

A Note on the Brand Names for “Bath Salts”

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This essay discusses a relatively recent phenomenon, namely, the sale and use of a synthetic chemical product known generically as “bath salts.” It then defines this term. Next, it discusses selectively the scientific literature on this product. Finally, it interprets the significance the brand names used to refer to the product and their referents within an onomastic and semiotic framework.

KEYWORDS “Bath salts,” brand names, chain of signification, connotative index, drug subculture

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is fourfold: (1) To discuss a recent phenomenon, namely, the sale and use of a synthetic chemical product known generically as “bath salts;” (2) to provide a definition of this product; (3) to discuss briefly the burgeoning scientific literature on this product; and (4) to address the brand names used to refer to the product and their referents.

The seemingly innocuous term “bath salts,” for many, alludes to a therapeutic product added to bath water. In fact, this term now refers to a type of dangerous drug whose composition, until recently, has flown under drug enforcement radar because of a lack of knowledge about it and its toxic effects. Olives et al. (2012: 58) state that “[a] movement to ban these substances is growing in the United States, following similar actions in Europe.” Likewise, President Obama signed a law to ban bath salts containing mephedrone or another stimulant, MDPV (= Methylenedioxypropiovalerone), in the United States (Illegal Bath Salts Mimic Cocaine in the Brain, 2012). The fact that the chemical recipes used to produce these illegal drugs may be changed easily means that designating a specific chemical *formula* will not eliminate these dangerous chemicals. Recently, a US Government publication (Office of National Drug Policy Control, 2012) enumerated specific actions designed to deal with the emergence of these synthetic drugs sometimes labeled as “herbal incense” or “plant food” to mask their actual use as drugs.

The use of the term “bath salts” is deceptive because it suggests a therapeutic product used externally, even though it is a drug ingested in various ways by its users.

The brand names for these drugs further divert attention from their use as harmful stimulants with dangerous side effects (Coppola and Mondola 2012; Penders, 2012).

Definition

The term “bath salts” has two referents. One meaning refers to a “[...] range of water-soluble, usually inorganic solid products designed to be added to bath water. They are said to improve bodily cleansing, enhance the experience of bathing, and serve as a vehicle for cosmetic agents. Bath salts have been developed which mimic the properties of natural mineral baths or hot springs” (Bath Salts, 2012). The other sense is a slang term for “[...] a family of designer drugs often containing substituted cathinones, which have effects similar to amphetamine and cocaine. The white crystals resemble legal bathing products like epsom salts, and are called *bath salts* with the packaging often stating ‘not for human consumption’ in an attempt to avoid the prohibition of drugs, but chemically having nothing to do with actual bath salts” (Bath Salts (drug), 2012). It is this second meaning of “bath salts” that is the focus of this essay. More specifically, it deals with the brand names of this drug.

Scientific research on “bath salts”

Borek and Holstage (2012: 103) describe “bath salts” in the following terms:

“Bath salts” and other Internet-acquirable synthetic substances are emerging drugs of abuse. These products are sold under a variety of unassuming brand names, such as Ivory Wave, Ocean Burst, TranQuility, Vanilla Sky, and White Lightning. Various products often have written warnings stating “not for human consumption” on the packages. Typical bath salt products contain a white powder that is abused by inhalation, ingestion, or injection. Bath salts can be purchased through a number of venues, such as on the Internet, in head shops, in convenience stores, or in certain tobacco shops. Analytic testing of some of these products has found 3,4-methylenedioxypyrovalerone (MDPV). In addition to being sold as bath salts, MDPV is also surreptitiously marketed as other substances, such as “plant food” or “fertilizer,” as a means of avoiding regulatory scrutiny. Reports that document the clinical effects of isolated MDPV intoxication are lacking. We present a case of marked agitation, hyperthermia, and multisystem organ system failure after the use of bath salts containing MDPV.

Jerry et al. (2012: 258) provide a symptomatology of what are called “synthetic legal intoxicating drugs (SLIDs)” known as “bath salts” because they can have “[...] powerful adverse effects, including acute psychosis with delusions, hallucinations, and potentially dangerous bizarre behavior” (Jerry et al., 2012: 258).

No one disputes the danger of these products for consumers since the scientific literature about these risks is already substantial (Spiller et al., 2011; Penders, 2012; McGraw, 2012; Kapka-Skrzypczak et al., 2011; Jerry et al., 2012; Olives et al., 2012).

Olives et al. (2012: 58) describe the effects of “bath salts” as follows:

User reports describe a euphoric high lasting between 2 to 4 hours with prominent letdown effects lasting several hours afterward. Reported doses range from 5 to 10 mg

for the more lipophilic MDPV (although 1 patient reported taking 2 g over an unclear time course) and 100 to 500 mg for mephedrone. Redosing of both is common. Euphoria, empathic mood, sexual stimulation, subjectively greater mental focus, and increased energy are reported in the highs of both substances. In a recent survey study of past mephedrone users, the 1,506 participants revealed that ecstasy (*sic*) compared most similarly. Significant complications have also been documented, including seizure activity, severe agitation, myocarditis, and chest pain, as well as compulsive dosing to sustain effect. Case fatalities resulting from bath salt consumption, as well as consumption of mephedrone and MDPV from other sources, have also been published in the literature.

In the next section, the names of the products will be discussed. These designations are an important part of the suggestive nature of naming a product to entice potential users, especially those initiated in the meanings of certain words and allusions.

The names of “bath salts”

Danesi (2009a: 47) defines brand name as a “product name that is designed to convey a specific IMAGE with which consumers can identify or relate to.” Danesi (2009a: 46) discusses the notion of “brand image,” which “[imbues] a product with an identity or distinct “personality” by giving it an appealing name, designing a distinct logo for it, devising appropriate pricing (for a specific market segment), associating it with a certain lifestyle through advertising and so on.” This “image,” as Danesi (2006: 37) points out, constitutes the connotative meaning of a brand name, and it is extremely important because it evokes specific cultural meanings. Danesi (2006: 37) calls this sense the “connotative index.” Brand names have implied meanings by virtue of these cultural associations. This network of associations for brand names involves a complex semiotic strategy, or a web of meanings, intended to evoke a certain image and a certain set of associations. In the case of “bath salts,” the system of connotative meanings derives almost exclusively from the drug subculture. It is thus possible to create a chain of signification as illustrated in Table 1.

It is clear that the brand names given to “bath salts” are, indeed, designed to produce a specific image of the product purveyed. Allusions to color, space, physiological effect, exotic locales, and other linguistic means contribute to the mystique of these products. In fact, the subculture that (ab)uses these drugs finds the product names and the small packages with very colorful contents (luminescent green, blue, orange, purple, or simply white powder) to be quite appealing. Moreover, the packaging for some of these products resembles the small packets of illegal drugs sold on the street

TABLE 1
CHAIN OF SIGNIFICATION OF BRAND NAMES FOR “BATH SALTS”

Brand Name	Referents	Implied Meanings
White Rush	Color symbolism;	Reference to the image or the color of many illegal drugs
	Physiological effect;	Reference to the immediate physiological effect of using the product;
	Drug culture slang terminology	Reference to the slang expression “rush” (= cocaine)

in some areas. Although these products are legal, it must be noted that laws are now being enacted to make these “bath salts” illegal. Such products, nevertheless, continue to be widely available at convenience stores. Finally, many of the brand names contain common drug subculture slang expressions for various sorts of drugs including cocaine, heroin, and other illegal products (NoSlang Dictionary.com Drug Translator, 2012). Danesi (2000: 211) defines slang as “[...] specialized vocabulary used for hiding from outsiders the meaning of what was said and/or to show group identity or solidarity [...].” The use of drug culture slang terminology for illegal drugs provides purveyors of “bath salts” with a cleverly encoded message for potential consumers of these products, which reveals their real purpose.

The designations for “bath salts” are important because they evoke specific meanings. In this section, the names for “bath salts,” used as a drug to achieve a desired but potentially harmful physiological effect. Several sources for these names are available (Alternate Names for the “Bath Salt” Drug, 2012). In the following sections, the names of products are often used in combination with other words to suggest certain effects, e.g., color, space, physiological effects, exotic origins, and other linguistic means.

Color imagery

Color imagery, or the association of a product with a specific color, is an important way of producing a significant association (Berlin and Kay, 1969; Gage, 1999). The term “white,” for example, can be a reference to the color of many illicit drugs such as cocaine and heroin. The following designations for “bath salts” feature specific color allusions to white: *Bayou Ivory Flower*, *Ivory Fresh*, *Ivory Wave Ultra*, *White China*, *White Dove*, *White Girls*, *White Horse*, *White Knight*, and *White Rush*.

This use of the color white with a following noun (“wave,” “China,” “dove” “horse,” “knight,” “rush”) likewise calls to mind additional connotative connections. The nouns “wave” and “rush” imply a physiological response to the stimulant. It is significant that many of the terms used in brand names derive from drug culture slang expressions and terms for well-known illegal drugs.

“Dove” is a slang term for crack cocaine (all slang expressions for drugs are from NoSlang Dictionary.com Drug Translator, 2012). “Horse” is a common slang term for heroin. “China” insinuates the exotic and references to nineteenth-century opium dens. The brand name “White China” is an inversion of “China white,” which is a slang term for a form of synthetic heroin. Finally, “knight” is a slang term for heroin.

The noun “ivory” alludes to the color “white” (elephant tusk, white-colored soap), *Bayou Ivory Flower*, *Ivory Fresh*, *Ivory Wave Ultra*. Likewise, the noun “snow” refers to the color of this form of frozen precipitation. Moreover, “snow” is a slang expression for cocaine or heroin, e.g., *Ocean Snow*, and *Snow Leopard* “Arctic” in the brand name *Arctic Blast* is an illusion to the snowy Northern tundra with its pervasive whiteness. Again, there is an indirect reference to snow with its common slang meaning of cocaine or heroin. *Vanilla Sky* features two references, the color white (“vanilla”) and “sky” with the meaning of “high” exemplified in the expression “sky high.”

Blue is a second color used in two of the names of these products. It is alleged to be one of the most popular colors, preferred by fifty per cent of the population. This color is associated with the sky (“sky blue”), hence a reference to the notion of “up,” or “high.” Among this color’s connotations are the its putative calmativ effect. The names *Blue Magic* and *Blue Silk* exemplify this usage. Furthermore, “blue magic” is a slang term for heroin. The slang word “blue” refers to crack cocaine and *OxyContin*®. “Mystic” as in the brand name *Mystic* may mean the color blue as well as a reference to “blue mystic,” a chemical developed by the American pharmacologist Alexander Shulgin (1925–) with properties akin to LSD. A related slang expression for LSD is “blue mist.”

A final color, red, is used in the brand name *Red Dove*. This phrase combines two slang terms, namely, “red” (= methamphetamine) and “dove” (= crack cocaine).

Spatial imagery

The noun “cloud” in the name likewise suggests the color white as well as the notion of “up” or “high” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 14–21). This dual allusion to color and effect achieves an even more powerful allusion by virtue of referring to the perceived effect of a drug, i.e., producing a “high,” e.g., *Cloud 10*, *Cloud 10 Ultra*, *Cloud 9*, and *Cotton Cloud*. The popular expression “cloud 9” is a slang term to refer to MDMA, or methylenedioxyamphetamine. Likewise, the word “cloud” is vernacular for crack cocaine. More precisely, it can allude to the effects of taking a drug. The colloquial expression “cotton” may mean *OxyContin*®.

Physiological effects

Several of the product names refer to the possible physiological effects of these drugs by the use of specific nouns and an adjective that suggest a powerful and immediate effect, e.g., *Arctic Blast* (“blast” is a slang term for cocaine), *Bonsai Winter Boost* (“boost” is a slang term for crack cocaine), *Dynamite Dynamite Plus* (“dynamite” is slang for cocaine mixed with heroin), *Hurricane Charlie* (“Charlie” is a slang term for cocaine, which suggests the effects), *Energizing Aromatherapy Powder* (“powder” is a slang term for cocaine, heroin, or amphetamine), *Euphoria*, *Gold Rush* (“rush” is a slang term for cocaine), *Lunar Wave* (“wave” is a slang term for crack cocaine), *Snow Leopard* (“snow” is a slang term for cocaine), and *Zoom* (“zoom” is a slang term for marijuana laced with PCP [= the abbreviation for the chemical name 1-(1-phenylcyclohexyl)piperidine]), or for PCP).

Exotic origins

A few names suggest exotic origins, e.g., *Bayou Ivory Flower* (Louisiana, white color, botanical source), *Bonsai Winter Boost* (Japan, white color of snow [= slang expression for cocaine], physiological effect), *Route 69* (an interstate highway with its implication of freedom, as well as a sexual allusion), *White China* (“China” suggests the nineteenth-century opium subculture).

Other linguistic signification

This section addresses various brand names for “bath salts” that do not easily fit into the previous categories. A few of the brand names include intensifiers such as “ultra”

(*Ivory Wave Ultra*) and “plus” (*Dynamite Dynamite Plus*), which indicate greater potency.

Another linguistic sign is the use of the alphabetic symbol “X,” which is replete with multiple allusions (Danesi, 2006; 2009b; Roy, 2000). Danesi (2009b: 14–16; cf. Danesi, 2006: 51–54) calls the use of “X” in brand names “X-Power.” “X” evokes many meanings including a mysterious-factor, person, or thing, an unknown element in mathematics, the Roman numeral for ten, location on a map, and much more. “X-Rated, of course, is the well-known rating for erotic movies. The more “X”s, the more powerful is the allusion. Thus, *Wicked X* and *Wicked XX* utilize the allusive power of the sign “X” as well as the adjective “wicked” with its suggestion of wrongdoing. Another alphabetical allusion is the letter “C,” which is a slang term for cocaine, e.g., *C Original*.

Finally, three other brand names merit mention. One is *Scarface*, the criminal moniker of gangster Al Capone, which alludes to a prominent scar on his face. It also refers to two movies of the same name. One is the 1932 film with Paul Muni (1895–1967) and George Raft (1901–1980), and its 1983 remake with Al Pacino (1940–). A second is *Mr Nice Guy* is an obvious allusion to a very potent strain of marijuana. A third is *Tranquility*, which alludes to depressants.

Concluding remarks

“Bath salts” constitute a significant dangerous drug. Only now is this drug beginning to receive the attention that it deserves from health care professionals and from law enforcement officials for its use as a harmful “recreational” drug. The brand names for this powerful substance may allude to its effects on the user. These brand names also encode lexical references commonly used in drug subculture slang. As a result, the “wise” client knows the intended use of these products, even though they may be innocuously labeled as “bath salts” or “plant food.” This brief onomastic note focuses on the way in which brand names for this synthetic chemical product signal the actual purpose of these products by reference to terminology drawn from the drug sub-culture. Every effort has been made to include all of the brand names for “bath salts” in this study.

Appendix

The following list of “bath salts” product names appears in alphabetic order. It derives from several sources (Alternate Names for the “Bath Salt” Drug; Olives et al., 2012: 58; Spiller et al., 2011: 502).

Arctic Blast
Bayou Ivory Flower
Blue Magic
Blue Silk
Bonsai Winter Boost
C Original
Cloud 10
Cloud 10 Ultra

Cloud 9
Cotton Cloud
Dynamite Dynamite Plus
Energizing Aromatherapy Powder
Euphoria
Gold Rush
Hurricane Charlie
Ivory Fresh
Ivory Wave Ultra
Lady Bubbles
Lunar Wave
Mr Nice Guy
Ocean Snow
Pure White
Red Dove
Route 69
Scarface
Snow Day
Snow Leopard
Tranquility
Vanilla Sky
White China
White Dove
White Girls
White Horse
White Rush
White Knight
White Rush
Wicked X
Wicked XX
Zoom

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