

The Impact of Drug Use on United States Policy and Societal Norms

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By

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On my honor as a University student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments.

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Introduction

Various substances have shaped cultural norms in the United States as different drugs integrated into and evolved with its recreational culture. The federal government has historically played a big role in regulating substance use among its citizens in the “War on Drugs”, or the effort by the federal government to reduce the prevalence of drug use among the general population through regulations and prohibitions, claiming to be in an effort to promote public health. This ‘war’ has had widespread effects including racial profiling, family separation, and political unrest.

These efforts to prohibit substance use has not necessarily decreased drug use, but actually may have had the opposite effect. Programs like Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) that were aimed at teaching children from a young age to stay away from drugs has ironically increased drug use among teenagers (Wolchover, 2012). This may be linked to the fact that DARE never offered any safe alternatives, but simply told the kids to ‘Just Say No’. Telling children to completely avoid an activity puts that activity on a pedestal in their minds and may cause them to experiment later in life out of curiosity.

The integration of drug use into American culture can be analyzed through the lens of the co-production framework. By performing an analysis through co-production, the idea that society facilitates the evolution of a technology while the widespread impact of the technology in turn causes the society that created it to evolve simultaneously is kept in mind (Jasanoff, 2004). Over the course of history, social norms and technology have both evolved immensely and co-production argues that this is not coincidental, but in fact that they are direct effects of one another. In this research paper, I will use the co-production framework to argue that drug use creates customs across various social groups in the United States and drives politicians to silence

certain groups through the War on Drugs. This information will then be used to analyze different events throughout history such as prohibition of alcohol, criminalization of marijuana, the psychedelic hippie movement in the 60s, the crack epidemic in the 80s, and the modern-day opioid epidemic as well as the causes and effects of legal involvement in these scenarios.

The Theoretical War that America Lost

There are many reasons an individual might begin experimenting with drugs. These reasons include physical need, boredom and a desire to experiment, depression and anxiety, and a desire to give oneself a competitive edge in society (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2014). As taught in schools, drugs can pose a huge health risk to a user. As a result, the government has taken an effort to reduce the prevalence of such substances through a series of bans and prohibitions. Strict penalties and jail time have been implemented for a wide range of drug crimes. The War on Drugs, has not necessarily succeeded at the aforementioned goal, but has had widespread effects that have changed the culture of the United States. A youthful fascination with drugs has been weaponized to silence and discriminate against minority and lower income communities through the War on Drugs.

Author Jarret Zigon describes the War on Drugs as a ‘situation’. The paper “What Is a Situation?: An Assemblage Ethnography of the Drug War” describes this ‘war’ as “a nontotalizable assemblage widely diffused across different global scales that allows us to conceptualize how persons and objects that are geographically, socioeconomically, and culturally distributed get caught up in shared conditions that significantly affect their possible ways of being-in-the-world” (Zigon, 2015, p. 1). This essentially says that the War on Drugs is so widespread and circumstantially specific that you cannot encompass it all in one definition.

This research paper looks at the situation that is the War on Drugs and some resulting widespread effects through the co-production framework, which relies on the belief that society and technology build off and inspire each other (Jasanoff, 2004). Using the example of drugs, many of these substances were developed by medical practitioners who recognized their potential therapeutic qualities. These drug technologies then made a huge impact on medical care and society evolved as a result. However, after being introduced for public use, negative side effects may have shown up. As a result, the drug must be changed, starting the cycle over again. Often rather than changing the drug, it is outlawed all together. But this does not necessarily mean that it will stop impacting society or evolving. In the case of marijuana, criminalization in the 1930's did not eradicate black market growth and sale. Over time, strains of marijuana may have become more potent than others and different groups have also integrated the drug into their culture (Stuyt, 2018).

Due to the destructive nature that some substances can have, lawmakers have made an effort to reduce drug use through threats of punitive measures. However, this has been shown to not be effective. The earliest example of a criminalization of a drug in the United States was prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s. Prohibition did not dissuade people from drinking, rather, it made the negative effects alcohol can have more pronounced (Levine & Reinerman, 1991). This behavior can perhaps in part be explained by a sense of rebellion young adults feel when told that a substance should not be consumed (Staff et al., 2010). People would either turn to bootleggers who smuggled alcohol into the United States or generally more unsafe homemade moonshine to get inebriated. This led to a spike in the prison population as well as treatments for alcohol related ailments (Levine & Reinerman, 1991). Due to its failure, the law outlawing alcohol was overturned. This brings up the question: why would similar, flawed, measures be

applied to other substances? An explanation for this could be that while these measures failed to reduce the amount of drug use, they worked quite successfully toward certain political agendas. In this paper I propose that the technological cycle drugs described in this paper go through is as follows:

1. A new psychoactive chemical is discovered and its benefits are explored
2. Negative side effects are discovered
3. Rather than finding ways to minimize negative effects, the drug is criminalized
4. Significant research into the drug is halted
5. The aforementioned negative effects are exaggerated and weaponized in order to advance a political agenda
6. Regardless of the criminalization, the drug still evolves among social groups, which in turn evolve as a result of the drug.

The co-production framework draws upon the Actor Network Theory, which describes the relationships between everything in the social world that facilitate social progress (Jasanoff, 2004). This cycle will describe the relationship that social groups have with perception altering substances and how they grew as a result of this relationship. It is noted that the standard cycle of co-production that holds true for most technologies is interrupted at step 3, as criminalization would supposedly stop the cycle completely. As later steps describe, however, this is not the overall effect. The cycle of co-production continues to take place, just in a different way than if the substance were to be researched by certified professionals. Outlawing a drug technology will cause the drug to evolve culturally, among social groups, rather than technologically.

Case Context

A drug is defined as a medicine or other substance which has a physiological or psychological effect when ingested or otherwise introduced into the body. These effects can take on a number of forms. For example, opioids, which are currently responsible for countless deaths nationwide, block pain receptors which produces a calming yet very addicting feeling (Pathan & Williams, 2012). Studies have shown that these effects become desirable during early adulthood, as a result of changing social roles (Staff et al., 2010). Throughout time this has become more and more prevalent. Survey-based data indicates that earlier generations did not have as strong of a relationship with substances (Staff et al., 2010). The federal government has different levels, or ‘schedules’ of how dangerous a drug can be (Figure 1).

HOW DRUGS ARE CLASSIFIED IN THE US

SCHEDULE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Schedule 1	Drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. They are the most dangerous drugs of all the drug schedules with potentially severe psychological or physical dependence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heroin - Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) - Marijuana (Cannabis) - Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (Ecstasy) - Methaqualone - Peyote
Schedule 2	Drugs with a high potential for abuse, with use potentially leading to severe psychological or physical dependence. These drugs are also considered dangerous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combination products with less than 15mg of hydrocodone per dosage unit (Vicodin) - Cocaine - methamphetamine - Methadone - Hydromorphone (Dilaudid) - Meperidine (Demerol) - Oxycodone (OxyContin) - Fentanyl - Dexedrine - Adderall - Ritalin
Schedule 3	Drugs with a moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence. Schedule 3 drugs abuse potential is less than Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 drugs but more than Schedule 4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Products containing less than 90mg of codeine per dosage unit (Tylenol and codeine) - Ketamine - Anabolic steroids - Testosterone
Schedule 4	Drugs with a low potential for abuse and low risk of dependence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">- Xanax <li style="width: 50%;">- Ativan <li style="width: 50%;">- Soma <li style="width: 50%;">- Talwin <li style="width: 50%;">- Darvon <li style="width: 50%;">- Ambien <li style="width: 50%;">- Darvocet <li style="width: 50%;">- Tramadol <li style="width: 50%;">- Valium
Schedule 5	Drugs with lower potential for abuse than Schedule 4 and consist of preparations containing limited quantities of certain narcotics. Schedule 5 drugs are generally used for antidiarrheal, antitussive, and analgesic purposes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cough preparations with less than 200mg of codeine per 100ml (Robitussin AC) - Lomotil - Motofen - Lyrica - Parepectolin

SOURCE: Drug Enforcement Administration

BUSINESS INSIDER

Figure 1: Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)'s classification of drugs (U.S. Controlled Drug Classifications)

Elected officials have used fallible assumptions in order to rally support for anti-drug legislation. It will often be implied that substance abuse problems arise as a result of the physical characteristics of a neighborhood or as a result of the customs of a group of people. However, statistics indicate that substance abuse arises fairly normatively among vastly diverse

communities (Covington, 1997). This is apparent in the case of marijuana, whose ban in the United States coincided with an influx of Mexican immigrants. Politicians argued that cannabis would cause a user to become violent and began using the word ‘marijuana’ to subtly associate the plant with people of Latino descent (Pagano, 2018). This cannabis ban is still in effect throughout the majority of the country. This almost century long ban has done more harm than good as marijuana laws justify putting minor drug offenders in prison, vastly increasing the prison population and placing a burden on the American taxpayer.

A strong argument for marijuana criminalization is the ‘gateway drug theory’, or the idea that by engaging with marijuana, a user is likely to move onto more dangerous drugs. It is argued, however, that this theory arises due to marijuana being on the same market as harder drugs, and if there is a true gateway drug it is either alcohol or cigarettes (Hall & Lynskey, 2009). The stringency of marijuana laws has also had negative health effects on some users. Within the past year, several cases of a disease related to vaping, or inhaling a vaporized form of nicotine or cannabis from electronic cigarettes, have been seen across the country. Initially advertised as a safer alternative to smoking cigarettes, electronic cigarettes became very prevalent among younger populations. While it was initially speculated that this disease was due to nicotine products, further studies indicated that the primary cause of this disease has actually been illegal THC products. THC cartridges purchased from an illegal source are often cut with chemicals such as vitamin E that can be deadly if inhaled (Sun, 2019). It is clear that the laws have not dissuaded people from using cannabis and if there was a safer way to obtain THC products then illegal cartridges would not be putting anyone’s health at risk.

Drug related incarcerations have also affected family dynamics in areas that have a high arrest rate for drug use. Oftentimes, a mother can be imprisoned for a minor drug crime,

separating her from her children. Aside from the implication it has on the mother's life, separating her from her children will affect their psychological development, which can lead to similar patterns of crime from them in the future (Bush-Baskette, 2000).

Another example of a drug movement silenced by federal regulations is the hippie movement in the sixties. LSD and psilocybin mushrooms began being used recreationally around this time. Shortly after these drugs saw recreational use, lawmakers voted to make these drugs Schedule I, essentially stopping all research into them. This is a more curious example because the primary demographic for psychedelic drug use has historically been affluent white males as opposed to minority communities as would seem to more often be the case (Smart & Fejer, 1969). Furthermore, the little research that does exist on psychedelic compounds has shown to be promising in treatment of depression. The government's involvement in regulating these substances essentially blocks medical research into potential treatments for depression, supporting the notion that the War on Drugs is not interested in people's wellbeing.

While politicians go to great lengths to restrict some drugs, there are others that there seem to intentionally be in abundance. These drugs are opioid based prescription painkillers, whose approved purpose is to remedy severe pain following a surgery. While pharmaceutical companies were aware of how addictive these products are, they provide incentives to doctors to overprescribe them in an effort to profit from widespread addiction (Dasgupta, Beletsky, & Ciccarone, 2018). After these intentions were revealed, the over-prescription of these painkillers saw a decrease. However, if an individual has developed an opioid addiction already, this addiction lingers regardless of changes in distribution. While the number of painkillers prescribed has decreased, opioid-related deaths have actually increased due to economic and social pressures as well as a general desire to seek refuge from trauma (Dasgupta et al., 2018).

Research Questions and Methods

This research addresses the question, how has drug use influenced the politics and societal norms of the United States? This question is important because drugs have undeniably impacted society for better or worse. Politicians have used drugs to influence elections and discriminate against minority groups. This research analyzes the source of this corruption. To answer this question, a case study was performed on the War on Drugs from a sociological standpoint so that trends relating to different groups of people can be discussed. The War on Drugs has had global effects resulting from United States interference (Zigon, 2015). Due to the prolonged nature of the War on Drugs, a historical analysis was necessary to delve into the roots of the problem. A timeline of significant events in the War on Drugs was constructed to discuss trends across time. This research addresses how substances had an impact on society and how people responded by changing the drugs or norms surrounding them. Thus, drugs and society evolve together, so the case study is viewed through the lens of co-production. In addition to the timeline of events, three interviews were conducted with individuals who have personally been affected by drug laws in order to address the effects of drug use on the individual level rather than just a systemic one. Finally, quantitative measures of incarceration rates and drug related statistics are analyzed in order to grasp the magnitude of the problems brought up in the timeline and the interviews.

Results

There are complex effects of drugs as they both bring people together as well as pull them apart. Historical evidence shows that drug related laws are biased against minority populations and are in fact part of a systematic effort to silence them, and an analysis of the War on Drugs indicates that politicians wanted to separate citizens based on race. This is particularly

evident in cases relating to marijuana and cocaine, the two most popular recreational drugs.

While the timeline analyzes this on a systemic level, personal interviews indicate that people of color tend to receive less leniency from the law than a white person might in the criminal justice system. While these interviews merely represent three experiences, they coincide with systematic trends indicated in the timeline.

Historical Timeline

Late 1800s-Early 1900s (Cocaine): Cocaine was among the first drugs to cause societal issues, particularly ones of race, in the United States. Coca originates from indigenous people in South America who would chew its leaves for a stimulating effect (Gay et al., 1975). Around the 1850s, chemists successfully isolated cocaine and used it medically for decades, for conditions ranging from anesthesia during eye surgery to dandruff, (Figure 2) (Grzybowski, 2007).



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IRRITATION OF THE SCALP, MAKES
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Joseph Burnett Co., Boston.

Figure 2. Advertisement promoting cocaine as a hair product from 1896 (Contest: Burnett's Hair Cocaine, 2011)



Given its stimulating effect, around the 1890s cocaine often replaced caffeine to boost productivity in the workplace, shaping its utility as a drug rather than a medical treatment. Employers often supplied cocaine to primarily black workers, claiming they were genetically in better physical shape and cocaine would maximize their efficiency (Spillane, 2000, p. 91). While at this point cocaine was used primarily for productivity, it soon became an enhancement to recreational culture. As popularity increased, cocaine began to damage society. Users would get aggressive and often become addicted. Furthermore, the drug disproportionately affected black communities. As the stereotype, which at the time was referred to as the ‘negro cocaine fiend’, became more and more prevalent, race fueled violence erupted (Madge, 2004, p. 85). Cocaine was first regulated by the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act in 1914 and outlawed by the Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act in 1922.

1920s-1930s (Prohibition): Alcohol has been engrained in human culture for centuries. While not often classified similarly to other drugs, excess alcohol intake tends to make the user susceptible to aggression and addiction. As a result, public support for criminalization of alcohol throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries grew, culminating in the 18th amendment to the Constitution, outlawing alcohol in the United States. The law intended to improve public health by removing alcohol from society. However, this backfired, because it did not remove alcohol, rather it created a black market which increased the likelihood of contaminants entering beverages. This increased alcohol-related treatments and expanded the prison population due to the new illegal status of alcohol (Levine & Reinerman, 1991). Additionally, the lack of tax revenue from alcohol may have played a role in causing the Great Depression (Hall, 2010). This serves as a model for the failures of drug prohibition.


1930s-1950s (Criminalization of Marijuana): Today, marijuana is the most popular recreational drug in the United States, subjecting it to regulation and propaganda. Its roots in American society date back to colonial times when plantations were encouraged to grow hemp as a cash crop—Virginia even requiring farmers to grow hemp (McNearney, 2018). Hemp was used to make fibers, but once the intoxicating effect of the plant’s fumes containing a combination of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD) was discovered, it came to be used as a drug. Cannabis started being used recreationally in the United States around 1910 when Mexican refugees introduced marijuana to the American Southwest (McNearney, 2018). Not long after, negative propaganda about the drug began emerging (Figure 3). The use of the word marijuana (opposed to cannabis) was normalized in order to associate it with Hispanic communities (Pratt, 2007, p. 142).


(Sample--Warning card to be placed in R. R. Trains, Buses, Street Cars, etc.)

Beware! Young and Old—People in
All Walks of Life!

This  may be handed you 

by the friendly stranger. It contains the Killer Drug
“Marihuana”-- a powerful narcotic in which lurks
Murder! Insanity! Death!

WARNING!
Dope peddlers are shrewd! They may
put some of this drug in the  or
in the Cock- Tail or in the tobacco cigarette.


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WRITE FOR DETAILED INFORMATION, ENCLOSE 12 CENTS IN POSTAGE—MAILING COST

Address: THE INTER-STATE NARCOTIC ASSOCIATION
(Incorporated not for profit)

Figure 3: Example of marijuana's portrayal in the media prior to criminalization in which the reader is warned that marijuana will cause them to go violent and warns them of places the drug may be found (Inter-State Narcotic Association Marijuana Warning Poster, 2003)

After a political effort to make cannabis seem to cause the user to lose the inhibition to commit violent crimes, The Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 outlawed the drug on a federal level following several state wide bans (McNearney, 2018). While research after the passage of this act continued to show that marijuana did not cause one to become violent as was believed, the government strengthened marijuana-related punishments by passing mandatory minimum sentencing laws in the early 1950s (Marijuana Timeline).

1950s-1960s (Hippie Movement): While marijuana was being regulated, a new drug was emerging. Scientist Albert Hofmann from Sandoz laboratories tried developing a circulatory

stimulant to aid in childbirth from lysergic acid, a chemical in ergot fungus. One derivative tested was Lysergic Acid Diethylamide which for years was proclaimed useless, until in 1943 Hofmann accidentally absorbed some through his fingertips and began feeling strange. He decided to ingest 250µg of the substance, thinking this was a miniscule dose. While biking home, however, he began having wild hallucinations, marking the discovery of the psychedelic drug LSD (Shroder, 2014). LSD provides the user with an experience that can last upwards of twelve hours involving visual and auditory distortions as well as profound thoughts about spirituality, existentialism, and the self and in some cases can even lead the user to disconnect entirely from themselves in an event known as ego death (Loi, 2019). These effects can have both positive and negative long-term effects on a user's psyche. By the 1950s, LSD emerged in the United States, and the CIA began researching LSD as a mind-control serum through a secret program called MK-ULTRA. In the search for a mind-control drug, the CIA tortured subjects in a manner reminiscent of Japanese and Nazi concentration camps (Gross, 2019). While this research was conducted, it did not take long for the drug to see recreational use. A counterculture surrounding the drug formed known as the hippie movement. Due to this counterculture and the failure of MK-ULTRA, LSD was outlawed in 1968 (Costandi, 2014).

1980s (Crack Epidemic): While Americans faced cocaine related issues before, its popularity surged in the 1980s. By freebasing cocaine, a smokable form known as crack was synthesized. Many preferred crack as it was cheaper and produced a more intense but shorter high (DEA History Book, 2006). Crack also posed more serious health concerns than powdered cocaine. Crack markets caused an uptick in violent crimes, specifically among black males. As a result, legal penalties for crack were significantly higher than those for the powdered form. While this seems like a legal decision made in good faith, crack was particularly associated with African

Americans. By imposing stricter punishments for crack, police were able to have a higher presence in black neighborhoods and perform a disproportionate amount of arrests in these neighborhoods. Gang violence and police brutality relating to crack devastated black communities throughout the country and continues to have a long-lasting effect, creating a significant gap in murder rate between black and white males, as the murder rate of young black males doubled after crack's introduction while that of white males did not change significantly. (Evans et al., 2018).

1990s-Present (Opioid Epidemic): Opiates are among the most addictive substances known to exist and as a result have made their way into society in many forms, even sparking international conflicts such as the Opium Wars between Britain and China in the 1800s. While a number of different forms have been outlawed, opioids continue to see widespread use primarily as prescription painkillers. OxyContin®, a widely abused painkiller, was invented by pharmaceutical company Purdue Pharma in 1995. Knowledgeable of the drug's addictive nature, Purdue provided doctors with incentives to overprescribe OxyContin® so patients recovering from surgery would become addicted and buy more (Meier, 2018). Purdue raised billions of dollars, increasing exponentially, from year to year. Patients would often turn to stronger opioids like heroin and overdose (Kolodny, 2015). While the opioid crisis does not discriminate racially, its effects are more pronounced in poor communities more likely to be exposed to hazardous conditions and require painkillers. In 2018, Purdue Pharma began manufacturing and selling a drug to treat opioid addiction, expected to raise even more money (Ivanova, 2018). In September 2019, Purdue Pharma filed for bankruptcy after lawsuits over the opioid epidemic (Hoffman, 2019).

2010s (Marijuana Legalization): While some states had legalized medical marijuana, Colorado became the first state to legalize recreational use in 2014 with other states soon to follow (Miller, 2016). This case is still developing so there is no further discussion on marijuana legalization.

Personal Interviews

Interviews were conducted with four individuals who have suffered legal consequences resulting from drugs, two of whom are white, one is black, and one is middle eastern. The interviews were intended to give a personal perspective to the research question and understand the individuals' drug habits as well as how legality has affected them. Due to the legal charges these individuals face, their identity is kept anonymous.

Individual 1 is black male describing his habits as “Typically only use drugs, particularly stimulants, during social settings where there is alcohol consumption. This doesn't happen at the majority of social events, but mostly ones where I have friends that either tell me they want to do it with me or offer it to me. Never is my drug use done in a setting where I am by myself. Every drug I have ever tried, except for marijuana, has been offered to me in social setting in which I was intoxicated and wasn't thinking about any consequences or possible addiction that could manifest.” Under the influence of cocaine and alcohol, he lost his friends leaving a bar one night. This led him to wander into a Sheetz convenience store around 2AM where he fell asleep on the Sheetz toilet. An employee found him and called 911. Once paramedics arrived, the individual, still intoxicated, refused an ambulance out of financial considerations, which resulted in his arrest. “Although anecdotal evidence is not very complete or representative of the difference in the situation, I do believe that the police had a very implicit bias towards me based on the stereotype black people have in the UVA community. As a result of this bias, they didn't give me the preferential treatment they may have given my non-white counterparts,” he says and cites

a similar incident happening to a white friend who was let off with a warning. “It gave me additional obstacles I had to deal with in regards to applying to medical school” he says.

Individual 2 is a white marijuana user, stating “I usually smoke about once a day and occasionally use psychedelics”. He later says “It started when I was around 15, that’s when I smoked for the first time. As I got a job and had money coming in I’d smoke more often since it was really fun and also a social activity I’d do with my friends. Over time the activity turned into a habit but not a dependency”. He describes his arrest, “I left my apartment to take an exam and came back home to a drug task force searching my apartment for drugs or anything they could find. I was never hand cuffed, but I had my rights read to me and I was questioned. The whole experience only took about a half hour but it felt like hours.” He later claims he was treated fairly and feels as though if the police were to hold a racial bias against him the situation would have been a lot worse. The long-term consequences of this incident are yet unknown.

Individual 3 is of middle eastern descent, smokes marijuana daily, and drinks alcohol on weekends. He describes how this behavior started, “Figured I'd try it and see what it’s like. Turns out I liked it. Saw that I could balance my responsibilities and manage to have some fun on the side so I didn't see an issue with it.” He describes his arrest as “Terrible. They were horrendously unethical. I was accused of running from the police after they had allegedly caught me and some other people smoking weed. Not only did they treat smoking a plant as a crime comparable to theft, rape, assault, they also treated me like shit and put words in my mouth and had no evidence of anything. They abused their power and charged me with a crime they didn't have evidence for.” The individual is unsure if race played a significant role in his arrest since he was arrested with a friend who was white. “This affected my perception of law enforcement”, he says, “they are there to meet quotas, and catch people doing harmless shit much more than they care about

being decent humans and keeping people safe. The charge has made me wiser and more resilient as a result of the pain I went through with it.” This also motivated him to transfer to a different university.

Individual 4 is a white woman who uses drugs recreationally, but was addicted to amphetamines such as Adderall from a young age. “I got diagnosed with ADHD so the stimulants were actually prescribed to me,” she says. This paved the way into her experimenting with other drugs such as marijuana and cocaine in high school. She later got charged with intent to distribute in college. She describes her arrest, “I got called to my colleges security office where there was a deputy waiting for me. He told me he had audio & video of me selling pills. I laughed. I literally said ‘no you don’t,’ until I remembered the only time I had ever sold anything in my life was to my best friend. I quickly realized she was wearing a wire, and her behavior of begging me for some of my Vyvanse for weeks started to make sense. He wanted me to work as a Confidential Informant for him as well, but even though I gave him my phone number there was no way I was giving that dude the time of day. I’ve never wanted to punch a cop in the face more.” The individual believes she may have been unfairly targeted by law enforcement, explaining, “the sheriff was up for re-election at the time, & his whole campaign slogan was ‘fighting the War on Drugs.’ This scenario screamed set up to me, and one week before Election Day, the motherfucker posted my mug shot onto his Facebook page as if he was fixing the drug issue in his county. Bitch, I had never even sold drugs before!” She goes on to explain that the sheriff in question had fired the only deputy running against him. After a legal battle, her charges were dropped down to a misdemeanor and 100 hours of community service, and believes her race may have helped her with this.

Statistics

Most drug crimes fall within two categories: simple possession which involves a small amount of a drug for personal use, and intent to distribute which involves a large enough amount to suspect the convicted was supplying others with drugs. It is apparent from numerical trends that far more drug related arrests are for simple possession charges rather than distribution. An arrest for possession is made approximately every 25 seconds in America (Every 25 Seconds, 2019). Furthermore, the number of arrests for distribution is approximately six times lower than the number of arrests for possession (Pearl, 2018). This would indicate that law enforcement is more concerned with putting minor offenders for often victimless crimes in jail than they are with stopping the spread of drugs. This is concurrent with the testimonial of individual 3, who at the time of his arrest was not causing harm to anyone and did not even have drugs on him, but was arrested on the suspicion that he had ingested marijuana. This trend might be due to the fact that the prison system in the United States is treated like a business and is in large part privatized. While public prisons are non-profit, the government contracts some of the work prisons have to do to private companies. Private prisons receive a stipend from the government because they claim they can host prisoners at a cheaper rate than a public prison, reducing the financial burden of government agencies. However, since private prisons are for-profit institutions, police are incentivized to fill up these private prisons with as many inmates as they can (Bryant, 2020). Given these incentives, it makes sense that police would jump to arrest people for minor drug possession offenses, and approximately one in ten Americans have been convicted of a minor drug offense (SpearIt, 2015). Despite public opinion on the War on Drugs predominantly changing, these incentives work in favor of the private prisons, resulting in the prison population having more than tripled since 1980 (Pearl, 2018). This increase in the prison

population increased also despite the fact that they are failing at rehabilitating drug offenders. Inmates are shown to go through a severe relapse into drug use habits upon release from prison, and within the first two weeks of their release from prison these individuals are statistically 129% more likely to die of a drug overdose than the general public (Pearl, 2018).

African and Hispanic Americans are incarcerated disproportionately for drug crimes (Figure 4). Despite making up only 12% of the population, African Americans make up 33% of the prison population, while white Americans make up 64% of the population but make up only 30% of the prison population (Gramlich, 2019). These statistics would indicate that law enforcement carries a bias toward minority communities and are motivated by factors other than public safety.

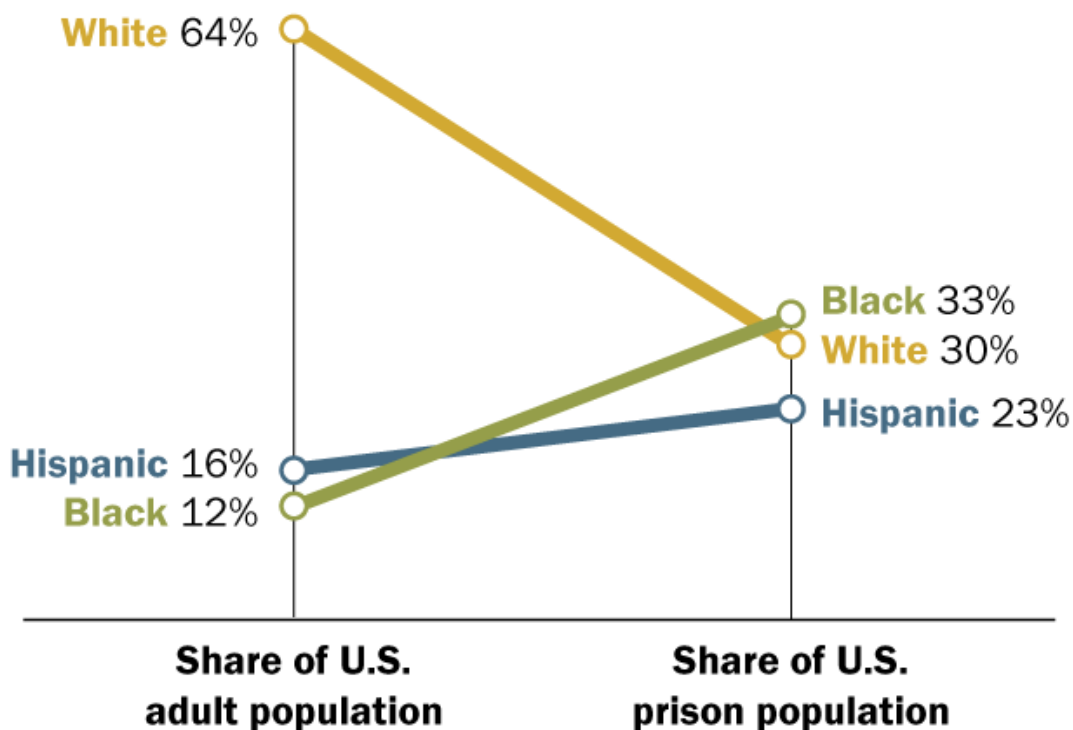


Figure 4: Percentages of entire population in the vs percentages of the prison population for three different ethnic groups (Gramlich, 2019)

These trends seem to confirm the notion that is deduced from the timeline that drug use has been weaponized against minority groups and also coincides with the assumptions of Individual 1 that he was treated worse than a white counterpart would be by that police officer. Furthermore, this can explain the motivations that the sheriff in Individual 4's case may have had. The individual's friend most likely told law enforcement that her friend was a drug user and the sheriff likely thought by going after her his department would benefit financially.

Discussion

Through this research it is apparent that restrictions do not work. Alcohol prohibition only lasted fourteen years. Criminalizing cocaine reduced use for a period of time, but caused the drug's return in more impure and dangerous forms decades later. In none of these cases did the illegality remove drugs from recreational use, just created punishments. The interviewees all stated they did not consider legal ramifications of their actions. Individual 1 participated in these activities despite legality due to drug normalization within certain social circles. A potential reason he cites for this is that schools teach children that drugs impede success, yet one might observe successful peers doing drugs and completely disregard everything they were taught about drugs. Individual 2 believes the information taught in schools about drugs is simply wrong, "It's demonizing weed when it's a drug that doesn't cause harm and doesn't cause problems," he says. Individual 4 believes the education system contributed to her decisions relating to drugs, explaining "The only time I ever remember drugs being taught in school was when I was in the fourth grade, and some dude came to tell us about the horrors of marijuana. I remember sitting there thinking 'I'd try that!'". Individual 4 also states that legality was never a concern for her, and attributes that to privilege, but still engaged in her recreational drug use in private out of common sense. Through necessary secrecy, drugs influence culture.

Drug use is often seen as a binary habit, one is either a drug user or not, and this is not the case. There are different kinds of drug habits, but historically the United States has processed drug users from social marijuana smokers to chronic crack users essentially the same way. It is impossible to ascertain the social and political effect of drugs as a whole, but rather each drug individually, as different kinds of drugs have different effects on the individual as well as society and politics, see figure 5. Marijuana is a drug that has had possibly the biggest effect both socially and politically. For decades, marijuana was used as a political tool to try to put minorities in jail. Politicians went to great lengths to associate the drug with black and Latino communities and by extension use the drug to make them seem dangerous. As time progressed, and more information about marijuana became common knowledge, it became more normalized. Marijuana evolved from a tool to push a political agenda to a social enhancement. As a result, a culture within the United States formed around marijuana. This is evident from a wide range of music and television, known as the ‘Stoner’ genre. And while media falling within this genre is exaggerated, it is based around a very real culture that evolved around consuming marijuana under the nose of the law. The reality of this culture is evident from the interviews conducted. Individual 2 describes his relationship with marijuana as a social activity he would do with friends once they started having money. Individual 3 described a similar relationship, but further explaining that he “could balance my responsibilities and manage to have some fun on the side so I didn't see an issue with it.” The government describing cannabis as violence inducing is incorrect and indicative of an ulterior motive. Even into the 21st century, these effects can still be felt. For instance, Individual 3 claims he was arrested on purely the suspicion of having smoked marijuana without having any in his possession. Officers just seemed eager to do their job rather than enforce the law justly. As more and more states legalize marijuana, it seems that the early

21st century is the tail-end of a century long process of depoliticizing a drug that has little to no negative side effects.

Similarly, LSD had a profound social impact, but not a large one politically. In fact, the government tried to politicize LSD, by making it a weapon that allowed the military to read minds, but this effort failed so spectacularly that the drug has not been used in a political context since. In a social sense, however, the drug had such a huge effect that it created an entire counter culture, that even fifty years later is notoriously known as the ‘hippie movement’. There is not a single other drug that had a social movement so large around it. This culture could not have happened without the presence of LSD, and LSD would not have come to be used this way without the hippies’ willingness to experiment with the drug, which emphasizes how society and technology (in this case a psychedelic drug) grow alongside one another. Having evolved from to a biological weapon to a recreational drug, LSD became the centerpiece of a youth movement and left a huge imprint on society that withstood the test of time. This is perhaps due to the intensity of effect that the drug has. Users report that this is such a difficult experience to put into words that knowing someone else has experienced it can bring them together. As a result, the onset of the hippie movement is likely attributed to the fact that users who know nothing about each other could bond over having and lived through the same intense experience in the same way that people can bond over shared experiences relating to where they grew up or what hobbies they have. The Hippie Movement also played a role in the United States’ decision to withdraw from the Vietnam War (Pruitt, 2018). It can be argued by extension that LSD’s impact on American Society was one of peace. What was once a chemical thought to be useless has come to create and strengthen interpersonal relationships between users and played a role in ending a seemingly endless conflict.

Unlike marijuana and LSD, cocaine is a drug that has driven people apart a lot more than it has brought them together. This is perhaps due to its addictive properties or the agitating effects, but it is obvious that cocaine has caused social rifts, primarily based on race. In the early 20th century, the drug had to be outlawed because of literal race riots that erupted only over the presence of cocaine (Madge, 2004, p. 85). As an illegal substance, law enforcement tore families apart because of the presence of cocaine. What was a widely used medical treatment in the 19th century evolved into recreational drug and further grew into a driving force for systematic racism. While the drug's function was changing, race relations were improving due to the Civil Rights Movement, but had cocaine not been politicized the way it had, these relations may have been even stronger. Cocaine's evolution as a technology is concurrent with deteriorating relations socially. While cocaine can be done in a social setting, it can be deduced from interviewing a cocaine user that it is usually not the thing bringing people together, like other drugs might. Individual 1 talked about doing cocaine socially, but in scenarios where he was doing this, alcohol was the drug driving people together, not cocaine.

Opioids are another drug that has had a profound political effect because the prevalence of prescription painkillers is attributed to pharmaceutical companies using money in politics. As with any medically prescribed drug, there is a proper way to use opioid based painkillers. Overuse and misuse can lead to a number of health complications including a strong addiction. Rather than warn the users about this danger, pharmaceutical companies sought to profit off of it. Individual 4 experienced a form of this, while not with opioids, she was diagnosed with ADHD and most likely received more of the medication than she needed, which likely led to other drug habits farther down the line. Opioids cannot have a positive social impact, as their effect on the user is to numb them both physically and mentally. Painkillers are intended to relax a patient so

it is likely inconvenient to do anything other than rest while under the influence of them, meaning they can only drive users to be anti-social. Long term addiction to such a substance can drive an individual to be less social and eventually make someone a hermit who cares about nothing but their next high. Opioids' evolution into a tool for businessmen to profit is concurrent with a social devolution as this profit came at the expense of the public health. These health effects would not be occurring without opioids being used to fuel greed, and pharmaceutical companies would not have been able to use the drugs this way if there was not a large portion of the public susceptible to this addiction.

Alcohol is somewhat of a middle ground. It had a profound political effect, but this effect is now nothing more than a historical anecdote. The attempt to outlaw alcohol failed, as criminalization caused negative effects of alcohol use to become more pronounced, and after this failure was observed, the political effect of alcohol has faded away to where the most notable law surrounding it currently is the minimum age to purchase or consume it. Throughout much of human history, alcohol has been a social enhancement. It takes away people's social inhibitions and makes simple actions seem more fun than they would be without alcohol which has shown conducive to social gatherings of any size. Even while alcohol was outlawed, this effect was seen and novels were written about it, such as the Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Alcohol is so normalized that the culture surrounding it is not really considered a counterculture, but more so just a part of American culture. This normalization is also what minimizes its political effect.

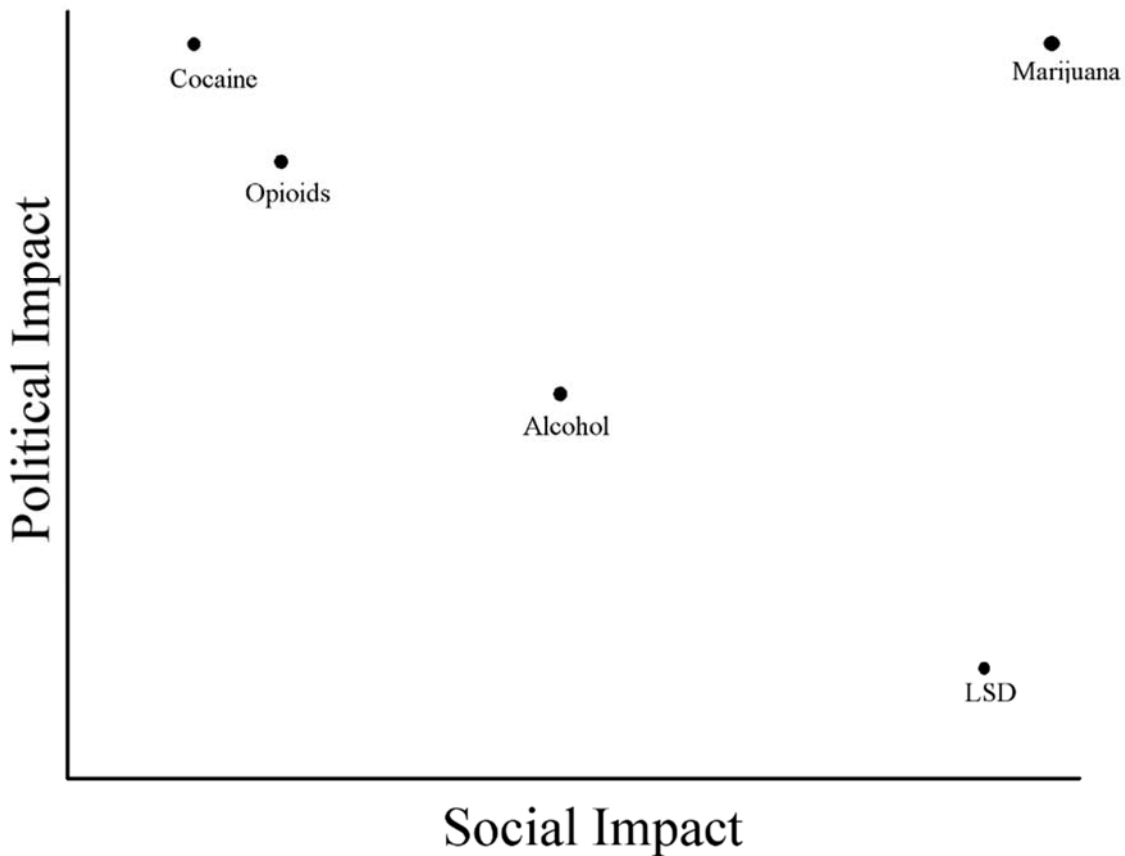


Figure 5: Plot of each drug discussed in this paper’s political impact vs social impact based on the above discussion

The co-production cycle is apparent in these cases. Uses of all of these drugs evolved with time, and while evolving, society responded to these uses and changed as well. Cocaine’s use evolved significantly. Through its social involvement, the drug created a racial divide causing a negative stereotype to develop, leading to criminalization of cocaine for public safety. Monetary pressures from black markets led to crack, tearing black communities apart. Crack caused increases in gang-related homicide, black incarceration rates, and family separations. Through this case one can see how an anesthetic evolved into a dangerous street drug that on a social level caused degraded race relations and broke apart families. LSD was a proposed circulatory stimulant, but discovering its hallucinogenic properties led the CIA to try to turn it

into mind control technology. Ultimately, Hofmann's accidental discovery monumentally influenced a wide range of art and a culture characterized by a distinct style of music, sexual liberalism, and desire to explore altered states of consciousness. LSD can potentially treat depression and anxiety, but the extent of this is unknown as LSD's criminalization essentially ended research into it (Costandi, 2014). What was a chemical thought to assist in childbirth became a notorious mind-altering substance that significantly impacted customs of a social group. These substances clearly evolve concurrently with their social impact.

This research was subject to a few limitations. First and foremost, there may have been some unintentional bias resulting from the individuals picked for interviews. The individuals interviewed in this thesis are all people I know personally and are all college aged. As a result, they may have been confirming prior beliefs I held. This being said, finding individuals with specific criminal charges against them would be challenging without knowing them personally, so there was an effort to present the evidence from the interviews in an unbiased way. Additionally, I tried to reach out to a police officer I knew to provide insight into both sides of the issue, but due to his schedule as well as mine, I was unable to get this interview.

I will use this research to advance my engineering practice by having knowledge of how a drug can affect different groups of people. As a biomedical engineer, there is a possibility that my future work will be used in the pharmaceutical industry. This research will make me better suited to do work in this field as I have insight on how an addictive substance can have widespread negative societal effects. From an ethical perspective, I feel like knowing not only how these drugs work physiologically but also in a social setting will lead me to make better decisions on whether or not a drug should be released to the public or if more research should be done in minimizing possible side effects.

Conclusion

“We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities,” says John Ehrlichman, a Nixon Aide, summarizing the War on Drugs in one statement: a tool to disrupt political rivals (Lockie, 2019). Although for almost a century the War on Drugs was weaponized against minorities, recent trends show that attitudes may be changing. The four individuals interviewed were all aware of the racial implications of the laws being enforced and were thinking about this during their arrest, whether it affected them or not. In a society that values diversity and equality, widespread knowledge of the racist origins of these cases can influence significant change. Some states have legalized marijuana, which is expected to be federally legal in the near future, and some locations have even proposed legalizing psilocybin mushrooms. Socially drugs cause groups of people to bond together and form a culture over getting high while politically drugs are used as a tool to push alternate agendas, and by understanding this, the United States can progress in a way that prevents more lives being ruined by drug-related legislation.

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