

Anth106 Drugs Across Cultures

Myths or common public perceptions that this unit will dispel

- That the effect of a drug is caused solely by its pharmacological properties and effects
- That some drugs are instantaneously addictive
- The gateway / stepping stone theory: that use of 1 drug necessarily leads to the use of other, “harder” drugs.

All of these myths can be debunked through a social / cultural approach to drugs.

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.” The OED also provides a useful list of rhymes.

Includes illicit drugs, legal recreational drugs, and legal but regulated pharmaceutical drugs that aren’t recreational at all.

Drugs are chemicals that alter, block, or mimic chemical reactions in the brain. This causes an alteration of the body's normal processes, causing physical. Faster heartbeat, deeper respiration etc.), or mental (Elevated mood, new thought processes etc.) changes.

Yet some drugs blur the definition between drugs and foods. Whether a drug is considered bad and is prohibited depends on the culture of the society in a particular historical period.

What is Addiction?

Anything pleasurable (in neurological terms, triggering dopamine release) = “addictive”. Reducing normal human pleasure-response conditioning to “addiction”.

Later in the semester: a psychologist will talk about psychological models of addiction. For now, note: these models don’t take into account how the social context of drug use shapes addiction.

Just how addictive are drugs, anyway?

The examples of cocaine and opium:

“Most drugs users never come to the attention of doctors, lawyers, or policemen”
[sic] (Robson, p.22).

- In one year of 1980s, over 25 million Americans tried cocaine. Animal experiments and ER surveys: Cocaine one of the most toxic and addictive drugs. Yet only a tiny percent present for treatment, help, or get arrested.
- Survey of cocaine users: 29% take the drug opportunistically. 29% buy their own, use infrequently. 28% use frequently and regularly. Only 14% categorised as compulsive, addicted users (Robson p.94).
- Opium: A significant percent (majority?) of heroin users use regularly, in controlled, ritualised way (Robson p.23).

What is Culture?

Definition of culture (Roger Keesing and Andrew Strathern): “a system of shared ideas, rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that humans live.”

Includes: laws, rituals, beliefs, political economy, media and popular culture... ideas about what is normal and abnormal.

“Culture” is always changing and contested, not unified (think subcultures) → Keesing and Strathern, 1998. *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co (Third Edition, first edition published 1976).

Ethnography as Method for Studying Drug Use:

What’s ethnography? “a process of observing, recording, and describing another people’s way of life through intimate participation the community being studied.” Participant observation, involving yourself in the life of the community, doing what other people do, observing what they do, asking questions, and learning what questions to ask.

Understanding the meaning of drug use in context.

Zinberg’s Theory of Drug Use

The effect of a drug is due to three variables and their interaction:

- **DRUG:** the pharmacological action of the substance itself.
- **SET:** The attitude of the person at 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.)
- **SETTING:** The influence of the physical and social setting in which use occurs. 2 dimensions:
 - Social sanctions
 - Social rituals

Refuting the myth that drugs are chiefly defined and determined by their pharmacological properties:

- Divide between legality & illegality is socially and historically determined, not based on objective ranking of the dangers of drugs.
- So this class will look at the social context surrounding drug classification and use, and how this changes historically
- Drugs and their effect on individuals can only be fully understood by taking into account the particular social, cultural, political, and economic contexts, in addition to their pharmacological properties.

A portrait of drug addiction – and NOT addiction: Meth

Anti-meth campaigns portray a drug that instantly addicts and destroys your life. But what about those who try it, enjoy it, and never become addicted? There's a good reason for that propaganda in high school!

- Effect of drugs on developing brains
- Substance use patterns established early

Criminological understandings of deviance that we apply to understanding drugs

Kai Erikson, 1962. "Notes on the Sociology of Deviance."

- All societies have moral boundaries that separate members from non-members. This enhances group identities.
- Society thus needs deviants to mark its moral boundaries. Deviants, and our reactions to them, help to publicise those moral boundaries.
- Therefore, society develops ways of ensuring a steady supply of deviants, like prison. Punishment for deviance isn't even intended to stop deviance. It ensures a steady supply of deviants.

A Post-Propaganda Approach to Studying Drugs

- **Neuropharmacology/Medicine:** How drugs work in our bodies
- **Psychology:** How addiction works
- How experiences with drugs are mediated by:
 1. Cultural symbolism (**anthropology**)
 2. The social organisation (subculture) of users (**anthropology & sociology**)
- **Political science and economics:** Drug law and international markets

- **History:** The history of drug use
- **Media/cultural studies:** Drugs in popular culture and the media
- **Philosophy and literature:** How drugs are pleasurable for many

In short: **an interdisciplinary approach**

Drug Branding and Symbolism

“The diversity of the branding demonstrates the vigour of the business and the dynamism of the market,” Davenport-Hines.

What’s your knowledge of drugs as a market?

- What are the gross profit margins that drug traffickers can make?
- In 1999, what percentage of U.S. youths aged 12-17 had used an illegal drug within the past 30 days?
- Comparing between laws and use prevalence in the European Union, what conclusions can we draw about the relationship between illicit drug use and a country’s drug laws?
 - a) the more restrictive the law, the less drugs are used
 - b) the more restrictive the law, the more drugs are used
 - c) it makes no difference.

What’s the moral of the story when it comes to all these figures?

- Both the illegal drug trade and the pharmaceutical market are HUGE and important social phenomena to study.
- Enormous economic implications: large profits to be made, and in the case of illicit drugs, a whole associated phenomenon of the so called “War against Drugs” – profits and criminality associated with drug trafficking.
- Temper the horror stories we hear of drug use: for every addict who has ruined his/her life and that of his/her family, there are many more people who do not become part of these horror stories.

Psychedelics / Hallucinogens

What has cannabis research mostly focused on?

It's medical uses OR the harmful health consequences of heavy and uncontrolled use (e.g. psychotic effects, links with schizophrenia, etc.).

Research on the potential positive spiritual/mystical/pleasurable effects of illicit drugs is considered illegitimate. Why?

Why no scientific research on spiritual/mystical/pleasurable effects of drugs?

- Dichotomy of mind and body in Western thought, emphasis on the primacy of reason.
- "Aesthetic horror" of drug use in mainstream society.
- Pervasive Puritan ethic, fear of hedonism and of Dionysian pleasure. (Manderson, LR)

We'll examine scientific thinking and the basic assumptions on which it is founded → shape the type of knowledge we seek and obtain.

- Hallucinogens as a case study to extend Manderson's insights about links between social class and the legal status of drugs
- Extend Himmelstein's insights into the role of moral entrepreneurs in shaping the way a drug is seen and used in a particular society.

Natural Hallucinogenic Drugs in Pre-Industrial Europe:

- Belladonna (deadly nightshade)
- Datura (Jimson weed, thorn apple)
- Mandragora (Mandrake)

Used in Europe mainly for ritualistic purposes e.g. witches' Sabbath.

**Reference:* Terence McKenna, "A Brief History of Psychedelics," chapter 25 in *Shamanism: A Reader*, edited by Graham Harvey, Routledge 2003

New World and Hallucinogens:

The New World has the highest concentration of plant hallucinogens of any region in the world (mostly in tropical and subtropical zones).

McKenna: "The New World subtropical and tropical zones are phenomenally rich in hallucinogenic plants" (p.425). The cults and religious orders that use hallucinogens for ritual, religious, and healing purposes also cluster in the tropical New World.

Some New World Hallucinogens:

Name	Active agent	Location found
Ayahuasca (yage / yaje)	Harmaline	Western Amazon
Datura	Scopolamine	North, Central, South America
Sacred mushrooms (e.g. <i>Psilocybe mexicana</i>)	Psilocybin	Mexico (evidence of shamanic use in Oaxacan Mexico going back 3 millennia)
Peyote cactus	Mescaline	North America, Mexico
San Pedro cactus	Mescaline	Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador
Viola snuff	Tryptamine	N.W. Amazon

Shamanism

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.

Definition of Shaman:

A religious and ritual specialist who gains control/power over supernatural forces → Shaman is often called “master of the spirits.” Shaman has ability to enter visionary trance-states (altered states of consciousness, including visions). Shamanic trance can be induced by:

- Tobacco
- Hallucinogenic Drugs
- Fasting
- Meditation, Hypnosis
- Music, Dancing
- Controlled Breathing

Functions of Shamanic Trances

Community Functions:

Shaman as mediator between the supernatural and the community. Shaman communicates with spirits uses spiritual power to gain control over supernatural forces for the benefit of the community.