

Inside the Party: The Social Environment of Chemsex

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Trigger Warning and Disclaimer

- This presentation will contain graphic descriptions and images of drug use.
- It will also contain frank mention of my own subjectivity, including sex and chemical use.

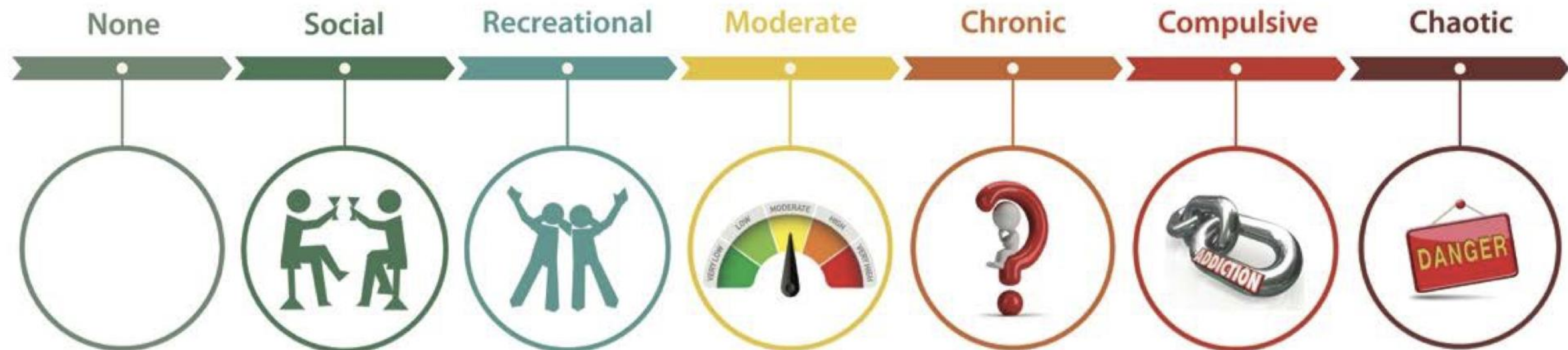
A Tale of Two Parties

- The Friday Night Get-Together
- The Trap House



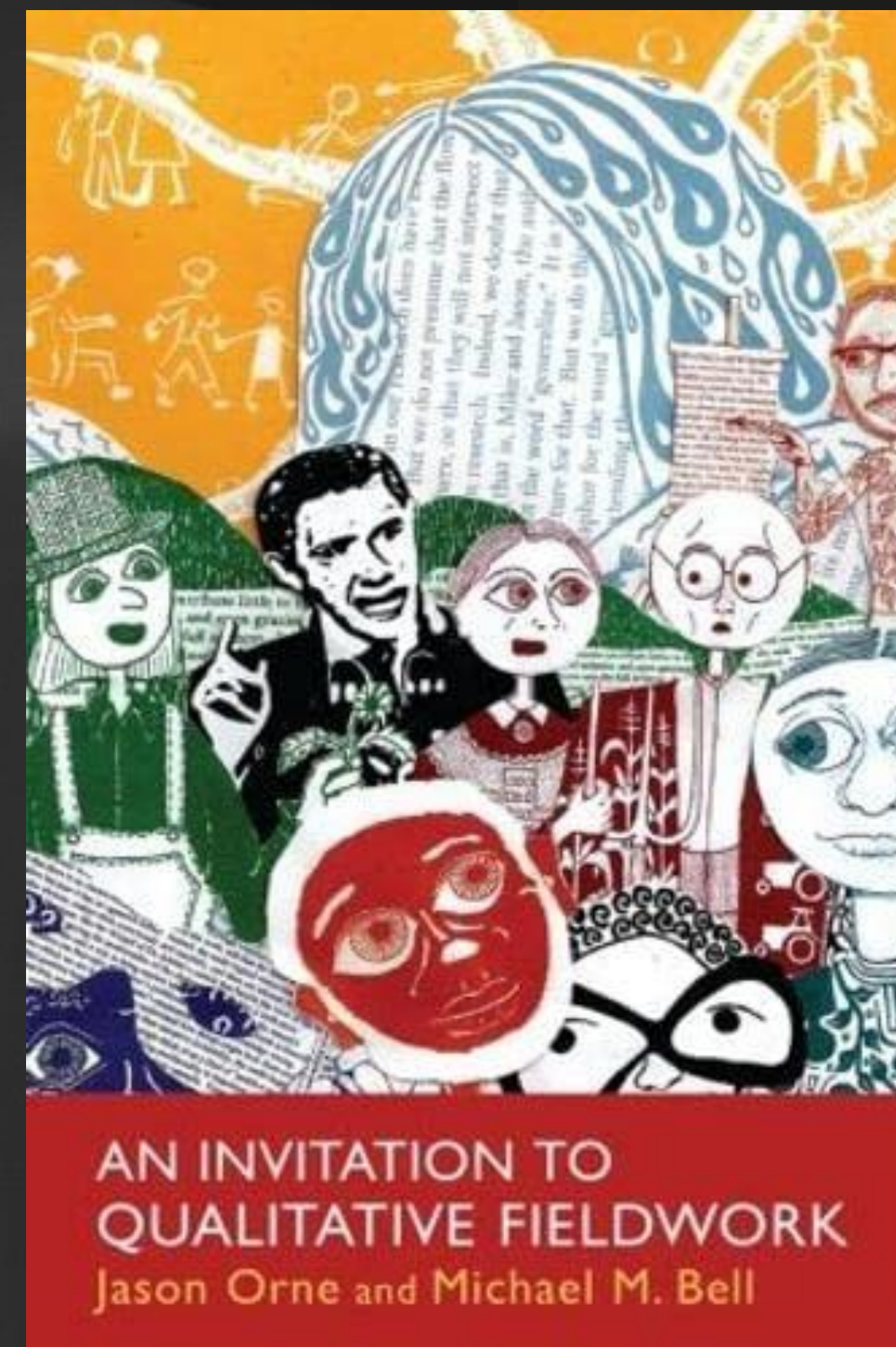
Learning Objectives

- Demystify the process and social environment of chemsex
- Understand the nuances of how chemsex looks to different parts of the substance use continuum
- Identify key questions providers can ask patients



About Me

- Professional Background
 - PhD in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Postdoctoral Fellowship in Community and Environmental Sociology (UW-Madison) and Asst. Professor of Sociology at Drexel University (2016-2021)
 - Author of *Boystown* (2017, UChicago Press) and *Invitation to Qualitative Fieldwork* (2014, Routledge)
 - Research Scientist and Harm Reduction Coordinator, The Aliveness Project
- Lived Experience: Sober from Meth/GHB



BOYSTOWN

JASON ORNE

with photography
by Dylan Stuckey

A Descriptive Approach

Who is doing chemsex?

- Quant Data on chemsex prevalence among MSM
 - Hibbert et al 2019: UK, Convenience sample taken from social media, n=1648
 - 41% reported some form of sexualized drug use
 - 15% reported chemsex
 - Non-UK born and urban MSM more likely
 - Maxwell et al 2019: Meta-analysis
 - 3-29% Prevalence Range for MSM
 - 1-50% Ever Injected; of those 5-56% ever shared
 - Higher estimates (17%+) associated with samples (4 of 8 studies) drawn from sexual health clinics.
- COVID and Chemsex
- Class differences
- Homelessness and Partying

What to Ask:

- Given the prevalence rates seen in sexual health clinics, it makes sense to screen all MSM that present for chemsex
 - How often are substances present when you have sex?
 - How often are you buzzed, drunk, stoned, or high when you have sex?
- Opening up the conversation on sexualized drug use in terms of alcohol and THC generally opens the door to talk about chemsex.
- How often do you stay elsewhere than your home?

Roles in the Chemsex Party

- Host - The person convening people, often the person who owns, rents, or paid for the space
- Dealers, Plugs, and Party Favors- The person or people providing the drugs
- “Firewalls” - Those with the power to invite or screen invitations
- The “floor show” - People there for sexual interaction and entertainment
- Admin - The person with the skill and experience to inject others. Often compensated with drugs

What to ask:

- Check for pressure to provide sex in exchange for drugs or presence
 - Who normally provides the substances that you use?
 - How do you meet the people that you party with?
 - How do you leave situations that you feel uncomfortable with?
- If they have *ever* injected:
 - Who normally administers you?
 - Discuss with them how to properly inject or direct them to the Harm Reduction Coalitions “Getting Off Right.” Give them agency and control, and most importantly the ability to recognize when someone is injecting them poorly.

How? How much? How Often?

Oral

Light	5-10mg
Common	10-30mg
Strong	20-40mg
Heavy	40-100mg

Insufflated

Light	5-10mg
Common	10-30mg
Strong	30-50mg
Heavy	50mg+

Oral

Onset	20-70 minutes
Total	8-10 hours

Insufflated

Onset	5-10 minutes
Total	2-4 hours

Smoked

Light	5-10mg
Common	10-20mg
Strong	30-60mg
Heavy	50mg+

IV

Light	5-10mg
Common	10-20mg
Strong	20-40mg
Heavy	40mg+

Smoked

Onset	0-2 minutes
Total	1-4 hours

Intravenous

Onset	0-2 minutes
Total	4-8 hours

What to ask

- How do you measure how much you are doing when you use?
- How often do you re-dose when you party?
 - Oral, Boofing, and Injection have less re-dose compulsion
- When do you normally hookup? How often do you hook up very late at night?
- “It’s not doing anything for me anymore”
 - Tolerance Breaks: the practice of discontinuing use for a period of time in order to reduce the amount of drug needed to produce the desired high.

Sleep

- Much of the harm comes from disrupted sleep cycles
- Psychosis and Sleep
- Night owls and Morning Larks
 - For night owls: Circadian Rhythm Disregulation: getting out of 'sync' with society
 - For morning larks: Missing the "window" to sleep

What to ask:

- How often have you missed a night of sleep in the last month?
 - Assess insomnia vs hooking up.
- How often do you sleep at night vs 'catching up' on sleep during the day?
What hours do you normally sleep?
- Using in the morning is less likely to disrupt sleep
- Encourage planning use for times when there is sufficient chance to engage in recovery sleep in the following day
- Planning sufficient sleep provides built in prevention of use escalation

Where? Environments of Use

Private Homes

Hotel Rooms

Vehicles

Trap Houses

Shared Residences

Bathhouses
and Sexual Businesses

Public Places



What to ask:

- Where do you typically hook up?
- What's the scariest place that you've partied?
- How much control do you have over your environment when you party?
 - Who is there? Privacy, Cleanliness, Safety
- How often do you move locations when you party?
- When you travel, how do you get there?
- Remember: Risk, Set, Setting!

Conclusion

- Chemsex looks different and comes with different concerns along the continuum of use
- Asking about Who, How, When, and Where can be a better assessment than How much or How often

