

# Book review on historical and theoretical perspectives on drug use and addiction

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



In their book, *The American Drug Scene: An Anthology*, published in 2009, writers J. Inciardi and K. McElrath discuss the question of drug use and abuse in the United States. They discuss, among other things, the evolution of drug taking in America, why people take drugs, types of drug users, sociological theory of addiction, social impact of drugs and the war on drugs.

They contend that drug users fall in four different categories - experimenters, social-recreational users, involved users and dysfunctional users - and that the drug problem, in the context that we know it today, is relatively new - about 200 years old - compared to the history of drug use, which spans thousands of years (p. 4). Abuse of drugs, they say, can be attributed to a number of factors: " advances in chemistry and medicine, the discovery of new intoxicants, and a variety of social and political changes all of which make drugs readily available" (ibid). In America, abuse of drugs has been tied a great part to the introduction of over-the-counter patent medicines during the early 1700s (p. 15) and as the patents grew so did the number of drugs available for abuse.

Patterns of drug abuse in America, however, have continually shifted and changed and with each new fad has been the call to strengthen the war on drugs. 20th century America, for instance, witnessed the abuse of marijuana in the 1930s, heroine in the 1950s, SLD and marijuana in the 1960s, amphetamines in the 1970s, crack in the 1980s and prescription drugs from the 1990s to date (p. 25).

A 1938 article by Alfred R. Lindstrom, incorporated in this piece, attempts to explain drug addiction by providing a sociological theory in which

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Lindestrom argues that addicts use opiates to avoid withdrawal from life; not to escape from it (p. 30). This is in sharp contrast to the commonly held psychiatric explanation which holds that the reverse is the case. A second article, by the Harvard professor, Andrew Weil, in addressing the question of why people use drugs, states that they do in order to fulfill a desire to alter their consciousness (p. 38).

In light of the issues discussed it can be said that drug use and abuse still remains a major issue in society today. The article vividly captures the gamut of these issues.

## **References**

Inciardi, J & McElrath, K. (2009). *The American Drug Scene: An Anthology*