

# Understanding Behavioral Health Problems in the Community: Behavioral Science Meets Anthropology

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# We Need Integration!

- Behavioral health problems a global burden
- Mental illness, addiction, obesity, stress, violence & trauma—these are major problems in the modern world



# Anthropology & Behavioral Science

- Anthropology: Holistic view
  - Concern with people's lives & with social and cultural factors
- Behavioral Science: Particulate view
  - Concern with processes that shape behavioral health
- Both are needed to understand and help change behavior

# How do I know that?

- Some boys from Bogotá changed my life





# Giovanni

## ■ Addiction:

- Withdrawal on the bathroom floor?
- Asked to steal a watch?

## ■ His Life

- Staring at the school
- “Social marginalization”



# Initial Integration

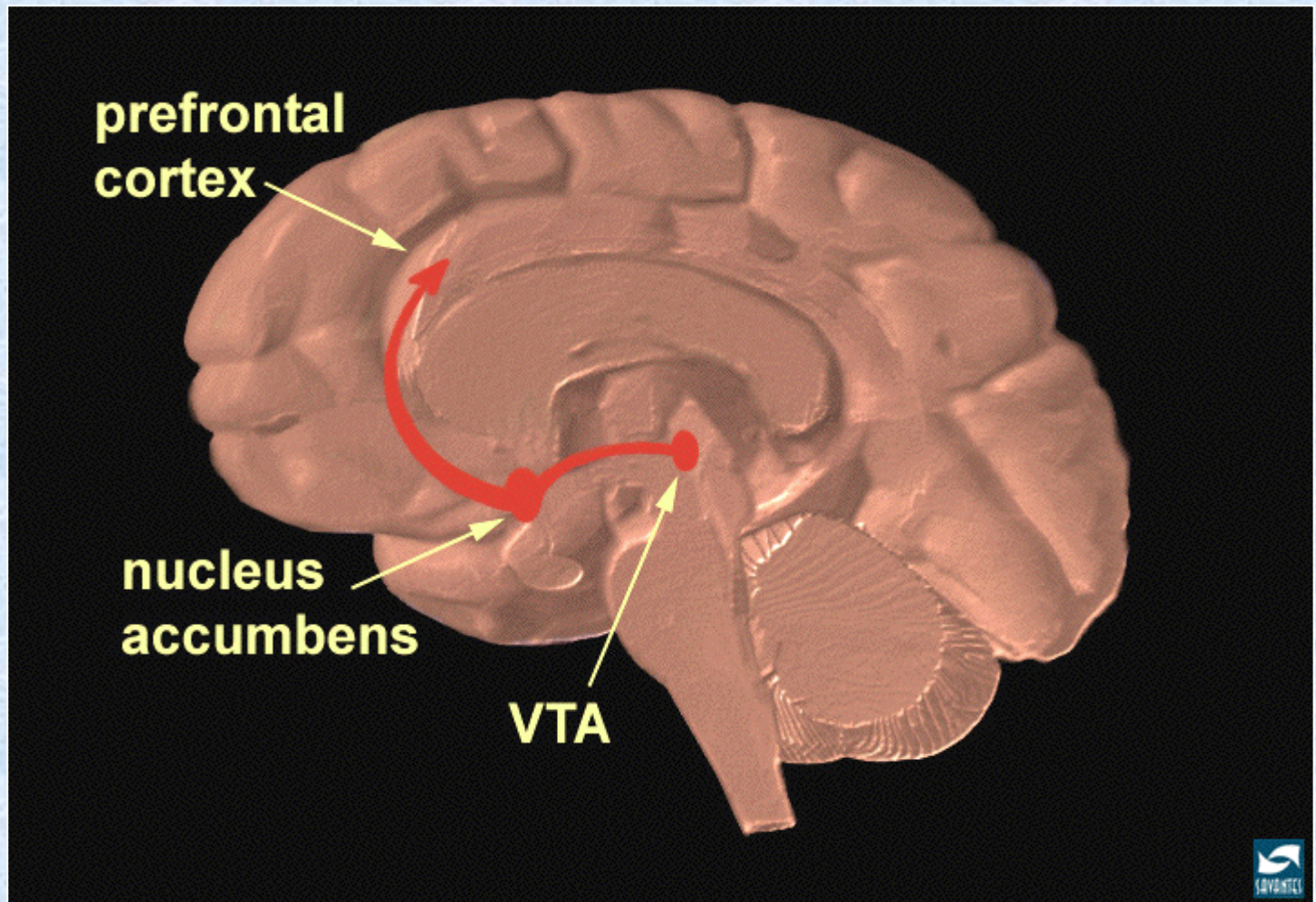
- Compulsive wanting around drug use
  - Brain biology
  - Psychological measures
  - Ethnographic descriptions
- Trying to answer: What is addiction?

# Back to Bogotá

Boys' definition of addiction: "querer más y más"—to want more and more



# The Dopamine System



# Treatment Center





# Descriptions of wanting

- Overwhelming desire
- Compulsion or urge
- Focus of attention/thinking only of that
  
- But also: a meaningful experience
  - Describe using as an imaginary place



# What the desire feels like

- Trapped in a jail, wanting to see your family
- Taken away to a mountain top

School:  
Didn't  
Get  
It





# Compulsive Wanting Scale

- Three dimensions: Wanting, Attention & Immediacy
  - Internally consistent ( $\alpha=.948$ )
- Sample Questions
  - At times what has most mattered to me is the desire to consume
  - When I have consumed, at times I have felt completely into the moment
  - At times when I have wanted to consume, I have wanted to do it immediately



# Got to have it

- Compulsive Wanting: One of three significant predictions of addiction in Colombia epidemiological work
  - Violence & drug-using friends other two
- Compulsive involvement cuts across substances and countries
  - Cigarette, alcohol or drug use
  - Similar in US and Belgium as Colombia



# More confirmation

- HBO Documentary: Dope Sick Love
  - Footage of a heroin addict who drops his packet of drugs
- Compulsive Wanting: Good answer to that original question, What is addiction?



# Summary: Compulsive Wanting

- Core Process in Addiction:
  - Brain Function
  - Psychological Involvement
  - Cultural Meaning
- Anthropology & Behavioral Science  
Both Needed



# But Not “Addiction”

- Addiction more than compulsive involvement
- Giovanni: That missing school, the traumatic life, the respect on the street
- These realities work against our popular notions of addiction in the US

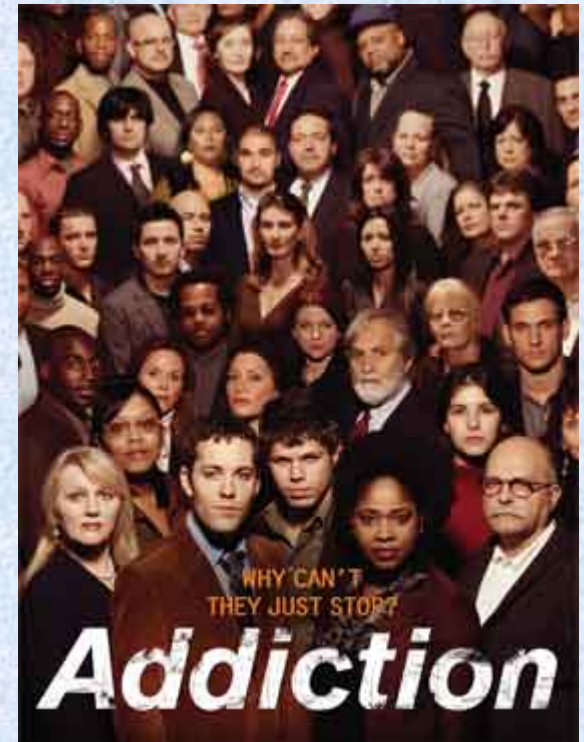


## Two popular explanations for addiction in the US...

- It's a disease. Something completely biological, not even involving the person.
- A complete collapse of will and self-control. The loss of any sort of moral compass.

# Cultural explanations that work for the US: A Disease

- “It’s a brain disease”—the typical scientific discourse on addiction, purposively set against a moral view
  - HBO series and book a good example: “Understanding Addiction: Addiction is a chronic relapsing brain disease.”



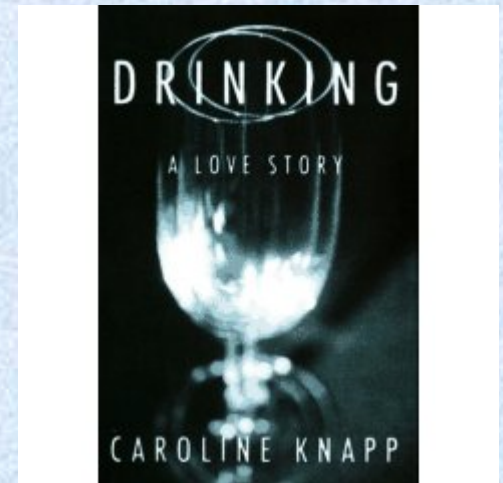


# Disease metaphor

- It works to explain it to people
- Does not work as good science
  - Brain imaging: A map does not tell you why states wage war
  - Functional neuroanatomy: Hardware doesn't tell you what the software does
  - Brain-centric approach: Neurobiological changes only one part of the story

# Cultural explanation—Moral failing or lack of character or willpower

- Knapp: “moral failing” implicit in the stories she heard about alcoholics: “They were unstable, unwell, irresponsible, and if they were parents, they tore through the lives of their children like tornadoes”





# Cultural judgment, not good science

- “Loss of control” provides a judgment, not an explanation
  - US values self-control and independence
- In Colombia, all excesses—from alcohol to pool playing—treated as “vices”
  - Not a moral failing per se, but rather a characterization of personality



# Disease vs. Willpower

- Each assert a “primal cause”
  - Often provided justification by leading scientific or cultural figures
- Hard to integrate behavioral science & anthropology when explanation based on one primal cause



# Cards on the table

- Two main cultural explanations similar:  
Addiction as something “not human”  
  
versus
- Addiction is the most human of things
  - Builds from experiences and behaviors we all can comprehend
  - Anthropology & behavioral science work together to add scholarly depth



# Why this is important

- **DSM-IV Criteria for Substance Abuse**
  - Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems
  - Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home
  - Substance is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than intended

# Why this is important to me

- My Mother



# First Everyday Experience: The Beer Run



- Trip to the local library
- Should I get some nice cold beer?
- Plotting the easiest route while telling myself I didn't exactly need an afternoon beer
- Particular road route -> Specific context (corner liquor store) -> Back home to relax on the back porch



# Integration

- Anthropology: Ethnographic research
  - Talking themselves into it
  - The importance of particular contexts & people you know
- Behavioral Science
  - Schema theory (prototypical sequences of actions)
  - Associative learning

# Second Everyday Experience: Riding the Carousel





# Riding the Carousel

- Having fun on it  
and
- No fun falling off it

# Arnold!

- Back in his steroid days!
- Imagine him spinning that carousel, how fast it would go and how dangerous falling off would seem





# Crazy use...

- Ethnographic Description:
- Why is drug use that makes you paranoid fun?
- It's like that carousel ride



# Behavioral Side

1. Basic reinforcement
2. Sensitization theory: Systems become more reactive
3. Conflicting impulses: Lead to short-term, often maladaptive behavior



# Addiction: Putting Together

- The Beer Run  
and
- Pumped-up Carousel Ride

Well, close...



- Freckled, red-headed, annoying boy and that light-bulb moment



# Cycle of Addiction

- To Do or Not to Do
  - Deciding, Prompting role of emotional state
- Seeking
  - Increased urges and narrowed attention
- Preparation
  - Ritual focus on the substance
- Use
  - Relief, Satisfaction, Change in State
- Lack of Satiation or Return to Start



# One step leads to another

- Ambivalence resolved by seeking
- Seeking turns to possessing
- Having becomes using
- Using means change (different from the ambivalence)
- Change either prompts more use or eventual return to ambivalence



# Cycle—a good descriptive account

- Takes us beyond mono-causal approaches to addiction
  - Including my own! (It's not all compulsion!)
- Closer to clinical experience and what I understood from my mother



# How to explain the cycle?

- Anthropological approaches
  - Career mode
  - Societal inequality
- Both valuable but missing that uncomfortable but real “animalistic” impression

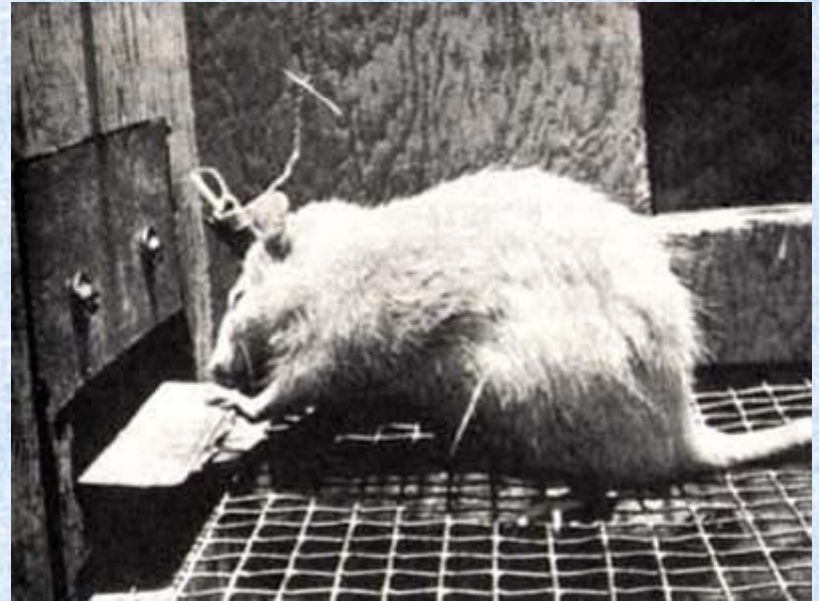


# Can't beat it? Join it!

- What animal metaphor will I build from?

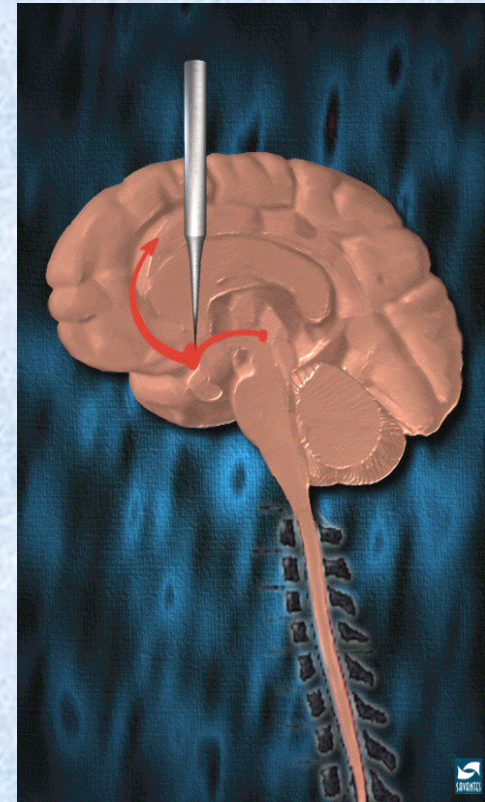
# Rat Brains?

- Feelings of pleasure, compulsive habits, loss of control all due to impact of drugs on the brain





Addicted Rats



NIDA: "Activation of the reward pathway by an electrical stimulus"

# One small problem: Bad science

- Rats need to be trained to use drugs
- Not all rats can be made to use drugs
- Environmental enrichment & social relations make a huge difference





# Viabile alternative?

- How about something rodents do on their own?
- Something linked to a modern environment—the “rat race,” so to speak





# Wheel running

- Normal:

- <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5881565237009655376>

- Sensitized

- <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1878443889919731711>



# Mostly a metaphor

- How do we humans create our own running wheels for ourselves?
- An Easy Way and a Hard Way

# The Easy Way





# The Hard Way: Social construction of our own reality

- Back to the “Beer Run”:
  - I wanted to do it
  - Specific sequence of actions & contexts
  - Ritual consumption at the end
- Ritualized behavior



# Ritualized Behavior—Not “Ritual”

- Not “Ritual” in a big sense
- Ritualized: the space between habits and rituals that is so important in modern life
- Ritualized behavior also links anthropology & behavioral science



# Ritualized Behavior

Boyer & Lienard (2007):

- Stereotypical patterns
  - A drug habit
- Positive and negative emphases
  - Chasing the high, avoiding family pain
- Individualized yet linked to specific contexts, practices, and people



# Ritualized behavior links:

## ■ Habits & Cues

- Reinforced behaviors, environmental cues linked to use

## ■ Behavioral Scripts

- Career mode—often an automatized process

## ■ Managing Positive & Negative

- Individually salient and culturally meaningful



# Invoking Ritual: Roy Rappaport

- Actions divorced from their normal goals
  - Drug use becomes end in itself
- Actions viewed as compulsory
  - Loss of control with addiction
- Ordered environment quite different from everyday life
  - Ordered, yet ignoring the high costs in everyday life



# What is Addiction?

- Compulsive involvement
  - Extreme desire & heightened urges
- Ritualized cycle of behaviors
  - From thinking about it to using: Creating the running wheel from the beer run
  - Individualized: (a) Liking the spin & afraid to fall off, (b) Divorced from everyday life



# Behavioral Health: Some Final Recommendations

- Use qualitative research
  - Get at the experiences, ideas and problems of the people you work with
- Draw on brain research
  - Provides a guide, more than a complete explanation
- Avoid cultural explanations for behavioral health problems
  - These tell us more about cultural ideology and power than they do about the problems themselves

