

In control and out of control. The discourse on intoxication among young Finnish women in the 1980s and 2000s

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ABSTRACT

AIMS – The article focuses on the discourse on intoxication and its changes among young women in Finland. According to surveys, drinking among Finnish women has been rising for decades. Especially young women have been in the front line in the raise of drinking and intoxication-oriented drinking. However, statistics are not able to explain the factors behind this change. What has happened to women’s attitudes and connotations related to binge drinking during the past decades? How do young women in their twenties perceive being drunk and how has the description of their relationship to this condition changed over the last 20 years? **METHODS AND DATA** – To explore these questions, the present article compares interview materials concerning drinking collected among young adults in 1985 and 2005/2007. The article analyses how young women identify themselves with intoxication in these periods and how the way in which women describe this relationship has changed in the meantime. **RESULTS** – The greatest change has to do with how young women regard drunkenness while presenting themselves. Whereas in the 1985 material young women distanced themselves from binge drinking, 20 years later they identify themselves strongly with it. The analysis shows that this development illustrates that both the significance of drunkenness in itself and the way in which drinking-related self-expression has changed. **CONCLUSIONS** – The results relate to the changes in Finnish drinking culture which have been more pronounced in the case of women than men as well as the change of acceptable and desirable images of femininity.

KEY WORDS – Alcohol, youth, young adults, young women’s drinking, drinking habits, intoxication, gender, qualitative methods.

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Introduction

This article focuses on the way young women talk about intoxication and how this talk has changed over time. As several surveys have shown, drinking among Finnish women has risen for decades and this development is considered to be one

of the most significant changes in Finnish drinking culture after 1960s (Mäkelä et al. 2010). According to statistics, especially young women have been in the front line in the raise of drinking and intoxication-oriented drinking (Mustonen et al. 2009).

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However, statistical data is not able to explain the factors which have led to the raise of drinking among young women nor can it explain the change in the way young women perceive their relationship to intoxication. In fact, the general trends in alcohol consumption say nothing about the meanings that people assign to drinking or intoxication, and even less about their views on the type of drinking or intoxication that they strive for or want.

In order to reduce this gap, especially regarding young women, group interviews were conducted on young people's drinking habits in 2005 and 2007. The content of the interview relied largely on the questions used in collecting similar material on students at commercial colleges in 1985 (Mäkelä & Virtanen 1987; Pyörälä 1991; 1995). This created a rare opportunity to compare the self-perception that young women in their twenties attached to intoxication at two different points of time.

This article concentrates on this subject by studying how young women verbalise their relation to intoxication and how this verbalising has changed during past decades. This shift is studied by looking how young women use intoxication as a part of their self-expression today and 20 years earlier. The examination starts with a review of the Finnish studies on young people's drinking habits from the perspective of gender. After that the theoretical framework, the perspective of the presentation of self, and the methods and materials used in the article are presented. Subsequently comes an analysis of young women's discourse on intoxication and its changes in the last 20 years. In the last part of the article the main results are summarised and examined in relation to the

European discussion on a "new culture of intoxication" (Measham & Brain 2005), which was initiated in the 1990s, and the much used concept of "controlled loss of control" (Measham 2002).

Young women in Finnish qualitative studies on drinking

The study of intoxication has traditionally been at the centre of research on Finnish drinking habits and studies of young people's alcohol consumption are no exception. Heavy drinking, i.e. drinking specifically in order to attain intoxication, has a long history in Finland and has become firmly rooted in Finnish people's self-perception (cf. Simpura 1983). Historically, however, women have been disregarded in the world of intoxication and still in the 1960s drinking and intoxication were considered a characteristic of a masculine environment (Holmila 1992). Alcohol consumption was linked with a clear gender division, in which women generally played the role of controlling men's drinking (ibid).

After that, when qualitative studies on young people's drinking became more common, intoxication was no longer connected with men only, but it was made available to both genders. The studies on young people's drinking conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s however, underlined the gender differences in intoxication and perceived the intoxication of young men and women as being far apart (Mäkelä & Virtanen 1987; Pyörälä 1991; 1995). In this time period young women's drinking was without exception compared to young men's drinking.

After that followed a period of qualitative studies, where instead of highlighting

gender differences, one gender was left out altogether. As of the end of the 1990s, qualitative studies tended to focus largely on young women's alcohol consumption, which meant that young men were sidelined as a research topic (cf. Maunu & Simonen 2010). Intoxication as a way of breaking limits, which had formerly been associated with masculinity, now began to feature in studies as an aspect of women's actions and self-perception, as well as men's (cf. Nykyri 1996a; 1996b; Jaatinen 2000a; 2000b, Pietilä 2001). This shift in perspective was linked with the fact that, according to statistics, alcohol consumption among girls grew at this time in the late 1990s, and in some respects it even exceeded alcohol consumption among boys (Rainio et al. 2009). Qualitative research represented an attempt to find out more about the factors underlying that shift.

On the whole, observations of intoxication among girls and women have tended to reinforce the argument that alcohol consumption among men and women has become more similar over the years. It has been suggested that women have started drinking on an equal footing with men, and that drinking and intoxication have become a part of women's self-perception as much as men's (cf. for instance Mustonen et al. 2001). Despite the growing similarity between men and women in terms of drinking habits, recent studies show that even though the situations when people drink and the reasons why people drink are now similar for both genders, there may still be gender differences in the perception of motives for drinking and experiences connected with drinking (Törrönen & Maunu 2007b). Furthermore, the conventional perception whereby women

are thought to simply follow and adopt the drinking habits of men has been questioned, with reference to the unique characteristics in women's drinking habits. For instance, young, urban women are thought to have entered the realm of intoxication in a style all of their own, and consequently to have begun to diversify the traditions surrounding intoxication-oriented drinking (Demant & Törrönen 2011).

In this article, the concept of a link between intoxication, the ways it is expressed, and gender forms the background to a study of the way young women talk about intoxication and the way this talk has changed in the last 20 years. As has been shown in earlier studies, perceptions of the connection between intoxication, controlled alcohol consumption and gender during the past decades tended to a great extent to reflect the perceived social conventions at the time concerning what was appropriate for either gender. In those conventions, drinking and control were more strongly linked with regard to women. In the following, the perceptions in the interview materials collected at two different times will be examined with a focus on how intoxication is used as part of the presentation of self among young women.

The discourse on intoxication as part of the presentation of self

In this article, discourse on intoxication will be examined as part of the presentation of self, which refers to the way people constantly give impressions in their interaction with others (Goffman 1956). Generally this is linked with people's tendency to show themselves in a favourable light and avoid embarrassment. In this context, Erving Goffman refers to keeping face, by

which he means that we strive to put ourselves across as socially respectable persons. Thus, even when people talk about intoxication, they tend to focus on aspects and characteristics of intoxication that are considered desirable and valuable. The presentation of self is also usually considered to include a perception of oneself as genuine and individual (cf. Taylor 1992). This striving emerges in our self-perception in relation to intoxication when we consider how and in what situations involving drinking we feel that we are genuinely representing ourselves. In addition we also tend to make the desirable and good aspects of drinking visible to others (Taylor 1992). This usually takes the form of categorisation between ourselves and others, whereby we identify with the people who possess desirable characteristics insofar as drinking is concerned (Törrönen 2010).

In relation to a gender-specific perspective, distinctions made between ourselves and others also tend to emphasise the characteristics we associate with desirable models of femininity and masculinity. Concepts of what is good and valuable are thus linked with the presentation of gender. Gender is presented by repeating a culturally established set of gestures (Butler 1990); however, it is relevant what is repeated and how. Although we socially and physically belong to one gender, we may use the way we talk about intoxication or the way we drink to shape, evade, deny, resist, emphasise or question various gender-related conventions (Tolonen 2001). Measham (2002, 351) thus argues that gender does not just influence the way people "do drugs", but drug use itself can be seen as a way of "doing gender". So people con-

struct their gender identity, their masculinities and femininities, not only through drinking but also through expressing their relationship with intoxication.

Studying the discourse on intoxication: material and methods

This article studies how the young women interviewed expressed their relationship with intoxication in the material from the two different time periods. Analysis further focuses on the values underlying the women's presentation of self and identification with intoxication. Because we can assume from previous research that experiences of intoxication have become more prevalent among women during past decades, it is interesting to examine how young women use intoxication as a part of self-expression and what kinds of associations they connect to intoxication at different times.

Answers to these questions are sought by comparing the interview material on young people's drinking habits collected in two different decades. The first set of material was collected in 1985, and was reported by Mäkelä and Virtanen (1987), and Pyörälä (1991; 1995). The material comprises 26 individual interviews. The interviewees were students at commercial colleges in two Finnish cities; half of the interviewees were young women and the other half were men. Only women's interviews are used in the present analysis. Most of the interviewees were 20–25 years old, i.e. they had been born in the early 1960s. Only few interviewees were older than that, the oldest being 28 at the time of the collection of the material. The interviews were carried out either at the com-

mercial college or, more commonly, at the home of the interviewee. The interviews are 45 minutes long and they were recorded and then transcribed. The interviews are structured around four questions dealing with a successful and an unsuccessful drinking situation, the best intoxication of the interviewee's life, and an imaginary ideal intoxication.

The earlier analyses made of the material emphasise the gender differences in intoxication-oriented drinking, whereby the young men tend to use intoxication in an effort to break everyday boundaries, whereas, for the young women, intoxication simply intensifies everyday interaction (Mäkelä & Virtanen 1987). The gender differences also emerge in the interviewees' concepts of the kind of intoxication that is considered ideal or desirable. The young men associate themselves with a high level of alcohol consumption that is not subjected to self-discipline, whereas regulation of their own actions and strict control are central in the young women's approach (Pyörälä 1991, 57–58, 92; Pyörälä 1995, 220–222, 225).

In this article, a renewed analysis will be made of the material in question. The previous analyses of this material have prompted me to focus on what young women's relationship with intoxication looks like twenty years later. However, the analysis at hand is not a repetition of the earlier analyses but a re-contextualization of the 1985 material by looking at it in the light of subsequent research knowledge and comparing it with the 2000s material.

Unlike the 1985 material, the material collected in the 2000s consists of group interviews. The first set of interviews was collected in 2005 as part of a project

entitled 'Local alcohol policy' (Paikallinen alkoholipolitiikka), and it consists of seven group interviews with young people aged 18–24 in the Hämeenlinna region. A single participant was 17 years old. Collecting seven group interviews, each with 5–8 participants, assured that the data became saturated. Focus group interviews were conducted with gender-mixed groups, which were similar enough to make comparisons between them. 24 of the participants were female and 33 male. The interviewees may be described as 'ordinary' young people, students or graduates of upper secondary schools or vocational education institutions. The interview groups were made up of natural groups in the sense that the participants in each of the groups already knew each other. The data has been collected by contacting some "key persons" that worked either in a shop aimed at young customers or as youth workers. The key persons were able to reach young people in the area and handed out letters which included information on our research and were written to motivate young people to gather a group for an interview consisting of participants from their own networks. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 90 minutes. The interviews were videotaped, recorded and then transcribed.

The second set of material from roughly the same period consists of four group interviews with young people aged 18–24, collected in 2007 as part of a project entitled "Changes in the cultural position of drinking" funded by the Academy of Finland. The material is made up of two group interviews with young women and two group interviews with young men, where one group in each category represents a

higher education level than the other. The amount of female participants is 13 and male 10. Only the interviews of women's groups, have been included in the analysis. The interviewed groups consisted of 4–8 young people who knew each other, i.e. the groups were put together from 'natural groups', as in the 2005 material. The group discussions on the participants' drinking habits lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and, like the previous material, they were videotaped, recorded and then transcribed.

Although the earliest material, from 1985, was collected using a different method than the two subsequent sets of material, comparison can be justified with their shared set of interview questions. Interviews on all occasions used the same main questions, focusing on intoxication and successful and unsuccessful drinking situations. However, in comparing the two sets of material, it is important to keep in mind the differences in the way they were collected. In the 1985 material, the young people were alone and responded to questions asked by an adult interviewer, while the young people interviewed in 2005 and 2007 discussed the questions put to them in groups. The potential impact that the difference in interview situations may have had on the interviewees' responses and the observations made on the material are discussed in the concluding section of this article, in the context of the general interpretation of results and the conclusions.

The sets of material emphasise a formative years perspective (for more on this concept, see Mannheim 1952/1928), which means that interviewees in their twenties are in their formative years insofar as alcohol consumption is concerned. In other

words, this is a time when their alcohol consumption stabilises and they become part of the Finnish alcohol culture. The interview material is treated as cultural narratives that reflect the way the interviewees construct meaning in relation to drinking (cf. Aapola 1999). The analysis of the material draws on influences from an approach involving the analysis of classifications in which the focus lies on analysis of the distinctions that the interviewees make between themselves and others (cf. for instance Törrönen & Maunu 2007a). The distinction between 'us and them' is evident in the way the interviewees identify with certain types of intoxication and distance themselves from other forms of intoxication-oriented drinking.

Identification is evident when young women make a distinction between 'us and them', like in the following excerpt, where the difference and distance between 'us and others' is expressed in terms of the target of drinking: (...) *when you drink, you do it to get drunk. You don't kind of have one pint 'cause it tastes good, it actually doesn't taste that good.* (Leena, 2007, interview 3, F, 18–24 years, L.). Here the speaker expresses her identity by making implicitly a distinction between herself and 'them', i.e. people who drink only a little and who's motivation to drink stems from the enjoyment of taste. Thus the speaker also identifies herself with the people who drink to get drunk. The presentation of self takes place in this way, through references to cultural and moral distinctions and values (Aaltonen 2008, 38).

In quotes from the material that describe identification with and distancing from intoxication, the anonymity of the interviewees has been protected in accordance

with the ethical principles of research, and their names have been changed. Quotes from the material are identified by giving the year of the interview (1985, 2005, 2007), the number of the interview and the interviewee's sex and age. The next section deals with the way young women use intoxication as a part of the presentation of self. There has only been paid attention to men's interviews if they helped to clarify the main characteristics of young women's relation to intoxication.

From fear of losing control to a desire for intoxication

The target of drinking and intoxication is described in the same way in the material from both decades. Young women define having fun as the foremost goal of intoxication. Having fun is perceived as spending time together and doing things together in which shared experiences are considered central (cf. Simonen 2007; Törrönen & Maunu 2007a; Maunu & Simonen 2010). Despite the collective experience, there is a difference between these decades in the way young women express their relation to intoxication and the importance they attach to intoxication when drinking and being together.

In the 1985 material young women separated drinking and intoxication. Even though drinking was considered desirable, intoxication was something which young women unambiguously distanced themselves from. This is clearly evident in the interviewees' responses to the question concerning successful drinking situations:

Terhi: Well, it's when you don't get drunk but you still have fun. (1985, interview K1/2, F, 21 years)

Terhi: When you haven't quite got drunk yet, but you're kind of a little bit tipsy. Once you're actually drunk, it's too much. (1985, interview K1/2, F, 21 years)

Satu: The most important thing for me is that no-one gets really drunk the whole time (...). (1985, interview K2/1, F, 21 years)

As these excerpts show, the essential thing about drinking is that it is a social situation where having fun is central, but where intoxication is not present. The difference between "us and them" is expressed in terms of intoxication, where young women define for themselves a membership in drinking and having fun where intoxication hardly plays a role: *I don't generally drink enough to ever get drunk. (Pauliina, 1985, interview K1/8, F, 28 years)*. The role of intoxication becomes even clearer when compared to the interviewed men. Unlike interviewed women, young men identified themselves with the idea of getting drunk together in both decades. By contrast, among young women, the difference in taking a stand toward intoxication and the way intoxication is used while presenting oneself is clear and visible: in the 1985 material, the young women expressed themselves by forcefully distancing themselves from intoxication, whereas in the 2000s material young women no longer draw a line between themselves and intoxication. This begs the question of what the young women were seeking to distance themselves from when they disassociated themselves from intoxication in the material from 1985. What meaning did intoxication actually carry for young women in this material?

In the material collected in the 2000s, intoxication is, for both sexes, associated with having fun. It carries strong connotations of social interaction and togetherness (Simonen 2007; Törrönen & Maunu 2007a). A number of recent studies have regarded intoxication as an indicator of intense sociability (Törrönen & Maunu 2007a). In the material from 1985, however, the young women interviewed did not associate intoxication exclusively with togetherness and fun. Although the intention of drinking was to attain a state of restrained relaxation at parties, these young women had strong associations of fear and shame, specifically a fear of losing control.

Satu: [An unsuccessful drinking situation is] when you've had far too much to drink. Afterwards, you get the feeling that you lost control. (1985, interview K2/1, F, 21 years)

Asta: It's when you've had too much to drink and you can't control yourself. (1985, interview K1/9, F, 21 years)

Elisa: When you've had too much to drink and you pass out somewhere or you're not in control of yourself. (1985, interview K1/10, F, 27 years)

The fear of physically losing control and of losing control over one's own actions were considered undesirable. Nykyri (1996b) uses the concept of *abject*, a loan from Kristeva (1982), to describe the feeling of horror that women associate with the loss of bodily control and the awareness that the body is no longer controlled by the rational mind. Experiences of the abject involve the

boundaries of the physical body. Intoxication blurs the boundary between the external and the internal, and some 'other' takes control of the body, so that a person is no longer their genuine self, i.e. a rational subject perceived to be autonomous and uniform (Nykyri 1996b, 96). Thus the experience of being oneself and being a subject requires strong control. It is the demand for control that could make women distance themselves completely from intoxication.

When we move 20 years ahead there is a striking change in attitudes to intoxication among young women. In the 2000s material the women no longer subject their desire for intoxication to a fear of losing control. The following excerpts illustrate this:

Satu: I can't ever drink just one cider, or I'm sure I could but I just don't want to during the week, or even if I do I just forget it; if I want to drink I will, I'd rather drink a lot during the weekend, not just think on Wednesday "shall I have one cider", that hardly ever happens.

Mervi: If you're gonna drink, drink a lot.

*Satu: That's right.
(2005, interview 6, F+M, 18–24 years)*

Leena: I never go out for just one pint and I never have just one beer.

Päivikki: One leads to another.

Alisa: My attitude is, if I'm gonna drink then I'll really drink.

Leena: Yeah, when you drink, you do it to get drunk. You don't kind of have one pint 'cause it tastes good, it actually doesn't taste that good.

Tiia: I've been out once or twice just for a beer or two (...).

Leena: I've never done that. If I have two, that's it, I lose it.

(2007, interview 3, F, 18–24 years, L.)

Interviewer: (...) how do you control it? Or is that a totally pointless question to ask?

Tuulia: When you drink, you drink. It's not like you can stop.

Johanna: Like, control it.

Tuulia: Like, stop it or control it in any way when you're already under the influence of alcohol. That's individual of course. I don't know.

Interviewer: You can't or you don't want to?

Tuulia: Personally, I find I stop when I throw up.

(2005, interview 2, F+M, 18–24 years)

These group discussions show that intoxication refers to a high intake of alcohol, "If you're gonna drink, drink a lot", with the specific object of achieving intoxication and no attempt is made to conceal a loss of control. The young women interviewed in the 1985 material expressed the difference between 'us and them' in terms of control, where they identified with a group of people with strong self-control and distanced themselves from the 'others', who were not in control of themselves. In the material collected in the 2000s, by contrast, the distinction between 'us and them' is no longer made with reference to self-control. This change is evident in Sirkku's comment that drinking can "get a bit out of hand" (2005, interview 3, 18–24 years) or in Leena's comment above, in which alcohol is elevated close to the role of subject, "If I have two, that's it, I lost it", but despite this, it is not felt to endanger the speaker's

position as subject. This is completely different from the 1985 material, in which the young women interviewed specifically expressed fear of losing control and experiencing themselves as non-subjects.

The enjoyment of breaking boundaries and losing control

In the material from the 2000s, the young women do not describe their behaviour under the influence of alcohol as controlled and restrained, as in the material from 1985.

Alisa: (...) But once, I got drunk like Bridget Jones, can you imagine that. I was totally drunk and mixing myself drinks, I have one of those Martini glasses, and then I drank beer out of that. Yay, I was just singing and going on like that. (2007, interview 3, F, 18–24 years, L.)

In the 2000s material, young women get intoxicated and they permit themselves to get intoxicated. Intoxication is presented as an essential part of having fun, as evidenced by Alisa's comment about drunken singing and 'going on'. This interpretation comes close to the observations made by Pietilä (2001) concerning the partying of girls under the age of 18 as a kind of street carnival, in which mundane rules and boundaries are broken. Alisa's comment reflects a pleasure and joy in doing things that diverge from the order of the everyday. After all, the transgressive logic of pleasure must have boundaries to cross and rules to break (Falk 1994). Instead of the restrained and responsible behaviour of the young women interviewed in the 1985 material, the 2000s material reflects

liberation and pleasure, and femininity is even expressed through daring erotic actions (cf. Törrönen & Juslin 2009).

Lissu: (...) like, by the time we'd had enough to drink, we were drunk in this amazing way (...), there were a lot of us and we went dancing, (...) and you get so flirty, for example, probably everyone else in the bar thought we were lesbians or hookers or something. (2005, interview 4, F+M, 18–24 years)

This is an example of the way in which the recent material – unlike the 1985 material – tends to associate a number of liberated and even transgressive features with drinking, in the shape of various ways of distancing oneself from everyday routines and casting off the self-discipline of normal life. The rules governing appropriate everyday behaviour may even be completely overturned, as in the following example given by Saara:

Saara: Last autumn, we were at a friend's summer cottage and Piia and me sort of kept drinking for two days straight, and then we were drunk and I had a whole bottle just by myself, and then I started just dissing everyone we know and they tied me down and (laughter).

Lissu: And we taped your mouth shut. (laughing).

Saara: And I just lay there on the floor and everyone went 'Saara, no more for you', well, we had a bottle of vodka between the three of us, didn't we, and then we kind of kept falling out of bed in the night.

(2005, interview 4, F+M, 18–24 years)

As a consequence of this kind of activity, the loss of physical control becomes possible for young women, in complete contrast to the way women described strict self-discipline and physical control in the material from 1985.

Saara: I'll say this for partying at someone's house, it's great to get really drunk there 'cause you don't have to go anywhere, so you can throw up and all that and pass out in the toilet.

Lissu: And it's not like the doorman will come and throw you out of the toilet, your friends will just go "oh, Saara is sleeping in there".

(2005, interview 4, F+M, 18–24 years)

Lissu: (...) so, by the time I can't sort of walk anymore, then I'll definitely call [my friends] to say "come and get me, I'm out here and I'm too drunk to walk and I'm about to throw up". (2005, interview 4, M+F, 18–24 years)

These quotes show that the interviewees are far from unfamiliar with situations where they have lost control of their own body. Although some of the young women in the more recent material do mention the loss of physical control as a factor that may ruin a good experience of intoxication, the demand for self-control on the whole is on a much lower level than in the 1985 material, where it was held up as an unconditional requirement in all drinking situations in the interviewees' presentation of self.

In this respect, differences also emerge between the ways intoxication and authenticity are experienced and the way the distinction is made between 'us and them' in

the different sets of material. In the material from 1985, young women strongly associated restrained behaviour and controlled drinking both with being themselves and with making the distinction between 'us and them', but the women interviewed in the 2000s material have a completely opposite experience of authenticity where intoxication is concerned. As described by these young women, intoxication does not bring about an estrangement from the self or endanger the subject's position; on the contrary, it may even augment these experiences (cf. Taylor 1992). In the following excerpts, the young women talk about the way in which intoxication makes them even funnier or more daring than usual.

Alisa: I can have fun without alcohol, but when I drink, I'm even funnier, at least I think so.

Leena: I'm the same. I don't think I'm any different when I'm drunk, I just think I'm a lot funnier, really great company. (2007, interview 3, F, 18–24 years, L.)

Annika: (...) Actually, I consider myself kind of daring anyway, but somehow I'm even more daring when I'm drunk, I don't mean I'd go climbing on the roof of a building or anything, nothing like that, it's just I think I have a lot of confidence but somehow you have even more confidence then. (2005, interview 4, F+M, 18–24 years)

Conclusions: in control and out of control

Based on the analysis of the discourse on intoxication of young women, social interaction and being together are seen as the

primary functions of intoxication-oriented drinking, as it was 20 years ago. But despite this continuity, great changes have occurred in the meantime in how young women describe their relationship to intoxication and how they use it as a part of the presentation of self. Whereas in the 1985 material young women presented themselves by distancing themselves from intoxication, 20 years later they identify themselves strongly with it. This insight raises the question about the explanations behind this change. Most importantly however, it is crucial to bear in mind that this change does not mean that young women would not have gotten drunk 20 years ago or that all of them would drink to get intoxicated in 2000s'. These two ways of taking a stand on intoxication – identifying oneself with it and distancing oneself from it – surely have existed during both periods. This means that also in the 2000s material some women distance themselves from drunkenness and stress self-control. However, compared between the materials from two decades it is clear that the weighting of the discourse has changed in favour of identification with intoxication-oriented drinking. This indicates, as shown in earlier studies, how widespread drinking in general and intoxication-oriented drinking in particular have become among girls and women (Rainio et al. 2009). However, the fact that intoxication-oriented drinking and identifying with it has become more common does not in itself indicate what the increase of intoxication among young women is actually about.

The analysis shows that what being drunk means to young women has changed. In the 1985 material, young women identified intoxication strongly with the loss

of face and shame, and the fear of losing self-control. They also considered intoxication a threat to their image of themselves as authentic rational subjects. By contrast, in the 2000s material the desire to get drunk overrides these inhibitions, and young women more commonly associate intoxication with a release, enjoyment and authentic experience (Paakkanen 1992; Simonen 2007). Indeed, in the 2000s material drinking in an intoxication oriented way is highlighted as an essential and natural part of having a good time.

Therefore the change in commitment to intoxication must be very much about a change in how young women present themselves. In the 1980s material, traditional conceptions of women's behaviour and the impropriety of getting drunk seem to have governed how women viewed intoxication as self-expression (cf. Nykyri 1996b). Presenting oneself as kind, decent and controlled was valued and intoxication was perceived to be a risk for the honoured womanhood. In other words, stressing self-control worked as a way of "keeping face" and maintaining the desired image of femininity. On the contrary, in the 2000s material partying and intoxication-oriented drinking are perceived as expressions of independency and self-security (cf. Holmila 2001, 57). The face can be kept also by losing control, and drunkenness and transgression are just as much present in the drinking-related discourse of young women as of young men. Indeed, the prevailing views of alcohol in relation to femininity have changed, and women getting drunk are not viewed with as much disapproval as earlier (Nykyri 1996b, 96).

However, when comparing modes of self-expression at different times, we

should take into account the ways in which the materials were collected. Most importantly, the interviewees in the 2000s material have been asked to respond to the exact same questions as the interviewees in 1985. Moreover, in both data collections, interviews were conducted in public spaces (such as schools or libraries) or at some interviewees' home. These conformities should ensure that the (informal) atmosphere of the 1985 interviews could be recreated as much as possible. However, there is one difference related to interview settings that has to be borne in mind while comparing the data. The 1985 material consists of individual interviews where young adults answered questions posed by an adult interviewer; by contrast, the 2000s material was collected in group interviews, where peer groups of young adults discussed themes prompted by the interviewer. This difference may be relevant for the incidence and boldness of drinking-related discourse; in 1985, a young woman had to disapprove of drinking in order to seem a 'decent girl' in the eyes of an adult, but in the 2000s material, speaking among friends, the interviewees were more likely to be more forward in their talk, including how they talk about intoxication. Intoxication is permitted for young women and men alike. In this respect, the role of a decent young woman seems to have shifted from a restrained, abstaining and self-controlled persona to one who expresses herself, enjoys herself and openly discusses her relationships. The gender-equalization of drinking has eroded differences between gender roles and diversified the ways in which young women express themselves. This represents a gender convergence in drinking

habits among young women and men (Törrönen & Maunu 2007 b; Mustonen et al. 2001); also, describing one's self-expression through drinking has become more common.

This is not to say, however, that young women use drinking as an expression of femininity in a similar way as is the case with young men and masculinity. Women are conventionally considered followers of men in intoxication-oriented drinking rather than active subjects expressing their gender identity through intoxication and setting drinking trends (cf. Demant & Törrönen 2011). Indeed, the intoxication-oriented drinking culture of women has been largely seen as being generated by men (cf. Saarikoski 2009). However, the strong presence of intoxication-oriented drinking as a form of self-expression among young women in the 2000s material indicates that drinking in order to attain intoxication has translated into an independent form of women's self-expression (cf. Saarikoski 2009; Demant & Törrönen 2011).

But the analysis of the increasing identification of women with intoxication-oriented drinking must still be further specified considering education, location, selection of the interviewees and interviewer's influence. Educational attainment does not seem to correlate with the increasing identification with intoxication, as young women with a vocational education and a university education alike identify strongly with descriptions of drunkenness. Regional factors also do not seem relevant. Naturally, it is possible that in 1985 young women might have been more outspoken about intoxication if the material had been collected in the Helsinki area rather than in two medium-size towns in central and

eastern Finland, since youth culture trends in Finland have been proven to originate in the Helsinki area and then trickle down to the rest of the country (cf. Ahlström et al. 2008). However, the influence of the Helsinki area does not seem enough to explain the strength of intoxication-related discourse among women in the 2000s material, because the drinking behaviour exemplified in the 2007 material collected in the Helsinki area was very similar to that in the 2005 material, which was collected in and around a much smaller city, Hämeenlinna. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that the increase in identification with intoxication among young women was due to the selection of interviewees. Because the interview groups in both of the 2000's materials describe and engage in the same drinking habits, it is hardly probable that the young women who ended up being interviewed all had particularly problematic drinking habits or unusual modes of self-expression. Neither should the fact that the interviewers were not the same as in 1985 affect to the raise in identification with intoxication, because in both decades the interviewers were male and of the same age. It has to be pointed out however, that, in 1985, part of the interviews were conducted by women.

Therefore, the observation that young women increasingly identify themselves with intoxication-oriented drinking must indicate, in spite of the possible effect of difference between the types of interviews dealt earlier, a shift in Finnish drinking culture. Firstly, it shows a change in the conception of gender-specific propriety in drinking; it is now common and accepted for women as well as men to use intoxica-

tion as a means of self-expression. Gender-coded expectations and cultural models of femininity enshrining how the ideal and proper woman behaves would seem thus to have expanded (cf. Aaltonen 2008). Secondly, this trend can hardly only be about a change in presentation of self and manifestations of femininity. During the 20-year period in question, significant changes occurred in the drinking habits of women in particular (Mustonen et al. 2009). Although it is quite certain that young women used to get drunk in the mid-1980s too, intoxication-oriented drinking in this gender and age group increased substantially by the 2000s. Whereas the percentage of young women aged 18 who got drunk at least once a month was about 8% in 1985, it was more than 30% in 2005/2007 (Rainio et al. 2009). The change in the presentation of self among young women would thus seem to be linked to a change in drinking habits among young women; there is a clear generational difference in this respect.

Even though the analysis at hand has some limitations – firstly, the size of the analysed material is limited and therefore does not allow to make strong generalisations, which is typical for the qualitative approach in general, and secondly, the restrictions considering the comparison of materials collected in the different ways – it represents an attempt to make a comparison of deferred material which is only rarely possible due to the lack of comparative qualitative data. The findings gathered through the comparison of decades are, however, essential to understand the changes in the meanings associated to intoxication and the growth in the way intoxication is used in the construction of female identity.

Especially from a perspective of gender, these findings are also, despite of the limitations explained earlier, interesting when compared to other European countries. The development of identification with intoxication can be compared with the case of England, where young women as well as young men, binge drink and openly show intoxicated behaviour and the breaking of gender roles (Szmigin et al. 2008; Measham 2005). On the contrary, for example in Denmark, "traditional" drinking-related gender roles seem to persist stronger today even though heavy drinking is typical for both genders. For example Janette Östergaard (2007) writes that alcohol can increase the likelihood of crossing boundaries of traditional gender roles but only for young men can this crossing add to the feeling of having fun. For young women it is not possible to binge drink to the same degree as young men and cross the boundary of "controlled way of losing control" without ruining the image of femininity (Östergaard 2007, 147; Östergaard 2009; see also Demant & Järvinen 2006; Demant 2007). Instead in Finland, as young women express in the material analysed in this article, the target and desire of getting drunk and breaking boundaries can also be considered as appealing and pleasurable.

In general, the European discussion on drinking habits among young people seems to lack the perspective of "uncontrolled" traits of intoxication. Even though the British discussion on heavy drinking and the pleasure of intoxication brings out the familiarity of heavy drunkenness among young people (Martinic & Measham 2008; Measham 2008), the commonly used concept "controlled loss of control" (Measham 2002) refers to self control over drunken

behaviour. According to the analysis at hand, however, the concept of "controlled loss of control" seems to be, at least in the Finnish case, inadequate, because it tends to ignore the uncontrolled traits of intoxication and is therefore not able to capture the whole drinking scene in Finland. In addition to the "controlled loss of control", in other words a drinking habit called social partying (Törrönen & Maunu 2007b), there is also "unbounded drinking", "determined drunkenness" or "heroic drinking" – depending on the concept – which is seen desirable while having fun and being together. This kind of "uncontrolled loss of control" still persists quite strongly in Finland and, as it has been shown in this article, traits of it are visible also in women's discussions in the 2000s material. This form of intoxication does not refer to an unpleasant or embarrassing side ef-

fect of drinking but an unbounded way of acting and a desired loss of bodily control, a behaviour which has become attractive also among young women and thus marks an exception from earlier decades. Referring to the findings, it is essential to ask why the borders of decent femininity seem to have become broader in Finland. Why the tolerance toward drunkenness is high, and intoxication bears many positive connotations in Finnish culture, even to such a degree that losing control has become an acceptable and desirable feature while constructing femininity?

Declaration of interest None.

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