



Gendered intoxication

A socio-historical analysis with gender lens

(focus on women who used drugs)

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Gender?

- Different from sex
- Sociocultural norms, identities and relations
- Gender intersects with other social categories (e.g. age, sex, class, sexual orientation, citizenship status...)

**Intersection of gender norms and drug stigma
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM HISTORY?**



Alcohol, the “western intoxicant”



Dionysios, God of Wine (Hellenistic mosaics)

The cult of Bacchanalia

- Hellenism the cultural cradle of the western civilization
- Wine and intoxication in the Mediterranean region
- Wine considered the cause of “carnival” behaviour in Bacchanalia
- Bacchanalian ecstasies – festivities to pay homage to Bacchus and Dionysus, associated with libertinism, banquet, feast and orgy

"When wine had inflamed their minds, and night and the mingling of males with females, youth with age, had destroyed every sentiment of modesty, all varieties of corruption first began to be practiced, since each one had at hand the pleasure answering to that to which his nature was more incline" (McGinty, 1978 in Roth, 1997, p.4)

Roth, M. (1997). "Carnival, Creativity and Sublimation of Drunkenness". *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 30(2), pp.1-18



"Bacchanal before a statue of Pan" , Nicolas Poussin (1631-1633)

Greco-Roman gender norms, Greco-Roman drinking double standards

MASCULINTY – Virility, decisive, virtuous, politically active, intoxication in the public sphere

- Drinking and seduction as prestigious activities in the Greek culture
- Heavy drinking and other hedonistic activities reinforced male socialization in the public sphere
- Resistance/ tolerance to alcohol as signs of masculine strength and superiority
- Male exclusive and intoxication and male-exclusive hedonistic privileges
- The emergence of taverns for male conviviality and hedonistic-driven activities
- “Romossexuality” – sexualized drinking and male homoeroticism (Ingleheart, 2015)



Greco-Roman gender norms, Greco-Roman drinking double standards

FEMININITY – Modesty, chastity, domesticity, subalternity, weakness, **sobriety**

- The belief that female drunkenness lead to “sexual abandonment”, unchastity and adultery
- Morally, female drinking was an unacceptable behaviour. It was considered to compromise all the “virtue” – a “vice” and “dishonour”
- Legally, Drinking wine by a woman was a crime (Roman law) – judge and punished by a judge
- At home, women who drank wine could be starved to death or killed by their husband
- Medically, compromised the reproductive function
- **But:**
 - The “matrons” and “prostitutes” “could” drink publicly
 - Women were allowed to drink lesser and sweetened wines



Drinking in taverns



"The empty glass" (1652) and "Two soldiers and a serving woman with a trumpeter" (1655), Pieter de Hooch

Drinking in taverns



"In the tavern", Jan Steen (1660)

Drinking women?



Tavern or Brothel Scene, Jan Sanders van Hemessen (1545-50)

Drinking women?



"Man offering a glass of wine to a woman" (1653) and "Woman drinking with soldier" (1658), Pieter de Hooch

Western European Colonialism and the “other” drugs - XIX and beginning of the XX century



Source: Intoxicating Spaces project, www.intoxicatingspaces.org

Problematic drug use among women

- **“Iatrogenic addiction”** (Aldrich, 1994) – married housewives (private sphere), unmarried domestics, teachers, actresses and especially *prostitutes* (social sphere)
- **Overmedication of women**
 - Eugenic and biased views on women’s health – “female troubles”, “nervousness”, “melancholy”, “hysteria”, dysmenorrhea and other gynaecological disorders
 - Laudanum (oral use) and later hypodermic injection of morphine
- **Female medical addicts seen as “Shameless and more skilful liars”** (Zieger, 2005)

- Aldrich, M.R. (1994). Historical Notes on Women Addicts. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 26:1, pp. 61-64
- Kandall S.R. (2010). Women and Drug Addiction: A Historical Perspective. *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 29:2, 117-126
- Vale Pires, C. (in press). “Shedding light on the forgotten history of women who used drugs in Lisbon in XXI and XX centuries”. In Gérmes, M, Hohne, S. & Klaus, L. (Eds.), *Drugs(counter)mapping – collective book project*.
- Zieger, S. (2005). "How Far am I Responsible?": Women and Morphinomania in Late-Nineteenth-Century Britain. *Victorian Studies*, 48(1), pp.59-81



Masculinity, the war and drugs

- “This explosion of morphine prescription and abuse coincided with the humiliating defeat of the French army in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 and subsequent anxieties concerning the loss of health, strength, and virility in French society” (Vieyra, 2015, pp.64)
- “Sedative Drugs such as alcohol, morphine, and opium helped to subdue the physical and emotional pain, relax, and alleviate the horrors of combat. Stimulants, such as cocaine and alcohol (but in small amounts), enabled men to keep going and get through everyday life at the front” (Kamiński, 2016, pp.15)
- “In the course of the First World War, governmental rations of alcohol and self-medicated drinking served all these time-honored functions (...)”
- Intoxicants (cocaine, morphine) as tools of war
- Alcohol and other drugs used to repress post-traumatic memories (Coelho, 1931)



- Coelho, A. (1931). *Ópio, Cocaína e Escravatura Branca*. Lisboa: Livraria Clássica Editora.
- Kamiński, Ł. (2016). *Shooting up. A history of drugs in warfare*, London: C. Hurst & Co.
- Vieyra, N. A. (2015). Illuminating Addiction: Morphinomania in Fin de Siècle Visual Culture. *Athanor XXXIII*, 33, pp. 63-69

Nonmedical uses of opioids and cocaine

- **Co-dependence**

- “In a social context in which men but not [Victorian] women were permitted to drink alcohol openly, men were often willing to share drugs with their wives, sweethearts, and mistresses” (Aldrich, 1994, pp. 62).

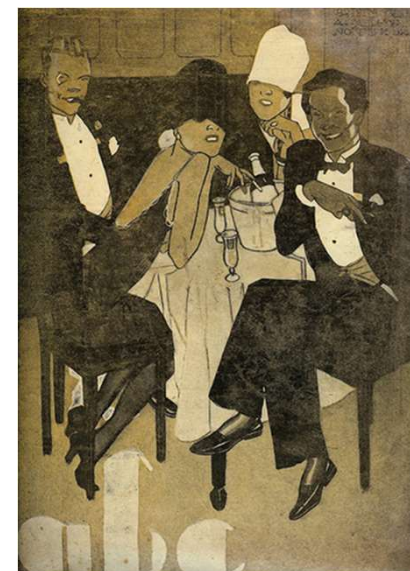
- **“Elegant Social Vices”** (Pernambuco & Botelho, 1924) **and male dominance in the hedonistic spaces**

- Nighttime drinking and drug-taking gentleman’s exclusive establishments (nightclubs, bordellos)

- **Heavy drug use as compromising feminine attributes and roles**

- **Drug use and “white slavery”**

- The belief that drug use compromised the chastity and moral respectability of women (and their families) – these “innocent women” were seduced by the “illusion of drugs” and led to “sexual deviance”, prostitution and “social outcast”



Magazine ABC, Jorge Barradas (1927)

- Aldrich, M.R. (1994). Historical Notes on Women Addicts. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 26:1, pp. 61-64

- Keire, M.L. (1998). Dope Fiends and Degenerates: The Gendering of Addiction in the Early Twentieth Century. *Journal of Social History*, 31(4), pp.809-822

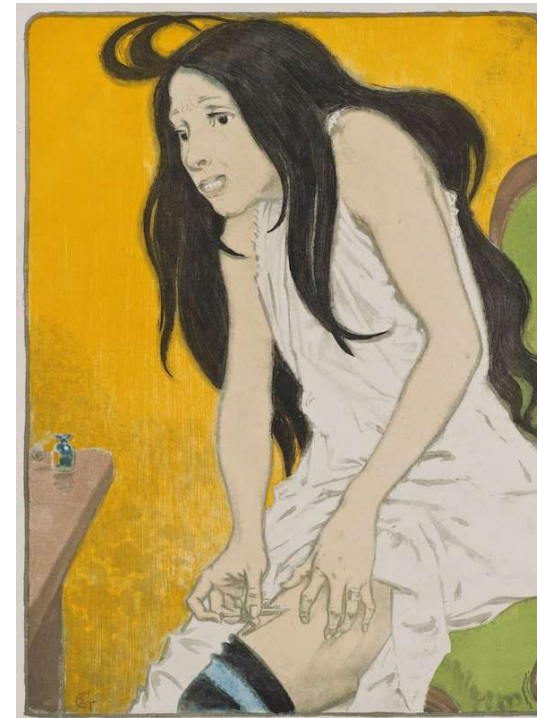
- Vale Pires, C. (in press). “Shedding light on the forgotten history of women who used drugs in Lisbon in XXI and XX centuries”. In Gérmes, M, Hohne, S. & Klaus, L. (Eds.), *Drugs(counter)mapping – collective book project*.

- Wilson, S. (2019) Morphinisé/morphinomane/morphinée : cultural representations of a French opioid crisis, 1870-1940. *Contemporary French Civilization*, 44 (4). 333-357.

“New feminine archetype” (Cembalest, 2014)



Paul Albert Besnard, *Morphinomanes ou Le Plumet* [Morphine Addicts or The Plume], 1887, etching, drypoint and aquatint.



Eugène Grasset, *La Morphinomane* [The Morphine Addict], 1897, color lithograph.

- Cembalest, R. (2014). The Eil-Looking women drug addicts of French Belle Epoque Art". *ARTNews*. Available online at: [Link](#)
- Halliwell, H. (2020). Absent presence: Imags of Morphine use(rs) in Frenahc visual culture c.1884-1914. *Intoxicating Spaces*, Online eminar Series: Season 2

“New feminine archetype”



Pieces of portuguese newspapers, 1926-1927 (*O Domingo Ilustrado* and *Diário de Lisboa*)

Vale Pires, C. (in press). "Shedding light on the forgotten history of women who used drugs in Lisbon in XXI and XX centuries". In Gérmes, M, Hohne, S. & Klaus, L. (Eds.), *Drugs(counter)mapping – collective book project*.

Gender norms & Drug stigma – moral panic towards prohibitionism

Feminization of drug-related harms, double alterity and moral panic

- WUD rapped between the moral (“vice”, “evil” “debauchery”) and the health (“sick”, “weak”, “fragile”)
- Pathologization (mental health, sexual and reproductive health)
- Sexualisation and sexual degradation of WUD stigmatization and social penalties of WUD in the public sphere (non-medical uses) and women who used drugs heavily (transgression of “sobriety” and “modesty” and a an attribute of traditions femininity, myth of the “bad mother”)
- Moralization and social degradation of WUD drugs as a politicized narrative against post-1st world war urban and social transformation and new social norms (progress vs. decline)



Adolfo Coelho, (1931) [Book]

Contemporary imageries of women who use drugs?

- Gender double standards
 - The same behaviour (drug use) evaluated having as reference gender (women seen as more deviant)
- Gender socialization and drug use initiation
 - The relation between women and “legal” (and more socially accepted) drugs
 - Gender relations and drug initiation and continuation
- Gender-specific risks
 - Experience(d) gender-based violence
 - Intersecting inequalities
- Social reaction to women who use drugs
 - Medical, media, visual representations of WUD



Gender matters in drug monitoring

- Drug use initiation
- Motivations
- Primary drug used (only illicit?)
- Drug use patterns
- Drug pathways
- Contexts of drug
- Gender specific risks (e.g. experience(d) gender-based violence)
- Access to services?

Sex-disaggregated data are basic (but not enough)
Definition of gender indicators?



"A nineteenth-century lithograph showing a man and a woman drinking and smoking in a tavern", Wellcome Collection, available at:

www.intoxicatingspaces.org



Thank you!

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