



Review: Understanding and Controlling Drug Users

Reviewed Work(s): Trafficking in Drug Users: Professional Exchange Networks in the Control of Deviance. by James R. Beniger: Substance Abuse, Habitual Behavior, and Self-Control. by Peter K. Levison: Drug, Set, and Setting: The Basis for Controlled Intoxicant Use. by Norman E. Zinberg

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another school if there are no rational grounds for choice of a metatheory. The crucial problem of postpositivism is still theory choice, and the problem is still unsolved. ♠

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Understanding and Controlling Drug Users

Trafficking in Drug Users: Professional Exchange Networks in the Control of Deviance, by JAMES R. BENIGER. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. 227 pp. \$34.50 cloth.

Substance Abuse, Habitual Behavior, and Self-Control, edited by PETER K. LEVISON. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984. 178 pp. \$25.00 cloth.

Drug, Set, and Setting: The Basis for Controlled Intoxicant Use, by NORMAN E. ZINBERG. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. 277 pp. \$22.50 cloth.

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These three works are best discussed individually. Beniger's Rose monograph reports a network study addressing highly theoretical issues concerning the nature of social systems. Aside from one chapter that provides a good historical account of the growth of public concern with the drug epidemic that began in the sixties, the monograph contains nothing of great interest to drug specialists.

However, there is an excellent chapter that clearly describes the difference between two major types of social theory that could profitably be read by anyone. These are the purposive-action or utilitarian and autonomous-system or structural approaches. The first "views social phenomena as involving . . . actors, each possessing a set of interests and attempting to control a set of events in furtherance of those interests," and the second views social phenomena "as a set of abstractable variables, interrelated by . . . complex . . . causal relations, which are ordinarily in . . . equilibrium" (37).

By regarding the sudden emergence of the drug problem as an exogenous shock to a social system in approximate equilibrium, Beniger sets the stage for his attempt to reconcile the two theory types, as both predict attempts to contain the deviance. However, the "action approach cannot account for patterns of control required at the system level . . .

[and] the system approach . . . cannot account for [all?] individual motivations and behavior" that are required by the system for restoring control (42-43). Beniger employs informational feedback, as in control-systems engineering, to bridge the supposed gap.

In brief, he views drug referrals and information about drug use as commodities, exchanged between professions that require one or the other to enhance practitioners' careers. Information and advice pass downward from the medical and psychology professions and referrals of users pass upward from the education profession, with the social-service and counseling professions serving as a facilitating component in the middle. The shift of resources in the form of money at the macro-level thus triggers a scramble within professions for a share of the new resources, wherein competitors depend for their success on their degree of integration into the network of commodity flows between professions at the micro-level. Thus, the self-interested exchanges between individuals, governed by norms of reciprocity, aggregate into the system flows between professional sectors that are required for social control at the macro-level, and provide the means by which the needs of one sector determine action in some other sector.

Beniger tests his synthesis of the two ap-

proaches using surveys of professionals in two cities that were conducted just as public concern over the drug problem was peaking. Numerous analyses based on methods for analyzing flows within networks largely confirm his often subtle expectations. In these and other respects the author's capacity for integrating complex theory with complex data is impressive.

The book's technical and theoretical brilliance aside, I am troubled that it holds no substantive surprises. This lack of discovery suggests to me that the phenomena investigated may have been so heavily determined by commonsense causes, as in the case of some Guttman scales, that they are not helpful for resolving highly abstract theoretical issues. Moreover, network analyses, like sociometric data, may often tap into processes that are so familiar and ordained within any social system that the analyses merely substantiate the obvious. Although "the obvious" can be a focus of scientific controversy, and hence a productive topic for investigation, the substance of Beniger's study is uncontroversial. Partly for these reasons, I am bothered by the high success rate of the analyses. Ingenious questions addressed through esoteric analyses that so often succeed may disguise the fact that we are not really learning anything new about relatively commonplace phenomena. Instead, we may simply be viewing those phenomena through the lens of a new method, turned first one way and then another.

In my view, and Beniger's too (137), action theory is more accessible to empirical testing than structural theory, and hence in better scientific standing. So the most important question to put to Beniger's study may be: What does it do for structural theory? Beniger's strongest assertion in support of the value of structural theory is that macro-level control of deviance was an "unintended by-product of individual, self-interested behavior" (173). But he did not examine all of the relevant motives and intentions of his actors, many of whom were in socially oriented, therapeutic occupations, which are typically staffed by professionals selected for their ability to recognize and solve problems, including ones of coordination.

During the sixties, the *Berkeley Barb* published a gleeful cartoon showing a raging sea of "acid" lashing a crumbling coastline of institutional edifices bearing such labels as "religion" and "government." If a cartoonist could appreciate those implications, why not Beniger's professionals?

The five contributions in Levison's book are too varied to discuss together. There is a scintillating essay by Schelling on tactics of self-management and how they interact with reinforcement schedules and temporal shifts in motivational hierarchies that has obvious relevance to drug use. Behavioral geneticist McClearn describes an ingenious series of experiments on a genetically uniform strain of mouse that unlike other strains imbibes alcohol in large amounts, but never exclusively. Eventually, the strain's robust plateau of intake is traced to the accumulation of toxic metabolic products of alcohol in the bloodstream. There is also an eclectic discussion of sources of self-control in continued drug-use, by Rodin, Maloff, and Becker, that might have been more valuable had it been organized around the heuristic insights available from operant conditioning theory.

However, reliance on operant theory alone is not sufficient either. Acquaintance with the particulars of using a drug outside of the laboratory is necessary too. This principle is illustrated by the two remaining contributions, both from specialists in certain unusual aspects of operant conditioning produced within the laboratory.

The first, by Dews, concerns the maintenance of responding solely by self-inflicted noxious electric shock. Because other evidence shows that shocks are not positively reinforcing, and that animals will work to avoid them, their ability to maintain this behavior is considered paradoxical. Partly for this reason, and partly because special background schedules involving other reinforcers are required in preparation for eliciting shock-maintained responding, Dews refers to the responding as being maintained by "schedules." This usage differs from usual in its deemphasis of the role of reinforcement.

According to Dews, his demonstration of the power of schedules in paradoxical circumstances potentially accounts for prominent features of drug abuse: (a) the "irrationality of the activities" (51) in terms of costs and benefits; (b) the disparity between the apparently weak and transient psychopharmacological effects of street-quality heroin and users' heroic effort to obtain the drug; (c) the variety of substances abused; and (d) the fact that lengthy abuse can terminate. Note that only item (b) challenges a theory that includes positive reinforcement, and it fails to acknowledge that drug quality varies.

The second contribution, by Falk, proposes a different laboratory phenomenon as the

model for drug abuse. Again, behavioral excess is attributed to schedule parameters rather than to intrinsic properties of reinforcers. But, unlike Dews, who is a strict behaviorist, Falk finds support in intuition (104), which does not threaten his own interpretations. When an animal's body weight has been lowered by limiting food, and consummatory behavior is restricted to brief, spaced episodes, "adjunctive behavior" appears: responses to stimuli whose reinforcing properties alone cannot account for the behavior become highly probable. Conflict between equipotent escape and consummatory responses is regarded as the cause. Falk suggests that corresponding social conditions may account for drug abuse in urban ghettos. However, black/white ratios of heroin use and addiction seem consistent with black/white ratios for crime in general.

These are two complex models in search of applications. However, little evidence of their ecological validity beyond the laboratory is provided. Instead, Dews and Falk try to advance their case by alleging defects in the competing and simpler positive reinforcement model, whose literature they mainly ignore.

Despite their emphasizing the power of schedules, neither author accords intermittent positive reinforcement schedules due respect. Such intermittent schedules may account for occasional cases of abuse in which street drugs prove weak and in which withdrawal produces minimal symptoms. No one has claimed that the intensity of withdrawal necessarily indexes the history of reinforcement. Zinberg, for example, details cases of extended opiate use by individuals who manage to avoid physical dependence, and hence who would not suffer withdrawal. McAuliffe and I have shown that getting high only two to four times per week is sufficient to sustain daily use for a major subtype of street addict that we called "weekenders" (not chippers). Moreover, the range of rates was great. The ratio of getting high to doses taken is often much lower than commonly realized, and even occasional modest highs may prove sufficient, in some cases of prolonged exposure to an intermittent schedule, to sustain habit strength. These issues must be probed before noting supposed cases of pseudo-addiction and drawing sweeping conclusions from them. In some cases, reinforcement from some other source might sustain drug use, but that proves nothing about the potency of positive drug effects.

Zinberg's book challenges present drug

policy by claiming that controlled opiate use short of physical dependence is both possible and perhaps socially tolerable. Controlled and hence responsible use that does not interfere with an otherwise normal life might replace excessive use to a significant extent if only the rules and rituals employed by controlled users were studied and disseminated. Awareness of such rules and rituals often contributes to moderation among users of alcohol and among later cohorts of LSD users, for example.

To make his case, Zinberg, too, must devalue the intrinsic properties of drugs. First he erects a straw person by reviewing instances in which the reinforcing or addictive effects of various drugs may have been overblown. Because many different drugs are considered, the average impression formed may be more misleading for some drugs than others. Second, like Dews, he caricatures the positive reinforcement position: the 1974 article by McAuliffe and me "abounds with such words as 'euphoria,' 'high,' and 'pleasure,' and even compares the effect of the drug to a sexual orgasm" (28). So much for positive effects. We explicitly defined "euphoria" as a technical term for subjectively pleasurable feelings from opiates, which can vary in intensity, not as a label for the ultimate pleasure, as such ridicule might suggest. We cited Chesick's metaphorical term "pharmacogenic orgasm" as one of several synonyms in the literature for the acute reinforcement of the "rush," but opted to use Lindesmith's term "impact effect." Later, we placed the weekenders' seemingly low frequency of euphoria in proper perspective by comparing it to other familiar schedules, such as the average frequency of intercourse, of days off, and of wage payments. Finally, one addict was quoted who likened the motive for opiate use to that of other activities that make one "feel good," such as drinking and sex. As the "big O" is actually a "big R," this addict was merely trying to communicate the idea of positive reinforcement common to all three activities.

Zinberg is contradicted by his own interview excerpts, comments, cost-benefit comparisons, and data, which "abound" with evidence that his opiate users experienced pleasure; one even mentions "euphoria" (120), a term not found in addict argot. His table 6 shows that the first or second most frequent reason for opiate use given by respondents in his two samples was "to enjoy the high." That reason was slightly exceeded in the compulsive user sample by "to alleviate depression,"

which may reflect special characteristics of mainly white samples recruited by newspaper advertisements from the Boston area. (All samples exceeded high school in mean education attained.)

Zinberg categorized users of various drugs as controlled or compulsive according to explicit criteria. This review focuses on the opiate user samples, where sixty-one controlled users (true chippers) averaged four and one-half years in current style of use. However, 48 percent had prior periods of compulsive use. Instability of the style is also suggested by the users' own apprehensions and the fact that only 49 percent maintained their pattern at follow-up one to two years later. The rest either progressed to less-controlled use or became abstinent. Chipping for four and one-half years would place a person two standard deviations above the mean length of onset of physical dependence in our sample (McAuliffe and Gordon, 1974), in which the extreme was seven years (attained by a college-educated addict); plainly, Zinberg's controlled users are unusual, but not necessarily immune to progression.

Controlled users did not differ from compulsive users in rituals or use of injection, but did differ in rules, which varied between persons. Significantly, Zinberg is vague about mode of administration, but it seems that the more euphorogenic intravenous route was infrequent (119). The most important rule, implicitly, appears to be "don't enjoy opiates too much." Vagueness also detracts from the value of interview excerpts, where one rarely knows even the speaker's sex. Once again, operant conditioning theory would have provided greater insight into the rules.

Zinberg's controlled users represent an extension of McAuliffe and Gordon's reinforcement continuum that falls on the other side of

the physical dependence divide from our "weekenders." The two groups are similar in many ways, particularly in commitment to a conventional life style. The controlled users illustrate Lindesmith's (1975) hypothetical optimal strategy for enjoying opiates, but their vicissitudes implicitly answer his question as to why their pattern is not more common: It is a difficult balancing act, and there is no way to know in advance how successful one will be. My bet is that our "weekenders" probably found it easier to manage the withdrawal syndrome, which adds another potential source of reinforcement, than to manage controlled use, particularly if they had failed by experiencing earlier periods of overindulgence.

The key fact about addiction is that onset is insidious, beginning with the first reinforcement. The endpoint is harder to identify, as many medical professionals and street addicts who discounted the power of opiates to subvert their self-control would testify. My view is that it is more productive to stress unequivocally the insidiousness than to encourage the common fantasy of control at the risk of furthering contagion. ♀

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