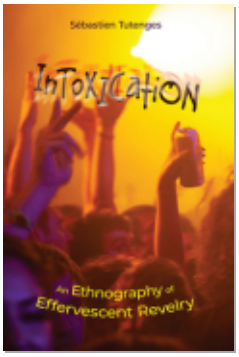
3. Unity



CHAPTER 3

UNITY

Some of the most revealing experiences during my fieldwork occurred during my downtime: having a break, walking home, carousing with friends, and so forth. One such experience played a major role in my understanding of effervescence. It took place one late summer night in the hippie settlement Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen. A friend of mine, Suresh, was working there, selling colorful clothes that he had brought back from Nepal. His stall was just next to Pusher Street, which has a constant flow of people who come to watch the scene or buy cannabis from the pushers who have given the street its name. Cannabis is an illegal drug under Danish law, but it has nevertheless been traded openly in Christiania since the 1970s. Suresh had heard rumors on Pusher Street that an underground rave party was coming up. To avoid police interference, however, the time and place of the event were only to be announced at the last minute to an in-group of trusted friends. I was eager to go to this party, so Suresh promised to let me know whenever he got news about it.

It turned out that the rave would take place on Rabbit Island, which is located in the middle of a canal that runs through Christiania. The island is no more than a couple of hundred yards wide and covered with trees and greenery. Suresh called just a few hours before the party; I raced on my bike to meet him at his stall. He is not a big drinker, so we only had one beer before we walked down to the canal. A wobbly boat brought us across to the island and we jumped on shore. The ground under us was soft and the air damp with the smell of earth, rotting leaves, and cannabis smoke. The sound system was facing a small dance area. No one was there yet besides a DJ and a group of men who looked like the biker types who sell cannabis on Pusher Street: muscular bodies, tattoos up their necks, big cannabis joints, and the occasional flash of a shark's smile. We had paid no admission fees. Perhaps it was the pushers who were financing the event. The Christiania pushers sometimes do "charity work"—donating money for

parties, strip shows, and smaller building operations—presumably to improve their reputation and recruit new customers.

It was a dog that got things started on the dance floor, racing after a laser dot that whirled across the ground. A woman in hippie clothes joined the chase. We drew closer and started dancing. Suresh put his sunglasses on, formed his hands into pistols, and mock-fired all around. I was jumping on the spot, trying to loosen up. There was an underlying simmering of anxiety in my body, so I turned my back to the pushers and the lights and sought release in the music. The hippie continued her hunt for the dog and the laser dot. Her laughter helped me relax. Everyone was focused on her and the dog, not me. My face was probably covered in darkness, anyway. A warm sensation filled me: I was dancing at a rave party, surrounded by smiling faces. Suresh seemed to be having the time of his life.

We went down to the water to rest and sat down in silence, all smiles. Here we were, at a secret rave right in the middle of Copenhagen. There was no way the police were going to shut down this party. We were close to the rest of the city and yet far away. The anxiety had left my body, and I felt happy and in harmony—with myself and everything else. This feeling grew as we went back to dance, and it stayed with me all through the night before slowly waning over the following days. Was I just having "fun" or feeling "excited" that night on Rabbit Island? I think the term *effervescence*—or more exactly, *compassionate effervescence*—better captures what I experienced.

I consider my experience on Rabbit Island to be an instance of effervescence because it meets the five criteria that define this altered state. First and foremost, the experience involved a sense of *unity*. I felt united on a deep level not only with my friend Suresh and the other people I danced with but also with something else: nature, humanity, or life, perhaps. Second, what I experienced was *intense*. I felt elevated, taken out of myself, and more alive in a way that has only happened a few times in my life. Third, the experience was *transgressive*. It made me relate to myself, others, and the world in a fundamentally different manner from what I am used to. The experience was thus unusual but, at the same time, strangely familiar. It all made perfect sense. Moreover, the rave party had elements of secrecy, criminality, and subversion, and these added to the transgressive quality of my experience. Fourth, the experience was so powerful that some of its energy was transfused into *symbols*—namely, the rave's location and music. Today, when I look at Rabbit Island or listen to certain types of electronic dance music, I sometimes feel reconnected with my experience at the rave. Finally, the experience was *revitalizing*. It made me feel very good, and it changed something inside of me.

Unity, intensity, transgression, symbolization, and revitalization: These are the experiential building blocks of effervescence. Each will be explored in turn in separate chapters, beginning with this chapter on unity.

"Being Together and Doing Things Together"

Durkheim emphasizes that the crux of effervescence is that people are united, that sentiments are felt in common and expressed by common acts. There is, he argues, something inherently gratifying in being physically close to others, meeting new people, moving to the same beat, and engaging in the same activity. To feel and act in common involves a mutual awareness that diminishes the distance between self and other. There is a sense of being enlarged and of merging with something bigger and more powerful than oneself. Durkheim writes, "When men are all gathered together, when they live a communal life, the very fact of their coming together causes exceptionally intense forces to arise which dominate them, exalt them, give them a quality of life to a degree unknown to them as individuals" (1994, 183). People at effervescent gatherings are elevated above themselves and freed from their "temporal and mundane interests" (1994, 185). What Durkheim has in mind is much more than just "fun," which does not imply that people attend such gatherings for networking purposes or to seek a partner, long-term friendships, or some other lasting gain. Rather, people come together precisely in order to be together. Unity is its own reward.

Many people describe their nightlife experiences in similar terms. Of course, some go out with the express goal of building networks or for some other practical purpose, but such goals rarely exist alone. The general desires to meet up, hang out, and be close, for no specific reason, are what really make things move in nightlife.

Consider the case of nightlife tourists. Most of them prefer not to spend their time unwinding, contemplating, reading books, visiting monuments, learning languages, or hiking in nature. Rather, most of their waking hours are spent in intimate verbal and nonverbal exchanges with each other—in swimming pools, at restaurants, at drinking venues, in hotel rooms, or on beaches. Even sleeping often has a social element to it, as most nightlife tourists share rooms with fellow travelers.

Søren Kierkegaard's expression "human bath" has often come to my mind when contemplating tourists (1983, 170). He used the expression to describe his daily walks in the crowded streets of Copenhagen, an experience that filled him with the energy he needed to pursue his predominantly solitary work as a writer. Vacations at nightlife destinations may also be thought of as human baths. These baths, however, last for several days and pump up the tourists with so much energy that they become overloaded by it. Yet far from being unexpected or unimportant, the overload is one of the key mechanisms that destabilize the tourists and push them toward the effervescent states that they have come to find. Popular nightlife destinations attract swarming masses, and the masses are part of what makes the destinations popular.

I had long discussions about these themes of masses, energy, and exhaustion with Simon and John, two big guys in their early twenties whom I followed during their one-week vacation in Sunny Beach. One afternoon, I interviewed them with my audio recorder as we were sitting on the balcony adjacent to their hotel room. The room, so small that it could barely fit the beds, reeked of alcohol-infused sweat and male deodorant. Their friend and travel companion Kim was lying on one of the beds. He said that Simon and John could speak for him because he was too tired, and anyway, he agreed with whatever they had to say.

"Yeah, man, you just do what you do best: go to sleep!" Simon roared at Kim.

Then turning to me, he summarized matter-of-factly that their aspiration for the vacation was to load up on alcohol, sun, and parties, as well as to meet lots of new people. The alcohol was important, he explained, because it helped him overcome inhibitions.[1]

"When I'm sober, I don't have the courage to go over and talk with a girl," he confessed. "But when I'm drunk, there ain't nothing holding me back."

The three friends usually began their evenings by tanking up on food and liquid courage. Then they typically went to a bar to continue drinking and start their search for women. They always stuck together, because this was more "fun," and also because it made them feel safer. Sunny Beach is marred by crime, so being drunk alone can be a real hazard, they said. Their nights in Sunny Beach lasted till around sunrise, when they would stumble their way back to the hotel and get a few hours of sleep before the hangovers started setting in. The first one to wake up would soon wake up the others. Only during toilet visits would they have some time for themselves, although some of these visits were made with the door left open. Indeed, as Simon pointed out, they were in it together.

I asked them how they would define a good party, and they agreed that good parties are wild parties. People have to get drunk and cheerful and dance on the tables, they explained. Cozy parties were obviously not their thing—especially not in Sunny Beach, where one is supposed to "go nuts." Simon estimated that on every single day of their vacation, each of them drank the equivalent of eight or nine liters of pilsner beer with an alcohol content of 4.6 percent.

John confirmed, "We drink lots and lots, so much that it seems impossible."

"If we told people about all the shit we have done, they wouldn't believe us," Simon said. "Really. Parents can't understand that it's possible to drink this much. They just can't."

"And the crazy thing is that it's only Kim who has vomited. We have been drunk as pigs all the time, but almost no puking. And seriously, with the loads we've taken, wild."

Drunkenness was certainly important for them, but they did not see it as a goal in and of itself. Rather, alcohol was, for them, more like a remedy to remove

inhibitions and enter a happy and extroverted state of mind so they could talk with women and do lots of "wild things," like going to a strip club.

Everybody at the party has to get drunk, John explained, but not "completely gone." One has to retain some degree of control; otherwise, people will get hurt. John preferred it when everyone at a party was cheerful and "the good mood gradually builds up from the ground." You get excited by the other people's excitement, Simon explained, drawing a parallel between the crowds at a party and those at a sporting event.

"It creates a sense of unity when you are surrounded by a sea of people," he said. "When we all yell and scream to a Danish song at a bar here at the resort, it's the same emotion that I get when I'm at a sports stadium. It's about being together and doing things together."

This simple motivation of "being together and doing things together" is a cornerstone of most rituals, whether religious or secular. It has the effect of allowing people to tune in to one another and, as Durkheim puts it, reach "agreement" on a moral and experiential plane: "It is by shouting the same cry, saying the same words, and performing the same action in regard to the same object that they arrive at and experience agreement. . . . The individual minds can meet and commune only if they come outside themselves, but they do this only by means of movement. It is the homogeneity of these movements that makes the group aware of itself and that, in consequence, makes it be" (Durkheim 1995, 232).

The collective attunement during rituals can give rise to strong feelings of freedom, power, and solidarity. Some people even get the sense, however brief, that they are connected with the wider universe as well as to their fellow humans. This is a deeply meaningful experience, which provides a glimpse into the connectedness and interdependence of all things. In the words of John, "There has to be a nice group feeling. You have to feel united with the people you drink with."

As mentioned, the effervescent recognition of unity is an end in itself and does not necessarily point beyond its own immediacy toward lasting friendships or any other future reward. This argument is central to the work of Maffesoli, who uses the expression of an "undirected being together" to emphasize that, in general, people come together for the sake of being together, period (1996, 81). Rational reasons may be advanced to explain why people assemble—political reasons, for example—but such reasons should not blind us to the affective drives and rewards that also, and always, play a major role when people get together. Maffesoli therefore warns against the tendency to interpret the human impulse to unite as a mere *project* (pro-jectum), meaning an activity that is aimed ahead of itself toward some well-defined goal in the future (1996, 16). The unitive drive is an anthropological constant that is fueled by and centered on the instant gratifications of people taking part in the same activities, the same movements, and the same states of mind.

However, it may happen that the connections made in nightlife lead to something durable. John and Simon met a woman in Sunny Beach who they were very fond of and saw as a potential friend. She had so much energy and had even asked if they wanted to go to a strip club.

"She got a lap dance!" yelled John, his eyes wide open with astonished admiration. "That's so f-cking classy. . . . She was the one who wanted it, and she asked if we wanted one too."

Simon laughed and added, "When she goes home and tells that story, nobody will ever believe that it happened."

John pointed out, however, that this woman was special. Most of the other people they had met were just "vacation pals. [. . .] You won't ever meet them once you are back home."

The bonds forged in nightlife are often fleeting, but this does not necessarily make them shallow, illusory, or meaningless, as some scholars would have it (see, e.g., Melechi 1993; Briggs 2013). Fleeting relationships have certain advantages over long-lasting ones. Most importantly, since they are not weighed down by future obligations, they facilitate an engagement with the pleasures at hand. Of course, fleeting contacts can sometimes be hollow, pointless, heartbreaking, and so forth. But they can also be liberating. To embrace the fleeting is to seize the moment and make the most of opportunities that are available in the here and now instead of cultivating something that may or may not provide joy or comfort in some uncertain future (Maffesoli 1985). Many also find it easier to engage in play when they are in an anonymous setting and surrounded by people they will never meet again. Indeed, as the performance researcher Alice O'Grady points out, "The party offers a play zone that protects its players from the outside world" (2012, 94). Here individuals may choose to adopt a "party persona" and behave in ways that would be difficult to get away with in other contexts. This allows the imagination to operate more freely and facilitates play and flirtation as well as risk taking and crime.

According to Durkheim, humans have a recurrent need to connect with the turbulent energies that come from being close to others. These energies can be just as powerful in an assembly of strangers as in an assembly of friends (see also Canetti 1978). Accordingly, Maffesoli argues that the fact of assembling—no matter why, where, when, and with whom—generally has the effect of raising the social temperature. It allows people to rub shoulders—"keeping warm together"—and temporarily set aside their personal problems and concerns (Maffesoli 1996b).[2] An expression of this in nightlife is the widespread practice of sharing. People buy rounds of drinks for their friends—and sometimes for strangers. They give away cigarettes for free. They pass around cannabis joints rather than smoke them alone. They ask someone to come join them when they go to the toilets to sniff cocaine. And they generously exchange compliments,

hugs, and kisses. These practices are both causes and effects of unity among the revelers. They illustrate that in nightlife, group needs have precedence over personal needs. The collective "WE" is more important than the individual "I" (Maffesoli 1985).

Simon and John were eager to meet new people, especially female people who would like to have sex with them. They did not want sex with men but were otherwise open to various constellations: couple sex, group sex, oral sex, drunken sex, sober sex, sex in front of a camera, and much more. Sexual experiences and experimentation were at the very top of their list of priorities in Sunny Beach—and pretty much everywhere else. From a Durkheimian perspective, sexual intercourse in its various manifestations may be understood as an essentially effervescent mode of being (Collins 2004, 223–257; Mellor and Shilling 1997). Intercourse usually assembles very few people, typically two, but it nevertheless has the capacity of producing a form of effervescence: symbolically significant moments of intersubjective union, intensity, transgression, and revitalization. Sexual experiences tend to be so effervescently powerful not only from genital friction but also from the whole bodily proximity of the sexual partners, their coordinated actions, and the way that they almost inevitably come to focus on each other's movements, touch, breathing, and state of mind. This proximity and mutual awareness may trigger what Collins calls "rhythmic entrainment," meaning that the partners intensify their rhythmic movements and become caught up in each other's bodily rhythms (2004, 233). There is a synchronization of movements, including movements of the breath and, sometimes, synchronized advancement toward sexual climax. Collins writes that in heterosexual sex, the synchronization is "not necessarily perfect," in part because "female orgasms may go on longer or more repetitively and involve many more spasms than male ejaculation" (Collins 2004, 234). Collins observes, however, that even moderate levels of synchronization during intercourse may generate "considerable pleasure and solidarity" (2004, 234). And if the partners meet repeatedly to have sex, they may develop relatively stable sexual practices and a strong sense of moral obligation and solidarity (Mellor and Shilling 1997).

John and Simon did not go into much detail about their sexual practices, but they made it clear that sex sometimes involves little pleasure and commitment. As John put it, sex may be nothing more than the physical act of "letting off pressure," adding, "There is nothing in it." This type of sex is common in places like Sunny Beach, especially when it is performed under the influence of large doses of alcohol. Simon admitted that he once had to interrupt sex with a woman because he had to vomit, and I have heard several sex stories from others that involved one of the partners being so drunk that he or she fell asleep or had a blackout during the act. This type of very drunken sex may not induce much pleasure while being performed; it can even be traumatizing if one of the

partners feels taken advantage of or abused. However, when there is mutual respect and consent, drunken sex is generally considered rewarding in the long run because of the symbolic value associated with having had many sexual partners and experiences (Pedersen, Tutenges, and Sandberg 2017). In many Western countries, young men—and, to a lesser extent, young women—may use stories of their sexual encounters to entertain friends and project themselves as being sexually successful and attractive. Here, the sexual intercourse does not primarily produce pleasure and solidarity between the sexual partners but rather between those who share stories about past acts (Collins 2004, 238).

Simon and John spent a lot of time, money, and effort trying to seduce women, but they found it depressingly difficult to reach their goal of "getting laid." This is the situation of countless male revelers around the world. As sociologist David Grazian points out, "It is statistically uncommon for men to successfully pick up women in bars and nightclubs" (2008, 140). So why bother searching for casual sex in nightlife venues? Why not focus on other platforms that give better chances, such as dating sites on the internet? Grazian explores these questions and finds that in nightlife, "males do not necessarily engage in girl hunting as a means of generating sexual relationships, even on a drunken short-term basis" (2008, 138). It may be that men portray their "girl hunting" as a pursuit of sex and nothing else. But Grazian convincingly argues that these missions also serve homosocial purposes by bringing together two or more men who collaborate in spotting attractive women. These friends typically encourage, assist, accompany, or watch as one of them performs his seductive moves toward the chosen "prey." Male-to-male bonding is key to this practice, as the huntsmen work together toward a common goal while boosting their sense of being real men on a manly mission. And as he makes his moves, the hunter can demonstrate and sharpen his seductive skills in the presence of a woman, perhaps under the lustful gazes of his male friends. Grazian therefore describes girl hunting as an "activity for which one's male peers serve as the intended audience for competitive games of sexual reputation and peer status, public displays of situational dominance and rule transgression, and in-group rituals of solidarity and loyalty" (2008, 138).

These observations illustrate that collective effervescence can be discriminatory—and sometimes viciously so—with a division between an in-group of fellows who nurture their own interests and an out-group of others who, whether they like it or not, serve as opponents, rivals, or mere playthings. The sense of solidarity may be high within the group but low or absent toward individuals deemed outside of the group. As Durkheim was well aware, collective effervescence does not only manifest itself as cosmic feelings of love toward everyone and everything; it sometimes involves a strong sense of in-group solidarity combined with fierce out-group hostility.

The practice of girl hunting, as described by Grazian, is an important reminder that effervescence is a volatile force. It can bring people together but also rip them apart. Another more extreme example is the violent effervescence caused by war. A war can lead to the most atrocious acts but can also inspire deeds of incredible bravery, as when a soldier dives on a grenade to save lives or runs into a rain of bullets to drag out a wounded comrade (Blake 1978).

Acts of self-sacrifice are also common among revelers. Examples are legion, but for now, I will only mention one: that of the *wingman*. In a military context, this term signifies a fighter pilot whose aircraft is positioned near a leading aircraft to engage in enemy fire if need be. As Grazian points out, the term has another sense in the context of nightlife, where it refers to "an accomplice who assists a designated leading man in meeting eligible single women, often at costs to his own ability to do the same" (Grazian 2007, 233). The wingman may, for instance, act rudely toward a woman in order to position the leading man as the good guy who steps up to defend her. The wingman hereby sacrifices his own reputation in an effort to secure the sexual success of his friend.

Though effervescence is conducive to selflessness, selflessness is not always a good thing. Simon and John always hunted for women together or with trusted friends, never alone. Yet they rarely employed advanced wingman tactics, such as those featured in Grazian's work. Rather, they preferred the simpler, well-established model of going to a place frequented by women, getting drunk, and hoping for the best. This model paid off one night—sort of. Simon managed to seduce a Swedish woman, but they "only" got to the stage of kissing. John was there and described what happened: "Nothing came out of it because we suddenly staggered on to the next bar. [Simon and the woman] began making out right there in the middle of the bar, and then I don't know what the hell we were thinking, but we left. So nothing came out of it."

"It went down the drain," Simon confirmed.

John and Simon blamed themselves and their drinking for having abandoned a woman who appeared genuinely interested in more than just kissing. One of them was finally close to having sex, and then drunken stupidity made them walk away. That is how they reasoned. Without alcohol, they were incapable of approaching women, but too much alcohol made them "dumb" and "disgusting."

However, there are alternative explanations for the seemingly paradoxical procedure of collaborating in chatting up and seducing a woman and then collaborating in walking away from the woman soon after she has been seduced. One explanation is that Simon was so drunk that his sexual desire and potency were diminished—or gone altogether. He derived pleasure from the masculine game of drinking and hunting for women, but perhaps he had reached a stage of drunkenness that would hinder him from having pleasurable sex with the allegedly very attractive Swedish woman.[3] Instead of attempting to have sex with her,

he returned to John and their game of drinking and hunting for women. Another possible explanation is that Simon and John preferred to stick together and cultivate their male-to-male bond rather than split up so that one of them could have a drunken one-night stand with a woman. They placed enormous value on casual sex but even higher value on their friendship. And by turning his back to a willing woman, Simon rendered proof of his loyalty and love: he would give up almost anything, even sex, before he would give up his friend.

Band of Sisters

I met Sarah, Tine, Natasha, Signe, and Denice at a pool party in Sunny Beach. There were several hundred revelers, but these five women stood out because of the many drunken stunts they performed and the inflated Lolita doll they carried around all night. I asked them for an interview, and we agreed to meet at their hotel the day after.

I found them in their hotel room, with the Lolita doll sitting in the sun on the balcony and almost looking more alive than the rest of the group. We all went outside by the pool to talk.

The doll was named "Linda," they said, and when I asked about her age, Sarah assured me that "she is old enough."

"We wanted to win this competition on who had the best rubber [pool] toy," Tine explained, "and we thought that we would need the world's coolest rubber toy, and we were walking by a sex shop and figure that, 'Hey, we can win this thing with a Lolita doll.' So we dressed her up, put her in some nice underwear and a T-shirt. Because we found the clothes she was wearing a bit too daring."

"Was this before the pool party?" I asked.

"Yes it was. It was—" Sarah began.

Tine cut in: "It was actually in the afternoon, so we brought her out to eat, and we got free champagne, and she got her own chair and plate and everything."

They won the rubber pool toy competition.

After this introduction to Linda, I asked some standard questions from my interview guide: "Could you explain what kind of place this is? What kind of vacation is it?"

"I would say that it's about partying and having fun with your friends," Sarah said.

Denice added, "Perhaps also getting to know other people."

But Sarah was not so sure. "Yeah, well, but not getting to know people and later making contact with them and stuff," she said. She continued with a question to me: "But this is a binge vacation, if that's what you're getting at? I mean that [binge drinking] is what it's all about, and all the parties here are built around that."

"But also just being with your friends," Nathalie said. "We get to know each other in a whole new way. . . . We see sides of each other that we didn't know before. . . . Because we are, like, together round the clock for an entire week. You're never alone."

"Also, we have to protect each other," Denice confirmed. "You have a responsibility. At home, we have our parents and all that, but here we only have each other."

The five of them had been friends for most of their approximately eighteen-year lives. However, they had never been on a "binge vacation" before. They had been drunk together on numerous occasions, but not for as long as an entire week. They had seen one another naked, but not on stage during a beach party.

"Here in Sunny Beach, you do all kinds of crazy stunts that you would never do at home," Denice explained.

One of the best stunts they had performed, she recounted, took place at a karaoke night organized by their tour operator.

"We had put on dresses, each in a different color . . . and we thought, 'Ah, why not do a song?' and, you know, Tine was in a yellow dress and yellow shoes and yellow all over and Nathalie was completely in turquoise. So we get up on a table and sing 'See My Dress' [a children's song] in front of everybody. We also won that contest."

Nathalie added, "The guides have also told us many times that they think we're cool. We're just game for anything. . . . So you could say that we want a bit of attention . . . at least come up with one funny idea per day."

"That's right. We make our own fun," Denice confirmed.

The five friends had lots of fun talking about their stunts—both done and yet to be done—and they perpetually threw themselves into new challenging situations, which sometimes put their health and reputations at stake. When Nathalie performed one of her strip shows in a bar, there were probably some in the crowd who thought badly about her.

"I mean, sure there were these two hundred people, but the only ones I will ever meet again are these girls who are sitting right here," she reasoned.

I had seen one of Nathalie's strip shows. She was battling with a man over who dared to throw off most clothes. She won, as always. I interpreted her expression during the show as one of determination and defiance—or perhaps it was disdain. She showed no sign of amusement whatsoever. I should have asked about that experience during the interview, but I did not. So I am not sure what to make of it.

I did ask, however, whether they were concerned about all the photos and videos that were being recorded whenever they performed their stunts.

Nathalie answered, "I don't give it any thought."

Denice said that, since they were in Sunny Beach, she did not mind much either. It was different than being at home, where pictures and videos easily "start

circulating" and people get "shocked" and gossip. This had already happened to them once, she said. They shot a video of themselves as they were having fun in a swimming pool, drunk and almost naked.

"Somebody got a hold of that video and sent it out to everybody," she recalled. "That wasn't cool."

Studies from many parts of the world show that, compared with men, women risk greater harm to their reputations when experimenting publicly with their sexuality, gendered behaviors, or altered states of consciousness (Armstrong et al. 2014; Bogle 2008). Writing about the Norwegian context, which is very similar to the Danish context, Eivind Grip Fjær and colleagues observe, "Even within modern 'hookup cultures,' heterosexual men are expected to be sexually active while women who are equally active risk stigmatization through 'bad reputations' and 'slut-shaming'" (Fjær, Pedersen, and Sandberg 2015, 961).

The five friends knew that their behavior in Sunny Beach could damage their reputations, but they emphasized that these were minor risks and that they would stand up for one another if anyone dared to question their behavior. They systematically violated traditional codes of gender and sexuality—sometimes for fun, sometimes simply because they could, and sometimes perhaps to express and exhibit their newly won autonomy as young adults. In Sunny Beach, they said, everybody was acting crazy anyway, so why hold back? They were primarily concerned with their emotional bonds of friendship, not with what outsiders might think of them.

Few things can unite people more powerfully than acts of collective transgression. When individuals join forces to transgress boundaries—whether boundaries of etiquette, morality, law, or religion—they tend to become acutely aware of one another and what they are doing as a group. There is, almost by necessity, a high level of mutual attention, a coordination of actions, and a fusion of individual wills. The senses are sharpened by the social or physical risks posed by the transgression, and the transgressors may become so caught up by the collective action that they set aside their own needs to focus completely on those of the group. Afterward, when the transgression has been accomplished, the group will have an exciting experience that they can think back on and relate to others, something that may help define them as a group and further solidify their group unity. Probably no one has expressed this mechanism more famously and forcefully than Shakespeare. As Shakespeare's Henry V declares to his men on the day before a grand battle,

> From this day to the ending of the world,
> But we in it shall be remembered—
> We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
> For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
> Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,

> This day shall gentle his condition;
> And gentlemen in England now-a-bed
> Shall think themselves accurst they were not here;
> And hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks
> That fought with us. (2014, 508)

The five women were not engaged in the transgression of war, but they were in a battle nonetheless. Their adversaries were oppressive social forces, such as conventions, stereotypes, and gendered expectations. They were not a band of brothers but a band of sisters. Their common battle consolidated their group unity. They did not shed blood together on the battlefield but rather lots of sweat, tears, vomit, and clothing. The women said that they would always remember their vacation and all the crazy things they had been through together. They emphasized, however, that the reason behind their stunts was not to boast and build a reputation. Their war stories from Sunny Beach were first and foremost theirs to keep and not designed for others to hear.

"We just want to have fun without anyone interfering or criticizing us," Nathalie explained. "What happens here is between us, between close friends. . . . And right from the beginning we agreed: what happens in Bulgaria, stays in Bulgaria. It's best if people back home don't know what we have been doing here."

"There is another kind of moral down here," Signe added.

"For sure," Nathalie confirmed.

"Can you tell me more about that moral?" I asked.

Signe replied, "Here it is less acceptable to abstain from drinking. When I see someone who doesn't want to party, I kind of think that they are boring."

"People should go out and have fun while they can," someone chimed in.

"People are generally more tolerant down here, more open," another voice added.

The women were indeed tolerant when it came to wild behavior, but not so when it came to restraint and self-discipline. Their tolerance did not, for example, extend to the practices of staying sober, saving money, doing sports, eating healthy food, reading books, and going early to bed. They were fervently in favor of excess—in the context of Sunny Beach, that is. At home, they were allegedly much more moderate and "boring."

Tine explained that they drew inspiration from a group of their male friends who had visited the resort earlier that summer. Back in Denmark, the men had told all sorts of crazy stories about what they had done at the resort.

"They were here just two weeks before us," she said. "We want to do it better than them."

"We have something to live up to," Nathalie said.

"You wanted to beat them? What did they do?" I asked.

"They decided to drag all the furniture out of their hotel room and dump it into the swimming pool. They were just constantly drunk," Nathalie recalled. Then she asked the group, "What else did they do?"

Everyone became animated and spoke fast (I am not sure who said what):

"I don't know. A lot of crazy shit. They wouldn't even tell us."

"They shouldn't come and tell us that we can't party!"

"Yeah, that's it. The guides and bartenders all remember those boys."

"It's also because [the boys] told us before we came, 'Bah, you can't cope' and like, 'It's too wild for you.' So I thought, 'Hell, I'll show you that we can do this.'"

These comments made me ask about the differences between male and female partygoers.

"I can't cope with as much [alcohol as men], let me put it like that," Tine said. "Also, [men], how to put it, they exaggerate more, right?"

"Yeah, but still," Nathalie objected. "All those times a boy has challenged me to a drinking contest. . . . I have beaten them all. They are not that tough."

Historically speaking, men used to be the "intoxicated gender" (Pedersen 2006, 81–84). They traditionally began using alcohol and illegal drugs at an earlier age than women and consumed larger quantities of both. They were the big smokers of tobacco, and they had a near monopoly on public displays of intoxication. These gender differences are no longer as accentuated as they used to be, especially when it comes to alcohol consumption. The last half-century has seen a gradual decrease in, but not complete disappearance of, the differences between young men and women.

The level and frequency of drinking among young men and young women have thus converged in recent times, but their intoxicated performances less so. Generally speaking, I would say that the intoxicated performances of women are comparatively more eroticized, whereas those of men are comparatively more risk oriented. For example, I have seen more women than men engage in erotic bar-top dancing, pole dancing, strip teases, seducing drinks out of strangers, and playful kissing with friends. On the other hand, I have seen more men than women engage in violent confrontations, vandalism, stealing, drunken driving, paying for sex, drug use, and drug dealing. Importantly, these observations should not be read as support of the old-fashioned understanding of gender as biologically determined and locked into the familiar binaries: women and men, passive and active, oppressed and oppressor, risk averse and risk prone, and so forth. Gender is a flexible, cultural construct, and in nightlife environments, people are expected to exhibit and experiment with their gender roles. This may involve adopting and exaggerating various stereotypical roles, like the "macho" man and the "slutty" woman. Part of the reason that such stereotypes persist is because they are so simple, striking, and widely known. This makes them easily imitated and conformed to (Hall 1997). Moreover, men from an early age are

taught to be independent and navigate risks, whereas the socialization of women tends to place more emphasis on caretaking and looks.[4]

Denice brought up an episode that illustrates another gender difference.

"There was one night where we wanted to go back home together, but two of us wanted to go to this place and eat," she recalled. "You goddamn can't do anything, even when you walk around [with] two people. If you meet some locals or something. Not that something really bad happened. We weren't like raped or anything, but still. People come over and grope you and push you and yell and stuff."

"You know, we were just walking on our own," Tine continued. "It was not some back alley or something, but quite dark. Then come these three Bulgarian men and stand there and touch us and say 'Do you wanna f-ck?' and like that. So we hurry on. I wouldn't say they were, like, offensive. They didn't follow us. But they were really, like, pushed her and stuff."

Across the world, female revelers are at greater risk of being sexually harassed than male revelers (Fileborn 2016). Indeed, this problem is so pervasive that some young women take it for granted that going out involves unwanted sexual attention and abuse (Tutenges, Sandberg, and Pedersen 2020). Note that Tine said that the Bulgarian men were not offensive, even though they had committed the clear-cut crimes of pushing and sexually touching the women without permission. Tine and her friends downplayed the whole incident, perhaps because they were used to this kind of offense, were confused by it, or were unaware that it represented a crime. They insisted that they were having a good time, that nothing had gone wrong, and that they were safe from harm—as long as they kept together.[5]

As if to demonstrate how much fun they were having, Nathalie suddenly leaped onto an air mattress in the pool and managed to stand upright for a brief moment before she splashed into the water. That was part of her daily routine in Sunny Beach: trying to find her balance on the wobbly air mattress.

"You have to give her that. She has really sacrificed herself for the team," Denice commented. I never asked what Denice meant by this—another blunder in my interview—but I suppose she employed the expression "sacrifice" because Nathalie's performances involved giving something of herself to her friends as well as other spectators. She risked her neck and personal reputation while elevating her group of friends by drawing attention to it. She also delivered entertaining performances for everyone to enjoy and remember. What she did was not simply for her own personal kicks.

I asked them how they got the ideas for their stunts, and Denice swiftly replied, "hangover humor." They explained that when they woke up, it usually took several hours before they really got out of bed. Perhaps they would go to the pool and have one beer to fight the hangover symptoms, but otherwise, they

would just lie down, moan, talk, and as Tine put it, "have these far-out laughing fits over weird things." They also planned the upcoming night, sometimes spending several hours discussing what to wear and how to create some new, spectacular scene. They thus gave advice and (im)moral support to one another so that they, individually and as a group, could push still farther down the road of excess. When night fell and one of them performed a stunt, the others would always applaud. No criticism would come from the group, only approval, and none of them had done anything they regretted—or so they said.

I think that the performances of Nathalie and her friends are best understood as a collective form of behavior. They would not have taken place were it not for the group, and they had the effect of strengthening the group's cohesion. Moreover, when one person in the group performed a solo stunt, it was, in a sense, done on behalf of the entire group. Both the individual performer and group were praised for the effort by other tourists and tour guides, and I suspect that it was the performer who derived least (immediate) pleasure from it. This is a general trend among the people I have studied in Sunny Beach and elsewhere. They prefer to venture down the road of excess together with friends. Their exploits are collective; they are performed with, for, and because of the group.