

MARGINALISED DRUG-USING WOMEN'S PLEASURE AND AGENCY

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Abstract. This paper discusses the problem of conceptualising female drug user's pleasure, agency and autonomy in the context of their social and economic marginalization and victimization. It examines how the conceptual tools derived from or influenced by cultural criminology, including Lyng's edgework and Steven's subterranean structuration, can illuminate and provide a rich account of marginalised female drug users' pleasure, agency and resistance. In so doing, it aims to highlight dimensions of female users' pleasure that are often pathologized as irrational or hedonistic or else silenced and dismissed. It also examines how women's agency and pleasure is obscured in the broadly male tradition of cultural criminology. And, finally, it explores women drug users' awareness of and reaction to the gendered discourses in which they operate.

This paper discusses the problem of conceptualising female drug user's agency and pleasure in the context of their social and economic marginalisation and victimization. Agency here is used in its traditional sociological sense as the capacity of an individual to act with self-determination and free choice. Pleasure is understood not in the narrow sense of a drug "high" but in its broader social context to include the pleasures a drug culture may offer such as a sense of adventure, belonging, comfort, or the thrill of risk taking. Constructions of female drug users in the research literature and treatment and policy discourse have tended to discount their self-determination and constituted them as victims or villains, as "mad" or "bad." Feminist scholars have challenged these constructions by exploring women's agency and capacity for resistance in the context of oppressive social structures, laws, and policies.¹ While these have all been valuable contributions, however, few have directly analysed female drug users' agency as it relates to and embodies pleasure.

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Ettore has underlined the importance of asking why and how women experience their substance use as pleasurable, and whether it can contribute to a woman's sense of autonomy, empowerment and wellbeing.² The pleasure and self-determination of female drug users have been explored in UK literature on the dance scene and ecstasy use in the 90s.³ In this literature, pleasure and agency were inextricably linked, as research subjects described pleasure and empowerment in the recreational use of ecstasy and other drugs at dance events. However, theorizing the pleasure, choice, and autonomy of a female "recreational" drug user in the context of a club or outdoor rave is relatively unproblematic. This paper explores a more difficult issue: how the conceptual tools derived from or influenced by cultural criminology, including Lyng's edgework and Steven's subterranean structuration, can illuminate and provide a rich account of marginalised female drug users' pleasure, agency and resistance.⁴ In so doing, it aims to highlight dimensions of female users' pleasure that are often pathologized as irrational or hedonistic or else silenced and dismissed. It also examines how women's agency and pleasure is obscured in the broadly male tradition of cultural criminology. And, finally, it explores women drug users' awareness of and reaction to the gendered discourses in which they operate.

The original research was based on semi-structured interviews with forty mostly crack and heroin users in three English cities (Bristol, Reading and London) in the UK.⁵ These were derived from three separate studies spanning an eight-year period.⁶ The interviews were analysed in the original study using Foucauldian discourse analysis.⁷ The focus of the analysis was the impact of drug policy on the women's lives.⁸ For this paper, the women's accounts were revisited using a new and different critical lens provided by cultural criminological concepts in order to explore previously obscured elements of pleasure and agency. The women were not asked directly about pleasure or agency in the original research as this was not a focus of investigation, although they were asked about the positive and negative aspects of being a drug user. While not all of the forty women from the original research are directly referred to or quoted in this paper, all of their accounts were taken into consideration in the re-analysis and all provided insights into the key themes discussed.

The age range of the women in the original cohort was between nineteen and fifty-two; most were from economically deprived, working class backgrounds, and approximately one-fourth were from middle class backgrounds; three-quarters were white British and one quarter were black or mixed race. One-third of the women had never had a legitimate job, and the majority who had been employed in formal labour had worked in low-paid menial jobs. Over half the women were single, one-third were living with boyfriends, and the rest were married. Over half the women had children, with a total of thirty-six children between them. Most of the women had

experienced homelessness, with half having no fixed abode and two being street homeless at the time of interview. One-third of the women were cohabiting with a partner. The rest lived alone. Most had used a range of drugs during their drug careers including amphetamines, ecstasy, cocaine, alcohol, legally prescribed drugs, methadone, and marijuana. Heroin and/or crack were the main drugs of choice for the majority of participants, although some used amphetamine as their main drug of choice. At the time of interview most of them were current users, but about one-third considered themselves to be “ex-users” in recovery. Most supported or had supported their regular crack and/or heroin use through criminal activities; shoplifting, soliciting, and dealing were the most common types of crime for them to be involved in. Around three-quarters of them had come into contact with the criminal justice system and half had served a prison sentence.

The narratives of the women in the original study were predominantly tales of sexual abuse, poverty, grafting for a fix, illness, domestic violence, sex work, isolation, homelessness, and separation from children.⁹ However, as Ettore argues, women drug users “can be seen to enact pleasure side by side with negative emotions and ‘displeasure.’”¹⁰ A greater understanding of the pleasurable aspects of involvement in illicit drugs may provide deeper insights into why any painful and miserable aspects of it are endured. Why do female users risk arrest, violence, being robbed, assault, illness, overdose, homelessness, imprisonment, and the loss of child custody? The paradigmatic response offered to this question in popular and official discourse is addiction. This paper aims to challenge this explanation by highlighting its limitations through an exploration of female drug users’ pleasure and agency. Exploring the pleasure, excitement, and distinction that female users gain from their involvement in drug cultures does not mean the pain, misery, violence, and illness they may endure needs to be obscured. The issues of pleasure and agency are also crucial as a discourse dominated by images of inequality, criminality, victimization, pain, misery, and disease make female users more susceptible to adverse legal, medical, and welfare intervention.¹¹

CONTROL, EDGEWORK, AND PLEASURE: REINTERPRETING WOMEN AND DRUGS

Cultural criminology seeks to highlight the lived experience of criminality, focusing not on instrumental, opportunistic, or rationalistic explanations but rather on the attraction, stimulation, and thrill of the singular criminal act, exploring the emotions, sensations, meanings, identity, and pleasure produced in day-to-day transgressions. According to Katz, each deviant act has its own unique sensual and creative appeal that motivates the criminal with the promise of subjective experiences and existential possibilities beyond those of everyday life.¹² The cultural imperative to create meaning, identity, and self-worth despite economic and political marginalisa-

tion transform acts of rebellion, transgression, and risk-taking into acts of resistance against structures of inequality and injustice.¹³ In this context, crime can be a way of taking back control. The pleasure and excitement of transgressive behaviour “offers a way of seizing control of one’s destiny”¹⁴ and a “reassertion of dignity and identity.”¹⁵ The women in this article often saw their individual acts of drug taking and associated criminal or transgressive behaviour in this way: as a response or a form of resistance to unfulfilling, limiting, or oppressive social conditions. Drugs and crime were attractive and seductive to them and offered them intense pleasurable sensations and emotions and an opportunity to express themselves in exciting and empowering new ways.

In a comparable attempt to make sense of the socio-economic and motivational context of the coexistence of drugs and crime, Stevens argues that “in a lifestyle of obtaining and spending money, of using and selling drugs, drug users can combine the mainstream values of work success and consumption with the subterranean values of adventure, excitement and hedonism.”¹⁶ Hedonism, a disdain for the discipline and tedium of the protestant work ethic, a rejection of mediocracy and the search for risk, excitement, adventure, and distinction are some of the values embraced by the socially and economically marginalised in the context of widening social inequalities and instabilities of work, career, and community. Underground illicit drug markets may not only function as a lucrative and principal source of cash to those whose prospects may be limited to “nasty, low paid and short-term” employment, but may also be an arena in which they are able to “fashion a life which meets some of their needs for pleasure, status and meaning.”¹⁷ Drugs become not only items for play, an escape, or high in themselves, but “become objects of exchange and identification.”¹⁸ That is, in a lifestyle of buying, using and/or selling drugs, individuals are able to construct a meaningful purpose and identity for themselves. Many of the women in this study gained pleasure, status and meaning from their criminal enterprise. They took pride in their productivity and creativity, and found purpose and identity in the subterranean drug cultures they became involved in.

“Edgework,” a central concept in cultural criminology, is also of value in an investigation of the pleasure and agency of female drug users. Edgework is the voluntary courting of risks for the thrill, not for any anticipated rewards or to achieve some end but for the experience of risk itself. Edgework requires an ability to maintain control of a situation that verges on total chaos, “to control the seemingly uncontrollable.” A central feature of edgework activities is that “they all involve a clearly observable threat to one’s physical or mental well-being or one’s sense of an ordered existence.”¹⁹ This demands a skilled performance, and success in negotiating the edge affords the edgeworker powerful feelings of competence, authen-

ticity, and self-realisation. Edgework involves the transgressive thrill of putting oneself in harm's way and surviving it through skill.²⁰ Negotiating the edge, whether between life and death, order and disorder, or sanity and insanity, allows for uninhibited behaviour, spontaneous expression, and self-determination. Edgework is a way of taking back control for those "being pushed through daily life by unidentifiable forces that rob one of true individual choice."²¹

A drug-using person can be said to be constantly living on the edge. "Edgework" is part of their daily lives. Drug users frequently risk withdrawal, overdose, disease, assault, being robbed, being arrested, and death, and therefore become accustomed to negotiating the edge between order and disorder, sanity and insanity, and life and death, but also pleasure and pain, health and illness, being somebody or a worthless nobody, being an isolated outsider or part of a community. Users will usually face more than one potential risk, and so will often have to make a choice about which risk to court in any one moment.

Despite the clear relevance of these concepts to women's lives, cultural criminology has predominantly focused on the activities of men such as the status, excitement, and sensual pleasure men derive from the "seductions of crime" or the practice of "edgework."²² It has been argued that such activities are expressions of masculinity and the cultural criminological perspective is primarily relevant to men's experiences.²³ Stevens cites Avril Taylor's work on women on heroin to argue that, apparently, women do not experience drug use and crime as exciting or hedonistic, but instead describe "drug use and the crimes they commit in paying for it as a normal and repetitive part of their daily routine."²⁴ While the women in Taylor's study may not have explicitly articulated moments of excitement, empowerment, or pleasure, this does not rule out the possibility that they enjoyed such moments. Taylor's study took place in a context in which very little was known about female users, and especially about their agency. In such early feminist work, the priority was to counter stigmatising and essentialising constructions of drug using women, which included that of the selfish, hedonistic pleasure seeker. Female users were situated as bad mothers and non-women, and thus to ask questions about or to discuss drug using women's pleasures, without an appropriate interpretative lens, would have been a delicate pursuit.

Lyng argued that risk-taking activities or "edgework" may attract more males than females as, due to socialisation, there are more pressures on males to "develop skill orientation towards their environment."²⁵ However, it may be that women are simply involved in different types of "edgework." As Lyng himself later acknowledged, risk taking *is* gendered, therefore, women and men may take different risks and develop different skill orientations.²⁶ In other words, there is diversity in outlets for excitement, risk,

and hedonism. Feminist researchers have utilised the concept of “edgework” to theorise women’s participation in various risk taking activities including sadomasochism, resistance in domestic violence, and anorexia.²⁷

Female drug users often face different risks than male users and will find themselves negotiating their way through different types of “edge.” For instance, due to gendered expectations about women as weaker, the stereotype of the “crack whore” and ideals about how a woman is supposed to behave, female users are more likely to be seen as easier targets for abuse, violence and sexual exploitation, judged as bad women and unfit wives and mothers, and treated accordingly by others.²⁸ Resisting gendered oppression in this context can thus be understood as a form of edgework. The forty women discussed in this study seemed to be continuously negotiating the “edge,” putting themselves in harm’s way and managing to survive it. In lives in which they often otherwise felt they had no control over, negotiating the edge seemed to afford them feelings of competence, self-determination and empowerment.

The next part of this paper explores the pleasure and empowerment forty female drug users derived from their participation in illicit drug cultures. It is divided into three broad themes, each covering different aspects of the ways the women’s narratives expressed agency and pleasure. The first, *An escape and comfort*, explores how the women embraced both the comfort and oblivion of drugs and the excitement and unpredictability of a drug using lifestyle. The second, *Being somebody*, explores the pleasure and autonomy that women gained from the wealth and status they found in their drug cultures. The third, *On the edge of control*, examines the ways the women used their skills and prowess to survive while creating and maintaining a positive identity for themselves by taking and staying in control and resisting gendered violence and social control.

AN ESCAPE AND COMFORT

One of the most striking examples of the conflicting pressures on modern consumers to both let go with abandon and to practice self control and restraint is drug use.²⁹ In this sense, as discussed previously, drug taking provides a unique opportunity for edgework: to negotiate the boundary between an ordered and disordered sense of self, pleasure and pain, sanity and insanity, consciousness and unconsciousness, and even life and death. On taking heroin or crack, the women described being taken over by an intense feeling or rush through their whole bodies which enabled them to transcend their everyday reality. The appeal, pleasure and thrill of this transcendence is part of the edgework experience where one transgresses the boundary between conscious and unconscious experience, between full awareness of one’s mundane, everyday environment and moments of oblivion or a more intense, “hyperreal” perceptual awareness. Lara described the first time she

took heroin at age 13:

This guy gave me my hit and I stood up off the chair and it was like a mad head rush but with a warm feeling that went right through my body. And I had to take a deep breath (does impression) like that and sat back down and I just nodded... It's so hard to describe. It's mad to say but it was a lovely feeling and I've been chasing that ever since. (Lara aged 23)

Many women said that the buzz experienced on crack was indescribable and incredible. Some said it was the best feeling they had ever felt and nothing could compare to it:

The intense rush that you get and the euphoria you get from it when you first do it is mind blowing. It's like all your happy memories in one hit... you feel happy, you feel alive. It's just amazing. If you can imagine the happiest moment in your life. (Diane aged 23)

Typically, stimulant drugs such as crack cocaine provided women with heightened energy, confidence, and even a feeling of omnipotence, while the opiate heroin gave them sedation, peace, and temporary oblivion.

Due to the predominance of the disease model of drug use as addiction in Western culture, drug taking is typically constituted as letting go into a state of unreason and insanity with an accompanying descent into chaotic life circumstances that threaten an ordered sense of self such as poverty, homelessness, violence, relationship breakdown, and loss of child custody.³⁰ Despite prevalent dualistic notions of drug use as a descent into chaos and abstinence as an expression of self-control, the women's narratives undermined this view. Far from seeing their drug taking as a descent into chaos, the women described the way it functioned as an escape from reality, and how it enabled them to manage emotional pain and trauma and feel more in control of their lives. The seductive appeal of heroin in particular was its ability to enable the women to block out and cushion them from the realities of the outside world: "That protection of cotton wool feeling that heroin surrounds you with, that nothing matters and nothing touches you too much because that's what it does it cotton wools you, it stops you feeling the knocks" (Shelly aged 35). In the face of traumatic experiences in their past and present, in the absence of people to turn to who loved them and cared for them, the women could always rely on drugs for comfort:

I lost my children, I lost my house, I lost my boyfriend. I'd lost everything and everything just caved in at once. So like the gear was the best escape for me because I had nothing else. (Suzi aged 31)

They've been my friend, and they've been my only friend when my parents and everybody that I needed wasn't there... I don't remember I'm on my own. (Sarah aged 33)

The women claimed that drugs provided a necessary escape, helped keep

them sane and/or kept them alive when their lives seemed too much. Drugs helped them “control the seemingly uncontrollable.”²³¹ This “self-medicating” in which the women sought pleasure to manage pain could be seen as an act of edgework. In the face of threats to their mental well-being, the women attempted to take control using the resources available to them in their immediate environment in the ways they knew how. They took control by getting out of control in the oblivion and transcendence of the drug experience, a “controlled loss of control”²³²:

I chose to use crack because I thought that I had no way of coping with stuff anymore and all the knocks. Drugs have helped me in my life. I know, to many people, that will sound strange. There were times when physically and mentally things were too much, and I would have broken and been unable to function. I prescribed my own medication to get through the trauma that I've been through. Without that I don't know if I'd have committed suicide already a long time ago. I wouldn't have got to this place in my life where I'm really happy. I needed something to get me through to a place where I could buzz off life. That has taken so long. (Sarah aged 33)

The governing of their pain was a key aspect of the edgework carried out by the women. The way this was managed fluctuated throughout the drug careers of the women depending on changing life circumstances. Some women described how they took just enough heroin to “feel normal,” that is, so as not to withdraw, while at the other extreme women took as much heroin and crack as they could get their hands on in dangerous and death-defying situations of edgework. For instance, Bridget described how she spent two years living in a “bin shed” with her partner while she worked as a sex worker and disappeared for days at a time. In all cases, the women were attempting to maintain the boundary between “that which enriches the self and that which destroys it.”²³³ Through their drug use the women negotiated the edge of their sanity and sense of self by controlling their drug use, and their ability to do so depended on their immediate circumstances. Some women described times in which they lost control and their edgework descended into destructive behaviour where they became completely consumed and obsessed with drugs at the expense of everything else. The pleasurable, self-actualising, highs of living life on the edge were destroyed by overwhelming personal tragedy and a complete loss of hope. The management of the boundary between pleasure and pain and order and chaos could no longer be maintained. Women who lost custody of children frequently described this loss of control. Sky described losing her son aged five “Because he'd gone into care my life just fell to bits it really did and erm... when he'd gone I just had nothing and erm that's when my drug use spiralled and I went on the streets and just did stupid, stupid things” (Sky aged 52). Many of the women expressed fear of getting clean due to apprehensions about how they would cope without drugs to cushion them

from emotional pain caused by their experiences of trauma and abuse. Frequently, attempts that were made resulted in the adoption of a substitute coping method such as alcoholism or self-harm. The pursuit of pleasure as a form of pain management edgework was very much at the heart of the women's drug use and the need for this pain management seemed to entrench their drug use.

The women in this study told stories of their drug use in which drugs featured not just as a source of a pleasure, escape, or as a high in themselves, but as an object through which they fashioned a whole lifestyle and identity. These lifestyles and identities represented a rebellion and transgression from what they perceived as the boring, mundane life that was otherwise on offer to them.³⁴ Many of the women saw the drug using culture as exciting, glamorous, and cultured, and a relief from their otherwise uneventful and unremarkable lives. Rosy's involvement in a drug culture as a young hippie allowed her to break free from the constraints of her working-class upbringing and gender role expectations which included low educational and occupational expectations, being used as an unpaid servant by her parents while her brother did nothing, and not having any time to think about what she wanted to do in her life. She described how during her childhood her family was very close but they "dint have much materially." Rosy was expected to spend most of her time doing domestic chores, cooking, cleaning, and babysitting, and when she reached her teens she began to feel as if she "was being put upon." She also described her childhood as culturally impoverished: "We didn't have a painting on the wall, we dint have a bookshelf... I had no musical instruments" (Rosy aged 47). Rosy explained how she was expected to leave school at sixteen and get a job. There was no question of her continuing her education. In addition, the kind of jobs she was expected to do were limited: "I'd never heard the word career. I was expected maybe to get a job in an office or a bank or be a nurse or a shop assistant and that was really the limit, that was the limits you were given." (Rosy aged 47). Rosy described how during her late teens she started mixing with "cultured," upper middle class hippies and began to experiment with drugs. Rosy asserted that she had found her "niche" and described how she began to feel resentful of her background:

The people that I started taking drugs with were like ex-university students, upper middle class and I mean I had a boyfriend who had a Rolls Royce when I was 21. I thought "This is the life" you know. "My parents are so uncultured" and I became very resentful and ashamed of them in some ways. (Rosy aged 47)

Although Rosy later empathised with her parents, the hippy scene provided her with a pleasurable and empowering lifestyle when she needed it. In search of excitement and adventure, Rosy found a way to reject what she

saw as a mundane, unfulfilling, and mediocre working class lifestyle and to take control of her own destiny. She was able to carve out a resistant identity to the one society attempted to impose on her through inequalities of gender and class, and this afforded her self-determination, autonomy, confidence, and self-respect.

Economic and social marginalization was the cultural context that provided an incentive for pursuing a drug-using lifestyle for the majority of the women in the study. As most of the women had left school with no or few qualifications, the kind of low-paid jobs they felt able to get were not at all appealing. Mandy left school with no qualifications and had limited work experience. She described her attitude to the lifestyle she saw was the alternative to her current one as a drug user and sex worker:

I ain't ready to give it up now. Do you know what I mean? I mean what's normal life? It's boring. I don't particularly wanna sit behind a till for 40hrs a week for £200 when I can make it out 'ere in a night! Then again – do I still wanna be a prostitute for the rest of my life? No I don't. But now I'm pretty confused. (Mandy aged 24)

Many women described feeling disillusioned by what the “straight world” or a “normal” lifestyle had to offer them. The predictability and “organized boredom” of late modern culture did not interest them.³⁵ They saw the drug culture they belonged to as a separate and distinct community comprised of other like-minded people who do not fit into the “straight world.” Many women described how becoming part of a drug culture enabled them to feel a sense of “belonging” with others like them seeking excitement.

Sarah claimed that not wanting to fit into mainstream society is an act of political resistance in response to being failed and stigmatised by it, and because being part of that society involves “not really living”:

The stigma that was attached to being a part of that society, it kind of pushed us together more. I think when you're in that society it is an act of resistance. It is a political thing to say “look, no, I don't want to do what you want me to, to fit in.” We didn't want to fit into that nine to five person. We looked down upon that as not really living, and not being exciting... We felt we were very different. All the people that you hang out with, they're doing the same things as you, they're rejecting society too. It's not necessarily that society has rejected us, it is that society has often failed us and we have decided that we don't want to fit into it. (Sarah aged 33)

The women thus adapted to society by becoming part of its “subterranean underside.”³⁶ As opposed to the dominant culture, Sarah asserted that the drug culture was about unpredictability and “digging deeper into oneself” to survive and this made it exciting:

You're like chasing this thing and it is exciting, so long as you have the money. And if you don't have the money it is exciting because you have to get it. You're anxious. It's not like today where I get up, and the highlight of my day

is if I get some time to myself I watch TV. There is something about surviving that is exciting. You have to dig deeper into yourself to survive. And also you just get into exciting situations, random situations. There is something about life being unpredictable and time isn't the same either. (Sarah aged 33)

Sarah seems to be describing a lifestyle involving living on the "edge," the excitement, anxiety, and unpredictability of not knowing how one will survive each random situation. Her narrative invokes Ferrell's claim that a modern culture focusing on work and empty promises of consumption becomes "systematically drained of human skill and possibility, devoid of the uncertainty and surprise that comes with human creativity."³⁷ Hence, the temptation for individuals to seek meaning and purpose in other ways of living. Sarah described the act of scoring to be one of anxiety, excitement, and adrenaline:

When I used to go to Bristol every day with my dealer friend to go and score, that was really exciting. Going in, your adrenaline is pumping because the police are always looking for people coming in and out of Bristol... you're elated, but you're also nervous... That was amazing. (Sarah aged 33)

BEING SOMEBODY OR A WORTHLESS NOBODY

In the socio-economic context in which the women had limited options to make their mark on the world or their communities in any meaningful and fulfilling way, many of the women discovered that nonetheless, in the subterranean culture they were a part of, they could, at least at times, enjoy access to quick and easy money and a status they could take pride in. Rather than being a worthless nobody, they could use the means available to them become somebody.

Wealth

Wealth is a fetishized aspect of drug culture, reflecting the wider late capitalist mainstream culture, and many of the women were attracted to and seduced by its pull. Social structures of gender inequality mean that women are more likely to live in poverty, have lower salaries and work in lower paid jobs.³⁸ At the same time, women are constantly exposed to the lure of commodity consumption through which they are supposed to fashion an idealized feminine identity, frequently represented as a measure of their self-worth. The women associated wealth in the drug culture with glamour, culture, freedom, and independence. Lara described her admiration for a group of heroin and crack users that she had begun to mix with and her desire to be like them and be accepted amongst them:

I could see what money they were making and how... to me it was sort of like glamorous in a way. It's sad to say but that's how I saw it you know. (Lara aged 23)

Sonya described the attraction and seduction of the confidence that wealth had given her current boyfriend as well as the comfort, luxury and glamour of the lifestyle it gave them access to:

He was selling drugs, and he had quite a bit of money, and he was a bit flash, nice car. Men with money have a more attractive persona. It's not because of the money it's because they're confident. He just oozed confidence because he'd always have grands falling out of his pocket, and however many drugs, and we'd stay in top hotels, and get the penthouse suite. (Sonya aged 24)

One could say that a dependent drug user is the quintessential capitalist consumer whereby the dream of easy money through quick success, spending without hesitation or restraint and immediate consumption in a seemingly never-ending cycle is a daily reality. The insatiable thirst for drugs such as crack cocaine or snowballs (a mixture of crack and heroin) must be matched with money-making success in equal measure. The women found shoplifting, sex work, dealing, robbery, and fraud, to name but a few, to be excellent ways to get quick and easy cash, often with little effort. Sky worked as a dealer and described the ease in which she could make money:

I've made a grand from a fucking three minute phone call and ten minutes later I've got a grand in my hand just for doing that and I've got seven grand in the bank. Yeah I liked it then. That was alright because I had money. See it's alright when it's going smooth it's alright you know. (Sky aged 52)

Many of the women described spending hundreds, and up to a thousand, every day on crack and/or heroin at certain points during their drug careers. For many, the value of money itself became almost meaningless, a means to an end in the pursuit of their drug of choice:

I'd miss so much time off work and I'd have written warnings and things. I just didn't care. My attitude was "Well I'm only young once" I can pay ... cause I got all these debts as well, credit card bills—"I'll pay it off later. I don't care." (Alanis aged 30)

The women described how especially when using crack, their desire for more and more cash in the pursuit of pleasure at times seemed to override their care and concern for other people. Although all tried to set limits on what they were willing to do for money, the description of their attitudes or the perceived attitudes of "other" users resembles the callous pursuit of wealth pursued by globalist corporate elites involving profit over people. One woman, Bethany, described how, despite her best laid plans to stop dealing crack, she was unable to because "the more money you see, the greedier you get." The false promise of capitalism that individualism, acquiring wealth, and endless consumption can bring one happiness and fulfillment was truly realized in the lives of the women who often found total isolation and destitution was just the other side of their pleasure.

Most women supported their habits through criminal activities or sex work, most through shoplifting. The women found these activities were considerably more lucrative than any legitimate work that was accessible to them and, if not a way out of poverty, at least a route to independence or a way to demonstrate their money-making expertise. Crime was not just described as lucrative, but in many instances as also fun:

Crime can be fun, quite a lot of fun. It's why people get hooked on it. And it's a rebellion, sticking two fingers up at the traditional ways of getting money and stuff. And it's more money than you would get in a whole week stacking shelves in Tesco. (Sarah aged 33)

In the context of late modern capitalist culture, the drug user is thus seen to take on the mainstream capitalist values of work success and consumption with the subterranean values of excitement, hedonism, and a disdain for the humdrum existence of the ordinary worker. Natalie gave up her job when she found that being a “driver” for her heroin using friends was more lucrative and easier than going to work. Her decision to give up work and be a driver made sense to her:

I was the driver cause I had the car. They used to say “Take me out and whatever I earn I'll give you half.” That was a lot easier than going to work all day for twenty or thirty quid when I could earn one hundred quid in an hour. It would be “Natalie, could you pop round so and so's? I've got this to sell. I'll sort you out.” So off I'd go. It's easier init than getting up and going to work? I gave up my job. I was pissed off with going to work every day. (Natalie aged 28)

The acquisition of wealth to buy and consume drugs became a whole lifestyle and provided the women with purpose, skills, confidence and autonomy that they otherwise may not have experienced. Some of the women had never had a legitimate job or stayed in one for long, and so the need to earn money provided them with an incentive to gain money making skills and a purpose.

Status and respect

Social constructions of gender mean that status is not an aspect of social life that women are particularly socialised to desire or to expect, unless that status has to do with being a “good” mother or wife. In criminological literature, status has been theorised as part of the way men express their masculine identities, toughness, male dominance, and the “badass.”³⁹ With male posturing and crime taking centre stage, it would seem female criminals are not concerned with status and, if they are, only because they wish to emulate men. However, there were women in this study for whom status and respect were extremely important and this had nothing to do with wanting to be like men, but rather with creating a reputation so they would

be left alone—as *women*. The women explained that showing vulnerability and weakness would potentially make it more difficult to get what they needed to survive, or put them at risk of being robbed, ripped off, taken advantage of, or subjected to violence, abuse, or losing their children. This is because, as many of the women stated, as women, they are seen as easy targets.

Sky described her experiences as a dealer in a male dominated scene and how she deliberately put up an aggressive front to protect her business and avoid the unwanted advances of men:

I started selling it which led to loads of problems people trying to rob me and the police raided me every year and tried busting me every year... If you're a woman you're kind of made an easy target really. I had this front. I had this really aggressive front that sort of said "Don't fuck with me" kept people at a distance.

Du Rose: Did you have a partner then?

No, no I didn't. Loads of offers cause I'd just turned up here and I suppose all the guys thought "Oh here's a chick, easy, on her own with a kid, she's dealing, nice set up." I think that's where I got my front from actually, to piss all those idiots off. There were loads of them as well... (Sky aged 52)

Sky also acquired status from being good at what she did and having good contacts in London, which meant she always had a supply:

You know I was very capable when I dealt. I could always get when Bristol was dry. I'd just get on the train or get in a car and go to London whereas all the other people tended to buy off the same person here... I did big amounts. You know I dint sell bags or anything. (Sky aged 52)

Sarah described how she went "off the rails" as a child after a series of traumatic life events.⁴⁰ When Sarah moved to a new town as a teenager she decided that being tough and making people afraid of her would protect her from harm:

When I moved to this area, because I'd come from quite a traumatic history... I thought that I had to create a "rep" so that people would leave me alone. Basically, I had my front which was quite aggressive and I ended up beating up a few people, couple of guys as well and people left me alone. They showed me respect. (Sarah aged 33)

Sarah said that she built a whole identity for herself around her reputation as a person to be feared which she took pride in. She explained that having a status meant she received special treatment from people who were "a bit scared" of her and she was allowed into circles that "you wouldn't be allowed into." She felt this status protected her when she got into crack later on.

It was empowering, because I built a whole life on it in a way, because people still don't mess about with me in the town. And also it probably kept me safe when I was using crack years later, because people didn't mistreat me. And now even with my son there will be people who say "that's her boy, we'll look out for him." It kept me safe as a woman. (Sarah aged 33)

ON THE EDGE OF CONTROL

So far, this paper has explored the ways in which the women derived pleasure and agency from the comfort, transcendence, or oblivion of the drug experience, the excitement, belonging, escape from mundanity, wealth, and status the subterranean drug culture they belonged to at times afforded them. Another source of pleasure and empowerment for the women was the thrill of living on the edge, living an unpredictable life, taking risks and surviving them by using their skills, smartness, and prowess. Living in this way meant that often the women would be faced with a choice between different courses of action, all involving a threat to their physical or mental well-being, in order to take control and survive. As stated earlier, edge-work, that aspect of experience when one has to dig deeper into oneself to survive, is part of the daily lives of some drug users. Sarah claimed this often involved "thinking in a different way":

Once you're exposed to certain things and you have to survive, you become a survivor. A survivor thinks in different ways, thinks outside the box or reacts outside the box that might not make any sense to people looking in. (Sarah aged 33)

Skill and smartness

The women were extremely resourceful and innovative in finding ways to earn the money they needed to buy drugs and survive. Surviving and supporting a drug habit and avoiding harm and arrest, and managing to stay in control, takes great skill. Success in criminal activities gave the women a feeling of empowerment, confidence in their skills as earners and their abilities to take risks and get away with it. Often other women they met taught them the skills they needed to be successful earners. Sarah described how a friend taught her the skills of shoplifting from which she derived pleasure, excitement, a way to survive, and desired material goods:

She said to me you have to look smart and like you could buy something in there, otherwise they are going to suspect that you are stealing. So she got me ironing all these green Marks and Spencer's carrier bags you couldn't see through. And we hit big shopping centres and she taught me how to shoplift. She taught me that there are some clothes that they don't put alarm tags on. There are some materials that it is easy to get tags off, how to hold two things at once and take one from behind. That was a buzz. I loved it. (Sarah aged 33)

Some women described how part of the thrill of crime was getting away with it. Sarah delighted in her prowess in dodging the law:

When you're dealing, there is something about the police not getting you; you're in this chase, all the time. You're like running away from them, you're making sure that they don't catch you, you're trying to outsmart them. There is a dance going on between you and the police... You like to think you're as powerful as they are. (Sarah aged 33)

Sarah also recounted the buzz she felt when she had robbed someone with a smile and a visible knife up her sleeve right outside a police station.

The notion that risk-taking activities “may attract more men than women” and that there is more pressure on males to “develop skill orientation towards their environment”⁴¹ was not supported by the women in the original study, many of whom supported the drug habits of their partners. Most did this through shoplifting.⁴² Only a few women said their partners supported their habits, and the majority of these were abusive and controlling. Arguably, on top of the everyday risks men and women experience in this type of drug culture, women are also more likely to have to navigate further risks. These include being seen as weaker and easier targets for violation and exploitation, exposure to the risks from sex work, abuse and violence in relationships with men, and punitive treatment due to gendered expectations of appropriate female behaviour.

The women seemed acutely aware of gendered stereotypes of drug users and the double standards that apply to male and female drug users. For instance, Bridget commented that “A dealer will automatically assume that that if you're a woman and you use drugs then you will do anything for it” (Bridget aged 39). Suzi had lived on the streets as a homeless woman for five years. She described how she would be targeted by men for sex or with violence. Suzi explained how in order to survive she has had to fight the men who attacked her and tell the ones who propositioned her to “piss off”:

When you are on the streets you get a lot of shit from blokes that are just members of the public. The amount of blokes that have tried kicking shit out of me when I've been asleep in shop doorways is ridiculous. They think it bigs em up. But most times they've come off the worst (laughs). I've also been propositioned for sex literally hundreds of times. I've just told them to piss off. Drunk pissed up on a Friday or Saturday night... I've had one of the blokes that own the massage parlour come up and proposition me saying I can earn £2-300 on a good night. (Suzi aged 31)

Controlling the edge

Resistance to the idea that they are chemically enslaved and willing to do anything for a hit but rather are actually in control of their drug habit, is an edge that some drug users, especially if they are poor, have to face.⁴³ The women set limits on their behaviour in order to feel they were still in control and to maintain their sense of agency and a positive identity. They compared themselves with “other” drug users who engaged in behaviour that they apparently never would, such as stealing from individuals rather

than shops (which were seen as fair game), or sex work (which was seen as too dangerous or undignified).

Sonya described her experience of going to a crack house and finding comfort in the company of a group of dealer-pimps that she spent the evening smoking rock with. Sonya's boyfriend had just been arrested.

I phoned up the dealer to score and he said to come to a big house... I had always stayed away from crack houses before. Steve hadn't been a great boyfriend but he was always there and I hated being on my own, and sleeping on my own. So I ended up staying there through the night, and smoking rock with them, and then the next morning they turned round and said, oh, you owe us £800 now, and you've got 24 hours to pay it... And the way they work is that they give you a load of rock and then basically you can't afford to pay it back and so they get you on the game.

Sonya then explained how she gained "respect," status and distinction amongst the dealer-pimps for her "grafting" abilities.

Du Rose: Intentionally get women on the game?

Yes, I've seen girls. So I thought, no, I'm not going to let this happen. So I was going into the Co-op and walking out with two DVD players, CD reader/writers and things like that. I just went on a bit of a mad day, but at the end of the day I actually had a grand. So I had money for me and I paid them back their £800. They had a lot of respect for me though for doing it. From then on it was like, he [boyfriend] was away for five days and I hung around with them... They had their black girlfriends who didn't take drugs, and they looked after them, and they had their white ones who were treated like pieces of shit, and took drugs, and they had them out on the game. If you were white it was quite hard to gain their respect as they really had no respect for white women. And then, like I said, a lot of them tried getting me on the game, and in the end I did, I suppose, have a bit of respect off them because, you know, I'd be more of a challenge to them. You know, we'll break her one day sort of thing. (Sonya aged 24)

Because Sonya, like all of the women in this study on a day to day basis, faced multiple potential harms, she was able to adeptly court one risk in order to subvert and resist another. Navigating her way through these contradictory risky imperatives, gave her an edge. She engaged in an act of edgework and experienced the transgressive thrill of putting herself in harm's way and surviving it through skill.

Resisting gendered oppression

Many of the women recounted times when they used skill, smartness, and violence to resist gendered oppression. Sonya decided she would rather risk arrest and criminal justice proceedings than be subjected to male dominance and sexual exploitation. Like many of the other women in the study, she was haunted by prominent popular images of drug involved women as desperate and degraded "crack whores" and sought to distance herself from

it. She expressed a sense of accomplishment in having avoided this demise and resisting this form of gendered oppression. Her actions afforded her the pleasure of self-determination and periodically challenged the literal strictures of her oppressed position. However, this does not take away from the fact that she was still exploited by the dealer-pimps who duped her into thinking they were sharing their crack with her and then threatened her.

For some women involvement in sex work was something they felt they could never do and marked the sign of a woman who had lost all dignity and self-respect – who had crossed the boundary between an ordered and disordered sense of self: “I’ve never worked on the street, ‘cause like, to me that’s selling my soul.” (Sharon aged 38).

However, this was not the way that it was seen or experienced at the time by Lara. Lara decided to split up with her boyfriend of six years who used to put her down “in every single way.” He was a dealer and Lara had depended on him to support her habit. For her, selling sex to support her own habit gave her independence and autonomy, enabled her to build confidence, and cut down her habit. All these things had been difficult for her with her partner, who had tried to convince her she would not be able to survive on her own:

I left him because I could see that he didn’t wanna get clean and even though I’m still using, I’m making my money, standing on my own two feet and I’ve cut down what I used to use from £250 to £20-30 per day. And I look healthier... I’m feeling good about myself... I’ve got self-worth now, self-respect and confidence... He always said to me “Oh you won’t be able to stand on your own two feet without me. You won’t survive.” So I thought “Right, I’ll show you and prove you wrong...” so I am doing quite... really well. (Lara aged 23)

The women very much appreciated and enjoyed the money they could make as sex workers and the independence it gave them. Sex work can be seen as a form of edgework in itself through which women navigate the boundary between an ordered and disordered sense of self, pain and pleasure, and life and death. Though sex work can be extremely lucrative and a great source of financial independence for female drug users, they constantly face the possibility of rape, assault, disease, or death. In the words of one respondent, “You risk your life every time you get into that car, you don’t know if you’re coming back or not” (Emma aged 21). Many of the women described encounters with punters in which they literally had to fight for their lives. Lara explained how she had experienced several very violent encounters with clients, including one in which she woke up in hospital and did not know what had happened:

It seemed like everything was alright... Next thing I know he punched me in the face and I woke up in hospital. That’s all I can remember. What the doctors told me was that he kicked me that many times between my legs, put it

this way I couldn't walk for three weeks. I was bleeding. I had three stitches, and I was literally black down there. I was in agony for three weeks. So, I know it is dangerous. (Lara aged 23)

Consequently, Lara described how she had decided to start carrying a knife on her to protect herself and was not afraid to use it. She seemed to take pride and pleasure in her bravery and the steps she had taken to defend herself:

That's why now when I work I carry a knife with me or a blade—I've got to and I'll do it... I've fought back with them... I've pulled my blade. I'm not frightened to use my knife... cause at the end of the day it's for my own safety. You take a risk every time you get in a car. (Lara aged 23)

Lara related how she had used it when she was again assaulted:

We agreed a price but when we got there he'd only give me so much money and he said he'd give me the rest after. I said "Well let me see the rest of the money, so I know you've got it." He wouldn't so I said "Look, well take me back yeah." And he said alright but he put the central locking on and started heading for the motorway. I said "If you don't turn round, take me back and drop me off, I will stab you" and he laughed. He thought I was joking and he slapped me round the face as if to say sort of like "Shut the fuck up, you silly little whore." So I just got my blade and said "Look I'm not fucking around listen now turn this van round and take me fucking back." So he punched me and with that I just went like that (action) and I caught his face and cut him across the cheek and he brought me back 'cause he knew I wasn't messing. Do you know what I mean? There are arseholes out there. (Lara aged 23)

Sex work thus afforded Lara the pleasure of gendered resistance both in defiance of financial dependence on her abusive ex-boyfriend and resistance to male violence. Sarah said violence was a source of pleasure to her, especially violence against men. This was because she had been victimized by them and needed to take back control. She described her violence as a symbolic act of defiance:

I enjoyed violence for quite a long time because I had been powerless, and when I was aggressive and violent, I buzzed off that because I then felt powerful, especially when I was hurting men, there was a statement there. There was a "fuck you, I can hurt you and you will never overpower me again," like a kind of statement to men and to society. (Sarah aged 33)

Each pleasure Sarah took in hurting men could be seen as an act of edge-work and resistance against gendered oppression, as creating a disorder in response to the gendered order.

While the women very much enjoyed many aspects of the pleasure and empowerment their drug cultures afforded them, there was one thing that soon took it all away. Many of the women discovered that powerful agents of the state in the form of social workers would not permit them to enjoy the agency and pleasure of the subterranean lifestyle they had chosen *and*

the pleasures of motherhood. Their deviation from the ideal of the good mother was judged severely and ultimately punished with their children being taken away. The women were aware of the double standard that applied to them.

A man can walk away but if I walked away, I would be the worst woman in the history of mankind. And they can walk away to pleasure. They can decide that "I want this life and I enjoy my drugs too much" and they can live that life outside of society's expectations when it comes to children but if you do that as a woman, there is a witch hunt. (Sarah aged 33)

Although women did all they could to resist this particular form of gendered inequality, triumphant tales were few. Once social services were involved, the machinery of bureaucratic rationalization and regulation closed in on the women and most lost their children, throwing them into existential despair. Notably, this is not a risk that male users tend to have to navigate. Rather than, as Lyng argues, risk-taking activities attracting more men than women, it is rather that risk taking, transgression, and pleasure-seeking in women is vilified and punished more severely due to social constructions of gender. And not only that, but such constructions create the social conditions which make transgression and crime attractive to them in the first place.

As this article has shown, drug using women get plenty of (gender specific) stigma already. Rather than jumping on board this cultural project, scholars should also recognize their pleasure and agency, which are crucial to any full understanding of their experiences and decisions.

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ENDNOTES

1. See Natasha Du Rose, *The Governance of Female Drug Use: Women's Experiences of Drug Policy* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015); Lisa Maher, *Sexed Work: Gender, Race and Resistance in a Brooklyn Street Market* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

2. Elizabeth Ettore, *Women and Substance Use* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

3. Sharron Hinchliff, "The meaning of ecstasy use to women and clubbing in the late 1990s," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 12, 5-6 (November 2001): 455-68; Sharron Hinchliff, "Mad for it: Ecstatic women," *Druglink* 15, no. 5 (2000): 14-17; Susan Henderson, "Drugs and culture: The question of gender," in *Drugs: Cultures, Controls and Everyday Life*, ed. N. South (London: Sage Publications, 1999): 36-48.

4. Stephen Lyng, "Edgework: A social psychological analysis of voluntary risk-taking," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 4 (1990): 851-86; Alex Stevens, *Drugs, Crime and Public Health: The Political Economy of Drug Policy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

5. The interviewer provided participants with a series of broad themes including background, drug use, positive and negative aspects of drug use, funding of habit, men, relationships, treatment, social services, and criminal justice system. The interviews were all conducted by the researcher. All the women were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

6. The women discussed in this study were derived from samples from three different English cities (Bristol, Reading and London). The twenty-one women in Bristol were interviewed for part of the researcher's PhD. Most of these women were contacted through a Drugs Project, some responded to a poster, several were contacted through the snowballing method and a few through other means (i.e. at a mother and baby unit, on the street, through a friend of a friend). These interviews mostly took place in a room in the Drugs Project or in a counselling room in a women's therapy centre where the researcher worked part time as a helpline coordinator. The second cohort of nine women (from a total that also included forty men) came from a Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)-funded study on stimulant services in Reading. They were accessed mainly through two of the DAAT funded drug services in Reading (a prescribing service and a crack support group) and were interviewed in available rooms attached to these services. The third cohort of ten women were all accessed in courtyards or doorways at the beginning of Narcotics Anonymous meetings in South or East London locations. This final sample were accessed with the intention of finding women who were "in recovery." These women were interviewed in a variety of informal locations including in their homes, quiet cafes, parks, and cars. All interviewees in the three samples were offered a cash incentive of £10 per hour for participation. Interviews across all the samples lasted for at least an hour but some for up to three hours. Some women in the Bristol study were interviewed more than once several months later.

7. See Du Rose, *The Governance*.

8. Ibid.

9. It is now widely noted that female users often report the continued use of drugs such as heroin or crack to block out trauma, pain, and misery. See Maria Root, "Treatment Failures: The role of victimization in women's addictive behaviour," *American Institute of Orthopsychiatry* 59, no. 4 (1989): 542-49; Sheila Blume, "Chemical dependency in women: Important issues," *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* 16, no. 3-4 (1990): 297-309; Beth Reed, "Linkages: Battering, Sexual Assault, Incest, Child Sexual Abuse, Teen Pregnancy, Dropping Out of School and the Alcohol and Drug Connection," in *Alcohol and Drugs Are Women's Issues, Volume 1: A Review of the Issues* ed. P. Roth (Women's Action Alliance and The Scarecrow Press Inc: Metuchen, NJ, 1991): 130-49; Jane Becker and Clare Duffy, *Women Drug Users and Drug Service Provision: Service: Level Responses to Engagement and Treatment* (Home Office Drug Strategy Directorate DPAS, Paper 17, 2002); Thomas Brady and Olivia Ashley, *Women in Substance Abuse Treatment: Results from the Alcohol and Drug Services Study* (ADSS), HHS Publication No. SMA 04-3968, Analytic Series A-26, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Office of Applied Studies: Rockville, Maryland 2005); Nancy Poole and Colleen Dell, *Girls, Women and Substance Use* (Ottawa: BC Centre for Excellence on Women's Health, Vancouver and Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2005); Du Rose, *The Governance*.

10. Elizabeth Ettore, "Revisiting women and drug use: Gender, sensitivity, embodiment and reducing harm," *The International Journal of Drug Policy* 15, no. 5-6 (2004): 10.

11. Margaret Malloch, *Women, Drugs and Custody: The experiences of women drug users in prison* (Winchester: Waterside Press, 2000).

12. Jack Katz, *Seduction of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions of Doing Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Lyng, "Edgework"; Jeff Ferrell, "Criminological Verstehen," *Justice Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1997): 3-23; Mike Presdee, "Young people, culture and the construction of crime: doing wrong versus doing crime," in *Varieties of Criminology Readings from a Dynamic Discipline* ed. G. Barak (London and Westport: Praeger, 1994); Mike Presdee, *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime*. (London: Routledge, 2000); Keith Hayward, "The vilification and pleasures of youthful transgression," in *Youth Justice: Critical readings*, ed. J. Muncie, G. Hughes, and E. McLaughlin (London: Sage, 2002): 80-94; Keith Hayward, *City Limits: Crime, Consumerism and the Urban Experience* (London: Glasshouse Press, 2003); Pat O'Malley, "Neoliberalism and risk in criminology," in *The Critical Criminology Companion*, Sydney Law School Research Paper No 09/83 ed. T. Anthony and C. Cunneen

(Leichhardt, NSW: Federation Press 2008): 55-67.

13. Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Rev. Ed. (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957); Hayward "The vilification"; Jock Young, "Merton with energy, Katz with structure: The sociology of vindictiveness and the criminology of transgression" *Theoretical Criminology* 7, no. 3 (2003): 389-414; Jeff Ferrell, "Making sense of crime: Review essay on Jack Katz's *Seductions of Crime*," *Social Justice* 19, no. 3 (2000): 118.

14. Hayward, "The vilification," 4.

15. Young, "Merton with energy," 408.

16. Stevens, *Drugs, Crime and Public Health*, 51; David Matza and Gresham Sykes, "Juvenile delinquency and subterranean values," *American Sociological Review* 26, no. 5 (1961): 712-19; Jock Young, *The Drugtakers: The Social Meaning of Drug Use* (London: Judson, McGibbon 1971).

17. *Ibid*, 45, 51.

18. *Ibid*, 45.

19. Lyng, "Edgework," 871, 857.

20. Stephen Lyng, "Sociology at the edge: Social theory and voluntary risk taking," in Lyng, ed., *Edgework: The sociology of risk taking* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005): 17-50; Young, "Merton with energy."

21. Lyng, "Edgework," 870.

22. Katz, *Seductions*; Lyng, "Edgework."

23. Lyng, "Edgework"; Stevens, *Drugs, Crime and Public Health*.

24. Stevens, *Drugs, Crime and Public Health*: 49; Avril Taylor, *Women Drug Users: An Ethnography of a Female Injecting Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993).

25. Lyng, "Edgework," 873.

26. Stephen Lyng and Rick Matthews, "Risk, edgework and masculinities," in *Gendered Risks*, ed. Kelly Hannah-Moffat and Pat O'Malley (New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007): 75-98.

27. Staci Newmahr, "Chaos, order and collaboration: Toward a feminist conceptualization of edgework" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 40, no.6 (2011): 682-712; Valli Rajah, "Resistance as edgework in violent intimate relationships of drug involved women," *British Journal of Criminology* 47, no. 2 (2007): 196-213; Jeannine Gailey, "Starving is the most fun a girl can have: The pro-ana subculture as edgework," *Critical Criminology* 17, no. 2 (2009): 93-108.

28. See Du Rose, *The Governance*, 29-31 and 217-18 for a discussion of the "crack whore" discourse.

29. Gerda Reith, "On the edge: Drugs and the consumption of risk in late modernity," in Lyng, ed., *Edgework*: 227-45.

30. See Du Rose, *The Governance*, 94-96.

31. Lyng, "Edgework," 871.

32. Hayward, "The vilification," 5.

33. Reith, "On the Edge," 228.

34. Jeff Ferrell, "Boredom, crime and criminology" *Theoretical Criminology* 8, no.3 (2004): 287-302.

35. Ferrell, "Boredom, crime," 293.

36. Steven, *Drugs, Crime and Public Health*, 48.

37. Ferrell, "Boredom, crime," 293.

38. Fran Bennett and Mary Daly, *Poverty through a Gender Lens: Evidence and Policy Review on Gender and Poverty* (Oxford: Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Oxford University, 2014).

39. Katz, *Seductions*; James Messerschmidt and Stephen Tomsen, *Masculinities, Crime and Criminal Justice* (Oxford Handbooks Online, February 2016); Jock Young, *The Vertigo of Late Modernity* (London: Sage Publications 2007).

40. Sarah found out her sister was really her mother, and her mother was her grandmother,

at the age of nine. Sarah spent the latter part of her childhood in care from the age of eleven. She lived in a care home which was later closed down for the neglect and violence of staff. At twelve Sarah was gang raped by a group of older boys in her neighbourhood, who would wait for her to pass by so they could do it again and again.

41. Lyng, "Edgework," 873.

42. Others mainly supported their drug use through sex work, dealing, legitimate work, credit card fraud, or begging. See Du Rose, *The Governance*.

43. See Du Rose, *The Governance*: 93-96 and 181-84, for a discussion of the discourse on women drug users as chemically enslaved, diseased addicts.