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MEDICALIZED MASCULINITIES: THE DIGITAL LIFE OF SUBSTANCES

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This panel is concerned with how notions and practices of masculinity emerge in and through medical and digital infrastructures. Key to our tracing of the social life of masculinity is that it does not derive (solely) from the male-identified body, but is formed, negotiated and transformed in culture, affecting all sorts of bodies and identities. Here, digital media play a central role. At the same time, to understand masculinity we must also understand the role of medicine, drugs and other substances. While studies of masculinities often trace processes of either *medicalization* or *mediatization*, few interrogate it at their very intersection. Doing so is the main purpose of this panel, which brings together cases that illustrate the effects the intersection of these large-scale changes in digital and medical technologies have on masculinities today.

Theoretically, the panel is based on the notion that society and everyday life are increasingly intertwined with and enrolled in both the logics of the health and pharmaceutical industry and in communication technology and media. Femininities have long been the subjects of (bio)medicalizing (Conrad 2005; Clarke et al. 2010), or

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optimizing (Hogle, 2005; Schildrick, 2015) regimes, such as medical interventions into reproduction as well as beauty-enhancing work through the use of anti-age creme and other “medical” products like cosmetic surgeries etc.. It can be argued that up until the release of Viagra, privileged or hegemonic masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) retained a position somewhat outside of this, meaning that masculinity work fell outside of the medical regime. But the overwhelming cultural significance of Viagra can be said to mark a turning point where all masculinities started to become governed by principles founded in the medical regime.

Notions and practices of masculinity are part of cultures increasingly marked by deep mediatization processes (Couldry and Hepp, 2018), including those of the platform economy (Gillespie, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013). Thus, a range of media technologies take part in the many ways that masculinity ideals are negotiated, practiced, and felt. Key academic works on men, masculinities, and media have focused on contemporary gay male sociability in dating app sex culture (Mowlabocus, 2010; Race, 2018), the male body in digital neo-liberal culture (Hakim, 2019), and pornography (Paasonen, 2011).

Because the language and logics of medicalization are so all-encompassing, this panel, in its effort to understand mediatized masculinity, broadly defines substances as materials entering the body that change, or are believed to change, its capacities through biochemical modulation. This allows us to consider a wide range of drugs used to modulate or enhance different aspects of the body in order to make it masculine. As such the papers cover both legalized medical products, substances that use medical signifiers to secure its value in the marketplace, and laboratory-produced illicit substances that aim to enhance sensory experience and bodily capacities. We would argue that to understand how seemingly different people of all genders are affected by notions of masculinity, tracing these substances is key.

In order to study the variation in how masculinity is both mediatized and medicalized, the panel uses a range of qualitative methods. This methodological variation enables us to understand masculinity at different scales: Mie Birk Jensen analyzes thousands of spam emails for their affective and normative production of virile masculinity; Tobias Raun and Michael Nebeling Petersen use ethnographic archive analysis of Youtube communities to understand peer learning and monetization of hair-loss and hair-gain products; and Kristian Møller uses participant observation to capture the sexual intensification in an online gay drug scene.

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‘POTENCY IS IMPORTANT FOR A REAL MAN’: AFFECTIVE READINGS OF SHAME AND PERFORMANCE ANXIETY IN SPAM SELLING VIAGRA AND OTHER SEXUOPHARMACEUTICALS.

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In this paper, I explore the emergence of Viagra spam in the nexus between online technologies and the medicalization of masculinity that make spam both possible and profitable. While spam is most often treated as a nuisance that impedes upon and infects the infrastructures of the internet, it is an integral part of everyday life online (Parikka & Sampson, 2009). Wasting our precious time, demanding our attention, selling illicit and possibly unsafe products, spreading malware, or breaking with the regulations of advertising, spam is constituted as a threat to human health, safety and productivity (Alongi, 2004; Hinde, 2003; Paasonen, 2011). Despite continuous efforts to annihilate spam, it constitutes a significant part of all e-mail traffic across the world, with billions of spam mail being sent every day (Parikka & Sampson, 2009; Yu, 2014). Thus, spam has become an anomaly of the internet and defining of the internet itself, at once representing ‘the mundane, the banal, and the largely undesired’ in online life (Paasonen, 2011: 116).

As an already inherently illicit activity, spam transgresses any rules and regulations, such as those that affect the pharmaceutical market and drug advertising more generally. Rather than first and foremost branding the content in a legal and aesthetic manner, spammers are focused on making it past filters, which has greatly affected the evolution of spam (Guerra et al., 2010). According to Yu (2014), the limitations of design also means that ‘the only thing left to appeal to the customers is the underlying component of the message, sex’ (41). Thus, paradoxically, it is in so far as spam is considered a particularly undesired medium that it becomes increasingly relevant to commodify desire itself, as a ‘capitalist mediation into sexual intimacy’ (Croissant, 2006: 342). It is therefore no surprise that much of the existing spam involves the sale of sexuo-pharmaceuticals, and, in spite of the pharmaceutical company Pfizer’s attempts to publicly distance themselves from spam’s distribution of counterfeit Viagra, spam has come to be synonymous with Viagra, and vice versa.

Existing studies have ignited important discussions about the cultural impact of Viagra, and how Viagra has contributed to the medicalization of male bodies, narrowing discourse on both masculinity and sex (e.g. Mamo & Fishman, 2001; Gurevich et al., 2018; Tiefer, 2006; Vares & Brown, 2006). Although it may be tempting to write of spam as an illicit activity that has no effect on our lives aside from it being a nuisance in our online presence, studies suggest that it also does build on, reflect and transmit gender ideologies in ways similar to regular advertising (e.g. Mullaney, 2004; Paasonen, 2009; Yu, 2014). For example, Passonen (2011) found that spam promoting pornography often reproduces heterosexual notions of desire, and Mullaney (2004) emphasizes how the vast majority of spam remains directed at men, reinforcing a gendered binary

between men as technologically competent and women as more ‘techno-phobic’; men as consumers of online pornography, and women as sexual objects for consumption (p. 296). However, as to date, no studies have focused on spam as an ‘engine of medicalization’ that in itself transmit and construct gendered ideologies and sexual norms concerning men’s sexual lives through the sale of sexuopharmaceuticals (Conrad, 2005: 5).

Taking my point of departure in an online spam archive, consisting of a collection of spam e-mails sent from 1998-2018, I begin to breach this gap in research (Guenter, 2010). In collaboration with Stefan Jänicke, assistant professor in Computer Science at University of Southern Denmark, the textual content of the archive has been organized into tagspheres (Jänicke and Scheuermann, 2016). These tagspheres provide an overview of some of the general tendencies in the archive, such as frequently used words over time. However, in order to avoid stripping spam of its ‘affective force’ by simply transforming it into neat numbers and quantitative visualizations, I also engage in a qualitative analysis of selected content of the spam archive (Paasonen, 2011: 117).

Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2004) theorical insights on the circulation of affect, I explore how the erect penis becomes imbued with meaning, and in extension, how masculinity is configured around notions of shame and anxiety. I argue that in spam, the depressed, anxious, shameful, and all-together failed masculine self, sticks to the flaccid penis, whereas the chemically induced erection brings promises a bright and positive future.

From here I go on to discuss how spam capitalizes on existing communication technologies in amalgamation with gendered pharmaceutical technologies for profit; in asking the possible consumer to envision a perfect, prolonged, and hypermasculine future, spammers thus take both online platforms and gendered discourse to their ‘functional extremes’ (Brunton 2019: xiv). I ask what we may gain by approaching Viagra spam as “frozen moments” (Haraway, 1994) that give insight into changes in the medicalization of masculinity and men’s everyday lives, both online and offline, as the boundaries between human and technology are increasingly blurred.

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THE POWER OF HAIR. UNRAVELLING THE AUDIO-VISUAL AESTHETICS OF SELF-TRACKING ON YOUTUBE

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Introduction

On YouTube, you can find videos with men talking about and documenting their lack of and growth of hair. Several products and procedures are tried out and evaluated on camera, and communities have formed around these products and problematics. The videos are interesting as late modern tales of medicalized and mediatized masculinity: Men are increasingly objects of surgical and medical technologies/interventions to gain an appearance aligned with gendered, aged, bodily and sexual norms. Being a man is no longer a given and self-reliant power position, thus, men too are increasingly told that they are in need of repair and improvement in order to become valuable in culture (Hakim 2020: 23).

We perceive the videos as part of the new ways in which men and masculinity are scrutinized and moulded in conjunction with biomedical and digital technologies. Hence, we approach the YouTubers as becoming in and with medical and media technology (Raun 2015, 2016). We analyse a sample of amateur YouTube-videos of men trying, evaluating and discussing the two most popular products: Minoxidil and Finasteride. Our overall framing of these YouTubers is in relation to the evolving field of self-tracking, and we characterise the videos as a specific genre of audio-visual self-tracking, that also draw on the selfie.

We are interested in how the effects of the drug (Finasteride and Minoxidil) are articulated, visualized and evaluated. In other words, how are the effects of the drugs audio-visually represented by the users on YouTube? And what characterises the self-tracking video as a genre?

Method

The analysis is based on a sample of 8 YouTube channels, produced by individual users, who themselves use Minoxidil and/or Finasteride. We found the case study channels by searching on YouTube for ‘Minoxidil’ and ‘Finasteride’ (in January 2020), sorted by the date of the upload and number of views respectively. We ended up selecting 3 YouTubers making videos about Minoxidil to enhance beard growth and 5 YouTubers making videos about Finasteride to prevent baldness.

Self-tracking

Self-tracking as a field of study is often associated with the term and the movement 'the Quantified Self'. However, self-tracking as a practice and a term has a much broader meaning than the Quantified Self subculture. In this paper we are interested in the form of self-tracking that one willingly and knowingly subject oneself to, and which we take as a starting point for analysing the self-representational practices of the YouTubers. This form of self-tracking is broadly defined as "directed at regularly monitoring and recording, and often measuring, elements of an individual's behaviours or bodily functions" (Lupton 2016: 8).

The genre of audio-visual self-tracking

We understand the self-tracking video as an audio-visual selfie designed to represent transformation. Like the selfie photograph, the self-tracking video is self-representational and networked (Tiidenberg 2018: 21), as the video inherently points to the person who filmed and authored the video, and is shared on social media platforms, in our case YouTube. We want to elaborate on the aesthetic characteristics of the self-tracking videos on YouTube. The overall drive guiding these videos are an overarching desire for transformation and progress, which encompasses both the visual aesthetics as well as the visual narratives, although in different ways. We suggest an overall framing of the self-tracking videos as either momental self-tracking or longitudinal self-tracking. In the figure below we have outlined the main characteristics of the two types of self-tracking videos.

	Momental videos	Longitudinal videos
Visual effects	Zooming in on specific body parts, unedited and recorded in one-clip. Close-up shots. Cut-off views	Visual juxtapositions, jump-cuts, collage/montage, multimodal effects, editing
Audio-visual narrative	A here-and-now account, that presupposes seriality, often referring to former or multiple videos → calls for individual or collective serials	Strong plot-driven narrative: The plot relies on the movement from a 'before' to an 'after', which typically is structured as a tale of successful change. Bildungsroman as master narrative
temporal organization	The freezing or stopping of time. The snapshot	Timelapse, a longitudinal stretch of time accelerated

Figure 1: Defining the genre of self-tracking videos

The momental video is characterized by a focus on a specific problem, body part and moment in time. Often the YouTuber literally uses the camera to zoom in or create a zoom effect by bringing the camera closer to the discussed area. In figure 2, a still image of Richie Z, he explains how the Finasteride and Minoxidil treatment has helped regrow his topical hair. The selfie position is presented, as Richie Z records himself from the front with a handheld camera. The video is recorded in one shot without any editing or graphical elements. The camera is held closely to Richie Z's face, so we can see the details of the new hairs emerging at his temple area.

Figure 2: Screenshot from Richie Z, April 27, 2020.

Although Richie Z does not actually use the zoom function of the camera, the composition of the video creates a zooming effect, due to the way in which the camera is brought close to the appointed problem area, and due to Richie's verbal and bodily pointedness, that orients us towards his hair and hairline. As a typical momental self- tracking video, this video is in essence serial: Although Richie Z starts the video by introducing himself in terms of name, age and purpose, he quickly explains, that "this is my eight month update", and he hereby connects this video to previous videos on his channel as well as anticipated future updates. The video narratively offers a snapshot of his current appearance in a specific moment in time.

The longitudinal video, on the contrary, forms a plot by unfolding a time period. The narrative structure resembles that of the bildungsroman, where the protagonist is faced with a problem (losing hair, not gaining hair), embarks on a journey (starts the treatments of Finasteride, Minoxidil, or a combination), and then finally is rewarded with the ultimate boon; more hair. It figures as a heroic tale of overcoming obstacles and finding peace and pride in oneself. This plot composition enables the YouTuber to speak from a position of experience, that is both knowledgeable and retrospective, which is also aesthetically underscored.

Figure 3: Screenshot from Hairloss Cure, September 29, 2018

In figure 3, Hairloss Cure makes a visual juxtaposition between a former photograph and a present moving image of himself, allowing the viewer to see, compare and contrast the amount of hair, while he, in past tense, talks about the knowledge and experiences he has gained from the treatment. The juxtaposition underlines the progressing plot structure, while it also structures the temporality of the video.

The longitudinal video often relies on momental videos, and sometimes functions as a summing up or conclusion on a series of momental videos. This is for instance the case

in JB Chats' video "Finasteride Month 8 Results and Update" (June 2, 2020), where he, in a split screen, speaks about his experiences and results in one side of the image frame, while clips from earlier videos are playing on the other side, and together form a documentation and scrutinization of the transformation enabled by the treatment.

Conclusion

In the developed model (figure 1), we have outlined the main characteristics for the momental video and the longitudinal video, defining both the visual effects, audio-visual narrative as well as temporal organization governing them. It is our claim that these defining characteristics are the core structural principles of these self-tracking videos on Finasteride and Minoxidil, but that they are also applicable to other (and potentially all) forms of videos preoccupied with tracking transformation.

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HANGING OUT, BLOWING CLOUDS: CHEMICAL AND SEXUAL EXPERIMENTATION IN A VIDEO-MEDIATED CHEMSEX SCENE

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In a Google+ forum dedicated to chemsex, that is, sexual encounters between men enhanced by drug use, an embedded Youtube video announces an event focusing on the pleasure of smoking methamphetamine (crystal meth). After downloading the required video conferencing app, which I due to ethical considerations do not name here, I type in the link address and click 'attend'. While the digital service is marketed to facilitate large, much like those traditional landline call-in services, this event leverages the privacy and somewhat inaccessibility of the infrastructure to facilitate a kind of "hangout" that for legal and social reasons is hard to sustain in other, more accessible, infrastructures. When I enter the room, generic house music is pumping, and my screen is filled with small, grainy video streams of mostly naked, male torsos lid up only by the cold blue light of computer screens.

Browsing through the video feeds I am met with men sometimes typing, sometimes masturbating, but mostly just staring blankly at the screen. They stare past me at something or someone else. Then, in the common chat, a user writes "clouds now". Knowing that this vernacular term describes the smoking of crystal meth, I scan the video grid to find his stream. As he artfully blows clouds of smoke into the air the chat erupts in appreciative comments.

The above description, and the paper as such, is based on my participant observation in a week-long online event. It is deeply 'counterpublic' (Warner, 2002), in that it consists of mostly gay men having sex with multiple partners, using illicit drugs as well as a number of media technologies, all of which marks it as well outside the 'magic circle' (Rubin, 1984) of normative intimacy. While it is a marginal practice, this paper argues that it provides compelling case for thinking about how contemporary sexuality in a time of 'deep mediatization' (Couldry & Hepp, 2018) and 'biomedicalization' (Clarke et al., 2003) is as much a matter of desire sticking to and traveling through digital and chemical infrastructures (Race, 2018), as it sticks to and is felt by bodies.

This article then, focuses on the role of these infrastructures in sustaining practice work, and making its erotics felt. From a platform (Gillespie, 2010) perspective, the paper analyses how the chemical and sexual experimentation of the scene depends on users levering the video and chat technologies in order to create and access such content. These 'techno-cultural microsystems' (Van Dijck, 2013*)* of the platform do not emerge in a vacuum but are deeply dependent on socio-economic structures that are available or, more to the point, *not* available. With increasing stricter moderation of social media leading to a general deplatformization of sex, these specific events are deeply dependent on the ability of its participants to find less policed and surveilled digital infrastructures.

While I suggest that the observed event is indeed part of the range of practices that we designate as chemsex, I rather seek to expand what this concept entails, that to contain the digital practice within its current boundaries. Health oriented analysis may often "rush to risk" (Bryant et al., 2018), which in turn contributes to an activation of moral panic scripts in popular media discourse (Hakim, 2018). Serving as a counterpoint, this article interrogates sexualised drug use (or drugged sexual activity) from a cultural and ethnographic perspective. To delineate the phenomenon I draw from Kerryn Drysdale's work on 'scene' as loosely organised network of places, people, and practices, among which modes of intimacy and identification are explored and experimented with (Drysdale, 2019, p. 10). From this perspective it becomes clear that online chemsex encounters are part of a larger scene of experimentation with what sexual desires and practices can emerge while using drugs.

Equally as important for this subscene is how the digital video infrastructure may enable its users to organize and value the participants' presentation as more or less desirable. Thus, it has specific local characteristics, leaders, and practices, all of which emerge in relationship to what the digital infrastructure affords. Collective desire emerges in the relationship among mediated bodies as they access and to varying degrees also produce sexual drug performances. Here I forego analysis of what constitutes production and consumption by instead looking at the qualities and ways that erotic charge flows. I focus on their variation in intensity and rhythm in order to flesh out what social drugged, sexual sociability looks and feels like in this mediated scene.

Preliminary findings suggest that what characterizes this chemsex scene is the co-presence of and movement between om the one hand the very low-intensity engagements of participants merely looking, and on the other hand those doing elaborate erotic acts in which the performative smoking of crystal meth "clouds" produces provide the highly intense social engagement among the performer and his audience.

The second major finding is that the scene is marked by a rhythmic fluctuation between these intensities. The video platform's wealth of mediated bodies hanging out creates an expansive sense of time, that is regularly punctuated by these performances. This fluctuation does not prevail on its own, rather, careful negotiation in the chat is required to direct everyone's attention to these smoking events. The erotic value of these moments is so important that smoking without notifying risks that you are by removed from the space by the organizing scene leaders.

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