

Chapter 6

Chemical cultures

Introduction

Modern ballroom dancing may easily degenerate into a sensuous form of entertainment, and if self-control is weakened with alcohol it is more than likely that it will do so, which might easily lead at least to unruly behaviour and not infrequently to sexual immorality. (*English Life and Leisure* (1951), quoted in Everitt, 1986)

Historically, no aspect of young people's lives has consistently ranked as highly in the popular imagination and public agendas of the UK during the 20th and early 21st centuries, as their collective involvement in consumer-based leisure (Cohen, 1972; Hebdige, 1979; Pearson, 1983; McRobbie, 1991; Murji, 1998; Presdee, 2000). In the context of these 'moral panics', young people's pleasures have been cast as transgressive and criminalised – none more so than the heady mix of music, dancing and various forms of intoxication (often illicit or illegal). The notion of young pleasures as problems was well established long before the post-war consumer boom heralded the birth of the 'teenager' but it was the ever-increasing expansion in the leisure-pleasure landscape that has set this perception in stone. From the threat to national security posed by the emergence of the nightclub, jazz music, dancing and cocaine (used initially by the lower social classes) in London's West End during the First World War (Kohn, 1997), to the spectre of marauding, nocturnal 'binge-drinkers' disrupting British town centres and with it British society in 2005, the history of young people's nocturnal public pleasures has been one of social threat and cause for social control and regulation (Measham, 2004a). Even a collective activity considerably removed from the spectacular canon of youth cultural history – ballroom dancing – was cause for concern in the early 1950s.

This tradition has been integral to public anxieties around social change. Concerns about the new forms of, particularly working-class, femininity made possible in war time and the threat of extending the vote to women under 27 were at the heart of the portrayal of the drug-related deaths of two young women too frail to cope with the freedoms of the 'modern girl' in the years following the First World War (Kohn, 1997: 137). The Inventing Adulthoods research period, also one of considerable social change, saw a familiar replay of old social anxieties and the gendered media stories of youth cultures. The 'single, white female' once again starred in an ongoing tale of drug-related deaths as an innocent victim preyed upon by evil male perpetrators – the source of the drugs, the music and

the venues at the root of these young women's decline (Kohn, 1997; Henderson, 1997; Blackman, 2005).

The normalisation of chemical excess: Popular young pleasures and public agendas

Shortly after their re-election in 2005, the UK Labour government launched a multi-pronged 'war on disrespect' which was somewhat reminiscent of the Conservative government's call to get 'Back to Basics' in the early 1990s. Young people, crime and transgressive pleasures – condensed into the spectre of 'yob' – loomed large on both agendas. However, the nature of the cultures reflected in these public concerns and the policy agendas addressing them changed considerably over this period of time.

Whilst consumer-based leisure involving dancing, music and chemical intoxicants had been a central feature of the weekend for a considerable minority of young people for at least half a century (Measham, 2004a: 338), the 1990s saw the commercialisation and growth of cultures with the use of Ecstasy, electronic 'house' music and all night dancing at their heart – further variations of which still persist in 2005.

Research had a role to play in sustaining this image of young people, as an increasing number of surveys and some qualitative studies painted a picture of a burgeoning 'pick and mix' youth drug culture in which the patterns, prevalence and symbolic currency of drugs appeared to have changed from being exceptional to a feature of contemporary everyday life – the 'normalisation' thesis (Newcombe, 1991; Henderson, 1997; Measham, 1996; Parker et al., 1998; South, 1999).

The Labour government's '10-year strategy for tackling drug misuse' (HM Government, 1998) marked a return to the prioritisation of drug use prevention, treatment and enforcement, from a public health concern with HIV and AIDS among drug injectors. Identifying and targeting those most likely to shift into drug dependency and problematic use became a priority of a broader policy framework geared to addressing the social processes through which certain groups become excluded from the mainstream of society (HM Government, 1998; Drugscope, 2000a; Drugscope, 2000b; Melrose, 2000).

Whilst critics of the normalisation thesis argued that actual levels of drug use were exaggerated (Shiner and Newburn, 1997), young people in the UK continued to be characterised in terms of having 'excessive appetites' (Measham et al., 2000). As the new century began, what had earlier been identified as a 'big bang' approach to drinking (Measham, 1996) ousted the horrors and consequences of Ecstasy use from the headlines and 'binge drinking' became the number one popular pleasure posing a threat to the nation. Towards the end of the research period, the suggestion that 'we are drinking younger, longer, faster and more cheaply across the class and gender spectrum' was well and truly established in the public imagination (Levy and Scott-Clark, 2004: 1).

Despite evidence of a 'normalisation of determined drunkenness' (Measham, 2004b: 321), there was no government-led 'war' on alcohol to match that on drugs and 'no attempts to bring down the "Mr Bigs" of the alcohol industry' (Hobbs, 2005: 24). Rather,

the main 'dealers' of alcohol worked together with police and local politicians in local policy partnerships.

Landscapes for excess? Transformation and globalisation

The emergence of these discourses and practices of excessive pleasures took place within a transforming landscape. The use of Ecstasy in the late 1980s blossomed, fragmented and transformed beyond all expectation. Its diversification in the early 1990s from predominantly illegal into commercial venues was simply the beginning of a dynamic process that perennially involved a broadening of its impact on mainstream consumer culture (Thornton, 1995; Garratt, 1998; Scott, 2000; Henderson, 2001; Measham, 2004a; Blackman, 2005). The Inventing Adulthoods study period saw club and bar culture shift to the centre of consumer culture. The spaces of the 'night-time economy' proliferated, coinciding with the entrepreneurial drive within 'dance' culture and with policy geared to developing the 24-hour city and urban regeneration (Measham, 2004a, Hobbs, 2005: 24).

The increasing globalisation of club culture, extended and sustained by investments from for example film makers, novelists and advertisers (e.g. Collin, 1997; Garratt, 1998), was also central to its longevity. Importantly, these successive generations of entrepreneurs connected with the structures of regional and global tourism (Harrison, 1998; Sellars, 1998; Turner, 1999; Pini, 2001) with the result that 'the 21st century has seen the emergence of an international clubbing scene as an organized and rationalized form of public entertainment' (Blackman, 2005: 175).

'Living it large?' Growing up in excessive landscapes

Commentators in the UK have tended to understand the 'turn' to chemical excess within the broader theoretical framework of social change in late modernity (Aldridge et al., 1999; Henderson, 1997; Measham, et al., 2000; Blackman, 2005). Whilst the predominant perspective in this context focuses on the emergence of 'risk cultures' in the face of economic uncertainty, rapid social change and the experience of modernity (Beck, 1992), it has also been argued that these conditions have, in fact, given rise to chemical cultures within which safety – in the form of collective chemical experience – is 'the ultimate high', an 'antidote to the prevailing atmosphere of risk and anxiety' (Calcutt, 1998: 2; Raven, 2001). In a context where 'youth' was increasingly a consumer category, where consumer culture was a central means of identity construction, and the currency of old models of adulthood was eroded, doubt was cast over previous understandings of intoxication as a teenage phase. Whilst there was little research evidence to suggest what proportion of experimental and recreational drug users moved into problem drug use, there

had previously been an assumption that a majority of young people who experimented with drugs moved on leaving drugs behind (Ashton, 1998).

The broader picture of how chemical culture figures in young people's lives over time is still sketchy. Very few studies have focused on the complex processes shaping the changing place and social meaning of drugs in young lives and into young adulthood. Rare exceptions – prospective longitudinal studies – have demonstrated the dynamic nature and complexity of the development of drug use and the role of transitions in other areas of life in determining drug pathways, including the transition from secondary school (Measham et al., 1998a; 1998b). These studies have found that, while illicit drug use was a central, substantive element of youth transitions, shared objective conditions in a locality experiencing extreme social exclusion produced markedly different orientations to drugs and drug pathways (MacDonald and Marsh, 2002, 2005). A more gendered picture of experimentation with chemical culture over time has also begun to emerge, suggesting different types of gender gap at different stages of growing up: while more young women experiment with illicit drugs in early teens, young men 'catch up' in their mid-teens and start to 'overtake' in young adulthood (Measham, 2002).

In this chapter, we take a step beyond public agendas relating to young pleasures and explore the complexity and detail of evolving biographies. We take a look at how young people in the study engaged with the landscapes of chemical excess that began evolving when they were babies or small children. In doing so, we draw upon and span a number of discrete and specialist areas of youth studies and policy, in particular those of youth cultural studies and research on substance use (criminological, psychological and sociological). Whilst the chapter mirrors the norms of much drugs research in that it concentrates particularly on those who made a heavy investment in chemical culture, it also breaks with the established paradigm of focusing in on the specifics of drug use then outward to its 'social aspects'. In line with this approach, data on drugs and alcohol were not collected systematically but arose in a number of different contexts in the course of biographical interviews. Our starting point is not drugs as an issue, but the broader fabric of young lives and the complex processes shaping biographies, combining a prospective and retrospective approach over time, and offering a situated account of young lives.

Chemical culture in Inventing Adulthoods: Changing landscapes, attitudes and involvement

One of the studies contributing to the 1990s picture of a popular chemical culture concluded that illicit drugs were used in different ways in different parts of the country and played different roles in different youth cultures (6 et al., 1997). This was borne out by our study, as we heard tales of different leisure and pleasure landscapes and different forms of engagement with these landscapes. In the demographically 'young' city in Northern Ireland, for example, club and bar culture was higher on young people's leisure list and enjoyed at an earlier age than elsewhere. This perhaps reflected a recent and dramatic expansion of its leisure and entertainment industry alongside a parallel (post-ceasefire)

expansion in drug markets (once blocked but controlled and policed by paramilitaries). An essential leisure tool for young people, there was a spatial map of the pubs and clubs considered to lie in Catholic or Protestant territory. At the same time, chemical culture provided young people with a vehicle for escaping the sectarian divide. They also talked more and at an earlier age about personal drug use than elsewhere. There were notably different cultures of drug use associated with different youth cultures: a more individualist and masculine 'freak' culture that involved heavy cannabis and alcohol use and revolved largely around the pub and indie music scene; and the more mainstream club scene based around Ecstasy and more open to young women.

Next in line for early engagement in party culture (albeit initially based in rural community centres and pubs) were young people in the rural research site, who shared with their peers in Northern Ireland an earlier engagement in the use of drugs other than cannabis. Although young people in the pub cultural landscape of the Home Counties were more talkative about drugs than their rural peers, their experimentation was largely confined to cannabis until leaving home for university. In contrast, young people growing up in the inner city and the disadvantaged estate were far less vocal about personal illicit drug use of any kind until later in the study, confining discussion largely to the 'druggy' reputation of their respective areas.

In terms of attitudes to illicit chemical culture, the overall pattern revealed in the Inventing Adulthoods study suggests a familiar picture of its changing place and meaning in young lives over time. In their early teens a majority were far more accepting of drinking alcohol and smoking than the supply and consumption of illegal drugs (McGrellis et al., 2000); by the time they started work or further education in 1998, drinking and experimentation with cannabis were largely viewed as a 'normal' part of growing up and a period of youthful fun that would end with adult responsibility; four years later, clubbing and pubbing, drinking and drugs were central to discussions of social life.

At the point in the study when a majority of young people were starting work or further education, just over half had tried cannabis but few had experimented further. Although nearly a quarter of the sample we are still in contact with ($n = 70$) went on to try Ecstasy and cocaine ($n = 16$), considerable involvement in chemical culture sustained over a period of years was only evident in a small number. It is to these young lives that this chapter now turns.

Chemical culture in the biographical round

As we saw in Chapter 3, some, largely middle-class, young people in the study assumed and followed academic achievement as a route to a secure future. As a source of additional skills and competence they also invested in work and leisure and tended to avoid relationships (see Chapter 11). Orientations towards chemical culture varied amongst these well-resourced young people but they were generally not impartial to alcohol, some having been allowed to drink in family settings from an early age, and had come into contact with the use of cannabis when younger and use of Ecstasy, cocaine and other club drugs when at university. Their approach

to substance use, however, seemed to reflect their instrumental approach to constructing their future: their chemical pleasures were generally limited to alcohol and to particular settings and times that would not jeopardise their main priorities.

For the minority of young people who are featured in this chapter, this leisure landscape became an alternative resource for constructing identity, a sense of competence, status and belonging and, to a greater or lesser extent, a future career. Any initial educational aspirations were linked to popular culture (usually Media Studies) but education was either rejected or abandoned as a route to the future. It was these young people who developed the most excessive appetites for chemical culture. Their careers in substance use, involving the use of Ecstasy and/or cocaine, alcohol and cannabis in particular, varied but were an integral part of this heavy investment in the leisure landscape. A look across these young biographies also suggests that social inequalities and differences were very much at play in chemical culture, the most immediately obvious of which relate to class and gender: those who invested heavily in leisure were largely male and middle class.

Having a flutter on leisure? Chemical culture and middle-class masculinities

For these young men, chemical intoxication was part of aspiring to non-traditional success, defined in terms of material wealth, hedonism, glamour, minor celebrity, entrepreneurialism and, in some cases, a flirtation with 'scam' culture. They were also disinclined towards steady relationships for much of the study, preferring casual sex, singledom and the company of friends (for an analysis of this approach to relationships, see Chapter 11). Growing up, these young men bore little responsibility, relied on their parents for financial and practical support and often confessed to being 'lazy' and/or 'spoiled'.

For example, in the affluent commuter belt, Richard and Sam (aged 16–24 and 16–23 respectively during the study) both looked forward to a future in the cultural industries when we first met them, and both were taking Media Studies. As time passed, they both did less well in education than expected: Richard left school without any qualifications and dropped out of college by 18; Sam made it to university but devoted himself to making contacts, having fun and a first serious relationship, and left university without completing his course (see too Chapter 4). Back in their home town, Sam moved into leisure management, later training in the design field, whilst Richard worked in a bar, went traveling and became involved in the travel industry.

Meanwhile, in the leafy suburb, Naz aspired to an eventual future in business but made little investment in education on the way, leaving college at 19 and working in the family business. Out in the countryside, Robin, whose critical moment (being caught smoking marijuana at school) we described in Chapter 2, fulfilled his aspirations and became relatively successful as a local club night promoter while unemployed, before beginning a management training course.

During the research, all four young men showed a leaning towards the easy life that conflicted with their ambitions – a point noted by researchers in their notes:

Having a good time and getting through life as handy as possible has been Naz's motto throughout the years. He has had a charmed upbringing – he recognises that he has been spoiled by his parents – and that life has been much easier for him than many of his peers

Richard is still a cool and wayward lad who may succeed in something, but not unless he puts in a bit of effort, something he is possibly a bit reluctant to do.

These young men continued to draw on their parents' resources throughout the research: Sam's father wrote off the debts he had incurred at university and continued to support him even after he set up home independently; Richard's parents continued to bankroll increasingly costly attempts to develop a career; Naz continued to live in the family home in the comfort to which he had always been accustomed; and Robin continued to move between his mother's and father's homes, making no practical or material input into either.

All of these young men began drinking and smoking cannabis in their early teens, moved into Ecstasy and/or cocaine use at 17/18 years, and experienced peaks and troughs in their drug use into their early 20s. For Naz and Robin, however, drugs took on a much more central and consistent role in their lives, defining the critical moments in their biographies over time and becoming integral to their flirtation with 'bad boy' identities. Naz, like Robin, was caught smoking dope at high school but, unlike Robin, was expelled. While Robin spoke of regret and still considered this as a terrible moment in his life 4 years later, Naz appeared unphased. Despite their very different responses, both continued to pursue 'bad lad' identities: Naz living the high life with other affluent young people and supplementing this lifestyle of fast cars and cocaine with 'scams' and drug dealing; and Robin 'hanging out' with local gangsters while building a reputation and making connections on the local club scene.

Although both young men talked in terms of 'reform' when discussing their drug use at various points, bingeing on cocaine in particular was a key feature of their late-teen/early 20s lifestyles, both typically spending £400–500 in a weekend. It was a rocky road for both young men. Naz had a brush with the law for possession in his early 20s. Initially he responded by turning to the gym and reducing his drug intake but this did not last. His cocaine use escalated once again until, 2 years later, he was shocked into giving up dealing after discovering that he was on the hit lists of more than one local gang leader. At this point he embarked on a serious relationship and returned to the gym. Robin's cocaine habit spiralled out of control at 19 after a year or so of unemployment. The loss of his friends and growing drug debts combined with increasing pressure from his mother, prompted him to begin a training course. Long hours, 6 days a week, initially left him little space to indulge in the high life he desired. But although the long hours continued, Robin fell in love with someone who was into cocaine, and by his last interview aged 20 had returned to long cocaine- and alcohol-fuelled weekends. While giving up drugs was a consistent theme in Robin and Naz's stories over time, they were still enamoured with the drug-related lifestyle in their early 20s. By the same age, Sam had relegated his drug use to the past:

[My partner] is very anti-drugs. ... And it's funny looking back on my drug days, because it's quite nasty thinking about it, and I think, 'God, why did I do all that?' ... But, not my cup of tea any more. (Sam, 20, 2004)

Getting stuck on leisure? Chemical culture in 'poor places'

While Sam, Richard, Robin and Naz clearly over invested in leisure – often at some personal cost – they also managed to incorporate future plans for education, training and career. For others, with fewer resources, the prioritising of leisure often meant a narrowing of the horizon as far as future opportunities were concerned. Alcohol and drug use were a key part of this group's leisure landscape but their investment was not backed-up by financial and practical resources and there was little expectation that education would provide a route to the future. For them, substance use (largely alcohol and cannabis) became an integral part of everyday life and grew in significance as work and education faded into the background.

Glen was an example here. From a working-class, Protestant family in Northern Ireland, he was initially set on doing a media course, but dropped out of college at 17, began another training course and was dismissed for failing a drugs test. A pattern of uncompleted training courses and placements under the UK government's 'New Deal' followed, none of which interested him. Unlike the middle class young men who could better afford a 'flutter' on leisure, Glen had nothing to fall back on and no-one to bail him out. Most significantly, Glen's housing situation was very precarious and remained so throughout the research period. His parents had split up when he was in his early teens, each moving to a different part of the city and setting up homes with new partners. Neither area felt welcoming or safe to Glen (see McGrellis, 2005a). He developed a sense of 'not caring' about sectarian loyalties and pursued an alternative, more cosmopolitan identity.

Throughout the study (between the ages of 17–23), Glen's dream was to become a successful musician. Against a backdrop of limited material resources, dwindling interest in education and work outside music, and a widening gulf between his dream and the day-to-day reality of life on benefits and dead end training schemes, Glen's investment in this area of competence and alternative family (his band and other musicians) increased. Support from his father was variable over time and while Glen was close to his mother, she was unable to support him materially. In this context, having a steady girlfriend became the other constant in Glen's story, providing him with emotional support and, often, a place to live. This kind of heavy reliance on the couple relationship is discussed more fully in Chapter 11.

Life on the local music scene brought with it a wide network of casual friendships and the social currency of shared drinking and smoking spaces. Glen's alcohol and drug use escalated. At 17, he and his mates spent their pay cheque in the pub and on the week's supply of cannabis. Long drinking binges with friends continued until, at 21, Glen felt he had come close to the edge of alcoholism. He also maintained a daily dependence on cannabis throughout the study. Having tried other drugs such as Ecstasy and LSD, he preferred cannabis because 'it just brings out the more creative side of me ... completely insane imagination'. Price was also a serious consideration and he did not get into the cocaine binges of middle class young men in the study.

Girlfriends were an important controlling mechanism for Glen's substance use. At 19, he 'calmed down a wile, wile lot on the pot', switching from using bongs and pipes (methods for taking much higher doses) to joints because a new girlfriend insisted on

this. At 21, he felt had been brought back from the brink of alcoholism by meeting his new girlfriend:

I don't get up in the morning now and go the bar or go to get drink... during the day or anything, there's no more of that problem any more. .. It was starting to get a serious problem, ... I scraped all over the first stages, the second stages and just went straight ... to nearly to a full blown alcoholic to tell you the truth but I didn't go there like ... I met (my girlfriend) and she says oh it was you, it was you who done it, it was nothing to do with me at all it was her. (Glen, 21, 2003)

Things seemed to be looking up for Glen when we last saw him (aged 23). He was still in this relationship, his housing situation had improved and his priorities had changed, shifting from a situation where he, in his words, would have sold 'my fucking granny for God sake' for 'drink and pot and stuff' to spending on 'coal first or oil first or food or something like that'. With a relatively secure base, he was making plans for the future. His drug use had changed to some degree as a consequence:

I've always been living in shit-holes basically like, all me life. And I'm just sick and tired of it like, and sick and tired of fucking living like that, like drinking loads and all that. Like I'm still smoking a lot like, but I'm not gonna stop, and everyone knows that like ... so I try to keep it down to about four or five joints in a day. (Glen, aged 23, 2004)

Excessive appetites and young femininities

Taking a look across the Inventing Adulthoods data for continuities/patterns in the ways drugs and alcohol entered young biographies produced a somewhat surprising result: the dominant picture, although a familiar one of drug use as a part of young identities being constructed in and through globalised consumer youth culture, was overwhelmingly one of young masculinities. This suggests more continuity in the ways in which young men invest in the chemical leisure landscape than young women. The final section of this chapter moves on to explore gender differences in the ways that drugs and alcohol 'fit' into young lives through two comparative case studies: Hazel from the rural site (aged 15–20 during the study), the only middle class young woman who took a similar 'flutter' on leisure in our sample, and Corinne (17–21), a young woman from Northern Ireland with a much higher chance of becoming 'stuck' in leisure through a similar involvement in club drug use.

Both young women were strongly anti-Ecstasy in adolescence (having witnessed its effects on relatives' lives) but started clubbing and taking Ecstasy towards the end of compulsory schooling (aged 16–17 years). At this crucial point, both began a year of 'living for the weekend'. For Hazel, her club-based party lifestyle involved taking nine Ecstasy tablets per session at its height as well as developing a taste for cocaine and, in her words,

'doing anything for a buzz'. While Corinne confined her drug use to 3–4 Ecstasy tablets per session, both young women began to 'fail' at school and experience increasing conflict at home. Hazel left school after failing most of her exams at 16, continued to work in a series of factory jobs (briefly returning to education and dropping out again) and settled into marriage and the routine of a domestic-based lifestyle at 18. Corinne managed to continue in education and was on course for completing a nursing degree when last in touch. Both young women felt they had put the clubbing and drugs lifestyle behind them by the age of 19 and each became involved in a serious relationship as part of a strategy for achieving this. Hazel, with money tight and a mortgage to pay, was confining her drug use to the odd night at the pub at 20, whilst Corinne, feeling she had little space in her life for leisure while working and training to be a nurse (at 21), drank 'as much as possible' when she was able.

Hazel: 'Why not be content with working in a turkey factory?'

Hazel had a great deal in common with her young male middle-class contemporaries who 'fluttered on leisure': she initially aspired to a non-9–5 lifestyle in the creative arts, came from a middle-class professional family with an emphasis on music and continued to draw on her parents' emotional and material support throughout the study. She avoided steady relationships for much of the time and shared an easy-going attitude to life, denying agency and adopting a fateful approach:

... sort of just take life as it is and don't try and make something that isn't going to happen basically ... cos I think basically if it's going to happen it will. (Hazel, 17, 2001)

However, her story over time illustrates some important gender differences, particularly relating to the alternative structures for social mobility within youth culture and to family responsibility.

Unlike the young men whose drug stories we touched on earlier, Hazel was expected to take on domestic responsibilities for her two younger siblings as she grew up in a family of two working parents (Henderson, 2005). She also took on a mediating role in her parent's ongoing conflicts from the age of 12. It was a wish to escape the conflict and responsibilities of domestic life, combined with a strong anti-academic attitude and sense of difference from her school peers that propelled her into the spaces of leisure. Her clear aversion to reproducing her parent's lifestyle was also clearly implicated in her resistance to education.

Although Hazel's rejection of traditional middle-class social mobility echoed that of her fellow, male 'flutterers', she did not share the same desire for wealth and success. Having actively embraced non-ambition as a strategy for avoiding disappointment at 17, she simply wished for 'a nice life'. The resources she drew on in this downward mobility strategy were also very different.

Hazel's parents' London origins had contributed to her sense of difference (Henderson, 2005) and, certainly, the club cultural lifestyle provided her with an exciting means of constructing an alternative identity and occupying a different set of 'urbanised' social spaces

from both her family and school peers. This route to a life beyond the local served a number of purposes; providing her with intergenerational, and cross-class and gender relationships more in keeping with her cosmopolitan identity; offering a forum for pursuing sensuality, flirtation and sexuality far exceeding the boundaries of the traditional 'settled' sexuality of the rural peers she disdained; providing a source of power and status, as a member of the 'in' crowd at club events; and, importantly (as a podium dancer), a source of income for sustaining her involvement. However, the options and possibilities for constructing an alternative career path through involvement in club culture were much more limited for young women and, despite the advent of the female DJ (Henderson, 1997), did not hold the same breadth of promise for her as, for example, for Robin.

Hazel also opted for another version of downward social mobility as a means of resisting a professional middle-class future. This involved drawing on an aspect of local rural working-class culture: rural factory work. Hazel was initially drawn to the most powerful symbol of 'failure' in the locality – working in a turkey factory – but, after experiencing the brutal culture shift this involved, settled into a wider variety of manual, unskilled work.

From the position of her middle-class and rural background, Hazel did not experience drug use as a risk to her future, simply as a contrast to boredom with her environs and a cultural passport to a world beyond it. Corinne's experience was rather different.

Corinne: 'I don't want to end up on the brew'¹

Corinne had much more in common with Glen in that she had far fewer material resources to draw on, but the close community she grew up in provided her with extensive social networks and a more domestically based, local party scene. The night-time cityscape became a key tool for Corinne in constructing difference and consciously ignoring the rigidity, restrictions and fear of sectarianism. She was able to move around the city's divided leisure spaces with friends from both sides of 'the divide' and as a young woman was relatively safe in doing so.

There were also a number of things working against the processes that tied her into her local community and its norms (MacDonald et al., 2005). Having seen male relatives living a similar lifestyle to Glen and having experienced its impact on others first-hand, Corinne felt an urgent need to escape this. As a result she invested heavily in education as a route out of poverty and sectarian divisions. Like Hazel, she saw no attractive opportunities in the party scene for a long-term future. Whilst Glen tended to present a positive picture of life, Corinne's story was marked with regret for much of the study; wishing at 17 that she had 'never even touched' Ecstasy, she felt her life was out of control and that the previous year had been 'the worst year of my life' – something she associated with the death of her uncle who was 'like a father to me' and who she felt would be 'ashamed' of her.

A turning point in her drug career came shortly before this when Corinne returned home one night to find her mother drinking and distressed about their declining relationship. Her ensuing resolve to repair this relationship was given a further boost when her teachers requested a meeting with her and her mother to discuss Corinne's changed attitude and achievement at school. At 19, Corinne was describing 3 years of Ecstasy use as a 'wee

phase' she had 'got over', having acquired a new, anti-drug social circle and boyfriend and reinvested in education as a route out of her community. At 21, she was still living at home, was close to her mother once more and had little contact with her old friends on her estate. Still with the same boyfriend, she was considering following him to work abroad. Working and studying filled most of her life. Her taste for hedonistic pleasures became heavily bounded in this context and took the form of drinking 'as much as I can' on rare nights out with her boyfriend.

Conclusion

The bigger picture of chemical culture at the turn of the 21st century emerging from the accounts of those of a more chemically hedonistic bent in the *Inventing Adulthood* study contradicts dominant understandings in that it invokes an oddly 'retro' image of the privileged classes dabbling in cocaine use and of predominantly male affairs with chemical culture. This seems a long way from the dominant portrayal of late modern consumer culture of chemical excess as a democratised zone in which gender, class, ethnicity and so on are no longer significant barriers to participation and in which postmodern femininities have played a prominent role. This predominantly middle-class male picture is all the more surprising given that the study sample became more female over time and remained predominantly working class. On reflection, however, it appears to point up a bent for new forms of material and social 'success' entailing downward social mobility amongst middle-class young men. Whilst the working-class young man – historically the 'spectacular star' of previous studies of drug cultures – is almost absent from this picture *in person*, his presence is arguably much more considerable in a symbolic sense. The burgeoning club culture may have produced the phenomenon of 'boys staying home to cook tunes' and with it a plethora of aspiring DJs (Henderson, 1997), but the relative normalisation of certain aspects of the criminal underworld and all things 'scam' within popular culture also contributed to the landscapes for young masculinities, lending currency to 'performing' a variety of 'working-class', 'bad lad' identities (Henderson, 1997; Beynon, 2002).

The bigger picture, however, only reflects the continuities and patterns within young biographies. The *Inventing Adulthood* study also enables a shift into the complexity and detail of connected individual lives over time, which illustrates that, although gender and class are clearly relevant factors, they are not sufficient tools for understanding the different place and meaning of chemical culture in young people's developing lives.

Whilst Glen was drawn to a more traditionally sub-cultural identity, his middle-class peers 'bought into' the masculine identities available within more mainstream chemical culture. For Hazel, intent upon downward social mobility, the resources for adopting a working-class identity were not as readily available to her within club culture as they were to her rural peer Robin. Instead she turned to the 'unrespectable' elements of the rural job market. Meanwhile, for Corinne, her changing attitude towards drugs increasingly became an expression of the way she dealt with the tension between her desire to leave behind the risks her socially disadvantaged community posed to her future, and a need to maintain her family ties and position within her community. In rejecting the Ecstasy culture,

she confirmed her rejection of a life of limited options and prospects. A less localised version of adulthood, achieved through education, vocation and social mobility, became her primary focus.

Glen's lack of resources meant that his sub-cultural investment led to diminishing options as well as fewer choices over time. In contrast, his middle-class peers were shored up by parental resources and, to differing degrees, this translated into an ability to turn their investment to advantage. This class difference also applied to Hazel and Corinne but worked very differently and with very different outcomes. Although Hazel's middle-class parental resources were crucial in supporting her through her fling with club culture, family origins, responsibility and conflict were, at the same time, the impetus to her initial involvement. Similarly, whilst Corinne shared many of the elements of Glen's disadvantaged Northern Irish background and was the most given to chemical hedonism amongst young women from 'poor places' within the study, her response to her local landscape and the role that her investment in intoxication played in this, was quite different.

Fiona Measham has recently argued that:

... for women 'doing gender' through 'doing drugs' allows the possibility of both constructing and challenging traditional and non-traditional notions of femininity. (Measham, 2002: 363–4)

Our case studies certainly suggest this analysis could be extended to 'doing' masculinities and 'doing' class through 'doing drugs'. However, Measham and colleagues have also noted the dynamic nature and complexity of the development of drug use and the role of transitions in other areas of life in determining drug pathways (Measham, et al., 1998a, 1998b). The case studies discussed offer complex, dynamic accounts of heavy investment in the leisure–pleasure landscape, situating engagement in chemical culture in the broader context of an analysis of structural and identity transitions. As such they provide a window on the different place and meaning of chemical culture in contemporary everyday lives, one that provides a refreshing contrast to its place on public agendas. They also suggest that the chemical leisure–pleasure landscape is not only a matter for public concern but also a popular arena in which inequalities are being remade. It is to such questions that the book now turns.

Note

1. Unemployed and in receipt of benefits.