



MEANING OF DRUGS FOR UNIVERSITY
SIGNIFICADO DA DROGA PARA UNIVERSITÁRIAS
SIGNIFICADO DE LA DROGA PARA UNIVERSITARIAS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to understand the meaning of drugs among university students. **Method:** qualitative study, supported by the theoretical-methodological approach Ethnography based on Geertz's Interpretive Anthropology. This study included 19 university students from a public educational institution. **Results:** from the interpretation of the data, the following themes emerged << The symbolism of the drug >>, << The symbolism of non-drug >>. Alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants were cited as not being drugs. They made the distinction between "strong drug" and "weak drug" hitherto not evidenced in other studies. **Conclusion:** although, for the common sense, the entrance in the higher education is related to the professional growth, there is another side that the educational institutions can not neglect. The university is responsible for education not only for professional autonomy, but also for respect for choices and reception, listening and referrals. **Descriptors:** Students; Ethnography; Drug Users.

RESUMO

Objetivo: compreender o significado da droga entre universitárias. **Método:** estudo qualitativo, respaldado na abordagem teórico-metodológica Etnografia fundamentada na Antropologia Interpretativa de Geertz. Fizeram parte deste estudo 19 universitárias de uma instituição pública de ensino. **Resultados:** da interpretação dos dados, emergiram os seguintes temas <<O simbolismo da droga>>, <<O simbolismo da não droga>>. O álcool, o tabaco e os inalantes foram citados como não sendo drogas. Fizeram a distinção entre "droga forte" e "droga fraca" até então não evidenciados em outros estudos. **Conclusão:** embora, para o senso comum, o ingresso no ensino superior esteja relacionado ao crescimento profissional, existe um outro lado que as instituições de ensino não podem negligenciar. Compete à universidade a educação não apenas para a autonomia profissional, mas também para o respeito pelas escolhas e o acolhimento, a escuta e os encaminhamentos. **Descritores:** Estudantes; Etnografia; Usuários de Drogas.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: comprender el significado de la droga entre universitarias. **Método:** estudio cualitativo, respaldado en el enfoque teórico-metodológico Etnografía fundamentada en la Antropología Interpretativa de Geertz. Se realizaron parte de este estudio, 19 universitarias de una institución pública de enseñanza. **Resultados:** de la interpretación de los datos, surgieron los siguientes temas << El simbolismo de la droga >>, << El simbolismo de la no droga >>. El alcohol, el tabaco y los inhalantes, fueron citados como no drogas. Se distinguieron entre "droga fuerte" y "droga débil" hasta entonces no evidenciados en otros estudios. **Conclusión:** aunque, para el sentido común, el ingreso en la enseñanza superior esté relacionado al crecimiento profesional, existe otro lado que las instituciones de enseñanza no pueden descuidar. Es competencia de la universidad la educación no sólo para la autonomía profesional, sino también para el respeto de las elecciones y la acogida, la escucha y los encaminhamientos. **Descriptores:** Estudiantes; Etnografía; Usuarios de Drogas.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the great challenges faced by Brazilian educators and society is the use and abuse of drugs, especially among university students.¹ Although the term drug, by biomedical rationality, is determined by any "substance not produced by the organism that has the property to act on one or more of their systems producing alterations in their functioning, and may be depressing, stimulating and disturbing", ² in this study it was realized that the significant drug and its meaning are very different from the biomedical model.

Since the mid-twentieth century, drugs have become one of the world's largest trading strategies, with the economic level in terms of inputs superior to those produced by energy and telecommunications economics. There is enormous interest in the circuits of production, circulation, distribution and consumption of these substances³. Paradoxically, the use and abuse of these drugs can cause suffering to the person who consumes them and their family, damage to school and work life, the growth of crime and illicit enrichment, as well as contribute to the increase of the global burden of diseases, resulting in losses due to premature deaths and years of disability.⁴

In modern times, with the dizzying increase in drug consumption, the researchers have aroused interest in the development of studies on the subject in question, which has caused us anxieties to develop studies that seek to understand the meaning of the drug and its consumption among university students. Literature was sought, for support for this understanding and gaps in science were found given the paucity of ethnographic studies that seek to understand the meaning of experience of alcohol and / or other drug use among university women.

The selected papers⁵⁻⁹ for the literature review point to the use of alcohol and / or drugs among university students as a public health problem, which requires clear, uniform and effective policies coming from educational institutions for better coping individuals, with regard to drugs, prevention and treatment.

Given the scarcity of qualitative studies that address this theme and the need to combine knowledge, it was sought, to understand the meaning of alcohol and / or drug use among university students, from the perspective of the person who experiences consumption, considering that every human being is coming from a culture and brings with

it habits and customs that interfere with their behavior and actions.¹⁰

As nurses and teachers, the researchers of this study are committed to this issue, because nurses play an important role in promoting, preventing, reducing harm, in the treatment and social reintegration of people who use any drug, whether legal or illegal. Their work with this group strengthens protective factors, improving self-esteem and developing strategies for health maintenance.¹¹⁻²

OBJECTIVE

- To understand the significance of drug use experience among university students.

METHOD

Qualitative study, anchored in the theoretical methodological approach of Ethnography, based on Geertz 's Interpretive Anthropology, in the search for a dense description. Its use was justified, by allowing the understanding of an experience from the perspective of the other, as is the case of university students who use alcohol and / or drugs.

This study was developed in a Public Institution of Brazilian Higher Education, located in the Southeast region, from November 2014 to December 2015. Currently, this institution offers undergraduate courses in the following areas of knowledge: Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Biology and Exact. The inclusion criteria were university students over 18 years of age, enrolled in undergraduate courses in the face-to-face modality and who used alcohol and/or other drugs.

Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews recorded with authorization, participant observation and field diary notes. The interviews were conducted by the main author, recorded in MP4, after authorization, and developed with the following guiding question: What does it mean, for you, to be a college student and to consume alcohol and/or other drugs?

On average, two interviews were conducted, per participant. These had an average duration of 40 minutes, were transcribed, immediately after the accomplishment, analyzed and filed electronically, using the Word Program. The identification of each interview was according to sequence of accomplishment with each participant and are presented with the letter E, followed by the corresponding Arabic number and fictitious name of the participant.

During the data collection, we consider the participants' understanding of the information, as well as, the environment, facilitating the availability of information. In addition to the interviews, participant observation was conducted and field diary entries resulting from interviews during interviews; at parties; in the educational institution; in the bar near the university, frequented by university students and in their residences. In search of a dense description, the data obtained were analyzed through the understanding of the sociocultural context, seeking to decode the senses to apprehend the meanings of the experience of alcohol and / or other drugs by the university students.¹⁰

The ethical precepts of Resolution of the National Health Council No. 466 of December 12, 2012 were respected, and this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under opinion No. 822,626. All the participants signed the Informed Consent Term.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

19 university students, who at the time of collection, used alcohol and/or drugs, participated in the research. There was a predominance of the 22-year-old age group, with a minimum age of 19 and a maximum of 38 years, of which 17 were single and only one had children. As far as housing was concerned, 14 lived in republics, one, with parents and three, alone. As for the religion, nine declared themselves Catholic; six, spiritists; two, of the WICCA sect and one had no religion. Sixteen, were financially dependent on parents and family members, 12 did not engage in any type of paid activity and seven were scholarship recipients. In relation to the courses, 13 were from the area of Health Sciences; three, from Humanities and Social Sciences and three, from Exact Sciences. All participants were properly enrolled and attended, between the 2nd and 10th period of the courses. Regarding the dependence on subjects, ten students reported to present at least one.

From the interpretation of the senses given to the experience of alcohol and drug use among university students, the following themes were presented: "The symbolism of drugs" and "The symbolism of drugs".

♦ The symbolism of the drug

The consumption of psychoactive substances accompanies the history of mankind, since, practically, in all cultures, in the most different epochs, these substances were and are being used in mystical /

religious rituals, as mediators in social relationships, in festivities, or, as a search for pleasure.¹³

Currently, the consumption of these substances has become a frequent phenomenon, especially, among young people inserted in the university context. Although attending a university indicates the opportunity for personal and professional growth, and gaining freedom, this period may become favorable for involvement with the use of drugs, as the young person comes to face critical situations as the separation of the family, the need to establish new relationships, to solve their problems alone in addition to fulfilling academic requirements.⁵⁻⁷

It was found, in the following testimonies, that the entrance to the university brings with it numerous changes, including the rupture with the family. Although they reported that the parents were strict, it was verified that the participants increased their consumption of alcoholic beverages with university admission, as well as began to use other drugs. This fact may be related to the sense of autonomy, the availability of drugs in the academic environment and, also, the fear of ostracism,⁶ in the face of the new webs of relationships that are being created in the university environment.

[...] Before, I drank rarely. [...] I went to drink beer even when I entered college and increased the amount of drink (E1 Flavia).

[...] I did not drink, I started to go out and drink after I went to college (E1 Camila).

During the meetings, it was learned that the great majority started or intensified the use of alcohol and other drugs after they entered the university. The need for socialization and acceptance by the group were the main justifications for drug use.

Although the family is considered the first agent of socialization and this socio-cultural environment influences future behaviors,^{9,14} the statements above make us think that culture is dynamic, that people are establishing new relationships, new traits¹⁰ and some people end up behaving accordingly with the norms of the new sociocultural environment.

For the participants,

[...] Marijuana is good, it is a weak drug, it stays relaxed, becomes chill. Quiet. It gets very hungry afterwards, the famous munchies (E2 Liz).

[...] Look, I already used a little good (marijuana). I think from the first to the fourth, I did not feel anything. After that, I felt a relaxation, I see that it is as if I had

been dizzy without a hangover, without having felt sick. You know, it does not give a hangover, it's even better it's cheaper and it does not have so many harmful effects (E2 Marcela).

It was learned that a drug can bring feelings of relaxation or euphoria to the young and meanings are shared with the socio-cultural environment in the production of the senses.¹⁰

The university students considered:

[...] Cocaine very strong [...] I used my first very old career, I did not use it in adolescence. It was a very euphoric feeling and the next day I felt like it. It's like you eat chocolate and feel like eating more chocolate. It's a very subtle thing if you do not take it you get more and more (E2 Luiza).

[...] The sweet (LSD) I used, I used a room and I was not tired, I used a party. I stayed the whole party without tiring, but I had no hallucination to see anything or feel anything, I just got restless. The staff used to use a room or a half, I did not have the guts to use a medium because I'm afraid. Whole is heavy. It is strong, it is very crazy to use (E2 Liz).

The notion of "weak drug" and "strong drug", according to the statements, seems to be related to the ability to induce addiction and cause behavioral changes that lead to agitation. The quantity is also something to be considered by them, in view of the commitment that the unregulated use of these substances can cause to their lives. Maybe, they want to use it to stay energized, but they are afraid of losing control.

The researchers attention was drawn to the fact that the participants reported, during our meetings, to consume alcohol socially and denied the use of any other type of substance other than tobacco. However, when accompanying them at parties, a contradictory behavior between the said and the unsaid, was observed. It was noticed, during a party, that, one of the participants using "lança-perfume" through a bottle of water. There was no fear on her part about using it in front of other people. The party was provided with two environments: the sertanejo and the rock. In the "rock" environment, people consumed beer and other beverages, however, the highest consumption was tobacco and marijuana. The majority of university students consumed these substances as a group. There were two bands, one of them made constant apology for the use of drugs, one of the excerpts of their song said: "Mad hatter to get out of reality" (Participating Observation, 11/22/2014).

For common sense, university entrance is almost always seen as a passport for the liberation of the family nucleus and the current model of creation, in which the parents adopt a permissive posture, not imposing rules and limits, can also contribute to the exposure of these young people to the trial of licit and illicit drugs¹⁵.

[...] It changes a lot! Here you are alone without anyone's control, you can do whatever you want (E1 Flávia).

[...] We have a lot of freedom here. Independence helps here, there is no one watching, each one is for himself. (E1 Liz).

The lack of parental guidance, during the academic life of the children, was cited as a facilitating mechanism for the consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

[...] What happens is that the father comes here leaves the creature on the first day of class and searches for graduation. It does not accompany, does not know what is happening, does not presence, and thus becomes very needy, and where they find attention they grasp it. Too much drunk did clowning caught the attention of the class so, opa I'm legal (E1 Michele).

Although the above statement points to the need for parental guidance during the academic life of the children, it can not be denied that the culture is dynamic, that during all time, new webs are being constructed and the academic should seek for their autonomy. The university is responsible for education for autonomy, not only professional, but, also, respect for the choices and the reception, listening and the necessary referrals. It is undeniable that liberty and permissiveness, in some situations, favor the consumption of these substances. In addition, the parties and the university environment itself contribute to this situation, by becoming a place for propaganda and apology to drugs, be they licit or illicit and for the students to remain in the social group, they consume them.^{8,16}

The following testimonies highlight the meanings attributed to the use of drugs among students.

[...] what I understand by drugs is what kills you slowly, that addicts you, I am not addicted" (E1 Camila).

Conflicting situations, experienced by students during the course of their life, have enabled the process of re-signification of the drug. The suffering experienced by the father and the whole family, during childhood, and the divorce itself, enabled Luiza to give a new meaning to the "drug":

[...] Prisons. I saw many people get lost, people I loved if they destroyed not only my

father, people who were very close to me, I saw a great waste of talents, I see people lost inside themselves (E1 Luiza).

Unlike Luiza, Erica re-signified the drug after developing a job with a group of dependent boys. According to her, the contact with the boys made it possible to realize that the drug is not a joke, but something that destroys people's lives. The reality that she came across was, according to her,

[...] very heavy. [...] Very sad (E2 Érica).

Each and every person elaborates a set of meanings that lead their lives, their way of thinking, feeling and acting. The interpretation of signs or signifiers, in the production of meaning, is something subjective that relates to the reality experienced by the person. The interpretation of events is something that happens all the time, and, to produce them, people rely on a variety of elements present in their socio-cultural context.¹⁰

♦ The symbolism of non-drug

From the statements of university students, it was observed that alcohol is not characterized as a drug.

[...] I think the most normal thing in the world. Men, women drink, everyone drinks, normal (E1 Camila). [...] alcohol I always remember being with friends, celebrating, talking. As I do not exaggerate is happiness (E1 Carla). For me it's normal [...] you drink to amuse with friends, I think it's okay (E1 Juliana).

Unlike other drugs, alcohol is a psychoactive substance that is present in most people's lives. Its consumption is considered socially common, it is linked to celebrations and celebrations, and to socially valued issues such as pleasure, freedom and leisure¹⁷. It is also added, that, alcohol is legally marketed, suffers the same quality control of other foods and its trade, since it is taxed, is free, being little inspected. All this economic and social apparatus means that it is not titled as a drug.¹⁸

It was reiterated that alcohol is a drug used in most societies, including, the daily life of Brazilian university students, and most of them usually consume this substance at parties.¹⁹⁻²⁰ Their excessive use, among university students, is greater than among young people of the population in general²¹, since the university environment provides the experimentation of psychoactive substances and the subjects, that relate to a greater number of friends who consume drugs, are more likely to use alcohol or tobacco.

It was also perceived that, alcohol is seen by most participants as an escape from reality capable of inducing happiness.

[...] People use alcohol to try to have fun. You always have some excuse to use, either because you are happy and have to have fun, or because you are sad and need to be happy (Flavia).

It is believed that, this search for happiness is one of the requirements to live in contemporary society, marked by the media culture that has, for philosophy, the pursuit of beauty, appearance and happiness at all costs.²² Consuming everything that eliminates pain and brings happiness is the motto, even if it is at the expense of drug use and abuse in pursuit of happiness. In addition, women report the use of licit or illicit substances to deal with their problems.²³

It was also found that, alcohol is used for sociability:

[...] When I entered college everyone already drank and when I went to parties I was a bit out of place, I think it's bad for you to go out with a person who drinks a lot and you do not drink, you get totally displaced, so I got into the mood (E1 Camila).

Alcohol is an important precursor to the process of disinhibition and interaction among university students. This was one of the study evidences²⁴, whose objective was to evaluate the gender differences in the expectations of alcohol use. Expectations about alcohol use between men and women may influence them differently. It was also emphasized that, in the spaces of coexistence of the university, there is a great number of posters of university festivals, where, in addition to the festival itself, contents related to the exacerbated consumption of alcohol are present in them, which favors their acceptance and apology, and contributes to indirect advertising. The tendency is to accept abusive alcohol consumption as certain and natural, neglecting the possible damages arising from it.²⁵

Although studies have stated that drinking habits tend to change over time, demonstrating that young people classified as low risk may become problematic,²⁶ the testimonials below have shown a reduction in the consumption of these substances during the college years through use of self-control strategies.

[...] I'm graduating this year. We are already more mature, we do not want to go crazy. Just like the people who are at the beginning of college, people drink more quietly, drink to enjoy themselves, but not to make fun (E2 Camila).

In the early years of university, the use of alcoholic beverages intensifies due to the need for interaction and acceptance by peers. Over time, increasing responsibilities and collecting them in relation to the professional future make these young people significantly reduce the consumption of these substances.

Just as the meaning of the use of alcohol and other drugs changed during the course of university education, the meaning of the consumption of these substances, during graduation, also changed. This transformation takes place under the appropriation of cultural elements of one social group on the other, through the process of re-signification and the meaning of the use of these substances, seized upon entering the university, can change during the years of graduation. Culture is dynamic and allows the modification of behaviors that change as the interaction with different social groups occurs. Thus, the same signifier - drug ends up having another meaning.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

In interpreting the meanings attributed by the university students to the experience of alcohol and/or other drugs, it is reiterated that, the consumption of these substances is related to the webs constructed in the sociocultural environment of each of them. Alcohol was the most commonly consumed psychoactive substance.

The participants reported maturation, over the years, due to the increase in responsibilities and the collection of the professional future, favoring the reduction of drug consumption. It was also found that there was a distinction between "strong drug" and "weak drug", until then, not evidenced in other studies.

Although, for the common sense, the access to the university is related to the reach of the objectives, it is essential that the university fulfills its role, by creating effective policies to face the issues related to the use of drugs and respecting the autonomy of the university students.

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