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## How do social media-related attachments and assemblages encourage or reduce drinking among young people?

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### ABSTRACT

Research shows that young people's online practices have become a continuous, seamless and routine part of their physical and social worlds. Studies report contradictory findings on whether social media promotes intoxication-driven drinking cultures among young people or diminishes their alcohol consumption. By applying actor-network theory, our starting point is that the effects of social media depend on what kinds of concerns mediate its use. Social media alone cannot make young people drink more or less but influences their drinking in relation to specific attachments that we call here 'assemblages'. The data consist of individual interviews among girls ( $n=32$ ) and boys ( $n=24$ ) between 15 and 19 years old from Sweden, covering topics such as alcohol use, social media habits and leisure time activities. The paper maps the variety of assemblages that mediate young people's online practices and analyzes how young people's drinking-related social media assemblages increase, decrease or exclude their alcohol consumption. The analysis shows that social media-related attachments seem to reduce our interviewees' use of alcohol by providing competing activities, by transforming their drinking under the public eye, by reorganizing their party rituals to be less oriented towards drinking and by facilitating parents' monitoring of their drinking situations.

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## Introduction

A broad range of research shows that drinking among peers is an important social ritual for young people. Peer groups are vital for young people's social lives generally, and drinking provides a pleasurable activity around which to gather to 'celebrate' peer relations and networks (Törrönen and Maunu 2007a). Furthermore, drinking helps mark out identities, status and shared realities among friends (Goodwin and Griffin 2017).

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However, since 2000 heavy drinking has lost its dominant position in Sweden and been challenged by competing activities. Between 2000 and 2012 alcohol consumption among 15- and 16-year-olds fell more than 50% (Norström and Svensson 2014), hand in hand with increasing abstinence rates (Henriksson and Leifman 2011). Moreover, heavy drinking decreased from 34% to 18% among boys (*ibid.*). This trend of low alcohol consumption among adolescents has continued to this day (CAN 2017), possibly indicating a new kind of understanding of the position of alcohol in social life among young people. Furthermore, similar declining trends of alcohol consumption among adolescents have been identified in other European countries (Kraus et al. 2018), North America (De Looze et al. 2015) and Australia (Livingston et al. 2016). As Swedish youth drinking culture has experienced the same kinds of tendencies as many other countries' youth cultures, the results of this study have cross-national relevance.

The way young people use social media in their everyday life practices may partly explain the decline of drinking among young people (Törrönen et al. 2019). Young people are intensive users of social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, and online networking practices have become a continuous, seamless and routine part of their physical and social worlds (Lyons et al. 2015). Social media may offer young people a new set of activities more rewarding than drinking. It may also change their drinking spaces to be more visible and vulnerable, as it provides technology to share pictures about their drunkenness that may end up being seen by parents or future employers (Bhattacharya 2016). From this perspective, it is possible that the changes in patterns of sociability from the widespread use of social media have led to a diminished role for alcohol in young people's sociability and identity work (Norström and Svensson 2014).

However, the use of social media is not necessarily linked only to the decrease of drinking among young people. It may also increase alcohol consumption among adolescents. A study from New Zealand by Griffiths and Casswell (2010), for instance, demonstrates that SNS may spread young people's 'culture of intoxication' (Measham and Brain 2005) to online realities, create 'intoxicogenic digital spaces' and legitimize 'intoxicogenic social identities'. Since young people have appropriated social media as an important arena for their self-display and networking, their drinking cultures are now increasingly played out online in interaction with public and private spaces (Bailey and Griffin 2017). SNS provide platforms for young people to share information and photos about their public and private drinking occasions, and thereby intensify young people's pleasures, identities and social networks around drinking (Lindsay and Supski 2017; Lyons and Gough 2017). Some studies also identify an association between heavy use of social media and heavy drinking (Brunborg, Andreas, and Kvaavik 2017; Savolainen et al. 2020) and propose that the heavier alcohol use of heavy social media users may be due to the fact that through online platforms they become exposed to positive alcohol messages by peers and the alcohol industry, without parental control (Larm et al. 2018).

In this paper, our starting point is that whether social media decreases or increases young people's drinking depends on what kinds of concerns, connections and practices mediate their use. Social media alone cannot make young people drink more or less, but influences their drinking behavior as part of networks of attachments that we call here 'assemblages' (Latour 2005, 213–218). There is a lack of knowledge about the kind of circumstances in which social media increases or decreases young people's drinking

(Obstbaum 2019). We do not know enough about how young people's drinking is related to online practices and how social media expands, reduces or transforms their drinking in the context of their everyday life routines. Our study addresses this lack of knowledge. By analysing individual interviews among girls ( $N = 32$ ) and boys ( $N = 24$ ) between 15 and 19 years old from Sweden – who in the interviews told us about their alcohol use, social media habits and leisure time activities – we map the variety of assemblages which are related to young people's online practices and drinking. We identify how the assemblages are composed of specific matters of concern, gatherings of human and non-human connections, and a set of particular practices, and analyze how particular assemblages encourage, modify, decrease or exclude young people's alcohol consumption. Furthermore, as studies point out that young people's online-related drinking practices may be linked to traditional images of masculine and feminine behavior or transgress idealized notions of heterosexual masculinity and femininity (Lindsay and Supski 2017; Lyons and Gough 2017), we pay attention also to how gender as an attachment may affect young people's online-related behavior in drinking.

### Actor-network theory, social media assemblages and gendered drinking

Actor-network theory (ANT) proposes that, in order to understand how social media-related networks encourage or reduce young people's drinking, we need to pay attention not only to human but also to nonhuman elements in action. In ANT, human and nonhuman elements are approached on a par, symmetrically, as *actors* who can equally mediate, steer and transform action (Latour 2005).

The agency of human and nonhuman actors is traced with a concept of 'actant' that Latour also calls a mediator (2005). The concept highlights, first, that in action all kinds of actors, such as ideas, machines, things, nations, technological devices, emotions, material objects, statistical aggregates, genes, and so on, have a possibility to take the role of an actant and participate in action (Latour 2005; Demant 2009). Secondly, human and non-human actors become actants when they make a difference to a state of affairs and transform it. In the making of difference a translation is introduced, in which actors are induced into coexistence (Latour 2005; Vries 2016; Törrönen and Tigerstedt 2018). If an actor makes no difference or produces no transformation, its agency remains unclear since it does not leave any traceable tracks. Therefore, Latour categorizes actors into two classes. They can act either as *intermediaries* or as *mediators* (=actants). When an actor acts as an intermediary, it takes a silent position in action and transports meaning or force without transformation (Vries 2016). Then it acts as a 'black box' with a given and apparent meaning, counting as one entity, even if it is made of many parts. For example, when a mobile phone functions as it is supposed to function when I call to my friend, it acts as an *intermediary*. It moves me into contact with my friend and facilitates our communication as an unnoticed and neutral actor. However, if the mobile phone does not function as it should or the connection is bad, its role as an actor becomes visible and active. It becomes transformed into a *mediator* and starts to modify the meaning of the elements it is expected to transmit (Latour 2005). According to Latour (1992), especially technological artefacts are expected to do their job unobtrusively as 'black boxes' or intermediaries, facilitating the coming together of heterogeneous elements and their transformative relational action.

The above example also shows that actors can only move action forward as attached to other actors. Without attachments, actors would not be able to move action further. Therefore, action is not determined by individual intentions but by relations (Duff 2014). Actors influence action and move it further as part of a network of attachments, which we here call ‘assemblages’ or ‘actor-networks’ (Latour 2005). An assemblage is composed of heterogeneous distributed attachments or connections, for instance of mobile phones, partyers, home, drinking, drunkenness, shared pictures, online platforms, sexuality and imagined audiences, which together form a network of actors and affect young people’s drinking. It is the actor-network as an assemblage with specific connections which moves an actor’s action, not the other way round: attachments are primary forces, actors secondary (Latour 2005).

In action, actors undergo ‘chains of translations’, in which their identities are shifting, redefined by their own and others’ situational performances (Vries 2016). Thereby, actors’ identities are temporary, under constant relational movement (Law 1999). Since none of the actors can independently have full control over a situation and steer freely the flow of events, networks of translations cannot be predicted in advance (Latour 2005, 39). Instead of transporting foreseen causality, translations induce actors into more or less surprising coexistence, in which they are related to each other through the translations they themselves carry out and through the translations other actors enact on them (Latour 2005, 108; Vries 2016, 92). Thus, instead of paying attention to ‘matters of fact’ that depict firm and anticipated associations, we need to examine ‘matters of concern’ or ‘matters of interest’ that characterize fluctuating relations and their reciprocal transformations (Latour 2005). Concerns and interests make actors gather actively around a certain kind of action, to mobilize human and non-human entities for transformative action and to develop habitual responses or practices for it, in which some of the elements of action become stabilized.

In our analysis below, we will apply the actor-network theory described above. We aim to map the variety of assemblages that mediate young people’s online practices and to examine how the practices – as composed of specific matters of concern, human and non-human connections and more or less stabilized practices – authorize, allow, encourage, suggest, modify, decrease, block or forbid young people’s drinking. In this we follow the world-making activity of the young people under study by paying attention to the human and non-human building blocks they themselves use when constructing their world, the tensions involved in it and the solutions they put forward (Latour 2005). As Latour himself argues (2005), in the identification and specification of the assemblages, the most important task is to track the actors’ own viewpoints, accounts and interpretations. In line with this, we treat our interviewees as ethnographers who are able to best describe to us what kinds of forces move them in their social media-related assemblages and how drinking or non-drinking plays a part in these actor-networks.

Furthermore, since the studies point out that young people’s online drinking may be affected by gender – sometimes connected to traditional and sometimes to progressive images of masculinity and femininity (Lindsay and Supski 2017) – we analyze how gender is performed in, by and through our interviewees’ drinking-related social media assemblages. For example, the studies point out that how young men and women take and upload photos about drinking, check, and tag them or untag themselves from them, is gendered (Hutton et al. 2016). As young women’s drinking, much more than

young men's, is subject to gendered regulatory scrutiny, double standards and moral censure, young women more intensively engage in curating their online presence by 'air-brushing' their photos to minimize the negative aspects of their online drinking, especially in relation to intoxication (ibid.). They actively supervise in what way their drinking is represented in digital spaces and make sure that it is not associated to promiscuous or disreputable images (Hutton et al. 2016).

## Methodology

### Participants

Our data consist of 46 individual interviews and 5 interviews with two participants (friends) among young people ( $n = 56$ ). The interviewees came from different backgrounds in terms of parenting, social class, ethnicity and educational background, and included both current drinkers and non-drinkers. Since previous studies suggest that the reduction of drinking may be a phenomenon particularly concerning 15–16-year-olds (Lintonen et al. 2016), we interviewed both 15–16-year-olds ( $n = 25$ ) and 18–19-year-olds ( $n = 31$ ). Among 15–16-year-olds 9 interviewees were drinkers (3 boys, 6 girls) and 16 non-drinkers (7 boys, 9 girls), and among 18–19-year-olds 20 were drinkers (9 boys, 11 girls) and 11 non-drinkers (5 boys, 6 girls). A larger number of girls than boys was interviewed (32 vs. 24). Drinking was slightly more common among the interviewed girls (53%) than among the interviewed boys (50%). In the older age group drinking was more common than in the younger age group (65% versus 36%) (Table 1).

### Procedure

Interviewees were recruited in 2017 mainly from various secondary (9th grade) and upper secondary schools (12th grade) in the Stockholm region and from other towns in the middle of Sweden. Participants were offered two cinema tickets as compensation (value EUR 20). As the data collection was part of a longitudinal study, some of the participants were interviewed twice. In the first wave (year 2017), most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. In the second wave (year 2018), most of the interviews took place over Skype. The interviews were based on semi-structured open questions covering themes such as how the interviewees use social media in different everyday life situations,

**Table 1.** Overview of the participants.  $N = 56$ .

	Drinkers	Non-drinkers	Total
<i>Gender</i>			
Girls	17	15	32
Boys	12	12	24
<i>Age groups</i>			
15–16	9	16	25
18–19	20	11	31
<i>Area of residence<sup>a</sup></i>			
Large city	6	2	8
Middle-sized town	8	14	22
Small town	15	11	26

<sup>a</sup>Based on number of inhabitants in the municipality. Large city > 500,000, Middle-sized town 50,000–499,999, Small town < 50,000.

how their use of social media is related to their drinking or non-drinking leisure time activities, and in what way their experiences of using social media are positive or negative. Although extensive usage of social media was not an explicit criterion when recruiting informants, all our interviewees turned out to be intensive users of social media.

After obtaining informed consent, the interviews lasted between 35 and 90 min. They were fully transcribed and then coded using NVivo software. Through the coding process, we identified young peoples' social media assemblages and specified how drinking and gender become enrolled in these assemblages. Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Regional Ethical Review Board in Stockholm, Sweden (ref. 2016/2404-31/5).

## **Analysis**

In our analysis below, we map the variety of assemblages that mediate young people's online practices. We first identify how the assemblages are composed of specific matters of concern, of gatherings of human and non-human connections, and of a set of particular practices. Secondly, we analyze how the distinct assemblages mediate drinking. Thirdly, as the studies point out that young people's use of social media in relation to drinking is linked to stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity, we pay attention to how gender is performed in, by and through these social media-related assemblages.

## **Findings**

### ***Young people's social media assemblages in general***

Our interviewees are intensive users of social networking sites (SNS), such as Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. When they speak about the use of social media, it is evident that online networking and practices have become a continuous, seamless and routine part of their physical and social worlds, as well as of their self-presentation (Lyons et al. 2015).

First, our interviewees join social media-related assemblages often when they have a break, are bored, are in a bus from place A to B, have ended their school day or are going to sleep. In these assemblages, messages act as actants that modify young people's mutual relations.

NABILA: It is when I come home from school. Sometimes it happens during lessons. In the evenings before I sleep, I always snapchat. I might be lying in bed at nine o'clock, because I know I have to unwind. I can lie there for two hours and just snapchat (IP 45).

ALI: The bus, when I am on my way to school; then I probably sit the whole ride to the school with the mobile phone and check Twitter, because it never ends, new messages always come (IP 32).

Secondly, our interviewees enroll in social media-related assemblages to manage their face-to-face leisure time with friends. With mobile phones and electronic media, they can plan their time out and spontaneously change their plans if they feel like it. In these assemblages, messages act as actants that move their interaction towards a common goal.

HENRY: (With) Snapchat we usually ... plan, if we are going to go to the cinema for example, or just be out together (IP 19).

In the hanging-out situations with their friends, our interviewees also use social media to extend the face-to-face action they are currently engaged in to include their physically absent friends. As the next quotation from Sophie's interview demonstrates, pictures and videos may then act as actants that put physically separated friends into communication with each other.

SOPHIE: Mm, I use Snapchat pretty much. There you can upload pictures that your friends can see for 24 h. This I can do quite a bit, adding in short videos when I have fun with friends (IP 14).

Thirdly, our interviewees enter into social media-related assemblages to do things online together, while staying physically apart. In these assemblages, the online environment and actors, for example, facilitate our interviewees to study online or to play online computer games.

HENRY: ... If an exam at school is coming, then we study together [online], we ask questions of each other (IP 19).

SAM: [When I was 15 and 16] I played [online] games on my computer pretty much. After coming home from school, I could sit for two hours and play ... ; and on the weekends, then, I could sit from three or four in the afternoon until five o'clock in the morning at night (IP 36).

Fourthly, our interviewees use social media, such as Facebook, Instagram or text messages, to inform their parents where they are. This means that parents, in turn, can monitor with social media their children's time-out activities.

CAROLINE: My mother uses Facebook and Instagram to follow me; ... we are friends, I follow her and she follows me, or rather, she follows me, because my updates are current (IP 27).

These online-related assemblages allow young people to experience the social in a new way by providing linkages that transform and modify their ways of being and acting together and of relating to others (Latour et al. 2012).

### *Young people's (gendered) drinking-related social media assemblages*

Before widespread use of social media, adolescents' culture of intoxication used to be based on face-to-face drinking rituals on Friday or Saturday nights in private situations, such as in house parties. These private situations constituted 'informal spaces' (Valentine, Holloway, and Jayne 2010) or 'dark drinksapes' (Wilkinson 2017), in which young people could create their own intimate space distinct from other spaces (Demant and Østergaard 2007, 121). In these private spaces adolescents aimed at getting intoxicated together with their friends by drinking at the same pace and as much as the others (Demant and Østergaard 2007, 117; Törrönen and Maunu 2007b). Heroic or chaotic drinking stories, shared next week at school to bolster one's status among peers, played an important part of this culture of intoxication. The intoxication stories also oriented adolescents to prepare themselves for the next fun-filled occasion (Tutenges and Sandberg 2013).

Our data suggest that all the assemblages we have identified above are also relevant in the context of drinking. Uses of social media in various kinds of situations enable young people to plan and discuss drinking-related activities and share drinking-related content also when they are alone. Our analysis further proposes that this intertwining of social media in young people's drinking practices has transformed the boundaries of their drinking parties, as well as the character of their drinking stories.

We might expect that the intertwining of social media in young people's drinking parties has multiplied drinking parties' and drinking stories' attachments to other spaces and their actors, and expanded assemblages and effects of heavy drinking. This is an argument the study by Griffiths and Casswell (2010) makes: that social media has made heavy drinking a stronger institution among young people. In this formulation, with respect to young people's drinking practices social media had taken the position of a *sender* who amplifies and legitimizes their heavy drinking as acceptable. Especially in shared photos in social media networking spaces that celebrate intoxication, social media functions as an *actant* that encourages young people to perform intoxicated identities also in face-to-face worlds.

In our data, this does not seem to be the case. The increasing presence of mobile networking technologies has transformed our interviewees' intimate and private drinking spaces into more public situations. The omnipotent presence of electronic media in their leisure activities has introduced new actors and linkages to their physical spaces, forcing them to redefine their understanding of the character of these spaces, and motivating them to pay more attention to their self-presentation (Truong 2018).

STELLA: Rumors spread very fast on parties, on social media. What you can post, it can be completely misleading. ... There was an image on Instagram of me standing on a table and dancing with a vodka bottle, and I really hugged the bottle. I was terrified. I did not know what to do. ... I contacted the person who uploaded the picture and begged, "Please delete this picture, I do not want to be attached to that picture, I'm ashamed", and she removed it. I also have a friend to whom exactly the same thing happened. She was drunk ... and someone shared a picture of her, calling her "worst fucking girl". Because of this, she became so much hated that after the drama she has chosen to go to parties sober (IP 37).

The above quotation from Stella's interview shows how a picture about your drunkenness shared in social media translates your drunkenness to social contexts, relations and normative landscapes that otherwise would not be present in the situation. The social media linkages convert your drinking to being under the public eye and induce you to think about 'imagined audiences' (Boyd 2007), who may enroll online, see the picture and interpret your behavior as disgraceful. Boyd (2014) characterizes these kinds of social media-related assemblages as configurations that are based on 'collapsed context' or 'context collapse'. They bring distinct social contexts and actors into a single situation in interaction with each other. By doing this they produce 'fuzzy boundaries' and impel young people to imagine that they are under the constant observation of diverse actors that may include peers, parents, teachers or employers (Truong 2018, 275).

JASMINE: Previously, there were no chances that parents or someone else would have been able to see images of you intoxicated. Now you can take a picture of anyone and send it (IP 42).

MAYA: You do not want that when you are looking for a job, your employer, while checking you out on Facebook, would see you [doing something questionable] (IP 44).

In our data, particularly girls are concerned about images in which they are represented in the online environment as intoxicated. Therefore, rather than acting as *actants* that celebrate heavy drinking and encourage young people to drink more, Stella's, Jasmine's and Maya's citations above exemplify assemblages in which the online pictures of intoxication act as *mediators* that prevent young women's drinking (Carah and Dobson 2016). Our male interviewees are not as worried concerning the online representations about their drunken behavior as our female interviewees are. Their insouciance about these kinds of intrusions on their privacy may be explained by the fact that since male drinking behavior has not been regulated by as strong moral censure as young women's, the online representations of their drunkenness do not generate trajectories in which they would feel shame and be scared of becoming stigmatized. However, our male interviewees are also careful in terms of what they share online.

GABRIEL: it may be that people are afraid that their parents will see them, it may be that you yourself are not an online friend with your parents but your friend can be and when your friend 'likes' an online picture [representing you drinking] it still comes up for your parents to see (IP 26).

All our interviewees are aware of the possible negative effects of sharing intoxicated images of themselves or of their friends online. Therefore, they have developed self-censorship practices that protect their networked privacy (Vitak 2012; Marwick and Boyd 2014). As the presence of social media has transformed their intimate and private face-to-face drinking spaces, making them more public, they have negotiated new ways of producing 'dark' spaces for themselves, to which not-so-well-known friends and observing authority actors do not have access. By differentiating between private and public online contexts and by using security settings to form private groups, they produce collectives of their closest friends that are based on confidential attachments and which exclude all unwanted actors (Duffy & Chan 2019, 129), such as parents, relatives and less-known peers whom they may have as 'friends' in their public Facebook or Instagram profiles. As our interviewees categorize messages and pictures about intoxication as sensitive and intimate issues, they post pictures of drinking and send messages about having fun only to their best friends, through their private groups in Snapchat, Instagram or Facebook. In these intimate online spaces, they usually have only about 20 followers whom they can trust will not share problematic images and messages outside their own circles.

SAM: [You don't share drinking pictures] on Facebook, for there you have your parents, but maybe when you have an Instagram that is private, where everyone is not allowed to follow, there you can share pictures, absolutely. It's funny. You do not post on your regular Instagram or on Facebook at all. But on Snapchat, guaranteed and often. You know, Snapchat stories are up for 24 hours, you can check them as much you want for 24 hours and then they disappear. It definitely happens ... but you do not put up embarrassing things (IP 36).

SANA: I do not consider Facebook to be private and I do not write so much there. I only update, since it is something most people see. But Snapchat, there I have my private conversations that I really don't want anyone else to see (IP 20).

LEO: Many of my friends ... share pictures and messages when they drink which you can see for 24 hours. I am a person who does not do it so often, but sometimes it can also happen to me that I post when I am with my friends and drink. However, I feel that ... why people do it, it's a bit to brag about "check what- I do right now". I think many people are not impressed by them, and that is why they are called drunken

snaps. You say it with a slightly dismissive voice since they are not so fun to see. Nobody likes them (IP 21).

That our interviewees protect their privacy in relation to drinking shows that they do not consider heavy drinking to be a publicly accepted activity. Accordingly, they share pictures and messages about their intoxication in the 'dark' spaces of their closest friends. However, in these intimate assemblages, the shared images and messages of drunkenness do not seem to produce uniform translations. Rather, they seem to become translated to heterogeneous trajectories. For some of our interviewees, they may function as mediators that strengthen closest friends' mutual feeling of solidarity, as Sam's citation above exemplifies. For some, though, they may act as actants that participate in producing embarrassing effects, as in Leo's citation above.

In order to know whether shared online pictures on drunkenness increase, stabilize or decrease our interviewees' drinking, we need to look at this issue in relation to their face-to-face drinking practices. In our data, young people do not drink while they are engaging with friends online even though social media provides creative possibilities for this. As drinking is for our interviewees something you have to do in a face-to-face situation with your friends, they provide the main stuff for their activity of sharing pictures and messages online. Moreover, as the pictures and messages of their intoxication shared in their intimate online assemblages disappear in 24 h, these pictures and messages do not become transported and translated to uncontrolled online realities. Instead of detaching themselves to live their own liberated lives online without being any longer attached to local realities, the pictures and messages remain closely tied to our interviewees' lived social relations and function as linkages that mobilize their closest friends that are not physically present in the fun to be virtually part of it.

Young people could have established habits to drink alone in their separate physical spaces and to update their status of getting drunk to their best friends through their private online assemblages enabled by digital networking applications. Yet, our interviewees do not do this.

As our interviewees' drinking-related pictures and messages remain closely tied to their own lived social relations, the effects of the pictures and messages depend on how they as attachments reorganize young people's face-to-face ritual of partying. Digital networking applications not only facilitate our interviewees to plan when, where and with whom they will drink. They also enable them to be late at drinking occasions, to be virtually part of many drinking occasions at the same time, to take individual breaks from the party they attend, and leave it to join another, if it does not inspire them enough:

- SAM: ... if I am at a party and another friend is at another party then you can send a message "ah, come here" or just "ah, I'll come to you" ... or if you are at different bars you can ask, "well, where are you?" or someone asks "where is everyone and where are you going next?", and so on.
- INTERVIEWER: Then you use the chat feature the most?
- SAM: Yes, but sometimes during the evening you may find it nice just to get away from the group a little, sit down and check out Instagram. Go to a bathroom, sit down and check out Facebook – if something has happened, you can absolutely do that (IP 36).

This passage from Samuel's interview shows that when social media-related connections enable young people to follow their individual paths on their evenings out, this has important restructuring consequences for their face-to-face drinking ritual. The way that our interviewees enroll in social media while drinking weakens their possibilities to drink at the same pace and as much as the others. As their partying becomes virtually related to actors in other parties and interrupted by online connections, these attachments make the group pressure to drink also a weaker actor in their assemblages of drinking. In these cases, the practice of using social media while partying diminishes young people's face-to-face time with each other in drinking, as well as destroying their unbroken focus on drinking as the main activity (Collins 2005). In this way, our interviewees' practice of using the mobile networking technologies in their face-to-face partying transforms their parties from quite homogeneous rituals into more heterogeneous events.

Furthermore, as our interviewees' drinking is also overseen and interrupted by online attachments that are related to parents, this also modifies their face-to-face drinking practices. As described above, many of our interviewees allow their parents to monitor their drinking events through social media (see Caroline's citation above). When parents become mediators in young people's drinking-related assemblages, this further increases social media's power to reduce young people's drinking.

## Discussion

Earlier studies propose that the use of social media may either increase or decrease young people's alcohol consumption (see Bhattacharya 2016; Obstbaum 2019). Our analysis above shows how social media-related attachments may reduce young people's alcohol consumption. However, as our study is based on qualitative data, we are not able to say how representative the different assemblages identified here are among young people.

Our study suggests several conclusions. First, when young people's action is primarily driven by attachments with online actors, then drinking is typically excluded. This includes activities of playing online games, studying online or surfing on the web alone at home. In these cases, social media acts as a competing activity to drinking.

Second, the omnipotent presence of electronic media may reduce young people's drinking in parties by translating the occasion into a more public phenomenon and by relating it to assemblages and mediators that belong to other contexts (Truong 2018). When our interviewees attend drinking parties that involve peers that do not belong to their closest circle of friends, this induces them to think about imagined audiences and to be concerned about their self-presentation, since other partygoers could share online pictures of or messages about their drinking. In the worst scenario, parents, teachers or employers would see these pictures or messages. We have above characterized these assemblages as based on 'collapsed context' or 'context collapse'. However, a better way to describe them is to consider them as exemplifying assemblages of 'expanded contexts' or 'interrelated contexts'. They introduce authority actors into young people's drinking-related assemblages and act as attachments and mediators that make young people reflect on and control their level of intoxication. Especially girls are worried about ending up as online actors in shameful drinking trajectories, but boys also discuss the negative effects of drinking pictures or messages that circulate freely in wider online environments.

Third, as a countermove to the possibility that one's drunkenness becomes translated via online sharing to webpages of wider audiences, our interviewees have developed self-censoring practices through which they aim to make their drinking an intimate, protected and predictable action (Lambert 2016; cf. Hendriks, Gebhardt, and Putte 2017). The practice of sharing images and messages about their drinking only via their private online groups rarifies the drinking's attachments to the actor-networks of surrounding society and stabilizes it to circulate in an assemblage that includes only actors and attachments they themselves are able to control. These intimate assemblages of drinking could increase or reduce young people's drinking, but when we look at how they reorganize young people's face-to-face drinking rituals, we notice that it is likely in the current circumstances in Sweden that they reduce young people's alcohol consumption. The assemblages introduce interruptions to the collective rituals of heavy drinking, in which you are supposed to drink in the same rhythm and as much as others. They enable individual digressions from the rituals, facilitate young people being virtually connected to many parties at the same time, and encourage them to compare parties and change from one party to another if they feel like it. All of these elements diminish young people's face-to-face time together and make the group pressure to drink a weaker mediator. Lastly, the social media-related assemblages that enable parents to monitor their children's time out in parties also provide attachments that reduce young people's drinking.

The assemblages in which social media gets an agency that facilitates the growth of attachments which make young people's practices and relations less focused on drinking are interestingly parallel to and functional with a broader set of forces influencing young people's living conditions. Young people are now living in an environment that can be characterized as neo-liberal. The studies show that neoliberal forces, as intermediaries of our times, encourage the growth of associations in which young people are translated into 'competitive units' (Brown 2015) and 'entrepreneurs of themselves' (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006). In order to be successful individuals in an environment of precarious employment futures, young people need early on to become concerned about their body images, health, reputation and school performance, and develop disciplinary techniques to handle these concerns. We believe that the social media-related assemblages we have identified above are concrete examples of what kinds of assemblages these kinds of forces may become translated into among young people in the context of drinking. In the assemblages identified above, social media is attached to mediators and linkages, which, as co-agencies, facilitate young people to make individual choices, monitor their self-presentations and enhance their performance and reputation (cf. Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011).

Our analysis further reveals that these assemblages are gendered. As neoliberal discourses and ideals ambivalently praise young girls as success stories of new capitalism, objectify their bodily looks and moralize their sexuality (Dobson 2014; Carah and Dobson 2016), it is no surprise that our female interviewees monitor and control their online self-presentations concerning drinking more than male interviewees. As the assemblages that circulate in surrounding society tend to attach young women's heavy drinking to stigmatizing and derogatory trajectories, it is understandable that this makes young women avoid behavior that could end up being translated into shameful connections. This result is in concert with earlier studies that show how young women are likely to

pay more attention to how their drinking is represented in digital realities than young men do (Hutton et al. 2016).

It is important to note that the neoliberal forces do not alone determine how social media is connected to particular actor-networks and what kinds of effects it has on alcohol consumption. As intermediaries of our times, they provide resilient elements for the building of assemblages, which, in turn, do not just reproduce the neoliberal circumstances and discourses but transform them and introduce them to new contexts and relations. As part of new contexts, relations and assemblages, the meaning of neoliberal forces changes and they participate in mediating different effects on young people's everyday life practices. The same goes for social media. It provides robust elements for the production of diverse actor-networks, in which it participates to mediate varying kinds of effects depending on what kinds of assemblages it is assimilated into and how it interacts with other elements in them. For example, under circumstances in which heavy drinking is highly valued and hardly contested at all among young people, in contrast to the circumstances that are present in our data, social media may become translated into assemblages that increase young people's alcohol consumption, distribute their attachments of drinking to other spaces, and make heavy drinking a stronger institution. The study by Griffiths and Casswell (2010) discussed above illustrates these kinds of circumstances. The contrasting results between their study and ours concretely demonstrate how social media, as part of different assemblages, may facilitate translations that increase, decrease or stabilize young people's alcohol consumption. The contrasting results also demonstrate that young people's drinking cultures 'are not homogeneous or static but are multiple and moving' (Savic et al. 2016, 280). When vital elements in a drinking culture change and become reconfigured into new kinds of associations and assemblages, this modifies young people's relation to alcohol and puts their drinking behavior under the influence of other kinds of forces and co-agencies.

Overall, our study contributes to developing a productive theoretical approach in the tradition of ANT to study how social media mediates young people's drinking practices. As it emphasizes attachments as primary forces in action that continuously translate human actors in interaction with non-human actors and vice versa (Millington 2009, 625), it helps us to follow how social media, as an actor in specific assemblages, may increase, decrease or stabilize young people's alcohol consumption. Our empirical results also suggest directions for future research. We need more research on how representative the different assemblages identified here are among young people; how the use of social media more exactly and concretely reorganizes young people's face-to-face drinking rituals; and on how social media as an actor in various kinds of assemblages transforms young people's spaces and group dynamics in drinking, intoxication, drinking selves and stories. We need to know more about what kinds of drinking-related assemblages social media is translated into among young people from different social backgrounds, cultural contexts, geographical areas, levels of education, digital literacy, and so forth (Lambert 2016); and about the actor-networks that enable young people to drink in virtual realities. A better understanding is needed of how young people's ways of sharing online information and self-presentations differ depending on the nature of the substance their messages deal with; and how practices of self-censorship (Duffy & Chan

2019) or self-disclosure (Tsay-Vogel, Shanahan, and Sigronielli 2018) act in these assemblages and modify their substance use. These are important research questions for future studies.

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