Sesame Street and Breaking Bad: Grover Has Some Blue Ice

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Abstract

The infiltration of illegal methamphetamines was studied in the Sesame Street neighborhood of Manhattan. The increased usage over the period from 2007-2013 was due to the introduction of a new form of crystal methamphetamine, “Blue Sky.” Muppets were twice as likely to become addicted to Blue Sky as humans. Increased addiction rates led to an increase in Muppet-on-Muppet crime. Gun permit acquisitions in the Sesame Street neighborhood increased dramatically during the same period. These findings suggest that increased resources need to be directed to drug abuse awareness and treatment programs.

*Keywords*: methamphetamine, addiction, crime, Muppet
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Attention has been drawn to American methamphetamine hydrochloride or “crystal meth” abuse by the television show Breaking Bad (Gilligan, 2008). Abuse of crystal meth in neighborhoods leads to increased health issues, higher mortality rates, increased crime rates, and more prominent gang activity (Merkert, 2005). “Meth labs,” or laboratories in which the crystal meth is prepared, pose high public safety risks. The materials used to “cook” the crystal meth are highly toxic. The air around meth labs can be polluted by toxic fumes, and a high risk for explosions is present because of the flammability of the ingredients.

An increase in drug related activity in the Sesame Street neighborhood led public officials to call for an investigation in 2008. Authorities quickly concluded that the surge in drug activity was due to crystal meth (Drug Enforcement Agency, 2008). This study was conducted to identify the reasons for the increase in methamphetamine usage, as well as to measure the societal effects of the drug. Other studies have been performed on the effects of crystal meth abuse in New York using a quantitative style (White & Pinkman, 2007). We designed the study to outline both the qualitative and quantitative measurements of the effects of the abuse, to more clearly outline the initial causes behind the surge, the driving forces behind the length of the surge, and the lasting effects of the increased activity.

Method

Participants

Potential participants were approached as they sat on their front stoops. Humans and Muppets were selected for further questioning if they were over the age of 12 for humans and two for Muppets. Individuals who appeared to be inebriated were not selected for further questioning. Participants were compensated with one to 12 cookies for their time. The mean age
of participants was 27, with an age range of 2-73 (see Table 1 for complete demographic information). Fifty-four participants identified as female, 47 as male, and one as transgender. A variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds were represented in the sample group, including African American, Hispanic, Blue, Caucasian, Red, and Avian.

**Measures**

Participants were guided inside a 1986 Fleetwood Bounder RV. They were interviewed using a written questionnaire (Figure 1) as a starting point, and they were observed by a separate researcher who did not engage the participant in any way. The interviewers were trained in each cultural background represented by the participants.

**Research Design**

Shades were drawn over the RV windows to prevent distractions. The song “Dead Fingers Talking” (Kay, McClure, & Working for a Nuclear Free City, 2006) was played at a low volume to drown out background noise. A small bowl of Funyons were provided to participants to snack on during the interview. The questions from the written survey were asked in the same order for each participant. Follow up questions varied based on the participant’s responses.

**Results**

Participants were gathered from May of 2008 through October of 2013. Participants interviewed during the early stages of the research were contacted for follow-up sessions every six months for the remainder of the study.

**Statistics and Data Analysis**

Prior to 2008, 12% of Muppets and 5% of humans were addicted to crystal meth in the Sesame Street neighborhood (see Table 2 for the full data). Eighteen percent of Muppets and 8%
of humans reported knowing someone who was an addict. There were 22 drug related crimes in 2007 (Table 3). There were three incidents of human-on-human crime in 2007, and four incidents of Muppet-on-Muppet crime. The mean number of applications for gun permits per month in 2007 was 1.08.

Forty percent of Muppets were addicted to Blue Sky at some point during the sample period, and 20% of humans reported an addiction. 64% of Muppets reported knowing someone in the neighborhood who was addicted, while humans reported a rate of 52%. 2012 marked the peak of drug related crime, with 86 incidents reported. During 2012, there were four incidents of human-on-human crime, and 27 incidents of Muppet-on-Muppet crime. The mean number of applications for gun permits per month in 2012 was 3.17.

Blue Sky was introduced into the Sesame Street market in 2008. Other “brands” of crystal meth represented 32% of the total illegal drug market in 2007. The market share for crystal meth increased to 67% of the total market by 2012 (see Figure 2). Blue Sky increased from 0% of the crystal meth market in 2007 to 98% of the market in 2012.

**Discussion**

The large increase of crystal meth in the overall illegal drug market, and the near-monopoly of Blue Sky within the crystal meth market show the highly addictive nature of Blue Sky. Within five years, 67% of illegal drug users in the Sesame Street neighborhood were using Blue Sky. One participant, who had witnessed a close relative become addicted to Blue Sky, commented “It was amazing to see how quickly the blue ice took ahold of him. One month he was happily running his store, the next he was sleeping in flophouses and robbing aliens for cash to get a fix.”
The rapidly increasing desire for Blue Sky mirrored the rapidly increasing drug related crime statistics in the same period. An increase in drug related crime of 291% occurred between 2007 and 2012. Particularly disturbing for residents, Muppet-on-Muppet crime increased 800% between 2007 and 2012. In the words of one participant:

My roommate could be a little grouchy at times, but was still my best friend. A mutual friend got him hooked on Blue Magic [Blue Sky], and he became a different person. Over the course of one year he lost most of his teeth, started bragging about his unibrow, and even punched me and my rubber ducky in the face.

Another participant stated:

My adopted son came home from school one day, just shaking like a leaf. He told me that he saw a group of tweaked-out Muppets beating another Muppet. The victim was a Big Blue [Blue Sky] dealer who temporarily ran out of product. The group was enraged and really gave him a stomping. His cape and helmet did not protect him, and he ended up in the emergency room.

Several Muppet participants indicated that they had considered moving to a safer neighborhood, like Fraggle Rock.

Another correlation can be drawn between the increase in crime, and the increase in applications for gun permits. There was a 192% increase in applications between 2007 and 2012. Several participants noted that they or their family members bought guns to protect themselves from burglars, or from the escalating gang warfare brought on by turf conflicts. One participant stated:

I couldn’t believe what got into people. Friends that I have had for 30 years- pacifists- went out and bought guns. One guy just ran around counting all of his new weapons and
laughing. I can’t remember such a scary time in the neighborhood since Snuffy became real.

The percentage of Blue Sky as a portion of the illegal drug market declined in 2013. Subsequently, drug related and Muppet-on-Muppet crime statistics also decreased. Participants attributed the decreases to a decline in the quality of Blue Sky on the market. Some participants speculated that there was a falling out among the manufacturers of the product. Regardless of the reasons for the decline in Blue Sky sales, the decline in crime statistics was not affected by the authorities. Records show that budgets for police manpower, substance abuse clinics, and social work were relatively flat between 2007 and 2013 (Goodman, 2014). One participant commented:

The City didn’t do anything. We got people dying in the streets, and we didn’t get a single extra cop, another clinic, or nothing. People in charge should be ashamed of themselves. Even though the Blue [Blue Sky] is gone, we still got issues.

Clapton, Richards, and Tyler (1994) have shown the effectiveness of a combination of increased police foot-patrols, well placed treatment clinics, and social workers for healing the effects of drugs in suffering communities. In 2013, 57% of participants who used Blue Sky at some point reported having serious health issues. Seventy-one percent of the same group reported that their relationships with friends and family members had suffered adverse effects from their drug use. Sixty-six percent of users reported being in financial distress at the time of their interview, and 12% of users reported being homeless. It is clear that the methods outlined by Clapton et al., if deployed in the Sesame Street neighborhood, would positively impact the residents. Community organizers should take further steps to encourage federal, state, and local government leaders and agencies to provide funding to heal some of the damage caused by Blue Sky.
There are several limitations to this research. Only individuals willing to leave their homes were interviewed. Inebriated individuals were excluded from the interviews, possibly skewing the data as these individuals were most likely to suffer the effects of Blue Sky. Some researchers missed their interview shifts, as they could not be told how to get, how to get to Sesame Street.
References


Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

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*Note.* Participants were not selected based on their ethnic or racial background.
Table 2

*Sesame Street Addiction to Crystal Meth*

<table>
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<th>Group</th>
<th>Addicted to Crystal Meth</th>
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Table 3

*Sesame Street Crime Statistics*

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*Note.* Crime statistics were reported by the New York City Police Department.
Figure 1

Participant Questionnaire

Participant: Date:

Participant Age: Gender (Related):

Ethnic/Racial Background:

Have you taken an illegal drug this year?
   If yes, what kind?

Do you consider yourself to be a drug addict?
   If so, what is your primary addiction?
   How has being an addict affected your life?

Do you know someone in the neighborhood who is a drug addict?
   How has being an addict affected their life?

Has the presence of illegal drugs been a positive or negative thing for the neighborhood in the past year?

Do you feel the neighborhood has become safer or more dangerous in the last year?
   Why?

Other comments:
Figure 2. Drug market share in the Sesame Street neighborhood.

Note. This sample paper is intended to assist college students produce works in the APA format.

This document was created by Shawn R. Fields of Lincoln College of New England, and everything about it is made-up.