

# Acknowledgements

The European Society for Social Drug Research (ESSD) was established in 1990. The principal aim of the ESSD is to promote social science approaches to drug research, with special reference to the situation in Europe. Organising annual conferences and producing an annual book is a core activity of ESSD. For this year's book, a number of participants who presented their research at the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual conference in Aarhus, Denmark in September 2011 were invited to submit a chapter. However, this invitation was not restricted to the participants of the conference: other ESSD members were also welcome to contribute. After a first review of outlines by the editorial board, submitted papers were peer reviewed by distinguished scholars. This book contains only the chapters that were approved during this process.

The editors thank the authors for their diverse and original contributions to this book, their responses to the editors' and peer reviewers' queries and comments, and their adherence to deadlines. We also gratefully thank the peer reviewers for their time: Vibeke Asmussen Frank, Joost Breeksema, Patricia Erickson, Teodora Groshkova, Marie Louise Jansen, Levente Móró, Ton Nabben, Aileen O'Gorman, Ed Pennings, Alastair Roy, Alfred Uhl, Tina VanHavere, Jenni Ward and Heike Zurhold. Karin de Nijs from the Bongor Institute of Criminology, University of Amsterdam deserves special thanks for her work on this book.

Finally, the editors gratefully acknowledge the support of the **Council of Europe Pompidou Group**, in particular our 'patron' Françoise Zahn.



# 1

## A kaleidoscope of meanings: An introduction

Dirk J. Korf

*The blanket term 'drugs' is shorthand for an assortment of psychoactive, intoxicating substances. If we view these in terms of their origin, we can distinguish natural or vegetable substances (like marijuana), chemical transformations of vegetable substances (like cocaine) and synthetic substances (like MDMA or ecstasy). If we view them by their pharmacological action, we can distinguish between those with sedative or anaesthetic effects (like opiates), stimulant effects (like cocaine and amphetamine) and psychedelic effects (like LSD). Judging 'drugs' from a legal point of view, some national drug laws make no distinctions whatsoever, but most countries classify them into two categories (such as 'soft' and 'hard') or even more (class A, B, C). From a sociological point of view, distinctions are made in terms of how particular drugs are used and what groups of people use them, such as 'problem users' who inject heroin or smoke crack (a variant of cocaine) versus 'recreational users' who smoke cannabis, sniff cocaine or swallow ecstasy – especially if they do so less frequently than problem users. There are substances that are labelled in terms of their preferred setting of consumption, such as 'party drugs', or the place where retail trading tends to occur, such as 'street drugs'. And I could go on and on.*

*Briefly, then, drugs are associated with a wide diversity of perceptions and emotions. What policymakers label as hazardous may be valued by users as exciting. One of the major theoretical and empirical challenges in social drug research is to capture and understand the variety of meanings attached to taking drugs and to being intoxicated. The purpose of this book is to further those research efforts.*

## 1 Variations in drug, set and setting

In his classic study *Drug, Set, and Setting*, Norman Zinberg (1984) argued that drug use can only be understood in terms of the interaction between the substance (including the ways, doses and frequency in which it is taken), the person who takes it (the set) and the social and physical environment in which use takes place (the setting). For Zinberg, the setting was a strong influence on how drug users perceive and experience the effects of a particular drug.

Different drugs are associated with different highs. Yet even the use of the same drug can have divergent meanings. At the same time that many sociologists have begun interpreting cannabis use in the general population in terms of normalisation, whereby the drug has largely been stripped of its subcultural connotations, the psychological literature predominantly designates the use of marijuana and hashish in early adolescence as an indicator and predictor of a range of psychological and social problems (Muscat et al., 2009).

In terms of set, the sniffing of cocaine has long been associated with socially successful, prosperous individuals and luxury self-indulgence, whilst injecting the same substance dissolved in water or smoking it in a crack pipe are sure signs of social marginalisation (cf. Decorte & Slock, 2005). In other words, cocaine may symbolise either affluence or poverty and social exclusion. One more example of shifting meanings: most people who take ecstasy in private settings are mainly seeking personal, inner-psychological experiences, whereas the euphoria they value when they take it in nightlife settings is said to foster social contacts, interpersonal emotions and endless energy (Nabben, 2010).

## 2 Temporal variations

The meaning of 'high' changes over the course of time. We see shifts in the popularity of substances and appreciation of their effects among users. Drugs that were long considered medicines may be transformed into 'illegal drugs'. Discourses on drug policy may shift from a focus on problems and criminalisation to a preference for harm reduction and normalisation, or vice versa. The meaning of 'high' may also change within the same individual over time. Heroin users starting out in their drug careers might derive special pleasure from the characteristic rush, but later become more obsessed with their craving and with avoiding withdrawal symptoms. And whereas the preference of young cannabis users may be for the 'strongest high' (high dose, deep inhalation, potent weed), desires in more veteran users seem to shift to the 'consistent high' (lower dose, milder cannabis, shallower inhalation or smaller amounts of potent varieties)

and, for those still smoking at an older age, to a 'steady quantity', whereby cannabis is smoked mostly alone at home and users are less inclined to adjust inhalation depth to cannabis potency (Korf et al., 2007).

### **3 Culturally defined highs**

The compelling and theoretically well-wrought essay by the Austrian psychiatrist *Alfred Springer* is strongly informed by cultural studies on drug use and drug users. Scholars in that tradition, such as Jock Young (1971), have devoted much attention to the experiences of drugs users and the meaning they attach to 'being high'. The central proposition is that culture provides a thematic framework that imbues the high state with cultural meaning. Under the physical influence of a drug, users feel that 'something has happened', and they supply their own content to that felt change (since the objective chemical basis of that change is open to cultural interpretations). In other words, the physiological effects of psychoactive substances have to be culturally defined to make them socially meaningful (cf. Willis, 1993). From this perspective, drugs are taken not so much for their pharmacological action but because of their sociocultural meaning. Springer in no way denies the diverse pharmacological properties of drugs, and he acknowledges that culturally defined highs cannot be induced by all classes of drugs in comparable intensity or quality. Nonetheless, he believes the choice of drug is largely culturally determined: 'Individuals use different drugs if that use seems appropriate in terms of the symbolic attribution of meaning.' Individuals, groups or 'scenes' differ from one another not just in the symbolic meanings that certain drugs have for them: those meanings may also vary for those same individuals depending on social, physical or temporal contexts. Conversely, the choice to take one psychoactive substance and not another is also influenced by those contexts.

Within cultural symbolism, highs are linked to culture-driven themes. Without pretending to be exhaustive, Springer identifies several basic themes and expands on them further. One of these is sensual drugs and the pleasurable high related to the search for pleasure, as reflected in the use of opium and hashish in 19th-century artistic circles, the marijuana-smoking 1940s jazz musicians in Howard Becker's classic study (1953), and the more recent work of Mike Jay (2010). Springer also distinguishes other types of highs, including the creative high, which fosters and enhances creativity; the social high, which is essential for the composition and perpetuation of social groups and subcultures such as beatniks, hippies and ravers; and the utopiate high, which includes both the high that induces personality change (as when psychedelic drugs are used by so-called psychonauts) and the high that facilitates (or even induces) social and cultural change.

Springer's analysis attests to his commanding knowledge of a wide variety of 'high cultures', both historical and contemporary. But that does not entirely eliminate the lurking danger of a certain exoticism (as is more generally the case in cultural studies). Could it be entirely accidental, for instance, that many of Springer's examples involve psychedelic or hallucinogenic drugs?

#### 4 Drugs in the language of artists and drug researchers

The study by *Fruzsina Iszaj, Bea Ehmann and Zsolt Demetrovics* on the effects of psychedelic substances on artistic creation serves as a fine theory-driven empirical elaboration of Springer's creative high. These Hungarian researchers analyse the relationship between the use of psychedelic substances and the effect of those substances on the language of creative artists. Their analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with artists: a test group of psychedelic substance users (who had used LSD and/or magic mushrooms in the past year) and a control group of artists who had never taken any psychoactive drugs. Employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the researchers examine differences in language behaviour between the two groups. Three notions deriving from the scholarly literature are central to their analysis: creativity, consciousness and spirituality. In short, the creative act and the altered state of consciousness are understood as being similar in several senses. Both provide easier access to the unconscious and to intuition (Sessa, 2008); psychedelic substances such as LSD can be promising tools to understand consciousness (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1979); and the theory of the link between psychedelics and spirituality is rooted in ancient traditions, such as the ceremonial use of ayahuasca (Adelaars, Rättsch & Müller-Ebeling, 2006). With regard to creativity, some of the artists who used psychedelics said they were unable to work under their influence because of the strong alteration of perception. Most, however, believed that psychedelics helped improve inspiration. Artists who had created art under the influence of psychedelics argued that those artworks were distinctly different from the ones created in a normal state of consciousness. The influence of psychedelics on consciousness found expression in the interviews reported here, in that most artists who used psychedelics spoke of improved thinking skills and of a keener ability to understand interrelationships (how things are connected). Most also believed that psychedelics helped them develop their view of spirituality. They reported a special kind of consciousness that induced feelings of calmness and completeness, and they felt unity with the object of art they were working on.

In their quantitative linguistic analysis, the researchers compared the two groups of artists in terms of the frequency in which they used words in the categories of creativity (e.g. 'original', 'autonomous', 'metaphor', 'unexpected'), conscious-

ness (e.g. 'dream', 'automatically', 'awake', 'ego'), and spirituality (e.g. 'energy', 'believe', 'true', 'God'). The results showed that artists in the psychedelic users' test group talked about topics in the three categories significantly more than those in the control group.

How do we interpret these empirical findings? The authors themselves are rather cautious: artists believe that the act of creation may be a state of high in which they feel they are in another dimension. The authors emphasise that their results do not suggest that LSD and magic mushroom users are indeed more creative, conscious or spiritual than non-users. This may be a bit too modest of the researchers. Certainly, in their decision to study this exceptional group of people (and perhaps even more so in their success in recruiting them), and also in their skilful linking of social science and linguistic analysis methods, we cannot accuse these researchers of a lack of creativity.

Language is also the central focus of the chapter by *Antonis Katsouros and Maria Eirini Papadouka*. Their research targets not artists, however, but drug researchers. And rather than analysing interviews, they subject the writings of the drug researchers to content analysis. Their chapter explores five different drug-related approaches, identifiable in the ways researchers set out their ideas and present their findings in their various studies on issues related to drug use. More specifically, Katsouros and Papadouka analyse the ways in which the drug researchers portray the drug users' feeling of pleasure (the high) and how they bring this portrayal to bear as a discursive construction in support of the researchers' viewpoints. The crux of Katsouros and Papadouka's analysis lies in how researchers represent significant elements of their own particular perspectives and connotations of drugs, drug users and intoxication as they report their research findings on drug use and its effects on users (the high). Their theoretical postulate is that the high is just as socially constructed as the researchers' identities. They have intentionally chosen to analyse a very wide range of publications to ensure maximum diversity in the researchers' language usage. They refrain from formulating any precise definition of the notion of 'high' in advance, employing instead the commonly used meaning of 'a feeling of pleasure after drug use'. This is a reasonable and theoretically justifiable choice in the interest of an impartial content analysis.

In sum, the Greek researchers found that the notion of 'high' was portrayed with different connotations in different publications. Although no clear definition was provided by any of the writers discussed, the socially constructed interpretations of the meaning of high could be inferred in their analyses. Hence, if the pleasurable feeling from taking drugs was expressed in language and confirmed in participants' words and actions, the high was variously represented in the writings as the primary motivation for drug use, as a means of socially

connecting among students, as a way of preserving a drug dealer's dual role (as both user and seller), as a personal interpretation of the feeling of pleasure, and as the principal medium for feeling one belongs to a particular social group. Significant in this series of meanings are the parallels with Springer's pleasurable high and social high.

Given Katsouros and Papadouka's deliberate choice for the broadest possible range of publications, it is no real wonder that they discovered wide variations in the discursive construction of drug use. But that does not make their contribution less relevant to this book. Much to the contrary, their findings confront the readers with the fact that their own, often implicit, use of language use will not easily conceal their own standpoints in the discourse on drugs.

## 5 Healing highs

In the chapters by *Cameron Adams* and by *Robert Telztrow and Oliver G. Bosch*, the central focus in our search for the meaning of high shifts to the issue of health. To some degree, we now find ourselves in the realm of Springer's 'high that induces personality change' (the first variant of his utopiate high). Major parts of both these chapters are based on internet data, and a common strand is a focus in their analyses of the ways that drug users verbally communicate about drugs, particularly in relation to health. That said, there are also manifest differences between the chapters in terms of theoretical perspectives, types of drugs studied, methodology and analysis.

The young anthropologist Adams explores how psychedelic drugs function as medicine, and how they may heal in that context. Methodologically, Adams shows he is a 'child of his time'. To be sure, he situates his method in the ethnographic tradition, but he performs his participant observation in virtual communities. He originates from the United States and works in the United Kingdom, but that is basically of little importance for his research activities, as he can keep tabs on communications in virtual communities from anywhere he likes. He focuses on a specific group of drug users, the psychonauts, whom he describes as 'individuals who use psychedelics'. In their circles, the term 'medicine' is frequently used to refer to psychedelic substances, and 'healing' is used for the experience of taking them. At the theoretical level, Adams draws inspiration from salutogenic theory (Antonovsky, 1979), an approach that explores the causes of good health, rather than the causes of disease. He prefers to speak of 'illness' (social and subjective) rather than 'disease' (objective and biological).

For his chapter in the present volume, Adams has confined himself to posts with reference to 'medicine' and 'healing' from one web forum and to a small, quali-

tative survey that he disseminated on the internet. These two methods complement each other superbly through triangulation. On the web forum, the term 'medicine' is essentially a variant, or subset, of the noun 'psychedelic' (which usually refers here to plant-based psychedelic substances). The use of the term 'medicine' appears mainly to symbolise the critical stance of the participants towards modern society. When queried directly in Adams's survey, however, they describe 'medicine' as a substance that improves mental and/or physical health or wellbeing and provides a means for personal growth. In other words, in the forum posts, the label 'medicine' for psychedelic drugs appears to mainly carry the meaning of Springer's 'social high', whereas in Adams's survey it primarily reflects Springer's 'high that induces personal change'. This second meaning of high is more unambiguously manifest in the use of the term 'healing'. Both on the forum and in the survey, 'healing' refers to spiritual or medical relief. Yet this does not mean just taking psychedelics without further ado: for healing to persist, the whole process is to include praying, contemplation or meditation. Throughout his chapter and in drawing this conclusion, Adams adopts quite a clear position in the drugs discourse: 'This is conscious, active healing as opposed to the passive healing of pharmaceuticals.'

Teltzrow and Bosch assume a less outspoken stance. They position themselves more as objective observers, but they are nonetheless selective in their targets. Like Adams, they focus on a selected group of users of a specific type of drugs, the so-called ecstatic anaesthetics ketamine and GHB. Although both of these substances have acquired a reputation as 'club drugs' in recent years, their histories began in the early 1960s ('the golden age of psychopharmacology'). Highly regarded in medical circles for their unique anaesthetic effects, they also held appeal for psychiatric practice, especially as psycholytic agents, but that drastically changed once the now classic tranquillisers and antidepressants appeared on the scene. Recently, though, as Teltzrow and Bosch conclude from their review of the biomedical literature, psychiatry has put GHB and ketamine back into the medical spotlight, launching them as new candidates in the search for novel pharmacological treatment strategies for major depressive disorders.

Meanwhile, the drugs were making their advance across European rave and club scenes (EMCDDA, 2008 and 2011; Measham & Moore, 2009; Nabben, 2010). Here, as well as in private settings, they are used in a variety of ways and with a variety of meanings. Teltzrow and Bosch focus on self-experimentation and self-medication, analysing user reports on a web forum and ascertaining that, in the reports they selected, ketamine induces 'mental travelling' and abstract self-exploration of 'darker' dimensions of consciousness. GHB, in contrast, emerges from the analysis as a drug mainly taken for its mood-lifting qualities. The effects Teltzrow and Bosch encountered characterise

GHB in their view as a hedonistic drug rather than one used for mind expansion. Despite these differences, they also discovered that some ketamine and GHB users shared similar aims, claiming to take the drugs for anxiety, depression and sleep disturbances. This finding draws a link to the discipline of medicine: 'Clinicians and recreational users have comparable motivations concerning the relief of individual suffering.' Teltzrow and Bosch argue that this opens promising avenues for research on the curative effects of ketamine and GHB – not in the natural setting of illicit use, as Adams would prefer, but in clinics.

## 6 Functional highs in the world of paid sex

Sex and drugs are a virtually inseparable duo in the media, not least in the realm of music. The sensual and eroticising effects of drugs are often glorified. The media labelling of MDMA as a 'love drug' and as 'ecstasy' almost certainly gave a boost to its explosive spread in the late 1980s and 1990s. There are also darker sides to the combination of sex and drugs, and we encounter them not only in the popular media, but in compelling research studies like *Women on Heroin* (Rosenbaum, 1985) and *Fast Lives* (Sterk, 1999), the latter about women who use crack cocaine. Although neither of these US studies is specifically about prostitution, it is clear that these very drugs, heroin and crack, also play prominent roles in the world of sex workers on European city streets.

The Belgian criminologist *Tom Decorte* reports his findings from a large survey of 500 female sex workers – the term he explicitly chooses in preference to 'prostitutes' – who were recruited in five Belgian cities. He has refined his quantitative data through qualitative, in-depth interviews. Impressive in this study is not only the large number of respondents, but also the broad diversity in terms of sex work sectors (street, window, bar, club, private and escort). Considerable differences emerge between these sectors in terms of substance use. Heroin, for instance, is used almost only in the street sector, and the women working there are also the most likely to take benzodiazepines. In bars and clubs, alcohol and cocaine consumption is higher than in any other sector. Drinking alcohol here is 'part of the job' and encouraging customers to buy it is often a more important source of income than the sexual services. Cocaine use in this sector is a function of alcohol use: the effects of alcohol are less noticeable under the influence of cocaine, so the women can carry on working. Not only do patterns of alcohol and drug use differ considerably from one sector to the other, they may also vary for workers in the same sector. Decorte also found bars where alcohol consumption by sex workers was lower and where managers accepted workers that do not drink.

However intriguing such differences between settings might be, Decorte also discerns a common denominator: that substance use often has functional meanings among sex workers. Many women use drugs and alcohol to facilitate their sex work, as the substances may numb feelings or may reduce psychological stress by aiding cognitive avoidance. Some women also engage in sex work to pay for drugs. A reciprocal relationship may also exist: taking drugs to facilitate sex work, and working to facilitate drug use. The use of substances may also make it easier to approach potential clients, may boost self-confidence and self-advocacy vis-à-vis clients, or may counteract boredom while waiting for them (cf. Zurhold, 2005). Yet although drug and alcohol use can be functional in several facets of sex work, it can also increase risks, in particular with respect to unsafe sex and unsafe drug use. Even here, Decorte concludes, practicing risky behaviour is likely to be functional for some women. Drug consumption and sex work should therefore not simply be interpreted as unproductive ways of dealing with reality. They may also be productive ways to cope with it.

The study by the British criminologist *Phillip Bean* may be less impressive in terms of numbers than Decorte's study – he interviewed 70 sex workers (7 of them male) in one city, Nottingham – but that does not make his contribution any less relevant and compelling. Bean focuses on street prostitution only, and that no doubt explains the prominent place that heroin and crack occupy in his study. We again encounter here several aspects of the 'functional high' that Decorte has brought into focus. Bean, for his part, contextualises these aspects more strongly in the broader social and economic conditions of Nottingham (an industrial city with considerable poverty, an unusually high crime rate and a long tradition of street prostitution). One intriguing finding is that most of his interviewees had simply drifted into prostitution – often encouraged by their social environment, including friends and family. The same applied to their drug use. Just as in many other studies that have sought causal relationships between drug use and crime, Bean could uncover no generally valid, uniform sequentiality. He distinguishes three basic patterns: drug use began before prostitution; prostitution began before drug use; and drugs and prostitution began together.

Bean has a sharp eye for the social meanings of drugs and drug use in the world of street sex workers. They often use their work to support significant others (partners, family members), in ways ranging from financial assistance to the provision of drugs. Most street workers have a boyfriend, whose role may be emotionally supportive in one relationship and controlling and violent in another. A final observation involves the economic role of street sex workers in the drugs market. Bean positions them not only as drugs customers, but also as active individuals who help supply drugs to their clients or act as agents for the dealers.

## 7 Changes over the life course

An association between drug use and homelessness has long since been established in the international literature, and there are striking similarities in the risk factors for homelessness and for substance use. This is how *Paula Mayock and Mary-Louise Corr* begin their chapter on homeless young people. But what does this say about the meaning of drug use in the lives of the people involved? In a qualitative, longitudinal study, the researchers have monitored developments in the lives of homeless young people in Dublin. In a population like this, one would expect an extreme rate of sample attrition, so it is a remarkable feat that the researchers have succeeded in tracking down and interviewing 28 of the original 40 respondents.

At the time of the first interview, a majority of respondents had reported regular, and sometimes high exposure to drug use and to the corresponding settings. Drug use was sometimes implicated in the process of becoming homeless. Yet the researchers found considerable diversity over time in the relationship between the drug use trajectories of the homeless young people and the meanings they attached to drug use. Five years after the first interview, all those who had found their way out of homelessness reported that their drug use had generally receded. Although engagement with drug treatment had been a significant enabler for some, Mayock and Corr found that it was the process (or at least the prospect) of moving out of homelessness to stable housing that really enabled them to address their heavy or problematic drug consumption. All those who remained homeless reported that they continued to use drugs at a level they perceived as problematic: many now injected drugs. They typically reported increased drug consumption and progressively more chaotic lifestyles. Over time, the homeless experience had altered their perceptions of the role and function of drug use, paving the way for a readier acceptance of the use of 'hard' drugs.

The influence of housing situations on the meaning of 'high' also comes sharply into focus in the study by *Charlotte N. E. Tompkins and Nat M. J. Wright*. They contacted 30 male drug users who had been released from English prison sentences, interviewing them in depth to find out how their drug-using practices had evolved during their time in prison and to identify what influenced and motivated their drug use and why. Whilst in prison, the men had felt overwhelmingly discouraged from using stimulant drugs such as amphetamine and crack. They had felt unable to fully enjoy the effects in that confined, restrictive setting. Experiencing the effects of depressants like heroin, on the other hand, had helped them to relax in prison. These substances were perceived to help prison sentences, and time in general, to pass more quickly, to palliate the boredom of prison life, to aid in sleeping and to provide a 'head change' – a psychological escape from the reality of being incarcerated. There were also social

motives to continue using drugs in prison, heroin in particular. Men were often reunited in this setting with associates with whom they had committed crimes or taken drugs in the past: by taking drugs together again, they reaffirmed these acquaintances and conformed to the features of them. Moreover, taking drugs in prison implicitly helped the men to 'fit in with' and feel accepted by their peers, to make new friends and to bond with cellmates. Although drugs could unite prisoners, however, that was often at a superficial level, as the men also spoke of many drug-related social problems in prison.

Though drug use largely continued during the prison terms, motivations and meanings often changed in that setting. The men in this study reduced their drug use in prison compared with their use in the community. Some reasons for that were the inability to secure regular supplies, the wider availability of prison-prescribed substitute medication, and the prohibitive costs of procuring drugs from other prisoners. But the men also reported a sense of drug use fatigue and a desire to change their future lives.

## **8 The criminal high**

Innumerable studies in the past few decades have explored the relationship between drugs and criminality – the drugs-crime nexus. In the final research paper of this volume, *Gary R. Potter and Aleksandra Osiniagova* re-examine the key themes in empirical research and theory development on this relationship. Two issues emerge as central to that discourse. The first concerns the sequentiality of the relationship: is it drugs first, crime first or both simultaneously? (This is a comparable issue to that raised by Bean in this volume about the relationship between drugs and prostitution.) The second focus of debate involves explanatory mechanisms: how one behaviour leads to the other. Such mechanisms tend to fit into the tripartite framework of psychopharmacological, economic and systemic links (Goldstein, 1985). In brief, psychopharmacological explanations are those in which the biochemical effects of a drug account for crime. Economic explanations include the economic-compulsive model, accounting for acquisitive crimes by those drug users who cannot otherwise afford their habit. Systemic explanations involve crimes related to drug dealing, which are seen as intrinsic to profitable, illegal markets.

Potter and Osiniagova find some empirical validity for each of these three models. The study they report on here consisted of qualitative interviews with 20 male self-defined recovering addicts who had engaged with drug treatment. What makes Potter and Osiniagova's study so exceptional is their finding that many of the men they interviewed talked about their involvement in crime in the same language in which they talked about their drug use: some reported

getting 'high' from crime, or even becoming 'addicted' to it. This forms the starting point for an exciting theoretical inquiry by the authors, interwoven with lively interview quotes, on the meaning of high in both drug use and crime.

## **9 Conclusions and policy implications**

The central theme of this book is the meaning of high. The authors address this theme from different angles, using different methods and studying different groups from without or within. The result is a kaleidoscopic picture. No single generic meaning of high emerges, but a whole range of meanings come under scrutiny. One reason for this is the diversity in professional perspectives: sociologists view social reality differently from psychologists, and researchers with medical backgrounds have different insights than anthropologists. This manifests itself not least in the chapter by Katsouros and Papadouka. Yet various authors also train their attention on the wide variation in drugs, sets and settings and the interplay between these three factors. The importance of that interplay is an explicit topic in several chapters. Teltzrow and Bosch explore differences between the use of GHB and ketamine in clinical settings and the use of them by psychonauts at home or out in nature; Decorte examines variations in the functionality of substance use between different sex work settings; and Tompkins and Wright show how the meaning of substance use is influenced by the physical and social contexts of prisons.

At the same time, many affinities between authors become apparent. The social high discussed by Springer is also a topic in other chapters – albeit in the very different forms and contents perceived by prisoners, street sex workers or psychonauts. Alongside the social high, we also encounter the pleasurable high in Katsouros and Papadouka's analysis and the 'high that induces personality change' in Adams' study. The temporal changes in the meaning of high as described by Springer at collective levels – as in the different ways of appreciating highs within particular drug-using groups or the contrasting policy responses over time – also manifest themselves at individual levels amongst Bean's street sex workers and Mayock and Corr's homeless youth.

All the authors of this volume help to build a better understanding of the meaning of high, but whereas some (such as Teltzrow and Bosch) are mainly interested in fundamental biomedical questions or in contributing to theory development in the social sciences (such as Potter and Osiniagova), others (such as Adams or Mayock and Corr) want to give a voice to particular groups of drug users. These varying perspectives also echo, some more explicitly than others, differing viewpoints on the relationship between research and policy.

Whilst some authors say little or nothing about the policy consequences of their research, others do. Both Bean and Decorte criticise policies that do not differentiate between types of prostitution or that assume a unilateral experience of the links between substance use and sex work. Mayock and Corr urge the Housing First approach in policy with respect to homeless young people who use drugs (cf. Pleace, 2011; Tsemberis, 2010). Tompkins and Wright argue that an increased availability of tailored psychosocial interventions to address prisoners' desires for a 'head change' could actually optimise prisons as settings for drug use recovery, and could diminish prisoners' motivations to take drugs whilst in prison. The most fundamental policy critique comes from Springer. He explicitly warns against the tendency towards increasing repression and prohibition and makes an ardent appeal for a balanced system of norms and controls. He argues that drug policy should above all permit room for informal social control in the form of self-regulation and should acknowledge favourable effects of drug use, while still trying to curb the destructive effects.

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