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The Role of the Curiosity in Interviews with Drug Users

Jozsef Racz

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Abstract: In studies with questionnaires the main reason reported for trying drugs is the curiosity. However, curiosity does not have an unambiguous meaning. The word itself (in English as well as in Hungarian) has more, sometimes contradictory meanings.

In my own research I examined the usage of the term curiosity among injecting and non-injecting drug users in qualitative interviews, conducted in Hungary. I encountered different functions of curiosity: in accounts it appeared as an *excuse* or, less frequently, as *justification of drug use behaviour*. Contrary to dominant contemporary drug policy literature, drug users themselves rarely used curiosity as the cause of their drug use in the context of its risk or dangers. The results of this research on curiosity demonstrate that the normalisation of drug use, which is already in progress in Western countries, has not yet taken place in Hungary.

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1. Introduction

The goal of the study is to unfold the different meaning of the word curiosity and its context in interviews with different kind of drugs users. I chose curiosity because of its widespread use in the drug addiction literature. It is worth mentioning that also in the scientific literature, the word carries a lot of different meanings. During the study I reconstruct the possible meanings and functions of this word in a series of interviews with drugs users. [1]

In questionnaires about experimenting with drugs and first drug use, a recurring answer to questions as to why the interviewee started to take drugs is curiosity. In a survey carried out in Budapest in 2003 with a representative sample of secondary school students, 75.8% of the respondents said they first tried illegal drugs (cannabis or hashish in 82.3% of cases) out of curiosity (PAKSI & ELEKES, 2004). In their executive summary, the researchers of "Monitoring the Future"—a research programme begun in the United States in 1975 with the aim of revealing the patterns of legal and illegal drug use among secondary school students—also concluded that "each new generation has to learn why *not* to use drugs. Otherwise, natural curiosity and the desire for new experience will lead them to drug use" (JOHNSTON, O'MALLEY, BACHMAN & SCHULENBERG, 2005, p.36, italics in the original). Other studies also highlight the role of curiosity and peer pressure (usually in combination, but treated as separate factors) in the case of adolescents and young adults with various socio-cultural backgrounds and using different psychoactive drugs (e.g. CALAFAT et al., 1998; DE MICHELI & FORMIGONI, 2002; GJERULDSEN, MYRVANG & OPJORDSMOEN, 2003; HOLMBERG, 1985; JANG, VERNON, LIVESLEY, STEIN & WOLF, 2001; MADIANOS, GEFOU-MADIANOU, RICHARDSON & STEFANIS, 1995; OBOT, WAGNER & ANTHONY, 2001; OXFORD, HARACHI, CATALANO & ABBOTT, 2001; PIERCE, DISTEFAN, KAPLAN & GILPIN, 2005; WESTERMEYER, WAHMANHOLM & THURAS, 2001; WOLF, OLENICK-SHEMESH, ADDAD, GREEN & WALTERS, 1995). [2]

LEVY, O'GRADY, WISH and ARRIA (2005) also examined the motives for drug use with qualitative methods in a focus group of Ecstasy users, among whom curiosity proved to play a significant role. However, they did not analyse the concept further. CALAFAT et al. (1998) studied the social representation of Ecstasy, and concluded that it was characterised by curiosity, especially in the first phase of the spreading of Ecstasy use (in time, as the negative effects of the drug became apparent and part of the social representation, the significance of this factor decreased). [3]

What does this curiosity mean exactly? In questionnaires, respondents only have to put an "X" next to the reason they started taking drugs, which tells me nothing about what this reason in a particular case exactly covers. In this study, as part of a series of interviews with users of illegal drugs, I attempt to reconstruct the possible meanings of the concept of curiosity. In addition to the *term* "curiosity"—as indicated among the possible choices in questionnaires—I will also look at the various *constructs* of curiosity. It is important to bear in mind that this research

was conducted in Hungary, a post-communist country undergoing transition, where drug use as it is commonly understood only became significant after the change of the political regime in 1990. [4]

Since I intend to begin my description of curiosity as a phenomenon by using the term *curiosity* itself, I look at the etymology of the word. This may help me to highlight the different meanings of the word located beyond the everyday usage of the word. This will be followed by an analysis of the constructions in which the term is used most frequently in the psychological and sociological literature, including papers dealing with morals, personality psychology and social psychology, risk discourse, and sociological discourse in the late modern age. Through the analysis of the word "curiosity" and its context, my aim is to obtain an interpretation system that can be applied in the analysis of interview excerpts. This interpretation will also enable me to describe interviewees and drug taking episodes using a different vocabulary. [5]

1.1 Etymology of the word curiosity

As my initial analysis of "curiosity" will be made by examining the occurrence of the word, it seems necessary to first look at the meaning(s), etymology and semantic mapping of the word.

> Main Entry: **cu·ri·os·i·ty**
> Function: *noun*
> **1 :** desire to know: **a :** inquisitive interest in others' concerns **: NOSINESS b :** interest leading to inquiry <intellectual *curiosity*>
> **2** *archaic* **:** undue nicety or fastidiousness
> **3 a :** one that arouses interest especially for uncommon or exotic characteristics **b :** an unusual knickknack **: CURIO c :** a curious trait or aspect
>
> (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary) [6]

It is worth looking at the origin of the word "curio":

> Main Entry: **cu·rio**
> Function: *noun*
> Etymology: short for *curiosity*
> **:** something (as a decorative object) considered novel, rare, or bizarre: **CURIOSITY**; *also*: an unusual or bizarre person
>
> (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary) [7]

According to the Visual Thesaurus, the meaning of curiosity falls somewhere in between the term *wondering* (a state in which you want to learn more about something) and the following group of words: rarity, peculiarity, oddment, oddity, curio (something unusual—perhaps worthy of collecting). This definition—which I interpret as an everyday meaning of the word—again implies something unusual or strange. [8]

Kíváncsiság, the *Hungarian* word for curiosity, which does not have its roots in the word *curio*, emphasises rather that someone is inquiring about something that (s)he is not supposed to know (The concise dictionary of the Hungarian language, 1978). According to an older definition (PALLAS ENCYCLOPAEDIA, 1893–1897):

> "curiosity is an excellent feature in comedies which is often condemned and usually ends up in a funny failure. It also features in ancient legends and tales as a bad personality trait. It is natural and attractive only in the case of children." [9]

As demonstrated above, the word in the Hungarian language has an even more negative meaning, but in a funny sense, fitting into a comedy (see its relation to etiquette). The root word of *kíváncsiság* is *kíván*, meaning that someone longs for something. The word, however, is not of fundamental importance (as a source of a drive, for instance). [10]

1.2 A moral point of view

In Christian literature, curiosity (*curiositas*) appears first in the character of Augustine as one of the three major sins, along with carnal pleasure (*voluptas carnis*) and pride (*superbia*). Curiosity mostly works through the eyes. Augustine analyses the temptation of Christ and attributes it to curiosity when Christ, encouraged by Satan to jump down from the top of the church wonders whether or not the angels would catch him. (AUGUSTINE: Ennarationes in Psalmos, analysed by PESTHY, 2005). For AUGUSTINE, the temptations were no longer external, from demons or Satan, rather the tendency to sin became a part of human nature, against which human will is all but powerless (he explains this mainly in Confession—PESTHY, 2005). [11]

BENEDICT (2001) studied the concept of curiosity in Early Modern England. While in the Middle Ages curiosity was a kind of perversion making the curious person a monster; in the 18th century an opposite view emerged, allowing the study of hidden desires and the explanation of the physical universe. In that century the interpretations of curiosity varied between these two opposites, but in the Modern Age, with the emergence of the "scientist", it became a definitely positive feature associated with modernity and progress. [12]

However, BENEDICT also associates curiosity with femininity. This interpretation produced another interesting pair of opposites, now based on masculine and feminine attributes. Curiosity is associated with the former as a drive to discover nature and to control people, while with the latter it is seen as a source of feminine tenderness through sexual curiosity. At the same time, curiosity became the preserve of particular social classes. Here the author (BENEDICT, 2001) would like to cite an idea of FOUCAULT: it was interpreted as a privilege of the literate elite, while it was to be controlled in common people. [13]

KENNY (2004) studied the notion of curiosity in the same age on the basis of Batavian and French sources, and reached a conclusion similar to that of

BENEDICT. Regarding the epistemological and moral perception of curiosity, a profound change took place in the discourse of the Early Modern Age. To put it simply, curiosity lost its negative, sinful associations (see AUGUSTINE). KENNY (2004) talks about the emergence of a "culture of curiosities". Curious people were replaced by "curiosities", that is curious, interesting things and stories. This also contributed to the transformation of the meaning and epistemology of the concept. In the following step, curiosity made it possible to cross certain boundaries—in the name of curiosity—while it prevented the crossing of others (KENNY, 2004, discusses at length the institutions regulating curiosity, paying special attention to universities). [14]

Lastly, a word about one of the author's contentions. When talking about contemporary literature, KENNY distinguishes between good and bad curiosity, associating the former to men and the latter to women. KENNY (2004) does not interpret the concept as having a single, specific meaning. Indeed, it is the contradiction it embodies which allows the individual to use it as a tool (against Nature and God; see also HARRISON, 2001). [15]

1.3 Curiosity as a psychological construct

The Late Modern Age seems in many respects to have seen a return to earlier notions of curiosity. This highlights—at least with regard to experimentation with and first use of psychoactive drugs—the negative aspects of curiosity, while treating it as part of a "rationally" calculable *risk*, instead of an amoral sin. Curiosity even appeared in scientific publications as part of *risk discourse* (e.g. DIERKER, AVENEVOLI, GOLDBERG & GLANTZ, 2004; KENKEL, MATHIOS & PACULA, 2001; MARTIN-SOELCH et al., 2001; PERETTI-WATEL, 2003, 2006; SHARLAND, 2006), often as a "risk factor" or as a "risk group" uniting special subjects of social intervention or late modern governance. I also often encounter curiosity connected with risk in drug policy documents such as those of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), certain documents of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA, 2003), or even in local drug related documents (e.g. DEEHAN & SAVILLE, 2003). [16]

The first scientific report directly dealing with curiosity was written by William JAMES (1890), who identified two types of curiosity. In connection with the first type he emphasised biological factors and an intrinsically driven behaviour aimed at discovering new things. This type is characterised by approach and exploration. The second type is "scientific" curiosity or "metaphysical astonishment" without any practical reason. JAMES interpreted this as a response of the brain to inconsistencies and gaps in knowledge. [17]

The most extensive empirical study on curiosity as a psychological construct was written by LOEWENSTEIN (1994). He pointed out four core features: definition and dimensionality, reason, conscious response to curiosity, and situational factors. A fifth feature is superficiality—intensity, as, according to his observations, curiosity may become more intense, change its orientation, or even end suddenly. Although I tend to consider curiosity as a temporary condition,

LOEWENSTEIN emphasised its significant power as a motivating force. Curiosity often induces impulsive behaviour or, by contrast, enhanced self-control. The author's answer to the question of why people are interested in something that apparently has no (external) benefit for them is that the satisfaction of curiosity *itself* is what gives pleasure. Curiosity, by its very existence, questions behaviour based on rational choices. BERLYNE (1957) distinguishes between *perceptual* curiosity, which leads to an enhanced perception of stimuli, and *epistemic* curiosity, which is a drive that impels us to "learn" and "discover". This is brought to the surface by quizzes, puzzles and knowledge gaps. Curiosity may be specific or diverse (more precisely, the exploration behaviour that can be studied in animal experiments can be defined in this way). In this interpretation, one should recognise William JAMES's thoughts outlined in the introduction. Regarding BERLYNE's model, LITMAN and SPIELBERGER (2003), based on the results of their questionnaire study found that curiosity is *one* construct with two dimensions: perceptual and epistemic curiosity. They also concluded that curiosity can be diverse and superficial, or specific and profound. In their investigations, men achieved higher scores in epistemic curiosity than women. BERLYNE later refined his theory (summarised by PICCONE, 1999), and distinguished between the following *behaviour forms:*

- Reducing uncertainty: the individual studies an object or the environment to discover its features (e.g. a child examines a flashlight that it has never seen before).
- Incorporation: the individual finds out how to use an object and determines its purpose (the child realises that the flashlight makes light).
- Game/higher order incorporation: the individual creates another reality for the object (a flashlight can also be used as a spaceship). [18]

KASHDAN, ROSE and FINCHAM (2004) sought to organise knowledge in connection with curiosity and exploration behaviour into a complex model. Curiosity goes hand in hand with subjective experience, a positive attitude towards the world and the future, and the belief that objectives can be reached, difficulties can be overcome, and seeking excitement, novelty and challenges is compelling. At the same time, curiosity has an inverse relationship with anxiety and boredom, which impedes self-control and learning. [19]

The scope of the concept may also include ZUCKERMAN's (1979) experience-seeking hypothesis and CSIKSZENTMIHALYI's flow theory (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1990). [20]

To sum up, curiosity is a positive *emotional-motivational system* which involves seeking new or challenging information and experiences as well as self-regulation relating to them (KASHDAN, 2004). *Trait* curiosity (SPIELBERGER & STARR, 1994) can be understood as something that indirectly indicates positive features attracting the partner in the interaction through the *state* of curiosity that evolves in the course of interaction (KASHDAN & ROBERTS, 2004). [21]

Certain studies caution that other factors connected to the psychological construct of curiosity should also be taken into consideration. *Boredom*, as something that "triggers" curiosity, has already been the subject of research. LITMAN and JIMERSON (2004) talk about *curiosity as a feeling of deprivation*, which comes from uncertainty and the tension between information seeking and problem solving. [22]

In contemporary literature, it seems, besides or instead of the concept of curiosity, the ideas of *novelty seeking* and *experience seeking* are employed and studied. Novelty-seeking is especially important in CLONINGER's personality system (CLONINGER, 1987), along with harm avoidance and reward dependence. ADAMS et al. (2003) tested CLONINGER's theory among adolescent drug users, and found that young people with low scores for novelty-seeking preferred alcohol and cannabis, while those with high scores preferred other psychoactive drugs. Those with very high novelty-seeking scores chose stimulants and positive confirmation, while those with extremely low scores preferred sedatives and the avoidance of negative feelings and events. The group of researchers examining the connection between *novelty-seeking* experimentation with psychoactive drugs include HIROI and AGATSUMA (2005), KELLEY, SCHOCHET and LANDRY (2004), NYBERG (2005) and others such as DESRICHARD and DENARIE (2005) or MARTIN et al. (2004), who link *sensation-seeking* to experimenting with and using drugs. I note that in this psychological literature, curiosity has a positive meaning, contrary to "risk discourse" or moral discourse. This use of the word is also contrary to the drug-related literature. [23]

The answers in questionnaires clearly indicate the role of *peer environment; the context in which the experimenting with the drugs takes place (see the examples in* Section 1). Adolescents usually consume alcohol for the first time at home, in a family environment, but they try smoking and illegal drugs amongst their peer group. As I have already indicated, curiosity is typically followed by peer pressure in the case of experimenting with psychoactive drugs. The two factors occur sequentially but independently of each other (see references in the first paragraph). Indeed, MCINTOSH, MACDONALD and MCKEGANEY (2003) link curiosity with conformity within peer groups in relation to experimenting with drugs. [24]

Today, in the "late modern age", curiosity appears in the context of consumption; to be curious is to try out the products seen in advertisements and the adventures seen in movies. Not surprisingly, BAUMAN calls today's consumers collectors of experiences (BAUMAN, 1998, p.83). In this context, curiosity loses all the positive features that experimental studies attributed to it (or to the curious individual). Simply being curious is enough for one to be caught by advertisements. [25]

The intention of looking for the etymology and the public and scientific use of the word curiosity were to know what kind of taken for granted, common usage or scientifically constructed meaning is associated to the word. This taken for granted meaning is ambiguous and ambivalent. I was "curious" so I wanted to

know what kind of meanings of the word, beyond the common usage, would be possible to apply when people used it for the description for their behaviours. I studied the use of the word and its context in a qualitative research in a special setting: among drug users. Here—according to the literature cited in the introduction—the causal explanation power of the term is accepted by the different authors *without* questioning the meaning of the word. In these studies the curiosity has a causal and explaining meaning, where the word and its meaning do not need further elaboration; however the meaning of the word is ambiguous. Drug users are "curious" of drug effect (or the taking of drugs?) and in the next step they try it. In my research my goal was to disclose other meanings and the usage of the word and the meanings that are close to the usual interpretation. [26]

2. Research Approach

2.1 Subjects and method

In the course of the research, I selected interviews containing the term "curiosity" out of interviews conducted with drug users. I sought to collect a range of interviews and interview details that included conversations with people who used different drugs in different ways and were in different phases of drug use. Following the selection and encoding of excerpts containing the word "curiosity", I returned to the interviews to look at the specific contexts in which the term was used, and these were also coded. *Context* in this sense meant the relationship of drug users to their drug taking. In the light of context examination results, in certain cases I had to re-code excerpts containing "curiosity". In this sense, "curiosity" as a core variable was similar to selective coding (GLASER, 1978). [27]

2.1.1 Subjects

In the course of the research, I used qualitative interviews with drug users conducted between 2002 and 2006, 109 from Budapest and 13 from the southern Hungarian town of Pécs. Out of the interview subjects, 23 individuals used cannabis and party drugs (Ecstasy, snorting amphetamine, LSD, psychedelic mushrooms), and 86 were injection drug users (heroin and amphetamine users). Their age varied between 18 and 30, but most of them were between 19–25 years old. All subjects had already been using illegal drugs (they were not trying drugs for the first time during the research) for an average of 2–5 years. All of them had used drugs within 30 days prior to the study (this was one of the criteria for taking part in the study). [28]

2.1.2 Data collection procedure, interview method

The interviews were done by eleven interviewers who had undergone 10- to 20-hours of training and were under continuous supervision and given professional help during the interviewing phase. Most of them were studying sociology at university, others were social workers who, in the course of their everyday work, had contact with mainly injection drug users (though they did not interview their

own clients during the research). None of the interviewees were undergoing treatment, but some of the injection drug users were interviewed within a couple of days of the start of hospital or out-patient treatment. The interview subjects were selected mainly by privileged access (GRIFFITHS, GOSSOP, POWIS & STRANG, 1993), but some of the injection drug users had just been involved in medical treatment or in low threshold services (such as needle exchange or street work). [29]

The privileged access meant that the interviewers already had had contacts with different types of drug users before the study started. Using these preexisting relationships they were able to make other contacts with snow ball and networking methods. The interviews were carried out in coffee shops or—to a less extent—in medical facilities or needle exchange services. In medical or health services they reached the participants through the networks and not by the official connections (e.g. as clients). The interviewers did not have any formal connections with these facilities, except the permission to interview there. [30]

During the interviews the interviewers followed the MCADAMS (1993) life story interview protocol and the subjects were asked in detail about their drug use (first use, legal and illegal drugs, injection use, good and bad experiences). In the interviews, the interviewers also asked injection drug users about the process and circumstances of the injection (RÁCZ, 2004, 2005), party drug users about the parties they attended, and students using cannabis (who might have used other drugs as well) about their university studies. Notwithstanding the multiple focuses, the common elements of the interviews allowed me to examine the role of curiosity. [31]

2.1.3 Data analysis

All interviews were taped and then transcribed (by the interviewer, or if not, (s)he double checked the typed text). I processed the interview texts with Atlas.ti data analysis software (MUHR, 1997). For the purposes of the present study, I selected sections dealing with explanations of drug using behaviour. [32]

The interview excerpts containing "curiosity" and the broader context of curiosity as well can be most appropriately referred to as "accounts". This paper focuses on what was learned in the study by treating interview data as "accounts" (SCOTT & LYMAN, 1968). The interview account may be viewed as "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to evaluative inquiry", the purpose of which is to "prevent conflicts from arising by verbally bridging the gap between action and expectation" (SCOTT & LYMAN, 1968, p.46).

> "In ‘accounting' for their actions by prospectively invoking rules or retrospectively offering rule-motivated explanations for action, members convey a sense of structure and order and, in the process, cast their actions as rational, coherent, precedented, and reproducible for all practical purposes" (ZIMMERMAN, 1970, based on GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN, 2000, p.491). [33]

Accounts also can illuminate how the self is presented within the context of situated rationalities of drug use risk acceptability (RHODES, 1997). Accounts of oneself—to others, for example, researchers—create self images which are situated within, and reproduced by, different contexts or discourses of social acceptability (RHODES & CUSICK, 2002). [34]

Using Atlas.ti, first I searched for the word "curiosity" and the related contexts in the interviews. Context meant parts of the text that could be interpreted independently, e.g. parts dealing with the start of drug taking or injection drug use, including the interviewer's related questions. In terms of structure, these parts often followed the development of a complete story. An introduction was followed by action and closure. In other cases, either the interviewer or the interviewee changed the subject. In these situations, the turn of topic marked the end of the excerpt to be analysed, while the starting point of the text part was a question, or series of questions, leading to the answer containing "curiosity". [35]

Then I examined to which life stages outlined in the interview the parts containing "curiosity" referred to. Did the excerpt relate to the initial period of drug taking? Did it refer to a shift from one drug taking method to another (e.g. from taking pills to injection) or to a shift from one drug to another, or was there no link with drug taking at all? In the comparison of text parts, I focused on drug use. I compared "curiosity" parts found in drug use context to the use of "curiosity" in parts that contained no reference to drug taking. [36]

In the next step, I examined what drug use methods (injected substances, marijuana, party drugs, the combination of these etc.) and phases of drug taking (first use, shifting from one drug to another, change in frequency of use etc.) the parts containing curiosity typically referred to. Again, the unfolded links were coded in relation to curiosity. [37]

Thereafter, I returned to the interviews to find out what explanations other than curiosity appeared in relation to the different stages (first drug use, shifting from one drug to another) characterised by curiosity, and how the accounts characterized by "curiosity" can be refined. At this point, the question to be answered was how drug users related their drug taking (not restricted to how they related to their changes in drug use) to other words or other meanings. I assumed that interviewees, in their accounts, had reflected upon the fact that drug use—and especially its more risky forms such as injection drug use—is disapproved of by the majority of people. They either accepted this majority opinion and sought to explain their behaviour, or rejected and opposed the public opinion. I looked at whether they gave any other explanation related to rules or personality characteristics, for example peer pressure, self-related problems, positive or negative traits (RHODES & CUSICK, 2002). This allowed me to find the place of "curiosity" in the explanations interviewees gave about their drug taking, especially with reference to the perceived moral disapproval by the majority of society. The relation to the majority opinion was of great importance because, as the etymology of the word revealed, "curiosity" is loaded with a moral

content which seems to have links to the behaviours and beliefs accepted or rejected by the majority of society. [38]

In the course of moving between the interviews and codes, it turned out that "curiosity" was more embedded in the interviewers' wording than in the responses of interviewees. This observation made interviewers themselves as one of the focuses of the analysis, and also raised the question of whether the word had been used spontaneously, or "hidden expectations" generated by the research circumstances, i.e. a linear interview plan, prompted them to use the word. This interview plan made them see drug taking and change of drug taking methods as a linear process based on cause and effect mechanisms (although I made efforts to avoid this possibility when compiling interview questions and preparing for the sessions). [39]

3. Findings

In this section I will present the stages (first use, changing to another drug, change in the drug taking method) in which "curiosity" appeared in the sections of the interview dealing with drug taking. I will also look at how the interviewers used the term and the context in which curiosity appeared. This will be followed by a presentation of the relationship between the context in which curiosity was used and how drug users positioned their drug taking with respect to the majority opinion. In the following sections I used citations from the interviews where I number the interviews (e.g. No.1513). [40]

3.1 Curiosity as an excuse and as the starting point of a linear process

In the answers of drug users relating to questions of *first use,* curiosity was often mentioned. First, I study the interview context where the word curiosity appears. Some examples:

> I: Yes. But if someone is strongly against it, no one can persuade him to do it.
>
> Q: So a kind of inner strength is needed ...
>
> I: Sure. *Curiosity* or something.
>
> Q: ... to avoid it, to be able to say no?
>
> I: Yes. (1513)
>
> I was in Amsterdam in '79 for the first time. Then I got deeply involved. *I was really curious about how these things work*, so I smoked and injected whenever I could. Then I met some people. There was a Hungarian guy in the group, he was my host, so I really had a good time. So I was high and all that stuff ... (1711) (italics by JR)
>
> The guys come, you know, and you just do it and do it and you go on, driven by *curiosity*. (1510)
>
> Because no one can forbid it. *Because people are always curious, looking for new things.* (1711) (italics by JR) [41]

Curiosity appears in the interviews as a general and sufficient explanation. This definition of curiosity corresponds to the *"extreme case formulation"* described by POMERANTZ (1986), where curiosity, as a potential group norm, is a sufficient explanation for a behaviour: "because *people* are curious ..." (No.1711). Thus curiosity is part of a normative system of excuses. However, one can also observe that curiosity can be more than a simple, "superficial" desire for something. In interview No. 1513 the interviewee links it to a kind of internal force (more precisely, the interviewee made the interviewer draw this conclusion). In another (No.1510), the interviewee refers to being "driven by" curiosity, that is, he implies that curiosity is a kind of motivating force and not just a thing existing by itself. Other interviewees also cite "curiosity" as the cause of their drug taking. In interview No. 1711, a similar example appears. Curiosity is directly followed by the expression "looking for", an active verb. Curiosity appears to be the starting point of a linear process, marking the start of taking a drug or drugs, or changing to another substance.

> At parties, among friends. How well it works. I was asked if I felt like trying it out. And *people* who have already tried other things *surely are curious about the new, to see if it has better effect.* Because people strive to be better. I mean, what *drug use causes*. And I think many try harder drugs because people think that if it is harder, its effect will also be harder than that of a soft drug. (1905) (italics by JR) [28] [42]

In interview No. 1095, curiosity appears not only in connection with something new (as in the above examples), but with craving for something more powerful as well. Again, the meaning of the word is a part of a process. [43]

Curiosity also appears in connection with the methods of use (injection use, where to inject). [44]

After an interviewee (No.1514) explained in which parts of the body he injected the substance, the interviewer asked him "and where else?" Here is the answer:

> I: No other place ... Ok, sure, I'll tell you. Ophthalmological needle. My girlfriend persuaded me, because she was curious, and she knew what my penis was like, so ... I feel pretty uncomfortable talking about it. Anyway. Veins are pretty thick in my penis, and she got an ophthalmological needle. To inject into my penis. Because she was *curious*. So she injected. Now it doesn't matter where you inject. There at least you have clean veins. That's what she told me: ‘at least you are clean there, so it will work'. So this is how I once injected into my penis. But there was no other occasion.
>
> Q: Heroin?
>
> I: Yes. (1514) [45]

This part demonstrates that curiosity is subordinate to peer environment: the girlfriend is more important. Curiosity—not even the subject's curiosity but that of *his* girlfriend—serves as an *excuse*, i.e. the interviewee is not responsible for what happened. It is further underpinned by the term "uncomfortable"—the interviewee is aware that he is talking about an injection method disapproved of

by the majority of society, and probably not even preferred by most drug users (no other interviewee came up with a similar story). [46]

Following, I observe the timing of different events (events of different kind of drug use) and the relationship with this chain of events with "curiosity". The curiosity has a special place in the time line of these events:

> Q: When I asked you about mixing substances you told me that one time you mixed speed with cocaine. But these lists are not in the interview design. And when did you try first these speed and Ex, speed and cocaine combinations? How old were you?
>
> I: I don't know.
>
> Q: But it was surely after you had tried heroin or cocaine separately. When you had already experienced the substances, right?
>
> I: After that. Sure. And later I became *curious* about how intravenous taking can feel. (1516) [47]

Curiosity appears as embedded in a process (see the examples above: interviews No. 1513, 1510, 1711). Using heroin and cocaine separately is followed by the emergence of a curiosity about trying them out together. Again, curiosity does not just emerge out of nothing, but the interviewee "became curious". The curiosity put as a "reason" becomes a process: "became curious", then it sets in motion where the use of different drugs or the use of drugs following each other happens. In the interviews' narratives the trying or experimenting with drugs—the more frequent use—the change of drugs are edited in a linear process or they are plot linear narratives. [48]

It can also be observed, especially in context, that the interviewee seeks to close the conversation (like with "I don't know" in his previous answer). Here, in my perceptions, the closing of the interview serves as a special case of excuse: the action (drug use) and the responsibility are avoided with the word curious. [49]

While examining curiosity, I often encountered the word "interesting" in the interviews. At first I thought that the interviewees were using these terms as synonyms, but then I noticed that injection drug users had generally used "interesting" in a *negative* form, often referring to the associated risks, rather than drug use, like in the example below:

> I think no one was much interested in it then (i.e. in hepatitis C infection; JR). (1710) [50]

The form "I'm not interested" was used mostly as an opposition to social expectations or the expectations of the interviewer. Consequently, "curiosity" and "interesting" are not synonyms—both their meanings and their positions in the discourse are different. [51]

Many subjects used "interesting" in their descriptions of the effects of cannabis. Marijuana users applied this word much more frequently than injection drug users. When members of this latter group used it, they did it in contexts like "I'm

not interested in it anymore" or "I'm not interested in what people think", "I am not interested in my hepatitis infection". They never applied the word in connection with heroin' effect (i.e. it is interesting or they were interested in it). [52]

3.2 Curiosity as a feature of the interviewee

Many of the interviewees—especially party drug and marijuana users—referred to curiosity primarily as their personality trait. "Party drugs" cover different substances in the pharmacological sense; what they have in common is the method of use. They are used in a specific environment in terms of time and place, and can be associated with parties and the party culture itself. Users of these substances far less frequently use curiosity as a general explanation.

> Because I was *curious*. Why, why, why ... 'cause I wanted to know how it feels. If you don't know about something, you should know about it. I mean, to get pleasure. To have a good time. (2001)
>
> Actually, I have a really *curious nature* and I'd like to try out everything. (9905) [53]

Curiosity usually stands alone, as opposed to the "progression" observed with injection drug users (who became curious, or were directly motivated by curiosity, first, then they used the drug latter). The interview subject actually does not try the substance, he only satisfies his curiosity (his "curious nature"). If it still appears, it is not used as a reason for using cannabis, but rather as an explanation for trying out another substance or in connection with "trying" to quit:

> Yes, 'cause I was always extremely *curious* about tripping. (2002)
>
> So they had it, and I was obviously *curious* what it was exactly, so I tried it out. (2003)
>
> You know, *I was curious how this drug works*, I thought there could be no problem, I even checked it and they didn't write that you become addicted right away, or like with heroin, a couple of occasions and you are addicted, or like with crack. So I checked it and decided to try it out. So it was not that someone came and forced me to try it, but I said ok, let's go out, I'd like to try it out so let's get some. And they said ok, let's get some. And then I tried it, good, it's worth, it's not worth, maybe sometimes, but anyway, I use synthetic drugs only occasionally. Really, I use hardly any compared to cannabis. (2004) (italics by JR) [54]

Here curiosity refers to a specific activity. It does not refer to novelty in general and does not take control over the individual but rather, as a feature, relates to a concrete effect of a given substance. It characterises the individual, rather than the action (unlike in the case of injection drug users). This is similar to the way in which interviewers use the word curiosity, where a person (the interviewer) is curious about an action, which is usually the next one, both in terms of chronology and causal relationship.

> I: So, sometimes ... at times, just to test myself, I said that I would not use anything for a time. And I could do it with more or less success.
>
> Q: And why did you decide so?

> I: You know, I was just *curious* if I can say no, I don't need it. (2005)
>
> ... it's dangerous for those who don't want to learn. I mean for those who are reserved or withdrawn, or are not *curious* about other people, because they think everyone is just like them, so these drugs are dangerous for them, because ... it simply supplies an inner world. (2006) [55]

In the latter case the *lack* of curiosity—though not about drugs but because of drugs—appears as a negative phenomenon. Here curiosity does not represent a "reason" or explanation for drug use, but the text implies that *not* to be curious is something bad (which is against the norms). In the cited section, curiosity also appears in relation to others, not only as a term characterising the individual or his or her act. However, the word is not used as an excuse (as in the case of the injection drug user No. 1514, where the girlfriend is responsible for the irregular method of drug taking), but rather as something that helps drugs to open gates towards other people. [56]

The term "interesting" observed in the answers of injection drug users was used in a different context here. Interviewees used it to describe the effects of drugs. Injection drug users did not use the term in this way.

> And for half a minute I didn't know where I was. It was *interesting*. (about the effect of sparklet, nitrogenoxidul) (1713) [57]

3.3 Interviewers and curiosity

Interviewers working with injecting drug users used the word curiosity remarkably frequently, a great deal more often than their colleagues working with the other group (interviewers could interview members from both groups). The following quotations are examples of such questions:

> Q: ... I am *curious* about your drug use habits, ... (1514)
>
> I mean I am *curious* about how the line works (how users can reach the dealer; JR)? /1523/
>
> Q: What I am *curious* about is if you made the doses for everyone in the same spoon or something ...? (1508) [58]

The above questions reveal that curiosity, besides trying drugs, may also relate to the application or even buying of the substance. It was often used as an excuse to downplay the importance of the question: "I'm just curious", "I'm just curious about a small detail". [59]

I observed this use of curiosity in those interviewers who conducted the interviews in medical or needle exchange settings. Here the distance between the interviewee and the interviewer is bigger, the questions and the answers are more superficial than in other interviews. The reason of those kinds of interviews maybe explained by the formal setting and the role of the interviewer who—

however he or she has not any formal role—is closer to the staff persons of these facilities. [60]

It sometimes happened that the interviewee rejected the interviewer's "curiosity", or asked him or her to ask a more precise question:

> Q: And were you with your friends? How did it happen? Why did you try it? Out of curiosity?
>
> I: Yes. Out of curiosity. Though, I wasn't really curious; it was rather that others tried it. I was there, so I tried it too. No. (1503)
>
> I: What kind of a question is that?
>
> Q: What kind of a question? A curious question.
>
> I: It's like a police interrogation.
>
> Q: No, it has nothing to do with police. I'm simply curious. Someone said that he liked it better when someone else injected the substance for him. He couldn't explain why, it was just better that way. Some said that, for example. (1503) [61]

The answer given to a "curious" question is usually a detailed story of what the questioner was expected to find out, i.e. where and with whom the first drug use took place. These are often short stories about trying drugs or changing to another drug. [62]

3.4 The appearance of the perceived opinion of the majority of society in respect of drug use in the accounts

Injection drug users perceive more intensely the disapproval of the majority of society to their way of substance use, i.e. the view that the method they use is "not normal". Their own disapproval toward their drug taking ranges from labelling it "not normal" to calling it an "evil trap". Accounts reveal that the interviewees perceive strong disapproval. This rejection, besides the disapproval of drug taking, may also relate to the individual.

> But, as I had a chance to do it, I didn't think that this was a... that this was such a bad thing. Because there was only one thing that mattered, to have it. You know what I mean. (3004)
>
> I: This is my life, and this is my choice.
>
> K: So if you decided to give up taking drugs and start a normal life, would you be able to?
>
> I: No. I will never live my life as a normal individual, in the sense you use the word. It's not that I don't want to. I just won't. (2007)
>
> K: When I say drug, what comes to your mind?
>
> I: It's a trap.
>
> K: What kind of a trap?
>
> I: It's diabolical trap that keeps you under control. (1713) [63]

The disapproval may also influence their own self-image, as the interview No. 2008's example shows:

> But now I'm here, and there's nothing I can do. I'm a good-for-nothing! (2008) [64]

In respect of substance use, ambivalence appears in the answers of injection drug users:

> K: If you had received a good upbringing and avoided being taken into an institution, do you think things could have developed in a different way?
>
> I: I think I would be in the same situation. This is a ... I don't know ... should I say an inherent abnormality? A desire for freedom. If I could, I'd go and start a revolution like Che Guevara. (2007) [65]

Marijuana and party drug users reported a less intense perception of social disapproval:

> I'm not ashamed of myself. I'm not proud of it, but not ashamed either, and I have no feeling of guilt because of it …
>
> I think that at least 75% of Hungarian young people are involved in this thing. (1801) [66]

As can be seen, ambivalence appearing in the latter examples does not involve such extremes as in the case of injection drug users. The interview No. 2007 moves between "inherent abnormality" and "revolution", while interviewee No. 1801 between "shame", "guilt" and "pride". Marijuana users often indicate that many young people use drugs, and there are no, or at least no serious, consequences of substance use. It does not prevent them from going to school or working. It implies that they question society's condemnation, finding it unfounded. Injection drug users do not come up with such claims. [67]

4. Discussion

I studied the role of curiosity as an explanation in qualitative interviews done with drug users in connection with experimenting with drugs and first use, change of use (e.g. changing from oral to injection use), and shifting from one drug to another. [68]

4.1 Curiosity and accounts: Curiosity as an excuse or justification

In the course of the analysis of interviews, I interpreted the interviewees' curiosity (their answers containing curiosity) in the context of their accounts. The verbal strategies used in the accounts lessen the responsibility attributed to the individual who committed the act. Out of these strategies, excuse and justification also frequently appear in the interviews (SCOTT & LYMAN, 1968). [69]

Curiosity is part of a *system of excuses*. An excuse also implies that the interviewee accepts the disapproval of drug use by the majority of society. As we have seen, this is more the case with injection drug users. However, there are others who do not use excuses, that is, who ignore rejection. Acceptance and ignorance may change even within an interview. Excuses may play different roles when the discourse is about changes in substance use. The interview situation is another factor that must be taken into consideration. The interviewer is a representative of the majority who has expectations regarding the interview, and this is indicated by the frequent occurrence of the word "curiosity" in the questions. The conversation between the two individuals may again influence the appearance of excuses or justification, and may make the interviewee account for the changes of his or her drug taking habits when the interviewer asked about the "hows" and "whats" instead of "whys". That is, the questions relate to "how" he or she changed to another drug, rather than "why". [70]

The appearance of curiosity in the accounts presents the opportunity to understand curiosity as a phenomenon with an independent ontological status that is linked to either the individual or the activity. When examining the ontological status of curiosity, its strong moral content and rules are conspicuous. It is accompanied by will, "drives" and suggestibility, sometimes even with bravery, self-excuse, the rejection of responsibility, and aspects related to seeking novelty and experience discussed curiosity as psychological constructs (CLONINGER, 1987). The term was predominantly used by injection drug users and the interviewees questioning them. This fact allows me to interpret its appearance in those interviews as a factor that connected the two individuals, or sometimes created a gap between them. "Curiosity" appearing in the questions and answers represented a playground that, depending on the development of the interview, may have dictated various directions for both the interviewer and the interviewee. To put it another way, it allowed different positioning (DAVIES & HARRÉ, 1990), while leaving the interviewer and the interviewee not having to adhere to a question or an answer. This playground often allowed the "acceptable" closure of the conversation: the interviewee's answer ("I was curious") simply closes the way to further questions and answers. Conversely, the curious questions of the interviewer—"I'm just curious"—may have provided the interviewee with a chance to withdraw and not to answer, and his or her doing so could be considered as a closure of the interaction on the grounds that the question itself was, let me say, not serious ("exaggerated excuse"). Questions with such wording reduce the weight of the answer; more precisely, it leaves the interactional situation in the control of the interviewee, even as far as declining to answer. In other cases, "curiosity" represents a sanctuary for the interviewee, where he or she holds no responsibility for what he or she has done. In this way, interviewees re-contextualise the drug use that drug users, mainly injection drug users, find risky and dangerous to society and reposition it in the versatile space of curiosity instead of considering it as a forbidden activity. [71]

The connection between curiosity and excuse brings up the possibility that curiosity is an explanation constructed *after* the activity. In this case, this is an explanation for substance use or a change of use created after the action. It is

mainly in the interviews carried out with injection drug users that I have a feeling —based either on the wording of the interviewer or the interviewee—that, besides being a retrospective *teleological explanation* (BROCKMEIER, 2001), curiosity also implies a linear order of events: "driven by curiosity"—the step following "curiosity" was drug use. The linear relationship between curiosity and substance use, as well as the chronological relation between first drug use and change of drugs, may again be linked to a response to the perceived expectations of the majority of society. The questions reveal that interviewees also tend to think in a linear pattern about experimenting with drugs and subsequent progression. [72]

Nevertheless, the use of "curiosity" by interviewers raises further questions. The interview plans that the interviewers used in the semi-structured interviews imposed a linear way of thinking (first drug use, giving up or suspension of drug use, taking different drugs in various ways concurrently, various explanations, absence of excuses etc.) upon the interviewees, even though other approaches also came up during the preparatory training and the interviews did not refer to curiosity. In some cases, the interviewee rejected "curiosity" and the related linearity as well as the decontextualisation generated by the term, or started to talk about his or her drug use, that is, placed it in a particular—usually social—context. I can consider the questioner's "curiosity" as decontextualisation because the same question could have been put in almost any situation, irrespective of the given subject (in this case, drug use and the stages of substance use). The use of the word also highlights—now in respect of the interviewers—that the question relates to something ambiguous and suspicious that is not necessarily accepted by the majority, and the interviewer apparently makes preparations for a withdrawal: "it is not important, I was just curious", and moves on to the next topic. However, the ontological space discussed above is narrower for the interviewer, providing less space to move for him or her than for the interviewee. This is because the interviewer plays an active part as a "researcher" and also presents himself or herself as such. Therefore, he or she cannot withdraw into complete ambiguity because in that case all his words and questions would loose their meaning, which would lead to the interruption of the interaction usually directed by the interviewer. [73]

The interactive and discursive nature of the interview could explain why I encounter the word "curiosity" relatively rarely in interviews compared to quantitative research. Interviews provide a broad space for explanations and discussions of those explanations between the two individuals involved (i.e. the interviewee and the interviewer). Furthermore, they also provide a broad space for an interplay between "*hows*" and "*whats*" in relation to drug use, for both the interviewee and the questioner. This differs from the answers given to the "*why*" questions in the questionnaires. This may also have to do with the differences between qualitative and quantitative research in terms of questioning and the ways they try to explore reality (GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN, 2000). On the other hand, in questionnaires "curiosity" may also serve as a kind of front (GOFFMAN, 1956), blocking the way for other, often more intimate, interpretations and explanations. PLUMRIDGE and CHETWYND (1998) identified discourse strategies in relation to injection drug users (based on SILVERMAN, 1997) that

could be used to protect the interviewee's moral status, citing that even intravenous drug taking involves reasonable actions by reasonable people. [74]

The fact that interviewers use the term "curiosity" more frequently to decontextualise their questions also calls attention to the connection between the interviewer and drug taking. Here decontextualisation means that the questioner focuses on isolated activities of drug use, thus excluding drug use itself (for "curiosity" can relate to anything, not just specifically to drug use). The conversations between curious interviewers and interviewees resorting to excuse or justification could suggest that drug use in Hungary has not "consolidated" yet, has not become enough of a recreational activity, so questions about it prompted accounts of drug use. In Western European countries this process was essentially complete by the late 1990s, though experts have conflicting views on it (e.g. JONES, 2004; MACDONALD & MARSH, 2002; MEASHAM, NEWCOMBE & PARKER, 1994; MOORE, 2004; SHINER & NEWBURN, 1997; PARKER, ALDRIDGE & MEASHAM, 1998; RILEY, JAMES, GREGORY, DINGLE & CADGER, 2001; The Lancet, 2006). [75]

It is possible that it is the curiosity of the interviewers that can be linked with BAUMAN's (1998) *collector of experiences.* The larger the distance between the interviewer and the subject, and the more interesting are the subjects, the more it is possible, or even necessary, for the interviewer to be curious (i.e. to be an impersonal collector). This view is supported with my experience that the interviewers' curiosity was framing in the interviews done in medical facilities where the distance between the two persons were thought to be bigger. [76]

Moreover, analysing the use of the word interesting I observed it was not used as a synonym of curiosity but has other, different meanings. There was also a difference between marijuana users and injecting drug users. I feel that *I was interested in cannabis* is closer to epistemic curiosity, while *the effect of cannabis is interesting* is a quite neutral, distance-creating expression with which the individual does not evaluate the effect as being either good or bad. The frequent use of "I'm not interested" by heroin users seems to indicate the rejection of social expectations, even in a sense that the user is not interested in a drug any more, as if it was a social "expectation" (prejudice) that (s)he should use drugs, to which (s)he gives the answer "I'm not interested". [77]

4.2 Conclusion

The interviews with drug users draw attention to various forms of curiosity or, more precisely, to various functions of curiosity and its textual context. The term "curiosity" itself is not free from prejudice or taken for granted meaning either; the etymology and the common meaning or scientifically constructed meanings of the word (in English and in the fundamentally different Hungarian language) imply the presence of something unwanted or strange. The crossing of boundaries—or at least the opportunity to do so—is inherent in the word. I hardly ever observed curiosity and its textual context in the interviews with drug users as an explorative or motivational psychological construct when it was examined in experiments

(and animal experiments). Epistemic curiosity was more frequent. It was applied in connection with the effect of drugs or with how the individual changed due to drug use, and what expectations (s)he had in this context. I also encountered other functions of curiosity: in accounts it appeared as an *excuse* or, less frequently, as *justification*. Curiosity, owing to its independent ontological status, was in itself sufficient for generating questions and answers about drug use. The multiple meaning of the word, i.e. its "hidden" (common usage) meaning related to crossing lines may well have contributed to this function. [78]

Contrary to dominant contemporary drug policy literature cited in the Introduction, drug users themselves rarely used "curiosity" in the context of risk or danger. In Hungary, the context of curiosity, used by either the interviewer or the subject, demonstrates that the normalisation of drug use, which is in progress in Western countries, has not started yet. [79]

The analysis of the concept of curiosity outlined above may contribute to a better understanding of the circumstances of first drug use, and may result in preventative material that take this multi-meaning nature of curiosity into account. This may be more efficient (e.g. in delaying first use and preventing users from moving on to other drugs) than programmes based on information transfer. The research also raises the question as to how pre-structured, linear interview plans can influence qualitative research. It is possible that a less structured interview plan providing the interviewer with more room for manoeuvre would produce a decontextualising and excusing ("I was curious") attitude in the questioner to a lesser extent. By contrast, interviewees often avoided giving direct (expected?) answers, and came up with a short story about the context of drug use, i.e. the "hows" and "whats" of substance use, while avoiding talking about "why" they tried using drugs. It may also be assumed that, for drug users, it is the narrated "how" that carries the relevant information, not the "why"—even if it sets them to a certain extent at odds with the questioner's preconceptions and linear cause and effect patterns. This is because "how" allows the presentation of different self positions, the telling of different stories, and a discussion about the perceived disapproval of drug use by the majority of society. [80]

I also learnt from the study that the taken for granted meaning of some special words has to be critically analysed and uncovered as early as the preparatory phase of the study while training the interviewers. [81]

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Author

Jozsef Racz, M.D., Ph.D., psychiatrist, is a senior researcher of the Institute for Psychology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His research interest is the social meaning and context of drug use, the narratives of drug users and of recovered drug users; his main research method is the qualitative interviewing. He also teaches at the Semmelweis University (Budapest), Faculty of Health Studies (head of the Department of Addiction Medicine). His teaching subjects are addiction medicine and qualitative methods. He is the director of the Blue Point Drug Counselling and Outpatient Centre (an NGO in Budapest): a treatment and a harm reduction centre for drug users.

Contact:

Jozsef Racz

Institute for Psychology
Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Victor Hugo utca 18-22
Budapest – 1132
Hungary

Tel.: +361 2796087
Fax: +361 2796087

E-mail: raczj@mtapi.hu
URL: http://www.mtapi.hu/

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