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YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF SEXUAL CONSENT IN RELATION TO ALCOHOL INTOXICATION

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English summary

The aim of this thesis was to investigate young Danes' understanding of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. The thesis starts by introducing the topic, arguing for its relevance, both on a societal level, but also research wise. Previous research has investigated how sexual consent is defined, communicated as well as how discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication can influence the processes of consent. The present study contributes to the existing research by focusing specifically on how young people's understanding and situational construction of sexual consent and sexual assault both draw on and is shaped by the abovementioned discourses.

Based on 30 qualitative interviews with young people in Denmark, aged 19 to 25, and by using a theoretical framework derived from Critical Discursive Psychology and narrative theory, the overarching research question of the thesis is thus to explore how young people understand and construct sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. In order to shed light on the different facets and aspects that characterize young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication, the overarching research question was broken down to three sub-questions. The first sub-question, addressed in the first manuscript, investigates how young people talk about consent generally, but also specifically in relation to alcohol intoxication. The second sub-question, explored in the second manuscript, investigates how notions of intentionality and responsibility influence young people's construction of sexual consent/assault in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. The third sub-question, that is the focus of the third manuscript, sheds light on how young people situationally construct agency in sexual interactions influenced by heavy alcohol intoxication.

After presenting the study's focus and research questions, previous research examining the association between alcohol, sex and sexual assault will be presented, followed

by a presentation of previous research on sexual consent. Following that, the theoretical framework the project was based on, as well as a description of relevant analytical concepts will be outlined. After that, the methodology of the project will be presented, including relevant ethical reflections, followed by a brief presentation of the three manuscripts' aims and central findings.

Overall, the thesis' results highlight how young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication is situational and contextual. This contextual and situational construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication can be due to how young people take up different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication for different aims and purposes that influence their understanding of consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. In addition, the thesis' results show how factors such as gender, sexual orientation and level of intoxication can influence young people's possibilities to consent to sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication.

Finally, the implications of the study's results, the study's limitations and the conclusion follow. Following this last chapter, the three manuscripts as well as the appendix can be found.

Dansk resumé

Formålet med denne afhandling var at undersøge danske unges forståelse af seksuelt samtykke i situationer, hvor de drikker alkohol. Til at starte med bliver afhandlingens emne præsenteret, samt emnets relevans på et samfunds- og forskningsmæssigt plan. Tidligere forskning har undersøgt, hvordan seksuelt samtykke defineres og kommunikeres, samt, hvordan diskurser omkring køn, seksualitet og alkoholberuselse kan have indflydelse på samtykkeprocessen. Herværende undersøgelse bidrager til tidligere forskning ved at fokusere på, hvordan unge anvender de førhen nævnte diskurser situationelt for at konstruere deres forståelse af seksuelt samtykke i situationer, hvor de drikker alkohol, samt hvordan disse diskurser påvirker den måde, de forstår samtykke på.

Studiet er baseret på 30 kvalitative interviews med unge danskere, mellem 19-25 år. Det overordnede teoretiske perspektiv er Kritisk Diskurs Psykologi og narrative teorier. Afhandlingens overordnede forskningsspørgsmål er at undersøge, hvordan unge mennesker forstår og konstruerer seksuelt samtykke i situationer hvor de drikker alkohol. For at belyse de forskellige aspekter af unges forståelse af seksuelt samtykke i situationer, hvor de drikker alkohol, inddeles det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål i fire underspørgsmål. Det første underspørgsmål som adresseres i den første artikel undersøger, hvordan unge mennesker snakker om seksuelt samtykke både generelt, men også specifikt, i situationer hvor de drikker alkohol. Det andet underspørgsmål, som adresseres i den anden artikel, undersøger, hvordan ideer omkring intentionalitet og ansvar har indflydelse på, hvordan unge forstår seksuelt samtykke og overgreb i forbindelse med alkoholindtag. Det tredje underspørgsmål der adresseres i den tredje artikel kigger på, hvordan unge mennesker konstruerer agens i deres seksuelle oplevelser i forbindelse med alkoholindtag.

Efter præsentation af studiets fokus og forskningsspørgsmål, vil tidligere forskning der har undersøgt sammenhængen mellem alkohol, sex og seksuelt overgreb

præsenteres, efterfulgt af en præsentation af tidligere forskning omkring seksuelt samtykke. I det efterfølgende kapitel vil det teoretiske perspektiv, samt relevante teoretiske begreber præsenteres. Efter det, vil projektets metodiske fremgangsmåde blive præsenteret, samt relevante etiske refleksioner. Før diskussionen af resultaterne, vil de fire artiklers formål og centrale fund blive præsenteret.

Overordnet viser studiets resultater, at unges forståelse af samtykke i situationer, hvor de drikker alkohol er situationel og kontekstuel. Denne situationelle og kontekstuelle forståelse udspringer af, at unge mennesker gør brug af forskellige og modsatrettede diskurser omkring køn, seksualitet og alkoholberuselse situationelt for at konstruere samtykke, og som samtidig er med til at influere, hvordan de unge forstår samtykke i situationer hvor de drikker alkohol. Derudover viser studiets resultater også, hvordan faktorer som køn, seksuel orientering og niveau af alkoholberuselse påvirker de unges muligheder for at samtykke til alkoholberuset sex.

Til slut, præsenteres studiets begrænsninger, efterfulgt af en konklusion. Efter dette sidste kapitel, kan man finde de fire artikler samt appendix.

Young people's understanding of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores young Danes' understanding of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. The PhD project is based on 30 qualitative in-depth interviews with young people between the ages 19-25 and investigates how the participants construct sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication and how they make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. The project was conducted at the Center for Alcohol and Drugs Research. It was funded by the school of Business and Social Sciences (Aarhus University) and ran from February 2020-February 2023.

In the following, the subject of the thesis will be introduced while pointing out its relevance in relation to society and research.

The prevalence and consequences of alcohol related non-consensual sexual experiences

Alcohol plays a central role in many young Danes' lives with Denmark being at the top among European countries when it comes to levels of alcohol consumption (ESPAD Group 2020; Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2018). In Denmark, as in many other countries, alcohol intoxication is inextricably linked to flirting and to having sex for young people (Grazian, 2007; Jensen et al., 2019). Research, for instance, shows that alcohol is often part of young people's casual sexual practices (Wade, 2021) and that some young people, at times, intentionally consume alcohol because they believe it will increase their sexual drive and decrease their inhibitions (Patrick & Maggs, 2009; Herold & Hunt, 2020; Hunt & Frank, 2016).

While studies show that alcohol intoxicated sex is – in a lot of cases – a pleasurable and normative experience for young people (e.g. Grazian, 2007; Jensen et al., 2019; Pedersen et al., 2017), other studies show that young people's negative and non-consensual

sexual experiences (NSEs) often happen under the influence of alcohol intoxication (Heinskou et al., 2017; Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Tutenges et al., 2020). NSEs is a term originally developed by Koss et al. (2007) and was summarized by Kilimnik and Humphreys (2018) as '*sexual activity (fondling, oral sex, or vaginal and anal penetration) that involves a lack of consent and/or is instigated by manipulation, coercion, abuse of power, incapacitation, force, threats, and/or violence*'. NSEs are, sometimes, also referred to as sexual assault, unwanted sex or rape; these latter concepts can, however, entail different meanings and/or sexual behaviors (Kilimnik & Humphreys, 2018). In this thesis, I will use the terms NSE or sexual assault interchangeably when referring to sexual activities characterized by a lack of consent, for reasons that will be elaborated on later.

Statistics show that 29% of officially registered NSEs in Denmark (Heinskou et al., 2017) and up to 50% internationally (Lorenz & Ullmann, 2016) happen when one or both people involved in the sexual interaction are under the influence of alcohol intoxication. Research also indicates that most NSEs happen to cisgender women (Armstrong et al., 2018) and LGBTQIA+ people (Frisch et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Thomsen, 2022). The consequences of experiencing a NSE are many, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, difficulty experiencing sexual pleasure or forming long-term relationships (e.g. Armstrong et al., 2018; Hermann et al., 2018). The prevalence and consequences of alcohol intoxicated NSEs thus point to the importance of trying to develop better understandings of how young people construct sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. Knowledge about young people's own views and understandings is crucial, as this can help inform campaigns and educational efforts aimed at reducing the high number of alcohol-related NSEs.

Sexual consent and -assault as uncertain and contested concepts

A second reason why an investigation of young people's construction of sexual consent (and, in extension, sexual assault) in relation to alcohol intoxication is important is that there is not an agreement among researchers and lay people about how to understand and define sexual consent. Muehlenhard et al. (2016) point at the lack of a universal definition of consent and describe how sexual consent has often been understood as, either, an '*internal state of willingness*', as an '*act of explicitly agreeing to something*', or as '*non-verbal behaviors that indicate a person's willingness to engage in sexual activity*' (Muehlenhard et al., 2016, pp. 462-463). Furthermore, research also shows that young people often have different preferences with regards to how they communicate consent, which can be either verbally, non-verbally, or a combination of both (e.g. Baldwin-White, 2021; Beres, 2010, 2014; Humphreys, 2007; Jozkowski et al., 2014a).

In a Danish context, a new consent-based legislation was recently passed that changed the premises for how NSEs are understood. According to the previous legislation, a sexual encounter was considered sexual assault if violence, or threats of violence were used, if the victim resisted in any way or was incapacitated (Kvinfo, 2020). However, due to the fact that many people who have been the victims of sexual assault experience tonic immobility (Kaluza & Conry-Murray, 2021) and are, therefore, unable to say resist, the Danish parliament voted for a new consent-based legislation in December 2020 (Samtykkebaseret voldtægtsbestemmelse, 2020). This focus on sexual consent has not only been documented in Denmark, but also internationally. For example, several states in the US have passed legislations around affirmative consent policies at state institutions (Muehlenhard et al., 2016; Willis et al., 2019), while Sweden also got a consent-based legislation in 2018 (Holmström et al., 2020). In Denmark, the new legislation meant that all individuals involved in a sexual encounter have to actively give and receive consent, otherwise the encounter will be considered

a NSE (Samtykkebaseret voldtægtsbestemmelse, 2020). At the time when the present study was conducted, young Danes were thus at a crossroad between the previous understanding of sexual assaults and the new understanding of NSEs. In Danish media, there was much debate about whether the new legislation with its consent-based approach would be fully adopted by young people, or whether it would result in further confusion where some would continue to draw on the previous understanding of sexual assault, while others would be quicker to adopt the new.

Against this background, it becomes relevant to investigate how young people understand and communicate sexual consent. Given that alcohol can impair a person's ability to consent to sex and because the alcohol culture is permeated by sexualized norms and imperatives (as I will elaborate later), it, furthermore, becomes pivotal to explore both how alcohol intoxication influences and shapes young people's situational constructions of sexual consent and their understanding of what constitutes sexual assault. Reflecting on the fact that Danish young people were at a legislative and conceptual crossroad, many of the participants in this study often drew interchangeably on both the previous and the new understanding of sexual assaults. This provides the basis for using the terms NSEs and sexual assault interchangeably throughout this thesis.

The complexity of sexual consent and sexual assault in heavy drinking contexts

Related to the above, a third reason for investigating young people's understanding of sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication is the complexity of those matters. One thing that shows the complexity of both sexual consent and sexual assault is research indicates that the experiential and complex reality of consent/assault often differs from how these are understood by law and in public discourses[1] (e.g. Beres, 2014;

[1] A discourse is a set of assumptions which center around a common logic and give meaning to the experiences and practices of people in a certain context, society, culture or historical period (Hollway, 1984b)

Stefansen et al., 2021; Tutenges et al., 2020). Sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication are often discussed and evaluated by the public and some researchers in relation to intentionality and responsibility. For example, in relation to intentionality, previous research has typically investigated incapacitated sexual assaults (ISAs) through a 'perpetrator tactics framework', i.e. based on an understanding that those assaults happen due to the deliberate tactics or manipulation of the perpetrator (Stefansen et al.2021). Other studies show that people view 'unintentional sexual assaults' more positively compared to assaults that happen due to the deliberate tactics of the perpetrator (Kaluza & Conray-Murray, 2021).

In relation to responsibility, research shows that in the case of alcohol intoxicated NSEs, people often hold the victim responsible for the assault they have experienced. This phenomenon is called 'victim-blaming' (Dyar et al., 2021; Maurer, 2016; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2018) and is based on the rationale that if the victim wanted to avoid the assault, they could have refrained from drinking (Ullman et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 2008). It is mostly women who get victim blamed (Wegner et al., 2015), which, in part, can be explained by the fact that women's alcohol consumption has traditionally been viewed as more inappropriate and negative than men's (e.g. Herold & Hunt 2020; Nicholls, 2020; Pennay et al., 2015) and because women's casual sexual practices are still viewed more negatively compared to men's (Bjønness et al., 2022). Related to this, in stereotypical and stigmatizing discourses, intoxicated women are also perceived as more sexually available (Farris et al., 2010). Men are rarely recognized as victims of sexual assault– even if research shows that some are – which, to a large degree, can be explained by the fact that men are perceived as physically superior to women, why they are presumed to could have resisted the assault (Davies & Rogers, 2006). Importantly, intoxicated perpetrators, are often ascribed *less* responsibility compared to sober perpetrators, which, in large part, is based on the rationale that alcohol intoxication might have led the perpetrator to misunderstand another person's non-consent (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003;

Nason et al., 2019). Since men often are the perpetrators, they are the ones that most often are excused for committing sexual assault (Wegner et al., 2015).

In recent years, the issue of 'responsibility' has also taken a center stage in debates about sexual consent. For example, anti-sexual assault campaigns typically advocate teaching young people how to effectively ask for- and communicate consent or non-consent to sexual activity, in order for them to avoid committing or getting sexually assaulted (Ortiz & Shafer, 2018). This puts responsibility on the individual young person to consent to sex and implies that all young people have a free choice in relation to consent (Ortiz & Shafer, 2018). In other cases, there seems to be a gendered imbalance in relation to responsibility with women being perceived as the gatekeepers in relation to consent, i.e. as the ones who are responsible for consent or not allowing men's sexual advances (Beres, 2014; Hollway, 1984; Gavey, 2018; Gunnarsson, 2018).

Discussions about sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication are, therefore, often characterized by simplistic and dichotomous understandings of responsibility and intentionality (e.g. Dyar et al., 2021; Maurer, 2016; Ortiz & Shafer, 2018; Stefansen et al., 2021). This has the consequence that the view on alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters is characterized by notions that there is always a clear allocation of responsibility, a clear distinction between a 'victim' and a 'perpetrator' and that sexual encounters can clearly be categorized as either 'consensual' or 'non- consensual' (e.g. Bay-Cheng & Eliseo- Arras, 2008; Gavey, 2018). Such discourses often result in an individualized understanding of why alcohol intoxicated NSEs happen (i.e. due to the ill intensions of a deviant person), overlooking how other factors, such as norms around gender, sexuality and intoxication influence why NSEs happen (which will be elaborated on later).

Research shows that the experiential reality and association between sexual consent, sexual assault and heavy drinking is often very complex and not always possible to understand in simplistic and dichotomous ways. Research shows that, in practice, it can often be difficult to draw a definite line between consensual and NSEs in heavy drinking contexts (e.g. Stefansen et al., 2021; Tutenges et al., 2020). While some young people report having had consensual sex while intoxicated (Muehlenhard et al., 2016), other studies argue that alcohol intoxication can make young people consent to sex they would not consent to if sober (Flack et al., 2007) or have sex they later regret (Orchowski et al., 2012). Other researchers have argued that not all alcohol intoxicated sexual assaults are the result of the intentional 'tactics' of the perpetrator (Stefansen et al., 2021; Tutenges et al., 2020). Rather, some assaults are a result of 'tumultuous and confusing' sexual interactions where it is difficult to draw distinctions between a 'victim' and a 'perpetrator' and where allocation of responsibility for those interactions becomes difficult (Stefansen et al., 2021). Contributing to the complexity is also the fact that victims of alcohol-related NSEs, at times, do not see themselves as such (Heinskou et al., 2017). There can be several reasons for such misconceptions of victimhood status, one being that sexual assaults often happen between friends, close acquaintances (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Rennison, 2002) or in the context of an established relationship (Taylor & Mumford, 2016), why the reality of sexual assaults often does not comply with populist 'rape myths', holding that sexual assaults happen between strangers and that the perpetrator is an unknown ill-intended stranger (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003). Importantly, however, while victims of NSEs might not always recognize themselves as victims, they still risk experiencing the post-event psychological trauma and stress as a result of the unwanted sexual interaction (e.g. Armstrong et al., 2018; Hermann et al., 2018).

Another thing that shows the complexity of sexual consent (and, in turn, sexual assault) is the fact that sexual consent can be different within LGBTQIA+ relationships

compared to heterosexual relationships (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022). Despite the fact that sexual consent can be different within LGBTQIA+ relationships, sexual consent is frequently discussed through a heteronormative framework, i.e. 'making heterosex the normal term, the commonsensical position' (Jakobsen, 1998, p. 518), excluding LGBTQIA+ people's experiences with sexual consent (De Heer et al., 2021). Research on LGBTQIA+ people's views and experiences with consent show how LGBTQIA+ people might have difficulty navigating consent due to how consent is often discussed through a heterosexual framework with a man seen as the 'initiator' and the woman as the 'gatekeeper' in relation to consent (e.g. Beres et al., 2004; De Heer et al., 2021; McKie et al., 2020). In same sex relationships, it is, therefore, unclear what 'role' each person is assigned in relation to consent (Sternin et al., 2022).

In recent years, researchers, but also international activist movements, such as the #MeToo movement, have started to challenge the individualized focus on alcohol intoxicated NSEs and, instead, argued that there is a need for acknowledgement of the role of power structures and a so-called 'rape culture' in facilitating 'a pervasive ideology that effectively supports or excuses sexual assault' (Burt, 1980, p. 218; see also Askanius & Hartley, 2019). In critiquing the traditional heteronormative understanding of sexual consent, researchers have also argued that there is a need for research on how LGBTQIA+ people often have unique ways of communicating consent and face unique challenges in relation to consent (Beres et al., 2004; De Heer et al., 2021; McKie et al., 2020). Later, I will elaborate on this latter aspect. Here it is suffice to say that, on the one hand, there seems to be a tendency to discuss sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication by drawing on simplistic and individualistic explanations and to exclude LGBTQIA+ people's experiences with sexual consent (and assault). On the other hand, the practical and experiential reality of sexual consent/abuse also seems to be a more complex than what public discourse will have us

believe. The mismatch between the lived experiential reality and dominant stereotypical discourses can result in some young people having difficulty navigating and making sense of sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication and they might face different challenges, also based on factors such as gender identity or sexual orientation. Research actually shows that young people have difficulty navigating alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters (Orchowski et al., 2022) which points to the importance of investigating how they understand those matters. The contradiction between how those matters are discussed and the experiential reality behind those matters also point to the importance of investigating not only how young people, of different genders and sexualities, talk about sexual consent and sexual assault, but also how they practice sexual consent and make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences, if we want to get a fuller picture of their understanding of those matters.

The lack of research on sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication

A final reason why investigating young people's understanding of sexual consent/assault in relation to alcohol intoxication is important is that there is a paucity of research focusing on sexual consent in heavy drinking contexts *specifically*. Research shows that alcohol intoxication itself, as well as contradicting norms and expectations embedded in the alcohol culture can influence the processes of consent and how sexual assaults are understood (e.g. Bogren et al., 2022; Hunt et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Laughlin et al., 2023). This, in turn, points to the importance of studying how consent is contextually constructed. Alcohol intoxication can interfere with a person's ability to consent to sex (Loeber et al., 2009), but, as mentioned earlier, it can be hard to draw a line between consensual and non-consensual alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences (e.g. Stefansen et al., 2021; Tutenges et al., 2020). For instance, depending on their body size and their level of tolerance, people can experience different effects from different levels of alcohol

intoxication (Steele & Josephs, 1990) why it can be hard to estimate when a person is no longer able to consent to sex (except when a person is incapacitated) (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Researchers argue that discourses around alcohol intoxication and sex have led to a situation where alcohol consumption not only increases the likelihood of a sexual encounter, but also where alcohol consumption can signal the expectancy of sex (Abbey, 2011). Related to this, intoxication is, sometimes, also interpreted as cues of sexual interest (Farris et al, 2010). Other research shows that young people intentionally consume alcohol because they believe it will increase their sexual drive and decrease their inhibitions (Patrick & Maggs, 2009). As aforementioned, there is today a widespread belief that alcohol intoxication in itself can lead to NSEs (e.g. Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022). The interlinkages between alcohol and sex are also evident in studies showing how some men at times encourage women to consume alcohol because they believe that this will make the women more sexually available (Farris et al, 2010). Finally, as mentioned earlier, alcohol intoxication can sometimes excuse committing sexual assault (e.g. Abbey, 2002, 2011; Wegner et al., 2015). Not only is heavy alcohol consumption often associated with a certain level of loss of control, i.e. a reduction in the individual's ability to make rational and sound decisions, nightlife cultures (e.g. nightclubs, bars, venues) are also special societal domains where heavy intoxication and transgressive behavior is encouraged and commercialized. Tutenges (2012), for instance, describe the nightlife culture as spaces that allow for a behavior that is different from the 'normal sober behavior' (see also Tutenges et al., 2020).

Heavy drinking contexts, such as the urban nightclub scene, are also characterized by gender and sexuality discourses that can influence the processes of consent (e.g. Bogren et al., 2022; Hunt et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Laughlin et al., 2023). In recent years, a number of studies have, for instance, showed how European nightlife contexts are characterized by the pervasiveness of a 'neoliberal discourse'

that encourages young people to be free-spirited and sexually agentic (Bailey et al., 2015; Farris et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2013; Peralta, 2010). Within that neoliberal discourse, young people are seen as '*rational, adult, contract-making individuals in a free market of options*' (Adam, 2005, p.344). They are expected to pursue their goals and desires and care for themselves (Brown, 2003). While particularly women's drinking and sexual pursuits have historically been constrained due to traditional gender norms based on modesty, discipline and notions about respectable femininity (e.g. Bailey et al.,2015; Griffin et al., 2013; Skeggs, 1997), with the neoliberal discourse women are now, like men, encouraged to be agents who actively pursue their individualized sexual desires (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2013). Importantly, however, the neoliberal conception of young people as free agents not only has implications for the normative framing of their relation to sex, it also has implications for how sexual consent is understood. Given that young people are positioned as free agents who make sexual choices based on their free will also means that, within the neoliberal discourse, young people are constructed as bearing full responsibility for their sexual encounters and their consequences (Brown, 2003; Holmström et al., 2020).

The contemporary nightlife scene and the broader culture of intoxication is, however, contradictory social spaces (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2013). While recent years have seen a growing dominance of a neoliberal discourse, this does not mean that more traditional norms and conceptions of gender, sex and agency have disappeared. Instead, research indicates that parallel to novel neo-liberal discourses, a more traditional 'male sexual drive discourse' continues to operate. Within this discourse, men are expected to always be ready to have sex (Ferrales et al., 2016; Small, 2015), which can result in men feeling pressured to consent to unwanted sex if they are to live up to traditional masculinity ideals (Beres, 2014; Hollway et al., 1984a,1984b; Gunnarssson, 2018; Gavey, 2018). Within this discourse, men's sexuality is sometimes viewed as a biological instinct, therefore, hard to control. This is

sometimes used as an excuse for why men commit sexual assault, based on the rationale that they could 'simply not control their sexual urges' (Anderson & Doherty, 2007; Meenagh, 2021). Within this discourse, women, on the other hand, are positioned as the 'passive recipients' of men's sexual advances and as 'gatekeepers' in relation to consent (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984).

The operation of different discourses have let Griffin et al. (2013) to argue that , when drinking and having sex, women have to navigate a contradictory or paradoxical social space. Women have to balance between normative imperatives urging them to indulge in heavy intoxication and consenting to casual sex in par with men if they are to live up to the expectations of being agentic (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008), while, at the same time, not getting too drunk and not consenting 'too much' to sex, since they then risk being perceived as 'slutty' (Bjønness et al., 2022; Johansen et al., 2020; Jozkowski et al., 2018). Relating to how women are expected not to have sex with too many people, the notion of 'token resistance' refers to how there is an expectation that a woman's 'no' to sex , actually means 'yes' and that her 'no' is due to her not wanting to be perceived as *too* sexually available (Shafer et al., 2018). Paradoxically, this can lead to a woman's non-consent being perceived as her consenting to sex. Therefore, women might sometimes find themselves consenting to sex not out of desire, but in order to live up to current ideals about the liberated and free-spirited agentic women or their might experience having their non-consent read as a consent to sex.

The different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication characterizing the contemporary alcohol culture influence young people's possibilities for consenting to sex, which, in turn, points to the need to study young people's understanding of sexual consent and sexual assault contextually. While there has been some research on young people's understanding of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication (which will be further elaborated in Chapter 2), the present study contributes to the existing research by

focusing specifically on how young people's understanding and situational construction of sexual consent and sexual assault both draw on and is shaped by the abovementioned discourses.

Research questions

Based on the above, the thesis draws on qualitative interviews with 30 young people in Denmark, aged 19 to 25, of different genders and sexual orientations. It explored the following overarching research question:

How do young people construct sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication?

In order to shed light on the different facets and aspects that characterize young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication, the overarching research question was broken down to three sub-questions:

1) How do young people talk about sexual consent both in general, but also in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication?
2) How do notions of intentionality and responsibility influence young people's construction of sexual consent/assault in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication?
3) How do young people situationally construct sexual agency in sexual interactions influenced by heavy alcohol intoxication?

The three sub-questions are explored in the three manuscripts (articles) making up the analysis of the thesis. The three manuscripts complement each other by focusing on different aspects of young people's understanding of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. The first manuscript, entitled 'Uncovering young people's situational construction of sexual consent' was written by me in collaboration with Vibeke A. Frank and Maria D. Herold. Based on the fact that the legislation on consent recently changed in Denmark,

meaning that young Danes stand at a crossroad between the previous understanding and the new understanding of sexual assaults, this manuscript focuses on how young people talk about sexual consent both in general, but also in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. The second manuscript is entitled 'Intentionality and responsibility in young people's construction of alcohol intoxicated sexual assault and sexual consent' and was written in collaboration with Vibeke A. Frank. This manuscript investigates how notions of intentionality and responsibility influence young people's construction of sexual assault and sexual consent in relation alcohol intoxication when presented with a hypothetical alcohol intoxicated sexual interaction during the interview. The third manuscript, which I am the sole author on, is entitled 'Sexual agency as situational: Moving beyond neoliberal understandings of sexual agency when investigating young people's alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters'. This manuscript focused on the 'experiential reality' of consent, and, more specifically, young people's situational construction of agency in their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. All three manuscripts use Critical Discursive Psychology (CDP) as a theoretical framework (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Davies & Harré, 1990), while one of them uses a narrative methodological approach (e.g. Bamberg, 2004, 2011). The theoretical framework and methodological approach will be elaborated on later.

Outline of the dissertation

Having introduced the focus of the thesis, as well as its relevance to research and society, a brief overview of the rest of the dissertation will now be provided. In Chapter 2, previous research examining the association between alcohol, sex and sexual assault will be presented, following by a presentation of previous research on sexual consent, since that research has provided the backdrop against which this PhD project was based on. In Chapter 3, the theoretical framework the project was based on, as well as a description of relevant analytical concepts will be outlined. In Chapter 4, the methodology of the project will be

presented, including reflections on ethical research practice when studying sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication, as well as reflections on positionality and transparency. In Chapter 5, the three manuscripts' aims and central findings will briefly be presented. In Chapter 6, the findings of the manuscripts will be discussed in light of the previous research presented earlier in the dissertation, as well as the implications of those findings, including their limitations. Following chapter 6, the three manuscripts are to be found, followed by the appendix (including the recruitment post, the informed consent form, the interview guide, the survey, a demographics table as well as the co-author statements).

Chapter 2: Previous research and contextualizing the dissertation

In this chapter, previous research on alcohol intoxication, sex and sexual consent will be unfolded. First, the Danish 'alcohol intoxication culture' will briefly be presented, followed by research that has examined the association between alcohol intoxication, sex and sexual assault. Finally, previous research on sexual consent will be presented. The presented research serves the aim of contextualizing the dissertation, as well as highlighting the relevance of the thesis' research focus.

The Danish 'alcohol intoxication culture'

In Denmark, and in other Western countries, consuming alcohol plays a central role in young people's lives (e.g. Advocat & Lindsey, 2015; Measham & Brain, 2005; McCreanor et al. 2016; Tolstrup et al., 2019). Danish youth are at the top among European young people when it comes to the consumption of alcohol. Statistics indicate that 92% of young Danes between the ages 18–24 drink alcohol and often to intoxication (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2018). This is despite the general decline concerning young people's alcohol consumption that has been observed since the early 2000s worldwide (Kraus et al., 2020; Pennay et al., 2015). Denmark has been characterized as a 'wet' drinking culture characterized by high consumption and more liberal drinking norms (including drinking to intoxication) as opposed to 'dry' drinking cultures characterized by low consumption (Room & Mäkelä, 2000). Alcohol consumption as well as drinking to intoxication is, therefore, a widely accepted practice in Denmark (Andrade & Järvinen, 2021; Demant & Østergaard, 2007; Tolstrup et al., 2019).

Researchers have characterized alcohol as a 'medium of sociability', creating a sense of communion among young people and their friends and is associated with feelings of pleasure, relaxation and fun (Douglas, 1987; Elmeland & Kolind, 2012; Hunt & Antin, 2019; Hunt & Frank, 2016; Thurnell-Read, 2013; Tolstrup et al., 2019). The importance of drinking

in the formation of youth bonding and sociality is also reflected in the fact that young people that choose to abstain from drinking risk being excluded from social networks (Bærndt & Frank, 2022; Conroy & Visser, 2012; Herold & Kolind, 2022; Tolstrup et al., 2019). Since alcohol consumption is such a widely accepted practice in Denmark, it is not surprising that it can put pressure on young Danes to drink alcohol as means of being socially accepted by peers (Frank et al., 2020).

The complex association between alcohol intoxication, sex and sexual assault

As mentioned in the introduction, alcohol consumption is inextricably linked to flirting and having sex for young people (e.g.Fjær et al., 2015; Jensen et al., 2020; Østergaard, 2007; Peralta, 2010; Farris et al., 2010; Tutenges et al., 2020). At the same time, however, there is also a close connection between alcohol consumption and sexual assault and it can be challenging to draw a line between consensual and non-consensual sexual experiences in heavy drinking contexts. A number of studies have tried to understand the association between alcohol consumption and (normative) sex by focusing on discourses regarding alcohol's effect, but also on discourses characterizing the alcohol culture (e.g.Fjær et al., 2015; Jensen et al., 2020; Østergaard, 2007; Peralta, 2010; Farris et al., 2010; Tutenges et al., 2020). The reason why alcohol consumption is inextricably linked to flirting and having sex for young people is related to the fact that the experience of alcohol intoxication is not only linked to its pharmacological effects, but also to the social, cultural and gendered meanings young people ascribe to it (e.g. Douglas, 1987; Gundelach & Järvinen, 2006; Hunt & Frank, 2016; MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969). Alcohol intoxication is perceived to lead to feelings of relaxation (Herold & Frank, 2020; Hunt & Frank, 2016) and to decreased (sexual) inhibitions (Patrick & Maggs, 2009). Research even indicates that some young Danes intentionally consume alcohol to pursue romantic and sexual relations (e.g. Jensen & Hunt, 2020). Tutenges (2012) investigated the norms and expectations operating in the Danish 'alcohol intoxication

context'[2] in order to understand the link between alcohol consumption and (normative) sex. He characterized the Danish alcohol culture as a 'place of playful transgressions' and as a 'space' where other norms and expectations operate, compared to the norms and expectations of everyday (sober) life. In heavy drinking contexts, young people are expected to be agentic in relation to their sexuality and pursue sexual and romantic relationships (Bailey et al., 2015; Farris et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2013; Peralta, 2010). The association between alcohol and sex can, therefore, partly be explained by norms and expectations relating to its effect on sexual boundaries as well as the expectations created in heavy drinking contexts (i.e. that young people pursuit romantic and sexual relationships). In many instances, therefore, discourses around alcohol intoxication's effect as well as normative discourses can be said to facilitate young people's sexual pursuits (e.g. Grazian, 2007; Jensen et al., 2019; Pedersen et al., 2017).

While some discourses link alcohol and sex with pleasurable and normative sexual experiences (e.g. Grazian, 2007; Jensen et al., 2019; Pedersen et al., 2017), other discourses around alcohol intoxication link it to sexual assault (e.g. Cowley, 2014; Lorenz & Ullman, 2016). The alcohol culture is thus not only associated with 'playful transgressions', as suggested in the above by Tutenges (2012), it is also associated with negative or predatory transgressions. Alcohol intoxication has often been conceptualized by researchers, policy makers and the public as a risk factor leading to NSEs (e.g. Cowley, 2014; Hunt et al., 2022; Lorenz & Ullman, 2016). Alcohol intoxication has also sometimes been highlighted as the very cause of sexual assaults since (often male) perpetrators are, at times, excused for committing sexual assault due to the rationale that they were intoxicated by alcohol, therefore, not in control of their actions (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Nason et al., 2019). Therefore, the fact that alcohol intoxication allows a different kind of behavior compared to the behavior when sober (see also

[2] The alcohol intoxication context refers to the spaces where heavy drinking takes place, but also to the norms and expectations regarding alcohol consumption

Tutenges, 2012) can, in some cases, result in excusing the commitment of a sexual assault. The idea of alcohol as an agent of sexual assault is further exacerbated by the tendency to blame, especially female, victims for 'getting themselves into' a situation where they were heavily intoxicated and thus presumably available for assault (Ullman et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 2008).

In a Nordic context, researchers have tried to examine the association between alcohol intoxication and sex (and sexual assault) by looking at how young people themselves make sense of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. This perspective has been useful to shed further light on the complex relation between alcohol intoxication, sex and sexual assault. For instance, in their study of Norwegian young men and women who had been the victims of alcohol intoxicated sexual assault, Tutenges et al. (2020) proposed the concept of 'sexually violent effervescence' (a subvariant of Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence; Durkheim, 1995) as a means of understanding why assaults happen and argued that this concept is useful to nuance debates around the victim's responsibility for 'getting themselves into' the assault. Durkheim (1995, p. 228) defined collective effervescence as a form of 'delirium' (Durkheim, 1995, p. 228) that involves a:

> blurring of the lines between licit and illicit, and which is so physically and mentally destabilizing that it can temporarily change people, not only in 'nuance and degree' but in their very core' (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 212–213).

Tutenges et al. (2020) argue that this 'state' does not refer to a literal state, but, rather, can be used to explain how many assaults happen as a result of 'ambivalent', 'tumultuous' and 'intoxicated' interactions. During such interactions, young people who have their boundaries violated will often have a sense of losing touch with the world around them and who they normally are and may find themselves acting in ways that they later consider out-of-character, wrong or surprising (Tutenges et al., 2020). This experience, Tutenges et al. (2020) argue, can

prevent them from resisting the sexual assault because they are confused, why they sometimes unintentionally let the other person take control.

Inspired by the concept of 'sexually violent effervescence', Stefansen et al. (2021) investigated the association between alcohol intoxication and sexual assault and argued that few assaults are a result of the 'intentional tactics' by the perpetrator. This perspective challenges previous research on sexual assault, which has largely been operating within a 'perpetrator tactics framework' (ibid). Tutenges et al. (2020) and Stefansen et al. (2021), instead, argue that many sexual assaults are a result of 'tumultuous' and 'confusing' sexual interactions that somehow go wrong. In those situations, the allocation of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' status is not easy or clear. Stefansen et al. (2021) identified two types of 'tumultuous' and 'confusing' sexual interactions and called them 'boundary' situations and 'opportunistic' transgressions respectively. Boundary situations refer to sexual interactions that are characterized by a level of shared responsibility for how the sexual interaction unfolded and a level of agency on the part of the victim (ibid). In Stefansen et al.'s study the male participants who had been subject to a sexual violation were particularly likely to narrate their experiences in the abovementioned way. According to the researchers this tendency might be due to the workings of the 'male sexual drive discourse', which holds that men are agentic sexually, that they always desire sex and where being positioned as a 'victim' is associated with demasculinization (Stefansen et al., 2021; see also Hollway, 1984a). Opportunistic transgressions refer to sexual interactions where the 'perpetrator' takes the lead and the victim is passive, but goes along with whatever happens (Stefansen et al., 2021). According to the researchers, in such situations the 'perpetrator' falsely interprets consent from the victim's behavior, i.e. the fact that the victim seems to go along with whatever happens. However, in such situations, the victim is often unaware that the interaction is about to progress into an assault, why their behavior should not be read as consent.

Overall then, the abovementioned research points at the complex relation between alcohol intoxication, sex and sexual assault and shows how alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters might be a particularly dilemmatic space for young people to navigate. The complexity of alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences point to the importance of further investigating how young people construct alcohol intoxicated sexual assault as well as make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. While there is a lot of research on how young people understand alcohol intoxicated sexual assault (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Grubb and Harrower, 2008; Holmström et al., 2020; Maurer, 2016; Nason et al., 2019; Willis & Jozkowski, 2021; Yndo & Zawacki, 2020), as well as make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences (e.g. Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Stefansen et al., 2021; Tutenges et al., 2020), there is a paucity of research investigating what discourses around gender, sexuality and alcohol intoxication young people draw on *situationally* to construct alcohol intoxicated sexual assault as well as to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. Based on the above, manuscript 2 investigates what discourses around gender, sexuality and alcohol intoxication young people draw on situationally to construct alcohol intoxicated sexual assault, while manuscript 3 addresses what discourses around gender, sexuality and alcohol intoxication young people draw on situationally to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences.

Previous research on sexual consent

Definitions, understandings and communication of sexual consent

Similar to research on alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters, research on sexual consent shows the complexity of the subject. As mentioned in the introduction, there is not a universal definition or understanding of sexual consent. Muehlenhard et al. (2016) have described how sexual consent has been defined as either an '*internal state of willingness*', an '*act of explicitly agreeing to something*', or as '*non-verbal behaviors that indicate a person's*

willingness to engage in sexual activity' (2016, pp. 462-463). In line with the view that sexual consent is an agreement, other researchers have pointed at how young people might also view sexual consent as a contract between two or more individuals about to have sex. (cf. Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2020). Researchers argue that this understanding adheres to the neoliberal understanding of the self as a free and rational individual that is able to make (responsible) choices when interacting with others (Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2020).

Feminist researchers have criticized some of abovementioned definitions of consent for being too simplistic, particularly those that are based on the neoliberal idea about the rational and choice-making actor (e.g. Cunniff Gilson, 2016; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Munro, 2008; Westlund, 2009). Feminist researchers argue that the experiential reality of consent is more complex, since gendered power structures not only constrain, but also permeate human subjectivity and agency, why not all young people have the same possibilities in relation to consent (Cunniff Gilson, 2016; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Munro, 2008; Westlund, 2009). For example, the 'male sexual drive discourse' is a pervasive gender and sexuality discourse that influences how men and women's sexuality is viewed and puts them in unequal positions in relation to consent (Gavey, 2018). When positioned in the 'male sexual drive discourse', women are perceived as the 'gatekeepers' in relation to consent and as the ones who have to respond to men's sexual initiatives (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). However, in recent years, women have also increasingly been met by the neoliberal discourse where they are expected to be agentic in relation to their sexual desires (e.g. Bailey et al., 2015; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Griffin et al., 2013). Therefore, women have to, simultaneously, balance between a traditionalist discourse and a more recent neoliberal one, meaning that they have to balance between consenting to sex in order to not be seen as 'frigid', but also not consent 'too much' to sex in order to not be seen as 'sluts' (e.g. Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020).

Because women are assumed to be eager to avoid the 'slut stigma', a woman's 'no' to sex is sometimes interpreted as really meaning 'yes', resulting in a man thinking that a woman actually wants to have sex, therefore, becoming very persistent until he gets a 'yes' and transgressing her boundaries (Gunnarsson, 2022). Men, on the other hand, are expected to be active sexually and always desire sex (Beres, 2014; Hollway et al., 1984a,1984b; Gunnarsson, 2018; Gavey, 2018). In order to live up to traditional notions of masculinity, some men might therefore feel pressured to consent to sex. Likewise, masculinist notions of men as sexually agentic can also result in men who are victims of sexual assault are not always recognized as such (e.g. Gavey, 2018). The above, thus, indicate how men and women do not always have a free choice in relation to consent and that the lines between consensual and non-consensual sex is blurred (Beres, 2014; Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Holmström et al., 2020; Jackson, 1978).

Another thing that shows the complexity of consent is the fact that consenting to sex is not always based on an actual desire to have sex (e.g. Beres, 2004; Muehlenhard et al., 2016; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). Research shows that people sometimes consent to sex because they want to please their partner (Gavey, 2018), because they feel that this is what is expected of them or because they feel coerced to (Conroy et al., 2015). Gendered power imbalances can play a key role in situations where a person consents to sex for other reasons than desire. Research, for instance, shows that women more often than men consent to sex because they want to please their partner (Gavey, 2018) or because they feel coerced to have sex (Conroy et al., 2015). The fact that women might consent to sex for reasons other than sexual desire has to do with traditional notions of femininity where women are expected to subordinate their own sexual desires to those of men's (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008). The 'have/hold discourse', another traditional gender and sexuality discourse, also suggests that some women consent to sex to gain or maintain a relationship (Hollway, 1984a). Researchers, therefore, argue that there is a need to distinguish between a willingness and a wantedness to

have sex and that consent is usually the external communication of willingness (e.g. Beres, 2004; Muehlenhard et al., 2016; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007).

The complexity of sexual consent is also evident in the fact that there is sometimes a contradiction between what young people perceive as the 'ideal' way of communicating consent and how they communicate consent in practice. Research shows that many young people often talk about the importance of communicating consent clearly (and verbally) in order to avoid miscommunication that could lead to NSEs (e.g. Holmström et al., 2020). The widespread belief that NSEs are caused by miscommunication (i.e. not communicating consent or non-consent clearly) is something researchers have termed the miscommunication hypothesis (Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

Despite verbal communication of consent being perceived as the 'ideal' way to communicate sexual consent, studies show that the experiential reality behind communicating consent might be more complex. Although the belief that NSEs are caused by the non-clear communication of sexual consent is a widespread one, much research does not support this hypothesis (Beres et al., 2014; Glace et al., 2021; O'Byrne et al., 2006, 2007). Studies, for instance, indicate that young men who talk about the risk of misunderstanding a woman's communication of non-consent are capable of understanding social refusals in other contexts, including indirect refusals (e.g. deflecting and making excuses without explicitly saying 'no') (O'Byrne et al., 2006, 2007). The young men in those studies expected nothing less than an explicit 'no' to sex. Any other response was considered ambiguously consensual. Therefore, researchers argue that individuals may claim consent miscommunication to justify a NSE, to avoid thinking about it as a NSE, or to avoid holding another person who committed an NSE responsible (Glace et al., 2021; O'Byrne et al., 2006, 2007). Other studies that investigated how young people communicate consent showed that young people perceive verbally negotiating consent with someone they do not know well as awkward and described such

negotiation as a 'turn-off' and a 'mood-killer' (Hölmström et al., 2020). Other research shows that young people typically do not communicate consent verbally, but, rather, communicate consent using non-verbal behaviors or by not resisting their partners' advances (Beres, 2007; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Therefore, some researchers suggest that sexual consent can be viewed more as an 'embodied gendered practice' (Beres, 2007; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013) and that verbally communicating consent several times with the same partner might be 'onerous and unrealistic' (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Other research, on the other hand, shows that young people communicate sexual consent either verbally or non-verbally (directly or indirectly) or using a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies (e.g. Baldwin-White, 2021; Beres, 2010, 2014; Humphreys, 2007; Holmström et al., 2020; Humphreys & Herold, 2007; Jozkowski et al., 2015).

The importance of context when investigating sexual consent

The abovementioned studies show the complexity of sexual consent. Against this background, researchers are increasingly considering how the broader context within which sexual consent takes place might influence the processes of consent. For example, research shows that the type of relationship that exists between two people can influence sexual consent (e.g. Fantasia, 2011; Humphreys, 2007; Lofgreen et al., 2021; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). In the context of a romantic relationship and/or in a relationship between two people who have had casual sex before, sexual precedence - i.e. having had sex with a person before -, can create an expectation that sex will happen again and that continuously obtaining consent is thus not necessary. For example, in their study of American college students, Willis and Jozkowski (2019) found that the longer a sexual history an individual shared with a partner, the more likely they were to rely on context (e.g. relationship status, routine) as indicators of consent, instead of sexual consent communication. Glace et al. (2021) also found that if a person

believes that a partner will react negatively to being asked directly about their consent, this person will be less likely to ask for consent (Glace et al., 2021).

Other studies show that the context where heavy drinking takes place can also influence the processes of consent. Beres (2010) and Hirsch et al. (2019) investigated young people's understandings of sexual consent and found that their participants viewed certain behaviors in heavy drinking contexts as indicators of consent. For example, if a person was willing to transition to a private location after the bar could be read as indicators of consent (Beres, 2010; Hirsch et al., 2019). What becomes problematic is that those behaviors and spaces can serve as sexual consent cues and, therefore, result in a person transgressing another person's sexual boundaries. In addition, as research shows, those cues can, sometimes, make it harder for some people to say 'no' to sex, since they are aware of the fact that an expectation has been built that consensual sex will occur (Holmström et al., 2020).

Despite the growing realization of how the context within which sexual consent takes place influences the processes of consent and studies indicating that the places where heavy drinking takes place and alcohol intoxication influence the processes of consent, few studies have made consent in relation to alcohol intoxication the specific focus of their analysis (e.g. Bogren et al., 2023; Hunt et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Laughlin et al., 2023. Hunt et al.'s (2022) study is one of the few studies that focused on how young heterosexual people understand sexual consent within the context of alcohol intoxication specifically. The researchers investigated how discourses around alcohol intoxication and gendered sexual scripts influence young heterosexual people's understanding of alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences and sexual consent. The term 'sexual scripts' comes from Gagnon and Simon's (1973) 'sexual scripting theory'. Gagnon and Simon (1973, p.19) argue that people draw on sexual scripts – interpretive resources – that help 'define the (sexual) situation, name the actors and plot the behavior' when interacting in socio-sexual situations.

Analytically, these scripts are defined at three distinct, but interacting levels. This means that young people's sexual interactions are influenced by social norms on a societal level, on an interpersonal level through social norms in different peer groups and on an intrapsychic level constructed through personal experiences and the internalization of norms constructed at the other two levels (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Hunt et al. (2022)'s research showed that the level of intoxication influenced what sexual scripts their participants drew on when discussing having alcohol intoxicated sex. When the participants discussed having sex while being intoxicated at a low degree, they emphasized that alcohol could play a positive role in enhancing sexual sociability (ibid). The participants also drew on more traditional sexual scripts (that are similar to the traditional gender and sexuality discourses mentioned earlier) in order to evaluate an intoxicated sexual encounter. More specifically, the male participants talked about how it was important that alcohol intoxication did not disinhibit their sexual performance and that they avoided having sex with -what they termed- 'low status sexual partners' (ibid). The female participants seemed to worry about issues of sexual consent, safety and retaining their respectability (i.e. avoiding the 'slut-stigma') (ibid). Finally, many participants drew on the idea of 'intoxication parity', that is, the idea that both partners in the sexual interaction should be equally intoxicated in different situations and for different reasons. One situation in which the participants drew on that idea was when they had difficulty determining when an intoxicated sexual encounter could be regarded as consensual or not. In those cases, the participants talked about how being equally intoxicated could render a sexual encounter consensual. The participants also drew on the idea of intoxication parity to handle issues of power in interpersonal sexual scrips (ibid). According to the participants, when two people are equally intoxicated, they are both equally responsible for the sexual interaction. The male participants thus drew on the idea of intoxication parity to avoid the risk of being accused of being a sexual predator (i.e. being held responsible for transgressing a woman's sexual

boundaries). The female participants, on the other hand, drew on the idea of 'intoxication parity' as a strategy to avoid being positioned as (solely) responsible for consenting or not to men's sexual initiatives (i.e. as a gatekeeper in relation to consent).

Another study focusing on sexual consent in the context of alcohol intoxication was Jensen and Hunt (2020)'s study, which centered on young heterosexual women's alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. They showed how young women's extended circle of friends, at times, influenced how they made meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences and sexual consent *after* the sexual interaction had taken place. More specifically, they showed that their participants' understanding of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences and sexual consent was influenced by how their friends responded to the participants' narrative accounts of their sexual experiences.

While the abovementioned studies provide important information on sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication, these studies do not examine in which situations, young people draw on different discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication to construct their understanding of sexual consent/assault in relation to alcohol intoxication as well as to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. The present study, thus, examines both how young people discuss sexual consent and sexual assault *as well as* their experiences with alcohol intoxicated sex and sexual consent in order to reveal the different facets of young people's understanding of sexual consent/assault in relation to alcohol intoxication. More specifically, manuscript 1 and 2 investigate what discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication the participants draw on when discussing their understanding of sexual consent (and sexual assault) in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication, while manuscript 3 focuses on the participants' meaning making of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences and sexual consent.

Sexual consent within LGBTQIA+ relationships

As mentioned in chapter 1, previous research on sexual consent (both generally, but also in relation to alcohol intoxication) has largely focused on heterosexual relationships. As a result, LGBTQIA+ people's experiences with sexual consent are excluded (De Heer et al., 2021). LGBTQIA+ is a term that refers to people who identify as a sexual- or gender minority (LGBT Danmark, 2021). Researchers have emphasized that LGBTQIA+ people communicate consent differently compared to heterosexual people and face unique challenges in relation to consent (e.g. Beres et al., 2004; De Heer et al., 2021; McKie et al., 2020), which is why it is vital to investigate sexual consent within LGBTQIA+ relationships. Another reason that points to the importance of investigating LGBTQIA+ people's experiences with sexual consent is that recent years have seen an increasing number of young people openly identifying as LGBTQIA+ (Thomsen, 2022). Although it is hard to estimate the exact percentage of people identifying as LGBTQIA+ in the general population, statistics show that around 2.2%-4% of the population identifies as LGBTQIA+ (Gates, 2014). Within a Danish context, a survey estimated that between 3,5%-6,2% identify as LGBTQIA+ (Gransell & Hansen, 2009). Finally, another reason that underlines the importance of investigating LGBTQIA+ people's experiences with sexual consent is that LGBTQIA+ people experience higher rates of sexual assault compared to heterosexual people (Frisch et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2016). For example, U.S. statistics show that lifetime sexual assault rates are 43,4% among lesbian and bisexual women and 30,4% among bisexual and gay men (Rothman et al., 2011), while another study found that 59% of transgender people have experienced sexual assault (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006). A Danish study found that 6,9 % of homosexual women and 16,9% of bisexual women have experienced sexual assault, while the percentage for heterosexual women having experienced sexual assault is 3,3% (Thomsen, 2022).

With regards to LGBTQIA+ people's communication of consent, Beres et al. (2004) examined LGBTQIA+ people's consent communication practices and did not find any significant differences between sexual minority cisgender men and women with regards to the frequency they used verbal or non-verbal communication behaviors when initiating a sexual interaction. This stands in contrast to findings from studies investigating heterosexual young people's behaviors showing that there are gender differences between heterosexual men and women's consent communication practices with men generally preferring non-verbal communication of consent while women preferring verbal communication of consent (e.g. Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Jozkowski et al., 2014). In a more recent study, Beres (2022) investigated LGBTQIA+ people's sexual consent communication practices and found that they use a mixture of verbal and non-verbal behaviors to communicate sexual consent. Importantly, the participants in her study talked about how they 'tune in' to their partner's signals and body language in order to assess whether their partner desired the sexual interaction (ibid).

Another strain of research has investigated how the pervasiveness of traditional heteronormative sexual scripts as well as the lack of alternative sexual scripts influence LGBTQIA+ people's consent communication practices (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021; Quies et al., 2023). As Rich (1980) argues, the western world is governed by 'compulsory heterosexuality'[3] and, therefore, many sexual scripts are grounded in heterosexual encounters. As mentioned earlier, in those traditional sexual scripts, men and women are understood as, respectably, the 'initiators' of sexual interactions and the (submissive) 'gatekeepers' in relation to sexual consent (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Within those traditional, heteronormative sexual scripts, men's sexuality is viewed as a biological instinct and they are expected to always be ready to have sex (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

[3] The theory that heterosexuality is assumed and enforced upon people by a patriarchal and heteronormative society

In addition, men are ascribed more power within heterosexual sexual interactions, since their sexual desire is constructed as more important than a woman's and women are positioned as merely having to respond and manage men's sexual initiatives (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Due to the pervasiveness of those heteronormative scripts, researchers argue that LGBTQIA+ people might often lack alternative sexual scripts, which has consequences for how they navigate their sexual interactions as well as sexual consent (e.g. Power et al., 2009). For example, studies focusing on bisexual individuals' experiences with sexual consent show that some of them had a clearer idea with regards to what their 'role' was in relation to consent in heterosexual sexual interactions, while they were less clear with regards to their role in same sex relationships (De Heer et al., 2021). This was because they could rely on the notion of women as submissive gatekeepers in relation consent, with men being positioned as the sexual initiators when engaging in heterosexual sexual interactions.

Another strain of research shows how the lack of alternative sexual scripts results in LGBTQIA+ people drawing on traditional gender and sexuality discourses in order to understand their consent communication practices (e.g. Sternin et al., 2022). For example, the non-heterosexual men in Sternin et al.'s (2022) study talked about how traditional notions of gendered sexual behavior applied in same-sex relationships as well. For instance, in relationships between two men, one was usually perceived as more 'feminine' and thus taking the position of the 'bottom' sexually (i.e. the person who is penetrated during sex), while the other was perceived as more 'masculine', thus, taking the position of the 'top' sexually (i.e. the person who penetrates during sex) (Sternin et al., 2022). In De Heer et al.'s (2022) study, lesbian women talked about the misperception that there is no power inequality between two women having sex, noting how heteronormative roles corresponding to masculinity and femininity also play out in sexual relationships between women, which can influence the processes of consent within those relationships.

Other studies have focused on how traditional sexual scripts infiltrated with traditional gender norms and expectations influence bisexual and homosexual men's sexual consent practices. These studies showed that bisexual and homosexual men are (similarly to heterosexual men) always expected to be ready to have sex (De Heer et al., 2021). Sternin et al.(2022) also argued that non-heterosexual men's sexual consent communication is characterized by being more upfront about what they desire sexually and that they separate between emotions and sexual gratification to a greater degree compared to heterosexual men (ibid). Sternin et al. (2022) argue that many bisexual and homosexual men display those 'hyper-masculine' behaviors in relation to consent (i.e. being more upfront about what they desire sexually and that they separate between emotions and sexual gratification) because they seek to compensate for deviating from traditional masculinity norms identifying 'real' men as heterosexual. Deviating from traditional masculinity norms can result in men experiencing marginalization (e.g. Bruce & Harper, 2011), 'minority stress' (i.e. experiencing conflict within the social environment due to the juxtaposition of minority and dominant values; Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009) and 'masculinity threat' (i.e. experiencing negative reactions due to how they deviate from traditional notions of masculinity; e.g. Bosson et al., 2009).

However, it is important to note that, while the lack of alternative sexual scripts for LGBTQIA+ people might result in them reproducing more heteronormative sexual scripts, in some cases, in other cases, it opens up the room for communicating consent in new/alternative ways (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021; Glace & Kaufman, 2020). For example, bisexual participants in De Heer et al.'s (2021) study talked about how their role was more unclear in relation to consent in same-sex relationships, why that opened up a space for active and explicit communication of consent. Asexual participants in De Heer et al.'s (2021) emphasized how any sexual consent they may communicate will be without enthusiasm due to how asexual people do not experience sexual attraction or only experience sexual attraction to

a low degree. Therefore, when a person was in a relationship with a person identifying as asexual, there was an increased need for communicating sexual boundaries in those types of relationships (De Heer et al., 2021).

Other studies show how traditional gendered dynamics can result in LGBTQIA+ people experiencing NSEs. For example, Ford and Becker's (2020) study showed that more traditionally masculine men were often perceived as the more dominant ones and, therefore, they could coerce less traditionally masculine men into having sex with them. This was because the less traditionally masculine men often perceived the dominant men as entitled to have sex or feared verbal or physical abuse if they declined their sexual advances (Ford & Becker, 2020). Other research showed that lesbian women (similarly to heterosexual women) sometimes consented to sex because of a perceived obligation to do so (Ronsson et al., 2015). This perceived obligation might be due to the workings of traditional gender norms where women are expected to 'contribute' to a romantic relationship by having sex with their partner (e.g. Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

While the abovementioned studies show how the pervasiveness of traditional heteronormative sexual scripts as well as the lack of alternative sexual scripts influence LGBTQIA+ people's consent communication practices, other studies focus on LGBTQIA+ people's unique challenges in relation to consent. For example, studies show that LGBTQIA+ people might have difficulty finding out what counts as consent to sex, as sex in LGBTQIA+ relationships might entail different sexual behaviors than in heterosexual relationships (De Heer et al., 2021). Other studies show how a person's mere presence in particular physical spaces (e.g. gay clubs and bars, bathhouses), certain webpages and/or dating apps (e.g. Grindr) can signal consent for bisexual and homosexual men (e.g. Braun et al., 2009a; Braun et al., 2009b; Sternin et al., 2022). Those spaces are perceived to provide the opportunity to meet

potential sexual partners why the sexual consent negotiation within those spaces is typically understood as being faster, more immediate and even implied (Sternin et al., 2022). This can result in consent withdrawal being more difficult as one's presence in such physical or online spaces is perceived as implying an implicit contract to have sex (Braun et al. 2009a; Braun et al., 2009b).

Overall then, some studies show that LGBTQIA+ people communicate consent differently than heterosexual people and that, in general, LGBTQIA+ people face unique challenges in relation to consent. While there are few studies addressing sexual consent within LGBTQIA+ relationships, there are even fewer studies investigating LGBTQIA+ people's construction and negotiation of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. The blindness to the role of alcohol intoxication is somewhat peculiar as research shows that alcohol intoxication itself, but also norms and expectations surrounding alcohol intoxication can influence the processes of consent (e.g. Bogren et al., 2022; Hunt et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Laughlin et al., 2023). In addition, LGBTQIA+ people have a higher than average level of alcohol consumption (Dimova et al., 2022; Johansen et al., 2015) and their sexual experiences are often connected to alcohol or other substances (Cochran et al.2004; Gaissad & Velter, 2019; Newcomb et al., 2014; Palamar et al., 2014). Taken together, those factors provide the basis for my decision to interview young people of different genders and sexual orientations.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter begins with outlining the premises of the theoretical framework the project was based on, which is Critical Discursive Psychology (CDP), followed by a presentation of relevant theoretical concepts when adopting a CDP framework, including 'interpretative repertoires' and 'subject positions'. After that, I present the narrative methodological approach, which is particularly used in the third manuscript.

Critical discursive psychology

Theoretically, the project is based on critical discursive psychology (CDP) (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996, 2003; Wetherell, 1998, 2015; Wetherell & Edley, 2014) which is based on an epistemology rooted in social constructionism (Locke & Budds, 2020). Because a key aim of the project was to understand the norms and expectations influencing how young people understand sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication, a theoretical framework within a social constructionist epistemology was deemed an appropriate analytical lens. Social constructionism sees the individual and the world around them as interdependent and emphasize that individuals' understandings of a social phenomenon are informed by culturally available explanations of that phenomenon (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism has been associated with the post-modern era of qualitative research (Andrews, 2012) and developed as a response to more cognitivist approaches that are rooted within a positivist epistemology (Burr & Dick, 2017). Despite important differences between different cognitivist approaches, these generally understand individuals as separate from the world around them (Burr, 2015) and assume that individuals acquire a set of attitudes, assumptions and expectations in a 'mechanistic' way, meaning that those attitudes, assumptions and expectations shape a person's behavior (Brown, 2017). Social cognitivist approaches have been criticized by proponents of a social constructionist approach (e.g. Radley, 1994, Stainton Rogers, 1991) for overemphasizing the role of cognitions (i.e. attitudes, assumptions and

expectations about the world) and for underestimating the social context within which individuals' behaviors take place (Willig, 2000). In contrast, a social constructionist approach encouraged researchers to pay attention to how socio-cultural norms shape social practices and understandings of what, for instance, constitutes sexual consent.

Aside from paying attention to the importance of normative frameworks, a social constructionist approach is also useful to study situational and relational complexities. Contrary to social cognitivists, and the tradition of positivism, which assumes the existence of a 'universal truth' (i.e., an inner essence of a phenomenon) and holds that thoughts and cognitions are fixed entities that predict human behavior (Haraway, 2020; Søndergaard, 2002), a social constructionists approach holds that individuals are embedded in different and contradicting understandings and that these are situationally negotiated (Burr & Dick, 2017). Therefore, by adopting a social constructionist framework enabled investigating how the participants' understanding of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication could be situational, fragmented and contradicting, as well as socioculturally specific (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996; 2003; Wetherell, 1998; 2015; Wetherell & Edley, 2014), allowing for understanding the subject in its complexity.

Social constructionism is, however, very broad and includes a multitude of approaches (Augoustinos, 2017). In this project, I, more specifically, made theoretical use of a CDP approach. CDP is a theoretical framework that falls under the umbrella of discursive research. While different discursive analytic approaches share similarities, there are also important differences. In the following, I provide an outline of some of the characteristics of discourse analysis, as well my primary reasons for choosing a CDP approach.

Poststructural and Foucauldian discursive analytical traditions tend to focus on identifying 'expert' or, as Yardley (1997) calls them, 'macro-level', discourses (e.g.

contemporary ‘health’ discourses) and institutional practices (e.g. pain management clinics etc.) and how those discourses construct individuals as subjects (e.g., as responsible for managing one’s own health or pain etc.) (Lupton, 1995; Willig, 2000). Such discourse analytical approaches have been criticized for viewing discourses as ‘monolithic structures’ that have implications for people’s lives (Wetherell, 1998) without examining how lay people take up, negotiate or transform those discourses across different social contexts (Lupton et al., 1997). Ethnomethodological and conversational analytical traditions, on the other hand, focus on identifying lay people’s use of different- and contradicting expert discourses in their talk (Willig, 2000). However, as Willig (2000) argues, attempts to identify expert discourses in lay people’s talk is often descriptive and focuses on overall patterns why less attentions is paid to *how* discourses are used, by whom, in what situations and with what implications. Moreover, ethnomethodological and conversational analytic approaches tend to not analyze the broader social context in which those discourses are taken up (Willig, 2000). As Parker (1992) argues, discourses are typically grounded in social and material structures and, therefore, discourse analysis needs to attend to the conditions that those discourses are grounded in and make them meaningful in the first place. In relation to the current project, adopting a poststructural and Foucauldian discursive analytical approach would primarily have made it possible to identify broader discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication, which is something that other research has done too (e.g. Bailey et al., 2015; Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020; Tutenges et al., 2020). Moreover, such an approach would not have allowed for looking at how the different discourses are taken up by the participants, i.e. in which situations and with what aims and purposes. Adopting an ethnomethodological or a conversational analytical approach, on the other hand, would have made it possible to look at what discourses the participants take up when talking about sexual consent in heavy drinking contexts. However, the wider

sociocultural context influencing their understanding of sexual consent in heavy drinking contexts would have been downplayed.

Instead, in this project, I made use of a CDP approach. CDP represents a synthetic approach between ethnomethodological and conversational analytical traditions, on the one hand, and poststructural and Foucauldian analytical approaches, on the other hand (Wetherell, 1998, 2015). CDP –simultaneously- focuses on how people take up particular discourses in particular contexts in order to accomplish specific social actions while, at the same time, looking at the wider social and institutional frameworks influencing what discourses they take up (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996, 2003; Wetherell, 1998, 2015). Moreover, a CDP approach allows for an exploration of the implications of taking up different discourses for people's subjectivity and lived experience (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996, 2003; Wetherell, 1998, 2015). In the context of this study, a CDP approach thus enabled a *simultaneous* focus on participants' situational use of discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication when talking about sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication and how broader discourses influence participants' understanding of those matters. Moreover, it allowed for investigating the wider implications of talking about sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication the way they did, something that is essential if we wish to understand and reduce the high number of alcohol related NSEs. It was, therefore, estimated that a CDP approach would result in a more nuanced and complex understanding of how young people think about sexual consent in heavy drinking contexts. This is because it takes into account situational factors, such as young people's situational use of different discourses, depending on their specific aims and purposes, the implications of using those discourses, as well as looking at the wider sociocultural context that influences their understandings. In addition, it was estimated that a more nuanced and complex understanding of how young people think about sexual consent in heavy drinking contexts might help bring together some of the different and

contradicting results of previous research on alcohol, sexual assault and sexual consent (as outlined in chapter 2).

Interpretative repertoires and subject positions

When adopting a CDP approach to analyze how young people understand and negotiate sexual consent and intoxication, two theoretical concepts are particularly relevant. These are *'interpretative repertoires'* and 'subject positions' (Edley, 2001).

An interpretative repertoire is a certain and coherent way to talk about and understand a social phenomenon that is available to members in a society (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The presence of an interpretative repertoire can be signaled by, for example, certain figures of speech, key metaphors, recognizable themes or vivid images and is, therefore, a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988; 1993; Wetherell, 1998). Different interpretative repertoires around sexual consent and sexual assault can offer different and often competing ways of talking about and understanding those phenomena. Even though interpretative repertoires and discourses are very similar concepts (Edley, 2001), the former is a more suitable analytical device as it enables a more fine-grained analysis (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012). However, throughout this dissertation, interpretative repertoires and discourses will be used interchangeably, something that other researchers have done as well (Edley, 2001). Interpretative repertoires will be mostly used when discussing the results of the first manuscript where interpretative repertoires were one of our theoretical concepts, while discourses will mostly be used in all other cases (such as when referring to discourses identified by previous research, such as the 'male sexual drive discourse').

People make use of particular interpretative repertoires for specific aims; for example, to improve their own- or others credibility or position in an interaction, explain, justify, blame, excuse themselves (Potter & Wetherell, 1988) or to establish their accounts as

factual and stable representations of the world (Potter, 1996). For example, O'Byrne et al. (2008) argued that the young men in their study made use of an interpretative repertoire that resembled the thinking behind the 'miscommunication hypothesis' in order to explain or even justify why a person would commit sexual assault. A person's use of interpretive repertoires is, however, not necessarily coherent, as competing or even contradictory repertoires can be used depending on the conversational context, and the specific themes, aims or purposes of the social situation in which it takes place (Potter & Wetherell, 1988).

On a wider level, making use of particular interpretative repertoires (or discourses) can have an ideological effect such as legitimating the power of one group in society at another group's expense, or render other ways of viewing a social phenomenon invisible (Wetherell, 1998). Therefore, even though there are many different and often contradicting interpretative repertoires around a social phenomenon, certain ways of talking about and understanding a phenomenon is often dominant and comes to be seen as 'common-sense' (Coelho & Mota-Ribeiro, 2014; Gavey, 1989). Which discourses end up being the dominant ones has to do with power-relations in society. Not only are those 'in power' able to set the standards and the norms, dominant discourses also tend to legitimate exiting power relations (Burr & Dick, 2017). An example of this is the 'male sexual drive' discourse, a pervasive discourse, which to a large degree influences how men and women's sexuality is viewed and evaluated (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). Dominant discourses, however, rarely remain unchallenged. For instance, the traditional 'male sexual drive discourse' is today challenged by other more novel discourses emphasizing female sexual initiative and the importance of female sexual pleasure (Masters et al., 2013). This latter discourse can obscure or challenge traditional ways of viewing men and women's sexuality and, instead, conjure up new subject positions, such as the idea of women as sexual initiators and men as victims of sexual assault. However, researchers have also argued that the continued influence of

traditional discourses has, sometimes, resulted in male perpetrators being excused for committing sexual assault due to the rationale that their sexuality is seen as an uncontrollable instinct and that it privileges men's sexuality and pleasure over women's (e.g. Mackey, 2015). In that way, the traditional gender/sexuality discourses can be said to sometimes reproduce existing power relations with men holding more privileges in Western, Patriarchal societies (Hunnicutt, 2009).

As the above indicates, people's meaning making takes place in the realm of interpretative repertoires which make different subject positions available (Wetherell, 1998). The concepts of 'subject positions' come from 'Positioning theory', which looks at how a speaker discursively and situationally positions her or himself in relation to others (Davies & Harré, 1990). When a person takes up a particular subject position, that person sees the world from the point of view of that position; that position being 'saturated with cultural meaning' (Søndergaard, 2002, p. 191) and coming with particular metaphors, images, concepts and story lines (Davies & Harré, 1990). Subject positions, therefore, place individuals in a network of meanings and social relations, therefore, influencing what they can say, think or do (Willig, 2000). Some subject positions are fleeting and transient, while others are more permanent (e.g. the positions of a man and a woman) and become internalized, ultimately influencing how a person experiences themselves and the world around them (ibid). Harré (1997) distinguishes between the public and private display of discourses with the former relating to a person's behavior and the latter to a person's internalization of (public) discourses, which, as a result, influences the person's experience of themselves. Therefore, Harré (1997) does not reject the inner aspect of a person's experience. In that way, 'Positioning theory', with its concept of subject positions, provides a set of conceptual tools and makes it possible to explore the relationship between discourse, subjectivity and lived experience (Willig, 2000). In this study, I used this approach and related concepts of positionality to explore how discourses around

gender, sexuality and intoxication influenced the participants' subjectivity and lived experience, but also to explore how discursively available subject positions are taken up and negotiated by young people in their talk about intoxicated sexual encounters and sexual consent.

As also described by Davies & Harré (1990), a person is not completely determined by a subject position offered by a particular interpretative repertoire/discourse. Rather, a person can take up many contradictory subject positions. Similarly, Foucault (2000) argues that, although difficult, it is possible to challenge dominant discourses, by taking up alternative subject positions. For example, a woman can challenge the subject position of the 'male sexual drive discourse' where she is positioned as the 'passive recipient' of men's sexual advances and is expected not to be *too* sexually active (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984) by taking up the sexually agentic subject position of the neoliberal discourse, which allows her a greater degree of sexual freedom (Moran, 2017). However, the male sexual drive discourse can be hard to challenge completely and, therefore, a woman might still find herself being judged for being perceived as 'too' sexually active (e.g. Jensen & Hunt, 2020).

At the same time, a person will not be *completely* free to choose a particular way to act since it depends on the subject positions being available (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012). Moreover, people from different social categories (such as gender, class etc.) will often have very different access to subject positions (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012) and in certain interactions some subject positions will feel comfortable and 'easy', while others will feel uncomfortable or problematic (Edley, 2001, Wetherell, 1998). For example, men can have a harder time positioning (and, therefore, also viewing) themselves as 'victims' of sexual assault due to the pervasiveness of the male sexual drive discourse, according to which men are viewed as always desiring sex (Hollway, 1984a; Gavey, 1989, 2018).

A narrative methodological approach

In the second manuscript, a narrative methodological approach was deemed more relevant. This was because analytical focus was on the participants' narratives on their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. More specifically, how the participants constructed (sexual) agency and made meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions, while, at the same time, how discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication influenced how they made meaning of their sexual interactions and their construction of agency. As will be argued for in the following, while Bamberg's (1997, 2004, 2011) narrative methodological approach resembled the CDP approach in several ways, there were also some differences, with those differences providing additional reasons for choosing his approach over CDP.

Narrative approaches can lie on a social cognitive-social constructionist continuum with the former trying to explain the drives, processes and forces that determine human behavior, while the latter sees individuals as integrated and embedded in their historical, social and cultural settings (Brown, 2017). Since the overall theoretical framework's epistemology is social constructionism, a narrative approach on the social constructionist end of the continuum was deemed appropriate.

There are several narrative analytical approaches on the social constructionist end of the continuum. In some of them, analytical focus is paid on identifying 'dominant cultural discourses' in people's narratives, which refer to stories about persons, places and things that have a consistent storyline and thematic content and are transmitted through media images or in conversation (Burck, 2018). Those dominant cultural discourses (or 'cultural narratives' as they have also been termed) reflect societal views about particular social phenomena, people or things (Salzer, 1998). Other narrative analytical approaches focus on the 'social organization of talk' (Burck, 2018), that is, focusing on the underlying construction of people's narratives and what people do with their narratives. More specifically, *how* people strategically construct

their narratives in order to present themselves in a particular way and with what aims and purposes (Riessman, 1990). This, in turn, influences how they are perceived and obscures alternative ways of perceiving them (ibid). Similarly to the other three manuscripts, there was an interest in not only focusing analytically on either the 'macro context', that is, identifying broader societal discourses in the participants' narratives on their alcohol intoxicated encounters, nor solely on the 'micro context', that is, focusing on how the participants narrated their encounters for what aims and purposes. Therefore, Bamberg's (1997, 2004, 2011) narrative methodological approach was deemed most relevant, as his approach made it possible to simultaneously focus on how the participants actively positioned themselves as sexually agentic in their narratives, while, at the same time, how their possibilities for positioning was influenced by dominant discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication.

Bamberg (1997) was one of the scholars who studied narration and he was interested in the social actions/functions the narratives played in participants' lives (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). This social function of narratives resembles the function of interpretative repertoires where analytical attention is paid to the aims and purposes of drawing on certain repertoires. Bamberg (1997) was the first to propose an understanding of the concept of 'positioning' that captures how identity work may specifically be carried out by narration. In the second manuscript, therefore, Bamberg's (1997) concept of positioning was used (instead of Davis and Harré's [1990]). This is because this model of positioning is better suited for analyzing narratives as it makes it possible to study identity work at two levels. It allows to explore how a person constructs their 'self' at the level of the 'talked-about', that is, as a character within the story they are telling and at the level of the 'here-and-now' situation, that is, how that person wants to construct themselves in the interactive context (Bamberg, 2011), in this case, how the participants wanted to construct themselves in relation to the interviewer. Furthermore, this model of positioning allows looking at the macro-context as both of these

levels feed into the larger societal context where broader discourses influence how a person can position themselves in their narratives, ultimately 'establishing themselves as a particular kind of person' (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 391). Therefore, Bamberg's (1997) concept of positioning, although similar to David and Harré's (1990) in some ways, offered an additional 'layer' of analysis by taking into consideration how the participants constructed their sense of self at the level of the narratives they told as well.

By adopting Bamberg's (1997, 2004, 2011) narrative analytical approach, it was investigated how the participants linguistically depicted the characters in their narratives around their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences, how the characters were positioned in relation to one another and what their narratives were about (Bamberg, 1997; 2004; 2011). By looking at how the participants positioned themselves in relation to the rest of the characters in their narratives, provided information on whether they positioned themselves with a higher or lower degree of sexual agency. This narrative approach also enabled looking at what the participants were trying to accomplish interactively with their narratives (Bamberg 2004). Finally, this approach made it possible to investigate not only how the participants positioned themselves agentically, but also, how their possibilities for positioning themselves as more or less sexually agentic was influenced by dominant societal discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Chapter 4: Methods, recruitment and data production

This chapter is divided in two parts. In the first part, some of the ethical considerations around the project as a whole will be presented as well as some reflections on transparency and positionality as those are vital within qualitative research (e.g. Finlay, 2002; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). However, this is not an exhaustive list and further reflections on ethical practice, transparency and positionality will also be mentioned in other relevant sections of the dissertation. After that, the methodology and data collection of the project will be outlined.

Ethical considerations

When studying a sensitive topic such as sexual consent and sexual assault (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009), there are several ethical issues to consider during the whole research process from developing the interview guide all the way through to writing the manuscripts (e.g. Duma et al., 2009; Rosoff, 2018). Ethical considerations in relation to research refer to rules and guidelines that the researcher should consider in order to avoid harming the participants (Farhud, 2011; Shirmohammadi et al., 2018). First, the formal ethical review process will be presented, followed by my personal ethical reflections and practices.

To begin with, the project was registered at the Danish Data Protection Agency and throughout the process, I have taken steps to ensure that the storing of data follows their rules as well as the GDPR rules and regulations at Aarhus University. Moreover, the project was approved by the Aarhus Business and Social Science's (Aarhus BSS) ethical review board, which assessed my research plan, including research aims, methodology and the type of data I was going to collect. In addition, the project was carried out at the Center for Alcohol and Drugs Research, where there is extensive experience with handling sensitive data in accordance with GDPR regulations. This meant that there was always the possibility to get information on

those regulations or guidance from my supervisors and senior colleagues if I was uncertain about how to handle some of the data correctly.

In the beginning of each interview, I informed the participants orally about what the interviews would be used for as well as about confidentiality and pseudonymization of the information they would provide during the interview. I also informed them of their right to refuse to answer questions and that they, at any time, could withdraw from the project if they wished to do so. Finally, I told the participants that if they experience any discomfort after the interview (due to talking about potentially sensitive issues), they could contact me or relevant institutions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I handed them an informed consent form to sign which stated the abovementioned things. The informed consent form can be seen in the appendix (no.2).

However, as Webb (2015) emphasizes, informed consent can be problematic when conducting open-ended interviews due to the open nature of the interviews where unexpected topics can occur. Therefore, Smythe and Murray (2000) recommend seeking consent continually throughout the interview process. In order to ensure continual consent, I made sure to ask the participants several times during the interview whether they were ok talking about the things they were talking about. Even though some of the participants became emotional talking about their sexual experiences, they still told me that they were ok and that the overall experience of being interviewed was good.

In order for the participants to feel safe and open up, I started the interview by saying that there are no right and wrong answers and that I was interested in the participants' thoughts and perspectives on the issues discussed. I stated this several times during the whole duration of the interview. In line with that, I was inspired by an approach called 'teller-focused interview' which has been shown to be well suited for interviewing research participants about experiences that are 'complex, sensitive and difficult to bring up' (Hydén, 2014, p. 810). This

approach entailed that I aimed at creating a safe space for the participants where I focused on listening and supporting their narratives (Hansen et al., 2021) and I also made an effort to show sincere appreciation of them being willing to talk about potentially sensitive topics, such as sexual assault (see also Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I did not question their narratives, thoughts or opinions. Instead, I tried to remain open and only asking genuinely curious (and not judgmental) questions (see also Bourne & Robson, 2015).

Since I presumed that some of the participants' sexual experiences under the influence of alcohol intoxication had been traumatic, I was careful not to ask too many questions if I felt like there was a risk of triggering re-traumatization (Weber et al., 2022). At the same time, I was interested in getting as thick descriptions as possible. Therefore, I paid attention to the participants' reactions and non-verbal cues in order to assess whether or not I could ask more questions about particular incidents and their experiences of these. If I sensed that a participant was emotionally influenced by the things they were talking about, I made sure to acknowledge the feelings the participant was experiencing (e.g. by saying 'I can see you get sad talking about this'). In addition, I made sure to mirror the participants in what they were saying. For example, if they said 'It is so just hard to talk about...', I would respond along the lines of 'So it is hard for you to talk about…'. Acknowledging the participants' feelings and mirroring what they are saying is important because, as Baxter and Babbie (2003) argue, the research participants will probably feel heard and validated in the feelings they are experiencing. At the same time, it is important to remember that there is a very fine line between creating a safe space when interviewing about sensitive topics and actual therapy (Rossetto, 2014). I made sure to clarify that this was not a therapeutic setting and, if needed, I mentioned other institutions where they could get therapeutic help. The abovementioned approaches proved to be quite fruitful, as several of the participants told me they had felt heard and non-judged.

While some of the interviews were face-to-face, due to the corona pandemic, others were conducted online (will be elaborated later). When doing the online interviews, I noticed that several non-verbal cues either disappeared or were harder to spot, making it more difficult to sense how the participants were feeling. Therefore, I made sure to make my own non-verbal cues more prominent (i.e. visible to them); for example by nodding- or smiling more frequently. Since their non-verbal cues were less visible to me, I also made sure to ask them more frequently how they were feeling. Despite these challenges, the participants seemed to have had a good experience with the online interview format.

As a debriefing at the end of the interview, I asked the participants how they had felt talking about the issues covered in the interview. This was done to make sure they did not leave the interview feeling severe discomfort (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The participants seemed to have had a good experience overall; some of them talked about getting new insights in relation to sexual consent and their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences (see also Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and since no one decided to withdraw from the project, I assume that they did not regret their participation.

During the process of transcribing the interviews, my ethical considerations largely centered on making sure that that my participants could not be recognized. In the transcriptions, I changed their names, so as their real names were not available anywhere (Søndergaard, 1996); neither in the transcribed documents (see also Søndergaard, 1996). If the participants mentioned information that could potentially lead to them being recognized (such as other people's names, the city they lived in, their school's name etc.), I would not write that information in the transcripts; rather I wrote something along the lines of '(name of friend/city/school)'. The student assistants that helped me transcribe around twenty of the interviews were instructed to follow the same procedure.

I made sure to change the participants' names in each manuscript, if I used quotes from the same participants in more than one manuscript. I also decided not to use certain sexual experiences in the manuscripts since some of them were quite unique and, therefore, I thought there would be a risk that the participants could be identified, had I chosen to use them.

Reflections on positionality and transparency

Apart from the ethical considerations, it is also important for a researcher within a CDP approach to reflect on issues of positionality and transparency. Positionality refers to the notion that the identities of both researcher and the participants affect the research process (e.g. Bourke, 2014; Holmes, 2020). Therefore, the interview situation and the knowledge produced from that is seen as a product of that specific interaction between the interviewer and participant, as well as embedded in a specific sociocultural context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Locke & Budds, 2020).The researcher's biases shape the research process and through recognition of one's own biases, it becomes possible to gain insights into how the researcher engages with their participants and the accounts they provide (Bourke, 2014). Thus, the researcher is not regarded as neutral; rather, they come with their own preconceptions and assumptions and a totally biased-free interpretation of the data is, therefore, considered impossible (Nikander, 2012). Following from that, Trent and Cho (2020) argue that, in order to make one's study as valid as possible, it is important that the researcher is transparent with regards to how their preconceptions, beliefs or background might have influenced the results of their study.

Based on the above, I made several reflections with regards to positionality and transparency. First of all, I reflected on how my position as a middle-class, white cisgender woman could have had an influence on what the participants told me. There is a possibility, for example, that some of the cisgender male participants might have had a harder time discussing their sexual experiences with me. My gender identity might also have prevented other young

men from reaching to me in order to be interviewed. On the other hand, the fact that I identify as a cisgender woman, could have made it easier for some of the other cisgender women participants to talk about their sexual experiences.

Second, I often considered whether the participants thought that I had a particular 'agenda' (for example, that I was a proponent of the Danish consent-based legislation), which could result in them being reluctant to express opinions they thought I might not agree with, therefore, resulting in the so-called 'social desirability' bias (Grimm, 2010). The social desirability bias refers to the tendency that research participants sometimes answer the researcher's questions in a way that they believe is more socially acceptable, a tendency that can be even more pronounced when researching sensitive topics (Grimm, 2010). Therefore, in order to try to minimize the risk of the 'social desirability bias', I emphasized many times - both before and during the interview - that I was interested in *their* perspectives and that there were no right or wrong answers.

Third, during the interviews, I made sure to ask the participants to clarify what they meant, since I knew there would be a risk that I interpreted something they said differently from what they meant and, possibly, in a way that was more congruent with my own ways of thinking. Søndergaard (2002) talks about how she would ask open, curious and, sometimes, naïve clarifying questions, which is what I also tried to do. To my surprise, in several occasions, I found out that our understanding of an issue brought up during an interview, was not always congruent.

Finally, in the process of analyzing the results and in writing the manuscripts (either alone or in collaboration with colleagues), I made sure to show some of my analytical points to other colleagues to ensure that these were 'empirically driven' and not based on my own preconceptions or way of thinking.

Research design

The project was based on in-depth qualitative interviews. I found interviews relevant to use since they serve as a window into people's meaning-making (Højgaard, 2010) and thus useful to develop an in-depth understanding of how the participants constructed sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication (Baldwin-White, 2021).

The interview guide included open-ended questions and ended with vignettes in the form of short written stories depicting an alcohol intoxicated heterosexual sexual interaction. After the interview, the participants completed a short survey (elaborated in section regarding the survey). In the following, I will present some of the reflections that went into developing the interview guide and after that, I will go into detail on the content of the interview guide, the vignettes and the survey.

The interview guide

In order to develop the interview guide, I began reading relevant scientific literature around sexual consent, gender, sexuality and young people's alcohol intoxication. This was not only to get extensive knowledge about the subject, but also to find out what gaps were in the existing literature (see also Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The aim was to help me develop the overarching research question and, by implication, get an idea of what interview questions I needed answers to in order to answer the overall research question. In this process, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) have proposed using a diagram, which I deployed and found very useful. In the first column, I wrote down the research question. In the second column, I wrote down the operationalization of the question, that is, how the research question would be answered, also in the form of questions. Importantly, the operationalization questions were different from the *interview* questions, since, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the interview questions must be written in non-academic language in order for the participants to understand them. In the third column, I wrote down the interview questions.

Due to ethical considerations, I carefully considered the wording of the different interview questions, and whether certain questions could risk triggering or re-traumatizing the participants (Weber et al., 2022). For example, I originally planned to have a question focusing on what the participants were thinking and feeling during an intoxicated sexual interaction. After discussing this question with my supervisors, I was aware that asking that question could potentially trigger a participant that had experienced an unpleasant sexual interaction due to them having to recall unpleasant feelings and thoughts. I, therefore, made sure not to ask this question to participants where I considered there was a risk of triggering or re-traumatization.

Since I was interested in investigating whether discourses around gender and sexuality influenced how my participants conceptualized sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication, I tried to avoid wording the questions in a way in which gender was directly asked about, since this could result in conversations centered on the more stereotypical aspects of gender (Højgaard, 2010). I was interested in the more subtle ways in which gender mattered in the participants' understandings of sexual consent and sexual assault (Haavind, 2000; Højgaard, 2010). Therefore, I tried to by minimize the risk of getting gender-stereotypical answers by following Højgaards (2010) propositions. First, I interviewed young people of different genders around the same matters in order to compare their understanding of consent and their sexual experiences in heavy drinking contexts (Højgaard, 2010). Second, I made sure that the participants mentioned names or other indications of gender identity in their narratives so as I could identify gendered practices without having to ask explicitly about them (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2005). Finally, the reason I used a hypothetical scenario (the vignettes, which will be elaborated on later) involving an alcohol intoxicated sexual interaction between a man and a woman was because it would give me the opportunity to ask the participants questions involving the gendered aspects of consent, without asking directly about gender (Højgaard, 2010).

Before initiating the actual interview process, I shared the interview guide with colleagues who provided feedback on the content and wording of the questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I also conducted two pilot interviews with a friend and a colleague in order to get more feedback on the interview guide as well as on me as an interviewer. The interview guide as well as the survey can be seen in the appendix (no. 3 & 4).

The interview guide started off with some 'warming up' questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) where the participants were asked to talk a little bit about themselves as well as their alcohol habits (how often they drink, where they drink, who they typically drink with etc.). The latter because I wanted to get an initial idea of the participants' alcohol consumption patterns. For a more smooth transition to the primary topic as well as to study possible norms and expectations around alcohol and sex, I asked the participants whether they thought there was a connection between drinking alcohol and having sex.

After that, I asked the participants about their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences (as opposed to asking them more direct questions on their opinions on sexual consent). I tried to get as thick descriptions of their experiences as possible. Therefore, I asked open-ended questions (also to avoid influencing their answers by asking them leading questions) such as: where they had that sexual experience, who they were with, what their relationship was with the person they had sex with, who initiated the contact, what happened after their sexual interaction etc. In cases where I sensed that there would not be a risk of triggering or re-traumatization, I asked them what they thought and felt during and/or after the sexual interaction. A reason why I wanted to get as thick descriptions as possible was that, as research shows, people's understanding of consent might involve a series of cues across an extended period of time (Jozkowski et al., 2018). Therefore, my aim was to investigate whether there was a *temporal dimension* on sexual consent; when did the participants perceive it as actually starting and when did it finish?

The participants were also asked questions about whether they talked about their sexual encounters with their friends. These questions were informed by prior studies showing that the meaning a person ascribes to sexual encounter and whether it is regarded as consensual or not can, sometimes, be renegotiated between friends long *after* the actual experience has taken place (Jensen & Hunt, 2020). Therefore, I wanted to see whether I could identify similar patterns in my own data.

The participants were also asked questions about their thoughts and opinions on sexual consent, how they communicate consent, what they think about the Danish consent-based legislation as well as their opinions about having sex while under the influence of alcohol intoxication. The reason for asking about their opinions on consent was that Denmark was at a cross-road where an old understanding of sexual assault was gradually being replaced by a new consent- based legislation, but also because I wanted to explore their views on how different levels of alcohol intoxication influence (and possibly inhibits) a person's ability to provide a valid consent (as I mentioned in the introduction).

During the whole process of the interview, I made sure to ask follow-up questions in order for the participant to help guide the conversation (Jozkowski et al.2018). This was to ensure that topics that were important to the participants were covered and to allow for spontaneous themes to emerge (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). The interview guide can, therefore be described as a semi-structured one (Locke & Budds, 2020).

Vignettes

In the second part of the interview guide, I utilized vignettes in the form of short fictitious written stories portraying an alcohol intoxicated heterosexual sexual interaction. The vignettes were used to study the participants' more implicit thoughts around sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to (heavy) alcohol intoxication (Hughes, 1998). Vignettes are suitable for examining sensitive issues (Barter & Renold, 1999), which might prompt

'politically correct' answers when asked about directly (Grimm, 2010). Therefore, by utilizing vignettes, I thought I would gain another type of knowledge on sexual consent and sexual assault in heavy drinking contexts compared to when asking directly about their understandings on those matters. In addition, the fact that the participants could talk about a hypothetical sexual situation (instead of their own sexual experiences) also served to desensitize the subject matter (Holmström et al., 2020).

I decided to develop one 'basis' vignette story (which can be seen in the third manuscript) that I would read to the participants. The vignette story provided enough contextual information for the participants to understand the situation depicted, but was also a bit vague (Finch, 1987). Keeping the vignette story a bit vague was done to allow the participants to 'fill in the gaps' with their own views and interpretations, which I presumed could reveal important information about their understanding of sexual assault and sexual consent and the role of heavy alcohol intoxication (Barter & Renold, 1999; Finch, 1987). After reading that 'basis' vignette story, I would change different factors in the story, more specifically: 1) whether there was resistance or not from the person on the receiving end of the sexual interaction 2) the levels of intoxication of each of the persons in the story 3) the relationship between the male and the female character and 4) flipping the genders so as the actions of the male character are done by the female character and vice versa. After reading each scenario, I would ask open-ended questions, such as 'What do you think about this situation?' while trying to avoid asking leading questions (e.g. 'Do you consider this sexual assault or not?') that could potentially influence the participants' answers.

The vignettes were developed partly inspired by previous research utilizing vignettes to study sexual assault in heavy drinking contexts and partly inspired by stories research participants in previous studies have described (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Grubb and Harrower, 2008; Holmström et al., 2020; Maurer, 2016; Nason et al., 2019; Willis &

Jozkowski, 2021; Yndo & Zawacki, 2020). The latter served to increase authenticity of the situations described in the vignettes. The factors that I chose to vary in the different vignettes were based on results from previous research indicating that these specific factors can influence how individuals make meaning of alcohol intoxicated sexual assaults and sexual consent (e.g. Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Davies & Rogers, 2006; Dyar et al., 2021; Humphreys, 2007; Maurer, 2016; Wegner et al., 2015). I discussed with my supervisors the possibility of varying even more factors in the stories, such as, for example, including non-heterosexual sexual encounters as well. However, we were afraid that the whole vignette exercise would, then, take too much time as there were already a lot of factors that were varied. This is because, had we included non-heterosexual sexual encounters, we would -technically- have to include different types of relationships as well (e.g. a non-heterosexual sexual encounter in the context of a romantic relationship, another one in the context of a casual, sexual relationship etc.), if we wanted to get a fuller picture of the participants construction of consent/assault in relation to alcohol intoxication. However, considering how diverse the sample ended up being, it would have been relevant to include non-heterosexual encounters as well, as this might have revealed even more nuances in the participants' construction of sexual consent/assault in relation to alcohol intoxication.

I ended up reading the vignettes to 20 out of the 30 participants. The reason that I did not read the vignettes to certain participants was either because the interview had already taken a long time, but also because of how I perceived that there was a risk of triggering or re-traumatization (Weber et al., 2022). While it can be hard to assess whether there was indeed a risk of triggering or re-traumatizing the participants by presenting them with hypothetical alcohol intoxicated sexual assault scenarios, I tried to pay attention to the participants' emotional reactions and non-verbal cues when they discussed their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences in order to assess whether I found it appropriate to present them the vignettes at

the end of the interview. In addition, if some of the participants had a traumatic sexual assault experience that resembled some of the scenarios presented in the vignettes, I would also refrain from reading the vignettes to those participants, again due to the risk of triggering or re-traumatization. Not reading the vignettes to all the participants could have the implication that the findings of the vignettes mostly represent young people who have an easier time discussing their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences.

Short survey

At the end of the interview, the participants were asked to complete a short survey involving basic questions on their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, educational and family background as well as their alcohol- and sexual habits. The survey was mostly used to keep an overview on what 'kind of' participants I had interviewed. This information was used to adjust the recruitment process and criteria along the way.

Recruitment and data production

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the related restriction on movement and interactions and the fact that many places where young people gather (e.g. cafés, bars, universities etc.) were closed down, the recruitment of research participants almost entirely took place online. The participants were recruited through social media such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIN where I used my own personal profiles. Recruiting almost entirely online could potentially have the drawback that I only reached young people who have access to or are active on social media. However, I estimated that most Danish young people have access to social media these days, considering how social media seem to be a big part of their lives (Goodyear & Armour, 2019).

Some of the participants helped me find other potential participants; therefore, the recruitment included some snowball sampling as well (Khosravinik & Unger, 2016). Snowball sampling comes with the risk of the 'filter bubble effect', that is, the risk that many

participants who chose to be interviewed share the researcher's general worldview (Pariser 2011). However, as Khosravinik & Unger (2016) argue**,** by the time the recruitment 'snowball' has reached a second or third wave of friends of friends (which was the case in the present study), that risk is very little.

I developed a recruitment post that stated that I was looking for young people between the ages of 18-25 that have had sexual experiences while under the influence of alcohol intoxication. I chose to interview young people between the ages of 18-25, as this is typically the age during which alcohol consumption peaks (Chen et al., 2004; Cooke et al., 2019). I was interested in all kinds of sexual experiences and not only non-consensual ones, which is why I used the more generic term 'sexual experiences', instead of, for example, 'sexual assault'. The post also stated that I was interested in hearing about young people's thoughts and opinions on sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. As a thank you for participating, the post stated that the participants would receive a voucher worth 200DKK (approx. 30 euros). The recruitment post can be seen in the appendix (no. 1).

The post was shared multiple times, both in my own online networks, in several online groups that had up to 33.000 members aimed at Danish youth in general, but also in LGBTQIA+ groups specifically. The post ended up reaching a wide audience of people. The reason for including posts in both generic- and specific LGBTQIA+ groups was inspired by Søndergaard (1996) who talks about how an important issue when sampling is to find the balance between reaching saturation and having a diverse sample.

The recruitment and interview process started in May 2020 and finished in March 2021. I decided to do 30 interviews partly because of the timeframe of the PhD project. The final sample size was also something that was being renegotiated along the data collection process. This was because I wanted to ensure that 'discursive repetition and recurrent patterns

of argumentation' would emerge (see also Nikander, 2012; Lenger, 2019), i.e. there was some 'discursive repetition' in the things the participants were telling me.

16 of the interviews were face-to-face, while 14 of them were online. The reason why almost half of the interviews were conducted online is that some of the data collection was done during the midst of the COVID-19 situation. The Danish health authorities strongly advised against meeting physically with people outside one's immediate circle and, therefore, it was deemed unethical to pursuit face-to-face interviews. Nevertheless, during the short periods of time when infection rates were low and fewer COVID-19 restrictions were in place, I decided to conducted face-to-face interviews as much as possible.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted at the participants' or my private home was because, at the time, it was not possible to meet somewhere else (again, due to COVID-19 restrictions). The fact that the interviews were conducted at private homes helped facilitate a friendly and relaxed atmosphere (Sandberg et al., 2019), something that is beneficial when talking about potentially sensitive topics.

One of the advantages of doing some of the interviews online was that it became possible for me to interview young people who lived in more rural areas that might have been hard to reach due to the lack of public transportation going to those areas (Janghorban et al., 2014). The online interviews were, however, in some cases, challenging due to – primarily - technical issues, such as a poor internet connection, which made some parts of the interviews inaudible. Luckily though, it was only a very small segment of talk that was lost. In addition, online interviews can make it more difficult to create rapport between the interviewer and the participant (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). However, many of the participants told me that they had actually had a good experience being interviewed. Some of them actually stated that they

preferred online interviews and that the fact that they were given the opportunity of doing the interview online was the reason for their participation.

Demographics of participants

In the following, some of the demographics of the sample will be presented, information that I gathered through the short survey that the participants were administered. I will not go into detail with all the demographics as this would be too long. I will, therefore, present some of the demographics that were mostly used in order to adjust the recruitment process along the way[4]. In order to get a better overview of the demographics, please visit the appendix (no. 5).

The participants were between the ages 19-25 and they came from different towns and cities in Denmark with the majority of them (N=18) living in the Region of Middle Jutland. 25 of them were born in Denmark, while the rest of them were born in other countries.

In terms of educational background, 4 of the participants had finished 9th grade, 13 of them had finished High School, 5 of them had finished HF and 1 of them had finished VUC[5]. 6 of the participants had finished College University[6] and 1 of them had finished university with a Master's degree. 4 of them were currently enrolled at University College and 4 of them were enrolled at university at a Master's degree, 1 of them was enrolled at a technical school and 1 of them was enrolled at VUC. The rest (N=20) were at the time of the interview not under education. This could partly because almost half of them (N=14) were between the ages 19-22, which is typically a time period where young Danes take one or more years off to work and/or travel after graduating High School before they begin studying again.

[4] For a complete overview of the survey, please visit the appendix

[5] HF is a two-year general upper secondary programme leading to the higher preparatory examination which qualifies for admission to higher education. VUC offers courses on elementary- middle- and high school level.

[6] A degree at the Bachelor's level

In relation to gender identity, 20 of the participants identified as cisgender women, 7 as cisgender men, 2 as transgender, and 1 as gender-fluid. In terms of sexuality, there were 10 participants who identified as heterosexual, 12 as bisexual, 3 as homosexual, and 5 as 'other' (e.g. pansexual, heteroflexible or queer). The sample, therefore, has an overrepresentation of cisgender women, which could be a reflection of more cisgender women having had experiences of sexual assault (Wijkman et al. 2010; Tutenges et al. 2020). It is also diverse in terms of sexuality with an overrepresentation of participants identifying as non-heterosexual, even though I mostly posted the recruitment post in general groups (i.e. not LGBTQIA+ groups specifically) on social media. A reason for my sample being diverse, especially in terms of sexuality, could be because I recruited from my own personal profiles where I have a lot of people in my network (as well as in their networks) identifying as LGBTQIA+. Another reason could be that more Danish young people identify as non-heterosexual (especially cisgender women who identify as bisexual) compared to older Danish people (Thomsen, 2022). The diversity of the sample in terms of sexuality could also be a reflection of the higher number of LGBTQIA+ people who have had experiences of sexual assault (Frisch et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Thomsen, 2022) or because issues of gender and sexuality issues might be very central to this particular group of people and thus they were eager to participate in the study. The lower number of cisgender men could relate to the fact that there is a lower number of men having had experiences of sexual assault (Wegner et al., 2015). It could also be because it is still considered a taboo for cisgender men to talk about issues of sex and sexual assault in heavy drinking contexts (see also King & Greening, 2007). The reason why it might be difficult to recruit participants identifying as genders other than cisgender men and women could be because they are considered a 'hard-to-reach' population (Gatlin & Johnson, 2017) or because, statistically, there aren't that many of them in the general population (Singer & Deschamps, 2017).

One might, understandably, argue that differences might exist in heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ people's understandings and narratives on sexual consent and sexual assault, given the differences in the two groups' sexual orientations (see also De Heer et al., 2021). Despite the fact that the sample was diverse, especially in terms of sexuality, I (initially) primarily focused on understandings and narratives of sexual consent and sexual assault that seemed to cut across gender and sexuality. A reason for focusing on cross-category similarities was that there were not enough participants identifying in each of the different gender and/or identity 'categories' (e.g. homosexual, non-binary etc.). Putting all LGBTQIA+ people in the same 'box' might be problematic as each gender or sexual identity comes with different experiences (e.g. Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Hird, 2000; Killermann, 2013; Paisley & Tayar, 2016). Therefore, I did not feel that I could make any final conclusions with regards to differences in how they understand sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication. Another reason that I focused on the common narratives and understandings has to do with the fact that several of the female participants identifying as bisexual (N=10), did not mention their sexual orientation during the interview; rather, their sexual orientation became known to me after their completion of the survey (that was administered to them at the end of the interview). This resulted in me not having the chance to ask them about their thoughts and experiences with consent and sex with other genders. In addition, they often discussed sexual consent as well as their sexual experiences within a heterosexual framework; i.e. by talking about their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences with cisgender men and discussing sexual consent as a practice that happens between a man and a woman. This could be due to the pervasiveness of some of the heteronormative discourses on gender and sexuality (see also De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022) and a result of sexual assault often being discussed as something men commit towards women (e.g. Turchik et al., 2016). Another possibility could be that they did not have any alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences with other genders

(Wegner et al., 2015). The abovementioned reflections, therefore, provided the reasons that I primarily focused on understandings of sexual consent and sexual assault that cut across gender and sexuality.

However, there were still some differences in the heterosexual and the LGBTQIA+ people's construction and experiences with sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. Those differences are discussed in manuscript 1 and 3 as well as in the discussion section of the dissertation.

In terms of civil status, 16 of the participants were single at the time of the interview, while 12 had a partner. 1 of the participants was dating a man exclusively and over a longer period of time, but they were not in a relationship yet, while another participant was in a polyamorous relationship. However, it is important to note that despite almost half of them being in a relationship, all of them narrated intoxicated sexual experiences from the time they were single too.

The majority of the participants drank alcohol frequently with 15 of them drinking 1-2 times per week during the course of the last year and 10 of them drinking once per month. When asked how often they have drunk to intoxication during the course of the last year, the majority of them (N=13) answered that they had done so 1-3 times a month. 4 of them had drunk to intoxication 1-2 times per week, while the rest had drunk to intoxication 7 times or less during the last year. It is important to note that the COVID-19 situation might have affected their drinking practices, giving them less opportunities to drink, since the bars, pubs and clubs were closed and the authorities advised against meeting with people outside one's immediate social circle and avoid alcohol-related activities.

Finally, the participants were sexually active within the course of the last year with 9 of them reporting that they have sex 2-3 times a week, 9 of them having sex 2-4 times a month, while 5 of them having sex 4 times a week or more.

Transcription

Having completed the 30 interviews, I started transcribing them with the help of student assistants employed at the Center for Alcohol and Drugs research. Transcription is an important part of the research process as it familiarizes one with the data and facilitates with the analytical process (Azevedo et al., 2017; Bazeley, 2013), which is why I tried to transcribe 10 of the interviews myself. However, due to how long of a process transcription is (Rosenthal, 2016) and the time-frame of the PhD project, I accepted some help from the student assistants. The student assistants were handed a transcription guide, which provided them with guidelines for transcribing.

I aimed for a denaturalized approach to transcription, since this approach has been used within critical discourse analytical frameworks (Fairclough 1993; van Dijk 1999). When adopting a denaturalized approach to transcription, it is more important to capture the substance of the interview and not as much depicting involuntary vocalization or accents (Oliver et al., 2005). However, some vocalizations, pauses or emotion expression (for example, crying, laughing etc.) were included if they were deemed meaningful to the interview (Oliver et al., 2005). However, what is considered ‘meaningful vocalizations’ can, sometimes, be subjective and since the student assistants did not conduct the interviews, they might also have had other opinions on what constitutes a ‘meaningful vocalization’.

Coding and analytic strategy

In the beginning stages of the coding and analytical strategy, I started coding the interviews as a whole. In order to aid with that initial coding process , I decided to follow some of the steps proposed by proponents of thematic analysis (TA), which helped get a sense of the most overarching themes covered in the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun et al., 2019). TA is a flexible analytical approach that can be performed across different epistemological traditions (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Boyatzis, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). However, TA has generally been developed within constructivist traditions, whereas other types of analytic approaches, such as content analysis, have their roots in positivism and has been mostly used in quantitative studies (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Morgan, 1993; Neuendorf, 2018). Due to how my study had its epistemological roots in social constructionism and that it was a qualitative study, I estimated that TA was a more appropriate form of analysis.

Even though TA is a flexible approach, Braun and Clark (2021) argue that it is important that the researcher takes their theoretical and analytical assumptions underlying the procedure of conducting TA into account. Braun and Clarke (2021) call this process a 'reflexive TA', which means that the researcher's subjectivity and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation is underlined. Therefore, I was aware of the fact that the coding and analysis of the data in the present study was done within a social constructionist epistemology and, more specifically, within a Critical discursive psychological framework (manuscript 1, 2 and 4) and a Narrative methodological approach (manuscript 3), both of which have their roots in social constructionism (as elaborated in Chapter 3).

TA thus provided some of the steps that I followed in the (primarily early) stages of the coding and analytic process (elaborated on later). Social constructionism (and, in turn, CDP and the narrative methodological approach) provided the epistemological framework, which influenced how I viewed and interpreted the data; broadly speaking, the data were

perceived as socially produced, i.e. as a product of that specific interaction (between the interviewer and the participants), as socioculturally specific and not as reflecting some underlying universal truth about sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication.

To begin with, I, in collaboration with my supervisors, each read a couple of interviews to familiarize ourselves with the data and to discuss what we 'saw' in the data and what could potentially be interesting themes (Braun et al., 2019). We discussed some initial/potential codes and after that, I read all of the transcribed interviews with the aim of getting an overall picture of the broadest/most prevalent codes on a semantic level. Capturing codes on a semantic level refers to dividing the data into codes that capture the explicit meaning of what is being said, therefore, close to what the participant is saying (Braun et al., 2019). I called those *'Background'* (general questions about the participant*), 'Alcohol use'* (general questions on the participants' drinking habits), *'Sex', 'Sexual consent'* (opinions, thoughts and communication of sexual consent and the new Consent-based legislation and thoughts and opinions on having sex in an alcohol intoxication context), *'Friends, family and social circle'* (How the participants' friends/family/social circle react and talk about the participants' sexual experiences/sexual consent), *'Vignettes'* and *'Other'* (aspects of the interview that did not fit in the other categories). Due to how those codes were on a semantic level, they were very much in alignment with the interview questions.

After that initial coding process, colleagues and I (depending on who were the authors in each manuscript) chose the specific codes that we wanted to focus on for each manuscript that we selected based on the aims and purposes of each manuscript. The first manuscript focused on the code 'Sexual consent', the second manuscript focused on the code 'One-night-stands/Casual sex/Friends with benefits' (a sub-code of the very broad code 'Sex') and the third manuscript focused on the code 'Vignettes'.

Around this stage, the coding and analytic process for each manuscript started differing and was adapted to the specific aims and purposes of each manuscript. In the first manuscript, we were interested in investigating how the participants talked about consent generally, but also, specifically, in relation to alcohol intoxication. We started sub-coding the 'Sexual consent' code and patterns seemed to emerge with regards to *how* the participants talked about- and constructed their understanding of sexual consent both generally, but also in relation to alcohol intoxication (i.e. talking about sexual consent in specific ways, employing certain metaphors, images etc.). The fact that patterns emerged with regards to how the participants talked about and constructed sexual consent made it relevant to look for interpretative repertoires the participants made use of when discussing sexual consent and the subject positions that those repertoires made available (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Employing interpretative repertoires and subject positions as our analytical concepts would also allow us to investigate the situational nature of the participants' construction of sexual consent both generally, but also in relation to alcohol intoxication (e.g. Davis & Harré, 1990; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). 'Interpretative repertoires' and 'subject positions' were, therefore, the theoretical concepts that guided our analysis of the data for this manuscript. After several rounds of refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2021), we found that the participants primarily made use of three interpretative repertoires to construct sexual consent in general, in relation to alcohol intoxication and in relation to gendered practices and expectations (elaborated in the first manuscript).

The second manuscript focused on the participants' understandings of intentionality and responsibility in relation to sexual consent, sexual assault and heavy alcohol intoxication. To explore this issue we used the broader code 'Vignettes' which was sub-coded into more focused topics (e.g. Braun et al., 2019). The sub-codes were on a semantic level, reflecting the different and varying factors in the vignettes (e.g. gender flip, resistance or not

etc., as elaborated in Chapter 4). By rereading the sub-codes, we found that those factors were connected to different *ideas*. At this stage, therefore, the coding went from the semantic level to a more latent level, meaning that we developed sub-codes that were not merely descriptive, but, rather, focusing on a deeper, more implicit level of meaning and abstracted from the explicit content of the data (Braun et al., 2019). After developing those codes on the latent level, we tried to capture the themes that seemed to cut cross the different sub-codes (ibid). After several rounds of renegotiating and refining the different themes, we selected those that aided us with answering the specific aims and purposes of the manuscript (ibid). In this manuscript, CDP functioned more as a broader 'lens' through which we interpreted our data, meaning that we analytically paid attention to how our participants drew on discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication in order to discursively construct notions of intentionality and responsibility (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 2003) and, thus, finding out what understandings of sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication were prevalent among our participants. In addition, we also looked at how broader societal discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication shaped their understanding of sexual consent and sexual assault (Wetherell, 2015; Wetherell & Edley, 2014).

In the third manuscript, I was interested in how the participants made meaning of and constructed sexual agency in their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions. Reading through the code 'One-night-stands/Casual sex/Friends with benefits', I found that the participants largely drew on the neoliberal discourse on sexual agency, emphasizing factors such as choice and responsibility (see also Bailey et al., 2015; Brown, 2003; Holmström et al., 2020) when narrating their experiences, but also other discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication. Due to how the focus of this manuscript was on the participants' narratives, I found that Bamberg's (1997, 2004, 2011) narrative methodological approach was more appropriate (as elaborated in chapter 3) to aid with the further analysis of the data. Therefore, I paid analytical attention to

how the participants linguistically positioned themselves as sexually agentic in their narratives and how their positioning as more or less sexually agentic was influenced by discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication (Bamberg, 2004). The three types of narratives were, therefore, identified with the help of the Bamberg's (2004) narrative methodological approach.

In order to make the selected themes in each manuscript understandable and transparent to an 'outside' reader, I/we I/we tried to find the quotes that were the most clear example of the themes they represented. However, I/we also chose quotes that challenged the themes, in order to show the complexity and the nuances of the participants' accounts. Finally, I/we also tried to use quotes from as many different participants (i.e. in relation to their gender identity, sexual orientation etc.) as possible in each manuscript in order to ensure that the participants' accounts were broadly represented.

Chapter 5: Presenting the manuscripts

This chapter entails a short presentation of the three manuscripts. For each manuscript, I summarize its aims and analytical findings with a more detailed presentation and discussion of those findings to be found in each manuscript.

Manuscript 1

Uncovering young people's situational construction of sexual consent

Authors: Evangelia Kousounadi Knountsen, Vibeke Asmussen Frank & Maria Herold

Status: Resubmitted to the Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs Journal (currently under the second round of reviews)

The aim of this manuscript was to investigate how the participants talked about sexual consent generally, but also specifically in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. The findings of this manuscript were based on more direct questions on the participants' understanding and communication of sexual consent and more indirect questions around their thoughts on having sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication. We used interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990) as our theoretical concepts and we found that the participants made use of three different interpretative repertoires that we named: 1) sexual consent as an agreement between rational individuals 2) intoxicated sexual consent and 3) sexual consent as a heteronormative practice.

Manuscript 2

Title: *Intentionality and responsibility in young people's construction of alcohol intoxicated sexual assault and sexual consent*

Authors: Evangelia Kousounadi Knountsen & Vibeke Asmussen Frank

Status: Published in the Nordic Journal of Criminology

The aim of the second manuscript was to investigate how notions of intentionality and responsibility influenced the participants' construction of alcohol intoxicated sexual

consent and sexual assault when presented with a hypothetical alcohol intoxicated sexual interaction during the interview. The findings of the second manuscript were thus based on the vignettes (elaborated in chapter 4). Conducting a thematic analysis (e.g. Braun et al., 2019) within a CDP framework (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987), we found three themes that we named: 1) (Un-) ambiguous communication of non-consent, 2) Levels of intoxication, power and responsibility and 3) different types of relationships, different expectations around sex. Central to those themes were discussions around whether the transgression of sexual boundaries was intentional as well as who was responsible for the sexual assault and/or sexual consent. While previous research has tried to nuance how we understand sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication by pointing at the inadequacy of intent and responsibility for fully understanding those matters, this manuscript showed that notions of intent and responsibility were central to how the participants made sense of a hypothetical alcohol intoxicated sexual interaction. At the same time, however, the results also showed that the discursive construction of intentionality and responsibility was situationally dependent, with the participants drawing on different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication which constituted their understanding of sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication as situational too.

Manuscript 3

Sexual agency as situational: Moving beyond neoliberal understandings of sexual agency when investigating young people's alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters

Author: Evangelia Kousounadi Knountsen

Status: Published in the Drugs: Education, prevention and Policy journal

The aim of the third manuscript was to investigate how the participants construct sexual agency in their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. The findings were thus based on questions around their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. A narrative analytical approach (e.g. Bamberg 2004, 2011) revealed that the participants drew on three types of narratives when

talking about their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters, which emphasized: 1) The pleasurable experiences and a large degree of agency 2) The ambivalent experiences of agency and 3) The out-of-control sexual experiences. In all three types of narratives, participants made use of a neoliberal discourse to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions, which is in accordance with previous research that has shown how neoliberal discourses emphasizing (sexual) agency, freedom, choice and responsibility influence how young people make meaning of their sexual interactions (Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008). Importantly, however, the participants also drew on different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication situationally, which influenced their possibilities for constructing themselves as sexually agentic. Thus, the participants positioned themselves with varying levels of sexual agency even within the same type of narratives. Based on the above, it is argued that a more situational understanding of sexual agency such as Cahill's (2016) might be more suitable than neoliberal understandings of sexual agency when investigating how young people make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In the following, I will start by summarizing the aims and central findings of each manuscript and argue for their contribution to previous research on alcohol intoxication, sex and sexual consent. After that, I will discuss the implications of the thesis' findings for our broader understanding of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. Finally, I will present the study's limitations.

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how young people (aged 19-25) construct sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. In order to shed light on the different aspects that characterize young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication, the overarching research question was broken down to three sub-questions that either focused on how young people discuss sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication or how they make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. Overall, the findings showed the contextual and situational nature of young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication and how factors such as gender, sexual orientation and level of intoxication influence young people's possibilities to consent to sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication.

The first sub-question revolved around young people's construction of sexual consent generally, but also, specifically, in relation to alcohol intoxication. This was explored in the first manuscript with a specific focus on how the participants talked about sexual consent.

When discussing sexual consent generally, the participants drew on a repertoire that resembled the neoliberal discourse (e.g. MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2020). They defined sexual consent as a 'mutual agreement' or 'understanding' and emphasized the importance of making the 'right/rational' choice in relation to consent, thus, exhibiting a contractual understanding of sexual consent (e.g. Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2020).

Importantly, the participants emphasized that sexual consent should be based on sexual desire, why the participants seemed to equate consent with a 'wantedness' to have sex (i.e. having desire-based sex) and not a 'willingness' to have sex (i.e. sex that is not necessarily desired-based) (see also Beres, 2004; Muehlenhard et al., 2016; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). They also emphasized miscommunication as a reason why sexual assaults happen, thus, mirroring what researchers have referred to as the miscommunication hypothesis (see also Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008). While their construction of sexual consent in general was similar to what some of the previous research on sexual consent has found, the results of manuscript 1 contribute to previous research by highlighting how the young people's construction of consent was context dependent, as the participants made use of different repertoires when discussing it in relation to alcohol intoxication and in relation to gendered practices and expectations.

When discussing sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication, the participants drew on an interpretative repertoire that was, in some cases, different, but, in other cases, similar to the first repertoire (i.e. the one they drew on when discussing consent generally). In some cases, alcohol intoxication was perceived as providing different possibilities in relation to consent. Alcohol intoxication seemed to be able to provide an explanation for why a person would not ask for consent while intoxicated or have sex that the person regretted the day after. In other cases, however, alcohol intoxication was not perceived as being able to excuse a person from their presumed moral responsibility to make the 'right/rational' choice in relation to consent. The right/rational choice in relation to (intoxicated) consent was, according to the participants, largely based on making sure that a person did not misunderstand their partner's sexual signals and, thus, transgressing their boundaries. Therefore, similarly to when discussing consent generally, the participants also drew on an understanding that resembled the miscommunication hypothesis (Beres, 2022;

Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008), however, also emphasizing how alcohol intoxication could *increase* the risk of miscommunication.

When discussing sexual consent in relation to gendered practices and expectations, the participants positioned men and women differently. The participants largely drew on more traditional gendered repertoires that expect men to be active sexually and always be ready to have sex (e.g. Hollway, 1984a; Gavey, 2018), while women were expected to balance between imperatives urging them to be agentic sexually, but, at the same time, not being too active sexually and merely respond to men's sexual initiatives (Bailey et al., 2015; Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020). In relation to consent, taking up such traditional gendered repertoires could have the implication that young people consent to sex not out of desire, but in order to live up to traditional gendered expectations. Previous research has shown how such traditional repertoires influence heterosexual young people's construction of sexual consent (e.g. Bailey et al., 2015; Bjønness et al., 2022; Gavey, 2018; Jensen & Hunt, 2020). However, the findings of this manuscript nuances previous research by showing how the LGBTQIA+ participants, simultaneously, endorsed and challenged those more traditional repertoires. Overall, the findings of manuscript 1 contribute to previous research by highlighting in which situations, for what aims and purposes young people take up different discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication to construct sexual consent as well as how factors such as gender identity and sexual orientation might influence what discourses young people take up.

The second sub-question focused on how notions of intentionality and responsibility influence young people's construction of sexual consent/assault in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. This sub-question was addressed by the second manuscript, which focused on the participants' more implicit understandings of sexual consent and sexual assault in relation to alcohol intoxication and, therefore, it contributed with a different facet of the

participants' construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication compared to the first manuscript. The findings in this manuscript were based on the participants' responses to pre-produced vignettes (see Chapter 4). Due to the fact that the participants had to make sense of a hypothetical sexual interaction, their understandings could also be a reflection of how they would respond to other people's sexual experiences (rather than their own). This is important information, as previous research shows that how other people respond to a person's sexual experiences can influence how they, themselves, make meaning of that experience (e.g. Jensen & Hunt, 2020). In addition, research shows that if other people respond to a person's sexual assault experience by blaming that person for 'getting themselves into' the assault, that person can experience negative consequences, such as increased anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder and an increased use of alcohol, among other things (Ulmann et al., 2007; Ulmann et al., 2008).

The findings of the second manuscript showed that notions of intentionality and responsibility were central to the participants' construction of alcohol intoxicated sexual consent/assault. The findings thus align with previous research showing that issues of intentionality and responsibility are central in discussions of sexual consent and sexual assault (e.g. Dyar et al., 2021; Kaluza & Conray-Murray, 2021; Maurer, 2016; Stefansen et al., 2021). The results of this manuscript contribute to previous research by showing that the participants' construction of intentionality and responsibility was situational, since they drew on different discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication to construct intentionality and responsibility. This means that whether certain behaviors were viewed as an intentional transgression of sexual boundaries and whom the participants viewed as responsible for the assault and/or consent was situationally dependent, ultimately constituting their construction of sexual consent/assault in relation to alcohol intoxication situational too.

In relation to intentionality, the participants found the intentional transgression of sexual boundaries more problematic, which echoes previous research (see also Kaluza & Conray-Murray, 2021). Therefore, they often emphasized the importance of communicating consent verbally in order to avoid the transgression of one's sexual boundaries, which could indicate that they, as also mentioned before, adhered to the miscommunication hypothesis (e.g. Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; O'Byrne et al., 2006, 2008). However, the results of the second manuscript nuances the results of previous research by showing how the intentional transgression of a romantic partner's boundaries was not necessarily considered as problematic. A few of the participants did not consider it problematic to persuade their partner to have sex, even in cases where they knew that their partner was not up for having sex. This was due to the rationale that having sex not out of desire, but to please one's partner is not necessarily problematic in the context of a romantic relationship. Previous research has shown how sexual consent within a romantic relationship is different than in the context of casual sexual relationships (Orchowski et al., 2022; Righi et al., 2021) and that people (especially women) will sometimes have sex with their partner to please them and not necessarily out of sexual desire (e.g. Gavey, 2018). In this case, therefore, the participants seemed to equate sexual consent in romantic relationships with a 'willingness' to have sex and not only a 'wantedness' to have sex (see also Beres, 2004; Muehlenhard et al., 2016; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007), which stands in contrast to how they discussed consent generally in the first manuscript.

Whether the participants viewed the transgression of sexual boundaries as intentional was also related to other factors. For example, some participants talked about how accepting to go home with a person after a party could signal consent to sex. Therefore, the participants emphasized that the person who said yes to going home with another person had an increased responsibility to communicate non-consent clearly in order to avoid that the other person (unintentionally) transgressed their sexual boundaries. The fact that going home with

someone after a party can signal consent, indicates how sexual consent has a temporal dimension, where certain behaviors happening (long) before the sexual act itself can be perceived as signaling consent. Previous research has also found how some young people perceive going home with someone as signaling consent to sex (Beres, 2010; Hirsch et al., 2019). However, the results of the second manuscript nuances previous research by showing how the type of relationship between two people influences the *extent* to which 'going home with someone after a party' counts as consent to sex. More specifically, the participants argued that, especially in casual sexual relationships, going home with someone after a party likely signals consent to sex. It is important to pay attention to whether young people ascribe to such 'temporal dimensions' of consent; if young people assume that an acceptance to relocate to a private location after a party signals consent, they can transgress the other person's sexual boundaries.

The participants also seemed to exhibit a situational understanding of responsibility; in some cases, they ascribed mutual responsibility for consent on men and women. In those cases, the participants drew on the neoliberal discourse that positions men and women equally in relation to sex and sexual consent (e.g. Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2020). In other cases, they ascribed individual responsibility on either men or women for consenting, which they argued for by drawing on gender, sexuality or alcohol intoxication discourses. For example, a few of the participants ascribed increased responsibility on men to communicate non-consent by drawing on the male sexual drive discourse and talking about how they had a hard time imagining men not wanting to have sex (see also Hollway, 1984a; Gavey, 2018). Therefore, the participants argued that men have an increased responsibility to communicate non-consent in order for women not to (unintentionally) transgress their boundaries. While previous research has shown how the male sexual drive discourse influences young people's understanding of men's sexuality (e.g. Gavey, 2018), the results of the present

study nuances previous research by showing how it was mostly the heterosexual participants that ascribed to that traditional gendered notion. However, since it was only three heterosexual participants that ascribed to that notion in the second manuscript, while the rest of the heterosexual participants did not, it was not possible to make any final conclusions in relation to that. In other cases, some of the participants ascribed increased responsibility for communicating consent to women by drawing on the notion of women as gatekeepers in relation to consent (see also Beres, 2014; Hollway, 1984; Gavey, 2018; Gunnarsson, 2018).

Responsibility around consent was also related to alcohol intoxication levels. In general, the less intoxicated person was viewed as more responsible in relation to making the 'right/rational' choice in relation to consent, while the more intoxicated person was viewed as less responsible in relation to consent. Similarly to previous research, intoxicated perpetrators were ascribed less responsibility for transgressing another person's sexual boundaries due to the rationale that they were intoxicated by alcohol and, therefore, they were not aware of what they were doing (see also Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Wegner et al., 2015). However, contrary to previous research that shows that it is often alcohol intoxicated male perpetrators that are excused for committing sexual assault (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Wegner et al., 2015) and alcohol intoxicated female victims that are blamed for getting sexually assaulted (Wegner et al., 2015), the present study showed that it was the intoxication levels, and not the gender of either the perpetrator or the victim that influenced the degree of responsibility they were ascribed by the participants.

The third sub-question focused on how young people construct sexual agency in relation to alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions and consent. This question was addressed by the third manuscript and, thus, also provided a different facet of their construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication.

The results showed that the participants largely took up a neoliberal discourse emphasizing (free) choice, responsibility and (sexual) agency (e.g. Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2020) when making meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters, even in those encounters where they experienced very little control (e.g. due to being incapacitated by alcohol, being coerced etc.). This is in accordance with previous research that shows how young people take up a neoliberal discourse when making meaning of their sexual experiences (e.g. Bay-Cheng & Elisseo Arras, 2008). The fact that young people take up the neoliberal discourse to a rather high degree when making meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences can be problematic, as taking up that discourse can obscure other factors, such as discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication that affect young people's possibilities in relation to consenting to alcohol intoxicated sex (see also Cunniff Gilson, 2016; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Munro, 2008; Westlund, 2009). However, the results of this manuscript also show how the participants simultaneously took up other discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication situationally and how that influenced their construction of agency. Therefore, how young people make meaning of their sexual experiences might be more situational than previous research has indicated. For example, the participants took up discourses on alcohol's positive effect on sexual boundaries (e.g. Herold & Frank, 2020; Hunt & Frank, 2016; Patrick & Maggs, 2009), talking about how alcohol helped them experiment with sexual boundaries, while also taking up discourses that link alcohol intoxication to sexual assault (see also Hunt et al., 2022; Lorenz & Ulmann, 2016). The fact that the participants took up contradicting discourses around alcohol intoxication highlights how the 'place for playful transgressions' (see also Tutenges, 2012) inherent to the alcohol intoxication culture can be double-sided. This is because alcohol intoxication itself, as well as the norms and expectations surrounding the alcohol intoxication culture can, on the one hand, facilitate fun and pleasurable sexual interactions, but, on the other hand, it can also result in the transgression of sexual boundaries.

The results of the third manuscript also contribute to previous research by showing how factors, such as gender influenced how the participants constructed agency. Previous research has mostly focused on how young women construct agency to make sense of their sexual encounters (e.g. Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008), while the present study focused on both how young men and women constructed agency in their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. The male participants were generally reluctant to position themselves with little or no sexual agency, which might be due to the pervasiveness of the male sexual drive discourse where men are expected to always desire sex (Hollway, 1984a; Gavey, 2018). This is problematic, as it indicates that young men might have a difficult time positioning themselves as not wanting to have sex or as victims of sexual assault. Women, on the other hand, oscillated between positioning themselves with limited sexual agency, while, on the other hand, also taking up the neoliberal discourse (e.g. Bay-Cheng & Elisseo Arras, 2008). Importantly, the latter did not only involve emphasizing a free choice in relation to their sexual encounters, but also taking responsibility for getting sexually assaulted (Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2020). The fact that the young women positioned themselves with a high level of sexual agency, on the one hand, could be because they are expected to be agentic in relation to their sexuality (Bailey et al., 2015; Jensen & Hunt, 2020). On the other hand, the fact that they took responsibility for getting sexually assaulted could due to victim blaming discourses that position, especially intoxicated women, as responsible for getting sexually assaulted (Ullman et al., 2007; Ullman et al., 2008), due to how women's alcohol consumption is viewed more negatively compared to men's (e.g. Herold & Hunt 2020; Nicholls, 2020; Pennay et al., 2015), or due to the 'slut-stigma' where women's casual sexual experiences are viewed more negatively compared to men's. The abovementioned factors might induce increased feelings of self-blame on young women, which might be part of the reason why they ascribed increased responsibility on themselves for getting sexually assaulted. Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras'

(2008) research also showed that the female participants in their study largely blamed themselves for consenting to unwanted sex. Similarly to Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras' (2008) study, the present study showed how more traditional gendered expectations contributed to the female participants consenting to (unwanted) sex. For example, some of the female participants expressed a wish to not 'ruin the moment' by saying no to sex, which could reflect how young women are expected to care for other people's needs more than their own (e.g. Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Hollway, 1984a). The results of the present study contributed to previous research by showing how not only gendered discourses, but also alcohol intoxication discourses together contributed to the female participants' consent to unwanted sex. An example of this could be the female participants' wish to not 'ruin the moment' combined with expectations in heavy drinking contexts to have sex (see also Bailey et al., 2015; Farris et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2013; Peralta, 2010) that pressured some of the young women in the present study into consenting to unwanted sex.

Finally, an important thing to note with regards to the findings of the third manuscript has to do with the fact that, in most cases, the participants did not explicitly mention sexual consent (i.e. whether they had given/received/were asked for their consent) when narrating their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. This could indicate that sexual consent is not yet a well-established part of how the participants made meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions, despite the fact that the participants were aware of the importance of mutual consent (something that they, in many cases, emphasized in manuscript 1 and 2). The fact that sexual consent was not a well-established part of how the participants made meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions could be because sexual consent is a relatively new term in the Danish society, as the previous sexual assault legislation was not consent-based (Kvinfo, 2020). In fact, it could be argued that the participants in manuscript 3 exhibited an understanding of sexual assault that was more similar to the previous

understanding of sexual assault as most of the participants mentioned their lack of resistance to a NSE, rather than whether there was a mutual consent communication process when narrating their experiences. Another possibility could be that their understanding of consent on an 'experiential' level is different from legal understandings of consent, something that Beres' (2104) research also shows. The 'experiential reality' of sexual consent might, therefore, be more of, what researchers have termed, an 'embodied gendered practice', where consent is typically communicated non-verbally or by not resisting one's partner's advances rather than an explicit verbal negotiation between partners (Beres, 2007; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration how young people not only discuss sexual consent, but also how they navigate it in their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions and to investigate whether their 'experiential reality' of consent is different or more complex than legal understandings of sexual consent.

Aside from the abovementioned narratives around sexual consent that were the most prevalent ones throughout the interviews and thus the focus of the three manuscripts, there were also other, less prevalent narratives, among the LGBTQIA+ participants. In many cases, similarly to the heterosexual participants, the LGBTQIA+ participants drew on different discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication situationally to construct consent; however, their construction of consent was, in other cases, also related to their gender identity and sexual orientation. For example, some of them talked about how their NSEs were the result of power imbalances (relating to factors other than gender, such as in male-female sexual interactions), which is in accordance with previous research investigating LGBTQIA+ people's consent communication practices that have also found how issues of power are inherent even in same-sex relationships and, therefore, sometimes, resulting in sexual assault (e.g. De Heer et al, 2021; Ford & Becker, 2020; Sternin et al., 2020). In addition, several of the LGBTQIA+ participants seemed to face dilemmas related to undefined sexual scripts, which – as previous research has

also shown (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022) – can result in some LGBTQIA+ people having trouble navigating alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions and sexual consent. The way those undefined scripts affected the participants' possibilities for communicating consent depended on the participants' sexual orientation. For some of the bisexual participants, the presence of undefined scripts resulted in them reproducing more gender stereotypical ways of practicing consent (e.g. by positioning the more masculine presenting individual as the initiator of the sexual interaction, while the more feminine presenting individual was positioned as the gatekeeper in relation to consent), which is in accordance with previous research (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021). However, in the present study, the only cases where the bisexual participants reproduced more gender stereotypical ways of practicing consent was when they were having sex with a gender that they had no or only few prior sexual experiences with. It is possible that, once bisexual individuals gain more experience with having sex with that particular gender, they might start practicing consent in less gender stereotypical ways. The male homosexual participants talked about how discourses urging young men to 'get drunk' and approach another person at a bar in order to have sex with that person (e.g. Bailey et al., 2015; Jensen & Hunt, 2020) was not available for all homosexual men to take up. In addition, they talked about how flirting with other homosexual men was not straightforward because it was not always clear whether the other person flirted back or was merely being friendly. Those things could indicate that sexual scripts for homosexual men are undefined, which makes it harder for homosexual men to navigate alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions. The lack of alternative sexual scripts resulted in the male homosexual participants using dating apps, such as Grindr, that are designed for men who want to have sex with men. According to the male homosexual participants, using that app presumably made the negotiation of sexual consent easier, since a person's presence on that app was implicitly interpreted as signaling consent to (casual) sex and homosexual preferences. Similar to how the participants in manuscript 2

viewed going home with someone as signaling consent, this could indicate a temporal dimension of consent as certain behaviors (in this case, a person's presence on an app) before the sexual act itself were perceived as signaling consent (see also Beres, 2010; Hirsch et al., 2019). Importantly, however, interpreting consent based on a person's presence on the Grindr app had the implication that some of the young men forgot to 'tune into' each other's sexual preferences upon meeting each other. This resembles the findings of previous research showing how assuming consent based on a person's presence in a particular context can result in sexual consent negotiation being faster, immediate and even implied (e.g. Braun et al., 2009a; Braun et al., 2009b; Sternin et al., 2022). It is important to pay attention to those nuances and differences in the LGBTQIA+ participants' construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication; however, it is also important to keep in mind the fact that those results are preliminary, therefore, further analysis of the LGBTQIA+ participants' narratives might have yielded different results.

Overall, the thesis' contribution to previous research is that it highlights how young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication is contextual and situational. This contextual and situational construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication can be due to how young people take up different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication situationally, for different aims and purposes. Their construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication can also vary depending on whether they merely talk about sexual consent or whether they reflect on their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. In addition, the thesis also contributes to existing research by showing how factors such as gender, sexual orientation and level of intoxication can influence young people's possibilities to consent to sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication.

It is vital to keep the situational nature of young people's construction of sexual consent as well as their different possibilities to consent to sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication in mind if we wish to reduce the high numbers of NSEs happening under the influence of alcohol intoxication. It can also be fruitful to make young people aware of the different discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication. This is because those different and often contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication can induce feelings of ambivalence for young people as they provide them with different possibilities in relation to sex and sexual consent. In general, the findings seemed to suggest that navigating alcohol intoxicated sex and sexual consent is a particularly dilemmatic space for young people, which was reflected by their use of contradicting discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication, their ambivalent alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences and the fact that many of them constructed consent as safe(-r) and more valid in sober situations. The latter is understandable, as alcohol does indeed have the potential to complicate the processes of consent (Loeber et al., 2009; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). However, since alcohol seems to be an inevitable part of many young people's casual sexual encounters (e.g. Wade, 2021), it would, nevertheless, be fruitful to find ways to help young people navigate those encounters and, at least, try to reduce some of the harms that can result from having alcohol intoxicated sex. In line with that, it could be helpful to spread awareness around what discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication are problematic and need to change. Those are, for example, the more traditional discourses around men's sexuality that can -in worst cases- serve to excuse NSEs (Gavey, 2018; Wegner et al., 2015) or fail to recognize them as victims of sexual assault (e.g. Gavey, 2018), or heteronormative discourses that result in LGBTQIA+ people having difficulty navigating sex and sexual consent (e.g. de Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022).

Another important thing to consider, however, is how the composition of the sample might have affected the results. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the sample was diverse,

especially in terms of sexuality, with several participants identifying as LGBTQIA+. Therefore, the results might have been different, had the sample primarily consisted of young people identifying as heterosexual. For example, if the sample had consisted primarily of heterosexual participants, traditional gender and sexuality discourses might have been even more prevalent. This could partly explain why Hunt et al.'s (2022) study that examined heterosexual young people's construction of consent in relation to alcohol intoxication found that many of their participants drew on traditional gendered discourses when discussing alcohol intoxicated consent. Even though heterosexual young people also challenge traditional gender and sexuality discourses (e.g. Morisson et al., 2015), LGBTQIA+ people might do so to a greater degree, since the pervasiveness of heteronormative discourses might 'force' them to re-construct consent in unique, non-traditional ways.

The fact that many of the participants came from bigger Danish cities (such as Copenhagen and Aarhus) might have also influenced the results. Previous research has shown that geography influences both how alcohol is consumed (e.g. Herold et al., 2020), as well as young people's sexual practices (e.g. Hubbard, 2018). Geography might, therefore, also have influenced the participants' construction of consent and their relatively favorable views and general knowledge towards sexual consent could be a result of them living in bigger cities that are characterized by a more progressive way of thinking. A possibility, therefore, exists that young people residing in rural areas might hold more traditional understandings of sex and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication.

Finally, another important thing to consider is how gender, sexuality and intoxication norms and expectations might be changing. In a few years' time, young people might endorse a different understanding of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. As mentioned in Chapter 1, at the time of the study, the participants were at a crossroad between

the previous understanding of sexual assault and the new consent-based understanding of sexual assault. The continued influence of debates on sexual consent as well as movements, such as the #MeToo movement, might contribute to a greater awareness about the cultural, gendered and sexuality factors that can result in sexual assaults (e.g. Petty John et al., 2019). In addition, gender and sexuality norms are changing where more traditional norms and expectations are gradually being replaced by more modern ones (e.g. Masters et al., 2013). For example, Morrison et al.'s (2015) study showed how some the male participants in their study discussed sex in a way where mutual sexual pleasure was emphasized, rather than discussing it in a way where only their own sexual pleasure was emphasized. The participants in Morrison et al.'s (2015) study thus seemed to ascribe to less traditionally masculine norms and expectations in relation to sex that usually prioritize men's sexual pleasure. Statistics also show that young people's alcohol consumption levels, while still high (Lunnay et al., 2022), are decreasing, both in Denmark (Tolstrup et al., 2019) and internationally (Törrönen et al., 2019). In addition, movements such as the #Sobercurious movement, which is a (mostly young people's) movement that encourages young people not to drink (or drink in moderation) are gradually arising (Lunnay et al., 2022). In general, therefore, the continually changing nature of norms and expectations around gender, sexuality and intoxication might change how young people construct sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication and the centrality of alcohol intoxication in young people's casual sexual encounters.

Limitations

The present study has different limitations. First of all, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, some of the bisexual participants disclosed their sexuality at the end of the interview when they were handed the survey (in which they were asked about their sexual orientation). Therefore, I might have found bigger differences with regards to the heterosexual and the LGBTQIA+ participants' construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication, had

the bisexual participants either completed the survey before the interview, disclosed their sexuality during the interview or had I asked them questions about their sexuality during the interview. Had I known that the participants identified as bisexual, I could have asked them about non-heterosexual sexual interactions and whether there were differences in consent communication practices in heterosexual and non-heterosexual sexual interactions. The reason why I did not hand the survey to the participants before the actual interview was because the survey asked them quite personal questions (such as, for example, their alcohol consumption and sexual habits). Therefore, I found it more ethical to begin with the actual interview in order to establish rapport with them, before asking them to fill out a survey addressing some very personal questions. The reason why I did not ask them questions about their sexuality during the interview was because all of the participants identifying as LGBTQIA+ (except some of the female bisexual participants) mentioned their sexual orientation themselves and often quite early in the interview, while the ones that did not explicitly mention their sexuality often identified as heterosexual. Therefore, I mistakenly assumed that the female bisexual participants that did not disclose their sexuality during the interview, identified as heterosexual, since they did not explicitly mention their sexual orientation and they only talked about heterosexual sexual interactions. In addition, due to the tight time-frame of the PhD project in combination with the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 situation that resulted in several delays, I did not have time to re-interview some of the bisexual participants where I could have asked them about non-heterosexual sexual interactions as well.

Another limitation has to do with the sample composition. The majority of the sample consisted of cisgender women as well as Caucasian white young people. The findings might, therefore, primarily represent their views. In addition, most of the participants seemed to be relatively educated with most of them either currently enrolled in or already in possession of a College University degree, a Bachelor's or Master's level degree. A limitation of this study

is thus its lack of focus on class and ethnicity and how that influences young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. Previous studies have shown that class (e.g. Skeggs, 1997, 2005) as well as ethnicity (e.g. Armstrong et al., 2018; Crenshaw, 1991) can influence both sexuality is enacted but also how alcohol is consumed (e.g. Lennox et al., 2018). For example, Lennox et al.'s (2018) study showed how the balancing act of being 'up for it' sexually and participating in the alcohol culture in par with men, while also retaining their respectability, is an even harder task for working class women (compared to middle class women), since both their drinking and sexual practices are generally judged harsher by society. However, aside from the fact that I had knowledge on the participants' educational level, which can be associated with class, I did not ask about other information that is associated with class (such as a person's family and social background). Therefore, even if I had had participants from different SES backgrounds, I would still lack important information regarding class. Future studies could benefit from employing an intersectional approach where factors, such as class, but also ethnicity, gender and sexuality are taken into consideration with regards to how they influence young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication, but also their possibilities in relation to consenting to sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication (see also Armstrong et al., 2018; Collpitts, 2022; Hirsch et al., 2019; Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2015; Skeggs, 2005).

Conclusion

Sexual consent has been a debated topic both in the public sphere, but also in the scientific community and has become an important part of how sexual assaults are discussed and understood. Previous research has addressed important debates around sexual consent's conceptualization, communication as well as how gender and sexuality discourses influence its understanding. However, there has been a paucity of research examining sexual consent in relation to alcohol specifically. The blindness to the role of alcohol intoxication in shaping the

processes of consent is peculiar, considering how alcohol is often a part of young people's casual sexual experiences and the fact that a high number of sexual assaults happen in relation to alcohol intoxication. The thesis' aim was, therefore, to examine how young people's understanding and situational construction of sexual consent and assault both draw on and is shaped by discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication. Overall, the findings showed that young people's construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication is situational and contextual because young people take up different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication situationally, for different aims and purposes. Their construction of sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication can also vary depending on whether they merely talk about sexual consent or whether they reflect on their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. Finally, the findings showed that factors such as gender, sexual orientation and level of intoxication influence young people's possibilities to consent to sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication. Considering the complex and contextual nature of sexual consent as well as the different possibilities young people have in relation to consenting to sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication will, hopefully, pave the way for less individualized and 'one-size-fits-all' solutions in the future when trying to reduce the number of sexual assaults happening under the influence of alcohol intoxication.

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The three manuscripts

1. Young people's situational construction of sexual consent

Authors: Evangelia K. Knountsen, Vibeke A. Frank & Maria Herold

Status: Currently under the second round of reviews

2. Intentionality and responsibility in young people's construction of alcohol intoxicated sexual assault and sexual consent

Authors: Evangelia K. Knountsen & Vibeke A. Frank

Status: Published in the Nordic Journal of Criminology

3. Sexual agency as situational: Moving beyond neoliberal understandings of sexual agency when investigating young people's alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions

Author: Evangelia K. Knountsen

Status: Published in Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy

Uncovering young people's situational construction of sexual consent

Abstract

Aims: The aim of the present study is to investigate how young Danes construct sexual consent generally, but also specifically in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. **Methods:** Drawing on 30 qualitative in-depth interviews with young people, aged 19-25, and adopting a critical discursive psychological framework, we explored the interpretative repertoires that the participants made use of to construct sexual consent and the subject positions those repertoires enabled. **Results:** Our analysis showed that young people made use of three interpretative repertoires that we named: 1) sexual consent as an agreement between rational individuals 2) intoxicated sexual consent and 3) sexual consent as a heteronormative practice. **Discussion:** The results of the present study highlight how young people draw on different repertoires when discussing sexual consent in general, sexual consent in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication and sexual consent in relation to gendered practices and expectations. **Conclusion:** Our study emphasizes how it is vital to keep the situational nature of young people's constructions of sexual consent in mind if we wish to understand and eventually reduce the number of non-consensual sexual experiences.

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Keywords: alcohol intoxication, interpretative repertoires, non-consensual sexual experience, sexual consent, subject positions, young people

Introduction

A high number of young people, especially women (e.g. Lorenz & Ullman, 2016) and LGBTQIA+ people (Johnson et al., 2016; Thomsen, 2022), are every year subjected to non-consensual sexual experiences (NSEs), i.e. '*sexual activities (fondling, oral sex, or vaginal and anal penetration) that involve a lack of consent and/or are instigated by manipulation, coercion, abuse of power, incapacitation, force, threats, and/or violence*' (Koss et al., 2007). Studies show that up to 50% of NSEs happen in relation to alcohol intoxication (Cowley, 2014; Heinskou et al., 2017; Lorenz & Ullman, 2016)[1]. The high number of NSEs underline the importance of investigating how young people understand sexual consent both generally, but also in relation to alcohol intoxication.

[1] The data on prevalence are based on self-reported measures and refer to sexual and intimate partner violence that only partially overlap with the concept of NSEs.

Previous research on sexual consent is extensive. A strand of research has focused on young people's definition of consent as either an 'internal state of willingness', an 'act of explicitly agreeing to something', or as 'non-verbal behaviors that indicate a person's willingness to engage in sexual activity' (Fenner, 2017; Muehlenhard et al., 2016, pp. 462-463). Other researchers have pointed towards how young people understand sexual consent as a contract between two or more individuals about to have sex (cf. Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2019). Researchers argue that this understanding adheres to the neoliberal view of the self where humans are constructed as '*rational, adult, contract-making individuals in a free market of options*' (Adam, 2005, p.344). Positioned in a neoliberal discourse, young people, across genders, are seen as having a free choice in relation to consent, which, at the same time, makes them responsible for their sexual encounters (Bay-Cheng, 2015; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008).

Other research has focused on how young people communicate sexual consent which is either verbally, non-verbally or by a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies (Baldwin-White, 2021; Beres, 2010, 2014; Humphreys, 2007; Humphreys & Herold, 2007; Jozkowski et al., 2015). This is, however, not congruent with how many young people regard verbal communication of consent as the most 'ideal' way to communicate consent in order to avoid misunderstanding each other's sexual signals and, potentially, transgressing a person's sexual boundaries (Holmström et al., 2020). The belief that NSEs happen due to miscommunication has been termed the 'miscommunication hypothesis' (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008). However, research also shows that young people are actually good at interpreting signals of sexual intent, either verbally or non-verbally (Glace et al., 2021; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999). Therefore, it has also been argued that young people might claim miscommunication in order to justify NSEs (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008).

Given the growing realization that sexual consent is a complex subject, researchers are increasingly considering the broader context where sexual consent takes place and influences the processes of consent. Feminist researchers have looked at how gendered power structures 'not only externally constrain, but also permeate human subjectivity and agency to their core', thus, influencing young people's possibilities in relation to consent (e.g. Cunniff Gilson, 2016; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Munro, 2008; Westlund, 2009). They have,

therefore, criticized the definitions of consent that are based on a neoliberal discourse where young people are positioned as having a free choice in relation to consent (Cunniff Gilson, 2016; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Munro, 2008; Westlund, 2009). For example, the 'male sexual drive discourse' is a pervasive gendered sexuality discourse that influences how men and women's sexuality is viewed and puts them in unequal positions in relation to consent (Gavey, 2018). Positioned in the 'male sexual drive discourse', women are seen as the 'gatekeepers' in relation to consent and as the ones who merely have to respond to men's sexual initiatives (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). Since women are simultaneously positioned in the neoliberal discourse and are expected to be agentic in relation to their sexuality (e.g. Bay-Cheng & Eliseo- Arras, 2008; Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020), they have to balance between consenting to sex to avoid being perceived as 'frigid', while also not consent 'too much' to sex to avoid being perceived as 'sluts' (e.g. Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020). This arguably explains the notion of 'token resistance' where a woman's non-consent might be perceived as signaling consent, based on the logic that they might initially not consent in order to avoid being read as too 'eager' to have sex (Baldwin-White, 2021). The 'male sexual drive discourse' positions men as active sexually and as always desiring sex (Beres, 2014; Hollway et al., 1984a; Gunnarsson, 2018; Gavey, 2018). Therefore, they might feel pressured to consent to sex in order to live up to those more traditional notions of masculinity or not have a NSE recognized as such (ibid).

Other researchers have focused on the norms and expectations surrounding alcohol intoxication as well as the physical contexts where alcohol intoxication take place that also seem to influence the processes of consent. As previous studies have pointed out, the effects of alcohol intoxication and the contexts where it takes place are saturated with social- and cultural meaning (e.g. Douglas, 1987; Hunt & Frank, 2016; Partanen 1991; MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969). Drinking to intoxication plays a central role in young people's lives (e.g. Advocat & Lindsey, 2015; Measham & Brain, 2005; McCreanor et al. 2016; Tolstrup et al., 2019) and has been associated with flirting and hooking-up (Fjær et al., 2015; Grazian, 2007; Jensen et al., 2019; Peralta, 2010; Østergaard, 2007), allowing a behavior that is different from the 'normal sober behavior' (Tutenges, 2012; Tutenges et al., 2020). This has sometimes resulted in sexually transgressive behaviors being excused with the rationale being that the perpetrator was intoxicated by alcohol and, therefore, was not in control of their actions (Abbey et al.,2001, 2002, 2011; Wegner et al., 2015). Other studies, such as e.g. Farris et al., (2010), emphasize how men can encourage women to consume alcohol because they expect women to

be more sexually available when intoxicated, or interpret their cues as a sign of sexual interest. Patrick & Maggs (2009) point towards how young people intentionally consume alcohol with the belief that it will increase their sexual drive and decrease their inhibitions. Another strand of research emphasizes that alcohol might cloud one's ability to give and receive consent to sexual activity (Loeber et al., 2009; Orchowski et al., 2022) or be the cause of a person being incapacitated and unable to consent to sexual activity (Koss et al., 2007). Hirsch et al., 2019 found that the physical places where parties are held also created certain expectations of sex to occur (Hirsch et al., 2019). Beres (2010) and Beres et al.'s (2014) studies found that their participants viewed certain behaviors in heavy drinking contexts as indicators of consent. For example, if a person was willing to transition to a private location after the bar could be read as indicators of consent (Beres, 2010), while 'relocating to the bedroom' could also be a cue that sex would follow (Beres et al., 2014). Research shows that such cues can, sometimes, make it harder for some people to say 'no' to sex, since they are aware of the fact that an expectation has been built that consensual sex will occur (Holmström et al., 2020).

Overall then, the abovementioned research shows the complexity of sexual consent as a scientific subject. While this research comes with important contributions in showing how context can influence the processes of consent and what young people perceive as consent, there is a paucity of research investigating *how* young people draw on those different understandings of consent situationally, with what aims, purposes and implications. The aim of the present paper is, thus, to investigate how 30 young people between the ages 19-25 construct sexual consent both in general, but also in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. We take on a critical discursive psychological approach (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Davies & Harré, 1990) in order to identify which interpretative repertoires young people draw on to construct sexual consent and how broader discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication influence their construction of consent (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Davies & Harré, 1990). Investigating that can give us important information on what understandings young people draw on to construct sexual consent, which is vital if we wish to prevent and reduce the number of NSEs.

Analytical framework

Our analytical framework is informed by critical discursive psychology (Wetherell, 1998; Davies & Harré, 1990). This framework is regarded as a synthetic approach between ethnomethodological and conversation analytic traditions and post-structural or Foucauldian analysis (Wetherell, 1998). In other words, it focuses on how people use language in particular

situations to talk phenomena in the world into being in different ways and accomplish specific actions, while, at the same time, taking the wider social and institutional frameworks that shape and enable this deployment (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 2003; Wetherell, 1998). Language does not describe a pre-existing psychological reality; rather it gives meaning to the experiences out of the words that are available (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 2003; Wetherell, 1998). The specific concepts that we employ in our analysis from this tradition are *interpretative repertoires* (Wetherell, 1998) and *subject positions* (Davies & Harré, 1990).

An interpretative repertoire constitutes a certain and coherent way of talking about and making sense of a social phenomenon (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). It is a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised from recognizable themes, common places and tropes (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988;1992; Wetherell et al. 1987). In a conversational context, interpretative repertoires are signaled by webs of culturally informed figures of speech, metaphors, vivid images etc. (Wetherell & Potter, 1993). These interpretative repertoires are the methods which members of a society have available to make sense of social phenomena (Potter & Wetherell, 1988) as, for example, sexual consent. A person's use of interpretative repertoires is not necessarily coherent, as competing or even contradictory repertoires can be used by a person – depending on the conversational context, the specific themes, aims and purposes of the social situation in which it takes place. In other words, people make use of interpretative repertoires to accomplish something; for example, to improve their own or others' credibility or position when they interact socially (Potter & Wetherell, 1988) and to establish their accounts as factual and stable representations of the world (Potter, 1996).

Using interpretative repertoires can also have a broader, ideological effect such as rendering alternative ways of viewing a social phenomenon (in)visible (Wetherell, 1998). Therefore, even though many interpretative repertoires exist around sexual consent, some are more hegemonic and are, therefore, seen as more 'natural', 'legitimate' or 'common-sense' (Coelho & Mota-Ribeiro, 2014; Gavey, 1989). Which repertoires become dominant is a question of power hierarchies; those in power are in a position where they are better able to define the standards and norms which the rest of the society is expected to follow (Burr & Dick, 2017).

People's meaning making thus takes place in the realm of interpretative repertoires. Those repertoires make different subject positions available in a situation for people to take up (Davies & Harré, 1990) that are 'saturated with cultural meaning' (Søndergaard, 2002, p. 191) and hold specific possibilities for – in our case – how young people are able to think about and make sense of sexual consent and alcohol use. When people draw on interpretative repertoires,

they – at the same time - position themselves and others (situationally) as for example 'victim', 'perpetrator', 'guilty' or '(ir)responsible' in the process of narrating their experiences (see also Wetherell, 1998;). A person is, however, not completely determined by the subject positions available to them, but can situationally engage in many and contradictory ones (Davies & Harré, 1990). Subject positions are, therefore, highly context dependent (Davies & Harré, 1990). Thus, variation and self-contradictory answers around sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication were, in our study, seen as a matter of how young people draw on different interpretative repertoires and take up different subject positions as they talk about this phenomenon. However, a person is never free to take up *any* subject position, as their conversational choices will always depend on which repertoires they have access to (Davies & Harré, 1990). Due to social power relations, in certain interactions and contexts, some subject positions will feel comfortable and easy while others will feel uncomfortable or problematic and thus require a huge amount of work and effort in order to be accepted (Edley, 2001, Wetherell, 1998).

Data, Methods and Analytical strategy

Our study is based on 30 in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with young people 19-25 years of age, all of which were planned and conducted by the first author. An interview guide was developed which focused on the participants' pleasurable and problematic sexual experiences and their understandings of sexual consent both in general, but also, in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication. The questions were developed after extensive readings of scientific literature (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) around sexual consent, gender, sexuality and young people's alcohol intoxication. A short survey was also developed that was used primarily for demographic purposes and to guide the recruitment strategy along the way.

In order to recruit participants for the study, the first author developed a post about the project stating that we were looking for young people between the ages of 18-25 that have had alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences and who were willing to share those experiences as well as their thoughts and opinions on sexual consent in an interview. The post was shared multiple times, both in the first author's own online networks, but also in relevant online groups aimed at both Danish youth in general and LGBTQIA+ groups specifically. The reason for including LGBTQIA+ groups in this study was because we sampled in order to balance between reaching saturation and having a diverse sample (Søndergaard, 1996). Since several of the groups had thousands of members, the post reached a wide audience of young

people. In addition to the online recruitment, there was some chain referral. The (primarily) online recruitment strategy could mean that it was mostly young people who have access to social media that reached out to us. However, since social media are a big part of young people's lives (Goodyear & Armour, 2019), we estimated that a large number of young Danes use social media as well. The self-selecting recruitment strategy could mean that only young people who were comfortable discussing their experiences reached out to us, therefore, the findings might primarily reflect those young people's views.

Interviewing took place from May 2020 – March 2021. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, 14 out of the 30 interviews were online. The interviews lasted 1-2 hours. The face-to-face interviews were, due to the restrictions, conducted either at the participant's or the researcher's home which helped to facilitate a friendly and relaxed atmosphere (Sandberg et al., 2019). The online interviews were, in some cases, challenging due to -primarily- technical aspects, such as a poor internet connection, which made some parts of the interviews inaudible. Luckily though, it was only a very small segment of talk that was lost. Despite the fact that online interviews can make it more difficult to create rapport between the interviewer and the participant (O'Connor & Madge, 2017), many of the participants expressed that they had had a good experience being interviewed. Some of them also stated that they preferred the online interview format and that the fact that they were given the opportunity of doing the interview online was the reason for their participation. At the end of the interview, all participants received a gift card worth 200 DKK (approx. 25 EUROS) as a thank you for participating.

The interviews were recorded using an off-line dictaphone and transcribed using a transcription guide based on a denaturalized approach (Oliver et al., 2005), which is relevant when adopting a critical discursive psychological approach (Van Dijk 1999).

The final sample consisted of 30 participants, 20 of which identified as cisgender women, 7 as cisgender men, 2 as transgender, and 1 as gender-fluid. In terms of sexuality, there were 10 participants who identified as heterosexual, 12 as bisexual, 3 as homosexual, and 5 as 'other' (pansexual, heteroflexible and queer). The sample is thus diverse in terms of sexuality, especially in relation to bisexuality, which could be due to how the first author recruited from her own personal social media profiles and the fact that she had a lot of LGBTQIA+ people in her network. In the analysis, we indicate gender, age, sexuality beside

name when quoting a participant[2]. Even though the sample was diverse, especially in relation to sexuality, the participants' construction of consent seemed to cut cross gender and sexuality, expect in the third repertoire where there were some differences in the heterosexual and the LGBTQIA+ participants' discussions on the gendered aspects of sexual consent. A reason that the participants' construction of consent cut cross gender and sexuality could be, as previous research shows, that some LGBTQIA+ people draw on similar discourses as heterosexual people in constructing consent (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022). Another reason has to do with the fact that many of the bisexual female participants did not mention during the interview that they identified as such and only discussed sexual experiences with men. The fact that they identified as bisexual was, therefore, first known to the first author after the participants completed the short survey, which was always done at the end of the interview. As a result, the first author did not ask those participants any questions regarding differences in sexual consent between heterosexual and same-sex relationships, which could explain why many of the participants reflected on sexual consent in heterosexual relationships.

All interviews were coded in NVivo. An initial thematic coding of the interviews as a whole was conducted (Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021) and the authors met several times to discuss potential themes and codes. The most general codes reflected the interview guide and overall knowledge ambition of the research project. For this paper, the analysis focused on the code 'Sexual consent' which was based on questions that addressed how the participants discussed sexual consent and having sex under the influence of alcohol intoxication. This overall code was divided into three subcodes at the semantic level (Braun et al., 2019); the first subcode focused on how the participants defined sexual consent, the second subcode addressed how the participants communicate consent, while the third subcode reflected the participants' discussions around having alcohol intoxicated sex (e.g. whether they considered it morally ok to have sex while intoxicated, possible dilemmas that could arise when having intoxicated sex).

Even though the study had its epistemological basis in critical discursive psychology, the initial coding was done without deploying specific theoretical concepts in order to allow 'surprising' patterns in the data to emerge. When reading the subcodes, patterns seemed to emerge with regards to how the participants talked about and constructed sexual consent which, after several rounds of refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2021), revealed the three

[2] In terms of gender, we refer to either she/her, he/him or they/them, depending on how our participants themselves identify.

repertoires and the subject positions they offered. Those three repertoires were not the only repertoires, but were the most prevalent ones and the ones that answered the research question.

Ethics

The project was registered to the (country) Data Protection Agency. It follows their rules for storing sensitive data as well as GDPR rules and regulations at (Name of University). It was approved by (name of institution)'s ethical review board. All participants gave oral and written consent and were informed orally and in writing about confidentiality, pseudonymization and how to withdraw from the project, if needed. Moreover, the consent form stated that if they experience any discomfort after the interview, they could contact the researcher or relevant institutions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

When investigating such a sensitive topic, such as sexual consent (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Rossof, 2018) it is important that the researcher creates a safe space for the participants where the focus is on listening and supporting their narratives (Hansen et al., 2021) and shows sincere appreciation to them for talking about such sensitive topics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, we were inspired by an approach called 'teller-focused interview' that is well suited for experiences that are 'complex, sensitive and difficult to bring up' (Hydén, 2014, p. 810). Since some of the participants' narratives might be traumatic, the first author was careful not to ask too many questions if she felt there was a risk of triggering or re-traumatization (Weber et al., 2022). If she felt a participant was emotionally influenced by the topics in the interview, she made sure to acknowledge these emotions and create a supportive space (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). At the same time, it is important to remember that there is a fine line between creating a safe space when interviewing about sensitive topics and actual therapy (Rossetto, 2014). The first author, therefore, also made sure to clarify that this was not a therapeutic setting and suggested public services that offer therapeutic help if needed. Those approaches proved to be fruitful, as several of the participants told the first author that they had experienced the interview situation as a non-judgmental and safe space.

Analysis

Overall, the participants made use of three interpretative repertoires when discussing sexual consent that we named: 1) sexual consent as an agreement between rational individuals, 2) intoxicated sexual consent and 3) sexual consent as a heteronormative practice. These

repertoires were frequently used in conjunction with one another, for different aims and purposes. In order to create clarity, we present them one by one.

Sexual consent as an agreement between rational individuals

When discussing sexual consent and sexual consent communication, the participants made use of a repertoire that endorsed a primarily contractual view on sexual consent. As we will show in the following, they drew on a neoliberal discourse (see also Beres, 2007; Loick, 2019; MacKinnon, 2016) and articulated a lack of consent as a matter of miscommunication, which resembles what researchers before have referred to as the miscommunication hypothesis (see also Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008). This repertoire enabled the subject position of the 'rational self' that has a free choice, but also responsibility around making the 'right' (rational) choice in relation to consent.

Many of the participants constructed sexual consent as a 'mutual agreement' or 'mutual understanding' between two or more people about to have sex, thus, adhering to a contractual view on sexual consent. Henrik (23/cis man/homosexual), for example, compared asking for sexual consent to a sales process, whereby 'there has to be a mutual agreement on the price of the product'. Constructing sexual consent that way implies an understanding of sexual consent based on a logic of 'market exchange' (Adam, 2005) where consent is a form of negotiation between two or more people trying to reach a mutual agreement or understanding in relation to whether they should have sex together.

Some of our participants also emphasized responsibility around consent since they often used words that reflected a form of moral impediment, such as 'should', when discussing sexual consent. For example, some participants said that sexual consent 'should be based on a true desire to have sex' (Melanie [22/ciswoman/heterosexual], 'should be based on a free choice' (Ashley [25/non-binary/bisexual]) and that giving and asking for consent 'should be done continuously over the whole course of the sexual activity' (Mette [19/ciswoman/homosexual]). By using a word such as 'should', our participants constructed the subject position of the 'rational self' that has a (moral) responsibility to make the 'right' choice in relation to consent, more specifically: not coerce someone to have sex with them, to not have sex if they do not want to, and to continually ensure that consent is present throughout the whole sexual interaction.

Other participants emphasized this moral component of sexual consent by drawing on other, non-sexual everyday situations as they spoke, arguably to relate the topic to

what constitutes good or appropriate (and, therefore, moral) social behavior. Sanne (23/cis woman/heteroflexible) for example said:

> Consent has to do with other things as well; I can ask "can I borrow your charger for my phone?" and then you can either say "yes" or "no". This applies to several situations, whether it's asking for permission to use a charger or to have sex or if you would like a hug.

By comparing asking for consent to asking for permission to borrow another person's charger, instead of just taking it without asking, Sanne invoked moral connotations of consent that it 'should' be asked for politely, and not taken for granted that the other person wants to have sex. Consent was also constructed by Sanne as a 'goods' someone can gain permission to access if they ask politely and as based on free choice, since she equated asking for consent to other activities, (physical and non-physical) where someone can choose to either say 'yes' or 'no', as easily as when asked to loan one's charger. Furthermore, Sanne constructs consent as a mutual agreement, however, in a way that is conditioned on the other person giving permission.

The participants discussed their consent communication preferences by drawing on an understanding that resembled the 'miscommunication hypothesis' (see also Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008) and a neoliberal understanding of the self (see also MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2019) in order to argue for those preferences. For example, Mina (20/cis woman/bisexual) said:

> I prefer asking for consent verbally because that works really well for me. I think it is the most secure way to ask for consent because you can misunderstand body language. If one part doesn't do anything, it can be read as 'you didn't resist'… where the other person might think 'well, I did not indicate that I wanted this to happen either'. So, I think in many cases you can misunderstand each other, you know, when one part doesn't know they have transgressed the other person's boundaries, exactly because nothing has been said or because they haven't asked (for consent).

Mette argued for her preference for verbal communication of consent by stating it as a personal preference in the beginning ('I prefer' and 'works really well for *me*'). However, after that, she presented verbal communication of consent as more ideal compared to non-verbal communication of consent ('I think it is the most secure way'). She backed her argument up by referring to how body language, more specifically, non-resistance can be read differently and for some people signal consent. She, therefore, drew on the notion that NSEs happen due

to miscommunication. By arguing that the way to avoid miscommunication is by verbally communicating consent could imply a neoliberal understanding of the self that is equally positioned in relation to the other person (they are about to have sex with) and is, therefore, able to communicate consent (verbally) (see also MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2019).

Other participants, such as Thomas (23/cis man/heterosexual) used the miscommunication hypothesis and a neoliberal understanding of the self in order to argue for his preference for non-verbal communication of consent:

> The way I personally prefer to give and ask for consent is physically… of course, what I experience might be different than what the other person experiences… so therefore it's a little tricky, but sometimes it's ok to find the "edge" [a person's sexual boundaries], you just shouldn't jump over that edge… because this is where it ends bad. So I think sexual consent works best until a "no" is said.

Thomas addressed the potential risk that comes with his preference for non-verbal communication of sexual consent which he described as a 'difference in how the sexual interaction is experienced', probably referring to how one person might think a sexual interaction is consensual whereas the other person might think otherwise. Thomas, therefore, also viewed miscommunication as a reason that NSEs happen. He acknowledged that communicating sexual consent non-verbally, makes it 'a little tricky' as he risks transgressing another person's boundaries. He tried to resolve that moral dilemma by arguing how it is 'ok to find the edge', indicating finding the other person's sexual boundaries. He, also presented a contractual view on sexual consent where consent is the 'line' that transforms a NSE into a consensual one, and therefore, as long as a person's sexual boundaries are not transgressed, the sexual encounter is morally ok and non-problematic (see also Beres, 2007; Loick, 2019; MacKinnon, 2016). The fact that he argued that *non*-consent should be communicated verbally from the person at the receiving end of the sexual interaction implies that he places responsibility on that person for communicating (non) consent verbally.

Intoxicated sexual consent

The participants drew on a second repertoire when discussing sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication. In some cases, they drew on contradicting discourses on alcohol intoxication's transformational effect on a person's (sexual) behavior, as emphasized by Fry (2011) (see also Tutenges 2012; Tutenges et al., 2020). In other cases, they drew on the neoliberal discourse (Beres, 2007; Loick, 2019; MacKinnon, 2016) emphasizing responsibility

and making the right choice in relation to consent as well as an understanding that resembled the miscommunication hypothesis (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008). Therefore, this repertoire, made available the subject position of the 'intoxicated self' that, in some cases, was constructed as an antithesis to the 'rational' self of the first repertoire, while, in other cases, was simultaneously expected that it did not act completely different than the 'rational' self. This resulted in contradicting expectations in relation to consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication.

Most participants constructed the 'intoxicated self' as different than the 'rational (sober) self' by drawing on discourses on alcohol's transformational effects on (sexual) behavior (see also Fry, 2011; Tutenges 2012; Tutenges et al., 2020) that, in turn, influenced their construction of consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication. One of the ways the participants constructed the 'intoxicated self' as an antithesis to the 'rational self' was in relation to the ability to make the 'right'/rational choice in relation to consent with many participants talking about how alcohol intoxication could interfere with that ability. An example of this is Henrik (23/cis man/homosexual) who reflected on his alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters:

> I haven't always been sure that I received a reasonable consent because so much alcohol was involved. Alcohol leaves you with the desire to have sex, but setting that desire aside and saying "I know that I'm not going to have sex that I *actually* want to have" is gone, it's dampened by alcohol in a way. It's easy to say "I should definitely not have sex in that situation" while sober, but when drunk, you lose that inhibition.

According to Henrik, alcohol intoxication magnifies his sexual desire, which can result in him pursuing sex without being sure he has 'received a reasonable consent' from the other part, something that he would not have done while sober. He distinguished between his 'sober self' that would abstain from having sex if he was not sure that the other part had consented to sex and his 'intoxicated self' that acts out of a momentary and all-consuming desire to have sex. Alcohol intoxication is perceived as leading him to make the wrong or 'non-rational' choice in relation to sex, which is emphasized by him saying that intoxicated sex is not something that he '*actually* wanted to have' (i.e. in a sober state) and the fact that he talked about how he, in a sober state, would never consider 'having sex in that situation'. Henrik's 'intoxicated self', therefore, acts differently than the 'rational self' of the first repertoire, where mutual consent was emphasized as important.

The ‘intoxicated self’ was also constructed as an antithesis to the ‘rational self’ in relation to sexual desire with many participants talking about how being intoxicated could result in them consenting to sex they did not desire. Kristina (25/cis woman/heterosexual), for example, said:

> This whole thinking-things-through disappears. You do things because you want to do them in that intoxicated state. I think that’s why I’ve gone home with people that I could never see myself with; it wasn’t something that I *actually* wanted, it’s because my drunk self takes over and it’s not rational at all.

Kristina reflected on some of her alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters and talked about how alcohol transforms her desire to have sex with a person when intoxicated and that this desire might be different and not congruent to her desire when sober (‘it’s not something that I *actually* wanted’). Her ‘intoxicated self’, therefore, might, contrary to the ‘rational self’ of the first repertoire, consent to sex that is either not desire-based or based on a momentary, ‘false’ desire and not a ‘true’ (sober) desire. By using phrases such as ‘disappears’, ‘my drunk self takes over’, ‘it’s not rational at all’ reflects that she finds herself as less able to act based on what she thinks is the rational thing to do, therefore, once again setting up an antithesis between the ‘rational sober self’ that would ‘think things through’ and the ‘intoxicated, less-rational self’ that ‘takes over’.

Several participants simultaneously constructed a version of the ‘intoxicated self’ that was not completely different from the ‘rational self’, especially when they were discussing whether it was possible to have consensual sex with an intoxicated person. They emphasized that it was important that the person initiating the sexual encounter made sure that the other person was ‘conscious enough to make an informed decision about consent’ (Magnus [19/cis man/bisexual]), ‘know whether the other person actually wants to have sex’ (Katja [19/cis woman/bisexual]) and ensure that the other person is not ‘too drunk to know what they are doing as they can risk regretting (their decision to have sex)’ (Amanda [22/cis woman/bisexual). The abovementioned quotes construct a version of the ‘intoxicated self’ as not completely different from the ‘rational self’, since it is expected that the person initiating the sexual encounter has the ability (despite being intoxicated) and moral responsibility to make a rational choice around consent (see also Beres, 2007; Loick, 2019; MacKinnon, 2016), i.e. making sure that the other person’s consent is based on an ‘informed decision’ and on a ‘true desire to have sex’, as Katja emphasized.

Many participants also constructed a version of the 'intoxicated self' that was both similar to and different to the 'rational self' when discussing the communication of sexual consent in an alcohol intoxicated state. In this case, they mostly referred to matters related to miscommunication (see also Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2007), which was also characteristic of the first repertoire. However, alcohol intoxication seemed to increase the risk of misunderstanding one's sexual consent communication, therefore, providing different consent communication possibilities for the 'intoxicated self', compared to the 'rational self'. For example, Terese (21/cis woman/heterosexual) talked about how a person should 'ask for consent [verbally] if they are unsure [whether the other person consents to sex]', on the one hand, while, on the other hand, also emphasized that a person 'should be careful about assuming consent if the other person is *too* drunk'. Henrik (23/cis man/homosexual) talked about the potential risk of having sex with an intoxicated person, which was, according to him, that one cannot be sure that their intoxicated partner '*actually* wants to have sex', despite that person claiming so. Sanne (23/cis woman/heteroflexible) argued that it was better 'to get each other's consent to sex in a sober state', before having sex in an intoxicated state, since consent to sex in a sober state 'was more reliable'. Therefore, the participants seemed to draw on the notion that NSEs happen due to miscommunication, which supports the 'miscommunication hypothesis' (see also Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2007), similarly to the first repertoire. On the other hand, however, alcohol intoxication was perceived as leading to a greater risk of miscommunication as the 'intoxicated self' (in this case, the person at the receiving end of the sexual interaction) was viewed as less able to communicate reliable consent.

Sexual consent as a heteronormative practice

The participants made use of a third repertoire, constructing sexual consent as a gendered, (primarily) heteronormative practice. This means that sexual consent was constructed primarily as a practice between a man and a woman with the participants drawing on more traditional, gendered expectations in order to construct men and women's consent. This provided different subject positions for men and women in relation to consent. Contrary to the previous two repertoires where consent was constructed in similar ways, across gender and sexuality, in this repertoire, there were differences in the heterosexual and the LGBTQIA+ participants' construction of consent.

In this repertoire, several of the heterosexual participants constructed sexual consent by positioning women as the 'gatekeepers' in relation to consent and men as the active ones sexually and the ones who had to ask for consent (see also Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). For example, Thomas (23/cis man/heterosexual) talked about how it is a 'woman's last word' that counts as consent to sex, while Thea (21/cis woman/heterosexual) talked about how it was the man who was expected 'to take (sexual) initiative', 'ask for the woman's consent' and make sure she 'actually wants to have sex'. Contrarily, many of the LGBTQIA+ participants seemed to either challenge the notion of women as gatekeepers and men as the initiators of sexual activity, or, simultaneously, challenge as well as drawing on a similar notion when reflecting on their own sexual practices (see also De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022). Mette (19/cis woman/homosexual), for example, challenged that notion by positioning herself as the initiator of sexual activity and the women she pursues as the 'gatekeepers' by talking about when she 'picks up girls in a bar' that she makes sure that 'they give their consent' or 'signal consent through their body language'. Jannik (25/cis man/homosexual), on the other hand, was one of the participants who seemed to simultaneously challenge and draw on a similar notion:

> If I am the submissive [sexually] in a relationship, I don't want my partner to ask (for my consent) every time he wants to try something sexually. If I am the dominant [sexually], then I'm more like 'tell me your boundaries in advance, what I shouldn't do; and if a 'no' is said later on, I will respect it immediately.

In this quote, Jannik challenged the subject position of the man as the sexual initiator by talking about how he, in some relationships, is the 'submissive' sexually, while his partner is the 'dominant' one and the one who will take sexual initiative. This resembles previous literature that emphasizes how the 'top' (dominant) and the 'bottom' (submissive) sexually within male homosexual relationships are often connected to masculine and feminine traits respectively (e.g. Sternin et al., 2022). Therefore, by constructing consent as the responsibility of the 'submissive' (and thus 'feminine') who has to respond to the 'dominant' (and thus 'masculine') partner, Jannik simultaneously seems to be adhering to a view similar to the notion of women as gatekeepers and men as the initiators of sexual activity.

Several participants also seemed to be drawing on the gendered expectations that men's sexuality is a biological instinct, that they are always ready to have sex and should take every opportunity to have sex, which could mirror the 'male sexual drive discourse' (Beres, 2014; Hollway, 1984a, 1984b; Gunnarson, 2018; Gavey, 2018). Those expectations had

implications for men's consent. Anton (21/cis man/heterosexual), for example, reflected on an alcohol intoxicated sexual experience of his and said:

> Two very drunk girls at a party were very insisting and wanted me to go to the bathroom with them. They were holding a 'stick' and tried to put it up my arse. In another situation, I would definitely be on board with it, but I just didn't feel like it that night. I think that had it been a very unpleasant situation, many guys wouldn't have had an easy time saying it. Because it's very hard for other guys to take it seriously. I mean, all my friends were like "Wow they wanted to have a threesome with you! I would have done it!". Having a threesome is at the top of the checklist among most of my friends. It's not as important whether you think it's exciting or not; if you have the chance, you take it. I think this is something that influences a lot of guys and it's hard to break out of.

Anton talked about how a man in an 'unpleasant situation' (possibly referring to a man being the victim of NSE) could risk not being taken seriously. He could, therefore, be referring to how a man's non-consent might not be read as such (see also Gavey, 2018; Gunnarsson, 2018). To back his argument up, he referred to how his friends responded to his (unwanted) experience by saying that they would 'have done it' which could imply that they adhere to the view that men should take every opportunity they get to have sex (Hollway, 1984a, 1984b). After that, he talked about how it is more important to take up the subject position of the man who always takes the chance to have sex than to take up the subject position where a man acts out of an *actual* desire to have sex and, therefore, not always consents to sex. He also talked about how this subject position as a 'proper man' is hard to 'break out of'. Anton seemed to take a critical distance to those expectations and, later on in the interview, he mentioned how he used to be influenced by those expectations when he was younger, but had distanced himself from them later on. However, at the same time, it seems that he did not distance himself entirely from that position, since he said that 'in another situation, I would definitely be on board with it'. Moreover, he constructed his experience as not an unpleasant one (despite being unwanted) by framing it in a hypothetical way ('*had* it been unpleasant'). Anton's quote, therefore, points towards how hard it is for young men to break out of that position and how their non-consent might not be perceived as such.

Similar to Anton, some of the heterosexual participants seemed to simultaneously draw on those expectations while also challenging them; however, a higher number of LGBTQIA+ participants seemed to balance between drawing on those expectations while also

challenging them. An example of that, is Maja (25/cis woman/bisexual) who reflected on why men does not understand non-consent to sex and, therefore, commit sexual assault:

> I think it has to do with poor upbringing. As a woman, you can only hope that a man will understand a no…because I also think it [men's sexuality] is like an animal instinct; between animals, there isn't any 'yes' or 'no', it's only like 'are you horny? Then let's go [have sex]! So yes, it's kind of an animal instinct… but it's just about upbringing; I mean, it's 100% the parents' fault if people do not understand a 'no'.

In the beginning of her quote, Maja attributed men's perceived 'inability' to understand a woman's non-consent to socialization processes (i.e. 'poor upbringing'), therefore, challenging the notion that man's sexuality is a result of biological processes (see also Hollway, 1984a). However, after that, she compared men's sexuality to an 'animal instinct' talking about how 'between animals, there isn't any 'yes' or 'no', possibly referring to how consent communication is not something that she thinks happens between animals. Therefore, as with animals, men's sexual desire (being 'horny') 'overrules' consent communication. In addition, she seemed to be drawing on the notion that men's sexuality is a result of biological processes by characterizing it as an 'instinct'. The fact that men's sexuality is compared to something animalistic and an instinct, contributes, in her view to men's perceived inability to understand a woman's 'non-consent'. However, she finished off by referring to socialization processes again, therefore, challenging the notion that men's sexuality is a result of biological processes. In addition, she went on to use the more generic, gender neutral term 'people' (instead of 'men'), therefore, constructing the inability to understand a person's 'non-consent' as something that is not specifically linked to men's behavior. Maja, therefore, both drew on as well as challenged the notion that men's sexuality is a result of biological processes (see also Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984a).

Finally, some participants also drew on the gendered expectations that women should simultaneously be sexually agentic, but not too sexually agentic (see also Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020), which had implications for women's consent. In this case, it was mostly heterosexual female participants that drew on those expectations. Line (21/cis woman/heterosexual) reflected on some of her experiences, talking about how the risk of being perceived as 'boring' could influence women's consent:

> I think many young women have difficulty saying 'no' [to sex] because they fear being perceived as 'boring'. When I'm out and guys try to ask me if I want to go home with them or if I want to kiss them and I'm like 'no', most of them are like 'oh ok'.

> Unfortunately, however, there are some guys that get angry or aggressive … and because of that, some women might not say 'no' next time it happens because they fear they will be called something bad.

Line explained women's consent to unwanted sex by drawing on gendered expectations around sex where women who say 'no' to sex, risk being perceived as 'boring'. She constructed men as the active ones sexually and the women as gatekeepers (see also Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984a), since they are constructed as the ones who respond to men's sexual initiatives. Reflecting on her own experiences with saying no to men's sexual initiatives, she talked about how some men responded by getting 'angry' or 'aggressive'. The risk of men getting aggressive as well as the risk of being perceived as 'bad' contributes, according to Line, to women consenting to unwanted sex.

Other female participants, such as Jasmin (25/cis woman/heterosexual) addressed the risk that, according to her, came when women consented 'too much' to sex:

> Us women, we are very quickly labelled 'whores' if we have sex with many people and, therefore, I think many women momentarily say yes to sex while drunk and the day after they regret it. And then the guy is blamed and that's not fair. But then again if women really feel like they have been taken advantage of, that's not ok either. I mean, it goes both ways [with consent], otherwise it's sexual assault.

In the beginning, Jasmin drew on the gendered risk of women being perceived as a 'whore' if a woman has sex with 'many people' in order to understand why some intoxicated women consent to sex they regret the day after. After that, Jasmin seemed to be drawing on the neoliberal discourse by emphasizing responsibility around consent (see also Bay-Cheng, 2015; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008). First, she attributed responsibility on women consenting to sex they regret later by talking about how it is 'unfair' for the guy that is 'blamed'. However, after that she talked about how consent 'goes both ways', therefore, constructing consent as a mutual responsibility.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate how young people construct sexual consent both in general, but also in relation to heavy alcohol intoxication more specifically. Our study's result showed how young people's construction of consent is situational and contextual and

how they draw on different repertoires when discussing sexual consent in general, sexual consent under the influence of heavy alcohol intoxication and sexual consent in relation to gendered practices and expectations.

In addition, while previous research has investigated the discourses (i.e. the neoliberal discourse, the 'male sexual drive' discourse etc.) that influence the processes of consent that resemble the repertoires found in this study, our study contributes to previous research by highlighting in what situations and with what aims and purposes young people draw on those repertoires to construct sexual consent. Our study showed that the participants drew on a neoliberal discourse (see also Beres, 2007; Loick, 2019; MacKinnon, 2016) to construct sexual consent in general and the miscommunication hypothesis (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008) when discussing their sexual consent communication practices. When discussing sexual consent under the influence of heavy alcohol intoxication, most of them drew on discourses on alcohol's transformational effects on (sexual) behavior (Tutenges, 2012; Tutenges et al., 2020) to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters and why they would behave differently (compared to when sober) in relation to consent while intoxicated. Many of them, simultaneously, drew on a neoliberal discourse (Beres, 2007; Loick, 2019; MacKinnon, 2016) and the miscommunication hypothesis (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al.2006, 2008) when discussing whether it was ok to have sex while intoxicated and consent communication under the influence of alcohol intoxication. Finally, when discussing sexual consent in relation to gendered practices and expectations, many of the heterosexual participants drew on traditional masculine and feminine expectations in relation to sex and sexual consent (e.g. the 'male sexual drive discourse', 'women as gatekeepers, men as sexual initiators' etc.). While studies have previously shown how young people draw on those traditional gendered expectations in relation to sex and sexual consent, our study contributes with highlighting how LGBTQIA+ people drew on those expectations, something that has been largely missing from previous research (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022).

Finally, our study contributes by highlighting what discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication young people draw on, therefore, also highlighting which discourses we need to change if we wish to reduce the number of NSEs. Those discourses could be the ones that lead to unhealthy perceptions of consent (see also Baldwin-White, 2021). The neoliberal discourse emphasizing free choice and responsibility around consent can obscure the more traditional gendered sexuality discourses that put men and women in unequal

positions in relation to consent (e.g. Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984a). This can result in young people disproportionately blaming themselves for consenting to unwanted sex. Young women might believe that a man being persistent with regards to sex is a normative part of a sexual experience and can obscure a potentially NSE (Baldwin-White, 2021) or might find it hard to maneuver the contradictory expectations around when to consent to sex (e.g. Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020). Men can have a harder time discussing a NSE because of the expectation that they have an ever-present desire for sex (e.g. Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984a). This can be even more problematic in heavy drinking contexts where flirting, hooking up and one-night-stands can be a normative expectation (Fjær et al., 2015; Grazian, 2007; Jensen et al., 2020). On the other hand, it might excuse them from engaging in a NSE if their sexuality is viewed as a biological instinct, therefore, something they have a hard time controlling (Anderson & Doherty, 2007; Meenagh, 2021). LGBTQIA+ people might find it hard to navigate sexual consent due to how sexual consent is often constructed as a heterosexual practice, i.e. as a practice between a man and woman (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022). As our study showed, in many cases, the LGBTQIA+ people challenged the more traditional gendered (and heteronormative) expectations; however, at the same time, many of them seemed to adhere to them, which could signal the pervasiveness of those expectations (see also De Heer et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022). In general, the three interpretative repertoires provide contradicting (and sometimes 'unhealthy') expectations around consent that can create a sense of ambivalence for young people and they might be caught up on what the 'rational choice' is with relation to consent. Fostering young people's awareness of the different discourses around sexual consent, can lead them to challenge them, allowing for more nuanced norms and expectations to arise.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the literature by highlighting the contextual nature of young people's construction of sexual consent. While previous research has examined how young people define and communicate sexual consent (e.g. Fenner, 2017; Muehlenhard et al., 2016) and how discourses around gender, sexuality (e.g. Bay-Cheng, 2015; Gavey, 2018; Gunnarsson, 2018) and intoxication (Abbey et al.,2001, 2002, 2011; Dyar et al., 2021; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2018) influence the processes of consent, our study contributed to previous research by showing in what situations, with what aims and purposes young people draw on those discourses to construct sexual consent. Keeping the complex and contextual nature of young people's construction of sexual consent in mind is vital if we wish to understand (and

eventually reduce) the high number of NSEs happening both in general, but also in situations where heavy alcohol intoxication takes place.

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Intentionality and responsibility in young people's construction of alcohol intoxicated sexual assault and sexual consent

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to investigate how notions of intentionality and responsibility influence young people's construction of sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication. Our sample consisted of 20 young Danes between the ages of 19 and 25. We used vignettes in the form of a short written story depicting an alcohol intoxicated heterosexual sexual interaction, each time varying different contextual factors in the story, asking our participants to comment on them. We conducted a thematic analysis within a Critical Discursive Psychological framework and found three themes that we named '(Un-) ambiguous communication of non-consent', 'Levels of intoxication, power and responsibility' and 'Different types of relationships, different expectations around sex'. Central to those themes were discussions around whether the transgression of sexual boundaries was intentional as well as who was responsible for the sexual assault and/or sexual consent. The participants drew on different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication situationally to construct intentionality and responsibility, something that revealed that their understanding of sexual assault and sexual consent in drinking environments was situational too.

Keywords
alcohol intoxication, qualitative research, sexual assault, sexual consent, vignettes, young people

Introduction
Alcohol intoxication plays a central role in many young people's lives in the Nordic countries (Fjær et al., 2015; Jensen et al., 2019). It is also frequently a part of young people's casual sexual experiences (Wade, 2021). While some research shows how having sex in heavy drinking contexts can be a pleasurable experience for young people (e.g. Pedersen et al., 2017), other research points to various negative experiences in this context, including experiences of sexual assault (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022; Tutenges et al., 2020). Studies show that 29% of sexual assaults in Denmark (Heinskou et al., 2017) and up to 50% of them internationally (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016) happen in relation to alcohol intoxication and that young people have difficulty navigating sex in intoxicated situations (Orchowski et al., 2022). An important question, therefore, becomes how young people understand

sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication if we wish to reduce the number of alcohol intoxicated sexual assaults.

Discussions about sexual assault and sexual consent among the lay public are often centered on notions of 'intentionality' and 'responsibility', i.e., whether a person intentionally committed sexual assault, who is responsible for the assault, and for obtaining consent. For example, in relation to sexual assault, previous research has typically investigated incapacitated sexual assaults through a 'perpetrator tactics framework', that is, based on an understanding that they happen due to the intentional tactics/manipulation of the perpetrator (Stefansen et al., 2021). In those cases, therefore, there is also a clear allocation of responsibility. Other studies show that intentionality influences how people view sexual assaults with 'unintentional sexual assaults' being viewed more positively compared to assaults that happen due to the deliberate tactics of the perpetrator (Kaluza & Conray-Murray, 2021).

However, discussing sexual assault by taking a point of departure in notions of intentionality and responsibility can result in a simplistic (and problematic) understanding of this rather complex issue. Research has pointed toward how a person getting sexually assaulted while intoxicated is at increased risk of getting 'victim blamed', that is, held responsible for getting assaulted due to the rationale that they could have avoided that assault had they abstained from drinking (Maurer, 2016; Dyar et al., 2021; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2018). It is mostly women who get victim blamed (Wegner et al., 2015), which can be due to how women's alcohol consumption is more stigmatized than men's (e.g. Herold & Hunt 2020; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Nicholls, 2018; Pennay et al., 2022). This is despite the fact that women are expected to drink to intoxication and to consume alcohol in the pursuit of pleasure, the same way men do (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2019). Another reason can be that young women's sexual practices are judged more negatively compared to men's (Bjønness et al., 2022). Even though young women are expected to be agentic sexually in par with men (Wade, 2021), at the same time, even in a Danish context with relatively liberal sexual norms, young women are expected to not be *too* sexually active as they risk being labelled a 'slut' (Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020).

Another important concept/theory that has taken hold within research is the miscommunication hypothesis, that is, a widespread belief that sexual assaults are often understood as a result of miscommunication (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al., 2006, 2008). This theory also emphasizes intent and responsibility and, therefore, offers a rather simplistic understanding of sexual assault. This is because it becomes a person's individual responsibility to communicate consent clearly, in order for the other person not to misunderstand their signals and (unintentionally) transgress their sexual boundaries. Consequentially, if that person gets sexually assaulted, they risk being viewed as responsible for the assault due to the rationale that they did not communicate non-consent clearly. The miscommunication hypothesis has also been problematized since research shows that young people are actually quite skilled at interpreting sexual signals (Glace et al., 2021; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999) and researchers have, therefore, argued that people might claim miscommunication in order to explain or justify sexual assaults (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al., 2006, 2008). For example, alcohol intoxication is sometimes used as an explanation for why the perpetrator committed sexual assault (Wegner et al., 2015). This is because it is based on the logic that the perpetrator, being intoxicated, was not able to understand the other person's non-consent (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Nason et al., 2019). In those cases, therefore, the perpetrator is ascribed *less* responsibility for the assault and the assault might be viewed as an 'unintentional' transgression of the other person's boundaries. Given how the majority of perpetrators are men,

there is also a gendered imbalance in this case, with mostly men being excused from committing sexual assault (Cameron & Stritzke, 2003; Wegner et al., 2015).

Something that also points toward how the miscommunication theory offers a simplistic understanding of sexual assaults is that it overlooks gender and relationship norms and expectations. For example, the notion of 'token resistance' refers to the widespread belief that a woman's 'no' to sex actually means 'yes' and that women initially say 'no' in order to not be perceived as too sexually available (Baldwin-White, 2021). This can result in men becoming very persistent sexually in order to persuade a woman to have sex, even though she said no (Baldwin-White, 2021). Other researchers have pointed toward the notion of 'sexual precedence', which refers to the expectation that if two people have had sex before, (consensual) sex will 'naturally' occur again (Humphreys, 2007; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). This can result in a person assuming that their partner consents to sex since their partner has consented to sex before. For example, Willis and Jozkowski's (2019) study found that the more sexual history college students shared with a partner, the more they also relied on context (e.g., relationship status, routine) as indicators of consent, rather than sexual consent communication. Therefore, those gender and relationship norms and expectations challenge the miscommunication theory's assumption that by (simply) communicating consent clearly, a person can avoid sexual assault.

Similarly to sexual assault, there are pervasive, often gendered, understandings of sexual consent that take a point of departure in notions of intent and responsibility, but, again, seem too simplistic if we want to understand young people's situational understandings of consent. An important discourse is the 'male sexual drive discourse' where researchers emphasize how men are positioned as the active ones sexually, and with an ever-present biological desire to have sex, and women are positioned as the 'gatekeepers' in relation to consent (Hollway, 1984; Gavey, 2018). In this discourse, therefore, women are positioned as responsible for consenting or not to men's sexual advances, instead of consent being a mutual responsibility between the two (Beres, 2014; Hollway, 1984; Gavey, 2018; Gunnarsson, 2018). Since men are expected to always want sex, their consent is perceived as always given (Beres, 2014; Gavey, 2018).

Along this more traditional gendered sexuality discourse, researchers have identified a neoliberal discourse where genders are understood as more equal in relation to their responsibility as regards consent. Based on a market exchange logic, this discourse positions young people – regardless of gender – as free, rational and calculating individuals (Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Loick, 2019). Positioned in that discourse, young people are viewed as having a free choice in relation to consent. However, they are, simultaneously, viewed as responsible for the sexual choices they make, even if they experience sexual assault, due to the rationale that they could have 'simply' not consented if they wanted to avoid getting sexually assaulted (Allen, 2003; Gill, 2007). The neoliberal discourse also offers a simplistic understanding of sexual consent, since it has been criticized for overlooking structural factors, such as gendered power imbalances, that challenge the notion that young people are always able to make a free choice in relation to consent (Loick, 2019; MacKinnon, 2016). Women might feel pressured to consent to live up to traditional notions of femininity where they are expected to be passive sexually and subvert their own needs to those of men's (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). Men, on the other hand, might feel pressured to consent in order to live up to traditional notions of masculinity where men should take every opportunity to have sex or risk having an experience of sexual assault not recognized as being an assault (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). The latter is not only due to how men are viewed as having a free choice in relation to consent (Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016;

Loick, 2019), but also because they are perceived as always having the possibility to resist the assault due to the notion that they are physically superior compared to women (Davis & Rogers, 2006).

Researchers have embarked on nuancing the responsibility and intentionality in relation to sexual assault and sexual consent by focusing on the context and social situations in which those take place. For example, Stefansen et al.'s (2021) research centered around Norwegian young people's incapacitated sexual assault experiences, and showed that many of them arise out of 'tumultuous and confusing' sexual interactions where the allocation of responsibility and intent becomes unclear. Similarly, Tutenges et al. (2020) have nuanced the discussions around the victim's responsibility to resist a sexual assault by using the concept of 'sexually violent effervescence' to describe how victims of intoxicated sexual assaults experience those assaults. Sexually violent effervescence is a 'state' of delirium that arises in a party context where the victim of a sexual assault might feel out of touch with reality and themselves (Tutenges et al., 2020). According to Tutenges et al., this state can explain why the victims of a sexual assault might feel unable to resist the assault.

Cahill (2014, 2016), who distinguishes between 'rape acts' and 'unethical sex', also offers a more nuanced understanding on sexual assaults where it is possible to discuss responsibility and intentionally situationally and contextually. Rape acts refer to when the perpetrator shows no regard for the victim's interest in the situation and through their actions prevent the victim's possibility to affect the situation. This does not necessarily entail physical violence, but can also happen through low-level coercion, such as simply not giving up and pushing the situation forward when the victim is in a more vulnerable state (Cahill, 2014, 2016). 'Unethical sex', on the other hand, refers to instances that do not constitute rape, but are, nevertheless, morally problematic, such as those where the perpetrator reads consent into the victim's physical acts. Such readings of a situation can be supported by the socio-temporal context of the interaction (cf. Hirsch et al., 2019). For example, research shows that going home with someone after a party or accepting a drink from someone might be read as consenting to sex (Wills & Jozkowski, 2019; 2022).

In line with that, Willis and Jozkowski (2022) have proposed a more complex understanding of sexual consent that nuances the discussions around intentionality and responsibility. They characterize it as 'an ongoing and iterative process that builds toward and continues throughout a consensual sexual encounter' (Willis and Jozkowski, 2022:797, see also Beres, 2014; Humphreys, 2007). Therefore, this understanding of sexual consent challenges the view on sexual consent as a static event happening right before the sexual act where there is an individual responsibility for communicating consent clearly in order to avoid miscommunication.

Overall then, notions of responsibility and intentionality are central when discussing sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. We need, however, more complex models in order to understand the situational and contextual nature of those matters. While Tutenges et al.'s (2020) and Stefansen et al.'s (2021) research has tried to nuance our understanding of those matters by taking a point of departure in how young people *experience* intoxicated sexual assaults, there is a paucity of research on whether notions of intentionality and responsibility influence young people's constructions of sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication. Researching that is important because it can influence how young people reflect back on their own alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences or respond to other people's sexual experiences. Therefore, the aim of the present qualitative study is to investigate how notions of intentionality and responsibility influence how 20 young people between the ages of 19 and 25 make sense

of a hypothetical alcohol intoxicated sexual interaction. We conducted a thematic analysis (cf. Braun et al., 2019) within a Critical Discursive Psychological approach (CDP), focusing on how our participants discursively constructed notions of intentionality and responsibility, in what situations, for what aims, and with what implications for their understanding of sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication (see also Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Methods

Study Design, Recruitment and Sample

This paper is based on 20 individual interviews with young people between the ages of 19 and 25. Recruitment mainly took place online (due to COVID-19 restrictions), but also by snowball sampling. The participants received a gift card worth approx. 30 Euros for their participation. The 20 participants consisted of 14 women, five men and one identifying as non-binary. Eleven identified as heterosexual, five as bisexual, three as homosexual, and one as pansexual. The sample had an overrepresentation of women, which could be a reflection of a higher number of women with sexual assault experiences (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016) and, therefore, women might be more interested in talking about such topics. Even though the sample was diverse in terms of sexuality, the themes identified for this paper cut cross the participants' gender and sexual identities and the participants seemed to make use of the same discourses.

The interviews overall lasted 1–2 hours and were conducted by the first author. The first author told the participants that she was interested in all kinds of alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences as well as the participants' thoughts and opinions on sexual consent. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, vignettes, and a short survey. This paper is based on data obtained from the vignettes. Due to ethical considerations, the vignettes were only read to 20 out of the whole dataset consisting of 30 participants. This was in cases where the interviewer considered that there would be a risk of triggering or retraumatization by reading vignettes that depicted sexual assault scenarios. This was often in cases where the participant had seemed quite affected by talking about their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences.

The rationale behind choosing to include vignettes in the study was that vignettes are a well-described technique to use to explore people's understandings of sensitive topics that might be difficult to uncover through direct questioning methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Holmstrom et al., 2020). By using vignettes in a qualitative study, we were able to get complex and in-depth narratives from our participants. We developed the following vignette:

> Jonas and Maria met each other a month ago after starting at the same education. They were instantly attracted to each other. They began spending more time together; studying together, going out eating and, in general, spending time with one another. One of the times they met, they kissed. Last weekend, they were at a party where they flirted, danced and had fun the whole night. They had some drinks and, therefore, got a bit "tipsy". Jonas asks Maria if she wants to go home with him and she says yes. When they arrive at Jonas' place, they start kissing and after some time Jonas tries to get Maria's clothes off and indicates that he wants to have sex with her. Maria hesitates and says she is not ready to have sex yet. Jonas does not seem to react to that and proceeds to have sex with her.

The first author started out by reading this version of the vignette and told the participants that there were no right or wrong answers, but that she was interested in gaining insight into

the participants' understandings. After having discussed this version, the interviewer read the vignette a number of times, each time varying different factors in the story and always in the same order of presentation. The vignette was varied in relation to a) whether Maria communicated non-consent verbally or not, b) the intoxication levels of Maria and Jonas (one of them is drunk/passed-out drunk while the other one is sober), c) the relationship between Maria and Jonas (dating/meeting at the party for the first time/in a relationship) and, d), flipping the genders so as Maria does what Jonas does and vice versa. After reading each of the different vignette scenarios, the interviewer asked open-ended questions, such as 'What do you think about this situation?'. The interviewer got the participants to reflect on each vignette, before moving on to the next.

Coding, Transcription, and Analytical and Theoretical Framework

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded in NVivo. The most general codes were on a descriptive level, reflecting the questions of the interview guide. All data related to the use of vignettes had its own code. Following Braun et al. (2019), we decided to do a thematic analysis in order to identify and describe repeated patterns of meaning across this code. The 'Vignette' code was initially divided into subcodes related to the different factors that we varied in the vignettes ('verbal communication of non-consent', 'intoxication levels', 'relationship' and 'gender flip'). By rereading the subcodes, we found that those factors were connected to different *ideas*. More specifically, that communicating non-consent had to be 'unambiguous', that the intoxication levels were connected with power and that the relationship between Jonas and Maria was connected to different expectations around sex. We also found that notions of intentionality and/or responsibility were central in the participants' discussions. Eventually, we began the process of capturing and refining the three themes that are presented in the analysis (Braun et al., 2019).

Thematic analysis is a flexible methodological approach that can be performed across different epistemological traditions (Braun et al., 2019). Therefore, we conducted thematic analysis within a critical discursive psychological framework (CDP), which is a synthetic approach between ethno-methodological and conversational analytical traditions and post-structural or Foucauldian analytical traditions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2015). This means that the participants were seen as – simultaneously – producers and products of discourses (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2015).

An important reason for drawing on CDP was that we could pay attention to how our participants drew on discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication in order to discursively construct notions of intentionality and responsibility (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 2003) that influenced their constructions of sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication. Another reason was that CDP allowed us to investigate whether our participants' understandings were situational, as people can draw on different and contradicting discourses for specific aims and purposes, such as to improve their own or others' credibility in an interaction, to explain, justify or excuse themselves (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and to establish their accounts as factual and stable representations of the world (Potter, 2003). A third reason was that we could simultaneously look at whether broader societal discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication shaped their understanding of sexual consent and sexual assault (Wetherell, 2015; Wetherell & Edley, 2014). Finally, this approach allowed us to shed light on the implications of those understandings for how the participants might make sense of their own and others' alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences (see also Wetherell, 2015).

Ethics

The study was approved by the Aarhus University's ethical review board. It was registered to the Danish Data Protection Agency, following their rules for storing sensitive data as well as GDPR regulations. The participants signed an informed consent form and were orally and in writing informed about pseudonymization, confidentiality, and how to withdraw from the project. The consent form stated that if they experience any discomfort during or after the interview, they could contact the first author or relevant institutions.

Analysis

In the following, we present the three themes that we named '(Un-) ambiguous communication of non-consent', 'Levels of intoxication, power and responsibility' and 'Different types of relationships, different expectations around sex'. Intentionality and responsibility permeate the three themes; however, the way intentionality and responsibility were constructed was situationally dependent. As a result, the participants' understandings of sexual consent and sexual assault under the influence of alcohol intoxication was situational too. The three themes were not mutually exclusive, but in order to increase clarity they are presented one by one.

(Un-) Ambiguous Communication of Non-consent

The first theme revolved around the communication of non-consent from Maria when Jonas was the active party (or vice versa) and was most prevalent in the scenarios where Jonas and Maria were lightly intoxicated ('tipsy'). The majority of the participants agreed that the sexual encounter between Jonas and Maria was sexual assault when Maria communicated non-consent verbally. For example, Mia (22/woman/heterosexual) says:

> There is no way Jonas could have misunderstood Maria because she says quite clearly 'no, I don't want to. I am not ready'. He sexually assaulted her.

Mia emphasized how Maria's verbal communication of non-consent was so clear and, therefore, unambiguous. There is no way, in her opinion, that Jonas could have misunderstood Maria's signals. His act is, therefore, according to Mia, done intentionally, and constitutes a sexual assault.

While Mia's perspectives were in accordance with most participants, a few expressed some ambivalence toward Maria's verbal communication of non-consent. For example, Kristina (25/woman/heterosexual) said:

> It's not Maria's fault because she said no. However, did she kiss him afterwards or cuddle with him, making him think that they can have sex after all? Maybe we [as women] should have better tools on how to enforce our boundaries. I think the way men are thinking is like 'When a girl says "naah", it actually means we should cuddle a bit more and eventually she would like [to have sex]'.

According to Kristina, Maria's 'no' is understood differently than how Mia understands Maria's 'no' and needs some contextual knowledge. She argued for her point by emphasizing that because of some men's expectation that women's 'no' might actually mean 'not yet', women should be better at enforcing their sexual boundaries. Kristina, therefore, not only ascribed Maria the responsibility for communicating non-consent more clearly to avoid a potentially unwanted sexual situation, but also questions Jonas' intentionality. If he thinks a 'no' means 'not yet', he might believe that 'cuddling a bit more' could lead Maria to wanting

to have sex after all. However, if Maria does not want to have sex at all that night and Jonas proceeds to have sex with her because he believes that she actually wants to have sex, he will unintentionally transgress her boundaries.

In the scenario where Maria did not communicate non-consent verbally, our participants' responses were more complex. Several participants emphasized that since there was no verbal communication of non-consent, the sexual encounter between Jonas and Maria could not be considered sexual assault. Frederik (23/man/heterosexual), for example, said:

> I would say it's [what Jonas does] a blameless crime; If she *thought* 'no', but didn't say it, then there is *no way* he could have known…

According to Frederik, what Jonas does is problematic ('a crime'), but Maria's lack of verbal communication of non-consent contributes, in Frederik's view, to Jonas being 'blameless' (and unintentional) in transgressing her boundaries. In this case, therefore, unintentionality comes with decreased responsibility on the part of Jonas due to Maria's lack of verbal communication of non-consent. Quite a few participants, however, argued that Jonas should still ask for Maria's consent, regardless of whether she communicated non-consent verbally. For these participants, there is no excuse for Jonas transgressing Maria's boundaries.

A few participants, such as Ezra (23/non-binary/pansexual), argued that Jonas should look for other signs of communication of non-consent:

> Even if she doesn't say anything, there are probably still signs that she doesn't want [to have sex]; if she is not actively participating or is passive, for example, then he will need some sort of signal of acceptance from her.

According to Ezra, Jonas has a responsibility to look for more non-verbal forms of non-consent communication, despite the lack of Maria's verbal communication. While these could be less easy to read, Ezra still talked about looking for signs of non-consent communication that are not totally ambiguous as they are still visible in some way.

In the vignette where Maria initiates sex with Jonas, the participants had more trouble defining the sexual encounter. Many of the participants acknowledged that men *could* experience sexual assault and emphasized similar understandings as above when it was Maria who communicated non-consent verbally. A few, however, felt more ambivalent in relation to men experiencing sexual assault. For example, Sidsel (24/woman/heterosexual) said:

> It might seem like a man consents if he has an erection. But he can't really control it if a woman is touching him; it has nothing to do with that [him wanting to have sex], that's just how his penis works. Many people think that men cannot get sexually assaulted because they are physically stronger than women and, therefore, they can just say no…And I can't help but think that if he doesn't want [to have sex], he can just push her away. Of course, he can be afraid to hurt her feelings… However, there are very few sex positions where the woman has full control, where the man doesn't have to participate actively in *some* way. If Maria's not sitting on top of him during sex and Jonas is actively participating, his body language shows that he wants [to have sex].

In the beginning, Sidsel seemed to take a critical distance from the notion that men cannot get sexually assaulted. She explained how the physical attributes of men's bodies as well as the fact that they have better opportunities to physically resist a sexual interaction can (falsely) signal consent. This could imply that Maria still has a responsibility to ensure

Jonas' consent and not merely assume consent. However, even though Sidsel was aware of the fact that men can get sexually assaulted, she still felt ambivalent about it, due to how she positioned men as always having the opportunity to resist a sexual interaction ('he can just push her away') and that many sex positions require men's active participation. Her use of the phrase 'I can't help but think' could symbolize how pervasive the notion that men cannot get sexually assaulted is. The implication of Sidsel's view could be that a man has an increased responsibility to signal non-consent clearly, in order for the woman not to (unintentionally) transgress his boundaries.

Frederik (23/man/heterosexual) also felt ambivalent toward whether Jonas could be sexually assaulted:

> It's hard to imagine a young man saying no to sex because us men, we are so primitive in relation to this [sex]. Of course, I have been in situations where I have said no to sex… other men usually don't view men getting assaulted from women as victims; if a woman wants to have sex, there is no man that says no; unless he is not physically attracted to her.

Frederik had a hard time imagining Jonas' verbal communication of non-consent. He argued for that point by displaying men's sexuality as an instinct and/or a biological necessity, therefore, Jonas' even unambiguous non-consent to sex was somewhat implausible to him. This is despite the fact that he, himself, has had experiences with saying no to sex, which shows how much he subscribed to the view that men do not say no to sex. The implication of what Frederik said is that a woman might assume that a man consents to sex and unintentionally transgresses his boundaries. Therefore, it could also be implied that a man has an increased responsibility in signaling non-consent.

In this first theme – revolving around whether Maria or Jonas communicated non-consent verbally when they were only lightly intoxicated – several different understandings of sexual assault and consent emerged. Almost all participants agreed that the interaction could be considered sexual assault if there was verbal communication of non-consent from either Maria or Jonas. This was because verbal communication of non-consent was considered an 'unambiguous' form of resistance, which constituted the transgression of boundaries as intentional and the person transgressing the other's boundaries as responsible for the assault. This is in accordance with previous literature emphasizing how people view the intentional transgression of sexual boundaries as more problematic (Kaluza & Conry-Murray, 2021).

However, some participants nuanced these perspectives by commenting on the context for resisting. Ezra emphasized Jonas' responsibility to look for non-verbal signs of non-consent communication (that were still somewhat visible though). Other participants positioned either Jonas or Maria as responsible for signaling non-consent, however constructing that responsibility by drawing on different gender and sexuality discourses. Maria was positioned as having an added responsibility to communicate non-consent, by explaining that a woman's 'no' might in fact mean 'not yet'. The participants could be drawing on a discourse similar to the notion of 'token resistance' (Baldwin-White, 2021); while what the participants said implied that Maria's 'no' meant 'not yet' (and not 'yes'), they also talked about how that 'not yet' could, eventually, be turned into a 'yes' if Jonas 'cuddled with Maria a bit more'. The participants could, therefore, also be drawing on traditional male sexuality discourses where men are expected to be insisting sexually (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). Although many participants recognized that men *could* get sexually assaulted, a few participants had a hard time positioning Jonas as someone who would say 'no' to sex or get

sexually assaulted; in this case, they could be drawing on the 'male sexual drive' discourse where men are expected to always be up for as well as taking every opportunity to have sex (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984).

By drawing on those discourses, the participants were able to argue for why the person initiating the sexual interaction might risk unintentionally transgressing the other person's boundaries. Therefore, even though many participants seemed to be subscribing to the miscommunication hypothesis by emphasizing verbal communication of non-consent (Beres, 2022; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; Maryn, 2021; O'Byrne et al., 2006, 2008), in some cases, even verbal communication of non-consent could lead to miscommunication, something the participants argued for by drawing on the more traditional gender and sexuality discourses.

Levels of Intoxication, Power and Responsibility

The second theme focused on the participants' responses to the intoxication levels of Maria and Jonas. The intoxication levels were connected to intentionality and ideas of power that influenced how problematic a sexual encounter was viewed as well as to different responsibilities around consent.

All participants agreed on the sexual interaction being a sexual assault when either Maria or Jonas was incapacitated by alcohol intoxication. For example, Martin (25/man/homosexual) says:

> It's one of the most disgusting situations. To use someone who is incapacitated – it's an asymmetric power relation. Someone uses their power, physically, but also mentally, because they are totally aware [of what they are doing]; and they're using it against – not a partner – but a victim, in this situation.

Martin found the sexual interaction 'disgusting' and emphasized that the sober person intentionally takes advantage of the situation. He called it an 'asymmetric power relation' and he further emphasized that asymmetric power relation by calling the incapacitated person a 'victim', not a partner.

Cecilie (20/woman/bisexual) also connected being sober with being more powerful compared to the intoxicated person:

> I feel like Jonas takes advantage of Maria being drunk. Whether he thinks about it or not. It's so important that the person who holds the power in that situation makes the right decision and is like "Hey, we shouldn't do this".

Cecilie talked about how Jonas intentionally or unintentionally ('whether he thinks about it or not') 'takes advantage of Maria'. Like Martin, she positioned Jonas as the more powerful in that situation; in her case, however, this power comes with an increased responsibility to make the 'right decision', i.e., not having sex with a person who is intoxicated.

Marcus (23/man/homosexual) also positioned the intoxicated person as vulnerable and reflected on how s/he would feel after a 'bad sexual experience' during which they were intoxicated:

> If Maria is drunk and Jonas transgresses her boundaries… he does it in a situation when she is *even more* vulnerable. She can be vulnerable while sober too, but when drunk you can be unsure whether you have made it clear enough that you don't want to [have sex].

For Marcus, Maria's intoxicated state constitutes her 'even more vulnerable' (and less empowered), and it can therefore be harder for her to know whether she signaled non-consent clearly enough ('you can be unsure whether you have made it clear enough that you don't want to have sex'). Although it might seem that Marcus positioned Maria as having the responsibility for communicating non-consent clearly, her intoxicated status seemed to downplay her responsibility. This is because Jonas' actions were constructed as morally problematic by Marcus, since Jonas transgresses Maria's boundaries 'in a situation when she is *even more* vulnerable'.

The participants had different perspectives on power and responsibility in the scenarios where Maria or Jonas initiate the sexual interaction while being drunk and the other party was sober, as Sidsel (24/woman/heterosexual), for example, says:

> I think it becomes even more important to say 'no' or 'yes' because they [drunk people] don't always understand things and you might have a bigger understanding about why they didn't understand that 'no'. Because their brain doesn't work properly. On the other hand, they are easier to push away because they are drunk with no control over their bodies.

Sidsel viewed a transgression of another person's boundaries by a drunk person as something possibly unintentional, since Maria or Jonas' 'brains' are 'not working properly' because of their intoxication. Therefore, according to Sidsel, a drunk person who transgresses another person's boundaries cannot be held completely responsible. The sober person was positioned as responsible for being even more explicit in relation to their sexual consent communication when approached by a drunk person. While the drunk person was, according to Sidsel, physically less powerful than the sober person and can easily be 'pushed away' by the sober person, the drunk person was still in a privileged (and hence not totally powerless) position as, according to Sidsel, they cannot be held totally responsible for transgressing another person's boundaries.

In this second theme – particular understandings of sexual assault and sexual consent emerged when either Maria or Jonas were (very) drunk or passed out that, similarly to the first theme, intertwined with notions of intentionality and responsibility. First, all the participants agreed that it was a highly problematic case of sexual assault if Maria was sober and had sex with Jonas, who was passed out, or vice versa. In this case, the sober person was regarded as taking advantage of and intentionally transgressing another person's boundaries who is passed out drunk. Therefore, similarly to previous research, the intentional transgressing of boundaries was viewed as more problematic (Kaluza & Conray-Murray, 2021). The present study adds to previous research by showing how the participants constructed intentionality specifically in an incapacitated sexual assault situation. The sober person was positioned as more powerful, with an added responsibility as regards making the 'right' decision in relation to sex. If the sober person had sex with the passed-out-drunk (and thus powerless) person, that act was constituted as sexual assault and an intentional transgression of the passed-out person's sexual boundaries.

In the case where Jonas and Maria were drunk, the sober, initiating party was positioned as more responsible for not transgressing boundaries, with the argument that the drunk/intoxicated party was (a lot more) powerless. In scenarios where Maria or Jonas were drunk and initiating sex while being intoxicated, most participants did not see the push toward sex as intentional, since the intoxicated person's 'brain' was clouded by alcohol and, therefore, they might not pick up any signs of non-consent from the other person. The intoxicated party was, simultaneously, positioned as less physically powerful, but still held a somewhat

privileged position, as being intoxicated could potentially serve as an explanation for why they transgressed the other party's boundaries. The participants could in this case be drawing on discourses around how alcohol can lead to misinterpreting a person's signals (Wegner et al., 2015). However, contrary to previous research that shows that it is mostly men who are excused from committing sexual assault (Wegner et al., 2015), in the present study it was the level of intoxication, rather than the gender of the person, that influenced how responsible they were viewed for transgressing the other person's boundaries.

Different Types of Relationships, Different Expectations Around Sex

The third theme centered on the type of relationship between Maria and Jonas that was associated with different expectations around sex and, coupled with intentionality and responsibility, influenced the participants' understandings of sexual assault and sexual consent.

For some participants, the relationship between Jonas and Maria did not seem to influence their construction of the sexual interaction. They emphasized the importance of obtaining or giving consent, similarly to the first theme. Others, however, talked about how going home with someone after a party could, in some cases, create an expectation of sex, as Peter (24/man/heterosexual) said:

> You are not forced to do anything, but you have, somehow, said 'yes' [to have sex]. You should say 'no' if you don't want to have sex anymore. On the other hand, it's also important that the person who initiates [the sexual interaction], makes sure it's still ok [ensures consent]. If Jonas and Maria meet at the party for the first time and one of them goes home with the other, but doesn't want to [have sex], then why go home with that person? However, if they are dating, they could say 'I'll go home with you, we can cuddle and kiss, but I am not ready to have sex yet'.

On the one hand, Peter equated that with *consenting* to sex. If a person views going home with someone after a party as a signal of consent, they can assume that the other person wants to have sex and unintentionally transgress their boundaries. Therefore, according to Peter, the person saying 'yes' to going home with another person has to communicate non-consent if they do not wish to have sex anymore. On the other hand, Peter (linguistically) made room for his view that going home with someone signals consent being wrong by using the word 'somehow', stating that a person is 'not forced to do anything' (have sex) and that it is important that 'the person who initiates the (sexual interaction), makes sure it's still ok (ensures consent)'. Peter might, therefore, not have wanted to position himself as someone who holds 'victim blaming' views (Maurer, 2016; Dyar et al., 2021; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2018). Another possibility could be that Peter might have felt ambivalent about how to interpret that scenario. This could be signaled by the fact that he wondered why someone would go home with another person after a party if they did not want to have sex with that person. His ambivalence could also be signaled by him talking about how that expectation was also influenced by the type of relationship between the two people. Finally, his ambivalence could also be signaled by the fact that he first attributed responsibility for consent on the person saying 'yes' to go home with the other person, while, afterwards saying how it is also the other person's responsibility to continually ensure consent.

In the scenarios where Jonas and Maria were in a long-term relationship, different perspectives occurred, especially when there was no verbal communication of non-consent. Some participants emphasized the importance of obtaining consent, no matter what relation Maria and Jonas had to each other. Other participants viewed being in a relationship

as an expectation of consensual sex to occur when going home together, as Sandie (21/woman/heterosexual) emphasized:

> If you are in a relationship where you have had sex before, but you don't say no and you just do as you usually do, it's hard for the other person to know that you didn't want to [have sex] because then it's just 'sex as we are used to'.

According to Sandie, the fact that Maria and Jonas are already sexually involved created an expectation that (consensual) sex will happen again. Therefore, she positioned the person at the receiving end of the sexual interaction as responsible for clearly communicating non-consent in order to avoid their partner unintentionally transgressing their boundaries.

Other participants talked about factors that might make it difficult to determine whether a sexual act in the context of a relationship constitutes a sexual assault. Elisabeth (24/woman/heterosexual), for example, said:

> The lines are a bit more blurred because you trust each other… it's easier to be like 'she doesn't want to, but I can make her want to [have sex]'. I have had sex before where I did it for my boyfriend. It was not bad, I just didn't really want to. But he wanted to, so I did it for him and that made me happy. There was also a time where I wanted to have sex; my boyfriend was tired, but he saw that I wanted to, therefore we did it [had sex]. It doesn't mean he didn't like it, but if I hadn't been persisting, he wouldn't have done it. Is that bad? None of us were negatively affected by it.

Elisabeth argued that it is more acceptable to persuade one's romantic partner to have sex as there can be reasons to have sex with one's partner, other than sexual desire, such as to make one's partner happy. Despite being *aware* of the fact that the partner might not want to have sex, Elisabeth questioned whether this is necessarily problematic. She argued for that by mentioning examples of personal experiences that she did not necessarily consider problematic. At the same time, however, Elisabeth emphasized that it can blur the lines between consensual and non-consensual sex.

In this third theme, the relationship between Maria and Jonas was connected to different expectations around sex that, coupled with intentionality and responsibility, influenced the participants' understandings of sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication. Peter pointed at the contextual cues in heavy drinking contexts where agreeing to go home with another person after a party creates an expectation of (consensual) sex to occur. This is similar to previous research emphasizing how going home with someone after a party can signal consent (Wills & Jozkowski, 2019; 2022). However, the present study adds to previous research by showing how the type of relationship between the two people can influence to what *extent* 'going home with someone' signals consent. The present study also adds to previous research by showing how young people might feel ambivalent about how to interpret such cues; as Peter's quote showed, consent was, on the one hand, constructed as the responsibility of the person saying 'yes' to go home with the other person, while, on the other hand, it was simultaneously being constructed as a mutual responsibility.

Many participants pointed at how sexual assault was harder to recognize in the context of a romantic relationship. Going home after a party with one's partner could signal consent to sex, not only due the acceptance of going home together (Wills & Jozkowski, 2019; 2022), but also because being in a long-term relationship and having had sex before creates an expectation of consensual sex occurring again. Therefore, the participants could, in this case, be drawing on ideas of sexual precedence, i.e., the expectation that once two people

have had sex, (consensual) sex will occur again (Humphreys, 2007; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). The implication of that was that the person had to communicate non-consent clearly in order for their partner not to (unintentionally) transgress their boundaries. Other participants talked about how being in a relationship made it acceptable to persuade the partner to have sex even though the partner might not be in the mood for sex, or to consent to sex for reasons other than sexual desire. This nuances the results of previous research by emphasizing that the type of relationship between two people having sex can influence whether an intentional transgression of the other person's boundaries is considered problematic (see also Kaluza & Conray-Murray, 2021).

Discussion

The results of the present study highlighted how notions of intentionality and responsibility were central to the participants' understandings of sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication. While previous research has emphasized that discussions around sexual consent and sexual assault often center around notions of intentionality and responsibility, the present study showed how intentionality and responsibility were discursively constructed *specifically* in alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters and how this construction was situationally dependent. In each theme, the participants drew on different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication to construct intentionality and responsibility. The fact that the participants drew on different and contradicting discourses could be due to their specific situational aims (e.g., wanting to present themselves as not subscribing to 'victim blaming discourses', or argue for why they did not consider having sex with one's romantic partner that is not desire-based as necessarily problematic etc.).

Even though previous research has emphasized the inadequacy of intentionality and responsibility to fully explain sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication (e.g., Cahill, 2014; 2016; Stefansen et al., 2021; Tutenges et al., 2020) our study showed that notions of responsibility and intentionality do, in fact, influence how young people understand those matters. This is problematic for several reasons. First of all, the fact that intent was so central to the participants' understandings as well as how they emphasized the responsibility of communicating consent clearly in order to avoid sexual assault can point to how they subscribe to the 'miscommunication hypothesis' to a rather high degree. Subscribing to the miscommunication hypothesis can result in young people having a hard time making sense of many instances of sexual assault where the victim experiences 'tonic immobility' (Kaluza & Conray-Murray, 2021). In addition, it can result in overlooking other factors, such as how discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication influence sexual consent and sexual assault under the influence of alcohol intoxication (see also Baldwin-White, 2021; Humphreys, 2007; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). As the results showed, the participants seemed to also be drawing on those discourses but still emphasizing personal responsibility and intentionality, thus somehow downplaying the influence of those discourses on sexual consent and sexual assault.

Second, subscribing to simplistic explanations to understand sexual consent and sexual assault under the influence of alcohol intoxication can result in young people experiencing increased ambivalence toward how to make sense of their own alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters where the allocation of responsibility is not clear. Those encounters could be similar to what Cahill (2014, 2016) described as instances of 'unethical sex' or be a result of 'tumultuous' and 'chaotic' sexual interactions (e.g., Tutenges et al., 2020). Previous research has shown that it is common for victims of sexual assault to recognize their experience as an assault long after that experience has taken place (Inglis, 2021). Therefore, even though

the sexual interaction might, at the moment a person experiences it, feel 'tumultuous' and 'chaotic' (see also Tutenges et al., 2020), as time passes, that person might feel caught up between the 'tumultuous' and 'chaotic' quality of their experiences on the one hand, and the tendency to try to understand those experiences by drawing on simplistic notions of responsibility and intentionality on the other.

Third, since the participants in our study had to make sense of a hypothetical sexual interaction, their understandings could also be a reflection of how they would respond to other people's sexual experiences. Subscribing to simplistic explanations to understand sexual consent and sexual assault under the influence of alcohol intoxication to understand other people's sexual experiences can be problematic, because previous research shows that how other people respond to a person's experience of sexual assault can influence how that person makes sense of that assault (e.g., Jensen & Hunt, 2020; Untied, 2012). It is also problematic because previous research emphasizes how being ascribed responsibility for being the victim of sexual assault can result in the victim experiencing increased anxiety, depression, PTSD and alcohol use (Ullman et al., 2008).

However, it is important to note that, even though many participants drew on notions of intentionality and responsibility when discussing sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication, there were also important nuances and variations in the participants' responses. The way intentionality and responsibility were constructed varied situationally, and some participants challenged those more simplistic understandings of sexual assault and sexual consent. In addition, while the participants seemed to be drawing on the same discourses regardless of their gender and sexual orientation, in the 'gender flip' case, the three participants who had a hard time positioning Jonas as someone who would say no to sex or experience sexual assault all identified as heterosexual. This could point towards a tendency for heterosexual people to subscribe to a larger degree to the – rather heteronormative – male sexual drive discourse (see also Hollway, 1984; Gavey, 2018). However, previous research also shows that LGBTQIA+ people might also subscribe to the more traditional gender and sexuality discourses (e.g. De Heer et al., 2021). That, combined with the fact that the rest of the heterosexual participants did not subscribe to that view, made it impossible to draw any specific conclusions with regards to whether gender and sexual identity had an influence on the participants' understandings. Future research could, however, benefit from exploring more of those nuances and differences.

An important thing to take into consideration in relation to our study's results has to do with our use of the vignette methodology. First, the factors varied in the vignettes could have had an influence on the participants' responses. The participants might have tried to make meaning of what the first author was trying to investigate (see also Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) and whether the first author had a specific 'agenda' (i.e., holding certain views around sexual consent and sexual assault under the influence of alcohol intoxication). Coupled with the 'social desirability' bias, the participants might have responded in a way congruent to the way that they thought the first author wanted them to respond (see also Grimm, 2010).

In addition, the order in which the different factors were presented could also have had an influence on the participants' responses (see also Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). For example, the fact that the participants were introduced to the 'gender flip' situation right after being introduced to the scenario where Jonas was the 'offender' could result in them interpreting that as a test of their 'gender equality credentials', which could explain why many participants made no or only a small distinction between the male versus the female offender. Therefore, varying different factors or presenting them in a different order could have yielded different results.

Finally, our vignettes only presented a heterosexual sexual encounter. Therefore, the results might have been different had we included non-heterosexual encounters. Our sample has an overrepresentation of cisgender, white women, resulting in our analysis primarily representing their views.

Conclusion

Previous studies show that sexual assault and sexual consent under the influence of alcohol intoxication are often discussed by taking a point of departure in notions of intentionality and responsibility, i.e., whether the transgression of the victim's boundaries was intentional as well as who is responsible for the sexual assault and/or communicating sexual consent. Researchers have tried to nuance how we understand sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication by pointing at the inadequacy of intent and responsibility for fully understanding those matters. Our study showed that notions of intent and responsibility were central to how our participants made sense of a hypothetical alcohol intoxicated sexual interaction. However, our results also showed that the discursive construction of intentionality and responsibility was situationally dependent, with the participants drawing on different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication, for different aims and purposes, ultimately constituting their understanding of sexual assault and sexual consent in relation to alcohol intoxication as situational too. Understanding the complex, contextual and interrelated nature of those understandings is vital if we wish to reduce the number of alcohol intoxicated sexual assaults.

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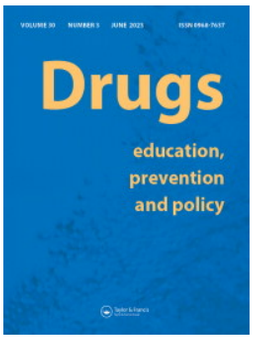

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sexual agency as situational: Moving beyond neoliberal understandings of sexual agency when investigating young people's alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters

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ABSTRACT

Background: A high number of non-consensual sexual experiences happen in heavy drinking contexts, pointing to the importance of investigating how young people make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions. In analyzing that, researchers have used the concept of 'sexual agency', to describe how young people often draw on a neoliberal discourse, which emphasizes freedom, choice and individual responsibility to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions. The aim of this paper is to argue for the applicability of a more situational understanding of sexual agency, such as Cahill's (2016), when investigating young people's alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences. **Methods:** 30 qualitative interviews were conducted with young Danes (aged 19-25) on their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. **Results:** A narrative analytical approach revealed that participants draw on three types of narratives on sexual encounters which emphasized: 1) The pleasurable experiences and a large degree of agency 2) The ambivalent experiences of agency and 3) The out-of-control sexual experiences. **Conclusions:** The results highlight the situational and varied nature of sexual agency in sexual encounters and that discourses on gender, sexuality and alcohol intoxication influence the participants' construction of agency.

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Introduction

Sexual experiences involving alcohol consumption are often a pleasurable and expected part of a 'night out' for many young people (e.g. Grazian, 2007; Jensen et al., 2019; Pedersen et al., 2017). However, research on young peoples' non-consensual sexual experiences (NSEs) (e.g. Cowley, 2014; Tutenges et al., 2020) also shows that up to 50% of them happen in the context of heavy drinking. Research shows that cisgender women (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016) and LGBTQIA+ people (Beaulieu et al., 2017) most often experience NSEs and that the majority of perpetrators are cisgender men (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016). Experiencing a NSE can have serious consequences such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, problematic relationships and substance abuse (Armstrong et al., 2018). Importantly, Alcoff (2014, 2018) argues that how a person, who has experienced a NSE *afterwards* constructs such experiences as meaningful can influence their ability to 'forward their own sexual becoming', that is, their ability to have future positive sexual interactions with others. Against this background, this paper will investigate how young people make meaning of and construct agency in sexual interactions under the influence of alcohol intoxication.

Research shows that young people's post-incident meaning making of sexual encounters is embedded in and shaped by the sociocultural context (Hirsch et al., 2019). In analyzing how young people make meaning of sexual encounters, researchers have often used the concept of 'sexual agency', to describe how young people often draw on a neoliberal discourse which emphasizes personal freedom, choice and individual responsibility (Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008). This discourse is root in a logic of market exchange (Beres, 2007; MacKinnon, 2016; Pateman, 1988; Loick, 2019) and implies that young people have the freedom to autonomously choose who they have sex with (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012). At the same time, this neoliberal understanding on sexual agency with its emphasis on individual liberty also implies that young people are solely responsible for their (unfortunate) sexual experiences.

However, drawing on a neoliberal understanding of sexual agency to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences can be problematic for several reasons. First, the pervasiveness of the neoliberal view of sexual agency in heavy drinking contexts that encourages young people to pursue sexual desires (Bailey et al., 2015; Farris et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2013; Peralta, 2008) can obscure the continued influence of more traditional gendered sexuality discourses. For instance, the traditional 'male sexual drive' discourse is a pervasive discourse that positions men as the active ones sexually with an ever-present sexual desire (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). Positioned in that discourse, men can risk

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consenting to unwanted sex in order to live up to ideals of 'proper masculinity' where they have to take advantage of every chance they get to have sex (Ferrales et al., 2016; Small, 2015) or not have a NSE recognized as such, due to how they are perceived as always wanting sex (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). Women, on the other hand, are positioned as the ones who have to manage (and fend off) men's sexual advances (Gunnarsson, 2018; Hollway, 1984) and are expected to not be 'too sexually active' since they risk being labelled a 'slut' (Bjøness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020). However, to complicate matters further, women are, at the same time, also positioned in the neoliberal discourse that urges them to be agentic in relation to their sexuality and have casual sex in par with men in order to not be seen as 'frigid' (Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020). Women can, therefore, be caught up in those contradicting expectations and consent to sex not out of desire, but because they want to live up to certain neoliberal expectations and norms.

As the above indicates, young people are thus not completely free to choose whether to have sex or not as each choice comes with different consequences and are embedded in gender specific norms and gendered power imbalances. Due to the pervasiveness of the neoliberal view of sexual agency young people might, however, place disproportional responsibility on themselves for consenting to unwanted sex. Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras (2008)'s study is an example of that, focusing on young women who consented to unwanted sex. The researchers argued that the reason why women sometimes consented to unwanted sex related to gendered norms and ideas about female passivity and the subordination of women's sexual desires to those of men's. The young women in Bay-Cheng & and Eliseo-Arras's study took full responsibility for consenting to unwanted sex, which, as the researchers argue, could be due to the pervasiveness of the neoliberal discourse which emphasizes personal responsibility and down-plays the continued importance of more traditional gender norms.

In practice, and especially in alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions, the allocation of responsibility is, however, not straightforward. Due to the profound influence of neoliberal understandings of sexual agency in alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions, victims of NSEs are often ascribed responsibility for being sexually assaulted, a phenomenon called 'victim blaming' (Allen, 2003; Gill, 2007). As a consequence, it is sometimes argued that if they wanted to avoid a NSE they could 'simply' have said no (Bay-Cheng, 2015; Fine & McClelland, 2006, 2007) or refrained from drinking (Dyar et al., 2021; Maurer, 2016; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2018). This is something mostly women are subjected to (Maurer, 2016), which also relates to how women's alcohol consumption is judged more negatively compared to men's (Blackman et al., 2015; Hunt & Antin, 2019) and that intoxicated women are often perceived as being sexually available (Blackman et al., 2015). Victimized men on the other hand are often not constructed as 'victims' of NSEs (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). Importantly, while intoxicated victims of a NSE are often ascribed excessive responsibility, intoxicated perpetrators are at times ascribed *less* responsibility for committing sexual assault. Alcohol intoxication, for instance, is sometimes used as an excuse for why (mostly) men commit sexual assaults (Wegner et al., 2015). In this context, young people sometimes face difficulties when trying to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions.

Adding to the above, researchers have argued that a further reason why a neoliberal understanding of sexual agency can be problematic is that it lead to a dichotomous view of sexual interactions as either being consensual or non-consensual, thus obscures 'gray-zone' sexual interactions (Gavey, 2018). Often, this leaves young people to view themselves as either 'victims' (however still responsible for bringing themselves into the negative situation) or as voluntary and free 'agents', with even assaulted young people often preferring the latter (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008). In practice, drawing a definite line between consensual and NSEs in heavy drinking contexts is however often difficult. Previous research, for instance, shows that while some young people feel that they have had consensual sex while intoxicated (Muehlenhard et al., 2016) and that they have intentionally consumed alcohol, as they might believe that it makes them more relaxed (Herold & Hunt, 2020; Hunt & Frank, 2016) and that it increases their sexual drive (Patrick & Maggs, 2009), other studies point to that being intoxicated made some young people consent to unwanted sex (Flack et al., 2007) or have sex they later regretted (Orchowski et al., 2012). Adding to that, other research shows that many alcohol-intoxicated sexual assaults are not a result of the intentional 'tactics' of the perpetrator. Rather, some assaults are a result of 'tumultuous and confusing' sexual interactions where it is sometimes difficult to draw distinctions between a 'victim' and a 'perpetrator' (Stefansen et al., 2021; Tutenges et al., 2020).

If we are to develop a more nuanced understanding of sexual agency in sexual encounters, this article argues that we need to move beyond dominant neoliberal understandings and, instead, develop a more situational understanding of sexual agency that takes into account those different and contradicting norms and expectations in heavy drinking contexts. Based on interviews 30 qualitative interviews with young people (ages 19-25), this article more specifically draws on Cahill's (2016) situational understanding of sexual agency as well as a narrative analytical approach (Bamberg, 2004, 2011), to investigate how young people themselves construct sexual agency in intoxicated sexual encounters as well as how discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication influence their construction of agency. The analysis showed that while many of the participants drew on a neoliberal understanding of sexual agency to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences, they simultaneously also drew on different and contradicting discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication depending on the situation and context.

An understanding of sexual agency as situational

Cahill (2016, p. 754) defines sexual agency as 'the ability to contribute meaningfully to the quality of the sexual interaction'. Sexual agency is not merely an ability an individual has

to act in the world irrespectively of the influence of others, but, rather, this agency is intersubjective and emanates from sexual interactions (Cahill, 2016). This means that all individuals will experience situationally depended higher or lower degrees of agency when engaging in sexual interactions.

Patterns of inequality, such as gendered power imbalances, can also influence how much sexual agency a person can exhibit. Cahill (2016) offers the example of a woman that is pressured (but not coerced) into having sex by a man. In this case, her contribution to the sexual act matters because she still has a possibility to say no to the sexual interaction (since she is not coerced). However, she might feel pressured to consent because she fears worse consequences if she does not consent. The consequences could, for instance, be sexual assault (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016) or to be perceived as 'frigid' (Bjøness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020), consequences that are gender specific and a result of gendered power imbalances. Her sexual agency is, therefore, according to Cahill (2016), limited in scope.

Finally, Cahill (2016) argues that sexual agency is also a relevant concept when trying to investigate 'gray-zone' sexual experiences and that if both people in the sexual interaction had their sexual agency fully recognized, the sexual experience would not be characterized as a 'gray-zone' sexual situation. Adopting this understanding on sexual agency can thus help us move beyond the dichotomy of consensual and non-consensual sexual experiences (see also Gavey, 2018), enable us to explore the relational and contextual constructiveness of sexual agency.

Methods

Research design, recruitment and data collection

The study was based on 30 in-depth qualitative interviews with young people (ages 19 – 25) conducted by the author, each of them lasting from 1-2 hours. The interview guide covered themes such as young people's pleasurable and problematic sexual experiences and their views on sexual consent in an alcohol intoxication context. For this paper, questions on the participants' sexual experiences were included in the analysis. Interviewing lasted from May 2020 – March 2021. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, 14 out of the 30 interviews were online. When the restrictions allowed for face-to-face interviews, the participants were asked how they would prefer to be interviewed, as well as where they would feel comfortable being face-to-face interviewed. The face-to-face interviews were (due to the restrictions) conducted at the participants' or the author's home.

Recruitment was mainly done online (due to the restrictions), but also by snowball sampling. A post about the project was shared several times, both in the author's own online networks, but also in relevant online groups aimed at both Danish youth in general and LGBTQIA+ groups specifically. Since several of the groups had thousands of members, the post reached a wide audience of young people. The reason for including posts in different groups was inspired by Søndergaard (1996) who talks about sampling in order to balance between reaching saturation and having a diverse sample. The post stated that the author was looking for young people between the ages of 18-25 of all genders that have had sexual experiences in an alcohol intoxication context that were willing to share their experiences and thoughts and opinions on sexual consent. The broad term 'sexual experiences' was used in order to ensure that people with a wide range of sexual experiences would reach out to participate in the study. However, most of the participants that were interviewed had experienced some NSEs. This could be because they might have had an expectation that the author was mostly interested in NSEs or that young people who had not had any unpleasant alcohol intoxicated sexual experiences did not feel the need to be interviewed.

The participants came from different cities around Denmark with the majority of them (N = 18) living in the Region of Middle Jutland. Most of them were born in Denmark (N = 25) and five of them were born in other countries.

In terms of gender identity, 20 of them identified as cisgender women, 7 as cisgender men, 2 as transgender, and 1 as genderfluid. Although efforts were made to recruit participants identifying as other genders than cisgender women, it was hard to reach those participants. Possible reasons for that could be that there is an overrepresentation of women experiencing NSEs (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016), that LGBTQIA+ people are a 'hard-to-reach' population (Guillory et al., 2018) or because it is still a taboo for men to talk about issues such as NSEs (Larsen & Hilden, 2016).

In terms of sexuality, there were 10 participants who identified as heterosexual, 12 as bisexual, 3 as homosexual, and 5 as 'other' (pansexual, heteroflexible or queer). The sample is thus diverse in terms of sexuality, which could relate to the purposive sampling, even though the author mostly recruited from groups aimed at young people in general. Although one might argue that LGBTQIA+ people's intoxicated sexual experiences might be different from heterosexual people's experiences due to those experiences being linked to their gender and sexual identity (de Heer et al., 2021), in this study, the author found narratives that seemed to cut across sexuality (with some small variations, which will be elaborated on later).

In terms of educational background, half of the participants had either finished or were currently enrolled in university at either a master's level (N = 5) or bachelor level (N = 10) and 12 of them had finished High school. The latter could be due to how almost half of them (N = 14) were between the ages 19-22, which is typically a time period where young Danes take one or more years off to work and/or travel after graduating High School before they begin studying again.

All participants received a gift card worth approx. 30 euros as compensation for participating.

Transcription, coding and analysis

The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and coded in Nvivo. An initial thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021) generating codes that were on a descriptive level, reflecting the questions of the interview guide (e.g. Sexual consent, Friends/Family/Social circle and Sex). For this paper, the analysis focused on the code

'One-night-stands/Casual sex/Friends with benefits' under the broader 'Sex' code that included sexual experiences that were *not* in the context of a romantic relationship. This is because previous research shows that young people's making meaning of sexual experiences is different within a romantic relationship from the context of casual sex (Orchowski et al., 2022; Righi et al., 2021). Another reason for focusing on casual sexual encounters is that those are the norm within heavy drinking contexts (Wade, 2021).

To investigate how the participants positioned themselves as sexually agentic in their narratives about their intoxicated sexual encounters, a narrative analytical approach was deemed relevant. Narrative approaches can lie on a cognitivist-social constructionist continuum (Brown, 2003). In this paper, the narrative approach lied on the social constructionist end of the continuum and Bamberg's (2004, 2011) view on narratives was adopted where the focus is on the function of those narratives.

Bamberg's (1997, 2004, 2011) notion of positioning was adopted to explore how participants linguistically positioned themselves as sexually agentic through their narratives and how they invoke notions of choice and responsibility drawn from a neoliberal discourse on sexual agency (Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019). The concept of positionality was also used to investigate how they, in their narratives, constructed them themselves and others to have higher or lower degrees of agency in sexual encounters. And finally, to investigate how the participants' positioning as more or less sexually agentic was influenced by discourses around gender, sexuality and intoxication (Bamberg, 2004).

Ethics

The project was reported to the (country) Data Protection Agency and follows their rules for storing sensitive data as well as GDPR regulations. It was approved by the (Name of institution)'s ethical review board. The participants gave oral and written consent and were informed about confidentiality, pseudonymization, and how to withdraw from the project, if they wanted to. Moreover, the consent form stated that if they experienced any discomfort after the interview, they could contact the researcher or relevant institutions (see also Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Attention was brought to the risk of triggering- or re-traumatization if some of the participants had sexual experiences that were traumatic (Weber et al., 2022). The author was careful not to ask too many questions if (pronoun) felt there was a risk of that. Moreover, if the participants looked like they were emotionally influenced during the interview, the author made sure to acknowledge them in the feelings they were experiencing (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). At the end of the interview, the participants were asked how they felt talking about those issues to ensure that they did not leave the interview feeling severe discomfort (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The fact that the face-to-face interviews were conducted at either the author' or the participants' homes helped to facilitate a friendly and relaxed atmosphere (Sandberg et al., 2019) and the participants expressed that the interview process had made them reflect on new things and that they had felt heard and non-judged.

Results and findings

The analysis is divided into three sections, focusing on 1) pleasurable, expected or non-problematic sexual experiences, 2) ambivalent sexual experiences and 3) out-of-control sexual experiences'. The number of sexual experiences falling within each type of narrative were 15, 16 and 18 respectively. Overall, the participants positioned themselves with varying levels of sexual agency, even within the same narrative, while their possibilities for positioning was influenced by discourses on gender, sexuality and alcohol intoxication.

The pleasurable, expected or non-problematic sexual experiences

The first type of narratives reflected the sexual experiences that were framed as either pleasurable by the participants or, at least, not problematic. In this type of narratives, the participants positioned themselves with a high level of sexual agency. Nadja (20/cisgender woman/bisexual) offers one example of this type of narrative:

> At a New Year's Eve party, there was a girl I had been talking to for some time. I had asked her if she wanted to be my New Year's kiss and she replied 'Yes, I would really like that'. We ended up kissing and she was like 'so… can I see your room?' We went to my room, kissed and ended up having sex. It was a wonderful experience where we just laughed and smiled. I think because we had had some alcohol, we weren't afraid of our bodies; the light was on and yeah, it was a very nice experience.

In her narrative, Nadja seemed to be drawing on the neoliberal discourse (Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020), positioning herself as having a high degree of sexual agency, and actively pursuing her friend. She positions herself and her friend equally in relation to each other since they desire the same things (kissing and having sex). There is no coercion or pressure to have sex. Her friend asks her whether she can 'see her room' (possibly indirectly suggesting to have sex) which does not signal coercion. Nadja is capable of getting what she wants (kissing her friend) and to influence how the rest of the night goes. Natja's experience of a high degree of sexual agency is also evident in her use of active verbs such as 'we kissed' and 'we ended up having sex', thus indicating the mutuality of the interaction. In her narrative, Nadja also drew on alcohol intoxication discourses holding that alcohol can lead to feelings of relaxation (Herold & Hunt, 2020; Hunt & Frank, 2016) when stating that intoxication made them more relaxed in relation to their bodies. This, in turn, obviated potential body-shame, which might otherwise have inhibited their experience of a high level of sexual agency.

While many participants, like Natja, drew on the neoliberal discourse (e.g. Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008) and on a discourse highlighting alcohol's positive effect on sexual interactions (Herold & Hunt, 2020; Hunt & Frank, 2016), there were some differences in how female and male participants constructed pleasurable sexual

encounters. When talking about an intoxicated sexual encounter, the male participants, such as Magnus (19/cisman/bisexual) stated the following:

> I was out and I saw a beautiful girl'. So I started a conversation with her and I took her home with me. There we had sex, but we were both really drunk. The day after I woke up and saw that wow, she has nipple-piercings, that's actually kind of hot. I didn't notice while we had sex. I was probably too drunk. I remember taking her home with me, but the details are quite blurred. It was not bad sex, though, it was all right.

Magnus positioned himself with a high degree of sexual agency, pursuing a girl he finds attractive which is indicated by his use of, primarily, active verbs throughout his narrative ('I started a conversation with her', 'I took her home with me' and 'we had sex'). Even though he was intoxicated to a degree where he had a hard time remembering what exactly happened and, therefore, was not totally in control of the situation, he framed his sexual experience as 'alright' and that the sex he and the girl had as 'not bad'. Moreover, he mentioned how the girl was 'beautiful' and had 'nipple-piercings', something that he found attractive. By talking about his sexual encounter in this way, Magnus positioned himself within the male sexual drive discourse, where men are expected to be sexually active, in control and to always desire sex (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984). This might also explain why most of the male participants in this study did not position themselves with a diminished sexual agency due to alcohol intoxication, or as someone who made a 'wrong choice' in relation to sex, that is, had sex that was 'bad' or with a girl that they did not find attractive.

Typically, the female participants constructed their sexual encounters differently compared to the male participants. One example of this was Ditte (23/ciswoman/heterosexual):

> I'm sitting and talking with this guy at a private party. We decide to go to a club and continue to party there for some hours. Eventually I suggest: 'should we go to your place or?' and he's like 'yeah, let's do that'. We went to his place and had some relaxed, cozy sex. In the end, however, I wasn't that attracted to him, the sex was quite quick and he fell asleep immediately after.

In the beginning of her narrative, Ditte positioned herself with a high degree of sexual agency, by drawing on a neoliberal discourse (Bjønness et al., 2022; Jensen & Hunt, 2020), constructing herself as actively pursuing a guy and asking him if she can go home with him. In her narrative, Ditte positioned herself and the guy as equals in terms of power-relations and in terms of both desiring to have sex. However, the sex ends up being too quick for her and the guy falls asleep. Later in the interview, Ditte talked about how she finds one-night-stands in an alcohol intoxication context 'uninteresting', meaning she found them boring or not particularly pleasurable. In her narrative, therefore, she did not seem to be drawing on discourses on alcohol's relaxing or positive effects (such as in Nadja's narrative). For Ditte, alcohol intoxication made her sexual experience 'uninteresting'. At the same time, however, alcohol intoxication was not perceived to severely diminish Ditte's sexual agency as she talked about how she actively pursued the guy and that the sex they had was 'relaxed' and 'cozy' (despite being 'uninteresting'), but not problematic or out of her control as in some of the next type of narratives.

The ambivalent sexual experiences

The second type of narratives covered sexual experiences that were characterized by experiences of agentic ambivalence. This is, for example, evident when Anne (21/ciswoman/bisexual) talks about her experience with a guy she met at a party:

> First, we were just talking. But because of a drinking game we were playing, we had to kiss. Afterwards, we went outside and took a walk to a forest area nearby. There he started pushing me [to have sex]. I am actually quite good at saying 'no'. I know and respect my own boundaries. But he kept pushing and I thought 'ok, whatever, I can do it'. It was ok, but it was unpleasant afterwards, because my boundaries were crossed. Maybe that wasn't his intention, I think it was this party setting somehow… and maybe the alcohol. I mean, we were having fun, we smiled, we were happy and I didn't want to ruin the moment by saying 'now it's too much. Please stop'. It kind of became an expectation that now we are at a party, so we might as well do it.

In the beginning of her narrative, Anne positioned the guy as having more control, describing him as psychologically pushing her and crossing her boundaries while positioning herself with a lower degree of sexual agency. At the same time, she characterized the experience as an 'ok' one, but still 'unpleasant afterwards' which could signal her ambivalence. Anne's ambivalence was also evident in the way she tried to reclaim sexual agency by describing herself as a person who is usually quite good at respecting her own sexual boundaries. This could be a way for her to regain some form of control based on the rationale that since she is usually good at setting boundaries, a similar situation will not happen again (see also Hansen et al., 2021). Anne's ambivalence is also indicated by her shifting views on who (the boy or herself) is responsible or to blame for the fact that she experienced an unwanted sexual interaction. On the one hand, her mentioning of how she is usually good at setting boundaries, and that she did not want to 'ruin the moment', could indicate that she viewed herself as (at least partly) responsible for what happened. In this way, Anna is at least partly drawing on the neoliberal discourse attributing sole responsibility for action to the individuals (see also Allen, 2003; Gill, 2007) and on a more traditional gendered sexuality discourse, where women are expected to care for other people's needs and well-being, more so than their own (Bay-Cheng & Elisseo-Aras, 2008). Not wanting to 'ruin the moment' becomes more important to her than her than setting her sexual boundaries. On the other hand, she also seemed to distance herself from being solely responsible for the sexual interaction by referring to the normative expectations to have sex that characterize the alcohol intoxication culture (see also Dahl et al., 2018; Fjær et al., 2015; Johansen et al., 2020; Pedersen et al., 2017). Anne, in this case, draws on discourses were alcohol is sometimes used as an explanation for why NSEs happen (e.g. Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022; Tutenges et al., 2020). The guy in her narrative does not seem to be positioned with any responsibility for what happened which is in

accordance with how men are often excused for committing sexual assault (Abbey, 2002, 2011; Abbey et al., 2001; Wegner et al., 2015).

Another example of this type of ambivalence was expressed by the male participants, but framed slightly differently. An example of this is Mark's (21/cisman/heterosexual) narrative:

> I ended up drinking a bottle of vodka at a party. Afterwards, I saw videos of me doing things (at the party) I don't remember. It was unpleasant to watch. Later I had sex with a woman [at his place] and it wasn't that nice. We had sex at night and then again the day after. It just wasn't interesting to me.
>
> ***I: Why wasn't it interesting to you?***
>
> I realized that I wasn't physically attracted to her and I wasn't attracted to her on an intellectual or emotional level either.

Mark was one of the few men who positioned himself with diminished sexual agency due to heavy alcohol intoxication that resulted in him not having a recollection of what happened. Even though he talked about how unpleasant it was for him to be heavily intoxicated, he reframed his sexual experience as merely 'uninteresting' due to the fact that he was not attracted to the woman he had sex with. Mark thereby reframed a, potentially, ambivalent sexual experience that he did not have that much control over, as simply an 'uninteresting' one. This is indicated by his use of the active phrase 'I had sex with her', meaning something he actively chose. By talking about his sexual encounter in that way, he did not position the woman in the narrative as having more control of the situation than he did. Even though Mark characterized his sexual experience as 'uninteresting', which is similar to way Ditte talked about sex, Mark's framing entails a different meaning than Ditte's. In Ditte's narrative, alcohol intoxication did not have a diminishing effect on her sexual agency and only made her experience 'dull' or boring. In Mark's narrative, describing his experience as 'uninteresting' serves the purpose of repositioning Mark from someone with diminished sexual agency to someone with sexual agency and still in control of the situation. Similarly to when other male participants discussed their non-problematic sexual experiences, Mark seemed to be drawing on the male sexual drive discourse where it is difficult for a man to position himself as a 'victim' of sexual assault and as not having control over their sexual experiences (see Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984).

Finally, Taylor (25/genderfluid/bisexual) talked about an ambivalent sexual experience where their[1] sexual agency was not only diminished by alcohol intoxication, but also influenced by misconceptions about them being a sexual minority:

> The second time I met with this girl was at a party. When she texted me 'I might come by your party later', I was like, this is the moment I show everyone that I'm bisexual. I mean, I wanted to kiss her, but it was also important for me to show who I was to my friends. But when she came, it was as if she was much drunker than me. And I think this whole idea (to show that I am bisexual) somehow interfered with my ability to really think about whether I wanted to have sex with her. She was too drunk and I was too drunk to sense where my boundaries were. We had the most awkward sex where it was really clear that none of us were really invested in each other.

Taylor was ambivalent about their levels of alcohol intoxication and it was not clear in the narrative how they and the woman are positioned. Both were quite drunk and it was unclear exactly why they had sex with each other. Alcohol was perceived to have a negative influence on Taylor's sexual encounter, making it 'awkward' and difficult to sense whether their boundaries were violated. Therefore, they positioned themselves with a diminished sexual agency. At the same time, they mentioned that they wanted to kiss the girl and that the girl was 'much drunker', therefore, maintaining a certain degree of sexual agency. In addition, the fact that Taylor wanted to make their sexuality visible to their friends was also something that was perceived to influence how the sexual encounter unfolded and the level of agency Taylor could exhibit. Later in the interview, Taylor attributed the need to make their sexuality visible due to misconceptions around bisexuality that characterize it, in their words, as a 'phase or simply because you have to try out things', misconceptions that have also been identified in the literature (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2017). Taylor, therefore, drew on discourses around how alcohol intoxication's negative influence on sexual boundaries that can lead to NSEs (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022; Tutenges et al., 2020) while, at the same time, also drawing on the neoliberal discourse (see also Allen, 2003; Gill, 2007) by trying to reclaim some sexual agency. However, contrary to some of the other participants, Taylor's sexual agency was not only diminished by being intoxicated by alcohol, but was also influenced by misconceptions about them being a sexual minority.

The out-of-control sexual experiences

The third type of narratives were characterized by the fact that the participants narrated very little or no control over the sexual interaction. An example of this was Elisabeth's (24/ciswoman/heterosexual) narrative:

> I was on a vacation with a friend… we had had extreme amounts of alcohol. I wasn't blacked out, but my body was just completely numb and I was falling around and I couldn't really speak properly. And then, suddenly, I was in a room with him [a guy they had met that day] where he started coming on to me, I was like 'no no', but he was like 'yes'. Then I don't know whether he thought that I wanted it, but I didn't really managed to … [reject him] so, I had to let it happen [sex]. I don't think I would have been in that situation, if I had not been drunk. But there was *nothing* I physically could do to stop him. If I had started screaming, kicking or hitting him, he might have punched me in the face to make me be quiet or held my mouth, or something. So this was my…solution… just lying there … and thinking 'ok, it might take 10 minutes, but at least it's over after that'.

In her narrative, Elisabeth started by positioning herself as having no control over the situation due to heavy alcohol intoxication which left her body 'numb', her 'falling around' and not being able to 'speak properly'. She was, therefore, drawing on discourses around alcohol's negative effect on sexual boundaries that can lead to NSEs (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022; Tutenges et al., 2020); in her case, alcohol intoxication was perceived to have a physical

effect on her body that made it more difficult for her to resist the NSE. The guy in her narrative was positioned as having full control, coercing her into having sex, and, combined with her intoxicated state, results in her positioning herself without any sexual agency. However, she went on to talk about how the situation would have been different had she not been that drunk, therefore, repositioning herself as more agentic and invoking notions of responsibility, self- blame and choice around the sexual experience (she 'chose' to drink a lot, therefore she 'brought herself' into that situation). Moreover, she characterized her inability to stop the man from assaulting her as her 'solution', which could be a way to make the best out of a very bad situation and maneuvering her very limited sexual agency. That limited sexual agency is evident by her saying 'just laying there'. She explained her decision not to physically resist by depicting how something worse might have happened had she chosen to resist more, i.e. the guy being physically violent to her. Elisabeth could be referring to how men are usually perceived as being physically superior to women; therefore, female victims of sexual assault might feel that they cannot physically resist sexual assault by a man (Davies & Rogers, 2006; Setty, 2022). The fact that she talked about 'kicking or hitting' the guy as a way of resisting the sexual assault, stands in opposition to her body being 'numb' which could imply that she –despite her intoxicated state - still invokes notions of responsibility, self-blame and choice (she could have 'chosen' to resist, but she chose not to). Therefore, even though she talked about how she had no control over the situation, she still seemed to be drawing on the neoliberal discourse (e.g. Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008), by (partly) blaming herself for consuming that much alcohol and by characterizing the fact that she just 'laid there' as a 'solution', therefore invoking a certain degree of (albeit quite limited) agency (see also Hansen et al., 2021).

A few participants narrated experiences where they talked about how they were out-of-control *solely* due to alcohol intoxication. An example of this was Ashley's (25/non-binary, transmasculine/bisexual) case:

> I had a 'friend-with-benefits' (a guy he had casual sex with) and there was this one time where I was really, really drunk and I just woke up at his place with no clothes on. I talked with him and he had not been to a party the day before. So it was this kind of 'gray-zone' thing where if I was so drunk that I can't remember going home to him why did we even have sex? I mean, he was not unpleasant in any way, it's just so scary not remembering what you have done and waking up in someone's bed.

In Ashley's narrative, his friend was positioned as having full control over the sexual situation. Ashley argued for that by talking about how he was black out drunk, therefore, incapable of influencing the sexual situation and was positioned with a non-existing sexual agency compared to his friend. He, therefore, drew on discourses on alcohol' negative effect on sexual boundaries that can lead to NSEs (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022; Tutenges et al., 2020), However, even though Ashley was not capable to consent, he described the experience as a 'gray-zone thing' and that his friend was not 'unpleasant'. This could be because he felt uncomfortable about positioning himself as losing all sexual agency to his friend which would put Ashley in the position of the 'victim' and his friend in the position of the 'perpetrator', i.e. someone who had sex with him despite Alex being in that intoxicated state. Ashley, therefore, simultaneously drew on the neoliberal discourse and avoided positioning himself as a 'victim', with no agency (see also Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008).

Mike (23/cisgender male/homosexual) was the only male participant who positioned himself as having very little control in his narrative:

> I was at a reunion party with my ex-boyfriend. We weren't together at that time, but we ended up kissing… and suddenly we ended up in the toilets… I mean we were both excited about this, but suddenly it gets unpleasant and I have to say stop. He doesn't stop to begin with, but I am so drunk that I can't stop him completely. It was actually because we were interrupted by someone who knocked on the window of that toilet… that it stopped. I don't think it was sexual assault because I did said yes to go in there (in the toilet), but… it never crossed the line to the point where I would be like 'I want you to stop RIGHT NOW otherwise this will spiral out of control, but it just got so unpleasant and I didn't have control over my body so I didn't know what was happening.
>
> ***I: Why did you feel like you had no control?***
>
> Because of alcohol… and because it was with my first boyfriend so I was like 'maybe I shouldn't stop it completely because… there might still be something between us'. But it was definitely mostly because of alcohol.

In his narrative, Mike started off by positioning his ex-boyfriend and himself equally as they both wanted to kiss and have sex. He, therefore, positioned himself as sexually agentic in the beginning of his narrative and within the realms of the neoliberal discourse (Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008). However, later on, his sexual agency was diminished as he did not want to have sex anymore, but his 'stop' was not respected by his ex-boyfriend. He talked about how he did not have control over his body, which he attributed to the effects of alcohol intoxication, therefore, drawing on discourses around alcohol's negative effect on sexual boundaries that can lead to NSEs (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022; Tutenges et al., 2020). Although he talked about how unpleasant the experience was and that it was out of his control, he later said that he consented to begin with (and so he had had a saying in the matter) and that it was mostly alcohol intoxication that contributed to him not having control. Mike, therefore, tried to make meaning of an unpleasant sexual experience by positioning himself, on the one hand, with very low levels of sexual agency, however, not as completely deprived of sexual agency. Furthermore, by attributing his diminished sexual agency to the effects of alcohol, could be a way for him to try to reclaim some sexual agency whereby if he did not drink that much again in the future, he could avoid experiencing a similar situation (see also Hansen et al., 2021). Mike, therefore, contrary to the other male participants, did not seem to position himself solely in the male sexual drive discourse since he talked about how he felt he lost control over the sexual interaction, albeit not entirely (see also Gavey,

2018; Hollway, 1984). A reason for that could be that his sexual interaction was with another man and not a woman and positioning another man as capable of committing sexual assault might be more easy compared to positioning a woman as a 'perpetrator' of sexual assault (Nason et al., 2019). This is something that can be further supported by how the person with the most control in this type of narratives was always a man and not a woman. In addition, contrary to Elisabeth, he did not attribute his limited sexual agency to his ex-boyfriend's physical superiority, which could also be related to the fact that the sexual interaction was between two men and not between a man and a woman (see also Davis & Rogers, 2006). At the same time, by claiming (some) responsibility for what happened and attributing the events to alcohol intoxication, he also avoided positioning his ex-boyfriend as responsible for the sexual interaction.

Discussion

This article has demonstrated the situational nature of sexual agency (see also Cahill, 2016). The participants made use of three types of narratives when making meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters and positioned themselves with varying levels of sexual agency even within the same type of narratives. In all three types of narratives, participants often times drew on a neoliberal discourse (Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008), even in those narratives where they narrated themselves as having very little or no control over the sexual interaction. This indicates the pervasiveness of the neoliberal discourse when young people try to make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions. Importantly, however, the participants also situationally drew on different and contradicting discourses on gender, sexuality and intoxication which influenced their possibilities for constructing themselves as sexually agentic. For example, while many drew on the neoliberal discourse, emphasizing how they were in control of and responsible for their alcohol- intoxicated sexual interactions, they, simultaneously, drew on discourses on alcohol's negative effect on sexual boundaries that can lead to NSEs (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016; Orchowski et al., 2022; Tutenges et al., 2020). The latter entailed positioned themselves with little or no agency as a result of heavy alcohol intoxication. On the other hand, many participants drew on discourses about alcohol's positive effects, such as its relaxation effects (Herold & Hunt, 2020; Hunt & Frank, 2016) as well as how it alleviated body shame, with some of them talking about how (even heavy) alcohol intoxication did not have a diminishing effect on their sexual agency.

Results also showed how sexual agency was intersubjective (see also Cahill, 2016). This was evident in that fact that how the participants positioned themselves agentically was connected to and influenced by how they narratively positioned their sexual counterpart. In the first type of narratives, the involved individuals were usually positioned equally to each other, which enabled both of them to exhibit a rather high degree of sexual agency. In the second type of narratives, the positioning of the involved individuals was less clear with them being positioned with varying levels of agency even within the same narrative. In the third type of narratives, one individual was positioned with having full control over the situation with the other having very little or no sexual agency as a result.

The situational nature of sexual agency was also evident in the fact that patterns of inequality influenced the participants' abilities to position themselves as sexually agentic (see also Cahill, 2016). While the male participants were generally reluctant to position themselves with little or no sexual agency, which might be due to the continued presence of a traditional male sexual drive discourse, the female participants more readily embraced this position, thus reflecting a general tendency were it is mostly women that are victims of sexual assault (Lorenz & Ullman, 2016). For women the subject position of the 'victim' is thus easier to occupy. Findings showed that women's sexual agency was, in some cases, limited due to how they felt unable to physically resist a sexual assault by a man (Davis & Rogers, 2006) or because they did not want to 'ruin the moment', thus complying to a traditional gender discourses that subordinates women's sexual desires to those of men's (see also Bay-Cheng & Elisseo-Aras, 2008). However, even in those cases where the female participants had little or no control over the sexual interaction, they still drew on the neoliberal discourse (Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2019; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo Arras, 2008), emphasizing personal responsibility, resulting (at least partly) in self-blame. Therefore, while young men might have difficulty positioning themselves with little or no agency, young women might find themselves oscillating between positioning themselves with a limited sexual agency, and as having overt responsibility for the occurrence of a NSE. Furthermore, the results showed that men were more likely to be positioned as having more control of the situation (however not always as 'perpetrators' of sexual assault) and women were more likely to be positioned as 'victims' of sexual assault.

Aside from gendered patterns in how the female and male participants positioned themselves, there was also some indication of variations which could relate to a person's sexual orientation, influencing their possibilities for positioning themselves as sexually agentic (as was the case with Taylor and Mike). Although there were not enough indications of those variations in the data (due to the low number of male participants identifying as homosexual as well as the fact that other sexual minority participants did not position themselves the same way as Taylor and Mike) to make any certain conclusions, future research could benefit from investigating how sexual orientation might influence young people's possibilities for positioning themselves as sexually agentic.

The finding that sexual agency is situational in nature, is beneficial for academics, policy makers and practitioners working in the fields of alcohol use and young people. Not only does this point to the need for better understandings of how young people often face dilemmas and ambivalences when trying to navigate alcohol-intoxicated sexual encounters, it also points to the importance of norms and culturally embedded expectations shaping NSEs, which can be used to reduce the individualized focus on why NSEs happen and the tendency to blame the victim (see also Maurer, 2016). The

article also points to which norms and expectations have to change if we are to reduce the number of NSEs happening in alcohol intoxication contexts. These are the belief that alcohol intoxication can justify committing NSEs (Wegner et al., 2015) or the traditional gender and sexuality discourses (Gavey, 2018; Hollway, 1984) that might obscure men's NSEs or make women consent to unwanted sex.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is that the sample had an overrepresentation of cisgender women as well as Caucasian white, Danish, middle class young people; therefore, the results might mostly represent their views. Moreover, the author identifying as a cisgender woman could have had an influence on how the participants narrated their experiences. The male participants might have had difficulty talking about their sexual experiences to a female researcher and both the female and male participants might have felt that they had to narrate their sexual experiences in a way that is conforming to traditional gender and sexuality discourses. Finally, this paper focused on young people's narratives about their intoxicated sexual experiences solely in the context of casual sexual relations. Therefore, how they make meaning of their sexual experiences in the context of a romantic relationship might be different.

Conclusion

Previous research has looked at how the neoliberal understanding of sexual agency emphasizing freedom, choice and responsibility in relation to sex influence how young people and, especially women, make meaning of their sexual encounters. However, the present study's results revealed that a more situational understanding of sexual agency, such as Cahill's (2016) might be more suitable when investigating how young people make meaning of their alcohol intoxicated sexual encounters. Adopting this understanding of sexual agency experiences is fruitful since it highlights the norms and expectations in heavy drinking contexts that contribute to the high number of NSEs in those contexts and provides a more nuanced understanding on the different dilemmas young people face when navigating alcohol intoxicated sexual interactions.

Declaration of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to declare

Note

1. Taylor uses they/them pronouns

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Appendix

1. Recruitment post
2. Informed consent form
3. Interview guide
4. Survey
5. Demographics table
6. Co-author statement for Manuscript 1
7. Co-author statement for Manuscript 2

Recruitment post

Alkohol, sex og samtykke – hvad er dine erfaringer?

Er du mellem 18-25 år? Har du haft sex, mens du eller vedkommende, du var sammen med, var påvirket af alkohol? Har du lyst til at bidrage til forskning i emnet? Så er jeg meget interesseret i at snakke med dig.

Jeg er nemlig i gang med mit ph.d.- projekt om unges seksuelle oplevelser i situationer, hvor der er alkohol indblandet. Det kan f.eks. være til en fest, i byen, en festival, en koncert m.m. Derudover, vil jeg også meget gerne høre om unges tanker omkring samtykke da det er vigtigt at få viden omkring, hvordan unge oplever sex og samtykke i situationer, hvor de drikker alkohol. Derfor vil jeg meget gerne høre om dine erfaringer og oplevelser.
Interviewet er anonymt.
Interviewet varer mellem 1,5-2 timer og vil foregå der, hvor det passer dig bedst.
Er du interesseret, kan du kan kontakte mig på mail: XXX eller her på telefonnummer: XXX
Som tak for din deltagelse får du et gavekort på 200 kr.
Glæder mig til at høre fra dig
🙂

OBS. Pga. COVID-19 vil der selvfølgelig blive taget forholdsregler for at sikre, at interviewet bliver gennemført på en sikker måde.
Hjælp gerne med at dele opslaget med jeres venner og bekendte så budskabet kan nå ud til flest mulige.
🙂

På forhånd tak for jeres hjælp.

Information om forskningsprojektet

Unges forståelse af seksuelt samtykke i en alkoholkontekst er et forskningsprojekt, som udføres af Evangelia Kousounadi Knountsen, ph.d.- studerende på Center for Rusmiddelforskning.

Formålet med projektet er at skabe viden om unges seksuelle oplevelser og deres perspektiver på seksuelt samtykke i forbindelse med brug af alkohol.

Projektet bygger på interviews med unge af alle køn, som er mellem 18-25 år og som er bosat forskellige steder i Danmark.

Center for Rusmiddelforskning v. Aarhus Universitet udfører og har ansvar for alle interviews foretaget i forbindelse med dette projekt, herunder interviewet med dig.

Evangelia Kousounadi Knountsen

Evangelia Knountsen

Dato: 25. maj 2020

Din deltagelse i forskningsprojektet

Du har henvendt dig til mig med henblik på deltagelse i mit projekt. Du er efterfølgende blevet kontaktet af mig for at aftale tid og sted for et forskningsinterview.
Interviewet vil blive behandlet fortroligt.

I interviewet spørges ind til dine seksuelle oplevelser samt dine perspektiver på seksuelt samtykke i en alkoholkontekst. Alle spørgsmål vil på forskellig vis relatere sig til disse emner.

Du har til enhver tid ret til at undlade at svare på spørgsmål eller stoppe interviewet. Der vil **ikke** være negative følger ved at undlade at svare eller stoppe interviewet, jeg er stadig taknemmelig for din deltagelse.

Du har også ret til at trække dit samtykke tilbage efter interviewet er foretaget.

Oplever du ubehag efter interviewet, kan du kontakte din egen læge eller Center for Voldtægtsofre (www.voldtaegt.dk) i din region. Du er også velkommen til at kontakte mig på mail: ekk.crf@psy.au.dk, hvis der opstår spørgsmål efter interviewet.

Som tak for deltagelsen vil du modtage et gavekort på 200 kr. fra Gavekortet.dk For at kunne modtage gavekortet skal du opgive en gyldig mailadresse. Du vil i dagene efter interviewet modtage gavekortet elektronisk via din mailadresse. Din mailadresse videre gives ikke, og anvendes ikke i anden sammenhæng, med mindre du har givet tilsagn hertil.

Center for Rusmiddelforskning
Aarhus Universitet
Bartholins Allé 10
8000 Aarhus C

Tlf.: 87165313
Fax: 87164420
E-mail: crf@au.dk
http://psy.au.dk/crf

Anvendelse af interviewmaterialet

Al information du giver mig i forbindelse med din deltagelse i projektet behandles **strengt fortroligt**, og videregives ikke.

Interviewene lydoptages og transskriberes efterfølgende af en projektmedarbejder. Vedkommende har naturligvis tavshedspligt og behandler data strengt fortroligt. Interviewmaterialet vil blive anvendt til videnskabelige formål, herunder forskningsartikler og formidlende artikler om "unges forståelse af seksuelt samtykke i en alkoholkontekst". Du vil ligeledes ikke ville kunne genkendes i de publicerede artikler.

Informeret samtykke: Deltagelse i forskningsprojektet ***Unges forståelse af seksuelt samtykke i en alkoholkontekst***

Erklæring fra deltager:

Jeg har fået skriftlig og mundtlig information om projektet, og jeg ved nok om formål, metode og vilkår for min deltagelse.

Jeg ved at det er frivilligt at deltage, og at jeg altid kan trække mit samtykke tilbage. Jeg ved også, at alt hvad jeg siger i forbindelse med min deltagelse i projektet behandles fortroligt og at jeg ikke vil kunne genkendes i det materiale, som produceres i forbindelse med projektet. Derudover, er jeg blevet informeret om, hvem jeg kan kontakte hvis der skulle opstå gener eller spørgsmål forbindelse med min deltagelse i projektet.

Jeg giver hermed samtykke til at deltage i forskningsprojektet og har fået en kopi af dette samtykkeark, samt en kopi af den skriftlige information om projektet til egen brug.

Deltagers navn: _____

Dato: _____ Underskrift: _____

Erklæring fra intervieweren:

Jeg erklærer, at deltageren har modtaget mundtlig og skriftlig information om forskningsprojektet.

Efter min bedste overbevisning er der givet tilstrækkelig information til, at der kan træffes beslutning om deltagelse.

Interviewers navn: _____

Dato: _____ Underskrift: _____

Hvis der opstår spørgsmål efter interviewet, er du altid velkommen til at kontakte projektleder Evangelia Kousounadi Knountsen (Aarhus Universitet) på ekk.crf@psy.au.dk

Mailadresse til distribuering af gavekort på 200 kr. fra Gavekortet.dk

Interview ID [udfyldes af intervieweren]:_____
Mailadresse [udfyldes af interviewpersonen]:_____

Yderligere deltagelse efter interviewet:

Jeg [dit navn]_____ giver tilladelse til at blive kontaktet i forsknings-mæssig henseende *efter* interviewet, men kan til enhver tid sige nej til yderlig deltagelse i dette.

Jeg kan kontaktes på: _____

Underskrift:_____

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
AARHUS UNIVERSITET

Interviewguide

Center for Rusmiddelforskning

School of Business and Social Sciences

Aarhus Universitet

Unges forståelse af seksuelt samtykke i en alkoholkontekst

Pseudonym:_____

ID:_____

Dato for interview: _____/_____/_____

Interviewer:_____

Center for Rusmiddelforskning
Aarhus Universitet
Bartholins Allé 10
8000 Aarhus C

Tlf.: 87165313
Fax: 87164420
E-mail: crf@au.dk
http://psy.au.dk/crf

Briefing

Tusind tak fordi du har lyst til at deltage i mit interview, det er en kæmpe hjælp. Nu har du jo læst opslaget/flyeren og vi har også snakket lidt i telefon sammen, men jeg vil gerne kort genfortælle, hvad interviewet kommer til at handle om.

Jeg er meget interesseret i, at høre om dine seksuelle oplevelser i situationer, hvor enten du-, den du havde sex med- eller i begge havde drukket alkohol, samt dine holdninger og tanker omkring seksuelt samtykke. Der er ikke nogle rigtige og forkerte svar og jeg er blot nysgerrig på at høre om netop dine oplevelser og dit syn på tingene.

Du er på ingen måde er forpligtet til at svare på alle spørgsmål- du kan sagtens undlade at svare, hvis der er et spørgsmål du ikke vil svare på.

Du har også ret til at trække din besvarelse tilbage efter interviewets gennemførsel, skulle du fortryde din deltagelse.

Derudover, kan du til enhver tid bede om en pause hvis du har brug for det.

Opstår der ubehag eller gener under eller efter interviewet, har jeg på denne blanket skrevet, hvor du kan henvende dig. Det kan f.eks. være hos din praktiserende læge, eller hos Center for Voldtægtsofre. Du er også velkommen til at kontakte mig.

Afslutningsvis, vil jeg lige sige, at du forbliver anonym og alle de ting du fortæller mig bliver behandlet fortroligt.

Selve interviewet vil vare mellem 1,5-2 timer.

Du vil modtage et gavekort på 200,- som kan bruges i forskellige butikker. Jeg sender dette til din e-mail efter interviewets afslutning.

Har du nogle spørgsmål? (…)

Inden vi går i gang vil jeg gerne lige have dig til at læse denne blanket, samt underskrive denne her samtykkeerklæring. Den ene side opsummerer de ting jeg fortalte om og på den anden blanket giver mig samtykke til, at jeg må interviewe dig. På den tredje blanket må du gerne skrive din e-mail, så jeg kan sende gavekortet til dig.

Find samtykkeerklæring frem (udover blanketten der handler om, hvorvidt interviewpersonen må kontaktes igen med henblik på opfølgende interview)

Tænd optageren

Center for Rusmiddelforskning
Aarhus Universitet
Bartholins Allé 10
8000 Aarhus C

Tlf.: 87165313
Fax: 87164420
E-mail: crf@au.dk
http://psy.au.dk/crf

Del.1: Generelle introduktionsspørgsmål

Til at starte med, vil jeg gerne spørge lidt ind til dig som person.

1. Fortæl mig lidt om dig selv:
   - Hvor gammel er du?
   - Hvor bor du henne? *(hvilken by)*
   - Hvordan ser din hverdag ud? *(arbejde? Skole? Hvem tilbringer du mest tid med?)*
   - Har du nogle fritidsinteresser? Hvis ja, hvilke?

2. Hvordan vil du beskrive dig selv? *(hvilke ting ved dig selv, synes du er vigtige for folk at vide for at de ved, hvem du er)*

Del.2: Seksuelle erfaringer i en alkoholkontekst

Nu hvor jeg har hørt lidt om dig, vil jeg gerne gå videre til at spørge ind til nogle af de seksuelle erfaringer du har haft i en alkoholkontekst. Du skal vide, at der ikke er nogle rigtige og forkerte svar, og jeg er blot interesseret i dit syn på tingene, da jeg ønsker at blive klogere på dine oplevelser. Som jeg også nævnte i starten af vores samtale, så er det selvfølgelig helt okay, hvis der er nogle af spørgsmålene du ikke ønsker at svare på. Du skal også bare sige til hvis du, undervejs, har brug for en pause.

3. Kan du fortælle lidt om dit forhold til alkohol?
   - hvor ofte drikker du?
   - hvornår plejer du at drikke?
   - hvem plejer du at drikke med?
   - hvorfor drikker du/hvad kan du godt lide eller ikke lide ved at drikke?
   - hvor plejer du at drikke?
   - Hvordan føles det at blive tipsy/fuld/black-out fuld? Hvilken tilstand kan du bedst lide at være i?

4. Der er mange der forbinder det at drikke alkohol med at score eller flirte, er det noget du kan genkende? *(har du selv prøvet det, hvordan tænker du, at det kan hænge sammen?)*

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E-mail: crf@au.dk
http://psy.au.dk/crf

(Hvis de nævner, at de har haft sex med nogen, så spørg ind til deres definition af sex "Når du siger, at du har haft sex med en person, hvad mener du så? /hvad lavede i?/Hvad indebærer sex for dig?)

5. Kan du fortælle om en gang, du havde sex med en person, hvor enten en af jer- eller i begge var påvirket af alkohol?

- *(Her vil jeg spørge ind til deres definition af sex, hvis ikke de har nævnt sex længere oppe)*
- Hvilken oplevelse husker du mest og hvorfor?
- Hvor lang tid siden skete det?
- Hvem var personen du havde sex med/hvordan kendte i hinanden/ hvad var jeres relation?
- Hvor foregik det?
- Hvem indledte kontakten?
- Var der andre til stede?
- Hvad skete der bagefter?
- Hvilke tanker og følelser gik der igennem dit hoved under hele processen?
- Har du stadig kontakt med vedkommende?

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- Hvis det var en god/dejlig oplevelse, hvad var det der var godt ved det?

- Hvis det ikke var en god/dejlig oplevelse, eller hvis det var en oplevelse der på en eller anden måde er forbundet med ambivalens, hvad var det der gjorde, at det føltes sådan?

- Er dette en oplevelse du har prøvet før? *(er det noget du ofte prøver, er det noget helt nyt for dig, eller plejer du at have sex på en helt anden måde?)*

6. Er der andre oplevelser du har lyst til at fortælle om?

- Gentag samme spørgsmål som til den første oplevelse, hvis det giver mening

Del 3: Andres reaktioner på interviewpersonens seksuelle oplevelser

7. Den/de oplevelse/-r du har fortalt mig om, er det noget du har snakket med andre om efterfølgende?

- Hvis ja:
  - Hvem har du fortalt det til?
  - Hvorfor har du fortalt det til den/de person/-er?
  - Hvordan reagerede de?
  - Hvorfor tror du de reagerede som de gjorde?
  - Påvirkede deres reaktion dig og hvis ja, hvordan?

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- Hvis nej:
  - Hvorfor fortalte du ikke til nogen om det?

Del 4: Definition, holdninger og tanker omkring samtykke og den nye samtykkelovgivning

Tusind tak fordi du ville dele dine oplevelser med mig, det sætter jeg virkelig pris på. Er du klar til at gå videre eller har du brug for en pause? De næste spørgsmål handler lidt mere om dine holdninger og tanker omkring samtykke. Der er rigtig mange, forskelligartede holdninger til samtykke, så der er heller ingen rigtige og forkerte svar her, jeg ønsker bare at blive klogere på, hvad du tænker om de her ting.

8. Hvad forstår du ved ordet samtykke? *(Hvad betyder samtykke for dig?)*

9. Hvordan synes du, man skal give samtykke? *(vil du gøre det verbalt ved f.eks. at sige "ja", ved at kysse "tilbage", ved ikke at sige "nej" osv.)*

- Hvad med din partner?

10. Hvornår er det okay at have sex med en person? Hvornår er det ikke okay? *(Dette spørgsmål handler om sex mere generelt og ikke specifikt i en alkoholkontekst)*

11. Hvornår er det okay at have sex med en person når der har været alkohol indblandet og hvornår er det ikke okay?

12. Ifølge den nye Samtykkelovgivning, som man diskuterer snart skal indføres i Danmark, har man et gensidigt ansvar for sikre sig, at den person man har sex med, har givet sit samtykke til at have sex med en, og hvis ikke de har det, er der tale om voldtægt. Hvad tænker du om det?

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Del 5: Vignetter

Tusind tak fordi du ville dele dine holdninger og tanker med mig, det var rigtig spænende at høre om dem. I den næste del vil jeg læse en kort historie op for dig, hvor jeg derefter vil bede dig kommentere på nogle specifikke ting i forhold til den her historie. Ligesom i sidste del, så er der heller ingen rigtige og forkerte svar, jeg er blot interesseret i, hvad du har at fortælle. Og du har som altid lov til ikke at svare, hvis du ikke ønsker det.

Scenarie 1:

Jonas og Maria mødte hinanden for en måneds tid siden da de startede på samme studie. De var tiltrukket af hinanden lige fra start. De begyndte derfor at bruge mere tid med hinanden; de læste sammen, var ude at spise nogle gange, og generelt hænge ud sammen. En af gangene de var sammen, kyssede de. Sidste weekend var de til en fest, hvor de flirtede, dansede og hyggede sammen hele aftenen. De fik begge nogle drinks og blev derfor lidt "tipsy". Jonas spurgte Maria om hun ville med hjem til ham hvor hun så svarede ja. Da de kom hjem til Jonas, begyndte de at kysse og efter noget tid prøver Jonas at få Marias tøj af og indikerer at han gerne vil have sex med hende. Maria stopper op og siger at hun ikke er klar endnu. Jonas reagerer dog ikke rigtig på det og går videre til at have sex med hende.

<u>Spørgsmål til vignet:</u>

13. Vurdering af situation

- Hvad tænker du om denne situation? Hvorfor? *(er der tale om samtykkebaseret sex? Er der tale om ønsket sex?)*

- Lad os forestille os, at Maria ikke havde sagt noget, men blot lod Jonas fortsætte til sex -hvad tænker du så om denne situation?

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14.Gender flip

- Lad os forestille os, at der var tale om det omvendte scenarie, altså hvis det nu var Maria der havde gjort det Jonas gjorde, og Jonas gjorde det Maria gjorde, det vil sige:

Scenarie 2:

Jonas og Maria mødte hinanden for en måneds tid siden da startede på samme studie og var tiltrukket af hinanden lige fra start. De begyndte derfor at bruge mere tid med hinanden, hvor de læste sammen, var ude at spise nogle gange, og generelt hænge ud sammen. En af gangene de var sammen kyssede de enkelt gang. Sidste weekend var de til en fest, hvor de flirtede, dansede og hyggede sammen hele aftenen. De fik begge nogle drinks og var lidt tipsy. Maria spørger Jonas om han vil med hjem til hende og når de kommer hjem til hende, prøver hun at få Jonas' tøj af og indikerer, at hun gerne vil have sex med ham, hvorefter han stopper op og siger, at han ikke er klar endnu. Maria reagerer dog ikke rigtig på det og går videre til at have sex med ham.

- Hvad tænker du om denne situation?
- Lad os forestille os, at Jonas ikke havde sagt noget, men blot lod Maria fortsætte til sex: Hvad tænker du om denne situation?

15.Adfærd før sex

- Lad os forestille os, at de ikke havde kysset den ene gang før og ikke havde flirtet til festen, men at de fortsat kendte hinanden; hvad tænker du om denne situation? Både i scenarie 1 og 2.

16. Hvem er fuld?

- Lad os forestille os, at det kun var Maria der var fuld (tipsy), hvad tænker du om denne situation? Både i scenarie 1 og 2.
- Lad os forestille os, at det kun var Jonas der var fuld hvad tænker du om denne situation? Både i scenarie 1 og 2.
- Lad os forestille os, at Maria var faldet om fordi hun var så fuld og derfor ikke kunne gøre modstand, hvad tænker du om denne situation? I scenarie 1.

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- Lad os forestille os, at Jonas var faldet om fordi han var så fuld og derfor ikke kunne gøre modstand, hvad tænker du om denne situation? I scenarie 2.

17. Relationen mellem Jonas og Maria

- Lad os forestille os, at Jonas og Maria først mødte hinanden til selve festen og at de derfor ikke kendte hinanden på forhånd – hvad tænker du så om det der skete? Både i scenarie 1 og 2.
- Lad os forestille os, at Jonas og Maria er kærester og de tog til denne fest sammen hos nogle fælles venner; hvad tænker du om denne situation? Både i scenarie 1 og 2.

Del 6: Survey

Som noget af det sidste i det her interview, vil jeg bede dig om at udfylde dette korte spørgeskema på tabletten og her kan du også vælge ikke at svare, hvis du ikke ønsker at svare på nogle af spørgsmålene.

Del 7: Afsluttende spørgsmål og debriefing

Vi er nu nået til slutningen af det her interview. Afslutningsvis…

18. Er der noget du gerne vil fortælle mig, eller noget, du synes der er vigtigt at tale om, som vi ikke har været inde på?

19. Hvordan har det været at snakke om disse ting?

- *(Hvis det har været ubehageligt):* Har du mulighed for at snakke om disse ting med en fortrolig efterfølgende? (evt. henvise til hjælpemuligheder igen hvis relevant)

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Debriefing:

Jeg vil endnu engang sige tak til dig for at lade mig interviewe dig – jeg synes det var rigtig spænende at høre om dine oplevelser og perspektiver på ting. Fordi det har været så spænende, vil jeg høre om jeg må kontakte dig igen i fremtiden (hvis det bliver relevant) til endnu et interview? Du vil selvfølgelig modtage et gavekort mere, hvis det bliver aktuelt.
(Hvis ja: giv interviewpersonen blanket til underskrift)

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A: Generelle spørgsmål

Du vil i følgende sektion blive spurgt ind til nogle generelle detaljer om dig selv. Er der nogle spørgsmål du ikke ønsker at besvare, er det helt okay.

1. **Hvor gammel er du?**

   - o 18
   - o 19
   - o 20
   - o 21
   - o 22
   - o 23
   - o 24
   - o 25
   - o Ønsker ikke at svare

2. **Hvilket køn identificerer du dig som?**

   - o Mand
   - o Kvinde
   - o Transkønnet
   - o Andet_____
   - o Ønsker ikke at svare

3. **Hvilket køn blev du tildelt ved fødslen?**
   - o Mand
   - o Kvinde
   - o Andet_____
   - o Ønsker ikke at svare

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4. **Hvad er din seksuelle orientering?**

- o Heteroseksuel
- o Biseksuel
- o Homoseksuel
- o Andet_____
- o Ønsker ikke at svare/ved ikke

5. **Hvad er din civilstand?**

- o Single
- o Har en kæreste
- o Gift
- o Separeret
- o Skilt
- o Andet:_____
- o Ønsker ikke at oplyse/ved ikke

6. **Hvor bor du?**

- o Region Nordjylland
- o Region Midtjylland
- o Region Syddanmark
- o Region Sjælland (herunder Lolland-Falster)
- o Region Hovedstaden
- o Andet_____
- o Ønsker ikke at svare

7. **Hvilken by bor du i?**

oNavn på by:_____

oØnsker ikke at svare

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8. **Hvor er du født henne?**

o Jeg er født i Danmark
o Jeg er født i et andet land, Hvilket?: _____
oØnsker ikke at oplyse / ved ikke

9. **Hvor er du vokset op henne?**

o Region Nordjylland
o Region Midtjylland
o Region Syddanmark
o Region Sjælland (herunder Lolland-Falster)
o Region Hovedstaden
o Andet_____
o Ønsker ikke at svare

10. **Hvad hedder byen du er vokset op i?**

oNavn på by:_____
oØnsker ikke at svare

11. **Hvor kommer dine forældre fra?**

o De er begge født i Danmark (spring til spørgsmål 14)
o Min mor er født i et andet land
o Min far er født i et andet land
o Min mor og far er begge fra et andet land
o Ønsker ikke at oplyse (spring til spørgsmål 14)
oVed ikke (spring til spørgsmål 14)

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12. **Hvor er din mor født?**

o Hvilket land: _____
oØnsker ikke at oplyse / Ved ikke

13. **Hvor er din far født?**

o Hvilket land: _____
o Ønsker ikke at oplyse / Ved ikke

14. **Er du adopteret?**

oJa
o Nej
oØnsker ikke at oplyse / ved ikke

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15. **Hvad er dit højeste gennemførte uddannelsestrin?**

oFolkeskole
oEfterskole
oHøjskole
oGymnasium, STX, HHX, HTX
oHF (fuld HF eller enkeltfag)
oVUC (fuld uddannelse eller enkeltfag)
oProduktionsskole
oTeknisk skole
oSocial- og sundhedshjælper (grundforløb eller praktik)
oHandelsskole, HG
oI lære, har læreplads/ skolepraktik
oI praktik, ikke lærlingeforløb
oKort videregående uddannelse, f.eks. Social- og sundhedsassistent, datamatiker, akademiuddannelse
oMellemlang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. pædagog sygeplejerske, socialrådgiver, Professions-BA-uddannelser
oLang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. forskellige universitetsuddannelser efter BA
oAnden uddannelse: _____
oØnsker ikke at svare/ ved ikke

16. **Er du under uddannelse nu?**

- o Ja - Fuldtid
- o Ja - Deltid
- o Nej (spring videre til spørgsmål 18)
- o Ønsker ikke at svare / ved ikke (spring til spørgsmål 18)

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17. **Hvilken type uddannelse er det?**

o Folkeskole
o Efterskole
o Højskole
o Gymnasium, STX, HHX, HTX
o HF (fuld HF eller enkeltfag)
o VUC (fuld uddannelse eller enkeltfag)
o Produktionsskole
o Teknisk skole
o Social- og sundhedshjælper (grundforløb eller praktik)
o Handelsskole, HG
o I lære, har læreplads/ skolepraktik
o I praktik, ikke lærlingeforløb
o Kort videregående uddannelse, f.eks.social- og sundhedsassistent, datamatiker, akademiuddannelse
o Mellemlang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. pædagog sygeplejerske, socialrådgiver, Professions-BA-uddannelser
oLang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. forskellige universitetsuddannelser efter BA
o Anden uddannelse: ____
o Ønsker ikke at svare/ ved ikke

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18. **Hvad tjente du flest penge på sidste måned?**

o Lønnet arbejde, deltid (inkl. fritidsarbejde)
o Lønnet arbejde (fuldtid)
o SU (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Lommepenge (fra familie og lignende) (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Aktivering, løntilskud eller revalidering (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Arbejdsløshedsdagpenge (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Sygedagpenge eller barselsdagpenge (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Kontanthjælp (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Førtidspension (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Andet: _____ (spring til spørgsmål 20)
o Ønsker ikke at svare / ved ikke (spring til spørgsmål 20)

19. **Hvad arbejder du med?**
o Arbejde: _____
o Ønsker ikke at svare/ ved ikke

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19. Hvad er din mors højeste gennemførte uddannelsestrin?

oFolkeskole
oEfterskole
oHøjskole
oGymnasium, STX, HHX, HTX
oHF (fuld HF eller enkeltfag)
oVUC (fuld uddannelse eller enkeltfag)
oProduktionsskole
oTeknisk skole
oSocial- og sundhedshjælper (grundforløb eller praktik)
oHandelsskole, HG
oI lære, har læreplads/ skolepraktik
oI praktik, ikke lærlingeforløb
oKort videregående uddannelse, f.eks. social- og sundhedsassistent, datamatiker, akademiuddannelse
oMellemlang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. pædagog sygeplejerske, socialrådgiver, Professions-BA-uddannelser
oLang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. forskellige universitetsuddannelser efter BA
oAnden uddannelse: _____
oØnsker ikke at svare/ ved ikke

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20. Hvad er din fars højeste gennemførte uddannelsestrin?

oFolkeskole
oEfterskole
oHøjskole
oGymnasium, STX, HHX, HTX
oHF (fuld HF eller enkeltfag)
oVUC (fuld uddannelse eller enkeltfag)
oProduktionsskole
oTeknisk skole
oSocial- og sundhedshjælper (grundforløb eller praktik)
oHandelsskole, HG
oI lære, har læreplads/ skolepraktik
oI praktik, ikke lærlingeforløb
oKort videregående uddannelse, f.eks. social- og sundhedsassistent, datamatiker, akademiuddannelse
oMellemlang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. pædagog sygeplejerske, socialrådgiver, Professions-BA-uddannelser
oLang videregående uddannelse, f.eks. forskellige universitetsuddannelser efter BA
oAnden uddannelse: _____
oØnsker ikke at svare/ ved ikke

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21.Hvem bor du sammen med på nuværende tidspunkt?

- o Bor alene
- o Forældre
- o Venner/Samboer
- o Andet familie
- o Partner eller ægtefælle
- o Andet_____
- o Ønsker ikke at svare

B: Spørgsmål om alkoholforbrug

Du vil i følgende sektion blive spurgt lidt ind til dit forbrug af alkohol.

22. Ca. I løbet af det sidste år, hvor ofte har du som minimum drukket en genstand - som et glas øl, vin eller drik med spiritus? (hvis usikker, giv dit bedste bud)

- o Har aldrig drukket alkohol (spring til spørgsmål 26)
- o Aldrig, sidste gang var mere end 12 måneder siden (spring til spørgsmål 26)
- o Mindre end en gang om måneden, men minimum mere end én gang om året
- o Cirka én gang om måneden
- o Én eller to gange ugentligt
- o Næsten hver dag
- o En eller flere gange om dagen
- o Ønsker ikke at svare / ved ikke

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23. Hvor ofte drak du nok til, at du følte dig beruset eller fuld i løbet af det sidste år?

- o Aldrig indenfor det sidste år
- o En gang indenfor det sidste år
- o To gange indenfor det sidste år
- o Tre til seks gange indenfor det sidste år
- o Syv til elleve gange indenfor det sidste år
- o En til tre gange om måneden
- o En eller to gange om ugen
- o Tre eller fire gange om ugen
- o Hver dag eller næsten hver dag
- o Ønsker ikke at svare/ ved ikke

24. Hvor mange genstande har du typisk drukket på en uge indenfor de sidste 30 dage?

- o Har ikke drukket alkohol inde for den sidste måned (spring til spørgsmål 26)
- oAntal genstande: _____
- o Ønsker ikke at svare / ved ikke

25. I løbet af de sidste 30 dage, hvor mange gange har du drukket mere end 5 genstande ved en lejlighed?

- o Antal gange: _____
- o Ønsker ikke at svare / ved ikke

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26. Hvor mange genstande skal du typisk drikke for at blive fuld?

o Antal genstande: _____
o Ønsker ikke at svare / ved ikke

C: Spørgsmål om seksuelle oplevelser:

Du vil i følgende sektion blive spurgt ind til dine seksuelle oplevelser. Er der nogle spørgsmål du ikke ønsker at besvare, er det helt okay.

27.Hvor gammel var du da du havde sex (sådan som du definerer det) for første gang?

- o Alder (skriv et tal)_____
- o Ønsker ikke at svare

28. Hvor ofte har du haft sex inde for det sidste år?

- o Har ikke haft sex inde for det sidste år (spring til spørgsmål 31)
- o Mindre end en gang om måneden
- o En gang om måneden
- o 2-4 gange om måneden
- o 2-3 gange om ugen
- o 4 gange om ugen eller oftere
- o Ønsker ikke at svare/ved ikke

29. Hvor mange personer har du haft sex med inde for det sidste år?

- o 1-2 personer
- o 3-5 personer
- o 6-10 personer
- o 10+ personer
- o Ønsker ikke at svare/ved ikke

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30. Hvem har du typisk haft sex med inde for det sidste år? (kan krydse flere af)

- o Med en kæreste/partner
- o Med folk jeg møder i byen/til fester
- o Med folk jeg møder over dating apps, f.eks. Tinder
- o Med folk i min omgangskreds, f.eks. venner og/eller bekendte
- o "Bollevenner"
- o Andet
- o Ønsker ikke at svare

31. Har du haft sex mens du- og/eller den/de andre du havde sex med var beruset?

- o Ja
- o Nej (spørgeskemaet er færdigt)
- o Ønsker ikke at svare/ved ikke

32. Hvor mange gange har du haft sex mens du- og/eller den person du havde sex med var beruset inde for det sidste år?

- o 1-2 gange
- o 3-4 gange
- o 5-6 gange
- o 7 + gange
- o Ønsker ikke at svare/ved ikke

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Demographics table

Age of participants						
19 N=6	20 N=2	21 N=3	22 N=3	23 N=5	24 N=6	25 N=5
Region of residence						
Region of Middle Jutland N=18	Region of Southern Denmark N=3	Region of Zealand N=2	Region of Copenhagen N=6	Region of Northern Jutland N=0	'Other' (Greece)[1] N=1	
Country the participants were born in						
Denmark N=25	Greenland N=1	Norway N=1	Estonia N=1	China N=1	Bulgaria N=1	
Educational background						
9th grade N=4	High-school N=13	HF N=5	VUC N=1	College University N=6	Master's degree N=1	
Currently under education						
Technical school N=1	VUC N=1	University College N=4	Master's degree N=4			
Currently not under education						
N=20						
Gender identity						
Cisgender women N=20	Cisgender men N=7	Transgender N=2	Gender-fluid N=1			
Sexual orientation						
Heterosexual N=10	Bisexual N=12	Homosexual N=3	Pansexual N=1	Heteroflexible N=1	Queer N=3	
Civil status						
Single N=16	In a romantic relationship N=12	'Other' (dating a guy exclusively and in a polyamorous relationship) N=2				

[1] The participant had moved to Greece for a year due to a job opportunity

Demographics table

Frequency of alcohol consumption during the last year								
Less than once a month but more than once a year N=2	About once a month N=10	One or two times per week N=15	Almost every day N=3					
Frequency of drinking to intoxication during the last year								
Never N=1	Once a year N=2	Twice a year N=1	Three to six times in a year N=3	Seven to eleven times in a year N=6	One-three times a month N=13	Once or twice a week N=4		
Frequency of sexual activity during the last year								
Has not had sex during the last year N=2	Less than once a month N=3	Once a month N=2	Two to four times a month N=9	2-3 times per week N=9	4 times a week or more N=5			

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Co-author Statement

Name of applicant: Evangelia Kousounadi Knountsen

Application for position: _____

_____

Co-author statement concerning publication (title):
Uncovering young people's situational construction of sexual consent

Name of co-author	Share of the complete work (i.e. writing and underlying research)	Signature of co-author
Evangelia Knountsen	65 %	
Vibeke A. Frank	20 %	Vibeke A. Frank
Maria D. Herold	15 %	✓ Maria Dich Herold
	%	
	%	
	%	

Date: 06.09.2023

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Signature of the applicant

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Co-author statement concerning publication (title):

Intentionality and responsibility in young people's construction of alcohol intoxicated sexual assault and sexual consent

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	%	
	%	
	%	
	%	

Date: 06.09.2023

Evangel

Signature of the applicant