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‘Congenial drinking’ and accomplishments of place-belongingness among young people in rural Denmark

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While research on youthful drinking is extensive, the literature has been geographically skewed towards urban settings. As a potential corrective to this, our focus in this paper is on youthful drinking in rural Denmark. Based on 22 in-depth interviews with young drinkers, this paper explores the drinking practices of rural youth. More specifically, drawing on Antonsich’s (2010) notion of place-belongingness, we examine how sentiments of belonging relate to locally embedded drinking practices. We highlight the extent to which rural drinking places are characterized by the participation of young men, whose educational and professional aims are predominantly tied to the local community and activities within it. In so doing, we show that these contexts are primarily associated with ‘drinking a single’, as opposed to drinking to intoxication like their urban peers. We argue further that these ‘lighter’ but frequent forms of alcohol use, which we term ‘congenial drinking’, are related to accomplishments of place-belongingness and stand out as a gendered, classed and place-bound phenomenon.

Keywords: rural youth, alcohol use, belonging, gender, education.

Introduction

The majority of research on youthful drinking in Denmark and other Nordic countries, with only a few exceptions, has been geographically skewed towards examining drinking within urban settings and more recently drinking within the nighttime economy (e.g. Bøhling, 2015; Demant, 2013; Olsson & Törrönen, 2008). This tendency is also apparent in much of the international research on youthful drinking (e.g. Griffin et al.,

2009; Measham & Brain, 2005; Kuntsche et al., 2011). Much less research has been conducted on examining youthful drinking in rural areas. This is in spite of the fact that both Danish (Stock et al., 2010) and international studies (Atav & Spencer, 2002; Chan et al., 2016; Lambert et al., 2008) have suggested that alcohol use is more prevalent among young people in rural areas and that serious health and social impacts often occur (Lambert et al., 2008). Furthermore, limited epidemiological research suggests that rural young adults initiate alcohol use earlier, drink more heavily, and are at an increased risk of alcohol abuse and related problems than their urban counterparts (Coomber et al 2011; Chan et al 2016).

The sparsity of research on rural youthful drinking is a characteristic not only of research on alcohol, but it also reflects a more general characteristic of youth studies research (see Farrugia 2014; Cuervo & Wyn 2014), though notable exceptions in Nordic countries exist (e.g. Haugen & Villa; 2006; Wiborg, 2004; Rye, 2006; Rye & Blekesaune, 2007; Paulgaard, 2016; Pedersen, 2018). As Farrugia (2014) has noted, rural youth have been largely excluded from sociological studies because a “metrocentric focus” is “the dominant theoretical perspective driving youth studies” (Farrugia, 2014, p.294). In other words, researchers have tended to accept the view that the important developments in youth cultures are located within urban areas, and, as a result, youth studies theory has been developed mainly to explain the lives of urban youth, not all youth. Consequently, young people in rural areas are predominantly viewed as uninteresting precisely because they are located and positioned outside important cultural processes (Farrugia 2014). Hence, rural and urban youth lives exist in a hierarchical relationship in which urbanity is associated with ‘coolness’, education, and progress, while rurality is associated with backwardness, traditional gender roles, and poor educational opportunities (e.g. Little & Panelli, 2003; Pedersen & Gram,

2018).

This hierarchical perspective of urban versus rural can also be seen in the ways that the media often portray rural areas. For example, in Denmark the media has adopted pejorative phrases such as ‘The Rotten Banana’ in describing rural parts of Denmark, thereby promoting negative and critical descriptions of rural Denmark as areas in need of help to ‘develop’ both economically and culturally (Winther & Svendsen, 2012; Nielsen 2016). While research has tended to confirm this hierarchical relationship by focusing on urban youth, the research that we present in this article suggests that identity formations in the context of rural drinking places, far from being in need of urban coolness, operate to strengthen a sense of place-belongingness.

Research on alcohol use among rural youth has, until relatively recently, been scarce (Jayne et al., 2011), although this may be starting to change as research on youthful drinking in rural areas has begun to appear (e.g. Valentine et al., 2008; Leyshon, 2008a, 2008b; Ander et al., 2015). Alcohol researchers have noted that young women and men have different opportunities for participation in rural drinking contexts, and especially drinking in rural pubs. Hunt and Satterlee (1987) for example, demonstrate the importance of the village pub for the development and consolidation of notions of masculinity. Young men may gain access and be allowed into adult formal drinking places, e.g. by entering the pub under the supervision of fathers, older brothers or even landlords, in ways not open to young women (Valentine et al. 2008, Leyshon 2008a, 2008b). Thus, rural young men learn how to perform locally valued forms of masculinity in a pronounced masculine environment by adopting designated masculine drinking practices (Campbell, 2000). By engaging in such performances, they ensure the possibility of becoming incorporated into the ‘public world of men’ in their local

areas, thereby gaining status and recognition within the community. Furthermore, being incorporated in this way may also work to attach young men more intimately to the community and its social activities thereby increasing their sense of belongingness. In contrast, the position of young women in public drinking places is described as “highly complicated as rural pubs are (largely) sites of hegemonic masculine behavior, strictly regulated through drinking practices, such as being able to drink to excess” (Leyshon, 2008b, p.274). This unequal access to public drinking places may also reflect young women’s general position in the community, where they are described as being much less visible and vociferous than the young men (Trell et al., 2014a).

Building on these recent developments, the aim of this article is to contribute to the growing literature on youth alcohol use in rural areas by focusing on 22 in-depth interviews with Danish rural youth. These interviews were part of a larger sample of 140 interviews with young people living across the whole of Denmark. More specifically, the aim with the article is to provide an exploration of how alcohol use among rural youth relates to living in and experiencing a sense of place-belongingness (Antonsich, 2010) to a rural area, and how such sentiments of belonging and alcohol use must be understood vis-à-vis both education and gender.

Despite the general scarcity of both quantitative and qualitative literature on rural youth and their drinking practices, a number of important issues have been identified in the existing research on rural youth. Mirroring our own data, existing studies indicate that both educational orientation and gender may be important factors to consider in an analysis of youthful alcohol use in rural areas, and in particular that norms around and performances of ‘rural masculinity’ (Bye, 2009) may play an important role in this regard. First, both national and international studies show that

rural young men, more than young women, tend to pursue employment and educational options available in their home areas, which typically are associated with different forms of craftsmanship, industrial work, and farming (e.g. Beck & Ebbensgaard, 2009; Faber et al., 2014; Nielsen, 2010; Morris, 2008). Young women, however, are more likely to leave their rural homes in pursuit of educational opportunities elsewhere (Faber et al., 2015; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Johansson, 2016). This pattern arguably reflects the asymmetry that exists between young men and women living in rural areas, which may furthermore reflect opportunities for participation in rural drinking contexts (cf. Hunt & Satterlee, 1987; Leyshon 2008a; 2008b). Because rural young women are portrayed as more ambitious, mobile, and liable to make decisions based on improving their educational qualifications, they may be less likely to be active participants in rural drinking milieus. This portrayal stands in contrast to the depiction of the young men who are regarded as ‘passive’ in terms of educational aspirations and mobility (Faber & Nielsen, 2015; Knudsen, 2013; Nielsen, 2010) and therefore may be more active in rural drinking settings.

Second, young rural men tend to have stronger feelings of belonging to their home areas. As Bloksgaard and colleagues (2015) noted, more young men than women in rural Denmark express a strong sense of attachment, both to their home areas and the people living there. Young men also express higher levels of satisfaction with the available entertainment possibilities and activities operating in their vicinities. These findings also reflect the findings of Glendinning and his colleagues (2003), who examined notions of well-being among youth in rural northern Scotland. They discovered, among other things, that while young men described their communities as caring and close-knit, young women were more likely to express negative sentiments, including feelings of being constrained by their social environment. Similarly,

Sinkkonen (2012) found that boys in rural Finland were more attached to their home municipalities than were girls, partly because of a greater sense of local participation, coupled with a belief in the importance of family roots and a preference for their place of residence over their choice of profession. These patterns are important for understanding the apparent gender differences that exist in our data on how and with what purpose young men and women tend to drink alcohol in rural Denmark.

In this article, we explore how rural youth's gendered experiences of local attachment may shape their drinking practices. In other words, how do the drinking practices and settings, described by our participants, relate to sentiments of place-belongingness, including their identities as rural youths? Unlike many of the current studies of alcohol use among young people, whether in urban or rural settings, we focus particularly on 'the everydayness of alcohol use' (cf. Valentine et al., 2008, p.34), a phenomenon which stands out in our aggregated data as particularly rural, and how this plays out across drinking places. Before presenting our data, we will first lay out our analytical framework, which centers on notions of belonging as accomplishment (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006), as well as providing information on our sample, methods and interview procedures.

Analytical Framework

From the literature laid out above, it is apparent that notions of place combined with gender and educational orientation have significant implications in influencing how rural youth live their lives and experience a sense of belongingness to their rural community (cf. Glendinning et al., 2003; Larsen et al., 2016; Leyshon, 2008a; Sørensen & Pless, 2017; Prince, 2014; Pedersen & Gram, 2018). A sense of belonging to the rural

community is regularly expressed in the alcohol-related accounts of our rural participants, and especially, although not exclusively, by the young men in our sample, who for the same reason dominate our analysis. To paraphrase Antonsich (2010), these accounts are marked by ‘phenomenological subjective-emotional experiences of feeling at home’, which he refers to as *place-belongingness* (Antonsich, 2010, p.646).

Belonging to a place is thereby defined as an emotional experience, a personal sense of feeling at home in a place, and feelings of familiarity, comfort, security and emotional attachment (ibid.). Moreover, place-belongingness relates significantly to one’s sense of self from which questions of ‘who am I?’ and ‘where do I belong?’ cannot be separated (Ibid.). In addition to this personal dimension of belonging to a particular place, Antonsich emphasizes a socio-spatial dimension of belonging related to processes of inclusion and exclusion, which he refers to as the *politics of belonging* (Ibid., p.649). While the former refers to the personal, even existential, dimension of belonging, the latter is conceptualized as a “discursive resource for drawing boundaries of social inclusion/exclusion” and thus “refers to the construction of belonging to particular collectivities” (Antonsich, 2010, p.647; see also Yuval-Davis, 2006). In other words, being able to feel at home in a place is not merely a personal matter but is also dependent on local norms, values and practices, which make one’s sense of place-belongingness possible and which can ‘separate us from them’ (Antonsich, 2010). This implies that the possibilities of accomplishing place-belongingness are not equally distributed between all rural youth but are dependent both on how they are positioned and how they position themselves vis-à-vis (intersecting) categories, in this case gender and education (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2006; see also Rowe, 2005; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016).

In a similar way to our conceptualization of place-belongingness as accomplishment, we approach *gender* as a ‘doing’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In

other words, in the context of this study on everyday drinking among rural youth and how this relates to accomplishments of place-belongingness, gender is seen as a ‘relational performance’ (Trell et al., 2014b, p.16), which plays out vis-à-vis e.g. social groups (such as drinking networks) and physical resources (such as drinking places). This implies that some gendered performances may not only be favored in certain contexts but may also ‘belong’, to a greater or lesser degree, in specific drinking places. Furthermore, as we will show in our analysis, educational orientation stands out as a category which intersects with gender, and which thus needs to be taken into account in understanding everyday alcohol use among young people living in rural areas.

Methods and Data

Based on a larger study on drinking and intoxication that included 140 in-depth interviews with young people between 18-25 years of age living across Denmark, the present article draws on 22 interviews conducted with rural participants. In defining notions of rural, it is not surprising that what constitutes rural varies from one country to another (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; Søgaaard, 2011). Given the fact that Denmark is geographically small and one of the least urbanized countries in the European Union (Danish Government, 2013), the selection of rural participants from our sample was based on a national district typology (Ibid.), in which Danish parishes are categorized on basis of two dimensions. Drawing on this categorization of parishes by 1) rural/urban distinctions based on town size and (2) center/periphery dimensions marked by driving distance to the closest urban area, we define a rural area as having no more than 3000 inhabitants and located no less than 50 km from the 5 largest Danish cities (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense, Esbjerg and Aalborg). The areas in which our rural participants were living at the time of the interviews range from that of a small inland or coastal settlement with as little as 150 inhabitants to larger villages of up to 2000

inhabitants with local pubs, a small selection of shops and grocery stores and a few locally based occupational opportunities, primarily related to fishing, agriculture/farming, local industry and small vocational businesses. Overall, despite of signs of positive developments in recent years (Danish Government, 2018), rural Denmark is still characterized by slower growth rates in terms of population, occupation, and educational levels, than more urbanized parts of Denmark.

Based on the national district typology mentioned above, we were able to identify 22 of our total 140 participants as living in rural areas. Of these, fifteen were men and seven were women, with an average age of twenty. Fourteen rural participants were in full-time education, primarily different forms of vocational training, farming and fishery schools, or high-schools. Nine worked full-time in different businesses, industries and care-services located in their local areas. Seventy-three percent (n=16) of this sub-sample had yet to obtain an educational level higher than elementary school, compared with 32% of participants in the total sample.

We recruited participants using a multi-tiered recruitment strategy, which included online and street-level recruitment as well as chain referrals. The interview schedule included descriptive pre-coded questions on sociodemographic information, general background questions, as well as alcohol use frequencies, quantities, and consequences. For the bulk of the interview, we used a semi-structured guide to collect qualitative data on the participants' backgrounds and current lives, using open-ended questions focusing on drinking practices and settings, subjective and bodily experiences of feeling intoxicated, and attitudes towards and perceived consequences of alcohol use. In the process, we were able to collect rich descriptions about experiences with drinking, meanings of alcohol intoxication, drinking places and the performance of gender. The interviews, which lasted between 2-3 hours, were audio recorded and

transcribed verbatim before being edited for confidentiality by the research team.

Interviews took place between April 2015 and June 2016 at our offices at the University, as well as in the homes of the participants, at other educational institutions, or public settings such as library meeting rooms. Each participant was given a movie theatre gift card as an honorarium.

We used the text analysis software Nvivo 11 to organize the data into overall themes around alcohol use arising from the interviews, e.g. health, age/development, and geographical- and gender related issues (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, all the interview material that pertained to geographical aspects of alcohol use was sub-coded in order to capture any narrative extracts dealing with geographical experiences, descriptions of local structures, geographical identities, and value attachments across the entire sample. Following from this, we analyzed all interview material from the 22 rural cases using a conceptually-driven approach to analysis that focused specifically on expressions of place-belongingness, gender, and educational orientation (Antonsich 2010; Maxwell 2013). In particular, we structured our analysis by focusing specifically on factors, which, according to Antonsich (2010), highlight sentiments of place-belongingness and, which we argue, are related to everyday drinking practices in rural areas. These include: 1) Auto-biographical factors such as personal histories and memories tied to a place; 2) Relational factors such as personal and social ties that enrich one's life in a given place; 3) Cultural factors, such as shared language, or shared understandings of other forms of cultural expressions, traditions and habits; 4) Economic factors such as being integrated into the local economy and the sense of having a stake in the future of the place.

Analysis

The analysis consists of three subsections. In the first section, we focus on masculinity as a gender category that is particularly salient in relation to rural drinking practices and within 3 prominent rural drinking places: garages, boiler-rooms, and the local pub. In the second section, we focus on educational orientation and how this relates to alcohol use and drinking behaviors among rural youth. Finally, we explore further the possible connections between drinking ‘singles,’ referred to here as ‘congenial drinking,’ and accomplishing a sense of belonging.

1. Gendered Rural Drinking Places: Garages, Boiler-Rooms, and the Local Pub

Generally, our rural participants had easy access both to private transportation and facilities associated with car or property maintenance, such as garages and boiler rooms, which are typically located outside the main living areas or home structure. Within these structures, essential utility equipment is housed, and many of our rural participants discussed spending time there. Having access to a car and a place to fix it was a high priority, particularly for many of the young men. Besides serving basic and obvious functions such as heating the house or supporting mobility in areas marked by infrastructural shortcomings (Agerholm & Møller, 2011), boiler rooms and garages are associated with everyday rural masculine responsibilities, such as maintaining the outdoor and material aspects of the household (Bye, 2009). Interviews with our participants highlighted the ways in which these places were also marked by social gatherings and specific ways of drinking alcohol. In the account below, Esben (20 years old, trainee gardener) describes what he refers to as “*garage-drinking*”:

It happens quite often at my place. We hang out at home, clean up [the garage], and someone drops by. It's sort of routine, we just know what will happen. You fetch some beers, and talk about all sorts of stuff. Sometimes just for an hour, other times all night. [...]. The garage is like a small

private workshop, dirty and with naked ladies on the walls. [...]. It might be my own friends, it might include my father's friends. But that's the thing about garage drinking – it brings folks together.

In the quote, Esben emphasizes that the garage serves as an important place, not only in terms of fixing things such as household machinery, but also as a place where social gatherings with local friends and acquaintances of different ages take place. Here, drinking alcohol plays an important role as it “*brings folks together*”. In so doing, drinking helps to consolidate personal and social ties that work to enrich the everyday lives of these young men. It also confirms a sense of tradition with older men in the community, “*my father's friends*”, that arguably enhances a sense of continuity within the community. The relationship between drinking beer and notions of a shared tradition and routine is also emphasized by other participants, for example Natasja (24 years old, care-worker) who noted that: “*Out here, you always have beer in stock, for when people drop by*”. However, unlike youthful drinking within urban settings, drinking in garages was not associated with transgressive or intoxicated drinking (cf. Hackley et al., 2015), although sometimes it could be the start of an all-night drinking event.

Furthermore, in the quote above, Esben explicitly notes the gendered characteristic of these drinking venues by emphasizing their ‘masculine’ character: it is “*dirty and with naked ladies on the walls*”. Later in the interview, he returns to the masculine characteristics of the garage by noting that even though “*the women are totally okay with it*”, nevertheless garage-drinking is primarily an activity for men.

Esben's narrative resonates with our observation that only a few of our rural participants, who identify as women, take part regularly in these drinking events, and that rural young women are rarely mentioned as central participants. Natasja, who was introduced above, is thus in the minority in her drinking network as she sees herself as a central participant and drinks with ‘the boys’ on a regular basis. In her drinking

network, they meet regularly and engage in what she and others refer to as ‘boiler-room meetings’, which includes what is commonly and euphemistically known as drinking ‘a single’ (one beer), although it may actually involve more than consuming just one beer.

This drinking practice usually occurs during the week:

Yesterday, I was helping a friend, who just moved in across the road. I had promised to help them clean up a room. It was myself, Malle, Johnny and Peter. We were talking over a ‘single’. Then we had another one, and went to the boiler-room. [...]. We go to boiler-room meetings to talk about everything and anything, and have a beer. Then Johnny left, and Pia joined in for a beer, and then Niels came. People come and go constantly when we meet like that. Out here, we have many boiler-room meetings.

In describing how they spent their time socializing, drinking, and fixing things within these private places, our participants not only mentioned the details of what they do, they also emphasized the meaning of what it is they do “out here,” emphasizing these drinking places and practices as part and parcel of living in rural areas and as a communal characteristic of belonging to the place where they live.

In addition to drinking in these private places, some of our participants also frequented the local pub. Their narratives demonstrate the ways that rural pubs are marked by a strong sense of masculinity, are frequented mainly by men, who enjoy going there for an ‘after-work-beer’, a characteristic also noted by other researchers (e.g. Campbell, 2000; Leyshon, 2005, 2008a, 2008b). Still wearing their work clothes, they meet up with friends and acquaintances, play darts or dice, and talk about town life and activities that occurred during the week. An important aspect of the pub, in addition to its role as drinking place, was its role as a central location for making arrangements to help each other out with practical tasks. In the process of setting up arrangements, drinking a beer together was a good way to “*finalize the arrangement*”, thus ensuring

one's place in the local 'barter economy'. Martin (22 years old, ship fitter) for example states:

They get hold of you to see if you can help them do this or that. And of course, I can! - We will do that. And then, when it is done, – or when the guy with the house, the car, the trailer, or the fishing boat that we will fix – when he thinks that we are done for the day, he will buy a beer or two, or as many as he feels like buying.

As noted by other researchers (Hunt and Satterlee 1986; 1987; Hey 1986; Valentine et al 2008), the pub plays a key role both as a meeting and a drinking place within rural areas. In this role, it is mainly frequented by men and hence imbued with strong notions of masculinity (Hunt and Satterlee 1987; Campbell 2000; Leyshon 2005; Valentine et al 2008). Similarly, boiler-rooms and garages, both of which resemble home repair shops, are also described by our participants as important, yet less public drinking places, which frame other activities such as talking about 'this or that' or fixing old vehicles or working on other types of repairs, usually in the company of friends. Participating in community news-checking and being willing to assist others in fixing things further consolidates the sense of belongingness to the community. All of these drinking places, whether public or private, are places where 'meeting up', sharing local knowledge, and making mutual arrangements are all done to the accompaniment of drinking 'a single,' or maybe more.

2. 'Who Drinks with Whom': The Significance of Educational Orientation

So far, we have discussed how garages, boiler-rooms, and the local pub operate as rural drinking places where alcohol is consumed on a daily basis and which frame processes of place-belongingness by strengthening social ties, inter-generational traditions, and local-economic interests. They are also drinking places frequented mainly by young

men in which performances of masculinity especially around fixing things and helping other men with material tasks take place.

However, these gender performances intersect with another salient social category - educational orientation. Influenced by the work of Pedersen & Gram (2018), we operationalize educational orientation based on our participants' current educational orientations and practices. In doing so, we distinguish between those orientations towards education and professions, available in the local community (often related to different forms of craftsmanship, fishery and farming), and those located in urban areas (primarily related to different forms of knowledge work). An emphasis on education in terms of knowledge work and the potential urge to move away from rural areas should be viewed in light of the aim of the Danish Welfare State that asserts that 95 percent of all young Danes should obtain a formal education. Because of this 'education imperative', young Danes are generally considered and expected to be educationally ambitious (Ekspertgruppen om bedre veje til en ungdomsuddannelse, 2017). However, as noted by Pedersen and Gram (2018), the 'education imperative' also necessarily becomes a 'mobility imperative' (cf. Farrugia, 2016) for rural youth. This imperative may lead to the dilemma of whether to stay and be near friends and family or move away for educational purposes (Pedersen & Gram, 2018; Paulgaard, 2016; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). Moreover, in our data, educational orientation operates not only as a potential dilemma or potential aspiration but also significantly as an identity marker that distinguishes different groups of rural youth: those willing to leave and those wanting to remain. Furthermore, and specifically pertinent for this paper, this differentiation distinguishes 'who drinks with whom' and 'where one drinks,' suggesting that a politics of belonging (cf. Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006) related

to educational orientation may structure the specific forms of place-belongingness that are worth accomplishing for different rural youth.

For example, Jesper (20 years old, works at the local port) notes that he rarely hangs out with local high-school youth, because he feels it is important to socialize with people who possess ‘practical’ knowledge:

It is important to be able to do practical stuff, because that is how we spend time together, you know. If someone is not capable of that, what else should we be doing together? Everyone I know is able to fix something. (...). My friends are all carpenters, fishermen, electricians, or they work at the port.

While Jesper does not explicitly refer to alcohol use, he nevertheless does identify the characteristics of his social network based on their shared professional and practical interests and abilities – “*everyone is able to fix something.*” The relationship between educational orientation and drinking practices are illustrated in the following quotes, where educational orientation reflects not merely notions of class but also reflects a sense of geographical embeddedness and mobility. Moreover, they illuminate more explicitly the ways in which gender intersects with issues of educational orientation. While interviewing Mia (21 years old, works as a clerical assistant), a friend of hers, Poul, spontaneously dropped by her house, and Mia immediately invited him to stay for a beer. Without any prompting, Poul described his view on the relationship between drinking alcohol and ‘staying in the same place’:

You drink in the same place as you have been drinking since you were 14. When people get older they start moving away to Aarhus or Aalborg or even to Copenhagen to get an education. Away from their families, you know... When we were younger, we used to drop by each other’s house and drink ‘a single’ together. That is what we still do. Because we are still in the same place. We haven’t left each other. We still meet over a beer. It is standard practice. It is an extension of how we used to drink. We meet over beer.

What is striking in this quotation is both the way in which Poul's autobiographical memories are attached to a particular place as well as the fact that he connects his and his friends' alcohol use to notions of staying put in the local area as opposed to migrating to urban centers for educational opportunities. For Poul, 'meeting over a beer' is important because it strengthens his sense of being locally embedded. Later in the same interview, Mia supplements Poul's account by emphasizing the connections between alcohol use and gender within a rural setting:

There is just something about holding a beer in your hand and being a real man. It's important to be a real man out here. Moreover, a man is someone who has the skills to fix his own car and do certain things, which are a little different in the city.

According to Mia, "a real man" performs masculinity, or more specifically rural masculinity, by drinking beer and possessing practical skills, which are "a little different in the city". As Paulgaard notes, (2016), doing manual work and possessing practical knowledge in rural areas is seen as a highly valued way of performing masculinity, while other forms of knowledge and specifically intellectual labour are not associated in the same way with being 'a real man'.

However, Krister (18 years old, high school student) provides a different view about drinking and educational orientation. Krister attends high school, plans to pursue higher education and has no plans of settling down in his local community. He expresses how he has grown apart from his local friends, which he attributes both to their different educational choices as well as the different ways they relate to their local community, including how they use alcohol:

It is accepted and completely normal to drink like that out here. But I have distanced myself from it. They used to be my best friends but since we left

middle school I have hardly seen them because that is the way they spend time together, drinking beer at the local pub. I hardly ever go there, and they go there several times a week. We do not dislike each other, we have just become very different, I think. We make different choices in life. As I see it, drinking should be moderated, but they have a somewhat looser approach.

While Krister does not go along with his childhood friends' drinking practices, this does not mean that he does not drink himself. However, when he does, he tends to drink either at private or high-school parties, which are primarily associated with drinking to intoxication, or sport activities where he occasionally will drink a beer or two with friends. Both of these settings are common contexts for alcohol use among Danish youth, and thus not particular to rural areas, even though location might play a role in how drinking at these events actually occurs (cf. Herold & Hunt, 2018).

Similarly, but from the opposite perspective, when Martin (22 year old, ship fitter) defines how he prefers to drink, he tends to distance himself and his drinking style from 'the others', noting that "*it is not good to behave like an 18-year-old at a high-school party*".

To summarize, educational orientation is a central identity marker delineating drinking networks, places, and styles. Participants, who are academically oriented, tended to drink primarily with friends their own age, often from the same school, at weekends and often in a party setting. However, participants, who are not in high-school and are strongly oriented towards 'staying local', tend to construct their drinking networks based on shared interests related to professional, practical know-how, and being 'a skilled fixer'. These drinking networks were often described as age-diverse, and in such settings, drinking was not primarily associated with intoxication (although this also happens). Furthermore, 'drinking a single' was not necessarily reserved for weekends; in fact on the contrary, it was described as an everyday practice. As already

noted, rural drinking places were intimately tied to performances of masculinity and mainly male participation. However, drinking and drinking groups were not only influenced by notions of masculinity in general but also by a socio-spatially bound variant of masculinity, which could be characterized as both rural and educationally based. Young men, who are academically oriented (as in the case of Krister), rarely participate in events such as garage-drinking or boiler-room meetings, nor do they tend to accomplish place-belongingness through ‘lighter’ but frequent forms of alcohol use. As such, within the context of rural place-belongingness, both gender and educational (and thus geographical) orientation arguably become important aspects of identity (‘who one is’) (Antonsich, 2010) and influence the formation of subsequent social drinking groups.

3. Accomplishments of Place-belongingness through ‘Congenial Drinking’

Rural settings are generally described as being close-knit communities (Glendinning et al., 2003), which implies that ‘everybody knows everybody’ and is knowledgeable about local goings-on. For some of the young people we interviewed, these characteristics are viewed as highly attractive, providing a sense of fitting in and feeling at home within a context of local norms and practices. We have argued that one way of accomplishing ‘place-belongingness’ (Antonsich, 2010), is by participating in rural drinking places, described earlier, and engaging in the ‘light’ but regular ways of drinking alcohol operating within these contexts. When rural youth participate in these drinking places, they do not drink with ‘explicit aims of becoming intoxicated’ (Kolind, 2011), engage in ‘transgressive drinking’ (Hackley et al., 2015) or in so-called ‘work-hard/play-hard’ drinking styles, typically reserved for weekends (Measham & Østergaard, 2009). Rather, drinking ‘a single’ is a highly valued everyday practice,

important for becoming knowledgeable, staying up to date with local news, and being integrated in the local community. As such, these drinking practices can be viewed as an extension rather than a transgression of everyday life. In this section, we introduce the concept ‘congenial drinking’ to examine in more detail this style of drinking.

Drinking ‘a single’ happens in rural drinking settings on a number of occasions and can be connected with accomplishments of place belongingness, and include, for example, cases of casually dropping by someone’s house for a talk after work; helping each other out with material tasks; and keeping each other abreast of issues of town-life. As one participant notes: “*It is common practice to help each other out, out here*”, and adds that “*drinking a single*” (one beer or more) is quite normal as part of this: “*just one or two beers, while figuring out what needs to be done*”. Importantly, while rural youth do drink to intoxication on some occasions, ‘congenial drinking’ serves other important purposes and is imbued with expectations, which are tied to accomplishing a sense of belonging. For example, while Viggo (23 years old, farm worker) explicitly associates drinking ‘a single’ with his work interests, he carefully stresses that he does not drink to intoxication on work days: “*we often drink an after-work-beer, but it is disrespectful to show up with hangovers the next day, cause you won’t be able to do your job, then*”. ‘Congenial drinking’ allows one to remain aligned with local expectations and norms, and consequently remain attuned to the social, cultural, and economic interests of the rural community.

Another example of ‘congenial drinking’, which also relates to belongingness, is ‘car-rounds’. These are locally embedded practices, frequently mentioned in the interviews, which are again related to masculine work occupations and interests. For example, Dennis (24 years old, works at a local industrial company) describes car-rounds as drinking a beer or two with friends while “*driving around at the port and*

checking up on ships unloading and other work related activities ...” In a similar way, other participants emphasized the ways in which this practice allowed them to catch up on developments in the community, for example who is rebuilding or what is happening in this or that business. Emphasizing the fact that young women very rarely participate in car-rounds, Kalle (24 years old, farm manager student) describes this activity as being simultaneously related to the rural environment and his future profession as a farm-manager:

It is a car-full of people and some beer. Then you just drive around and check out the local machine vendors, talk about the farming equipment that is for sale, and if it is any good. But before we go, we normally pick up a six pack at the gas station. It doesn't have to be about farming equipment, though. It could also be looking at cows, fields, somebody spreading manure. It is about what we have in common out here.

Jesper (22 years old, works at the local port) provides a similar account:

Out here, you simply phone your friends: 'Do you wanna cruise around the port? And then you just know what will happen... I never go to pick up my friend and drive around the port without bringing a six pack. Then we cruise around the port, drink a single beer and talk about our everyday lives... We find out what needs to be fixed, and then 'let's have a look at it'.

As mentioned by Jesper in the above quote, and as shown previously, drinking ‘singles’ is often associated with fixing things in the company of friends. Thus, when rural young men are performing masculinities by repairing equipment or fixing houses/vehicles, as part of engaging in ‘congenial drinking’, they are engaging in a central way of accomplishing a sense of belongingness and connectedness. Since these central accomplishments of belongingness and connection are rooted in specific places in the rural milieu, as we have seen so far in our analysis, it is clear that drinking practices and places becomes important in terms of accomplishing place-belongingness for these rural young men. For example, Esben (20 years old, trainee gardener) emphasizes the

importance of ‘congenial drinking’ as a way of becoming locally known, being invited to help out, and ‘being in the know’:

When some of the regular garage-drinkers drop by for a beer, meet up and talk, they might suddenly ask, for example, ‘I need to have my car fixed, do you know someone?’ Then another might reply, ‘yeah, sure, I know someone, let’s make some arrangements’. And then it is set up from there.

In sum, achievements of place-belongingness through, for example, joint property or machinery maintenance and engagement in the local economy, both formally and informally, are dependent on gaining access to shared knowledge on ‘who can fix what’ and ‘what goes on’ locally. This process is both embedded within and facilitated by local practices of ‘congenial drinking’.

Discussion

In the Danish context, articulations of the hierarchical relationship between rural and urban areas have long marked the political climate and media portrayals of rural Denmark (Winther & Svendsen, 2012). However, the hierarchical relationship that exists between urban and rural areas is not solely a Danish characteristic (e.g. Jansson, 2003; Eriksson et al., 2015). As such, our study on youthful drinking in rural areas represents just one local variant of a global phenomenon, which both affects (young) people’s future prospects and their current life situation (Paulgaard, 2016). Furthermore, the hierarchical relationship between rural and urban areas arguably relates to the relative lack of research on rural youth in comparison with urban youth studies. In this article, we have attempted to re-address this discrepancy by examining youthful drinking within a rural context. Hence, this article supports the work of other qualitative researchers who point critically to the dominant ‘metrocentric focus’ of youth studies

(Farrugia, 2014), which is also particularly apparent in the research on drinking and alcohol consumption. More specifically, in examining youthful rural drinking we have focused on the relationship between a sense of place-belongingness and locally embedded drinking practices. This article thereby adds to the existing literature on youthful alcohol use in three ways. First, it emphasizes ‘the rural’ as a context for youthful alcohol use. Second, it connects rural drinking practices to a sense of place-belongingness, and finally it provides an empirically based discussion of the gendered and educational dimensions of this relationship.

We have shown how rural youth, at least in Denmark, do not solely drink with the explicit aim of becoming intoxicated (Kolind, 2011) and are not simply motivated by sentiments such as ‘heroism’ (Demant & Törrönen, 2011), transgression (Hackley et al., 2015) or the opportunity to ‘play hard’ (Measham & Østergaard, 2009). By introducing the notion of ‘congenial drinking’, we argue here that ‘lighter’ but more regular forms of alcohol use, in addition to party or intoxication-oriented drinking mentioned above, are practiced by rural youths, and in particular young men. ‘Congenial drinking’ does not only differ from drinking practices found among urban youth but is also importantly intertwined with processes of accomplishing a sense of belongingness and inclusion with rural communities. It is embedded in locally based everyday contexts and is congruent with norms, interests, and expectations of the rural community. Furthermore, this form of drinking is not merely tied to the social rural context in which it operates, but is also a gendered practice, which is closely related to educational orientation. However, this way of drinking, which is arguably a characteristic of rural life, may not necessarily remain within a rural setting but may in different ways migrate along with rural youth to more urbanized areas. Such possibilities could be the focus of future research.

Despite the fact that rural drinking places such as garages, boiler-rooms, and local pubs are predominantly characterized by male participation and masculinity, this is a particular form of masculinity, which intersects with educational orientations and professional aims tied to the local community and activities within it. Similar to the conceptualization of place-belongingness as an active accomplishment, we have approached gender as a ‘relational performance’ (Trell et al., 2014b), or ‘doing’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987), which is played out vis-à-vis e.g. social groups (such as drinking networks) and physical resources (such as drinking places). This implies that not only social contexts but also places and their materiality hold the possibility of enabling some forms of gender performances more than others. Thus ‘place matters’, not only in relation to alcohol consumption (cf. Jayne et al., 2017), but also more specifically in relation to the gendered dimensions of alcohol use (cf. Törrönen et al., 2017). In the present study, despite the fact that young women’s narratives on alcohol use are also part of the empirical basis, we decided to focus on performances of masculinity. In so doing, we do not wish to suggest that rural young women are not active alcohol users, but, in the context of particular rural drinking places, the presence of young women and notions of femininity do not stand out. Rather, rural drinking places, and the drinking practices which play out there, are mostly characterized by masculinity, the participation of young men (see also Leyshon, 2008a; 2008b), and accomplishments of place-belongingness. This alcohol-related example further illustrates the finding from many existing studies that young men, more so than young women, experience a sense of place-belongingness within rural settings (cf. Glendinning et al., 2003; Johansson, 2016).

Within this article, we have attempted to highlight the meaning and role of rural drinking practices for rural youth, such as having ‘a single.’ We have done so by

applying the theoretical lens of place-belongingness as presented by Antonsich (2010), thus showing how alcohol use in rural settings serves to strengthen both place-bounded memories, social ties, shared traditions, and a sense of having a stake in the local economy and its future. Thus, while on a national level it is tempting to view rural young people, who choose to stay in their home communities, as passive and educationally indifferent, especially in light of the available mobility and educational imperatives, they can also be viewed as actively engaged in continuous processes of constructing both their local communities and their local identities through accomplishments of place-belongingness, within, for example, settings of ‘congenial drinking’. While this topic calls for further research, we argue that alcohol consumption by rural youth should be explained not only by notions of ‘boredom’ or a ‘lack of leisure activities’ as suggested by some researchers (e.g. Stock et al., 2010). Instead, we would suggest, that it be understood in relation to the complex inter-relatedness of social categories such as place, gender, and educational orientation.

Finally, our findings should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. First, our qualitative study has been designed to investigate an under-explored phenomena in existing studies on youthful alcohol use: youthful drinking in rural areas. However, the sample of 22 rural youth is not a representative sample of young people living in rural Denmark, and what is considered as ‘rural drinking practices’ may therefore potentially differ across rural settings. Second, while notions around ‘rural place’ and issues related to the hierarchical relationship between rural and urban areas stood out in our data, already in the first phases of interviewing, the overall study on which the present article is based did not initially set out to explore geographical aspects of youthful alcohol use. Consequently, in our analysis we were not able to consider the particulars of the rural areas in which our participants were living, such as spaces of

amenity, production, conservation, or to what extent these places were divided by, for example, class and intergenerational relations. Such dimensions should be considered more systematically in future research. Furthermore, while 7 young women were included in our sample, future research should focus more explicitly on locally embedded drinking practices among young rural women, and consider to what extent they exist, and whether they are related to accomplishments of place-belongingness in the same way as ‘congenial drinking’ works for rural young men.

Declaration of interest

The authors report no conflict of interests.

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