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COMMENTARY

Bodies and Behaviors as Taboo—The Gendered Stigma of Substance Use, a Commentary on Enefalk, Bailey, Griffin, and Shankar, and Harder and Demant

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The social meanings constructed about psychoactive substances and their uses are varied and conflicting, context dependent, and invariably gendered. The three articles by Enefalk, Harder and Demant, and Bailey, Griffin, and Shankar in this special issue all raise questions about how context and gender intersect to contribute to a gendered stigma of substance use. The stigma of substance use is defined by negative social meanings and stereotypes associated with substance use, which identifies such use as being shameful and results in the marginalization of the substance user (Link & Phelan, 2001). Of note, substance use is not intrinsically shameful but can become shameful through the negative social meanings attached to it in particular contexts as well as for particular people. Research on stigma has been criticized for too narrowly focusing on a singular stigmatizing attribute, like substance use, neglecting to consider that people may experience multiple forms of stigma and that stigma may be experienced differently in different contexts (Collins, von Unger, & Armbrister, 2008; Grossman, 1991; Stuber, Meyer, & Link, 2008). These three articles illustrate the ways in which gender overlap to shape meanings of substance use that, for some, may be "deeply discrediting," particularly in certain contexts (Goffman, 1963).

Enefalk provides us with an historical example in her analysis of diaries written by middle class women between 1850s and 1920s. She combines these analyses with her previous research to consider women's use and perceptions of alcohol at the time of industrialization in Sweden as well as whether the stigmatization of alcohol for women intensified during this time. Enefalk argues that drinking wasn't limited to working class women, as previously believed, and that instead certain types of alcohol were used unproblematically by bourgeoisie women to mark their social standing. However, these women straddled contradictions related to their consumption of alcohol in that alcohol was both a marker of social status as well as threat to traditional notions of femininity. In spite of an "unbroken continuity of female drinking," the gendered stigma of alcohol consumption is clear. For working class women, this stigma appears always present. Yet for "women of standing," Enefalk argues that the stigmatization of drinking, or maybe the stigmatization of intoxication—perhaps particularly in the public sphere—intensified during industrialization when notions of moderation became a new morality and a requirement of femininity. Enefalk acknowledges how this stigma of intoxication ultimately transferred to (working class) men's consumption as well, situating abstemious women in a position of moral authority.

Bailey et al.'s article is framed by the backdrop of the *feminization of the night-time economy* (Chatterton, 2001) in the UK and investigates young middle and working class women's negotiation of femininity within a night-life culture of intoxication. The authors highlight two important contradictions—(1) the negotiation of a culture of intoxication that is both expected as well as disparaged for women and (2) ambivalent narratives about hypersexual femininity within the culture of intoxication that is both desired and derided. These contradictions highlight the unrelenting and pervasive "patriarchal discourse" that perpetuates a stigma of intoxication for women. In spite of some questions about the overinterpretation of participants' narratives, Bailey et al. argue that young women are faced with these "contradictory 'dilemmatic spaces'" (Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013) in which an ideal level of drunkenness and an ideal form of hypersexual femininity are unachievable and create anxieties for young women. This argument is in contrast to postfeminist discourses that situate female drunkenness within an emancipatory framework that emphasizes a woman's agency to *be who she wants to be*.

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Harder and Demant's article presents a response to what they term "intoxication feminism," a research approach that has introduced a gendered perspective to the study of the night-time economy and one that has emphasized women's intoxication and participation in nightlife as being experienced as emancipatory. The authors argue that this perspective has neglected men's gendered experiences *within* the club, and therefore to counter this perspective, they present narratives from three interviews with young men who participated in a larger study of club drug use among young people in Denmark. Participants' narratives introduced the use of drugs to achieve an idealized masculinity within the club: drugs reduced threats to masculinity (e.g., immunity from women's rejections) and facilitated satisfying sexual encounters. However, this *utopic party scene* disintegrated once participants stopped using. As *utopia* collapses and drug use wanes, masculinity fades giving rise to the possibility of men's feminization.

It is surprising that Harder and Demant (this issue) have chosen to estrange themselves from the very paradigm they call "groundbreaking," whereby they acknowledge that "intoxication feminism. . .has opened the field of club studies to a gender perspective . . ." (p. 761). Perhaps their research agenda could have more impact if their work were seen as being a complement rather than being an antagonist to this perspective. Though they don't describe their research in these terms, the young men's narratives (albeit limited) may suggest how the stigma of substance use—where all drug users are seen as being out of control and abnormal (Room, 1985)—contributes to a desire to conform to society in other ways, perhaps in this case to the ideal of a *hegemonic masculinity*, where drugs sanction "young men to go out and act like 'real men'" (Collison, 1996; Ettorre, 2007; Jefferson, 1994). When these men stop using, they find it difficult to achieve idealized masculinity. Does the stigma of substance use linger after quitting drug use? Does it give rise to the manifestation of another stigma—that of failing to achieve a masculine position? Acknowledging the undeniable stigma of selected substance use, as it affects male users, is an important contribution to the literature, in part because it may shed light on how the stigma of drug use shapes and constrains men's performance of gender.

Unquestionably, women drug users are also stigmatized by using, yet this stigma overlaps with other stigmatized positions, intensifying women's oppression:

While both women and men drug users will experience the damaging effects of gender, whether as a social process or an institution, women are at a greater disadvantage because "masculinist' (that is male privileging) more than gender sensitive structures and paternalistic epistemologies pervade all our theories and practices, as well as determine any new developments within both classical and postmodern paradigms. (Ettorre, 2007, p. 22)

The articles by Bailey et al. and Enefalk illustrate the overlapping stigmas faced by female drinkers. In the Bailey et al. piece, the contradictions rife within a (relatively) new culture of intoxication introduce the complexity of the stigma of substance use. On one hand, some amount of alcohol consumption is expected from women within the night-time economy and can mark positive social identities (Lyons & Willott, 2008). That being said, what is the social stigma for abstaining or not being able to *keep up with the men*? On the other hand is the obligation for women to control their intoxication and not jeopardize their femininity. Accomplishing an alternative form of femininity that challenges "heavy drinking" as an exclusively masculine position while also conforming to more traditional notions of femininity appear to create important tensions within the night-time economy for these women. The authors then introduce the ways in which social class further complicate the stigma of substance use or more aptly intoxication. Middle class women participants expressed a desire to avoid being associated with the "classed figure of the drunken 'chav,'" illustrating the way in which the stigma of intoxication intensifies for working class women.

Though the article by Enefalk focuses primarily on the gendered stigma of alcoholic beverages and their uses among the middle class, this article also draws attention to a similar issue to that of Bailey et al., that is the multiple and overlapping stigmas experienced by the working class woman. In 21st century in the UK, working class women arguably engage in the culture of intoxication in part for gendered emancipation. However, the historical landscape of Sweden during Industrialization sets the stage for an alternative marking of alcohol and perhaps a different expression of gendered *liberation* for working class women. Enefalk argues that the economic realities of working class women in particular may have mobilized their support for temperance because it stigmatized a product considered to be an unnecessary household expenditure. To what extent women's support for temperance was divided by class is unclear. We are given examples of bourgeoisie women both aligning and resisting temperance. What is clear are the ways in which both gender and social class shape the manifestation of the stigma of alcohol and intoxication for women.

Bodies are inscribed with stigmatized identities (Ettorre, 2007), and the substance user is no exception. Substance use marks bodies as stigmatized, and this stigma intersects with other attributes to shape the lived experiences of the substance user. By considering these three articles within the context of stigma, we see the valuable perspective that a postfeminist approach brings to studies on drugs and alcohol; their use, misuse, and nonuse.

Declaration of Interest

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