

The consumption of alcohol and drugs in university students: an ephemeral illusion

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It is very well known that university students is one the global population groups that consumes alcohol and drugs; consumption that in most cases has already begun at school or inside the family. Alcohol and drugs consumption has become a phenomenon that reaches universities finding a niche to settle and develop due to the convergence of diversity, freedom, controversy, dreams, autonomy, opposition, and changes within the social place the university represents.

The ephemeral illusion of happiness, the total gratification, the disconnection, the fact of discarding feelings of anguish or tension are some of the expressions alcohol and drugs consumers refer to at the very first time of ingesting them. It is known that the initial sensation of pleasure experienced with drugs and alcohol is what is desirable to be repeated; it is experimented again and it is in that desire whose consumption is linked with the slogan of the time: enjoy.

The existing ways of alcohol and drugs consumption are not timeless; they correspond to the societal model, to the logics of neoliberalism, to a narcissistic society that through diverse ways is coming up with the imperative of full enjoyment through their consumption, inviting us to get everything immediately. The market catches the need of drive satisfaction throughout oral and visual ways; the replica of pleasing objects is sold and it even promises heaven and earth. Within such an ephemeral and tricky promise, impossible to keep, drugs are settled as a way to fulfill material lacks and head towards the longing completeness.

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What is true is that the consumption of alcohol and drugs produces in the most of the cases a sensation of *transient welfare*, because once the episode vanishes the person experiences a sense of sinking, loss of will and sadness that provokes the compulsion to be repeated (González, 2008) “produce en la mayoría de los casos una sensación de bienestar transitorio, ya que una vez pasado este episodio el sujeto experimenta un sentimiento de hundimiento, de pérdida de voluntad y de tristeza que provoca la compulsión a la repetición” (González, 2008, p. 7).

As previously stated, the university, as a social institution, makes a niche for the installation of consumption in its midst. It is necessary to admit that the university is not exempted from being permeated by the demands of the neoliberal model. As stated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007), 21st century universities have been transformed in their nature; they have displaced the public ethos -in terms of knowledge and incidence in the understanding and transformation of the phenomena that take place in societies—towards a more corporate and privatizing one influenced by the demands of the commercialization of their academic activities facing the expansion of the educational industry, the introduction of a business rationality.

Such rational logic: university-business, strengthens the offer of the promise of happiness, the easy, the immediate, the practical, the functional, the profitable. It is frequently find universities advertising a future of success, conquests, money, possibilities to access to goods and services. This is because in our society the ideological and propagandistic emphasis has shifted from productivity to consumption; austerity is no longer promoted, but hedonistic consumption “nuestra sociedad el énfasis ideológico y propagandístico ha pasado de la productividad al consumo, ya no se promueve la austeridad, sino el consumo hedonista” (González, 2008, p. 8).

The fallacy this promise entails obviates the confrontation with both failure and frustration of life eventualities. Thus, creating conditions to accommodate consumption in a young person who is living through the demands of the era that seeks to erase all limitations proper of the human condition through all types of artifices.

How have university institutions responded to its different actors' consumption reality?

Current approaches to alcoholism and drug additions phenomena at universities have made it clear that the institution itself is the one a) which needs to be much more actively involved in facing the phenomenon as one of its educational nature fields of action; b) whose purpose is not only the professionalization and the commercial expansion of knowledge, but to deal with the human issues of the community that inhabits the campus.

In order to address the phenomenon, universities have responded from psycho-pedagogical actions technically planned and oriented to inform and to discouraged the consumption of illegal drugs and to avoid the excess of those legal ones, as well as to promote awareness over their risks and damages.

Some universities in their actions of prevention privilege to the subject in order to promote his/her skills, attitudes, knowledge and self-care and regulation practices; nevertheless, the singularity of the current youthful world, the newest consumption dynamics and the associated facts are not sufficiently known, understood; consequently, they are not addressed while the interventions.

The university is called upon deepening the comprehension of its youths' psychic, ethical, aesthetic, cultural, and relational logic and mutations from the singularity of each educational community; likewise, being in charge of the physical, technical and human transformations necessary to generate ethical, coherent and conscious institutional responses.

From that perspective, it is high time to initiate and keep an in-campus life observatory as a core of knowledge to improve the comprehension of the different emerging issues and dynamics; the consumption, as one of them. From that knowledge and understanding, contribution regarding policies formulation, plans and programs intended to comprehensively address such problems might arise.

Knowledge got from the observatory would constitute the axis in the process of students' formation through transversal intervention action; not only addressing the consumption, but the events related to the physical and mental health of the community at the university: habits, aesthetics, needs, passions, interests, practices, fears, interactions, among others, to unveil and understand the human, social and cultural aspects of the actors that converge at it.

To specify at the university coherent, well-founded and systematic prevention requires of a generous and decided resources invest to generate logistic, technical, locatives and professional conditions that represent opportunities and motivations that counteract the consumption offer, to find in those a similar illusory sense to that one offered by the drugs. That is, to strengthen and diversify those offerings, taking up the identities and the logics of the current life with its contradictions and potentialities based on the construction of other senses of the university experience, alternating with the academic competence and the logic the consumption could have. In short, the university is called to contain, to house the humanity of the students, like a shelter.

How can we read then the consumption and the consumers for the purposes of interventions?

First at all, it is essential to know the state of shock, which is understood as an alteration, as a violent agitation of the spirit that young students are living when entering to the university, as a result of the confrontation with their families, social and academic demands that coexist in the aim for the conquest of the status at the university.

This convergence of terror by the demand and the fantasy of not being conformed to the standards and the exaltation for the joy of autonomy, -being free, doing what they want, deciding-, represents a breeding ground for getting involved in situations of consumption, since in that situation, the consumption fulfills the double function of confirming the illusory feeling of power and greatness and of mitigating the anguish, the discomfort due to the uncertainty.

It is known that many of the students who start at the university are 16-19 year-old-adolescents, it is a vital moment framed by meaningful mental and emotional processes derived from the transition to adulthood; this means that bereaved beings pass through the multiple ruptures that take place in their lives in front of us in the corridors and classrooms of the universities, they are experiencing the turbulence of the metamorphosis, understood as a process in which they confront their old truths and assurances about family, friendship, love, knowledge, own image, social organization, the notion of what is right, among others, they are suffering the beginning of the fall of their ideals built in the family and at school.

Faced with the emptiness of that fall, of those ruptures, facing the ambivalence and the fragility, the consumption of psychoactive substances (SPA) plugs the anguish up, giving the illusion of happiness and, in some cases, it acts as a bridge, as a company, as a support for that passage, in the manner of Caronte, the ferryman who helps the souls to pass to the other side of the harbor.

Consistent with the imaginary of consumption as a support for the transition to adult life, it should be emphasized that in order to define coherent prevention actions it is necessary to differentiate the senses and the functions of consumption in university students, that is, to clarify that the consumption of SPA, what is consumed, the moment in which it is consumed and with whom it is consumed, it obeys a subjective, singular and different logic in each person.

As it is perceived the consumption of SPA by university students, I believe that the strategies of prevention, in addition to promote attitudes and skills for the control and for the information on the effects, the risks and the damages, we must question the representations that students have built over the social, cultural and political paradigm to which they belong, to interrogate the fantastic, easy, and complete world, without choices or costs, to accommodate the frustration, the differences and the contingencies as part of the life.

To accompany students to recognize, to accept and to assume their humanity and to know how to do it ethically and responsibly, it is urgent, in my view, to demystify the terror of "incompleteness", loneliness, loss and to the discomfort.

If we continue to prevent in a planned and technical way, without recognizing the complexity of the subjects, both those who intervene and those intervened will continue to attend irremediably to the deadly repetition of those who seek in drugs and alcohol the illusion of a pleasure that eliminates discomfort, and in that way, paradoxically, they are in risk of perpetuating it.

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