



Drinking comfortably? Gender and affect among Danish pre-partiers

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ABSTRACT

Background: The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between youthful drinking practices and gender within the domestic pre-party (prior to a night out), an arena, which has been relatively ignored in existing qualitative research on youthful alcohol use. An examination of the relationships between gender and drinking practices in this context is important for three reasons. First, pre-parties are associated with heavy drinking, which has traditionally been associated with masculinity. Second, because pre-drinking takes place in the private sphere of the home, it is therefore 'controlled' in terms of who can participate and hence what precisely is the gender composition. Third, whilst being located in the private sphere of the home, pre-party practices are nevertheless informed by the (hyper) gendered environments of public drinking spaces in the Night-Time Economy (NTE), most dominantly mainstream clubs and bars. We suggest that such characteristics allow for the emergence of specific gendered relationships, activities and affectivities, thereby demarcating the pre-party as a particular gendered drinking space.

Methods: We draw on narrative data from 140 in-depth face-to-face interviews with young Danish alcohol users between 18–25 years of age. The interviews were part of a large-scale research project on the gendered aspects of youthful alcohol use and intoxication. Theoretically, we draw on a combination of the 'doing gender' paradigm (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and affect theoretical notions on (un)comfortability (Ahmed, 2014). We propose that these perspectives mark out the pre-party as a particularly gendered drinking space.

Results: While our analysis supports the observation of existing qualitative studies, that pre-partying is not merely motivated by the possibility of becoming intoxicated in a cheap and un-surveilled way before going out, we especially argue that pre-partying is fueled by a desire for 'comfortability', which seems almost impossible to disassemble from the gendering that pre-partying also entails. Our analysis therefore contributes to the ongoing academic discussion around the relationship between 'intoxicated femininity' and 'intoxicated masculinity' by suggesting that we need to take the *affective* implications of young people's (gendered) drinking practices into account in a thorough discussion of the relationship between youthful alcohol use and gender.

Introduction

Alcohol use and intoxication have traditionally been associated with masculinity and understood as a display of strength and vitality, whilst restraint and abstinence has been associated with femininity (Hunt & Antin, 2019). As part of this pattern, women's drinking used to be confined to 'the home', hidden from the public gaze due to the status of drinking as provocative and masculine (Eriksen, 2015; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Hussman & Goldstein, 2019). However today, young women are now "active participants in public drinking environments, and like young men, partake in a culture of drinking and intoxication in the pursuit of pleasure, group belonging and friendship bonding" (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019, p.60). While a gender gap continues to exist between

men and women's consumption of alcohol, recent studies suggest that the gap between especially young men and women is diminishing both in Denmark (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2015) and in other industrialized countries (e.g. Hussman & Goldstein, 2019). This pattern reflects a situation in which young people today, across genders, party and consume alcohol as central features of their social activities (Demant & Østergaard, 2007). Nonetheless, researchers continue to demonstrate that alcohol use and related practices are still imbued with gendered double-standards, meanings, 'dos and don'ts', which are both co-constituent of gendered identities and shaped by already existing gender norms (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019; Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013; Herold & Hunt, 2018; Lennox, Emslie, Sweeting, & Lyons, 2018; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Nicholls, 2018;

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Østergaard, 2007). Drinking practices and intoxication are, in other words, highly gendered, and despite the fact that drinking patterns of young women and men are becoming more similar, intoxicated behaviors are still assessed on the basis of gender norms and expectations. This implies that intoxicated young women are particularly vulnerable, in terms of exposure, to public condemnation based, for example, on their looks and appearances, whilst young men are more easily expected to drink, because “*not doing so detracts from their perceived masculinity*” (de Visser & McDonnell, 2012, p.626. See also Bailey, Griffin, & Shankar, 2015; Griffin et al., 2013). In line with other qualitative researchers, who are interested in the possible relationship between gender and alcohol use, the main objective of this article is to explore this relationship, particularly as it emerges in the context of young Danish pre-partiers. Besides being less examined in comparison with other drinking settings (Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2011), we will argue that domestic pre-parties are an important arena for such an investigation for at least three reasons. First, pre-drinking is associated with heavy drinking, which is traditionally (and contemporarily) associated with masculinity. Second, because pre-drinking takes place in the private sphere of the home, it is therefore ‘controlled’ in terms of who can participate and hence what precisely is the gender composition. Third, whilst being located in the private sphere of the home, pre-party practices are nevertheless, at the same time, informed by the (hyper) gendered environments of public drinking spaces in the Night-Time Economy (NTE), most dominantly mainstream clubs and bars. We suggest that such characteristics allow for the emergence of specific gendered relationships, activities and affectivities, thereby demarcating the pre-party as a particularly gendered drinking space.

Pre-parties are, by definition, the first link in a chain of collective drinking events, which has been conceptualized by Dresler and Anderson (2017, p.416) as ‘the alcohol consumption journey’, and which serves as a function for collectively preparing its participants for the more challenging, or risky, environment of the NTE (Barton & Husk, 2014; Fileborn, 2016). Pre-partying, commonly referred to, in the literature, as pre-drinking, pre-gaming or pre-loading, thus takes place before the start of a night out. It is not only popular among Danish youth, but has become an international trend, causing concern among public health professionals due to its association with excessive alcohol consumption (Foster & Ferguson, 2014; McCreanor et al., 2016; Wells, Graham, & Purcell, 2009). As Foster and Ferguson (2014) demonstrate in a recent review, existing studies focus predominantly on pre-partying among US college students, and most often by means of quantitative methodologies. The main objective of this type of research is to study the link between pre-partying and alcohol-related risks and harms such as black outs, recreational drug use, drunk driving, aggression, violence and other forms of victimization (see for example Pedersen, LaBrie, & Kilmer, 2009; Ogeil et al., 2016; O’Rourke, Ferris, & Devaney, 2016). In addition to this, a smaller branch of predominantly qualitative studies demonstrate, that pre-partying plays a central role in young people’s collective drinking, including enactments of gender norms and identities. These latter studies present pre-partying as structured around a variety of preparatory activities, and as related to ‘getting in the mood’ and becoming intoxicated cheaply before entering the licensed venues of the NTE (e.g. Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019; Dresler & Anderson, 2017; Barton & Husk, 2014; McCreanor et al., 2016; Bancroft, 2012; Nicholls, 2018). Furthermore, Barton and Husk (2014) argue that pre-parties are often gender-divided events, which are socially motivated, and which in many cases are marked by more thought and effort than the NTE phase of the evening. Informed by this qualitative body of research, we argue that pre-partying should be approached as a “*culturally embedded practice*” (Barton & Husk, 2014, p.60), and that while reasons for engaging in pre-partying include such issues as the cost of alcohol, they have, at the same time, moved well beyond “*the price factor*” (Barton & Husk, 2014, p.58).

In spite of the decreasing gender gap in young people’s alcohol consumption, ‘the home’ remains a gendered drinking space. For

example, Østergaard (2007) argues, in a survey-based investigation of house partying among young Danes between the ages of 15–16, that no gender gap exists in terms of creating ‘the right atmosphere’ at the party through ‘drinking in tune’ with the other party goers, and that “*alcohol is an equally important symbol for both boys and girls*” (Østergaard, 2007, p.145). However, in terms of what boys and girls do at these parties and how they relate to each other, noticeable differences occur. According to Østergaard, girls, for example, are more engaged in being the ‘hostess’, and are more active in making people feel comfortable, while the activities of boys are more directly related to alcohol consumption. Furthermore, Atkinson and Sumnall (2019), using focus-group data from interviews with young adults between the ages of 16 to 21 in the UK, show that both young men and women found pre-parties important in terms of “*reaching a desired state of intoxication*” (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2019, p.60). However, the social and preparatory activities of the pre-party appeared to be more important for young women in terms of creating and managing heterosexual sociality and femininity in comparison with the young men “*who focused solely on alcohol consumption itself*” (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2019, p.65). Pre-partying, however, is not only gendered, it is also an affective practice. Looking specifically at mono-gendered drinking among young New Zealand women (18–24), Dresler and Anderson (2017) found that alcohol use did not merely constitute a way to enact gender roles in specific ways (i.e. through being the ‘hostess’). It also constitutes a ‘socio-pleasure’ (cf. Tiger, 1992), that is, a pleasure emerging from social bonding through collective intoxication. In addition to this, the young women in their study experienced pre-parties as a particularly safe space for becoming intoxicated, which led the authors to conclude that it “*served a greater purpose in enhancement of mood, creating a bond with a friendship group and setting the tone for the rest of the alcohol consumption journey*” (Dresler & Anderson, 2017, p.417). Similarly, Nicholls (2016, 2018) found that for young women in the UK (18–25), the domestic part of a ‘girls’ night out’ served as an important mono-gendered drinking context allowing for expressions of intoxicated femininity in a way that was different to performing intoxicated femininity within the NTE. In relation to this, it is noteworthy that NTE studies on risks and safety suggest that young alcohol users actively seek to ‘do’ a sense of safety by engaging in particular, and highly gendered, routines such as dressing, walking and talking in specific ways. These routines serve the twofold purpose of ‘doing gender’ in accordance with the gender norms of the NTE, whilst also preventing (sexual) violence and similar risks (Fileborn, 2016). We propose that such routines, or practices, are potentially both being rehearsed, prepared and circumvented at the pre-party.

Thus taken together, existing studies indicate that pre-parties can be described, not only as gendered but also as affective practices associated with sentiments such as comfort, pleasure and safety. It is on this basis that we in our investigation of the relationship between gender and alcohol use pay specific attention to how expressions of affectivity mark young alcohol users’ pre-party accounts. In order to do so, we employ an affect theoretical notion of ‘(un)comfortability’ (Ahmed, 2014) which we utilize together with a performative understanding of gender as ‘doing’ (e.g. West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, we aim to add an affect theoretical lens to the on-going discussion of the relationship between gender and alcohol use/intoxication, and in particular the relationship between ‘intoxicated femininities’ and ‘intoxicated masculinities’. Furthermore, on the basis of findings suggesting that gender compositions may be a relevant factor to consider when exploring the relationship between alcohol use and gender among young people (e.g. Nicholls, 2016; Dresler & Anderson, 2017), we will pay specific attention to this dimension of pre-partying in our analysis.

Methods and data

Our analysis is based on narrative data from 140 qualitative, in-depth, face-to-face interviews with young Danish alcohol users between

18–25 years of age (average age: 21.2). 49 percent identify as female, 49 percent as male, and 2 percent as other. All participants are active alcohol users, and most of them engage in pre-partying regularly. The interviews stem from an on-going large-scale research project on the gendered aspects of youthful alcohol use and intoxication. The large sample size of 140 supported our aim to interview a diverse group of young adults, and thus not only focus on college students or clubbers, who have tended to be the primary populations, especially in the U.S., in existing studies on youthful alcohol use, including pre-party studies (Foster & Ferguson, 2014). In order to fulfill this, our research team used a targeted sampling approach (Bluthenthal & Watters, 1995; Peterson et al., 2008), and recruited participants using a multi-tiered recruitment strategy (online, street-level recruitment and chain referrals). As a result, we interviewed a diverse sample of young people from different social groups, including straight-to-work and unemployed young adults as well as full- and part-time students living in all parts of Denmark.

We completed the interviews between April 2015 and June 2016. They took place at our offices at the University, participants' homes, other educational institutions, or public settings such as library meeting rooms. The interview guide and our participants' willingness to talk at length about their experiences and perspectives on alcohol use contributed to the lengthy nature of the interviews, which generally lasted between two to three hours. We employed a semi-structured interview guide structured around open-ended questions on drinking practices and settings, subjective and bodily experiences of feeling intoxicated, and attitudes towards and perceived consequences of alcohol use. The interviewers were generally concerned with producing knowledge around gender and alcohol use/intoxication, albeit preferably not from posing direct or confronting questions around this issue, as this is more likely to produce gender stereotypical accounts (Højgaard, 2010). As an alternative, we were concerned in the interviews to produce detailed contextualized descriptions of everyday life contexts, experiences, practices and relationships within which our participants used alcohol. As part of this, we were particularly attentive to the ways in which gender operated within these descriptions and to follow-up on such cues (cf. Højgaard, 2010). However, we did also ask a limited number of four interview questions, which focused explicitly on gender attitudes in the latter parts of the interviews in order to secure data, which directly related to gender (Haavind, 2000). All participants received movie theatre gift-cards in appreciation for their participation. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and subject to qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), using the qualitative data-analysis software program Nvivo. The aggregated interview data was subject to two major rounds of coding. First, we organized the data into overall themes brought up in the interviews in intersection with notions of alcohol use, such as health, location, age/development, sexuality/desire and gender issues. Second, based on the first round of coding, we identified all interview accounts around the topic of pre-partying and gender. These were then subjected to further coding, informed by our analytical framework, which we will present in the following section. For the purpose of the current paper, any account across the aggregated sample in which gendered aspects of alcohol use and/or intoxication in pre-party settings was brought up (103 participants out of the total 140 are represented) became subject to further analysis. Importantly, the interview-data from which we identified these accounts are, per definition, discursive constructions of how our participants pre-party. However, following Wetherell and Edley (1999, p.339), we contend that at the same time, self-accounting does have a generality outside the interview context. Thus, while interview-data only allows us to gain insight into how pre-parties are presented and described, we argue that these accounts do mirror, to some extent, our participants' gendered pre-party practices, including their affective implications.

Gendered (un)comfortabilities in pre-party settings: analytical framework

Taking our theoretical point of departure in the notion that gender is both a structuring force and a socially constructed and ambiguous phenomenon (e.g. Lykke, 2010), the main analytical aim of this present article is to explore the gendered aspects of alcohol use and/or intoxication by focusing particularly on domestic pre-partying as a setting in which gender is 'done' (cf. West & Zimmerman, 1987). As part of this, we are particularly concerned with the affective implications of especially mono-gendered pre-party contexts, as most of our participants suggested that they prefer pre-drinking with friends of their own gender category. When analyzing our interview data, we soon became aware that affective expressions, for example related to the sense of 'fitting in' at the pre-party or 'feeling comfortable', were not equally distributed across the interviews. It was particularly noteworthy how this seemed related to how participants were positioned, and how they positioned themselves, vis-à-vis the gendered environment of the pre-party. It is in this regard relevant to consider that differences exist in socio-cultural expectations for what is 'appropriate' (intoxicated) behavior for young men and women. Thus, when existing research suggest that (young) people 'do' gender through alcohol use, intoxicated behavior and related practices (e.g. de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Lyons, 2009; Fileborn, 2016), these performances are both delimited and made possible by existing norms and understandings of gender. For example, intoxicated behavior, which is left un-noticed, ascribed as 'normal', or perhaps even praised when enacted by bodies that are read as masculine, is more likely to be seen as 'irresponsible', or even as 'disgusting', when enacted by bodies that are read as feminine (e.g. Bailey et al., 2015). However, as noted by West and Zimmerman (1987, p.136): "*to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior at the risk of gender assessment*". This performative take on gender implies that masculinities and femininities are seen as constituted through iterative practices, behaviors and interactions that people repeatedly play out in their everyday lives, including pre-partying and alcohol use. These practices are continuously being assessed and (re)produced within a binary frame of reference, which entails that a given gender expression is considered to be *either* feminine *or* masculine (cf. Butler, 1993). Being assessed vis-à-vis such normative notions of gender means that some gender expressions become more dominant and powerful than others. The notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) captures this gendered hierarchy in posing that certain forms of masculinity subordinate and marginalize not only femininity, but also alternative masculinities through hetero-centric discourses on desire, difference and complementarity. Thus, even though hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily accomplished, it nonetheless plays a significant role in terms of how masculinity is embodied, and in terms of the dominant position of masculinity in contexts of alcohol use (Lyons, 2009). Following on from this, some (intoxicated) gender enactments are arguably more likely than others to be assessed as 'natural' or positive, and subsequently more likely to be experienced as comfortable or associated with sentiments such as playfulness.

Theoretical and analytical interests in affectivity and related concepts are currently gaining ground in research on alcohol and other drugs. Researchers have, for example, become interested in how pleasure and safety shape people's party practices and intoxicated subjectivities (e.g. Böhling, 2015, 2017; Wilkinson, 2017; Pedersen, Tutenges, & Sandberg, 2017; Farrugia, 2015). Drawing theoretical influence from developments within assemblage theory, actor-network theory and science and technology studies, 'affect' is, within these studies, conceptualized as a more-than-human phenomenon; i.e. a "*force of intensive relationality – intensities that are felt but not personal; visceral but not confined to an individual body*" (Whatmore, 2006, p.604). Thus, in amplifying the implications of affect for the formation of subjectivities, this perspective stands in contrast to the popular

conceptualization of emotions or feelings as something that reside and emerge strictly within either individuals or within the social realm. Thus, in ways similar to gender, emotions are seen as performative and relational, emerging through repeated socio-cultural practices (e.g. AOD use), in interplays between people, and between people and environments. Similarly, from Ahmed's (2006, 2014) Ahmed, 2006 Ahmed's (2006, 2014) queer phenomenological perspective, which we also draw on here, affect - or to use Ahmed's vocabulary: 'emotion' - is seen neither as internal nor external to the subject (i.e. the pre-party participant). This means that emotions 'happen' between partygoers and the socio-material environment of the party. As such, emotions emerge relationally between different actors at a pre-party, and at the same time, young pre-partiers 'take them in', experience them, are formed by them, and bring them to new encounters, situations and relationships, for example, in the nightlife.

Despite that gender plays a central role in young people's AOD use, gender often plays a minor (if any) role in existing AOD studies on affect (for exceptions, see Hutton, Wright, & Saunders, 2013; Held, 2015; Fileborn, 2016; Poulsen, 2015). Yet in this article, we argue that adding an affect theoretical lens to the study of gender and alcohol use offers a promising perspective, in particular in relation to the still hierarchical relationship between intoxicated behaviors of young men and women. Ahmed's (2014, pp.144) metaphor of 'the comfortable chair' seems particularly useful in this regard. In Ahmed's work, the analogy of 'the chair' represents the concrete meeting between subjects and environments in which affectivity emerges. Whether or not 'comfortability' emerges from this meeting depends on the extent to which specific (gendered) bodies are able to 'match' the environment they seek to inhabit. In this sense 'comfortability' can be seen as a bodily sensation (cf. Bissell, 2008), which is produced in intersections between specific (intoxicated, gendered) bodies and specific (intoxicated, gendered) environments such as, for example, the pre-party or the NTE. The characteristics of 'the chair', then, come to affect whether bodies feel at ease, accepted, at home - and thus comfortable in it. Un-comfortability, on the other hand - i.e. sensations of situational disorientation, of feeling alienated, uneasy and overly self-aware - arise when 'chairs' and bodies do not match. It is a sensation that arises situationally, and we might not even notice that we are comfortable before the possibility of becoming uncomfortable emerges. Until this happens, the body 'sinks' unnoticed into the chair (Ahmed, 2014). Feeling comfortable, in this sense, is a privileged "ability to be so at ease within one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins" (2014, p.148), and one which emerges in contexts that allow people to "relax, feel at ease with themselves, and let down their guard" (Call & Mortimer, 2001, p.120). Similarly, as noted by Holliday (1999, p.489), being comfortable "implies a lack of necessity to worry about the world or one's position in it". Specifically, in relation to alcohol use, it is arguably when this happens - when bodies align with the environment they are in and comfortability emerges - that playfulness and untroubled intoxicated subjectivities are enabled.

Analysis

The analysis is structured into three sections. In the first section, we describe briefly what pre-partying entails for the participants in our study. The following two sections focus specifically on pre-partying in mono-gendered settings. Thus, in the second section, we focus on female-identified participants' mono-gendered pre-parties in which 'dressing up collectively' stands out as a central activity. Then, in the third section, we go on to focus on male-identified participants' pre-parties, in which practices such as tumbling around, 'dirty-talk', and competing stand out. While these mono-gendered practices are in many ways different, they also have a number of things in common: 1) They are disturbed by the presence of young people, who do not identify with the dominant gender category at the pre-party. 2) They serve preparatory and transformative purposes in terms of pre-partiers'

subsequent NTE participation. 3) They are sites for gender performativity in which 'the body' plays a significant role, and are closely related to notions of femininity and masculinity, respectively. The overall purpose of the two latter sections, which together form the main part of the analysis, is to show analytically how the identified preparatory, mono-gendered pre-party practices play out, how they relate to gender and are associated with (un)comfortability among young pre-partiers.

'Getting ready!' Transformations of bodies and subjectivities at mono-gendered pre-parties

Drinking alcohol together in pre-party settings is one way to obtain what Dresler and Anderson (2017, pp.420) have conceptualized as 'socio-pleasure', and which, from an affect theoretical perspective, involves a "transformation of [AOD] using subjects' capacities to think, feel, act and be in the world" (Bøhling, 2017, p.133). Our participants for example mention becoming "more loose, confident, chatty" (Mogens, M, 23 y/o), "uninhibited" (Charlie, M, 20 y/o), "in a crazy good mood" (Karoline, F, 18 y/o), "outgoing, courageous and self-confident" (Camilla, F, 19 y/o) when affected by alcohol in the company of other young people. Not surprisingly, alcohol use and intoxication are central aspects of pre-partying. However, our data also suggest that not only drinking alcohol, but also other central pre-party activities such as dressing up collectively, competing with each other in different ways, eating together, listening or dancing to music, provide a scaffold for young pre-partiers' transformative processes of getting in the 'right' mood and obtaining the 'right' bodily expressions for their subsequent participation in the NTE. Important in this regard, our study participants overall describe pre-parties as highly gender-divided events (cf. Barton & Husk, 2014), which means that transformative processes such as those mentioned above often play out in mono-gendered settings. For example, Ninna (F, 21 y/o) notes that "if we were both girls and boys together, it wouldn't really be a pre-party, but just a regular private party".¹ In line with Ninna's statement, our female-identified participants in most cases prefer to pre-party with their "girlfriends", while male-identified participants usually pre-party with "the boys". Pre-parties are thus in many cases marked by mono-gendered sociality; ways of being together, that can be easily disturbed or altered by the participation of young people, who are not identified as belonging to the dominant gender category. While pre-parties are mainly described as gender-divided events in our data, mentioning of pre-parties where both female- and male-identified young people participate do also occur. Yet even in these cases, interaction across gender categories, for example in the form of talking, dancing, flirting, or scoring, is associated with other drinking sites such as private parties or the NTE (cf. Pedersen et al., 2017; Jensen, Herold, Frank, & Hunt, 2019). Thus, also when female- and male-identified young people pre-party in the same setting, pre-parties are often described as gender-segregated events. Karl-Johan (M, 18 y/o) for example explains that:

"...the girls sit in the sofa and drink strawberry daiquiri or something like that, while the gentlemen place themselves in another couch or around the dining table and drink something else [...]. The girls talk about one thing, and the guys about something else, so we just split up automatically [...] even though we are actually in the same room".

Karl-Johan's account thus exemplifies that gender is a visible structuring force in many pre-party events. In spite of this, however, pre-parties across genders do also share a number of characteristics. In this regard, our data suggest that it is not un-common to meet up during the afternoon to play games, talk and eat dinner together, as exemplified by Hildur (F, 21 y/o) and Børge (M, 18 y/o) below:

¹ As opposed to pre-parties, private parties are not organized with an explicit intention of subsequent NTE participation.

Hildur: We [girlfriends] often eat dinner together.

Interviewer: Do you cook together, or?

Hildur: Yes, or else we fetch some take-away, depending on how much energy we have and what everyone's been up to during the day. But I really like cooking together [...]. At this point, we are not necessarily drunk yet. So, we make an effort with the food, spend a lot of time eating, and clean the table. Then, we start to drink, - but first, we have had time to look each other in the eyes. I really like that."

Cooking, eating, drinking, talking and catching up, as described by Hildur, enables the young women to 'tune in' on each other – to "look each other in the eyes" – before the event turns into a fully developed pre-party where drinking alcohol becomes more central, together with other elements such as music and games. Børge (M, 18 y/o) shares a similar account of how he prefers to pre-party with "the boys":

"I prefer [pre-parties] that are quite intimate. We listen to music and cook dinner, usually something easy, because it's a boy-thing [...]. Sometimes we get drunk while we play computer. We turn it into a competition, some sort of drinking-game".

Activities such as cooking together, drinking, talking and playing different kinds of games are in other words not associated strictly with either femininity or masculinity, but are characteristic of pre-parties across genders, albeit sometimes in variable ways (the young women for example seldom bring up computers).

However, other pre-party practices stand out as more explicitly gendered, in particular activities in which the body plays a central role, either in talk, in dressing up together or in otherwise interacting corporally with friends. We will in the following sections pay specific attention to such preparatory practices, and show how they relate to notions of gendered (un)comfortability.

'Dressing up' collectively and emergences of gendered (un)comfortabilities

Liv (F, 19 y/o) provides one of many descriptions in our data of how dressing up collectively plays out, and not least how important this is for female-identified young women when they pre-party:

"There's a lot going on, actually. We turn up the music, and then we start to figure out what to wear. Try on twenty different items, and observe each other, and like 'no no, you have to wear something else' [...]. Then we start on hair and make-up, and it's all really nice. And we help each other with the hair and everything, and then 'cheers' once in a while. Get something to drink and singalong to the music. We really enjoy dressing up nicely together [...], a bunch of girls do each other's brows and hair, while we get something to drink [...]. There's so much to do, really, and it's an important part of how we are together [...]. And then it's like 'ok, we look really good now, we've had a lot to drink and spend some quality-time together, now we are ready to go out".

As described by Liv, dressing up collectively is a reciprocal endeavor, which revolves around the young women's bodily transformations and accomplishments of the 'right' look and mood as preparation for going out together. Another young woman, Michelle (F, 19 y/o) shares a similar description, elaborating more explicitly on the preparatory aspect of accomplishing the 'right' look for the NTE:

"Michelle: ...we did some shopping, and went to her place where we dressed up together and got started. I had packed some clothes beforehand, and then we changed outfits, did our hair and make-up. [...]. It's super nice doing it together with my girlfriends, and like 'should I wear this or that', 'how should I do my hair' and such. [...].

Interviewer: So, how would you describe the look that you aim for?

Michelle: We don't want to look totally cheap, but we don't want to hide too much skin either. Don't show too much, don't show too little. It's a good mixture, really. To me, when I go out, I want to leave a little bit for the boys' imagination".

Engaging in bodily transformations through collectively dressing up often takes up a good part of the pre-party, and often involves alcohol use, but not necessarily getting drunk. As Esther (F, 22 y/o) puts it, it is a pivotal "*part of going out instead of just meeting up out there [NTE]. It's a joint project, something we always do together, get in the mood, and then we go to [*club*]*". Dressing up with girlfriends is, in other words, crucial in terms of getting ready to 'match' the atmosphere and gendered environment of the NTE. In the experience of these young women, this is marked by an imperative to "walk the line" (Denise, F, 24 y/o), not being seen as boring, under-dressed or invisible, and not being assessed as too "wild or willing" (Denise, F, 24 y/o), and thus "to leave a little bit for the boys' imagination", as Michelle puts it in the quote.

While dressing up together is often constituted as fun and joyful in the interviews, quotes such as these arguably show that by dressing up together, female-identified pre-partiers engage in processes of achieving 'well-balanced femininities' which conform to societal gender norms. In order to 'sit comfortable' and have fun at the pre-party and beyond, in other words, they need not to compromise these norms by, for example, (accidentally) becoming 'too drunk' or 'too wild'. Yet, this does not mean that they do not drink alcohol at the pre-party or are sober when they enter the NTE. Importantly, as we emphasized in the first analytical section, and as noted in other studies (e.g. Dresler & Anderson, 2017), alcohol use plays an important role in young women's pre-parties by enabling 'socio-pleasure', intimacy, and marking the event as a pre-party (and not just any other event). However, specifically in relation to dressing up, alcohol use is portrayed more as an 'accessory', and less as a central component. In other words, becoming intoxicated must not compromise their endeavor of performing 'acceptable' femininity through looks and appearance.

Katrine (F, 19 y/o) argues, that for her, accomplishing the 'right' look is closely tied to gaining "*acknowledgement and self-confidence*", and thus being recognized for her looks when she goes out. It is therefore immensely important for her, to not only 'match', but also preferably impress, the NTE environment that she seeks to inhabit, which makes the process of dressing up collectively crucial for her. Similarly, for Henriette (F, 19 y/o), engaging in dressing up collectively prevents experiences of unpleasant gender assessments and thus enables a sense of comfortability, here also in the form of feeling self-confident:

"When my girlfriend did my make-up, I felt more self-confident, because I don't do much make-up myself, and I never really cared that much about it. But if I'm dressed up and wearing some nice make-up, then I feel more confident. Sometimes I don't feel comfortable at all, and my clothes are not right..."

Henriette describes herself as relatively inexperienced when it comes to dressing up and accomplishing the 'right' look. In relation to her girlfriends, this makes her extra vulnerable in terms of not being able to 'match' the gender norms that forms the activity – of 'not getting it right'. Hence, she can arguably be seen as sitting at the *edge* of the comfortable chair, however, by engaging in the process of dressing up together with her girlfriends, she gains access to a more comfortable position at the party. In order to obtain a comfortable position, it is, in other words, important to be able to use each other not only for practical help (e.g. putting on make-up), but also good advice, and for mirroring and assessing one's choices. Thus, accomplishing acceptable femininity, and in turn sentiments such as self-confidence, is supported and enabled by girlfriends, who seek to embody similar forms of femininities.

Dressing up collectively is clearly guided by how young female-identified pre-partiers expect to be met and evaluated once they enter the NTE, but it also implies some degree, not only of support, but also of

policing by fellow female-identified pre-partiers who mirror, rather than challenge, the gender norms of the NTE. Among others, Denise (F, 24 y/o) touches upon this latter aspect, stating that, “*we are girlfriends, but we still assess each other. Like ‘wow, she is wearing too little clothes’ and such... So we tend to observe each other, and dress in line with the others, I guess*”. Lina (F, 22 y/o) shares a similar account:

“So, can I wear this or should I wear something else, and how do you think this looks? We are very much in it together. And, when I have decided what I want to wear, she finds something similar. If I wear a skirt, she would want to wear one, too. I often prefer wearing similar outfits to my girlfriends [...]. I think it’s because we don’t want to look too different. Like ‘you were really complimented for your skirt last time we went out’. I want that too.”

As we have seen so far, many young women, in fact the vast majority, express that they enjoy dressing up collectively due to the “*intimacy*”, “*fun*”, “*togetherness*”, “*hygge*”², “*confidence*” emerging from this practice. Yet at the same time, dressing up together is presented as a collective response to the gendered expectations that female-identified pre-partiers associate with partying and intoxication in mix-gendered public realms such as the NTE, and of which they are highly aware. These expectations arguably affect not only their participation in the NTE, but also how they pre-party in domestic settings prior to going out. Sentiments of comfortability emerging from collectively dressing up, in other words, interweave with many of these young women’s fears of being excluded or devalued on the basis of their appearance, as well as with their ‘desire to be desired’ and gaining acknowledgement both “*out there*” and in their friendship groups. With reference to accounts such as Henriette’s, Lina’s, and Denise’s, dressing up collectively does thus not merely foster sentiments related to feeling good, at ease or in other ways comfortable. It is also an important strategy to accommodate to the felt imperative of transforming their female-identified bodies in accordance with a carefully balanced notion of femininity (cf. Nicholls, 2012; Bailey et al., 2015). This is enabled by co-dressing girlfriends, as well as by an intersecting anticipated male ‘gaze’ (Brace-Govan & Ferguson, 2019), which the young women are actively preparing to be subjected to later in the evening. In this sense, dressing up together is not only linked to comfortability, but also to assessments and policing of embodied gender performativity, both in mixed-gender contexts such as the NTE and in the group of pre-partying girlfriends.

Not surprisingly, not all female-identified pre-partiers are comfortable with this premise. For example, Heidi (F, 20 y/o) notes that “*it [dressing up together] is not really my thing, I just need a shower*” but also that “*sometimes the others put pressure on me to use mascara, and maybe I will...*” Jenny (F, 19 y/o) similarly states that she is not always comfortable with the requirements she experiences around her body and appearance. This is something she explicitly relates to being identified as a young woman, who is expected to dress up in certain ways:

“There is this idea or pressure that you have to be a lady, or a girl, feminine and stuff. But sometimes, it’s just more fun to do things that are tied to masculinity, I think. [...]. To wear something more practical instead of dressing up, I think, is really nice. I mean, I like dressing up once in a while, but I prefer sneakers and some comfortable pants over a tight dress and high-heels when I go out”

Thus, some female-identified participants clearly aspire to alternative gender positions and embodied relationships, and do not readily accept the premises of dressing up collectively. However, for example Jenny is very well aware that this privilege does not apply, in the same

way, to her as it does to her male-identified peers. Returning to Ahmed’s (2014) notion of the comfortable chair, it is, in other words, evident that some female-identified bodies desire to ‘match’ the gender norms of the NTE more than others, who distance themselves from accomplishing comfortability on the gendered premises of mainstream pre-partying. Tanja (F, 24 y/o) for example stresses that she is “*not really able to submit to norms, which I don’t think are cool*”, while Mette (F, 23 y/o) states that she “*really likes to dress up before going out, like to show off that I’m good looking*”. Dressing up together, then arguably enables a sense of comfortability only for those who (at least situationally) enjoy or, at a minimum, accept this premise. Importantly, though, even for young women, who do readily engage in this practice, emergences of comfortability appear to be relatively complex, and intersecting with other sentiments such as fears of negative gender assessments of alternative ways of performing femininity and a felt pressure to conform. Furthermore, it involves great levels of peer-assessment and self-awareness of ones’ body, which on the one hand becomes a strategy to ensure comfortability, whilst at the same time being a defining aspect of becoming uncomfortable (cf. Ahmed, 2014). Thus taken together, pursuing or accomplishing pre-party femininity through dressing up collectively stands out as a highly affective and double-edged endeavor, in which emergences of comfortability are difficult to separate from emergences of uncomfortable.

Competing, ‘dirty talk’ and emergences of gendered (un)comfortabilities

As shown above, besides being associated with various sentiments related to comfortability, dressing up together can be a difficult practice to avoid for female-identified pre-partiers. However, this is different for our male-identified participants. In fact, across the interviews, no examples exist of young men who engage in this practice. In chorus with many other male-identified participants, Soham (M, 21 y/o) for example states:

“The friends I have don’t really care about how they look when we go out. I don’t want to look ugly, of course, I just wanna look ordinary, really. In fact, I’ve never worn anything special for a night out. Just wanna feel comfortable and good about what I wear. I need to be able to move in it instead of feeling trapped [in a suit]. The most important thing is to feel comfortable, and then you’ll automatically look good, too.”

In terms of appearance, then, Soham does not need to pay much attention to his looks, besides feeling “*comfortable and good*” which for him emerge from being able to move around freely and have fun. Reflecting this stance, in terms of accomplishing ‘socio-pleasure’ (cf. Dresler & Anderson, 2017), our male-identified pre-partiers are generally more preoccupied with having ‘friendly fights’, ‘tumbling’, ‘dirty-talk’ and competing in various ways, than with looks, bodily transformations and dressing up together. This, for example, includes taking off their shirts and “*bonk into each other [...]* and *jump up in the air to the music chest against chest*” (Per, M, 21 y/o), “*naked-runs*” (Adrian, M, 21 y/o), and “*shirtless wrestling*” (Tim, M, 25 y/o). Below, Viggo (M, 23 y/o) provides an example of what he refers to as “*fun-fighting*”, which he presents as a fun, competitive, and ‘boyish’ form of pre-party interaction:

“Interviewer: What do you do together, then, when it’s just with the boys?”

Viggo: Well, mostly more physical things like tumbling around. Boys’ stuff.

Interviewer: Tumbling... what’s that?

Viggo: Arh (laughter) for fun, you know, fight a little bit with each other, stuff like that. There’s always a hierarchical thing going on among us boys. We always have to see who’s... you know, I mean it’s always just for fun, nobody ever gets hurt [...] We just roll

²‘Hygge’ is a Danish term for a particular way of ‘feeling good’, often in the company of friends. No exact English translation of ‘hygge’ exists, however, the term does now appear in the Oxford English Dictionary where it is regarded as a defining characteristic of Danish culture. It is an oft-used term throughout our interview data.

around on the floor, and fight with each other.”

To play around and have fun in ways such as described by Viggo and the others is arguably one way to accomplish pre-party masculinity vis-à-vis male-identified friends. As opposed to dressing up collectively, this form of playfulness is not in the same way fueled by an anticipated ‘gaze’ from ‘the other’ gender. In fact, it is commonly stated that when it comes to different forms of competing, this is about “*getting credit*” (David, M, 25 y/o) or status within the group of male-identified peers, where young women’s assessments are largely irrelevant. The fun and playfulness that emerge from these practices are, however, easily disturbed by the presence of female-identified peers, and thus dependent on a “*specific [all-male] atmosphere*” which allows for “*a strong sense of community*” (Geo, M, 18 y/o), “*feeling at home together and just being yourself*” (Kharim, M, 23 y/o). Tor (M, 21 y/o), for example, describes his preference for mono-gendered pre-parties as follows:

“To me, it becomes a bit more superficial when genders are mixed. Things you’re not allowed to say, things you can’t do. When it’s just the boys, it’s more free, easy, casual, [...] and that’s what I prefer”

In our data, characteristics such as those mentioned above are primarily linked with a ‘masculine’ pre-party style, which is overall positively evaluated, and associated with comfortability that allow for “*fun*”, “*play*”, “*humor*”, and “*fooling around*” to emerge.

The “*free, easy, casual*” (Tor, M, 21 y/o) pre-party atmosphere furthermore entails the possibility of engaging in what is, for example, referred to in our data as “*talking dirty*”, “*guy-talk*”, “*pussy-talk*” or just being “*rowdy*.” Together, such notions refer to pre-party conversations, which are described as “*straight-forward talk*” primarily about female bodies, specific young women, sex or the desire to score. Viggo (M, 23 y/o) shares a rather hesitant example of this during his interview:

“Viggo: ...with the boys, we talk differently than when girls are present. We are aware that things might easier offend them... How we talk, calling each other names and stuff, who you’ve been with [sexually]. We just don’t talk about it in the same ways when girls are present. I don’t think they mind us talking about it per se, it’s more how we do it. Not as rowdy [...] Boys’ talk and girls’ talk are just very dissimilar [...]

I: Can you give an example of how you guys talk?

Viggo: Eeeerh, we don’t say this around girls, but for example ‘big cunts’.

I: Referring to particular girls, or?

Viggo: Yeah... or at least a part of a girl... Let’s just leave it at that.”

It is commonly expressed among our male-identified participants, that while this way of talking about women and bodies is in many cases thought of as an important pre-party element, the intention is not to upset or harm young women. In chorus with other male-identified participants, Kharim (M, 23 y/o) for example explains that he and his friends would not deliberately behave in ways that would make young women uncomfortable; however being able to engage in “*dirty-talk*” is still a central part of how they pre-party. ‘Talking dirty’ does not relate to bodily transformations of male-identified bodies such as ‘dressing up together’ as in the case of young women. Yet, in some cases, it stands out as a way for male-identified pre-partiers to prepare themselves collectively for their subsequent participation in mixed-gender settings such as the NTE, by transforming their subjectivities (mood) to match their anticipations of what is expected from them when they enter these settings. For example Tim (M, 25 y/o) suggests that it serves a purpose of ‘building up’ for their participation in mixed-gender sites for alcohol use, such as the mainstream NTE. Using the notion of “*pep-talk*”, he explains how this way of talking, in connection with a certain level of intoxication, affects his courage to engage with young women later in the evening:

“We [‘the boys’] have often discussed if we should invite some girls over, but we always agree not to, which is kind of strange, because the overall theme of the night is ‘to score ladies’ [...]. We need to be alone so that we can talk about these things in private, fantasize about how cool we are when we get out there [the NTE]. Then the reality might prove to be different. But we need that ‘pep-talk’ first, and it’s not possible with girls around, [...] so we start out in separate [gender] groups and breakdown the shyness before we meet-up in town, or where ever”

As such, and despite that looks and appearance are not a significant theme among male-identified participants, not only female- but also male-identified participants are arguably aware of what is expected from them (and what they expect from themselves) in mixed-gender settings such as in the NTE. More specifically, this means that young men are (still) expected to be ‘active pursuers of sex’ in these settings, which generally favor heterosexual encounters (e.g. Fjær, Pedersen, & Sandberg, 2015; Jensen et al., 2019). Krister (M, 19 y/o), for example, notes that “*we don’t just talk about ‘who scored who’, but more like ‘so, you should just go over and ‘do her’ tonight*”, and Nicholas (M, 18 y/o) notes that when girls are around, they have to behave more nicely, and that it is “*more fun when it’s just the boys. Like ‘go get yourself some pussy’, and things like that*”. Kresten (M, 21 y/o) similarly notes that “*if we are going to a club, then it’s like ‘we’re gonna get us some pussy tonight’ when we pre-party*”. In addition to this, other participants, such as Hans (M, 18 y/o), notes that he and his friends sometimes challenge each other to “*go and score her*”. While it is also noted in our data that this very common way of talking is “*just jargon*” or a way to “*have fun*”, we argue that it may at the same time constitute a preparatory practice in relation to ‘the girl hunt’, defined by Grazian (2007) as a collective, homo-social way of performing masculinity, which is characteristic of the nightlife environment.

Importantly, however, not all of our male-identified participants are comfortable with (or need) what Mick (M, 25 y/o), for example, refers to as “*hetero-boy-groups who need to show everyone how hetero-masculine they are, and it really annoys me*”. This includes not only ‘dirty-talk’, but also other forms of physical, competitive behavior such as tumbling around and competitive drinking. Thus overall, while being associated with sentiments such as “*fun*”, “*play*” and “*feeling at ease*”, pressures to compete in different ways, feelings of un-comfortability, that potentially emerges from this, are also brought up in the interviews. In some cases, this is described as a felt un-comfortability, which is not necessarily constant, whereas for others, engaging in what Mick refers to as “*hetero-boy*” sociality is generally undesirable. Again for others, for example Oscar (M, 19 y/o), highlights the fact that the “*macho atmosphere*,” which in his experience often dominates pre-parties, easily leads to a “*distanced attitude towards personal issues*” and that such issues are therefore seldom in focus in these gatherings.

Discussion

A growing interest in drinking practices and their implications for friendship, gender and identity formations among young alcohol users currently exists (e.g. Dempster, 2011; MacLean, 2016; Nicholls, 2018). Part of this literature focus on pre-partying, which form a widespread way of drinking alcohol for young people across genders before going out, to the nightlife or to other mixed-gender drinking sites (e.g. Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019; Dresler & Anderson, 2017; Barton & Husk, 2014; Bancroft, 2012). Overall, our analysis supports the observation of these studies, that pre-partying is not merely fueled by possibilities of becoming intoxicated in a cheap and un-surveilled way before going out. We argue that it is also fueled by a desire for comfortability – for a fun, joyful, intimate, easy-going atmosphere, which seems almost impossible to disassemble from the gendering that pre-partying also entails. Drawing on Ahmed’s (2014)’s affect theoretical notion of ‘the comfortable chair’, we have aimed to show in our analysis how such

affective sentiments emerge in different ways and on differently gendered premises across mono-gendered pre-party settings. On this basis, we show that pre-parties form important sites for processes of both reinforcements, maintenance and attempted negotiations of the gender hierarchy and gendered drinking practices that mark present (and past) drinking cultures (e.g. Eriksen, 2015; Bailey et al., 2015).

While participation in public drinking sites such as the nightlife is no longer solely the purview of men (e.g. Hutton et al., 2013; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019; Nicholls, 2018), and while the gender gap between young men and women's alcohol consumption is currently decreasing (e.g. Hussman & Goldstein, 2019), the drinking practices of young people are still highly gendered. As Hutton et al. (2013, p.452) notes, for young women, "*this 'new' order is not divorced from older, conservative discourses of femininity with implications for how young women 'should' behave*". According to our analysis, nor is it divorced from how they should look, appear and transform their bodies prior to entering the NTE or other mixed-gender drinking sites (see also Bailey et al., 2015; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016). In fact, traditional – and in some cases even gender-stereotypical – norms and practices still largely seem to influence how young pre-partiers interact and drink alcohol together. Furthermore, as our analysis suggests, the affective implications and gendered premises of these relationships vary across different gendered pre-party compositions. These are relevant observations to consider in any discussion of the (still) hierarchical relationship between 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in relation to practices around alcohol use and intoxicated bodies (cf. Lyons, 2009; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012).

Associated with sentiments of comfortability such as 'hygge', 'enjoyment' and 'togetherness', preparatory practices of dressing up collectively form a central site for alcohol use among our female-identified participants. At the same time, however, we have argued that these practices emerge as a joint response to an individually felt, yet shared pressure, to carefully balance their bodily appearance before going out. As such, female-identified pre-partiers are easily "*drawn into a relationship with their body [which is] principally founded upon physical appearance*" (Brace-Govan & Ferguson, 2019, p.69), and which then becomes the premise on which sentiments of comfortability emerge. While processes of bodily transformation are in fact associated with comfortability and intimacy with girlfriends before going out, these processes interweave, at the same time, with fears of devaluation, high levels of self-awareness and thorough assessments of both one's own and others' bodily appearances. Thus taken together, the affective implications of the central, and highly gendered, pre-party practice of 'dressing up collectively' stand out as highly complex.

Turning to our male-identified participants, pre-party practices associated with masculinity such as tumbling around and competing in different ways do not center, in the same way, on bodily transformations, yet the body does play a central part here as well. However, in contrast to 'dressing up', these practices appear as less defined by subsequent participation in the NTE, and more directly associated with collective 'intoxicated playfulness', without needing to "*worry about the world or one's position in it*" (Holliday, 1999, p.489) – at least not outside the male peer group. At first sight, this resonates with existing findings indicating that while young people across genders drink alcohol and find alcohol important on a symbolic level, drinking tends to play a more central role among young men, while young women are more pre-occupied with performing hetero-femininity and engaging in hetero-sociality (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019; Østergaard, 2007). However, while alcohol use does appear to play a different role among female-identified pre-partiers, accomplishments of particularly hetero-masculinity and engagement in hetero-sociality do appear important for our male-identified participants, for example through different forms of competitive corporeal interactions and what we have referred to as 'dirty-talk' in the analysis. Furthermore, tumbling around and competing playfully with each other can be associated with notions of 'playful drinking' among young men, defined by 'play' with social and bodily styles (Demant & Törrönen, 2011). While it may be possible to

argue that 'dressing up together' can also be seen as a 'play with bodily styles', the playfulness that emerges from this practice, is however affectively confined by a desire to 'fit in' as well as fears of devaluation, and thus does not in the same way stand out as carefree and comfortable (cf. Ahmed, 2014; Holliday, 1999).

Thus, while 'the body' plays a significant role across mono-gendered pre-party settings, how bodies are put into play, on what premises, and the affectivity that emerges from this, arguably varies vis-à-vis gender. In relation to this, the notion of 'the gaze' (Brace-Govan & Ferguson, 2019) becomes relevant, as it characterizes how gendered embodiment is assessed (cf. West & Zimmerman, 1987). As we have aimed to show in our analysis, the (hetero) 'male gaze' plays a noticeable role both in pre-parties dominated by female- and by male-identified young people. In both settings, this is, in other words, a significant and anticipated source of recognition and acknowledgment, but also potentially one of devaluation. In contrast, the power of the 'female gaze' appears to be delineated to pre-parties where everyone is female-identified, and supposedly also to some extent to mixed-gender settings. Moreover, mainstream NTEs (which is in many cases what pre-partiers are preparing for) form a context which easily becomes problematic, particularly for young women, due to its' hetero-sexualized atmosphere (e.g. Boyd, 2010; Grazian, 2007; Tan, 2013), the 'public condemnation' of intoxicated young women (e.g. Griffin et al., 2013; Bailey et al., 2015), and concerns around safety (e.g. Fileborn, 2016; Brooks, 2011). In this light, it is no surprise, that going out requires thorough preparation, not just in terms of reaching a 'desired state of intoxication' or 'the right mood', but also in terms of dressing and appearing in ways which might be seen as preventing possible harms such as unwanted sexual attention or even violence (cf. Fileborn, 2016). Arguably, the notion of 'the girl hunt' and the sexualized (albeit not necessarily harmfully intended) nature of 'dirty talk', which in our data is prominent among male-identified pre-partiers supports this latter interpretation. Thus, in addition to being constructed as a fun, comfortable and joyful site for gender performativity, female-identified pre-partiers careful attention to 'dressing up collectively' might also be linked to their awareness of being seen as 'prey' in the context of the NTE. From this perspective, performing well-balanced (intoxicated) femininity can be seen as a way of avoiding unwanted attention, but also of avoiding being described in derogatory ways, e.g. as having a 'big cunt' (Viggo).

With this in mind, it is not surprising that existing qualitative research emphasize that pre-partying seem particularly important for young women (e.g. Bancroft, 2012; Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019). Yet, our analysis indicates that domestic pre-party settings are not just important in terms of performances of femininity, as suggested by, for example, Atkinson and Sumnall (2019), but male-identified pre-partiers also engage in different forms of gender performativity. Some of this relates strictly to the pre-party setting and desires to have fun in this mono-gendered context of male-identified peers, and some arguably relates to their subsequent participation as potential 'girl hunters' (cf. Grazian, 2007) in the NTE. Thus, in our data, gender is performed at great lengths, both corporally and discursively, across mono-gendered pre-party settings as preparations for venturing into (hetero-normative) mixed-gender settings such as the mainstream NTE (cf. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Across these contexts, the hegemonic status of the 'male gaze' prevails, arguably privileging the hetero-oriented male body in terms of accomplishing comfortability. At the same time, however, it is being tentatively challenged and negotiated by young pre-partiers in this study, who aspire towards alternative gender positions, possibilities of interacting with friends in the context of alcohol use, and alternative premises for having fun and feeling comfortable.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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