

13th Conference  
of the European  
Sociological Association

(Un)Making Europe:  
Capitalism, Solidarities,  
Subjectivities

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ABSTRACT BOOK

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RN16 | Session 10c The Pharmaceuticalisation of Performance: Consumption Practices Across Generations

Film representations of performance enhancement: the role of cinema in the shaping of social imaginaries and discourse

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This presentation discusses the nature and role of film representations of performance enhancement in the reframing of social imaginaries and discourse regarding traditionally bounded visions of the body and of the legitimate scope of its technical manipulation. Film constitutes a cultural product particularly embedded in society, both in terms of its production – usually involving complex networks of social actors – and of its, potentially global, reception. Therefore, it can work as a powerful mediator in the establishment of shared cultural definitions and views of social issues and problems gaining visibility in certain contexts. On the one hand, cinema can take away from social debate thematic material, securing a certain capital of social interest; but on the other, framing it in narrative form, it can contribute to settle the terms of subsequent social discussion, producing an exemplary vision of it. Therefore, cinema can, simultaneously, socially expand and culturally contract public debate. We will address that dynamic looking at representations of performance enhancement in film, and discussing them at three levels. First, that of narrative conventions in film, through which moral discourse on a subject can coexist with its cultural naturalization. Second, that of the place of cinema in contemporary infoscapes, which can further that naturalization by allowing for a growing circularity of representations across different media, which heightens films' mediation role in social discourse. Third, that of the relation between film representations and individuals' actual social representations and practices, concerning the use of performance enhancers, particularly medications.

Managing cognitive performance with medication: comparing youths and elders experiences

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One of the expanding strands of pharmaceuticalization is the reconfiguring of the social uses of medicines. If, once, these were confined to the realm of health and illness, empirical research has shown their usage beyond therapeutic goals, namely for the daily management of cognitive performance. Hence, medication consumption (or the dispositions to consume it), oriented to this feature, reflects not only the growing social pressure to enhance performance – which is one of the cultural traces of modern societies –, but also the possibility and desirability of managing performance with pharmaceutical resources, on a drive in which pharmaceuticalisation exceeds medicalisation. These social pressures assume different meanings for different generations and in the different daily contexts individuals live in. Starting from this outlook, this presentation aims to discuss the uses of medication to manage cognitive performance from a transgenerational and comparative perspective, illustrated with empirical data on the consumption, and dispositions to consume, of two segments of the population: youngsters (18-29 yo) and elders (65+ yo). These data were drawn from two sociological studies carried out in Portugal: the first, finished in 2014, on therapeutic consumptions for performance among youths; the latter, finished in 2015, on the psychopharmaceuticalisation of old age. In both studies, a mixed methods approach was used to collect the data, including a questionnaire (n=1483 and n=414, respectively), followed by semi-directive interviews (n=43 and n=30, respectively).

Performance-enhancement investments in urban Mozambique

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Within the increasingly diverse offer of products in the global (and local) market(s), more and more options are available for individuals to enhance their image and their (cognitive, social and physical) performance. These new consumption tendencies are connected with the idea of well-being and improvement, and are based on constructed desires, expectations and needs that go beyond the (often blurred) dichotomy of health and illness. While this seems to be a widespread trend, sociological studies on the pharmaceuticalisation of performance have mainly focused on 'western' contexts. This presentation aims to discuss how the circulation of such 'global' technologies (especially pharmaceuticals), ideals (of well-being, performance, improvement) and images (performative, aesthetical) is having expression in local consumption practices and aspirations in urban Mozambique. What are the individuals' main concerns regarding their performance? Which areas or activities are more permeable to investments through the use of substances (whether herbal medicines or manufactured pharmaceuticals)? What are the main differences in terms of gender and age? Based on a