The Social Ecology of the Public House

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The Social Ecology of Everards Public Houses

Abstract:

Despite holding an important place within British culture, the public house remains an under-researched space. Most academic research describes the social activities that occur within the pub, yet seldom draws on theoretical conceptualisations or models of place from across the social sciences. This is surprising given the wealth of research on the ways in which places become meaningful to groups and individuals. Using semi-structured interviews and observations within six public houses, the current project attempted to understand how the pub serves as a social space within a local community. Drawing on concepts from within ecological psychology, the project sought to better understand the reciprocal relationship between the customer and the pub environment. The current study viewed pubs through the lens of ecological psychology to uncover the different affordances that the pub offers its customers, and how these affordances are in turn influenced by the customers own needs and experiences.

Customers perceived the public house to be spatially complex. Rather than being a homogenous space, the pub was interpreted as a number of different nested zones. Customers’ also described the unique sociality that is produced and occurs in the pub and the role of history in their experience and evaluation of the public house. The study provided an opportunity to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the public house as a social space and to bring the public house into current debates within the social sciences. The project also highlights opportunities to explicitly draw on concepts from other disciplines such as social and ecological psychology.
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Introduction

For many, the public house is Britain’s oldest and most popular institution, used as a place to celebrate and commiserate, to be on one’s own or surrounded by others, for quiet encounters and large scale meetings. At first glance the pub appears a simple place in which customers can purchase a drink, relax and socialise. Yet scholars have consistently argued that the pub is more than simply a business that sells alcohol. A British phenomena, once a “bastion of traditional English culture” (Everitt, & Bowler, 1996, 102) the most common discourse surrounding public houses in current popular culture is that of the ‘death’ of the traditional, English pub (Edwards, 2008; Kingsnorth, 2008) and indeed the ‘death’ of traditional practices such as visiting for a ‘quick pint’ (Naylor, 2015).

Reported figures vary between sources, with the suggested numbers of pubs closing ranging from six to 29 pubs per week (Kingsnorth, 2008; Naylor, 2015). Despite the irregularities in these claims due to official definitions of what constitutes a pub, there is consensus that the number of pubs that are open and trading in the UK are in decline. Figures from the British Beer and Pub Association have supported the notion of overall widespread loss of pubs, with the number of pubs in operation decreasing from approximately 69000 in 1980, to approximately 49000 in 2012 (BBPA, 2014). Therefore whatever the most accurate and official number, one thing that is certain is that the number of public houses in the UK is declining.

Many have pointed towards the report conducted by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1989, suggesting that this marked the beginning of the end for the local pub. In an attempt to break down the monopoly that large brewing companies held over the beer market, laws were passed that prohibited brewers from owning more than 2,000 pubs. However, to overcome this change in legislation many brewers created stand-alone pub companies, referred to as PubCos, to which they sold all of their pubs. Therefore the newly created PubCos were exempt from the new legislation (Kingsnorth, 2008). The creation of PubCos led to the introduction of distinctive branding strategies, as companies attempted to develop a strong sense of identity between themselves
and their competitors. As a result, pubs began to appear more and more identical, eliminating the individuality that was often the very essence and flavor of each local pub.

Although it is certain that the creation of PubCos vastly altered the market, it has been suggested that its effect on the number of pubs has been greatly overstated (Snowdon, 2014). Other cultural and economic factors have also played an important role in the apparent demise of the traditional pub. For example, during times of recession, people may have become more cautious of the way they spend their money during leisure time. The rising price of alcohol in pubs and the ever increasing entertainment options within the home has led to many people choosing to drink at home rather than venture out to the pub. In addition, despite regular moral panics surrounding ‘binge drinking’, alcohol consumption is at an all-time low, perhaps due in part to increasingly available information about the effects of alcohol on an individual’s health. However, with all of the afore-mentioned factors in mind, Snowdon (2014) raises an important concern:

“The data raise several ‘chicken or egg’ questions. For example, are people drinking less beer because they are going to the pub less or are they going to the pub less because they are drinking less beer? Are people buying more alcohol at home because it is cheaper to buy from supermarkets or are people buying more alcohol from supermarkets because other factor, such as the smoking ban, has made drinking in the pub less appealing?” (Snowdon, 2014, 31)

As traditional pubs have declined, many pubs have attempted to survive and to maintain their profit margins. In doing so, many pubs have evolved into themed pubs, such as an Irish Pub, Australian pub, gastro pub etc. This has led many to argue that pubs are no longer ‘pubs’ in the traditional sense at all, or as Naylor argues “[the pubs of today] are effectively restaurants in former pub spaces” (Naylor, 2015). Therefore the very identity of public house is in turmoil.

Everards, founded by William Everard in 1849, are a family-run brewery located in Leicestershire, a county in the East Midlands in the UK. Everards brew high quality ales. They have a core range of four beverages and also brew a range
of limited edition ales throughout the year which change on a monthly basis. In addition, Everards’ are a property management business, owning an estate of over 170 pubs. Pubs are located all over the country, yet the majority are in the East Midlands. Everards believe that each of their pubs are ‘personality-led’, driven by the licensee team and supported by the brewery and their dedicated staff. As a result, unlike a large managed estate, each of the pubs are unique. In addition, Everards have partnered with a number of other small brewers to create a new range of pubs, known as ‘Project William pubs’ which offer an increasing variety of local ales.

In line with the increasing focus away from large scale, one-size-fits-all pubs and towards unique individual pubs, Everards have also began to work with local artisans, introducing them and their products to their licensees to be used and sold within their pubs. Everards also have a ‘Community Vision’, described as “making a beneficial contribution to the communities in which we work and live” (Everards, 2015). In a part due to this community vision and in part an attempt to understand the ‘pub of the future’, following an East-Midlands wide call for partners issued by the University of Leicester, Everards teamed up with the university in order to create a research project to provide them with new ways of understanding and thinking about their pubs.

Although there has been a wealth of research that has examined in detail the importance of places to individuals and groups (Perkins & Thorn, 2012), the public house remains an under-research space. Existing literature surrounding pubs have argued that the pub is a highly social space, playing an important role in keeping villages and their communities alive. As previously mentioned, at first glance the pub appears to simply be a place to purchase a drink and unwind. However beyond typical descriptions of the social activity occurring in pubs and arguments that the pub is an iconic part of Britain’s heritage, the complex nature of the pub is yet to be understood. For many the pub represents a place to find and ‘consume’ friendship, a complex environment with its own social norms, informal rules and intricate history.

In order to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of public houses and the way in which the pub operate as a social space, research into
the relationship between the customer and the environment in which they consume is required. Drawing on theoretical conceptualisations of places, the project utilised a qualitative approach to explore the ways in which the public house serves as a social space within a local community.

The project was underpinned by theoretical assumptions from within the philosophical paradigm Critical Realism, which suggests that although there is an external ‘reality’ that exists independently of human thought and explanation, all knowledge of such a reality is socially constructed. To investigate the way in which the public house serves as a social space, the methodologies used within the project were qualitative, ethnographic and interpretivist in nature. Observations were carried out within six public houses to gain an insight into the activities and social interactions taking place inside each public house. In addition, short, semi-structured interviews were carried out with customers of each public house.

There were several themes that emerged amongst participants’ responses, which are discussed in detail later within this thesis. However, before these findings are discussed, the rest of the thesis shall progress as follows. The proceeding literature review is split into three discrete sections. Section 1 provides a thorough overview of existing research that has been conducted into the public house. Part 2 introduces theoretical frameworks and concepts that have been developed in the social science literature regarding place, before moving on to Part 3 in which the pub is viewed through the lens of these frameworks and concepts, highlighting the need to bring the public house into current social scientific debates.

The Methodology chapter outlines the theoretical assumptions that underlie the project, alongside details of the research methods used, data collection and analysis. This section also contains a description of each of the six research sites that were selected to take part in the study. Then the Results section is split into three empirical chapters based on the themes that emerged during interviews with customers of the six public houses. ‘Spatial Complexity’ examines the suggestion that the public house consists of a number of smaller nested zones and explores the ways in which these zones are differentiated,
suggesting that one way to understand each of the zones is to examine the affordances that a spatial location can offer. As the reader moves to the second empirical chapter, ‘Sociality’ ventures beyond generic descriptions of the pub as a social space to develop a deeper understanding of the sociality that is produced within the public house. The chapter suggests that although the pub is widely regarded as a place where social activity and community spirit can be found, in reality the sociality produced in the pub is complex and unique. The final empirical chapter ‘History’ explores popular conceptualizations of the pub as a symbol of Britain’s history and heritage and argues that perhaps it is not the factual history of the pub that captures its customers, but the way in which the pub is intertwined with the customers’ own personal, autobiographical history.

The thesis closes with a discussion of the projects findings, relating the empirical chapters to one another and to existing. In addition, the discussion offers critical comments regarding the studies design and suggestions for future research. The current project brings the public house into current debates concerning the importance of places to both individuals and groups and provides new ways of exploring and understanding public houses.
Literature Review

Introduction

There have been many bold claims put forward that the public house is symbolic of British history and culture. The pub has been described as a “cultural and social hub” (Markham, 2011, 1), “holding a “unique position in British society” (SIRC, 2008, 3), as a “bastion of traditional English culture” (Everitt, & Bowler 1996, 102), “expressing [the nations] very identity (Jennings, 2011, 15). The pub also forms part of a wider mental representation of traditional British life, which Mingay (1989) termed a ‘rural idyll’. Due to the widespread depiction of the pub as a focal point of the community, Maye, Illberly and Kneafsey (2005) argue that the pub is often bestowed with ‘mythical qualities’ and is therefore a very important part of the “rural idyll” described by Mingay (1989).

The current literature review is divided into three sections. In the first section an overview of the existing literature regarding pubs will be presented. Next, an exploration of the wider literature from a range of disciplines within the social sciences, regarding space and the way in which spaces become meaningful, will be introduced and considered. Finally, the third section will draw on such literature and argue that doing so could provide a way of bringing the public house into current debates regarding space, and therefore could provide a greater understanding about the way in which individuals use these spaces.

Part 1: Existing public house research:

A brief history of the public house

Attempts have been made to summarise, document and explore the ways in which the public house has developed in Britain throughout history (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Chrzan, 2013; Jennings, 2011; Smith, 1983; Williams, 2014). Although not the focus of the current research, a brief overview of the evolution of pubs in the Britain demonstrates important milestones in their development. As early as the eighth and ninth centuries, throughout Britain monasteries and churches brewed and distributed popular beverages such as beer, ale and
mead (Williams, 2014). However, as the British population grew in number, many individuals, most often wives, began to brew their own beer and open up their home as an ‘alehouse’ to members of the public (Smith, 1983). Ale was a particularly common feature of the British diet due to unsafe water conditions and a lack of sanitised drinking water (Scholliers, 2001).

By the fifteenth and sixteenth century Britain contained many drinking establishments. Smith (1983) suggested that there were three main types of establishment during this time: the ‘Inn’, providing refreshments for the coaching trade, the ‘Tavern’, selling wine to the casual drinker, and the ‘Alehouse’ offering a traditional village drinking hole for members of the local community. During the sixteenth century, urban living conditions were overcrowded, unclean and uncomfortable (Smith, 1983). The public house provided a comfortable refuge from harsh external conditions. This was particularly true for the lower classes, with Bailey (1978) arguing that during a time of social dislocation the pub “was a centre of warmth, light and sociability for the urban poor” (Bailey, 1978, 10). Furthermore, it has been suggested that during this time the pub offered individuals a unique refuge from both political and religious rule, as “the church was controlled by the clergy, the town hall by the lord, but the public house was controlled by the people” (Chrzan, 2013, 5). Therefore the pub offered a space that was comparatively comfortable and in which individuals had a higher level of freedom than what was permitted elsewhere.

The introduction of The Beerhouse Act in 1830 permitted individuals to open up alehouses so long as they paid an annual fee. As a result there was a sharp increase in the number of pubs across Britain and pub-brewing companies began to redesign their pubs with flamboyant architecture and an array of available spirits (Smith, 1983; Williams, 2014). However, during the turn of the twentieth century, it has been argued that the public house began to lose its “central position” as a choice of leisure space (Greenaway, 1998, 174). Both Britain and the United States experienced a ‘public recreation movement’ in which there was increased economic investment in the provision of museums, libraries, playgrounds, and other public spaces such as national parks and beaches (Williams, 2014). Furthermore, there was an increase in the number of
opportunities to attend organised group activities such as arts and crafts clubs, social clubs and other team sports.

Efforts were made to reduce the number of pubs and to restrict the hours in which pubs could open and the activities that were permitted to take place in the form of various pieces of legislation (Andrews & Turner, 2012). At the same time, the twentieth century also witnessed the increase in the number of alternative establishments in which to enjoy one's leisure time. For example, circuses, cinemas and dance halls became popular establishments throughout the 1920s to the 1950s and the number of shopping centres, restaurants also increased (Jennings, 2011; Williams, 2014). Leisure time became increasingly associated with consumption, as people began to purchase goods for pleasure and sociability (Perkins & Thorn, 2012). During this time, consumption also became to be used by individuals as a way of expressing their own personal identity and social position with society (Sassatelli, 2007; Vebelen, 1994). For many people, particularly the working class, visiting the pub, amongst other activities such as bicycling, bowling and visits to local cinemas, became a part of a distinct identity and culture (McLean et al, 2008). As a result, there was a resurgence of the pub’s popularity during the 1970’s (Jennings, 2011).

However, the temporary increase in number of public houses was short-lived and the number of pubs began to decline once more. This has continued into the current day, which has led many to argue that there has been a ‘death’ of the English pub (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Williams, 2014). Official figures from the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) suggest that the total number of British pubs in Britain has decreased from approximately 69000 in 1980, to approximately 49000 in 2012 (BBPA, 2014). The reasons for the decline in the number of pubs in Britain are complex have been discussed extensively in both academic literature and national news articles (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Cabras, 2011; Hickman, 2013; Muir, 2002; Pratten & Lovatt, 2002; Wheeler, 2013). Explanations have pointed to various pieces of legislation, such as the ‘Smoking Ban’ of 2007 which prohibited the smoking of tobacco in public places and the Licensing Act of 2003, which relaxed opening hours, increased staff costs and encouraged a trend towards late-night bar culture in the centre of towns. Alternative explanations have pointed to the price of alcohol in
supermarkets, which remains much lower and more affordable that in public houses and better entertainment options within the home (Cabras, 2011).

Despite the decline in the number of pubs in Britain the amount of money spent on alcohol still remains at a substantial level (Raistrick, 2005) and many pubs have continued to trade successfully. Maye, Iberly & Kneafsey (2005) point out that that the idea that the British pub is experiencing a ‘crisis’ is often based on quantitative measures, that is the number of pubs that remain open. The authors argue that quantitative measures alone may not accurately represent the current state of the pub trade across Britain. For example the authors note that during the 1980s and 1990s, a time that is often painted as the ‘golden years’ for pubs, there may have been too many pubs, and that closure of these sites does not necessarily signal a ‘crisis’ as is often portrayed by the media.

Although it is not an intention of the current project to present a history of the public house, a quick overview of historical uses of the pub demonstrates the ever-changing, dynamic circumstances in which the public house exits. The pub and the way in which it is used is influenced by the wider changes in society. However, although public houses have evolved over time there appears to be a strong consensus amongst all writers that the pub operates as a social space, providing the opportunity to meet and socialise with others. Therefore the pub is an ever-changing environment, subject to influence from wider social and political factors, yet its use as a social space has remained stable throughout history.

**The public house as a social space**

One of the earliest and most comprehensive studies of pubs, conducted in one northern town, suggested that pubs were indeed a social space and “not merely a drinking shop” (Mass Observation, 1943, quoted in Orford et al., 2009, 69). Since then many authors have discussed the social activity that occurs within pubs and reiterated the social benefits that the pub environment brings to those who use the space (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Cabras, 2011; Cabras & Reggiani, 2010; Muir, 2002; Orford et al., 2009).
In 2002, a report was carried out by Muir (2002), entitled ‘Pubs and Places: The social value of community pubs’. The report aimed to assess the social value of public houses, to demonstrate the ways in which pub were important to its customers and to highlight concern about the current state of the pub trade. Within this report, Muir (2002) echoed the earlier findings of Mass Observation, acknowledging the important social roles that pubs perform, as highlighted in the following quote:

“The public house is more than just a retail business; it plays an important role at the heart of the community, providing a hub through which social networks can be maintained and extended.” (Muir, 2002, 24)

The report suggested several areas in which public houses are important to the economy, society and individuals. For example, pubs provide an opportunity for people to develop social networks through meeting and socialising with new people and existing friends. This in turn improves community cohesion, through promoting interaction between people of different social backgrounds. In addition Muir (2002) suggested that pubs can increase ‘community and civic participation’ as they are often used to host community events and activities such as quiz nights, fundraising events and sports clubs. Muir (2002) noted that public houses also have an important economic impact, injecting £80000 into their local economy each year and contributing 2% of Britain’s gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, pubs provide a number of ‘public services’ for its customers, operating as a place where individuals can seek advice and find information about local tradespeople and events. Finally, pubs have a unique ‘cultural value’ as they are representative of traditional English life and identity.

Much of the existing research into pubs has often focused on one or more of the areas outlined in Muir’s (2002) report. For example, Cabras and colleagues have argued that pubs are a natural place for social aggregation and act as ‘hubs’ for people to socialize and network with others. The authors outline several benefits of doing so, including the opportunity to discuss community life, reinforce relationships that tie together the local community and are also often the starting place for many group activities. As a result, Cabras (2011) argues that the pub provides its local visitors with social capital, defined as the ability to
access and utilise support from one’s neighbours (Cabras, 2011). This is important as previous work research conducted by Putnam (2000) has found that increased social capital is associated with “good health, good education and good government” (Cabras & Reggiani, 2010, 948).

Building on the suggestion that the pub provides individuals with a source of social capital, Cabras and Reggiani (2010) hypothesized that increased social capital may in turn increase the level of socioeconomic activity in the area surrounding the pub. The authors found that in areas where there was an established community, the presence of pubs had a significant impact on socioeconomic activity. This included activities and events that had both social and economic benefits, such as village fetes and other fundraising activities. However, in areas where there was little sense of community, the presence of a pub had little or no impact on socioeconomic activity. Therefore, it could be suggested that pubs provide an additional catalyst for socioeconomic activity in areas where there is already an established community.

The term ‘community’ has traditionally been applied to larger scale groups, but the term can also be applied to much smaller ‘micro-settings’, such as schools, internet groups and pubs (Fisher, Sonn & Bishop, 2002). In an attempt to gain an insight into the relationship between the pub and a sense of community, Orford, Rolfe, Dalton, et al. (2009) carried out interviews with a group of heavy drinkers in a large British city. When questioned about their views of the pub and community, the authors found a variety of views amongst responses. Some customers believed the pub was unrelated to the community, whilst others either believed the pub represented its own community or formed part of a wider, local community. The lack of consensus amongst participants responses show that the relationship between the pub and community may be much less clear-cut than is first imagined.

The Dutch term ‘gezellig’ is often associated with pubs to refer to a cosy, friendly atmosphere that creates a sense of belonging and inclusion (Cabras, 2010). Research conducted by Emslie, Hunt and Lyons (2013) assessed the role of alcohol in the friendships of middle age Scottish men. The authors found alcohol was integral part of maintaining their friendships, which is particular
significant as high level of alcohol consumption, particularly excessive alcohol consumption, occurs within this demographic. The respondents noted that drinking together, particularly drinking pints of beer, allowed them to take part in a social activity that aligned with their own masculinity whilst forming friendships within the pub.

All of the aforementioned research suggests that the pub operates as a social space. However, Hall and Barret (2012) note that places that are often designed to be inclusive and used by everyone can quickly become territorialised by certain groups of people. Although somewhat based on stereotypical views, this is often observable in everyday life, with the bingo hall and community café frequented by the older generation, the local park claimed by groups of young people and certain pubs being considered a place for groups of men to meet and relax. All of these spaces are, in theory, open to people from all walks of life, yet in practice the people that visit may share certain defining characteristics. In addition, Hall and Barret (2012) note that although many places are designed with the intention of promoting inter-cultural dialogues, often the interaction between people of different social groups is characterized by tolerance rather than integration. Watt (2009) demonstrated the way in which places can be used to reinforce existing social boundaries, suggesting that people are ‘spatially selective’, choosing to visit or avoid places where they feel they do or do not belong.

Exploring the use of two pubs in the same small village, Hunt and Staerlee (1986) noted that although pubs can be spaces for social cohesion, they can also reinforce and reflect existing social divisions. The authors stated that instead of being a place where people from all walks of life were present, the pub was in fact occupied by specific groups of people. The idea that pubs may not be a ‘space for all’ has also be suggested by Chrzan (2013), who argued that in comparison with the past in which pubs were the only spaces large enough to hold large scale social events, today pubs tend to be frequented by more homogenous group of customers, thus providing little opportunity to mix with people from different social backgrounds. Therefore although there is consensus that the pub represents a social space for some, whether or not the pub represents a social space for all is more ambiguous.
The public house as a ‘third space’

An early paper, produced by Smith (1985) discussing the social uses of public drinking houses, suggested that pubs provided a meeting place for a “kaleidoscope of human interaction” (Smith, 1985, 370). Furthermore pubs were associated with meeting people, recreation, games, entertainment, song and occasionally sexual activity. Smith argued that the pub functioned as an “intermediate institution” (Smith, 1983, 383). Smith used this term to suggest that the pub was positioned in the middle of several continuums; between formal nature of the workplace and informal nature of the home, between being both a public and private space, and between both respectable and disrespectful activity.

The term ‘intermediate institution’ was used by Smith before Oldenburg’s (1999) crucial introduction of the term ‘third place’. The concept of a ‘third place’ was described by Oldenburg as a place that is physically separate from both the home (the first place) and work (the second space); two settings in which individuals spend a large proportion of their lives. Oldenburg (1999) described third places as spaces that are highly accessible to many people, both in terms of proximity and in financial cost. In addition, third places are sociable places, in which the primary activity is social interaction, and a place where both ‘regulars’ and newcomers can meet. Although third places may provide the opportunity to purchase or obtain items such as food and drink, these items are not essential. Instead, the sociable atmosphere created by the people that inhabit the space is of the highest importance (Oldenburg, 1999).

Oldenburg placed emphasis on the ‘ordinariness’ of such establishments, noting that third places are often taken-for-granted spaces where people are able to meet up, interact and relax. The conceptualization of a third place has been applied to several settings, including; coffee shops (Shapira & Navon, 1991; Warner, Talbot & Bennison, 2012), libraries (Elmborg, 2011), barbers (Lofland, 1998), local convenience stores (Hickman, 2013) and pubs (Oldenburg, 1999). Despite the acknowledgement that the pub can operate as a third space, little empirical research has been further conducted. However,
there is a small body of literature that has examined the ways in which other third places settings are able to fulfil a range of customer needs.

The conceptualization of third spaces has been applied to coffee shops. Shapira and Navon (1991) have suggested that cafes are an ambiguous place, between a private and public setting and it is this fluidity that is the essence of a third space. However, Shapira and Navon (1991) argue that the conceptualization of a third place is not applicable to all coffee shops, particularly highly commercialized, large chains of coffee houses. The author’s suggest that the reason for this is because these environments often suppress rather than encourage human interaction, which directly contradicts the inclusive atmosphere that third places provide.

The suggestion that cafes can act as a third space was further investigated by Warner, Talbot and Bennison (2012). The authors conducted an ethnographic case study into ‘Anita’s café’, a cafe located on a high street in a financially deprived area. After conducting interviews with both customers and the café owner, the authors proposed that the café fulfilled a variety of needs. For example, the café provided a place where customers could enjoy a food and drinks in comfortable surroundings, thus meeting a functional need for shelter, warmth and food. In addition, the customers placed great importance on the ways in which the café met their social needs, such as the need for companionship and to feel connected to other people. Customers felt that staff were interested in their well-being, demonstrated in regular conversations with staff and occasions where staff – and sometimes other customers - noticed when a regular customer was absent. Both the staff and the customers felt that the café was ‘for everybody’, thus providing a friendly, inclusive atmosphere.

The study into Anita’s cafe highlighted the important social role that third places can play in the lives of their customers and the sense of belonging and community that third places can create. However, it is not just cafés that provide these important functions, but third places at large. For example Rosenbaum and colleagues (Rosenbaum, 2006; Rosenbaum, Ward & Walker et al., 2007) conducted research into ‘Sammy’s diner’ situated in Chicago. Like Warner, Talbot and Bennison (2012), Rosenbaum (2006) also argued that the
diner was able to fulfil a variety of customer needs. Alongside meeting the ‘physical need’ for food and warmth, the diner was able to prevent loneliness in two ways. Firstly, the diner fulfilled a ‘social need’ through providing a place where companionship could be found. Secondly, the diner also fulfilled an ‘emotional need’ through providing a place to seek social support from other people (Rosenbaum, 2006).

Rosenbaum continued to develop an understanding of third places by demonstrating that people who had been involved in life experiences that had exposed them to loneliness, such as bereavement or divorce, were more likely to seek to replace their lost social resources by visiting third places and forming relationships with both customers and employees (Rosenbaum, Ward & Walker et al., 2007). The social importance of third places has also been examined by Hickman (2013). On interviewing residents from six deprived areas in Britain, Hickman (2013) found that considerable levels of social interaction took place in third places such as shops, pubs and cafes. Residents believed social interaction was a symbol of both health and vibrancy and that a lack of social interaction could signal the decline of the local community. When referring to ‘social interaction’ most people focus on verbal interaction, however for some residents in Hickman’s study, merely watching other people pass was considered to be meaningful and important.

Because much face-to-face interaction takes place in ‘ordinary’ establishments such as pubs, cafes and shops, Hickman (2013) suggest that these spaces are particularly beneficial for certain groups of people. This includes people who may be lacking face-to-face social interaction elsewhere, such as individuals that live in deprived areas, the elderly and people that spend a large proportion of their time at home due to ill-health, retirement, unemployment or having young children. Therefore, taken together, the afore-mentioned literature demonstrates the way in which third spaces hold important personal social benefits for individuals, through satisfying important physical and social needs.

Although clear positive economic, cultural and social benefits of both third spaces, and more specifically of public houses, have been documented, recent reports and news articles have documented the decline in the number of public
houses in Britain. Official figures from the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) demonstrate a reduction of 20000 pubs across the past three decades. The closure of many pubs represents a loss of a space that is considered to be both a social space and a third space. This can have not only significant consequences for both individuals that are licensees, staff or customer but also wider implications for the surrounding area. Third places, such as public houses, provide a place where social interaction, companionship and social support from other people can be found (Rosenbuam, 2006, 2007; Warner, Talbot & Bennison, 2012). Therefore it is important to consider the potential negative consequences of having such places taken away, which is a particularly possible risk during periods of national financial difficulty.

In summary, many authors have suggested that the public house represents an important part of British history and culture. An examination of the use of public houses throughout history demonstrates the way in which the public house has been shaped by wider societal changes. However, one stable feature of the public house is its function as a social space, with authors also suggesting the pub represents a third place. Research into the pub as both a social space and a third space has suggested many benefits to both individuals and wider communities in which pubs exists.

**Part 2: An exploration of academic literature regarding space**

An examination of the existing literature regarding public houses emphasises its important and unique status within British culture and heralds the pub as an unequivocal social space. Although the existing academic literature has described and documented the social activity that occurs within the pub, research is seldom situated within wider theoretical conceptualisations of space. This is surprising given that places are the object of study for many people, including, geographers, psychologists, geologists, sociologist, architects, planners and engineers. In particular there is a wealth of research that focuses on what Perkins and Thorn (2012) refer to as ‘socio-spatial’ interactions; the ways in which places become meaningful and the interaction between people and their environments.
All behaviour and psychological experience is situated within a particular space, which is highlighted in the work of American geographer Pred (1986), who argued that:

“The practices through which social structure is both expressed and reproduced cannot be divorced from the structuring of space and the use of spatial structures. Previously structured space both constrains and enables the reproduction of social practices and social structure. The social becomes the spatial. The spatial becomes the social.”

(Pred, 1986, 198)

Pred (1986) suggests that social activity cannot be separated from the space in which it is produced and enacted. Therefore to understand social activity within the public house, it is important to draw on literature from across the social sciences that consider the way in which such experiences and practices are situated spatially within the pub. In doing so, one can attempt to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the way in which the pub operates as a social space.

Places are meaningful to the people that inhabit and interact with a space. Early work from the influential geographer Tuan stated that “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value (Tuan, 1977, 6). In addition, Perkins and Thorn (2012) have also explored the ways in which places hold meaning for individuals. The authors argue that “at the core of most place-related writing is the notion that places are more than just locations” (Perkins & Thorn, 2012, 14). The authors suggest places are often taken for granted, noting that it is only when the loss of a place occurs that their value is often acknowledged. For example, Perkins and Thorn (2012) cite several examples of research that demonstrates the sadness of residents when allotments were replaced with houses (Perkins, 1988) or when a local barber shop has closed (Lofland, 1998).

Despite a substantial interest in places and the way they shape and are shaped by individuals, one under-researched space is that of the British public house. Although there are currently around 49000 establishments in the UK (BBPA,
2014), the pub has received little academic attention. As a result there is limited understanding about the way in which people use these spaces. This is problematic because it leaves an important aspect of contemporary social space outside of ongoing debate.

**Theoretical conceptualisations of place**

In an attempt to understand how places become meaningful, several authors have offered theoretical conceptualisations of place. For example, Relph (1976), a humanistic geographer, outlined a three-part model of place consisting of the ‘physical setting’, ‘activities and events’ and the individual and group ‘meanings’ created by people that interact with the space. Relph (1976) suggested that of the three components, ‘meaning’ is often considered to be the most important to individuals, yet it is also the most difficult component to understand.

A separate three-part conceptualisation of place was outlined by Canter (1977a), a psychologist interested in what makes places meaningful to people. Canter argued that ‘place’ occurs as a result of the relationship between the ‘physical attributes’ of a place, the ‘actions’ and the ‘conceptions’ of the people who use the place. Canter (1977b) later extended the model into a four-part ‘facet theory’ and proposed four inter-related ‘facets’ of place. These ‘facets’ were; ‘functional differentiation’, ‘place objectives’, ‘scale of interaction’ and ‘aspects of design’. Functional differentiation referred to the different activities that occur within a place, whereas ‘place objectives’ extended Canter’s earlier notion of ‘conceptions’ to consider the social and cultural experience of a place. ‘Aspects of design’ referred to the physical characteristics of a place, whereas ‘scale of Interactions’ highlighted the importance on the size of the environment. Both Relph (1976) and Canter (1977a, 1977b) attempted to identify the basic elements of a place. Despite originating from different disciplines and using different linguistic terms, both models highlight the importance of physical objects, activities that occur within a setting and a psychological component.

Echoing the need to consider place as complex and multifaceted, Massey (1994) critiqued existing social scientific literature regarding place, arguing that place is often reduced to a singular identity. The author argued that places can
have multiple meanings and can be experienced and interpreted by different people in different ways. Therefore Massey (1994) suggested that places are continuously reproduced and are a product of the ongoing interpretations of individuals.

In a divergence away from a compartmentalised model of place, Gustafson (2001) outlines a model of place in which the meaning associated with a place can be mapped between three inter-related poles. Gustafson (2001) based his model on his own research in which he interviewed people about places that were meaningful to them. Based on participants' responses Gustafson (2001) proposed three broad themes of meaning; ‘self’, ‘other’ and ‘environment’. Rather than compartmentalising each of the three themes, meaning is created as an interplay between all of the factors.

Gustafson (2001) used his model, which highlights the need to consider place as multifaceted and complex, to demonstrate how the meaning of places differed based on the physical size of a place. Places of smaller physical size, such as a neighbourhood, were associated with ‘self-related meanings’ that occurred as a result of self, self-other, self-environment and self-other-environment relationships. Conversely, it was found that places of larger physical size such as a country became meaningful based on ‘other-related’ meanings. This includes meanings that were directly related to others, the environment or the relationship between other people and the environment.

Theoretical conceptualisations of place are useful for disentangling different dimensions of what makes a place meaningful. Therefore attempts to outline and model the different facets of place provide a useful framework for which to further investigate places. However, existing models do not explore the reciprocal relationship between and individual and their environment.

**Introducing concepts from ecological psychology**

Both theoretical conceptualisations of place and empirical research suggest that in order to fully understand the complexities of what makes a place meaningful, a holistic approach is required. A separate body of work, derived from ecological psychologists, such as James Gibson, Roger Barker and
Timothy Ingold, examines the reciprocal relationship between spaces and the people that use them. In his highly influential book *The Perception of the Environment*, Ingold (2000) states that whilst attempting to understand the importance of place, he was concerned about the disconnection between the natural and social sciences. Ingold (2000) argues for the need to move away from the nature / culture dualism that permeates academic thought, and towards a view of dynamic synergy between an organism and its environment.

In an effort to create a complimentary thesis that could draw on both natural and social sciences without relying on Cartesian based dualisms of mind-body, nature-nurture, Ingold turned to the work of James Gibson (1979). Most theories of perception that were dominant during the 1950s and 1960s suggested that perception occurred as a result of the mind working as a data processor, analysing external stimuli. However, Gibson (1979) provided a different explanation and insisted that perception occurs as a result of the individual moving through the world. For Ingold, Gibson’s proposition, one that did not require a distinction between the external world and internal mental processes of the individual, represented an opportunity to disregard the traditional dualist approach that he disagreed with.

Authors within the field of ecological psychology suggest that environments are continually constructed and that it is only through being inhabited that the world becomes meaningful (Ingold, 2000). Each environment offers the users a number of ‘affordances’. The concept of ‘affordances’ was first introduced by Gibson (1979) as ‘action possibilities’ offering the opportunity to *do* or *feel* something. Affordances are both objective and subjective. It has been suggested by Heft (2001) that Gibson’s (1979) concept of affordances has roots within the Gestalt approach to psychology, in particular the work of Kurt Lewin and Kurt Koffka. Heft (2001) notes that the word ‘affordance’ can be traced back to Lewin’s concept ‘aufforderungscharakter’, meaning to prompt a character or individual. In addition, Koffka (1935), like Gibson, believed that an object holds enough information to ‘tell’ the individual observer about its function. Koffka wrote that “a fruit says, ‘Eat me’; water says ‘Drink me’; thunder says ‘Fear me,’ and woman says, ‘Love me’” (Koffka, 1935, cited in Heft, 2001, 220).
In their explanation of how individuals came to understand the meaning on an object or environment, Koffka and Lewin relied on a distinction between the physical and mental world. They asserted that an individual perceives an object based on their own personal needs at the time of perception. Lewin (1969) recognised that objects do indeed have fixed, ‘non-psychological’ properties, yet believed that on being perceived by an observer an object acquires new “psychological” properties. However, Gibson (1979) believed that there needed to be a way of understanding the meaning of an object that could account for both the subjective ‘psychological’ and objective ‘physical’ properties of an object without the need to rely on a mental-physical dichotomy. Therefore Gibson (1979) argued that the meaning of an object is directly perceivable from the object, arguing that “an affordance is not bestowed upon an object…The object offers what it does because it is what it is” (Gibson, 1979, cited in Heft 2001, 222). Unlike Koffka and Lewin who argued that affordances come into and out of existence based on the perceivers need, Gibson argued that affordances are static; that the affordance is always present, but they perceiver may or may not chose to attend to that affordance at any given time.

Within Gibson’s (1979) conceptualisation, affordances occur as a result of the interaction between the object’s physical properties and the user’s own interpretation of the object. The possible affordances of an object or environment do not change, yet an individual’s perceptions of the affordances that are available are fluid and influenced by the observer’s needs (Ingold, 2000). Therefore it is possible for different people to perceive multiple, diverse affordances from the same environment and the affordances that are perceived will, in turn, influence the value a person attaches to a place. This is apparent in Macnaghten and Urry’s (1998) discussion of the affordances of woodland areas. Whereas some people may perceive the environment as providing a safe area for small children, others will perceive the environment as affording a quiet space for relaxation or an easily accessible place for walking and exercise. Therefore the perceived affordances are influenced by a person’s own beliefs, needs and experiences.

Most empirical research into affordances has focussed on children’s environments and play spaces. This is in part because ecological psychology...
as a discipline evolved and gained momentum due to the work of Barker and colleagues, who focused on children’s spaces as ‘behaviour settings’ (Barker & Gump, 1964; Barker & Schoggen, 1973; Gump, Schoggen, & Redl, 1963). The term ‘behaviour setting’ has been used to suggest that certain spaces are able to influence human behaviour through a combination of its physical and social attributes (Scott, 2005). However, there is considerably less attention placed on spaces that are designed and used by adults. The current project will therefore seek to apply ecological psychological concepts to a space used by adults, that of the public house.

**Part 3: Bringing the public house into current debates**

The first section of the current literature review provided an overview of existing research into public houses, highlighting research that has examined the role and function of the pub as a social space. Next, the second section of the review introduced models and concepts from a range of social scientific disciplines that have been used to understand the importance and meaning of places. There has been a spatial turn within psychology, with authors acknowledging that it is hard to disentangle the social from the spatial. As a result, several scholars have called for more convergence between the disciplines of social and ecological psychology (Charles, 2011; Heft, 2007; Hodges & Baron, 2007).

As an environment that has been used as a social space throughout history, the pub represents a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which ideas from across the two disciplines could be brought together to gain a more comprehensive understanding of place. Existing research into pubs appears to be compatible with the theoretical conceptualisations of place and with wider ecological psychology literature. For example, several studies into pubs are compatible with the concept of affordances. To illustrate this we can consider the work of Measham (2004) who uses the term ‘play space’ to describe licensed leisure locations, such as pubs and bars. The author notes that such locations represent a “controlled loss of control” (2004: 338) and an opportunity to let go of responsibilities, as a way of counter balancing the experience of stress of an individual’s everyday life. Therefore it could be argued that by
providing the ‘controlled loss of control’ that Measham (2004) describes, ‘play spaces’ such as pubs and bars offer their customer’s particular psychological affordances.

In addition, several aforementioned studies have suggested the public house represents a social space. Gibson (1979) believed that some of the richest affordances an environment can offer are those provided by the presence of other people. The social affordances an environment can offer individuals occurs as a result of the way in which individuals within the space interact with the physical features of the space that support social actions (Heft, 2007). In addition, Macnaghten and Urry (1999) suggested that affordances are modulated by the presence of other people. Empirical research has explored this proposition further. For example, Clark and Uzzell (2002) built on the concept of affordances to assess the significance of different environments used by adolescents. The authors found that the presence of other people was a motivating factor that encouraged adolescents to use different spaces. Therefore despite using different linguistic terms, much of the research that suggests visiting the pub has social advantages could be viewed as examining the social affordances that pubs provide.

**The public houses as a source of identity**

In addition to research that has focussed on the social benefits that pubs can provide, there is also a small body of research that explores the relationship between the pub and an individual’s sense of identity. Many scholars, particularly sociologist, have argued that in the post-modern era there is an increased emphasis on choice, diversity and uniqueness (Giddens, 1991). Personal identity is less closely associated with the family or community in which an individual is born into. Instead, individuals are increasingly able to choose their identity through the products they consume (Beck, 1990; Giddens, 1991). Therefore there is an important relationship between leisure and consumption and an individual’s personal identity.

As previously noted, during the late twentieth century people began to spend their leisure time taking part in consumption activities (Perkins & Thorn, 2012). As a result, Sassatelli (2007) argues that consumption became a “fully social
phenomena”, used to mark the relationships between people and demonstrating social standing. This proposition echoes early sociological theory put forward by both Simmel (1907) and Veblen (1994). Simmel (1907) argued that people consume goods to fulfil two basic needs. This includes the need for ‘cohesion’, to obtain goods that are similar to the goods of others, and the need for ‘differentiation’, to be unique other people. In addition, Veblen’s (1899/1994) ‘theory of the leisure class’ presents an early formulation of a thesis that would be revived by Bourdieu (1984), namely that consumption can signal social hierarchies, and introduced the term ‘conspicuous consumption’. The term ‘conspicuous consumption’ is used to suggest that some goods are perceived as valuable because they make a person’s social position visible to others.

Research has suggested that the performance of different identities may be occurring within the pub setting. In Western culture drinking alcohol, particularly pints of beer or ale, has historically been linked to a masculine identity (Leyshon, 2008; Spracklen, Laurencic & Kenyon, 2013). Research conducted by Emslie, Hunt and Lyons (2013) has assessed the way in which the consumption of alcohol is used to portray a masculine identity. As previously noted the authors found that consuming alcohol was an important practice within male friendships. Furthermore drinking pints of beer was considered to be indicative of a masculine activity. Therefore men that purchased alternative drinks such as soft drinks and spirits were viewed ‘feminine’. Within the same study the research team suggested alternative activities to the male participants, such as going for a meal or a coffee. However, drinking in the pub was believed to be the only way to socialize that was consistent with the male participants’ gender and sexual identity. The study therefore demonstrated the way in which alcohol can be used to express a certain identity, in this case a gendered identity.

Although historically the pub has been considered to be a male that is predominantly male, in recent years there have been an increasing number of women and children entering public houses. In the same way that Emslie, Hunt and Lyons (2013) demonstrated that practices surrounding alcohol consumption enabled participants to perform a masculine identity, the same
authors also explored the role of alcohol consumption in identity construction amongst women (Emslie, Hunt & Lyons, 2015). The authors found that for women, alcohol represented a temporary 'time-out' from employment and the unpaid work of the home. Women emphasised traditional notions of femininity, noting the importance of drinking gender-appropriate 'girly' drinks. In addition, drinking also enabled some women to temporarily transform their identity to a younger version of themselves with fewer responsibilities.

The research carried out by Emslie, Hunt and Lyons (2013, 2015) demonstrates the way in which current research is beginning to link practices of alcohol consumption with wider notions of gendered identities. However other important facets of identity, such as ethnicity and sexual orientation, have largely been overlooked. Previous research from Hunt, Maloney and Evans (2011) has explored the construction of ethnic identity amongst Asian-Americans males within nightclubs. The authors found three distinct ways in which participants believed taking illicit drugs influenced their identity. Due to the disjuncture between the Asian-American ethnicity and drug use, participants viewed their use of illicit drugs as exceptional and outside of cultural norms. Secondly, participants believed drug consumption represented a merge away from their Asian-American identity towards mainstream American society. Finally participants related their drug use to personalised tastes and lifestyle choices. The research conducted by Hunt, Maloney and Evans (2011) demonstrated the way in which ethnicity, as related to identity, can be dynamic and constructed by individuals. At present there is a deficit in research that relates ethnic identities to practices within the setting of the public house. However, the afore-mentioned literature suggests that research is beginning to explore the ways in which practices carried out in the pub, particularly the consumption of alcohol, are a way of constructing and negotiating personal identities (Giddens, 1991).

Although research has explored the ways in which the public house can be considered a source of identity, whether a personal or social identity, much of this research has been conducted outside of the framework of ecological psychology. However, the research findings are immediately compatible with this framework when reimagined in terms of affordances. For example, visiting
the pub could be viewed as providing customers with a particular psychological
affordance; the ability to consume, develop, perform and explore parts of their
own identity.

**The public house as a rural idyll**

A separate body of research has explored a different approach between the
public house and practices of consumption and has suggested that the public
house itself can be commodified and consumed. For example, Perkins and
Thorn (2012) have argued that it is possible to consume a local identity through
the commodification of activities and spaces. The authors suggest that
experience days, such as four-wheel driving and white-water rafting are all
examples of rural activities that have been commodified. Similarly, Urry (2002)
suggested that heritage shopping centres and wine tours represent ways in
which people that are travelling to a new area attempt to consume local
experiences through purchasing local products. Therefore it is possible to
package together places and activities for people to purchase.

This stream of research is particularly relevant to the pub setting, as it has been
suggested that the pub forms part of a wider rural idyll (Mingay, 1989).
Therefore Bell and Valentine (1997) have argued that the pub represents a way
in which tradition, rural life is commodified, with many people visiting ‘traditional
pubs’ in an attempt to consume a traditional British experience. Many popular
tourist locations have undergone a process of gentrification in order to be able
to offer an ‘authentic’ experience (Zukin, 2008). Zukin (2008) explored this
process of creating authenticity and argued that small ‘streetscapes’ are
created in which individuals can visit to consume, and potentially purchase,
goods that are imbued with value of authenticity.

Research conducted by Ernst and Doucet (2014) examined the effects of
genrification on the local area through an exploration of local pubs, known as
‘brown cafes’, in Amsterdam. The authors interviewed people who regularly
attended the Dutch pubs and people who were new to the local area as they
were interested in whether interactions within the pub either reinforced or
reduced divisions created by gentrification.
Whilst examining social interactions inside Dutch pubs, Ernst and Doucet (2014) found the meaning of the pub differed for both locals and newcomers. This finding is particularly compatible with concept of affordances and demonstrates the way in which the perception of affordances is dependant on the goals and expectations of the perceiver. For ‘locals’ who regularly occupied this pub, the pub represented a space in which to be oneself, relax and offload. On the contrary, for ‘newcomers’ the pub represented the chance to experience an ‘authentic’ part of traditional Dutch culture. The study demonstrated the way in which locals and newcomers were presented with the same pub, yet their perception of the environment differed considerably. Therefore the research demonstrates the way in which an individual’s own experiences and expectations can influence the perception of an environment and the affordances it can offer.

**Summary:**

In conclusion, despite a wealth of literature suggesting the pub is emblematic of British history and culture and an unequivocal social space, existing research has neglected to situate results within wider academic literature concerning theoretical conceptualisations of space. It is important to consider the way in which all behaviour and psychological experience is situated within a particular space. One way of exploring the way in which the social and the spatial interacts would be to combine approaches of social psychology and ecological psychology.

Models of place are useful for disentangling different dimensions of what makes a place meaningful. However, existing models do not explore the mutual relationship between and individual and their environment. However, concepts from within ecological psychology can uncover the reciprocal relationship between the individuals and their environment. Therefore it is important to draw on literature from across the social sciences to further explore practices that are situated within specific environments.

Although places are the object of study for many people, one under-researched area is that of the British public house. There are currently around 49000 establishments in the UK (BBPA, 2014), yet the pub has received little
academic attention beyond descriptions of the pubs history and an exploration of the social activities that occur within these spaces. As a result there is limited understanding about the way in which people use these spaces. This is particularly problematic as it leaves pubs outside of ongoing academic debates. One way to bring the pub into current academic debates would be to view pubs through an ecological lens. In doing so it may be possible to uncover the different affordances that the pub offers its customers and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the way these spaces are used.

It is possible to re-examine much of the existing literature regarding public houses through the lens of ecological psychology. For example, two streams of research are beginning to explore the link between consumption and identity construction within the pub. Firstly, authors have explored the way in which practices of consumption, particularly alcohol consumption, are used to construct personal identities. Secondly, authors have argued that the pub itself can be commodified and consumed, representing an opportunity to experience a wider rural idyll. The application of theories from social scientific disciplines is promising. However, further research into public houses, that intentionally utilises theoretical conceptualisations of space and concepts from ecological psychology will mark an important development in bringing the public house into social scientific discussions and lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the way in which the public house operates as a social space.
Methodology

Research problem and research question

Despite holding an important place within British culture, the public house remains an under-researched space. Although there are currently around 49000 establishments in the United Kingdom (BBPA, 2014), the public houses space has received little academic attention. As a result, understanding about the way in which people use these spaces is limited. Most academic literature regarding pubs has described and documented the social activity that occurs within the pub (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Mass Observation, 1943; Muir, 2002; Smith, 1983), yet research is seldom situated within theoretical conceptualisations or models of place.

The lack of research into public houses is surprising given the wealth of research on the ways in which places become meaningful and the interaction between people and their different environments. Places, and particularly the way in which places are actively shaped by the individuals interacting with that environment, are the object of study for many people from across a number of academic disciples, including: geographers, geologists, architects, psychologists, sociologist, and engineers.

Due to the somewhat limited body of research into public houses, the current project was exploratory in nature. Although existing literature documents the social uses of public houses, it typically treats pubs as if they are a generic, homogenous entity. The current project attempted to understand how the pub serves as a social space within a local community and examined the diversity of the different social uses within and between public houses. Drawing on concepts from within ecological psychology (Gibson, 1979; Heft, 2001; Ingold, 2000), the project sought to uncover the reciprocal relationship between the customer and the pub environment. Examining pubs through an ecological lens, the study examined the different affordances that the pub offers its customers, and how these affordances are in turn influenced by the customers own needs and experiences.
The project aimed to bring together the work on public houses as a social space with wider theoretical conceptualisations of place to ask: **How does the public house serve as a social space within a local community?**

The project also aimed to build on concepts derived from ecological psychology to ask: **What affordances do the customers of the public house perceive?**

In addition to the above two broad theoretical questions, the project address a number of empirical questions:

1. What are the experiential and spatial dimensions of the pub as a social space?
2. What makes pub meaningful to individuals and group within the space?
3. What is the relationship between the pub and a sense of community?
4. How do customers use different parts of the pub to meet their own needs?

**Theoretical underpinnings**

The current research was guided by Critical Realism, a philosophical paradigm that emerged during the latter half of the twentieth century as an anti-positivist movement within the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). During this period two main philosophical paradigms dominated the social sciences. On the one hand, the Naturalist tradition suggested that social scientists should observe empirical facts to produce generalised laws of cause-and-effect. On the other hand, the Hermeneutics tradition suggested that social scientists should seek to understand and describe the world and the way in which it is socially constructed (Danermark, Ekstrom, & Jakobsen et al., 2002).

Despite research philosophies being portrayed as a distinct dichotomy, many scholars argue that this is unhelpful (Bhaskar, 1978; Danermark, Ekstrom, & Jakobsen et al., 2002; Sayer, 1992). This is also an argument made within other areas where dichotomous assertions of complex issues are often made, including, the dominant Cartesian paradigm of mind-body dualism (Charles, 2011; Ingold, 2000) and the interaction between organisms and their environments (Gibson, 1979; Ingold, 2000; Heft, 2007; Hodges & Baron, 2007).
Sayer (1992) notes that these dichotomies, which are “deeply embedded within our culture” (Sayer, 1992, 93) make understanding complex issues particularly problematic.

Instead of conceptualising research philosophies as 'either/or' phenomena it is important to consider the ways in which the different approaches may be complementary. For example, Thyre (2012) suggests that an acceptance of an objective reality would not interfere or contradict the proposition that the meanings that reality holds are socially constructed by humans. The Critical Realist approach utilises this stance, subscribing to interpretivist epistemological belief that all knowledge is socially constructed and a realist ontological belief that there is an external 'reality' that exists independently of human thought and explanation.

Critical Realism suggests that the world is structured, stratified and changing and proposes that there is a reality that exists independently of human consciousness. However, knowledge of the world is influenced by social factors, consisting of people’s interpretations of their own reality. As a result, knowledge of the world is always socially constructed and therefore fallible (Danermark, Ekstrom, & Jakobsen et al., 2002; Sayer, 1992). Therefore based on Critical Realist tenets, the aim of both the natural and social sciences is to produce concepts and explanations that are as close to reality as possible.

Critical Realism suggests that knowledge is created by the researcher and research participants. Therefore interactive research methods such as observations, focus groups and interviews are used (Rosenberg, 2012). The current project adopted a Critical Realist approach, combining theoretical conceptualisations of place and ecological psychology to investigate the ways in the public house operates as a social space.

The concept of affordances is consistent with the Critical Realist approach. The objective properties of the pub exist independently of the pubs customers, yet the affordances of each pub are dependent on the subjective perception of each pub user. Within the current project the researcher situated herself within
six pubs to carry out observations and semi-structured interviews with customers. In doing so, the researcher aimed to uncover multiple subjective constructions of the public house that each customer held. The researcher also compared, contrasted and assimilated the individual interpretations to gain a better understanding of the meanings associated with public houses.

In accepting that all knowledge is socially produced and therefore fallible, Critical Realists proposed that knowledge is not equally fallible (Bhaskar, 1978; Sayer, 1992). In order to overcome the issue of knowledge fallibility, and to produce theories and concepts that are as close to reality as possible, researchers should use robust methods of data collection and data analysis, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

**Research Methods:**

The methodologies used within the current project were qualitative, ethnographic and interpretivist in nature. Ethnography, described as both an “art and science of describing a human group” (Angrosino, 2007, 14), grew out of anthropological research that studied ‘exotic’, non-Western cultures. However this approach is now used to examine more common-place settings that exist closer to home (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Robson, 2011).

The ethnographic approach was particularly appropriate for the current project as it allowed the researcher to examine a space that is commonplace within the lives of many people, yet under-researched; the public house. Critical Realism, the philosophical paradigm that guided the project, suggests that knowledge is socially constructed and therefore collaboratively created by the researcher and research participants. As a result, the study utilised two interactive research methods that are commonly used within ethnographic research; observations and interviews.

Observational methods were particularly relevant to the project due the project’s exploratory nature. The researcher carried out observations within six public houses to gain an insight into the activities and social interactions taking place inside each public house. Observations situated within a real-life context, referred to by Hayes (2000, 57) as ‘ethnological observations’, produce more
valid data than data produced in a laboratory. This is because the use of observational methods provided the opportunity for the research to immerse herself in the world that was to be studied. The researcher was able to experience the public house first hand and to build up inside knowledge and trust with participants.

In addition to observations, short, semi-structured interviews were carried out with customers of each public house. The use of interviews requires a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee and can be more time consuming than other methods of data collection (Barbour, 2014). However, through immersing herself within the pub, the researcher was able to establish her place in the pub which formed a solid basis of building a rapport with customers. In addition, this method allowed the researcher to gather information directly from participants. The methods of data collection were consistent with the Critical Realist philosophical approach, which acknowledges that knowledge is created collaboratively by the researcher and research participants.

The use of open-ended questions encouraged a natural conversational flow, which in turn assisted the researcher in building a rapport with participants. Although interviews are just one of a number of possible research methods, alternative research methods such as questionnaires would be too prescriptive. Furthermore, questionnaires or interviews that involved closed-questions would have limited both the variety of data collected and the degree to which the research participants could actively shape and create knowledge. Therefore the use of interviews will produce more valid data, according to the criteria set out by Critical Realism. The use of two research methods, as opposed to only relying on one method, also increased the validity of the data collected.

Due to the qualitative nature of the project and the specific context in which the research is conducted, it could be argued that research findings may not be generalizable to other settings (Barbour, 2014). This could include the lack of generalizability to other public houses outside of the Everards’ brand, or lack of generalizability to other leisure and consumption locations.

Within the current study the researcher situated herself within the public house environment. The involvement of the researcher within a research study can be
conceptualised as existing on a continuum from a passive observer to an active participant-observer (Barbour, 2014). However, within the current project, the researcher aimed to adopt a middle position, interacting with the participants and observing their behaviour.

**Research Design**

**Development of an interview guide**

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method of data collection. The semi-structured approach was employed as it enabled the researcher to base the research questions on existing literature, whilst also allowing new findings to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore an interview guide was developed based on a review of the existing literature on public houses. The interview guide was used to direct the topic of conversation but also allowed for flexibility and the introduction of new topics.

Questions within the interview guide probed customers on the reasons they enjoyed visiting the pub and the aspects of the pub they most enjoyed. Several additional topics were also introduced, including the role of the pub’s own history and the customer’s personal history in their experience on the pub and the sense of community within the pub. Several questions also focussed on the use of different spaces within the public house, such as which parts of the pub the customer preferred, or did not prefer, to sit (See Appendix A).

**Selection of research sites**

The researcher carried out case studies of six public houses. Within the current project the term ‘case’ refers to each pub. Utilising a case study design allowed the research team to collect rich, detailed data, beyond what would be possible if there were several cases to explore (Hayes, 2000). The case study approach was also deemed appropriate because it allowed the researchers to explore a novel topic area (Crabtree & Miller, 1992) and is consistent with the philosophical assumptions of Critical Realism (Easton, 2010).

Due to time and funding constraints it was decided that all research sites would be within a reasonable distance (approximately 15 miles) of the University of
Leicester, where the research was based. Even when this geographical boundary was accounted for, there was a pool of over 50 public houses to choose from.

Representatives from the Brewery were included in a discussion about which public houses to include as research sites. The factors against which pubs can be compared are almost endless. This is especially true for the Everards estate in which pubs are ‘personality led’. This is a term used by Everards employees and licensees to describe the way in which the design, layout and day-to-day operations of the pub are directed by the licencee(s), in collaboration with Everards, rather than being driven by Everards. In encouraging pubs to become ‘personality led’, there is great variation between each of the pubs in the Everards portfolio. However, in an attempt to visit a variety of public houses, several factors were considered. This included the location of the pub, as situated in either a village, suburban or urban area, the socioeconomic demographics of the area and whether the pub made most of their profit based on the sales of food or beverages, a ‘drinks-led’ or ‘food led’ pub respectively.

The research team agreed on an initial site, the Hare and Hounds, chosen due to its proximity to the University of Leicester (all names used are pseudonyms to maintain anonymity). Like the Hare and Hounds, the second site, the Anchor was also a large pub, catering to families and offering food throughout the day. However, the pub was situated on the edge of a housing estate in an economically deprived area that was generally less affluent than the area surrounding the Hare and Hounds. Both the third site, the Nags Head and fourth site, the Black Swan were situated in villages. The Nags Head was based in a small village of approximately 800 inhabitants, whereas the Black Swan was situated in a larger, affluent village of approximately 5000 inhabitants. The fifth site, The King Arms, was chosen due to its city-centre location whereas the sixth and final site, The Crown, was chosen because it was both ‘drinks-led’ and located in a suburban area. The area was less affluent that the areas surrounding all of the other sites, with the exception of the Anchor.
Everards Brewery prides itself on all of their pubs having a degree of individuality. Therefore it was anticipated that customers in each site might provide very different responses to interview questions. It was also anticipated that this could make data analysis challenging and increase the possibility that responses may not be representative of all public houses, both within and outside of the Everards estate. However, the study aimed to surface common themes across all data, identifying similarities and differences between the pubs within the study. In addition, because the project is based within an under-researched field, it was envisaged that analysis would likely highlight a number of avenues for further research.

All research visits were conducted on weekdays between the hours of 12:00pm and 8:00pm. The limited time of day may have resulted in a bias of the responses collected, with responses being less applicable to occasions outside of this timeframe (i.e. weekends and evenings). It could be possible that people who visit the public house late at night or during weekends will experience the public house differently and visit for different reasons. However, the eight hour time window covered lunch-time, early doors, dinner-time and the early evening period and therefore provide a variety of responses.

**Accessing each public house**

Two groups of people acted as gatekeepers to the research sites: Everards and licensees. Access to public house sites required the initial agreement of Everards Brewery. However, as co-funders of the research this did not pose an obstacle. Informed consent was required from each licensee to carry out research on the site and to approach customer.

To obtain informed consent, the researcher visited the licensee at the public house with a representative from Everards brewery. This provided the opportunity to build a positive relationship with licensees, to improve access into the public house. All of the six sites that were initially approached agreed to take part. During the visit, the researcher explained the purpose of the research and what participation would entail.

Ethically, this raised the issue of licensees feeling pressured into taking part. It
was made clear to the licensee that their participation was completely voluntary and there would be no repercussions if they did not wish to take part. In addition, as tenants of Everards pub, licensees had more freedom in their decisions to take part in the research rather than if they were direct Everards employees. During the initial meeting it was also made clear that licensees would not assist in recruiting consumer respondents, so as to minimize the impact of the licensees as gatekeepers. In addition, customers were given the opportunity to take part in interviews in the absence of the licensee.

**Recruitment of customer participants**

Once the licensee had verbally agreed to research being conducted on the premises, informed consent was required from each customer who wished to participate in a semi-structured interview. The participants were selected through ‘opportunity sampling’ of available respondents. However, the research also took into account criterion for potential exclusion, discussed in the next ‘Ethical considerations’ section. The researcher also aimed to interview a cross section of participants, with regards to gender and age.

On approaching each participant the researcher introduced herself, identified herself as a researcher and provided a short, verbal description of the study. The researcher asked the customer if they would like to take part in a short-informal interview, explained what participation in the study would entail and assured the customer that their participation was completely voluntary. It was also made clear that responses would remain anonymous and that participants had the right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason, even after the interview has taken place.

If the customer stated that they were interested in taking part, they were then provided with an information sheet and an informed consent form (see Appendices B and C). With the permission of each participant, all interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed.

A total of 26 interviews were conducted with 41 participants. On 11 occasions the interview was carried out with one person, whereas on 15 occasions the interview was carried out with two people. Of the 41 people that participated in
the interviews, 24 were male (58%) and 17 were female (42%). Of the two tables presented below, Table 1 shows the way in which the participants were spread across the six research sites and Table 2 below demonstrates the different ages of participants.

Table 1. A table to show the distribution of participants and their gender across each of the six research sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Gender distribution Male(%) / Female(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hare and Hounds</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6(67) / 3(33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anchor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4(80) / 1(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nags Head</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5(71) / 2(29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black Swan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2(33) / 4(66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The King’s Arms</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4(50) / 4(50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Red Lion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3(50) / 3(50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>24(58) / 17(42)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. A table to show the distribution of participants’ age across each of the six research sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>18-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51-60</th>
<th>61+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hare and Hounds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anchor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nags Head</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black Swan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The King’s Arms</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Red Lion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td><strong>2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>17%</strong></td>
<td><strong>24%</strong></td>
<td><strong>32%</strong></td>
<td><strong>24%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical considerations**

All research was conducted in line with the University of Leicester’s Research Code of Conduct. Ethical approval was obtained on 13th November 2014 (see Appendix D), with a further amendment for additional participants obtained on 2nd February 2015 (see Appendix E). The initial Ethics Application requested permission to interview 36 participants. This was based on the notion that six
individual interviews would be carried out in six public houses. However, during initial data collection it became clear that it was often more appropriate to interview people in pairs, to increase the willingness of people taking part and to be able to observe social interaction during interviews. Therefore an amendment was requested and approved for an addition 24 participants, to increase the total to 60 participants.

All collected data was anonymized, including any mention of third parties such as friends, family members, other pubs and suppliers. There was no identifying personal information attached to the interview data beyond generic demographic descriptors. Informed consent forms that had been signed by participants were kept separately to the data files. Research sites were also given pseudonyms and described in generic terms to increase anonymity.

There were also a number of additional ethical issues raised around the consumption of alcohol. Each public house was a licensed premises on which alcohol could be bought and consumer. In addition to providing the information sheet and asking participants to sign an informed consent form, the researcher took several steps to minimize the ethical risk. Firstly, all participants were adults, aged 18 years and above and were not from vulnerable populations. The researcher also used their discretion to make a sensible judgment as to whether potential participants were intoxicated and whether their alcohol consumption would influence their interview responses.

In approaching potential participants as part of the informed consent procedure, two options were offered: to conduct the interview there and then (provided the person was not intoxicated), or to arrange the interview for a later date. Moreover, all participants were given full contact details for the researcher and two members of University of Leicester staff, so that they could withdraw from the research at any point. This was deemed appropriate in case the participant felt that alcohol had affected their responses and later wished to withdraw.

It was also considered that the research setting, as a licensed premises, could pose a risk to the researcher. As a result, all research visits were carried out with another research student. The researcher also took sensible precautions such as refraining from the consumption of alcohol during site visits, conducting
site visits during afternoons and early evening, and travelling to and from the pubs by their own car, thus retaining control over when and how to leave the research site.

**Data analysis**

A modified version of Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to guide the process of data analysis, which was performed using a computer software package. Grounded theory is a type of qualitative analysis that provides researchers with a systematic framework to thematically analyse data obtained from social research. This method was chosen to enable the project to fulfil its aims of exploring and understanding the multitude of ways that the pub serves as a social space. It also allowed the researcher to base analysis on the emic, emergent data, collected in the form of participant responses, rather than basing the study’s direction on pre-existing academic literature. That is to say, analysis was ‘grounded’ within the data that had been collected.

The researcher carried out a three-step process of coding and utilised an approach to data analysis first outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Firstly, the researcher identified ‘open’ codes by reading through the interview transcripts and began to code each line of text according to the phenomena, concept or relationship to which it referred to, in an attempt to compartmentalise the data into discrete parts and analyse each data fragment.

Secondly, the identified ‘open’ codes were constantly compared whilst analysing the rest of the transcripts until the authors began to identify relationships between the ‘open’ codes to produce ‘axial’ codes, a process described as “weaving the fractured data back together again” (Glaser, 1978, 116). Finally, the researcher identified a ‘selective code’, a core category against which all data other data relate to.

During the second stage of data analysis, the approach began to differ from the original approach outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). After ‘open codes’ had been identified the researcher also began to reflect on the available existing literature, alongside purely grounding the analysis within the collected data, an approach often described as an ‘etic’, or iterative analysis (Tracy, 2013).
The Grounded Theory approach to data analysis compartmentalises data before searching for relationships between the different parts. This approach of data fragmentation has been criticised, with Richards and Richards (1994) arguing that segmentation of the data increases the risk that data will be de-contextualised. As a result, the researcher aimed to be continuously aware of the way in which the different themes within the data came together to form a holistic picture of the public house as a social space. This approach to analysis is consistent with Gestalt principles, from which ecological psychology was derived from that suggest the meaning of any system is more than the sum of its individual parts (Charmaz, 2006; Heft, 2007).

**Research site descriptions:**

Site 1: The Hare and Hounds

The Hare and Hounds is located in a suburban residential area, approximately two and a half miles from the city centre. The pub is comprised of two buildings - a brickwork house built in the late 19th century and an older cottage with a sloping thatched roof, dating back to the 17th century. There is a large car park for approximately 35 cars and a large enclosed beer garden, with wooden picnic tables, a paved seating area and grass. The pub is very clean and tidy. It has an open fire and wooden beams, yet many of the fixtures and fittings are modern. From a customer’s perspective, the pub is loosely divided into three main areas; the dining area, the bar area and a ‘back room’.

Most formal meals, particularly large group bookings, take place in the dining area. However, customers are permitted to eat anywhere within the pub. Located near to the kitchen, the seating area is raised so that although customers are able to view the bar area, yet it feels somewhat separate to the rest of the pub. Seating options include both booths and wooden tables.

The ‘bar area’ is at the centre of the pub. This area is carpeted throughout and consists of a large bar, an open plan seating area with tables and smaller boots, and a small fire place. In addition, in the middle of this area there is a raised island tables for seating. This is a very busy part of the pub, in which customers often engage in conversation with each other.
The ‘back room’ is separated from the bar area by large wooden double doors. It is possible to close the doors for functions such as live music events and parties. The back room contains another bar; however during the time of research visits this was not operational. There is also an additional fireplace, a selection of wooden tables and chairs and a dart-board. This area is often quieter than the rest of the pub and is decorated more traditionally, with pictures of previous football and cricket teams on the wall, wooden panelling and a parquet floor.

The pub’s two licensees have been running the pub for approximately five years. The pub offers food throughout the day and offers a quiz night and an open mic night on a weekly basis. It is possible to hold events and parties in the pub. During research visits, there were several people who had attended the pub to celebrate a birthday or Christmas.

Site 2: The Anchor

The Anchor is located in a residential area, on the edge of a housing estate, approximately one mile from the city centre. The pub is situated on one of the main routes into the city, yet set back from the main road. The pub is a large brick building, built in the 19th century. The pub has a car park for approximately 25 cars, a sheltered outdoor seating area and a separate outdoor family area, containing a large wooden pirate ship and a bouncy castle.

The pub is clean, carpeted throughout and is always decorated to either reflect seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas and Valentine’s Day, or for one-off events such as a children’s party, a ‘ladies night’ or to celebrate Mother’s Day. For example, during Christmas, the pub created its own ‘snow scene’, complete with a life size polar bear statues in addition to tinsel and festive memorabilia. In addition, there were life size statues of well-known people from popular culture.

The pub is divided into two main areas. The main ‘bar area’ consists of the bar, two gambling machines, a games machine and several wooden tables and chairs where people can have their main meals or drinks. There is also a ‘back area’ that is partially separated by a wall. This area is regularly used for children’s parties, family events and snooker nights and therefore contains a
sweet machine and a snooker table. There is an exit that leads out from this area on to the family seating area.

The pub’s two licensees have been running the pub for approximately five years. The pub and the surrounding area previously held the reputation of a place of trouble and fights, yet it is now considered a ‘family pub’. The pub offers food throughout the day and has many themes evenings such as a ‘curry night’ or mid-week deals of two meals for a set price. Customers were generally of a lower-economic status due to unemployment, retirement, or having to claim incapacity benefit, however many customers also worked in the building trade.

Site 3: The Nags Head

The Nags Head is located on a main road that passes through a small, affluent village of approximately 800 inhabitants, five miles from the city centre. The pub was built during the early 17th century and used as a coaching house, yet has been a pub for approximately 130 years. The pub is of a peculiar shape, appearing from the outside as if it is made up of several smaller buildings. The pub has a sloping roof, which was once thatched but is now made of slate. There is a car park for approximately 25 cars and well maintained paved area with picnic tables.

Inside, the pub is very small, warm and cosy. It has many physical features of a traditional pub such as its three open fires and wood panelling. There are wooden beams on the ceiling and old pictures on the walls of the pub during different years, such as black and white photograph of one of the pubs customers outside of the pub when it had a thatched roof. The pub is decorated to reflect the interests of one of the licensees, mainly fishing, sport and country walks.

The pub is divided into two main areas, of which the bar is connected to both. On arrival, one passes through a small porch into the ‘front bar’. The ‘front bar’ is small, with an open fire and seating for approximately 10 people. Passing through this bar, customers enter the ‘back bar’. This has seating for an approximately 30 people, and two additional open fires.
The pub’s licensee team are a married couple that have been running the pub for approximately 25 years. They are very friendly and well known by many of the customers. The pub is a popular destination for couples, pairs or small groups of friends to have a meal and a drink. Most of the clientele fall between 35 and 75 years of age. There is also a small crowd of regular customers who arrive individually yet always group together towards the bar area in the larger room.

The pub opens during more traditional hours of 11:00am - 2:30pm and then again 5:30pm – 11:30pm. The pub offers food throughout the day. In addition there are several nights in which a specific food and drinks ‘deal’ is available. The pub also offers a quiz night on a weekly basis and has a skittle alley, which can be booked in advance.

Site 4: The White Swan

The White Swan is located approximately 10miles from the city centre, in a village of approximately 5000 inhabitants. The pub is located in a busy area along a main road within the village centre. The pub has been recently refurbished, both internally and externally. The pub is built from brick but also has visible wooden beams on the top half of the exterior of the property. The pub has a car park from approximately 20 cars. On arrival at the pub customers pass through a tidy paved seating area that is partitioned off from the road.

Once inside the pub there is a corridor to the main bar area. This corridor contains seating in the form of unusual barrels; however this area is not often used. On the right hand side here is a large room that can accommodate for larger functions such as parties. Entering the main pub, there is a large bar with bar stools. There are tables around the edge of the pub, made from solid wood. The pub has a country feel due to the low ceilings and wooden beams. The pub also contains a number of interesting items including an open fire, chairs sourced from an old school and church and two well-maintained armchairs.

The pub is known locally for offering an excellent food menu. There are several day-time ‘deals’ and specific culinary nights. In addition, the pub has live music
on a Friday and Saturday night. The licensee team consists of two brothers that have been at the pub for approximately five years. The licensees are often on site, particularly at the evening and weekend, but are less frequently seen at the front of house during the day. Many of the customers live within the surrounding villages, yet there are also people who travel from further afield to eat at the pub. There were a greater number of women customers at this site, yet the age range remained very varied.

Site 5: The Kings Arms

The Kings Arms is located at the intersection of two narrow shopping lanes within the city centre, close to a large shopping complex and local tourist attraction. The site, a three story brick building, has operated as a public house since the 16th century. The pub can only be reached on foot due to the city centre location; therefore there is no car park at this site. However, there is a small area outside of the pub in which customers can sit down on the metal tables and chairs provided.

The central area of the pub is occupied by the bar. Around the edge of the bar, the pub is partially separated into different sections. This includes a bar area, an area for dining, a ‘snug’ consisting of a large round table with fairy lights, a portioned off seating area and an additional area with tables and chairs that is also used for dining. All of the areas have tiled floors and are decorated to reflect a traditional pub. Much of the pub’s brickwork is exposed and the pub still features gas lights.

The pub offers food throughout the day, with various themed offers. There is also a quiz on a weekly basis and space upstairs that can be used as an additional seating during busy period or for functions. However, this space was not in use during the research visits. The pub’s licensee also runs several other pubs within the area and therefore employs a management team. However, there have been numerous changes within the management team prior to research visits, with further changes occurring whilst the research was being conducted,
The pubs customers vary. Although there are a small number of people who visit several times throughout the week, most customers visit alongside a trip into the main city. This results in a wide variety of customers in terms of age, gender and socioeconomic status. There were also a notable number of customers who said they had visited the pub for a number of years and continued to visit less frequently, approximately once a month.

**Site 6: The Red Lion**

The Red Lion is located on a main residential street, in a suburban area approximately four miles from the city centre. The pub is a large building that was originally built during the 20th century, but that has been extended more recently. There is a large car park to the front of the pub, with space for approximately 50 cars. In addition, at the back of the pub there is a paved seating area with metal tables, chairs and a large children’s play area with a swing and slide.

The pub is carpeted throughout and separated into two rooms; a small bar area and a large main room. The small bar area consists of a bar, a pool table, a games machine, gambling machine and a large television screen. There are tall bar stools surrounding the bar and close to the television, yet there are no other tables.

The other ‘main room’ is much larger. It contains a bar, a carvery and lots of seating options including sofas, tall tables and regular wooden tables. The pub is carpeted throughout, kept very clean and tidy and is decorated with vases, prints of the pub and other photographs.

The pub offers a carvery alongside its standard food menu and pizza menu. The two licensee team have been in the site for approximately four years. Most of the pubs customers live in the surrounding area and are employed in manual occupations or work in the surrounding shops, post office and off-licenses.
Findings

**Spatial Complexity:**

**Introduction**

The public house is a quasi-public space where a plethora of social interactions occur. Some of these interactions are intentional and deliberately sought out, such as meeting a friend or attending a birthday celebration. Others are incidental, and emerge during the course of other activities, such as deciding to turn an after-work drink into a meal. Social interactions are shaped by the environment of the pub, which facilitates, constrains or serves as an obstacle to both planned and unplanned activities. For example, a lack of appropriate seating may frustrate a plan to meet with a friend; a television showing a football match may give a group of work colleagues an unanticipated focus; an outside space provides opportunities for smokers to interact.

The environment is not a simple backdrop or container in which activity occurs, but rather a constituent part of that activity. The noise of a television, for example, becomes part of the interaction between those who are arranged around it, providing conversational opportunities or, alternatively, serving as something that has to be deliberately overcome and ignored. Likewise, activity is not simply determined by the environment, but rather actively picks up on and makes use of spatial features of the pub. For example, a large groups of people may re-arrange the furniture and in doing so alter the flow of activity around them.

It is important to think of the relationship between the spatial features of the pub and the activities that occur within the site as reciprocal, with each shaping the other. One way of focusing on this mutuality is through the application of the concept of ‘meshwork’. This concept was proposed and defined by the social anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011) in the following way:
“Places … are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring. A house, for example, is a place where the lines of its residents are tightly knotted together. But these lines are no more contained within the house than are threads contained within a knot. Rather, they trail beyond it, only to become caught up with other lines in other places, as are threads in other knots. Together they make up what I have called the *meshwork.*” (Ingold, 2011, 149)

Here, Ingold describes how a house may be thought of as akin to a ‘knot’ which ties together ‘lines’ of activities. This can include clearly defined activities such as eating, sleeping, watching television, reading and washing. However more generally, a house ties together the lives and experiences of those who share it. Ingold suggests that a house, or indeed any place, does not ‘contain’ the experiences that occur within it, since this suggests that experiences are neatly produced and held within a space. Instead experiences are woven together within a space, with previous activity flowing into the space and shaping the experience produced there.

Take the example of a parent who returns home from work in bad mood to learn that their child has received an award at school. Neither the ‘bad mood’ nor the ‘good performance’ are produced by the home environment. Instead they are a product of previous activity that occurred elsewhere. However, both experiences are woven together within the household. In this way, there is not a clear division between the inside and the outside of a place. Instead it is a site where activities that originate from other spaces are provisionally brought together. People move through places instead of being defined by them.

Conceptualising public houses as meshworks therefore encourages exploration of the way in which the activities, which are brought together as part of these places, originate within the broader community. Rather than see the pub as a bounded environment, we have instead to focus on the manner in which it weaves together lines of activity and experience and the effects that arise from this.

**Knotting of activity**

When discussing their visits to the pub, customers talked about the way in which their visit the pub was built into their day, occurring in between various
other arrangements. This could be part of their journey home from work, after a shopping trip, as part of a walk around the local area or before or after medical appointments.

“Erm, most of us are self-employed so if we finish early we can come and have a couple of pints. Early doors and then go home.”
(Daniel, The Hare and Hounds)

“You know, you come to the pub to have a pint! When you do like our job, its back-breaking work, its early morning, freezing cold, snow sleet, ice, it’s horrible and as much as I like to go home at the end of the day – see the kids, the missus, the dogs – sometimes you just need an hour to have a pint, have a chat, relax and then go home. Otherwise you go home in a mardy, all miserable and you take it out on them.”
(Paul, The White Swan)

“Do you ever come specifically to go to the pub or does it tend to be added on to your shopping trip?”
“No it is after a shopping trip”
(Joanne, The Kings Arms)

“So you said that you came here often in the 70's, do you come here very often now?”
“Usually when I go down the [hospital] for an eye-test. I can’t drive so I pop in here and have a couple and make a day of it – well half a day, sometimes more than a day [laughs]. And then I go down the pie shop and have a cob… And obviously I’ve talked to one or two people at the bar and certain people come at certain times on certain days. When they do their shopping, you know. Well that’s how these pubs are.”
(Jonathon, The Kings Arms)

A common feature of the above extracts is the way in which a visit to the pub is described as something that is incorporated into another activity, rather than an overall objective in itself. The first two extracts describe the way in which the pub operates as an intermediate space between home and work, a ‘third space’ (Oldenburg, 1999). The purpose of the visit seems to be a way of transitioning, or ‘shifting gear’ from work life to home life. Therefore the pub as a space serves as a meshwork that knots together the activity between the public and the private, the workplace and the home.

In the first extract, the participant describes meeting other fellow self-employed workers on occasions where they ‘finish early’. Here the pub serves as
something of ‘decanting space’, as somewhere to relax and unwind before returning home, but which is removed from the work environment. In the second extract, the benefit of such a space is outlined. It serves as a place to work through all of the bad feeling generated by work, instead of taking those feelings home. In this way, the activities which are knotted together are primarily those of managing the relationship between domestic and work life, with the pub serving as a means to ease that transition rather than acting as an ‘end’ destination in itself.

The final two extracts point to the role of the pub as a means of adding to or topping up a day’s worth of activities, exemplified in the use of the phrase ‘make a day of it’. In both extracts participants describe activities which take them out of the immediate local environment for a number of hours, such as for a shopping trip or hospital appointment. Although scheduled, these trips seem to disrupt the usual rhythm of the day. A visit to the pub is then added onto these activities in a supplementary fashion as a way of making the day into a semi-complete package. We might venture that the reason for this supplement is counter-balance the idea that the day might otherwise have been wasted if it had been entirely committed to the single activity. As the last extract makes clear, participants engage with other visitors to the pub as part of this sense of ‘topping up’ the day’s activities, again rather than as an end point in itself.

**Nested zones**

Although the public house exists as a whole within its external walls, the pub was not seen as a singular unitary space that contains activities. What happens within the pub is only really meaningful when set in the context of broader ‘lines’ of activities that pass through it. Therefore the boundaries between the pub and the external world are highly porous, yet within the pub itself there is a division amongst activities.

During the interviews that were carried out with public house customers, it became clear that one way to understand the way in which the public house operates is to view the space as a collection of different zones. Each of these different zones were simultaneously nested into the pubs overall vicinity and appeared to have its own purpose, such as being designated for food, ‘a quiet
drink’ or as a more sociable ‘communal area’. Sometimes these spaces were marked out formally. For example, cutlery was placed on the tables that were designated for the eating of meals. However, often these spaces were not formally differentiated from one another, yet it was still possible to observe different types of activity that occurred within each zone.

“If you come in on a Friday afternoon and you’re sat down here [in the bar area] you will have people who have just finished work and people dining over there and everyone respects each other.”
(John, Hare and Hounds)

“Oh, like most people dine in the top area, the communal bit is all around here. All the lads stand and have a drink around here at the bar and all that having a drink. Some people dine down there but if you wanna go and have a quiet drink you go round there.”
(Daniel, Hare and Hounds)

“All right. So you are sitting here at the bar today, do you have a preferred place that you like to sit?”
[Chris gestures towards table of four next to a window, approximately 2 metres from the bar]
“Over there?”
Claire: “We’ve never ever - this is the first time ever we have sat on barstools in this pub. Normally we get a table and sit down.”

“Why did you sit here today?”
Chris: “Because it was full.”
Claire: “Because there was people in it.”
Chris: “Because we got off the bus and every table was taken or covered in knives and forks.”
(Chris and Claire, The White Swan)

Participants were able to clearly point to an internal demarcation of the pub environment. They understood and were able to articulate exactly where different types of activities ought to occur. For example, customers regarded some areas as designated for communal socialising, others for eating, and some spots for having a ‘quiet drink’. Notice that participants state that recognition of these internal divisions is an aspect of becoming a regular at the pub. As the participant in the first extract notes, a premium is placed on visitors tolerating or ‘respecting’ the rights of one another to engage in activities that are appropriate to the space within the pub they have chosen to occupy.
The converse of this situation presumably also applies, that ‘inappropriate’ space-specific activities are sanctionable matters. This was evident in one interview in which a customer described becoming annoyed at a group of young customers who were being loud in a space that he considered to be appropriate for quiet reflection and hushed conversations. This suggests that local informal rules govern the relationship between space and appropriate activities and that this is an important way in which regular pub activity is self-regulated. Through the use of these local informal rules, social order is maintained without the need to invoke the authority of members of staff.

The final extract is also interesting because the participants here describe a change in their usual routine. When interviewed the pub was busier than usual and as a result their usual spot, which the couple deemed to be appropriate for a conversation over a drink, was unavailable. This forced them to sit on barstools instead, which they had never done before. Their prior unwillingness to do this in the past is presumably underpinned by a sense that the activities that are appropriate to within this particular space, such as willingness to engage in casual interaction with bar staff and other drinkers coming to the bar, are not the activities for which visited the pub. Therefore the activities that the space encourages are incompatible with their own agenda and reasons for which they arrived at the pub. Sitting at the barstools does not just put them in the ‘wrong’ place for what they want to do, but is also takes that space away from visitors who do want that kind of interaction. Hence it creates an imbalance in the social order.

Customers then perceive the pub to be comprised of a number of different zones, rather than as a homogenous space. Although customers were able to provide examples of physical cues that marked out the different zones, such as the presence of cutlery, often the zones were not marked out by any physical signage or features. Interestingly, one customer was even able to provide an example of a zone that was functionally differentiated from the rest of the pub prior to a physical boundary being erected.

“Does that [area] tend to be more full of kids?”
Joe: “Yes”
Tom: “Yes, apart from Sundays when we take over the pool table!”
“Okay, is it…”
Joe: “But they can go out that way [referring to a door that connects the partitioned section to the outdoor play area] and in the summertime they can go out on the bouncy castle. And they can go out and that’ll be an area that’s full of kids anyway. Parents will be sitting inside having a beer while the kids play outside. So they will be in and out, in and out, all of the time.”
“Yeah, that’s quite interesting how it’s separated. Because that wasn’t there you said earlier. So what was it like before that when that wasn’t there?”
Tom: “So there was still a partition but that was about to here”
“Where you are?” [half way down wall]
Tom: “Like a half partition down there like that.”
“Okay, so when that was up. Was it still split like families or not?”
Joe: “No. Hmmm, I suppose so, there still was yeah.”
(Tom and Joe, The Anchor)

This example suggests that it is not a pre-requisite that a space needs to be physically marked out in order for it to be considered a space of different functionality. That is, the area of the pub to which the customer refers was already being used by families with small children before the wall that separated the area was built. The wall is then merely a physical representation of a socially-negotiated separation of activity. What this suggests is that the ‘self-regulation’ of the pub ‘community’ does not necessarily need to be marked out in the physical environment. Instead, regular customers ‘know’ what to do in each zone without the need to for the use of signage or physical features. This raised questions over the purpose of building the wall. However, we can speculate that this occurs when routine interactions within the community break down, or the community itself changes in some way, for example, through an influx of new members.

As previously mentioned, one implication of customers being able to understand and articulate the type of activity that ought to occur in each nested zone is that to be comfortable in the pub, customers need to be space-literate. Customers need to be able to read and understand the space and the way that activity is differentiated within it. This may have some unintended consequences, such as pub only attracting customers who already know how to read and use the space. Therefore the pub may only serve those who already
have this space knotted into their lives through the existing knowledge they have acquired through a period of socialization.

The suggestion that the pub may not be a comfortable space for those who are not space-literate poses a challenge for pubs, particularly if pubs wish to attract new customers. This will be discussed further in the final discussion, but an example is provided in the afore-mentioned interview in which regular customers became annoyed with group of young customers. Within this example the young group were being loud in a space that he considered to be appropriate for quiet reflection and hushed conversations. It is possible to speculate that as they were fairly new customers to the pub, they were not yet able to read and understand the ways in which activity was differentiated within the pub. Therefore the different nested zones within the pub have their own boundaries that new members must negotiate, which would have implications for a business looking to expand of sustains it’s market.

It is possible to draw on the work Latour (1992), a sociologist who described the way in which hotel managers and other staff members attempt to police the way that guests visit and use hotels. The main way of doing this was through control of room keys. In smaller hotels, a member of staff is able to sit on reception desk and ask for the key when visitors leave the building. However, in larger hotels, an increased number of guests renders this as impossible. To overcome the problem, managers produced large signs near the entrances of each hotel room, asking for keys to be returned. When this was not effective, managers attempted to encourage guests to return their keys by attaching large or heavy weights to the key fob, thus making it difficult to leave the hotel with them. Finally, if this did not work many hotels had introduced an electronic-key system, in which disposable plastic cards could be switched on and off, regardless of the actions of the guests.

Latour describes a kind of ‘game’ played by both the management and guests, each of whom is seeking a different kind of outcome. Rather than directly negotiate with their guests, the managers attempted to shape the environment so that guests are effectively obliged to conform with the manager’s objectives.
Similarly, we may see the demarcation of pub space as developing in the following way:

Based on the sequence outlined above, nested zones are frequently initially borne out of the way that customers interact with the public house environment. This informal regulation of space shapes the activities that occur within each different zone. The difference in activity is then formally enforced by members of staff and the licensee team. This can lead to the use of written, semiotic and physical regulation, such as the placement of signs or objects to signal the different usages of the public house space, or even the physical altering of the space to enforce customers' behaviour. However, formal regulation is not wholly dependent on informal regulation occurring, instead it is possible for formal regulation to occur without the preceding customer-led, informal regulation. For example, a licensee may choose to build a wall in order to force a demarcation of the space, rather than to reinforce existing differences in the activities performed within different areas of the public house.

**Activities and obligations**

Each of the different zones, nested within the public house, appeared to create specific obligations for the customers. These obligations were apparent to customers without the need for them to be reminded by staff. This suggests that
a high level of either ‘informal’ or ‘semiotic’ regulation is present in the pub
spaces:

“Okay I noticed you were sat at the bar when I approached you. Is
that where you usually sit?”
“Yeah, not if I’m with my kids or if I’m with my Mrs. I mean, I’ve got my
friend who owns the hairdressers over there and he has kids so if we all
come with the kids we will tend to sit out there near the barrels out the
back [referring to long corridor with wooden barrels that were used as
tables]. Just obviously if the kids are with me, so we don’t piss people off,
because if I come without the kids I get annoyed at other people.”
(Paul, The White Swan)

“Yeah, do you ever sit in the restaurant area?”
“We have done a couple of times. I’ve eaten here maybe 2 or 3 times. I’ve
sat up there a couple of times but we kind of know not to sit up there when
you’re not eating [laughs].”
(Natalie, Hare and Hounds)

“OK. One of the questions we are asking people is about where they
choose to sit. So you are sat here [in dining area] today, why is that?”
“Why? Well if you go in the other parts they are for just drinking, so we
usually come in this part.”
(Joan, The Kings Arms)

The first extract exemplifies ‘informal regulation’. This participant is aware of
specific activities that are appropriate for each space within the pub. As a result,
he situates himself within different places depending on the nature of the
occasion. The phrase ‘so we don’t piss people off’ suggests that he anticipates
what activities may be sanctionable and uses the space pre-emptively to avoid
this. The second and third extracts also demonstrate informal regulation, with
participants showing that they ‘kind of know’ where to sit based on the activities
they would like to engage in. This finding is not surprising, as it has been
previously noted that within third spaces, such as pubs, café’s or community
centres, it is the occupants that make their own rules and create their own
social norms (Oldenburg, 1999).

As we saw in a previous extract, the boundary between eating and drinking in
the pub space is sometimes marked out through ‘semiotic regulation’, such as
the presence of cutlery and utensils on a table. Where this occurs participants
stated that they interpret this as a sign that they ought not to sit there if they are
not eating. Customers are able to ‘read’ or make sense of the way the space is marked out and to position themselves accordingly. This has been referred to as “person-environment congruence”, a term used to describe a situation in which “a setting promotes the behaviours and goals within it; the degree of fit between people and their environment” (Bell, Greene, & Fisher et al., 2001, 511). Person-environment congruence can be managed through the use of signs and objects that have semiotic reference, such as utensils placed on tables, or magazines/newspapers hung from a wall. These objects mark out the space as appropriate for particular sorts of activities and conversely as not appropriate for others.

The environment is then meaningful to customers, whether through semiotic regulation or through informal regulation. But this raises the question of how customers learn to ‘read’ the environment. Responses suggest that the way in which customers make sense of the public house and position themselves is carried out rather intuitively. However, this only occurs after a process of learning to become space-literate. When customers were asked about their choice of seat and the reason they had chosen to position themselves as they had done, they were often initially unable to articulate their choice.

“I tell you what, it's habit.”
(Pete, Hare and Hounds)

“I don't know to be honest! It's just, I used to live locally in the village below so to me this is always local to where I used to live so I suppose its old habits coming to the same”
(Simon, The Nags Head)

Leanne: “Yes we tend to sit over there.” [refers to seated area often but not exclusively used for dining, not close to a fire]

“Why is that?”
Leanne: “It's habit! It is habit!”
Gareth: “It is habit.”
(Gareth and Leanne, The Nags Head)

The fact that customers responded to questions about their choice of seat as ‘I don’t know’ or ‘it’s a habit’ could suggest that they are ambivalent in where to sit, and that all parts of the pub are equally preferred. The term ‘habit’ suggests an automatic, unreflective behaviour. The customers simply do what they
usually do without giving too much thought to it. However, with further prompting, these same customers were often able to produce a detailed set of criteria or reasons to explain their choice of seat. Therefore ‘reading’ the pub space is an easy, unconscious feeling, but only for those who have learnt how to do so; rather than being truly intuitive, the reading of the pub environment is deeply socialized and structured.

“Is there anywhere in the pub where you wouldn’t want to sit?”
“I wouldn’t want to sit?”
“Or [anywhere that] you wouldn’t choose to sit?”
“I wouldn’t like to sit down the bottom mainly because I like to be where the hustle and the bustle of the place is. I like to be where it’s most busy so that I can talk to people.”
(Daniel, Hare and Hounds)

Steven: “If we sit with friends we tend to sit there [points] because this gets a bit tight with six of us round here so we move down the bottom end. We generally stay in these two rooms for some reason. We don’t go down the bottom end, I don’t know why, I don’t like it.”
“I was just going to say, do you know why that is?”
Steven: “Haven’t got a clue. Small room! You know, I don’t know why!”
“Just a little bit too small?”
Steven: “Yeah, probably.”
Eloise: “We have been in there when this has been full but that’s the only time yes, it is.”
“Like, you will go in there but it’s not your favourite place to sit.”
Eloise: “Yes, no.”
Steven: “Don’t know why!”
Eloise: “It’s a bit different than in here though.”
Steven: “Yeah, because there is more community in here basically. Everybody kind of congregates around that bar.”
“Is it more sociable?”
Eloise: “Yeah, I think so yeah.”
Steven: “And there [referring to the small bar room], you’re coming in off the carpark with people walking by you all the time. That’s also an entrance [referring to entrance near where we are sat for the interview] but it seems more, people are going out there to… I just prefer these rooms really!”
(Steven and Eloise, The Nags Head)

“Is there anywhere you don’t like to sit or just don’t sit?”
“Not really. I don’t to sit right near the bar just because that’s the busy area and a bit livelier in terms of like volume and having a conversation
that you don’t want to be, where everyone else is loud, so I quite like the booths, the larger booths around there but yeah other than just head away from the bar really.”

(Natalie, Hare and Hounds)

The above quotes demonstrate how the customers had chosen their place within the pub based on a number of complex and interacting factors. This included noise, space and level activity. These factors were often linked to their own personal goals or to their reason for visiting the pub. For example, when visiting with a large group of friends, customers located themselves based on the practical issue of having enough space for their whole party. Similarly, if they are seeking social interaction, customers may place themselves in area where they know there is likely to be lots of activity.

What is interesting here is that noise, space and activity levels were described as ‘feelings’. Participants appeared to experience a felt sense of the space that is different to a reflective conscious. Cromby (2015) proposed that ‘feelings’ are a powerful component of an individual’s relationship to the space through which they pass. Therefore the felt relationship to the space of the pub is key to how participants position themselves within the environment. This is particularly evident in the second extract where two participants struggle to articulate why they dislike sitting in the ‘bottom room’. The participants gradually work through a series of possibilities, such as its size, position near the car park, lack of activity and so on. It seems that these participants have a highly developed feeling for the flows of activities that pass through the pub, and in so doing shape the space, but that these feelings are not easy to clearly articulate verbally.

We can see this difficulty with articulating feelings across a range of interviews. On several occasions customers deployed analogies to help them to express the intuitive nature of choosing a space within a zone that would suit their needs:

“I think it depends on like who’s already around. I think we kind of came down this area because we were looking for somewhere that was in the corner away from, so like we didn’t disturb anyone with our friends ranting [laughs]. It’s kind of like a social etiquette where you survey the situation
to see what already exists and then you make your choice based on other people.”
(Natalie, Hare and Hounds)

“Erm, well first of all I’d go and have a pint there. Soak in the… I would see if I liked it and if I did I would have one more pint.”
“What sort of thing would make you stay?”
“Well it’s like when you buy a house. You might look at half a dozen houses but you walk into one, and you sort of, it just grabs you.”
(Jonathon, The Kings Arms)

When you go in a pub, it’s like an interview really, within the first like 10 minutes you know if you like it. And you come in here and people are friendly.
(Phillip, The Red Lion)

In the first extract, the participants hedge their description with the phrase ‘I think’. This indicates a level of uncertainty or tentativeness in their explanation of their behaviour. This is reinforced by the similar phrase ‘we kind of came down to this area’. The participant describes a ‘surveying of the situation’ in which they explore the activities and people that are already present within the space, before making a choice on where to situate themselves. In this case, the choice was based on a desire not to disturb other customers, as they anticipated that the friends accompanying them would be noisy (‘ranting’). Here we see how self-regulation is based on a highly developed felt relationship to the space, such that customers can sense how to place themselves in appropriate way within the environment.

The second and third extracts describe how this felt relationship can be developed very rapidly when going into a new pub environment. The second extract compares this to viewing houses where the house that suits just ‘grabs you’. In other words, you have immediate felt sense of the possibilities for a place, and those that are suited to your needs. Although in the case of a pub, this might take the time needed to have a pint to properly ‘soak in’. The third extract compares visiting a new pub to an ‘interview’, where within the ‘first ten minutes’ you can arrive at a good judgement of fit, in this case between the individual and the pub.
The explanations provided in extracts two and three, using the metaphors of viewing a house or attending an interview, may at first appear to explain an ‘intuitive’ or natural process. However it should be noted that the capacity to rapidly develop this felt relationship is one that comes with being an experienced long-term pub customers. Therefore rather than being intuitive, the ability to rapidly develop a felt relationship within a space reflects a match between a new text (in this instance a new pub) and an established form of literacy of pub spaces or a particular set of pub practices. This raises several questions, which will be further addressed in the discussion, around the ways in which future pub goers are being taught and are subsequently learning to become space-literate within the pub. It also raises questions around whether the requirement to read the practices within the pub are knotted to other activities, such as being tied to alcohol consumption, which creates tighter knots for some groups yet obstacles for others.

In summary, rather than taking the time to rationalise and think through their decision about where to place themselves, customers quickly become highly attuned to a space. Customers are able to ‘feel’ what might type of activity may be sanctionable or possible across the different nested spaces within the pub, and choose a suitable location without rationally and consciously working this through. Speaking about the nature of space and the way in which spaces become meaningful, Tuan suggests that “what begins as an undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan, 1977, 6). Therefore, through spending time in the pub customers are able to learn and make sense of the subtle differences between each zone, and become sensitive to the informal and semiotic regulation of the space. Through understanding the different obligations, informal rules and activities that occur within each zone, and the way in which these zones overlap, the pub as a social space becomes meaningful for each customer, and they are able to develop a felt relationship to the space.

Affordances

One way to understand the way in which customers understand the different nested spaces within the pub is to draw on the concept of affordances. As
previously discussed within of the preceding literature review (see Chapter 2), the term 'affordances' was coined by ecological psychologist Gibson (1979) to introduce the idea that an object or environment will offer the organisms within it a number of action possibilities. The properties of the environment or object, for example it’s texture, size and edges, allow an individual to perceive its “invariant functional properties”. This term has been explained as the “useful’ properties of an object that do not change” (Bell, Greene, & Fisher et al., 2001, 65). The invariant functional properties of an object are thus perceived as affordances. Affordances can be physical (making it possible to carry out an action), social (making it possible to carry out certain social activities) or emotional (making it possible to experience a psychological feeling).

Every object or environment possesses an array of multiple different affordances. However, affordance are a combination of the physical properties of an object or environment and of the individuals own qualities and experiences. Therefore whilst an object has many affordances, some of these affordances will not be perceived by an individual. Also, the same individual may perceive different affordances from an object or environment as their own needs change.

Heft (1988) argued that utilising Gibson’s theory can provide a way of describing the functional significance of an environment for an individual or group. Therefore, analysing how various affordances are arranged within the different spaces of the pub is an interesting way into the pub experience. The concept of affordances can be applied to customer’s responses to provide a way of understanding the way in which they make sense of the public house space. To illustrate this, three examples are provided below. Each outlines a situation in which customers chose their location in the pub based on the type of action and social interaction the space afforded.

Example 1:

In this situation the researcher asked two customers about their choice of seat. They were sat in an area of the pub that was semi-private, slightly closed off from the rest of the pub which had seating for approximately 10 customers.
“And you are sat here today. Do you tend to sit here or do you sit in other parts of the pub?”
Joanne: “We usually sit here when there’s not many in. Sometimes it’s quite busy in this room and it’s nice.”
Andrew: “It is, if there are people in here in this room then you can get into a conversation with them.”
Joanne: “Talking to them yes.”
“Does that happen very often?”
Joanne: “I think it does, yeah, because you are with them anyway”
Andrew: “Especially in a room like this, you can’t not talk to people”
Joanne: “Well you start by being polite and finding out bits and bobs and suddenly you are discussing everything so…”
“Is there anywhere in the pub you don’t like to sit?”
Joanne: “We don’t tend to go anywhere else.”
(Andrew and Joanne, The King’s Arms)

Here the customers demonstrate how their chosen ‘zone’ within the pub provides a social affordance; the opportunity to meet and to create conversation with new people. The room in which they sit becomes busy at times due to its location within the pub space. The arrangement of seating and the size of the room mean that casual interaction becomes almost inevitable. By routinely sitting in this room the couple take advantage of its affordances to engage in incidental conversations with whoever else makes use of the room.

Example 2:
Here, the researcher had approached a customer who had visited the pub on his own and sat very close to the bar area.

“Okay. So, I notice today you are sat here. Is this your preferred place to sit?”
“Well actually my favourite place is right over there.”
“Where I was sitting?” [laughs]
“Well that’s fine, it doesn’t matter. You know, next to the fire.”
“A few people have said they like the fire.”
“It takes me back to my childhood in a way.”
“Really?”
“My parents - we always had an open fire and I used to love it. And we don’t have one of those at home at it doesn’t matter erm, but I do like, you know when you see the flames. And it is a central point, it’s a focal point.”
(Wilf, The Nags Head)
This example illustrates how an object, in this case a traditional log fire, can hold an emotional affordance, reminding the customer of their own personal history. This response is consistent with the proposition that individual’s perception of affordances are influenced by their own thoughts and experiences, as if he had not experience the fire place in his own home as a child, he may not have made this connection with the fire in the pub. Moreover, the affordances of the open fireplace provide a ‘focal point’ within the pub, around which customers orient themselves. To sit at the fireplace is then to situate oneself at the very the centre of the pub, to feel that one is at the heart of things. We might speculate that it is this sense of being at the centre rather than the periphery of the environment which is also satisfying to this participant.

Conversely, rather than viewing the fire as providing an emotional affordance, another customer noted that they liked to sit near the fire to stay warm, a physical affordance.

“So basically, I don’t care what the pubs like but one thing I will insist on is some bloody warmth!”

“Warm?”

William: “Warm! I don’t like sitting drinking alcohol in the freezing cold! When you come into a pub, you’re actually going into someone else’s living room. And I would not expect you to sit in MY living room cold.”

“So the main thing is warm?”

Kirsty: “Yeah”

Kirsty: “Long as it’s warm and I can have a beer I’m alright!”

(William and Kirsty, The Anchor)

The two different responses regarding fire places demonstrates the way in which two people can be presented with the same stimuli yet hold two different perception, a phenomenon described by as “perceptual relativism” by Ingold (2000: 15). This has also been discussed by Macnaghten & Urry (1998) as affordances being borne out of the “reciprocity between the environment and the organism”, and occurring as a result of the way in which the individual interacts with the environment in which they are in. In practice it may be that these various social, emotional and physical affordances are woven together in the ways that visitors experience the environment, with some affordances
becoming heightened depending on the particular relationship a person has with the space.

**Example 3:**

On a different occasion, the researcher spoke to two participants that were sat at the bar. When asked about their preferred place to sit the male customer remarked that he preferred to sit in the window. His response is outlined below.

“**What do you like about there in particular?**”

“The light, from behind you so you can do your crossword and also under that lamp, that metal thing it’s all heated you see - because I’m a real starved dog.”

(Chris, The White Swan)

This response demonstrates how a particular part of the pub environment is able to offer physical affordances of adequate light and warmth that enables the customer to carry out his intended goal of completing his crossword comfortably. What is interesting here is the combination of the affordances of heat and light. The customer’s description of himself as a ‘real starved dog’ indicates that this is a space of comfort that he seeks out – much as a domestic animal might seat itself in a favoured spot – because of the unique combination of affordances that are offered by that part of the environment.

The three examples provided here demonstrate the way in which the concept of affordances can be helpful in understanding the way in which customers navigate and locate themselves within a spatially complex environment, such as the public house. Although affordances can be physical and emotional, many of the customers situated themselves within a space that offered the social affordances that they desired. This finding is consistent with academic literature from ecological psychology. Although Gibson did not discuss social affordances at great length, he acknowledged that “the richest and most elaborate affordances of the environment are provided by other animals and, for us, other people” (Gibson, 1979, 135).
More recent research has examined the role of social affordances in more detail. Research has demonstrated that the presence of other people can act as a motivating factor to use an environment and therefore are mediators in the perceptual process (Clark & Uzzell, 2002). In addition, research has also suggested that social factors play a more important role than physical factor in the way in which individuals socially construct a place that is meaningful to them (Kyle & Chick, 2007). The results from the current study support this, with many participants acknowledging that the presence of other people elicited additional affordances beyond those that were perceived directly from the physical environment.

Although customers discussed the way in which the public house was differentiated into a number of zones, it is important to note that these zones are not mutually exclusive and that there is some overlap between the activities that occurs in each zone. For example people may choose to have a meal outside of a pubs designated ‘restaurant’ area. It is not the case that customers will remain within one zone during their visit. Instead they may move through a number of different zones. Therefore the zones are experienced in the way that they relate to one another, through comparing the different affordances that appear to be available within each zone.

The transactional approach to analysis proposes that an environment cannot be analysed by simply breaking it down into different parts and analysing these parts separately. Instead, the different parts of the overall environment are inter-dependant and therefore any analysis of the experience of an environment needs to consider all of the constituent parts and the way in which they are interlinked. This proposition is consistent with the Gestalt approach to perception and Gibson’s (1979) ecological perception theory.

It is also important to note that the zones within the pub are ever-evolving and subject to change as people move around the pub. This was evident in several responses that noted that if the researcher were to visit at a different time or on a different day, they may find a different set of people and have a different experience of the pub.
“Yeah, at weekends it’s a totally different crowd. At weekends you get sort of once a month type people that come in. That come to eat, come to dine and because we are here all the time we tend to notice who is different, and at weekends it is different.”
(Daniel, Hare and Hounds)

“I think on a Friday pub this pub isn’t for us. We go to [another pub] because on a Friday night nobody stays that long. They’ve come in from work, it’s a Friday night. Nobody stays that long. They stay about an hour and a half, long enough to offload.”
(Jack, Hare and Hounds)

Joe: “You get a lot of old people come in at times on Sundays you know.”
“Okay so you just said that old people come in”
Tom: “You do nearer dinner time yeah. They come in and something’s happening. They have a meal and catch up.”
“What about at night time?”
Joe:“It’s more young ones that come in at night time.”
“Yeah? Do you [to Tom] agree with that or…?”
Tom: “Yeah, you don’t get any older ones – not with the sort of music [the licensee] puts on!”
(Tom and Joe, The Anchor)

Many respondents had purposely chosen a time and day to visit the pub that suited them, as they were aware that the activity within the pub fluctuates, almost on a cyclical nature throughout the day and week. The way in which places are continually constructed has been discussed by many authors who have argued that places exist only so long as the people within it continue their practices (Dorling, 2012; Ingold, 2000; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). The pub experience, therefore, is continually created and constructed by the customers that are present at any given time. The meshwork of the pub environment is continuously weaving together different lines of activity, and in so doing creating novel experiences.

As previously discussed, customers were able to find a space that suited their need quickly and with little conscious effort. This may suggest that affordances are perceived in an intuitive manner, rather than rational and consciously thought out. Customers were able to read the different affordances available across the different zones, and were able to do so very quickly.
The proposition, that customers are able to perceive the many affordances of the public house space without rationally thinking through each of the action possibilities of each object, is consistent with Gibson’s original proposition. Gibson believed that “the basic affordances of an environment are perceivable and are usually perceivable directly, without an excessive amount of learning” (Gibson, 1979, 143). Instead of bestowing objects with meaning, we directly receive valuable information from our perception of the environment. The properties of any environment or object provide enough information to enable an individual to perceive its action possibilities. Therefore the information about the object and the actions that it makes possible is available directly from that object, and the affordances are directly perceivable.

**Summary**

In summary, we can view the spatial complexity of the public house as a meshwork that draws together different lines of activity. As such, the boundary between the pub and its environment is inevitably diffuse, meaning that many people visit the pub not as an end in itself but rather as a space encountered on the way to another. In this way, customers talked about their visit to the public house as an activity amongst a flow of other activities that occurred throughout their day. Once they arrived at the pub, customers viewed the pub not as a unitary singular space, but as a collection of different nested spaces or ‘zones’. Although there were occasions in which these zones were physically marked out through formal regulation, often there were no physical cues to mark the space yet nevertheless each zone was used for different kinds of activity. In these cases we see a high degree of either informal or semiotic regulation of activities.

Regardless of whether the zone was marked out with physical cues or not, each zone appeared to set up a number of different obligations for the customer. Within each zone there appeared to be small informal rules and norms created by the pub customers through informal regulation. The customers were able to read and interpret each of these spaces to find a space that was able to meet their needs.
This process of selecting a suitable place within the pub appeared to occur intuitively with little conscious effort. However this was, in part, due to the majority of participants being regular customers at the pub in which they were interviewed. As a result, what may appear as a unconscious process actually reflects a high level of space-literacy, which has occurred as a result of an extended process of learning and socialization. This was evident in customers’ responses, with many people struggling to explain their choice when first asked, but later being able to provide a complex set of criteria that led them to situate themselves within their chosen location.

One way to understand the spatial complexity of the public house is to look towards the concept of affordances. This discussed the relevance of the concept of affordances chapter to customers responses by providing for examples in which customers located themselves based on the affordances that their specific location offered. Customers were able to find a space that suited their need quickly and with little conscious effort. This suggests that affordances are perceived in an instinctive manner, an argument that would be consistent with Gibson’s original conception of affordances and direct perception.

Despite recognition of the differentiated zones within the pub, it is important to conceptualise each as a dynamic, ever-evolving space and not as a static of fixed space. Each zone exists as a result of the interaction between the physical setting and the actions of the individuals that use the setting. Therefore, each zone, as well as the overall pub space is constantly in a state of flux, and is continually being created by the individuals that move in and out it.
Sociality

Introduction

An overwhelmingly consistent, yet not surprising finding is that for many customers, the pub represented a social space. Customers frequently talked about the sociality that occurred within the pub and used a number of phrases such as “a social gathering with a couple of beers” (Stefan, Hare and Hounds), “an easy meeting place” (Natalie, Hare and Hounds) “the social side of drinking” (June, The White Swan), and “a bit of a social event” (Paige, The Red Lion).

Customers were also able to provide examples of numerous social occasions for which they had attended the pub. This included spending time with existing friends and family or to meet and socialise with new acquaintances. In addition many people attended the pub to mark special events such as birthdays, Saint Patrick’s day and for festive Christmas and New Year’s Eve celebrations.

Some customers also stated that they visited the pub to spend time on their own and observations confirmed many instances where individuals visited the pub alone. Although sometimes they remained on their own for the duration of the visit, often the customers made conversations with the staff and other customers. Therefore although this may appear to be a non-social act, it is interesting that these customers chose a location in which other people are present. Rather than see this act as an effort to be solitary, we might instead see it as a particular kind of social act, described by Turkle (2013) as a way of being ‘alone together’. In these instances, customers appeared to be highly aware of what was going on around them, whilst nevertheless not directly participating in the surrounding activity.

When speaking about the aspects of the pub they enjoyed, customers frequently referred to other people within the pub. This included other customers, members of staff and members of the licensee team. There were also a number of phrases that were commonly used amongst customers' responses, describing the pub as ‘warm’ and ‘friendly’:

“Okay so what do you mean by ‘nice atmosphere’?”
“Erm, it’s always warm, - if its cold outside its warm in here, people are
friendly, the bar staff are good. They know you by name and that’s good.”
(Daniel, Hare and Hounds)

“Is there anything else you would look for?”
Kirsty: “Like, I agree with what William says. Exactly the same; warm, friendly…”

“Friendly staff or friendly people?”
Kirsty: “Friendly staff, friendly people and the atmosphere’s…”
William: “I aint bothered about that because I can still have a drink.”
Kirsty: “No but you don’t want to go in a pub where the atmosphere is not very good.”

“Can you think of a pub that you have been in and thought “I don’t like the atmosphere in here“
Kirsty: “Yeah [name of pub]”

“Oh, what’s that like?”
William: “Like you just explained yeah. Really edgy. Full of idiots, drunks, cold! Cold!”
(William and Kirsty, The Anchor)

“That has got to be warm, and I don’t mean heat, but somewhere that feels warm when you walk in”
(Gareth, The Nag’s Head)

The formulation of a pub being ‘warm and friendly’ or the reference to the pub having a ‘nice atmosphere’ is evident throughout the interviews. These terms are synonymous with popular conceptions of a traditional, British pub (Campbell, 2000; Maye, Ilbery, & Kneafsey, 2005). On the one hand this phrase appears fairly straightforward. A ‘warm and friendly’ pub is both a physically comfortable pub and a place where visitors immediately feel welcome. This is exemplified in the third extract which connotes a sense of both physical relaxation and safety. However, the simplicity of the expression ‘warm and friendly’ disguises the complex ideas wrapped up and used under this umbrella phrase.

To illustrate this, we can see that within the first extract the idea of warmth is relational, with the customers describing outside as cold and inside as warm. However, since the pubs is visited by customers across all seasons, presumably the concept of ‘warmth’ need not refer purely to temperature, but rather that there is a physical difference between the space of the pub and the ‘everyday’ world outside of it. Furthermore, ‘friendliness’, as we can see from
the second extract, is used in opposition to ‘edginess’ and ‘idiots’. On one level, friendliness means an absence of concerns around physical safety and the behaviour of others. But it does not necessarily imply that what is desired is much beyond simple recognition. Therefore the first example suggests that the staff being ‘good’ and ‘knowing you by name’ constitutes friendliness. This seems to be a fairly minimal version of friendliness, akin to that which might be expected from a work colleague or perhaps a local shopkeeper. Therefore, what is at issue here is a very particular form of friendliness in which people are pleasant towards one another but are not required to spend time engaged in conversations.

At a much broader level, the idea of the ‘warm and friendly’ pub seems to invoke a traditional notion of the British pub, akin to that described by George Orwell in his famous 1946 essay ‘The Moon Under the Water’. This ‘ideal pub’ is one which is very different from the actual public houses that participants visit and indeed from many that they may have actually experienced, including the fourteen pubs currently called ‘The Moon Under the Water’ (see Moody & Turner, 2013). In this way ‘warm and friendly’ may refer a fantasy of an ideal pub that is invoked as an almost impossible standard. Customer’s perceptions of an ideal pub will be discussed further in the next chapter, yet it is interesting to note that whether ‘fantasy’ or not, the presence of ‘friendly’, ‘welcoming’ people appears to feed into customers’ evaluations of the pub. These examples also demonstrate the way in which other people play an important role in the pub experience.

This finding that the pub operated as and represented a social space for many customers is no surprise and confirms the existing body of literature that explores and describes the types of social activities that occur in pubs (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Mass Observation, 1943; Muir, 2002; Smith, 1983;). This body of work suggests that pubs are crucial in providing a space for a “kaleidoscope of human interaction” (Smith, 1985, 370). Participants’ responses also suggested the pub was a social space, thus demonstrating continuity in the pub’s function over time, given that research conducted by Mass Observation (1943) made similar claims over 70 years ago. In addition, there has been a
body of literature focusing on ‘third spaces’, a term originally developed by Oldenburg (1999).

Third places are physically separate from an individual’s home (the first place) and place of work (the second place). Although third places may provide the opportunity to purchase items such as food and drink, these items are not essential. Instead, the sociable atmosphere created by the people that inhabit the space is of the highest importance. Third spaces are social spaces in which the main activity is socializing and conversation. Third spaces provide people with somewhere to meet and relax. However, they are often ‘ordinary’ spaces that may not look new, modern or special and as a result they are frequently taken-for-granted spaces (Oldenburg, 1999). This can have a number of implications for these spaces, in that they are at risk of being undervalued and underfunded, with their important to local individuals underestimated. Perkins and Thorn (2012) suggests that these types of places are often taken for granted and as a result their importance is often only realised when a loss occurs. For example the authors cite research into the sadness felt by local residents when allotments were replaced with houses (Perkins, 1988), or when a barber shop has closed down (Lofland, 1998).

The conceptualization of third places has been applied to several settings, including; coffee shops (Shapira & Navon, 1991; Warner, Talbot & Bennison, 2012), libraries (Elmborg, 2011), allotments (Perkins & Thorn, 2012), barbers (Lofland, 1998), local convenience stores (Hickman, 2013) and public houses (Oldenburg, 1999). In line with the afore-mentioned research studies, the current study also suggests that the pub operates as a third space. However there are clearly many features of pubs which differ from other sorts of third spaces. Not least amongst this is the dominance of alcohol sales and consumption as one of the primary features of what happens within a pub. Clearly alcohol consumption has an effect on behaviour and the overall atmosphere of the environment where it occurs. We will then need to characterize the particular ‘third space’ features of pubs that differentiate them from places such as barbers or allotments. Therefore the type of sociality that occurs within the pub is further investigated throughout the remained of the chapter.
The pub as a community

Idyllic notions of traditional, British public houses often portray the pub as the centre of the local community (Hunt & Satarlee, 1986; Bowler & Everitt, 1999; Cloke, 2003). Although the ‘term’ community has traditionally applied to large scale collections of individuals, the term is now being applied to ‘micro-settings’ such as workplaces, schools and virtual communities (Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002).

Pervious research from Orford, Rolfe, Dalton, et al. (2009) interviewed the Birmingham Untreated Heavy Drinkers (BUHD) cohort about their views regarding the relationship between the pub and the sense of community. This cohort of 500 people, age 25 - 55 years, living in the West Midlands and meet the criteria outlined by General Household Survey (ONS, 2001) to be categorised as ‘very heavy drinkers’. The study found a wide variety of responses. Most frequently, respondents believed the pub provided a sense of community in itself. However some customers also stated that the pub was unrelated to the community or that the pub formed part of a wider community.

The study conducted by Orford and colleagues deliberately only interviewed people from within the BUHD cohort. Therefore it is not clear whether these views are representative of people who consume fewer units of alcohol. To further explore the connection between the pub and community, customers within the current study were asked whether they felt there was a sense of community surrounding the pub in which they were interviewed. They were then asked further questions to more fully explain their response.

Customers provide a diverse range of response with regards to their views on whether or not the pub comprised a community. For example, some people strongly believed that the pub operated as a community.

“I’ve said for years, it’s a community centre that sells beer, that’s what a pub is. It kind of holds people together.”
(Daniel, Hare and Hounds)
“The [pub], although I don’t live round here, is very much a community pub. It is 100% that way. People that live round this area they want a nice local pub and I think that’s what they’re achieving.”
(Lewis, Hare and Hounds)

“One of the questions we have is do you think there is a sense of community around this pub or not?”
Leanne: “Definitely.”
Gareth: “And that’s only because since we’ve been here we do know, well I couldn’t tell you their names, but people will speak to us and they know where we live. And, I mean, a couple of people have made us –
Gareth: “Made an effort.”
Leanne: “I mean, it’s that whole things about being welcomed into the village.”
(Gareth and Leanne, The Nag’s Head)

The strongest response is in the first extract, in which the participant describes the pub as wholly oriented towards the community, with the sale of alcohol being subsidiary to its primary purpose of serving as a hub for community activities. In comparison, the second extract provides a softened version of this, with the formulation ‘community pub’ describing a public house that is primarily used by the community and hence dominated by the needs of ‘people that live round this area’. The last extract gives a relative outsider’s view of the ‘sense of community’ to be found in the pub. Being welcomed into the general community involves also being addressed by regulars in the pub, who recognize you as legitimate members of the local community, even if you do not necessarily know who they are.

However, in contrast to the above responses there were also people that strongly believed that the pub did not represent or operate as a community.

“Do you feel like there is a community in this pub, or not?”
Kirsty: “No, I don’t.”
William: “I don’t know really because these days I just come out and have a few beers… if people want to join us, they want to join us. I don’t come out to –”
Kirsty: “We don’t go out of our way to talk to anybody do we? We just keep ourselves to ourselves.”
William: “Just do my thing and you can’t get in trouble then can you! But my days of romancing and all that are way behind me… I think it’s all
gone. It’s all gone, there is not a thing where we used to – I, I could virtually go to any pub in Leicester, Leicestershire, and now you would struggle. Because, the way things have gone.”

Kirsty: “Yeah that’s true.”

“So are there any pubs that you can think of where you would think ‘Oh actually there is a bit of community in there’?”

William: “No, it’s all gone, it’s all gone”

(William and Kirsty, The Anchor)

“Ok. So do you think there is any sense of community around this pub or not?”

“Not as far as we know. I mean, there is people, I don’t know if there is any locals round here.”

(Andrew, The King’s Arms)

In these extracts, the participants talk about a ‘sense of community’ as something that was previously found in pubs, but is now something that is relatively absent. For these participants, a sense of safety and the ability to engage in casual social interaction does not afford the pub the status of ‘community’. One customer stated that he believed that they had experienced a greater sense of community in the past, and that pubs that were ‘old fashioned’ offered a greater sense of community.

“There is more in the old fashioned pubs.”

“In the older pubs like [a previously mentioned pub that the customer considered to be old-fashioned]?”

“Yes because there are strangers coming in and they start mingling, in the old traditional pub. They all mingle. It’s a big difference.”

[Another customer joins in] “The local pubs are gone”

“The locals are dying off, definitely”

(Craig, The Anchor)

In both this extract, and the previous two examples, community is considered a feature of the ‘traditional’ pub which has now been lost. Note that the term ‘traditional’ here seems connected to the idea of ‘local-ness’, where the pub served as a meeting point for the local community. As this participant puts it, it is possible to recreate some sense of the physical environment of an ‘old-fashioned’ pub, and this seems to afford social interaction or ‘mingling’ that resembles the traditional pub. But without this crucial link to ‘local-ness’, the sense of community cannot be restored. However, it is noteworthy that the above three extracts were provided from two pubs in particular; The Anchor,
located on the edge of a housing estate, and the Globe, located in the city centre. Within both sites customers were more likely to be unemployed and of a lower socioeconomic status. There were multiple reasons for this including ill-health, retirement and redundancy. Previous research has shown that individuals use third spaces as a way of replacing lost social resources, through forming relationships with customers and employees. (Rosenbaum, Ward, & Walker et al., 2007). Therefore it is plausible that for customers who do not have access to other regular social contact (such as through regular employment), the community available in the pub is an even more significant resource. Therefore they may be more aware of changes in the sense of community in the pub.

It is not clear whether or not this notion of ‘lost community’ is itself a fantasy, a nostalgic view of the past that is at odds with the historical experience of pubs. However, despite this ambiguity, what is interesting here is that the physical changes in the structure and operation of public houses in recent times are associated with the loss of community. When asked if a sense of community could be recreated in the pub in which he was interviewed, the customers stated:

“It wouldn’t work anymore”
“Okay, is that because there are less locals?”
“Yes we had many locals where the older generation used to go. It’s also to do with safety because it’s not the same anymore. Particularly this area around here, it’s not the safest area. It’s a combination of many aspects!” (Craig, The Anchor)

The customers’ comments describe the decline in the experience of community within pubs in a general manner rather than just being relevant to the pub in which they were interviewed. There was a belief that ‘old fashioned’ pubs had previously provided a sense of community, but that this had eroded over time.

Consistent with the participants’ responses, many authors in both popular culture and academic research have argued that there has been a ‘death’ of the English pub (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Williams, 2014). Their claims are often supported by the figures of the number of public houses in operation. For
example figures provided by the British Beer and Pub Association show that the number of pubs in Britain is declining, with approximately 61600 pubs in 1992, which had decreased by approximately 20% to 49400 pubs in 2012. However, Maye, Iberly & Kneafsey (2005) argue that the ‘crisis’ and decline of the British pub is most often measured quantitatively, based on the number of pubs that remain open. However, the authors note that quantitative measures alone may not represent the current picture of pubs across the United Kingdom. For example, although the 1980s and 1990s are portrayed as the ‘golden years’ for pubs, there may have been too many in existence. Therefore the closure of these sites does not necessarily signal a ‘crisis’ as is often portrayed by the media.

Results of the current study paint a more complex picture, with some, but not all of the customers experiencing a qualitative change in the pub house environment in comparison with a previous time. Although this is an interesting finding, comparisons of the ‘old fashioned’ and modern day pub was not the remit of the current study and therefore further research would be required to substantiate this claim.

If there was a division between participants claiming for either the persistence or the loss of a sense of community, there were also a number of participants who provided a more nuanced response. For example, many participants suggested that the pub ‘sometimes’ provided a sense of community, or ‘sort of’ constituted a community:

“Erm, I've noticed it with a community in a sense of individual communities rather than a whole community, in a sense that, erm, for example on a Friday night, if I pop in on a Friday evening, they usually sit near that fireplace over there. There is a husband and wife and the wife’s father, who is in his 80s. And that’s a community in a way. There is another crowd I noticed when I was in, well a couple of times, I've been here on a Sunday on the way home from church and there is a group of people from a Rugby club who meet as a group, about 4 or 5 of them for their regular Sunday pint.” (Wilf, The Nag’s Head)
“Okay, do you think there’s any sense of community around this pub?”
“Yeah, definitely. Not on a Friday or Saturday night, no. Because like I say, they put bands on and people come from, you know, quite far away to come and see all that but that’s when it’s like rammed, jam-packed and I don’t like it.”
(Paul, The White Swan)

“And do you think there is any sense of community around this pub or not?”
“They’re can be”
“They’re can be? What do you mean by that?”
“It depends on what set of people come down.”
(Sophie, The Red Lion)

The above responses point toward a more complex account of the sociality experienced within the public house. Many customers believed the pub to be a meeting place for a number of smaller pre-existing communities, such as described in the first and third extracts. The pub is then a venue for small scale ‘collectives’ to meet rather than a locus for a community per se. Furthermore, as the second extract indicates, efforts to attract these collectives – such as people who are brought together by the enjoyment of a particular kind of music or followers of a specific band – are seen as partly corrosive of the local community of a pub, presumably because the visitors on these occasions are unlikely to want to mix with regulars or to contribute to the long-term life of the pub. Therefore the sociality experienced by customers within the pub was fluid and each pub had its own rhythms of sociality. Customers indicated that they experienced different degrees of ‘community’ on different days of the week and at different times of day. Furthermore, the experience of sociality appeared to be continuously created by the people within the pub and the way they interact with the pub setting and one another. This proposition is consistent with an ecological approach to understanding spaces and the way in which they become meaningful to the individuals with them (Ingold, 2000).

Customers were able to provide examples of occasions when the sociality within the pub had resulted in typical community-like actions. This included a
petition to prevent houses being built on land near to the pub, the use of the pub space to host community and fundraising events:

“We used to come here with [the local fire service] many years ago. We are retired firemen and we would always end up here. It’s a charity collection that always goes around the streets and in this area this is the pub we would end up at.”

(Mark, Hare and Hounds)

“Ok. The only question I have left really is “Do you think there is a sense of community around this pub”?”

“Oh yeah! I'll tell you a little story. They wanted to build 150 houses on the back here, about 140 houses. And the whole village objected, as they normally do! They formed a village committee and called it TAG, T-A-G, I don’t know why. They did a fantastic job and the meetings were here. And, we all attended the council meeting, in the council hall over there. And the bill got banned.”

“Okay so they didn’t get built here?”

“Yeah. So last Wednesday on the so-called committee came down here and got a little bit inebriated to celebrate the occasion.”

[Laughs] “Really?”

“Yeah, so it is a community place yeah!”

(Pete, The Nag’s Head)

In both these extracts, an activity occurring within the broader community is facilitated by or at least partly enacted through the space of the pub. In the first extract, the pub is the place where the charity volunteers retire to after their work is done, whilst in the second extract, the pub is the venue where the newly formed ‘village committee’ hold their meetings and ultimately their celebration upon victory. However, note in the second extract that the nature of this community is ironised somewhat as a ‘so-called committee’. This then is community only so long as it has a purpose rather than a community grounded in a broader sense of place or association.

Despite the rich examples provided by customers, assessing customers’ responses more broadly suggest that the use of the term ‘community’ does not accurately represent and describe the variations across the types of sociality that occur within the pub. In addition, the fact that there was a wide disparity between some of the responses suggests that the link between the pub and the community is not straightforward. This finding, consistent with Orford et al.
suggests that the lay person’s concept of community does not fully and accurately represent the type of sociality that occurs within each public house. The pub does not automatically constitute its own community, yet it does provide a place for people to meet regularly and through which to imagine, if not engage in, community.

It is important to consider the different conceptualisation of ‘community’ that each individual may hold. Therefore even within the same pub, one person may view the pub as a community whilst another may refute this idea. Similarly, academic literature on communities is also complex and contested. Research has suggested that there are as many of 94 different definitions of the term community (Hillery, 1955, cited in Kagan et al. 2011). Many authors have raised concerns around the term ‘community’ and the inconsistency in the way it is used (Little, 2000; Delanty, 2010). These authors note that despite the lack of a clear definition, this has not prevented the term ‘community’ from being used as a common discourse, both in academic literature and popular culture. Delanty (2010) argues that there has been an increasing nostalgia for the past and traditional community, caused by the rise of industrialisation, capitalism and individualism. The author argues that the term ‘community’ is used as a utopian vision (Delanty, 2000) an idea that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

**What kind of sociality is found within the pub?**

The suggestion that the term ‘community’ does not fully represent the fluid sociality that customers experience in the pub generates further questions about what type of sociality is actually being constituted. It is crucial to understand which elements of the sociality are important to the pub’s customers. Further interrogation of the customers’ responses has helped to draw out some potential answers to these questions.

For example, customers placed great importance on ‘knowing’. This included knowing and recognising other people within the pub, knowing the staff and licensee(s) and noticing when regular customers were absent.
“There are less and less pubs now than there used to be and it’s an integral part. Especially for my age group and my father’s and people before me. It’s an integral part of their lives. And when that’s gone… Erm, I mean, you do talk to some people who can’t believe you know the landlord. “What you know him?” “Well yeah, he’s my mate!” And if they’re not in this kind of environment then they don’t really understand that you will know the landlord who runs the pub. “Well yeah because I go there a lot so I know him yeah”.
(Daniel, Hare and Hounds)

“Most people come in here on a kind of day-to-day basis. Most people know each other; they all know each other by first name down they? So they all know each other. We know probably half the people that come in here day-to-day because you get similar, you know familiarity and all that and you get to talking to them.”
(Kirsty, The Anchor)

The responses presented above demonstrate the way in which ‘knowing’ people was an important part of the pub experience. As the first extract describes, the idea that you would form a relationship of mutual recognition – that the landlord would be someone who you could refer to as a ‘mate’ – is one that seems to be lost to a younger generation of pub customers. This also holds amongst customers themselves, as the second extract outlines, where knowing people on a ‘first name basis’ is an important part of being a regular. However, although some people formed close friendships in the pub, customers were not required to disclose or obtain detailed information about one another. In fact, some individuals preferred it if other customers did not know too much information about them. This is evident in the example given below.

“Okay, so do you think there is a sense of community in this pub?”
“100%. Yeah, yeah. Definitely. Everyone knows each other. Sometimes it can be a little bit too much, you know, people knowing your business and things like that but its nice people care and people are always bothered. You know if someone’s not very well or if there’s a funeral you know the whole pubs practically going or helping out or something like that or expressing their concerns. You know, if somebody doesn’t come in for a while that’s noticed.”
(John, Hare and Hounds)

What is interesting in this extract is that the participant affirms that there is a sense of community in the pub. However when they start to unpack this idea a
little more, it becomes clear that there is a delicate balance to be accomplished. The positive aspects of the community are that people ‘care’, meaning that they are aware of issues in one another’s lives and seem themselves as having mutual obligations, such as attending funerals. But there are also possible negative consequences, such as too great an intimacy, where ‘people know your business’. Therefore the version of community that this participant sees as operative is what we might call ‘minimal community’, constituted of recognition and low level obligation without strong bonds.

On occasions participants described how it was simply enough to recognise another person, without knowing the other person’s name or any further information. Therefore in order to feel as if they ‘know’ others, customers did not need to engage in verbal communication. Participants enjoyed watching other people within the pub. This vicarious experience of sociality, achieved through observing other people, was noted by several of the customers. Customers noted that they enjoyed watching others and witnessing the social interactions that took place.

“We don’t always talk to many other people around here, but sometimes we meet people here by chance that we know and that’s always nice… So I would say yes, it’s very nice and I think it’s one of the things that a lot of people like about the pub. And I think that new families have been… welcomed…you know and they don’t cause any bother. Sometimes, the children, you see them there. And so I would say that they’re very relaxed here. So, you know they talk about people watching? Well I watch the families. Our children are grown up now but here we are enjoying them enjoying their families. It’s nice to see it. You’re smiling because you are seeing the hugs and all. We don’t come from here so our family aren’t here but it’s nice to see other families.”

(Jack, Hare and Hounds)

“How can I phrase this… Would you want to be a part of it or are you
happy the two of you?”
“No. We’ve got our own pub and we are a part of that so…”
“Do you go there more regularly?”
“Yes, we are more involved in [the other pub]”
(Chris, The White Swan)

In the first extract, the participant describes how families that are new to the area are socialised into the pub environment through being ‘welcomed’. Presumably this socialisation process involves inculcation into the norms and practices of the pub since following this welcoming ‘they don’t cause any bother’. The participant then goes on to describe the vicarious pleasure they derive from seeing families interact with one another, since their own children are now ‘grown up’ and elsewhere. Note that the participant does not describe interacting directly with these families, that their contact is limited to simply observing (‘it’s nice to see’). The second extract similarly describes how customers can enjoy the interactions which are occurring in the pub without feeling the need to have to participate directly in what is happening.

Both of the previously discussed extracts from Jack (Hare and Hounds) and Chris (The White Swan) demonstrate the ways in which the sociality that occurs within the pub can be experienced and enjoyed by customers, even when they are not directly involved in the interactions that take place. This finding is consistent with previous research, conducted by Hickman (2013). The author interviewed 180 residents from deprived area in the UK and found that ‘third places’, such as shops, pubs and cafes were valued by individuals as they provided a place for social interaction. Hickman (2013) also found that respondents enjoyed seeing other people, regardless of whether they knew them on a personal level. Hickman proposed that although Oldenburg’s (1999) discussion of third places had focussed on verbal interaction, verbal interaction is not essential for individuals to consider third spaces beneficial.

In line with Hickman’s (2013) suggestion, it seems to be the case that pub customers placed importance on watching other people, even in the absence of direct verbal communication. It could be intuitively assumed that the people witnessing and enjoying the social interactions are simply longing to experience these interactions themselves. However, the final example (Chris, The White
Swan), provided above, suggests that this is not the case and demonstrates the way in which it is possible for customers to enjoy the sociality that other people create, without wanting to be more centrally involved with the group and the interactions that are taking place.

Peripheral participation and the pub experience

The way in which individuals enjoy witnessing other people interact, whilst not taking part in the interaction themselves could also be described as a form of ‘peripheral participation’. Peripheral participation is a term used in academic literature around ‘Communities of Practice’. The concept of Communities of Practice was originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and has been described as a group of people who share a common interest or concern, and who interact with each other on an on-going basis. As individuals interact, distinct knowledge cultures emerge (Kislov, Harvey & Walshe, 2011).

The seminal text, written by Lave and Wenger (1991), that outlined the Communities of Practice approach proposed a paradigm shift within the field of learning. The authors suggested that learning is always ‘situated’, occurring within a specific time and place. The authors also suggested that learning is a social process. Within the approach, learning occurs when a ‘newcomer’ watches, or is guided by, a more experienced member of the group. The process of doing so is referred to as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in which an individual observes the actions of the group and learns rules, practices and social norms.

The concept of peripheral participation is applicable to the social interactions that occur within public houses. For example, newcomers can learn how to become a well-known member through observing more established ‘regular’ customers, perhaps as part of the process of being ‘welcomed’ described in the extract in the last section. Although the application of the concept and terminology of peripheral participation is a novel idea, a similar idea has been put forward by several authors. For example, whilst documenting the social usage of public house, others have suggested that visiting the pub can provide an entrance into the social activities within the surrounding area (Hunt & Statarlee, 1986; Smith, 1983).
This is illustrated in the extract below which comes from a female customer who had recently moved to the surrounding area. The customer had begun to visit the public house as a way of getting to know people in the area.

“Okay, have you been coming here for very long?”
“Well, I’ve only been here for just over a year so…”
“Just in the area?”
“Yeah just in the area, so I don’t really know anybody so like I’ve got to know people from, like, just coming in here.”
“Did you come from very far?”
 “[A nearby town]”
“Okay. So what do you like about coming to this pub?”
“Everyone’s just like really friendly. And like just make you feel at home. Yeah, because like I say, I didn’t really know anybody so, they’re but everyone’s really friendly.”
“To get to know people in the area and the pub?”
“Yeah.”
(Roxanne, The White Swan)

The customer noted that she visited the pub regularly, around twice a week, but chose to do so when it was relatively quiet, usually around midday or after finishing her job in a nearby shop in the late afternoon.

“That’s just me. Yeah, [because] like I say, if anywhere gets really packed then having to come in on my own, I don’t really like it. Yeah. It’s like, this time I don’t mind.”
(Roxanne, The White Swan)

The example provided here supports the argument that the pub offers newcomers an entrance into an established social life. We can also see here the process of becoming highly attuned to a space, described in the preceding chapter, where customers are able to locate themselves based on the complex array of affordances that each spatial location offers. It is interesting to note that when approached to take part in an interview, the customers had seated herself on the edge of the bar. Within this site, the bar was particularly busy area. Therefore positioning herself on the edge of the bar allowed the customer to participate ‘peripherally’, observing the social interactions that occurred, whilst learning the social norms and practices of the more established group.
In this example, the customer is both a peripheral member of the group and located on the spatial periphery from where social interaction was taking place. However, despite this correspondence between the social and the spatial position of the individual, Hughes, Jewson & Unwin (2007) argue that the terms ‘peripheral’ and ‘central’ are not necessarily intended to convey spatial location. Instead, it is possible for people to be spatially located on the edge of the group whilst remaining a “central member” and vice versa. One can feel oneself to be a part of things whilst not necessarily being in the ‘centre of the action’.

**Minimal obligation and optional sociability**

The pub is a very particular kind of social space. In comparison to membership in many other social situations, such as a family, friendship groups, or within a work environment, within the pub there is little obligation for the customers to contribute to the wider group. For example, customers are not formally required or expected to attend at certain times or on certain days. Instead, customers visited spontaneously, usually in between other activities such as on their way home after work, on passing by during a walk or after a shopping trip.

In addition to the lack of obligation to attend at schedules times, involvement in social interactions with others is also optional. Within each pub there was a group of ‘regular’ customers that attended the pub frequently. However, customers who visited less often felt that they were able to approach the ‘regular’ customers without the need to increase the number of times that they attended the pub.

“And is that community just for regulars or the wider pub?”
Steven: “Oh no, they're quite welcoming. They don't exclude you if you come in here, they don't exclude you at all. It's if you want to join in, and we like our own company so we don't necessarily join in. So you're not…”
“So it's like an optional thing?”
Eloise: “Oh yeah.”
Steven: “Yeah it's not a clique, it's a community. If you are at the bar and you're on your own, you can go and stand at that bar and they'll talk to you.”
“They've been talking to us [researchers] and we've only been in here for a couple of hours!”
Eloise: “I was going to say, we have a joke actually!”
Steven: “Yeah we do on occasions, you know, yeah. We’ve sat around there and spoke to them from time to time, we’re not excluded by any means, it’s not a clique.”
(Steven and Eloise, The Nags Head)

“Okay, so one of the questions we’ve got is; do you think there is a sense of community around this pub, or not?”
“Yeah definitely.”
“There is?”
“Yeah.”
“What makes you say yes?”
“Erm, because of how friendly people are to one another I suppose. There’s never a bad atmosphere in here, everyone’s always talking about what they do locally so yeah I suppose it is a community sort of pub.”
“You said you don’t tend to know many people in here?”
“Yeah I don’t know many people in here at all.”
“Is that a good thing or does that matter?”
“Not to me personally, because as I say, the thing I like is that we can come for a quiet drink just the two of us.”
(Simon, The Nag’s Head)

In the first extract, the participant describes how it is possible to interact with regulars if one wishes to do so. Rather than form an exclusive ‘clique’, regulars welcome casual interaction. But not that this extends to other people ‘standing at the bar’. The Interaction described here is spatially grounded. Regulars effectively place themselves in a spot that ensures that they will ‘catch’ possibilities for interaction as people go to the bar to be served. However this interaction is ‘optional’ for others – if one does not want to interact with regulars, then there is no obligation to do so. This suggests that customers are able to opt-in and opt-out of the sociality that takes place as they desire. Therefore pub provides a place where sociality is always available and on offer, but never compulsory, as we can see in second extract.

Although involvement in the social interactions that take place is optional, customers are, at the very least, required to put in a small amount of time in order to feel the benefit of ‘knowing’ and being ‘known’ and recognised by other customers. However, so long as they are willing to meet the minimal obligation, they are able to access and experience the sociality created by the other customers within the pub, without entering any long-term commitments.
**Summary**

In conclusion, the findings of the current research project are consistent with previous literature that has suggested the pub is very much a social space. Customers frequently made reference to other people within the pub and provided examples of social occasions for which they had visited. This finding is not surprising given previous work documenting the social usage of pubs and describing other similar ‘third places’.

Traditional mental representations of British public houses portray pubs as being at the heart of the local community. Therefore customers were asked about their opinions regarding the relationship between the pub and the sense of community it did or did not provide. Responses varied greatly, with some customers strongly believing the pub did provide a sense of community and other strongly refuting this idea. However, the most common response was more mixed, with customers suggesting the sociality within the pub was fluid, with the pub providing a sense of community ‘at times’. Customers also noted that they believed the pub to be a meeting place for small, pre-existing communities and gave examples of where the sociality in the pub had resulted in typical community-like actions.

The inconsistency in customer responses suggests that the term ‘community’ does not fully represent the fluid nature of sociality within the pub. However this may represent a wider inconsistent use in the way that the term ‘community’ is used in both popular and academic discourse. The suggestion that the term ‘community’ does not fully encompass the different types of sociality that occur in the pub led to further investigation of customers responses.

A more detailed examination of customers responses suggests that ‘knowing’ was very important to customers. This included ‘knowing’ other customers, staff and licensee members. Another interesting finding is that in order to feel as if they ‘know’ others, customers did not need to engage in any verbal communication. Often, customers simply enjoyed watching other people and vicariously experiencing the sociality that they performed.
It is possible to apply the concept of ‘peripheral participation’ to the data and to suggest that the pub provides a space for newcomers to observe and learn the way of more established, ‘regular’, pub customers. However, the current study suggests that not all customers take part in peripheral participation with the goal of eventually achieving a more central role within the group. Instead customers take part in peripheral participation simply because they enjoy vicariously experiencing their social interactions.

Unlike other social situations, the pub requires a very minimal obligation from its customers. Attendance voluntary and not confined to specific times and involvement in social interactions is optional. Therefore the pub represents a social space in which interaction is always available, yet also optional. Customers are able to experience the sociality of the other people around them without entering any long-term commitments. The opportunity to experience the benefits of sociality, whilst being required to contribute little to the wider group, makes the public house a unique social space.
**History:**

**Introduction**

Public houses hold an important and unique place within British culture. Pubs are iconic, representing British history and heritage (Markham, 2011) and are often used as a central location within books, comics, television shows and soap operas (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Maye, Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2005; Muir, 2009; Smith, 1983). In fact, Jennings (2011), a historian who documents the evolution of the local pub throughout history in his book *The Local*, suggests that the public house has “occupied a central place in the nations imagination, expressing its very identity” (Jennings, 2011, 15).

Many depictions of pubs within popular culture portray the pub as a stereotypical, ‘local pub’ – i.e. as a comparatively small venue populated by regulars which serves as focal point for the community. The Rovers Return and the Queen Vic in the respective long running soap operas Coronation Street and Eastenders are strong archetypes here. As a result there exists a commonly held cognitive representation of a ‘typical’ pub. This conceptualisation of a typical British pub contains; aesthetic elements (such as traditional décor, wood panelling, a thatched roof and open fire places), locational elements (such as situated in a quiet village, if in the countryside, or sited in the central square or crossroads if in an urban settings) and social elements (inhabited by friendly local people who form part of the wider community). Maye, Ilbery and Kneafsey (2005) suggest that within this cognitive representation, the pub is often bestowed with mythical, magical qualities, and forms a part of a wider ‘rural idyll’ (Mingay, 1989). The term ‘rural idyll’ has been described by Campbell (2000) as a “nostalgic fiction of yester-year” (Campbell, 2000, 362).

To illustrate this, we can consider the work of Lievesley and Warwick (1992), who suggested that to create a more idyllic rural life the required ingredients are; a local shop, a post-office, a school, a village hall and bus service and a local pub. However, it should be noted that increasingly many rural villages lack many of these ingredients and some practically all of them. To describe this
more succinctly, Cloke (2003) used the term “imagined rural package”. The pub is such a strong indicator of an imagined rural ideal that Hill (2008) argues that the closure of the local pub affects less the actual village than the perception of that village as aligned to traditional, idyllic life. Therefore the closure of the pub signals erosion of a previous way of life. The argument put forward by Hill (2008) that the loss of pubs is a symbolic loss of a traditional rural ideal is illustrated further in the dramatic and well-cited quote from writer and poet Hillare Bellocs, who stated; “When you have lost your inns, drown your empty selves, for you will have lost the last of England” (Bellocs, 1943, cited in Hutt, 1973, 7).

Traditional and nostalgia

Amongst participants’ responses, many individuals discussed the notion of a ‘traditional’ pub. The term was used positively, to describe a pub that either looked traditional, offered traditional products or in which a traditional set of practices were carried out. This included the way in which the pub was decorated, the presence of traditional games such as darts and bowls, selling real ales and allowing customers to sample a small amount of ale before the committed to buying a full pint. The participants believed that these practices were no longer common amongst more modern, commercialised pubs.

Participants also used a number of other phrases to signal a traditional pub. This included terms such as ‘pub-pub’ and ‘proper pub’. Participants also simply used the word ‘pub’ with an emphasis that suggest that other pubs that exist were operating in a way that did not fit with their conceptualisation of what a pub is and ought to be.

Examples of the way in which these phrases were used are provided below:

William: Well they’ve changed from more pubs into food pubs…. If I go to a pub, I want to go to a pub.
Is the atmosphere of the old pub the atmosphere that you prefer?
William: Yeah
Kirsty: Oh, definitely
Do you go to any other pubs in the area?
William: Yeah, I use [another pub]
And is it similar atmosphere there or are they different?
William: It’s a different pub, I mean, there’s no food there but it’s a better atmosphere.

Is that because they don’t do food?
William: Well it’s because it’s a pub!

*(William and Kirsty, The Anchor)*

If you had the choice would you like to see more or less food in the pub?
Well, given the choice, erm… I would be fair placed for this to be what I can a ‘proper pub’.

Does that mean no food?
Yeah. There’s a pub in the village that will be unnamed and it [sells] snacks at lunchtime, the TV is only on for sport and if it’s a Sunday afternoon the soccer or the rugby is on. They don’t serve food; they only serve cobs, that sort of thing.

Do you like that?
Yeah, yeah! For a pub yeah! Pubs are not really pubs anymore. As I was saying, they’re pubs that serve food, or restaurants that serve beer.

*(Pete, The Nags Head)*

Eloise: Well a lot of them are eating pubs now, aren’t they? They’re not ‘pub-pubs’ are they?
Steven: A lot of them have just got staff that just….
You’ve spoken a lot about ‘eating pubs’ and ‘pub pubs’ and the way you are describing it, feels like a bit of a trade-off. As though the more you do food, the less of a ‘pub’ it is. Do I understand you, or is that not what you mean?
Steven: We prefer traditional pubs. Erm, we know, we go to another pub where they don’t do food in the evening at all
Eloise: They do in the lunchtime but not –
Steven: But at lunchtime only Monday to Friday, they don’t do Saturday or Sunday. That’s what I call a pub! We go to a pub in town where they do food and it’s a drinking pub but they do sell food. But it’s not a trade-off. But I like pubs and I like beer!

*Kind of different pubs for different occasions?*

Eloise: Yeah!
Steven: You tend to find a lot of managed houses, whereas this isn’t managed, it’s a free house. Therefore it’s in the landlord’s interest to make it a welcoming place. A managed place, the guys gonna get paid whether you’ve got one person in there or whatever. And the staff seem to reflect that.

*(Steven and Eloise, The Nags Head)*
The participants in the above extracts use different phrases to signal that the pub meets their expectation and beliefs about what a ‘proper pub’ is and ought to be. Note in the first extract, that the customer uses the term ‘pub’ in a way that seems to be self-evident to them. Hence the force with which they present the last line – the ‘old pub’ they frequent is incomparable to the alternative ‘food pub’ in terms of atmosphere because it is a ‘pub’ and the other, by definition, is not. In all three of the above extracts the participants discuss the way in which the presence of food seems to alter their evaluation of the pub as a ‘proper’, ‘pub-pub’. Based on the first two extracts it would be easy to surmise that the presence of food moves the pub further away from being a ‘proper pub’. However, some customers noted that they understood that this was a necessary requirement if pubs were to thrive in the current economic climate and evolve to meet the demand of modern customers. As the last extract states, there are ways of offering food that do not have to involve a ‘trade-off’ with traditional values. Towards the end of their response, the customers then move towards a focus on customer service; something that was also mentioned by a number of other participants.

Customers were also able to provide a more detailed explanation of their own interpretation of what a traditional pub was. They were also able to provide justification for their preference towards ‘proper’, ‘traditional’ pub when compared against more modern, commercialised pub. Often these examples focussed on factors that were broader than simply the presence or absence of food. Instead, customers discussed the level of customer service that they received and the type of people that were present within the pub.

“I think also, for a pub that’s close to the town, it’s almost got sort of a country vibe to it even though it’s close to the town.”
“**And can you explain that a bit more? I think I know what you mean but just so I am clear**”
“Well it feels like a proper pub. I can go from here down the road and we can go in any bar down there. They’re not pubs, they’re bars. And essentially a bar is like an off-licence with chairs in it. It’s not got the same vibe as an actual pub. You know, I’m 48 years old and drinking in pubs from when I was younger and that, it’s better to be in a pub than in a bar.”
* (Daniel, Hare and Hounds)
“We always had a mix. I’ve played darts with bank managers, insurance salesman, all a mix. We used to, but now we don’t mix anymore.”

“And did you prefer it when there was more of a mix?”

“Absolutely yeah.”

“Ok I’m with you now, I get what you mean by the old atmosphere.”

“I think it was different aspects of life and different intellects. And then because of that the people that you knew, you got less trouble. Nowadays you get everybody in here but you’re always looking [inaudible] And also, another thing – the old local used to be full of everybody from every background! For us it was like a job centre! Do you know what I mean?”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s an electrician, he’s a bricklayer, I’m a joiner. “Oh by the way, have you got time next week, I’ve got work”. And that’s all gone in pubs now, it’s all finished. We didn’t need a job centre! Never!”

(Craig, The Anchor)

Richard: “It’s sort of olde-worlde, it’s like…”
Alan: “Traditional! Traditional pub!”
Richard: “Yeah it’s as olde-worlde as you can get really without having…”
Alan: “Spit and sawdust!”
Richard: “Yes, and drunks falling on you!”

“Do you like the traditional pubs?”
Richard: “Oh yeah! Yeah, yeah definitely! I don’t like the bouncer pubs. But most people don’t do they, of our age? Yeah and the staff are alright because they actually acknowledge you.”
Alan: “Yeah, because he advises you!”
Richard: “Yeah, what the beers like and he actually seemed to know about. So that’s a good thing. Unlike the modern pubs where it’s like “Just give us your money!”

(Richard and Alan, The King’s Arms)

“It’s the only [pub] in Leicester with gas lights.”

“Is that a good thing, to you?”

“Well they are trying to keep the… what’s the word… authentic aren’t they? It’s a nice quiet friendly pub. Every time I come in here I get talking to people. The reason I started drinking lager is because when I was 15 or 16, in the 60s, in every pub the beer changed. Because of how it’s kept so a lot of the youngsters went on to lager and they still drink it. And this is what I like about this place, they have a taster…But this is not a youngster’s pub.”

“Well what makes you say that?”

“Well, all of the lads I know tend to finish work and neck as much as they can to get drunk. I’ve never gone out with the intention of getting legless!
Drinking shots and... I’ve tried it but you get a headache the next morning.”
*(Jonathon and Diane, The King’s Arms)*

The above extracts provide a broad range of reasons for the participants’ preference for traditional pubs that goes beyond the simple presence or absence of food. In the first extracts the participant states that it is “better to be in a pub than a bar”, describing bars as un-personable, using the phrase “an off licence with chairs”. This is an interesting choice of words and suggests that in comparison to more modern bars, pubs provide a more social, welcoming ‘vibe’. Put slightly differently, the comparison here establishes that the ‘pub’ is not simply somewhere where alcohol is sold and customers remain whilst they drink, a proposition reminiscent of the claims made by Mass Observation (1943) that the pub is “not merely a drinking shop” (Mass Observation, 1943, quotes in Orford et al., 2009, 69). The sociable atmosphere, that participants believed was more likely to be present in traditional pubs is also discussed in the second extract. Here, this participant talks about the type of company that could be found within other customers in traditional pubs. The participant believes that traditionally pubs were places that provided contact with people from many different backgrounds, and that this has declined in more recent years.

The nostalgia which is expressed in the afore-mentioned second extract, taken from the response provided by Craig in The Anchor, is for a time when the pub acted as a kind of ‘social leveller’, where class and social barriers could be set aside. Oldenburg (1999) notes that it a key feature of all third spaces, that “worldly status claims must be checked at the door in order that all within may be equals” (Oldenburg, 1999, 25). For Craig, the pub was a space outside of the norms of broader social order, which enabled unique activities to emerge, such as informal labour exchange and the opportunity to meet with people from different walks of life.

In the third extract there appears to be an acknowledgement that traditional pubs may also have their own faults. For example the reference to ‘spit and
sawdust’, a phrase used to refer to a time when pubs were very basic and less comfortable than the pubs that exist today. However, within the extract the participants explains their preference for traditional pubs as a result of the better customer service that the staff provide; that the staff ‘actually acknowledge’ their customers, rather than creating a overtly financial transaction. It seems that the problem here is that the status of traditional pubs as outside of wider social norms also means that they suffer from problems with social self-regulation (e.g. ‘drunks falling on you’). Finally, in the fourth extract, the participant describes the way in which traditional and modern drinking culture and practices differ. The participant believed that the pub was not suitable for young people. The reason for this was because young people were more likely to try to consume much more alcohol in a shorter time with the intention of getting drunk. For the customer in the fourth extract, this was incompatible of the practices within the pub, in which customers were more likely to visit and consume their alcohol at a much slower pace. Although the participants view of a younger generation of people that drink alcohol may be somewhat rooted on a negative stereotype, it is interesting to examine the way in which, for this customer, the idea of a traditional pub is embodied in cultural practices around alcohol consumption.

Taken together the above four extracts provide a broad range of reasons that customers prefer a traditional pub. These reasons go beyond the simple presence or absence of food. Although customers distinguish between ‘pubs’ and ‘food pubs’, it is not just food that marks this distinction, but a complex set of factors. These ideas are reiterated in the passage below, which brings together ideas about the way the pub is decorated, the type of people present in the pub and the customer service that the pub provides.

Richard: “Well they’ve done the same everywhere haven’t they? Just modernised everything and ruined it.”

“So is that a bad thing?”

Richard: “Well yeah, I think so.”

Alan: “Yeah, [chain pubs], they’re, erm, beer warehouses!”

Richard: “There used to be a personal thing in a pub, now you’re a number, you’re just a pound. You know, you’re just -you’ve always been money but now it’s just, faceless, that’s all. Give us your money and that’s
all you are sort of thing, so that’s the difference. I don’t know, it’s just life isn’t it.”

“Can you think of any pubs where you don’t feel like that?”
Richard: “In here and the [name of another pub].”

So what is it about here and [the other pub] that’s different?”
Richard: “Well, it’s probably that it’s been open for 40 years!”

“Ok, so is [the other pub] more of a traditional pub?”
Richard: “Oh it stinks, it’s got people that have been there and never left…”

Alan: “Paint peeling off the walls!”
Richard: “Yeah! But it’s got personality.”

“You like it?”
Richard: “Well it’s not my regular or anything but –“

Alan: “Once there was wall paper on the walls but [signals the wallpaper falling off and laughs]"

“Not now!”
Richard: “Yeah, and you get characters in there and you feel like they like having you there. Even though we all know everyone is in it to earn their wage and that, it’s nice to go somewhere that it’s not obvious to just “give us you money and f**k off” kind of thing!”

Alan: “It’s like, we come in here and the bar man advises you. “Try this one, this one is nice, try this, have a taste of this one” They advise you what the beers are.”

(Richard and Alan, The King’s Arms)

The above extract brings together multiple ways in which a pub can be considered ‘traditional’ and offers many reason why traditional pubs are considered to be ‘better’ than modernised pubs. These include factors such as size, hospitality, longevity, the retention of regulars, a comparative lack of attention to maintaining décor, demonstrating care in fit of product with customer etc. Anecdotally, the pub in which this customer was interviewed also had an extensive food menu. However this did not interfere with the customer’s perception that the pub was still a traditional pub. The participant here uses the phrase “beer warehouses” to refer to pubs that belong to large chain-pub companies. Throughout the interviews there were examples of customers using language to negatively describe other types of drinking establishments that do not align with the ‘traditional pub’ model. For example, bars were described as an “off-licence with chairs” (Daniel, Hare and Hounds). When comparing this against the same customers description of ‘proper-pubs’ as a ‘community centre that sells beer’ (Daniel, Hare and Hounds) it is clear to see the way in
which traditional pubs are strongly preferred, at least by some customers, to more modern pubs and bars.

It appears that to be considered a ‘proper’, traditional pub, the pub needs to align with culturally embedded representations of a pub in at least one of the several possible factors. It is not necessary, and may not even be plausible for the public house to meet all of these. In addition, pubs that do meet the criteria, set by individual customers, to be considered ‘traditional’ are likely to be very different from one another. Therefore the conceptualisation of a traditional pub, and the way in which this is recreated in the pub itself is produced from an interplay between the physical features of the pub, the staff and management team within the pub and the customers that come and go.

Participants used many terms to refer to pubs that were well aligned with popular conceptualisations of a traditional pub, including ‘pub-pub’ and ‘proper-pub’. Participants were able to explain their preference for traditional pubs, which included the perception that these pubs provided a better, more personable customer service, and that people from a broader range of backgrounds could be found within these ‘types’ of pub. However, it is important to consider whether the way in which customers compare traditional pubs with more modern pubs, and portray them as ‘better’ is actually representative of different pubs or if their responses simply reflect a nostalgia and longing for the past.

As a result of this nostalgia, and a longing for tradition and rurality, it has been possible to commodify products and activities that offer a link to days gone by. For example, Cloke and Perkins (1998, 2002) provide examples of rural activities and spaces that have been commodified, such as white-water rafting, four wheel driving experiences and country lodge breaks. In addition, Urry (2002) has examined the way in which people travelling to a new area attempt to consume local experiences through purchasing local products, experience days and visiting heritage shopping centres. What this body of research suggests is that it is possible to package together ‘traditional’ experiences and to commodify these for people to purchase as both an object and an ideal.
Pubs also represent a way in which ‘the rural’ is itself commodified (Bell & Valentine, 1997). Clark, Kell, & Schmidt et al. (2000) make a distinction between three distinct stages of evolution of the public house; the ‘pre-modern’, ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ pub. The authors describe the pre-modern pub as existing up until the Second World War, in a time when ale was produced and consumed on site. The authors go on to state that the pre-modern pub is the “blueprint for the ‘archetypal’ pub in the nostalgic post-modern consumer perspective” (Clark, Kell, & Schmidt et al., 2000, 699). The authors note that during the late twentieth century, as pubs became part of larger managed pub chains, many of the local pubs that met this archetypal ideal began to close as the supply chains became incorporated into larger commercial structures. The authors argue that customers feel nostalgia for the typical, traditional, ‘pre-modern’ pub, yet this representation of the pub has dubious origins:

“whilst the archetypal pre-modern pub, as such, may never have existed in reality, the shared social memory of the concept is powerful in a nostalgic sense… which informs a certain unease amongst consumers with the managerially led development of uniform pub brands” (Clark, Kell, & Schmidt et al, 2000, 707)

Just as participants showed a preference towards traditional pubs and “the good old days” (William, The Anchor), there too has been a resurgence in the consumption of real ales. The ‘Cask Report 2014/15’ conducted by Brown (2015) for Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) documents this marked growth, noting that that the market value of real ales has increased by 23% from 2010, to a total of £1.72 billion. It could be possible that customers are seeking a traditional British pub experience through the purchasing of drinks that are often associated with traditional pubs and days gone by.

**History: explicit, implicit and autobiographical**

Due to the body of research that suggests that pubs are conceptualised as symbolic of British culture, history, and an imagined traditional ideal, participants were asked about their knowledge of the history of the pub in which they were interviewed and whether or not they considered the history of the pub
to be important. A few participants were able to provide anecdotal stories about
the history of the pub in which they were interviewed.

“Erm, yeah, vaguely. [A local family], didn’t they used to own a lot of land
in this area for some time? And I think you can see from the architecture
outside, like shoes and horses, there were arches out there weren’t there?
And they used to bring the horses in and shoe them out there, things like
that. It’s got quite a long history yeah.”

“Does that history matter?”
“Isn’t say it matters, but it adds to the flavour of erm, you know, the
good, in this country, the long tradition is with pubs isn’t it? And especially
out in the country, and I think it adds to the flavour of that.
(Daniel, Hare and Hounds)

Jack: “Well we can remember it before it was completely refurbished.
Because it was, we’ve lived in this house for 32 years, so we can go way
back, probably before you were born!”
Ann: “Probably not as far back as the 19th century or anything like that
though.”
Jack: “And it used to be like very different. The layout didn’t exist. But also
the main thing was the bar in front.”
Ann: “Yeah the little smoke room.”
Jack: “So we would have come here then and we would have been in the
smoke room wouldn’t we?”
Ann: “Yeah.”
Jack: “We have been in the smoke room.”
Ann: “Yeah.”
Jack: “Yeah.”
Ann: “Well it’s till there but it’s not sort of, sort of isolated. It’s not sealed off
like it was you know.”

“Is that history important?”
Jack: “Hmmmm not really, no.”
(Jack and Ann, Hare and Hounds)

Tom: “I know this started off as a separate building.”
“Sorry?”
Tom: “There was a separate [pub], it tells you round there” [signals
towards a metal sign on the other side of the bar]

“Was that knocked down?”
Tom: “Round the corner there [signals towards bar] it tells you that there
was an old pub”
Joe: “They knocked it down when they built the road through and the built
this one, a separate one.”

“That history, is that important or not?”
Joe: “No”
The above three extracts provide examples of participants who held a partial, limited knowledge of the pub’s history. In the first extract, the participant marks their knowledge as ‘vague’, and offers each of the points they make as candidate claims (i.e. through the rising question-like intonation at the end). When asked about the importance of history, this participant responds by framing this as a ‘general’ rather than a ‘specific’ good. The history of this particular pub is important insofar as it is part of a more general project of maintaining tradition which ‘adds flavour’ to the present. In the second and third extract the participants note that the history of which they were aware was not especially important to their experience of the pub. This is puzzling, since in both extracts there is a reasonable amount of detail, and in extract two this detail is tied to the autobiographical experiences of the participants. They have lived through the history that they now describe as not adding much to their present experiences of the space. This was, in fact, a common theme amongst participants’ responses, with the majority of participants stating that they were unaware of the pubs history, or that they factual history of pub was not an important factor in their experience and evaluation of the pub.

**Steven**: “I know very little about the history of this pub. I couldn’t tell you about it at all. It’s an Everards pub and that’s all.”

“**Does the history of a pub matter to you or not?”**

Eloise: “Not really!”

**Steven**: “Not really no.”

“**To be honest, everyone I have asked has said “Oh no not really” and I was quite surprised. I thought some people might tell me a lot [about the history] but no!”**

**Steven**: “Well if you go to Nottingham, you go to… what is it… [a pub that is referred to as oldest pub in Britain], because it’s got history. But that’s about it. Local pubs are just local pubs; I don’t know the history and I don’t come here for the history either.”

(Steven and Eloise, The Nags Head)

“**Do you know anything about the history of this pub?”**

Richard: “I know probably the last 16years, that’s about it.”

“**Is that important?”**

Alan: “No not really, not at all.”
“What about yourself [to Richard]?”
Richard: “No, not really.”
(Richard and Alan, The King’s Arms)

“And do you know anything about the history of this pub?”
Phillip: “No I don’t really, it’s not an old pub.”
Sarah: “It’s built on a landfill isn’t it?”
Phillip: “It’s built on a landfill if that’s any good for you?”

“Is the history of the pub important?”
Phillip: “Not really, no”
Sarah: “Not really, no. If you like it then yes but the pub we used to use, that was brand new and we used to go there for years and we loved it. “
Phillip: “It doesn’t make a difference really. As long as the people are good”
(Phillip and Sarah, The Red Lion)

The above extracts provide examples of customers who believed that the history of the pub was not important to their experience of the pub. In the first extract, the participant notes that unless the pub has a particularly detailed or important past, the history of any given pub is not important to them. This is further supported by extracts two and three in which the participants stated that they also did not consider the history of the pub to be an important factor. However, some participants noted that although they did not consider the history of the pub itself to be important, the existence of a history, however vague, did enhance their experience of the pub.

Steffan: “The only reason I know that is because I’ve got the deeds to my house. The deeds to your house used to be kept at the bank. So the bank sent it and I’ve not looked through it but there is something that used to belong to the area that had something do to with it that this [pub] is named after it. I don’t know all the details if I’m honest.”

“Do you think the history is important?”
Mark: “I don’t know. It could be interesting but not important.”
Steffan: “Yeah that’s a good way of looking at it.”
(Steffan and Mark, Hare and Hounds)

“Okay, do you know anything at all about the history of this pub?”
“I don’t know about the history of it no.”

“Is the history of the pub important?”
“I suppose it depends if you like history, which I do. So, I suppose, yeah, to me. I don’t know the history but I am always looking at the pictures [of the pub throughout the years] but yeah if you like history as a topic then
Participants considered the factual history of the pub in which they were interviewed to be background information that did not take a central role in their experience or evaluation of the pub. Although the factual history of the pub did seem to be a more important factor for individuals who had an interest in history, such as in extract two, most people were either unaware or uninterested in the history of the pub.

The finding that the history of the pub does not play a central role in the overall experience of the pub for most customers is somewhat surprising, given that pubs, at least in popular culture, are considered to be iconic of British history, heritage and identity. One explanation for this may be that history is a taken-for-granted element of most public houses. Literature that documents the evolution of public houses note that as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth century Britain contained many drinking establishments, including ‘Inns’ providing refreshments for the coaching trade, ‘Taverns’ that sold wine to the causal drinkers, and ‘Alehouses’ which provided a traditional village drinking hole (Smith, 1983). Although most pubs that are in operation today are not quite as old as the inns taverns and alehouses that Smith (1983) describes, many pubs have a history spanning several decades, and likely longer. Therefore it is possible that the history of a pub is a taken-for-granted facet of the overall pub experience.

As noted in the previous chapter, Perkins and Thorn (2012) has suggested that the the significance of places to the lives of individuals is often only realised when a loss occurs. The authors provide examples of the sadness felt by local
residents when allotments were replaced with houses (Perkins, 1988), or when a barber shop has closed down (Lofland, 1998). In a similar way, it may be possible that the history of a pub is a taken-for-granted element of the overall pub experience. Participants’ responses provided support for this idea, with many, yet not all, customers noting that they preferred a traditional pub in comparison to a newly built pub.

“I like to see that it’s, like, I don’t think the same of a pub and I look at it and it’s a new build. I like that I look at it and it’s kind of like got some structural details that show that it’s been a pub for a while.”

(Natalie, Hare and Hounds)

Richard: They’ve modernised everything haven’t they!
Alan: Undercut, undercut, undercut the prices! So the other pubs can’t trade and close down.

And you [to Richard] just said they modernised everything?
Richard: Well they’ve done the same everywhere haven’t they, just modernised everything and ruined it.

(Richard and Alan, King’s Arms)

I like olde-worlde ones that have got character. As opposed to modern, bright lights and all this like some of the pubs in town, I like the olde-worlde cosiness.

(Paige, The Red Lion)

The above extracts suggest that although the history of the pub was not considered to be important, customers did not like it when the history of the pub was either taken away or entirely absent to begin with. One way to understand this paradox is to make a distinction between the explicit and implicit history of any individual public house. Here the term ‘explicit history’ is used to refer to the factual details of the pubs’ own past. This could include stories about the way in which the building became to be used as a pub, previous uses of the buildings, stories about the previous people who worked or visited the pub and details about the way in which the site has changed over the years. Conversely the term ‘implicit history’ refers to the implied history of the building as having a previous history based on its age, or physical, visual cues that suggest it has been in existence.
It may be the case that for customers, so long as a public house has an implicit history, made visible through old pictures of the pub or the surrounding area or physical features such as old panels, that this is enough for the pub to address their expectations and representation of what a pub ought to be. Therefore it is not necessary for customers to know and understand the intricate factual history of the pub. It is not even important that the history of the pub needs to be verified as factual correct. Rather, the presence of an implicit history, suggestive of an archetypal, traditional pub is all that is necessary.

Although the history of the pub - or at least the explicit, factual history - was considered to be unimportant, it was interesting to find that instead participants focussed on the way in which their experience of the pub was interwoven with their own personal history. Participants frequently talked about the ways in which the pub was connected to their own autobiographical story-telling.

“Yeah, I’m talking from 1989/90, the [pub] was the place to come to. Especially on a Sunday night. New Year’s Eve it was the place to be like. It was like “where are you going?”, “We’re going to the [pub]”, “Oh can you get me a ticket”…. It brings back some memories for me! I love coming back, especially to yeah yeah, you know, once a good pub! I mean, the [pub] for me – you’re never going to get when I was 20 again but it’s nice to come back now I’m 47 and its back to the old days!”

(Karen, Hare and Hounds)

William: “Yes I used to come in this pub and have about 3 or 4 pints of Old Original, Everards beer, because I used to work in the nightclubs. So I used to come in here and have a few beers and then start work. So they were the good old days.”

Kirsty: “We used to come in here when the kids were younger, when they were all babies; we used to sit on the front. But they’ve all grown up now.”

(William and Kirsty, The Anchor)

“I’ve been coming here for about 15 years because that’s how long I’ve lived in the village. When I moved out of the village 30 years ago, we used to come here on Friday nights, for example, when they did food. And the place, every Friday night, was absolutely rammed. And that was when you could park on the pavements outside and not get booked. Yeah, so erm, it goes back years and years.”

(Pete, The Nags Head)
The above responses show the importance that participants placed on the way in which their visits to the pub were interconnected with important times in their own life. In the first extract this is based on a previous era in which the participant was younger and enjoying the pub as a popular place to spend his leisure time. Here, the customer explicitly states that being at the pub takes him “back to the old days”. This is also echoed in extract three, with the participant describing a time when the pub was so popular and busy that it was “absolutely rammed” with people. The importance of times gone by is also discussed in and in extract two, with William reminiscing about a previous era.

In addition, in the second extract, participant two notes that they used to visit the pub with their young children. Many other participants talked about the ways in being in the pub reminded them of important occasions from their own personal life. This included “watching the kids grow up” (Ann, Hare and Hounds) or using the pub as a “starter pub” before heading off into the main town for night out with friends (Alan, The King’s Arms). One participant also stated that she enjoyed visiting the pub due to her attachment with the area surrounding the pub, stating that she had “an association with this area since really since a child” (Karen, Hare and Hounds) having grown up in the houses near to the pub.

The importance that customers place on the way that visiting the pub is interwoven with their own personal history supports the idea put forward by Massey (1994) that places can support multiple different accounts of the past. Participants described their visit to the pub as knotted in with their own autobiographical history. The concept of knotting was discussed within a previous chapter, in which participants described their visit to the pub as an intermediate space between home and work. The pub served as a meshwork, knotting together activity in the public sphere of the workplace and the private sphere of the home. Here, the participants’ emphasis on the way in which visiting the pub is interwoven with their own life suggests that the activities that are occurring both inside and outside of the pub whilst these knots are formed, become an important factor in customers’ evaluation of the pub. This gives
support to the idea that experiences that are woven together within the pub are a product of activity that occurred elsewhere.

Customers’ responses devalued the role of explicit factual history and instead focus on the way that the pub is interlinked with their own life. Taken together, this could suggest that for customers, the explicit, factual, in-depth history of the pub is not important. Instead customers favour for an implicit history that is usually a taken-for-granted element of most public houses. This history does not have to be detailed, yet customers want to be able to relate their visit to the pub to their own personal, subjective history.

**Fantasy and reality:**

One of the questions put to all participants was to describe their ‘ideal’ or ‘dream’ pub. What is interesting is that participants’ responses were often well aligned with popular stereotypical representations of pubs and the “rural idyll” that Campbell (2000) describes.

“I like that I look at [the pub] and it’s kind of like, got some structural details that show that it’s been a pub for a while.”

“**Can you give me any examples of that?**”

“Like fireplaces, and like old wood and the beams and just the kind of rustic feel. As if it’s been there for a few years and like your granddad has been... you know that kind of thing.”

*(Natalie, Hare and Hounds)*

“Yes. One of the great marks of a pub is when you walk in and the staff remember you. And sometimes they usually remember what you like to drink. And the other thing is; the ceilings are low, they have these wooden panels and in the winter time they have these lovely fires.”

*(Will, The Nags Head)*

“Yes, the trouble is with [the village] is that we’ve got a lot of pubs but none of them are what you would call a ‘village pub’. The nearest one is the one [in the next village], which is a fabulous pub. I think this is probably - this and [the other pub] - have got the closest feel, but they’re still not quite there.”

“**So if could have your ideal pub; what would that be like?**”

“Wood panelling, roaring open fire!”

*(June, The White Swan)*
“If you moved away and you were looking for a new pub, you’re ideal pub, what would you look for?”
Ben: “Well my ideal pub…”
Paige: “Free!”
Ben: “A pub, next to a river. Yeah, next to a river. Quiet like, with no kids. [laughs]
“Would it have to look a certain way?”
Ben: “Oh no, no. It wouldn’t matter to me if it had sawdust on the floor.”
“What would matter?”
Ben: “I think, as long as they didn’t think, the people that come in, didn’t think they were higher than you are sort of thing. Yeah.”
Paige: “I like olde-worlde ones that have got character. As opposed to modern, bright lights and all this. I mean some of the pubs in town, I like the olde-worlde cosiness.”
“Can you think of any pubs that you really like because they look like that?”
Paige: Well yes the [pub] at [a nearby village], that’s next to a river and its lovely.
(Ben and Paige, The Red Lion)

In all of the above extracts, participants drew on a popular conceptualisation of a British pub and discussed several ways in which their ideal pub would align with this popular conceptualisation, with a particular focus on aesthetic aspects. For example, all participants in the above extracts talked about the pubs’ physical features, such as the presence of wood panels, open fires. They also discussed the way in which the pub was decorated to produce an ‘olde-worlde’ feel of a previous era and days gone by. In addition to the way the pub was decorated, the fourth extract provides an example of a participant that stated that their dream pub would be located in a secluded, quiet area, ideally “next to a river”. This answer draws on the ‘rural idyll’ that Campbell (2000) describes. Finally, for the participants here, an ideal pub would be one that was inhabited by friendly people. This included the presence of staff members that “remember you”, as is mentioned in the second extract, and welcoming customers and treat other customers with respect, as is mentioned in the fourth extract.

What is interesting in the final extract is that Ben states that it “wouldn’t matter” whether the pub looked like a stereotypical pub, as long as the people were welcoming. This illustrates the way in which certain elements may take priority for different customers. Therefore the visual appearance of a pub only makes
up part of a wider more general “ideal”. Just as Cloke (2003) used the term “imagined rural package” to describe an ideal rural village, there too exists an “imagined package” of what a pub is and ought to be.

Although customers desired an ‘ideal pub’ that matched with the idyllic, archetypal pub, the pubs in which participants were interviewed did not always meet this model. For example they did not have a thatched roof and were not located in the countryside. Also, when participants were asked if they would like to change anything about the pub in which they were interviewed, often their suggestions were rather basic.

“All I would like is this place, with these people, with a beer garden. Not a courtyard, you know somewhere you can relax in the summer and if you’re with the kids they can run around and, because they can get bored, kids get bored.”
(Paul, The White Swan)

“If you were to move away and you were looking for a new pub out of Leicester – what would you look for?”
Carol: “I think what we have just said.”
“Yeah?”
Carol: “Welcoming atmosphere, friendly and efficient staff, good beers and wines.”
June: “And clean loos. I haven’t been here but clean loos!”
(Carol and June, The White Swan)

“And thinking of pubs more generally – is there anything that other pubs have that they don’t have here that perhaps you would like?”
[both think]
Both: “Erm, no, not really.” [laugh]
Sue: “No, they have good food, good wine and a good atmosphere. And we can talk to each other, because you know the music is not loud and yeah it’s just a nice atmosphere really ain’t it?”
Joan: “Yes.”
“So good food, good wine, good atmosphere – is there anything else you would look for?”
Sue: “Not really, no.”
Joan: “You can sit here and nobody bothers you really.”
“OK. Well that’s most of my questions done. Lots of people have things that they want to change but you two seem quite happy.”
Sue: “It don’t take much to please us two!”
“You’re happy having a tea and a chat?”
Joan: “We’re easily pleased aren’t we?”
Sue: “Yes, we are!”
(Joan and Sue, The King’s Arms)

The above extracts show that despite participants stating that their dream pub would fit the rural ideal stereotype that is perpetuated in popular culture, when asked about they would change about the pub in which they were interviewed, suggestions were small and realistic. For example, in the first extract the participant states that he would add a beer garden for his children. Later on in the interview he states that “so they only thing I would change about anything is the garden, if I could have the pub somewhere else that I could go to – It would be this place, with these people, with a garden” (Paul, The White Swan).

Similarly, in the third extract, two elderly women discuss their experience of the pub they are unable to name anything that the pub lacked and stated that “It don’t take much to please us two” (Sue, The King’s Arms). These two customers explained their contentment with the pub based on several factors – they were able to sit and talk without being bothered, they considered the food and wine to be good, and also enjoyed the atmosphere. Therefore the customers place a great emphasis on very basic aspects of the pub experience.

The customers in extract two also listed very basic requirements when they were asked about what they would look for if they were searching for a new pub. The customers had very basic expectations, including clean toilets, friendly staff and good beer. The question asked here read as follows: “If you were to move away and you were looking for a new pub – what would you look for?”

The response provided by the participants in extract two are markedly different from the aforementioned responses that were given to the question “If you moved away and you were looking for a new pub, you’re ideal pub, what would you look for?” On asking this question, participants provided much more elaborate, idyllic answers.

The only difference in the wording of the two questions discussed above is the presence of the word ‘ideal’ in the latter. One explanation is that there is a separation here between imagination and reality. Customers have a particular representation of a dream pub, but they are aware that their regular pub is not and could not live up to their ‘fantasy pub’. The pub may match some of the
customers own preconceptions of what a ‘dream’ pub may be, yet it is impossible to do so across the many different aspects that make up a perfect pub, and even more so impossible to do so for the many different conceptualisations that individual customers may hold.

The argument that the perfect pub may not in reality exist is reminiscent of the essay “Moon Under the Water”, written by George Orwell in 1946. As noted in the previous chapter, within the essay Orwell describes his own ‘ideal pub’. Orwell begins by describing the ‘Moon Under the Water’ as a perfect pub with Victorian architecture and fitting, local people and barmaids that know the customers by name, amongst other things. However towards the end of the essay he states:

“But now is the time to reveal something which the discerning and disillusioned reader will probably have guessed already. There is no such place as the Moon Under Water. I know pubs where the beer is good but you can’t get meals, others where you can get meals but which are noisy and crowded, and others which are quiet but where the beer is generally sour…And if anyone knows of a pub that has draught stout, open fires, cheap meals, a garden, motherly barmaids and no radio, I should be glad to hear of it” (Orwell, 1946)

The point that Orwell is making, which is reiterated amongst the responses of the participants here, is that although there is a commonly held representation of a ‘typical’ British public house, this archetypal pub does not, in reality, exist. What is more, the participants in the current study appear to understand and know that this perfect fantasy pub does not exist and, as a result, do not wish for the publican to try and create this unattainable fantasy.

Because pubs cannot possibly be the dream pub that most people have within their minds, Clark, Kell, & Schmidt et al., (2000) argue that instead pubs of today can offer a “a pub-like virtual reality” (Clark, Kell, & Schmidt et al., 2000, 708) imitating some of the features of a traditional pub. It is not possible for customers to attempt to find their ‘dream pub’ and it is not sensible for the publican to aim to create a perfect, fantasy pub. Although customers show a preference for traditional public houses, their concerns and requirements are
focussed on much more mundane issues such as clean facilities, good food and good wine or beer.

**Summary**

In summary, pubs are more an important part of British culture and a representation of a collective shared heritage that forms part of wider ‘imagined rural package’. Participants talked about ‘traditional’ pubs and used many terms to signal this, including ‘pub-pub’ and ‘proper pub’, and talk favourably of pubs that a pub fits with their own representation of what a pub ought to be. Participants differentiated between ‘pubs’ and ‘food pubs’, however this differentiation is not simply based on the presence or absence of food. Instead participants were able to articulate the difference between the two, stating that traditional pubs were considered to have a ‘better’ atmosphere, mix of people and to provide ‘better’ customer service.

Although customers showed a preference for traditional pubs, it is important to consider whether this may simply be a nostalgia for a previous era. Previous research has shown that it is possible to commercialise nostalgia, apparent in the commodification of rural locations and experiences (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Clark, Kell, & Schmidt et al., 2000; Cloke & Perkins, 1998, 2002; Urry, 2002). Pubs are also a part of the commodification of rurality. As large pub-chain companies have begun to build an ever-growing portfolio of pubs, those pubs that were once considered ‘proper’ local pubs have been closed down or modernised. As a result there has been an increased nostalgia for what Clark, Kell, & Schmidt et al., (2000) term the ‘pre-modern pub’, a trend that can be seen in the increasing interest in traditional cask ales. However, often what is being sold is a collective memory about what pubs are and ought to be.

When asked about the history of the pub in which they were interviewed, although a small handful of customers were able to provide some anecdotal history, most said that the history of the pub did not play an important role in the experience of the pub. However, some participants noted that the presence of a history did ‘add to the flavour’ of their experience and many showed a
preference for older pubs in comparison to newer, more modern pubs. One explanation for this may be that, given the age of most pubs that are in operation today, history is a taken-for-granted aspect of the pub experience. Alternatively, it may be useful to distinguish between a factual ‘explicit’ history and an ‘implicit history’. Customers look favourably on an implied history as this aligns with popular conceptions of traditional pubs. However, the explicit, factual history is considered to be less important. Although the factual of a pub was not considered to be important, customers placed great significance on the way in which visiting the pub linked in with their own autobiographical history.

When asked to describe their ‘dream’ or ‘ideal’ pub, participants regularly provided answers that were suggestive of the collective memory of a ‘traditional British pub’. However, when asked about suggestions for changes in the pub in which they were in, or asked to provide a list of things that they would like to see in a pub in ‘real-life’, suggestions were much less grand. Instead, participants only put forward very basic requirements. This presents a paradox in that in their ‘dream’ world customers long for an idyllic pub, yet in reality they are looking for a pub that is much more ordinary and mundane. One explanation for this is that there is a separation between fantasy and reality, with customers of the pub knowing that the fantasy of a perfect pub is not achievable. This echoes Orwell’s (1946) description of his conceptualisation of the perfect pub the ‘Moon under the Water’, of which no such place exists.
Discussion
The current study set out to achieve a more sophisticated understanding of the public house through exploring the ways in which the public house serves as a social space. In addition, the project explored the different affordances that customers perceived the public house to offer. After carrying out observations and interviews across six public houses, three broad themes of meaning emerged amongst customers’ responses. Customers discussed the ways in which the public house was perceived to be spatially complex, comprised of a number of different nested zones rather than being a singular, homogenous space. In addition, customers’ responses explored the sociality that occurred within the pub, suggesting that the sociality produced and enacted within the pub space is unique. However, although unequivocally a social space, stereotypical representations of the pub at the heart of the local community did not appear consistent with customers’ experiences of the public house. Finally, Customers preferred pubs that met the aesthetic ideals of an older, traditional pub, yet were less concerned about the factual details of the pub’s history. Instead customers placed great importance on the way in which the pub was tied to their own autobiographical history.

The pub as a meaningful space

It has been argued by Perkins and Thorn that “at the core of most place-related writing is the notion that places are more than just locations” (Perkins & Thorn, 2012, 14). Based on the findings of the current study it appears that the public house is no different, holding multiple meanings for its customers. However, the suggestion that the pub is more than just a meaningless vessel in which activity occurs is not a new proposition. In fact, this is the argument that was made by Mass Observation as early as 1943 when they conducted the first major investigation into public houses, and concluded that the pub was “more than merely a drinking shop” (Mass Observation, 1943, quoted in Orford et al., 2009, 69).

The participants in the current study viewed the pub as a complex space. Rather than viewing the pub as a singular homogenous entity, customers perceived the pub to be made up of a number of different nested zones. Each
of these spaces was believed to have different functionalities, with different activities associated with each zone. Customers felt that certain activities were or were not appropriate within specific zones, and discussed a number of ways in which activities were regulated within the pub. Although some zones were visibly demarcated due to the pub’s physical environment, the activity within each zone was shaped by the people within the pub and the way in which they interpreted the space. Customers highlighted ways in which the activity within each zone was initially self-regulated and determined through a process of informal consensus amongst customers. Over time regulation became more formal, enforced by members of staff and marked via the use of signage and physical objects.

The proposition that the activity in each of different nested zones was shaped by the customers highlights the need to consider the reciprocal relationship between the pub users and their environment. Although physical features may constrain or enable certain types of activity, the social activity that occurred within different zones of the public was ultimately created and shaped by the customers and their own social practices. This proposition is consistent with the work of Ingold (2000) who argued that the only way to understand an environment is to gain a deeper appreciation of the mutual relationship between the environment and its inhabitants.

Customers were able to situate themselves within a space that they felt met their personal needs. Customers believed that they were able to understand the different zones and the types of activity which were appropriate almost intuitively. This process of understanding the affordances that each zone offered was described as something that customers ‘felt’ rather than consciously processed. The idea of a felt relationship to space is consistent with Gibson’s (1979) approach to perception. Gibson (1979) proposed that the environment provides enough information for the user to be able to understand the way in which to use it. At face value, this appears to be consistent with the way in which customers described the ability to locate themselves within an appropriate zone within the pub. However, Gibson’s (1979) theory of direct perception also suggest that because the environment provides ample information for the user to interact with and use it, there is little need for prior
experience when perceiving spaces. However, it may be possible that what is experienced by customers as an intuitive ‘knowing’ of where to sit in order to meet their own goals, may actually be a product of a period of learning. Customers may learn to read the different affordances that each nested zone offers in a process of becoming space literate.

The current study has looked towards the concept of peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to explain the way in which participants may have learnt to understand and read the public house. However, further research could extend the findings of the current study by investigating in more detail to what extent and under what conditions the zones within the pub are intuitively known, and to what extent they are understood through a process of learning. In the current study, most participants were regularly customers at the pub in which they were interviewed, visiting more than once per week. These people were purposely selected as it was assumed that they would be able to provide rich detail about the pub and their experience within it. However, it would be interesting to seek the views of people who attend the pub much less frequently, to explore the way in which this group of customers interpret and come to ‘know’ the different nested zones within each pub.

**Pub as a social space**

The current study supports a wealth of existing research that suggests the pub represents a social space. Previous literature has repeatedly made claims that the pub is a place where a plethora of social activity occurs (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Muir, 2009; Smith, 1983). This was evident in the majority of customers’ responses, in which they described and discussed the wide range of social activities that they took part in whilst in the pub. However, the current study went beyond generic descriptions of social activity, suggesting that the sociality produced and experienced within pub is a complex phenomenon. The activity that occurred within the pub can be conceptualised as a ‘knots’, situated along a longer ‘lines of activity’. These two conceptualisations have been taken from the work of Ingold (2011) and are useful in describing the ways in which places, such as the public house, create opportunities for lines of activity to come together and intertwine. This conceptualisation appears consistent with
customers’ experiences of the pub, as it was common for customers to talk about the way in which a visit to the pub ‘fit in’ amongst other activities that they were preforming that day.

The application of the concept of ‘knots’ to the public house is a novel suggestion, one that could provide a useful framework for future research. This conceptualisation may be particularly useful in understanding the way in which the social activities that occur within the pub are linked to activities that occurs elsewhere. For example, previous research has attempted to demonstrate the ways in which the presence of a pub can bring socio-economic benefits to local villages (Cabras & Regianni, 2010). This research has suggested that in villages in which there was an established community the presence of a pub led to an increase in the number of activities that had socioeconomic benefits, such as village fetes and other fundraising activities. However, in areas where there was little sense of community, the presence of a pub had little or no impact on socioeconomic activity.

Drawing upon the concept of knots, it could be suggested that in villages where there was an existing established community, the pub provided a place where activity could be knotted together. In providing this space, local people were able to develop existing activities into outputs that are beneficial for the local community. Therefore, the conceptualisation of the pub as a knot amongst a meshwork of other activity is consistent with previous research that has suggested that pubs can act as a catalyst for socioeconomic activity in areas where there is already an established network of activity. In addition, this conceptualisation may provide useful for future research as it provides a new way of understanding the way in which the pub is linked to the wider environment in which it is situated.

The sociality within the pub

The current study suggests that the conceptualisation as the public house representing a community is also complex and contested. Existing literature regarding public houses repeatedly argues that the pub is a social space. As a result, it is often assumed that pub also represents a local community. However further exploration of the notion of community unearthed a number of ways in
which the lay understanding of the term community did not fit with customers’ experience of the sociality within the public house. Although some customers either strongly agreed or disagreed that the pub provided a sense of community, many customers provided a more ambiguous and ambivalent opinion. It was most common for customers to describe a contentious experience of community within the pub, believing that there were occasions when community both did and did not exist. This ambiguous idea of community contrasts sharply with idealised and stereotypical views of public houses.

The pub is also often assumed to be a social space for all, open to all members of the public from a wide spectrum of different social backgrounds. Although the current project supports the suggestion that the pub is a social space, it appears that it is not a space that is as inclusive as stereotypical descriptions would lead us to assume. Infact, idyllic descriptions of archetypal pubs, with friendly locals and a welcoming atmosphere, may actually be presenting pubs in ways that do not accurately represent reality. There were numerous examples of people that had met in the pub and had subsequently made friends with one another. There were also instances in which different friendship groups had become integrated within the pub. However, observations suggested that many of the customers grouped together with people who were of a similar demographic to themselves, both in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. There were fewer examples of social activity amongst people of different generations or ethnicities.

Although stereotypical representations of the pub often suggest the public house is a space in which there is a mixing of people from different walks of life, the lack of integration between of different ages and cultures in the current study is not surprising. Previous research has suggested that in cities in which there are many different cultures, the relationship between the different groups is often characterised by tolerance rather than active cross-community involvement (Sennett, 1994). In addition, research has also shown that public spaces are often territorialised by certain groups (Amin, 2002). Therefore, although authors have argued that the public house often represents the “flavour of a particular neighbourhood” (Jennings, 2011, 111), it may be more
accurate to suggest that the public house can only ever represent the flavour of a small proportion of the neighbourhood; that is, the flavour of the people who are in the pub in the first place.

For the individuals that took part in the current study, the pub was viewed as a place for pre-existing communities to meet, rather than as a place for a broader sense of community to emerge. This could lead to potential conflict within the pub. Previous research conducted by Hunt and Satarlee (1986) examined drinking practices of two groups of customers in two different pubs within the same village. The authors argued that cultural practices, such as round buying or pooling money together, can confirm the togetherness of a group. This can lead to both increased solidarity amongst group members but also to a stronger, more rigid group boundary which prevents integration with other non-group members. On a wider level, Hunt and Sarterlee (1986) suggested that once the pub has become full of regular customers, the majority of which are part of a wide in-group, it may be difficult for other non-regular customers to access the pub and the sociality produced within it.

Customers in the current project acknowledged that the pub could be a possible place of conflict, suggesting that one of the many marks of a ‘good pub’ was a group of friendly regular customers that made non-regular customers feel welcome. However, although many people stated that this was important and the pub was, at least officially, open to people from all walks of life, it was interesting to note that a large majority of customers were white and aged 35 and above. Therefore, future research could begin to draw on the work of social psychologists to further explore the dynamics between individuals and social groups within the pub. For example, research could utilize theories of group formation (Tuckman, 1965) or theories that explore group socialisation (Moreland & Levine, 1982).

**The pub as representative of local and national history**

Given that pubs are often heralded as synonymous of British history and culture, it would be logical to assume that the customers’ experience of visiting the pub is inevitably linked to the pubs own story within history. In the current
study, customers ascribed to the view that pubs provide a link to a traditional past and disclosed a preference for pubs that appeared to be older and more traditional. Customers highlighted several ways in which physical aspects of the pub could signal that the pub had a history. This included fixtures and fittings, such as fireplaces, or being decorated to reflect a traditional pub, such as the use of wood panelling and beams. However it was not simply the aesthetics of the pub that signalled a link to a time of tradition. Customers also highlighted the social practices within the pub, such as being given the opportunity to sample a small amount of ale before committing to buying a pint. The majority of customers expressed a preference towards pubs that aligned with stereotypical mental representation of what a ‘traditional pub’ ought to be, particularly when contrasted with new, modern ‘chain’ pubs that were part of large commercial companies.

However, although customers preferred a ‘traditional’ pub, the specific details of the pubs history remained largely unimportant. It was surprising to find that customers were often unaware of the pubs factual history. Therefore although it may be sensible to assume that the pubs own history would play an important part in the customers’ evaluation of the pub, this does not appear to be the case. Instead, customers focussed on the way in which their visits to the pub were interwoven with their own personal history.

The importance that customers places on the way in which their use of the pub tied in with their own lives and history may at first appear surprising. However, looking towards literature that explores the meaning place, this finding is consistent with existing research. For example early research from Eyles (1985) interviewed residents from a small town about their ‘sense of place’. Participants identified 10 dominant ‘sense of place’ themes. Three of the identified themes were linked to the residents own life history. For example a ‘nostalgic sense of place’ focussed on the salience of a place during a previous time period, a ‘family sense of place’ was characterised by family attachments and interactions and a ‘roots sense of place’ was described as linked to places in which people felt they has spent important developmental periods of their life. Taken together, findings from Eyles’ (1985) research and the results of the
current study suggest that an individual’s life-stage may be an important factor in the way that individuals create meanings attached to places.

Within the sphere of ecological psychology, perceived affordances are influenced by a person’s own beliefs and experiences, including their life stage. For example, Macnaghten and Urry (1998) have provided a discussion on the way that the affordances of a woodland area are influenced by a person’s own beliefs and personal characteristics. Whereas some people may perceive the environment as providing a safe area for small children, others will perceive the environment as affording a quiet space for relaxation or an easily accessible place for walking and exercise. In addition, existing literature has suggested that the places are ever-shifting points of meaning, and that the meaning assigned to a place is influenced by the perceiver’s life-stage (Smalldone, Harris & Sanyall, 2005). Given the importance placed on the way in which visits to the pub interlinks with the customers own autobiographical history, future research could seek to explore and compare the perceptions of people at different life stages, and the way in which their life stage is linked to their evaluation and experience of the public house.

**Contribution of the current project**

As previously noted, the current project actively set out to develop a deeper understanding of the public house. Prior to this study, the public house was an under-research space. Of the research that had been conducted, the majority simply documented the ways in which the pub was used as a social space or discussed the evolution of the public house throughout history. The current project has therefore brought the public house into social scientific discussions and demonstrated ways in which existing concepts from across the social sciences could be used to further explore the pub. The current project has begun to outline several topic areas that could be further investigated in the future, including the way in which people understand and interpret the pub, the sociality produced within the pub, and the link to both community and history.

Several of the issues discussed in the current project, particularly those that centred around the sociality produced within the pub, could be applicable within
the wider third place literature and it is likely that similarities will be found elsewhere within other third places. For example the current study suggested that ‘knowing’ was important to customers. This included both knowing other people such as customers, staff and licensees. When customers felt that they ‘knew’ other people, they did not feel the need to engage in verbal communication and often stated that they enjoyed watching others. This has also been demonstrated in local shops, with Hickman, (2013) suggesting that shoppers placed great importance on simply recognising familiar faces, regardless of whether they had engaged in conversation with others.

In the current study it was also suggested that customers may go through a process of peripheral participation in learning the social practices within the pub and the way in which the pub was functionally differentiated into different zones. This concept may also be applicable within other third spaces such as in coffee shops, working men’s clubs and in local community groups such as craft groups. The current study also highlighted important facets of the sociality within the pub, suggesting that the public house offers its customers the option for social interaction whilst requiring a very minimal level of obligation from its customers. It is this particular type of sociality that appears to make the public house unique. However, it could be possible that this type of sociality, or a similar type of sociality, is apparent within other social spaces. Therefore further research could test the applicability of some of the concept discussed here within other third space locations.

The current project brings together concepts from both ecological psychology and social psychology, and attempts to draw on ideas developed within the two disciplines to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the way in which the public house operates as a social space. Many scholars have called for greater convergence between ecological and social psychology (Charles, 2011; Heft, 2007; Hodges & Baron, 2007). The current project has therefore attempted to demonstrate ways in which greater assimilation between the two disciplines can be achieved.

The current project has also developed and extended the concept of affordances by exploring the way that affordances can be spatially located
within different nested zones. Rather than being derived by the environments individual surfaces, numerous complex factors come together to create zones that are perceived by individuals as offering unique affordances.

Theoretical discussion of place

Several authors have attempted to provide theoretical models of place. For example early research from Relph (1976) and Canter (1977a, 1977b) attempted to disentangle the different dimensions of what makes a place meaningful. In doing so the two authors independently suggested a compartmentalised model of place. Although the authors models differed somewhat, each author suggested that ‘place’ consisted of a physical environment, activities within the environment and a psychological component.

The current research has also suggested that the meaning of the public house is borne out of a number of factors; including the physical environment (that is perceived to be split into a number of different zones), the activities that occur within the different areas of the pub, and the way in which the pubs customers interpret that environment. There the current research appears to be consistent with both Relph (1976) and Canter’s (1997a, 1997b) proposition that ‘place’ consists of an interplay between both the organism and the environment. However, in compartmentalising place into a number of discrete and mutually exclusive factors, both Relph (1976) and Canter (1977) failed to highlight the relationships between each of these components.

In an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which places are dynamic and multifaceted, Gustafson (2001) proposed a model of place in which the meaning of place could be mapped against three related poles of meaning; ‘self’, ‘others’ and environment’. Gustafson suggested that the meaning of place is derived from the interplay between these factors. Therefore a places meaning can never be truly understood when only one of these factors is taken into consideration. Results from the current study also highlight the need to take a holistic approach when trying to understand the meaning that individuals and groups assign to places. For example, much of the activity that occurred within
the pub was merely a ‘knot’ along a longer line of activity that originated and continued elsewhere. Therefore there is a need to consider the way in which a visit to the pub fits with activity elsewhere in order to understand the customers overall pub experience. In addition, it was not simply the built physical environment that determined the activity that would occur in the pub. Nor was it simply the customers or staff team. Instead all of these factors interacted. Customers were able to view the pub space and interpret all of these interacting factors in order to read the possibilities for action in each of the nested zones.

Therefore the results of the current project support Gustafson’s (2001) proposal that the meaning of place is ever-shifting. It is interesting to note that Gustafson believed that places of a smaller physical size, such as a neighbourhood, were more likely to be associated with self-related meanings. This included meanings that occurred as self, self-other or self-other-environment interactions. Customers in the current study places a great emphasis on many factors that would be consistent with this proposal, such as the importance of ‘warm and friendly’ people and the way in which visits to the pub tied in with customers own personal history, such as being a place where they spent time with family or had their first ever pint.

Theoretical models of place appear to be compatible with many concepts and ideas put forward by authors within ecological psychology. For example the theoretical models put forwards by Relph (1976), Canter (1997a, 1997b) and Gustafson (2001) all propose that there is an interplay between the perceiver and their environment. This is immediately consistent with the claims of ecological psychology and, given the compatibility between the two subject areas, may signal an area in which there is opportunity for a convergence of concepts in future research. Although authors have previously called for a union between social and ecological psychology, perhaps a greater assimilation of concepts from ecological psychology within the place literature could provide ways in which to further understand the meaning of place.
Methodological limitations

The study was conducted across six public houses within Leicestershire. With all case study research, it is possible that the relatively small number of research sites could result in the results not being generalizable to other public houses, both in the Everards estate and elsewhere. However, the six sites were purposely chosen based on a variety of factors including their location (such as whether they were a village, suburban or urban area), their size, the socioeconomic demographics of the surrounding area and whether they made most of their profit based on the sale of food or drinks (i.e. a ‘food-led’ or ‘wet-led’ pub).

In addition, the study used an opportunity sampling approach, with potential participants being limited to people who were in the pub at the same time as the researcher, aged 18 years and above, not a member of a vulnerable group and not intoxicated. Although this limited the sample somewhat, a conscious effort was made to interview a cross-section of customers, in terms of both gender and age, whilst attempting to obtain a sample of participants that represented the pubs overall customer group. Early interviews highlighted the way in which the pub was viewed as made up of a number of nested zones. As a result, an effort was also made to speak to people who had situated themselves in different areas of each pub.

Despite an attempt to recruit a diverse range of participants, there were noticeable trends in the customers that took part in interviews. The overall distribution of gender and age are listed in Figure 1 and 2 (see page 43). For example, only one of the people interviewed within the current study were below the age of 30 years old. This may be due to the times at which the research took place, as most visits were conducted during the week, between the hours at 12:00pm and 8:00pm. It is possible that younger people were visiting pubs during alternate time periods, such as at weekends or later on in the evening.

Another striking way in which the current sample was not representative of the wider population was apparent in the way that all of the interviewees in the current study were of White British ethnic origin. This in part reflects the overall demographic of customers within each pub. Approximately 85% of the
customers that visited the pub, at least during the times the researcher was present, were White British. When non-white customers were present within the pub, the researcher attempted to interview these customers. However, the potential participants declined, most frequently stating that they did not have the time and that they would not be stopping in the pub for much longer. It is important to note that this response was common amongst potential participants of all ethnicities and not just those from non-white backgrounds, as it was common for customers to “pop in” to the pub, have a quick drink and head back out.

The absence of participants from black and other minority ethnic groups, both in the study’s sample and in the wider pub raises some important questions and highlights a need for further research. For example, it would be beneficial to actively seek the voices of the people who are not included in the current sample, that is, both people under the age of 30 and people from a range of ethnic backgrounds. As previously noted in the literature review (see pages 28-30), research is beginning to link ethnic identity with leisure practices such as taking part in illegal drug consumption in nightclubs (Hunt, Maloney & Evans, 2011). However, although it is known that some religious groups do not condone the consumption of alcohol, at present there is little understanding about the way in which visits to the public house may be influenced by a person’s ethnic identity.

Therefore future research could further investigate the way in which public houses reflect and reinforce social divisions, and ways in which pubs could act as a place for potential integration of people from different ages, ethnicities and social backgrounds. Further research is also needed to further explore the role of a persons’ ethnicity in the experience of visiting the pub. In particular, thinking about the conceptualisation as the pub as a ‘knot’ within a meshwork of wider activity, further research could explore the way in which pubs are themselves knotted to other activities (such as alcohol consumption), and the way in which taking part in associated practices may create tighter knots for some groups while creating obstacles for others.
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Appendices

Appendix A- Interview Guide
Appendix B- Information Sheets
Appendix C- Consent Form
Appendix D- Ethical approval
Appendix E- Ethical approval amendment
Appendix A

Interview guide used during interviews with public house customers.

1. Opening/ warm up question: how often do you visit this pub?

2. Thinking about this particular pub—what brings you here?
   - Probe: social aspects of the pub (friends, others)
   - Probe: physical aspects of the pub (layout, decor, etc.)
   - Probe: objective aspects of the pub (beer, food, cost, etc.)
   - Probe: atmosphere (other people in the pub etc.)

3. How long have you been coming to this particular pub? What keeps you coming back?

4. What are the things you like best about this pub in comparison to others in the area?

5. What sorts of ‘occasions’ are best suited to this particular pub? What are definitely not suited?
   - Probe: eating, drinking, birthdays, work colleagues

6. Do you know much about the history of the pub? Does this interest you or not?

7. You mention that you visited this pub [repeat info], is that important to you?

8. Tell me about the kinds of people who tend to come in this pub. What do you think keeps them coming back?
   - Probe: Do people tend to be quite similar or more of a mix? How so?

9. Do you think there is a sense of community around this particular pub? If yes, tell me more. If not, why not?

10. Since you have coming to this pub, have you seen any changes in how the pub looks and how it is run?
    - Probe: changes for the better/ worse
    - Probe: design, layout
    - Probe: changes to pub offering (e.g. food) or organised activities
    - Probe: changes in staffing

11. Do you have a particular place in the pub where you like to sit (if so, where and why)?

12. Are then any spaces in this pub that you really do not like (if so, where and why)?

13. Could you describe to me what your ‘dream’ or ‘ideal’ pub would look like? What is missing from this particular pub that would make it resemble your ideal pub?
Appendix B

Information sheet provided for participants prior to their participation in the study.

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Information Sheet

‘The Watering Hole’

October 2014

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. This information sheet provides an overview of the research, how the data that you supply will be used, and how we will protect the protections of your privacy and confidentiality.

Researcher: My name is Fawn Harrad (fh106@le.ac.uk). I am a postgraduate student from the University of Leicester’s School of Management. My supervisors are Professor Steve Brown (sb343@le.ac.uk) and Dr Jennifer Smith Maguire (jbs7@le.ac.uk), also from the University of Leicester’s School of Management.

Purpose of data collection: I am conducting interviews as part of a University of Leicester MPhil research project that explores consumers’ experiences and perceptions of the pub. The research is part funded by the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) through the IRSA (Innovation through the Research Support Accelerator) scheme, by the University of Leicester, and by Everards Brewery PLC. The data will be used as the basis of my MPhil dissertation, to produce a findings report for Everards. The data will also possibly be used for further academic publications and outputs, such as conference papers, academic journal articles, and popular/trade press pieces.

Details of Participation: The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and is much like an informal conversation—there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. I am interested in hearing your experiences and opinions about pubs. The interview can take place immediately. However, if you would prefer, the interview can be arranged to occur at a mutually convenient time and within a public place such as a pub, cafe, or similar. During the interview, I will take notes, and—with your permission—digitally record the interview to help me capture an accurate account. The recording will be transcribed into a written format. All written and audio records will be accessed only by myself
and my supervisors, and stored securely using password protection and locked cabinets.

Your participation in the project is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to answer any of the questions asked, and to withdraw from the interview at any point, including after the interview has taken place. You will be able to contact myself following the interview using the above contact details to withdraw from the study without giving any reason. It is important to exercise this right to withdraw if you are unhappy in any way with your participation. The information received will be treated in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act. Data will be anonymised: this means that neither you, nor anyone you mention in the interview, will be identified by name.

Please feel free to ask me any questions about the project or what participation involves. To discuss any further details about the project after the interview, please contact myself or my supervisor (contact information is available at the top of this letter). If you would like to receive a copy of the final dissertation, please provide me with an email address and I will be happy to send it to you after submission (June 2015).

Thank you again for participating!

If you would like to ask any questions about this study, or if you have taken part and would like to withdraw, please contact:

Fawn Harrad

Email: fh106@le.ac.uk
Appendix C

Consent form used to obtain informed consent from customers taking part in the study.

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Consent Form

‘The Watering Hole’

October 2014

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research at any time up until when the project is to be submitted, without giving any reason. This includes the right to refuse to answer any questions asked. I may withdraw using the contact details provided by the researcher at the top of the information sheet.

2. I understand what my participation will involve.

3. I understand that my data will be anonymised and only the researcher and supervisors will have access to the raw data. The identity of any other person(s) mentioned during the interview will also be anonymised.

4. I understand that I will be able to obtain general information about the results of this research by giving the researcher my email address.

5. I understand that the data (including direct quotations) will be used in an MPhil dissertation and a findings report for Everards, and potentially in publicly-available academic publications and other outputs.

6. All of my questions about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

7. I am happy for my interview to be voice recorded.

I agree to participate:

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Participant’s signature: ______________________________

Participant’s name (please print): ______________________________

Date: __________

If you would like to receive a summary of the results by e-mail, when this is available, please provide your email address: ______________________________

Please note that this form will be kept separately from your data.
Appendix D

Ethical approval granted on 13th November 2014

To: Fawn Harrad

Subject: Ethical Application Ref: fh106-f508

(Please quote this ref on all correspondence)

13/11/2014 15:38:52

School of Management

Project Title: The watering hole: The social ecology of consumption in Everardsâ€™ public houses

Thank you for submitting your application which has been considered.

This study has been given ethical approval, subject to any conditions quoted in the attached notes.

Any significant departure from the programme of research as outlined in the application for research ethics approval (such as changes in methodological approach, large delays in commencement of research, additional forms of data collection or major expansions in sample size) must be reported to your Departmental Research Ethics Officer.

Approval is given on the understanding that the University Research Ethics Code of Practice and other research ethics guidelines and protocols will be compiled with

- http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice

- http://www.le.ac.uk/safety/
The following is a record of correspondence notes from your application fh106-f508. Please ensure that any proviso notes have been adhered to:

Oct 6 2014 3:25PM This is a very thorough and well thought out RER and I have just two areas that I’d like some further clarification on please.<BR><BR>1. The role of the gatekeeper. As you acknowledge there are only a small number of pubs in the Everards portfolio, whilst in the first instance it is perfectly plausible that there would be no pressure placed on Landlords to take part in the event of no-one (or insufficient numbers) agreeing to take part can we be so confident that the funders of this research won’t push publicans in to taking part so they get their results. Also on the role of the gatekeeper how much access to data are they likely to gain. Again given the limited number of potential sites and the fact that Everards will know which pubs you have carried out interviews in it is likely that they will be able to identify people and/or pubs in the study based on the answers. Have you any strategies for this?<BR><BR>2. On the issue of interviewing people under the influence of alcohol you state in section one that they must not be intoxicated but then in section 4 state that you will use your judgement to decide on this - is this objectively possible and would it not be better to arrange to interview people without alcohol. I also think you need to be aware of the potential impact on how others (for example examiners and journal reviewers) view your results and data if you are interviewing people who have been drinking.

Oct 9 2014 2:24PM Agreed, a very thorough RER which identifies ethical risks and details management strategies in place to deal with those risks. <BR><BR>Two queries:<BR><BR>1) More detail needs to be given to explain the relationship between Everards and the publicans to allay concerns that there is potential for coercion - what is the business relationship between Everards and the publican?<BR><BR>2) Alcohol consumption - this raises the ethical risks in the project and needs to be more clearly discussed and justified. Is it possible to 'design away' these risks by simply recruiting in the pub and interviewing when there is no or much lesser chance that alcohol has been consumed? Perhaps there are reasons why this is not possible or desirable and these need to be clearly articulated in your review. Alcohol clearly impacts on participant judgement and from an ethics point of view you need to consider issues about informed consent and potential risks of embarrassment. Reviewer one asks about how can you judge alcohol consumption - could you ask people in advance of the interview how much they have had to drink and set a max amount after which they will not be interviewed? Please can you think about these issues and discuss them with your supervisors. Please can you then detail your decisions on research design and provide a thorough justification.

Oct 9 2014 2:28PM Dear Fawn <BR><BR>Two reviewers have looked at your ethical review and both agree that there is a considerable amount of effort and thought in your review to identify and then put strategies in place to manage ethical risk. Both reviewers however raise a query about the role of the operations manager in securing access to the publicans. Please can you take a look at the comments provided by mrq1 and ajd42. Please can you consider the issues the reviewers outline. What you need to do next is to respond to the reviewers concerns either by changing your research design or by putting in place further security to manage the ethical risks of coercion that seems possible with the operations manager introducing you to the publican. The reviewers also query the strategy you have in place for dealing with alcohol consumption and interviews. It might be that there are important reasons why the interviews should be on-site at the pub which would exclude interviewing elsewhere but because you suggest that you will also offer this possibility
then it seems that this is not the case. What the reviewers require is a more detailed explanation and justification for your recruitment strategy demonstrating how you have minimised risk via research design and where there is not a straight forward case for this to happen then you need to detail the compromises involved and the decision you have made to deal with these.<br>Please can you respond to the reviewers queries by adding your comments and details as a note to this section 8 or attaching a letter of response to the reviewers as an attachment.<br>Please can you share this feedback with your supervisors and discuss your response with them before returning this application. When you re-submit this ethics application it will come directly to me as the DEO (i.e. it will not go via your supervisors). If you have any questions or queries about the content of the reviewers comments please do not hesitate to contact me.<br>Please can you share this feedback with your supervisors and discuss your response with them before returning this application. When you re-submit this ethics application it will come directly to me as the DEO (i.e. it will not go via your supervisors).<br>Oct 11 2014 4:47PM Many thanks to the reviewers for their feedback on the proposal. The project team have considered the issues raised and offer the following as further clarification:<br>1. The role of Everards as gatekeepers: Firstly: the concerns raised seem to stem from a misunderstanding of the organizational relationship between Everards and publicans. Everards is not in the position of an employer; publicans are tenants who run their own businesses in partnership with Everards. It is therefore reasonable to expect publicans’ as adult independent business operators to exercise their own judgement in agreeing to participate or not in the research. Indeed, they are likely to be interested in the outcomes of the research. Thus, we do not perceive there to be a risk of coercion. Secondly: the role of Everards’ operations manager as gatekeeper is essential to the research design, in order to establish access and rapport in the field. The operations manager works closely with all of the pubs; it is both impractical and from the point of view of the research undesirable to forcibly separate the link between researcher and publican. The Everards estate currently comprises around 180 sites. We only require 6 participating sites and are therefore confident of securing the numbers. 2. Interviews and alcohol. The research design incorporates several measures to ensure that intoxication does not pose an undue ethical risk to the participants (or the quality of the data). First: Risk is minimal by virtue of the research topic and design. Participants are adults and are being interviewed about non-sensitive matters; data will be anonymized, including mention of any third parties. Second: As indicated in the ethics application, the site visits will take place in the afternoon and early evening, thereby reducing the likelihood of excess alcohol consumption on the part of potential participants. Third: the researcher will use his own good judgement, following prior discussion with the research team of likely scenarios. The supervisor will also accompany the research student on some of the visits, particularly during the earliest visits to help the student develop their judgement. Fourth: potential participants will be offered the chance to do the interview at a later time so that they do not feel any need to interrupt their social time, nor proceed if they judge themselves to be unfit for interview. Whilst participants will be offered the opportunity to participate in an interview off site, it is preferable to do so on site because the research is primarily concerned with material culture and the setting itself, which is clearly easier to discuss in situ. Fifth: participants will retain an information sheet with full contact information explaining that they can withdraw even after the interview, should they change their minds at a later date. The research team strongly feel that asking participants to
Appendix E

Ethical approval amendment agreed on 2\textsuperscript{nd} February 2015

To: Fawn Harrad

Subject: Ethical Application Ref: fh106-9c8c

(Please quote this ref on all correspondence)

02/02/2015 15:35:53

School of Management

Project Title: The watering hole: The social ecology of consumption in Everardsâ€™ public houses

Thank you for submitting your application which has been considered.

This study has been given ethical approval, subject to any conditions quoted in the attached notes.

Any significant departure from the programme of research as outlined in the application for research ethics approval (such as changes in methodological approach, large delays in commencement of research, additional forms of data collection or major expansions in sample size) must be reported to your Departmental Research Ethics Officer.

Approval is given on the understanding that the University Research Ethics Code of Practice and other research ethics guidelines and protocols will be compiled with

- \url{http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice}
- \url{http://www.le.ac.uk/safety/}
The following is a record of correspondence notes from your application fh106-9c8c. Please ensure that any proviso notes have been adhered to:-

Jan 27 2015 11:35AM  Please note this is an addendum to a previously approved project (fh106-1f508)<BR><BR>The current addendum requests to increase the maximum number of participants taking part to 60. The reason for this is that preliminary findings from the data covered so far have not reached theoretically saturation and it is therefore necessary to increase the number of participants. There have been no changes to the proposed methods and I have attached the approved consent sheet, information sheet and Sign-off letter from my previous application.<BR><BR>Thank you,<BR>Fawn

Jan 28 2015  9:34AM  I did not feel my first note was clear enough - <BR><BR>The original application was approved for 36 participants. The current addendum requests an additional 24 (maximum) participants to take part, to total a maximum of 60 participants for the project. The reason for this addendum is that preliminary findings from the data collected thus far have not reached theoretical saturation point, and it is therefore necessary to increase the number of participants.<BR><BR>As already stated, there have been no changes to the proposed methods and I have attached the previously approved consent sheet, information sheet and Sign-off letter from my previous application.<BR><BR>Thank you,<BR>Fawn

--- END OF NOTES ---