

“I Beg My President to Care:” Examining Intersectionality and Substance Use in the LGBTQ+ Community and the Impact of Drug Policy on Minoritized Communities

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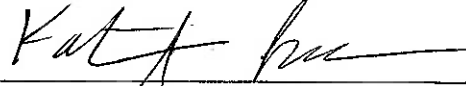
THESIS APPROVAL

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Abstract

This thesis examines the historical significance of drug policy in the United States from 1875 to 2022. Specifically, this thesis will explore drug policy's impact on minoritized communities, particularly the LGBTQ+ community and its intersections with communities of color. At the center of this research, however, my goal is to discuss substance use in the LGBTQ+ community and explore why the rates of substance use remain so high today. This research is important and relevant because the LGBTQ+ community is largely ignored throughout historical narratives despite the deep historical trauma endured by this community. I will make relevant contributions to this discussion using analysis, oral history interviews, and the archives available to me through The Women's Research and BGLTQ+ Student Center at the University of Central Oklahoma. This thesis will utilize a multidisciplinary approach of both History and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality studies methodologies and pedagogies. In addition, this thesis will utilize approaches from other academic fields such as Political Science, Law, and Sociology. Although several scholars across a variety of fields discuss the impacts of drug policy on minoritized communities and substance use in the LGBTQ+ community, very few historians present their voices in the parameters of these discussions. It is my goal to introduce these issues to the historical field and call attention towards reforming these policies. In this thesis, I argue that drug policy is indeed a tool of the government to control and police bodies that do not fit the status quo, specifically those within the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, I will argue that the LGBTQ+ community has been ignored in historical narratives related to substance use and drug policy, leading to further demonization and isolation of this community.

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When my mother passed away in the summer of 2022 after I received my Bachelor's degree in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, I had no idea how I would be able to complete a Master's in History. I was able to push through this program through the help and support of some amazing people who I am fortunate to have by my side. I would like to thank those people in this acknowledgements section.

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To my family: Cierra, Grandma Doris, Jodi, Karen, and Tyler, it has been a tough journey for us and I thank you for always cheering me on. I know Mom and Grandpa would be proud of all of us. I love you all.

Finally, to my life partner Joseph: I thank you for being my rock during the hardest times in my life. I will always be thankful to you for being there during my non-working times through walking our dogs, Roxxy and Sasha, sharing a laugh, and watching too many movies to count with our cat, Kitty, on our laps. I look forward to this next chapter in our lives.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Linda Ash (1967-2022), and to my grandfather, Chuck Nestander (1933-2023). I love you and miss you everyday.

Chapter One: Introduction

Since I was a young child, I have been acutely aware of addiction and the impact that it can have on individual lives. I watched my father go through the many phases of addiction all throughout my formative years. What started off as what most people would consider a controlled “high-functioning,” alcoholic would eventually lead into something more serious. After undergoing several intense surgeries on the hips and brain, my father became addicted to his pain medication which would lead into a heroin addiction that would shake my family’s world upside down. After struggling with and reconciling with the fact that I would not have a father in my life after my middle school years, I took a hard stance on addiction and substance use. I believed that it was all bad and that people who use substances were destroyers of families, themselves, and society.

It would not be until my sophomore year of high school when my best friend since 2013, Liz, opened up a dialogue about addiction and substance use that would change my stance on the topic forever. Liz was quite the debate champion in high school and we, along with several other friends, would meet almost nightly at our local Starbucks. In between working on our AP school work and discussing the most recent drama of high school, we would engage in conversations that I understand now shaped me as a scholar. While Liz worked on a debate speech about addiction and substance use, she posed the question: “Do you think that all drugs should be decriminalized and/or legalized?” Having been the only person in the group to have experienced what addiction can do to a person firsthand, my immediate response was “absolutely not.” Through much debate that night, Liz framed her take in such a humanizing and matter-of-fact way that it changed how I perceived this conversation outside of my own trauma regarding the subject. This conversation sparked my interest in substance use research.

Later, in college, I would struggle to decide what to major in. I changed my major six times until I found Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) in 2019 while sitting in Dr. Churchill's Intro to WGSS class. Dr. Churchill and WGSS shaped the ways in which I reflect, research, and write about scholarly topics. Prior to WGSS, I considered myself a person who saw things in "black and white." Now, WGSS allows me to think in technicolor to see the spaces in between the "black and white" as well as explore the duality of topics that seem so rigid. Throughout college, I always gravitated towards substance use related research topics whenever the chance to choose my own topic presented itself. In 2022, I would take my final class for WGSS, the Capstone course. The topic for Capstone was "body politics" and naturally, I chose to write about the history of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community. The topic is something that I'd done some superficial research on, but nothing that I had fully delved into as a possibility for a conference-ready, full-length paper. Upon starting the project, I found that there were not many sources on the topic, particularly historical resources that situate the LGBTQ+ community into the discussion of addiction and substance use. This discovery would lead me on a three-year journey to enroll in graduate school and dedicate these three years to investigating why this discrepancy exists in historical narratives.

This thesis is a historical discussion of the corruption of the United States government and how this corruption manifests in the scope of drug policy. It is important to discuss drug policy in this thesis as it opens space for a narrative of the substance use present in the LGBTQ+ community through the lens of intersectionality. Along with an intersecting mix of secondary sources, this thesis will present primary sources from members of the LGBTQ+ community during the 1980's and 1990's using newspaper articles like those from *The Gayly Oklahoman*. My thesis is a direct contradiction to George Fisher, and scholars like him, who argue that

modern historians find evidence of racism in policy-makers in connection to drug policy. Fisher argues against this claim by stating that the people who create such laws are too concerned with their own race to worry about the well-being of other races. Because the LGBTQ+ community has been left out of the conversation surrounding drug policy, this thesis utilizes sources from a variety of fields to allow for a greater scope of understanding who drug policy affects and if it is effective. In this thesis, I argue that drug policy is indeed a tool of the government to control and police bodies that do not fit the status quo, specifically those within the LGBTQ+ community, and how intersectional analysis can aid historians to a greater understanding of this corruption seen through the United States government.¹

Chapter Two, “A Historiography of Drug Policy in the United States, 1875-2022,” explores historiographical discourse on drug policy in the United States. I list my sources largely in order of the date of publication to gain a fuller picture of how drug policy is portrayed by historians and scholars of a variety of backgrounds. Some sources are shifted to fit with the format of this historiography. Beginning with Richard Schroeder's *The Politics of Drugs: An American Dilemma*, published in 1980, and David T. Courtright's 1992 article “A Century of American Narcotic Policy,” it is clear to see that many scholars discuss drug policy through the lens of President Richard Nixon's The War on Drugs. Although The War on Drugs is the most public-facing and fearmongering of the drug policies, it is important to view drug policy as existing both before and outside of this era. Moving away from the Nixon era of drug policy, I utilize Cheryl L. Chamber's 2011 book *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism: The Story Told by the Congressional Record* to highlight the ways in which the Reagan Administration helped to propel the Nixon era drug policy forward. While this historiography mainly focuses on Nixon

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, “status quo” refers to white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper class men.

and Reagan, due to the popularity of these sources, I also explore pre-Nixon and post-Reagan drug policy to understand the motivations behind the beginning of drug policy and the steps towards a right direction, ending with the year 2022.

Chapter Three, “Public Enemy Number One?: The Impact of Drug Policy on Minoritized Communities in the United States, 1875-2022,” continues with the conversation of drug policy but largely through primary sources. I begin this section with the year 1875 because that is the first time that drug policy became a thought in the minds of legislators in the United States. This was due to the demonization of the Chinese community through the 1875 Page Law which banned Chinese women from entering the United States due to an assumption that Chinese women caused immoral behaviors from Chinese men, particularly regarding opium use. From here, it is clear to see that the motives behind drug policy and its passage have always been attached to underlying reasons related to xenophobia and racism. This discussion of Chinese exclusion in the United States leads me into a new topic for this thesis: xenophobia and racism towards Mexican immigrants in the early twentieth century. The passage of the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 further exposes the corruption of the United States government as their motivations behind such acts are supported by fears of Mexican immigration. For both the Chinese and Mexican populations discussed in this section, I highlight the propaganda used to demonize these groups as well as white society’s hypocrisy in supporting these legislative acts. This chapter also features a discussion of Nixon, Reagan, and Obama era drug policy to begin the conversation towards situating the LGBTQ+ community in the topic of drug policy as a tool of oppression.

Chapter Four, “We Need to Get Rid of the Drug War Mentality: The History of Substance Use in the LGBTQ+ Community, 1980s-2022,” utilizes both primary and secondary sources evenly to highlight the ways in which this community has wrongfully been left out of historical

discussions of this topic. Beginning with the 1980s, I discuss Reagan and his failure in supporting the United States through the HIV/AIDS epidemic, especially the LGBTQ+ community as they were the targets of false narratives. I take the time to note important artistic endeavors as a form of activism during the HIV/AIDS epidemic to showcase the resiliency of the LGBTQ+ community during a time when they were cast to the side and ostracized due to homophobic news stories and legislation. Or conversely, queer people were completely ignored in the discourse and rendered invisible. Ostracizing the community due to HIV/AIDS leads to a breakdown of the culture of the LGBTQ+ community during the 1980s and subsequently a rise in substance use to cope with immense pain and pressure. It is important to note, while this thesis is an intersectional discussion of the LGBTQ+ community, it is difficult to find sources on lesbian and trans members of the LGBTQ+ community because men are seen as “perfect subjects” for quantitative studies. I utilize lesbian publications like *Lesbian Connection* and *Off Our Backs* to provide qualitative information about how lesbians dealt with and thought about addiction in their communities, however, quantitative results are notably missing in this research compared to gay and bisexual men of various races. This chapter highlights a variety of substances and the decades they became popularized by the LGBTQ+ community to discuss why this community utilizes substance use to navigate homophobia and transphobia. This chapter also highlights the ways in which the LGBTQ+ community is left out of larger discussions of drug policy despite the impact felt by this community.

Chapter Five, “Out of Body and World: The Impact of Online Communication Systems on Rates of Substance Use in the LGBTQ+ Community, 1990s-2022,” explores how the LGBTQ+ community engages with social media. Including this chapter is important to the scope of this thesis because social media and the internet have drastically changed the ways in which

people communicate and form meaningful relationships with like-minded individuals. I start this chapter by analyzing life before the internet and how LGBTQ+ individuals met one another without assistance from social media. I then shift focus into the start of the internet and its massive gain in popularity since its creation. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the LGBTQ+ community utilizes social media either through dating apps or platonic means of connection. Then, I examine the rates of substance use prior to and during the age of the internet to examine if substance use rates in the LGBTQ+ community have remained the same, decreased, or increased since the rise of the social media digital age. I also discuss the ways in which relationships formed via social media can evolve into real life relationships and what this looks like for the LGBTQ+ community.

In the conclusion, I discuss the findings from this research and restate my argument. I also put forth the solutions that I believe are necessary to undo the corruption found in drug policy in the United States. Although I do not believe these solutions can be made quickly, I believe them to be steps towards an America which seeks to help its citizens in their struggle through drug addiction rather than criminalizing these individuals. How can we end substance use and addiction in the United States if we do not allow treatment and education to be the starting steps?

Chapter Two

A Historiography of Drug Policy in the United States, 1875-2017

Introduction

The study of drug policy in the United States is a topic that is severely underrepresented in historical studies. Much content pertaining to United States drug policy is represented in Criminal Law, Political Science, and Sociological journals. However, there is much less content regarding substance use to analyze within Historical journals. While this chapter will be a historiography analyzing the events between the beginning of United States drug policy and today, much of its contents rely on information outside of the historical sphere to fully capture the impacts of drug policy in the United States. To understand why drug policy exists and who it affects, this historiography will also include information from sources regarding substance use, addiction, recovery, and harm reduction in order to develop a clear understanding of who drug policy impacts and why.

Across all disciplines and discussions, however, there is one consistent theme when discussing the War on Drugs and its continuation into today's society: failure. The War on Drugs is often looked at as a failure by historians, and other scholars analyzing U.S drug policy, in that it never effectively stopped anything, especially the rate of substance use across the United States. Despite the seemingly well-intentioned efforts of drug policy in the United States to keep society "safe", historians argue that a deeper understanding of the racist history of drug policy is necessary to examine how it affects other marginalized groups, like the LGBTQ+ community. This chapter will explore the intersectional and institutional limitations at force against members of the LGBTQ+ community in conjunction with scholarly analysis of drug policy, substance use, addiction, recovery, and harm reduction techniques in the United States since the 1870s, prior to the Nixon Administration's declaration of the War on Drugs. Due to the lack of inclusion of

queer folks in historical writing, much of how drug policy, and the motivations behind it, affects the LGBTQ+ community must be interpreted through other mentions of race, class, and gender to form an intersectional understanding of this topic. This thesis will work to offer a large overview of how members of the LGBTQ+ community came to be perceived as a part of the drug war while attempting to position them within a historical narrative that they are often left out of.

In order to fully grasp the methodologies utilized throughout this thesis, it is important to understand the term “intersectionality” and why it has gained popularity as a tool to aid researchers in a deeper understanding of their chosen topic. In 1989, Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal scholar and professor of law at UCLA and Columbia University, coined the term “intersectionality” in her article titled “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.”² Dr. Crenshaw uses the term intersectionality to address the issue of feminist and antiracist theorists who treat the identity of a Black woman as two separate identities rather than looking at the person as a whole in order to see how different systems affect these two coexisting identities together rather than separately.³ Dr. Crenshaw uses the example of a General Motors lawsuit to showcase her point. In the lawsuit, General Motors did not believe discrimination occurred in their hiring process because they hired both white women and Black men. To General Motors this meant that there was no proof of sexism or racism in their hiring process. Through this example, Dr. Crenshaw highlights that “Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination [which] implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine

² Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* Vol. 1989: Iss 1, Article 8 (1989): 138-167.

³ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 139-140.

are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences.”⁴ Later, Crenshaw’s work was expanded on to show the importance of multiple identities in experiences with privilege and oppression. Throughout this thesis, I will utilize the term intersectionality to address as many aspects of a person’s identity to understand the systems at war against them while still examining the effects of drug policy and substance use on an already marginalized group of people, the LGBTQ+ community.

The War on Drugs: New History or Same Old Story?

The earliest work related to drug policy amongst these sources comes from Richard C. Schroeder. Schroeder holds an impressive resume including his work in the early 1970s to develop a study related to international narcotics controls for the U.S Department of the State, work as a consultant for the Drug Abuse Council, and contributions to numerous magazine and newspaper articles on the subject of substance use and abuse.⁵ In the 1980, second edition, copy of Schroeder’s book, *The Politics of Drugs: An American Dilemma*, he criticizes analysts who claim that the War on Drugs represents the beginning of drug policy in the United States when, in fact, the U.S. has a long-standing history in attempting to control its citizens’ rates of substance use.⁶

Since the colonial and prohibition periods, the Nixon administration’s War on Drugs is just another example of the government implementing policies that use more resources and fix fewer issues under the guise of keeping society safe. In a similar critique of drug policy in the United States, David T. Courtright notes in his 1992 article, “A Century of American Narcotic Policy,” that the War on Drugs is more about control rather than treating people who use

⁴ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 141-143.

⁵ Richard C. Schroeder, *The Politics of Drugs: An American Dilemma* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1980), vii-viii.

⁶ Schroeder, *The Politics of Drugs*, 2.

substances, especially those experiencing addiction.⁷ If, Courtright contends, the War on Drugs was about treating addiction, the federal government would have pushed for methadone clinics and rehabilitation centers to become normalized instead of arresting people who use or sell illicit substances.⁸ Had treatment been the main way to combat substance use in the United States, marginalized groups may not have been as scrutinized in the following decades and, perhaps, even provided help instead of judgment. In their 1987 research, Dana Finegan and Emily McNally understand the need for treatment early on in addiction. The book *Dual Identities: Counseling Chemically Dependent Gay Men and Lesbians* by Finegan and McNally highlights the interconnectedness of people experiencing addiction *and* members of the LGBTQ+ community through highlighting the shared stigma and isolation from larger society which both groups face.⁹ An important aspect to this comparison, however, is the distinction in treatment between queer and non-queer folks. Finegan and McNally claim that in the treatment of non-queer folks, recovery begins when the person addicted to the substances comes to terms with the fact that they are “ill.” However, for the treatment of queer folks, it is important to break down the common misconception that homosexuality is a mental disorder and not something to be treated but rather, their addiction to their substance of choice.¹⁰ Finegan and McNally’s motivations for writing *Dual Identities* stem from their shared experience as queer women who are recovering from alcohol addiction.¹¹ *Dual Identities* set the stage for other publications in the same field as it breaks down social stigma towards queer folks, defines queer terms, and is the first resource of its kind to highlight the importance of LGBTQ+ centered treatment plans. It is

⁷ David T. Courtright, “A Century of American Narcotic Policy,” *Treating Drug Problems: Commissioned Papers on Historical, Institutional, and Economic Contexts of Drug Treatment* Vol. 2 (1992): 1-62.

⁸ Courtright, “A Century of American Narcotic Policy,” 12.

⁹ Dana G. Finnegan and Emily B. McNally, *Dual Identities: Counseling Chemically Dependent Gay Men and Lesbians* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1987), 4-8.

¹⁰ Finegan & McNally, *Dual Identities*, 4.

¹¹ Finegan & McNally, *Dual Identities*, 8.

significant that *Dual Identities* came out in the late 1980s as the queer community, particularly gay men, are especially scrutinized during that decade due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Knowing this crucial information from Finegan and McNally, one major way to aid in the decrease of discrimination would be through proper construction of rehabilitation centers and specialized treatment options for patients of intersecting backgrounds instead of criminalizing these individuals. Although prevention and treatment efforts, initially, had substantial support from the Nixon Administration, by 1973 the White House Special Action Office on Drug Abuse Prevention (SAODAP) crumbled and Nixon assumed a “law and order” approach to his drug war.¹² This new approach from the Nixon Administration resulted in further funding towards law enforcement, with a substantial increase from \$20.2 million in 1968 to \$317 million by 1975 which shows a trend in popularity towards continuing the drug war even after Nixon.¹³ As evidenced by Renee Scherlen in the 2012 article “The Never-Ending Drug War: Obstacles to Drug War Policy Termination”, the drug war has seemingly always been about reducing substance use, however, little impact has yet to be seen regarding rates of substance use despite increased funding towards law enforcement efforts.¹⁴ If anything, substance use has only increased while prices for substances have decreased, showing a high supply and demand for illicit substances in the United States. Scherlen’s analysis finds that while the War on Drugs has been a failure, policy termination may not be as easy to accomplish, as other analysts have suggested. Whether policy termination includes the creation of a new prohibition-like policy focused on harm reduction and the decriminalization of all illicit substances, *or* a different policy focused on the legalization of some substances, the split amongst pro-policy terminators is still

¹² Schroeder, *The Politics of Drugs*, 144.

¹³ Schroeder, *The Politics of Drugs*, 145.

¹⁴ Renee Scherlen, “The Never-Ending Drug War: Obstacles to Drug War Policy Termination,” *Political Science & Politics* Vol. 45, no. 01 (2012): 67–73.

too broad to make an effective case against current drug policy.¹⁵ Furthermore, despite attempts from the Obama Administration to end raids on medical marijuana businesses and launch effective needle-exchange programs, the War on Drugs remains a dark shadow upon America's past and present. The growth of the War on Drugs, and its continuation through the Reagan Administration, is a harsh reminder of this past and a reality check towards racist and classist laws still in effect today in the United States.

Just Say No?: Reagan's Failure

The Reagan Administration is a prime example of what happens when the government attempts to politicize and govern minoritized communities in misguided attempts to better society and, particularly, end substance use. In Bruce Bagley's 1988 article, "U.S Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: An Analysis of Policy Failure", he examines the impacts of United States drug policy, both domestically and internationally, with a focus on Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.¹⁶ Domestically, First Lady Nancy Reagan sprouted her anti-substance use campaign, "Just Say No", which gained traction from the public school systems and news outlets clinging to the perceived safety in the continuation of Nixon's War on Drugs. This anti-substance use mentality remained persistent and ever-growing throughout the decade with the Reagan Administration and the passage of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, and later 1988, which enacted mandatory sentencing laws. Cheryl L. Chambers echoes this critique in her 2011 book *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism: The Story Told by the Congressional Record* through her argument that despite claims from the Reagan Administration that the sentencing laws are not racist, the fuel behind it had centuries of racism to back it up and propel it forward.¹⁷ Despite

¹⁵ Scherlen, "The Never-Ending Drug War," 68.

¹⁶ Bruce Michael Bagley, "US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: Analysis of a Policy Failure," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* Vol. 30, no. 2/3 (1988): 189–212.

¹⁷ Cheryl L. Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism: The Story Told by the Congressional Record*. (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Pub., 2011), 1-263.

attempts to limit substance use domestically, access to illicit substances, especially marijuana, crack, and heroin, increased, thus, the failure of the continued War on Drugs is exposed.¹⁸

Internationally, however, attempts to locate the people who distribute illicit substances grew steadily as critics claimed that Reagan was not exhibiting enough force in these areas. While it is believed that if the United States can control drugs coming in from across the border that the substance use issue can be resolved, these efforts prove to be ineffective in disrupting large mafias emerging in Latin American countries.¹⁹ Moreover, the Reagan Administration's attempts to push forward with the War on Drugs only exacerbates substance use in the United States and increases international tensions all while promoting racism and classism as drug policy.

Similar views surrounding the Reagan Administration and the War on Drugs carry over into the 2000s with historians uncovering even more truths. In the 2012 anthology *Drugs and the American Dream* edited by Patricia A. Adler, Peter Adler, and Patrick K. O'Brien, the realities of United States drug policy are analyzed through various lenses to further understand the history of drug policy in the United States.²⁰ In chapter forty-three of the anthology, Duane McBride et. al., highlight that despite the evidence for similar rates of substance use among almost all ethnic groups, Black Americans are incarcerated at alarmingly higher rates than their ethnic counterparts.²¹ One major cause for this justice-affected disparity is the mandatory sentencing laws which the Reagan Administration enacted, and the Obama Administration diminished, which further criminalizing substance use and, especially, possession.²² Moreover, McBride et.al., call for greater efforts towards the decriminalization of some, if not all, substances in order

¹⁸ Bagley, "US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs," 190.

¹⁹ Bagley, "US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs," 197.

²⁰ Patricia A. Adler, Peter Adler, and Patrick K. O'Brien, *Drugs and the American Dream: An Anthology*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1-399.

²¹ Adler, Adler, and O'Brien, *Drugs and the American Dream*, 380.

²² Adler, Adler, and O'Brien *Drugs and the American Dream*, 380.

to improve the quality of rehabilitation centers, which mirrors much of what historians have promoted since the 1970s. This is significant because despite efforts to push for less harsh drug policy in the United States, the government has largely ignored these suggestions while funneling more money into law enforcement.

One reason for this is explained by James Gray in his 2012 book *Why Our Drug Laws Have Failed and What We Can Do About It: A Judicial Indictment on the War on Drugs*. In his book, Gray claims that since the government chooses to make certain substances illegal, therefore making them perceived as “bad” within society, that it is inevitable for substance use to become a major discussion point in politics.²³ Moreover, Gray explains that while the United States government has always been corrupt, the War on Drugs only exacerbates this corruption by the permission of law enforcement to be the main vehicle for controlling substance use.²⁴ While undoing the racist and classist motives behind United States drug policy may never have full success, recent legislation may shed some hope for the future regarding harm-reduction methods and better treatment facilities. Overall, the War on Drugs still lingers in the minds of politicians who want to govern bodies rather than fix tangible issues that need solutions. It is the goal of this thesis to both put forth solutions to the drug war mentality as well as provide a humanized narrative as to why certain, intersectional communities utilize substances to cope with the oppression they face on a daily basis.

A Step in the Right Direction

In *5 Grams: Crack Cocaine, Rap Music, and the War on Drugs* by Dimitri A. Bogazianos, the connection between the War on Drugs and racism is further analyzed through a narrative intent on investigating the criminalization of both the substances deemed as harmful

²³ James P. Gray, *Why Our Drug Laws Have Failed and What We Can Do About It: A Judicial Indictment of the War on Drugs*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 1-262.

²⁴ Gray, *Why Our Drug Laws Have Failed*, 151.

and the Black community. Specifically, Bogazianos uses Marxist analysts' views of punishment as non-instrumental and counterintuitive to highlight the failure of drug policy in the United States.²⁵ Furthermore, Bogazianos' analysis finds that other analysts agree that the criminal justice system currently affirms these counterintuitive motives through explicit goals paired with implicit functions, such as increased punishment for substance use or possession.²⁶ A shining example of this framework in action can be seen in the Reagan Administration's Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988. Bogazianos highlights the sentencing disparity of 100 to 1 in relation to possession of crack versus cocaine and the racist motives behind it.²⁷ In 2010, the Obama Administration made a step in the right direction towards a reduction in the sentencing of 100 to 1 to a ratio of 18 to 1. However, Bogazianos claims that this is not enough as minoritized communities are still targets of law enforcement actions and therefore, higher rates of incarceration.²⁸ Overall, Bogazianos views the War on Drugs, and the deliberate target set on crack, as an intentional method to widen the gap between Black Americans and equity in the United States.²⁹ It is important to note that prior to the late 1800s in the United States, there were virtually no legal limitations on the regulation of substances or how they were used.³⁰ In *Graphic News: How Sensational Images Transformed Nineteenth-Century Journalism* by Amanda Frisken, Frisken argues that anti-Chinese propaganda in the late 1800s catalyzed not only xenophobic ideals in the United States but also set a precedent for future drug policy organization.³¹ In chapter two of *Graphic News*, Frisken examines false narratives created by

²⁵ Dimitri A. Bogazianos, *5 Grams: Crack Cocaine, Rap Music, and the War on Drugs*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1-148.

²⁶ Bogazianos, *5 Grams*, 18-19.

²⁷ Bogazianos, *5 Grams*, 15-16.

²⁸ Bogazianos, *5 Grams*, 16.

²⁹ Bogazianos, *5 Grams*, 31.

³⁰ Courtwright, "A Century of American Narcotic Policy," 1-15.

³¹ Amanda Frisken, *Graphic News: How Sensational Images Transformed Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 50-68.

newspapers about Chinese immigrants in the United States during the late 19th century. Here, Frisken observes that the majority of images circulating about the Chinese population are negative and stereotypical, often over-sexualizing the women and creating addicts out of the men.³² Even though Chinese immigrants contribute greatly to the economy through the services provided by their community, citizens of the United States grew increasingly xenophobic and racist as they became exposed to this anti-Chinese propaganda.³³ In one image, Frisken analyzes a scene inside of an opium den where all of the participants are wealthy white men and women and the only Chinese person visible in the image is a service worker not partaking in the use of opium.³⁴ This is significant because as opium dens came known to be labeled as sexually dangerous areas where only Chinese men go in order to sexually assault women and get high, this image shows quite the opposite. Frisken further observes that the white people in the photo all exhibit posture that would be indicative of opium use yet none of them, especially the women, appear to be in any sort of sexual danger.³⁵ In order to contextualize the attitudes of the United States during the late 1800s, the images provided by Frisken are helpful for achieving that goal. Frisken goes on to argue that the anti-Chinese propaganda of the late 1800s is the leading force in passing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 as it portrays Chinese immigrants as opium-addicted, job-stealing rapists who do not contribute to American society, something Frisken exposes as not factual.³⁶ Prior to the federal action of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, however, Frisken notes that the 1875 Page Law, which prohibits Chinese women from gaining access to the United States, led to the eventual total exclusion of all Chinese people to come overseas.³⁷

³² Frisken, *Graphic News*, 53.

³³ Frisken, *Graphic News*, 54.

³⁴ Frisken, *Graphic News*, 60.

³⁵ Frisken, *Graphic News*, 60.

³⁶ Frisken, *Graphic News*, 64.

³⁷ Frisken, *Graphic News*, 54.

Within the same year, 1875, San Francisco became the first state to ban opium dens under the guise of keeping white society safe. While the law is not explicitly aimed at the Chinese population, Frisken argues that anti-Chinese propaganda aids in the ability for such laws to propel forward by the United States government because the Chinese population is portrayed as a one-dimensional, stereotypical, and untrue version of what some Americans believe due to such propaganda. Although some scholars may disagree with Frisken, her argument is the most compelling as she combines the analysis of racially-motivated propaganda with the legislation of the late 1800s whose goal was to exclude Chinese people from American society while also enacting drug laws in racist pursuits to “other” this population of people making economic, social, and political contributions to the United States.³⁸

George Fisher is one of the scholars in this field who disagrees with Frisken, as he claims that drug policy in the United States is not due to racist motivations. While Fisher’s article, “Racial Myths of the Cannabis War”, differs significantly in content from *Graphic News*, the comparisons between the criminalization of opium and marijuana are similar enough to discuss Fisher and Frisken’s arguments together regarding the relations between race and drug policy in the United States. In “Racial Myths of the Cannabis War”, Fisher claims that “too” modern historians often find evidence of personal racism from Harry J. Anslinger and translate that into racist motivations for drug policy, particularly surrounding opium and marijuana use.³⁹ Instead, Fisher argues, laws which banned opium, cocaine, and marijuana in the late 19th and early 20th centuries came from white lawmakers who are more invested in their own racial communities’ well-being rather than punishing or demonizing minoritized communities.⁴⁰ Fisher goes on to claim that despite Anslinger’s personal records of racism and one-on-one correspondence with

³⁸ Frisken, *Graphic News*, 54-57.

³⁹ George Fisher, “Racial Myths Of The Cannabis War,” *Boston University Law Review* Vol. 101 (2021), 933–940.

⁴⁰ Fisher, “Racial Myths”, 933.

other government figures, his lack of expression of this racism to the general public relieves him of his attachments to racist motivations for furthering drug policy and punishments for illicit substance possession.⁴¹ Fisher is a part of a small group of scholars who do not believe drug policy in the United States is rooted in racism, classism, and sexism but rather believes that drug policy is a way to protect all of society. Throughout this historiography, I will argue against viewpoints like Fisher as they usually have conflicting points of view that could be summed up easier by arguments like Frisken who recognize the underlying intersectional and institutional boundaries in the way for people of color, queer people, women, working class, and poor individuals.

Whereas Fisher believes that scholars wrongly perceive Anslinger's personal racist ideals as interfering with drug policy decisions, Johann Hari, author of the 2015 book *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*, not only argues but uncovers evidence of racist motivations for past and present drug policy. While Hari does focus on Black, Latino, and Asian communities, his most compelling argument lies in the unraveling of details about Billie Holiday and the harassment she endures by Anslinger and his partners. Succinctly, Hari argues that "Harry Anslinger is our own darkest impulses, given a government department and a license to kill."⁴² Ultimately, Hari argues that the War on Drugs is not the idealistic safeguard that many Americans seem to view it as, but rather, a tool given to power hungry government agents to terrorize and criminalize drug users instead of actually providing help via harm reduction practices like clinics and clean needle exchanges. Additionally, Hari argues that addiction is not as clear cut as scientists and politicians have shaped it to be, causing societal confusion on how to approach addiction and substance use. Hari uses *Chasing the Scream* to call out corruption,

⁴¹ Fisher, "Racial Myths", 938.

⁴² Johann Hari, *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 1-298.

racism, and medical history as it relates to the War on Drugs and substance use.⁴³ One of his more controversial arguments states that “the opposite of addiction is connection,” challenging ideas about the chemical and physical aspects of substance use.

Marijuana: A Saving Grace?

Of the authors mentioned thus far in this chapter, all of them have included some mention of the legalization of marijuana in order to combat and lower incarceration rates, especially among the Black community. This is significant as it shows that even since the 1980s, decriminalization and legalization methods have always remained in the minds of Americans who are pro-drug policy reform. In Ingrid Walker and Julie Netherland’s 2018 article, “Developing a Transformative Drug Policy Research Agenda in the United States”, they argue that a new approach to the reformation of drug policy must be considered if it is to have any success at the federal level.⁴⁴ In their two-pronged argument, Walker and Netherland argue that both a restructuring of the system as well as a deeper understanding of substance use is required of the government in order to begin the discussion towards enacting change.⁴⁵ Walker and Netherland’s analysis is important for self-regulation among proponents of drug policy reform as their previous arguments have been somewhat disjointed. Instead of calling for an immediate and rapid reform, proponents of change should approach reform in a strategic manner that dismantles drug policy in steps rather than all at once.

One key example towards this argument put forth by Walker and Netherland is the contested legality of marijuana throughout the history of the United States. In Clayton J. Mosher and Scott Akins’ book, *In the Weeds: Demonization, Legalization, and the Evolution of U.S.*

⁴³ Hari, *Chasing the Scream*, 7-32.

⁴⁴ Ingrid Walker and Julie Netherland, “Developing a Transformative Drug Policy Research Agenda in the United States,” *Contemporary Drug Problems* Vol. 46, no. 1 (2018): 3–21.

⁴⁵ Walker and Netherland, “Developing a Transformative Drug Policy Research Agenda,” 13-14.

Marijuana Policy, they analyze the history of marijuana criminalization and legalization across the United States. Beginning in the 1930s, Mosher and Akins highlight the racist motives behind the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937, claiming its passage is successful because it further ostracizes minoritized groups, particularly Hispanic communities.⁴⁶ The 1930s and 1940s came to be known as the “reefer madness” years. This craze continued into the 1970s with the War on Drugs and the further demonization of minoritized community groups, especially the Black community.⁴⁷ Despite its long history of political control, marijuana is decriminalized or legalized in over half of the United States through the persistence of pro-marijuana organizations and the scientific community, thus showing that change can be made, despite its slow pace. In a similar discussion, contributors to the 2013 anthology *A War That Can't Be Won: Binational Perspectives on the War on Drugs* argue that the drug war may never end, however, it can be reformed. In Chapter Ten, Israel Martinez argues that United States drug policy overlooks the health aspect to addiction and leans heavily on the criminalization of substance use.⁴⁸ Again, the ever-present theme of racism can be seen in United States drug policy while also failing to actually obtain the results seemingly desired from the drug war. Since the late 1990s, however, drug policy surrounding the use of marijuana changes rapidly by undergoing shifts from criminalized, to decriminalized, to either medically or recreationally legalized per the state’s choice, either through voting or legislative actions.

Although legalized marijuana may seem like a step in the right direction, there are still racist, sexist, and medical discrepancies within the marijuana industry. As highlighted in the 2020 article by Deborah Ahrens, “Retroactive Legality: Marijuana Convictions and Restorative

⁴⁶ Clayton James Mosher and Scott Akins, *In the Weeds: Demonization, Legalization, and the Evolution of U.S. Marijuana Policy*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019), 1-234.

⁴⁷ Mosher and Akins, *In the Weeds*, 23-25.

⁴⁸ Tony Payan, Kathleen A. Staudt, and Z. Anthony Kruszewski, *A War That Can't Be Won: Binational Perspectives on the War on Drugs*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 1-330.

Justice in an Era of Criminal Justice Reform”, even the distinction between medical or recreational marijuana can lead to further scrutinization of the use of marijuana.⁴⁹ While recreational marijuana leaves little room for discrimination of its use, medical marijuana can still perpetuate bias towards cannabis use while also promoting the use of law enforcement to arrest those using it for “non-medical” purposes (despite marijuana’s inherent medicinal nature).⁵⁰ Additionally, Ahrens notes that access to the cannabis industry and commerce is not equitable, with the majority of shop owners identifying as white therefore further exposing discrepancies in marijuana policy and operations.⁵¹ Moreover, Ahrens highlights two suggestions for narrowing these disparities: reform drug policy and erase or limit the conviction of marijuana offenses in states where it is currently legalized in some form.⁵² While marijuana legalization may pose new hopes for the future, much work still needs to be done in order to displace the War on Drugs mentality and promote a healthier nation through acknowledgement of treatment needs.

In the 2016 book *Blowing Smoke: Rethinking the War on Drugs Without Prohibition and Rehab*, Michael J. Reznicek deconstructs the model of rehabilitation and popular ideas which surround the image of the “addict.”⁵³ Reznicek pinpoints two key assumptions made about both substance use treatment and people who need the treatment. The first consists of the idea that people who use illicit substances are predisposed to their addiction instead of attributing their addiction to a lack of education about substances, geographic location, or other factors outside of biological explanations. The second harmful idea surrounding substance use treatment is the idea that the people who use illicit substances want to stop but cannot, which leads to the stripping

⁴⁹ Deborah M. Ahrens, “Retroactive Legality: Marijuana Convictions and Restorative Justice in an Era of Criminal Justice Reform,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* Vol.110, no. 3 (2020), 379-440.

⁵⁰ Ahrens, “Retroactive Legality,” 399.

⁵¹ Ahrens, “Retroactive Legality,” 403.

⁵² Ahrens, “Retroactive Legality,” 404-408.

⁵³ Michael J. Reznicek, *Blowing Smoke: Rethinking the War on Drugs Without Prohibition and Rehab*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 1-199.

away of a person's agency in sobriety which halts positive results.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Reznicek attributes these faults in thinking to the anti-treatment mindset of the Nixon-era, the War on Drugs, and their active part in stifling the potential of treatment centers.⁵⁵ Overall, the War on Drugs remains a pervasive mindset that persists in today's society through racist and classist motives which hinders effective rehabilitation actions focused on harm-reduction measures and the decriminalization of some, or all, illicit substances to end high incarceration rates of Black Americans. While the recent legalization of marijuana in some states may seem positive, the United States still has a long way to go in order to restore justice to the communities affected by its drug policy and racist intentions.

A Brief Look at the Impact of the Internet

In the research conducted thus far on this topic, the most cohesive, humanized, and historical narrative of the impact of online communication systems on substance use and overall mental health in the LGBTQ+ community comes from John-Manuel Andriote. Andriote's semi-autobiographical, semi-historical, and semi-anthropological 2017 novel entitled *Stonewall Strong: Gay Men's Heroic Fight for Resilience, Good Health, and a Strong Community*. *Stonewall Strong* can be considered semi-autobiographical because the first part is a detailed outline of Andriote's life from the 1980s-2005, when he received a positive HIV result which prompted him to write *Stonewall Strong*.⁵⁶ Andriote's book can also be considered semi-historical as Andriote incorporates references to the Reagan administration, AIDS organizations and their movements, and pop culture references to television shows, music, and movies throughout the decades. Andriote's work can also be considered semi-anthropological as

⁵⁴ Reznicek, *Blowing Smoke*, 62.

⁵⁵ Reznicek, *Blowing Smoke*, 33.

⁵⁶ John-Manuel Andriote, *Stonewall Strong: Gay Men's Heroic Fight for Resilience, Good Health, and a Strong Community* (Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2017), 1-314.

he examines trends in society through lenses of public health, interviews he conducts which he then turns into a narrative story, and his unending quest to maintain queer cultural history through these stories.⁵⁷ In Part Two, Chapter Nineteen, Andriote highlights the story of Sami Medina, who describes his younger self as the “angry goth kid,” and his struggles with self-harm, addiction, and feelings of loneliness as a gay kid in an “unfair world” that he knows he had to make work for him.⁵⁸ Andriote pairs this humanized image of Sami with statistics which focus on the level of harassment experienced by students regardless of their sexuality. Of 3,095 students interviewed in 2015, 98.1% of students report understanding “gay” as a negative word, 57.6% of students report feeling unsafe due to their sexual orientation, and 48.6% of students report electronic harassment.⁵⁹ Andriote also explores the more positive impacts of dating apps, especially for members of the LGBTQ+ who also have a disability of some kind. In chapter twenty-three, Andriote shifts his tone from discussions about online communications systems as a way to find substances which leads to harassment to speaking about dating apps as an accessibility tool for members of the LGBTQ+ community.⁶⁰ Andriote’s ability to capture both the negative and positive side effects of the use of online communication systems, especially for the LGBTQ+ community, makes him an important addition to this historiography section as he is one of the first researchers, from the research done thus far, who is able to both humanize this subject and provide statistical evidence for the qualitative research conducted.

Conclusion

While intersectional studies of drug policy in the United States are fairly new, the sources available contain some solid content. Overall, analysts who do this work all seem to agree on one

⁵⁷ Andriote, *Stonewall Strong*, 1-10.

⁵⁸ Andriote, *Stonewall Strong*, 151-159.

⁵⁹ Andriote, *Stonewall Strong*, 154.

⁶⁰ Andriote, *Stonewall Strong*, 207-219.

thing: the failure of the War on Drugs. Similarly, the consensus seems to be that had treatment for addiction been trusted with healthcare professionals instead of law enforcement agents, the rates of substance use in the United States may look somewhat different. However, this can only be speculated upon as, barring a few exceptions in certain states regarding marijuana, substance use remains highly criminalized in the United States. In order to deepen these conversations, historians must begin to put these thoughts into legislative action to begin the act of reform. Especially considering minoritized groups, like the LGBTQ+ community, effective treatment plans will go further than unjust incarceration efforts. Even though legalized marijuana seems like a beacon of hope, historians seem to agree that there is still much work to be done in order to right the wrongs done by the United States government and the criminal justice system towards minoritized communities.

Chapter Three

Public Enemy Number One?: The Impact of Drug Policy on Minoritized Communities in the United States, 1875-2022

Introduction

Analysis and research pertaining to drug policy in the United States is a topic that has been discussed in historical conversations, however, it is often framed in a rigid manner which causes an often superficial analysis of drug policy impacts and effectiveness. While much discussion of drug policy and its impacts are deeply analyzed in other fields like Criminal Justice, Sociology, and Political Science, the topic is overwhelmingly ignored by historians. This chapter will be a historical discussion which encompasses intersectional boundaries related to race, class, gender, and sexuality and how these characteristics are targeted by United States drug policy. Some of this chapter's contents are supported by sources outside of the historical scope of academia to provide a richer understanding of these impacts.

There is one overarching theme that all disciplines have been able to narrow down in regard to discussions on drug policy, as mentioned in the historiography of this thesis: failure. It is important to understand this overwhelming and commonly understood concept of drug policy as a failure due to how often it comes up in this research. Since the late 19th century, federal attempts from the United States government to regulate substance use have always been attached to underlying issues related to race, class, gender, and sexuality and the desire of the government to control these bodies. Under the guise and well-intentions of trying to keep the United States and its society "safe", drug policy does quite the opposite. Historians, and scholars across a variety of fields, argue that understanding drug policy is necessary for grappling with the racist, classist, xenophobic, and homophobic undertones present within these policies and,

consequently, society. My research will explore the intersectional and institutional boundaries created by United States drug policy and how these policies negatively impact the lives and image of Chinese bodies, Latinx bodies, Black bodies, and LGBTQ+ bodies in the United States.

Pre-Nixon Drug Policy, 1870s-1930s

Beginning in the late 1800s, reactions to Chinese immigrants in the United States takes an increasingly negative turn which eventually leads to the 1875 Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, as discussed in the historiography section of this thesis. To reiterate: The 1875 Page Law excluded Chinese women from entering the United States and, only seven years later in 1882, evolves into the total exclusion of all Chinese people to come into the United States. This set a precedent of minoritized demographics in the United States to be observed under tremendous scrutiny as their race, class, sexuality, and gender are the target of numerous policies. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, however, is met with differing viewpoints as to the extent of exclusion for the Chinese population. In an 1882 *New York Times* article, one journalist notes the political atmosphere surrounding the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 stating that questions of citizenship and partial exclusion are discussed among policymakers during that time.⁶¹ Despite the varying viewpoints on the total exclusion of Chinese immigrants coming to the United States, the bill passes by a vote of twenty-nine to fifteen.⁶² Since then, policies enacted in the United States have held an undertone of xenophobia and racism, especially as it pertains to drug policy.

In Desmond Manderson's 1999 article, "Symbolism and Racism in Drug History and Policy," he examines racist policies not only in the United States but also in Australia and

⁶¹ "The Chinese Bill Passed: A Vote of Nearly Two to One In The Affirmative," *New York Times*, March 10, 1882, 1.

⁶² "The Chinese Bill Passed," *New York Times*, 1.

Canada, showing the pervasive nature of xenophobic and racist policies worldwide.⁶³

Specifically, Manderson relates the rise in late 1800s drug policy to the rise of Chinese immigration in the United States at that time. Manderson illustrates these correlations in the form of metaphors and symbolism to help the reader to better understand the impact of xenophobia and racism on the Chinese community seeking a home in the United States in the late 1800s. Manderson compares ideas surrounding dirt and pollution to similar attitudes surrounding illicit substances.⁶⁴ Whereas dirt and pollution are often attached to ideas of a “breach of boundaries”, a sense of social (dis)organization, or a “danger of impurity” so too are illicit substances viewed in a similar yet different view.⁶⁵ These metaphorical conceptions of dirt and pollution are similar to the symbolism of illicit substances in that they all represent a violation of boundaries, however, addictive substances are viewed as a threat of the loss of control paired with the shattering of the Western philosophical ideology related to the connection between mind and body distinction as understood through Rene Descartes in the idea of Dualism.⁶⁶

This is an important division of thought because the idea of a loss of control as well as a “contradiction” to Western ideals is what can fuel xenophobic and racist drug policies like the ones seen against Chinese immigrants in the United States during the late 1800s and early 1900s. As evidenced in Amanda Frisken’s 2020 book *Graphic News: How Sensational Images Transformed Nineteenth Century Journalism*, this idea of dirtiness is easy to create propaganda around, especially when it means degrading one group of people to uplift another, more privileged, group of people. Because the propaganda surrounding opium dens in the late 1800s is so consistent and repetitive, acts like the 1875 Page Law and Chinese Exclusion Acts passes with

⁶³ Desmond Manderson, “Symbolism and Racism in Drug History and Policy,” *Drug and Alcohol Review* Vol. 18, no. 2 (1999), 179-186.

⁶⁴ Manderson, “Symbolism and Racism,” 182.

⁶⁵ Manderson, “Symbolism and Racism,” 182.

⁶⁶ Manderson, “Symbolism and Racism,” 182.

ease as the Chinese population are known for images of “otherness” in relation to their appearance, religion, and living standards which is seen as a threat to American nationalism.⁶⁷ Although these policies are set in place over one-hundred years ago, we are still seeing the impact of these policies as well as the use of similar tactics under the guise of attempting to keep white society safe. While most drug policy has negative impacts on society, especially towards minoritized groups of people, there are some changes that have continued to have positive effects on the entire population of the United States.

One major cause for a positive shift in drug policy as it also relates to food production is the 1906 novel written by Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*. *The Jungle* follows an immigrant family from Lithuania who moves to Packingtown, Chicago in search of the American Dream.⁶⁸ While the novel largely focuses on Jurgis and his family’s attempts at survival in an unfamiliar world, *The Jungle* is a catalyst for changes in food production policy, and subsequently, drug production policy. In Chapter 14, Sinclair highlights the conditions of both the workers in the meat-packing plant as well as the conditions of the meat within the factory. The visceral descriptions of these conditions spurred actual public outcry from citizens who engaged with the novel. Descriptions like “they use everything of the pig except the squeal,” “there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white—it would be dosed with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption,” and “the men who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one” implying that rats were in the sausage, are like scenes from a horror movie, however, they are eventually found to be truthful.⁶⁹ The 1906 *New York Times* article titled “Meat Inspection Bill Passes the Senate,” discusses the passage of the Beveridge Meat Inspection Bill

⁶⁷ Frisken, *Graphic News*, 55-58.

⁶⁸ Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1906), 1-358.

⁶⁹ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 145-147.

and how it passed successfully due to the contents of and public reactions to Sinclair's *The Jungle*.⁷⁰ Because the contents of *The Jungle* are so horrific and unbelievable, especially with the descriptions of the meat industry, President Roosevelt believed Sinclair to be a muck-raker and had to be convinced of the authenticity of *The Jungle* and its contents.⁷¹ Eventually, President Roosevelt invites Sinclair to the White House to discuss the novel and ask how Sinclair is aware of these conditions.⁷² Sinclair, who lived in Packingtown with his family, quickly joined "Socialist societies" in the area and became acquainted with individuals who worked in these conditions which inspired the novel's main premise.⁷³ Less directly but still significantly, *The Jungle* catalyzed the passage of other legislation which had been proposed numerous times prior to the novel's release. Due to the Beveridge Meat Inspection Bill, the pressure to pass more legislation regarding the regulation of food, and subsequently, substances for human consumption skyrocketed to keep public fear low and instill citizen's trust back in the United States government.⁷⁴

Another way that Sinclair's *The Jungle* assisted in the furthering of drug policy is in 1906 when the United States Federal Government passed the Pure Food and Drug Act. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 became the first federal law to simultaneously address "production adulteration, production, distribution, and marketing of food, beverages, and drugs."⁷⁵ The passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act is significant as it had been proposed over two hundred times between the years of 1879-1906 meaning that the final product ideally met the

⁷⁰ "Meat Inspection Bill Passes the Senate: Added Without Debate to Agricultural Bil as a Rider: Its Adoption Unexpected: Direct Consequence of the Disclosures Made in Upton Sinclair's Novel, 'The Jungle,'" *New York Times*, May 26, 1906, 1-2.

⁷¹ "Meat Inspection Bill Passes the Senate," *New York Times*, 1.

⁷² "Meat Inspection Bill Passes the Senate," *New York Times*, 2.

⁷³ "Meat Inspection Bill Passes the Senate," *New York Times*, 2

⁷⁴ "Meat Inspection Bill Passes the Senate," *New York Times*, 1.

⁷⁵ Ilyse D. Barkan, "Industry Invites Regulation: The Passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906," *American Journal of Public Health* Vol. 75, no.1 (1985), 18-26.

standards of both sides of Congress.⁷⁶ The 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act catalyzed further initiatives to regulate the distribution of certain substances such as heroin, alcohol, and cocaine.⁷⁷ Three years later in 1909, the United States passed the Smoking Opium Exclusion Act as the desired results of keeping American society safe and sober by banning Chinese immigration was not successful.⁷⁸ There are two reasons for this failure: first, the white population in the United States became increasingly addicted to opium. Therefore, they created their own opium dens without the labor of Chinese immigrants available.⁷⁹

Despite the Smoking Opium Exclusion Act of 1909 which had its intended effect of decreasing opium use among Americans, opium is able to be refined cheaply into heroin and morphine, causing a larger problem nationally.⁸⁰ In the 1908 *New York Times* article, “The Growing Menace of the Use of Cocaine,” Dr. Hammond, a neurologist, is quoted as saying “the best thing for the cocaine fiend is to let him die,” which spurred an even greater divide between the addicted and the sober, the white and the “other.”⁸¹ Similar remarks would later be used by the Reagan Administration, specifically Nancy Reagan and her “Just Say No” initiative. By 1914, the first significant action towards a structured drug policy in the United States came to fruition. As an amendment to the Opium Exclusion Act of 1909, the Harrison Act of 1914 passes in Congress with a main goal meant to eliminate drug distribution, identify drug dealing, and uplift state’s rights to regulate substance use by seeking out the points of origin for distribution.⁸² Despite these seemingly well-intentioned efforts to create a safe and sober United States, the

⁷⁶ Barkan, “Industry Invites Regulation,” 18.

⁷⁷ “Part 1: The 1906 Food and Drugs Act and its Enforcement,” Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Last updated April 24, 2019.

⁷⁸ Audrey Redford and Benjamin Powell, “Dynamics of Intervention in the War on Drugs: The Buildup to the Harrison Act of 1914,” *The Independent Review* Vol. 20, no. 4 (2016): 509–530.

⁷⁹ Redford and Powell, “Dynamics of Intervention,” 520.

⁸⁰ Redford and Powell, “Dynamics of Intervention,” 523.

⁸¹ “The Growing Menace of the Use of Cocaine,” *New York Times*, August 1908, 1.

⁸² Redford and Powell, “Dynamics of Intervention”, 524.

propaganda exposed by scholars like Frisken, as mentioned in this chapter, combined with the passage of the 1875 Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 make it clear that the United States government cared little about the actual well-being of its citizens and more about pushing out non-white folks trying to obtain the American Dream.⁸³

Since the availability of safe and legal opium is no longer present after the passage of the Opium Exclusion Act of 1909 and the Harrison Act of 1914, white users began to find ways to synthesize the drug which led to greater enforcement of drug policies. By the 1920s, the Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act of 1922 and the Heroin Act of 1924 passes in Congress to further regulate the distribution of narcotics with the former focusing on regulations for larger society and the latter focusing on its use in medical settings when prescribed by a physician.⁸⁴ The irony is not lost upon the fact that these three laws; the Harrison Act of 1914, the Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act of 1922, and the Heroin Act of 1924, are all direct consequences from the initial decision to regulate opium as loopholes can be found within the legislation to create other means of substance use in the United States during the early 20th century.

Furthermore, these three laws enable the passage of the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 which regulates both recreational and medical use of marijuana as well as the distribution of marijuana in the United States.⁸⁵ This strict regulation of marijuana imposed a rule requiring a “high-cost transfer tax stamp” for each purchase related to marijuana despite the lack of use of these stamps by the federal government.⁸⁶ Prior to the total ban of marijuana, United States citizens who cultivated marijuana could apply for a producer’s permit in order to legally grow

⁸³ Maia Szalavitz, “One Hundred Years Ago, Prohibition Began in Earnest—and We’re Still Paying for It,” *Pacific Standard*, January 2, 2015, 1-5.

⁸⁴ Redford and Powell, “Dynamics of Intervention,” 527.

⁸⁵ U.S Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Finance, *Marihuana Tax Act of 1937*, 75th Congress, 1st sess., 1937.

⁸⁶ U.S Congressional Research Service. Drug Enforcement in the United States: History, Policy, and Trends (R43749; Oct. 2, 2014), by Lisa Sacco.

the plant within the confines of the law.⁸⁷ According to Mrs. George Bass, “supervisor of the federal narcotic bureau for Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin” in 1937, farmers must pay one dollar per ounce of marijuana or plants with the tops still attached.⁸⁸ Additionally, if marijuana is transferred to an unregistered individual, farm, or group, meaning they did not pay the twenty-four dollar required tax, the farm who illegally distributed the marijuana would have to pay one-hundred dollars per ounce of marijuana sold.⁸⁹ Even after adhering to all of these new regulations, farmers would only receive fifteen dollars per every two-thousand pounds of dry hemp distributed. This led most people to say it would be “better to burn it,” in reference to the crops.⁹⁰ Mrs. Bass sympathizes with the farmers claiming that she recognizes the difficulties of this reality and works with officials to see where they could cooperate better with the farmers so that they could continue to cultivate hemp for its “useful and harmless purposes.”⁹¹

Although promises from Mrs. Bass and others like her seemed attainable, marijuana, and subsequently hemp, would not be as easy to cultivate as some farmers had hoped. Shortly after its passage, the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 eventually made it to where all states banned the possession of marijuana, which made it illegal nation-wide.⁹² Moreover, the ambiguity of the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 created confusion for its growers as some were cultivating it for the use of marijuana cigarettes while others were cultivating it for the multi-faceted use of the hemp fibers.⁹³

Even though the United States had never previously expressed concern for the use of marijuana, there was a growing fear surrounding the substance nation-wide. Why? The answer

⁸⁷ Frank Ridgway, “Day by Day Story of the Experimental Farms: Hemp Regulated,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1937): 1.

⁸⁸ Ridgway, “Day by Day Story of the Experimental Farms: Hemp Regulated,” 1.

⁸⁹ Ridgway, “Day by Day Story of the Experimental Farms: Hemp Regulated,” 1.

⁹⁰ Ridgway, “Day by Day Story of the Experimental Farm: Hemp Regulated,” 1.

⁹¹ Ridgway, “Day by Day Story of the Experimental Farm: Hemp Regulated,” 1.

⁹² Sacco, “Drug Enforcement in the United States,” 4.

⁹³ “Day by Day Story of the Experimental Farms: A Hemp Problem,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 1937, 1-3.

can be found in underlying issues of racism towards a new demographic of people who were targets in the United States: Mexican immigrants.⁹⁴ Even though Mexican immigrants, like Chinese immigrants, contributed greatly to the United States economically and socially, the media and political sphere created another false image of immigrants who were lazy, drug-addicted, and sexually deviant.⁹⁵ In Cheryl L. Chambers 2011 book *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism: The Story Told by the Congressional Record*, she highlights the ways in which marijuana became demonized as a way to progress xenophobic and racist drug policy, as seen with the Opium Exclusion Act of 1909. Prior to the 1910s, smoking marijuana is not seen as a problem until it is reported that Mexican immigrants brought it across the border despite the fact that Americans, and particularly soldiers, had been smoking the plant years before this accusation.⁹⁶ Regardless of the origin of smoking marijuana in the United States, smoking the plant became inextricably tied to Mexican immigrants, and therefore, deviancy as a threat to American nationalism.⁹⁷ Myths surrounding the Mexican population in the United States skyrocketed. Propaganda and stories about those who smoked marijuana include false claims of superhuman strength, bloodthirst, and murderous habits filled the minds of white Americans.⁹⁸ This image of Mexican immigrants as violent individuals capable of greater rates of crime led to fast action in anti-marijuana drug laws as they were supported at local and national levels, particularly by Harry Anslinger, the Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics from 1930 to 1962.⁹⁹ As with Sinclair's *The Jungle* and the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act, the 1936 film *Reefer Madness* was fundamental in aiding the passage of the Marihuana Tax Act

⁹⁴ David Musto, "The 1937 Marijuana Tax Act," *Archives of General Psychiatry* Vol. 26 (1972), 425-430.

⁹⁵ Musto, "The 1937 Marijuana Tax Act," 425.

⁹⁶ Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism*, 86-87.

⁹⁷ Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism*, 87.

⁹⁸ Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism*, 87.

⁹⁹ Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism*, 88-89.

of 1937.¹⁰⁰ Films like *Reefer Madness* (1936), *Marijuana* (1936), and *Assassin of Youth* (1937) help to catalyze the passage of marijuana-related drug policy because they show sensational images of marijuana use that are unrealistic and scary to those who had never used marijuana as a mind-altering substance but rather for the hemp fibers.¹⁰¹ Additionally, these films, paired with Anslinger's remarks about marijuana, not only frame the plant as a gateway to crime driven habits but also as a link to insanity, causing greater fear, xenophobia, and racist thoughts towards Mexican immigrants among the American public.¹⁰²

Other evidence of Anslinger's racist attitudes which influence drug policy come out of the Harlem Renaissance which began in the 1920s and slowed down by the 1930s. Although it is called the "Harlem" Renaissance, its influence spread to Black people throughout the United States.¹⁰³ According to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Harlem Renaissance "encompassed poetry and prose, painting and sculpting, jazz and swing, opera and dance."¹⁰⁴ According to Hari, author of *Chasing the Scream*, in a 2017 podcast interview with *News Beat*, Anslinger's attitude towards people facing addiction stemmed from a negative childhood experience he had with a neighbor.¹⁰⁵ This already negative view of addiction would empower Anslinger to further demonize and criminalize members of society who he did not agree with, particularly Black Americans. Hari notes that "Anslinger's war had a lot to do with stamping out what he perceived to be a decaying social fabric, hastened by a supposedly diabolical drug. He especially viewed Jazz culture, combined with cannabis, as a distinct threat."¹⁰⁶ In *Chasing the Scream*, Hari highlights this "distinct threat" through the life of Billie

¹⁰⁰ Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism*, 8-9.

¹⁰¹ Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism*, 124-125.

¹⁰² Chambers, *Drug Laws and Institutional Racism*, 102-103.

¹⁰³ National Museum of African American History & Culture, "A New African American Identity: The Harlem Renaissance," *Our American Story*, Accessed July 9, 2025.

¹⁰⁴ National Museum of African American History & Culture, "A New African American Identity," July 9, 2025.

¹⁰⁵ Medium, "Racism, Weed, & Jazz: The True Origins of the War on Drugs," *News Beat*, August 25, 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Medium, "Racism, Weed, & Jazz." August 25, 2017.

Holiday and the harassment she faced by Anslinger and his crew. After her arrest in 1947 from a set up created by Anslinger, she could no longer perform in any bars that served alcohol, which happened to be every jazz club in the United States.¹⁰⁷ Despite the abuse that she faced from Anslinger, Holiday would continue to sing the song that Anslinger feared the most, “Strange Fruit.” This refusal to be frightened by Anslinger and his crew came from a promise Holiday made to herself when she was a young girl: “I just plain decided one day I wasn’t going to do or say anything unless I meant it.”¹⁰⁸ Holiday meant every word that she sang in “Strange Fruit.” It is also important to note that Anslinger had no problems with Holiday’s white counterparts, like Judy Garland, who used drugs. In fact, Anslinger aided Garland through her addiction as he claimed that arresting her would “destroy the unblemished reputation of one of the nation’s most honored families.”¹⁰⁹ This quote from Anslinger along with the commentary on Holiday’s harassment from Anslinger helps researchers to understand that the problem has never been about substance use but rather it is about criminalizing certain races in an effort to keep them away from white society.

Since the 1870s in the United States, drug policies have been curated carefully to create an image of keeping American society safe and sober when in reality these policies are set in place to demonize and create false narratives surrounding minoritized communities in order to continue xenophobic and racist ideals. None, however, created such a divide as the War on Drugs catalyzed by the Nixon administration in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The War on Drugs: 1960s-Now

Since the Opium Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act of 1922, the Nixon-era War on Drugs is just another example of the government implementing

¹⁰⁷ Hari, *Chasing the Scream*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Hari, *Chasing the Scream*, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Hari, *Chasing the Scream*, 26.

policies that use more resources and fix fewer issues under the guise of keeping white society safe.

In a press conference in June 1971, President Richard Nixon declared drugs to be “public enemy number one” sparking nation-wide hysteria and fear surrounding substance use and addiction.¹¹⁰ Once again, drug policy became skewed to have the public believe it was for their protection while there were other disguised motives behind Nixon’s War on Drugs. The War on Drugs soon became a way to implement police surveillance deeper into society through the means of control rather than treatment for people experiencing addiction.¹¹¹ If the War on Drugs had been about treating addiction, the federal government would have pushed for methadone clinics and rehabilitation centers to become normalized instead of arresting people who use or distribute illicit substances.¹¹² Had treatment been the main way to combat substance use in the United States, marginalized groups may not have been as scrutinized in the following decades and, perhaps, even provided help instead of judgment. Instead, with Nixon and the War on Drugs a new law and order approach was brought to the forefront of the criminal justice system through the decimation of the White House Special Action Office on Drug Abuse Prevention (SAODAP) and implementation of new task forces.¹¹³ This new approach from Nixon resulted in further funding towards law enforcement, increasing from \$20.2 million in 1968 to \$317 million by 1975, showing a trend in popularity towards continuing the drug war even after Nixon.¹¹⁴ By 1973, the Nixon administration created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) which set new precedents on how to control the distribution and use of substances inside of the United States. Despite the continued misguided mindset that drug policy does more to help society than to

¹¹⁰ Ronald Kotulak, "Nixon Asks Help from A. M. A. to Battle Drug Abuse Problem," *Chicago Tribune* (1971), 1-2.

¹¹¹ Courtright, “A Century of American Narcotic Policy,” 13.

¹¹² Courtright, “A Century of American Narcotic Policy,” 12.

¹¹³ Schroeder, *The Politics of Drugs*, 144-145.

¹¹⁴ Schroeder, *The Politics of Drugs*, 145.

divide society, one quote from Nixon's domestic policy advisor, John Ehrlichman, chillingly reveals the alternative motives behind the War on Drugs. In 1994, Ehrlichman was interviewed by Dan Baum about the Nixon administration and the War on Drugs. Ehrlichman is quoted as saying: "We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black[s], 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."¹¹⁵ This quote alone proves that while leaders of the United States may not always outwardly express their intolerance for citizens outside of the description of heterosexual, white, cis-gendered, upper-class, and able-bodied males, their motives behind passing legislation, specifically related to substance use, have always been about furthering racist, classist, and homophobic standards. As the War on Drugs continued through the Nixon administration, the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s would prove to carry with it stigma related to substance use and sexuality. Again, we see drugs as a way to regulate the bodies of those that the United States government deems unacceptable or "deviant."

In 1981, Ronald Reagan was elected as president of the United States and the first case of HIV/AIDS was discovered in the medical community. Despite the rapidity at which the virus spread throughout the United States, the Reagan administration did little to assist in progressing research and care for patients living with HIV/AIDS. The issue with HIV/AIDS is that it was initially seen as a "gay man's disease" or "gay man's cancer" which led to social stigmatization of the virus and decreased financial support in regards to federal funding.¹¹⁶ In *The Gayly* newspaper published in Oklahoma, Ginny Apuzzo is quoted as saying: "We have to let the Reagan administration know, that we see that politics is based on homophobia, that AIDS is an

¹¹⁵ Dan Baum, "Legalize It All," *Harpers Magazine*, (2016), 1-5.

¹¹⁶ Randy Shilts, *And The Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, (New York City, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) 150-170.

example of what government does when any group gets disenfranchised. Be it women, the poor, people of color, the unemployed, the underemployed, the aging, and the lesbians and gays.”¹¹⁷

This quote from Apuzzo is helpful for contextualizing the fear of the decade as members of the LGBTQ+ community were targets for hatred as it was believed only gay men and people experiencing addiction could contract the virus.

By 1986, Reagan had done more to demonize Black and queer individuals than to aid the United States through the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 also passes which set mandatory minimums and harsher provisions in place for possession of a substance. Specifically, a provision of one-hundred to one passed along with the bill. This meant that possession of five grams of crack cocaine would receive the same sentence as someone with five-hundred grams of powder cocaine.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the first five years of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 shows a massive disproportion of Black Americans incarcerated in state prisons with rates rising from seven to twenty-five percent, with higher rates of incarceration seen in the federal prisons.¹¹⁹ Even though white folks were using and selling drugs at similar or higher rates than Black folks, these disparities in arrests remained consistent throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. By the mid-1980s, the Reagan administration would increase the ramifications of the War on Drugs and issue the use of profiling by the DEA in a disguised attempt to keep the streets free from substances.¹²⁰ Profiling instead was a racist and homophobic tactic used to target members of minoritized communities and criminalize their bodies instead of actually seeking out the major distribution centers in the United States.¹²¹ Furthermore, profiling

¹¹⁷ Kathy Tepes, “‘Intolerance Is Intolerable’ An Interview With Ginny Apuzzo,” *The Gayly Oklahoman*, (1984), 1-4.

¹¹⁸ Cigdem V. Sirin, “From Nixon’s War on Drugs to Obama’s Drug Policies Today: Presidential Progress in Addressing Racial Injustices and Disparities,” *Race, Gender & Class* Vol. 18, no. 3/4 (2011): 82–99.

¹¹⁹ Sirin, “From Nixon’s War,” 83.

¹²⁰ Sirin, “From Nixon’s War,” 85.

¹²¹ Sirin, “From Nixon’s War,” 85.

allowed police officers to stop anyone and search a person based on the belief that the individual would have substances on their person, not because the police officer had seen a transaction occur and stopped the individual afterwards. This ability to stop anyone from completing their daily tasks leads to the higher incarceration rates of particularly Black Americans as they were and are more likely to be stopped than white Americans.¹²² For the LGBTQ+ community, profiling has its strongest roots against the culture of drag. Beginning in the 1840s, the United States saw an increase in state laws banning public drag appearances. Specifically, these anti-drag laws banned “a dress not belonging to his or her sex” or “wearing the apparel of the other sex.”¹²³ Although the 1980s in particular saw many successful lawsuits against such laws like the three article rule which required an individual to wear at least three items of clothing associated with their assigned sex at birth, law enforcement still targeted members of the LGBTQ+ community in accordance with their dress.¹²⁴ Although the appearance of drag was the main target of such profiling, law enforcement often led raids in LGBTQ+ bars and clubs where inevitable substance use also took place.

Although there is still much work to be done, drug policy in the United States seems to be taking steps towards undoing these wrongful laws. It is the hope of this research that eventually the United States can create a future where decriminalization and legalization may become a more attainable discussion in the future.

The first steps towards correcting the mistakes of the past occurred with the Obama administration in 2010. In 2010, the Obama administration enacted the Fair Sentencing Act which overturned both Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988, reducing the one-hundred to

¹²² Sirin, “From Nixon’s War,” 87.

¹²³ Clare Sears, “This Isn’t the First Time Conservatives Have Banned Cross-Dressing in America,” *Jacobin*, March 15, 2023.

¹²⁴ Sears, “This Isn’t the First Time.”

one sentencing disparity to eighteen to one.¹²⁵ Although this disparity is still relatively high, the enactment of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 is a step towards demonstrating to the United States that our biggest enemy has never been addictive substances. As of 2022, marijuana has been legalized, either recreationally, medically, or both in 38 states, including Washington D.C. Despite the growing acceptance of marijuana use nationwide, discrepancies still exist in regard to incarceration rates for folks with marijuana possession charges. Nationwide, Black Americans are 3.6 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana than white Americans, despite similar rates of use.¹²⁶ At a county level, this criminal justice-affected discrepancy can affect Black people up to 50 times more than white people.¹²⁷ Especially following the rise of the Black Lives Matter movements and the death of George Floyd, and countless other Black folks, in 2020, it is time for a major reform to the criminal justice system and, therefore, to drug policy in the United States.

Solutions & Conclusion

Despite the well-intentioned guise of drug policies set in place to create a safe and sober society, there is overwhelming proof to suggest there are alternative motives to these policies. Since the origins of a structured drug policy in the United States, there has always been an underlying motive related to race, class, gender, and sexuality throughout the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Whether these attacks are targeted towards Chinese, Mexican, Black, or queer bodies, the motives remain frighteningly similar: criminalize drugs and incarcerate minority groups. Instead of criminalizing people who distribute illicit substances and people facing addiction, the

¹²⁵ Sirin, "From Nixon's War," 90.

¹²⁶ "New ACLU Report: Despite Marijuana Legalization Black People Still Almost Four Times More Likely to Get Arrested," *American Civil Liberties Union*, (2020), 1-3.

¹²⁷ ACLU, "New ACLU Report," 2.

United States needs to take a close look at current and past drug policies to see where the failures exist and why the expected results have not come to fruition.

First, the United States needs to completely restructure and reform the criminal justice system, in slow and methodical steps, as it is a corrupt system used to enslave citizens and keep people of color away from society and their families.

Next, the United States needs to decriminalize or legalize all current illicit substances and implement effective rehabilitation centers focused on life-planning and harm reduction techniques.

Third, and finally, the United States needs to implement equity and sensitivity training to professionals who would provide rehabilitation and criminal justice services to society as too often people facing addiction are met with judgment and contempt for simply seeking help. As exhibited by the Opium Exclusion Act of 1909, the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937, the War on Drugs, and the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988, drug policy in the United States works as an institutional boundary for intersecting identities outside of the desired body of the United States: heterosexual, white, cis-gendered, upper-class, and able-bodied men. Through the analysis of these policies, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that the basis for drug policy in the United States is founded on racism, classism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia which are then carried out into society, leading to more division than unity amongst Americans.

Chapter Four:

“We Need to Get Rid of the Drug War Mentality”: The History of Substance Use in the LGBTQ+ Community, 1980s-2015

Introduction

Homosexuality was not defined, specifically, in medical or psychiatric literature until the early 1870s.¹²⁸ The definition of homosexuality as a mental disorder in psychiatric literature was common until 1973 and led to greater discrimination and scrutiny of members of the LGBTQ+ community as they were seen as something to “treat”.¹²⁹ Despite the declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973, members of the LGBTQ+ community still face discrimination which leads to feelings of isolation, negative self-image, and hopelessness at higher rates than non-queer folks.¹³⁰ While substance use is not a unique issue for the LGBTQ+ community, the active marginalization of queer folks can lead to higher rates of substance use within the community as they have been placed under a microscope societally and “othered” or ostracized. Prior to the rise of online communication systems, members of the LGBTQ+ community used substances to help cope with negative institutional interactions, specifically related to social standards or political motives. However, since the emergence of online dating and the wider accessibility to other queer folks, the rate of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community has become increasingly based on the convenience, ease, and access to these substances which had been normalized throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The intention of this chapter is *not* to further ostracize and demonize the LGBTQ+ community, but rather, to analyze their motives behind substance use while simultaneously analyzing corrupt and homophobic

¹²⁸ SAMHSA, “A Provider’s Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals,” 8.

¹²⁹ SAMHSA, “A Provider’s Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals,” 8.

¹³⁰ SAMHSA, “A Provider’s Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals,” 83.

policies in the United States to offer a plan of reform to these institutions. As members of the LGBTQ+ community and the intersecting identities which can exist for people in the community, substance use occurs at a higher rate because of the marginalization experienced by this community from both society and the United States government.

Art and Activism During the HIV/AIDS Epidemic of the 1980s

Much of the scrutiny experienced by the LGBTQ+ community in the 1980s can be traced back to the presidency and carefully curated public perceptions of HIV/AIDS. The first two years of the 1980s was an exciting time politically with an election and the ushering in of a new president, Ronald Reagan, in 1981. Reagan's first year as president saw major changes in United States social and political relations such as the appointment of the first female Supreme Court justice, tough international relations with Iran, and the first infection of HIV found in the United States.

HIV and the AIDS epidemic in the United States could have been tamed much quicker if the Reagan Administration had an appropriate response time to the rapidity at which the virus spread throughout the nation. Despite the first discovery of an HIV infection in the United States in 1981, it would take Reagan almost four years, over 20,000 dead Americans, and the diagnosis of his personal friend to address the virus in public for the first time.¹³¹ Much of the inattention given to HIV/AIDS was due in part because it was initially seen as a "gay man's disease" or "gay man's cancer" thus leading to social stigmatization of the virus in the media. Due to this misconception and demonization of the virus, the United States saw decreased financial support in regard to federal funding for a cure.¹³² At a congressional hearing in 1985, a young man recently diagnosed with AIDS is quoted as saying, "I beg my president to care. I beg my

¹³¹ Jack King, "The Drama That Raged Against Reagan's America," *BBC News*, October 19, 2020.

¹³² Shilts, *And The Band Played On*, 150-170.

president to be moved. I beg my president to act” just days before Reagan finally addressed the nation for the first time regarding HIV/AIDS.¹³³ This is significant as it highlights two flaws to the Reagan Administration: first, it shows that HIV/AIDS, four years since the discovery of the virus in the United States, had gone largely unnoticed or unattended to by the Reagan Administration thus leading to a call for action by Americans directly affected by the virus. Second, it shows that Reagan’s motives for addressing HIV/AIDS was largely influenced by the diagnosis of his friend, Rock Hudson, and not due to the vast number of Americans who were infected with, living with, and dying from HIV/AIDS every day.¹³⁴ The Reagan Administration deliberately ignored the cries for help from Americans living with HIV/AIDS, initially, in hopes that the “problem” would somehow resolve itself.

Because finding a cure for HIV/AIDS would require federal acknowledgment and funding, the LGBTQ+ community went to the media to address their concerns and call out the corruption of the presidency. In both LGBTQ+ news publications and mainstream news outlets, people like Ginny Apuzzo, mentioned in Chapter Three of this thesis, made calls to action, artistic displays of grief, and activist organizations to spread awareness of the virus all throughout the 1980s and leading into the 1990s. In Lisa Bacon’s 1987 article titled “Lessons of AIDS: Racism, Homophobia are the Real Epidemic,” she highlights the massive amount of deaths already accrued in 1987 as well as the impact of the virus on various, intersecting communities.¹³⁵ At the beginning of the article, Bacon notes that in 1987, 37,000 Americans were diagnosed with AIDS. Additionally, an estimated 1.5 million Americans carried the HIV virus and out of those people, thirty to fifty percent of them would go on to develop AIDS.¹³⁶

¹³³ "Victim Urges Reagan To Talk About AIDS," Associated Press, *Orlando Sentinel*, September 14, 1985.

¹³⁴ King, "The Drama that Raged Against Reagan's America," 3-4.

¹³⁵ Lisa Bacon, "Lessons of AIDS: Racism, Homophobia are the Real Epidemic," *Listen Real Loud*, October 1987.

¹³⁶ Bacon, "Lessons of AIDS," 1.

Bacon makes calls to action throughout her article with statements like: “AIDS is killing us, and the only thing that can stop it is our willingness to talk about sex, drugs, and death. Not quite the dinner table conversation. Oh, and yes- we also have to start talking about racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, the cost of medical care, and privacy.”¹³⁷ This quote helps to contextualize the fears of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as other minoritized communities, and the obvious lack of care from the Reagan Administration in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This fear leads to a shift in substance use as a coping mechanism for dealing with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and, subsequently, the uncertainty of life during the 1980s as a result of inaction by the United States government.

In similar actions to spread awareness of the epidemic happening in the United States, artists and activists began to create art, poetry, and protests in response to the lack of response to the virus from the Reagan Administration. In Douglas Crimp’s 1987 article titled “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” he puts forth a three-pronged argument in regards to the perception of HIV/AIDS.¹³⁸ The most important point of the three, according to Crimp, is the idea that “art *does* have the power to save lives.”¹³⁹ Furthermore, Crimp goes on to say that there is no need for a “cultural renaissance” or to transcend the virus but rather to end the virus as it is “criminally neglected” by the Reagan Administration.¹⁴⁰ In order for art to be engaged in the changes of cultural practices, Crimp offers several examples of art as a means for change in the perception of the virus. Crimp’s first, and most compelling, example of these changes to cultural practices is of an art installation outside of New York’s New Museum of Contemporary Art set in place in November of 1987.¹⁴¹ The installation, created by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power

¹³⁷ Bacon, “Lessons of AIDS,” 1.

¹³⁸ Douglas Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” *The MIT Press* Vol. 43 (1987): 3-16.

¹³⁹ Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” 5.

¹⁴⁰ Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” 4-5.

¹⁴¹ Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” 5-6.

(ACT UP), features the pink triangle used to identify members of the LGBTQ+ community during Nazi Germany as well as the phrase “SILENCE = DEATH.”¹⁴² Accompanying these symbols which came to be associated with the LGBTQ+ community and the HIV/AIDS epidemic were also six photographs of people from influential backgrounds like U.S senators, surgeons, televangelists, and news reporters with the words “AIDS CRIMINALS” supported by devastating quotes from these individuals who saw HIV/AIDS as only an issue for gay men and people facing addiction.¹⁴³ Crimp’s article is useful for understanding the various ways in which members of the LGBTQ+ community worked to cope with the reality of HIV/AIDS.

Additionally, Bacon and Crimp’s articles in discussion with each other detail how little the Reagan Administration, and subsequently influential people in the media, cared about this reality. This lack of care and attention from the Reagan Administration led to greater stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ community and a shift in motivations for substance use within the community to cope with the loss of friends, social isolation, and uncertainty surrounding the political views towards the LGBTQ+ community in the 1980s.

LGBTQ+ Substance Use in the 1980s

The lingering excitement from the sexual revolution and hippie movements of the 1960s and 1970s carried over into the 1980s in the form of bathhouses, bars, and dance clubs specifically catered towards the LGBTQ+ community. So, what are bathhouses and why are they so scrutinized? Bathhouses, as defined by Ralph Bolton, John Vincke, and Rudolf Mak in their article “Gay Baths Revisited: An Empirical Analysis,” are essentially “gay saunas” where gay men in particular would meet one another and engage in sexual activities as well as partake in

¹⁴² Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” 5-6.

¹⁴³ Crimp, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” 5-8.

substance use.¹⁴⁴ These places of recreation became the primary way for members of the LGBTQ+ community to meet other queer folks and present as their true selves in a safe environment free from heteronormativity.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, these spaces became a place for members of the LGBTQ+ community to experiment with substances, mourn with their friends, cope with messages in the media, and have fun in a time of great loss and uncertainty.

Even prior to mainstream awareness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, members of the LGBTQ+ community in 1980 either utilized addictive substances or supported the creation of sober spaces for the wider community, not just those attempting to become sober. For instance, in 1980 the First Black Lesbian Conference took place in the San Francisco Women's Building to specifically discuss the issues affecting Black lesbian women. Of the issues discussed in the article like internalized racism, Black talent, and economic troubles, alcoholism and addiction received its own section which shows the importance of the topic in the Black lesbian community.¹⁴⁶ In a workshop at the conference titled "Alcoholism and Drug Abuse," a woman is quoted as saying it was "good to see other 'clean' addicts together and also to see and hear those still struggling because it helps to keep us clean too."¹⁴⁷ Other comments from that workshop claimed that it is "no accident" that the only types of spaces members of the LGBTQ+ community have to socialize with one another is at bars and similar, non-sober settings.¹⁴⁸ From these discussions, debates broke out about the weight of the responsibility on Black lesbians to curate sober spaces. One woman said she "did not want to give up her good times to 'sacrifice' for another woman" even if she supported that woman's decision to be sober.¹⁴⁹ As an objection

¹⁴⁴Ralph Bolton, John Vincke, and Rudolf Mak, "Gay Baths Revisited: An Empirical Analysis," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 1, no.1 (1994): 255-273.

¹⁴⁵ Cynthia Gorney, "The Bathhouse War: San Francisco's Move to Fight AIDS Creates Rift Among Gays," *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1984, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Gabrielle Daniels, "First Black Lesbian Conference," *Off Our Backs* Vol. 10, no. 11 (1980): 4-5, 8.

¹⁴⁷ Daniels, "First Black Lesbian Conference," 5.

¹⁴⁸ Daniels. "First Black Lesbian Conference," 5.

¹⁴⁹ Daniels, "First Black Lesbian Conference," 5.

to this statement, two other women spoke up and said “we’re just asking if you could kind of look at the fact that there are some of us who don’t use or drink to open a space for us.”¹⁵⁰

Although these women have similar intersectional identities, the differences in their opinions are vast because of the ways in which substance use influences members of the LGBTQ+ community in terms of coping with oppression and socializing with like-minded individuals.

As HIV/AIDS became an increasingly larger problem nationwide, especially as gay men faced tremendous bigotry, lesbians became the care-takers for gay men and subsequently called for a larger emphasis on sobriety both among lesbians and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. In a 1982 article in *Lesbian Connection* titled “Dykes for Sobriety,” a woman from Gainesville, Florida calls for better treatment options for lesbians who are dealing with addiction. In “Dykes for Sobriety,” the anonymous author puts forth a request to hear from other lesbians who struggle to find sobriety in “straight-oriented treatment centers.”¹⁵¹ In a discussion of the need for LGBTQ+ centered Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and similar groups, the author notes her difficulties in both gay and non-gay settings as she is so comfortable with herself, both in her identity as an addict and a lesbian.¹⁵² The author calls out her own community in ways which center identity through statements and claims like: “we do not know what to do with our sisters who are seeking to belong, to identify, who become inebriated to the point of obnoxiousness.”¹⁵³ Furthermore, the author claims that she notices a lack of concern among women in her circles who do not face addiction and accuses them of seeking to remove lesbians who face addiction “out of their midst.”¹⁵⁴ This article highlights the struggle of lesbians who face addiction which come both from the heteronormative world but also their own community. Outside of alcohol

¹⁵⁰ Daniels, “First Black Lesbian Conference,” 5.

¹⁵¹ Anon., “Dykes for Sobriety,” *Lesbian Connection* Vol. 5, Iss. 4 (1982): 1-30.

¹⁵² Anon., “Dykes for Sobriety,” 3.

¹⁵³ Anon., “Dykes for Sobriety,” 4.

¹⁵⁴ Anon., “Dykes for Sobriety,” 4.

addiction, lesbian women also used a wide range of substances during the 1980s to cope with heteronormativity, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the looming reality of a lack of sober queer spaces throughout the United States. In the July 1984 publication of *Up and Coming*, an author by the name of Cathy retells a story of her friend who wants to get sober after the consumption of numerous substances.¹⁵⁵ After receiving a phone call at five in the morning from a familiar voice, Cathy recognizes the voice of a friend who was partying all night long.¹⁵⁶ Cathy reveals that on that night, her friend had tripped on acid but the result of her “freakout” was likely the result of six years of daily “pot smoking,” barbiturate use, meth use, cocaine use, alcohol use, and mushroom use, according to Cathy.¹⁵⁷ While this article cannot provide conclusive evidence for how many lesbians use these substances, it does provide insight into what substances were popular during the 1980s among LGBTQ+ individuals. There is more conclusive evidence following this section as it relates to substances which require a needle as needle sharing can contribute to the rise in HIV rates among both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ individuals.

Intravenous (IV) drug use became increasingly popular throughout the 1980s which increased chances for contracting HIV, thus, causing further stigmatization of the virus for being associated with substance use.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, by the late 1980s, IV drug use among men, queer and non-queer, accounted for over one-third of HIV cases in New York alone.¹⁵⁹ While rates of IV drug use was most common among heterosexual males, members of the LGBTQ+ community still engaged in IV substance use as a coping mechanism for social and political pressures.¹⁶⁰ Outside of substances which could transfer HIV from one person to another, such as

¹⁵⁵ Cathy, [Clean, Sober, Free, and Grateful,] *Up and Coming*, July 1984: 1-8.

¹⁵⁶ Cathy, [Clean, Sober, Free, and Grateful,] 1.

¹⁵⁷ Cathy, [Clean, Sober, Free, and Grateful,] 1.

¹⁵⁸ Lawrence K. Altman, “Who’s Stricken and How: AIDS Pattern Is Shifting,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 1989, 1-2.

¹⁵⁹ Altman, “Who’s Stricken and How,” 1.

¹⁶⁰ Altman, “Who’s Stricken and How,” 1.

IV substance use and, therefore, needle sharing, there was also an increase in substances which could be smoked or inhaled.

Another substance which gained much popularity within the LGBTQ+ community in the 1980s was Amyl or Butyl Nitrate, or “poppers”, an inhalant used to enhance sexual pleasure.¹⁶¹ Despite insistence from their manufacturers that “poppers” were safe to consume, the CDC advised against their use saying that they should not be consumed since they were not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and could be the cause of higher HIV rates.¹⁶² Claims like these led to an increased effort to regulate and close LGBTQ+ friendly spaces in an attempt to lower the spread of HIV instead of making efforts towards finding a cure. Mervyn Silverman, a city official for San Francisco, made wide attempts in 1984 to shut down bathhouses under the guise of trying to regulate public health.¹⁶³ In actuality, the regulation of queer bodies and queer love became the way to combat HIV/AIDS within San Francisco, and throughout the United States, despite evidence that bodily fluids other than semen could pass along the virus.¹⁶⁴ The fear surrounding HIV/AIDS was decreased significantly with the introduction of azidothymidine (AZT) to help treat the virus in the late 1980s. Despite the uncertainties surrounding AZT, fears were squashed because there was hope provided. However, members of the LGBTQ+ community still faced discrimination at higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts thus leading to the continued use of addictive substances in the 1990s as rates of HIV/AIDS related deaths did not drop until the late 1990s.

The 1990s in the United States

¹⁶¹ Dion B. Sanders, “Poppers,” *The Gayly Oklahoman*, January 1984, 1.

¹⁶² Sanders, “Poppers,” 1.

¹⁶³ Gorney, “The Bathhouse War,” 1.

¹⁶⁴ Gorney, “The Bathhouse War,” 1.

Although treatments for HIV/AIDS were developed and continuing to develop by the 1990s, members of the LGBTQ+ community still carried with them the grief and fear of the 1980s combined with continued discrimination from outside groups. The 1990s was a time of political uncertainty regarding LGBTQ+ issues, specifically regarding their right to serve in the military or to marry the partner of their choice. By 1994, President Bill Clinton had passed the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy stating that gay and lesbian Americans could serve in the military so long as they did not disclose their sexuality to others in the force.¹⁶⁵ “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was set up to be a compromise for allowing queer folks into the military but still left them vulnerable for discrimination as they would have to prove they would not act on their sexuality if outed as a queer person.¹⁶⁶ In 1995, Eugene Nickerson, a federal judge, declared “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” to be unconstitutional as it censors free speech, specifically for members of the LGBTQ+ community and nobody else.¹⁶⁷ James Finefrock, a reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner*, covered the response from Nickerson and claimed that “history will record that the heroes of this battle included Judge Nickerson. Bill Clinton will be listed AWOL.”¹⁶⁸ This response towards and from Clinton is significant as he was supposed to be a more progressive president but continued to pass non-progressive acts such as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” leaving the LGBTQ+ community to question the status of their basic rights.

Another example of the Clinton Administration in failing the LGBTQ+ community was through the enactment of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). By 1996, the Clinton Administration had passed the Defense of Marriage Act which federally defined marriage as a

¹⁶⁵ James Finefrock, "Do Tell, Soldier Clinton's Craven 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' for Gays in the Military Gets a Verbal Shredding from a Judge Who Calls it Unconstitutional," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 2, 1995.

¹⁶⁶ "Don't Ask, Don't Tell Rule OKd," Associated Press, *Las Vegas Review*, April 6, 1996.

¹⁶⁷ Finefrock, "Do Tell," 1.

¹⁶⁸ Finefrock, "Do Tell," 1-2.

union between a cis-man and a cis-woman.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, DOMA declared that same-sex couples who were married in a state where it *was* legal would *not* have those same rights upheld if they were to move to a state where it was not legal.¹⁷⁰ In an article published in *Star Tribune*, a newspaper in Minneapolis, they quote a poll from *Newsweek* where 58% of Americans who responded said that they were opposed to legally sanctioned same-sex marriage.¹⁷¹ The active and broadcasted scrutinization of members of the LGBTQ+ community in the 1990s led to an increased vulnerability for substance use, particularly with the introduction of “party” or “glamour” drugs in queer circles.

Although bathhouses were largely shutdown by the 1990s, members of the queer community continued to gather in bars and dance clubs which led to an increased likelihood for substance use. One of the most popular substances in the 1990s is crystal methamphetamine, or crystal meth. Especially within the LGBTQ+ community, crystal meth was used most commonly as an aphrodisiac to enhance sexual pleasure.¹⁷² In a series of studies containing self-reporting measures regarding meth use among gay men, over 50% of those surveyed said that they have tried meth at least once in the context of a party.¹⁷³ While meth was used by non-queer folks, the use of meth in the LGBTQ+ community was driven by sexual enhancement and grief.¹⁷⁴ In a 1995 article posted in the *Los Angeles Times* by Lorenza Munoz, an interview between Munoz and an anonymous gay man who used meth is included with the quote: "I stick a needle in my

¹⁶⁹ Matt McKenny, "Defense of Marriage Act: Bill Opposing Gay Marriage is Creating Political Unrest: Same-Sex Marriage is a Major Tug-of-War Issue between Gay Activists and Politicians Who Oppose such Unions," *Star Tribune*, June 24, 1996, 1-2.

¹⁷⁰ McKenney, "Defense of Marriage Act," 1.

¹⁷¹ McKinney, "Defense of Marriage Act," 2.

¹⁷² José E. Nanín, Jeffrey T. Parsons, David S. Bimbi, Christian Grov, and Justin T. Brown, "Community Reactions to Campaigns Addressing Crystal Methamphetamine Use among Gay and Bisexual Men in New York City," *Journal of Drug Education* Vol.36, no. 4 (2006): 297–315.

¹⁷³ Dana Hunt, Sarah Kuck, and Linda Truitt, "Methamphetamine Use: Lessons Learned," *PsycEXTRA Dataset*, February 2006, 1–74.

¹⁷⁴ Lorenza Munoz, "Positively Risky Sex-Enhancing Drug may Expose New Generation of Gay Men to AIDS," *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1995, 1-4.

arm so I can forget about the world telling me it's not OK to sleep with another man, the only thing that makes me relax when I have sex with men is when I'm high. It's hard for me to have sex sober."¹⁷⁵ Treatment for members of the LGBTQ+ community who used meth posed a challenge as they were “doubly” addicted to both the meth and the sex.¹⁷⁶ This is significant because people who were doing well in treatment would be released back into their regular social circle which increases the likelihood of relapse as meth was the drug of choice for queer folks, especially gay and bisexual men, in the 1990s.¹⁷⁷ Arrests for crystal meth use spiked across the nation in the 1990s, especially in regions close to its production, such as California.¹⁷⁸ By the end of the 1980s, arrests for crystal meth in Hawaii had increased 3% from 1987 to 1989 and were only increasing.¹⁷⁹ One person who used meth who was arrested in 1987 and released in 1990 is quoted as saying: “But when I came out at the beginning of 1990, it [meth] was everywhere! It was like an epidemic! Everywhere you turned, everyone was smoking it!”¹⁸⁰

Outside of crystal meth use, members of LGBTQ+ community were using other substances as well to cope with societal pushback and governmental marginalization. For instance, in a sample of 131 gay and bisexual men, 76% were more likely to consume alcohol and 25% were more likely to consume crack cocaine when compared to their heterosexual counterparts who were 49% and 2% likely to use alcohol and crack cocaine, respectively.¹⁸¹

These stark differences in rates of use between queer men and heterosexual men helps to

¹⁷⁵ Munoz, “Positively Risky Sex-Enhancing Drug,” 2.

¹⁷⁶ Munoz, “Positively Risky Sex-Enhancing Drug,” 2.

¹⁷⁷ Munoz, “Positively Risky Sex-Enhancing Drug,” 3.

¹⁷⁸ Munoz, “Positively Risky Sex-Enhancing Drug,” 4.

¹⁷⁹ Hilary Klee, ed., *Amphetamine Misuse: International Perspectives on Current Trends*, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997), 1-39.

¹⁸⁰ Klee, *Amphetamine Misuse*, 165.

¹⁸¹ Margaret Rosario, Joyce Hunter, and Marya Gwadz, “Exploration of Substance Use Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* Vol.12, no. 4 (1997): 454–476.

highlight the use of substances as both a coping mechanism and a social tool among the LGBTQ+ community as substance use became an integral aspect to queer spaces.¹⁸²

The 1990s also saw an increase of use in the substance 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as “MDMA” or “ecstasy,” which is used as another way to increase sexual pleasure. MDMA is unique from the other substances discussed so far in this thesis in that it can be used in combination with other substances and is often “cut” or contaminated with other drugs.¹⁸³ One user of MDMA interviewed in *The Village Voice*, a newspaper published in New York, is quoted as saying, “I use the Ecstasy as the base drug, and then afterward use the K [ketamine] as a temporary effect to heighten the E experience... It’s more a social thing than a drug thing.”¹⁸⁴ A growing divide occurred between drug researchers and their opposers towards the furthering of research related to improving mental health using substances like MDMA. In 1993, Dr. Nichols, a researcher who tested MDMA in rats in the early 1980s, is quoted in *The Daily Breeze* stating: “We need to get rid of the drug war mentality and see that drugs aren’t all evil.”¹⁸⁵ Additionally, proponents of MDMA research believed adults should have the right to explore non-conventional treatment options in regards to mental health.¹⁸⁶ The growing tensions towards substance abuse studies was prefaced by Nixon-era drug policy and stifled by the War on Drugs through the demonization and criminalization of drug users.

In the early 1990s, nearly 100,000 Americans were arrested every month with charges related to substance use. An overwhelming majority of arrests came from marginalized

¹⁸² Munoz, “Positively Risky Sex-Enhancing Drug,” 459-471.

¹⁸³ Frank Owen, “Higher and Higher,” *The Village Voice*, July 27, 1999, 1-10.

¹⁸⁴ Owen, “Higher and Higher,” 5.

¹⁸⁵ Lynn Franey, “Ecstasy: Evil Drug or a Cure?,” *Daily Breeze*, December 26, 1993, 1-2.

¹⁸⁶ Franey, “Ecstasy: Evil Drug or a Cure?,” 1.

communities.¹⁸⁷ In an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the rates of arrests, in Philadelphia specifically, are broken down to further reveal racist motives behind post-Nixon drug policy. Specifically, one statistic shows that “Blacks make up 12 percent of the nation's population, but accounted for 41 percent of all drug arrests last year” showing that there is a severe discrepancy in arrests, fueled by racism, made for possession of a substance.¹⁸⁸ It was not until the Obama Administration, and their efforts in 2010, when the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988 were overturned by the Fair Sentencing Act which reduced the 100 to 1 sentencing disparity to 18 to 1.¹⁸⁹ Overall, the War on Drugs has drastically impacted drug policy in the United States and introduced a stealthy way to promote racism and classism through the law. The War on Drugs is a shining example of what happens when the government politicizes certain communities to progress their own political agenda and ignore the needs of others. While the drug war mentality still lingers in the United States today, recent legislation throughout varying states may catalyze a change towards a reform to drug policy and a potential toward the decriminalization of some, or all, substances.

2000 - 2015 in the United States

While analyzing drug policy is helpful for understanding how these policies impact minoritized communities, much of the history leaves queer folks out as it is not a common demographic standard to practice. By the 2000s, both substance use and substance abuse studies increased drastically as “party” drugs remained popular to consume. In one study conducted by Mattison et al., the researchers were able to obtain 1,169 questionnaires gathered outside of popular gay bars in three major metropolitan areas regarding their rate of substance use. From

¹⁸⁷ David Zucchino, "Racial Imbalance Seen In War On Drugs: Blacks And Hispanics Are Often Targeted For Arrest, Yet Three Times As Many Whites Are Users," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 1, 1992, 1-5.

¹⁸⁸ Zucchino, "Racial Imbalance Seen in War on Drugs," 1.

¹⁸⁹ Sirin, "From Nixon's War," 89-91.

the usable data, the researchers were able to conclude that 79% reported use of alcohol, 72% reported use of ecstasy, 60% reported use of ketamine, 39% reported use of poppers, 36% reported use of meth, and 28% reported use of GHB all in conjunction with high rates of alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine use as well.¹⁹⁰ With the growing rise of the internet, finding these substances became increasingly easier and allowed for a mode of stealth in purchasing and selling drugs as folks did not have to do all of the interactions face-to-face in a potentially public area.

In *Out & About*, a newspaper published in Tennessee, a nationwide survey pertaining to the use of dating apps among gay men was recorded and analyzed. Of the 537 gay men who responded in 2010, 66% of participants claimed to have used dating apps in hopes of finding a long-term partner.¹⁹¹ Moreover, one-third of respondents said they used dating apps to “have fun with their friends” potentially implying the use of dating apps to find substances, however, this cannot be for certain.¹⁹² Regardless, dating apps have only increased queer folks’ accessibility to each other, therefore, creating more opportunities to partake in substance use. Another study conducted in 2010 contained interviews from seventeen gay or bisexual men and their rates of both substance use and unprotected sex. One of the interviewees, Steve, is quoted as saying: “You do the drugs to lower your inhibitions so that you will try things that you normally wouldn’t do on a regular basis. But, if you don’t do the drugs, you’re not going to go there.”¹⁹³ By the mid-2000s, dating apps only increased in popularity as well as the presence of queer-centered bars and dance clubs thus increasing the social aspect to substance use.

¹⁹⁰ Andrew M. Mattison, Michael W. Ross, Tanya Wolfson, and Donald Franklin, “Circuit Party Attendance, Club Drug Use, and Unsafe Sex in Gay Men,” *Journal of Substance Abuse* Vol.13, no. 1-2 (2001): 119–26.

¹⁹¹ “National Gay Men Survey Finds Two-Thirds Use Dating Apps,” *Out & About*, February 1, 2013, 1.

¹⁹² “National Gay Men Survey Finds Two-Thirds Use Dating Apps,” *Out & About*, 1.

¹⁹³ Patrick O’Byrne and Dave Holmes, “Desire, Drug Use and Unsafe Sex: A Qualitative Examination of Gay Men Who Attend Gay Circuit Parties,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* Vol. 13, no. 1 (2011): 1–13.

In June of 2015, *Obergefell v Hodges* was signed into law which allowed for same-sex marriage to be federally recognized as a basic right for queer folks. *Obergefell v Hodges* was a monumental win for members of the LGBTQ+ community and allowed for queer folks to be included in their spouse's insurance plans, have rights to medical visitations, and granted queer couples access to adoption processes for a child.¹⁹⁴ A queer woman from Pennsylvania was quoted in the *Erie Times* as saying: "It's a very celebratory atmosphere right now... To not have your relationship legally recognized, it really does make you feel like a second-class citizen" Despite the overwhelming response of positivity from the Supreme Court decision, the rate of substance use among the queer community has remained consistent due the continuation of bars and dance clubs as the main form of social interaction among the community. Institutional change must occur in order for members of the LGBTQ+ community to feel safe in a society that continues to find ways to ostracize and marginalize this community.

Conclusion

The LGBTQ+ community has consistently been a target of social and political discrimination, bias, and erasure leading to increased vulnerability towards substance use. Since the Nixon Administration's War on Drugs, minority communities have been the victims of racist and classist drug policy thus stifling the growth of these communities through incarceration of their people. To combat these issues within drug policy and create better treatment plans, the United States needs a complete reform of the criminal justice system. One solution to catalyze these efforts would be an initiative to decriminalize *all* illicit substances in the United States to create effective rehabilitation centers focused on harm-reduction methods. Prioritizing rehabilitation and life-planning would be more effective than isolation and incarceration,

¹⁹⁴ Gerry Weiss, "Same-Sex Married Couples in Erie Reflect on Landmark Decision," *Erie Times*, July 12, 2015.

however, the United States is far from seeing these ideas become a reality due to the racist, homophobic, misogynistic, and classist history of the United States.

Although the statistics in this essay are limited to the research and sample sizes available, the results show significant trends towards substance use in the LGBTQ+ community as both a coping mechanism and a way to socialize and meet other like-minded individuals within a similar community. Moreover, this research highlights that much work is still needed when including queer folks, other than gay or bisexual men, in substance abuse studies. I hope to be a part of this effort in whatever capacities are available to me. Furthermore, this research should be looked at as a starting off point for analyzing the history of substance use in the queer community and the results of social, political, and self-isolation.

Chapter Five

Out of Body and World: The Impact of Online Communication Systems on Rates of

Substance Use in the LGBTQ+ Community, 1990s-2022

Introduction

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the history of substance use in the United States is a nuanced topic that must be analyzed through various lenses in order to understand the impact of substance use on United States society. Substance use is a complicated topic as it impacts the lives of people of different races, sexualities, genders, economic statuses, and religious backgrounds in various, intersecting ways. With the rise of the internet and online communication systems, the ways in which substances are located, sold, and utilized have changed drastically especially considering the methods used prior to the internet. The rise of online communication systems has enabled people, especially members of the LGBTQ+ community, to meet and discuss their lives privately without the pressures of the outside world. The increasing number of people who use dating apps has made this privacy accessible, allowing individuals to find and use substances at a higher rate. Including both a historical and a psychological perspective in this chapter is helpful for understanding the trends in online communication. I will also use psychology and history to compare and contrast the methods of searching for substances before the internet was invented to today. This chapter will analyze the trends in online communication and examine whether substance use, and the reasons for it, has remained the same since the decades prior to the surge of the internet or not.

Contextualization: Life Before the Internet

Prior to the rise of online communication systems, people, especially members of the LGBTQ+ community, had to find their preferred substances in public spaces. For members of the

LGBTQ+ community, the search for substances was conducted primarily in queer bars, dance clubs, and bathhouses, a trend that is still popular today as proven by Grov, Rendina, and Parsons in their 2014 article “Comparing Three Cohorts of MSM...”¹⁹⁵ Although these trends remain popular today, it is important to understand the difference in the political and social atmosphere from the pre-1980s United States to today and the difference in the ways in which these spaces were engaged with among the LGBTQ+ community.

As mentioned throughout this thesis, bathhouses were a popular way for gay and bisexual men to meet each other without the pressures of the heterosexual gaze. Bathhouses were under intense scrutiny by the middle of 1980s with the rise in blatant homophobia because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. With city officials like Mervyn Silverman in San Francisco and others across the nation attempting to shut down bathhouses, queer individuals felt as though their methods of socializing were under attack. This obvious homophobia is combined with the mindset from LGBTQ+ individuals that "you're not going to stop people [from] having sex. You can't be everywhere. You're not going to have two or three people per square foot to watch that everybody doesn't have sex."¹⁹⁶ While some gay men advocated for the closure of bathhouses in the 1980s if it meant keeping their community safe, most gay men saw the closure of bathhouses as an end to sexual freedom and security as bathhouses were some of the only places they did not have to exist on the “down low.”¹⁹⁷ Although bathhouses are not common for alcohol consumption, bathhouses, gay bars and clubs, and sex parties all featured high levels of IV drug and methamphetamine usage in the 1980s.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵Christian Grov, Jonathon Rendina, and Jeffrey Parsons, “Comparing Three Cohorts of MSM Sampled Via Sex Parties, Bars/Clubs, and Craigslist.org: Implications for Researchers and Providers,” *AIDS Education and Prevention* 26, no.4 (July 2014): 362-382.

¹⁹⁶Gorney, “The Bathhouse War,” 1-8.

¹⁹⁷Ralph Bolton, John Vincke, and Rudolf Mak, “Gay Baths Revisited,” 258.

¹⁹⁸Ralph Bolton, John Vincke, and Rudolf Mak, “Gay Baths Revisited,” 260.

Although there is plenty more that could be said about the 1980s and the rates of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community, it is important to examine the decades before the 1980s and their historical significance on the LGBTQ+ community's mental health and public safety. Prior to the 1980s and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, members of the LGBTQ+ community still utilized bars and clubs, bathhouses, and sex parties to find substances, however, the popular substances were different from those of the 1980s. In the 1960s, homosexuality was still classified as a mental illness, not becoming declassified until 1973 by the American Psychiatric Association.¹⁹⁹ The 1960s posed a real threat on queer and trans lives as their every move was scrutinized to ensure they were living within the bounds of the heteronormative, binary rules of masculinity and femininity in the United States. Due to these historical truths, finding statistics and stories related to substance use in the LGBTQ+ community in the decades prior to the 1980s are difficult as many of these findings require an individual to "out" themselves as queer or trans to answer the questions that would be asked in these styles of research. Due to the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness until 1973 and the War on Drugs beginning at the start of the 1970s, it is difficult to know the exact rates of substance in the queer community during these decades, however, it is known that the queer community in the 1960s reported use of marijuana, methamphetamine, and psychedelic drugs, however, these rates cannot be known on a reliable, national scale.²⁰⁰ Additionally, it is known that the 1970s helped to popularize amyl nitrate, or poppers, crack/cocaine, and quaaludes for members of the LGBTQ+ community due their characteristics in relaxing the body, expanding blood vessels, and performing as an aphrodisiac, however, once again these rates cannot be determined on a reliable, national scale specifically for

¹⁹⁹“A Provider's Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals,” SAMHSA, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012.

²⁰⁰Jennifer Robinson, “Decades of Drug Use: Data From the '60s and '70s,” *News Gallup*, July 2, 2022.

the LGBTQ+ community.²⁰¹ Although there is not much readily available, statistically proven information about the rates of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community prior to the 1980s, it is important to understand the methods of finding substances which were conducted through public spaces like queer bars and clubs, bathhouses, and sex parties.

The 1990s - Now: The Rise of the Internet and Online Communication Systems

Although queer bars, clubs, and sex parties remain popular locations for members of the LGBTQ+ community to socialize, seek out substances, and find romantic partners, there is no doubt that the launch of the World Wide Web to the United States' public in 1993 would help members of the LGBTQ+ community to expand the ways in which they could communicate, create communities, and even find love via the access of the internet.²⁰²

By the end of 1995, more than twenty-four million people in the United States and Canada alone spent an average of five hours per week online and the numbers have only continued to increase.²⁰³ As of 2024, the average daily screen time among Americans is seven hours and three minutes with higher numbers seen among adolescents.²⁰⁴ In a concise study performed in 2019 on the rates of Grindr screen activity to correlations with HIV and substance use rates, the results provide interesting information on the rates of substance use but not necessarily where the substance use took place.²⁰⁵ Martin Hoenigl et al., concluded that of seven hundred and eighty-four men who have sex with men that were interviewed and measured along a risk-assessment test, 48% had reported opening Grindr within the week of time that the study took place. Additionally, Hoenigl et al., found that participants who were in or above the

²⁰¹Jennifer Robinson, "Decades of Drug Use," 2.

²⁰²*All Things Considered*, "30 Years Ago, One Decision Altered the Course of our Connected World," presented by Julian Ring, aired on April 30, 2023, on NPR.

²⁰³Julian Ring, "30 Years Ago," 1:50.

²⁰⁴ Kute Kids: Early Intervention, "Average Screen Time Statistics and Facts (Usage): Exploring Global Trends in Screen Time Usage and Its Implications," December 27, 2024.

²⁰⁵Martin Hoenigl et al., "Grindr™ on Screen Activity on iPhones Correlates with HIV Risk and Substance Use in Men Who Have Sex with Men, San Diego," *Open Forum Infectious Diseases* 6, no.2 (Oct. 2019): 63-64

eightieth percentile of high usage for Grindr saw higher levels of risky sexual behavior and substance use, about nine percent higher than those with a lower score of Grindr usage.²⁰⁶ It is important to note that Hoenigl et al., excluded marijuana and alcohol from their surveys but did not include what specific substances were asked about during the interview process. While the research conducted by Hoenigl et al., cannot be used as conclusive evidence towards national rates of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community as it correlates with online communication, their findings are helpful for noting historic shifts in the search for substances online versus without the aid of online communication. It is essential to this thesis to understand that the primary fields taking charge in the discussion of substance use rates in the LGBTQ+ community in correlation with the rise of the internet are the fields of social psychology and public health. Because of these facts, it is only appropriate to include the research conducted by Christian Grov, Jonathon Rendina, and Jeffrey Parsons and their 2014 article titled "Comparing Three Cohorts of MSM Sampled via Sex Parties, Bars/Clubs, and Craigslist.org: Implications for Researchers and Providers" in this chapter. There is an argument to be made for the contributions of psychological research on historical research as it aids historians in making quantitative sense out of their qualitative findings. Moreover, Grov, Rendina, and Parsons are able to piece together miscellaneous studies combined with their own research to help answer the question of if where a sexual partner is found, whether online or in person, impacts the rates of substance use, STIs, and overall risky behavior on the LGBTQ+ community, specifically men who have sex with men.²⁰⁷ For the research conducted by Grov, Rendina, and Parsons' the conclusions are helpful for understanding that of the men sampled, one-hundred and fifty with three cohorts of fifty men,

²⁰⁶Hoenigl et.al, "Grindr™ on Screen Activity," 64.

²⁰⁷Grov, Rendina, and Parsons, "Comparing Three Cohorts," 368.

the internet was the most common method for meeting other gay men with 83.7% having used social networking sites in the last three months.²⁰⁸

Additionally, for men who reported meeting a partner at a bar or club, 69.3% reported that they were drunk or “buzzed” at the time of meeting. For men who reported meeting a partner through a private sex party or sex club, 60.9% reported that they were actively using poppers at the time of meeting. For all venues of meeting, either via bar or club, sex party, or online chatting, 25% reported use of methamphetamine.²⁰⁹ Although the research conducted is not necessarily conclusive given the variables presented with the small sample size and limitations on social networking membership, Grov, Rendina, and Parsons’ work is foundational in the sense that they are some of the first researchers to use others’ research on this topic and combine it with their own research in order to make sense of the psychological, and subsequently historical, impacts of the internet on mental health, communication, and substance use in the LGBTQ+ community.

To better understand the historical importance of the rise of the internet and the LGBTQ+ community’s interactions with online communication forums, it is imperative that historians become more involved in this type of research as these trends help them to understand shifts in communication styles, political and religious ideology, addiction rates, and economic statuses. In *LGBT Identity and Online New Media* edited by Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper in 2010, the authors utilized previous research and their own findings to conclude that of the participants surveyed, men who have sex with men who found their sexual partners via dating apps were more likely to engage in barebacking and use club drugs like methamphetamine.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸Grov, Rendina, and Parsons, “Comparing Three Cohorts,” 368.

²⁰⁹Grov, Rendina, and Parsons, “Comparing Three Cohorts,” 369.

²¹⁰Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper, *LGBT Identity and Online New Media* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 1-386

Barebacking refers to condomless, anal intercourse. The individuals who used the apps were also more likely to have asked their potential sexual partner about their sexual history prior to meeting up.²¹¹ This appropriate conversation between two or more consenting sexual partners is important, however, dating apps and other forms of online communication allow users to feel a sense of anonymity which can often lead to deceit when discussing sexual history. Pullen and Cooper found that those who found their sexual partners online sometimes engaged in what is called “bug chasing,” the active search for an HIV positive person to have sex with in order to also contract the virus themselves.²¹² Bug chasing also works in the reverse order where an HIV positive person purposefully engages in sexual relations with an HIV negative person with or without their consent, also known as “gift giving.”²¹³ While bug chasing and gift giving are rare occurrences, it is important to understand the impacts of online communication systems on these forms of sexual socialization as it is understood that the internet has been the catalyst for this subculture of members of the LGBTQ+ community.²¹⁴ Although research on bug chasing and gift giving is relatively new, several scholars have already attempted to answer the question of “why” and determine the historical and psychological shifts in this trend.

Christian Grov and Jeffrey T. Parsons in their article, “Bug Chasing and Gift Giving: The Potential for HIV Transmission Among Barebackers on the Internet,” help to answer and provide reasons as to why an individual may want to contract HIV or aid in the continuation of the virus by passing it along to someone else. One reason for this phenomenon of bug chasing is that the positive, life-saving advancements made in HIV/AIDS treatments caused the concern surrounding condom use and contraction of the virus to dwindle significantly, especially when

²¹¹Pullen and Cooper, *LGBT Identity*, 319-322.

²¹²Pullen and Cooper, *LGBT Identity*, 319-321.

²¹³Pullen and Cooper, *LGBT Identity*, 319-322.

²¹⁴Christian Grov and Jeffrey T. Parsons, “Bug Chasing and Gift Giving: The Potential for HIV Transmission Among Barebackers on the Internet,” *AIDS Education and Prevention* 18, no.6 (2006): 490-503.

compared to the 1980s when HIV/AIDS was practically a death sentence.²¹⁵ This current, seemingly nonchalant view of HIV/AIDS when compared to the fear and isolation experienced by the LGBTQ+ community in the 1980s seems almost disrespectful when one considers how many people lost their lives from the virus and how many cannot currently afford treatment for their symptoms. However, when one considers Grov and Parsons' next finding it may become clearer as to why someone may consent to contracting HIV. Another reason for the rise in bug chasing in correlation with the rise of the internet is this idea that members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially gay men, have about the "inevitability" of contracting the virus. These individuals believe that by seeking out and contracting the HIV themselves, that they will gain some sort of control over their bodies, the virus, and their emotional response to contracting the HIV.²¹⁶ Grov and Parsons also found that the increase in bug chasing stems from the erotic possibilities of risk taking behavior, even if it means contracting HIV.²¹⁷ The fourth reason that Grov and Parsons' research supports is the idea of "survivors guilt" or feelings of exclusion when a loved one receives a positive test result, causing the HIV negative person to seek out a positive result. The fifth, and final, reasoning for the phenomenon of bug chasing relates to political action. Grov and Parsons found that because gay and bisexual men believe they have a predisposition for contracting the virus, their status as an HIV positive person would "preemptively fulfill the negative societal labels" which they perceive as empowering and as a reclamation of the power that the virus once held.²¹⁸ While these reasons may be difficult to reconcile with, especially considering the historical significance, death, and grief surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, two or more consenting adults should not be shamed for the

²¹⁵Grov and Parsons, "Bug Chasing," 490.

²¹⁶Grov and Parsons, "Bug Chasing," 492.

²¹⁷Grov and Parsons, "Bug Chasing," 493.

²¹⁸Grov and Parsons, "Bug Chasing," 493.

choices that they make with their bodies but rather offered any help available to prevent any further harm to their bodies as a result of their decisions. Choices made by perpetrators to give someone HIV without their consent should be faced with the appropriate legal actions regarding sexual assault. The survivors of such crimes should be offered the available help necessary to assist them through their mental and physical wellbeing. Overall, Grov and Parsons' article is useful for understanding the ways in which substance use can lead to greater risk-taking behaviors.

Grov and Parsons' work is important for understanding not only bug chasing and the historical implications of it, but also the relationship between bug chasing and barebacking to substance use, even if only based on what the online profiles from their study overtly self-identified as. In their study consisting of one thousand six-hundred and six online dating profiles, Grov and Parsons were able to conclude that 45% of the profiles examined overtly characterized themselves as bug chasers. Interestingly, only 29.4% of users identified themselves as gift givers, showing a discrepancy between those who do not have HIV but want it versus those who have it but do not want to pass it along to someone else.²¹⁹ Similarly, and more so related to the larger scope of this thesis, Grov and Parsons also found that members of these sites engaged in party and play (PnP) meaning that they like to incorporate substance use into their sexual excursions.²²⁰ Of the 74.1% of members who claimed that they preferred barebacking, 86.3% of these members also indicated that they were "PnP friendly." While this does not necessarily mean that substances are used in all of these sexual circumstances, it does show trends in the use of substances and the tendency towards risk taking behaviors like bug chasing and gift giving in the LGBTQ+ community, especially among gay and bisexual men.²²¹ Grov and

²¹⁹Grov and Parsons, "Bug Chasing," 494-497.

²²⁰Grov and Parsons, "Bug Chasing," 496.

²²¹Grov and Parsons, "Bug Chasing," 496-497.

Parsons' article helps to make sense of the findings found in Pullen and Cooper's book as Grov and Parsons focus specifically on bug chasing and gift giving whereas Pullen and Cooper only briefly mention bug chasing and focus more on queer online identity, historic trends in homophobia, and substance use.

A quick search of keywords like "bug chaser" on Twitter leads users to a plethora of accounts looking to either contract HIV or give someone HIV. In a 2020 article, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser' Who Changed His Mind," by Mark S. King highlights the subculture of LGBTQ+ members who identify as bug chasers. King found a tweet from December 2019 from a username on Twitter called "@bug_chaser" who is a self-proclaimed "AIDS worshipper and death-dick glorifier."²²² The tweet includes details of one of @bug_chaser's friends who was in the ICU after contracting HIV and found that treatments would not work for him.²²³ @Bug_chaser received comments on his tweet with sentiments like "if he's hot enough..." implying that the commenter would still engage in sexual acts with @bug_chaser's friend despite his friend's condition. @Bug_chaser replied to this specific comment with "Not. The right. Response. AT ALL" and stopped posting on that Twitter account.²²⁴ King set out to get in touch with @bug_chaser to understand why this subculture engages in such dangerous acts.²²⁵ King sent a direct message (DM) to @bug_chaser and learned that his real name is Jack and he is a thirty-three year old gay man. King also learned that the friend mentioned in the original tweet died the following day due to complications of HIV.²²⁶ Jack goes on to tell King that prior to "eroticizing HIV," he could only get "turned on" by watching condomless porn. Jack explains this as a "primal" and natural response to sex which eventually led him to the subculture of bug

²²² Mark S. King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser' Who Changed His Mind," *MarksKing* (blog), January 20, 2020.

²²³ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

²²⁴ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

²²⁵ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

²²⁶ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

chasing and barebacking.²²⁷ After his friend's death, Jack reported to King that he no longer wants to "chase" and is back on PrEP full time.²²⁸ This switch in Jack highlights the implications of bug chasing and gift giving as many of the accounts who claim to want HIV did not live through the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. King set out to write this article as an HIV advocate in the hopes of bringing to light the dangers of bug chasing and gift giving, however, some commenters had mixed reviews on his article. One commenter, Peter Wexler, claims that gifting a partner with HIV is more intimate than heterosexual procreation.²²⁹ Another commenter, Marcel Bruyndonckx, says "HIV is welcome in my body, so if anyone wants to give it to me, give me a call."²³⁰ Most comments, however, condemn the actions of bug chasing saying that those who want HIV "are all too young to have lived through the 1980s. There was absolutely nothing erotic about it [HIV]."²³¹ Another commenter, Harmony Ray Zorio, condemns the article as a whole asking "how is that advocacy ABOUT HIV?" claiming that the article does nothing to promote information about testing or proper prevention.²³² Although King does not provide information on testing, he does a great deal to promote the importance of medications like PrEP in diminishing the number of positive HIV cases on a daily basis. Although Jack's story is certainly not unique, it is helpful for understanding how and why individuals come to be involved in this subculture as well as why someone might leave the subculture due to death, injury, or overall health implications. King's article in conjunction with Pullen and Cooper's work on LGBTQ+ online identities work well together to create a discussion of the motivations behind bug chasing.

²²⁷ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

²²⁸ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

²²⁹ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

²³⁰ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

²³¹ King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

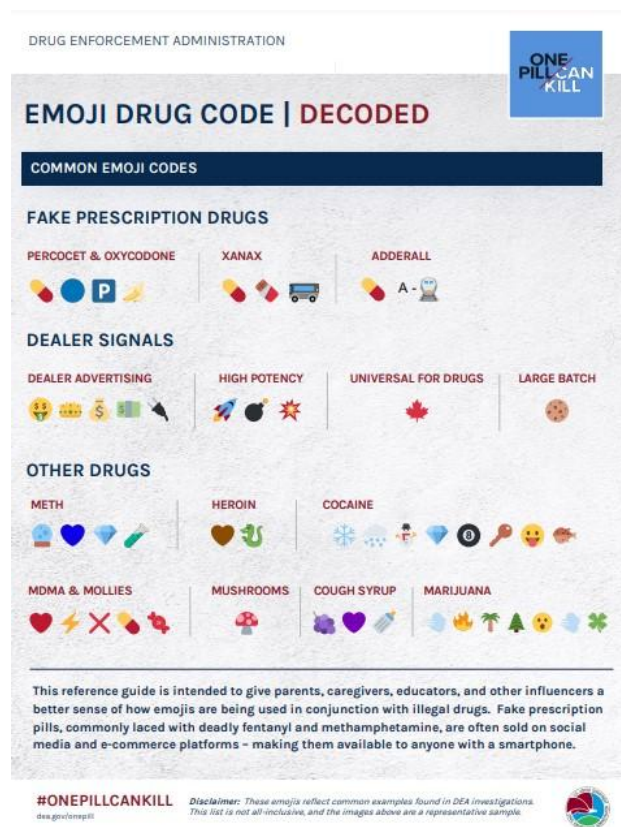
²³² King, "The HIV 'Bug Chaser,'" January 2020.

Pullen and Cooper conclude their work by incorporating the socio-political contributions like homophobia and homophobic legislation which help historians to understand the increase seen towards the rise in members of the LGBTQ+ community online.²³³ This conclusion makes sense as queer and trans individuals have historically always had to exist under the radar, on the down low, and live their lives on the margins. Public access to the internet and the World Wide Web made it possible for communities in rural towns and small cities to reach out and connect to queer and trans individuals across the nation and the world. Gone are the days of feeling isolated, lonely, and stuck because with the click of a computer mouse, an individual can be connected to hundreds of people within seconds. The internet and online communication systems have become so easy to communicate through that often, words are not even necessary to respond to a direct message or text message.

The creation of the emoji, a small digital image embedded into text messaging keyboards to express emotions and symbols, has enabled online communication users to create entire sentences using only emojis. Although the creation of the emoji may not at first appear to be historically significant, it has drastically changed the ways in which people communicate with each other, even in face-to-face interactions. The use of an emoji not only allows users to make messages that may appear as blunt or rude originally seem friendly and upbeat, emojis can enable texters to speak in a code-like language. This occurrence is especially common when it is in reference to substances or other illegal activities. In Moises Mendez's article titled "Gay Social Networking Apps are Fueling Crystal Meth Use," he highlights the story of "Adam P." and his experiences with crystal meth, dating apps, and unprotected sex. In his recollection, Adam attributes the rise of dating apps to his continued use of meth saying "the drug is so readily available in the LGBT community because of apps like Grindr, Scruff and Jack'd" that he

²³³Pullen and Cooper, *LGBT Identity*, 262.

would get back on the apps and relapse as a result of the meet up.²³⁴ Additionally, Adam notes that coded messages were popular on these dating apps due to character restrictions, down low members, and people engaging in more than just conversation and sexual relationship searches. Since Mendez’s research focuses on crystal meth, he only made note of Adam mentioning that the diamond emoji was commonly used to represent someone’s profile who was selling or seeking methamphetamine.²³⁵ In order to expand upon the references made in Mendez’s article, an image from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) is helpful for understanding emoji use among the demographic of people who use dating apps, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, to find their substance of choice. The image supplied by the DEA confirms the use of the diamond emoji for crystal meth as well as the crystal ball and blue heart emojis. Additionally, the image exposes that the snowflake and magic eight ball emojis represent cocaine, various leaf and smoke emojis represent marijuana, and the lightning bolt and pill emoji represent MDMA or molly.²³⁶ The ability to communicate without words not only creates more work for law enforcement, therefore making it more difficult to find those who are engaging in illegal activities, but also allows the



²³⁴Moises Mendez, “Gay Social Networking Apps are Fueling Crystal Meth Use,” Capstone, (CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, 2019), 1-11.

²³⁵Mendez, “Gay Social Networking Apps,” 2-3.

²³⁶Drug Enforcement Agency, “Emoji Drug Code: Decoded,” Infographic, DEA, 2022.

individuals who use emojis to hide these messages from their parents, spouses, children, and employers.

These findings from Mendez, his interview with Adam, and the results from the DEA image are historically significant in that they show the change over time of communication. It is significant to track the changes from the times of speaking only to those in your geographical area, to the ability to send mail back and forth, to the widespread popularity of newspapers, to the invention of phone calls, to the booming success of the internet and the World Wide Web which makes it possible to not only communicate via words but also sans words via GIF and emoji to create complex global communities of people halfway across the world from each other engaging in political, economic, religious, and psychological discussions despite their geographical and linguistic differences. Furthermore, these findings aid historians to better understand the impact of online communication systems on substance use on a wide scale and on a smaller scope focused on minoritized communities like the LGBTQ+ community. In a study conducted by Patrick O’Byrne and David Holmes in 2010 of gay men who utilized dating apps to find sexual partners and substances, one of the interviewees is quoted as saying, “You do the drugs to lower your inhibitions so that you will try things that you normally wouldn’t do on a regular basis. But, if you don’t do the drugs, you’re not going to go there.”²³⁷ This quote is significant as it relays several historically significant challenges for the LGBTQ+ community. First, this quote reveals that the vitality of homophobia is so rampant in the United States that it even becomes internalized by members of the LGBTQ+ community forcing them to seek ways to become comfortable with their sexuality. Second, O’Byrne and Holmes’ interview suggests that substance use lowers one’s inhibitions causing them to engage in situations they would not usually engage with especially in regards to sexual encounters putting them at risk for increased

²³⁷O’Byrne and Holmes, “Desire, Drug Use and Unsafe Sex,” 1–13.

STI exposure. Third, and finally, the interviewee's quote exposes the nature of addiction and the feeling that the use of substances is necessary in order to engage in sexual activities especially for members of the LGBTQ+ community who are not as comfortable in their sexuality. While this thesis makes some intersectional analysis of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community, it is largely centered around gay and bisexual men of various or ambiguous races. This is due to the lack of inclusion of non-masculine individuals in quantitative studies regarding the subject. Additionally, white, cis-gendered men are often deemed as "perfect subjects" for scientific research which explain the discrepancies seen in both the lack of inclusion of feminine bodies as well as explicit mentions of races.

Outside of online dating, members of the LGBTQ+ community utilize social media to create bonds and friendships both parasocially and in real life. The 2023 book *Raving* by McKenzie Wark follows Wark who is a trans woman who was born and raised in Australia but moved to the United States shortly after receiving her PhD from Murdoch University in 1998. Wark is currently a Professor of Culture and Media at Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts at The New School in New York.²³⁸ In *Raving*, Wark utilizes her real-life stories combined with fictionalized elements to tell the stories of the New York rave scene, specifically in queer spaces. Although Wark uses fictional elements to help progress her story, the main takeaways are her real experiences therefore, it is appropriate to discuss in this chapter. Wark calls this style of writing the first layer and refers to it as "autofiction." Wark claims that because her work is autofiction, the stories in *Raving* are "fiction dancing around facts."²³⁹ The second layer in *Raving* is what Wark refers to as "autotheory" which she defines as "writing that needs to gather

²³⁸ McKenzie Wark, "McKenzie Wark in Conversation with Ryan Mangione," by Ryan Mangione, *NovemberMag* Vol. 8 (2022).

²³⁹ Wark, *Raving*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2023) 1-86.

concepts from situations more than it needs to extract stories from them.”²⁴⁰ Wark defines a rave as something that “serves a lot of needs” which includes but is not limited to: “distraction, entertainment, exercise, and cruising,” especially for the LGBTQ+ community.²⁴¹ In the acknowledgments of *Raving*, Wark specifically gives thanks to the community that she has gained through social media platforms like Twitter, especially “trans Twitter,” Discord, and Signal.²⁴² This shows the special bonds which can be formed through online communication systems, even platonic relationships, for the LGBTQ+ community. These parasocial relationships, which can eventually lead to in person friendships, show that the ways in which people, especially members of the LGBTQ+ community, have adjusted communication styles to introduce a wider range of people of various backgrounds into their lives which lead to meaningful connections. Moving on to the discussion of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community, Wark details the extensive substance use which takes place at rave events in the New York City nightlife. Wark claims that “drugs are a part of rave culture” and that people, especially trans people, need events like raves to “disassociate.”²⁴³ Wark notes that trans people need to feel this sense of disassociation because they are a kind of people “who need to not be in body or world” because “the body feels wrong” and “the world treats us as wrong.”²⁴⁴ Throughout *Raving*, Wark describes the various substances that she and her friends engage with in order to both extend the time in which they can enjoy the rave as well as achieve this sense of disassociation. Wark makes mention of substances of all forms like ketamine, marijuana, molly, acid, psilocybin, speed, and Adderall to showcase the prevalence of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community and those who attend raves.²⁴⁵ One of the people that Wark interacts with

²⁴⁰ Wark, *Raving*, 4-5.

²⁴¹ Wark, *Raving*, 3.

²⁴² Wark, *Raving*, xiv.

²⁴³ Wark, *Raving*, 7-8.

²⁴⁴ Wark, *Raving*, 7-8.

²⁴⁵ Wark, *Raving*, 1-23.

at the raves throughout her book is Jasmine Infiniti. Jasmine is a Black trans woman and she says that because of the obstacles in place for Black trans women “it’s almost as if we are existing in hell already” so she “might as well live it up and find the best parts of existence that [she] can.”²⁴⁶ This quote helps to highlight the impact that substance use can have on the mindset of LGBTQ+ individuals who struggle with the pressures of heteronormativity, homophobia, transphobia, racism, and sexism. *Raving* is a useful resource to understand the aforementioned pressures as well as to understand the impacts of online communication systems in its ability for ostracized members of society to connect on a new level in order to get out into the real world with a group of well-established friendships to reject these pressures. While people who lived and partied prior to the rise of the internet did not have this luxury, they were also able to find their community groups to separate themselves, even momentarily, from the expectations of straight, white, cis, and male dominated society.

Conclusion

The rates of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community have always been somewhat higher than their heterosexual counterparts due to political, social, religious, and economic barriers to access in the way for queer and trans folks. These barriers to access create feelings of isolation, negative self-image, and confusion as these individuals must navigate the scrutiny of homophobia and transphobia as a daily task. Members of the LGBTQ+ community found ways to escape these negative feelings by using substances like methamphetamine, hallucinogens, marijuana, alcohol, and cocaine. Prior to the rise of online communication systems, members of the LGBTQ+ community searched for, sold, and used substances in the safe, yet public, spheres of LGBTQ+ bars and clubs, bathhouses, and sex parties. While these methods of finding, selling, and utilizing substances remain popular, the rise of the internet and the World Wide Web for

²⁴⁶ Wark, *Raving*, 26.

public use created a shift in the ways in which people are able to locate substances. Analyzing these trends in online communication systems is a worthwhile historical endeavor as these systems have changed the ways in which communicating about politics, economics, religions, and social groups comes to fruition on a local, national, and global scale. The aim of this research is to continue to mark trends in communication styles, analyze the rates of substance use in the queer community because of online communication systems, and examine whether or not these trends are significant in the grand scheme of minoritized communities in the United States.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The rates of substance use in the LGBTQ+ community have remained consistent since the 1980s, however, the means through which they find and use the substances has changed drastically. Although the creation of the internet and social media platforms makes the search for substances easier, there is not necessarily a conclusive statistic to say that substance use has increased for the LGBTQ+ community since the 1980s. Due to a variety of factors like the HIV/AIDS epidemic, homophobic and transphobic legislation, and overall higher rates of loneliness, hopelessness, and negative self-image, the LGBTQ+ community has always used substances at a higher rate than their heterosexual and gender conforming counterparts. This thesis helps to bring the LGBTQ+ community into the scope of drug policy analysis as they are noticeably absent in research surrounding drug policy despite the obvious ostracization of the community during peak times of the implementation of certain drug policies beginning in the 1960s. While lesbians and bisexual women tend to make notable calls of action towards sobriety and sober spaces while also experiencing higher rates of substance use, gay and bisexual men often lean into the societal expectations of their communities regarding substance use at higher rates, as seen in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. Although certainly there are members across the LGBTQ+ spectrum who call for sobriety in their community, it is seen most significantly among lesbians and bisexual women. To grapple with the impacts of substance use on the LGBTQ+ community and other minoritized communities, the United States must make changes to current legislation that is founded in both pre and post Nixon drug policy. These issues relate to my argument that the United States utilizes drug policy as a way to police intersecting

identities of citizens, particularly those who exist in the LGBTQ+ community, in order to demonize bodies that do not fit in the status quo.

To reiterate my thoughts from Chapter Four, I would once again like to break down the steps in which I believe are most important towards achieving the aforementioned goals . First, the United States needs to completely restructure and reform the criminal justice system, in slow and methodical steps, as it is a corrupt system used to enslave citizens and keep people of color away from society and their families.

Next, the United States needs to decriminalize or legalize all current illicit substances and implement effective rehabilitation centers focused on life-planning and harm reduction techniques.

Third, and finally, the United States needs to implement equity and sensitivity training to professionals who would provide rehabilitation and criminal justice services to society as too often people facing addiction are met with judgment and contempt for simply seeking help.

While these steps could take decades to implement into society, they are necessary to undo the drug war mentality which is so pervasive in the United States. It should be the responsibility of historians to uncover historical truths about drug policy. Scholars of other fields like Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, and Criminal Justice should not be the only ones who lead the charge towards these changes as their findings are largely quantitative and not qualitative. There is still much work to be done on this topic to explore the impact of drug policy on minoritized communities and where the LGBTQ+ community fits in the discussion of drug policy. While this thesis argues that the LGBTQ+ community must be present in discussions of the corruption of the United States government to understand how drug policy affects this community, as well as other minoritized communities, through xenophobia, racism, homophobia,

transphobia, sexism, and classism, it is important to also work towards situating the LGBTQ+ community in discussions of drug policy. It is my hope that this thesis successfully contributes to this idea as well as makes meaningful connections both for people in academia and outside of academia.

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