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Go Ahead and Cry. It's Happy Hour.

By **TRIPTI LAHIRI**

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On a recent Monday afternoon, a woman wandered into Terra 47, a cheery little cafe off Union Square in Manhattan.

She quickly retreated, her eyes wide as she backed out of the restaurant's red Art Nouveau-style doors.

It might have been that the tiny lemon-yellow space was already bursting at the seams. It might have been the occasional bared breast. Or just possibly, it might have been that some of the tippers inside appeared to be shy of the current drinking age - by a couple of decades.

"Oh, get out, you don't have a baby," exclaimed Jennifer LaBelle, only half in jest, sipping a glass of wine as her daughter, 9-month-old, plump-cheeked Oona, napped.

Ms. LaBelle, along with some 20 other women and their babies, had come to a happy hour for first-time mothers. Sure, drinking in the afternoon might seem a bit louche at first glance, but the en masse presence of babies, the sunny atmosphere of the restaurant, the organic snacks and the absence of cigarette smoke made the outing appear rather wholesome, in a slightly risqué European way.

Shara Frederick, who lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, got the idea for the happy hour, which she calls Tots and Tonic, when her son Oscar was about 5 months old. The gatherings, intended chiefly to get new mothers out of the house for a couple of hours, are held one afternoon a month, on Mondays in Manhattan and Tuesdays in Brooklyn.

"I missed being able to sit at a bar and have a beer, something you would just not do with a kid in a stroller," said Ms. Frederick, who felt isolated staying at home but found going out a challenge,

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Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times Group of mothers and babies 'Tots and Tonic' gather at Terra 47 in Manhattan to talk and drink. Kristin Rice, center, of Manhattan with Lily, 3 months, gets smiles in front of the counter.

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'Tots and Tonic'
A HAPPY HOUR FOR MOMS

not least because of the fear of dirty looks from other patrons if Oscar was noisy. "Here, moms can hold each other's babies. And I think it's good to see that these kids, they all scream."

The Brooklyn Tots and Tonic continues to meet in Williamsburg, at a sofa-filled bar called the Lucky Cat, at 245 Grand Street, but the novelty of having a drink while out with baby may have worn off. At the February gathering, tea and coffee were equally popular.

"The draw of this was the parents, not the drinks," said Jennifer Wilson, who was at the bar with her 3-month-old daughter, Olive.

Ms. Frederick has been organizing the event in Manhattan only since December, however, and the moms there seemed quite tickled to be having a glass of wine or a beer. Some might have even had two.

But the women present, most of whom were in their late 20's or early 30's, were even more ecstatic about conversing with fellow adults, just possibly on a topic that did not involve babies. Most were veterans of mothers' groups run by facilitators and centered on issues related to child-rearing, but the afternoon in question was blissfully unstructured.

"It's about moms, but you don't have to discuss babies unless that's what you want to talk about," said Maria Dekker, who is originally from the Netherlands and was holding her blond, blue-eyed 4-month-old boy, Boaz. "Sometimes I'm like, I want to talk about something else - but what?"

Pamela Foster, who wore a black sweater and jeans, her blond hair pulled back in a ponytail, said she was happy just to be out of her pajamas.

"I'm sure I used to have interesting things to say, but I can't remember," she said wistfully as she nuzzled her baby, Duncan.

The two soon gave up the effort, and returned cheerfully to the topics of new motherhood - sleep (or lack thereof), slings and when to introduce solid food.

"It's nice to meet people that have similar issues," Ms. Foster said. "None of my friends really have children, so it's tough. You want to vent, you want to kvetch a little, you want to just find out little practical things, like where did you get this and where can I find that, and what is a good back exercise to do?"

Some less-than-subtle eavesdropping revealed that the weight of babies, lack of sleep and the birthing process were far and away the most popular topics.

Breast-feeding was another frequent subject, one that raised some potentially touchy questions. Would drinking a glass of wine adulterate the purity of mother's milk and bring the child welfare authorities? Could the early exposure of an infant's tabula rasa to drink encourage pernicious vices later in life? And what about the possibly hazardous combination of drinking and pushing a stroller?

Ms. Foster confessed that her mother had been a little concerned when she mentioned where she would be that afternoon, but she said her doctor thought that the occasional drink was fine. Many of the mothers there were of the same opinion. (The American Academy of Pediatrics includes alcohol on a list of substances "compatible" with breast-feeding, within moderation, but advises nursing mothers to feed their babies before having a drink, and to wait two hours after the drink before feeding again.)

Modern technology - the breast pump - offers another option.

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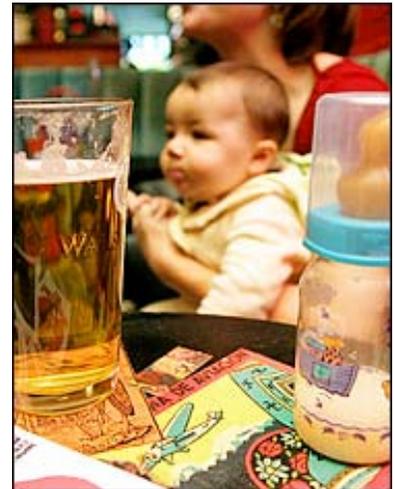
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Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times
Thea Mogg, 6 months, is held by her mother, Katherine Mogg, at a recent Tots and Tonic gathering in Brooklyn.

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Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times
Maria Dekker held her son, Boaz, 4 months, at a monthly get-together in Manhattan for mothers and infants.

"The old 'pump and dump,' " explained Ms. Foster, cheerfully. "You pump out the first load of milk and you're good to go."

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