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Adult recreational drug use: patterns and trends in the new millennium

In England and Wales, recent drug use has been in slow and steady decline since the turn of the 21st century, most notably within the 16-24 age group which has seen a 7% decrease since 1996 (Home Office, 2014). Aldridge (2008) theorises decreases in the rates of drug use in two ways. The first is through the 'period effect', where incidence of drug use has declined over the past few decades. The second is the 'cohort effect', where new generations of young people are less drug involved than those growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. Although older drug takers are still very much in the minority statistically, the most current addition of the CSEW (Home Office, 2014) reports that last year drug use has slightly increased for all age groups 30 and over, the 45-54 age group shows the largest increases from 1.9% in 2012/2013 to 3.5% in 2013/2014. The proportion of drug use within the 45 to 59-age range has doubled since 1996, from 4.6% to 11.3% in 2013/2014 (Home Office, 2014). Williams and Askew (forthcoming) theorise the cohort effect as an explanation for the recent increase in drug use for the over 30s. They argue that generations of young people growing up in the 1980s and 1990s are taking higher levels of drug consumption into middle and older adulthood. To explore the persistence of drug use in adulthood, this paper analyses interviews conducted with twenty-six recreational drug takers, all of whom are over the age of thirty.

Explaining adult recreational drug use: normalisation, diversity and the clubbing generation

1

The 1990s initiated debate about whether recreational drug use remained a deviant activity. In response to the growing numbers of young people using drugs, academics from the University of Manchester embarked on the North-West England Longitudinal Study (NWELS). The authors argued drug use had undergone a process of normalisation, via the accommodation of attitudes and behaviour within British Youth culture (Parker et al. 1998; Parker et al. 2002). In Aldridge and colleagues latest revision of the thesis in 2011 *'Illegal Leisure Revisited'*, the authors include five dimensions: drug availability, drug trying, drug use, social accommodation, and the cultural accommodation of the illicit. These dimensions demonstrate that drugs have been more accessible, widely used, tolerated and accepted within generations of young people growing up in the late 1980s and 1990s. It could be argued that drug use has remained accommodated for a proportion of this generation in adulthood (Williams and Askew, forthcoming).

The normalisation thesis has been subject to criticism and development. Shiner and Newburn (1997, 1999) aligned with traditional deviancy theorists and argued that both drug users and abstainers view drugs as risky and problematic, and therefore rejected that drug use could be considered normalised within British youth culture. This is supported by those who argue that drug use remains associated with a subcultural acceptance and wider stigma, rather than mainstream cultural tolerance (see Hathaway 2004; Hathaway et al. 2011 and Sandberg, 2012, 2013). Recent contributions in the development of the thesis have focused on micro-social, rather than macro-cultural normalisation, examining the social and cultural dimensions. Shildrick (2002), for example, introduced the concept of differential normalisation, which highlights complexity in the relationships between young people and drug use,

2

with varying levels of tolerance when considering social class. Recently, Hathaway et al. (2011) reinstated the term normification, whereby drug takers are normalising the self, rather than normalising drug use. For example, cannabis users resisted stigma associated with dependant drug use by outlining the moderation of their consumption. The micro-social development of normalisation has been well established through the application of the concept to different social groups or settings, such as clubbers (Measham et al, 2001), a friendship network of adults living in London (Pearson, 2001), drug takers in Sweden (Rodner-Szinitzen, 2008), and Australia (Duff 2003, 2005; Pennay and Moore, 2010).

Measham and Shiner (2009) argue that early normalisation debates failed to consider the impact of structure when providing explanations for illicit drug use, they conclude *'we have each come to view drug use as the result of a complex and fluid interplay between structure and agency, which can be understood in terms of 'situated choice' or 'structured action'* (Measham and Shiner, 2009: 507). The authors argue that young people lack the formal roles and responsibilities of adulthood and therefore have more freedom for leisure and pleasure activity. Increased incidences of adult recreational drug use, could therefore be explained by shifts such as, an increase in later onset of 'settling down' for recent generations, rising numbers of people entering extended education and subsequently delaying the responsibilities of parenthood and marriage (Aldridge et al. 2011; Shiner, 2009; Williams and Parker, 2001; Williams, 2013; Williams and Askew, forthcoming). Trends from the latest General Lifestyle Survey in 2011 show more diversified household and family arrangements than preceding generations: fewer people are getting married, more people are living alone, there are increased incidences of childlessness, more one child families and higher divorce rates (ONS, 2013). Accordingly, as people are now living more varied and

3

changeable lives, this provides opportunity for more diversified lifestyles beyond the traditional routes into adulthood.

Even if responsibilities increase and lifestyles change, this is not to say these shifts will inevitably be associated with reduced drug consumption (Williams, 2013). Drug use is permitted within the 'subterranean world of play' (Young, 1971, later reinstated by Shiner, 2009) and is justified through the application of hard work and productivity in the workplace, thus, adults as well as young people are afforded time to relax and to have fun within their social lives. Several studies have explored the persistence of recreational drug use in adulthood. These have predominately found drug use to be accommodated (although usually at a reduced frequency than within youth) within functional lifestyles, much the same way as youthful recreational drug use (Delcorte, 2001; Hathaway et al. 2011; Lau et al, 2015; Notley, 2005, Pearson, 2001, Vervaeke and Korf, 2006; Warbuton et al, 2005, Ward, 2010, Williams, 2013; Zinberg, 1984). Since the 1980s, the night-time economy in the UK has expanded and the dance club scene has continued to evolve and diversify (Measham and Moore, 2009). In this sense, the abundant sites of leisure provide continued opportunities for drug consumption. This could offer a further structural explanation as to why some illicit drug use continues beyond youth.

Illicit drug use within otherwise conforming lives: negotiating criminality and moral condemnation

Although there are plausible explanations for recreational drug use, several factors restrict its acceptance within adulthood that debatably, because of adults' potential

4

greater stake in society and conformity, become more significant. The UK 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act prohibits various psychoactive substances; users risk criminal sanctions, including custodial sentences, for their possession, supply and/or cultivation. Drug takers must therefore negotiate criminal and health risks, as well as stigma and moral condemnation (Hammersley et al., 2003; Hathaway et al. 2011; Measham and Shiner, 2009; Radcliffe and Stevens, 2008; Pennay and Moore, 2010; Rodner-Szitman, 2008). Neutralisation theory was originally developed by Sykes and Matza (1957) to explain how deviant behaviour is rationalised, in order to protect self-image and avoid blame. This was part of a theoretical shift within criminology, which conceptualised deviance as a social reaction to behaviour, rather than individual pathology. Neutralisation theory assists in understanding the persistence of criminality and deviance from the perspective of the 'offender' (Maruna and Copes, 2005). It is therefore suitably applied to explore how current drug takers make sense of their illicit behaviour.

Sykes and Matza argue that the psychological process involved in reasoning and excusing criminality and deviance, signifies an attachment to mainstream norms and values. Their five techniques comprise of: (1) the denial of responsibility, (2) the denial of injury (or harm), (3) the denial of a victim, (4) the condemnation of the condemners, and (5) an appeal to higher loyalties. Maruna and Copes (2005) urge us to go beyond providing a list of the five techniques and scrutinise the function and purpose of the neutralisations used. Often the terms, rationalisations, justifications and excuses are used interchangeably without recognition of the distinction between them. However, Scott and Lyman (1968) distinguish between justifications and excuses. The use of a justification signifies that the speaker accepts responsibility, but rejects the

5

negative judgement associated with their behaviour. Rationalisations are similar to justifications as they are rejecting the deviant label that is being applied. Becker (1963) and Young (1971) applied the concept of rationalisations to argue that drug taking was not inherently deviant behaviour; in some circumstances it was socially acceptable. Becker (1963) used the example of jazz musicians smoking marijuana and Young (1971) argued drug use is permitted within leisure time, which he termed the 'subterranean world of play'. Scott and Lyman (1968) assert that an excuse is different in its function, as the speaker is accepting behaviour is wrong, but denies responsibility for it. The authors outline the denial of responsibility technique is an excuse, whereas the other four techniques are justifications.

In response to a critique of the normalisation thesis from Shiner and Newburn (1997; 1999), Aldridge et al. (2011) evaluate neutralisation theory in relation to recreational drug use. Similar to the concept of justifications (Scott and Lyman, 1968) and rationalisations presented by Becker (1963) and Young (1971), Aldridge et al. (2011) apply the idea of 'good neutralisations' developed by Maruna and Copes (2005), which illustrates how behaviour is justified. Aldridge et al (2011: 220) assert *it may be possible to conform to societal values generally, but to reject some specifics (e.g. 'it's ok to take drugs so long as it's soft drugs, and it doesn't interfere with your job/family')'*. This provides evidence for the adaptation of drug use within otherwise conforming lives, rather than a rejection of it. Monaghan (2002) similarly found that steroid users justified their consumption as use rather than abuse. Maruna and Copes (2005) highlight the need to distinguish between adaptive and non-adaptive neutralisations to allow for a more nuanced understanding of the purpose and function of them. Using discursive psychology as the analytical approach, this paper describes

6

the difference between justifications and excuses when drug takers account for their illicit behaviour.

Discursive Psychology (DP): the approach

DP assesses the purpose and performance of language, how it is described and what meaning this gives to a narrative. This method is particularly useful when participants are accounting for behaviour that challenges cultural norms and values. Riley et al. (2008) used DP to examine the ways in which the substance ketamine is conceptualised, both positively and negatively by those attending rave events. On one hand, ketamine was described as a powerful dissociative that threatens the collective party atmosphere rendering users out of control, and on the other hand, as an expression of free will and escapism from conformity that the free rave scene represents. Focusing on discursive strategies like these *'is a sign of the multiplicity and fluidity of use of these discourses'* (Riley et al. 2008:226) and emphasises how drugs are 'constructs' rather than 'entities' (Martin and Stenner, 2004). Rather than attempting to understand drug taking as behaviour, DP can offer a way of understanding how people conceptualise their use. In this paper, it is used to garner insight into the ways this illicit behaviour is legitimated, and in what instances it is unjustified.

Riley et al. (2010) continued with the DP approach, studying the narratives of psilocybin mushroom users. Within both their studies, the concept of personal control was fundamental in verifying what constitutes acceptable drug use. This aligns with neoliberal principles as the emphasis is on choice, but ensuring the 'right' choices are selected in order to maintain equilibrium within society: *'controlled consumption is*

7

appropriate consumption' (Riley et al. 2010: 448). This demonstrates that drug takers can positively describe their use within certain parameters. The concepts of control and function are likely to be key factors regarding acceptability (see Lau et al., 2015; Delocorte, 2001; Monaghan, 2002). In addition, recreational drug takers tend to resist a drug user identity and reject labels such as, 'addicts', 'junkies' and 'drug abusers' in order to distinguish themselves from the negative cultural associations attached to drug use (Hathaway et al. 2011; Monaghan, 2002; Mayock, 2005; Rhodes et al. 2011; Riley et al. 2008; Radcliffe and Stevens, 2008; Rödner, 2006; Riley et al. 2010). Resisting the 'dysfunctional' drug user label is, therefore, likely to be important tool for legitimisation.

Sandberg (2012) adopted a similar discursive strategy when looking at cannabis users in Norway. However, he took a different approach, analysing resistance through risk and stigma, rather than conformity via legitimisation of the self. The negotiation of criminality and deviance is often overlooked when discussing the meaning and motivation for recreational drug use, which is perhaps surprising given the legal and political framework that currently exists in the UK. DP examines the construction of the self, the other, and the broader cultural significance of a particular phenomenon (Phillips and Jøgensen, 2002). The microanalysis that focuses on 'accounting for behaviour' cannot be fully understood without reflecting on the wider ideology surrounding illicit drug use in the UK. This is where the discursive accounting must take place, as on one hand, we are in a prohibitionist era in which the possession and supply of certain substances is unlawful through the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. On the other hand, drug use is associated with leisure, pleasure and recreation. It may be

that drug use can be justified as controlled; however, this legitimisation will need to be negotiated alongside the criminal and deviant associations of illicit consumption.

Methods

Theoretical sampling

In-depth, loosely structured interviews were conducted with twenty-six drug takers; these took place either in the participants' own homes, or a quiet bar or café and lasted between one and three hours. The criteria for participation was as follows, aged thirty or over; have taken drugs within the past year; do not partake in criminal activities as their main source of income; and are not seeking drug treatment. The sample were generated through initial contacts within personal networks, and snowballed using a theoretical sampling approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glasser, 1978). A number of gatekeepers and participants were identified in the first stage of recruitment. However, as is so often the case with a snowball sample, these heavily relied on drug takers involved in clubbing scenes. As the focus of the research was on criminality and deviance, the sampling strategy evolved to locate drug takers who were perhaps more private about their consumption, for example, those who hide their drug taking from their partners, those with managerial roles and people working in criminal justice and healthcare sectors.

The DP method

9

The interviews took a narrative approach in order to encourage the participant to reflect upon and share stories about their drug experiences. This was important for the analysis, which focused upon how drug taking is accounted for. For example, a typical first question asked to participants was: *'Tell me about your drug taking and what part it plays in your life'*, which encouraged personal reflection. The interviews were inputted into NVivo and using inductive analysis, emergent themes were created into codes. The analysis involved an examination of how drug use is presented, i.e. either positively or negatively. It also involved assessing the subject position, for example, establishing which identities are represented (i.e. parent, worker, partner) and whether participants either resisted or conformed to a drug taking identity.

During the analysis stage, two emerging themes arose, firstly when drug takers were deflecting criticism and the other when discussing functionality and control. It was clear that narratives could be categorised by: (1) the frequency of drug use and the types of drugs used, (2) the context in which drug use occurred, and (3) how drug use was described as controlled. From this analysis, three frameworks or 'interpretative repertoires' were developed. These situated personal accounting for drug taking as legitimised in the following ways: through social accommodation, as an occasional activity, or through the wide availability and access to substances. The frameworks are discussed in further detail in the findings section.

Description of the sample
>>>Insert table 1 here>>>

Table 1 describes the sample. The participant group were equally split between males and females, their ages ranged between 30 and 59, the average age was 41.Twelve out of the 26 participants were parents (46%), the age of their children ranged from toddler to adult. The most common substances used by the participant group were cannabis, cocaine, and MDMA/ecstasy; and to a lesser extent ketamine, LSD and amphetamines. Frequency of drug use varied considerably within the sample and also as part of the individuals' lives. The majority of participants were polydrug takers, consuming more than one substance on one occasion or taking different substances as separate and unrelated experiences (Boeri et al. 2008; Ives and Ghelani, 2006). Table 1 includes a code system, which details approximate frequency of the three main types of drugs. These were categorised based on how the participants referred to drug use within the interviews and were split into three categories: daily (D), which referred to cannabis use only; (F) was frequent/regular occurrence or (O) was episodic or occasional. There was only one participant, Johnson, who used two separate frameworks, the 'drug cultures' framework for his daily cannabis consumption and the 'planned celebration' framework for his occasional ecstasy use. Regular and daily cannabis use was spoken about as a separate and often unrelated experience to stimulant and psychedelic drug use.

The participants were, with the exception of their drug consumption, conforming adults. Their main source of income was not through criminal activity; they were involved in domestic, social and financial responsibilities through employment, parenthood and constructive activity, such as sports teams and community work/activism. The majority of participants were employed, one was a full-time student and one was retired. There was a wide variety of jobs/careers, including

11

education, construction, health-care, customer service, management, and creatives. Although a small sample, the participants are varied in terms of lifestyle and employment, which indicates the diversity of drug takers.

Findings

The 'drug cultures' framework: legitimisation through social accommodation

Drug use is associated with a particular social scene or group(s) of people in the 'drug cultures' framework and these drug takers situate themselves at the heart of these contexts. This was the dominant framework utilised, with 15 people drawing from it to account for their frequent drug use. Participants described drug taking as motivated by their social lives – either through the enjoyment of music, dancing and feeling of unity through a shared social pursuit, or as enhancing social interaction at an intimate level, typically taking cocaine in the home with close friends. This is consistent with the literature outlining contextual and unifying pleasures associated with drug use (Aldridge et al. 2011; Boys et al, 1999; Hincliff, 2001; Hunt and Evans, 2008; Malbon, 1999; Measham, 2004; Moore, 2008; Pennay and Moore, 2010; Rödner, 2006; Williams, 2013). Participants discussed how drugs are accepted in certain contexts and environments. Here, Dina describes drug use as accommodated within her social group in clubbing contexts:

> *I would say the majority of my close friends do drugs. There are a few of us that over the years that have done it less and less, but I would say a good 90 odd per cent of my friends do drugs in some recreational way. If there is*

12

someone around on the [clubbing] scene that doesn't do drugs, it is just their

choice that they don't want to do them and they don't think any less of us.

(Dina, 38)

In this extract drug use is positioned and reiterated as a collective rather than individual pursuit. This functions to demonstrate drugs as socially accommodated by peers and embedded into the clubbing scene. This indicates that the acceptability of drug use is dependent on environment and context (Measham and Shiner, 2009). The extract also positions non-drug takers as the exception within this scene, with individual decision-making to refrain from drugs resisting (rather than conforming to) the norms within this context. This further constructs the acceptability of drug use here, as abstainers are positioned as neutral about this behaviour, '*it is just their choice that they don't want to do them and they don't think any less of us'*. This rationalises drug use as accommodated, but arguably this relates to other clubbers within that context, rather than peers in general. This social accommodation has been observed within other qualitative research, which demonstrates the acceptability of drug use is bounded within social contexts (Becker, 1963; Young, 1971; Pearson, 2001; Duff, 2003, 2005; Rhodes et al. 2011; Rodner-Szitman, 2008; Measham and Shiner, 2009; Pennay and Moore, 2010; Williams, 2013).

The 'drug cultures' framework also accommodates habitual drug use alongside conformist routines. Regular cannabis use was described as a separate experience to stimulant drug use within the participant group. Five participants smoke cannabis either daily or a few times a week, all but one of these described how they preferred weaker strains of cannabis, such as bush or resin and would avoid smoking skunk. As

13

found by Becker's (1963) seminal study of marijuana smokers, participants tended to rationalise their regular cannabis use by comparing it to moderate alcohol consumption (further supported by Peretti-Watel, 2003 and Peretti-Watel & Moatti, 2006), often highlighting their preference for cannabis over alcohol. Annabel demonstrates this in the following example,

> *I don't have that urge coming home, "oh I could do with a nice glass of wine". It would be, "oh I could have a big fat spliff". I think it is the way it makes me feel. I can really zone out with a spliff and I can't so much with alcohol or I would have to drink a lot more to get that effect. I can sit in here skin up and smoke and feel really sleepy. I am not a hyper person and it's not like if I don't have a spliff, I can't sit and relax. I can easily mong out in front of the tele and whatever. But yeah I do like to, it is the relaxing qualities of a spliff.*

(Annabel, 40)

Using alcohol as a comparison conveys the cultural acceptability of Annabel's cannabis use. She justifies this daily consumption by comparing it with moderate, functional and acceptable alcohol use. Cannabis use is rationalised as an individual decision, based on a preference for its effects, it is further legitimised as controlled behaviour, when Annabel emphasises how she would need to consume a lot of alcohol to achieve the same state of relaxation. Relaxation at the end of the day is contingent within conformist lifestyles. We can see the ways in which participants within this framework resist the connotations of dependence, as Annabel asserts, '*it's not like if I don't have a spliff I can't sit and relax*'. Moderation is central to this narrative; it is

highlighted through the sedentary effects, the minimal amounts consumed and as a marginal aspect of the day. Contrary to Sandberg's findings (2012, 2013), cannabis smoking is not positioned as a subcultural activity associated with opposition to the status quo, Annabel's narrative illustrates how moderation and control, together with the cultural associations to alcohol, function to legitimise daily cannabis consumption as a conformist activity.

In the 'drug cultures' framework, drug use is positioned as accepted and even expected within certain circumstances. This framework provides evidence that acceptability is dependent on social context, for Dina this is within music scenes and for Annabel this is through the moderation of consumption within her own conformist routine. The discursive strategies used present the both normification of drug taker (Hathaway et al., 2011) and the emphasis upon moderate consumption is consistent with the notion of 'sensible' recreational drug use (Parker et al., 2002).

The 'planned celebration' framework: legitimisation as an occasional activity

Eight participants used the 'planned celebration' framework to account for their drug use, which they described as an occasional activity occurring when they deserve time for fun and pleasure. Participants drawing from this framework, compared to those from the 'drug cultures' framework, place themselves on the periphery of drug taking environments rather than central to them. One of the key discursive features of this framework is the autonomy of drug taking decisions and the infrequency that drug use occurs. For instance, Saskia describes how roles and responsibilities impact her drug use:

15

I have more time, because my son is a bit older, I have more time to myself so I

think I am more inclined to let myself go. At the weekends and also after work,

I would be more inclined to take a little bit of something whatever that is. But

I am not a heavy drug user and never have been. I just don't think I would be

able to hack it. I wouldn't be able to work; I wouldn't be able to look after my

child if I did. So it is literally just sort of 'every now and then' in small doses.

(Saskia, 33)

Throughout this extract, Saskia signifies the importance of her role as a parent and her work commitments, which dominate the construction of the self and her order of priorities. Yet, she highlights how her parental responsibilities have reduced, which justifies a renewed focus on the self and time for leisure activity. Nevertheless, she resists a drug user identity and emphasises the minor role drug use plays within her life, *so it is literally just sort of 'every now and then' in small doses.* She positions 'heavy' drug use as a barrier to functionality and therefore impermissible alongside the formal responsibilities of adulthood. This is consistent with the concept of 'good neutralisations' where drug taking is rationalised alongside otherwise conforming lifestyles, rather than being excused or denied (Aldridge et al. 2011).

Participants drawing from the 'planned celebration' framework stress that work, family, and other hobbies take precedence in their lives and drug use is, therefore, restricted to special occasions and events, such as festivals, birthdays and holidays. Here, Rhys emphasises how drug use is planned around his work commitments:

16

The last time it really happened, I had been on holiday for a week… it was a friend of mine's wedding, and I was out there with all of my friends and we were dancing around having a really good time and we all took some pills. It was totally premeditated fun, we danced around and made fools of ourselves, and I have got no problem with that. It doesn't happen as much as it should do. It's like once a year when I might be in those conditions, when I am neither exhausted nor tired. I am using it partly as a pick me up, when I am not worried about the consequences of being on shit form for two or three days.

(Rhys, 35)

Rhys legitimises his drug use via his is commitment to work, acknowledging the deserved time for pleasure and leisure. He positions himself as 'out of kilter' with a work-life balance and emphasises how this planned drug use acts as a release from his busy schedule. This supports Pearson (2001) who found drug use is a periphery activity in adult recreational drug takers social lives. Notice how the narrative is verified, '*and I have got no problem with that',* which demonstrates that he is the autonomous agent within this decision-making. Rhys also legitimates drug taking and celebration as way of recovery in order to get back to work. This further demonstrates the function of drug use to facilitate active and productive lives.

The 'drug cultures' framework accommodates drug use within certain social contexts; the 'planned celebration' framework permits drug use as a subsidiary part of adult life. Here the status gained within adulthood centralises responsibility, drug use is considered acceptable as long as professional and domestic responsibilities take

17

precedence. Drug taking is therefore legitimised as an occasional activity, which is linked to pleasure, leisure and celebration. It represents 'time-out' from busy, stressful and responsible lives. Narratives within this framework reflect notions of functional and controlled recreational drug use (see, for example Aldridge et al., 2011; Delocorte, 2001; Lau et al., 2015; Moore, 2008; Williams, 2013). Indeed, they hark back to the work of Young (1971) and Shiner (2009) who associate drug use with the 'subterranean world of play'. This framework aligns with the capitalist principle that leisure is permitted through the application of hard work and productivity in the workplace.

The 'situational opportunity' framework: legitimisation through wide availability of drugs

Participants within the 'drug cultures' and 'planned celebration' frameworks rationalise use based on their ability to control their consumption (either through frequency, amount or maintenance within life overall). In contrast, the three participants drawing from the 'situational opportunity' framework refer to difficulties in controlling their drug use, primarily, lacking the restraint to limit the amount of drugs taken on one occasion. It is within this framework that participants express guilt, concern and even remorse about their drug use, as Albion demonstrates in the following example,

> *I wouldn't want to defend my behaviour because frankly, I am not entirely comfortable with all my behaviour. I am not hugely uncomfortable about it but I wouldn't want to say this is fine, get over yourselves. I am not at that stage…*

18

There is a sense of empathy with ecstasy and I have made lifelong friends but

ultimately it is [a] self-indulgent, selfish act that is hugely enjoyable but is for

you to enjoy. Enjoy collectively, but ultimately the objective is to do something

that is going to make you feel great and it is short lived.

(Albion, 38)

Albion disassociates from the subject positioning of a drug taker, '*I wouldn't want to defend my behaviour because frankly I am not entirely comfortable with all my behaviour'*. The use of '*I am not at that stage'* denotes that other people may be, but this is not a position he has achieved. Whereas the pleasures of drug use are justified within the other two frameworks, the bodily pleasure experienced through drug use is not legitimated within the 'situational opportunity' framework, '*ultimately it is self-indulgent, [a] selfish act that is hugely enjoyable, but is for you to enjoy'*. Albion also rejects the instant gratification of drugs, in favour of behaviour that has a longer lasting impact on the self. This is demonstrated through outlining the positive impact, in respect of interpersonal relationships, that drug use has had in his life. However, the personal pleasure and enjoyment that Albion associates with drug use is not presented as an acceptable justification.

The negative constructions of drug use, like those in Albion's narrative, are associated with the lack of personal control and undesirable consequences experienced after consumption. This type of behaviour is non-adaptive alongside functional lifestyles. Participants in the 'situational opportunity' framework refer to a lack of memory, heated or embarrassing discussions, outlandish behaviour, as some examples. In order to legitimise their lack of personal control and the guilt associated with drug use,

19

participants adopt the 'denial of personal responsibility' technique (Sykes and Matza, 1957) and state that they do not (or very rarely) buy their own drugs and only take them if they are readily available or offered. Drug use is legitimised through the wide availability and access to drugs within social life, as Marcus demonstrates in the following extract:

> *When I first moved here and joined the football team, a guy on the team said that some of the guys do drugs and I said 'well I don't want anything to do with it because I have stopped doing that'. So I was hanging round one night and they were having coke and they said, 'do you want some'? And I said 'No, No' because I will probably want some later when I have a few more beers in me. And they said, 'well there probably isn't going to be any left', so I went, 'OK' and I guess when it is always around, I guess if my friends didn't do it, I wouldn't do it.*

(Marcus, 35)

When Marcus describes taking drugs when he first joins a football team, he positions himself as entering into a drug-taking environment as an 'outsider' who receives an invitation to take drugs. This functions to reduce personal responsibility and demonstrates the influence of environment and the wide availability of drugs. Notice how he goes from adamant that he will not take any '*well I don't want anything to do with it because I have stopped doing that'*, which then changes within the account. The final decision to take drugs is determined by an amalgamation of outside factors: the domination of the drug taking environment of which he is a visitor, the influence

20

of alcohol on decision-making, and finally the potential that there would not be any left later. Marcus positions himself as a victim of circumstance, '*I guess if my friends didn't do it, I wouldn't do it*' rather than an active decision maker.

Within the 'situational opportunity' framework, drug taking is neutralised through 'the denial of personal responsibility'. Drug use is reported to occur due to the wide availability of drugs that are on offer in social and leisure situations. The influence of peers and access to drugs are discursive strategies to legitimise consumption within this framework. In doing so, these narratives allude to a lack of autonomy and control over personal drug use.

Discussion

The nuances of legitimisation: understanding acceptability via control and function

These findings support similar research using discursive psychology, which highlight multifaceted representations of drug use (Riley et al., 2008; Riley et al., 2010). All twenty-six adult drug takers interviewed engage in neutralisations. Any behaviour that carries risks (whether that be to health and well-being or criminality) is likely to be neutralised in some way (Aldridge et al., 2011; Pennay and Moore, 2010), but this cannot automatically be assumed to mean that behaviour is internalised as wrong (Maruna and Copes, 2005; Aldridge et al. 2011). What is fundamental in ascertaining acceptable drug consumption is the use of justifications rather than excuses.

21

There was evidence of justifications (Scott and Lyman, 1968), rationalisations (Becker, 1963 and Young, 1971) within the 'drug cultures' and 'planned celebration' frameworks. Drug takers rationalise their illicit consumption in respect of their attachment to the roles and responsibilities of adult life, which supports the normification of the drug taker (Hathaway et al., 2011). In the 'drug cultures' framework, drug use is described as one component of established and purposeful social groups, such as those associated with dance music or even friendship groups more generally. This provides further evidence for Pearson's (2001) contention that drug use is accommodated beyond the dance music scene. It is within this framework that drug use occurs the most frequently, but is justified as moderated and functional within daily life, for instance habitual cannabis use to relax after work. In the 'planned celebration' framework, drug takers justify their consumption as an occasional activity. The construction of the 'planned' and also autonomous decision-making process, further emphasises this behaviour as responsible action, and supports the assertions made by Riley et al. (2010) that drug takers use neo-liberal discourse to convey controlled and functional consumption. Monaghan (2002) found steroid users justify their use for the purpose of physical enhancement. Similarly, both these frameworks illustrate how illicit drug use is accommodated alongside some degree of external purpose within everyday life. This indicates that drug pleasure alone is not enough to legitimise use.

Excuses are evident within the 'situational opportunity' framework, where participants project distain associated with their inability to control consumption, which can result in dysfunctional behaviour. In order to legitimise drug use in these instances, drug takers use one of the traditional techniques of neutralisation to

disclaim personal responsibility and outline the wide availability and access to drugs. This positions the individual as a passive recipient, rather than an active agent in continued drug use and participants are therefore separating themselves from the culpability of this non-adaptive behaviour. Ultimately, drug use that is compulsive and dysfunctional is constructed as unacceptable, supporting other studies, which centralise the importance of control and functionality in drug takers' narratives (Decorte, 2001; Lau et al., 2015; Monaghan, 2002; Riley et al., 2010).

This paper does not test or redefine normalisation, but it does contribute to the debate about its contemporary relevance in explaining drug use. Two dimensions within the thesis, the social accommodation of drug use by abstainers and the access and availability of drugs, assist in legitimisation for these drug takers. More broadly, the emphasis on control and function is consistent with the argument that 'sensible' recreational drug use, rather than all drug use is accommodated (Aldridge et al. 2011). The concept of differential normalisation (Shildrick, 2002) is usefully applied here, functional drug use is accepted, but excessive or dysfunctional drug use is rejected. The narratives resist the common features of dependence, especially in the 'drug cultures' framework where drug use is more frequent, for example Annabel's daily cannabis use is presented as moderated through the amount consumed, the time of day it occurs and as a rational choice to aide relaxation. In addition, drug takers distance themselves from excessive and dysfunctional use within the recreational sphere. Acceptability of drug use is associated with the subterranean world of play (Young, 1971; Shiner, 2009), but even here use must not be excessive to the extent that it results in outlandish behaviour or permeates the functionality of otherwise

23

conforming lives. This demonstrates the nuances of acceptability within the broad spectrum of 'recreational' drug use.

The incidence of drug use for adults over the age of thirty, who lives are otherwise conforming, demonstrates that these individuals are not attached to deviant lifestyles. Pleasure and leisure are permitted within the narratives, this is linked to a number of social contexts, clubs, pubs, the home, festivals, and therefore is not associated with a particular subculture, but leisure time in general. In addition, the participants describe easy access to drugs, which illustrates their wide availability. This is especially significant considering these drug takers are in the statistical minority in terms of their age and furthermore for those participants who take drugs infrequently. The paper describes the micro- politics (Pennay and Moore, 2010) of normalisation; however, the narratives illustrate the wider impact of structure on behaviours and decision-making. The abundant sites of leisure, the accessibility of drugs, and the diversified nature of adulthood in the 21st century indicate that the process of normalisation is contingent upon the social context of use (Measham and Shiner, 2009).

The acceptability of drug use is dependent upon a spectrum that runs from control through to dysfunction. If drug takers can articulate their ability to control their use and maintain functionality within their lives, then both drug taker and drug use may be legitimated. Functionality and control, rather than criminality determines acceptability for these drug users. The three frameworks of legitimisation are interpretative repertoires, demonstrating the discursive representations of drug use and should not be considered true reflections of behaviour. The narratives outline that functional drug use is legitimised, but the do not provide evidence that these drug

24

takers always exercise moderation within their consumption practices. The epistemological perspective of discourse analysis rejects that narratives depict actual behaviour, what they convey is meaning of a particular phenomenon, in this instance the parameters of acceptability regarding the illicit drug use of otherwise conforming adults.

Conclusion

There is a dearth of research focusing on 'functional and controlled' drug use, perhaps because this does not affect society in an adverse way and some funders maybe reluctant to attribute their tight resources to projects that demonstrate the pleasures, functions and benefits of drug use, rather than research that identifies risk and prioritises reducing harm. However, emphasising the negatives distorts public perceptions of drug use, perpetuating a culture in which drug takers are stigmatised. This paper contributes to a more balanced view of drug use, as it acknowledges the existence of functional drug takers who are currently absent from drug policy discussion (McKeganey, 2007, Parker, 2005; UKDPC, 2012). Recognising the positives of drug use, as well as responding to the risks, thus helps to reduce the social and cultural harm caused by stigma and negative stereotypes.

This paper has demonstrated that drug takers can articulate functionality and pleasure associated with their use; it also shows they can convey disdain when drug use becomes excessive and dysfunctional. The narratives of drug takers are important in understanding cognition around certain behaviours as they represent belief systems, reasoning and mechanisms for control, which are useful when reflecting on treatment and therapy (Maruna and Copes, 2005). This highlights the need to incorporate the

25

experiences of drug takers into research, policy and education, rather than alienate them from the debate. The binary of drug takers as either recreational or problematic is primarily concerned with consumption frequency, which fails to acknowledge the variety in drug related experiences, particularly that occasional drug use can result in health, well-being and behavioural issues, but perhaps more controversially that more frequent or habitual drug use can be accommodated into functional lifestyles. In order to better understand the impact of drug use and the acceptable boundaries of drug using behaviour, this research has demonstrated that it is more appropriate to conceptualise drug use on a spectrum that runs from control through to dysfunction, rather than either recreational or problematic.

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