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Engaging with motherhood and parenthood: A commentary on the social science drugs literature

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ABSTRACT

The majority of qualitative social scientific research on the topic of parenthood and substance use focuses on mothers who use illicit drugs and their experiences of social marginalization and stigmatization. This commentary argues that new and important insights might be gained about parenting in the context of substance use by engaging more closely with everyday experiences of mothering and with contemporary theorising around motherhood and parenthood. Drawing on recent sociological studies of family life influenced by late-modern individualism and by new expert attention on the quality of parent-child relationships, the commentary proposes directions for future social research on the identities and experiences of mothers and fathers who use alcohol and other drugs.

Introduction

Research on mothers and fathers who use alcohol and other drugs suggests that they often face unique dilemmas and challenges compared to their non-parent counterparts. For example, while care and concern for children can be a powerful motivation to engage with drug treatment professionals or to seek other sources of support (Copeland, 1998; Klee, 2002b; Lundgren, Schilling, Fitzgerald, Davis, & Amodeo, 2003; Mitchell, Severtson, & Latimer, 2008; Simpson & McNulty, 2008), fears of custody loss and other factors, like the incompatibility between the structure and organization of services and family life, are often significant barriers to care (Chandler et al., 2013; J. Fraser, 1997; Fraser & valentine, 2008; Harris & McElrath, 2012; Jessup, Humphreys, Brindis, & Lee, 2003; McMahon, Winkel, Suchman, & Luthar, 2002; Milligan et al., 2011; Stengel, 2014; Stewart, Gossop, & Trakada, 2007). Insofar as it examines how social contexts mediate parents' experiences of both substance use and access to services and supports, qualitative social scientific alcohol and other drugs research helps us better understand these realities for mothers and fathers who use alcohol and other drugs. The aim of this commentary is to offer a brief synthesis of this research and to propose some directions for future studies.

The vast majority of qualitative social scientific research on the topic of parenthood and substance use focuses on the experiences of mothers who use illicit drugs and who live in western societies. I demonstrate that these studies call attention to common experiences of stigmatization and social marginalization, and how both are shaped by normative expectations of women as mothers, but do not often look closely at everyday experiences of mothering or engage with contemporary theorising around motherhood and parenthood. I argue that doing both might help better inform explorations of parenting in the context of substance use. Drawing on recent sociological studies of contemporary family life, I propose that social scientists begin to ask different questions about the kinds of dilemmas and challenges that mothers and parents who use alcohol and other drugs face, suggesting that this might, in turn, yeild new insights about how services and supports for them might be improved.

Combating stigma and social marginalization: Established approaches to motherhood in the social science drugs literature

Being a mother comes with normative expectations that are widely considered incompatible with illicit drug use— a fact, according to the social scientific literature, that has a powerful impact on the identities and experiences of mothers who use illicit drugs. A number of these studies highlight the moral condemnation directed at this group because they are perceived to transgress both gender norms— due to the link between femininity and motherhood— and a socially-sacralised relationship of trust and dependency with their children (Boyd, 1999; Campbell & Ettorre, 2011; Campbell, 1999; Ettorre, 1992; Murphy & Rosenbaum, 1999; Simmat-Durand, 2007; Young, 1994). Many also demonstrate that mothers who use illicit drugs share the same beliefs about motherhood as their non-drug-using counterparts, and value being mother as a means of fulfilling normative feminine virtues (Radcliffe, 2009; also see Kearney, Murphy, & Rosenbaum, 1994; King, Ross, Bruno, & Erickson, 2009). While this can be a powerful motivation to seek drug treatment and/or make positive lifestyle changes (Banwell, 2003; Brudenell, 1997; King et al., 2009; Martin, 2011; Silva, Pires, Guerreiro, & Cardoso, 2013; Taylor, 1993), it can also be a tremendous source of guilt and shame (Colten, 1982; Couvrette, Brochu, & Plourde, 2016; Holland, Forrester, Williams, & Copello, 2013; Klee, 2002a; Rhodes, Bernays, & Houmoller, 2010; Rosenbaum, 1981). The struggle to overcome stigma, to see oneself— and to be seen by others— as worthy of motherhood— is thus a common experience for mothers who use illicit drugs and a frequent theme in the social scientific literature (Murphy & Rosenbaum, 1999; Radcliffe, 2009, 2011).

Another experience shared by many mothers who use illicit drugs, according to the social science literature, is social marginalization. Numerous studies demonstrate that such women often live in difficult life circumstances that include poverty, homelessness, estrangement from family and/or lack of other social supports and that these forms of

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relative deprivation make it difficult, if not impossible, to live up to dominant mothering standards and expectations (Baker & Carson, 1999; Banwell & Bammer, 2006; Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Maher, 2000; Murphy & Rosenbaum, 1999). Studies also demonstrate that very limited appropriate social supports are available to mothers who use illicit drugs (Kearney et al., 1994; Klee, 2002a; Mulia, 2002; Rosenbaum & Irwin, 2000) and that when they do engage with such supports, they are subject to the scrutiny of professionals who too-often assume they are unfit mothers, regardless of their actual mothering practices and regardless of the historical and/or structural impediments that they may face in caring for their children (Benoit et al., 2014; Campbell, 1999; Ettorre, 1992; Leppo & Perälä, 2009; Leppo, 2013; Olsen, 2015; Paltrow, 1998; Stokes & Schmidt, 2011; Toscano, 2005). That mothers who use illicit drugs face such hardship rarely lessens their "merciless judgement" by the press, the law and the public (Klee, 2002b, p. 5).

Less often explored in-depth in the social science literature, however, are mothers who use illicit drugs' experiences *as* mothers— that is, their everyday mothering practices, their relationships with their children, or the influence of both on their identities. Several studies examine the maternal identities of women who use illicit drugs (Baker & Carson, 1999; Banwell, 2003; Grundetjern, 2018; King et al., 2009; Martin, 2011; Radcliffe, 2009, 2011), but these studies often concentrate either on how women attempt to *represent* their mothering practices as consonant with the "good mother" ideal or on the influence of activities (e.g. engaging in drug treatment) and relationships (e.g. with health and welfare professionals), other than those directly related to childrearing. Conversely, studies that specifically examine the mothering practices of women who use illicit drugs (Baker & Carson, 1999; Carlson, Matto, Smith, & Eversman, 2006; Kearney et al., 1994; Klee, 1998; Richter & Bammer, 2000) tend to highlight the strategies that they use to protect their children from harm and fulfill their practical needs, or the struggles that they face in this regard. These studies demonstrate that women who use drugs can and often do effectively care for their children, but focus on specific kinds of (drug-related, harm-reducing) mothering practices and generally do not engage with the question of identity.

Social scientists also do not often consider how the normative expectations that shape the identities and experiences of mothers who use illicit drugs might vary across different contexts or change over time. Variations of the following description of the "good mother" ideal are common in the social science drugs literature:

> A good mother is thoughtful, altruistic, patient, devoted to her children, and fulfilled by her mothering role. She sets her own goals and interests aside, devotes herself entirely to her children, and does not make life choices that may impede her children's development. For a woman, raising children becomes a time-consuming, emotionally draining and labor-intensive practice (Couvrette et al., 2016, p. 292).

This passage is based on a collection of critical feminist writing about motherhood as a social construct published during the 1990s (e.g. Hays, 1998; Marshall, 1991; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991) that continues to be widely cited today. With a few exceptions (Banwell & Bammer, 2006; Grundetjern, 2018),[1] studies of drug-using mothers have not engaged with more current writing on motherhood or parenthood, a tendency that contrasts markedly with related research on pregnancy and substance use (e.g. Bridges, 2012; Ettorre, 2007; Knight, 2015; Leppo, 2013; Salmon, 2011). Perhaps due to a commitment to advocating for better supports for mothers who use illicit drugs and countering their stigmatization, the emphasis is often instead on the circumstances that make it challenging for women who use illicit drugs to live up dominant mothering standards and expectations, as the conclusion to Murphy and Rosenbaum's influential study (1999) illustrates:

> Our interviewees' mothering standards and values resonated with those of most American mothers: mothers should protect their children from harm, keep them fed, warm, presentably dressed, and clean; and see that they are educated, prepared for the work world, and shown right from wrong. These goals are a tall order, however, under conditions of lifelong victimization; lack of skills and education; unplanned childbearing; single parenting; violent and unsafe housing; and scarcity of resources not only for children's play and learning but for basics, such as food, clothing and shelter (pp. 135–136).

In short, the social science literature to date offers many important insights about mothers who use illicit drugs' common experiences of stigmatization and social marginalization; less attention has been given to everyday mothering practices and how the mothering norms that shape these practices might have evolved in recent years. This may have paradoxically limited our appreciation of mothers who use substances' complex and varied life experiences. In particular, the existing literature may not have entirely done justice to what Wilson, Cunningham-Burley, Bancroft, & Backett-Milburn, 2012, p. 125) describe as "the haunting power of cultural ideals of family and the emotional significance […] of the absence"— or presence— "of expected family practices" in drug-using mothers' lives, which can be inferred from studies demonstrating the devastating impact of custody loss on this group (Broadhurst & Mason, 2013; Nixon, Radtke, & Tutty, 2013). The same might be said of recent studies that include the perspectives of fathers who use illicit drugs and/or examine the use of other substances, like medically-prescribed opiate substitutes, in the context of family life (Chandler et al., 2013, 2014; Olsen, 2015; Rhodes et al., 2010; Wolf & Chávez, 2015). These studies also largely focus on the struggle to be seen and to see oneself as a "good parent," rather than on parents' feelings toward, or relationships with, their children *per se*.

For social scientists to offer additional insight into substance-using parents' experiences as parents is vitally important, given that other disciplines, like social work, which tend to adopt an individualizing problem-orientation, continue to dominate the literature on more "difficult" family experiences. It is also important given the additional meaning that family relationships may have for people, like illicit drug users, who experience social marginalization (Wilson et al., 2012, p. 111). One of the ways in which this effort could be enhanced is by engaging with more diverse and contemporary theoretical perspectives on contemporary motherhood and parenthood. As Barker and Hunt (2004) suggest with reference to the drugs and family literature, such an engagement has the potential not only to improve our understanding of substance-using parents' lives, but may also assist with the development of more innovative policy and social supports. Moreover, it is important for the social science drugs literature on parents to be theoretically innovative, like scholarship elsewhere in the field (e.g. Duff, 2008; Fraser, Moore, & Keane, 2014; Hughes, 2007; Vitellone, 2010; Weinberg, 2002). To assist with this task, and to help better capture current cultural ideals of family and the way they inform substance-using parents' experiences, the following section highlights some recent sociological scholarship on the meaning and significance of having a child in contemporary western societies. It draws attention in particular to new expert knowledge about parent-child relationships and the anxieties generated by late-modern individualism.

The emotionally engaged, authentic parent: Sociological perspectives on contemporary family life

Contemporary sociological writing on the family suggests that childhood— and thus parenthood— has become "the most intensely governed sector of personal existence" in western societies and cultures

[1] These studies observe that "good motherhood" now also includes successfully balancing care for children with career achievements.

(Rose, 1999, as cited in Macvarish et al., 2014, p. 77). Ensuring the wellbeing of children has long justified expert and state attention and intervention into the realm of parenting, but, according to a number of sociologists, both have intensified in recent years (Chadwick & Foster, 2014; Daly, 2013b; Furedi, 2008; Gillies, 2008; Godderis, 2010; Kanieski, 2010; Lee, 2014; Lee, Macvarish, & Bristow, 2010; Scott, Jackson, & Backett-Milburn, 1998). Some suggest that two, key developments have brought this shift about: That more and more aspects of modern life are considered risky, particularly for children— evident in the extensive policy and expert attention now given to children's play and eating habits, for example (Fraser, Maher, & Wright, 2010; Frohlich, Alexander, & Fusco, 2012; Lee et al., 2010; Scott et al., 1998)— and neoliberal governments' abandonment of social policies and programs that attempt to address social problems as rooted in systematic, structurally engrained inequalities (Edwards, Gillies, & Horsley, 2015; Gillies, 2005; Lee, 2014). In this context,

> [T]he minutiae of parent-child relations become a far greater preoccupation. Limiting risk becomes the dominant substitute for efforts to bring about purposeful change, and exerting control over an area of life where it seems most possible to do so arguably attains far greater attention than in the past (Lee, 2014, p. 72).
>
> In other words, governments and experts are now more preoccupied with parenting than ever before because, lacking faith and investment in more "social solutions," they portray parenting (in policy, research and advice) to be the single most important cause of children's future life chances (Lee et al., 2010, p. 295).[2]

Sociologists also observe that the expanding field of "parenting expertise" and parent-focused government policies convey very specific ideas about *how* parents determine their children's success and wellbeing later in life (Broer & Pickersgill, 2015; Blum & Fenton, 2016; Faircloth, 2014; Kanieski, 2010; Lawler, 2000; Lee, 2014; Lowe, Lee, & Macvarish, 2015; Macvarish et al., 2014; Thornton, 2011; Wastell & White, 2012). These studies highlight the influence of scientific disciplines like neuroscience, neuropsychology and psychology, which hold that quality of parental nurturing, particularly in the first years of a child's life, is formative (Edwards et al., 2015; Kanieski, 2010; Lee, 2014). Specifically, some note that neuroscientific research on infant brain development has permeated the influential view, already established by psychology, that parental love and parent-child "attachments" are critical to children's emotional, cognitive and social development (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013, as cited in Edwards et al., 2015; Thornton, 2011). As a result, "children and people generally are posed as comprised by their brains and parents as rearing the brains" (Edwards et al., 2015, p. 174) by forming close, emotional bonds with their children (Kanieski, 2010; Thornton, 2011). In other words, it is not parenting in general that is now believed to determine children's future life chances, but the strength and quality of parents' *relationships* with their children. Moreover, parents' ability to form such relationships is now thought to depend on adopting appropriate (i.e. expert-sanctioned) knowledge and skills, rather than being "natural" or "instinctive" (Lee, 2014, p. 74).

Several studies examine how the focus on parent-child relationships has shifted perceptions of motherhood in particular, given that women continue to do a disproportionate amount of both the emotional and practical work involved in caring for infants and young children and that "parenting" advice and expertise continues to predominantly address mothers (Blum, 2007; Daly, 2013a; Faircloth, 2011; Kanieski, 2010; Lawler, 2000; Thornton, 2011; Valencia, 2015; Wall, 2010). Lawler (2000) argues, for example, that contemporary mothering is increasingly conceptualized as the work of cultivating the unique "selves" of children. She attributes this to the expansion of the "psy complex"— the disciplines of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy and the helping professions— and the relentless scrutiny of the self that it incites. This has generated a general cultural preoccupation with self-help and personal growth, which, according to Lawler, dovetail perfectly with the central tenets of late-modern, "enterprise" capitalism: Active self-motivation, personal responsibility and the freedom to realise one's chosen objectives and aims (Keat 1991, as cited in Lawler, 2000, p. 72). In this context, Lawler argues, our parents, especially our mothers, have become the key identifying referents in the journey to discover our "true" selves. Correspondingly, the "good mother" is now she who fosters her child's ability to be him or herself— that is, an autonomous, self-actualizing individual.

Thornton (2011) makes similar observations in her analysis of what she calls "back-to-basics" mothering advice, which recommends emotional attachment and bonding with one's baby as a set of practices that will produce emotionally healthy children— defined primarily in terms of self-confidence and emotional adaptability (Thornton, 2011, p. 417). Like Lawler, Thornton points to the correspondence between these ideas and the "entrepreneurial models of self-conduct" promoted in neoliberal societies and cultures (Thornton, 2011, p. 401). She also considers this advice relative to previous models of mothering, namely the "socialization" model, which focused on guiding children into predetermined paths, teaching them to conform to social norms via practices like precise scheduling and strict discipline, and according to which "too much motherly love could have devastating effects" (Thornton, 2011, p. 406). In contrast, child development experts' current advice to mothers is now "emotion-centric"; it asserts that what children need is, "in fact, not regular scheduling or lessons in conformity, but an outpouring of motherly love and affection" (Thornton, 2011, p. 407). Influenced by both attachment theory and neuroscientific research on infant brain development, "back-to-basics" mothering advice stresses that love, care, and affection are critical for babies' and children's emotional— and hence total— development (Thornton, 2011, p. 410).

Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that this intensification of expectations of women as mothers— to ensure not only their children's health, safety and security, but also their neurological development and thus future social and emotional wellbeing— has occurred at the same time as the vast majority of women of childbearing age have joined the paid workforce (Bell, McNaughton, & Salmon, 2009; Blum & Fenton, 2016; Faircloth, 2011; Kanieski, 2010; Lupton, 2011), with some suggesting that attachment parenting discourse, for example, constitutes a backlash against the freedoms gained by the feminist movement (Badinter, 2012). Others, like Thornton, point out that contemporary mothering discourse is all the more salient and productive because it valourizes women's freedom; it encourages them to self-optimize *through* the work of mothering (Thornton, 2011, p. 405). She highlights the ways in which advice given to mothers does not impel women them to conform to a social role that demands self-sacrifice, but encourages them to act out of their own desires, to "maximize their own pleasures and satisfactions in their relations with their infants, through their mothering" (Thornton, 2011, p. 415).

A different body of sociological work similarly suggests that ways of conceptualizing and practicing parenthood and motherhood have undergone significant transformation in recent years, but attributes this to large-scale social and economic changes occurring across western countries— such as increases in the number of women working outside of the home and the emergence of increasingly competitive and mobile labour markets (e.g. Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; Chambers, 2012; Esping-Andersen, 2016; McCarthy, Edwards, & Gillies, 2017; Miller, 2005; Smart, 2007; Smyth, 2016; Widmer & Jallinoja, 2008). Much of this work also engages with Anthony Giddens' (1991) and Ulrich Beck's influential (1992) characterization of late-modern societies as having undergone related processes of "detraditionalization" and "individualization"— that is, the giving way of traditional social roles

[2] As a result, "what were once considered banal, relatively unimportant private routines of everyday life for families […] have become the subject of intense debates about the effects of parental activities for the next generation of society as a whole" (Lee et al., p. 294).

pertaining to gender, family, and class identity and their associated codes of conduct to an "ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 165). According to some, these processes have brought about unprecedented changes to family life, particularly relationships between romantic partners, which are said to be more contingent now than ever before (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 2016; Giddens, 2013; Illouz, 2012; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). At the same time, people are said to rely more on their personal relationships to be a source of meaning and self-understanding, as result of their increasingly insecure attachments to other sources of personal identity, such as permanent, long-term employment (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Boltanski, 2013; Gabb, 2008; Miller, 2005; Villalobos, 2014, 2015).

One of the more compelling ideas to emerge from this literature is that having a child has assumed new symbolic significance for parents (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Gabb, 2008; Miller, 2005). As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) write: "The more other relationships become interchangeable and revocable, the more a child can become the focus of new hopes— it is the ultimate guarantee of permanence, providing an anchor for one's life" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, as cited in Gabb, 2008, p. 45). In other words, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that the parent-child relationship is the only relationship that one cannot "choose" to discontinue; parents thus consider their child(ren) their only reliable source of love, emotional security and lasting attachment (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 34–37; also see Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).[3] Others have similarly argued that contemporary parents' often intense emotional investments in their children— evident in descriptions of their feelings for their children as incomparable to those they have for anyone else, for example— is a means of situating the parent-child relationship outside of its wider social context, and thus claiming permanence for this relationship (Gabb, 2008, pp. 45–46). Some also suggest that seeking emotional intensity and meaning through their relationships with their children is a way in which some parents try to compensate for insecurity in the realms of both partnership and work (Bailey, 1999; Villalobos, 2014, 2015).

French sociologist, Luc Boltanski's (2013) recently translated sociological study of "engendering"— of "what happens when a woman finds herself pregnant" (2013, p. 7)— makes related claims about the significance of having a child in what he calls contemporary "connectionist" societies. Boltanski described "connectionist" societies as those in which individuals are primarily defined by the bonds that attach them to others and suggests that they produce two prevalent and contradictory anxieties: While we fear social exclusion more than anything else, we also worry that our connections to others will become too multiple and diffuse to be meaningful (p. 96–97). Becoming a parent, he argues, has become "a rampart against fragmentation, and constitutes one possible path in search of a more 'authentic' life" (p. 101). This is because we commonly perceive having a child as the creation of a bond that "lasts as long as lifetime;" according to Boltanski, it is precisely because it is difficult to disengage from this bond, as opposed to others, "that confers on it the property that is tacitly attributed to it of bringing forth something authentic" (p. 126). As he explains:

> In engendering, each actor is expected to reveal his or her most 'profound' (and thus most 'authentic') aspects, because once formed the project of having a child imposes itself on the will those who have entered into its contract and acts as a test on which 'one cannot cheat.'(p. 126-7).

[3] Importantly, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest that the pressure to adapt to post-industrial labour markets has contributed to this transformation (1995, 78-79, 102-103). They argue that the more difficult it is to have and raise children, the more "special" the parent-child relationship has become and, paradoxically, the more time, energy and thought parents feel that they must invest in this relationship.

The work of thinkers like Boltanski and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim differs from and overlaps with that outlined previously in important ways. Both suggest that parenting/ mothering is increasingly conceptualized as a singularly important set of activities, the aim of which is to form a close, emotional bond with one's child. While the latter frames this as an effect of expert discourse, the former suggests it is a product of relatively rapid social and economic transformations that have rendered children parents' most reliable sources of emotional and ontological security. It is important to note that the relative fragility of other intimate relationships is the subject of much debate in sociology (Jamieson, 1999; Pahl & Spencer, 2004; Smart, 2007); few question, however, that the emphasis on the enactment of individuality in late modern societies generates distinct anxieties about how to create and sustain both a sense of self and connections to others (e.g. Adams, 2006; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009; Ehrenberg, 2008; Honneth, 2004; Howard, 2007; Illouz, 2008; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2016). It may be that expert and government parenting discourse resonates the way that it does in contemporary culture because of these very anxieties. In other words, the growing social and cultural emphasis on the parent-child relationship— as an emotionally-intense bond of great consequence— may not be entirely government- and expert-driven, but also fuelled by a more general preoccupation with, and insecurities about, our attachments to others and thus our biographical continuity.

The identities and experiences of parents who use alcohol and other drugs: Possible new avenues of inquiry

According to the studies outlined in the previous section, "psy" and neuroscientific discourse, and the uncertainties generated by late-modern, neo-liberal social conditions have changed the meaning and significance of motherhood and parenthood. These studies suggest that children's emotional and social development— their future ability to be "themselves" and thus able to adapt to the demands of life in competitive late-capitalist societies— is now believed to depend on the strength and quality of their emotional attachments with their parents. They also suggest that the parent-child relationship is increasingly valourized as a unique, lasting bond due to the relatively difficulty of sustaining other personal relationships and sources of personal identity, and that parents increasingly conceptualize having a child as a means of realizing their own "authentic" selves. Both developments have had a particular impact on women as mothers, because the social organization of parenting continues to position them as the primary caregivers of children.

These ideas raise some new and important questions for future social scientific research on substance-using mothers and fathers. First, and perhaps most importantly, it may be important to consider if and how drug treatment and health care professionals assess the quality of parent-child attachments in families affected by substance use. The studies outlined above suggest that child development experts now stress the importance of parents' forging close, emotional bonds with their children, on the basis that such attachments are essential to children's emotional, cognitive and social development. It seems that these ideas are having an impact on social policy in places like the United Kingdom, where there is a growing emphasis on "early intervention" (Edwards et al., 2015; Macvarish et al., 2014) that disproportionately targets and affects women in their role as mothers and those who are disadvantaged or the heads of "socially excluded" families (Daly, 2013a; Gillies, 2008). Some also suggest that policy responses to parents found to be using drugs have become more punitive (Olsen, 2015) and that health and welfare practitioners may be placing greater emphasis on the quality of mother-child relationships in their assessments of substance-using mothers' parenting capacities (Benoit et al., 2014). Future studies may wish to consider how or if ideas about the importance of parent-child or mother-child attachments inform current social and health service delivery for pregnant women, mothers and parents who use substances.

Another question raised is whether mothers and fathers who use illicit drugs are facing different dilemmas— and engaging in new practices to attempt to resolve these dilemmas— in light of new ways of thinking about parents' roles in the lives of their children. Previous studies demonstrate that mothers who use illicit drugs share the same beliefs about their children's needs as their non-drug-using counterparts (Colten, 1982; Murphy & Rosenbaum, 1999; Taylor, 1993). The description of these beliefs provided in studies like Murphy and Rosenbaum's (1999) corresponds closely with the socialisation model of motherhood— that is, protecting children from harm, keeping them fed, warm, and clean, and seeing that they are properly disciplined and educated— a model which Thornton (2011) suggests has been replaced by the emotionally-engaged mother. While studies suggest that such models are always more closely aligned with middle- and upper-class women's mothering practices (Gillies, 2005; Lawler, 2000), it remains important to consider whether or how parents who use substances— who are often also socially marginalized— perceive themselves as meeting the emotional needs of their children, and how they negotiate and manage these self-expectations. Some recent studies have noted that the inability to "be there" for one's children as a central concern for many substance-using parents (Couvrette et al., 2016; Martin, 2011).

This relates to another possible new area of inquiry, which is how parents who use substances interpret engaging in drug treatment services and/or the attempt to disengage from substance use. Addiction is commonly perceived to be a condition in which one's self is lost, or rather, "hijacked" by the presumably overwhelming power of psychoactive substances (Carr, 2011; S. Fraser et al., 2014; Keane, 2002). Correspondingly, a particular idea often reinforced in drug treatment settings is that successful recovery depends on coming to terms with the "truth" about one's self (Carr, 2006, p. 636). It might be productive to consider how this idea dovetails with the view that having a child, and caring for that child, is a means of realizing one's "true" self, which scholars like Boltanski propose. Whether a dichotomy, between the "false" addict self and the "real" abstinent self-*as-parent* influences the self-perceptions of parents' attempting to disengage from substance use may also be worthy of exploration.

Finally, the existing literature suggests that substance-using women value being a mother because it presents them with an opportunity to re-align themselves with normative feminine virtues (Radcliffe, 2009; also see Kearney et al., 1994; King et al., 2009). While this is a compelling claim, the parent-child/ mother-child relationship is likely also personally meaningful in other important and socially-determined ways. According to several scholars, parents living in late-modern societies increasingly view this relationship as uniquely important because it is relatively permanent and stable; it is a bond that "lasts as long as lifetime" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Boltanski, 2013; Gabb, 2008; Villalobos, 2014, 2015). Forming such a bond may be all the more significant for people who use substances, given the common finding that they often experience social isolation and estrangement from family and other supports (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). Scholars may wish to ask whether, in addition to being an opportunity to adopt a normative social identity, having a child might also be interpreted and experienced as a means of generating a lasting attachment to another, the lack of which, some suggest, is a source of particularly acute social suffering in "connectionist" societies (Boltanski, 2013; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2016).

Conclusion

The existing social science literature offers a number of important insights about substance using mothers and fathers, namely that they share the same expectations of themselves as parents as their non-drug-using counterparts, but often struggle to live up to these expectations due to their relative social and economic deprivation, inadequate drug treatment services, and the coercive practices and judgemental attitudes of health and welfare professionals. The aim of this commentary has been to encourage social scientists working in the drug and alcohol field to engage more closely with substance-users' experiences of motherhood and/or parenthood and with more recent sociological scholarship on contemporary parenting ideals and expectations. In this discussion, I have focused on the ideal and practice of "authentic," emotionally-engaged mothering/parenting; new insights might also be gained from other scholarly disciplines or from other sociological studies— for example, those that explore how women reconcile their feminist values and/or desires for autonomy with contemporary mothering ideals and expectations (e.g. Glass, Hamilton, & Tebeck, 2014; Lupton & Schmied, 2002; Miller, 2005; Wall, 2010) and those that propose new theoretical approaches to motherhood and family life (e.g. Boyer & Spinney, 2016; Hird, 2007; Price-Robertson & Duff, 2018). Regardless, engaging more closely with substance-using parents' experiences *as parents* and giving due consideration to whether and how mothering and parenting norms might be changing, and thus reshaping these experiences, is a worthwhile endeavour. Doing so may not only strengthen our understanding of parenting in the context of drug and alcohol use, but may also offer new insights into the meaning, significance, and experience of mothering and parenting in contemporary western societies more generally.

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