

Don't Panic! We're All Just Looking For Something To Fill the Void

By: Anonymous

I am a drug user. An illicit drug user. Admitting it takes courage, even to myself. You see, I live in a predominantly Catholic country, a very conservative one at that. To openly talk about my drug use is an act of great personal bravery.

If given a choice, I would rather keep it to myself to prevent judgement from others. What will people say? What will my family say? Am I a bad person? Irresponsible? Will I lose respect and trust?

As a drug user, and a woman for that matter, we are constantly judged by society and are told how we can or cannot live our lives.

It is a common misconception that drugs will make us crazy and will turn us into "addicts". But that's not always the case. Our society is quick to judge when we choose to use our body and mind in a certain way. Maybe we use drugs to escape the reality of the world we live in or maybe to numb ourselves from the stresses of everyday life.

Alcohol is a drug, the same as tobacco and coffee and the list goes on. But why are we demonised for choosing something else? Aside from our choice being against the law, but did we ever wonder why?

Drug users are demonised and stigmatised. Imagine what it is like for women drug users.

We live in a time where women's rights are being fought for every day. Even the state has something to say about our reproductive health. We are under-represented. We are underestimated. And we are constantly fighting for what is ours. Women make up just over half the world's population yet only hold 30% of leadership roles in the boardrooms of the world's biggest companies and yet we comprise the majority of.

As a woman who uses drugs, I feel very strongly about this issue. I have the right to choose what I do with my body and where I place my priorities in my life. I don't feel as though I should have to justify this to anyone, not even to myself. But I have to.

My physical and mental health is my responsibility.

To clarify, my drug use is a personal choice. I was not coerced nor pressured to partake in "illegal activities". I am free to choose what I put in my body and decide how it affects my life.

I've been using cannabis since my early twenties. For recreation, yes. It was legal for me to consume alcohol and tobacco, but I chose cannabis. It was only until I was diagnosed with vertigo that I realised that I was not just using it for pleasure, but also for therapeutic purposes. As a matter of fact, I was able to get off my prescription medication. I have never suffered from vertigo since then.

My views about cannabis have changed. Of course I experimented with different drugs, but cannabis was my drug of choice for so many reasons. Now, I am a mother of two and still a cannabis user. I am honest to my kids about my use. They know about my choices and unlike the people around us, my kids hold no judgement. They understand, respect and love me for who I am.

I also have to say that I might have ADHD and could also be on the autism spectrum. My son was diagnosed with both at the age of seven. The more I try to learn about his condition, the more I understand myself better. Add to that, I have read studies mentioning it being hereditary. My husband looks like he has it too.

It is said that neurodivergents are prone to self medicate. And that explains why I experiment with different drugs the same way my husband did. But despite my drug use, I still manage to be a contributing member of society. But again, why do I have to defend my drug use? Why do I have to feel guilty? The reason? I am afraid of the law, and more afraid of my own family and my community.

Where I'm from, once you get caught using or possessing even small amounts of illegal drugs would mean jail time for you. You will be placed among criminals even if the only criminal act you did was to consume an illegal substance. Aside from having a criminal record, you are forever shamed and branded as a drug user.

My views about drug use have changed over the years. Cannabis was indeed a gateway. Understanding cannabis prohibition made me dig deeper into why certain drugs were made illegal and others are not. The drug war wasn't founded in science, but in politics and personal biases.

It made me furious. Imagine being lied to all your life, and you still have people believing in propaganda who think that drug users like me are just defending our use, citing medical reasons as alibis. There are people who still think that drug users like me are a threat to society.

This got me involved in drug policy reform and harm reduction. Starting off as a cannabis advocate, I realised that advocating for the decriminalisation of cannabis use wasn't enough. Moreover, slogans like "don't panic, it's organic" and "it's not a drug, it's a medicine" being echoed by advocates further stigmatise other drug users.

The more I engage with different communities and hearing their stories, the more eager I am in pushing for total drug policy reform. Policies and approach to drug use needs to be changed, and it won't unless drug users speak up. And we need more women sharing stories of how drug use does not make anyone of us less of a person.

The world as we know is stressful, it's challenging to navigate through life. And with this, I say that we're all just looking for something to fill the void.

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