Chemical Companionship:

Erotic Collaboration of Users and Drugs in Chemsex Porn Publics

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ABSTRACT

Before Pornhub's 2020 content purge, a networked chemsex public briefly flourished around amateur, meth-themed gay porn. In this article, I explore this public through 450 pseudonymous user comments, asking how sex, drugs, and desire are imagined, narrated, and shared. Drawing on critical chemsex studies, feminist theory, and new materialism, I develop the concept of "chemical companionship" to describe the affective and agentic relationships between viewers and the drugs they fantasise with.

This public was shaped by the affordances of porn platforms—anonymity, minimal moderation, and algorithmic visibility—but is now largely erased due to the ongoing deplatformisation of digital sexual expression. I argue that this erasure weakens not only the cultural self-understanding of gay people who engage in sexualised drug use, but also the ability of sexual health organisations to understand and reach them with harm reduction initiatives. By reading these comment sections as ephemeral zones of queer intimacy, the article shows that their expansive social space allows for socio-sexual creativity that is nevertheless finely attuned to the hegemonic morality and stigma around drug use.

KEY WORDS

CHEMSEX, DEPLATFORMISATION, PORN, SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

Drug use has long been intertwined with gay sexual practice, with poppers and ecstasy historically amassing a particularly significant position within this culture (Buckland, 2002; Florêncio, 2023a; Race, 2009). Recently, however, the notion of *chemsex* has risen in prominence in the cultural imaginary of gay sexualised drug use (Florêncio, 2023b; Hakim, 2018). Chemsex is a practice of sexualised use of the drugs methamphetamine (crystal meth), GHB, and mephedrone, typically in private domestic spaces. Since the release of the documentary *Chemsex* (Fairman & Gogarty, 2015), the phenomenon has become an uneasy part of gay sexual discourse. It is at the same time also a phenomenon shaped by the gay digital infrastructures of hook-up apps (Race, 2015) and pornography (Møller, 2021), making a confluence of gay, sexual, digital, and chemical moral worries and panics dominate the discourse (Hakim 2018; Møller and Hakim, 2021), ultimately harkening back to the fact that it operates in the outer limits of hegemonic sexual hierarchies (Rubin, 1984). People's actual erotic engagements are thus made secondary to concerns of safety and morality. It is not surprising, then, that chemsex practice remains taboo for many gay people.

This leaves porn and pseudonymous online communications as useful sites to make chemical erotics socially visible. A previous study has shown the proliferation of such content on Pornhub (Møller, 2020), perhaps the most well-known porn tube platform. However, the deplatformisation of sex has hit the availability of chemsex porn hard. In 2020, Pornhub purged 10 million videos that did not meet new standards put in place to minimise illegal content (Gregory, 2024). As of publication, searches for chemsex are blocked, presenting the message: "Your search could be for illegal and abusive sexual material, including non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) or image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)". So, while the purge did not technically target illegal content (Gregory, 2024, p. 3), these further restrictions are direct reactions to the US anti-sex trafficking laws, Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA). While some other tube sites have laxer regulations showing some results, it has become notably harder to come by chemsex porn online.

By examining data that is now lost to deplatformisation, this article makes visible what is lost when this type of sexual expression disappears. Drawing from data collected before the 2020 purge, it identifies the types of sexual publics that can emerge when chemsex porn is circulated freely, and when its audience comments are seemingly unmoderated. The fact that social media and platforms have become all but synonymous with public space (Dijck & Poell, 2015; Gillespie, 2010) underlines the devastating consequences of the ongoing deplatformisation of sex (Blunt et al., 2021). For the taboo and illegal, yet for queer people highly significant, chemsex practices, this means that discussion of and reflection on their cultural significance is diminished, leaving these participants in their physical sexual publics particularly vulnerable.

Materially, the article examines the sexual networked publics that formed in the comment sections of chemsex porn on the platform Pornhub. By investigating the erotic production that occurs in the *vicinity* of pornographic representations, this study contributes to the porn research strand that interrogates its infrastructural and social conditions (Hakim, 2019; Hernández, 2019; Martins, 2019; Mercer, 2017a; Nagel, 2021; Paasonen, 2011; Sarson, 2019; Tiidenberg & van der Nagel, 2020). The study leans into new materialism to emphasise somatic and chemical aspects of chemsex porn consumption. This allows for analytical connections to be made between the porn genres and tropes that the videos and erotic imaginations rely on (as shown in Møller, 2021), the vernacular creativity of porn commenters, and the situated, embodied, and chemical realities that such comments both mediate and produce. By closely examining affective and narrative structures leveraged by commenters, it specifically interrogates the mobilisation of tropes of intoxication in the

affective and discursive production and sharing of erotic pleasures.

The article asks, in comment narratives, what relationship is posited between the body and the drug? What capacities to act and feel emerge? Taking a new materialist methodological approach, the comments are construed as a form of "playing with the text" (Paasonen, 2018, loc. 420), that is, a process of both consumption and socialisation that places the comments in relation to the porn video, the psyche and perspective of the commenter, and the social relations that emerge in any given comment section. The analysis combines qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) with close readings. The material selection is inspired by Michael Warner's work on publics, defined as emergent, contingent, social speech events (Warner, 2002). Comments sections are infrastructurally the epitome of such characteristics, thus providing a rich textual foundation for interrogating chemsex as a cultural and everyday sexual phenomenon. Boyd's work on networked publics informs my understanding of commenting as a specific kind of speech act enabled by social media infrastructure, which makes speech relatively persistent, highly replicable, scalable, and searchable (Boyd, 2010). Thus, the article examines comments to chemsex porn as instances of networked gay sexual publics, that is, sexual expressions and communications in digital spaces with social media affordances. In the platform analysis framework, it is a study of users and usage, rather than content (Dijck, 2013), which serves to centre on how "regular" people enact their sexuality online. It thus offers unique insight into how, before deplatformisation, gay men in their erotic imaginations mediated the pleasures of chemsex with the anti-drug norms that problematise them.

The article unfolds in the following manner: First, I situate the phenomenon and study in relation to other digital aspects of chemsex culture, specifically social media and porn, with particular attention to deplatformisation. Then, critical drug scholarship is used to define the analytical approach. In presenting the material and methods for collection, archiving, and coding, I pay particular attention to the ethical and legal issues of doing such research. The analysis and findings section falls into two parts. The first presents evidence for the expansiveness of the sexual discourse found in this networked chemsex public. The second complicates this finding by showing how what I call "chemical companionship" scripts organise the agentic relationship between users and drugs. Finally, I discuss the reasons for such scripting to exist, what that tells us about chemsex and stigma, as well as what platformisation and deplatformisation mean for nonnormative sexual and intoxication culture.

NETWORKED GAY SEXUAL PUBLICS

Internet scholarship has documented the rise, spread, multiplicity, and deplatformisation of networked sexual publics. Early studies of pre-social media, specifically web 1.0 chat forums, found that the pseudonymity of such interactions enabled forms of discourse that were more expansive than the traditional sexual and moral landscape. Such expansiveness enables social formations to emerge around marginalised identities and interests, including sexual and gender minorities (Correll, 1995; Campbell, 2004; Mowlabocus, 2010). Such safety combined with the invisibility of the body allows for the construction of textual bodies and sexual narratives that play with and even subvert hegemonic and subcultural scripts of gender and sexuality (see, for example, Campbell, 2004). However, the literature also shows how hegemonic gay sexual scripts remain in gay media, such as on dating or hook-up apps (Sarson, 2019; Mowlabocus, 2020), and porn (Mercer, 2017b). By creating profile texts, filling in categories of sexual belonging and orientations, and by looking at and communicating with others, users of hook-up apps create a sexual public that at once is erotic in its sometimes-pornographic aesthetic and usage (Tziallas, 2015), and a facilitator of hook-ups. Hook-up apps have become the prime site at which gay people express sexual interests.

However, hook-up apps' lack of a social feed creates

somewhat insular sexual publics. In contrast, peaking in the 2010s, the so-called "microblogging sites" Twitter and Tumblr provided infrastructure for sharing, reposting, and commenting on sexual content in the form of short porn clips and GIFs (Byron, 2019; Cao, 2022). Tumblr enabled so-called "Not Safe For Work" (NSFW) content because of its lower level of content moderation than other social platforms at the time (Tiidenberg, Hendry, & Abidin, 2021). For queer people, this meant an ability to enact sexual identities in conversation with "… a wide-ranging landscape of identity" (Byron, 2019, p. 346). While sexual drug using Tumblr publics have not been documented, the presence of drug discourse (Ruddock, 2020) makes it reasonable to assume the presence of chemsex publics as well. However, Tumblr's demise following its NSFW content ban and the general deplatformisation of sex happening across all major platforms (Tiidenberg, 2021) has severely limited the ability for networked sexual publics to form.

Porn tube platforms, that is, aggregative porn sharing sites with social media functionalities, created the conditions for the proliferation of chemsex porn. From a production and distribution perspective, making Do It Yourself (DIY) style productions by amateurs much more prominent (Paasonen, 2011), up until the recent deplatformisation, it allowed for the distribution of user-generated content that established porn studios could risk legal sanctions for. Previous studies of chemsex media have focused on pornography aesthetics and production, addressing vernacular creativity (Mercer, 2017a), race and power (Mahawatte, 2021), and masculinity scripting (Florêncio, 2020). From a consumption perspective, the relative anonymity that commenting from unverified, pseudonymous profiles affords makes them key entry points for engaging with chemsex imagery, narratives and affects. While porn tube platforms are increasingly moderated (Blunt et al., 2021; Bronstein, 2021), they still facilitate sexual public space-making by affording pseudonymous commenting on porn content.

In this vein, I have shown how Pornhub-mediated chemsex videos emerge as genres in part because users with various affective connections to chemsex practice seek them out through search (Møller, 2021). While the commenting practices reveal their varying fear-desire configurations, these sexual publics are mainly presented to understand the genre characteristics of the videos they attach to. Because comment circulation often originates from behind pseudonymous profiles (Nagel & Frith, 2015), they can evade the scrutiny of potentially judgmental gazes and legal and social repercussions. As such, the discursive practices in comments to chemsex porn promise frivolous and multi-facetted discourse on a subject that is limited by normative pressures and materially made scarce through deplatformisation.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The textual approach to the study of sexualised drug use aligns with the notion heralded by critical drug scholarship, that drug "effects" must be understood as cultural practices (Moore, 2020). Specifically, the comment discourse is analysed as sexual narratives that bring chemsex drug affects into "eventful attention" (Dennis, 2019, p. 161), that is, narratively constructed affective situations that perform sexual drug effects and experiences. This destabilises the notion that drugs create stable, uniform, unidirectional, chemical forces that alter the body and its faculties in predictable ways. Instead, following Maryon McDonald, a substance "…is always the cultural values invested in it" (McDonald, 1994, p. 18). In this context, it allows me to ask what user investments emerge, what the drug is imagined to be doing, and how both personal biography and investments in sexual futures are written into eventful attention. Looking for ascription of agency to porn representations, drugs, and commenters, the analysis follows recent critical drug scholarship by attending to "…the forms of agency that emerge from particular arrangements of human and nonhuman actants" (Race et al., 2021, p. 4). Drawing from this, I focus on the ways the commenters position themselves and their erotic attachments in relation to the spectacle observed

in the videos, on what effects drugs are imagined to have, and what sexual and practical agencies are ascribed to human and drug actants.

MATERIAL AND ETHICS

The material consists of an archive of 450 comments relating to 41 chemsex-related videos found on Pornhub in June and July of 2019. The video sample was assembled through a series of interface "walk-throughs" (Light et al., 2018) designed to reveal emergent aspects of chemsex aesthetics in conjunction with the interface's algorithmically produced presentation of content, which contributes to such assemblage. By systematically going through and noting affordances, site structure, as well as content types, and my initial understanding of their logic and cultural significance, I familiarised myself with the ways the interface surfaced content. Using keyword searches for "chemsex," the algorithmic "related searches" engine would suggest related vernacular. In the process of reviewing and surveying the video archives it produced, I collected videos based on both perceived tendencies and variations in aesthetic and narrative expression. In turn, the related user comments to these videos were identified, collected, and interpreted through a series of open and closed codings. The legal and ethical aspects of collecting data online were discussed with the University Data Officer. Together, we formulated strategies for collecting, storing, analysing, and ultimately deleting data, informed by the EU GDPR framework. Collecting and analysing social media user activity is widespread in internet studies, with its ethical implications a source of recurring discussion. As noted in the Association of Internet Researchers' influential recommendation for ethical decision-making (Markham & Buchanan, 2012), collecting highly sensitive data (relating to the sexual matters of a minority group) without consent heightens the requirements for both data management and the distribution of value to this group. In other words, the value of the research should arguably not only be general, but also directly benefit the people and publics it represents. I argue that this article's systematised insights into this form of sexuality and drug use provide such directed value simply by giving one of the few detailed descriptions of a phenomenon whose logics are rarely interrogated openly. Thus, it provides a touch point for such cultures and practices to understand and make sense of themselves, which is otherwise systematically suppressed by the illegality of their intoxication preferences and by the relative taboo of homosexuality. The collection of data poses little risk to individuals whose comments are included, as it is already pseudonymised and has been further anonymised by removing the usernames as soon as data analysis completed.

The article construes the comments as emerging from "real people", that is, non-coordinated text written by individuals with no other agenda than simply participating or expressing themselves. This is ultimately a fallible assumption, as internet scholarship has shown how online publics can often be manipulated. In this context automated and semi-automated commenting from bots is of most relevance. Both social media and dating apps are riddled with bot activity (Harrison, 2017; Pilipets et al., 2024) aimed at shaping discourse or extracting value (selling products, scamming), making it hard to distinguish between human and non-human activity. The data might very well have bots participating. Indeed, the simple affective expressions present in the material could conceivably have been produced by bots. However, the incentive for any external entity to do so in this context is minimal, as individual uploaders of DIY porn have little economic incentive in driving traffic or changing user perceptions through manipulation. Notably no invitations to off-site activity are present in the material. Moreover, the more complex comments upon which the main thrust of the article's argument relies are sufficiently intricate, specific, and consistent to warrant the assumption that they are predominantly authored by humans. The consistency that makes the formation of themes possible, seems then to reveal a systemic truth, rather than a conspiracy of bot interference. Thus, I think that the reliability of the analysis is not significantly weakened by this theoretical issue of data contamination.

The dataset was extracted via an R script. The collected comments were left unedited. The typos and the heavy use of chemsex vernacular interfere significantly with legibility for most readers, including myself. I present them as is, with accompanying explanations and interpretations. Arguably, this illegibility is a feature of the digital chemsex public, and presenting it verbatim not only maintains data transparency but also might reflect the "messy" affective and cognitive state of the commenters. While I refrain from speculating further about any direct causes of such opacity in discourse, its affective thrust will be included in my more-than-representational analyses. Themes emerged from several rounds of both inductive and abductive coding.

COUNTERPUBLIC SEXUAL PLEASURES

The comments relate to the chemsex video content in rather enthusiastic and personal ways:

> I don't pnp [party 'n play] myself but it's hot watching guys bb [bareback, anal, condomless sex] under the influence. Even the editing is druggy

> Ur hot as fuck man! Vers here and would love to have my 1st time pnp with a sexy white fucker like yourself! Ever fuck blk guys? Post most videos already!

> You are the pnp amature fuck of all times. Award winner!

Speaking in the first person and disclosing personal preferences, experiences, and wishes pull the videos into the personal sphere. While representations of illicit drug use in popular culture mostly portray them as having negative consequences, the comments remain overwhelmingly positive, with almost no discourse of worry or rejection. As such, the distribution and social, anonymous, or pseudonymous consumption of chemsex porn on Pornhub operates as a relatively expansive space for expressing and sharing erotic fantasies. This may stem from the erotic example set by the video, combined with the low risk of social consequences afforded by online anonymity, which allows commenters to bypass the typical scripts of risk and moral judgment.

While Pornhub enables people without physical chemsex experience to encounter its digital instantiations (Møller, 2021), for those with personal experience with sexualised use of crystal meth, GHB, or mephedrone, these videos can activate drug memories and sensations. Consider the following comments:

> i love the Feeling and after every slam [drug injection] I get a really whore

> i domt klnow this is me biuty meth or stine i can even feel thickles

> i still remember my first high. being a bottom, i went crazy mad for the dick. there is nothing quite like your first high. ever.

> Love the rush and it makes me so horny, can not say no to anything when I am wired

> Love that feeling after, cock starts twitching, and you just get so fucking horny

From presumably watching the videos, the biographical chemsex experience of the commenters seems triggered, making it felt through "thickles." I read the many typos as reflecting the chemically-induced sensorial, bodily, and cognitive changes that sustain the heightened erotic capacities that motivate the comment in the first place. Continuing Dennis's use of Massumi's affect theory (2002) to think about triggers, the chemsex videos seem to call drug-using habits "into eventful attention" (Dennis, 2019, p. 161). As such, the engagements with chemsex porn at once produce a shared generalised erotic chemsex imaginary and make personal sexualised drug use experiences and affective memories visible. Compared to other media infrastructures, Pornhub's social media functionalities provide expansive social space for nonnormative thinking and feeling. Its socio-technical infrastructure allows the erotic orientations and

narratives of the commenters to divest from scripts of respectability and morality that typically attach to both queer bodies and intoxication practices. What emerges is the possibility for a chemsex counterpublic to form around the narrative construction and appreciation of drug effects on sex. However, this is not to say that this public is formed independently from normative scripts of sexuality and drug use; rather, following Warner, its erotic narratives should be seen as direct responses to such pressures, even when they are not directly acknowledged. This narrative work will be the subject of the following section.

ASSIGNING SEXUAL AGENCY TO DRUGS

Some comments go beyond mere recognition and appreciation of drugs and their effects, to play with the relationship between body, drug, and intoxicated pleasures. One commenter writes: "I remember when I had a man who would have me sucking on that glass pipe and then blow on his dick." The crystal meth smoke enveloping the penis can be read as a gesture of chemically enhanced submission and worship, with the act of blowing smoke both evoking the drug effects on the blowing subject (as it exits the body) and the intent of symbolically transferring its pleasures. The blowing of crystal meth smoke on the penis thus symbolically performs a *transfer* of erotic appreciation, which bypasses the typical human embodiments of its capacities. The airborne drug helps to make the materiality of breath visible, which can then contribute to a visual economy of affective exchange.

The way drugs materially flow through the body and affect its chemistry is also subject to eroticisation. When one comments, "I would totally take his chemmed up load, too!" it performs a fantasy of drug-sperm *infusion* that further intensifies the symbolic charge of semen transfer, a charge that Tim Dean famously argues underpins a type of gay "brotherhood" and even kinship (Dean, 2009). Drug effects are thus narratively instated through the symbolic infusion of physical smoke fumes, which make visible and transferable capacities for chemical bodily alteration.

The grammatically incorrect sentence "…in testicles, rock smoke would blow" almost poetically conveys a pleasure practice in which crystal meth smoke can operate "inside" testicles, with it being entirely unclear exactly what entity is doing the "blowing." Thus, it imagines crystal meth smoke as not merely acting upon a body's erotic orientation but in fact without a "host body." The smoke emerges as having an erotic orientation and intention itself, thus transcending its physical properties and instating its appreciation of *other* bodies by acting upon them. The symbolic transfer of chemical effects from one body to another through creative readings of porn performances speaks to a certain closeness between drugs and their users in the comments. As such, drug narratives may operate in symbolic registers, openly rejecting any claim to realism. This creates the narrative possibility for placing drug effects outside, but in relationship to, the body in a way that I will call "chemical companionship":

> see how he has that ass up at 2.20, I me waiting for that dick. Tina [crystal meth] and I. Hot Hot video
>
> METH AND I WOULD SUCK HIS DICK ANYDAY! HOT MOTERFUCKER!

In the discursive alignment between subjects and drugs ("Tina and I," "METH AND I"), the drug takes on something akin to personhood. Crystal meth receives agency and permanence that go beyond the role of an intermediary (Latour, 2005) between people. This recalls Dennis's finding that some heroin users will make sense of their habitual relationship to drugs as "friendship" (Dennis, 2019, p. 154). Such friendships are played out with great intensity in the comments. Discursively, crystal meth is placed within the scene as a sensing entity along with the person, thereby being granted affectability, embodied permanence ("waiting for that dick"), and sexual desire to "Suck his cock." This human-chemical friendship is seemingly organised around a shared longing for the sexual pleasures of engaging with

other men. In this narrative, the person looking at porn is not alone in their desire practice; they can establish a social chemical companionship through commenting. This arguably eases the pressure of the stigma associated with porn consumption as a lesser-than version of "real" human sexual contact. Even more so, it may work to redirect the normative pressure of understanding drugs as effectuating mental and social deroutes.

Risks are not removed but remain present in the narratives as crystal meth acts as a playful "buddy" that might get the commenter in trouble. Assigning corporality to crystal meth enables it to operate as a companion with which (or rather, whom) pleasure can be sought out. Therefore, the companionship model does not exactly ignore notions of risk and harm, but in placing it in a body of its own, makes the responsibilities for potential harm fall back on this "chemical buddy" and, in turn, less so on the person taking them, who merely operates as a "partner in crime." As such, its counterpublic (Warner, 2002) erotics are partly drawn from the same opposition to danger that normatively attaches to drug use.

What emerges is a human-chemical relationship of mutuality, in which neither is subordinated to the effects or in control of the other. The chemical companionship narrative script works to preemptively avoid the labelling of drug relations as "addicted," a labelling that would diminish and devalue the pleasures otherwise made available in the chemical encounter. Instead, chemsex drugs become "playmates", a complicit sexual partner. The chemical companionship compounds the more-than-human sociality of mediated engagement in which commenters place themselves in affective proximity to the porn scene and its actors, adding a complicit chemical presence that works to validate the erotic charge. This ultimately expands and complicates the social relations from being between commenters and audiovisual content to being one between crystal meth, commenters, porn scene, and its performers, which in turn, allows the commenter to take pleasure in chemsex imaginaries by making themselves immune to impending moral judgment.

As such, we may understand the mobilisation of chemical companionship as trying to resolve the resistance to drug use installed in normative subjectivity by way of creating erotic relationships with the drug itself. By granting it permanence and agency, the narrative substitutes medico-chemical characterisation with human traits of interests and sociability, thus bypassing the notion of drug use as always only incapacitating. The chemical companion narrative imagines drug effects as residing in a chemical body with which the human body can venture off in search of pleasure. As such, the narrative helps the commenters break through the confinement imposed by the agential dichotomy that so dominates drug discourse, enabling its wielders to perform and appreciate new ways for drugs to participate in gay sex.

I have demonstrated how drug effects are narrated in such ways that their normative transgression can be fetishised and erotically consumed while remaining safely distanced from addiction narratives. Thus, the digital drug effects provide a deterritorialising effect in gay porn's play with hegemonic erotic imaginaries. It would be a mistake to assume that drug effects operate in a vacuum or somehow supersede or overrule the sexual cultures in which they intervene.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This article has approached the narrative and affective work in commenting publics to chemsex videos on Pornhub as zones of exchange in which chemsex imaginaries emerge in exchanges between bodies and crystal meth, between porn representations and its audience experiences and fantasies, and between gay cultural scripts and personal chemical biography. The analysis has shown how porn tube platforms can be rich sites for exploring erotic imaginaries, not least for a sexualised intoxication practice that is otherwise mostly made sense of in terms of health promotion. Different drug effects have been identified, ranging from appreciations of their intensities that are relatively unmarked by normative evaluation to complex

agential dispersions of agency across humans and chemicals (chemical companionship), which mediate normative danger narratives with pleasure.

The chemical companionship narrative emerges as a particularly inventive configuration of power and drugged pleasure. Placing the drug effects outside the body arguably makes it harder to read the characters and, in turn, the narrator as "addicted." So, while the companionship model is clearly "transgressive," it is so in surprising ways. Rather than ignoring the social circumstances that place it outside the charmed circle (Rubin, 1984), it seems to mediate moral concerns in ways that seek to minimise the subject's accountability to a moral standard not set by them. It operates as a novel way for a counterpublic sexual public to form around nonnormative pleasures. Understanding normativity as present within all subjects enables us to make sense of this. Sexual counterpublics do not consist of subjects outside hegemonic sexual normativity, but of the repetition of speech that allows pleasures to be had despite the moral judgments that subjects carry with them.

The, at the time, seemingly unrestricted social discourse creates a sprawling interrogation of what intoxicated arousal feels like. It also shows that drugs are used to make something possible, to expand the gay erotic experience to include more people/bodies/orientations, and to work around the moral roadblocks that make erotic notions difficult to access. Thus, it takes part in gay people's sexual experimentation (Pienaar et al., 2020a, 2020b). The intensity and frivolity of discourse align with previous studies of chemsex that find that the consumption of chemsex imaginaries in digital spaces signifies an overflow of erotic charge (Møller, 2020). However, recent critical chemsex scholarship has reignited discussions between STS and ANT about the role and malleability of affect (Race et al., 2021) in networked analysis. Here, I would argue that the data also reveals that drugs do not operate as unmalleable forces that freely amplify preexisting sexual orientations. Instead, the comments reveal how drug effects are themselves brought into eventful attention in strategic ways. Most clearly, the companionship model of such eventuation is shaped by hegemonic notions of "good sexuality." Such production is not a mundane achievement but must be understood in relation to the the array of forces that work to suppress such pleasure practice, most notably the general deplatformisation of sexuality and the illegalisation and social stigma of drug use. On one level, then, networked chemsex publics pose as simple affective overflows and amplifications of gay sexuality, enabled by the expansiveness of this digital social space. On another level, however, the very expression of drugged pleasure emerges in conversation with the hegemonic sexuality.

The study has several limitations, of which the role of race is perhaps most pertinent. Whiteness operates as a default in gay porn (Mercer, 2017b, p. 147), and in the case of chemsex, Mahawatte argues for the "… the implicit 'entribing' of the white-raced body as the beneficiary of the chemsex party scene" (Mahawatte, 2021, p. 3). While there was little mention of race in the comments, the data would have benefitted from a more careful consideration of how the racial signifiers in the videos create the backdrop for the identified erotisations of drug use. This would allow a better understanding of how chemsex is imagined to afford social and sexual mobility, and how that is racially distributed.

Digital space has changed "the terms through which people and things associate" (Race, 2018, p. 20). The study adds to critical chemsex research by examining another way in which chemsex is a highly mediated phenomenon. Pornhub (and other tube sites) have shaped chemsex by allowing commenters to create sexual publics around the relatively free and expansive production of drug narratives. Paradoxically, the colonisation by big tech companies of online social space (Couldry & Mejias, 2019) has both created the conditions for the rise and fall of the phenomenon that the data observes. It is, in some ways, the pinnacle of what early internet scholarship observed: that digital platforms can create opportunities to produce more expansive social spaces, enabling minoritised, stigmatised, and illegalised practices and

subjectivities to operate. The presence of comments that simply appreciate and rehearse drug pleasures represented in porn supports the analysis that normativity holds less power in these digital spaces.

At the same time, the advancement of these very digital infrastructures has created business incentives that underpin the deplatformisation that has (at the time of writing) cast all but the most vanilla networked sexual publics aside. With the ongoing deplatformisation restricting sexual speech acts, sexual publics are disappearing from digital culture. The opportunities for nonnormative sexuality, as explored by the surveyed commenting public, are primarily predicated on access to social media that a) allow anonymity and b) allow sexual content. With more social media platforms employing increasingly sex-negative moderation policies (Tiidenberg & Nagel, 2020), the ability for any form of sexual expression is significantly lowered, not least those that are sexually or chemically nonnormative. All things equal, our ability to interrogate other configurations of sex beyond the charmed circle is weakened.

Research on digital queer sexuality might have to contend with the fact that a more equitable and expansive digital terrain is not in our immediate future. The repression of online sexual discourse represents an apparent setback for sexual liberation. Sexualised drug use does, of course, not entirely depend on our ability to form digital publics around their pleasures. However, with the weakening ability to represent and make sense of it socially, the negotiation of its ethos and value within gay sexual culture and identity stands to be weakened. From a health equity perspective, the suppression of sexual publics that are culturally stigmatised limits the ability of sexual health organisations to initiate and target harm reduction that supports these at-risk populations. The platform economy is not going away anytime soon, so new networked gay sexual publics will undoubtedly emerge in digital terrains that manage to evade the scrutiny of datafied heteronormative platform governance. Gay sexual history has seen its share of spatial creativity and under-the-radar sexual practices, and the waves of deplatformisation reconfigure the spatial conditions in which such counter-public tactics are invented.

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