

CATHINONES AND VIAGRA IN CHEMSEX: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF TOUCH, MASCULINITIES AND AESTHETICS

*CATINONAS E VIAGRA NO CHEMSEX: UMA AUTOETNOGRAFIA
DO TOQUE, MASCULINIDADES E ESTÉTICA*

*CATINONAS Y VIAGRA EN EL CHEMSEX: UNA AUTOETNOGRAFÍA
DEL TACTO, LAS MASCULINIDADES Y LA ESTÉTICA*

Jorge Humberto Lucero Díaz ¹

¹ Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Espanha

Abstract: This article presents an autoethnographic analysis of chemsex, focusing on the simultaneous use of viagra and cathinones. The haptic and aesthetic dimensions of these encounters are examined, considering their effects on masculinities, gender, and sexual practices. A central tension emerges between haptic experimentation, which fosters a non-genital-centric sexuality, and the homonormative masculine aesthetics that shape these experiences. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the research is based on critically analyzed personal participation in chemsex, which was documented through field notes. The results reveal that chemsex practices are deeply relational, influenced by both pharmacological effects and aesthetic norms. The study concludes that chemsex constitutes a space of complex cultural transformation, where new forms of relationship, pleasure, and gender expression are challenged and redefined.

Keywords: Chemsex; Autoethnography; Viagra; Masculinity; Aesthetics.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta uma análise autoetnográfica do *chemsex*, com foco no uso simultâneo de Viagra e catinonas. Ele examina as dimensões hapticas e estéticas desses encontros, considerando seus efeitos sobre masculinidades, gênero e práticas sexuais. Uma tensão central surge entre a experimentação haptica, que promove uma sexualidade descentralizada do ponto de vista genital, e as estéticas masculinas homonormativas que moldam essas experiências. Com uma abordagem multidisciplinar, a pesquisa baseia-se na participação pessoal no *chemsex*, documentada por meio de anotações de campo e analisada criticamente. Os resultados revelam que as práticas de *chemsex* são profundamente relacionais, influenciadas tanto pelos efeitos farmacológicos quanto pelas normas estéticas. O estudo conclui que o *chemsex* constitui um espaço de transformação cultural complexa, onde novas formas de relacionamento, prazer e expressão de gênero são contestadas e redefinidas.

Palavras-chave: *Chemsex*; Autoetnografia; Viagra; Masculinidade; Estética.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta un análisis autoetnográfico del *chemsex*, centrado en el uso simultáneo de viagra y catinonas. Se examinan las dimensiones hapticas y estéticas de estos encuentros, considerando sus efectos sobre las masculinidades, el género y las prácticas sexuales. Se identifica una tensión central entre la experimentación haptica, que promueve una sexualidad genitalmente descentraada, y la estética masculina homonormativa que da forma a estas experiencias. Con un enfoque multidisciplinario, la investigación se basa en la participación personal en el *chemsex*, analizada criticamente, la cual fue documentada a través de notas de campo. Los resultados revelan que las prácticas de *chemsex* son profundamente relaciones, influenciadas tanto por efectos farmacológicos como por normas estéticas. El estudio concluye que el *chemsex* es un espacio de compleja transformación cultural, donde se cuestionan y redefinen nuevas formas de relación, placer y expresión de género.

Palabras clave: *Chemsex*; Autoetnografía; Viagra; Masculinidad; Estética.



Introducción

While watching a pornographic film during a chill in Barcelona, Spain, a guy showed me the list of substances offered by his favourite dealer. A chill is a colloquial name in Barcelona's gay culture for a sexual encounter with drugs. Although the list itself was not particularly extensive, nor did it feature substances entirely unfamiliar to me, it was the categorisation under which these substances were presented that captured my interest. While I cannot recall the exact substances listed, the categories were delineated as follows:

“Stimulants: M, Tina, 3MMC...
Depressants: GBL, GHB...
Psychedelics: 2CB...
SEXdrugs: Viagra...” (Field notebook, 2021, December 2, Ciutat Vella)

Reflecting on this encounter, it becomes evident that in the current socio-historical-cultural context, viagra is virtually inseparable from the concept of chill. In fact, my first experience of such an encounter in Barcelona involved the guy offering me viagra when he noticed my lack of erection. Thus, the categorisation established by the dealer seems intelligible, with viagra positioned as a technological artefact or substance for participation in such encounters. At the core of the dynamics of a chill is the intertwining, coordination, and entanglement of the stimulating, depressing, and tumescent effects of the flesh within a relational context encompassing diverse actants.

It is worth noting that I use ‘viagra’ as a common noun, denoting the colloquial term for the blue pill, rather than ‘Viagra™’, the proprietary term assigned by Pfizer Laboratories in 1999 with the approval of the United States Food and Drug Administration; the latter designates its medical, legal, and commercial application. Additionally, I employ the pharmacological family of these substances to underline their molecular interactions with my body. Viagra, with sildenafil as its chemical name, belongs to the family of selective phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors (PDE5Is), while substances like 3-Methylmethcathinone (3MMC) and mephedrone belong to the cathinone family.

What I have identified as a chill, Milhet et al. (2019) define as an evolution of sexualised drug use among men who have sex with men (MSM) or chemsex. This article aims to analyse the combined use of PDE5Is and cathinones in a chemsex encounter, employing a multidisciplinary and autoethnographic lens. In doing so, I draw attention to the haptic and aesthetic components of the experience. While this analysis may risk being reductionist by focusing solely on the use of two pharmacological families (PDE5Is and cathinones), it is a deliberate choice that arises from the limitations of this format and my own practice. I have specifically selected cathinones for their entactogenic properties, and viagra because of its consistent presence alongside cathinone use in a chill. Subsequently, I will delve into the entactogenic or haptic aspects of the experience while using viagra. The aesthetic components of the experience are contingently embedded in a homo-normative masculinity that shapes the encounters. Next I will reflect on chemsex, viagra, cathinones and the entactogenic effect and then autoethnographically develop a tension generated by aesthetic aspects that accompanied part of the chills in which I participated.

Chemsex, Viagra, cathinones and the entactogenic effect

Recent studies have shown that chemsex is deeply embedded in specific geographical, cultural, social, and material contexts, shaping sexual encounters in a variety of ways. It is

most frequent in urban centres, with encounters lasting from hours to more than a day, often facilitated by geolocated dating apps (Fernández-Dávila, 2017). However, Pérez-Flores (2022) found that 56.3% of individuals engage in chemsex through social circles rather than apps, and the HomoSalud Study (2021) notes its presence in rural areas. Chemsex has also been linked to the rise of synthetic psychoactive drugs, such as cathinones (Gish et al., 2024).

Epidemiological data reveal a positive correlation between chemsex and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as the risk of addiction (Milhet et al., 2019). Media narratives often focus on the negative aspects, framing chemsex as a public health issue. However, other authors view chemsex as a sociocultural assemblage that integrates substances, contexts, history, and pleasure (Møller & Hakim, 2021). These perspectives challenge the risk-focused view, recognising that while chemsex can have negative effects, it can also offer life-affirming experiences (Florêncio, 2021).

Despite numerous references to viagra's presence in chemsex encounters, there has been a lack of comprehensive analysis of its effects, consequences, and participants' experiences. Reviews of academic literature highlight that PDE5Is are a key component of substances used in chemsex, particularly among MSM populations (Íncera et al., 2021). Viagra™ experienced the fastest post-patent sales growth in medical history (Botz-Bornstein, 2011). Since the mid-20th century, bodies and technology have become intertwined, with body architecture modulated at the molecular level. Penile erection, facilitated by viagra, represents this fusion (Preciado, 2020). Molecules such as viagra interact with the body, altering its structure. PDE5I inhibitors, prescribed for erectile dysfunction, increase blood flow to the penis, causing tumescence and visible "visually noticeable penile stiffness" (Field notebook, 2021, December 2, Ciutat Vella) for participants in a chill.

Regarding cathinones, a recent report by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2022) identified cathinones as the second-largest group of new psychoactive substances introduced to the European market between 2011 and 2021. Naturally occurring cathinones have been used in Africa and the Arabian Peninsula before their synthesis in Europe in 1928 (Soares et al., 2021). Cathinones share a chemical structure with phenethylamines (e.g. amphetamines), leading to similarities in their effects. For example, mephedrone is used as a substitute for ecstasy (Peglow & Rahmani, 2021), and bupropion is a legal cathinone prescribed as an antidepressant in Spain.

Researchers have noted the use of mephedrone and other cathinones in chemsex due to their entactogenic properties (Corkery et al., 2018). Nichols et al. (1986, 2011) coined the term "entactogen" for psychoactive molecules that enhance communication and insight through touch. The term comes from the Greek 'en' (within) and 'gen' (to produce), along with the Latin 'tactus' (touch), meaning to produce an *inner touch*. Nichols has studied the therapeutic use of entactogens such as MDMA, which facilitate "touching or reaching inside to retrieve repressed memories" (2022, p. 3).

In my case, I emphasise this group of molecules because I perceive *inner touch* as a bodily experience in relation to others, rather than an individual psychological process. Although I recognize the limitations in verbalizing this experience, my aim is to highlight the importance of *inner touch* at a chill. I challenge the idea that touch is limited only to the skin; it is experienced both on the surface and within the body, relationally, in interaction with others. For example, touch transcends my skin: "I touched him with my gaze" (Field notebook, 2022, January 21, Ciutat Vella) or extends beyond my body: "it was touching what the other guy was touching" (Field notebook, 2022, April 24, Ciutat Vella). This experience involves viscera and bodies in a context where the boundaries of the skin are blurred. I do not seek to glorify the use of cathinones or other substances but to describe the experience without idealising it. My

focus is on the haptic, or what Nichols et al. (1986) termed entactogenic, from a pharmacological perspective. It represents an interoceptive experience connected to the environment, not to specific organs, but the flesh as a whole. I conceive of entactogenic as a pharmacologically assisted haptic experience. In the following sections, I will outline the methodological framework used in this article and present the findings through an autoethnographic lens.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research is autoethnography, characterised by eclectic writing techniques and the creation of new thematic fields of research (Badley, 2022). Autoethnography has been applied in diverse fields such as medicine, economics, and ecology (Murphy et al., 2022). In this multidisciplinary approach, I synthesise concepts from social sciences, philosophy, and pharmacology, narrating an autoethnographic story (Holman et al., 2022) that moves between phenomenological and scientific-philosophical discourse. My training as a pharmacist and psychologist is inseparable from my writing, my experiences, and my sexual encounters.

Using reflexivity and deep introspection, key elements of autoethnography, I connect my experiences in chills to a broader cultural network (Badley, 2022; Holman, Adams, & Ellis, 2022). This reflexive practice is transformative and shape both learning and action. By engaging in autoethnographic reflexivity, I reveal aspects of my experiences that are significant in my everyday life and during chills, particularly masculinities and their influence on me, which I will explore further in the following sections.

My writing style aligns with Analytic Autoethnography (Anderson, 2006), emphasising personal experience, theory, and analytic objectives. As a self-reflexive researcher, I critically examine how my experiences influence the research, integrating them not as anecdotes but as essential data sources. My aim is to generate theoretical knowledge that enhances understanding of broader social phenomena. By incorporating personal narrative within a structured analytic framework, I contribute to theoretical discourse on cultural dynamics. This approach allows me to analyse the phenomenon from an embodied perspective, offering perspectives that expand theoretical considerations, supported by 'privileged' knowledge (Hamdan, 2012).

As part of the autoethnographic record, I kept a field notebook. The notes that compose it come from my participation in seven encounters between December 2, 2021 and April 23, 2022, in Barcelona. These encounters took place in various districts of the city: two in Eixample, two in Sants Montjuic, and three in Ciutat Vella. The time of participation ranged from a minimum of six hours to a maximum of over 30 hours. I ingested oral sildenafil and snorted 3MMC at all encounters. The dose of sildenafil ranged from 50 mg to 100 mg, while the dose of 3MMC ranged from an estimated low of 250 mg to a high of over 1 g. In addition, I used other substances, including smoked crystal methamphetamine, oral alcohol, oral hydroxybutyric acid (GHB), snorted mephedrone, and oral PrEP. It should be noted that no GHB or alcohol was consumed concomitantly due to their interaction. Regarding the number of participants, the minimum was three individuals, including myself, and the maximum was closer to fifteen. It should also be noted that calculating the maximum number of participants is challenging, as encounters can span multiple rooms within a building, with individuals entering and exiting intermittently.

All references to the field notebook in this article refer to cases where I used viagra and 3MMC exclusively. For the analysis that follows, I draw upon two significant moments from

my encounters, which I refer to as 'scenes' due to my dual role as protagonist and spectator, a fictional binary division that became necessary for the writing of this article. These scenes took place in disparate locations with no common individuals other than myself. Notably, a significant distinction is observed between the two scenes in the physique of the participants, Scene 2 features individuals with athletic bodies indicative of engagement in fitness culture, while Scene 1 exhibited greater aesthetic body diversity.

To protect anonymity, I anonymize the individuals I met with, as well as the exact addresses where such encounters occurred. These measures are in line with recommendations outlined in the World Health Organization Guidelines on Biobehavioural Surveys in Populations at Risk of HIV (2018). It is pertinent to note that individuals who sent me invitations to the encounters were known through apps and were aware of my research.

Experimentation and aesthetics

Scene 1. PDE5Is and cathinones: experimentation

He was eating my feet with his mouth. I couldn't see him, but he was biting me with appetite, I think his teeth were or are big. He was sticking his tongue between my toes while I was intemperately penetrating another guy. Everything was rough. Everything was kind of thick and sticky. The boy whose back I squeezed with my hands, I reached for the muscles under his shoulder blades and gripped them tightly. He felt. I felt. Everything was fast, but time had no presence. Somehow my arms were lost, or was I doing it? Or was I the arm that did it as I felt and touched? (Field notebook, 2022, January 21, Ciutat Vella)

According to several studies, in chemsex, "men often resort to using Viagra™ and other ED medications, typically off-label, specifically to enhance and prolong their sexual functioning or to overcome the erectile dysfunction that often accompanies methamphetamine use" (Hammoud et al., 2018, p. 198). While this erectile 'dysfunction' accompanied my consumption of cathinones after several inhalations, I intend to delve into two key aspects surrounding the use of the term 'enhance' that prevails in most descriptions of this phenomenon. First, I propose that a deeper analysis of this term is required. The concepts of Pharmacosex (Moyle et al., 2020) and Pharmacotopia (Davis, 2018) offer intriguing perspectives for exploration. Furthermore, this notion of enhancement may also intersect with what Rose (2006) has articulated as lifestyle maximisation, which manifests as a drug-assisted optimisation of sexual experiences. Second, my conception of enhanced sexual encounters, or the encounters I have had during chemsex, does not align with the traditional model of healthy sexuality focused solely on penetration, with its typical progression towards climax culminating in ejaculation. Rather, I have sought to move away from established frameworks that prescribe particular sexual practices. Sometimes, hours can pass without ejaculation during chemsex encounters. In such cases, a more appropriate term would be experimentation.

In a chill, there is a collective exploration of new ways of experiencing, enjoying, and engaging to the body. In Scene 1, there was an atmosphere of trust and intimacy, distinct from friendships formed outside of these encounters. The interactions defied traditional gender bina-

ries, creating a space for experimentation that was not always pleasurable, positive, or replicable. However, in Race's (2018) terminology, it was collective, though I prefer to describe it as relational. What occurred was a mutual exchange of emotions that immersed us in an intense intimacy, underscored by a palpable bodily presence. The encounter became a search for new experiences, blurring boundaries, including those of the body. Biochemical interactions involving serotonin transporters and PDE5Is influenced enzymes were transduced into a deeply tactile experience, where touch became transformative, opening up new pathways of sensation.

I approached these encounters as a spectrum of possibilities, rooted in the haptic experience. It was not just about physical touch but about engaging the whole body in exploration. It meant a move away from conventional sexual encounters focused solely on genitals and acts of penetration. My intention was not to change hierarchies or the dominance of sensation, but rather to expand sensory possibilities, fluidly shifting between sensations. Foucault (1997/2021) suggested that practices such as sadomasochism and drug use can desexualise pleasure, extending eroticism beyond conventional boundaries set by the pharmacosexual regime. This fluid shift in sensation generated a kaleidoscope of experiences, where sensations merged with one another.

Sensations stand out or are highlighted, changing from one to another, like flashes of fluorescent colours in the dark... These colours unified and the tongue that licked my feet squeezed the muscles of the back of the boy I was fucking.
(Field notebook, 2022, January 21, Cuitat Vella)

While the penis played a role in these experiences, it often took a backseat and touch and sensation extended beyond it.

According to Montagu (2016), the haptic is produced mentally through the sense of touch. When we "act in space... [o]ur perception of the visual world, for example, actually combines what we have touched in past associations with what we have seen, or with the scene we witness" (p. 16). This author, with a centripetal, skin to mind approach, understands the haptic as a mental product produced by external stimuli captured by tactile receptors (including interoceptors). For me, the haptic is intertwined with the entactogenic, a relational product at the molecular level that arises from interactions between substances. This is not a rejection of centripetal or psychosomatic processes but rather a recognition that my haptic experiences during chemsex are situated within relational contexts, characterized by centrifugal and centripetal movements.

This drug-assisted exploration can be linked to Dowsett's (1996) notion of desire dispersion triggered by the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, which lead to a decentering of the phallus in sexual practices. It can also be related to specific forms of sociability shaped by the conscious chemical bath that permeates and modifies the body (Le Talec & Linard, 2015). The presence of STI risk is present in both notions, but it is not paradigmatic. Psychobiomedical discourse has focused its analysis of chemsex on risk and the categorisation of users as subjects of it; however, this risk must be imbricated in a context in which experimentation is part of the practices. In this imbrication, ephemeral tactile impressions make practices more complex in conjunction with their meanings. Of course, risk exerted its ruinous, ghostly or desired presence in my experimentation in Scene 1, bringing the tongue and the penis from the anus to the mouth could imply the contagion of an STI. But risk was not always central or the most important element in my experience. It was rather a possibility always combined with the feeling of materiality and its roughness in the action of sexual practices. This could make psychobiomedical agreements about the 'best' sex more complex.

While I enjoyed the experience of 3MMC itself and “having a stiff penis is exquisite” (Field notebook, 2022, March 24, Sants), I understand cathinones and PDE5Is in proximity to Foucault. That is, as mediators of “those incredibly intense pleasures” (2021, p. 129). These substances aided my experimentation as poppers do for some users seeking to increase their anal dilation (Sepulveda & Lucero, 2023). In this sense, Foucault reminds us that “sexuality is created by yourself” (2021, p. 163). This mediation is shaped by cultural, historical, and material conditions. The haptic exploration I have discussed here evades conventional knowledge systems that seek to make sexuality intelligible. It offers an alternative to traditional genital-centric narratives, opening up new avenues for bodily experiences.

This assistance is shaped by a network of practices influenced by the cultural, historical, and material context in which it emerges. The haptic experimentation I delve into here manages to elude the understanding of conventional knowledge systems that make sexuality comprehensible, as Dean (2018) suggests. This evasion is, in part, attributable to an exploration that shifts the focus from genitals to the emergence of bodily surfaces, distancing itself from the dominance of the penis, but still with it. Haptic exploration manifests itself as an endless journey into a realm of timelessness. Consequently, within this timeless space and amidst the sensory experience, an intersection of continuous transformations and knowledge-generating intensities emerges. It signifies an epistemology derived from the body, for the body.

In this section, I have analysed and described my haptic experiences within a broader cultural context. By contrasting this description with predominant definitions of chemsex, I aim to enrich our understanding of this practice. I seek to create an epistemological space where autoethnography and lived experiences shed light on aspects of chemsex, rendering it a more nuanced and less rigid phenomenon. In the next section, I will explore part of the aesthetic aspects of my experiences, drawing on another encounter, Scene 2.

Scene 2. Viagra and cathinones: aesthetics

‘I like them with hard cocks and short hair’, He said to me. I looked at the rest of the guys, then I looked at myself and fucked him like a man. I think my erect cock allowed me to be that stoned, and sexual man in the middle of the others. (Field notebook, 2022, January 14, Eixample)

According to Flowers et al, “a new discourse on the penis now seems to be the emerging, an aesthetics of the penis that focuses on penile appearance as much as its function” (2013, p. 1). This shift reflects a broader trend of biomedicalisation that permeates sexuality and everyday life, wherein interventions extend beyond the boundaries or functions of the body to encompass its aesthetic dimensions. For these authors, the biomedicalisation of sexuality and everyday life is a process of intervention on the body. A process that has not only referred to its limits or functions but also to an aesthetic embodied in the body as a whole and in each of its parts. Following these authors, the transduction at the molecular level is interwoven with an aesthetic production in which I generated a reformulated male body (Messerschmidt, 2018; Turnock, 2018) of a modern man in chills. An aesthetics that indicates health and fitness. This aesthetics signifies health and fitness, mixing elements of heterosexuality and homosexuality. This was me asserting and upholding masculinity with my tumescent, viagrian flesh and ‘short’ hair.

The concept of aesthetics functions as an analytical tool and producer of materiality, deeply intertwined with the cultural fabric of modern society. It operates by differentiating objects within social functions, imbuing them with specific sensory experiences and closing off alternative interpretations. In this differentiation, aesthetics lack neutrality and create delimited spheres of sensible experience, subsuming and/or closing them (Rancière, 2015). In these terms, my experience of the sensible was mobilized in conjunction with an aesthetic that separated the field of masculinized genital sensibility away from other configurations of the sensible. I generated a topography of the sensible that modulated the forms of experience and the ways of affectation. I configured the body within a framework in which acceptance homogenized it to be that drugged and sexual man in the midst of others. These aesthetics framed my exposure, movements, and rhythms to produce the 'art' of being as a man under these material and scenographic conditions. In Scene 2, I engaged in an interpretative regime of images, movements, and sensations, in which the gaze served as the focal point of gestural display. I was framed in a pharmacotechnified knowledge that allowed me to (re)enact this 'art' based on visibility and exposure. This aesthetic spectacle was supported by the visible and palpable tumescence of my penis, which shaped my actions within the framework of the erection model (Davis, 2010).

However, this aesthetic production was not free of concealment. It was the formation of a limit that veiled the unspeakable, creating borders. Trías (2022) conceptualizes this hidden aspect as 'the sinister', an intrinsic element interwoven with the fantastic and the real. The aesthetic produces the embodiment of that which is fantastic that I may have feared but desired. Producing an articulation between the fantastic and the realised that makes the naturalization of practices possible. Thus, the sinister presented itself "under a familiar face" (Trías, 2022, p. 49). In the context of my chemsex encounters, the sinister manifested itself as a veiling of homonormativity and the fixation of masculinity on bodily tumescence. In the embodiment of this masculinity in a molecularly modified body, a process of naturalization depended on a veil of concealment, which obscured the underlying tensions between normative ideals and lived experiences.

The embodiment of masculinity within this aesthetic framework extended beyond individual performances, becoming intertwined with broader cultural narratives and social norms. This embodiment hid how I homonomalized the body through bodily preparations, movements, and practices. The body turned blue (metaphorically speaking, because of the blue colour of viagra), the blood turned blue. That blue hid a culture based on male corporeality in which the gay sexual imaginary is housed (Fernández-Dávila, 2017). Could it be that the aesthetics produced by the use of PDE5Is in this context is a response to the crisis of masculinity produced by feminism and gay aesthetics? It is certainly a relational aesthetic centred on an athletic, vigorous and healthy body. Is not this temporary increase in resistance an indicator of reformulated masculinity? Is not this masculinity the one that modulates the selection of boys through apps (Parra & Obando, 2019; Race, 2018) or through friends or when I was selected or when I selected? Have not we incorporated the same set of conditions required for access to social acceptance and tolerance (Mowlabocus, 2021) in a heterosexualized society into the demands of the bodies participating in a chill? And I cannot help but ask, is not that masculinity based on white European men, or else on the bodies exoticised by them?

My bluish penis was constituted as a differentiated space but linked to other spaces within the body that, in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari (2020), could constitute a striated space. It is a space that produces borders or delimitations that define it materially, symbolically and constitutively. This delimitation functioned as an element of isolation, preventing contamination

or mixing. A first characteristic of striated spaces is their delimitation. A second characteristic is the establishment of a relational order and a special configuration, producing successions of fixed measurable forms and a concatenation of differentiated elements as in a machine.

Taking into account the characteristics of a striated space, I was able to establish that from the homonormativized body aesthetics (the sinister or the veiled) in Scene 2 I produced a body as a striated space, in which my masculinized sexual performance centrally delimited my penis in its erect configuration and concatenated actions. This genital centrality created boundaries that distanced the erect genital from the rest of the other bodily spaces. Such a bluish aesthetic configuration conceptualized sexual functioning along with the field of action and what were considered erogenous zones, assigning and not assigning them corporealities and experiences within pleasure. I generated a striated space in which the aesthetics of my erect male genital penis provoked a withdrawal or retreat of the haptic in order to experience the sinister. Why is this withdrawal necessary? Why do not we have sexual encounters without an erect penis? At some point in the encounter I felt that the blue of my body made me look as if I had short hair shaved on the sides, just as I imagine sailors in American movies look, or as gay men in uniform with their chiselled beards appear in the barbershops of Barcelona. This striated space imposed boundaries, delineating the erect genital from other bodily surfaces and establishing a hierarchical order of bodily sensations. Despite its apparent subversion of traditional sexual norms, this aesthetic configuration ultimately reflected the persistence of a homonormative masculinity within chemsex culture.

In interrogating these drug-assisted dynamics, I am compelled to reflect on the extent to which chemsex encounters serve as an escape from modern sexuality or simply reproduce existing norms and power structures. Despite their apparent countercultural nature, sometimes these encounters reify normative ideals of masculinity and sexuality, somehow perpetuating a cycle of homonormativity and colonial aesthetics. As I navigate these complexities as a researcher and participant, I find myself grappling with the paradoxical coexistence of subversion and conformity within the realm of chemsex. A tension that significantly pervaded my encounters and experiences.

Conclusion

In this autoethnographic article, I have situated the examination of substance use outside the confines of strict prohibition or endorsement, in line with Davis (2018) in creating an open space for contemplation of the contemporary state of the body and pleasure. By contextualising the analysis within my own encounters, I have contributed to a cultural framework that enriches the understanding derived from chemsex studies.

Overall, this analysis illuminates that my experiences in chills were multifaceted and relational. They were shaped by interactions at the molecular level, resulting in drug-assisted bodies and movements that make the conventional understanding of the phenomenon more complex. While considerations of risk and enhanced sexual experiences were evident, they did not necessarily dominate my experience. The pharmacological assistance provided by substances participated in the creation of bodily experiences and materialities that exceeded the biomedicalized conception of 'better' sex. Instead, my encounters analyzed here were fundamentally influenced by a dynamic interplay between the aesthetic and the haptic.

Haptic experimentation or entactogenic experiences facilitated the construction of a sexuality centred on the relationality of materiality, where the prominence of the penis as a primary source of pleasure was diminished, though still present. In contrast, aesthetics with their masculine or homonormative characteristics played a major role in shaping my encounters. This emphasis may be partly due to my own identity, which challenges hegemonic masculinity. However, I also found myself conforming to certain aspects of an ideal of masculine fitness as illustrated in Scene 2. In many cases, I lived up to these expectations by displaying a drug-enhanced blue erect penis. Thus, my experiences and body in the chills were consistently influenced by the interplay between the aesthetic and the entactogenic, fluctuating in intensity.

The nuanced understanding of chemsex practices illustrated in this article underscores the significance of integrating concepts of masculinities, gender, sexual practices, and social transformation. The redefinition of masculinity in these encounters highlights the fluidity and complexity of gender performance in chemsex contexts. The entactogenic effects of cathinones and the aesthetic influence of viagra reveal how sexual practices can simultaneously reinforce and challenge normative ideals. This duality points to a broader social transformation within various cultural spaces, where traditional notions of masculinity are both questioned and upheld.

Moreover, this analysis suggests that chemsex practices are not mere acts of indulgence, but are deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric that shapes participants' identities and experiences. The relational aspect of these encounters encourages a collective exploration of pleasure, expanding the boundaries of conventional sexual norms. It also reflects the broader social dynamics at play, where substance use and sexual practices are intertwined with issues of power, identity, and resistance.

I propose that a valuable complement to this article would be an examination of chemsex practices within the broader context of the global gay culture, of which Barcelona serves as a prominent center. Cities such as Barcelona are integral nodes within a global network that shapes tourism and markets, standardizing subjectivity, body norms, and masculinities, with substance use being an integral component of this phenomenon.

In conclusion, the haptic and aesthetic dimensions of chemsex encounters offer rich terrain for understanding the intricate ways in which masculinities, gender, and sexual practices intersect with social transformation. This autoethnographic account contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced account of chemsex, moving beyond pathologizing narratives to recognize its multifaceted and transformative potential. Future research should continue to explore these intersections, providing deeper insights into the lived experiences of those involved in chemsex and the broader cultural implications.

References

Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 373-395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605280449>

Badley, G. B. (2022). Autoethnography as practice and process: toward an honest appraisal? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221126702>

Barker, M., Gill, R., & Harvey, L. (2018). Mediated intimacy: sex advice in media cultura. *Sexuality*, 21(8), 1337-1345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460718781342>

Botz-Bornstein, T. (2011). *The philosophy of Viagra: bioethical responses to the viagrification of the modern world*. Rodopi.

Corkery, J., Guirguis, A., Papanti, D., Orsolini, L., & Schifano, F. (2018). Synthetic cathinones -prevalence and motivations for use. In Jolanta Zawilska (Ed.), *Synthetic cathinones: novel addictive and stimulatory psychoactive substances* (pp. 153-190). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78707-7>

Davis, O. (2018). Foucault and the queer pharmatopia. In Lisa Downing (Ed.), *After Foucault: culture, theory, and criticism in the 21st century* (pp. 170-184). Cambridge University Press.

Davis, W. (2010). *Queer beauty: sexuality and aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and beyond*. Columbia University Press.

Dean, T. (2018). Foucault and sex. In Lisa Downing (Ed.), *After Foucault: culture, theory, and criticism in the 21st century* (pp. 141-154). Cambridge University Press.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2020). *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, trans.). Bloomsbury Academic.

Dowsett, G. (1996). *Practicing desire: homosexual sex in the era of AIDS*. Stanford University Press.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (2022). Early warning system from 2011 to 2021. https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/topic-overviews/eu-early-warning-system_en

Fernández-Dávila, P. (2017). Consumo de drogas y su relación con el sexo: escuchando las voces de un grupo de hombres gais y bisexuales de la ciudad de Barcelona que practican Chem-Sex. Agencia de Salut Publica de Catalunya.

Florêncio, J. (2021). Chemsex cultures: subcultural reproduction and queer survival. *Sexualities*, 26(5-6), 556-573. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720986922>

Foucault, M. (2021). Sex, power and the politics of identity. In P. Rabinow (Ed. Reprint), *Ethics, subjectivity and truth* (pp. 163-174). The New Press. (Original work published 1997)

Flowers, P., Langridge, D., Gough, B., & Holliday, R. (2013). On the biomedicalisation of the penis: the commodification of function and aesthetics. *International Journal of Men's Health*, 12(2), 121-137.

Gish, A., Saint-Omer, A., Hakim, F., Grenier, C., Hennart, B., et al. (2024). Panorama analítico de los casos de intoxicación identificados como relacionados con la práctica del chemsex, entre enero de 2020 y febrero de 2023, en el laboratorio de toxicología de la Universidad de Lille Hospital. *Toxicología Analítica y Clínica*, 36(1), 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tox-ac.2023.08.126>

Hamdan, A. (2012). Autoethnography as a genre of qualitative research: a journey inside out. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11, 585-606.

Hammoud, M., Vacchera, S., Jina, F., Bourneb, A., Hairea, B., Mahera, L., & Garrett T. (2018). The new MTV generation: using methamphetamine, TruvadaTM, and ViagraTM to enhance sex and stay safe. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 55, 197-204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2018.02.021>

Holman, J. S., Adams, T. E., & Ellis, C. (2022). *Handbook of autoethnography* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

HomoSalud. (2021). Consumo recreativo de drogas y su uso sexualizado (chemsex) en hombres gay, bisexuales y otros hombres que tienen sexo con hombres (GBHSH) de España. 27/04/2023. https://www.infocop.es/pdf/2021Chemsex_en_Espana.pdf

Íncera, D., Gámez, M., & Moreno, S. (2021). Mental health symptoms associated with sexualized drug use (chemsex) among men who have sex with men: a systematic review. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 18(24), 13299. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182413299>

Le Talec, J. Y., & Linard, F. (2015). Placeres químicos: sexualidad y uso de drogas en hombres homosexuales con VIH. *Psychotropics*, 21(2-3), 157-182. <https://doi.org/10.3917/psyt.212.0157>

Messerschmidt, J. (2018). *Hegemonic masculinity: formulation, reformulation, and amplification*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Milhet, M., Shah, J., Madesclaire, T., & Gaissad, L. (2019). Chemsex experiences: narratives of pleasure. *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 19(1), 11-22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DAT-09-2018-0043>

Møller, K. & Hakim, J. (2021). Critical chemsex studies: interrogating cultures of sexualized drug use beyond the risk paradigm. *Sexualities*, 26(5-6), 547-555. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607211026223>

Montagu, A. (2016). *El tacto: la importancia de la piel en las relaciones humanas*. Paidós.

Moyle, L., Dymock, A., Aldridge, A., & Mechen, B. (2020). Pharmacosex: reimagining sex, drugs and enhancement. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 86, 102943. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102943>

Mowlabocus, S. (2021). Fucking with homonormativity: the ambiguous politics of chemsex. *Sexualities*, 26(5-6), 585-603. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460721999267>

Murphy, K. J., Griffin, L. L., Nolan, G., Haigh, A., Hochstrasser, T., Ciuti, S., & Kane, A. (2022). Applied autoethnography: A method for reporting best practice in ecological and environmental research. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 59, 2688-2697. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.14252>

Nichols, D. (2022). Entactogens: how the name for a novel class of psychoactive agents originated. *Front. Psychiatry*, 13, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.863088>

Nichols, D., Hoffman, A., Oberlender, R., Jacob, P., & Shulgin, A. (1986). Derivatives of 1-(1,3-benzodioxol-5-yl)-2-butanamine: representatives of a novel therapeutic class. *J. Med. Chem.*, 29, 2009-2015.

Observatorio Europeo de las Drogas y las Toxicomanías (2022). Informe europeo sobre drogas 2022: tendencias y novedades. Oficina de Publicaciones de la Unión Europea. <https://doi.org/10.2810/307211>

Parra, L. & Obando, A. (2019). De armarios virtuales a campos digitales de exterminio: interseccionalidad de Grindr, fábrica de gaycidad chilena. *Comunicación y Medios*, 40, 98-113. <https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-1529.2019.54008>

Peglow, S. & Rahmani, M. (2021). Substance-induced psychoses: an updated literature review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1234.

Pérez-Flores, A. (2022). *Chemsex en las personas LGTBIQ+ de Barcelona: diálogos entre salud y consumo de medios*. Máster en Comunicación Especializada Itinerario Cultural UB.

Preciado, P. B. (2020). *Testo yonqui: sexo, drogas y biopolítica*. Anagrama.

Race, K. (2018). *The gay science intimate experiments with the problem of HIV*. Routledge.

Rancière, J. (2015). La dimensión estética: estética, política, conocimiento. *Ciencia Política*, 10(19), 21-43. <https://doi.org/10.15446/cp.v10n19.52370>

Rose, N. (2006). *The politics of life itself: biomedicine, power, and subjectivity in the twenty-first century*. Princeton University Press.

Sepulveda, M. & Lucero, J. (2023). Usos de poppers y homoerotismo: hacia una genealogía queer del régimen fármacosexual. *Caracol*, 25, 475-511.

Soares, J., Costa, V., Bastos, M., Carvalho, F., & Capela, J. (2021). Anup dated review on synthetic cathinones. *Archives of Toxicology*, 95, 2895-2940. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00204-021-03083-3>

Trías, E. (2022). *Lo bello y lo siniestro*. DEBOLSILLO.

Turnock, L. (2018). *Essays on masculinity, media, the body, and performance enhancing drugs*. MFA Pub.

World Health Organization (2018). Guidelines on biobehavioural surveys in populations at risk of HIV. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/978-92-4-151301-2>

JORGE HUMBERTO LUCERO DÍAZ

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6431-6168>

Chemist, Universidad de Chile. Psychologist, Universidad de Chile. MA Postcolonial Culture and Global Policy, Goldsmiths University of London. PhD student Autonomous University of Barcelona, Person and Society in the Contemporary World Program. Beca Chile ANID Grant No. 72210491.

[E-mail: jpoinds@gmail.com](mailto:jpoinds@gmail.com)

Acknowledgements: Thanks to PhD Lupicíño *Iñiguez-Rueda*, PhD *Isabel Piper* Shafir and LAICOS IAPSE for the great support.

Historic	Submitted: 15/09/2024 Accepted: 15/10/2024
Funding Statement	The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Use of image consent	Does not apply
Ethical statement	This study was approved by The Commission on Ethics in Animal and Human Experimentation of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (approval no. CEEAH 6101).