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Frightening or Foolish? Gendered Perceptions of Public Intoxication Among Youths and Adults in Norway and Finland

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ABSTRACT

Background: What people define as acceptable alcohol use may differ between social situations and depend upon on who is drinking as well as who is evaluating the situation. **Objective:** The aim of the study was to explore how Norwegian and Finnish youth and adults perceived the acceptability of situations involving public intoxication and how gender and alcohol's harm to others were made relevant in their reflections. **Methods:** We conducted eight focus groups among adolescents ($N = 44$) and eight among adults ($N = 38$), using photos and stories of drinking situations as stimuli for the discussions. **Results:** Youths' and adults' perceptions of public intoxication were characterized by ambivalence: negative evaluations were often nuanced and negotiated while positive evaluations typically were followed up with reservations. To some extent, their evaluations depended upon the gender and age of the drinker. Although a norm of gender equality was emphasized, women were typically criticized for their looks and for foolish behavior when drunk, while drunk men were often perceived as frightening. Age was a prominent dimension in evaluations of the acceptability of women's alcohol use, while it was seldom mentioned when discussing intoxicated men. Youths seemed to have somewhat more restrictive attitudes towards public intoxication than adults, reflecting perhaps how they related to the situations with more general conceptions of drinking and harms from drinking, picked up from public debate or from school. **Conclusion:** Perceptions of alcohol's harm to others were clearly gendered, in that intoxicated men were seen as frightening while women were seen as foolish.

KEYWORDS


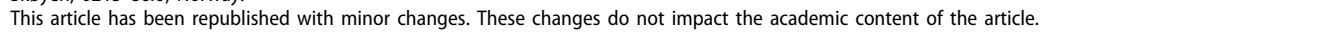
Public intoxication; attitudes; gender; age; alcohol's harm to others; focus group interviews

Introduction

Alcohol use is guided by cultural norms regulating the where's, how's, when's, and why's of appropriate drinking (Ahern, Galea, Hubbard, Midanik, & Syme, 2008). In the Nordic countries, drinking has traditionally taken place during weekends and on special occasions and has typically been intoxicated-oriented (Bye & Rossow, 2009). In recent years, a more continental drinking culture, characterized by more frequent episodes of moderate drinking, has developed, making alcohol much more a part of everyday life (Bye & Østhus, 2011). However, binge drinking during weekends still remains common (Horverak & Bye, 2007; Mäkelä, Tigerstedt & Mustonen, 2012). Drinking to intoxication has been described as providing the drinkers with a "time out" from the rules and constraints of everyday life. On the other hand, drunken transgressions are only acceptable within certain limits (MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969). Public

intoxication can, due to this complexity, be regarded as a situation that accentuates cultural norms regarding alcohol use.

What people define as acceptable alcohol use may change over time (Nordlund, 2008; Mäkelä et al., 2012) and differ between social situations (Fjaer, Pedersen, von Soest, & Gray, 2016) or between countries (Nordlund & Østhus, 2013; Rolando, Törrönen, & Beccaria, 2014). It may depend upon who is drinking (Bye & Østhus, 2011) or who is evaluating the drinking situation (Østergaard, 2008). Norms and expectations related to drinking tend to be highly gender-specific (Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013; Holmila & Raitasalo, 2005; MacLean, Pennay, & Room, 2018; Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1997), with drinking being less accepted for women (Montemurro & McClure, 2005; Simonen, Törrönen, & Tigerstedt, 2013). This has been even more apparent in relation to public intoxication, which has tended to be associated with female promiscuity,

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loss of femininity, and increased vulnerability to unwanted sex (Bogren, 2008).

Nordic countries have high gender equality (Borchorst, 2011). As regards alcohol consumption, men drink considerably more than women, although the gender difference in consumption levels has decreased over the last decades (Bye & Østhus, 2011; Mäkelä et al., 2012). Recent research suggests that women's entry into public drinking spaces is one of the factors behind a change towards a more heterogenic and less intoxication-oriented drinking culture in these countries, and that women engaged in public drinking to a lesser extent than before provoking negative and immoral images (Demant & Törrönen, 2011). It has also been suggested that women's gender identity in relation to drinking has expanded beyond traditional feminine values and become more layered and varied (Simonen, 2013).

The degree to which intoxication is accepted has also been shown to be contingent on personal drinking levels (e.g. Nordlund, 2008), and women tend to report more restrictive attitudes towards alcohol use than men (e.g. Scheffels, Moan, & Storvoll, 2016). Some studies have indicated that youth have restrictive attitudes towards drinking (Katainen & Rolando, 2015; Simonen et al., 2017), while others do not find this (De Haan, Boljevac, & Schaefer, 2010; Simonen, 2013). A focus group study with participants aged 16–80 from Denmark described people's acceptance of drinking as defined by the age of the drinker and by drinking context in general (Grønkaer, Curtis, De Crespigny, & Delmar, 2011). Similarly, an Australian study among young adults (MacLean, Pennay, & Room, 2018) found that drinking in public places was seen as particularly problematic, and that drunk women were vulnerable to being regarded as sexually inappropriate while drunk men were likely to be perceived as threatening. A study among undergraduate students in Norway and the UK concluded that the tolerance for visible intoxication was conditional on who was exposed to it and that being drunk with family or with children present was least accepted in both countries (Fjaer et al., 2016). These limits to when and how it is seen as acceptable to be drunk could be related to whether the drunkenness is perceived as harmful to the drinker himself or, perhaps even more importantly, to others.

Most of the research addressing alcohol's harm to others has mapped the prevalence of a set of predefined harms and how the prevalence of these harms varies between different demographic groups (see e.g. Bellis et al., 2015; Laslett et al., 2011; Lund, Moan, &

Storvoll, 2016; Moan et al., 2015; Rossow & Hauge, 2004; Storvoll, Moan, & Lund, 2016). For example, it has been shown that the burden of social harms from others' drinking to a larger extent is carried by women than by men (Huhtanen & Tigerstedt, 2012; Ramstedt et al., 2016; Rossow & Hauge, 2004) and by young individuals more so than older individuals (Storvoll et al., 2016). However, little is known about whether and how these patterns are reflected in the views of drinking and intoxication, and how expectations of alcohol's harm to others relate to cultural norms on public intoxication.

In this study, data on perceptions of public intoxication were collected among Norwegian and Finnish adolescents and adults. From an international point of view, these two neighboring Nordic countries are fairly similar as regards alcohol culture. However, alcohol policies are slightly more restrictive in Norway (Karlsson, 2014), the overall consumption is higher in Finland (Hallberg & Österberg, 2016), and drinking to intoxication is somewhat more common in Finland (Moan et al., 2015). Moreover, a study comparing survey data from the Nordic countries showed that the prevalence of harm from others' drinking was higher in Finland than in Norway (Moan et al., 2015). These differences could influence how people view alcohol use and intoxication.

We presented two situations involving public intoxication to focus groups consisting of youths and adults in Norway and Finland, and analyzed how participants in the groups made sense of the situations. The aim of the study was to explore how public intoxication is perceived among youths and adults in the two countries, including how the participants identified or disassociated with the drinking situations presented to them. We also aimed to study how gender and alcohol's harm to others was made relevant in evaluations of the situations and how the participants explained their views.

Methods and analyses

Participants and procedures

Our data consists of eight focus group interviews with teenagers aged 14–17 years (four in each country) and eight focus group interviews with parents of teenage children (four in each country). Data were gathered in metropolitan areas. In Norway, 24 teenagers (50% boys, age 15–16 years) and 18 parents of students in 10th grade (39% men) participated, while in Finland, 20 teenagers (55% boys, 14;17 years) and 19 parents (all female) participated in the study. The majority of



Figure 1. Photo illustrating public intoxication.

the focus groups had 5–7 participants. Due to cancellations, two groups had three participants, but the dynamics in these groups did not differ from the rest (see also Simonen et al., 2017). All groups were gender mixed, except the all-female adult groups in Finland.

In Norway, both teenagers and parents were recruited via four schools. It was not an aim to interview parent/child pairs. The adults were chosen based on volunteering and teenagers by a combination of volunteering and suggestions from teachers, who were asked to help recruit students who were talkative and interested in participating in a group discussion (see also Scheffels et al., 2016). In Finland, the teenagers were recruited via schools and youth clubs and parents via schools' parental associations, in both strata based on volunteering. Finnish youth participants were rewarded with a movie ticket while in Norway, the participating classes received a remuneration to be used for social events like school excursions, etc.

The interviews lasted from 60 to 90 min and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Citations are marked with Y (youths), A (adults), I (interviewer), country F (Finland), or N (Norway) and the speaker's gender F (female) or M (male). The project received ethical approval from the Norwegian Center for Research Data in Norway, and the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland.

Stimulus material

This study was part of a larger study exploring cultural norms relating to alcohol use, using a total of six stimuli to help participants discuss different drinking situations and relate them to their own experience. Two stimuli illustrating situations involving public intoxication were used for this study. Both thematised

A 15 year old girl is travelling home with the subway train from the city center on a Friday night. A group of boys aged 18 or 19 who are obviously very drunk enter the carriage and sit down next to her.

Figure 2. Story involving public intoxication.

gender, age, and harm to others, and were chosen in order to challenge and activate participants to reflect about these themes. The first was a photo of a situation where a group of mainly women drink alcohol in a public place (see Figure 1).

The second was a story of how a young girl is approached by a group of young drunk men in a subway train (see Figure 2).

The photo and story were shown to the groups separately. The participants were asked to describe what was going on in the situation, to share their immediate responses and evaluations of it, and if it was familiar to them. The gender order represented in the stimuli was used actively to explore how participants reflected and talked about public intoxication and gender. When showing the photo, we asked how the participants would have perceived the situation if the drinking women had been men. In discussions about the story, we asked how they would perceive the situation if the teenager on the subway train had been a boy instead of a girl. In Norway, we also asked how they evaluated the situation if the drunk persons entering the train had been women instead of men.

In the discussions, the stimuli were used as externalized reference points for the dialog, aiming to make comparison of the interpretations easier (Törrönen, 2002). A limitation when using stimuli in focus groups is that participants are impelled to draw general conclusions from particular situations. However, by an

active use of counterfactual “what if”—questions (e.g. what if the women had been younger, or men), we experienced that the discussions about the stimuli quickly evolved into broader discussions about perceptions of public intoxication in general.

Data analysis

The interviews were performed and transcribed in the local language in both countries. The first stage of the analysis was done on Norwegian and Finnish data separately, and resulted in the production of thematic reports in English from each country. The coding was discussed during workshops where findings were synthesized into overarching themes (Silverman, 2006). The purpose of these procedures was to ensure that we analyzed and perceived the data in both countries by following corresponding principles and steps (see also Simonen et al., 2017).

We examined how youths and adults defined the situations in the picture and story, how they discussed the acceptability of drinking in them and to what extent they identified with these situations. We particularly looked at how the participants talked about gender and harm to others and how these dimensions were accentuated in their evaluations of the situations. We aimed to compare and contrast results from Norwegian and Finnish groups, but country comparisons were not a main aim in this study.

Findings

Partying on the street

The situation in the photo was understood to be a party or a celebration, and was immediately connected to intoxication by most of the participants in all focus groups: “A city festival where a lot of alcohol is consumed” (M, adults F). Expressions like “wild” (M, adults N) and “rough” (F, youth F) were common across the groups, highlighting that it was perceived to be a transgressive episode. The initial evaluation of the situation was mostly disapproving, explained by the transgressive character of the situation, the amount of alcohol involved, the children present, and that the drinking took place in a public place:

‘They can choose for themselves how much they drink. But *where* they drink. When they are standing like that, it affects everybody around them’ (M, youth N).

As the discussions developed, however, these negative evaluations often became more nuanced. The situation was perceived as more acceptable if it did not happen

too often or if it was a special occasion, like a weekend trip or a festival. Some of the participants emphasized how drunk people could sometimes contribute positively to the dynamics of social interaction, but such statements were typically followed up with reservations like: ‘...but if she starts shouting at people, then the atmosphere becomes bad’ (F, adults N). Overall, potential harmful consequences of drinking seemed clearly present as a backdrop for their reasoning.

In both countries, the situation was at first seen as unfamiliar, but this was also often negotiated as the discussions progressed. In Norway, the situation was typically seen as more familiar if it was a special occasion. In Finland in particular, some participants seemed to identify more personally with the situation: “That’s how we party” (F, adults F) and some also described a more collective identification: “If I wanted to describe what is Finnish, I just would show this picture” (M, youth F). Also statements like these, however, were typically continued with reservations: “It is familiar, but if I was there I would have a nice time but getting drunk, like she is, would not be my main goal” (F, adults F). Their talk indicated that they perceived drinking in public in itself as acceptable, but not if it was done primarily in order to get drunk.

Both youth and adult groups talked about how it sometimes was difficult to know how to respond to intoxicated people’s behavior, and how this could cause discomfort and make them feel insecure or afraid: “If they shout at you. I would be kind of scared, perhaps. Or get a very uncomfortable feeling” (F, youth N). They also talked about the discomfort of being exposed to intoxicated people, because they were often acting foolishly. In the youth groups in particular, many laughed when first seeing the photo:

F1: Well, I think it is a bit strange, kind of, those are older women, standing there with really little clothes on, and with a bottle of beer. It is just.

F2: Yes, she looks like my grandmothers age, kind of
Group: laughing loudly

M: It should not be in public (youth N)

When asked to explain their reaction, they often mentioned the age of the women in the photo: “This is someone going through their 50 year crisis” (M, youth F), and talked about how awkward it would be to see their parents or relatives in a situation like this.

When asked how they would have evaluated the situation if the women in the photo had been men, almost all said at first that this would not have changed their views. When probed, many however

modified this stand, and expressed that they believed women would be more easily condemned for this type of behavior: “One would probably draw conclusions faster if it was a woman you saw drinking like this” (M, adults N). Youths also emphasized many times that the situation would have been more frightening if the women in the photo had been men: “It would have been even more unpleasant. Because men are more scary” (F, youth N), and some said that men would be sanctioned more: “If a man would appear shirtless in a festival, it would mean he’s so heavily drunk he would be removed from the place” (M, youth F). They perceived that men would also be condemned, and in some situations perhaps even more easily than women, but for different transgressions. They seldom mentioned age when discussing how they perceived intoxicated men.

The participants’ views about whether and how gender mattered to how they interpreted the situation seemed to differ more than their views on other issues, and raised a lot of discussion in the groups:

I: What if the women in the photo had been men?

F1: I guess it would be the same. Probably.

F2: I would think that they were going to a football match or something.

M: Yes, I mean, my personal opinion is that women behave more properly in general and are more careful about how they behave than men. And then this seems a bit more unusual. And then you kind of get more puzzled by this photo, because they are women. But I did not really think about that, when you first showed the photo.

I: Do you think that gender matters, for how you see this photo?

M: A tiny bit.

F1: No, it doesn’t.

F2: Yes, I think it does.

F3: I do not think it does.

M: Is that because it should not matter, or because.?

F3: No, but it isn’t just that. I do not think about that, I do not have a negative reaction towards it (adults N)

As in this discussion, some level of gendered double standards was often recognized, without necessarily endorsing these standards. On the contrary, the participants often distanced from such double standards and described it as something “others” had. This was done both explicitly and implicitly, as when using the passive form “one would” instead of “I would” (“probably draw condemning conclusions faster if it was a woman

you saw drinking like this”) (M, adults N). However, some also reflected upon how such ideas could subconsciously influence their own evaluations:

‘Somehow you allow men to do more than women. I don’t know why one tends to be stricter towards a woman. But somehow it looks worse when there is a woman in this picture’ (F, adults F)

The term “looks worse” could here be read as a general expression of dislike, but also more explicitly as referring to physical appearance. In another discussion, looks were talked about more explicitly: “If this was someone I knew, I would be most embarrassed by how she looks. That skirt is so ugly” (F, youth N). Often, assessments of looks and behavior were intertwined:

F: 60 years old and running around in a golden bikini with a beer in her hand.

M: They are out on the street and it looks like she is shouting. The woman in the front in particular, she does not look good’ (youth N).

In this account, age was again used as a criterion for evaluation: asserting that the woman was too old for this look, as well as for this behavior. While the youth groups often used strong expressions like “shouting and acting like maniacs” (F, youth N), adults expressed similar views, but with more moderate language: “Well if you look at it from the outside, it does not look pretty” (F, adults N) and:

M: ‘I think it’s OK. Can’t be too moralizing either.

F: ‘No, but it is perhaps something about how they look’ (adults N)

Overall, the discussions indicated that while a norm of gender equality was expressed clearly, gendered expectations seemed to be active in both youths’ and adults’ evaluations of public intoxication to some extent, and expectations of harm were intertwined in these expectations. The limits of accepting the public intoxication seemed to be defined differently for men and women. Intoxicated women were criticized for their bodily appearance, for embarrassing themselves, and for drinking in a way that was not appropriate for their age, while intoxicated men were seen as potentially aggressive and thus as frightening.

Drunk young men approaching young girl in subway train

The situation in the story was most often defined as a “high risk situation” for the girl, because the men entering the subway train were intoxicated and thus:

“unpredictable in actions and also in words” (M, adults N). Both adults and youths emphasized how drunk persons might cross borders of personal space in an unwanted ways, and the risk of sexual harassment or assaults was also a core theme: “They could start touching you or talk to you, and kind of get too close. It could even be a rape” (F, youth N). Youths often discussed how they would feel discomfort when they were alone and met groups of older youngsters who had been drinking: “I just get really scared that they will start fooling around and make fun of me, and that is so uncomfortable and embarrassing” (F, youth N). Again, they pointed to how fear could be closely intertwined with the social insecurity of not knowing how to interpret the situation:

F1: You get really scared, and if you are sitting there alone, you feel that they perhaps are looking over to you, and talking about you, like. It is really not comfortable.

F2: Like, they are so many, and they could work each other up and like: ‘Go talk to her, and they could start, like, whistling at you or something’ (youth N)

Some interpretations, in particular in the Finnish groups, were less problem-focused, pointing out how “they only talk and try to make the girl laugh” (F, adults F) or that this could be “just a gang of boys giving attention to a girl” (F, adults F). Others emphasized how the girl would handle this easily, if she was sufficiently socially competent: “If the girl flirts, it makes it different than if she is shy and a nerd who becomes distressed from every gaze” (F, youth F). In these interpretations, the situation where intoxicated young men entered a public subway train seemed to be less problematized, and the girl was framed less as a victim.

Both youths and adults described the scenario presented in the story as familiar. The adults related it to the experiences in their youth and as a situation they feared that their children would experience. Both girls and boys in the youth groups identified with the girl in the story, and many described how they had planned strategies to handle similar situations. While girls’ vulnerability to sexual harassment was often highlighted in the discussions, the boys in the youth groups argued that the situation would be very scary also for them:

M1: I think it is scarier if boys approach us like this. Because then it is, like, they are boys also, and they might beat you up and.

M2: They will be looking for trouble, then.

M1: Yes, definitely. If it is a girl, it could be (that they come after you) because you are pretty or cute,

and they want to talk to you a little, but if it is a boy, they are looking for trouble.’ (youth N)

In Norway, the participants were asked directly how they would evaluate the situation in the story if the drunk persons entering the subway had been young intoxicated women instead of men. Both youths and adults responded that the situation would be unpleasant because the women could be rude or intrusive. However, the aspect of fear was much less prominent: “Girls can also be rude, but they won’t hit you” (F, youth N). Similar to the discussions about the photo of the drunk women in the street, many emphasized that they would see drunk women in this scenario as foolish, but not frightening:

I: What if those drunk young men entering the subway had been women?

M: That would be almost funny, really. It would not be threatening or anything.

F1: If they were girls it would feel more awkward, than scary.

I: You would be embarrassed?

F1: Yes, embarrassed, like, ‘Oh, this is embarrassing’. Or just like, ‘they are daft’. But if they were boys it would be more like ‘Oh no this is scary’ (youth N)

Summing up, the scenario of a young girl exposed to drunk men in a public place was evaluated negatively and as involving risk of her being harmed, and was seen as familiar both among girls and boys. Social discomfort was highlighted as an important negative consequence of being exposed to intoxicated people in public situations, in addition to fear of more serious harm, like sexual harassment or violence. Similar to the discussions about the photo, drunk women were perceived as embarrassing themselves, while drunk men were seen as frightening.

Discussion

Norwegian and Finnish youths and adults often expressed negative attitudes towards situations involving public intoxication and they associated them with transgression, social discomfort, and risk of harm to self and others. However, these evaluations were often nuanced and negotiated and positive evaluations were also common. Public intoxication was seen as acceptable when it happened on special occasions, and transgressive behavior was said to sometimes contribute positively to the dynamics of social situations. Still, most statements of accepting the public intoxication were counterbalanced with accounts reflecting perceived problems related to alcohol use, indicating an ambivalence in the participants’ evaluations.

Both in Norway and in Finland, social norms related to alcohol use have traditionally been restrictive (Lindeman, Karlsson & Österberg, 2013; Rossow & Storsvoll, 2014), and alcohol policies among the strictest in the world (Brand, Saisana, Rynn, Pennoni, & Lowenfels, 2007). Compared to southern European countries, alcohol has been much less integrated into daily life, and rather been used as an intoxicant during weekends and on special occasions (Bye & Rossow, 2010; Mäkelä et al., 2012). This intoxicated-oriented drinking style has been characterized by accepting the transgressive behavior when drunk, including release of bodily control, like burping or passing out (Demant & Törrönen, 2011). In these contrasting restrictive and permissive norms, a long history of ambivalence towards alcohol use in Nordic countries becomes visible.

In recent years, population surveys indicate that there has been an increase in overall consumption, but this is not accompanied by a corresponding increase in the proportion who drink to intoxication (Bye & Østhus, 2011; Tigerstedt, Simonen, & Törrönen, 2010) and instead, drinking seem to have become more a part of everyday life than before (Horverak & Bye, 2007; Mäkelä, Härkönen, Lintonen, Tigerstedt, & Warpenius, 2018). The ambivalence in the participants' ways of talking about public intoxication could reflect an added tension between old and new ways of drinking, where drinking in itself has become more accepted, while drinking to visible intoxication and transgressive drunk behavior is viewed more negatively than before.

The analysis also showed that gendered evaluations of public intoxication seldom were expressed directly, indicating a norm of gender equality. This aligns with other recent studies concluding with a relaxation of gender stereotypes of alcohol use and intoxication in the Nordic countries (Abrahamson, 2012; Demant & Törrönen, 2011; Simonen, 2013). It is also possible that the focus group context gave ground for socially desirable statements, and that statements in favor of gender equality were regarded to be the most socially appropriate response. However, drunk women's behavior and appearance was also frequently criticized and drunk women were typically perceived as silly and as embarrassing themselves and others. Similar to what Kaminer & Dixon (1995) described more than 20 years ago, women's drinking to intoxication was often seen as 'laughable'. These negative evaluations were often linked to age, indicating perhaps that while women's intoxication might have become more

accepted in the Nordic countries, this applies to younger women more than older.

The findings also indicated gendered expectations and expectations of harm to others were closely intertwined in the participants' perceptions of public intoxication. While esthetics and bodily control were important dimensions in limits between acceptable and unacceptable drunkenness for women, men were evaluated based upon how harmful or frightening to others their drunken behavior was considered. This could be related to the traditional intoxicated drinking culture, and could imply that in some contexts men's drunkenness is sanctioned more; as showed in a Norwegian study where women were overserved more often than men, because they, in contrast to intoxicated men, were not expected to cause trouble when drunk (Buvik & Baklien, 2016). However, it also highlights how social norms and sanctions that regulate drunken comportment may function to reduce harm from alcohol use, by preparing the ground for setting limits in social networks and promoting more moderate forms of alcohol consumption.

But judging women for how they look and behave when drunk even if they are not seen as threatening also indicates that the limits of acceptable behavior and self-presentation when drunk still seem to be more narrow for women than for men, also in gender-egalitarian Nordic countries. The findings resembles studies from other countries (Bailey, Griffin, & Shankar, 2015; DeVisser & McDonnell, 2011; MacLean et al., 2018), concluding that while it was not seen as a problem in itself that women were drinking to intoxication, standards for how to behave when intoxicated (including how to dress and how loud to shout) were different for women, and getting it wrong would position them as unattractive and unfeminine.

Finnish and Norwegian participants did not differ markedly in their views, but the analysis indicated that the tolerance towards public intoxication might be somewhat higher in Finland. While comparison between countries was not the main aim in this study, one might speculate that any such difference could reflect the higher level of alcohol consumption, including drinking to intoxication, in Finland than in Norway (Hallberg & Österberg, 2016; Moan et al., 2015). Youths did to some extent express more negative evaluations of the situations. Given that most of them had not yet started drinking themselves, it could be that they related to the situations with more general conceptions of drinking and harms from drinking, picked up from public debate or from school (Scheffels et al., 2016; Simonen et al., 2017). Further,

their talk resonated survey findings of how young people are more vulnerable to harmful from other's drinking (Laslett et al., 2011; Moan et al., 2015, Storvoll et al., 2016). Interestingly, both girls and boys identified with the girl in the story from the train, indicating that age was seen as the prominent cause of vulnerability in that situation, with a (subsidiary) gender effect appearing more in expectations about what type of negative consequences one might expect. Youths seemed also to be more concerned about the age appropriateness of drinking. This could relate to how the situations presented in the stimuli focused mainly on adult drinking, and how they identified with the 'other' exposed to the intoxicated persons.

Conclusions

The findings in this study highlight the diverse and ambivalent ways in which both men's and women's intoxication in public was evaluated within the context of a gender-egalitarian Nordic culture. While a norm of gender equality was expressed clearly, gendered expectations still seemed to be active in both youths' and adults' evaluations of public intoxication, and expectations of alcohol's harm to others seemed intertwined in these. Limits of accepting the public intoxication were to some extent defined in different ways for men and women: intoxicated women were criticized for their appearance and for embarrassing themselves with foolish behavior, while intoxicated men were seen as potentially aggressive and thus as frightening.

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Declaration of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the article

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