

DRUG ADDICTION AS COPING WITH SOCIAL DISLOCATION

by

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To Michael and Rob.

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by

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THESIS

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There has been a rising trend of drug addiction in the United States and criminal sanctions and social policies have worked to ameliorate this issue. Previous research has looked at drug addiction as an “adaptation” to psychosocial distress, specifically “social dislocation”. Essentially addiction is a coping mechanism with a purpose that benefits the individual. The research question the study is designed to address is: What is the experience of the adaptive dimension of addiction to illegal drugs as a means of adapting to social dislocation, or lack of social integration, and how does the experience of drug addiction's adaptive dimension as a way of adapting to social dislocation work? Through interviews with individuals that have been addicted to drugs, this can be explored and assist in creating a more comprehensive way of tackling the issue of drug addiction in the United States.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

There has been a rising trend of individuals suffering from drug addiction in the United States. Data obtained from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health assert that 20.3 million Americans (age 12 and older) were diagnosed with a substance use disorder in 2017 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018). Additionally, data from the CDC shows that “there were 70,237 drug overdose deaths in the United States” in 2017 (Hedegaard, Minino, & Warner, 2018).

Inadequate psychosocial integration, also referred to as “dislocation”, is a common theme with those who have an addiction to drugs (Alexander, 2000). Dislocation is the lack of connection with others, which research has shown is a core psychological need that all humans have (Hari, 2015). Humans have psychosocial needs that, if unmet, contribute to psychological distress. If the need of social connection is not met, individuals may “adapt” to this lack of connection, stemming from dislocation, by using and subsequently becoming addicted to drugs (Alexander & Hadaway, 1982).

Criminal justice and rehabilitation policies, currently created in response to the exposure or disease models, alienate drug addicts and cut them off from society, which may in fact be perpetuating their addiction (Hari, 2015). Understanding psychosocial dislocative and psychological disintegrative features of drug addiction is important for several reasons; it can give a voice to a marginalized and stigmatized group, provide a different perspective on drug addiction, and it can also lead to the implementation of new policies that target the treatment of

individuals who are addicted to drugs. This research seeks to understand the adaptive, or coping, dynamic of drug addiction as a way these individuals address their social dislocation.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013) is to understand the experience of the phenomenon of addiction to illegal drugs' adaptive dimension as a means of dealing with "social dislocation," the inadequate psychosocial integration of individuals who are addicted to illegal drugs with members of society (Alexander, 1990). Specifically, this phenomenological study seeks to understand the "essence" of the "lived experience" (Creswell, 2013) of drug addiction's adaptive dimension as a "mechanism" (Creswell, 2013), or a means, of dealing with social dislocation. This study seeks to understand phenomenologically what the experience of drug addiction's adaptive dimension as a way of dealing with social dislocation is. This study also seeks to understand phenomenologically how this experience of drug addiction's adaptive dimension vis-à-vis social dislocation works.

As has been noted, this qualitative, phenomenological study is designed to contribute findings about the essence of the experience of addiction to illegal drugs' adaptive dimension vis-à-vis social dislocation. The detailed and nuanced detailed data gathered and analyzed through coding for patterns, themes, and contradictory and unexpected information, together with findings about what this experience is essentially and how the adaptive dimension of addiction to illegal drugs works will contribute to our understanding of the social features of drug addiction that has been established in the discipline of Psychology. This study's phenomenological design fills in a methodological gap by gathering data and analyzing them phenomenologically, contributing a phenomenological perspective to our understanding of the experience of addiction

to illegal drugs as adaptive in relation to social dislocation. There are Phenomenological studies that have been done on the lived experience of drug addiction however they address other factors (such as spiritual transformation and the lived experience of going through recovery itself) and do not reference social dislocation in their analysis.

The rationale for this study is to help to fill in a gap in the current research literature in the field of Criminology and Crime and Justice Studies. The literature in this discipline neglects the adaptive dimension of addiction to illegal drugs as a means of adapting individuals who are addicted to illegal drugs to their social dislocation from society; it focuses instead on the chemical and physical dimensions of drug addiction. The literature in Criminology and Crime and Justice Studies treats drug addiction as a chemical and physical phenomenon and does not give attention to social contributions to and features of drug addiction as adaptive behavior, in particular social dislocation. Furthermore, drug addiction's adaptive dimension vis-à-vis social dislocation challenges current drug addiction rehabilitation practice and therapies, which treat mainly chemical and biological features of addiction and not its social features, particularly social dislocation.

This study will gather detailed data and nuanced detailed data about the lived experience of participants' relationships with their family members, friends, and others; their thoughts and feelings about these relationships as they lived their lives from day to day and how these thoughts and feelings affected their day-to-day lives, particularly in relation to their family members, friends, and others; those particular experiences that contributed to their use of illegal drugs, especially their experiences of a certain social relationship or relationships; the character

and quality of these relationships concerning social dislocation; and how all of these express social dislocation.

Research Question

The research question the study is designed to address is: What is the experience of the adaptive dimension of addiction to illegal drugs as a means of adapting to social dislocation, or lack of social integration, and how does the experience of drug addiction's adaptive dimension as a way of adapting to social dislocation work? The research question will be addressed through a one-on-one interview consisting of six questions about the participant's past experience of addiction to illegal drugs and their relationships with family, friends, and others.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

With the literature from Criminology and Crime and Justice Studies not giving attention to the social features of addiction to illegal drugs and addiction's adaptive dimension as it relates to social dislocation specifically, this study turns to the discipline of Psychology and the psychological literature found there that gives attention to social features of drug addiction and to social dislocation specifically. This study builds upon the psychological research of Alexander, Hadaway, and Coombs (1980); Alexander (1990); and Alexander (2012). Alexander's research contributed to studies of drug addiction the influence of "social dislocation", which he defined as "lack of psychosocial integration", or "dislocation" (Alexander, 1990).

Alexander substituted an "adaptive model" of drug addiction for the "exposure model" of addiction as well as the "disease model" of addiction. The adaptive model emphasizes drug addiction as a way of adapting to "social dislocation", or lack of social integration. Alexander's adaptive model "portrays addicts as healthy people who have been stymied in their attempt to attain full integration" (Alexander, 1990). Alexander's "Rat Park" experiment challenged the exposure model, the traditional view of drug addiction that explains addiction as a process of increasing exposure to a chemical substance that causes addiction once a certain threshold of exposure is reached, with harder drugs being the most addictive (Alexander, Hadaway, and Coombs, 1980). Alexander's work also challenged the "disease model", which assumes that individuals who have become addicted have essentially contracted a disease that requires treatment by experts (Alexander, 1990).

Alexander's article (1990) provides the empirical and theoretical basis for the adaptation model of addiction, citing quantitative studies and clinical observations to support the model. Rather than being a result of exposure or disease, the adaptive model presents addicts as otherwise healthy people who have been prevented from gaining full integration in their social relationships (Alexander, 1990). Alexander used Erik Erikson's work on psychosocial integration as the theoretical foundation that describes integration failure as a precondition for addiction and argued that addiction is serving a purpose for the addict – including control and coping (Alexander, 1990). Alexander gave the lack of psychosocial integration the term “dislocation”, and noted that, at its extreme, dislocation can lead to depression, anxiety, shame, and suicide (Alexander, 2012).

The process of adaptation begins with some combination of inadequate upbringing and environmental support, coupled with some level of physical or psychological unfitness. These difficulties contribute to social integration failures for the individual, presenting as inability to achieve self-reliance, confidence in themselves, and social acceptance, to name a few. This creates a need for the individual to search for substitute ways in which to gain some semblance of social support and purpose. These substitute adaptations do not fully satisfy the individual's need to integrate but provide a means of dealing with social dislocation that allows for continued survival. Substitute adaptations, while potentially harmful, are as such the “lesser evil”. Stigmatization for being labeled a drug addict is a more tolerable identity than having no identity at all. The adaptive model, basically explains how an individual adapts to the failure to integrate psychosocially (social dislocation), a “gravely serious state, accompanied by psychological

distress”, by seeking out a substitute that allows them some sort of pseudo-integration, in this case, illegal drugs (Alexander, 1990).

The intent of this study is not to evaluate or to defend Alexander's research conclusion, that drug addiction is an adaptation to social dislocation. Rather, its intent is to build upon Alexander's research in offering a Phenomenological perspective on the adaptive dimension of addiction to illegal drugs, as it relates to social dislocation, in order to understand better the experience of this adaptive dimension of addiction to illegal drugs, as it relates to social dislocation, for individuals who are addicted to illegal drugs. The intent of this study is to gather any and all information regarding participants' experiences of the adaptive dimension of drug addiction vis-à-vis their social dislocation while studying the essential experience of adaptation to social dislocation reported by participants who share this essential experience. This is done with the intent to hone in on the essential experience of adaptation to social dislocation shared by participants -- what this experience of adaptation is essentially and how this adaptation works. In order to hone in on this essential experience of adaptation, this study also gathers information on and considering experiences of participants that do not fit this essential experience, helping to understand what the experience of adaptation vis-à-vis social dislocation is by studying what it is not also.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The foundation for this research comes from two theories: psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963), and coping theory (Lazarus, 1993). These two theories provide the foundation for understanding how the individual addicted to drugs responds to the process of socialization and how addiction can be a method of coping that adapts the individual's lack of ability to integrate psychosocially with society and into its social expectations.

Erik Erikson (1963) developed the theory of psychosocial development and ascertained that there are eight stages in which individuals negotiate biological and sociocultural forces. In each stage, there is a psychosocial conflict between these two forces that must be reconciled within the individual. If an individual successfully reconciles the two forces, they emerge with a corresponding virtue (i.e. hope, will, purpose, etc.). Alternatively, if the individual does not reconcile the two forces in a given stage this can lead to an inability to complete future stages and lead the individual to develop an unhealthy personality and a negative sense of self (Erikson, 1963).

Richard Lazarus' coping theory (1993) describes two different approaches to coping, the method by which individuals deal with threats to their psychological integrity. One approach emphasizes style and describes coping as a personal characteristic, and the second emphasizes process, which views coping as an effort to manage stressors that may change across an individual's lifespan and as a method of adaptation (Lazarus, 1993). This theory is important to this study and complimentary to the previously discussed theory of psychosocial development. When the individual is unable to integrate or reconcile their biological and sociocultural forces

and develops an unhealthy personality and negative sense of self, this produces a psychological conflict that needs to be managed through a coping strategy. This is the foundation of the view of this research that drug use and subsequent addiction combine as a method of coping with a lack of psychosocial integration and the inability to connect with society meaningfully.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

The approach this study plans to use for the research design is Phenomenology. One of the defining features of Phenomenology is exploration of the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this research project that phenomenon is the coping strategy or dynamic of drug addiction as a way to deal with social dislocation. The research purpose of this Phenomenological approach is understanding the essence of this coping strategy or dynamic of drug use and addiction specific to social dislocation and dealing with it.

The unit of analysis will be several individuals who have shared the experience of turning to drugs and becoming addicted to them as a way of coping with social dislocation. The way data will be collected will be through interviews with individuals who have used drugs addictively but who no longer do so. The interviews will provide detailed and nuanced descriptions of their backgrounds and their lived experience of drug addiction.

Study Population and Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategies that will be used to recruit participants for this research project are criterion and snowball (or chain) sampling (Bailey, 2007). Through criterion sampling, participants who will be selected who have had the experience of being addicted to drugs but who no longer do so. Flyers advertising the study will be posted on The University of Texas at Dallas campus in the Center for Student Recovery. This office caters to individuals that have been addicted to substances – alcohol or drugs – and are in the process of recovery, by providing them with resources that will help them on their road to recovery. Posting flyers in the Center for Student Recovery offers a direct line to individuals that have been addicted to drugs, allowing

the opportunity to do strategic recruiting of participants by making these students aware of the study with recruitment assistance from the Center's staff. The Center will be the main source of obtaining participants. To further obtain a sample size of 5-10 participants, snowball sampling will also be implemented, using the original participants to refer further participants for the study.

Data Analysis

Data for this research will be collected through interviews with the subjects in the study. Interview questions are designed to get a comprehensive view of the subject's history of drug addiction and possible social dislocation and as previously stated, their experience of drug addiction as a way of coping with dislocation. Additionally, the interview questions will examine the way that dislocation is experienced for each subject.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Once the interviews are completed and transcribed, they will be analyzed to explore the themes through coding. Holding the research question in mind, the data will be coded into themes that reflect what the research is aiming to understand – the adaptive dimension of addiction to illegal drugs as a means of adapting to social dislocation and how that process works. The coding frame, as discussed by Margrit Schreier (2013), is the “heart” of the method, consisting of at least one main category and at least two subcategories. The main categories reflect aspects of the data that the researcher seeks to gain more information about, and the subcategories reflect what is said within that data in respect to the main categories (Scheier, 2013). For this research, examples of the main categories for the coding frame would be connection, disconnection, and coping, and the subcategories will be determined after the interviews are completed.

The themes that the study expects to find based on the literature that was reviewed above are themes of disconnection or lack of social integration, psychological distress, and a sense of relief while using drugs. These themes will be used and built upon as the codes that help identify features of social dislocation in the study subjects and features of their addiction to drugs that are adaptive to their dislocation. The answers that do not fit the findings the literature guided will also be coded in order to contrast them with the themes in the analysis of individuals who did undergo adaptation as a way of coping with social dislocation. This way the essence of the adaptation to dislocation by way of drug addiction can be better understood.

CHAPTER 6

PROGRESS REPORT

After developing and submitting the IRB Application for Expedited Review along with the supporting materials, the research study received approval from the Institutional Review Board. As the application was being developed, the opportunity arose for the researcher to refine the research design to be refined- particularly the research problem, research purpose, research question, and interview questions. The original research design was created in the Fall 2019 course EPPS 6346 Qualitative Research Methods. During the process of developing and completing the IRB Application the psychological literature on social dislocation by Alexander, Hadaway, and Coombs (1980); Alexander (1990); and Alexander (2012) and the theories that lay the foundation of the research by Erickson (1963) and Lazarus (1993) were reviewed again. The review gave the opportunity to understand more fully and articulate the variables that this study focuses on in its effort to address the research question: social dislocation, use of and addiction to drugs, and adaptation to social dislocation through drug addiction.

During the development of the application the recruitment and interview methods were refined, namely recruiting study participants through the Office of Student Recovery on campus and planning the private location in the EPPS conference rooms to hold interviews in a confidential setting. Jeremy Eicke, the program manager at the Office of Student Recovery granted authorization to post the recruitment flyer for this study in the Office of Student Recovery in the researcher's effort to recruit participants among UTD students who make use of this office and its services. Regular meetings were held with Dr. Bobby Alexander throughout

refining the research design and developing and submitting the IRB application.

CHAPTER 7

POLICY RELEVANCE

If addiction to illegal drugs' adaptive dimension offers a way of dealing with social dislocation, then the way our society is treating drug addiction through current practice in the arena of crime and justice is counterproductive. Criminal sanctions for use of illegal drugs will only serve to push an individual that is addicted to illegal drugs farther away from what they truly need, which is to be connected with other individuals and with society. These sanctions literally separate an individual that is addicted to illegal drugs from society by incarceration and once the individual is released, it labels the individual a "drug addict," which is already stigmatizing, and increase the stigma by adding the label of "criminal." Stigmatizing an individual can contribute to their feeling isolated and apart from society, furthering their inability to feel as though they have psychosocially integrated successfully. Therefore, criminal justice policies that criminalize and punish use of illegal drugs furthers disconnection, which only exacerbates an individual's addiction.

This research has policy relevance for not only the realm of criminal justice reform, but also concerning how drug addiction treatment centers operate. These treatment centers run in basically the same fashion, removing an individual that is addicted to illegal drugs from their daily social connections in order to rehabilitate them.

Two countries that have had a history of drug addiction problems have radically changed their policies in an effort to fix this problem. Switzerland developed a four-pillar program for treating addiction (harm reduction, prevention, treatment, and law enforcement). After experimental trials it was determined that the best course of action was to use heroin to treat the

increasing trend of rising addiction to this drug. Treatment centers administered heroin in safe doses, resulting in a significant decrease in the number of individuals that were addicted to illegal drugs, with many achieving successful recovery (Uchtenhagen, 2009).

Portugal formed The Commission for a National Drug Strategy (CNDS) to consider their increasing drug use problem. The CNDS recommended that Portugal decriminalize all illegal drugs and shift drug policy towards harm reduction, similar to Switzerland's treatment centers. However, in addition to decriminalization and harm reduction, Portugal went a step farther and implemented initiatives to support the social and professional reintegration of individuals that were addicted to drugs (Van Het Loo, Van Beusekom, & Kahan, 2002).

Research showing that the current removal methods of treatment for addiction is damaging to an individual that is addicted to illegal drugs and contributes to drug addiction as a coping strategy for social dislocation can affect how addiction is viewed and policies can be developed to create better programs, such as Switzerland's and Portugal's, to remove criminal sanctions against individuals that are addicted to illegal drugs, to protect them from further social dislocation, and work to reintegrate them into society.

By offering a Phenomenological understanding of the adaptive dimensions of addiction to illegal drugs as a means of dealing with social dislocation, this study will provide detailed findings and nuanced details about individuals' experience of addiction to illegal drugs' adaptive dimension vis-à-vis social dislocation that can help shift the view of the criminal justice system away from the exposure and disease model of drug addiction toward a wider view that includes the adaptive model. A Phenomenological understanding also can help shift current practice of drug therapy away from removal of individuals that are addicted to illegal drugs from their

everyday social connections of family, friends, and others, which itself acts as social dislocation and thereby exacerbates the problem of becoming addicted to illegal drugs as adaptation to social dislocation, and shift practice toward helping these individuals maintain their social connections.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherine Wilds was born in Dallas, Texas. After completing home schooling, she obtained her GED in 2007 from Plano ISD. In 2013, Kate enrolled in Collin County Community College and completed coursework in criminal justice studies before transferring to The University of Texas at Dallas in 2015. She received a Bachelor of Arts with a major in criminology from The University of Texas at Dallas in May 2018. She became employed as a teaching assistant in the sociology department while finishing her graduate degree in applied sociology at The University of Texas at Dallas.

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