

BOOK REVIEW

## Jaeyoon Park, *Addiction Becomes Normal: On the Late-Modern American Subject*

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*Addiction Becomes Normal* analyses the normalization of addiction in late modern America. Park advances convincing arguments that evidence how and why addiction has become normalized – a term signifying a move away from the perception of addiction as abnormal. To Park, normalization is not an ‘increased cultural acceptance of addiction’ (p. 12). Rather, it is the recent shift towards addiction being part of human nature; addiction and desire lie ‘latent in each of us’ (p. 120). The book is structured by four comprehensive chapters covering American politics, medicine and science, underpinned by philosophical, namely (post-)Foucauldian, ideas about the self and desire. Those philosophical concepts emerge fully in the book’s conclusion, in which Park recasts desire as something that is accumulated through experiences. No longer Foucault’s modern subjects of essence, we are now late modern ‘subjects of accretion’.

The first chapter is essential for understanding Park’s theory and for contextualizing the book’s argument. In it, Park outlines the historical context of addiction in American society pre-normalization before revealing the extensiveness of normalization across four sectors: science, diagnostic procedures, judicial theory and national rhetoric. ‘Normalization’ relates to a process of change across those domains over the last forty years. Park addresses the significance of the late modern period in each chapter, carefully evidencing well-chosen moments of cultural meaning and social policy that shifted ideas about addiction towards normalization. New frameworks for addressing addiction and criminality (Chapter 1), the shift toward behavioural interventions (Chapter 2) and the emergence of the scientific theory of addictive craving (Chapter 3), for example, all came in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the period Park pinpoints as vital to addiction’s normalization.

Time specificity is of similar significance to the book’s Foucauldian strands. The increase in behavioural interventions (the current and most common method of addiction treatment) not only is a ‘vector’ (p. 75) for normalization, but also provides the ‘move beyond disciplinary power’ (p. 84). According to Park, the increase in behavioural interventions is evidence that late modern America is post-disciplinary in a post-Foucauldian sense. This is one example among many where Park delicately sets up the concluding chapter, which calls for a ‘repudiation’ of Foucault’s modern subject (p. 161).

Park’s description of the term ‘addiction’ as an ‘umbrella term’ appears in a terminological note (p. 183). Drawing out such a discussion in the main body may have been beneficial because the case studies explored in the book give preference to drug and alcohol addiction, although other addictions are mentioned sporadically. However, using ‘addiction’ in its

broad sense allows for an exploration into human craving and desire in the third chapter. There, Park reveals that desire is not formed within the subject, but is a 'reflection of the desirability of the object' (p. 116). Using addiction as an 'umbrella term' is pivotal to Chapter 4, too, in which a central theme is the late modern proliferation of addiction(s). The chapter begins with the historical development of wellness – a discussion that will be of interest to many due to the current ubiquity of the term. Asking 'why have so many addictions, and new types of addiction, been claimed and identified ... in recent decades?' (p. 124), Park demonstrates lucidly how the so-called expansion of addiction in type and discourse is related to addiction's normalization in late modern America.

One of the strengths of *Addiction Becomes Normal* is the author's ability to interweave diverse source types, widening its appeal to scholars working in social policy, science and drug history, philosophy and psychology. Such variety – the *Commonwealth v. Eldred* case (Chapter 2), the Netflix ratings system (Chapter 3) and the language used by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (Chapter 4), for example – helps generate an in-depth overall argument about normalization that is tough to contest. But there are instances where knowledge is presumed and additional historical/historiographical context would be useful, particularly for general readers or those new to the field.

Park is persuasive and perceptive; acutely aware of social changes and their impact on how we think not only about addiction, but also about the human condition more broadly. With power and control as underlying threads, it is logical, then, that Park draws on Foucauldian concepts to ask deeper questions about the application of normalization beyond addiction. Some of the philosophical discussions may not be accessible to readers less familiar with Foucault, while those more familiar with the French philosopher may query a lack of discussion on the medical gaze and biopolitics.

While the particularity of the late modern historical moment in *Addiction Becomes Normal* is integral, the specificity of culture and nationhood (America) does not always receive the same attention. The book is evidently about America, and focuses on it throughout, but is the new trend to see addiction as a 'deterioration of public health' rather than a 'corruption of national spirit' (p. 44) unique to America? The author's periodic use of phrases such as 'our cultural place' (p. 23) are ambiguous, particularly to non-American readers. I am left wondering whose cultural place, and to what extent the normalization of addiction is, or could be, an American, Western or global concept.

Park acknowledges that the 'post-disciplinary governance of addiction is farther advanced for certain demographic groups' (p. 87), yet notes that a more generalized approach can illuminate the wider implications. This is a valid point, but the continued use of the first person plural is somewhat incongruous with the recent attention elsewhere on individual experience and demographic as factors important for addiction and for accessing help. If *Addiction Becomes Normal* is essentially about what it means to be human, what are the impacts of the normalization of addiction at an individual level? How might the concept that each of us is 'an addict in waiting' (p. 1) influence how humans (as non-specialists and as individuals) actually view one another? I would have liked to read potential responses to such questions, because I very much value the author's insights.