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Changing arenas of underage adolescent binge drinking in Swedish small towns

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ABSTRACT

AIM – The study explores arenas of adolescent binge drinking in small Swedish towns and the meanings these have for young persons. The focus is thus on space and place, and on the geography of underage drinking. **DESIGN** – An ethnographic approach was used, including direct observations, document studies and contacts with youth workers on local and national levels, and interviews with 28 underage binge-drinking adolescents chosen as informants. **FINDINGS** – Adolescent binge drinkers seem to have moved away from street and other outdoor drinking arenas to home environments, where they feel they have more control over their party location and participants. **CONCLUSIONS** – One consequence of outdoor drinking moving indoors is that professional youth workers and police cannot enter party arenas and the only adults who can do so are the parents. This has implications for preventive alcohol strategies and outreach social work. Measures should be directed to parents to make them fully aware of the importance of the party location in their homes.

KEYWORDS – underage adolescent binge drinking, street arenas, control location, place, space

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Introduction

For many years, increase in underage binge drinking – of those under 18 – has been regarded as a significant problem in Sweden and other countries, both for the big risks for the young people involved and for the disturbance in public locations. In terms of total quantities, however, alcohol consumption among Swedish and other adolescents has decreased since the millennium, and the numbers of abstainers have increased (Leifman, 2013). Norström and Svensson (2014) report that there is

a smaller relative decrease among heavy drinkers compared to adolescents who drink less alcohol. Hallgren, Leifman, and Andréasson (2012) even point to a possible polarisation, with a substantial reduction in adolescent alcohol consumption in general and at the same time a sharp increase in the numbers of adolescents treated in hospital for alcohol intoxication. Therefore, despite the positive decrease in general, adolescent binge drinking continues to constitute a significant problem.

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The term “binge drinking” is commonly used in research, and as there is no other self-evident term, it is also used here, even though the term can be seen as problematic, politically charged and is sometimes linked to a moral panic (Szmigin et al., 2008). The term often refers to hedonistic drinking which seeks drunkenness, but can also denote a quantity or drinking more than a certain amount per drinking event. The exact amount is not internationally agreed on. In Sweden, the quantity being defined as binge drinking is the equivalent of a bottle of wine or 18 cl of liquor per drinking event (Leifman, 2012). In this study, while the quantities will also be discussed, the focus is more on the aspect of drinking to get drunk.

The concepts of place and space, adopted from sociology and human geography, identify two intertwined yet different aspects of arenas. Their importance in outdoor youth leisure activities, including binge drinking, has been highlighted in several studies (Demant & Landolt, 2014; Demant, Ravn, & Thorsen, 2010; Fry, 2011; Hodkinson & Chatterton 2006; Robinson, 2009; Storvoll, Rossow, & Pape, 2010). Place is a geographical and specific location such as a room, a park bench or a neighbourhood, and has according to Gieryn three defining features: location, material form and meaning. Place is where something occurs, whereas space is more understood as distance, volume or shape, and is often perceived as more abstract than place (Gieryn, 2000). Thus, space concerns possibilities for activities to occur. Where place focuses on spatial boundaries, limitations and security, space concerns possibilities to reach out, transcend and act out. Place is the location

where you may or may not sense that you have the space to act.

Mennis and Mason (2010) conclude that adolescents’ perceptions of the importance of a place are closely connected to their friends and their culture. Hall, Coffey, and Williamson (1999) recognise the importance for adolescents of having places to go to where they can get together, hang out and be away from adults such as the police, outreach social workers and parents. Robinson (2009), in her ethnographical research of nightscapes, shows the importance for adolescents of free spaces. At the same time, places that provide such space for youth activities have often attracted societal fears and concerns.

Our study explores the significance of arenas of underage adolescent binge drinking in some Swedish small towns and the meanings these have in terms of place and space for the young persons involved.

Locations for underage drinking

Partying is important for many adolescents and can be seen as a way to escape everyday life and to experience a sense of pleasure (Gundelach & Järvinen, 2006). The most common places for underage drinking in Scandinavia are parent-free home environments. Other groups have made street arenas and other public or half-hidden outdoor places their own leisure space away from adult control, and these groups have had a higher rate of binge drinking than most other youth groups (Demant & Landolt, 2014; Leifman, 2013; Robinson, 2009; Storvoll et al., 2010).

In Swedish municipalities, small and large, adolescents have for years gathered in town centres and other places to look for friends and action. These gatherings

have often included public drinking. Adolescents' use of public space beyond adult control has long given cause for concern (B. Andersson, 2005), as at the end of the 1980s, when adolescent activities in municipal centres raised a wave of worry. Swedish national media were filled with headlines about groups of adolescents meeting in city centres, resulting in calls to stop the "youth riots" and public disturbances. Another result was a report commission (Nilsson & Ivarsson Westberg, 2011). The response from adults has been to discourage public drinking and nuisance by means of control efforts, and at the same time to support and establish various accepted activities often under adult control. Various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as "Mums and Dads in the City", started to organise "parent walks" in the streets and other outdoor places identified as adolescents' meeting places (M. Andersson, 2005; Leisti, 2005). Professionals such as outreach social workers and the police were also busy locating youth groups in these locations. Outreach social workers have a history of trying to make contact with adolescent "street groups" and to invite them to other, more easily controlled and safe places, somewhere in the interspace between home and school arenas with youth clubs as the most typical examples (B. Andersson, 2005; Andersson, 2013; M. Andersson, 2005).

In addition to such public places as streets, teenagers might meet at certain benches at a train station, shopping malls, hidden places at the back of schoolyards, or half-hidden places in small parks or forests. These places would be occupied by groups of adolescents making them their

own and giving them "a sense of space"; this is where they would feel free to act (Robinson, 2009). The groups could be closed or more loosely knitted, and their members could use their chosen arenas for shorter (months) or longer periods. These places, typically passed on to new youth groups, were often well-known to the outreach social workers (Andersson, 2002), as they provided a space for young people to meet, to talk, "hang out", be with friends and search for action. In Switzerland, some groups used these places as an arena to party, get drunk on alcohol and sometimes to try illicit drugs (Demant & Landolt, 2014). Occasional outdoor drinking events, such as school graduations, have not been seen as equally problematic behaviours on an individual level, although they often create more nuisance on a societal level.

Home is typically seen as a private space, where one can feel safe and have a sense of belonging and control. Contrary to the street and other outdoor places, the home arena is more readily recognised as a "safe haven", and behaviours in home arenas are often seen as less problematic (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001; Chow & Healey, 2008). Also, adolescent binge drinking in home arenas is less researched than that in public spaces. Demant and Østergaard (2007) show that Danish home parties play an important role for underage adolescents: this is where they commonly have their first experiences of alcohol and intoxication. The study concludes that home parties provide a space where the adolescents are in control and where the parents and other adults have limited access. The home provides a party space for getting drunk together with friends and for "letting go" (ibid).

Many adolescents grow up in small towns far from the bustling city centres and “night-time economy”. Leifman (2013) highlights that there are differences in how much alcohol is consumed by youth between different regions in Sweden, but as these regions include both smaller towns and bigger cities, this gives no clear information on possible differences between small towns and cities. A regional survey on 15- and 17-year-old students in 13 municipalities, most of which could be labelled as small towns, shows that the overall alcohol consumption is lower than the national average (Widén, 2014).

Ethnographic approach

This study uses an ethnographic approach. This approach draws on social interaction to learn about people through people, although Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) recognise that many ethnographic studies could be more precise in terms of their focus on place and space.

In certain ways, our research process was similar to a journey. Some steps were planned, but often the journey had to take turns in directions and shift between methods of data collection in order to arrive at the goal set for the total journey (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). Here, as will be shown, we also had to shift the focus to adapt to new knowledge at hand.

We used a variety of data collection methods to learn about the place and space of binge drinking, including direct observations, formal interviews and informal talks with individuals and groups among professionals as well as adolescent informants, discussions about photos taken at the places, field notes and studying the records of meetings. Further descrip-

tions are presented under the section “Recruitment of informants at youth centres”.

The study is based on informed consent. All interested persons were given written and oral information about the purpose of the research, and adolescents willing to be formally interviewed signed a letter of consent. No one under the age of 15 was formally interviewed but may have been present at informal chats. All personal data has been handled as confidential. The study was approved by the Regional Ethics Review Board in Linköping (Dnr 2011/402-31).

Preconceptions influence researchers’ collecting and analysing the findings, and can be recognised as part of the method (Aspers, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the late 1980s and all through the 1990s, the first author worked as an outreach social worker for the social services in a medium-sized Swedish city. In this position, the emphasis was on preventing adolescent problems with alcohol and illicit drugs. Her previous experience provided familiarity with youth cultures and facilitated access to the informants, while a large age gap and lack of updated experiences of binge-drinking places made it clear that the researcher was an “outsider”. She had to adapt to her new role as an ethnographic researcher and make use of her previous social work-related knowledge of binge-drinking cultures. This knowledge was not always updated, which became obvious at the beginning of the research project.

Consulting outreach workers

Our early focus was to study the importance of street and other outdoor arenas and the young persons who frequented

these places. The first author visited youth and outreach social workers on local and regional levels to get updated information regarding the local outdoor places and youth groups. The questions were met with answers such as: “We don’t exactly know. We don’t see them in their usual places. They seem to have moved indoors.”

To find out if this change of arenas was only a local or regional occurrence or if similar changes were found elsewhere, youth workers nationally were addressed through the National Association of Outreach Workers (RiF) with a short survey on places of adolescent binge drinking. Ten outreach groups countrywide responded. The questions were also brought to a national conference of outreach social workers and were discussed in a seminar session with 25 participants from small and large municipalities throughout the country. The results of the survey and the seminar seemed to indicate that a general change of locations had taken place: binge drinking had during the past few years moved away from street arenas in all municipal reports in both small and large cities in different parts of the country. Similarly, the youth workers were unsure of the whereabouts of current youth binge drinking. Young persons’ increased use of social media, such as Facebook, was suggested as one possible explanation for the change. Maybe the adolescents could “meet” their friends on Facebook and be updated on what was going on without having to enter the “street”? As to when this shift had taken place, there was no clear reply, although some suggested that it had happened gradually during the past few years.

Binge-drinking adolescents in small towns

In order to further explore the findings of the first steps above, the research continued with data collection in three communities in southern Sweden. Two of these were small municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants, and the third was a small community (less than 5000 inhabitants) on the outskirts of a medium-sized city (more than 100,000 inhabitants). All three municipalities were situated in areas with lakes, forests and rural areas close by. All three were industrial communities, with small centres of food stores and other shops. In all three towns, only a few restaurants served alcohol. All three had youth centres run by the municipality, and these were open three to five evenings a week.

In one community, there was an active “Mums and Dads in the City” NGO. The “Mums and Dads” consisted of parents who on a voluntary basis patrolled the small town on Friday and Saturday evenings. The written records reported the situation “on the streets” from January to September, i.e. during nine months in 2012. Only one incident was reported, when two youth groups met at the train station and the “Mums and Dads” were afraid there might be violence and therefore contacted the police. Apart from this, the records show that the parents saw very little youth activity in any of the local haunts. “Quiet and peaceful” were the words most often used. The two other towns had no such active organisations at the time, although they had existed previously.

The first author did direct observations on five weekend nights by following out-

reach social workers in two of the municipalities. No underage outdoor drinking was observed. This was in line with the “Mums and Dads” reports. Although the streets were quiet and the outdoor arenas empty, underage binge drinking was still evident, as indicated in the field notes.

A late Friday evening in 2012, it’s freezing outside and the small town seems deserted. Two adults are walking a dog, a few cars pass by. Other than that, the centre appears empty. A few food stores, some churches and one small pizza restaurant are clustered around the small square.

Together with the outreach social workers, I visited several places during the evening. These included a small hut with a fireplace in front of it up by the woods, the enclosed schoolyard of the preschool, and the train station. All these places have a long history as locations for youth interaction and binge drinking. We continue to drive through the town.

Police officers are already outside a small house. All windows in the surrounding houses are black; is no one awake? Oh yes, one face behind a curtain. When I arrive, two police officers stand on the street outside the garden talking to two quite angry boys. Through the doorway and windows of the house, I can see a party going on inside – loud music, screams and laughter. In the garden, some people are trying to help someone who’s had too much to drink and who is now vomiting. The street outside the garden is littered with empty beer cans. The police officers turn to my youth

worker companions and say that they will leave; there is nothing they can do, as this is a private party. The youth workers ask a girl whom they know if things are OK. When we drive away I can hear laughter and loud music, Euphoria (a popular song).

Some days later I speak with one of my informants who had been at the party. She estimated that 25 persons had been in the tiny apartment and that it had been a very good party. She said that drunken people were taken outside to throw up: “you don’t want them inside while they become sick”.

The field notes illustrate that binge drinking activities are still going on, but have moved indoors.

Recruitment of informants at youth centres

As it turned out, direct street observations had only limited value. A change of strategy was needed in how to establish contact with adolescent informers. To learn more about the meaning of current adolescent binge-drinking arenas, we decided to interview teenagers recruited at youth centres, as this was the alternative at hand. In each of the three communities, youth centres were used as bases for interviews. Swedish youth centres are open to all adolescents, but are typically more frequently visited by adolescents from families with fewer economic resources (Mahoney et al., 2004). Participants are often associated with higher consumption of alcohol compared to the average underage youth. The first author spent some evenings each week during spring 2012 at the youth centres and became relatively well known to

many of the adolescents. Informal contact-making “small talk” took place in the midst of playing cards, drinking coffee or standing outside smoking. The youth workers were informed about the study and agreed to speak to adolescents they thought would be interested in being interviewed and who to their knowledge had experiences of binge drinking.

During the spring and summer of 2012, 15 boys and 13 girls aged 16 to 17 were interviewed. All informants were aware of the purpose of the research and they showed interest in talking about their experiences of places for binge drinking. The youngsters chose how they wanted to be interviewed, i.e. alone or together with one, two or three friends and if they wanted to be interviewed more than once. One pair of informants chose to be interviewed four times and two informants twice. Most of the interviews were carried out in rooms adjacent to the youth centres where the youngsters felt comfortable being interviewed out of sight from other visitors. The interviews were semi-structured around central themes, including the meaning of binge-drinking places, the importance of social networks and what made a good party.

Nearly all of the informants attended secondary school, mostly in vocational programmes, and most of them needed to travel to nearby towns to attend school. The informants lived in apartments, semi-detached houses or detached houses, and some had older siblings living on their own. All informants had experiences of binge drinking in various ways. They had all been to parties where almost everyone was drunk, and all but one had on numerous occasions been drinking to get drunk.

The amounts of alcohol typically consumed during drinking events were quite large; two persons sharing a box of 24 cans (33 cl) of strong beer was considered quite normal for both girls and boys.

Home as a place for binge drinking

Most parties were held in homes without adults present: “It’s mostly at someone’s home. When the parents are away, we can then be in their house.” (Boy 16). What the informants labelled as home environments varied. The informants had experiences of drinking in different home settings and seemed to have no preference whether drinking in small flats or in bigger houses, but there should at least be one room where they could play music, a kitchen and preferably a balcony or a garden where they could smoke and watch if anything was going on outside. The size of the home mattered only in the sense that it sometimes set limits on the number of persons invited and there tended to be fewer invited persons to a family home than to homes of siblings or older friends.

If the adolescent host lived in a large detached house, he or she would normally close off some rooms, like the living-room and the parents’ bedroom as they felt responsible towards the parents for “protecting” the house. If they were at an older friend’s or sibling’s apartment, the informants said they would not be as cautious with the furniture and the owner’s belongings as in someone’s family home.

The front door to the home environments was always of great importance to the informants. One could choose to open it to friends, for inclusion, or close it to unwanted people, for exclusion. Locking the

place to secure it from outsiders provided a safe indoor locality that gave the adolescents a space for acting out, including drinking large amounts of alcohol. Some informants found it difficult to navigate between keeping to the parents' instructions and what they believed the parents wanted. Others presumed that their actions were tolerated: "They (parents) sort of understand. It's not like you directly tell them we are going to drink." (Girl 16)

When asked if the neighbours or other adults complained about the noise or beer cans thrown on the street, the informants replied that they did not have any experiences of such complaints. They thought that other adults were perhaps afraid to interfere and instead called the police. Both girl and boy informants had experiences of police officers and youth workers being outside, and some thought it was fun chatting with them. This was not seen as a big problem, for the informants were aware that the professionals could not legally gain entrance to the house. A few informants also had experiences of "Mums and Dads in the city" coming to the house, and they thought it was OK that other parents came by and showed interest, but if you were drunk you would normally avoid talking to them.

Key restricting factors to binge drinking were, according to the informants, lack of home arenas, lack of money and lack of a "right" group of friends. The level of binge drinking was also lower in homes where the parents were present in another section of the home or were out for the evening. Such circumstances also decided how many friends you could invite and how much alcohol you could drink, because you had to appear sober when the adults returned. An-

other restricting factor was when you hosted a party in your own home without the parents' knowledge. This would normally mean restrictions on how many friends to invite and how much alcohol to consume. None of the informants talked about problems in getting access to home arenas because of overcrowded accommodation, big families or a poor living standard.

Reasons for avoiding street and public locations

Using outdoor places for binge drinking was not an option for the informants – neither for boys nor girls – and they did not even understand the question why much of the binge drinking had moved from outdoor arenas to home environments. Most of them had no experience of drinking in outdoor arenas other than having a few beers at lakeside barbecues in the summer.

The exceptions were two girls who had some previous experience of drinking in the "street" and other outdoor places, and they stated that it was unsafe to drink much in outdoor places since they had no control over who were there, and sometimes there could be fights and people using illicit drugs. In addition to safety, being in a home was nicer when it was cold or raining. It was also a place where they could keep the alcohol in one place instead of having to carry it around. An indoor place therefore provided more secure spaces for drinking a lot and acting out.

Some of the informants, girls and boys alike, talked about how easy it was to get a bad reputation if they were seen drunk in public places and met adults. It did not have to be anyone you knew well, but just meeting adults when drunk was embar-

rasing. “This town is so small, you have relatives everywhere... It’s like everyone knows everything about you.” (Girl 17) One of the girls said that she felt sorry for her mother who also got a bad reputation in the small town because of what was happening in the evenings.

The meaning of home for drinking activities

Frequently used words by the informants were control, planning and safety. They wanted control over who had access to drinking places, and planning was how they could gain control and safety and still have space for bingeing.

The adults think that, of course, adolescents stay out on the streets, but what the f... Teenagers today are not that stupid. Me and my friends, we plan our parties in advance. We can plan several days ahead and write lists of who is invited, what is allowed or not; for instance if you pick a fight, we’ll report you to the police. We plan days ahead (Boy 17).

To be indoors and to feel safe while drinking was vital. This also meant that unwanted people could be locked out, such as those who would start fights or get too drunk, or the police. Having parties in home environments also added a sense of maturity and respectability. Sometimes, for special occasions like birthdays, one could dress up and start off by drinking a more expensive and tasty brand of beer. The chosen arenas for binge drinking allowed the adolescents to live out their drunkenness in ways they wanted to, with control and maturity.

The respectability and maturity was also manifested through the importance of showing ability to control your drunkenness to the right accepted level and to be allowed to frown on those who failed. It was seen as important to show control, but also to behave in a “different way” when reaching the planned level of drunkenness. For example, drinking 10–15 cans of strong alcohol beer or alcopops would lead to an accepted level of drunkenness, if one drank in the “right” controlled way, although to large amounts.

Different meanings for girls and boys of parties as an arena

Even though both girls and boys enjoyed large indoor parties with both genders present and felt that these provided a space for drinking a lot and acting out, the consequences of losing control differed between genders. Girls more easily got a bad reputation among friends, whether male or female friends. If girls lost control, got too drunk, vomited or passed out, they would be regarded as immature among their peers. Boys who got too drunk would more often be thought of as acting in a funny way.

Some girl informants had arranged special girls-only parties, typically with only a few participants. Here they could drink wine and behave in a more “girlish way”, giggling, talking and singing. This was not seen as immature, but as a way of expressing feminine interests. “...and we can relax and loosen up..... we drink wine but I don’t want to get plastered,..... to unwind, be happy and to feel the buzz...” (Girl 17). The difference from “normal” parties was that this arena gave these girls an opportunity of being more relaxed and to act out more without fear of losing their reputation.

The boy informants said that they were not interested in boys-only parties, but also admitted that they would sometimes watch sports together on TV and drink beer, which they saw as a normal “boy activity”. Even though the boys did not label such occasions as a party, they did provide a space for drinking a lot within a same-sex context.

Parties provide arenas for exploring gender roles. Girls more than boys felt the demands to behave in a controlled way, despite consuming equal amounts of alcohol. Girls-only arenas seemed therefore to be more central, giving space for playful activities while drinking. Even if boys also have same-sex gatherings with lots of alcohol consumed, they do not experience this as important. It is the sports event which is clearly more in focus.

Discussion

This “research journey” started with a focus on outdoor arenas for teenage binge drinking and “hanging out”, but had to take a different direction as these places had been abandoned. Groups who traditionally would have frequented them stayed indoors, partying in home environments. This seems to be a change in arenas from the 1980s and 1990s. This finding is based on the consistency of a variety of data from outreach social workers on regional and national levels, surveys, direct observations, experiences from youth centres, police, “Mums and Dads in the city” and from interviews with adolescents. The finding also seems to correspond with a reported decrease in alcohol-related public assaults and crime among adolescents, and it may reflect a trend of less disorderly adolescent outdoor activities (Granath,

2013; Ring, 2013). Such a change may also be consistent with findings that there is an overall decrease in adolescent alcohol consumption, and with reports of continued heavy drinking in subpopulations (Leifman, 2013). The findings therefore do not imply that all serious problems have decreased. If one of the national goals is to reduce adolescent binge drinking, success cannot be necessarily claimed even though the national figures of total alcohol use are lower.

Easy access and regular use of social media have made it less important to meet face to face in public places and is likely to be part of the change, but this is an area that needs further research.

Most of the previous research on places for underage binge drinking is grounded in ethnography (Demant & Landolt, 2014; Demant & Østergaard, 2006; Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2011). The ethnographic approach, with a combination of data collection methods, offers opportunities of making the necessary switch in focus from parks and streets to homes, and at the same time allows access to show how informants make meaning regarding place and space for binge drinking. Ethnographic research can be discussed in terms of whether the findings represent only the communities and youth groups studied, or if they to some extent may also capture broader national trends (O’Reilly, 2009). Similar changes of decreasing outdoor drinking have been reported on a number of towns and cities of different sizes all over the country. One must however bear in mind that there are important differences between small towns and large cities that are not accounted for in our interviews.

We should consider some of these differences. In general, small-town adolescents drink somewhat less than adolescents in larger cities (Leifman, 2013; Widén 2014). There is also less to attract teenagers to spend evenings out in small town centres compared to large cities. Adolescents under 18 cannot legally go to a pub or a bar in Sweden, but unlike cities, small towns also lack most other commercial meeting places that attract young persons, such as cafes with a youthful buzz.

Small town city centres, in contrast to bigger cities, appear nearly empty at night. There are few grown-ups around, as there are few commercial meeting places even for adults. The “Mums and Dads” and police patrolling at weekend nights may therefore be the only visible persons there. In addition, the informants talk about a lack of anonymity if they are seen drunk by grown-ups or other youth groups. There is also the risk, especially for girls, of earning a bad reputation in small towns, as there is a greater chance of knowing the persons you happen to meet. The implications for adolescents living in small towns seem therefore to differ in some respects from those living in bigger cities, and more studies in other kinds of communities should bring more nuances to the picture.

Interpretations on home arena as place and space for parties

Building on reports of a change in locations of binge-drinking adolescents, we need to interpret this finding. Teenagers often try to avoid parental control of their chosen arenas. If they chose to escape parental control in the homes in the 1980s, they now escape adults by choosing home arenas in the absence of adults. As in the

1980s, adolescents strive to get a free space without adult interference. Private homes are now the locations where they can meet and enjoy themselves with friends and form their own culture of drinking. Home environments are where adolescents create free space adapted to their meaning-making processes and needs.

There is an overall decrease in adolescent alcohol use, while small groups at the same time seem to increase their alcohol intake per session (Elmeland, 2014). This study did not aim to compare indoor and outdoor drinking and does not indicate that indoor drinking is less problematic in a more general sense than outdoor drinking. Large quantities of alcohol are still consumed by underage persons beyond parental or other adult control.

The persons interviewed here were chosen among adolescents with experience of heavy drinking. The adolescents – both boys and girls – reported drinking quantities estimated to be equal to 144 grams of pure alcohol per drinking event. This is about twice the limit of “binging” according to the AUDIT Manual (Bergman & Källmén, 2002). Even though the informants were aware that they consumed quite large quantities of alcohol, they perceived it as being quite normal and in line with their peers’ consumption levels. They describe their parties and how drinking is performed in a hedonistic way, i.e. to get drunk. From both pattern and amount of alcohol consumed, their way of drinking could be categorised as binge drinking.

As most of our adolescent informants had no personal experience of binge drinking in outdoor arenas, they considered home environments to be the “only right” place for partying. The street arena did not

provide the sense of space for action and it was certainly not the place where one could feel safe. Home arenas without adult interference provided the adolescents with a place for partying that gave them space for acting out and drinking a lot and at the same time enabled them to feel safe and in control.

The change of binge-drinking arenas seems to be related to changes in alcohol consumption patterns. These changes concern not only the location and the quantities, but also how binge drinking is performed even when there is no reduction. Space cannot be seen as just a stage where binge drinking is performed. Whatever the reasons for the change in arenas, such a shift is also likely to be related to how patterns of drinking lots of alcohol are formed. In outdoor drinking gatherings, you may need to shout in order to be heard and there is less need to be cautious with furniture. Such gatherings may therefore get more noisy and rowdy and are likely to result in more uncontrolled behaviours, whereas indoor arenas can support the development of more controlled ways of acting out.

The need for full control of place, of inclusion and exclusion of participants, and of the right level of intoxication is clearly manifested by the informants and is in line with previous research (Demant & Ravn, 2013; Järvinen & Østergaard, 2009; Kolind, 2011; Measham, 2008). The change to home environments provides an increased possibility to display ability of how to “behave” in someone’s home in a mature way also when getting drunk and acting out. In the light of the shift, the inclusion of only those who drink and behave in the “right” way is vital. The exclusion of both boys and girls who behave immaturely and

who are considered lacking the right level of self-control are in the light of this shift seen as necessary when choosing home environments.

Also, this study shows that displaying some sort of control is crucial also for teenagers who indulge in partying, letting loose and drinking large quantities to get drunk (i.e. bingeing). The notion of “bounded use” captures how keeping to a desired level of getting drunk for many adolescents demonstrates their ability of having control (Østergaard, 2007). This self-bounding of binge drinking seems to be in accordance with Measham (2002), who highlights the importance in young persons’ strive for a “controlled loss of control”.

Both the amount of alcohol consumed and the importance of control in bingeing had similarities among boys and girls. Especially the girl informants stressed that home environments provided them with an increased sense of safety and control. The parties were an arena not only for drinking and acting out, but they also provided space for developing gender identities. This was done both in larger mixed-gender parties, and in smaller same-sex parties. Large amounts of alcohol were consumed in both of these, but the two forms of party had different meanings and perform different roles. Same-sex parties were described as more relaxed, while mixed-gender parties were regarded more as a stage to show how you wanted to present yourself. Home arenas therefore seemed to provide locations for nuanced expressions, giving space for performing, acting and experimenting with roles in various ways.

Implications for prevention

Adolescent behaviours have long been seen as a major concern. The focus often lies on night-time events that attract large numbers of young people and are therefore considered more risky (Hunt, Evans, & Kares, 2007). The adult community has a history of mobilising professionals as well as voluntary organisations to control underage activities in public arenas. This mobilisation may have contributed to the underage adolescents' move from the streets to home environments. This has been not just a reversed change in places, but it signifies a continued teenage effort to find spaces for living-out freely, without adult control and interference (Robinson, 2009). The boundaries and limits of the home arena are now used to keep adults and other unwanted persons out, so that the adolescents can enjoy their free space. In one sense it may even be claimed that the change from outdoor arenas to drinking in home environments makes the scene out of reach for many adults such as social workers, the police and the "Mums and Dads" organisation, who are all left standing outside and are forced to just watch.

The only adults having indisputable access to the home are the host's parents. Even though the parents are not present physically, their instructions and trust are something many of the informants relate to. Breaking parental rules is perceived as problematic, not only for fear of consequences such as curfews, but also because the adolescents do not want to lose their parents' trust in them. Järvinen and

Østergaard (2006) show that parental rules regarding the use of alcohol can make a difference, and with clear rules that are understandable to them, adolescents tend to drink less. Elmeland and Kolind (2012) stress the importance of parents in preventing binge drinking and reducing harm by an "everyday practice-oriented" approach.

Visible outdoor binge drinking seems to be replaced by binge drinking in home arenas, which makes binge drinking less visible. This change in arenas could be expected, as getting adolescent binge drinking away from the streets was a goal of adult mobilisation with outreach work and volunteer parents' groups. The change of arenas has implications on teenage drinking patterns, also when large amounts of alcohol are consumed. Home environment parties are an important arena for experimenting roles in forming identities. The findings of our study clearly stress the importance of including parents in preventive work against adolescents' heavy drinking.

Declaration of interest None.

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