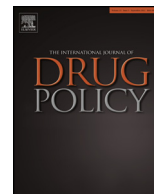




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Conceiving of addicted pleasures: A ‘modern’ paradox

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on research with people who inject drugs in London, UK, this article will explore how participants conceived of pleasure, and try to understand some of the tensions that ensued. There is a strong sense in participants' accounts that drug use is at points pleasurable but it should not, or rather, could not be conceived of in this way. As such, the article will reflect on several situations in which pleasure came up during fieldwork but was quickly redirected towards addiction using terms such as 'denial'. Trying to make sense of this seemingly paradoxical dynamic, in which pleasure can be addictive, but addiction cannot be pleasurable, I turn to some of the practices that actively keep pleasure and addiction apart, indeed, in some areas of the addiction sciences, antithetical. That is, a singular account of pleasure is produced as *freely* chosen (of the 'free' *subject*) in opposition to the determined nature of addiction (of the automated brain or *object*). These realities materialise in participants' accounts, but due to their constructed nature they also collapse and multiply. This 'hybridisation' is what Bruno Latour refers to as the paradox of the Moderns. Considering pleasure, however, as both natural and cultural, it is better conceived of as always in tension, expressed by participants as 'mixed feelings', 'love/hate', 'sweet and sour', 'good things and bad things'. Against a backdrop of neglect, especially within the context of injecting drug use, such conceptualisation can help acknowledge pleasure where it is least conceivable and yet perhaps has the most to offer.

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Introduction

Once labelled 'the great unmentionable' (Moore & Valverde, 2000, see also Hunt & Evans, 2008), pleasure for many in the 'West', including for drug researchers, health practitioners, policy-makers, as well as the media has been hard to conceive of in relation to illicit drug use (Holt & Treloar, 2008; Ritter 2014), especially using 'addictive' drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine (Pienaar et al., 2015), and further still injecting these substances (Dwyer, 2008; valentine & Fraser, 2008). This article, however, seeks to explore where pleasure gets discussed (or not) by participants in a study looking at experiences and practices of injecting drug use and how participants make sense of pleasure in a way that might lead to its wider inclusion in the drug and addictions field. A distinctly 'modern' (Latour, 1993) refrain to pleasure is identified, based on the separation of nature and culture, that is, where pleasure is associated with the 'free' world of subjects, addiction is associated with the realm of objects and the 'determined brain'. The two become antithetical, which makes pleasure, within a context of 'addictive' drug use, hard to exist. In this sense, what is usually considered as

ontological becomes political, and several sociomaterial practices take place to maintain pleasure's absence. The possibility of pleasure lies in negating these binaries: pleasure/addiction, object/subject, nature/culture. This article therefore explores the ways that 'addiction' and 'pleasure' co-exist in participants' accounts, always in tension. By re-framing pleasure away from 'freedom', the article suggests that wider discussions and possibilities of how drugs are experienced (which can include pleasure among other affects) can take place in drug treatment practice and policy.

Background

According to O'Malley and Valverde (2004), the absence of pleasure in drug research has a long political history based on controlling drug users. They argue this is due to the perceived threat that drug users pose to neoliberal ideals of autonomy and choice. In this sense, pleasure for some drug researchers and practitioners has served as a useful tool in re-rationalising drug use, but this allows for only a very specific kind of pleasure (based on autonomy and choice), which could be neglecting quieter, more subjugated forms.

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O'Malley and Valverde suggest that since the eighteenth century discourses of 'pleasure' have been linked to discourses of reason and freedom, so that problematic drug consumption appears both without reason (for example 'bestial') and unfree (for example 'compulsive'), and thus not as 'pleasant'. (2004: 25)

O'Malley and Valverde (2004), like much of the work on the neglect of pleasure in the sociology of drug use, draw on Michel Foucault's concept of 'governmentality'. Foucault uses 'governmentality' to explain a decentralisation of power occurring in the 'West' during the eighteenth century in which localised 'technologies of power' started to produce self-governable citizens (Foucault, 2007). The concept has been developed by Nikolas Rose in relation to the neoliberal consumer society, which is seen to be based on 'government through freedom' (Rose, 1999: xxiii). Expanding on this further, in a joint paper by Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde (2006), this is the idea that we are not controlled through an impingement of our freedoms, but rather, paradoxically, through an obligation of freedom – 'subjects [are] required to be free and [are] required to conduct themselves responsibly, to account for their own lives and their vicissitudes in terms of their freedom' (Rose et al., 2006: 90–91). Within this framework, drug use is seen to be without 'freedom', without 'rationality', and consequently without 'pleasure':

Pleasure, especially as in the figure of the felicity calculus, is at the heart of liberal constructions of the rational and free subject. Pleasure and rationality are foundationally linked, precisely because the pleasure/pain couple is a given in the liberal constitution of rational calculation (O'Malley & Valverde, 2004: 27).

For Rose (2000), drug users 'are problematic because they throw into question the very presuppositions of moral consciousness, self-control and self-advancement through legitimate consumption upon which governmental regimes of freedom depend' (2000: 321). Therefore, drug users need to be controlled, and hence Reith (2004) observes a paradox in contemporary society where 'values of freedom, autonomy and choice have been accompanied by a vitiation of freedom, an undermining of agency and a lack of choice characterised by a number of addictive states' (2004: 283). That is, those that are deemed unable to manage their own choices and perhaps more importantly 'risks' are subjected to various disciplining technologies. For O'Malley and Valverde, this has meant that drugs' pleasures have been replaced by 'craving':

More recently the compulsion of 'addiction', thought to be located in certain brain processes, has been joined by what ostensibly appears to be a proxy for pleasure – as 'craving' has taken the place of other 'impelling' forces. (2004: 34)

For many working in the sociology of drug use, this has made re-rationalising drugs' pleasures a popular way of de-pathologising drug users. For example, Pennay (2012) challenges 'media and public health discourses which construct drug users as uncontrolled, irrational, irresponsible, and disorderly' (2012: 419), in demonstrating, instead, how participants 'regulated and ordered their bodies during sessions of alcohol and party-drug use' (2012: 417). In highlighting the intentionality behind intoxication, a number of terms have evolved to rationalise the pleasures found in alcohol and other drug use, such as, 'determined drunkenness' (Hutton, 2012; Measham, 2006), 'calculated hedonism' (Brain, 2000; Featherstone, 1991; Szmigin, Griffin, Hackley, Bengry-Howell, & Mistral, 2008), and more recently 'functional fun' (Askew, 2016). But is more rationality what we need? And how might this be excluding those forms of pleasure that are not so

easily rationalised, and those people experiencing pleasure in drug use that could be described as more dependent?

Schnuer (2013) has criticised research on drug use for focusing on 'rational choice' theories, and more specifically for focusing on pleasure as a purposive and consciously chosen motive for action. Schnuer (2013) argues that this neglects a form of pleasure 'without aims and intentions', what he calls 'overwhelming pleasure'. He draws on a 'moderate reading' of George Bataille who 'attaches great meaning to the absence of the pursuit of something meaningful' (2013: 263). For instance, Bataille's concept of Sovereignty is defined in opposition to the 'modern term, where "letting go of control" [was replaced with] "being in control" as the basis of autonomy', and instead defines it as the 'capacity to lose oneself, to disconnect oneself from the constraints of choice' (2013: 263). Schnuer argues that this introduces us to an idea of 'pleasure' as neither rational nor irrational but 'arational', that is, 'disinterested in rationality'. This has a powerful potential for being able to transcend the dichotomy of the 'rational mind' and 'irrational body' in researching the bodily and excessive side of pleasure – permitting 'an immoderate, undisciplined, and arational pleasure to be positive' (2013: 264).

Extending an idea of pleasure beyond the rational, Weinberg considers the agency of the body through its context

wherein the pleurability of drug effects is not a neurological fait accompli but derives to a considerable extent from perceptions of a felicitous fit between drug effects and the practical demands of specific situations. (2013: 178)

Fitting into his larger intellectual project calling for the recognition of embodied addiction in which 'learning occurs not only through symbolically mediated interpretive work, but through embodied forms of collaborative practice' (2002: 14), Weinberg draws on Latour's (2004) notion of the body as 'learning to be affected' to illuminate

the lived realities of embodiment by revealing the body as not only the mechanical medium through which our minds learn but an intrinsically developing and learning faculty in its own right. (Weinberg, 2013: 177)

Weinberg's approach also shares similarities with Duff's recent move from 'context' (2008) to 'assemblage' (2012; 2013; 2014), in which pleasure is seen as one of many e/affects enacted in the specific coming together of 'diverse objects, spaces, actors [human and nonhuman] and affects' (Duff, 2012: 145). Duff's work is important here for developing a relational approach to pleasure which ontologically disrupts any notion of rationality.

Singling out one actor in this network – such as the consuming subject – without acknowledging the agency of the myriad additional actors involved in this consumption merely reinforces the quaint dogma of rational choice. (Duff, 2012: 155)

The relationality of drug effects, such as pleasure, is reflected in Duff's research participants' narratives on ecstasy:

Implicit in these narratives is an affective and relational account of the phenomenology of ecstasy use, one that downplays the material properties of the substance itself in highlighting the relational construction of drug-related pleasures. (Duff, 2012: 153, original emphasis)

In this sense, alcohol and other drugs are 'not the same thing from one network to another, or from one event of consumption to another' (Duff, 2013: 169). Therefore, drugs do not cause pleasure, and people do not choose pleasure, but it is made in these contexts.

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