

The socialization of drug use: alcohol, opioids, and tina in contemporary queer C...



The daily challenges, discrimination and stigma are all factors to the higher rates of substance use among the members of the LGBTQ+ community as many turn to alcohol and other drugs as a coping mechanism. As a result of these and other stressors, sexual minorities are at increased risk for various behavioral health issues. Although data on the rates of substance abuse in gay and transgender populations are sparse, it is estimated that between 20 percent to 30 percent of gay and transgender people abuse substances, compared to about 9 percent of the general population (Hunt 2012).

Queer bars and clubs have traditionally been welcoming spaces where members of the community have the opportunity to socialize and feel safe. In many of these venues, smoking, drinking and drug use remains popular. Both books lack information in terms of substance use and abuse within the gay community, but several parallels and connections can be made between the discussion of alcohol in *Getting Wasted*, opioids in *Dreamland* and methamphetamine from scholarly sources. In this paper I will examine the influence of socialization that takes place in these environments and its influence over the prevalence of drug use within the contemporary queer club culture with a specific focus on the use of methamphetamine (meth, Tina, etc.) for gay men.

Getting Wasted written by Thomas Vander Ven puts a strong focus on the significance of wealth and race when examining the history of heavy drinking on college campuses. From the start, those four years of enrollment in an institution were a time for people to have fun. Instead of facing pressure and uncertainty in the question, "What are you doing after college?" individuals were more concerned about how they were going to spend their trial period

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of adulthood. There was less of an emphasis on the importance of education and more on the need for entertainment while living by the phrase “ C’s get degrees.” This was throughout the time when campuses consisted of primarily one demographic—upper class whites. Throughout the decades drinking culture on college campuses continuously shifts in terms of normalcy, frequency, emphasis and who is doing it.

During prohibition, people started becoming more academically inclined and this drive is intensified by the 1960s counter-culture. The 60s were a time when younger generations began critiquing culture and wanted to utilize their time on campus to enact change. Fraternities and sororities started disappearing and became less important, which is another factor that contributed to the decline of college drinking. Fast forward to the release of the film, *Animal House* in 1978. The prominence of Greek Life returns and with it comes the resurrection of binge drinking. Suddenly, alcohol becomes accessible to any member of a group who wants it.

Moving on from the history of the act itself, alcohol use among college campuses is extremely gendered, starting as early as the simple getting ready process. Who can get drunkest the fastest turns into a competitive race and happiness becomes associated with drinking as one falls into the social norms and desire of being accepted by a group. Alcohol does its job as it relaxes you and gives you confidence.

The majority of content in *Getting Wasted* is specific to heterosexuals. So for a wider perspective on the community I’ve chosen to call attention to a 2013 survey conducted by the U. S. Census Bureau found that a higher percentage

of LGBT adults between 18 and 64 reported past-year binge drinking (five or more drinks on a single occasion) than heterosexual adults. Additionally, alcohol consumption for queer individuals started earlier than their heterosexual counterparts.

Queer hubs such as New York City's Greenwich Village or Los Angeles' West Hollywood have a number of choices when it comes to bars or clubs that are exclusively targeted at gay men. It is the safety and inclusiveness of these neighborhoods that seems to inspire such heavy drug use (Parsons, Kelly, and Wisner 2007). Queer individuals who more than likely outcasts who lacked support from their small town come to the urban hubs and find a welcoming environment where, for the first time, there are other queer people to relate to. This comfort level leads individuals to "release their inhibitions more than they generally would—which can lead to drug abuse" (Parsons, Kelly, and Wisner 2007). As a result, party drugs, such as meth, tend to flourish in these areas. Methamphetamine, one of the most commonly used club drugs, has emerged as a significant health issue among gay and bisexual men in North America, Europe, and Australia (Worth and Rawstorne 2005). As a stimulant, meth increases the release of dopamine and norepinephrine, the brain's pleasure and alert chemicals, producing euphoria, increasing energy and prolonging sexual performance all of which can enhance an individuals club experience (Sloane).

Another factor to consider is the collective use of drugs in the party scenes within gay clubs especially. There is a strong stigma associated with an individual taking drugs in isolation that can oftentimes turn people away from using. However in the gay nightlife scene, the use of party drugs, <https://assignbuster.com/the-socialization-of-drug-use-alcohol-oids-and-tina-in-contemporary-queer-club-culture/>

especially meth, is at times the social norm, which results in the conformity of the individual to their particular social group.

As I've previously mentioned, queer people often face difficulties beyond the regular stresses of daily life including homophobia and other feelings of isolation -to cope with these unique stressors, many turn to sexual activity and substance use (Barrett et al. 1995). Recent research suggests that methamphetamine use and abuse has become a key problem within gay communities (Fernandez et al. 2007; Martin et al. 2006; Parsons et al. 2006a; Nanin and Parsons 2006). Although meth use is more prevalent among queer men in the western part of the United States (Hirshfield et al. 2004; 2006), drugs and alcohol are part of our American culture, as described in *Getting Wasted* and *Dreamland*. However, their use is even more prevalent among gay men since the bars and clubs are the main social outlets. This frequency of use can lead to the overestimate in those individual's ability to keep recreational use from developing into dependence and addiction.

Furthermore, the socially constructed celebrations explained in *Getting Wasted* relate to the gay bars and clubs that provide a sense safety and comfort, which is oftentimes lacking in other environments for these individuals. Additionally, alcohol and drugs can help to ease the anxiety that may come with the inclusion into that environment. The patterns of club drug use may be better explained and argued by socialization processes in the queer community rather than by Gateway Theory, which, traditionally, is used to explain patterns of drug use among the population.

Substance use is the norm in certain segments of gay culture and I will explain the development of the use of meth in particular. Clubbing in 1990's New York City bring up images of a mass of dancing club-goers and so many drugs. In the late 1990s and early 2000s methamphetamine became the most widely used illicit drug among urban queer men, especially in these "community centers." Alcohol-Fueled dancing is similar to meth in that sense. *Getting Wasted* explains that consuming alcohol allows the person to lose their self in the moment and to take part in a performance that would typically cause embarrassment if they were sober. Thus, drunken dancers may feel more comfortable both physically and psychically (Vander Ven 2011: 62). As for meth, it increases energy that facilitates dancing, drinking, and long hours of partying. To support this statement, users in the club scene described it as, "facilitating long nights of partying, enabling greater quantities of alcohol consumption, and allowing for greater exertion while dancing" (Kelly, LeClair, and Parsons 2013).

Tina as a party drug isn't the only prevalent drug in the "big city." In the chapter "The Adman" in *Dreamland* places a particular focus on New York City, NY as it walks the reader through the development of Purdue Pharma through medical advertising (Quinones 2015: 28-31). Arthur Sackler transformed drug marketing in the 60s when he released a new tranquilizer, Valium. One method he carried out was sending salesmen to doctors' offices with free samples of the drug. With the industry's billion-dollar drug, Purdue discovered their success through direct selling and intensive direct advertising and put those strategies into marketing its new opioid painkiller OxyContin. As we now know, prescription opiates are highly addictive (and

expensive) medications. Many turn to heroin as their drug of choice, because of its drastic decrease in cost. The logic of heroin distribution allowed New York to remain the nation's principal heroin hub throughout most of the twentieth-century (Quinones 2015: 54). Around the 70s heroin became the choice drug of the despised America: urban outcasts, homosexuals, artists and jazz musicians populated the early heroin world. In regards to socialization and the impact of an individual's environment, the list of stories captured in *Dreamland* goes on and on. For example, there was Adam in West Virginia (Quinones 2015: 17) His mother was an alcoholic and used drugs for several years. He was described as a "misfit" in a socially conservative area. He was more of an "alternative" kid and searched for friends more like him, which led him to become highly involved in the music scene. Adam's brother was shocked to find him dead of a heroin overdose, for he said "Heroin? That was for New York City." (Quinones 2015: 17)

There is a strong connection between alcohol and meth to risky sexual behaviors. *Getting Wasted* emphasizes the belief that getting drunk was seen as a necessary prerequisite for seeking sexual romantic companionship. As for meth, there is also a correlation between use and sexual compulsivity, which includes sexual risk behaviors, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Sloane). Similarly to alcohol meth neutralizes negative feelings, self-doubt, social anxiety, isolation and poor self-image

There is a lack of research on the alcohol and drug use on drag queens in particular but several contestants in *RuPaul's Drag Race* are open to sharing their personal experiences with drugs and the social influence as an

influence for their use. Yekaterina Petrovna Zamolodchikova, or Katya, was
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one of the first Drag Race contestants to share her story of substance abuse, specifically with meth, on television and other platforms. When season seven of *Drag Race* was being filmed, Katya had achieved one year of sobriety. In the later stages of that season, the producers were sure to include the emotional scene where she reaches out to Miss Fame for support. Miss Fame, coming up on a decade of being clean, offered her experience, consolation and strength to show Katya that she wasn't alone.

Katya is arguably the most vocal queen when it comes to talking about her recovery journey as a meth addict. For her, this has been a common topic of discussion on several outlets such as *Drag Race*, her podcast *Whimsically Volatile* and other series such as her YouTube sensation, *UNHhhh*.

In *Whimsically Volatile* Katya even elaborates on the accessibility to meth for drag queens in the gay club scene is a key factor in its rampant use. She explains how before, during and after performances, other queens and/or members of the audience would offer her a variety of drugs and alcohol left and right. The normalization of substance use in that particular environment disconnects individuals to the actual risks that come with the drugs. On her and Trixie Mattel's "Drugs" episode on *UNHhhh* Katya makes clear that they are not damming or glamorizing the use of drugs in their conversation. Trixie comically describes Katya as the "evil Knievel of drugs" when she asks Katya to describe her drug experiences. In their episode "Drinking" Trixie supports the prevalence of alcohol in drag queen culture by saying "Oddly enough if I'm going to drink I prefer to do it on nights off," which goes to show that she is a minority when it comes to the typical social norms of drug and alcohol use among queens.

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The title of the article alone, “ Just Because You’re Queer Doesn’t Mean You Have to Go to the Bar” captures the emphasis on nightlife for members of the queer community. The people who partake in contemporary queer club culture are agents of socialization with their selective interactions as their peers commonly influence their lifestyle behavior and values of imitation. The influence of socialization that takes place in these environments correlates to the prevalence of alcohol and drug use, as it is a leading factor to the normalization of substances within the queer venues.

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