

Assignment 2: Guided Critical Review

Watts, S 2011, 'Brain Doping', *New Scientist*, vol. 19, no. 2839, pp. 32-33.

Topic

Cognitive enhancing drugs (CEDs) were once reserved to treat patients with certain medical conditions, but now they are also prescribed to healthy individuals to boost memory and mental powers. Long-term scientific studies are needed to weigh up all the risks and benefits. Scientists believe if these drugs are regulated properly by governmental and medicines regulatory boards that the benefits of CEDs could play a beneficial role in society.

Content

The article discusses the use of CEDs and centres mainly on the use of drugs called Modafinil, Ritalin, and Adderall. The study in the article reported by *BBC's* current affairs show *NewsNight* and *NewScientist* looks into the percentage of society that takes cognitive enhancers. At the same time, Barbara Sahikian, a neuroscientist researches into the prescribed use of CEDs to patients experiencing medical conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Watts (2011) considers it a requirement that it is important to look into the risks and benefits of cognitive enhancing drugs and how they impact on society.

Source

The periodical article is written by Susan Watts, a *NewsNight* science editor, and is from the opinion section of *NewScientist* magazine published on 19th of November 2011.

Audience

NewScientist magazine caters to a wide audience with diverse backgrounds. The magazine also caters to a select audience including science researchers, medical boards, and pharmaceutical laboratories. This periodical is not exclusively intended for scientific or technical consumers. Of this audience, the readership

profile is likely to include people interested generally in current scientific affairs and scientific discoveries.

Rhetorical function

The author questions the topic surrounding bio-medical ethics. Watts asks is it right or wrong to push beyond the boundaries of human limitations with the aid of a smart pill. The aim of the author is to test the readerships' moral judgements on this issue. Watts also warns the reader of possible side effects from these drugs and educates governing regulatory boards working in the field of pharmaceuticals that pharmaceutical companies would require safety trials in order for biomedical smart pills to be commercially produced.

Purpose

The purpose of the article is to inform the audience about the easy over the counter accessibility of buying CEDs over the internet. The bottom line here is not just patients are consuming CEDs for memory enhancement. Instead, some healthy fellow classmates that want to perform better at school are using cognitive enhancers. Other candidates also use the drug Modafinil to simply get a leading edge over others in the job market. Watts criticises the availability of CEDs over the internet while also educating people that it is illegal to supply a controlled substance without a prescription.

Perspective

Watts raises the moral issue surrounding smart pills. Watts describes how people who can freely access CEDs over the internet to improve educational prospects, whilst warning candidates of the issue of a two tier educational system it imposes. To support her argument that CEDs are beneficial in aiding neurological enhancement, she reports on 'moral enhancement' and interviews speaker Anders Sandberg from the University of Oxford's Humanity Institute. Sandberg tests the theory that morality needs to be thoroughly tested on the drugs in order for these drugs to produce moral enhancement. In doing so, he compares CEDs to hormones like ghrelin and oxytocin. Watts's beliefs are summed up in

the headliner stance that the use of CEDs should not be just confined to prescribed patients on prescription.

Positioning

The article largely relies on an anonymous online questionnaire to show how many corresponding users use CEDs. Although Watts admits, the online questionnaire does not represent society, the data surveyed by *NewsNight* and *NewScientist* is really a flagship to prove the real statistical data is out there. In another study, one of the drugs Modafinil was given to sleep deprived surgeons in a bid to improve their ability to perform complex tasks.

Visual Literacy

The visual aspects of the text are significant because the picture of a brain holding a power pill in the foreground of the article draws attention to the sub-headline. Overall, the image sums up the author's stance that cognitive enhancing drugs can be used to boost mental powers.

Impact

The position of the *NewsNight* science editor reinstates the views up for discussion and debate, which is more than one view of bio-medical ethics. It is more of a moral stance the writer conveys to the reader. Does society want to push all the frontiers of the human mind with just the help of a memory pill? Or does society want to be manipulated to such a way that by using advancements in biotechnology, it could mean risking side effects that could outshine the human condition? Therefore, a perfect pill can achieve accessible possibilities that were never thought imaginable.