

In George Orwell's classic novel *1984*, a powerful government maintains thought control over its citizens in part by revising the nation's entire language. In the real modern world of U.S. drug prohibition, the manipulation of terminology has likewise influenced our perception of drug problems.

"CRACK BABIES"

During the 1980s, crack use among women were directly linked to disabled children, based on media images and hospital data saying that birth defects were caused by mothers smoking crack cocaine. These unhealthy newborns quickly became known as "crack babies". But when these children developed normal mental and learning capabilities, follow-up studies were done and revealed that the original studies omitted various factors in the mothers' lives - poverty; poor health care; malnutrition; exposure to physical abuse; use of alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs. Thus, "crack baby" is the terminology of a false interpretation. Yet, because of the mass scare put on by public reports and studies during the 1980s, punishment for crack use has been the focus of attention while improvements in welfare, health care, and treatment are typically ignored.

"DRUG EPIDEMICS"

"Crack babies" and the "crack epidemic" were the U.S. government's area of focus for its drug war during the 1980s, similar to alcohol in the 1920s, marijuana in the 30s, LSD in the 60s, heroin and powder cocaine in the 70s, and ecstasy today. Each period in recent American history has faced hysteria over a "new killer drug," although the actual damage seldom matches the level of attention being fueled. Nicotine, for example, has been the number one leading cause of death in Americans for years. Diseases and cancers related to cigarette smoking (including second-hand smoking) kill over 400,000 Americans each year. That's more than AIDS, traffic accidents, gun violence, every U.S. war in history, or all legal and illegal drugs combined has ever done within any given year. Yet, there has been no hysteria over the "tobacco epidemic" because the term "epidemic" has never been applied to the appropriate substances.

"NEW KILLER DRUGS"

Another characteristic of drug epidemic scares is that our country and children are faced with a new deadly substance. Again, the words are misleading. Often, the drug in question is not "new," and has even been used by humans for many decades. For example, heroin was America's most effective (and most addictive) legal

painkiller for most of the 20th century. Cocaine was a popular cure-all for everything from headaches to drowsiness, and was an ingredient in Coca-Cola. Ecstasy was first synthesized in 1912 and applied to marriage counseling and psychotherapy sessions during the late 1970s and early 80s. Marijuana use dates back to the world's oldest civilizations. In fact, our Founding Fathers supported the cultivation of the cannabis plant's hemp fibers for numerous industrial purposes, including the manufacturing of paper. Calling these substances "new killer drugs" suppresses all of this info, and makes everyone ignorant of the world history behind drug use.

"CLUB DRUGS"

Since the late 1990s, a concern has risen over the illicit use of various stimulants, hallucinogens, and sedatives at all-night dance parties known as raves. What this concern fails to acknowledge, however, is that every "club drug" has been around for decades and is still primarily used for purposes other than dancing. The majority of users of ecstasy, GHB, LSD, speed, or other "club drugs" do not go to raves or clubs. Furthermore, the most widely used and abused party drug - alcohol - is forgotten amidst this concern, even though alcohol is responsible for more overdoses, sexual assaults, and acts of violence than all of the "club drugs" combined. And the attempt to ban a growing dance culture due to the link between ecstasy and raves is unrealistic of the historical relationship between drugs and music. Jazz, reggae, rock, hip hop, disco, punk, and practically every other music genre has had drug use intertwined into its culture. So the application of the term "club drugs" ignores the safety of most users who aren't ravers, dismisses the problem of alcohol abuse at clubs and college parties, and exaggerates the dangers of a music culture that brings nothing new to history in terms of recreational drug use.

"DATE-RAPE DRUGS"

In recent years, GHB, Rohypnol, ecstasy, and a number of other drugs have been cited as being commonly used in cases of "date-rape". The emphasis behind this is that people don't typically use these drugs for any other purpose, which is obviously false. The majority of people taking these drugs are not rapists or rape victims, but are consensual recreational users. Of the small percentage who do abuse drugs in rape assistance, promoting the term "date-rape drugs" does little to protect potential victims. By applying the action "date-rape" to the drug instead of to the rapist, the blame is lifted off the human culprit and placed on a chemical, shifting the attention away from the real danger. And like "club drugs", use of the term "date-rape drugs"

dismisses the one substance most responsible for the abuse at hand - alcohol. The warnings against GHB, Rohypnol, ecstasy, and other "date-rape drugs" never include the legal drug alcohol, even though it's involved in over 90% of all rape and sexual assault cases.

"SEXTASY"

Many users of ecstasy (MDMA) experience difficulty achieving erections. As a result, some of them have tried taking Viagra at the same time to enable sexual performance while on ecstasy. This drug combination has been dubbed as "sextasy" by doctors and the media. Their population of focus has been ravers and clubbers who apparently take "sextasy" to achieve all-night marathons of sex and dancing. But contrary to popular belief, the typical environment within a rave or club is not like a sex orgy. While illicit drug use, kissing, and making out are common, the assumption that intercourse and oral sex also take place at these "wild parties" is simply a myth. Such an assumption reflects the other misguided perception that ecstasy and other "club drugs" are only used by clubbers and ravers. Thus, the health of the majority of users who don't attend these parties isn't addressed. Likewise, the majority of "sextasy" users - those doing it at home where private, intimate sex can take place more easily - are not mentioned in warnings against the dangers of combining ecstasy with Viagra.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Drug Policy Alliance

America's largest non-profit organization dedicated to ending the War on Drugs and building more effective and compassionate laws to reduce substance abuse.

www.drugpolicy.org

Harm Reduction Coalition & Training Institute

Bicoastal (Oakland, CA & New York-based) group offering professional trainings, direct services, and publications to help reduce drug-related harms in various communities - sex workers, prisoners, GLBT, youths, the homeless, etc.

www.harmreduction.org

DanceSafe

National coalition of drug education organizations serving the rave & nightclub scene, Entirely volunteer-based.

www.dancesafe.org

The Vaults of Erowid

Website featuring extensive facts, articles, and links on hundreds of known substances (legal & illegal).

www.erowid.org

WAR ON DRUGS

A LANGUAGE OF MISINFORMATION

- "Crack babies"
- "Drug epidemics"
- "New killer drugs"
- "Club drugs"
- "Date-rape drugs"
- "Sextasy"

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