

Limbaugh on Drug Addiction

Debates on the distribution, sale, and use of illegal drugs have been prominent in United States politics for the past several decades. Political commentator and talk show host Rush Limbaugh has become well known for his outspoken opinions on a number of political and social issues, including drug abuse.

During his talk show on October 5, 1995, Limbaugh stated: “There’s nothing good about drug use. We know it. It destroys individuals. It destroys families. Drug use destroys societies. Drug use, some might say, is destroying this country. And we have laws against selling drugs, pushing drugs, using drugs, importing drugs. And the laws are good because we know what happens to people in societies and neighborhoods which become consumed by them. And so if people are violating the law by doing drugs, they ought to be accused and they ought to be convicted and they ought to be sent up.” Limbaugh argued that drug abuse was a choice, not a disease, and that it should be combatted with strict legal consequences.

In October 2003, news outlets reported that Limbaugh was under investigation for illegally obtaining prescription drugs. Limbaugh illegally purchased hundreds of prescription pills per month over a period of several years. He engaged in the practice of “doctor shopping” by visiting different doctors to obtain multiple prescriptions for drugs that would otherwise be illegal. When this was disclosed, Limbaugh checked into a treatment facility. He said, “Over the past several years I have tried to break my dependence on pain pills and, in fact, twice checked myself into medical facilities in an attempt to do so.... I have recently agreed with my physician about the next steps.”

Though doctor shopping was punishable by up to five years in prison under Florida law, charges against Limbaugh were dropped after he sought help and agreed to the prosecutors’ settlement. Limbaugh has said that he became addicted to painkillers as a result of serious back pain.



Discussion Questions:

- 1) How would you describe Rush Limbaugh’s fundamental attribution error in this case? Explain.
- 2) Do you think Limbaugh’s own drug addiction would change his opinion on drug abuse and his judgment of people using or affected by illegal drugs? Why or why not?
- 3) If you were a regular listener of Limbaugh’s talk show, how might the disclosure of his drug addiction affect your opinion of him? What if you were not a regular listener?

- 4) Can you think of any other examples of the fundamental attribution error apparent in popular media? Describe an example and explain why it would be a case of fundamental attribution error.
- 5) Can you think of any examples of the fundamental attribution error from your own life? Describe and explain.

Resources:

Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545312>

Shock Jocks: Hate Speech & Talk Radio: America's Ten Worst Hate Talkers and the Progressive Alternatives
<http://www.worldcat.org/title/shock-jocks-hate-speech-talk-radio-americas-ten-worst-hate-talkers-and-the-progressive-alternatives/oclc/213375832>

The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making
<http://www.worldcat.org/title/psychology-of-judgment-and-decision-making/oclc/26548229>

Toxic Talk: How the Radical Right Has Poisoned America's Airwaves
<http://www.worldcat.org/title/toxic-talk-how-the-radical-right-has-poisoned-americas-airwaves/oclc/471819884>

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