The Sociology of Intoxication

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Course code SCIL10054

Lecture and seminar: Thursday 11am-1pm, Seminar Room 1, Chrystal Macmillan Building.

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Follow me on twitter: @socintox
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What the course is about

“The best of life is but intoxication.” Lord Byron

Political and media discourses only consider intoxication when it manifests as a social problem, treating its effects as accidental or incidental. This course aims to address two significant gaps in our thinking on this topic. First, we mostly think of the experience of intoxication – being drunk, getting high and so on – as happening largely at physiological and psychological levels. The content and construction of the experience of intoxication itself seems to be thought of as off-limits to sociological investigation and theorising, as irrelevant, or as an unfortunate and unwanted side effect. The course will explore the social factors involved in the generation of different experiences of intoxication. Second, when we do consider intoxication as worthy of study we turn it into a problem, rather than seeing it as a normal social practice, as much bounded by rules and norms as any other activity. This course draws on sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, neuroscience and other disciplines to all you to examine intoxication as a practice embedded in social life.

The course is hands-on. You will conduct your own research into intoxication and write it up for assessment.

Aims

In the course you will …

Examine the patterns and practices of drug, alcohol and tobacco use internationally.

Examine how some private substance use troubles become public problems, with regard to: addiction; alcoholism; binge drinking; smoking hazards.

Discuss the uses and merits of different forms of drug control.

Examine the strengths and weaknesses of various sociological, psychological, biological and anthropological approaches to and theories of substance use.

Explore the research base, the methods used to research substance use and limitations with them.

Produce your own journal reflecting on the issues raised in the course.

Optionally, produce a video ethnography of your research
Readings


Key readings and prezis are posted on Learn, but please also make use of the Zotero shared library.

Zotero Shared Course Library

Rather than you having to dig up all the readings yourself, I have created a shared library online for the course using Zotero. Zotero is a free bibliographic management programme and is the single most useful application I use. It is available as an extension for the Firefox web browser or as a standalone beta programme. You can download it from: http://www.zotero.org/. You have to sign up for a Zotero account in order to use the shared library. I will send all students on the course an email inviting them to join the group. You can annotate articles and also add references you come across that are not on the reading list.

Fieldwork and Field Trip

Each week has a fieldwork task set for it, detailed in the timetable below. These are practical or reading tasks I expect you to conduct outside of the class, which will form the basis for class discussion and also the online journal (see Assessment).

There will also be a field trip to the drug education service, Crew, during the term.

Class conduct

At times we will be discussing potentially sensitive issues around drug and alcohol use and their associated problems. You are free to discuss anything you like but do not feel obliged to share any
personal experiences you do not want to. Please treat all personal information mentioned by your peers as confidential. If you find any aspect of the course difficult or upsetting for any reason please feel free to discuss with me in confidence.
Lecture Outline

1. Introduction: How Drugs Become Drugs

In this session we will discuss the questions: What is a drug? Why do people use them? How do some substances become drugs and others do not? What is intoxication?

Reading:


**Fieldwork for next week:** Read Dennis, P. A. 1975. “The Role of the Drunk in a Oaxacan Village.” American Anthropologist 77(4):856-863. Take one intoxicant - this could be tea, coffee, chocolate, cigarettes, or alcohol. Describe what roles are associated with it. Next week we will be using what you have written to examine the ways in which the effects of drugs are culturally experienced and mediated.

2. Cultures of Intoxication

In this session we examine the uses to which intoxicants are put and the ways their effects are shaped by material culture.

Reading:


example of a ‘drug’ use ritual, and describe what it involves and what it does – what is achieves, its purpose, its effect on participants. This may be a one-off rite of passage, or a recurrent event.

3. Ritual, Distinction and Obligatory Intoxication

This session examines the uses of drugs in rituals and in binding social groupings and affirming social bonds.

Reading:


Do a Google (or other) news search on a particular drug. Look at the risk terminology that surrounds it. Who is at risk? Where does the risk emerge? How is it expressed? Who has responsibility for avoiding or minimizing risk? Think widely about this: for instance, much of the danger involved in drug use comes at the point of production, rather than consumption.

4. Drug Problems or Problem Drugs?

This session explores the moral regulation of problem drugs and the discursive generation of problem people.

Reading:


5. Addiction – Triumph of Body over Mind?

It is possible to speak of some forms of dependency as socially sanctioned, caffeine addiction being a fairly benign example. Much recent academic writing on drugs has taken care to separate ‘problem’ from ‘recreational’ drug use. However, it has not really examined where the boundary between the two lies, and has tended to treat that separation as quite rigid whereas it is a mutable, porous boundary which is studied in this session.

Reading:


**Fieldwork for next week:** observe and record, or write down your recollections of, intoxicant use in one of the following situations; a party, pub, nightclub, coffee house, or similar intoxication space. In the class we are going to be discussing how our experiences of intoxication are socially shaped. So that you can be ready to discuss this, after you have written your account I want you to think about the literature you have read so far and think about how your account could be a sociological one. For guidance read Cameron Duff, “The pleasure in context,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 19, no. 5 (October 2008): 384-392.

6. Alcohol and Economies of Pleasure

Society is often said to be one where experiences are consumed, rather than lived. This session examines the political economy of intoxication experiences. Please note, alcohol is just one focus of this and you do not have to concentrate on that in your fieldwork task.
Reading:


European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing, *The Seven Key Messages of the Alcohol Industry* (EUCAM, 2011).


**Fieldwork for next week:** Read Andy Letcher, “Mad Thoughts on Mushrooms: Discourse and Power in the Study of Psychedelic Consciousness,” *Anthropology of Consciousness* 18, no. 2 (September 1, 2007): 74-98. Consider: what boundaries do hallucinogenic drugs transgress? Is this different from other drugs and if so why?

7. Psychedelics and Waking Dreams

This session explores the use of psychedelic drugs to explore, enhance or depart from consciousness. It examines why some psychedelic experiences are given a higher social status than others, and what the use of psychedelics tells us about consciousness in modern society.

Reading:


Karenza Moore and Fiona Measham, “It’s the most fun you can have for twenty quid”: Motivations, Consequences and Meanings of British Ketamine Use,” *Addiction Research & Theory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 231 - 244.


**Fieldwork for next week:** Read Philippe Bourgois, “Just Another Night in a Shooting Gallery,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 15, no. 2 (May 1, 1998): 37 -66. What ethical, moral and methodological problems are there in research, especially ethnographic research, with heroin and crack users?
8. Heroin, Crack and Street Ethnography

In this session we examine ethnographies with heroin and crack users. We discuss why heroin and crack are especially stigmatised drugs, the different subcultures that surround them, and the limits of research with users.

Reading:


Fieldwork for next week:


9. Prohibition, Drug Control and Cognitive Liberty

In this session we will debate the history and effectiveness of various forms of prohibition.

Reading:


Fieldwork for next week: read Parry, V. (2003), ‘The Art of Branding a Condition’, *Medical Marketing & Media*, 38, 5, 42-49; and list some ways in which drugs or medicines ‘enhance’.
10. Conditioning, Medicalisation and Enhancement

This final session looks to the future and the institutionalised use of drugs to manage the self.

Reading:


**Assessment**

Assessment will be by an online journal (25%) and either a long essay or a video ethnography (75%). The online journals and long essay are marked anonymously so do not put your name on it, just your exam number.

See the ‘Essay and Journal Advice’ document on Learn for more information on how to approach the assessment.

Course work will be submitted online using our submission system – ELMA. You will not be required to submit a paper copy.

Marked course work, grades and feedback will be returned online – you will not receive a paper of your marked course work or feedback.

For information, help and advice on submitting coursework and accessing feedback, please see the ELMA wiki at [https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SPSITWiki/ELMA](https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SPSITWiki/ELMA)

**Journal**

The journal is your account of the fieldwork tasks. As this is a new form of assessment you can submit a formative journal which will not be assessed but which I will give feedback on so you can learn what is expected.

The formative journal should be 500 words long. Submit the formative journal by 12pm noon, - Week 5, Monday 14th October.
The journal itself should be 1400-1600 words long. It should contain an account of at least two of the fieldwork tasks. Submit it by Week 8 Monday 4th November.

Journals above 1,600 words will be penalized using the Ordinary level criterion of 1 mark for every 20 words over length: anything between 1,601 and 1,620 words will lose one point, between 1,621 and 1,640 two points, and so on. Note that the lower 1400 figure is a guideline for students which you will not be penalized for going below. However, you should note that shorter essays are unlikely to achieve the required depth and that this will be reflected in your mark.

You can submit a video and a shorter journal of 700-800 words if you are planning to do the video ethnography. This allows you to keep the option of taking the long essay open. Word count penalties apply as with the journal above.

**Long Essay**

Long essays should be 3,500-4,500 words long, excluding bibliography. The essay is submitted by 12pm, Monday 9th December.

Long Essays must be between 3500 and 4500 words in length, including footnotes/endnotes but excluding the bibliography.

- You must include a word count (which your word processing software can produce) on the title page.

- Essays above 4,500 words will be penalized using the Ordinary level criterion of 1 mark for every 20 words over length: anything between 4,501 and 4,520 words will lose one point, between 4,521 and 4,540 two points, and so on. The same penalties apply to the journal.

- Note that the lower 3,500 figure is a guideline for students which you will not be penalized for going below. However, you should note that shorter essays are unlikely to achieve the required depth and that this will be reflected in your mark.

So that you can get feedback before you submit the essay, submit a draft essay by the end of week 8. I want each of you to arrange to meet me in week 9 to discuss your essay plan.

**Video ethnography**

This will consist of a short ethnographic video made by you. To take this option, take video diaries and documentary material when you are doing the fieldwork task. The final video should be 10-15 minutes long, along with a 2000 word reflective review highlighting key themes and linking them to the literature.
You can look here for an example: [http://goo.gl/LhqMNS](http://goo.gl/LhqMNS). This was produced by myself and a group of Sociology students. I am not looking for anything as polished, but some of the same techniques might be involved.

I will have a special session to introduce students who are interested in this assessment to it.

**Lateness**

If coursework is submitted after the deadline (noon on the relevant day) then Lateness Penalties will apply. See the Sociology Honours Handbook or other student handbook relevant to you for the lateness penalties, and on what to do should you have a good reason for missing the deadline.

**Suggested Long Essay Questions**

For all questions, it is up to you how you defined ‘drug’, so you can include alcohol, cigarettes, medicines etc. unless I have specified ‘illicit drugs’ or ‘medicines’. I’ve added suggesting starting points to each question, and you can ask me for more, but I also want you to explore the literature yourself and decide what’s worth including and what is not.

1. **What makes drug/alcohol problems real?**
   

2. **Critically assess the claim that addiction is a disease.**
   

3. **Pleasure: the enemy of health? Discuss.**


4. **Examine the claim that methadone maintenance is largely concerned with governing addicts.**


5. **How useful is Becker’s account of becoming a marijuana user to understanding drug use today?**

6. What evidence is there to support or refute the notion that British society may be entering a new historical phase of drug use and regulation?


7. What are the implications for society of a ‘pill for every ill’?


8. Take a number of empirical studies of intoxication and/or intoxicant use; examine the research design and methods used and discuss whether they give a convincing account of the subject matter.


9. Using comparative examples, discuss in what ways intoxication is a cultural phenomenon.


10. The House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee has asked you to prepare an expert report with your recommendations on drug control and classification. What do you tell them?


11. In what ways, if any, is risk replacing morality as the primary mode of governance around intoxication?


12. Apply any of the theories or perspectives discussed in the course to the phenomenon known as ‘sobriety’.


13. Examine how drugs, or a drug, are defined and classified. This could be legally, scientifically or professionally. How do these processes of definition contribute to the social construction of drug problems?

14. Compare how recreational and medicinal drug use are both ‘governed’ and ‘governing’.


15. Where and how does pleasure come into intoxication?


**Plagiarism**

Never reproduce material that is not your own unless it is clearly marked as such. This includes material from readings, the internet, other students' work and your own work that has been submitted for another course.

You must ensure that you understand what the University regards as plagiarism and why the University takes it seriously. This is your responsibility. All cases of suspected plagiarism, or other forms of academic misconduct, will be reported to the College Academic Misconduct Officer. You’ll find further information in the Sociology Honours (or Visiting student) handbook, and at the following page:

http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/honours/what_is_plagiarism

We use the ‘Turnitin’ system to check that essays do not contain plagiarised material. Turnitin compares every assignment against a constantly-updated database, which highlights all plagiarised work.
SSPS Extended Common Marking Scheme

A+ (90-100%) An answer that fulfils all of the criteria for ‘A’ (see below) and in addition shows an exceptional degree of insight and independent thought, together with flair in tackling issues, yielding a product that is deemed to be of publishable quality, in terms of scholarship and originality.

A (80-89%) An authoritative answer that provides a fully effective response to the question. It should show a command of the literature and an ability to integrate that literature and go beyond it. The analysis should achieve a high level of quality early on and sustain it through to the conclusion. Sources should be used accurately and concisely to inform the answer but not dominate it. There should be a sense of a critical and committed argument, mindful of other interpretations but not afraid to question them. Presentation and the use of English should be commensurate with the quality of the content.

A- (70-79%) A sharply-focused answer of high intellectual quality, which adopts a comprehensive approach to the question and maintains a sophisticated level of analysis throughout. It should show a willingness to engage critically with the literature and move beyond it, using the sources creatively to arrive at its own independent conclusions.

B B- (60-63%) B (64-66%) B+ (67-69%) A very good answer that shows qualities beyond the merely routine or acceptable. The question and the sources should be addressed directly and fully. The work of other authors should be presented critically. Effective use should be made of the whole range of the literature. There should be no significant errors of fact or interpretation. The answer should proceed coherently to a convincing conclusion. The quality of the writing and presentation (especially referencing) should be without major blemish.

Within this range a particularly strong answer will be graded B+; a more limited answer will be graded B-.

C C- (50-53%) C (54-56%) C+ (57-59%) A good answer with elements of the routine and predictable. It should be generally accurate and firmly based in the reading. It may draw upon a restricted range of sources but should not just re-state one particular source. Other authors should be presented accurately, if rather descriptively. There should be no serious weaknesses in the coverage of the topic and the relevance of the material. Factual errors and misunderstandings of concepts and authors may occasionally be present but should not be a dominant impression. The quality of writing, referencing and presentation should be generally good. Within this range a stronger answer will be graded C+; a weaker answer will be graded C-.

D D- (40-43%) D (44-46%) D+ (47-49%)
A passable answer which understands the question, displays some academic learning and refers to relevant literature. The answer should be intelligible and in general factually accurate, but may well have deficiencies such as restricted use of sources or academic argument, over-reliance on lecture notes, poor expression, and irrelevancies to the question asked. The general impression may be of a rather poor effort, with weaknesses in conception or execution. It might also be the right mark for a short answer that at least referred to the main points of the issue. Within this range a stronger answer will be graded D+; a bare pass will be graded D-.

E (30-39%) An answer with evident weaknesses of understanding but conveying the sense that with a fuller argument or factual basis it might have achieved a pass. It might also be a short and fragmentary answer with merit in what is presented but containing serious gaps.

F (20-29%) An answer showing seriously inadequate knowledge of the subject, with little awareness of the relevant issues or literature, major omissions or inaccuracies, and pedestrian use of inadequate sources.

G (10-19%) An answer that falls far short of a passable level by some combination of short length, irrelevance, lack of intelligibility, factual inaccuracy and lack of acquaintance with reading or academic concepts.

H (0-9%) An answer without any academic merit which usually conveys little sense that the course has been followed or of the basic skills of essay-writing.
External Examiners

The External Examiners for this course for session 2013-2014 are as follows:

Dr Esther Dermott, University of Bristol
Dr Michael Halewood, University of Essex