The Medicalization of Society: Ways and Boundaries of Increasing Performance

Summer 2016

Course description

People perceive an increase in performance requirements that is often associated with increasing stress levels. At the same time scholars and the media speak of a medicalization of society. It is assumed that this increase in performance requirements leads healthy people to take drugs to increase their cognitive performance. In this interdisciplinary course, we get introduced to potentials and dangers of substance-based (e.g. Ritalin, Modafinil, or Caffeine) and non-substance-based strategies (e.g. meditation, physical activity, or brain stimulation) to enhance cognitive performance (in the media and scholarly debated this is often referred to as “Cognitive Enhancement” or “Brain Doping”).

After an introduction to the topic, we will mainly focus on substance-based enhancement. Therefore, we will discuss the prevalence of cognitive enhancement in different populations and problems associated with measuring this prevalence (e.g. social desirability bias).

We will then review sociological, socio-psychological, psychological, and criminological theories that aim to explain the consumption of performance enhancing drugs. Among these theories are: rational choice theory, social learning theory, theory of planned behavior, and strain theory. We will learn about empirical studies that examine characteristics of the substances, personal characteristics, and social characteristics that are assumed to influence substance intake or the denial of doing so.

This is followed by an ethical discussion of reason for and against substance use among healthy individuals in general and in particular in healthy children, for example, with a reference to fairness norms, and the equal chances. Furthermore, we will discuss prevention strategies and policy implications regarding substance use. Within the seminar, we will also explore tasks for future research and ways to approach these tasks.

Besides presentations, the seminar includes interactive elements such as discussions and research-oriented group works.
# Syllabus

## Day 1

### Introducing the topic, explaining the goals, topics, and requirements of the seminar

### Break

1. **Presentation: Overview about prescription drugs used for cognitive enhancement**

Which prescription drugs are potential enhancers? For which cognitive functions are they used (e.g. augmented concentration or memory)?

**Basic literature for all**


**Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)**


### Lunch break

2. **Presentation: Overview about legal substances and non-pharmacological methods for cognitive enhancement**

Which legal substances and which non-pharmacological methods are discussed as potential cognitive enhancers? Which effects have been found on which cognitive functions?

**Basic literature for all**


**Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)**


**Und Suppliments:** [http://jn.nutrition.org/content/suppl/2008/12/19/jn.108.095182.DC1/nut095182ST01.pdf](http://jn.nutrition.org/content/suppl/2008/12/19/jn.108.095182.DC1/nut095182ST01.pdf)

### Pause

3. **Presentation: Prevalence of cognitive enhancement drugs and drug sources**

How prevalent is the use of cognitive enhancement in different populations? What are the sources of cognitive enhancement drugs?

**Basic literature for all**


**Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)**


**Input from current research (Sattler) and discussion to presentation 3:** How prevalent is the use of prescription drugs for cognitive enhancement? Measuring the prevalence with a special technique.

**Organizational issues and questions of the day and regarding the next day**
Day 2

4. Presentation: Factors influencing the use of cognitive enhancement substances – Part 1
Part 1: Which mechanisms and theories are used to predict and interpret the use and non-use of cognitive enhancers? Which characteristics of drugs, individual, and social factors empirically influence the decision to use or not use cognitive enhancers?

Basic literature for all

Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)

Break

5. Presentation: Factors influencing the use of cognitive enhancement substances – Part 2
Part 2: Which mechanisms and theories are used to predict/interpret the use and non-use of cognitive enhancers? Which characteristics of drugs, individual, and social factors empirically influence the decision to use or not use cognitive enhancers?

Basic literature for all

Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)

Input from current research (Sattler) and discussion to presentation 5: Work-related stress and cognitive enhancement among university teachers in Germany

Lunch break

Explanations of expectations and exercise for the final assignments

Break

Workshop for future research 1: Group work targeting future research questions (presentation of the results on the last day of the seminar)

Organizational issues and questions of the day and regarding the next day

Day 3

6. Presentation: Normative evaluation of cognitive enhancement
Which individual, social, and ethical problems are expressed by opponents of cognitive enhancement and how do proponents of enhancement react to these arguments. What factors influence the moral perception of cognitive enhancement empirically?

Basic literature for all

Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)

Break
### 7. Presentation: Normative evaluation of cognitive enhancement in young people

Please describe the discussion about cognitive enhancement in young people. Are young people a special case? Why? What needs to be considered for the use of cognitive enhancement in young people and who is responsible for the respective decision-making?

**Basic literature for all**


**Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)**


### Break

### 8. Presentation: Prevention and regulation of cognitive enhancement

What are the practical implications that can be drawn from cognitive enhancement research?

**Basic literature for all**


**Optional literature (only mandatory for presenters)**


### Lunch break

**Workshop for future research II:** Group work targetting future research questions (presentation of the results on the last day of the seminar)

### Break

**Poster exhibition and evaluation of the posters**

**Organizational issues and questions of the day and regarding the next day**

### Day 4

**Talk show regarding the rights and wrongs of cognitive enhancement from the perspective of different stakeholders (e.g. physicians and parents)**

**Break**

**Workshop for future research III:** Presentation of the results of the group works

**Lunch break**

**Workshop for future research IV:** Presentation of the results of the group works

**Awarding the Best-Poster-Awards; final discussion regarding open questions in the topic and final assignments; Evaluation of the seminar**