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### Experience Versus Understanding

Methamphetamine powered the Nazi blitzkrieg across Europe. Cocaine brought Pablo Escobar unimaginable wealth. Opium was used by the British Empire to colonize China. There has never been a point in human history where we have not used drugs. Whether it's for our enjoyment, or if it's for our advantage, drugs have followed it. In the modern era, it seems that it's common knowledge that drugs are bad for us. However, just like how methamphetamine was used to give the soldiers of World War II an edge, the people of today are powered through caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol. What is it that truly defines the way we use drugs?

In order to understand how we use drugs; we first must know what drugs are. Simply put, a drug is a chemical that changes something about us. In alcohol, it suppresses our nervous system and makes us feel calmer and less alert. Caffeine does the opposite, stimulating our nervous system while enhancing our alertness and our cognitive function. Most of the time, we associate drugs with illegal ones such as cocaine or methamphetamine. These drugs are much more powerful than the beforementioned drugs, with far harsher consequences. Meth and cocaine are both more addictive, and their highs are far more substantial than that of caffeine or alcohol. The list of drugs can go on forever, from substances like marijuana up to LSD. Each drug is unique in its effects and consequences, however all of them are impactful.

Due to the special nature of each drug, there are a wide variety of uses for them. Many can treat medical conditions, such as Adderall with ADHD, and some such as alcohol can

seemingly take the edge off life. So, what is it that creates our perception of drugs? Alcohol for example, some people refuse to drink it entirely, some people only drink it occasionally, and some people are completely addicted to it. Each person is different, and to find out what defines the way individuals use drugs, we should first understand their introduction to drugs.

Everyone's introduced to drugs in a different way. Some learn about it from the news, some have wine at their family dinner, but we all end up introduced to drugs eventually. These experiences through life define us, and to categorize them we can use literacies. Literacies are pieces of knowledge that are within specific subjects, for example knowing a how to say hello in Spanish would fall under the Spanish literacy. However, as there are so many individual literacies, we have to classify some of them. These literacies are school literacies and home literacies.

The difference between home and school literacies is well said by Amanda Hayes in her essay "Splintered Literacies". Hayes' learned much of her family's history from oral tales passed down from generations over one-hundred fifty years ago. These tales included knowledge, entertainment, and overall valuable information she would keep for life. When it came time for Hayes to go to school, she describes the new form of writing she experienced as "not constructed as playing the preserving role it did in my early life" (Hayes 226). The difference Hayes saw between home and school literacies was impossible to miss; school literacies taught understanding, where home literacies taught the experience.

In a similar way to Hayes' experience with writing, drugs are learned far differently at home versus in school. Most people have experienced sitting through a thirty-minute-long assembly, bored out of their minds, while someone talks about how their life fell apart due to drugs. Some people watched a friend powerlessly fall to addiction, or their parents come home

from a stressful day just to say they need a glass of wine. Each of these experiences teaches whoever went through them something about drugs, whether they are good, bad, or boring. Some experiences, however, are more impactful than others. To prove this, I conducted an anonymous interview with a student who has had some learning experiences with drugs.

In the first part of the interview, I mainly asked questions about the student's father's ongoing struggle with an alcohol addiction. Through the answers, there was a clear impact on the student's life because of this addiction. The fear of alcohol was the most notable, as they do not drink consecutive nights because they fear becoming addicted. When close friends or family drink they're worried they might become like their father. I asked if they learned anything at school about alcohol, and they said that they learned nothing important, and it had no effect on them (Anonymous).

In the second portion of the interview, I was curious about the student's perception of other common drugs other than alcohol. I first asked what they thought was the worst drug overall, and to my surprise they said nicotine. Their reasoning was because they saw the outcome of nicotine addictions all over social media, teenagers crying because they couldn't get a vape, and the constant headaches nicotine addicts deal with. Later in the interview, I questioned if they judged people based off the drugs they use. To this, they also said they heavily judge nicotine addicts. The student described nicotine addicts as childish and preventable, people who always need to carry around a "nic stick" (Anonymous), something I presumed to mean a vape. It was clear that the student's perception of other drugs was mainly formed off media and their experience with other students.

Lastly, I wondered what the student's opinion on hard drugs was, and how that opinion was formed. When I asked if they would do those drugs, it was a hard and stern no. Similarly, to

how they hated nicotine or alcohol, they hated the idea of using hard drugs. This surprised me, as I knew the student had not been exposed to the idea of hard drugs as much as alcohol or nicotine. I questioned why they were so against it, and they said that the media “demonized” the drugs, and due to a lack of anything else it successfully taught them to never do those drugs. Another notable part of the interview was the student’s opinion on drug laws. In reference to the drinking age of twenty-one, the student went on to say that “laws don’t mean shit” (Anonymous) and that it felt more like a challenge and encouraged drinking. In response to other drug laws, the student said most of them were understandable aside from the laws against marijuana. During the interview, school literacies were almost completely absent, and all of the student’s perception of drugs was formed off experience.

When working in tandem, home literacies and school literacies can prove to be quite effective. However, when a conflict arises, there tends to be issues. Hayes’ town in Appalachia currently faces one of these issues, as she describes at the end of her essay, “A recent newspaper article recently lamented the prevalence of hunger in our county... My grandparents, as octogenarians, still gardened and stocked a basement pantry... They, children of poverty by any standard, didn’t grow up hungry” (Hayes 226). In this case, school literacies prevailed over home literacies and people forgot how to garden. They now suffer through hunger, something that could have been prevented with their ancestor’s knowledge. Drugs face this same problem, where when they lack the home literacy to stop drug use and the school literacy fails to educate.

We use drugs because of the way we are educated. Peer pressure, a tough environment, and easy access can all lead an unknowing person to do drugs. Assemblies often have someone come in and tell students their experience with drugs, and nothing else. School literacies deal with understanding; home literacies deal with experience, and we want to learn that experience

on our own. The student from the interview was taught about drugs through their experiences – not some random person's. However, schools can teach us to understand drugs. If students properly understand drugs on a higher level than just addiction and drunk driving, we may see an improvement in many drug statistics. In the end, what defines why we use drugs is the literacies that we build upon for our lives, and through experiences and understanding.

Works Cited

Anonymous. Personal Interview. 3 December 2022.

Hayes, Amanda. "Splintered Literacies." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2014, pp. 225–27. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43490914>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2022.