is there and saying "no drinking" which I don't think lends itself to a good environment. I'd far rather support it, but appropriately. So, say "here's a £100. Have a pint with your mates. Enjoy what you've done. Talk about that, reflect. Then after that it's up to you". - Mike, Head coach

Mike felt alcohol had a role in rugby. For instance, he explained alcohol was one method which could be used to create a "team culture". In other words, it helped to facilitate team cohesion. This view may stem from the fact that Mike himself had been through the same processes (i.e., he had been taught early in his playing career that it was important to drink following matches and that initiations and drinking games were tradition). As has been observed throughout this and the preceding Chapter, this lived experience would have shaped his dispositions, like it had shaped those of more senior players involved in the current research. Mike, however, was also aware of the problematic culture which this thesis has drawn attention to, and was attempting to address these issues (such as the culture of fear and intimidation experienced by novices in particular).

I see alcohol, as one form, of a huge array of different things that you can use to generate a team culture. What I'm trying to do is get people to support each other, look after each other. So, one session I'm going to do is on how you look after the first-years. When you speak to the third years who have just left, a player whose gone on to play elite level said when he first arrived, he was shitting himself, he didn't know what to expect, had heard about these initiations and drinking and they're worried about it. I don't want people to come in worrying about that. - Mike, Head coach

These anecdotes draw attention to the difficulties when trying to change the drinking culture which is embedded within rugby. On one hand, coaches such as Mike are aware of and are trying to root out problematic elements of the ethos, through educational interventions such as workshops on "how you look after the first-years". On the other

hand, however, they approve of, and to some extent, encourage alcohol use. According to Vamplew (2005) there are many contradictory practices within sport, when it comes to alcohol use. For instance, “players know that drinking alcohol might adversely affect their performance, yet they find that their employers are tolerant of a drinking culture” (Vamplew, 2005: 406). McLaughlin (2005) argues there can be both an ‘intended’ ethos and an ‘experienced’ ethos. The intended ethos is aspirational, where leaders or institutions set values that they expect or encourage a group to aspire to. The experienced ethos, in contrast, describes the reality experienced by those groups. It defines the actual tone or sentiment experienced. In the context of this Chapter, for example, the head coach wanted players to drink responsibly and held sessions to educate his players on how to behave (the intended ethos), however, he also offered to purchase them alcohol after a match (the experienced ethos). Jones (2016, p.49) argues “it is possible, but difficult, to bring an experienced ethos in line with an intended ethos. This requires significant changes in habits, routine behaviour and attitudes and may take a long time.”

These gestures would have been powerful in legitimising the drinking ethos and strengthening the alcohol habitus. Research suggests coaches exert significant influence on the alcohol use of their athletes (Mastroleo et al., 2012), and some have argued the influence a coach has on an individual athlete's life may be greater than any other individual on campus (Martens et al., 2006). Prior research has drawn attention to the uneasy relationship between the coach and players when it comes to alcohol management. Roy and Camiré (2017), for instance, found coaches were aware of drink driving by athletes, but refrained from condoning it. The authors argued that because coaches themselves engaged in idiotic/hegemonic behaviours throughout the season, their credibility as moral authority figures was diminished, and they were in a difficult position to condone behaviours they participated in. A conversation with Thomas, a coach of the first-year squad, revealed what he perceived were the factors underpinning the drinking ethos. Thomas’s description of the drinking culture was complex and multifaceted. There was a general expectation that students “drink a lot” and there was a perception that excessive drinking was essential for having “a good time”. Although Thomas felt alcohol use should never jeopardise performance.

We want them to have a good time, they are students after all. We understand students will drink a lot. But we still want them to be able to perform. It’s a

different culture across the clubs, the firsts won't drink as much, but the lower clubs will. – Thomas, first-year coach

This view, that alcohol use should never jeopardise performance was shared by the head coach, Mike. He described that elite performers had a recovery training session on Thursday mornings, following the typical Wednesday drinking session which was commonplace amongst this team. Mike felt it was a “good habit” if players drank heavily the night before and still turned up for recovery the next morning, even if they were still a bit “half-cut” (i.e., still under the influence of alcohol).

We have pool recovery at 8am on a Thursday morning. So, the focus group boys (*the elite group*), either they are (drinking heavily on Wednesday evening), or they'll do it and rock up to pool recovery and be a bit half-cut, but they'll get there and get it done. Which again, for me is a good habit. You know, if you have a few drinks, you still have to front up the next day. That maybe reinforces my relationship with alcohol. You know, if you go out, you have work the next day, you can't use it as an excuse. - Mike, Head coach

These anecdotes draw further attention to the disparity between the intended and experienced ethos. The drinking culture itself was not perceived to be an issue unless it jeopardised performance. The intended ethos, as described by Mike above, is that athletes should drink moderately, but the experienced ethos is that athletes could turn up to recovery sessions under the influence of alcohol, as long as they “get there and get it done”. For many of these athletes, however, elite performance was out of their reach. These athletes needed not worry that their drinking habits influenced their performance. For example, Thomas elaborated that athletes lower in confidence, who felt they were not up to the standard of others, focussed more on the social side of the sport, and drinking was a substitute for high performance.

They see the standard of some of the boys and think they're not good enough, so they give up and concentrate on the drinking, but they were bloody good players. – Thomas, first-year coach

This finding provides further evidence that athletes were trading on different types of commitment they could offer the team. In Bourdieu's (1986) words, they were exchanging the capital they had access to. For example, the players who “think they're not good enough” attempt to gain social status through showing commitment to the

social side of rugby. They are trading cultural capital (i.e., the ability to tolerate alcohol well or regularly attend socials) for social and symbolic capital (i.e., a strong network of peers or a high position in the hierarchy). The elite performers, on the other hand, possessed a wealth of social and symbolic capital, because of their rugby ability, and did not need to prove themselves by drinking beer particularly fast, for example.

At a broader level than direct pressure, praise and approval from teammates and coaches, social media was an avenue for encouraging alcohol use. Throughout the season, posts were regularly made on official rugby club social media platforms normalising drinking and promoting it. These posts typically focussed on rewards and celebrations. For instance, “the forwards have earned their pints tonight” or “a wonderful game... that made them earn their pints”. These posts broadcasted to followers of the rugby club that drinking was an appropriate and necessary reward for a strong performance. On the other hand, posts such as “enjoy the night boys!” and “WHAT A WIN! We hope you celebrate big time!” insisted that achievements should be celebrated with nights out. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests social media alcohol messaging and marketing can have an impact on individual drinking patterns (Moreno, 2016; Jones et al. 2016; Hoffman et al., 2014; Alhabash et al., 2015; Carrotte et al., 2016). Recent qualitative research has shown that exposure to alcohol portrayals, particularly on social media, shaped young people’s drinking perceptions and attitudes (Kaewpramkusol et al., 2019). Kaewpramkusol and colleagues found social media posts normalised perceptions that alcohol use was expected in certain situations (such as at university initiation rituals), and that certain types of drinks (i.e., beer) were associated with certain events (i.e., sport) (ibid.). These findings provide support to the argument that social media may have reinforced the drinking ethos in athlete culture at this university.

### **7.5.2 Alcohol availability, price, and promotion**

On this university campus, alcohol was easily accessible, in close proximity to where people played sport, studied, and lived, it was cheap and heavily promoted. This section will consider each of these factors independently alongside the evidence which suggests they are likely to contribute to student athlete alcohol use. Firstly, this study identified alcohol was easily available and within close proximity to student accommodation, education facilities and sport facilities. For example, on-campus accommodation (an environment of high alcohol use) was situated less than 500 meters from the student

union bar, sport training facilities were located less than 100 meters from the bar, and playing facilities were sited under 200 meters from the bar. Previous studies have shown that alcohol outlet density at universities was related with heavy drinking, frequent drinking, and drinking-related problems (Weitzman et al., 2003; Kypri et al., 2008; Scribner et al., 2008; Young et al., 2013). For instance, in a recent study, Hobbs et al. (2020) found close proximity to alcohol outlets was associated with increased risk of hazardous drinking. Hobbs and colleagues found students who lived less than 292meters from alcohol outlets were at greater risk of hazardous drinking than those living between 292-525meters from outlets, who in turn were at greater risk of hazardous drinking than those living between 526–868meters, or greater than 868meters away.

These findings help explain further the alcohol prevalence data presented in Chapter 5, which showed student athletes consumed significantly more alcohol than non-athletes. Halls of residence which were predominantly occupied by nonathletes at this institution were located 1.2 miles from alcohol outlets (such as the student union bar). The recent study of Hobbs et al. (2020), combined with other findings showing that the closer one lived to a bar, the more likely they would be to report risky alcohol behaviour (cf. Schonlau et al., 2008; Connor et al., 2011; Halonen et al., 2013), suggest the close proximity of student athletes to alcohol outlets (i.e., the student union bar) may have contributed to excessive drinking. It is clear, however, that this would be one further contributor to the multitude of factors identified throughout this thesis (i.e., early onset of drinking and a drinking ethos interwoven with a social hierarchy and culture of coercion).

The second campus contributor to student athlete alcohol use was price. Alcohol was available at the student union bar at low cost. For example, a pint of premium lager could be purchased for £2.85, lower strength lager for £2.45, cider at £2.65, spirits between £1.20 and £1.75 per 25ml and alcopops for £2.50. Academics have argued that of all alcohol sold, cheap alcohol products play the biggest part in driving alcohol-related harm (Anderson et al., 2013). Several studies show that increasing price at a population level is a simple and effective way to reduce consumption, and thus alcohol-related harm (Anderson et al. 2013; Wagenaar et al., 2009; Gallet, 2007; Sousa, 2014; Meng et al., 2014; Burton et al., 2016). Others have suggested this impact may be especially pronounced among students, who may have less disposable income than

older populations (Chaloupka and Wechsler, 1996; Chaloupka et al., 2002; Kuo et al., 2003; Österberg, 1995). Research in university settings has found that increases in alcohol prices are accompanied by less alcohol consumption (O'Mara, 2009; Morrell, et al., 2020).

Further exacerbating the potential impact of low cost alcohol on student drinking, alcohol was frequently and heavily promoted throughout the campus. Throughout campus, noticeboards were covered with posters and flyers advertising “Happy Hour” promotions between 4pm and 7pm every evening. The link between exposure to alcohol advertising or promotional activity and subsequent alcohol consumption in young people is well established (Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). For instance, an independent review of the effects of alcohol pricing and promotion on young people in the UK found price promotions increased binge drinking (Booth et al., 2008). Further, the availability of large volumes of alcohol, low sale prices, and frequent promotions and advertisements at both on- and off-premise establishments have been found to be associated with higher binge drinking rates on college campuses (Kuo et al., 2003).

It is argued that the combination of these factors (proximity, price, and promotions) are likely to have contributed to student athlete alcohol use. Further, they may have normalised and legitimised the prevailing alcohol ethos on this campus. Qualitative research conducted by Brown (2016), in a similar geographically area to Bayfields University, identified alcohol management practices normalised heavy alcohol use among first year students. The authors argued that safe drinking messages contrasted with student needs to successfully adapt to their new role, where alcohol was promoted as central to social activities. From this perspective, alcohol management practices may encourage groups with a heavy drinking habitus (i.e., athletes) to continue their pre-university norms (as identified in Chapter 6), but also ostracise non- or low drinkers. This latter group may be under pressure to adapt their drinking behaviours to fit in to the culture.

### **7.5.3 Advertising and sponsorship**

The marketing of alcohol to student athletes was more direct and pronounced than the happy hour promotions and low cost alcohol targeted at the general student population. There were various forms of alcohol industry pressure throughout the campus that promoted and encouraged drinking. Social media was identified above as a subtle method normalising drinking following matches. There were instances where this

pressure was more direct. In one case, the student union used social media to promote “£1.50 bottle beers tomorrow... Come support”, linking low cost alcohol with a need support the team. In a separate form of digital marketing, the student union attempted to promote sport and increase participation by using alcohol as a key attraction.

The "Freshers' Welcoming" always proves to be a great night for all involved.

Drinking is never forced but, of course, forfeits go to the best/worst fancy dress

– Student Union, via Website

In this instance, the culture of coercion (i.e., forfeits) abundant throughout athlete discourse presented in this and the previous Chapter was used to encourage students to take part in sport. The data presented in the preceding Chapter showed athletes expected and accepted that forced consumption was an unavoidable part of the culture. Messages like these from the Student Union may have reinforced these beliefs. Intriguingly, the Student Union was using a practice which could be (and was by athletes in Chapter Six) negatively framed, to encourage participation. The Student Union may not have understood the negative impact of these practices on novice athletes, or were misled by their abundance, and perceived value, throughout the culture.

In a more direct form of alcohol industry pressure, a popular city centre nightclub, Dixies, sponsored each university sport club, providing they met certain conditions. Benjamin, a first-year athlete explained the rugby club would receive £1000 of funding if they held social events in the student union each month and attended the nightclub afterwards. To further persuade teams to attend the nightclub, significant club members (i.e., captains and managers) were provided free entry.

**3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete:** They would drink every single week and have socials in the SU every single week because in order to get your Dixies (nightclub) sponsorship you had to have so many socials.

**Researcher:** What's that?

**3<sup>rd</sup> year athlete:** They put a £1000 into each teams' pot if they have so many socials in the SU (student union), and then captains and team managers have a card where they get entry for free into Dixies.

**Researcher:** A thousand pound for what?

**Athlete:** You can spend it on anything. Tour. Kit. Anything. You have to just meet a certain requirement of socials each month, going to Dixies and having socials in the SU

This direct link between the alcohol industry and university sport clubs raises important ethical questions. Studies have shown alcohol advertising and sponsorship is associated with stronger intentions to drink, and higher levels of alcohol consumption in early adulthood (Anderson et al., 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009; Brown, 2016). For instance, research from New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom found athletes in receipt of alcohol industry sponsorship were more likely to be hazardous drinkers (O'Brien & Kypri, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2011; O'Brien et al., 2014). Given the growing evidence for the potentially harmful impact of sponsorship, policy makers should consider whether the harms outweigh the financial benefits of alcohol sponsorship (O'Brien et al., 2014). Indeed, the head rugby coach, Mike, himself drew attention to the contradictory nature of the messages sent to athletes, and the wider student body. Mike felt the intended message to students during the first two weeks of their university lives was that academic and sporting performance are important. Yet they were bombarded by marketing from the alcohol industry and became too intoxicated to attend lectures.

That's one of the concerns I've raised since I've been here over the last few years. We bring students in and then spend the first two weeks, when they're meant to be understanding university processes and the academic processes, and then we spend the first two weeks taking them to all the pubs you can, with the cheapest drinks that you can, and then they're so pissed they don't turn up for their lectures the next day. On the one hand we're saying how important academic study is, and their rugby, that's where I'm coming from, yet from a student union, student experience perspective, there's an expectation from these student coming in, that's one of the reasons they're coming to university - Mike, Head Coach

Mike felt that there was an expectation from the newly arriving students that the drinking culture is "one of the reasons they're coming to university". This thesis would argue, however, that the drinking ethos abundant at this university shaped that expectation. As Chapter 6 identified, many student athletes felt they had no choice to drink as they arrived at university. The alcohol marketing directed towards them would have normalised and legitimised this belief. These alcohol industry practices, such as

sponsorship of sports clubs raises an important ethical point – that the drinks industry has a vested interest in promoting the drinking ethos. Jones (2016, p.27) has argued elsewhere that “sport provides access to millions of thirsty customers who traditionally consume beer, particularly on ‘game day’”. At the end of this season-long case study, I interviewed the Director of Student Services, Chris, to gather his view on the relationship between sport and alcohol. Chris admitted that profits generated through alcohol sales were a significant contributor to the sports clubs, societies, and activities they provided, and thus they “absolutely wanted to maximise that”. He also held the view that it was safer for athletes to take part in drinking games and initiations, for example, in licensed premises, so that the behaviours of athletes could be controlled.

We are probably hypocrites in this area, in some respect. Our licenced trade is a significant contributor to the activities that we put on. Our licence trade generates a significant amount of our profit every year and it's that money that is spent on the sports clubs, societies, and different stuff we do. So, we do absolutely want to maximise that. We're not going to stop people consuming alcohol. We're not going to stop our core clientele from wanting to go out and have a good night. But can we bring these people into licensed premises so that drinking is controlled. What we are thinking of now is do we, not encourage people to come and play drinking games in our premises, but do we set an element of acceptability. If it's done in this way, knock yourselves out. – Chris, student union director

Thus, the athlete population were facing a multitude of pressures encouraging them to drink, and often. Prior to their arrival at university, they were told by those who had gone to university before them to be prepared for a heavy drinking culture. Upon arrival, they were greeted with a social hierarchy which was maintained by using alcohol as a form of control and punishment, and the environment itself encouraged alcohol use. These environmental factors (i.e., alcohol availability, low-cost, promotion, sponsorship, and advertising) contributed to an intoxicogenic space on this university campus. This would have normalised and legitimised the view that to play sport, one also had to drink heavily.

## **7.6 Chapter summary and conclusions**

This Chapter, by taking an innovative and holistic view of student athlete drinking, has revealed features of the student-athlete environment which normalised and legitimised

the drinking ethos identified throughout this thesis. These were represented through four themes, including: 1) Routine and ritualised consumption, 2) Enforcement and Compliance, 3) Showing off and gaining status, and 4) Institutional contributors to alcohol use. The first of these themes explained how alcohol use was embedded within the athlete's weekly routine when playing sport, training, and watching first-team athletes. Over time, drinking became a taken-for-granted ritual of university sport. The second theme showed how specific roles and responsibilities (i.e., social secretaries), punishments (i.e., drinking forfeits) and events (i.e., initiation ceremonies) were used to ensure athletes complied with the drinking ethos. The third theme presented new evidence that athletes used alcohol to gain status and reputation. This, however, led to a culture where no behaviours were off limits and led to potentially harmful consequences. The final theme set the environmental context to the practices observed throughout this Chapter. This case study provides original insight into the way the institution itself normalised and legitimised the drinking ethos by expecting and approving of excessive alcohol use, and in some cases (by the Student Union, for example), actively encouraging it through low cost, easily accessible and heavily promoted alcohol. The final Chapter of this thesis will bring together the findings from all four studies (Chapter Five, Six, and Seven) and discuss the future implications of this thesis.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion and recommendations**

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### **8.1 Introduction**

This Chapter summarises the findings of the empirical studies outlined in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Following this, several practical implications are identified which could be implemented to foster a healthier environment at Bayfields and similar institutions. This Chapter also discusses the strengths and limitations which need to be borne in mind when considering these findings and how future research can build on the discoveries made.

### **8.2 Summary of findings**

This thesis has provided further evidence of a drinking ethos in university sport in general and team sports (such as rugby) in particular. The quantitative element of this research (Chapter 5) showed athletes were significantly more likely to report (binge) alcohol use than their non-athlete counterparts. The qualitative studies that followed (Chapters 6 and 7) led to several discoveries which can help explain why and how this drinking culture developed and is maintained. The first quantitative study (a cross-sectional survey of student alcohol use) revealed alcohol use by athletes remained high regardless of one's age, gender, degree stage, or living arrangements. Thus, there appeared to be a more potent influence on drinking habits which outweighed structural factors that typically impact upon the drinking habits of students.

This research was designed to provide an original contribution to knowledge across three key areas. Firstly, this research sought to provide a greater understanding of the extent to which athletes begin drinking heavily prior to university, or if they become accustomed to these behaviour during university. Secondly, this thesis aimed to identify the capital (value) attached to drinking practices and the purpose or use of these for social positioning. Thirdly, this research explored the environmental context in which drinking practices exist and identified the wider direct and indirect alcohol related pressures athletes were exposed to.

This thesis, through approaching this problem from an alternative theoretical perspective, and by utilising a range of complimentary data collection techniques, has gained valuable insight into several processes which created and sustained a drinking ethos at this university. This programme of research has enhanced our understand of the three main gaps in knowledge identified through the literature review in Chapter 2. Further, this research has provided a nuanced understanding into how drinking practices

are enforced and how compliance with the drinking culture is embedded. As such, there were four novel contributions achieved through this research. These were 1) Initiation of alcohol use, 2) Intoxogenic environment, 3) Cultural value (i.e., social, cultural, and symbolic capital), and 4) Enforcement and compliance. Each of these are covered in greater detail below.

### **8.2.1 Initiation of alcohol use**

This thesis provides new evidence that the way athletes are initiated into alcohol use may be problematic. The quantitative phase (Chapter 5) showed university athletes did not appear to start consuming alcohol earlier than their non-athlete peers, however, the relationship between past and current drinking was different for both groups. For those who did not play university sport, onset of alcohol use or binge drinking was not related to current alcohol use. However, for those who did play university sport, onset of alcohol use and binge drinking were both significantly associated with current alcohol use. Interviews with athletes (Chapter 6) revealed club rugby culture conditioned athletes to drink in a particular way from a young age, where drinking was expected during post-match and post-tournament celebrations, coming of age ceremonies (i.e., winning man of the match for the first time) and end of season tours. This meant that when athletes arrived at university, they were already consuming alcohol at a high level and knew how an athlete was expected to behave. In other words, they understood excessive drinking was widespread and expected.

### **8.2.2 Intoxogenic environment**

The season-long case study (Chapter 7) presented evidence that the university environment reinforced the message that alcohol use was normal, expected, and to a certain extent, encouraged on this campus. Alcohol was easily accessible, at low cost, and heavily promoted throughout campus. The message that alcohol use was expected when watching sport and to celebrate a good performance was broadcasted frequently via social media, and alcohol related challenges were used to encourage newcomers into sport on the student union website. Finally, sport clubs were sponsored on the condition they visited the student union bar and a popular city centre nightclub on a regular basis.

### **8.2.3 Cultural value (social, cultural, and symbolic capital)**

There was a social hierarchy within the rugby culture. Those at the top of the hierarchy, typically 3<sup>rd</sup> year athletes and first-team players, had the greatest status. Whereas those at the bottom of the hierarchy, typically 1<sup>st</sup> year athletes, had the lowest status and were

frequently dehumanised and treated poorly. Alcohol use was interwoven with the social hierarchy, where drinking forfeits were used to maintain the social hierarchy, and in turn the social hierarchy reinforced the drinking ethos. The social hierarchy, and consequently the drinking ethos, was underpinned by the exchangeable value of drinking practices. Alcohol use could be used to show commitment to the team (cultural capital), or to build relationships (social capital) by engaging in highly praised practices (i.e., being able to drink particular fast or tolerate alcohol well). This, however, led to a culture where athletes continually attempted to out-do each other by behaving more notoriously. Athletes aspired to achieve greater status (symbolic capital) than their team-mates.

#### **8.2.4 Enforcement and compliance**

Finally, there were several mechanisms embedded within the culture to ensure the rules and rituals were enforced and everybody complied with the drinking ethos. Specific roles and responsibilities were given to certain members of the team who had the authority to decide when, where, what, and how the team drank. Crucially, however, those with higher positions in the social hierarchy chose who should set the rules, who in turn enforced the rules through punishments. The dominant group subsequently used non-compliance with the rules they helped create to display their dominance. This process reinforced and sustained the social hierarchy and drinking ethos, and the system was always weighted in favour of the dominant group. Punishments (such as drinking forfeits) were the primary method used by seniors to display dominance over novices and to ensure athletes complied with the drinking ethos. These punishments consistently fell heaviest on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Finally, strategic events (i.e., initiation ceremonies) were integrated into the social calendar and acted as stand-alone occasions to enforce the drinking ethos. These events were used to pass on the rules and rituals of the club to newcomers, to further reinforce the social hierarchy and culture of coercion, and to ensure that excessive alcohol use was embedded within the athletes' schedule.

### **8.3 Practical implications**

There does not appear to be any published studies that evaluate interventions aimed at reducing alcohol use among student athletes in the UK. The results of several systematic attempts to reduce alcohol use in the USA have been published and we must be wary of making direct comparisons (cf. Foxcroft et al., 2015; Cislighi & Heise,

2018; Su et al., 2018; Dempsey, McAlaney & Bewick, 2018). There are of course relevant similarities between athlete culture in the UK and elsewhere, but there are also important differences. In the USA, for instance, sport is integrated with academic programmes, significantly better funded and organised, enjoys a much higher profile on and off campus and is far more prestigious. Previous attempts to reduce consumption among student athletes have most commonly been underpinned by social norms theory, and had a narrow focus, namely, to correct individual misperceptions about the drinking patterns of other students. Foxcroft and colleagues (2015) argue, however, that of 75 randomized studies with almost 45,000 students, there were “no substantive meaningful benefits associated with social norms interventions for prevention of alcohol misuse among college/university students”.

Motivational interviewing (MI) is another popular approach to change behaviour. This approach attempts to resolve ambivalent feelings towards a problematic behaviour and facilitate individuals to acquire internal motivation to initiate behaviour change (Miller, 1983). According to Markland and colleagues (2005), MI helps individuals clarify their strengths and aspirations, elicit their own motivations for behaviour change and promotes autonomy and decision making. A wealth of academic output has been devoted to assessing the effectiveness of MI (cf. Appiah-Brempong et al., 2014), however, like social norms approaches, a recent systematic review concluded “no substantive, meaningful benefits of MI interventions for preventing alcohol use, misuse or alcohol-related problems” (Foxcroft et al., 2016). Both common approaches to reducing alcohol use among the student population have focussed on ‘fixing’ the individual, rather than recognising the interconnectedness between the individual and his or her social and cultural surroundings. It is perhaps unsurprising that there have been no substantial in-roads into reducing heavy drinking among students given this potential over-emphasis on individual cognition and motivation, and a substantial under acknowledgement of the environment (such as university alcohol policies and practices), and social pressures from team-mates, role models and figures of authority.

This thesis suggests these approaches have substantially over-simplified the relationship between alcohol use and sports participation, and have overfocussed on the psychological contributors to this complex phenomena.

By taking a holistic view of the drinking culture within university sport, this thesis provides novel insight which can help inform interventions aimed at developing a more moderate drinking environment. This research provides evidence of a plethora of social and environmental factors which contribute to alcohol use by student athletes. It is plausible that each of these constituent factors could jeopardise attempts to reduce or control usage if they are not addressed collectively. Based on this conclusion, interventions which recognise the interconnectedness between the several contributors within the entire university sport system may achieve more substantive change than has previously been achieved. Recently, policy advocates have become increasingly open to the potential role systems theory can contribute to reducing behaviours which can be detrimental to the public's health (cf. Rutter et al., 2019). Systems theory recognises the fluid interconnectedness between the social and environmental drivers to each societal issue (such as alcohol use, physical inactivity, obesity, or smoking), and hypothesises that addressing these issues requires changes to the physical, commercial, sociocultural, and political contexts in which they occur (ibid.). There are several factors within the university sport system which could be targeted to reduce alcohol use among student athletes. Some of these factors, such as the prevailing alcohol ethos, appears to occur wherever that sport takes place. Others however, such as availability, promotion, and sponsorship, may vary substantially between different institutions with differing policies.

This thesis has added considerable evidence suggesting athletes may be exposed to, and inducted into, problematic drinking practices at an early age. As such, reduction and prevention efforts aimed solely at university settings may be insufficient to change ingrained drinking habits and expectations. There is a need to educate amateur clubs of the potential long-term harm which can be caused by allowing or encouraging adolescents to consume alcohol in this environment. A common perception of amateur club members is that receipts from alcohol sales are vital for the financial survival of the club. Research has shown, however, clubs with better alcohol management practices are more inclusive (Rowland et al., 2019). Addressing this widespread myth may be a promising avenue for directly reducing alcohol use through better alcohol management practices, and indirectly, by having a more diverse group of players and club attendees.

A whole systems approach which recognises the role amateur clubs have in shaping the drinking habits of younger players is essential to address the drinking ethos in sport.

This thesis implies, however, universities bare considerable responsibility for the drinking patterns of students. This thesis cannot generalise to university institutions beyond Bayfields, however, there was a consensus among athletes studied throughout this thesis that their alcohol use increased during university. This thesis highlighted several potential environmental factors which are likely to contribute to the alcohol ethos within university sport at this institution. Firstly, social media was used on numerous occasions to promote alcohol use as commonplace and earned. There is a need to challenge whether this encouragement is appropriate, particularly given social media platforms are highly un-regulated, and content may be viewed by prospective athletes/students considering or preparing to attend university. Second, there is a need to terminate the direct sponsorship of sports clubs by the alcohol industry. Third, the widespread promotion of already low unit priced alcohol should be re-considered. Universities have a duty of care over students and such widespread targeted promotion of unhealthy behaviours calls into question a strategy pledge to “provide a welcoming, supportive and healthy working and study environment” (Healthy Universities, 2019).

This thesis argues a drinking ethos has evolved at this university where alcohol has symbolic value. Alcohol was used to demonstrate power over others and to build individual reputation. Further, alcohol use was structured into the weekly routine of athletes. This latter issue raises an important question around how these individuals, with an embedded drinking routine, transition out of university and into adult life. The extent to which these individuals maintain these drinking habits post-university is unknown. Jones (2016, p.49) speculated that change on an individual and collective level requires parity between the intended and experienced ethos, which “require significant changes in habits, routine behaviour and attitudes, and may take a long time”. At this institution, the environmental changes suggested above may shift the intended ethos, however, changing the experienced ethos will likely be more complex and take significantly longer. This thesis suggests athletes learned the unwritten drinking rules through repetitive action and moved from receivers of acts of dominance, to dominators, over-time. This process led athletes to feel they had earned the right to be in a position of power, and removing or restricting this power created a strong sense of unease. To address this cycle of cultural reproduction, new field actors, with a more measured approach to alcohol need to be grown into positions of strength within the social hierarchy. A first step in this process will be to address the institutional factors which legitimise and normalise excessive alcohol use. The next stage will involve

educating players of the harms of excessive drinking and the physiological and psychological consequences on performance. Finally, alternative social activities need to be introduced which fulfil the need to build team cohesion. The reproductive cycle of cultural values, norms and expectations may then, over-time, develop a culture with less reliance upon alcohol use and intoxication.

Despite a need for a whole-system approach to addressing alcohol use amongst athletes, there are specific areas where interventions could be targeted which could impact the drinking patterns of athletes. Some of these interventions could be achieved within a short time-frame, whereas others are likely to be significantly more challenging and will take longer. In the short term, changes could be made to make this and other similar campuses less of an intoxicogenic environment. For example, the pricing of alcohol and widespread promotion and advertising could be restricted, and the alcohol industry sponsorship of athletes or clubs could be terminated. Such changes would send a different message to athletes around what is expected and accepted. In the medium term, coaches could be supported to embed a more moderate drinking environment. The head coach involved in this research had introduced alcohol education interventions, and this willingness of the head coach to reduce player alcohol use, and take part in this research, could be further utilised. Such alcohol workshops could be delivered more regularly throughout the season and everyday interactions could be used to send a different message to players regarding what coaches expect of their players. Further, players with more moderate drinking habits and preferences could be given leadership opportunities within sports clubs. To this end, the hierarchical structure and power dynamics could reproduce a more moderate drinking culture over-time.

Achieving longer-term behaviour change to the athlete drinking culture at this and similar universities will be more complex. This thesis has contributed to the evidence base by highlighting the immense value of drinking practices to student athletes. As a result, there will be no quick and easy way to disentangle the symbolic nature of alcohol use for achieving status and recognition among a group of fellow athletes. However, this thesis has also discovered ‘cracks’ or ‘contradictions’ within the culture which could provide opportunities to challenge the drinking culture and value of drinking practices, and introduce interventions. This thesis has shown (some) novice athletes enter the university athlete system without an affinity for certain aspects of the drinking culture (i.e., the controlling, coercion, and repetitive nature of consumption). These

individuals could form the bedrock of interventions. For example, such opposing views could be given higher recognition which could encourage more people to speak out. With this in mind, interventions must be introduced in partnership with athletes. The theoretical insights of Bourdieu and the findings presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis highlight the conflict (hysteresis) which arises when dominant cultural values and practices are challenged. An awareness of hysteresis and the gradual changing nature of the habitus tell us that interventions aimed at changing a culture of embedded values and practices should be gradual and collaborative, to avoid a rejection by those with established positions.

Partington and Partington (2021) acknowledge that at present the development, implementation and evaluation of interventions targeting student athletes is lacking. Despite this, the authors argue that working with athletes to develop clear discrepancies between drinking behaviours and their athletic goals and values, may help athletes to accurately assess the pros and cons of their heavy-drinking behaviour. Partington and Partington (2021) suggest there are grounds for exploring subgroups within the wider student athlete group in more detail. In particular, the authors speculate that understanding the views and motives of athletes who chose not to drink could provide valuable insight which can inform the design and implementation of effective interventions. This thesis supports the views of Partington and Partington and extends that understanding the views and motives of athletes resistant to the drinking culture could also provide novel insight which can assist the development of interventions.

#### **8.4 Strengths and limitations**

To develop a rich and comprehensive understanding of the drinking culture within university sport, this research focussed on a single university setting. This single setting was investigated extensively through four sub-studies and a plethora of data sources. This intensive methodological focus on a single university, with a breadth of complimentary data collection techniques, provided a deeper understanding of how drinking patterns within sport, and particularly rugby, are produced and reproduced. This led to a unique understanding of the complex interplay between individual level (such as pre-university experiences and expectations), group level (such as power relations) and institutional level (such as policies and practices) factors. Collectively, these findings offer important insight into the various micro and macro level contributors to sport-related drinking cultures, and suggest previous attempts to reduce

consumption may have over-simplified the relationship and over-emphasised individual level drivers.

A further strength of this thesis is the impact and relevance of findings to different audiences. The methodological and theoretical approaches undertaken have produced original insight relating to what drives alcohol use amongst student athletes. Future research should consider adopting similar methodological and theoretical positions to investigate alcohol use by (student) athletes and other areas of health and wellbeing. Further, this thesis has drawn attention to the hierarchy and power structures within student sport and suggests such processes could outweigh individual level drivers of student alcohol use (i.e., motivations, norms, and identities). This could explain why research and theory which has approached this phenomenon from a psychological and individual perspective has produced inconclusive and contradictory results (cf. Partington & Partington, 2021). Outside of academia, these findings are useful for those both within the culture (i.e., coaches) and on the outside (i.e., university sports administrators and university leaders). Coaches and university leaders may not be fully aware of how widespread excessive alcohol use is in sport culture and the dehumanising and coercive nature of practices amongst those involved. On the other hand, figures of authority may be aware of the drinking culture but not be aware of how these habits are created and sustained. This thesis has drawn attention to several unique and important practices and processes which help authorities understand the specific mechanisms driving drinking habits. Coaches and leaders have a duty of care over students and awareness of the practices and processes highlighted throughout this thesis can help them develop and introduce more appropriate alcohol management practices and policies.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that there are several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting these findings. Firstly, it is possible that the findings of this thesis may not be generalisable to other institutions, with differing student demographics, environmental drivers (such as alcohol availability and pricing), and university policies and practices. Certain facilitators to alcohol use by student athletes may be more universally applicable than others. For instance, throughout this thesis, initiation of alcohol use was associated with sport participation by students residing at several regions throughout the UK, prior to university. Combined with similar findings elsewhere (cf. Roy & Camire, 2017), it is likely this is a widespread phenomenon.

A degree of caution needs to be borne in mind when attempting to generalise the group level contributors to alcohol use, such as power relations, social hierarchies, and the symbolic nature of alcohol use, to other university sport cultures and between different sports (Smith, 2018). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make confident claims about the generalisability of these drivers of alcohol use beyond the Bayfields campus and beyond rugby. Institutional and environmental contributors to alcohol use are likely to vary substantially between institutions with varying policies towards acceptable alcohol use, regulation, and promotion. Therefore, the specific ecological contributors identified in this thesis may be more applicable to Bayfields campus. For instance, the availability of alcohol, proximity of halls of residence and proximity of sport facilities to alcohol outlets may have facilitated alcohol use at Bayfields, but may protect against usage at other institutions. Similarly, promotional activity and low alcohol pricing may have contributed to the high levels of alcohol use found at this university although may differ at other institutions.

### **8.5 Future Directions**

There is a need to explore these findings across multiple institutions. It is likely that alcohol management policies and practices will vary considerably between institutions, therefore understanding the impact of these alternative approaches would be worthwhile. This research has found evidence that participants from varied geographically backgrounds had seemingly identical introductions to drinking at amateur/youth level. Future research should explore the relative influence of this introduction on current alcohol use for athletes entering different universities, with varied alcohol management practices and embedded drinking traditions. Further, there is need to develop a rich understanding of the social mechanisms underpinning alcohol use, between institutions with varied alcohol prevalence rates. Previous research has found large and highly significant differences in alcohol use between different institutions in England (Partington et al., 2010). The institution studied throughout this thesis could be considered a heavy drinking university, as previously reported (cf. John & Alwyn, 2014). Future research should explore the symbolic value attached to alcohol use, and the presence of social hierarchies with differential power ratios, at other institutions, particularly those with lower levels of drinking and intoxication.

Further, there are other ways this drinking culture could have been studied which may have provided greater insight into the mechanisms which create and sustain it. Firstly,

this thesis has provided evidence that pre-university alcohol experiences and habits may be influential in shaping alcohol use in later life (including at university). A longitudinal study which tracked athlete alcohol use from amateur or youth rugby into and throughout university would help better understand the relative impact of these pre-university experiences. Secondly, this research focussed most resource on investigating male rugby culture, and the female university culture could have provided intriguing data. Interviews with female athletes (Chapter 6) showed the drinking culture was undergoing change and an in-depth observational study, such as was conducted on the male rugby club, would have provided valuable insight into this change. Finally, a longer case study period may have benefitted this research. This would have allowed greater rapport to be developed with players which could have led to greater access to certain events (i.e., initiation ceremonies). Alternatively, greater time dedicated to case study research could have been used to understand the female rugby club in greater depth.

Finally, existing interventions aimed at reducing alcohol use among student athletes have been relatively unsuccessful (Partington & Partington, 2021). As such, there is a need for more research to identify and understand how a more moderate drinking culture can be created. This thesis, combined with the recent work of Partington and Partington (2021) suggests future research could explore the views, motives, expectations, and subsequent behaviours of different sub-groups of the student athlete culture (such as non-drinkers and those resistant to the drinking culture who nevertheless comply). There are several practical suggestions which stem from this thesis. If and when these practical implications are considered and implemented, there is a need for controlled evaluations examining the feasibility of reduction and prevention strategies, the processes involved in implementation, and the outcomes of any actions.

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## **Appendix A: Study One – Online survey**

---

### **Start of Block: A bit about you**

Q2.1 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Non-binary (3)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (4)

-----

Q2.2 What is your Age?

\_\_\_\_\_

-----

Q2.3 What is your home postcode?

\_\_\_\_\_

-----

Q2.4 How would you describe your ethnicity?

▼ Prefer not to say (3) ... Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group (19)

Q2.5 Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

☐ Heterosexual or Straight (1)

☐ Gay or Lesbian (2)

☐ Bisexual (3)

Q2.6 What is your religion?

▼ None (1) ... Zoroastrian (9)

Q2.7 What is your parent's marital status?

▼ Single, Never married (1) ... Widowed (5)

Q52 Which University/Institution do you attend?

Q2.8 What degree are you studying?

Q2.9 How long is your course in years?

☐ 1 (1)

☐ 2 (2)

☐ 3 (3)

☐ 4 (4)

☐ 5 (5)

---

Q2.10 At what stage of your degree are you?

☐ Year 1 (1)

☐ Year 2 (2)

☐ Year 3 (3)

☐ Year 4 (4)

☐ Year 5 (5)

---

Q2.11 Do you play University sport?

☐ Yes (4)

☐ No (5)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you play University sport? = Yes*

Q2.12 Which University sport(s) do you play?

- ☐ Sport One (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Sport Two (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Sport Three (3) \_\_\_\_\_

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you play University sport? = Yes*

Q2.13 When did you start playing sport?

- ☐ School (1)
- ☐ Club (Under 16) (2)
- ☐ Club Youth (17-18) (3)
- ☐ College (4)
- ☐ 6th Form College (5)
- ☐ University (6)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you play University sport? = Yes*

## ***Alcohol and Sport***

### *Appendices*

Q2.14 What is the highest level you compete at?

- ☐ Club (1)
  - ☐ University (2)
  - ☐ Regional (3)
  - ☐ National (4)
  - ☐ International (5)
- 

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you play University sport? = Yes*

Q2.15 On average, how many hours do you train for your sport each week

- ☐ 0-2 (1)
  - ☐ 3-4 (2)
  - ☐ 5-6 (3)
  - ☐ 7-8 (4)
  - ☐ 9-10 (5)
  - ☐ 10+ (6)
- 

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you play University sport? = Yes*

***Alcohol and Sport***  
*Appendices*

Q2.16

Are you currently or have you recently been injured and unable to play sport?

- ☐ No (1)
- ☐ Currently (2)
- ☐ Within the last 2 months (3)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you play University sport? = No*

Q2.17 Have you ever played sport before? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Yes, at school (1)
- ☐ Yes, at club level (under 16) (2)
- ☐ Yes, at club level (17-18) (3)
- ☐ Yes at club level (19+) (4)
- ☐ Yes, at College (5)
- ☐ Yes, at 6th form College (6)
- ☐ No (7)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Have you ever played sport before? (Please select all that apply) != No*

Q2.18 If you do not play University sport, What is your reason(s) for not doing so?

---

Q2.19

Are you a member of any University clubs and/or societies? Please specify all that apply

---

Q2.20 Where do you live at Term-time?

☐ On Campus/Halls (1)

☐ Off Campus/Student House (2)

☐ Family/Guardian (3)

☐ Other (Please Specify) (4)

---

Q2.21 Does your parent(s) currently play, or used to play sport?

☐ Yes (5)

☐ No (6)

---

Q2.22 At what age did you first attend a sports club?

---

**End of Block: A bit about you**

---

**Start of Block: Alcohol Consumption**

Q3.1 Are you currently teetotal or abstaining from drinking alcohol

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ Yes, but only during the past week (2)
- ☐ Yes, but only during the past month (3)
- ☐ No (4)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Are you currently teetotal or abstaining from drinking alcohol != No*

Q3.2 What are your reasons for becoming teetotal or abstaining?

---

---

**Q3.3 In Answering the following questions:**

One unit of alcohol is: 1/2 pint average strength beer/lager OR one glass of wine OR one single measure of spirits.

**Note:** some drinks may contain deceptively high quantities of alcohol. For example, a can of high strength lager may contain 3–5 units and a bottle of pre-mixed spirit drink may contain up to 2 units.



Q3.4 How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

- ☐ Never (1)
  - ☐ Monthly or Less (2)
  - ☐ 2-4 times a month (3)
  - ☐ 2-3 times a week (4)
  - ☐ 4 or more times a week (5)
- 

Q3.5 How many units of alcohol do you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?

- ☐ 1 or 2 (1)
  - ☐ 3 or 4 (2)
  - ☐ 5 or 6 (3)
  - ☐ 7, 8 or 9 (4)
  - ☐ 10 or more (5)
-

***Alcohol and Sport***

*Appendices*

Q3.6 How often do you have six or more units of alcohol on one occasion?

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Less than Monthly (2)
- ☐ Monthly (3)
- ☐ Weekly (4)
- ☐ Daily or Almost Daily (5)
- 

Q3.7 How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Less than Monthly (2)
- ☐ Monthly (3)
- ☐ Weekly (4)
- ☐ Daily or Almost Daily (5)
-

***Alcohol and Sport***

***Appendices***

Q3.8 How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Less than Monthly (2)
- ☐ Monthly (3)
- ☐ Weekly (4)
- ☐ Daily or Almost Daily (5)
- 

Q3.9 How often during the last year have you needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Less than Monthly (2)
- ☐ Monthly (3)
- ☐ Weekly (4)
- ☐ Daily or Almost Daily (5)
-

***Alcohol and Sport***

***Appendices***

Q3.10 How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Less than Monthly (2)
- ☐ Monthly (3)
- ☐ Weekly (4)
- ☐ Daily or Almost Daily (5)
- 

Q3.11 How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Less than Monthly (2)
- ☐ Monthly (3)
- ☐ Weekly (4)
- ☐ Daily or Almost Daily (5)
-

***Alcohol and Sport***

*Appendices*

Q3.12 Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?

- ☐ No (1)
- ☐ Yes, but not in the last year (2)
- ☐ Yes, during the last year (3)
- 

Q3.13 Has a relative or friend or doctor or another health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?

- ☐ No (1)
- ☐ Yes, but not in the last year (2)
- ☐ yes, during the last year (3)
- 

Q3.14 At what age did you first consume a drink containing alcohol?

---

Q3.15 At what age did you first consume six or more units of alcohol on one occasion?

---

Q3.18 What location did you first consume alcohol?

- ☐ Home (1)
- ☐ On the street (2)
- ☐ In a park (3)
- ☐ In a sports club (4)
- ☐ In a non-sports club/pub (5)
- ☐ Holiday (6)
- ☐ Other (Please State) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

**End of Block: Alcohol Consumption**

## **Appendix B: Study Three – Interview schedule**

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### Interview themes and questions

#### **Introduction**

What are you studying?

How long have you played rugby?

Why did you start playing rugby?

Have you played any other sports?

#### **Onset of consumption**

When did you start consuming alcohol?

---

What was the context?

How many times per week did you drink then?

How heavy were you drinking then?

Why did you start drinking?

**Current consumption**

How many times do you tend to drink per week now?

How many drinks do you typically consume per session?

What factors tend to determine your consumption each week?

At the beginning of the week do you have a predetermined idea of when you'll be drinking, or does it come up on the day?

Let's walk through a typical session. Where do you go? How do you start?

**Motivating dynamics**

What are the reasons you drink now?

Do you think the reason you drink is the same as your team-mates? Or sporting students?

Other students generally?

Are the reasons you drink now the same or different to when you started?

Do you think your alcohol consumption is linked to sport?

What role does alcohol and drinking play in your sporting life?

**Desistance**

Are there factors that stop you from drinking?

**Concluding comments**

Is there anything you would like to add?

---