Research paper

We, ourselves and us: tensions of identity, intersubjectivity and positionality stemming from the people and dancefloors project

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Abstract

Grounded in intersubjective participatory action research, the people and dancefloors project has sought to produce a space for the co-creation of knowledge about dancefloors and drug taking, building a platform for developing insights from the positionality of current drug users. Through film, it provides hermeneutic insight while legitimising their voices.In this paper, we share some reflections as researchers/users/activists arising from our involvement in the project. To begin with, we reflect on the motivations for the project, and the epistemic suppositions that animated it. This is followed by conversational style interviews where we re-evaluate our position in light of the project, with a particular focus on the tensions that drug use introduces between professional, personal and political domains in our lives.These reflections are useful to people who use drugs and hold privilege by nature of their social and cultural position. While questioning the silencing of personal experiences in relation to drug use, we also react to some of the traditional tendencies of academia, including institutionalised individualism, which isolates researchers and discourages them from finding political collectivity, and the subjectivist/objectivist dichotomy, which supports a tendency to objectify research participants while removing the self from the equation. Despite the challenges that arise from disentangling our multiple experiences and identities, our intersubjective dialogue inspires deeper learning about ourselves and each other, encouraging us towards a more openly political stance.

Introduction

This paper relies on autoethnographic reflections by its four authors to address struggles of identity, specifically in negotiating our roles of researchers, drug users and activists. While in general, the role of researcher is one that can be proudly held in public, the role of drug user is often kept secret and confined to the private realm, despite its potential productive capacity in relation to research. The four authors make up the research team of a project titled 'People and

Dancefloors: Nnarratives of Ddrug-Ttaking'. Our involvement with the project inspired the reflections collated in this paper.

Here, we focus on the tension between roles as researchers and drug users. Recognising such tension has stimulated conversations about core aspects of identity, including the intersection between drug use and class. In addressing tension openly, we lay bare issues that do not normally figure in academic discussions, hoping to join others in a process of dialogue and exchange. By taking a reflexive stance, we are not attempting to make claims to better knowledge, or indeed argue that we should privilege personal experience as a lens through which we observe and mediate the social world. Rather, we are interested in the potential consequences of increased openness, honesty and dialogue about issues that are usually confined to the private and personal for policy debates.

While we do not always speak univocally, we actively engage with questions about the relationship between identity, experience and our sociological imagination, grappling with issues of power, privilege and pragmatism afforded by our position as academic researchers versus our drug use. We engage in discussion about whether acknowledging our drug use in public fora is a form of political activism. We believe it important, at this juncture, to ask whether researchers and other people with privilege are responsible for being open and honest about their drug use (Ross, Potter, Barratt & Aldridge, 2020). Public openness about drug use from people with considerable social and cultural capital could have positive consequences, including its potential to dispel myths about who is a drug user, moving away from stigmatised or stereotyped representations as well as linear, flat, totalising labels and understandings.

Background: the people and dancefloors project

"People and Dancefloors: Narratives of Drug-Taking" is building a network for knowledge co-creation between researchers, a filmmaker, and project participants, who were invited to share their stories about dancefloors and drugs in multiple forms (on-camera interviews, audio interviews, written statements, creative writing, images etc.). With NN = = 13 participants and a team of four researchers so far, the main outputs of the project are a short, documentary-style film, a website (www.peopleanddancefloors.com) and a growing network. Participants were recruited online, through existing social networks, word of mouth and snowballing. Most participants are white British, living in England in the 30 to 40 age bracket. By recruiting participants to share experiences about the meaning of dancefloors and drug-taking in their lives, and collating those narratives together through film, the project provides a unique channel to voice such experiences and a direct, less mediated platform for those experiences to be shared. The current drug policy landscape displays a combination of criminalisation and harm reduction practices in relation to drug use and users, but harm reduction interventions are compromised by criminalisation (Strike & Watson, 2019; Zampini, 2014). The historical and current struggles for inclusion of affected communities to shape public policy and discourse are testament to the need for creating such platforms (Jürgens, 2008). The film was first screened at the University of Greenwich in 2019 and was well received by the audience, with discussions ranging from the academic value of the participatory, multi-media methodology of the project, to its wider engagement potential. The project's website was launched in February 2020. It currently hosts a blog and podcast series, the film trailer, and the film. All 2020 in-person screenings were cancelled because of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The project was conceived by Dan and Giulia, who met while volunteering at the Bristol Drugs Project and later recognised their mutual quasi-obsession with drug policy reform. In 2018, the advocacy organisation Volteface launched the *Night Lives* report (written by Fisher & Measham, 2018) at the House of Commons. The main thrust of the report was about the possibility of offering harm reduction services, including drug testing, across the UK's city centres. Multiple stakeholders were present at the launch, but there was no organisation representing people who use drugs in the night-time context. The absence of drug user voices in the room was troubling. There is extensive rights-based activism amongst people who use drugs (e.g. Clear; the Psychedelic Society; INPUD; EuroPUD to name a few). We knew about Dancesafe in the USA, and later discovered the Dance Drug Alliance, a group of user activists in the early 2000s mobilising around harm reduction at clubs, but we couldn't think of any current user-led movement around "party drugs" in the UK.

The People and Dancefloors' project aims to open the drug policy debate in the direction of a key, but silenced, affected community while addressing the hypocrisy at the centre of our cultural relationship with drugs and associated socio-economic hierarchy. Hierarchies are mutually reinforcing. Many mostly white, educated people keep their drug use hidden out of fear of the repercussions this may have on their lives and careers (Ross et al., 2020; Walker, 2017). The

same people may say we should not stigmatise others for using drugs, but then hide their use of drugs in order to shelter their reputation from stigma. Meanwhile, people with lived experience of using drugs but whose drug use cannot be hidden are systematically excluded from discussions about drug policy (Lancaster, Treloar & Ritter, 2017; Ritter, Lancaster & Diprose, 2018; Stevens & Zampini, 2018). Our understanding of drugs is embedded in hierarchical relations, ideas about morality and purity, and prohibition (Douglas, [1966], 2003; Stevens & Zampini, 2018). People who abstain are generally considered to be righteous, moral, pure and healthy. The licit drug alcohol enjoys a large degree of cultural acceptance, and the UK's population has been found to be its most enthusiastic consumer (Winstock, 2019). As for controlled drugs, there is a hierarchy of both substances and of those who use them (Ettorre, 1992). Cannabis continues to be the most popular (EMCDDA, 2020; Winstock, 2019). Recent global drug policy reform has been directed at decriminalising or depenalising its possession ((Eastwood et al., 2016) ~~Eastwood, Fox and Rosemarin, 2016~~; Stevens, Hughes, Hulme & Cassidy, 2019), or legalising and regulating its sale with either more profit-orientated models or public health underpinnings (Pardo, 2014). Psychedelics are enjoying a renaissance, increased social acceptance and cultural accommodation (Sessa, 2012), while those who use them in a western context tend to be affluent people looking for spiritual awakenings, productive creativity, counselling and enlightenment. Lower down the hierarchy, we find "recreational", "party", "part-time" drug use – a plethora of mostly stimulants and some hallucinogens used at regular intervals, be them weekly, monthly, or yearly, for a variety of purposes, including blowing off the accumulated steam of capitalism's intense productive modes, functionally increasing energy levels, seeking enhancement, pleasure and sociality (Aldridge, Measham & Williams, 2013; Askew, 2016; Askew & Williams, 2020; Young, 1971). At the bottom, we find addicted and abject use: heroin, crack, crystal methamphetamine, often administered intravenously, most visible on those who are poor, economically excluded and socially marginalised (Harris, 2009; Stevens, 2019).

It is fundamental to stress that our existing socio-economic hierarchy, and not drugs themselves, shapes the way drug use is perceived, as we discuss later in relation to class. Social status and material wealth allow those who are privileged to use drugs - including heroin, crack and crystal methamphetamine - in private, without being subjected to social or criminal sanctions. Conversely, those who are poor are cast as abject, and their use of drugs, whether licit or illicit, serves to reinforce their social positioning as self-abasing, moral failures. Too often, privilege is perceived as individual success, which in turn shapes the way drug use and addiction by privileged people is perceived. While there are differences along gender and racial lines (see Becrkers & Eeckalear, 2014; Tiger, 2013 in relation to celebrities) privileged people's addiction is often framed through a victim narrative, whereby people are constructed as victims and not as abject.

When interviewing drug policy experts (Zampini, 2014; 2016; 2018), there was a growing suspicion that many of them forfeited their identity as drug users or even former drug users in order to increase their credibility as experts. Not all drug policy experts are also illicit drug users, but some have used illicit drugs. Many use licit drugs like alcohol, and some struggle with their use of drugs. From a feminist standpoint, the idea of a divorce between experience and expertise is problematic (Ettorre, 2010; Haraway, 1988; Wakeman, 2014). This division perpetuates hierarchies of knowledge, of deservingness, of moral status and of credibility. We understand our relative privilege, and we see how transgressing, moving out of one's place and comfort, is necessary for political change (hooks, 2004). Others may disagree by noting how hiding one's drug use is a pragmatic position that ensures protection from stigma and some political gain. This tension underpins our discussions in this paper.

Drugs, identity and the sociological imagination

Ross et al. (2020):1) posit that 'there is clear merit to further open discussion on the role of disclosure and reflection on personal drug use experience amongst those working in drug research and drug policy'. In 1959, sociologist C. Wright Mills told us: 'you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work' ([Instruction: the reference is in the list, but I am not sure how to format it when including a page number for a direct quote]Mills, 2000: 196). For those who study and seek to understand the social world, this seems rather obvious. Social scientists are often drawn to subjects and themes that interest them or of which they have experience (Ross et al., 2020). Any strong demarcation between experience and observation is fabricated (Ettorre, 2017). The positivist objectivism we inherited from laboratory science has fostered the myth of the neutral, cold-blooded observer by asserting the separation between subject and object, even in a social science context where often there is no object at all ((Archer et al., 1998)~~Archer, 1998~~). Social research is mostly made of subjects and intersubjective experiences. Yet, the idea that personal experience and emotional investment equal bias, which in turn equals bad science, is still rampant. Research that includes a focus

on drugs usually prevents people from acknowledging the way their experiences with drugs have influenced their perspectives. For some, drugs were used instrumentally to gain access to a research subject (Adler, 1993; Thornton, 1995). For others still, being drug users formed part of their identity and motivation to do research in the drugs field (Harris, 2009; Hart, 2013; Walker, 2017).

The privileging of positivist objectivism in mainstream understandings of science can result in accusations that a researcher who is also a drug user is self-motivated, self-interested and subjective in their work, damaging their credibility (Ross et al., 2020). Such a view of science, and of the academic persona, also precludes researchers from identifying as activists, because activism may be regarded as partial, political and "dirty" - something that science should not be. Not all scientists support the view that science is or should be detached from politics. While there is a strong tradition of activism in the academy, a clear boundary over what is regarded as acceptable forms of activism intersects with the limits imposed by laws and institutions. As for the "law-breaking" type of activism, a clean and dirty differentiation can still be applied. Grassroots environmental action could, for example, be considered "clean" because of its association with the moral purity of environmentalism. Conversely, activism around drugs could be seen as "dirty" because of the status of drugs as illicit and immoral. Even dirtier is drug use itself. We are 'dirty researchers' (Southgate & Shying, 2014:226) if we admit to it. Following Southgate's and Shying's (2014) three-tiered typology of dirty researcher, all authors of this paper were already tainted because we were all drug users before becoming researchers. There seems to be little room for researchers to embrace their multifaceted identities in public, particularly if one or more aspects of their identity are "dirty". It is their professional identity, the researcher, that gives them clout. By implication, we as researchers, as social scientists, are still struggling to publicly come to terms with our political and personal selves vis-à-vis our scientific selves. We are "insiders" (Hodkinson, 2005) pretending to be "outsiders" in order to enjoy the benefits of the absence of stigma. But as Southgate and Shying put it, 'researchers that bear the stain of a dirty worker, publicly and in secret, help us avoid a sanitised, depoliticised version of knowledge production' (2014: 236).

Drug users are often associated with labels such as lazy, immoral, weak (Ross et al., 2020). Using drugs delegitimates a person – it calls into question their moral standing. If that person is a researcher, a category usually associated with erudition, seriousness, detachment, rationality, then this association is bound to create conflict and friction between two apparently incompatible activities and related identities. At present in the public discourse about drugs, we keep going back and forth between identity and activity. The relationship between activity and identity is a complex one. While *doing* drugs and *doing* research are both activities, hence the suffix verb "doing", they are often conflated with identity, defining what a person is. Thus, *being* a researcher or *being* a drug user connote how activities shape identities. Identity is formed by multiple overlapping activities sustained over time, but no activity is necessarily dominant or immutable. Certain aspects of identity, such as skin colour, sex or place of origin, are given and hard to mutate. Conversely, aspects of identity that are shaped by activities are multiple and malleable. A seemingly primary activity such as being a mother, or being a daily heroin user, is always accompanied by other activities and by other aspects of identity, so it should not, in theory, be totalising. Going from being a mother of young children to a mother whose children don't live at home will inevitably affect the primacy of the mother identity. Similarly, going from using heroin daily to abstaining may open the possibility for a new, abstinent identity. The longer one spends doing an activity, the more one invests in that activity, the more that activity shapes one's identity (Alexander & Wiley, 1981). But some identities stigmatise more than others.

Experiencing the negative consequences of widespread use of totalising labels has motivated harm reduction activists and drug policy reformers to advocate for a labelling shift, from drug users to people who use drugs (PWUD), in such a way that using drugs does not define identity. The seed of this idea in the anglophone world was chiefly planted by Becker and Goffman back in 1963, with their seminal works on labelling and stigma respectively [Instruction: when inserting these references, the system won't let me delete the brakets in bewtween or add a semicolon](Becker, 2008) (Goffman, 2009). And yet it was only in 2017 that the Global Commission on Drug Policy called for a shift in language as a necessary step to address and reduce harm (GCDP, 2017), and only in 2010 that the UK Drug Policy Commission drew attention to the role of stigma in perpetuating fear and myths about people who use drugs (UKDPC, 2010). This is not to say that activists and researchers have not been highlighting these issues for some time, but it is only now that these ideas are entering the mainstream. And yet, this has not translated into a mass coming out event. People seldom discuss their drug use in public; they seldom identify as people who use drugs. Privileged people who use drugs enjoy the benefits, pleasure and sociality that drug taking may bring without many of the negative

consequences that are experienced by less privileged drug users, such as criminalisation and stigma. Our silence works to maintain existing social and cultural hierarchies.

One issue with such focus on language is the perhaps misplaced hope that shifts in discursive practices alone will entail paradigm shifts in power structures and institutions. So far, we have not witnessed a significant change in the way drug users are socially perceived or institutionally intervened upon, which begs the question: is the shift from identity to activity that we are seeking to input into mainstream language a way to circumscribe the issue, a political expedient that warrants further reflection and a different kind of political engagement?

In the next sections, we reflect on the interplay between identity and experience stemming from our involvement with the people and dancefloors project and each other. But first, we discuss our methodological approach in this paper.

Proximity, intersubjectivity, positionality and dialogue

Understanding the power of relational proximity was crucial to developing the method for the people and dancefloors project. The use of film to enable the viewer/listener to connect with participants' stories, mobilising empathy and human connection, was central (though we are not naïve to the fact that empathy is differentially mobilised and filtered by individual biases, Crow & Jones, 2018). Digital storytelling has been recognised as crucial to amplify marginalised voices in policy debates (Matthews & Sunderland, 2017). We have seen examples of drug policy reform advocacy centred on mobilising emotions by appealing to universal structures such as the family and relying on ideas of shared humanity (e.g. Anyone's Child in the UK, Family Drug Support in Australia, but also the mothers who mobilised around access to medical cannabis for their children with epilepsy and other conditions in the UK). Stories rely on proximity and can trigger intersubjective understandings.

Related to proximity is the intersubjective relationship of the researcher with the researched. A participatory action research project, which people and dancefloors claims to be, challenges the separation between researcher and subjects. Within this framework, the decision not to participate ourselves, or at least not to openly reflect on our positionality, is problematic. Blackman (2007) admitting to self-censoring about his drug taking during his doctorate fieldwork is a cautionary tale – that such omission is more about fear of losing legitimacy as a junior academic than a good approach to research and dissemination per se. In the context of club studies, Measham and Moore (2006) argued that the body of club research we have accumulated is heavily shaped by researchers' personal biographies and their at least partial insider status and knowledge, albeit this has been done in an implicit fashion without open admission to drug use (except in the case of Newcombe). Measham and Moore (2006: 22) openly state that 'club researchers […] may feel the need to downplay or even hide their consumer role in dance clubs, particularly if that consumption also includes club drugs. Consequently, issues of reflexivity and insider knowledge in club research remain obscured by a façade of respectability'. We contend that this is largely still the case. In 2003, an academic reviewer of Measham's work called for a careful reading of her co-authored book because of her bias as a clubber (Wibberley, 2003). This is a classic example of how detachment, neutrality and supposed objectivity was reasserted as superior to a more subjective, emotive and personal account. We are still facing similar controversy in terms of the dual disadvantage of qualitative reflexive accounts being considered less scientific, and therefore less valid, combined with the issue of including the drug-using-self in the research equation (Ross et al., 2020). Historically, clubs and drugs research was dominated by epidemiological studies, and related epistemologies, at the expense of cultural approaches. In order to do the work of rebalancing accounts in this field, cultural studies scholarship became attentive to pleasure, subjectivity and sociality, but failed to fully acknowledge the role of drugs (Hunt, Moloney & Evans, 2009). This silencing may also emerge from researchers' reluctance to be open about their experiences and ambiguities in relation to drugs.

Much drug consumption is intersubjective in nature and should therefore be addressed as such. We have found the combination of feminist and intersubjective epistemologies methodologically and politically productive (van Stapele, 2014). The concept of intersubjectivity, derived from phenomenology, has seen extensive application across the social sciences and psychoanalysis (see, for example, Dunn, 1995). Reacting against the positivist straitjacket, phenomenologically inspired approaches are inclusionary of experience by design (Fuchs & De Jaeger, 2009: 467). Prus's (1996: 15-17) proposition that human life is *intersubjective, multi-perspectival, reflective, activity-based, negotiable, relational* and *processual* underscore our approach in this paper and in the people and dancefloors project more broadly. It is only through intersubjective interaction that one may reach 'more comprehensive understandings of the viewpoints of the other as well as more intricate senses of self' (Prus, 1996: 11).

In tune with this logic, we utilise our intersubjective experiences in dialogue by addressing a series of questions,[1], to draw us into a stronger relationship with the research project and its subjects, combining autoethnographic reflection with intersubjective dialogue. A similar but more openly conversational approach was adopted by Stirling and Chandler (2020) in their discussion of self-harm, activism and academic identity (a back and forth conversation is easier with two voices than four). The questions we asked each other can be broadly categorised into three domains: motivation for involvement with the project; any learning which happened through involvement; and feelings about the self and identity. Each one of us addressed the questions separately through written responses which were later read and discussed collectively. We each wrote our answers to the questions, then read each other's answers and made queries and comments, eliciting further development or clarification where needed. In this way, we engaged in double reflexivity (Blackman & Commane, 2012). Our personal experiences, our work with the project and other research layered our conversation and through this process, we re-presented our positions with the considerations and comments of others. From a feminist standpoint, it is an engaged, political action to re-present oneself in a reflexive and honest manner. A reflexive dialogue and embodied, empathy-led approach is what we strive for in our interactions (Finlay, 2005; Marková, 2003). We moved from individual to collective reflection, not in the sense that we have a united voice, but rather that we understand and respect each other's voices. In the process of drawing these together, we also legitimised our experiences.

The People and Dancefloors project has received approval from the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Committee. Because our approach here is autoethnographic, we have not sought ethical approval for this paper, nor have we changed our names. We recognise that the decision not to seek ethical approval from a university ethics committee for this paper could be regarded as controversial. After some consideration, we have concluded that in this case, professional standards do not align with seeking ethical approval from an institution. There should be a boundary between governance of research that seeks to protect participants, which we acknowledge and abide by in the context of the people and dancefloors project, and the personal, intellectual and political freedom of researchers to share and reflect on their own experiences. We agree with Ross et al. (2020) that coming out should be a personal decision. We are not naïve to the potential consequences, including reputational damage. But the point of the paper is precisely to be open about an aspect of identity that is forcefully closeted by intersecting institutions. In other autobiographical accounts that have been inspirational to us, such as Wakeman's (2014) and Ettorre's (2017), there is no mention of seeking institutional approval to enable their autoethnographic self-reflection (though Wakeman states he received ethical approval for his ethnographic participant observation, the auto-ethnographic element is not explicitly mentioned). In Ettorre's (2005) autoethnographic account of her illness, she explicitly states that she did not seek ethical approval. If our decision is controversial, we stand in good company.

While we are a relatively diverse group, we share at least two aspects of identity as researchers who use drugs (though not all of us are drugs researchers). Three of us are early career researchers, and one of us is an ex academic turned filmmaker. We are all European of white ethnicity, two cis-gender men of working-class origin but with middle-class cultural capital, and two middle class cis-gender women.

Q8 Tension between roles: a matter of respectability

Anthony's very first sentence made us chuckle:

> I woke up this morning to a text message asking if I'd like to buy some speed.

He goes on to qualify:

> The person who sent the message works for a major scientific institution. Both of us would be considered "respectable" on paper, yet this part of us obviously needs to be kept hidden from the public (largely through fear of losing our jobs and reputations). Indeed, the last rave I went to was populated by similarly "respectable" people: a software engineer, a recruitment consultant, a nurse, a physicist, all of them on at least one illegal drug, and back to work by Monday, just like the people in the pubs.

> As an undergrad student I had no trouble reconciling this part of my life with my current social position and status. The tension started growing as I completed my PhD then became a research assistant on a major ESRC funded project. I used to say academia and raving should never meet, yet I felt they were swerving dangerously close to each other as

I moved between 'dropping gurners' and dancing til 5am on a Saturday, and discussing research agendas over coffee on Monday morning. For some reason doing drugs and doing academia seemed irreconcilable. There seems to be this idea that successful, coherent, well-rounded and stable people don't do illegal drugs, which in my direct personal experience is nonsense.

What I have trouble with is reconciling these two parts of my supposed identity, but that struggle is occasional and is felt at different levels of intensity at different points in my life. The idea of being a "Dr" and being very high was one of the main things that propelled me towards getting a PhD in the first place, as it just seemed funny and a bit malevolent (this occluded any sense of fiscal responsibility, otherwise I'd probably never have done it). My sense of humour has a lot to do with my current position, but sometimes I feel that maybe I've pushed the joke a little too far beyond my control and the Lacanian 'Real' has finally caught up with me. It becomes impossible to integrate this ridiculous self into any symbolic order (in other words "what the fuck am I doing here?").

What Anthony is describing is the tension between a respectable professional demeanour and a hidden recreational drug taking behaviour, perfectly split across the work and leisure time that weeks and weekends, and life stages from youth to adulthood, articulate. He defines both drugs and academia as activities that one *does*, then talks about the struggle to reconcile them in relation to identity.

As both a researcher and film maker, Lee's methodological approaches have involved participant observation (or more properly, participation) and "third cinema" (Salter, 2020; Wayne, 2001). It is this "third cinema" approach that was used to make the project's film, following third cinema techniques of making films "from the inside", foregrounding hermeneutic insights raised through genuine intersubjective positionality. Lee's experiences with drugs are rather different from Anthony's – not as punctuated by the leisure work split, and much more centred on his internal struggle. In his own words,

I would describe my intoxication experiences as more compulsive and addictive than others in the project. I've over-used drugs and alcohol for most of my life but managed to pursue education and a career at the same time. In this sense I "managed" my relationship with drugs and alcohol insofar as it didn't normally interfere with professional work or was explained away and excused, but it has rarely been a healthy relationship.

Reflecting now, over the past 20 years the longest stretch without drugs or alcohol is perhaps 5 days. If I go two nights in a row, I feel I've done well. But then that is always met with a "reward" of more.

Thus, there's a paradox: within friendship circles the acceptance of me as usually drunk or high meant that problematic aspects were seen as fun, whereas hiding it in professional contexts meant that problematic aspects were not seen as such. In this sense, managing it became a way to see how far things could be pushed - a game that ends only when, finally, they go too far.

According to his characterisation, Lee's relationship with drugs and alcohol has 'rarely been a healthy' one. Lee has 'managed' this by keeping it hidden at work and by making it appear as fun with friends. This strategy of managing tension has allowed Lee to maintain this relationship for twenty years. Any relationship with drugs inevitably involves 'management', which will depend on the individual's perception and experience of particular substances, but also on the cultural scripts that we inherit and apply. It is near impossible to understand one's relationship with drugs outside of accepted cultural scripts, including cultural ideas about health and healthy behaviour, which do not normatively include drug use. Seldom do the words "healthy" and drugs appear as mutually reinforcing outside a medical context. There will always be a question about the extent to which normative cultural scripts shape our perception of what it means to be healthy versus our experience.

[Instruction: this should be a section heading]Identity

Can we find some reconciliation between seemingly incompatible identities as drug users and research professionals? Identity is a commonly articulated concept, but one which is often under-theorised; it can refer to our sense of self,

others' perceptions of us, our reaction to others' perceptions, and the social and structural categories that shape this process (Lawler;, 2015). Our conversational method drew out barriers that existed between our worlds and senses of self. The public presentation of self and the inner self may not be the same, they may not have the same objectives or desires. The conversations we had with ourselves evolved into a collective dialogue and later returned to a reflection on the self in light of others' experiences.

For Anthony, whose research is about film and cultural politics (Killick, 2017; 2019; 2020),

> Drugs (both legal and illegal) have been a central part of my leisure time since I was 13 years old. I don't feel in the least bit bad about that, but I do care about how I'm perceived, so like most other people I moderate my behaviour based on the people I'm surrounded by at that moment. There's nothing subversive about that. Yet the tension between these two parts of "my identity" can give rise to a feeling that I am some sort of stowaway in my job, that I will soon be found out and thrown overboard.

Anthony has compartmentalised his identity into leisure and work; he acts consciously in relation to how he may be perceived, and he is afraid that if his "leisure identity" - his drug taking identity - was exposed, then others' judgement about his character will change, endangering his professional position.

For Eve, whose research is about festivals (Buck-Matthews, 2018), which are more intimately connected with drugs and leisure,

> the project opened my eyes to how I had suppressed a side of my identity; elements, rituals and practices of recreational drug taking that had a huge influence on my academic career and research imagination, but which had been eradicated and censored from my own narrative.

To which Anthony responds,

> I could say it was the other way around for me. Drug taking had no bearing whatsoever on my academic imagination, but was very much a part of my personal narrative.

What is the relationship between experience, identity and the research imagination? What is, and what should be, the boundary between the personal and the professional? These questions should be central to social research but have seldom been asked in relation to the intersection between drug use and professional life.

Even though we are academically aware of the literature on reflexivity, we were surprised by the segmentation of our identities (Chavez, 2008; Greene, 2014). The project uncovered our hiding. In Giulia's account, there is a desire for the contradictions stemming from drug use to not remain hidden.

> Drug use is not an aspect of one's identity in the same way as sexuality, so I can't say that I am turning shame into pride by coming out. Drug use involves a degree of choice, for the most part. I may remain ashamed of doing something that is also harmful, but shame or guilt is not the only thing that I feel. I also feel good, connected, satisfied, emotional, happy, full of energy, loving and caring. I feel many things at once. When I feel all these things, and the negative emotions too, the shame and the guilt, I want to be able to talk about it, and not feel in silence and hide.

While activity-based aspects of identity such as drug use can remain hidden or unspoken, other core aspects of identity have shaped our experiences in more fundamental ways. The most significant of these as emerging from our accounts was class.

[Instruction: this should be a section heading]Class

A clear difference between our experiences emerged from our class of origin. Giulia's and Eve's middle classness made for overall more sheltered drugs experiences, mostly characterised by sociality and positivity – except for Giulia's work in a needle and syringe programme.

> Working in harm reduction was my first in-your-face experience of confronting my own privilege. I have used drugs in some form or another for years. But, despite this, I was

never the subject of direct stigma, discrimination or prosecution because of my use of drugs – which was mostly hidden from parents, colleagues, authorities. Drug use did not particularly show on my face or body in the same way it may have done on the bodies of some of the clients that I saw at the needle and syringe programme. I often felt like the only difference between me and the client sat opposite me was my privilege. I am middle class and educated, my family supported me emotionally and financially, I have always had good friends around me and have been given many opportunities in life. I also love to get high, but I usually balance that with many other activities. I am, by most accounts, also an addict, but I am addicted to a licit substance. Not a day goes by where I do not smoke. I smoke first thing in the morning and last thing before bed. I do experience a small level of stigma for it, and increasingly so since the smoking ban, but nowhere near the stigma experienced by a person who is homeless and uses heroin and crack regularly.

Anthony's and Lee's experiences were rather different. While class does not necessarily determine the nature of an individual's relationship with a substance, it does shape how such relationship is socially perceived, as well as what might happen when the relationship is habitual. For Anthony:

some of my anxieties about drug use also undoubtedly spring from growing up working class. Middle and upper class people don't sustain the same class-based attack on their fundamental sense of self-worth and identity as working class people often do, and this largely comes through various forms of demonising (practices, cultures and lifestyles) through the media and various institutions. If you're a working class person, you understand that taking drugs gives you the appearance of a dependant and/or habitual "user" who is lazy, dirty, violent and generally "un-desirable". This is a derivation of how working-class people are represented in the broader sense. I also have to reconcile myself with the fact that this representation has such force because there is a lot of truth to it. Growing up, I have witnessed habitual drug use (largely in the form of alcoholism). I have known people who are lazy, dirty, violent and generally "un-desirable". But I've also known middle and upper class people who fit these characterisations, and many more people across all classes who are fundamentally decent, stable, what you might call "nice people", as well as being drug users.

In Lee's account of his experiences, both lived and witnessed, of the relationship between drug use and class, working class drug use is configured as problematic and dysfunctional, often compounded by deprivation:

I know the damaging impact drugs and alcohol have had on my life. I have also seen many friends fail in their lives because of drugs and alcohol problems, though it has been difficult to understand causality. The two most recent cases involved a builder who got sciatica so couldn't work, and then took drugs every day, to the point that he couldn't find a way out. Another recent case was a friend who was a bus driver and was sacked for drug and alcohol use - he had been an aspiring physicist, but an accident had resulted in a debilitating illness that shattered his dreams, giving him a sense of hopelessness. He got into a cycle of depression and drug and alcohol use, and after being sacked, he took out a loan and fled the country. It was only then that the extent of his problems become clear - before that point it was all good fun.

I've had many family members with alcoholism and drugs problems - it killed two of my uncles and my aunt has been an alcoholic since the age of 18, and my maternal cousin was an alcoholic and heroin addict who was murdered over a drug debt. During the course of writing this piece, I received the news that a member of my childhood "gang" died from alcohol abuse at the age of 44.

There is a clear sense of desperation and pain that comes across in the stories that Lee has witnessed, which stand in contrast with Eve's characterisation of her overall experience with drugs as

an overly positive, libertarian happy one perhaps. Came from being a girl - I am certain of that one - the guys did the deals, the girls stayed home, maybe it was a Yorkshire thing?

> Not doing deals but having drugs given / bought for me and being sheltered from the negatives of the scene. Very lucky, very privileged experiences.

While she notes that gender plays a role in sheltering her from active participation in the drug market (Campbell & Herzberg, 2017), there is a sense that such privileged experiences may also stem at the intersection with class.

[Instruction: this should be a section heading]Reconciliation, collectivity and "coming out"

For all of us, the project acted as a trigger to reconcile the tension of identity through collectivity. In Anthony's words,

> My participation in the project has enabled a degree of reconciliation between myself as an academic and myself as a drug user. This is largely because of meeting similar people, and because I have started doing my own research into the culture and political economy of drug use in the UK. Some of the tensions outlined above have been lessened, although it has to be said my participation in the project has come alongside broader improvements in my personal life (mainly work and living arrangements). As an early career academic, the project has given me some ideas and direction for further research.

Anthony is not a drugs researcher, but he is an academic and an activist interested in film, cultural politics and political economy. The project made apparent to him the contradictions inherent in the political economy of drugs in the UK, inspiring him to pursue research in this area and to take a more activist stance about these issues.

> Trying to drink less for "health reasons" has helped me to lessen my alcohol consumption (basically I can't be bothered with hangovers anymore). But it was when alcohol consumption took on a political dimension that I found myself moving away from it during a rave, which is where I am most likely to drink a lot.

Similarly, Eve's participation to the project underpinned the realisation that drugs should no longer sit exclusively in the realm of the personal.

> It was no longer just a personal reflection on a hidden part of myself, but one that has a lived impact for many. I should use my position and platform to support others, to challenge incorrect, harmful and offensive representations. I have always been an activist with a deep sense of challenging injustice. I would describe myself as a work in progress. Confidence to be more authentic has been growing since completing my doctorate and being considered a 'proper' academic. It validated my knowledge in a way that experience alone could not. I also think age, maturity and now being within academia, rather than an outsider, has helped.

Eve recognises that by shifting reflection about her drug taking away from the private realm, she engages in a form of activism, a form of public sociology that starts with taking responsibility for challenging harmful representations, supported by the credibility of her academic status. As professionals, we have all - directly or indirectly - marginalised our drug user identities to gain respect and credibility. But what happens, and what could happen, if we open this marginal space up to scrutiny? We agree with [Instruction: correct double bracket here]Ross et al. (2020):2) that 'staying silent about drug use when it does occur merely hides an aspect of the researcher's positionality from the research audience. For researchers who value reflexivity, therefore, silence on this issue is bad science.'

This paper has been a progression, both in method and practice, from individual to collective reflection. We have sought to acquire a deeper understanding of one another and in doing so found connections and differences. It has been through dialogue that we have affirmed a position, a united position, as advocates for speaking out about drug use. For Anthony, it has been a calculated decision:

> To summarise, how I feel about being a drug user has more to do with how it appears than the actual reality of it. The question comes down to "should I care what other people think of me?", and my basic careerist answer to that is "it depends on who those other people are". I understand that this position only facilitates wider social pathologies around class, power and identity, but that's the game I'm involved in for the time being at least.

For Eve, it was less of a thought-out progression and rather a stumbling moment:

Being honest became a political act, I feel I took the first step in drugs activism by my involvement with the project. I feel I am an overt activist with other concerns, environmental politics primarily, but fell into drugs policy activism by virtue of my private and personal recreational drug use. By self-silencing, I realise I was not challenging but perpetuating narratives and stereotypes of drug users.

Lee's key learning point was in acknowledging the difference between his and others' experiences of drug taking, which meant that his personal experience has become less defining of his ideas about drug use.

Given my relationship with drugs and alcohol has been quite dark, I was very surprised to hear people describe theirs in very different ways - in particular how they had been seen as therapeutic by very capable people, opening up the world, whereas mine had always been to shut out the world. I'm not naïve, but perhaps the biggest lesson of this project is how one's own experiences or perspectives can blind one to other's experiences. Indeed, being around other people's experiences, I see much more how - perhaps paradoxically - there's a sense of moderation and proportion. Time is put aside for the activity of drug taking and dancing, and then for the "come down", which is almost a cleansing practice that is distinct to my own, where one intoxicant is replaced by another.

Finally, Giulia has sought a way to reconcile being a researcher and a drug user as a political stance:

The project gave me the impetus to come out and take some responsibility for my privilege, but also to see my professional self and my experiential self not as two distinct, compartmentalised entities, but as part of the same entity and growing together, feeding off each other. Instead of keeping this part of myself quietly hidden in shame, I want to force myself to work through any shame and guilt, opening myself up to scrutiny. A part of me wishes that well established academics could lead the way in challenging knowledge and structural hierarchies in more ways than one - for example by coming out as drug users, or by boycotting the publishing game, so that us newbies can do the same without fear of being excluded or marginalised by losing our job or our reputation. The other part of me is like: if not you, who? if not now, when?

Would we have 'come out' if we were alone? For Eve, not in this manner. She had already come out in the safety of informal academic circles. However, she did not have the courage to write on the topic before the project and not before we underwent the process of co-writing. Witnessing the participants to the project discussing their experiences with drugs, many of them on camera, encouraged us to turn the lens towards ourselves. There is strength in numbers and confidence grows through support. Through reflexivity, we have legitimated our identity, making conflicts explicit. If it wasn't for this project, its participants and the research team, we probably would not have come out individually. Our very involvement in the process forced us out of thinking that these issues should remain silenced within the individual realm. We hope to join others in exploring potential avenues for new thinking that emerge from problematising the boundaries between "clean" and "dirty" roles. Finally, we are interested in what might happen in drug policy if more people with privilege spoke out about their drug use.

Credit author statement

Funding sources for the work

Have you obtained ethical approval for the conduct of your study?

The People and Dancefloors project received ethical approval from the University of Greenwich research ethics committee. No ethical approval was sought for this particular paper given that the data/discussion is autoethnographic.

Q9 Uncited references:

Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson & Norrie, 1998, Becker, 2008, Eastwood, Fox & Rosmarin, 2016, Goffman, 2009, [Instruction: This does appear in the reference list and in the text]Mills, 2000.

Declarations of Interests

None.

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> (i) The corrections made in this section will be reviewed and approved by a journal production editor. The newly added/removed references and its citations will be reordered and rearranged by the production team.

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Footnotes

Text Footnotes

[1] Questions:

Why did you get involved? What attracted you to the project?

How do you identify? What words would you use to describe yourself?

Did you learn anything new? (This should be interpreted in the widest way possible – so include any self-reflection that might have happened as a result of the project, personal and professional)

How do you feel about being a drug user?

Did your involvement in the project change how you feel about yourself in any way?

Did it give you a different perspective? On yourself as an individual? On yourself as a professional? On others?

Queries and Answers

Q1

Query: Please confirm that givennames and surnames have been identified correctly.

Answer: Yes

Q2

Query: Country name was missing. Please check country name for correctness

Answer: UK

Q3

Query: Country name was missing. Please check country name for correctness

Answer: UK

Q4

Query: Country name was missing. Please check country name for correctness

Answer: UK

Q5

Query: Country name was missing. Please check country name for correctness

Answer: No institutional affiliation for Lee Salter so country name is not available

Q6

Query: The reference 'Eastwood, Fox and Rosemarin, 2016′ is cited in the text but is not listed in the references list. Please either delete the in-text citation or provide full reference details following journal style.

Answer: The reference is in the list, had embedded it in the text

Q7

Query: The reference 'Archer, 1998′ is cited in the text but is not listed in the references list. Please either delete the in-text citation or provide full reference details following journal style.

Answer: The reference is in the list, I have cited in the text

Q16

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: New York

Q17

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: It's a journal: *MPS*

Q18

Query: Please confirm that this is a one-page article.

Answer: Please add: pp. 1-16

Q19

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: Please change to:

Cambridge: Polity Press

Q20

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: Please change to:

New York: Routledge

Q21

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: Please add:

London: Routledge

Q22

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: Oxford: Oxford University Press

Q23

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: New York

Q24

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: London:

Q25

Query: Please provide volume and page range for this reference.

Answer: volume not available. pp. 1-26.

Q26

Query: Please provide volume and page range for this reference.

Answer: volume not available. pp. 1-16.

Q27

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: Cambridge: Polity Press

Q28

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: Seattle

Q29

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: London

Q30

Query: Please supply the name of the city of publication.

Answer: London

Q31

Query: Please confirm that this is a one-page article.

Answer: please add: pp. 1-10.