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## **Out of sync: Time management in the lives of young drug users**

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### **Abstract**

The paper analyzes young cannabis users' experiences of time from two different perspectives, one looking at how their everyday life is related to social time structures and another looking at their actual time management strategies. The paper shows that intense drug use is a reason behind the interviewees' underinvolvement in interaction time, institutional time, and cyclic time. Yet, drug use may also be an attempt at solving problems with time management, a strategy that again brings the users further away from the social time structures of society. We identify temporal synchronicity, or rather

the lack of this, as a central challenge for the interviewees' social identities and general feelings of a meaningful everyday life. Further, we argue that the young cannabis users are both social and temporal "outsiders" to society and that new time management strategies are key to reversing this process of social marginalization. The paper is based on qualitative interviews with 30 young cannabis users in outpatient drug treatment in Denmark.

**Keywords**

Time, drugs, youth, marginalization, qualitative interviews

## **Introduction**

This paper, based on qualitative interviews with 30 young cannabis users in outpatient drug treatment in Copenhagen, Denmark, focuses on time and drug use. We analyse cannabis users' experiences of time from two different perspectives, one looking at how their everyday life is related to social time structures, and another looking at their actual "time management" (Klingemann, 2001) or "time work" strategies (Flaherty, 2003). In terms of the former, we draw on Lewis and Weigert's (1981) proposed paradigm for the sociology of time, describing temporal embeddedness, temporal stratification and temporal synchronicity. As regards time management, we are inspired by symbolic interactionist studies (especially Calkins, 1970) describing people's strategies for making time meaningful in contexts where the balance between time levels, especially "self time" and "institutional time" (Lewis & Weigert, 1981), is challenged.

Time is a central theme in classical as well as modern sociology. Writing from a functionalist perspective, Durkheim (1915) described social time as an expression of the collective rhythms of society. According to Durkheim, time is neither reducible to quantitative, physical time nor to individual temporal consciousness; it should be approached as a "social fact". If one wants to understand human time, Durkheim argued, one has to start with inquiries into the "the nature of society" and its collective concepts and symbols. Continuing the functionalist tradition, Sorokin and Merton

(1937) criticised approaches that regard time as homogeneous and “quantitative and possessed of no qualitative aspects”, time that is “continuous and permits of no lacunae” (p. 616). According to Sorokin and Merton, any human conceptualisation of time is in reference to social activities and definitions. Human time is by necessity discontinuous, operating with beginnings and ends, and time duration is not absolute but dependent on the nature and intensity of our social experiences. As James (1922) stated: “In general, a time filled with varied and interesting experiences seems short in passing, but long as we look back. On the other hand, a tract of time empty of experiences seems long in passing, but in retrospect short” (James 1922: 624, quoted in Sorokin and Merton, 1937: 617).

The aim of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, we want to contribute to the sociology of time by analysing time experiences and time management strategies that are severely challenged by substance use problems. We intend to show that the desynchronization of time levels and the (often unsuccessful) attempts at managing time described by our study participants are relevant for broader analyses of the relationship between time and self, and not only for people struggling with drug problems. On the other hand, we hope that an analysis of drug use inspired by theories on time may advance the tradition of sociological substance use research.

While sociological approaches are in general well-established in the drug research field, studies focusing explicitly on drug users' temporal experiences are relatively rare. One line of research that implicitly touches upon this is based within the literature on controlled drug use emanating from the pioneering work of Howard S. Becker (1953). Thus, a substantial number of studies have looked at how drug users, and cannabis users specifically, fit their drug use into their daily lives. Central in this literature is a focus on the social contexts for people's drug use and how they regulate their patterns of use, including the extent and timing of their use, in order to limit potential negative consequences (see e.g., Becker 1953; 1955-56; Decorte 2001; Reinerman and Cohen 2007, Hathaway 2004; Hallstone 2006; Kronbæk & Frank 2013; authors 2011, 2014).

The time experiences of drug users are also implicit in another line of studies, that is, studies on people's motivations for drug use. For the purposes of the present paper we will not go into detail with this literature as a whole but focus on one specific *time*-related motivation, i.e. boredom. For instance, based on survey data, Boys and colleagues found that 70 percent of their sample of young poly-drug users used cannabis to decrease boredom (Boys et al 2001). Also, Willging et al. (2014) demonstrated a relationship between experiences of boredom, drug use and 'trouble-making' among young people, especially in environments with limited educational and employment possibilities. In a somehow similar vein, but from a different theoretical perspective,

the literature on risk-taking and ‘edgework’ (Lyng 1990; 2005) suggests how drug use can provide a sense of thrill or break-away from dull everyday life (Lupton & Tulloch 2002; Reith 2005). However, the focus in this stream of research is primarily on the balancing between control and loss of control in the edge-work experience, and on the self-actualization that is often seen as the outcome of such experiences, and not on the relationship between drug use and time

Curiously, the few studies that explicitly address drug users’ temporal experiences focus on users who are or have formerly been enrolled in drug treatment. Thus, Reith’s (1999) study of people in recovery from opiate addiction and Klingemann’s (2001) study of clients in alcohol and drug treatment are important exceptions to the lacking focus on temporal aspects of drug use. While Reith focused on the users’ perceptions of the past, present and future, Klingemann (2001, Klingemann & Schibili, 2004) investigated the perceptions of time and the time management of clients (and staff) in addiction treatment and analysed how this related to treatment expectations and goals. What we share with these studies is a focus on how drug users experience and relate to time.

Unlike Klingemann, however, we analyse how young drug users structure their everyday life *outside* treatment, and how their drug use, and cannabis use in particular, plays into their time experiences and attempts at making time meaningful. In doing this, we seek to take the temporal focus beyond studies explaining time problems with

reference to inpatient treatment. Instead we apply this perspective to drug users' temporal marginalisation outside of treatment, showing that institutionalisation is not a necessary condition for time management problems. In doing this we draw on specific concepts within the sociology of time, which we present in the next section.

### **Theoretical framework**

As mentioned above, we approach time and drug use from two slightly different (but related) perspectives: one looking at the social time structures that regulate the young drug users' life, and the other addressing their (active or more passive) time management strategies.

Inspired by the Durkheimian tradition and symbolic interaction, Lewis and Weigert (1971) emphasise three features of social time: stratification, embeddedness and synchronization. Temporal *stratification* indicates that time can be comprehended at different structural levels; Lewis and Weigert differentiate between "self time" (individual level), "interaction time" (group level), "institutional time" (the level of formal organisations) and "cyclic time" (the societal-cultural level). They describe these time levels as hierarchical, in the sense that institutional time and cyclic time demand precedence over interaction time, and interaction time, in turn, demands precedence over self time. In other words, cyclical time (the yearly seasons, and the weekly and

daily routines that constitute societal life) and the institutional time of organisations are the time levels that people have to adapt their self time and informal interaction time to, if they are to be socially integrated. Temporal *embeddedness* is the mechanism that ties time levels to each other in a person's life and enables feelings of a continuous self across differing social experiences and actions. Lewis and Weigert (1981: 453) relate temporal embeddedness to people's experience of the pace of time. The more socially integrated a person is, in terms of occupying meaningful social roles, the quicker time seems to pass for him/her. Hence, experience of the passage of time is related to the number of temporally embedded events during a certain amount of physical time. Temporal *synchronicity*, finally, describes the relationship between stratification and embeddedness. In Lewis and Weigert's words (1981: 451): "Synchronizing one's life is a public achievement which merges the unbridgeable individuality of personal existence constituted out of embedded time with the irreducible collectiveness of social order constituted by stratified social times". Adapting one's self time to the time demands of organisations and society also means displaying one's "normalcy". Hence, a failure to follow the time stratification demands of social life may lead to a questioning of the person's moral character, and to accusations of laziness, untrustworthiness – and inferior selfhood in general (ibid. p. 451). Lewis & Weigert's work can be seen as reflecting the modernist age of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in which it was written, and the relation between the different structural levels of time may be more flexible today.

While in the analysis we use their concepts as analytical categories, we return to a reflection on the topicality of the hierarchical model in the concluding discussion.

In terms of the interviewees' time work, we turn to another classic sociological study of time: Calkins' (1970) analysis of time experiences and ways of managing time among long-term patients in a rehabilitation institution, i.e. people with an abundance of time but limited choices of how to use it (p. 487). Like other social time theorists, Calkins criticises the linear mechanistic perspective of time, showing that time can only be marked if particular events are distinguished from the daily treadmill. Building on Mead's theory of time, Calkins writes: "In order to mark a duration, points denoting sequence or change must be identified". For patients at the institution Calkins studied, the present felt engulfing and the future unpredictable, and their points of reference for time measurement tended to become hazy. Patients responded in different ways to the monotony of institutional life. "Passing time" was the most common adaptation: in order to make the present tolerable, patients involved themselves in temporary diversions, such as watching television. "Doing time" was another response, characterized by drifting and lack of activity: the patients sat and waited, usually in isolated silence. "Making time" was an example of a more active relationship to time: the patients adopted (or maintained) the time management model of the outside world,

creating the image of having limited time at their disposal instead of the many undefined hours of institutional time (Calkins, 1970).

In going further into the actual experience of time, we draw on Horton's (1967) study "Time and Cool People" the message of which is that "street life doesn't run by the clock; what counts is what's happening" (p. 5). Built on fieldwork among "hustlers" in Los Angeles, that is, street people making money outside of the world of legitimate work, Horton's study shows that time on the street may be "dead" or "alive". Time is dead when there is no action, when "yesterday merges into today, and tomorrow is an emptiness to be filled" (p. 8). On the contrary, time is alive when there are necessary and desirable happenings, when there is a flow of activities, people and money. Street time is, according to Horton, built around the irrelevance of clock time, "watches are for pawning and not for telling time" (p. 10). The study indicates that time is diverse and that people's sense of time derives from their environments, and the activities that constitute these environments, and from the place an individual occupies in the social structure at large.

### **Methods and data**

The paper is based on 30 qualitative interviews with young people enrolled in drug treatment in Copenhagen, Denmark. The interviewees were contacted at three small

treatment centres, all offering outpatient treatment (Centre A: 14 interviewees, Centre B: 12 interviewees and Centre C: four interviewees). Outpatient treatment is the most common treatment model for drug addiction in Denmark, offered to the large majority of drug users who seek treatment. In recent years the trend shows a further decrease in the number of users offered inpatient treatment, reflecting political decisions (National Board of Health, 2013; Hesse et al., 2012). Outpatient treatment is defined as consisting of 3-8 treatment sessions a month (Hesse et al., 2012), either as individual sessions, group therapy sessions or a combination of both. Among the interviewees in the present study, most attended the treatment centre once or twice a week.

Almost all interviewees (27) were recruited through the staff at the treatment centres who introduced the research project to potential participants. If the young drug users were interested in participating, they gave their mobile number and were then contacted by the interviewers. Three participants were recruited at a group therapy session which one of the interviewers had been allowed to observe. She introduced the study in the beginning of the session and those interested in participating contacted her directly afterwards to settle an interview appointment. While a few interviews were conducted at the researchers' work-place or in a nearby park, due to requests from the participants, most interviews took place in a meeting room at the treatment facilities. The interviews lasted 45-80 minutes, most often around one hour.

Altogether, 19 men and 11 women with an average age of 21.7 years were interviewed. The interviewees' age ranged from 17 to 28; however, the majority (21 people) were between 18 and 23 years of age. At the time of the interviews, most interviewees were on welfare benefits and, as part of this, some participated in different educational or activation projects. 10 interviewees were in regular jobs (some half-time or temporary) or enrolled in education. Cannabis was the all-dominant drug in the participants' drug use profiles, and most of them reported that they had sought treatment because of their daily cannabis use. A majority had experimented with other illegal drugs as well, predominantly amphetamine, cocaine and ecstasy, but in general they did not feel they had problems with these drugs the way they had with cannabis.

During the past ten years there has been a change in treatment approaches to drug addiction in Denmark. More and more treatment centers, including the ones we have studied, work with "graduated goals", meaning that a reduction of the users' drug intake (e.g. a change from smoking cannabis every day to smoking during weekends only) is accepted as a legitimate treatment goal. According to information material from the three centers and/or interviews with staff members, it is the clients' own decision if they want treatment aimed at reduction or complete cessation of drug use (Author A, 2013). Of the young people participating in the study, more than half stated that they wanted to

reduce but not entirely stop their cannabis use, while the rest had abstinence as their treatment goal, or had not yet made up their mind about what treatment goal they preferred. At the time of the interviews, a third had stopped smoking completely while an equal number reported that they had reduced their cannabis use, varying from marginal reductions (e.g. going from 15 to 12 joints a day) to more marked reductions (e.g. now smoking one joint in the evening instead of smoking all day). The remainder of the interviewees had not experienced any changes in their drug use, meaning that most of them used cannabis several times a day.

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on four overall themes, covering drug use development, present drug use, expectations when seeking treatment, and experiences with being in treatment. The present paper focuses on the two first themes and not on the participants' specific treatment experiences. Time was not an explicit theme in the interviews, but when reading through the transcripts, we noticed that it played a central part in the participants' depictions of their drug problems. Firstly, it was visible in their struggles in maintaining a stake in conventional, everyday activities such as education or jobs, and secondly there was a lot of descriptions of "dead time" (Horton, 1967), i.e., weeks and months passed in inactivity and social isolation, difficulties in recollecting events that had passed and challenges in planning for the future. After consulting the literature around the sociology of time, we found that the

specific concepts presented earlier in this paper seemed useful for opening up the data. All interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed and anonymised with respect to names, places and other identifiable markers. Both authors coded the transcripts separately after which we compared the codings for the different sections.

### **Social time structures and time management**

In the analysis we first look at the interviewees' accounts about time through Lewis & Weigert's (1981) concepts of stratification, embeddedness and synchronization. Here we focus on the relationship between "self time" and what Durkheim (1915) called "the collective rhythms of society", i.e. the tensions that our interviewees experience when trying to navigate between the different dimensions of social time, showing how the resulting lack of synchronization leaves them with large quantities of self time. Second we will go more into detail with what constitutes this self time and how it is experienced by the interviewees. Here we look for which "blocks of time" (Lewis & Weigert, p. 439) that structure the young drug users' everyday lives, the time management (Calkins, 1970) they practice and the density of meaningful events that contribute to creating "dead" and "alive" moments (Horton, 1967: 8).

### **Macro-level: Institutional time and cyclic time**

A recurrent theme in the interviews concerns the participants' difficulties in maintaining their engagement in education or jobs as their drug use escalates into daily use. After finishing 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade, practically all of them started some kind of upper secondary education (mostly vocational training), but only very few had completed this. Instead, the interviews are dominated by stories of losing interest in school and dropping out. Some interviewees had started several different educational programmes and dropped out of all of them, while others opted for an unskilled job instead of pursuing further education. In the following quote, Line (23 years old) describes how her drug use was interfering with her daily rhythms and thereby also with her ability to attend to work:

At present I am still outside the labour market because of my misuse, because I can't [...] I can't get myself up in the morning to go to work because of the extent of my misuse. And it means that other things slip out of sight, I am more focused on smoking a joint than on earning money [...] I told them [the treatment centre] that I smoked 15-20 joints a day, and that was basically what my day was all about; getting up and getting myself stoned so I could go to bed again [...] When I realised that I could not go out the door without smoking [cannabis] or go anywhere without bringing a joint, I realised that it was bad. Your main concern is suddenly "when can I have my next joint?"

As the quote with Line shows, smoking cannabis causes a clash between self time and “cyclic time” (Lewis & Weigert, 1981), because her daily rhythms are out of sync with the time norms and expectations of society at large; i.e., that you get up early in the morning and go to bed not too late at night. The more consequential tension, however, occurs between the individual level and the institutional level as Line’s sleeping habits make her unable to synchronize her own time with the schedule that most day jobs are based on, hence leaving her unemployed. Importantly, though, the lack of synchronization is not only a matter of not being physically able to get up in the morning, but also of simply being focused on something else. This is also evident in the following quote with Thomas (18):

And then from December until mid-January I attended another school, but they also kicked me out, because I was stoned in school, before school and after school, I could not really...I did not care, I showed up as it suited me and stuff like that, right. And that’s it, that’s what is so bad about smoking cannabis, you do not really care about anything, things have to be just the way you want them, and you only do what you are feeling up to.

As both Line and Thomas describe it, smoking cannabis simply takes precedence over other everyday activities and makes it unimportant – or even meaningless – to abide to the hierarchical order between self time and institutional time.

For some of the interviewees, however, the difficulties in living up to the requirements of cyclic and/or institutional time are not (only) related to the individual level but also to the peer group. As Steffen (26) describes it:

I go around and do nothing, and the friends I have are *also* the ones who do nothing, and *also* the ones who smoke cannabis. Those who don't do a thing. Because they are the ones who are around [during the day], right. So obviously I hang out with them because they have the time to meet up. It's a kind of vicious circle. I mean, my friend is not going to find a job when I show up at his place at 9am with a joint in my hand and say "hey, what's up". Then that day just passes.

Compared to the examples above, the "vicious circle" described here not only concerns the present: hanging out with other cannabis-smokers who have dropped out of school also points towards the future in the sense that these peer groups are described as limiting the individual members' opportunities for actually trying to adhere to

institutional time and requirements, such as spending the day applying for a job instead of smoking cannabis.

### **Micro-level: Interaction time and self time**

While the interviewees' problems with maintaining their stakes in ordinary activities such as schools or jobs as their cannabis use progresses is perhaps not surprising, what may be more surprising is how they also have trouble in synchronizing their self time with interaction time, i.e. time with their friends and family. For almost all interviewees, their early cannabis careers were social in nature; they started smoking together with friends or other peers and their cannabis use progressed alongside their friends' use as well (cf. authors, 2014). However, for a number of participants this changed as they started smoking several times every day. In some interviews, this is described as a "rational decision" – when smoking alone they did not have to share their cannabis with other people – but for the majority this seems to be something that happened unintentionally. As Torsten (25) says:

I have had this really bad tendency to hide, so periodically I disappear, or I did earlier on, and nobody could get hold of me. People could call me all they wanted. Like, I would make arrangements but then not show up, not answer my phone for three weeks [...] Typically it starts with someone

calling you at a bad time, and you don't answer the call. And then the next time they call, you still do not answer it, even though now is not a bad time, but you just don't have any excuses as to why you didn't answer their first call. And then it just gets more and more and more and more difficult to answer the phone. And this all starts because I smoke, because I was convinced that I was too stoned to answer the phone the first time it rang.

In Torsten's words, he would sometimes just "disappear" from all kinds of social interaction; face-to-face arrangements as well as phone calls. However, this "escape" is not presented as a deliberate choice motivated by a need for more self time (cf. Lewis & Weigert 1981, p. 454), but rather as an unwanted side-effect of attempting to hide his cannabis use from his surroundings which then spirals into a negative situation. Even though he knows that he ought to answer the phone the second or third time, he ignores it and withdraws from all social interaction. Such withdrawal is also described by David (23), but for him this is not only something that happens every now and then, but rather appears to be indicative of his everyday life as such:

I started to isolate myself, right, and I didn't realise that this was happening, what I was actually doing, but I could just feel that it was a really bad process. [...] I never went to school [...] I don't have any real friends, I

don't have any social, like, peer group or what it's called, I don't have a social life, I go home [from work] and then I am with my parents [...]

Earlier on it was cool to just sit and smoke and [listen to music] but it's not enough anymore, I get too lonely. So in order to *feel* that I am social, while I smoke, to *feel* that I am sharing this with someone, I drink [whisky and coke]. Because then I feel I *am* social, and when I *am* social it's almost like, it's *almost* as good as if there was somebody there.

Earlier on, David dropped out of Medical School, but at the time of the interview he has held an apprenticeship as a carpenter for a couple of months. Thus, he actually manages the synchronization between self time and the institutional time of the work place.

However, because his everyday life is almost completely derived of interaction time except for casual interactions with his parents (he moved back home when dropping out of university), he feels that he is left with too much self time. For David, though, the problem is not, or not any longer, that he ignores social relations; there are practically no peers left to ignore. In that way, he can be seen as being further down the road than Torsten, because his earlier tendencies to withdraw and isolate himself have had the consequence that his friends are all gone. David now tries to make up for feelings of loneliness through activities that he would formerly consider social, i.e. drinking

alcohol, and in that way creates the illusion that he has company in order to escape the seemingly endless hours of self time.

### **Relating to time: doing time**

The plenitude of self time, and the lack of synchronisation of self time with institutional time and cyclic time is associated with different forms of time-work among our interviewees. By and large, their orientation towards time may be captured by Calkins' (1970) concepts "doing time" (lack of activity, drifting, isolation), "passing time" (diversions in order to avoid feelings of emptiness) and "making time" (attempting to transform dead time to living time). A crucial difference between our study participants, and those of Calkins, is that time management problems in our interviewees' life are not related to a sudden disruption of everyday life in the form of being hospitalized, but to illegal drug use *in* their everyday lives. On the one hand, as we have discussed above, their drug use has led to problems in time synchronisation; on the other hand, as we will show in the following sections, they use drugs in order to handle time. Also, it is important to note that the participants in our study cannot be grouped into categories on the basis of their time management, like Calkins (1970) did with her participants. Rather, varying descriptions of one's relationship to time can often be found in the same interview.

The following quote from the interview with Kathrine (24) exemplifies “doing time”.

This is a passive, liquid relationship to time in which drug use serves as a buffer against the world:

When I started here [in treatment], I did nothing. I just sat at home smoking [cannabis] and watching the telly. Everything fell apart. Half a year passed and I just went down and down and [...] I was shut in, and more and more distant from the world I wanted to be part of. I did not tidy up my apartment and therefore couldn't have people coming over. I couldn't see my family, because I feared they would notice that I had smoked [...] Smoking was like pulling the duvet over my head, just being there without thinking and feeling.

In the interview with Kathrine, time is described as a continuous unity devoid of distinctive elements, reminiscent of Horton's (1967) concept of “dead time”. Periods of intense cannabis use are experienced as drifting time, with one day disappearing into the next, and with few points of reference for time awareness. Doing time this way is, as the quote indicates, related to a lack of transactions with the external world. Without social commitments and references, Kathrine's conception of time becomes blurred; everyday life seems unchanging as the “self programs itself in reference to the present, not the future” (Calkins, 1970: 491).

Part of this continual sliding of diffuse presents into each other is also that cannabis smoking may affect your memory. According to the interviewees, time passes unrecorded, not only because cannabis affects your time conceptions while under the influence of the drug, but also because it disturbs your subsequent recollection of what happened. Rasmus (22) relates:

I felt I was in a deadlock, and I felt that nothing whatsoever happened [...]  
Cannabis isn't exactly known for making people enterprising, right? When you're on cannabis you can't control things, and you remember exactly nothing. People sit there telling you things and you're like "oh, what?" And five seconds later "what were we talking about"? Honestly, you just sit there.

Other interviewees described recollection problems in different ways: "I have a big hole in my memory, there are several months I cannot remember" (Kathrine, 24); "My IQ has dropped. I have lost part of my vocabulary. I have black holes in my brain" (Lise, 26); "It's not that I can look back at things and say 'hey, do you remember when we did this and that' [...] There is a kind of emptiness in my mind" (Jonas, 20). As Reith (1999) noticed in her analysis of Scottish opiate addicts, time with active drug use can be conceptualised as "frozen time", i.e. the drug user's consciousness revolves around

the present, and there is little consideration for the future or reflection on the past. In retrospect, Reith's interviewees experienced these periods of intense drug use as "lost time", meaning that the "years had slipped by unrecorded, and in so doing, had stolen all the experiences and events that went with them"(Reith, 1999: 110). Our analysis shows a similar pattern. The interviewees describe an inability to register time when using cannabis excessively as well as difficulties in conceptualizing time in meaningful sequences of past, present and future. And when they later look back at these periods of excessive cannabis use, they feel that the past is blurred, distant and difficult to access.

### **Relating to time: passing time and making time**

A somewhat more active orientation to time, and an orientation that may be captured in Calkins' term "passing time" is described by David (23). In contrast to the interviewees quoted above, David deliberately tries to engage with time. He is aware of and very reflective about the flow of time, or rather, the lack of flow of time, and tries to make it proceed more quickly through smoking cannabis:

What this is all about is that if I have nothing to do, I smoke. For many years it was the other way around, I tried to arrange my day in a way so that I had time to smoke. But now I have plenty of time, far too much time. Actually I have nothing to do, and so I smoke. I smoke in lack of better things to do.

In David's interview, passing time with the help of cannabis is a way of getting rid of emptiness and making the present less engulfing. Passing time in this and other interviews, however, is not a form of time management directed towards a desired future. It is not that the participants pass time in order to quickly arrive at events they have planned and joyfully anticipate. Rather they seem to wait for something undecided, for diffuse changes in their life to come about, for new relationships and activities to appear, for a less problematic relationship to drugs to develop – and to use cannabis to make this waiting more tolerable.

A substantial amount of research has shown how cannabis may sometimes be used as “self-medication” (see authors, 2013, Pedersen & Sandberg, 2013, Harris & Edlund, 2005), i.e. to manage or reduce emotional problems (anxiety, restlessness etc.). What is perhaps less well-known is that this self-medication may also function as a time compressor. Cannabis quenches emotional experiences – it makes your mood “flat”, it “curbs your feelings”, it makes you “indifferent to everything” (expressions in interviews) – and all this contributes to our interviewees' experience of time passing unnoticed. Cannabis use decreases the distinctiveness of events, negative as well as positive, making the user dwell less on things happening to him/her. This slumber or de-animation of life due to drug use affects the processes of recollection and projection

discussed above, so that time which felt long in passing very often feels contracted in retrospect (cf. James 1922; Sorokin and Merton 1937).

In our interviews, a move from the more passive “doing” and “passing” of time to the active “making” of time (Calkins, 1970) seems to be related to the solution of the time synchronization problem described in the first part of the analysis. As long as the young cannabis users are trapped in unsynchronized self time, they seem incapable of developing more active time management strategies. This is because the making of time is dependent on an adaptation of self time to interactional, institutional and cyclic time – and on a more forward-oriented relationship to time than most participants have while using cannabis intensely.

The difference between forms of time management can be seen when interviewees compare their present passing of time to their making of time before they became regular cannabis users. Steffen (26 years old) says:

I often try to think back at the time when I didn't smoke. How did I spend my days back then? It was something about playing football, climbing, going to the [youth] club [...] When I was a kid and my parents said to me “we're going to the *Tivoli* on Friday”, wow, that was great. But I don't think *Tivoli* is fun anymore. I

never go to the movies like I used to, I am not interested. I don't go to the Internet café like I did when I was 13. I never travel [...] I have no hobbies, no interests, apart from going to Christiania ["free town" in Copenhagen where cannabis is easily available]. I don't do any sports. And this is why I have been in a bad mood lately. Because if the drugs disappear, there is nothing left. Obviously nothing whatsoever.

As the quote shows, Steffen relates his difficulties in transforming the passing of time into an active making of time to a lack of interests other than cannabis smoking. To recall an everyday life without cannabis he has to go far back in time, into his childhood and teenage years, because for the past 10-12 years his main spare time activities (and peer relations) have been centred around cannabis smoking. Other interviewees tell similar stories of never having developed hobbies or recreational engagements that they can turn to now, when trying to stop or reduce their cannabis use.

The difference between forms of time management can also be seen when participants compare their everyday life to that of their non-drug-using peers. Tanja (25) says: "Now I have turned 25 and a lot of my friends are enrolled in university, they buy their own apartments, they get to travel and what else. And me, I am still sitting here and my apartment looks like shit. I want it to be different". In Tanja's experience, her life has

been at a standstill while her friends have moved on, and comparing herself to her peers makes her realize that she is not adapting to the “age norms” (Caspi et al., 1990) related to being 25 years old – a realization that becomes a motivation for her to change her drug use. In the above-mentioned study of Scottish opiate users, Reith (1999) showed that the orientation towards the future tended to come back as the users quit their drug use and started to build a new drug-free life. For some of the young people in our study this change appears as a longer process that actually begins while they are active users, thereby serving as a motivator for seeking treatment, instead of (primarily) being an outcome of treatment.

As mentioned in the methods section, 20 of the interviewees are living on welfare benefits and are only marginally involved in work or education, while ten hold regular jobs (often half-time and/or temporary) or attend school. This means that the majority of the participants lack the time-regulating structure (work or school) that typically compartmentalizes other (young) people’s existence into institutional time vs. self time and (informal) interaction time (Lewis & Weigert, 1981). Whereas Lewis and Weigert (1981: 446) described the “increasing temporal embeddedness of social time” in modern societies, and the risk of institutional and cyclic time invading interaction time and especially self time, our participants face a very different challenge. They are left with too much self time which they feel they cannot structure in a meaningful way. And

while Lewis & Weigert saw the ability to be wholly oriented towards the present as bringing “pure recreation”, because it breaks with modern day requirements to always plan ahead and synchronize one’s life with the lives of others (p. 437), our interviewees do not describe their self time as a pleasurable ‘living in the present’. In general, their lack of orientation towards the future (and towards the past) does not seem to be self-chosen but rather related to inertia, lack of engagement, and social isolation.

## **Discussion**

This paper analysed the relationship between drug use and time as described by young people having (had) an intense use of cannabis. We have shown that daily cannabis use may disturb the relationship between past, present and future so that the user feels he or she is left with an extended present characterised by indifference and purposelessness. Whereas some of our interviewees tried to combat these experiences by active time management strategies, seeking e.g. to develop new relationships and educational and work commitments, others continued to smoke cannabis in order to pass time. The latter strategy may be seen as a vicious circle: drug use was both described as the reason for the interviewees’ under-involvement in interaction time, institutional time and cyclic time and as an attempt to solve their problems with unlimited self time which again brought them further away from the social time structures of society.

Self time in Lewis and Weigert's (1981) description is not merely a question of how much personal time one has at one's disposal. Self time is also phenomenological time "as it appears immediately in the experience of the solitary ego" (p. 435). Self time – and a meaningful embeddedness of self time in social time – is in this perspective decisive for the individual's identity and sense of purpose and direction in life.

"Temporal panic" is Lewis and Weigert's (1981: 436) concept for a reaction when the future is approaching faster than the person's ability to handle the present requires. This is the situation when time scarcity is passed down the hierarchy of social times. Our study shows that the opposite condition may be equally destructive. For the young cannabis users, self time is detached from the temporal structures of society and social interaction, resulting in a condition where the individual experiences very little time pressure from the surroundings and a general loss of orientation towards the future. In this, the interviewees expressed an absence of momentum and flow in their life, and a sense of going nowhere and anticipating nothing (cf. Brissett & Snow, 1993).

While time scarcity is a much described experience in the late modern world, and one that is said to threaten the possibilities of individual relaxation and contemplation, it is also seen as a sign of a person's industriousness and engagement in society. Time abundance, on the other hand, is far less researched and seldom associated with ideals of success and influence. Quite the contrary, living outside of society's rhythms and

demands is often considered “a waste of time and, by implication, a waste of a person’s potential, skills and attributes” (Brissett & Snow, 1993, p. 247). In an era when time is regarded as a precious resource that must be carefully planned and organized, “doing nothing” may be a serious threat to a person’s social identity and feeling of self-worth. This was reflected in a number of interviews in the present study where participants positioned themselves as temporal *and* social “outsiders”.

In some cases, the interviewees seemed to experience a double pressure: On the one hand, they were aware that they did not live up to the overall societal expectations about adapting one’s self time to the demands of society, as explained above; on the other hand, they felt they did not live up to prevailing age norms (a case in point was Tanja, 25 who compared her own life’s “standstill” to the situation of her non-drug-using peers). This suggests that periods of frozen time may be particularly critical when colliding with expected turning points (Clausen, 1998) in a person’s life course, such as moving into further education, getting a job, establishing a life of one’s own, etc. In other words, frozen time specifically and the lack of synchronisation between the different levels of time in general may be said to interact critically with youth transitions and may thereby amplify the impact of such standstill time for years to come.

By all accounts, the temporal detachment we have found among our interviewees is not merely a question of their relationship to cannabis. Lewis and Weigert (1981) did not focus on individual time experiences alone but explicitly, as the title of their paper indicates, on the “structures and meanings of *social* time”. Horton (1967) related the time conceptions and time management strategies of his “street people” to their social position outside of society’s mainstream institutions, pointing out that “a man’s sense of time derives from his place in the social structure and his lived experience” (p.9). In a similar vein, our interviewees’ difficulties in handling time are not only associated with the extent of their cannabis use, but also with their general position outside of society’s institutions and networks (education, work, family, friends). More specifically, our analysis shows a self-reinforcing process in which excessive cannabis use and exclusion from the educational and employment system seem to go hand in hand. According to Lewis and Weigert (1981: 452), “increasing the social integration of an individual by adding more social roles” contributes to an individual’s temporal embeddedness and hence, to strengthening his or her feelings of self continuity and future-orientedness. Conversely, a decreasing level of social integration is often related to a desynchronisation of social time levels that in the long term may threaten the individual’s self-worth and ability to “make time”. Time, then, is not a thing to be analysed in isolation, but a relationship between self and society. Furthermore, this relationship is a normative one with culturally defined criteria specifying at what points

during the life-course different social roles and commitments should be enacted and how the relationship between institutional time, interaction time and self time should be balanced over the life course.

Lewis & Weigert's approach to temporality is itself a product of a specific period in time (the late 1960s/early 70s). One may ask whether their depiction of a highly hierarchical relation between e.g. self time and institutional time still applies to Western societies today, often characterised by concepts such as institutionalised individualism (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and detraditionalization (Giddens 1990). Labour market changes and increasingly flexible working hours mean that some groups have more opportunities to combine institutional time and self time as it suits them.

Moreover, increased digital communication and online interaction with markets and colleagues around the globe has arguably destabilised the 9-5 working day as the norm, affecting not only institutional time but also cyclic time. However, we will argue that these changes are predominantly affecting a specific part of the population, i.e. the (adult) middle and upper classes. In contrast, our interviewees' interaction with institutions and work places are of a different character. To the extent that they hold a job, these are working class jobs – carpenter, shop assistant etc. – which do not offer the same opportunities for deciding your own working hours. In the educational system most teaching still follows traditional, institutional time, which is also the case when the

young people in our study are in contact with the social services. In addition, it is clear from the analysis in this paper that the interviewees clearly *perceive* a normative relation between self time on the one hand and societal time structures (cyclic time, institutional time and interaction time) on the other, which they feel unable to live up to, and that this is a central part of their experiences of marginalisation.

As mentioned, Calkins' (1970) study, which served as theoretical inspiration in our analysis of time-management, was focused on patients at a physical rehabilitation centre, showing how difficult it is to maintain an active relationship to time in a total institution. Similarly, scholars have documented time use problems among inmates in prisons or prison-like settings, e.g. institutions for juvenile offenders (see e.g., Bengtsson, 2012; Cope, 2003; Medlicott, 1999; Scarce, 2002), describing the time management problems as related to the disruption of everyday life and social relations. In contrast to these studies, our study focuses on young drug users in out-patient treatment, i.e. a sample with a much looser relation to the institutional setting (as mentioned earlier on, outpatient treatment covers 3-8 treatment sessions a month) and one that to a much lesser extent intervenes in the user's daily life. However, despite this crucial difference, our participants' time experiences are clearly reminiscent of those reported among clients/inmates in total institutions. This suggests that the problem is not (solely) related to institutionalisation, and the disruption of everyday life that often

comes with it, but rather to a lack of social integration that occurs in institutional settings *and* elsewhere. In particular, our analysis identifies the lack of temporal synchronicity (the relationship between stratification and embeddedness) as a threat to the interviewees' identity and feelings of meaningfulness in life.

Our findings have a number of implications for the organisation of prevention and treatment efforts. The most important one is that time work should be included as a central dimension of addiction treatment. As Flaherty (2002: 384) notes, time work is just as much an effect as it is a cause. A distorted relationship to time may, as we have shown, be the effect of intense drug use and social marginalisation. But time work, or “agentic practices designed to control or manipulate aspects of temporality” (Flaherty, 2002: 387) may also be used to change a person's problematic relationship to drugs. Thus, our analysis showed how the enormous amount of unstructured time, and a general lack of future-orientedness among the interviewees posed a barrier to quitting or reducing the use of cannabis. This suggests that drug users in treatment could benefit from more comprehensive programmes addressing time management strategies in the short run – for instance, programmes working systematically with what individuals can do to “pass time” instead of smoking cannabis – as well as time synchronisation problems in the long run, for instance, trying to re-integrate the individual in social networks and institutions.

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