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Perhaps for both good and ill, then, this age of heritable human gene editing is not yet completely upon us, despite the news from Newcastle. For one thing, most diseases, or traits, are not the fruit of one gene but many, and we don't know how they all interact. Attempts to edit or prune genes could have devastating unintended consequences. “We don't know enough,” says Flinter.

Then there are concerns about our genetic editing “tool” – known as Crispr (Clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats) – which is not always perfectly accurate and can cause “off-target effects”. Research is being done to improve its accuracy, but new techniques

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And then, of course, there is the law. For the moment there is what Flinter calls “a pretty good international consensus, a moratorium on germline genome editing even for the treatment of serious genetic disorders.”

“Editing is still hugely controversial in the field,” says Darren Griffin, professor of genetics at the University of Kent. “Apart from the ethics there are concerns about safety. About off-target effects. About the complexity of the genome.”

That is why there was such outcry about He Jiankui, a Chinese scientist who, in 2018, announced that he had created the first gene-edited human babies, their DNA altered with the aim of conferring immunity to HIV. Far from winning acclaim, he found the scientific community was appalled.

Unlike the children born in Newcastle, we know the names of the children born under his supervision: Lulu and Nana. Like them, however, they are otherwise

wreathed in anonymity. Some geneticists say the gene edit “was not entirely as was predicted”. Whether the twins are healthy, and will remain so, is a mystery.

More optimistically, it is likely that if there is a country where the legal-ethical-medical-technological quandaries of human gene editing can be navigated for the greater good, it is this one.

“There's a safety net here so that patients can't feel exploited, yet scientists are able to do work that is forbidden around the world,” says Prof Flinter.

“Scientists abroad are very jealous of what we are able to do.”

Prof Griffin concurs: “We were the first to do IVF, we were the first to do PGD [Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis, where embryos are screened for a genetic disorder before IVF so that only those not carrying it are implanted].

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The etiquette of work drinks

Bosses have been told to serve less alcohol at social events – and it's about time, says *Catherine Renton*

The Chartered Management Institute has called on businesses to limit the amount of alcohol served at work social events, after finding that a third of managers have witnessed harassment or inappropriate behaviour at parties.

This statistic will come as no surprise to anyone who has ever socialised with work colleagues, and I, for one, am fully behind the campaign. I almost lost my job over one ill-conceived conversation during Christmas drinks with my team.

I was working as an administrator in a design studio, and a minor quibble in the office a few weeks earlier was still niggling me. Doug, a company director, had pulled me up for wearing trainers in the office.

After several glasses of champagne, I cornered him. “The office is full of men who look like they've just rolled out of bed. They all wear trainers. I'm the only woman. It's double standards,” I shouted out in front of everyone.

Doug had a reputation as being quite a hard manager and so everyone turned to listen in. Doug, who was also tipsy but nowhere near my level, said: “We'll talk about this on Monday.” I immediately felt sick and left shortly afterwards, spending the weekend queasy with nerves.

When I arrived at the office on Monday morning, I was ushered into the boardroom with three company directors and told I would receive a formal written warning about my behaviour at the party. I stayed at the company for another six months, but after my drunken outburst it wasn't the same. I felt isolated and like I was constantly being watched.

When I decided to give up alcohol six years ago I kept coming back to that Christmas party in my mind; it played on whatever the opposite of a greatest hits reel is.

Across all the industries I've worked in, from creative to corporate, getting drunk in the name of team bonding was a familiar ritual – but really it's a toxic workplace culture.

David Greenhalgh, a specialist employment lawyer at Exello Law, says alcohol is a frequent

factor in cases he works on, and a shift is well overdue. “The unhealthy reliance on the provision of alcohol to ‘reward’ staff is consistently leading to instances of misconduct.”

Some say the idea of a cap on alcohol consumption at work events is excessive. Isabella Russell of food and drinks start-up SVI believes adults should be trusted to have enough self-discipline to manage their consumption. “A drinks cap is a condescending way for employers to treat staff,” she says. “I disagree with anything that seeks to stigmatise social drinking among working adults or promote a sense of taboo around alcohol.”

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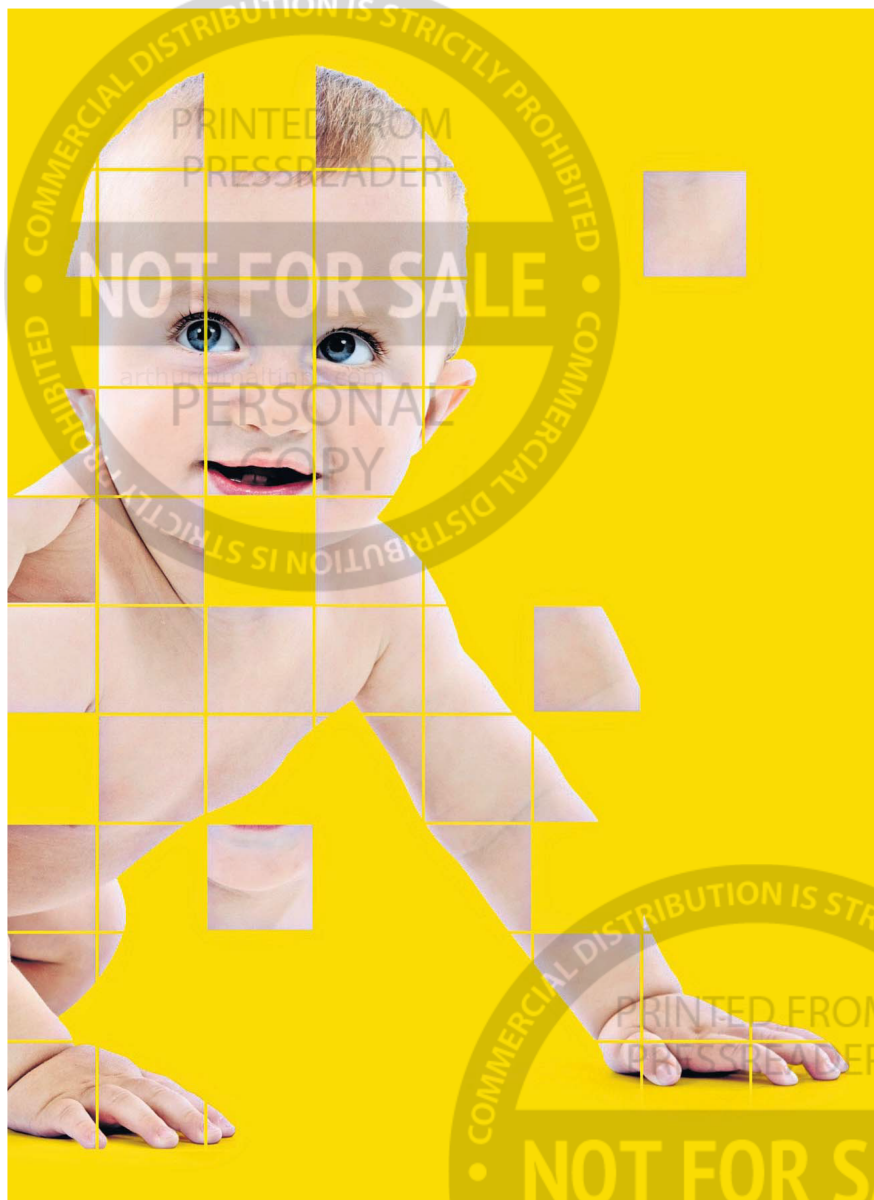
workers drinking less than their older colleagues, and the rise of home working meaning teams are often virtual rather than physical, employers are looking at new ways to build connections without alcohol.

Jessica Flinn-Allen, chief executive and founder of Jessica Flinn, a wedding and engagement ring specialist, pivoted away from alcohol-focused work events after a cocktail night one Christmas led to disciplinary action for a few team members. They have tried axe throwing, pottery painting and escape rooms. “Alcohol doesn't need to be a part of the experience, though we do not prohibit it. The choice is left to individual team members, ensuring that everyone feels comfortable and included.”

The prospect of axe throwing with your line managers while stone cold sober might sound daunting, but it's surely time to move on from the traditional boozy office party and find a more moderate way to socialise. I have no doubt Doug would agree.



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