

Week 1: Introduction, Drug Symbolism, Hallucinogens, and Cannabis

Introduction - What are Drugs?

- Oxford English Dictionary definition: A medicine or other substance which has a physiological effect when ingested or otherwise introduced into the body”.
- Urban Dictionary (surprisingly good definition): Drugs are chemicals that alter, block, or mimic chemical reactions in the brain. This causes an alteration of the body’s normal processes cause physical or mental changes”.

Addiction: Not Just A Neurological Process

- Article headlines: World of Warcraft is more addictive than crack cocaine, high-fructose corn syrup is as addictive as cocaine, fast food is as addictive heroin, love can be as addictive as cocaine, etc.
- All of these headlines: anything pleasurable (in neurological terms, triggering DA release) = “addictive”.
- Reducing normal human pleasure-response conditioning to addiction.
- Most drugs users never come to the attention of doctors, lawyers, or policeman (Robson, p. 22).
 - In one year of the 1980’s, over 25 million Americans tried cocaine (~1/10 of the population of at the time). Only a tiny percent present for treatment, help, or get arrested, despite it being thought of as one of the most addictive drugs.
 - Survey of cocaine users: 29% take the drugs opportunistically, 29% buy their own and use it infrequently, 28% use frequently and regularly, and only 14% were categorised as compulsive, addicted user (Robson, p. 94).
 - Opium: a significant percent of heroin users use regularly, in controlled, ritualised way.
- Definition of culture: “A system of shared ideas, rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that humans live” (Roger Keesing and Andrew Strathern).
- Culture is the “organisation of difference” - always changing and contested, not unified.

Zinberg’s Theory of Drug Use

- The effect of a drug is due to three variables and their interaction:
 1. **Drug:** the pharmacological action of the substance itself.

2. **Set:** the attitude of the person at the time of use, including his or her personality structure, and what they expect the drug to do. Individual attitudes are significantly influenced by social values and social expectations).
3. **Setting:** the influence of the physical and social setting in which use occurs. Two dimensions: *social sanctions* and *social rituals*.
 - Social sanctions: informal, often unspoken values about shared conduct within the group e.g. the idea that you don't drink vodka with breakfast - use drugs at certain times and in certain contexts.

Drug Symbolism

- The hypodermic syringe (needle) and aesthetic aversion - 'boundary violation' and pollution.
- Influence of anthropologist Mary Douglas: views pollution as "matter out of place".
 - Our notions of pollution are about boundary violations.
 - Manderson says needles is "metal out of place".

Drugs and Possession

- Manderson (2005): 'possession' assumes humans actively appropriate and use passive things.
 - Criminal law makes the assumption that punishment is for intentional and/or wrongful acts (innocent until proven guilty).
 - Drug law is the opposite (guilty until proven innocent). More often than not, YOU have to prove the drugs are not yours or that you had no wrong intentions.
 - Possessing the drugs at all is seen as a crime.
- Parallel with witchcraft beliefs of 16th and 17th century Europe: women who had been seduced and possessed by the Devil and believed to be addicted to the sexual pleasure.
- Double-sidedness of drug symbolism: Manderson (1995) states that there is a double meaning to drugs and drugs objects e.g. hypodermic syringe.
 - **Example:** while the needle and other drug paraphernalia evoke disgust in non-users, but to those who use the drugs they connote physical pleasure and social rituals.
- Manderson: both the law and the addict share a common obsession.

- Drug laws stage a passion play of identity. The law is the stage. There is lots of media attention to drug seizures in attempts to make it seem more dramatic.
- Every drug seizure or shootout is clearly of the most trivial, actual significance, but it is presented as an elaborate morality play.
- That doesn't mean there's no harm in drugs. But drug law isn't about harm. Proof of this lies in some more harmful drugs are not outlawed and less harmful drugs that are.
- We need them to stage theatre, to show people how to behave in society and what a good citizen looks like.

Psychedelics/Hallucinogens

- Cannabis research has mostly focused on its medical uses or the harmful health consequences of heavy and uncontrolled use.
- Research on the potential positive spiritual/mystical/pleasurable effects of illicit drugs is considered illegitimate.
- Dichotomy of mind and body in Western thought, emphasis on the primacy of reason (Manderson - different to Manderson above).
- Aesthetic horror of drug use in mainstream society.
- Pervasive Puritan ethic, fear of hedonism and of Dionysian pleasure.

Natural Hallucinogenic Drugs in Pre-Industrial Europe

- Belladonna (deadly nightshade): translates to "beautiful woman" as it was used as an eye-drop, and this causes the pupils to dilate, supposedly making the user appear more attractive.
- Datura (Jimson weed, thorn apple).
- Mandragora (Mandrake).

New World and Hallucinogens

- The Americas have the highest concentration of plant hallucinogens of any region in the world (mostly in tropical and subtropical zones).
- The cults and religious orders that use hallucinogens for ritual, religious, and healing purposes also cluster in the tropical New World.

Shamanism

- Shaman: a religious or ritual specialist who gains control/power over supernatural forces. Shama has the ability to enter visionary trance-states altered states of consciousness, including visions (often called the “master of spirits”).
- In the New World, the use of hallucinogens is centred on shamans who play a dominant role in their societies with respect to religion, ritual, and healing.
- Shamanic trance can be induced by: tobacco, hallucinogenic drugs, fasting, meditation, hypnosis, music/dancing, and controlled breathing.
- Community function of shamans:
 - Shaman acts as a **mediator** between the supernatural and the community. Shaman communicates with spirits and uses spiritual power to gain control over supernatural forces for the benefit of the community.
 - **Healing:** the shaman uses visionary trances to diagnose illness. man can ‘see’ or visualise the cause of an illness, and commonly does battle against evil and harmful supernatural forces causing illness. Effect of changing the mental state of the patient
- a form of faith healing or psychotherapy.
- Personal spiritual functions of shamans: hallucinogens may contribute to the development of religious awareness.