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The Uncommon Ground: Drunk Drivers' Self-Presentations and Accountings of Drunk Driving

Lars Fynbo
VIVE - The Danish Center for Social Science Research, lf@soc.ku.dk

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Abstract

The paper analyses the self-presentations of three convicted drunk drivers: two women and one man. It applies symbolic interaction theory to analyze how the interviewees account of themselves and their driving under the influence (DUI) convictions. The analysis shows how uncontrolled and unpredictable features of the data generating process impacts on the interviewees' self-presentations. One interviewee, a 28-year-old man, uses his dog and tattoos to close-in on his problem with alcohol consumption. Another interviewee, a 61-year-old woman, uses legitimate cultural scripts of being a responsible woman to neutralize the fact that she has been drunk driving frequently for many years. The third interviewee, a 40-year-old woman, refuses to conceive herself as a drunk driver. Rather than taking responsibility for her DUI-conviction, she tries to relieve herself in the interview by blaming her DUI on her social surroundings. The paper demonstrates how qualitative interviews are sometimes unpredictable and dependent on diverse feelings and reactions and how drunk drivers, generally conceived as moral offenders, need intelligible, normative social positions to relate to their DUI.

Keywords

Qualitative Interviewing, Drunk Driving, Accounting, Social Deviance

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The paper analyses the self-presentations of three convicted drunk drivers: two women and one man. It applies symbolic interaction theory to analyze how the interviewees account of themselves and their driving under the influence (DUI) convictions. The analysis shows how uncontrolled and unpredictable features of the data generating process impacts on the interviewees' self-presentations. One interviewee, a 28-year-old man, uses his dog and tattoos to close-in on his problem with alcohol consumption. Another interviewee, a 61-year-old woman, uses legitimate cultural scripts of being a responsible woman to neutralize the fact that she has been drunk driving frequently for many years. The third interviewee, a 40-year-old woman, refuses to conceive herself as a drunk driver. Rather than taking responsibility for her DUI-conviction, she tries to relieve herself in the interview by blaming her DUI on her social surroundings. The paper demonstrates how qualitative interviews are sometimes unpredictable and dependent on diverse feelings and reactions and how drunk drivers, generally conceived as moral offenders, need intelligible, normative social positions to relate to their DUI. Keywords: Qualitative Interviewing, Drunk Driving, Accounting, Social Deviance

Introduction

This paper presents findings from a study about heavy consumption of alcohol outside the treatment system. The study conceives driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol as a risk activity related to heavy consumption of alcohol. Based on the same study, other analyses have pointed out how convicted drunk drivers balance between control and loss-of-control of alcohol as well as driving (Järvinen & Fynbo, 2011), how convicted drunk drivers refer to different social identities when reflecting upon their DUI-convictions (Fynbo & Järvinen, 2011), or how young DUI-offenders use drunk driving as a radical type of risk behavior challenging normative society (Fynbo, 2014). In this paper, I analyze the self-presentations of three convicted drunk drivers during interviews with me about their alcohol use and feelings about DUI. These three interviewees account very differently about their alcohol consumption and how being a convicted drunk driver has influenced their lives. While doing so they show how morally challenged interviewees use accounting as a defense mechanism (Austin, 1961).

While the overall purpose of the study was to produce knowledge about drunk driving, which could inform future policy developments, the interviews aimed at allowing the DUI-offenders to account of their actions as diverse individuals.

Qualitative Interviewing Is Symbolic Interaction

To interview people is not just a matter of getting answers to questions. Interviewing is an "interactional event" and standardized questions are too "fragile" and "technical" to be viable (Suchman & Jordan, 1990, p. 241). Semi-structured qualitative interviews are, writes Mason (2002, p. 65), "social interactions" and "it is inappropriate to see social interaction as

'bias' which can potentially be eradicated" Inckle (2010, p. 31) describes an interview as an inter-relational "appropriation of intimate experiences." Within classic symbolic interactionism, social interaction is not conceived foremost as a representation of inner conditions, motives etc., of interacting individuals or as a social representation of an outer cultural order. Rather, argues Blumer (1936, p. 518), symbolic interaction is a creative process based, on the one hand, upon on-going "interpretations" and, on the other hand, upon "spontaneous and direct" responses. Central to Blumer's interpretation of social interaction is that meaning is generated in an interaction process. Meaning never exists objectively. Hence, according to symbolic interactionism (Austin, 1961; Blumer, 1936), it is impossible to approach interviewees neutrally and objectively and, parallel hereto, interviewees are unlikely to react identically in similar situations.

Austin (1961, p. 131) argues that a qualitative interview is not standardized but complex and unpredictable:

> Do we all say the same, and only the same, things in the same situation? Doesn't usage differ? And, why should what we all ordinarily say be the only or the best or final way of putting it? Why should it even be true?

According to Austin, the same person in the same interview is likely to give different answers to the same question. Nilssen (2012, p. 25) adds that it is an "ontological premise" of qualitative research to conceive "reality" as "complex, ever-changing and constructed by every individual who is involved in a research situation." She thus argues that interviews should be approached as complex and ever-changing "meetings" in which "knowledge is constructed" during unpredictable and relatively uncontrolled interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Interviews are made up by, sometimes, unpredictable interactions caused by different agendas. Interviews are asymmetrically structured by complex power relations (Packer, 2011, p. 45) and affected by sudden moods and spontaneous reactions (Austin, 1961, p. 143).

Whatever its purpose, writes ten Have (2004), "The interview format tends to be based on an asymmetrical distribution of interactional jobs" (p. 58). Even in interviews where interviewers appear to, somehow, share an "even" allocation of their "distribution of interaction," this relationship is easily shaken by unpredictable inputs or gestures. For example, sudden differences in the perceptions of the topics discussed, unpredictable attempts at controlling the interview or simply by spontaneous and unprepared-for incidents can have a strong impact on the development of an interview. Furthermore, societal discourses condemning DUI may drive the interviewer to push interviewees to take ownership over the DUI that the interviewees may not acknowledge outside of the interview situation.

Contrary to this, Presser (2004) argues that qualitative interviews with perpetrators of violent crimes can provide interviewees with a possibility to adhere to non-deviant identities. By incorporating normative, cultural scripts into the interview, the interviewer enables interviewees to resist the immoral identity that their moral offences otherwise have designated for them.

For this study, cultural scripts were important for the interviewed drunk drivers. Unexpected features and spontaneous enacting of intuitions and moods during the interviews also turned out to be important.

Self-Interpretation through Accounting

A special philosophical approach to qualitative data analysis conceives interviewees as "accounting" of selves through "presentations of their preferred interpretations of the actions" (Järvinen, 2001, p. 263). Accounting occurs when interviewees are asked to relate personal

behaviors that infringe on or deviate from mainstream social norms (Inckle, 2010, pp. 28-29). Within an interactionist perspective (Austin, 1961; Järvinen, 2003; Scott & Lyman, 1968), it is argued that socially stigmatized and marginalized individuals often "defend" and/or "legitimate" themselves in an interview situation. Accounting thus happens when a person "is *accused* of having done something, or […] where someone is *said* to have done something which is bad, wrong, inept, unwelcome, or in some other of the numerous possible ways untoward" (Austin, 1961, pp. 123-124).

Similarly, Järvinen (2003, p. 217) argues that interviews about "troubled identities" allow socially challenged people an opportunity to present themselves according to their own "preferred interpretations of their present and past situations." She writes: "Faced with the possibility of being positioned as a [negative figure], a person may turn to identity negotiations and 'accounting,' for example, through neutralizations, by holding back sensitive information or attempting to 'redefine' the interview setting" (Järvinen, 2003, p. 218). The relation between what is asked of the interviewee (by the interviewer) and what is known and told by the interviewee (to the interviewer) is therefore influenced by the interviewee's "temptation" to manage her/his self-presentation (Austin, 1961, p. 132). For instance, a single term that describes an action, for example, as unintentional, fully controlled, or necessary, may be used to describe similar, recurring actions which may not have been as unintentional, controlled or unavoidable when they occurred (Austin, 1961, p. 149). Järvinen (2000, p. 386) also points out that interviewees account "in greater or lesser agreement with recognizable cultural scripts." In line with this, Sandberg (2013, p. 80) argues that identities are always negotiated in different contexts and that interviewees, therefore, shift spontaneously between different, sometimes conflicting self-narratives.

Järvinen (2001, p. 280) concludes that the accountings of socially stigmatized interviewees are best understood considering their relations to "real or imagined accusations." In other words, in interviews with people who think that other people (including the interviewer) might define their behavior as illegitimate, qualitative researchers need to incorporate an understanding of the interviewees' feelings of being accused.

Interviewing Drunk Drivers

In Denmark, DUI is widely condemned with two-thirds of the Danish population in favor of stricter punishment of drunk drivers (MandagMorgen, 2011, p. 14). In response, convicted drunk drivers may feel inclined to justify DUI through neutralizations such as "denial of responsibility" and "denial of injury" (Sykes & Matza, 1957, p. 667). During a qualitative interview, they are apt to "forget" about some incidents or argue that at the time of the act it was "a permissible thing to do." When given a circumstantial "reason" for doing something, which otherwise would be considered illicit, the action is "justified" as a necessary exception (Austin, 1961, p. 124). Pestello (1991, p. 41) unambiguously states that "problematic behavior does not need to be explained to outsiders [if] outsiders never see it." Following the same line of reasoning, a DUI arrest can be "excused," for example, as a once-in-a-lifetime incident or as an incident of the past (as opposed to the present). An unintentional misbehavior is easier to admit than an intended misbehavior or, according to Austin (1961, p. 124), to present an offence as an "unintentional slip" is to argue that the offence does not need to be answered for.

The data for this study was generated in interviews with 25 convicted drunk drivers in Denmark. The same interviewer (the author) carried out all interviews over a period of three months in 2010. The interviewees were participants at mandatory alcohol and traffic safety courses for DUI offenders (Danish National Police, 2012). The first contact was established through teachers at different course locations within the same Danish region handing out a pamphlet about the study. The pamphlet described the research project in broad terms,

including its purpose of exploring DUI from drunk drivers' perspectives as well as guaranteeing anonymity and offering a gift voucher of 40 Euros to each person who participated in an interview.

The interviews were conducted in classrooms, at the interviewees' homes, or in the interviewer's office. Prior to the interviews, only the age and gender of the interview subjects were known. A semi-structured interview guide was used for all interviews. The guide focused on risk behavior, social life, self-conceptions, attitudes towards DUI, and drinking (and drug use) in general (see also Fynbo & Järvinen, 2011, p. 777). The interviews were loosely shaped as open-ended interviews in which the interviewees were encouraged to recount their stories, particularly those to do with DUI.

The age of the interviewees spanned from 19 to 68 years with an average of 38 years. Five interviewees were female and 20 were male. None of the interviewees were serving a prison sentence at the time of the interview although some did talk about criminal histories that extended beyond DUI, including six persons who had been imprisoned for violence and/or selling illegal drugs. Seven interviewees had caused traffic accidents while under the influence, but none of these had inflicted harm on others.

The national Danish Data Protection Agency authorized the study in 2010 and the study complies with the American Sociological Association's code of ethics (ASA, 2018).

Accounting of DUI

In the following, I focus on a main methodologic finding of the overall study: namely, that some interviews contain moments where, within the interview setting, the interviews suddenly become more intimate. Sometimes this occurs when something unpredictable happens. I also focus on how the interviewees present themselves in relation to having been convicted of DUI, which was a general focal point for the overall study.

Out of the 25 interviews, I have selected three interviews that in relation to the general sample contain particularly strong self-presentations. The three self-presentations, however, are also very diverse. Charlie, 31, somehow with the use of a dog, presented two respectable selves that enabled him to reframe the interview around his personal troubles of emerging addiction. Marianne, 61, used accounting techniques more profoundly when relating to her drinking habits, her social responsibilities, and her drunk driving. Lastly, Joanna, 40, redefined the entire interview to a self-presentation, which sometimes appears to challenge even herself.

CHARLIE'S TROUBLES

Charlie, 31, lived alone in a 1970s housing complex. The whole area looked neglected with old cars, abandoned shopping trolleys, and worn out baby trolleys. A few houses had nationalistic emblems in the windows called for support of "white pride" and National Socialism, and many had their blinds down. Charlie opened the main entrance door accompanied by two cats and a dog. He was big, about two meters tall, and, judging by his size, over 100 kg. He was bald with a pointed goatee beard and tattoos on both arms and around his neck. At first, he held back the dog, an illegal American bulldog, but then let it go when I told him that I was not afraid of dogs. In the living room, Charlie had a modern hunting bow on a shelf next to a pornographic poster. For the interview, we sat down in a sofa in front of a coffee table. The dog then jumped to my end of the sofa, putting its head close to my face. Charlie said that it was playful, gentle, and obedient.

For me, the interview began as a play of positioning or dominance. Before asking this young man questions about his risk behavior and DUI experience, I had to go through an unexpected and somewhat threatening opening phase. I was on his home ground – an apartment

in a lower class, white neighborhood, with weapons on the shelf and an illegal combat dog in my lap. Clearly, Charlie had no intention of threatening me, and it soon turned out that Charlie preferred dogs and tattoos to power and violence.

> Interviewer [first question]: Are these dogs not illegal?
> Charlie: Yes since July.
> Interviewer: But why hasn't it been put down then?
> Charlie: Well, if it had been born after 17 March, then it should have been destroyed.
> Interviewer: But was it not born after this date?
> Charlie: No, it was born on 5 March.
> Interviewer: That's close.
> Charlie: Yes, it is.
> Interviewer: So, it is allowed to be here.
> Charlie: Yes, he is. But he is not allowed to mate. He cannot make new pups.
> Interviewer: No. Well, I guess that all dogs just need to be brought up well.
> Charlie: Yes, nothing more.
> Interviewer: But this one is really well-behaved. That's easy to see.
> Charlie: Yes, yes. It's a family dog, not a power thing.

In the interview, it turned out that Charlie was struggling with mixed feelings about himself. On the one hand, he explained that he wished to be in complete control of his behavior, his drinking included. On the other hand, he said he struggled with an "innate craving" for binge drinking. "Drinking," he said, made him "lose control" and he feared that he could be "in the middle of actively developing addiction." Obviously, it was not easy for Charlie to talk about drinking problems and emerging addiction. This meant that we had to make space, so to speak, for him to explore his feelings about possibly being in the process of developing addiction. One way of doing this was to talk about themes largely irrelevant for the study of DUI but which created a safe ground for both of us. Charlie's combat dog represented such a theme and during the interview we would come back to the dog several times. The tattoos – and his general interest in art – represented another, yet similar topic:

> Charlie: I never liked school. I thought it was a waste of time to sit still.
> Interviewer: To sit still, why?
> Charlie: Well, I don't know. I guess that it just never really made me comfortable. It was too boring. I did my homework and knew my stuff, but I never liked it. I preferred to do something more creative.
> Interviewer: What would you rather do?
> Charlie: I liked art. I like to draw. And, generally, I just like to use my hands and body rather than sit still.
> Interviewer: … But Danish schools don't teach lots of art.
> Charlie: No, but when we did have it, I felt that I could relax more and use my thoughts creatively. [More talk about art] …
> Interviewer: Today, what do you draw?
> Charlie: Mostly tattoos. You know, like … Well, I guess that you could say that I appear to have a liking for tattoos.
> Interviewer: Can I see some of your tattoos? Did you design them yourself?
> Charlie: Yes, the one on my upper arm, I drew myself.
> Interviewer: OK. It is sort of like a mixture of different styles.

> Charlie: Yes. Sometimes life is not that simple. Sometimes you have to mix it up a bit.
> Interviewer: And the guy in the tattoo himself has a tattoo. That's neat.
> Charlie: Yes, yes.
> Interviewer: Well, just to return to the drinking and driving –
> Charlie: – well, you know, I continued drinking. I got drunk in the weekends, but then it became too much. I lost control again …

In the interview, Charlie, who to me at first had had the appearance of a biker or skinhead, somewhat unexpectedly presented himself as a dog-lover and amateur artist. In the meeting with an interviewer who also liked dogs and who showed an interest in tattooing too, Charlie appeared to feel safe and confident enough to also talk about his habit for binge drinking. During the interview, Charlie the dog-owner and artist, in interaction with the interviewer, reflected upon the troubles of Charlie the drunk driver who tended to lose control over alcohol. And maybe this is the closest I can get to understanding Charlie as a diverse individual: someone who was torn between ideals and practices and whose self-presentation therefore dichotomized between two conflicting types of selves: the controlled dog-owner and artist on the one side and the uncontrolled binge drinker and drunk driver on the other side. Rather than accounting for the DUI as a mistake, something harmless etc., Charlie dichotomized between two opposite selves, which in the interview situation appeared equally important for him.

MARIANNE'S ACCOUNTING

Marianne, 61, presented herself as a busy and hard-working daughter, wife and mother respectively, who had had to face several demanding conflicts throughout her life. As a teenager, she had cared for her father who, although he was sick, refused to receive social security. Because of this, Marianne did not get the education that she desired, but, instead, had to help support her family financially. Later, her father started drinking and her then-husband began cheating on her. She had to help her mother manage her relationship with Marianne's father as well as cope with her own disintegrating marriage. After her divorce, Marianne had to take full responsibility of her children, including making sure that they received a proper education.

At the time of the interview, Marianne had recently retired. When asked about her present life situation, she answered by complaining that her house had become too big and expensive for her to live in. The house, it turned out, played an important part in her accounting of DUI. In presenting her life story, Marianne, like Charlie, included descriptions of heavy consumption of alcohol. But, unlike Charlie, Marianne also expressed a rather relaxed attitude towards DUI. She described drinking both as part of her social life and as something she did when seeking relief from stress and daily worries over conflicts at work or in the family. Until she was arrested, when she lost control of her car, Marianne had mostly considered drunk driving as a practical necessity, that is, she was forced to do because she was a single person who always had to drive herself home from social functions.

When asked about DUI, Marianne defended herself through different types of accounting. At first, she claimed that throughout her life, there had been "only two episodes" of DUI, including the one when she had been arrested. Later in the interview, she said that she had been drinking and driving regularly over many years, including after "lots and lots" of social functions and dinners. Through different accountings, Marianne then presented a narrative that, during the interview, became more and more self-critical.

Initially Marianne downplayed her drunk driving by saying that she "had not harmed anybody" and that after the arrest she had "ceased drinking and driving completely."

> Marianne: … the worst thing would have been if I had hurt other people. … But I did not. … I did drink and drive once before, when I had been picking up something from my friend's place. … It is not because I have an alcohol problem. It has happened once before … but I will never do it again. Never.

Secondly, while relating specifically to the incident that led to her arrest, Marianne described a chain of events, which she felt she was not responsible for.

> Marianne: … I put the house up for sale and thought that the kitchen needed some polishing up and repainting. I had been living alone in the house for nine years and could no longer afford it. … Unfortunately, some of the carpentry had to be done on a specific Sunday morning, when I also had an invitation from some family later at twelve. But I was just happy, you know, that I had managed to find a cheap carpenter and so I agreed to do it all in the same day. The carpenter arrives early and at eight we have a beer. At that time, I have already been coating the worktop with some very strong paint. … So, we have a beer at eight, and at nine we drink some red wine. But we use beer glasses. Of course, not a half-liter beer glass, but still rather big glasses for wine. … After he leaves, I feel that I am running a little late. You know, it always takes more time than anticipated to get out of the door. I also had to bring some vegetables from the garden, a small present and flowers. Anyway, I am running a little late and start getting a little stressed, so I drink another big glass of red wine just before leaving. By then, the clock would have been around eleven.
> Interviewer: Just to relax?
> Marianne: Yes, and again, it is a big beer glass.

Marianne then brought up another factor that she could not be responsible for: the weather. "It had been raining," she said, and together with the stress and/or the effect of the paintwork, but not the drinking, this caused her to lose control of the car.

> Marianne: Then the road is a little slippery, you know, because of the rain. … At one point, I feel that I have been drinking. You know I fell a little dizzy or something. But it may just as well have been the stress, and afterwards I have also considered that it was due to the strong vapors that I had been inhaling. I think that this [the stress and the paint] must have caused it [the accident] though I did leave the window open while I was painting.

Asked to consider the possible effect of the beer and wine that she had been drinking before driving, Marianne resumed to hold on to the paint vapors as the primary cause:

> Marianne: … while driving, I did feel slightly drunk, but it is hard to say whether this was perhaps caused by all the strong vapors that I had been working in for some hours.

Marianne presented herself as a responsible family person: "I had to drive, because I had promised that I would come to the family lunch." And, as several other interviewees, she questioned the measure of her blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level:

> Marianne: When they make me blow the breathalyzer, it shows 0.05 per cent … but then, when they take a blood test, it shows 0.091. But this is two hours after the arrest and I have read on a website that the BAC is at its highest two hours after your last drink. This means that it has accelerated since I was stopped. … Also, it was slippery. Not because of snow but because of rain. I didn't consider that I couldn't drive. I drank at seven, at nine and eleven, but of course the glasses were bigger, you know. … I have no idea why it went wrong like it did. The car was in good condition and all.

Thirdly, late in the interview and after Marianne had been reflecting further upon her drinking habits and prior incidents of DUI, she turned to personal experience and a special technique of moderating the intoxication before driving as excuses for DUI. She, thus, claimed to remain in control of driving, even after drinking, because she knew how to handle drinking as well as driving.

> Marianne: … You know, I am the kind of person who would drive home after a party. It is because I am single. But I usually stop drinking an hour before leaving. By then, I have had a welcoming drink, wine for each of the three courses, maybe some beer, more wine, but no cognac! I probably drink two glasses of everything else and then I take the car home after midnight. But before driving, I always sit for an hour without drinking. … I have never caused accidents before and I have never been insanely intoxicated.

As we can see, Marianne divided her accountings into three main parts. One that generally referred to a time-related distinction between a former (immoral) self and a present (moral) self; one that related to the particular incident that led to her arrest, which she was not responsible for; and – after a while – one that referred both to her ability to manage drinking and driving and to her status as a single woman who always had to do the driving after social functions. Firstly, she said that the arrest had been an "eye opener" and, thus, excused past ignorance with present reason. Secondly, she described the specific situation that led to her arrest through a line of independently innocent events setting out from her house, including being stressed and affected by paint vapor rather than intoxicated by the alcohol she had been drinking. This logic was also used to argue against trusting her BAC measure. Thirdly, she looked upon her many past incidents of DUI, which had been going on for many years without causing any arrests, as something that was "probably wrong" and "somewhat irresponsible" but that "had never caused any harm." Furthermore, whereas couples can negotiate a designated driver, she was alone and therefore always had to be the driver. Besides, as she reasoned, her DUI had always been "controlled," that is, until the time when she did in fact lose control.

JOANNA'S STRUGGLES

Out of the 25 interviews, the interview with Joanna, 40 was the most difficult to control. It was very hard for her to accept that she had been arrested for DUI and she refused to see herself as a drunk driver. Joanna lived in a market town in the provinces. Her house was big, overlooking a forest and located in what appeared to be the nicer part of a small and generally well-kept town in the Danish country side. At the same time, her house showed odd signs of neglect – the entrance way was unfinished, the ceiling in one of the children's rooms had a large hole and one of the bathrooms didn't work because the plumbing had never been connected. When Joanna was giving the interviewer a tour of the house (before the interview), she complained about these and other things that different, "irresponsible" workmen had left

unfinished over the years. During the interview, she also complained about her partner, including his drinking habits and attempts at "restricting [her] personal freedom." She repeatedly distinguished herself from "people of petty-minded market town identity," "dull neighbors" and "boring in-laws," as well as from her partner's "lack of sensuality and romance." Instead, she presented herself as fulfilling several different roles, including as a "sensual" and "strong-minded woman."

Joanna was arrested after a private dinner with her then-husband. She said that at the time, about three years prior to the interview, their relationship had been critically challenged by the husband's relationship with another woman. She described the dinner as the culmination of a stressful period in which she had been "struggling" with the husband's "ignorance" as well as not being able to "fulfil [her] own desires." The dinner, as well as its preceding troubles, she offered – and described – as "the causes" of the arrest:

> Joanna: … the fight itself was the real reason why I was arrested. … [My husband] felt threatened when I told him that he had to move out of our home. [His new girlfriend] had been pulling him from one side and I had been pulling from the other. But, just then, I stopped pulling and told him to get out of my life. … Then he is leaving, and I tell him that he cannot drive because he has been drinking too much. He doesn't listen, so I have to get into my own car and follow him. … Then I call him up from the car because I feel that something is wrong, and he tells me that he has called the police and asked them to stop me. … He was trying to steal my power and I had to get it back. At any cost whatsoever. … Even if I need to take a car and drive fast, risking the lives of other people as well as my own. I will do it because I need to be in control. … When I am angry because I am not being seen, not heard or understood correctly, then that is all that matters, nothing else. And then I must do what I must do to get back in control. … The arrest was a necessary evil to get rid of a lot of anger over my partner's attempts at controlling me.

According to Joanna, her DUI arrest was set up by her then-husband, but at the same time it also served as a way for her to regain power in an on-going marital struggle. In the interview, the presentation of this power struggle became an expression of Joanna's positioning of herself as a sensual and strong-minded woman in the middle of a romantic drama, which further served to disengage her from being a drunk driver. She said that she was "really furious" with the police for pulling her over. "How could they pull me over?" she asked, "Why didn't they stop him, who had been drinking a lot more than I had? It was pure provocation."

When asked why she did not just let her partner go, she again pointed towards the power struggle and, eventually, engaged in a more detailed description of the drunk driving:

> Interviewer: Did you not realize that you had been drinking and that driving might be [dangerous] –
> Joanna [cutting short]: – Oh, no! No, no, no, no, no, no! We were only focusing on who was in charge of the situation, and who was in front of the other [while driving]. … We did not have time to think about being drunk. Besides, we were not that drunk, you know, not too intoxicated to … know … Well … What can I say? Of course, we were sufficiently clear-sighted to know that we had been drinking more than allowed when driving. But, nobody would find out that we were drunk driving because we were not *that* drunk, and nobody would think that we were drunk from the way we were driving. After all, it is also just a short

> drive. … I was driving right behind him and he could not get away from me even though he had a faster car.
> Interviewer: You were racing?
> Joanna [pausing]: I think we were. Yes. I think it was something about him being surprised by my ability to keep up with him. And I was very angry. I gambled and tried to overtake him in a curve by forcing the oncoming traffic to move away, into the verge next to the side of the road. I raced past him on the opposite side of the road. … Then he got so scared that he had to call the police. That is the reason I was arrested.

After the arrest, Joanna tried to reverse the conviction. She claimed that the BAC level was wrong and suspected that something could be wrong with her liver:

> Joanna: First [the BAC] was 0.14 per cent, but then the blood sample showed 0.17. I don't believe it. Even the first BAC was too high, and how can the blood sample be even higher? … At the scene, the police convinced me that the blood sample would not be higher than the breathalyzer, which it turned out to be nevertheless. I tried to have a lot of lawyers investigate this.
> Interviewer: Into what?
> Joanna: If something could be done. What about my liver? I get drunk really fast, so something could be wrong with my liver, or maybe with something else. I went through several tests. I just cannot believe how I could have such a high BAC level. [My husband's] would have been a lot higher and he wasn't even pulled over! There is something cunning about the whole situation.

When relating to the arrest, Joanna refused to consider the fact that she had been drinking. Rather, she chose to focus on the aftermath of the arrest in which she struggled partly with authorities over the conviction and partly with practitioners over examinations of her body.

> Interviewer [continued from above]: Maybe. But do you remember, just roughly, how much you had actually been drinking?
> Joanna: Not at all!
> Interviewer: Still, you believe that the BAC is not correct?
> Joanna: I am sure that it is incorrect and should have been lower. … I also tried to appeal the conviction. You know, they needed to take uncertainty related to the test procedure into account. Blood tests are not exact. But the complaints were rejected. … When you get slapped in the face like this you need to understand exactly what is going on. First you suspect that it was because of a high BAC … and because you went driving. Okay? You understand this, right? But then we need to look at the body, you know, at the way the inner organs transform alcohol. The liver does this, right? So, then you need to examine the body to see if there is actually a liver there.
> Interviewer: Did you get such an examination?
> Joanna: Yes, I did. There was nothing wrong with my liver.

Probably out of a combination of surprise that she had been drinking more than anticipated and irritation over the fact that she was arrested, Joanna, in the interview situation, directed her skepticism towards the BAC measure and the authorities behind it. Several interviewees questioned the accuracy of their BAC. But to take the skepticism as far as to engage lawyers

and to undertake clinical examinations is exceptional and, therefore, gave her accounting a rather "insisting" character.

Joanna's third type of accounting follows the same pattern of disengaging herself from drunk driving:

> Joanna: … Try to consider living with the kind of people that I do. … My new partner and most of his friends are drinking and driving several times a week, whereas I hardly ever drink. … My real friends, not the ones who live here, were shocked when I told them that I had lost my license. They were dumbfounded, but also had to laugh. They thought it was hilarious that I of all people had lost my license. It is completely unnatural for me to do something like this. So, I had been drinking a little, yes, but to lose my license? Come on! … The people that I live with now drink and drive three to four times a week and never lose their licenses. I do it once and immediately I am arrested.

Here Joanna reluctantly acknowledged that she probably had been drinking and driving. But, more fundamentally, she did this by distancing herself from social circumstances that she, at the same time, strongly associated with DUI. Joanna, thus, used the interview situation as an attempt to transmit an activity (DUI), which was unnatural for her, into a social context where it was normal. At the same time, she dissociated herself from this very context and its inherent DUI. She, thus, used a double dichotomization (her normal behavior against DUI behavior and her individual position against her social surroundings), which not only attempted to separate her from the blame of her DUI incident but also, and more radically, from DUI altogether.

A Mutual Relationship between Self-Presentation and Accounting

In the interviews about DUI, the interviewees both rejected and admitted to frequent DUI. A gradual acknowledgement of DUI as unsound – along with problematic drinking habits in general – was present in the interviews with Charlie and Marianne, whereas Joanna consistently refused to consider her DUI as problematic. Self-presentations were important for all three interviewees, but the relationship between their self-presentations and accountings differed. Charlie used self-presentations to create a safe ground that enabled him to be self-critical and go into more details about his conflicting personas and fear of developing alcoholism. Marianne used self-presentations particularly to neutralize the moral harm inflicted by her DUI arrest but also as more general explanations of her personal experience with DUI. Joanna used self-presentations more insistently to disengage from her social context and, through this disengagement, from DUI as such.

The interviews thus produced extended, and not entirely coherent, self-presentations. Charlie, the youngest of the three, was actively troubled by his behavior because it challenged his self-control. Marianne, who was entering her senior years, presented herself through a consistent life story, which also included personal disappointments and self-criticism, including when – retrospectively – considering her alcohol habits and DUI experience. The middle-aged Joanna appeared very sure about herself and how to conceive her place in the world – although she did this "negatively" by criticizing the way she was being misconceived by others; especially her partner and present social circumstances, but also authorities and practitioners in the aftermath of the DUI arrest.

The three interviewees, thus, positioned and presented themselves differently in the interview situations and further used their positions and self-presentations differently when accounting of their DUI convictions. Charlie set out from his physical presence in his own house. Together with his dog, he reduced the social distance within the interview situation

(between interviewer and interviewee) by offering self-presentations that the interviewer was equally happy to accept. Whether or not this gave Charlie a feeling of being socially accepted in the interview situation, his (positive) self-presentations were followed by more detailed reflections over his "darker" side, particularly his lack of control over alcohol.

Marianne based her self-presentation more fundamentally on her life story, in which she played the role of the respectable, hard-working – and somewhat suffering – woman. She struggled with the fact that she had crashed her car while under the influence of alcohol, and only when explicitly separating her past from her present did she conceive herself as a (former) drunk driver. She did not present this self-conception by referring to her physique, nor by using images of something that she wished to be, but rather by committing herself explicitly to certain social obligations (e.g., the obligation to look after one's house and visit one's family), which forced her to drink and drive.

Joanna did the opposite when describing herself as having certain attributes (among them sensuality and strong-mindedness), which characterized her as an uninhibited, progressive and strongly emancipated woman who, naturally, did not drink and drive. Through her self-presentation, in which she disengaged from her social context and, in an aside, also questioned the physical constitution of her body, she positioned herself as someone who could not be made responsible for the drunk driving for which she had been convicted. Joanna's accounting of DUI was, thus, tied entirely to her self-presentations as someone who could not be identified as a drunk driver.

Conclusion

Rather than agreeing that DUI constitutes an "intrinsically harmful and malignant nature" (Blumer, 1970-1971, p. 298), the three interviewees in this paper related to DUI through manifold accountings and self-presentations. The initial moral offence of DUI, which largely correlated with the public concern, was neutralized during the interviews through accounting-based self-presentations. Each self-presentation (dog-loving artist, hard-working, single mother, strong-minded woman) symbolized a legitimate social position in a contemporary society where DUI represents an illegitimate and moral offense. The interviewees, in other words, used intelligible, normative social roles as symbolic backgrounds to their accountings of DUI. The interviews, thus, consisted of symbolic interactions in which meaning was produced by referring each participants' on-going interpretations of the interaction to a common (symbolic) social sphere.

Within this symbolic interaction, Charlie, more than the other two interviewees, included a self-understanding that more fundamentally challenged himself as a person. Marianne supported her accountings of DUI symbolically through presenting herself as a legitimate and normal person. To do so, she had to neutralize the moral stigma that she felt the arrest had imposed on her, for example, by pointing towards certain (legitimate) circumstances and factors other than alcohol as causes of her DUI arrest. On top of her accountings, and only in retrospect, she was still able to consider herself as a drunk driver without undermining her self-respect. Joanna, on the other hand, did not see herself as a drunk driver and used the interview to argue against the fact that she had been drunk driving when arrested. Although Joanna had been arrested with the highest BAC level of the three, her accounting tended to exclude drunk-driving completely, even as a mistake. In her self-presentation she seemed to evade the fact that she was a person who had been arrested for DUI. She appeared to prefer to be someone other than a DUI-offender in an interview about drinking and drinking, an interview that she, for whatever reason, had agreed to participate in.

To sum up, the interview situation constituted a timely, asymmetrical meeting between two strangers, which allowed the interviewees to account of DUI through different kinds of

self-presentations. This combination of self-presentation and accounting did not lead to a given outcome but rather defined a fluctuation or even a dichotomy between self-criticism and self-defense. Whether a given interview turned towards one or the other was unpredictable and depended on several circumstances, including the interviewer's responsiveness to spontaneous challenges in the interview situation, the agendas of the interviewees, their life histories and, often multiple and contradictory, enactments of self. The interviews thus suggest that drunk drivers will defend themselves against a categorical DUI identity to maintain a legitimate self-conception. Whether this defense is something that needs to be dismantled to prevent continuing drinking or driving, or the defense is rather an opportunity for DUI offenders to accept themselves as human beings and, as such, enable them to stop DUI is hard to say. In relation to this dilemma, the paper points towards two opposites: the legitimate self-presentation appeared to be a progressive tool for two of the three interviewees, enabling them to self-critically consider their DUI habits as challenges in their lives that had to be dealt with, whereas the third interviewee insisted on defending herself completely against DUI as something of relevance to her.

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Author Note

Lars Fynbo is researcher at VIVE – The Danish Center for Social Science Research. He mainly focuses on qualitative research in the alcohol and other drugs area often from a contemporary risk perspective. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: lafy@vive.dk.

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