

Brainwashed: A Survey of Addiction in the United States

My capstone project will attempt to examine what I consider one of the most controversial afflictions in the realm of disability studies: substance abuse and substance dependence. While the DSM I-V lists both as classifications--thereby officially categorizing them as mental illnesses--there still remains heavy stigma and backlash regarding the notion that addiction is far more than a series of poor choices. To this point, there are even federal laws ultimately directed at punishing the very populations affected by substance abuse and substance dependence rather than providing support or referral for rehabilitation. With all this being said, this paper will explore the factors that contribute to the development addiction, the federal laws directed at people suffering from substance abuse and substance dependence, the cultural stigma surrounding them, and finally propose a different way in which addiction should be viewed and treated.

In an age where our political climate is likely to have strong ramifications on health care policies and administration, I feel that now is the most crucial time to address the failings of our present system--including the Americans with Disabilities Act--to address addiction in a way that doesn't further victimize those who suffer from it. As it stands, the ADA states the any form of addiction is considered a disability once the the individual is fully in recovery from said addiction. With this being so, individuals who actually need services to aid them in the process of recovery are potentially shut out from these services until they may no longer need them. I feel that contributing to both the existing literature and the conversation regarding substance abuse and dependence is not only a way to oppose the unjust treatment of people suffering from a legitimate disability, but a means to develop a better system.