

The Cultural Milieu of Criminology and Drug Research

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When we think of drugs and drug users certain images come to mind. The images are products of an array of culturally specific connotations associated with these terms. Most likely, “drug users” do not conjure up images of people sitting around a cafe consuming caffeine and nicotine. Rather, one might think of a pot smoking hippie or an emaciated crack addict. Such images and connotations are produced largely through the media (Brownstein, 1996; Reinerman and Levine, 1997). But less recognized is the role that researchers and scholars play in the production of these images. This paper seeks to identify how the discursive practices of criminology contribute to the creation of drug user identities.

Scholars are increasingly recognizing criminology’s role, or at least complicity, in the actual production of criminal categories and images. Criminology’s foundation in individualization and differentiation (Garland, 1985:115) and its corresponding methodologies have encouraged a particular constructed view of the world and the criminals inhabiting it. Critics have argued that criminology’s reliance on government funding subjects its ‘agenda’ to the influences of legislators’, policy-makers’, and practitioners’ current concerns (Maguire, 1997:141). Milakovich and Weis (1974) even argue that to predict the findings of any study, one need only know the agency conducting it, the method of funding, and the implicit values to be upheld.

Or more insidiously, the social scientist cannot help but simply defend the reality of his or her own world - thus reproducing that reality - under the guise of social science (Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973:33). Regardless, the conclusion of many critics is that all knowledge, including that of the social scientist, is indeterminant and artifactual (Schwartz and Friedrichs, 1994:226). Though such

statements may be overstating the problem, it could be argued that images of drugs and drug users, defined to some extent by the criminological discourse involving them, are little more than artifacts of certain dominant perspectives.

Because any account of a phenomenon can disqualify other accounts (Miller, 1993), presenting only certain patterns of drug use within particular contexts could well ignore the infinite other possible presentations. Thus criminological practice creates certain truths about drugs and drug users (Goode, 1972). The discursive focus on causation and identifying difference coupled with a historical tradition of fear and misunderstanding of certain drugs has led to pathological images of drug use in much criminological writing.

By no means is criminology, or more generally academia, singularly responsible for the construction of images of drugs or drug users. First, criminology is obviously no monolithic entity engaged in a narrow and closed discourse. Within the field there are many different approaches to the study of drug use. Nor has the discipline remained static over time. There have been, however, some discernible approaches in enough of the mainstream publications to justify an analysis of how criminology may be influencing the construction of drug use images.

Second, criminology is not constructing these images in a vacuum constrained only by methodology and personal choice. Researchers are operating within a cultural milieu characterized by hegemonic assumptions about illicit drugs and users. In other words, when researchers think of “drug users” they also operate under the influence of connotations - addiction, disease, violence, hedonism, etc. - associated with the term. The nature of this context and the resulting constructs serve as the subject of this essay.

Nor do the constructed objects passively accept their identities from on high. Certainly, the law, media, the public and drug users themselves have all played important roles in the development of drug subcultures. The interaction between media and criminal justice officials in creating images of drug users and drug panics has been well documented by researchers (Brownstein, 1996; Reinerman and Levine, 1997). Moreover, Becker (1963) and others have noted the importance of *moral entrepreneurs* in constructing the identities of deviants.

The intervening effects of criminological research and theory in the study of drugs, however, have been under-investigated. Phillippe Bourgois (1995:18) points out that “under [a]... microscope everyone has warts and anyone can be made to look like a monster.” By submitting drug users to the scrutiny of field observation and/or surveys, researchers call attention to and emphasize a distortion of the users’ personal foibles and idiosyncracies, thus perpetuating the myth that drug users are somehow pathologically different from others. This essay explores how and why criminology (in the U.S. at least) produces these images of drug use and users.

Research Methods

First, the criminal justice system’s current shift toward “know-nothing managerialism” (Cohen, 1992:19) encourages a return to emphasis on simple measurement (i.e., the predominance of numbers as a descriptive medium (Maguire, 1997)). Various drug use measurement instruments such as the Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) program, the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), and the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) presents little more than trends in the magnitude of

use. Thus, reliance on the criminal justice system will lead mainstream criminology farther away from any understanding and closer to mere descriptives of broad trends.

Moreover, criminology's tendency toward differentiation, prediction and, correction leads to the isolation of individuals on the basis of some perceived shared characteristics - predictors of use. Young (1971) points out that the task of the "expert" includes not only explaining deviance but also reforming it. Viewing drugs from primarily a "correctionalist" perspective, criminological research is usually only interested in finding what makes drug users different from non-users in order to stop all illicit drug use. When viewing the object of study through the legalistic definition of drug abuse, criminology often fails to appreciate the subjective distinctions between use patterns understood by the users.

Eve Sedgwick's (1990) work on homosexuality suggests a means for considering drug research. She notes that the study of homosexuality is problematic because there are few people or institutions studying it who see homosexuality as a positive, much less prized, trait. Studies rarely provide advice on how to make sure one's kids turn out gay. On the other hand, there is an "unimaginably" large number of institutions endeavoring to prevent it (Sedgwick, 1990). Similarly, with a few notable exceptions in the growing approach of harm reduction, very few researchers are concerned with how to encourage responsible drug use. Instead, drug use is studied with the goal of prevention, the eradication of certain drug users.

This is why Eve Sedgwick is wary of studies of homosexuality. As long as cultural norms view it as pathological any causal model, for instance the nature/nurture debate, will be engaged under the

assumption of pathology. This influence of culture is what prevents any science from being truly “objective” or value-free.

Hence, researchers can stretch logic to the tearing point in the construction of a disease model of drug use:

‘heroin use - like marijuana, alcohol, cigarettes, slang, clothing fads and popular music - spreads within groups of closely associated youths by a process of peer emulation and influence.’ or to put the matter a bit differently, drug use spreads like an infectious disease (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985:371).

One would be hard pressed, however, to find this “disease model” applied to the spread of popular music or clothing fads. Here, because the subject is drugs, the authors’ own biases allow them to forsake theoretical clarity and draw an analogy between social learning and the spread of infectious disease - separate theoretical approaches.

In their discussion of control theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) likewise allow prejudicial assumptions to taint their analysis. It leads them to take the drugs/crime relationship out of its political/legal context by simply connecting the two through an underlying shared trait. “Crime and drug use are connected because they share features that satisfy the tendencies of criminality. *Both provide immediate, easy, and certain short-term pleasure*” (p41, emphasis added). All recreation can be described this way. Recreation is nothing more than any activity “that amuses or stimulates; play” (The American Heritage Dictionary). Monday night football or must see Thursday night TV, renting movies, going to the opera all satisfy this basic human urge for amusement, yet these activities are conspicuously absent from the discussion. An implicitly problematic explanation is reserved for recreation (or any desire) conventionally defined as deviant.

Is drug use somehow *more* recreational because it is more effective or more fun? Certainly, the process of acquiring, preparing and consuming drugs is certainly more difficult and requires more planning than going to the movies. Hirschi and Gottfredson have allowed cultural definitions of drug use as hedonism to taint their discussion and then further perpetuate this definition under the mantle of social science.

This desire to *explain* drug use - to search for its causes - results in a continuous stream of publications showing whatever statistically significant (though rarely robust) differences between users and non-users can be found. In fact, journal editors are unlikely to publish studies that do not find significant differences (Spender, 1981). One feminist editor of a journal points out the problem in the study of females:

...it becomes very difficult to have findings of 'no difference' reported in the literature, because if the purpose of research is to find where [the objects of study] are deficient, and the deficiency cannot be located, then the experiment can be classified as a failure (rather than as a 'breakthrough' to a reconceptualization of the problem) (Spender, 1981:192).

Studies failing to find differences between users and non-users fail to find causation, which is the primary mission of criminological theory. The publication of only those studies which find "significant" differences continues to construct the separate categories of users and non-users according to a growing array of tested variables. Assuming their own cultural expressions and identity as the norm, dominant groups, including criminologists, then construct these discovered differences as a lacking or negation (Young, 1990:59). Illicit drug users then become identified as a problematic Other.

Thus, the literature is filled with studies demonstrating differences between drug users and non-users without ever really telling us very much about the users or their subjective experiences themselves. Though their identification of new significant variables may seem like social scientific progress, it nevertheless remains merely a “progress of detail” within the conventional framework rather than the “evolution of new and significant interpretations of the social universe” (Young, 1971:106). For instance, social learning theory has been tested countless times studying adolescent marijuana use (Akers and Cochran, 1985; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce and Radosevich, 1979; Winfree, Griffiths and Sellers, 1989; Bahr and Hawks, 1993). Time and again the studies find that one of the best predictors of marijuana use is the extent of association with other marijuana users.

While these studies may help in testing theory, say, by comparing the effects of social control variables versus social learning variables, it is of little use for better understanding the subjective experiences of drug users and serves only to enhance the mirage of their otherness. Without a doubt, peer influence affects choice in music, literature, sports, and infinite other recreational activities, yet we are not bombarded with study after study concerned with showing how high school athletes are different (and never pathologically different) from everyone else.

Studies investigating the differences (or the causes of use) between drug users and non-users also develop a system of *auxiliary* traits (Becker, 1963) that seem to distinguish between the two. Users are identified not simply because they use certain drugs of interest, but also because the discovered differences purportedly leading them to use the drugs provide further secondary characteristics of users. The predictors of use come to be seen as secondary social/psychological characteristics of users.

So now users under study are different from non-users on as many variables for which the researcher can fit into the statistical model and find significant results. These auxiliary traits then come to further distinguish users from non-users. Marijuana users are not just distinct because they use marijuana but also because they share other characteristics such low self control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), impulsivity (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985) or retreatism (Merton, 1938). Drug users are most often presented as poor, minorities, addicted to crack or heroin and living in the inner cities.

Moreover, there is a considerable imbalance of studies involving impoverished or powerless groups of drug abusers. Criminological research in general focuses on the less powerful segments of society, the young more than the old and the poor more than the wealthy (Pepinsky and Jesilow, 1984). High school drug use surveys and the Drug Use Forecasting program (DUF) in jails focuses on the less powerful, more marginalized drug users. It seems quite unlikely that wealthy “respectable” community members, having more to lose, would come forward about their drug use when surveyed by the National Household Drug Abuse survey.

Additionally, the crack scare of the 1980's and the AIDS epidemic have led to a further concentration of studies on residents of the inner cities. Crack is used primarily by urban minorities, and indigent heroin addicts have been the concern for studies about needle sharing and AIDS epidemiology. In reality, however, this is a small minority of the illicit drug using population. Studies such as Beck and Rosenbaum's (1994) ethnography of mostly middle class ecstasy users are exceptional for their rarity.

The linkage between particular drugs and feared or rejected groups or political causes has historically served as a powerful theme in the American perception of drugs. David Musto (1997) has

chronicled how American culture, in previous moral panics over some drugs, developed a fear of illicit drugs through their association with undesirable subgroups of society. Cocaine was linked to blacks, marijuana was linked to Mexican immigrants and opium was linked to Chinese immigrants. Research focusing on such groups of drug users is both a product of and contributing force to an historically based cultural milieu associating illicit drug use with poor minorities.

This focus on isolated inner city drug markets allows researchers to make broad generalizations such as: ‘illicit drug markets are criminal by definition. They are essentially organized around the distribution and use of illicit substances. *In this environment, there is no meaningful definition of community [emphasis added]*’ (Wilson, 1996 [emphasis added]). When “this environment” refers to socially and economically isolated culturally disorganized communities, it may very well be true. Such a description, however, would be unrecognizable to members of Adler’s (1993) cohesive networks of drug dealing business partners and friends. For that matter, most drug users in better environmental circumstances would disagree entirely with this characterization of the “drug market.”

There are a number of reasons why research focuses inordinately on addicted and powerless drug users. In the case of harder drugs like cocaine and heroin many researchers just do not believe controlled use is common or perhaps even possible.

The National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse reported in 1973 that 90 percent of Americans disagreed with the statement, “You can use heroin occasionally without ever becoming addicted to it.” The existence of hundreds of articles about heroin addiction, as opposed to only a few on any other pattern of use, attests to the research community’s agreement with that view (Zinberg, 1995:147).

With titles of books on heroin such as *It's So Good Don't Even Try It Once* (Smith and Gay, 1972), it would seem researchers do not agree with this view so much as they have perpetuated it.

Researchers and professionals are the sources of the information used by the media and public.

Although researchers are increasingly recognizing that the number of controlled heroin users may equal or even exceed the number of addicts (Kaplan, 1983), historically researchers simply assumed almost all heroin use was or became abusive (Zinberg, 1995).

Most importantly, the research methods used influence the study population. Many studies use data from DUF or ADAM which track drug use trends of arrestees. Using a population already over represented by poor and minorities inevitably leads to studies reflecting such distortions. Other studies identify their population through services such as needle exchange programs, drug treatment or others used primarily by the poor or addicted.

It is quite difficult to find and study middle and upper class illicit drug users because they are understandably hesitant to come forward about their use. Usually such individuals are found once they have entered treatment for drug abuse problems (Exceptions, of course, do exist. See, for example, Siegel, 1977 and Beck and Rosenbaum, 1994 to name just two).

Finally, some criminologists may be hesitant to acknowledge and study successful controlled users of illicit drugs because they present “a *highly* contagious” example to potential drug users (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1989:11 [emphasis in original]). Such users may serve as positive role models for current or prospective users of illicit drugs. “It is the nonaddicted drug users who are most conspicuously thumbing their noses at the state authority” (Zimring and Hawkins, 1992:16). By

emphasizing problem drug users, researchers can ignore the threat to their value system posed by controlled or recreational users.

Grace (1986) suggests that social scientists rarely verbalize any explicit discursive assumptions (about illicit drugs and users). That is, there seems to be little reflexive acknowledgment of the discourse's own kind of coincident biases toward the objects of study. Instead, some time in the past "someone began talking *as if* such and such things were true. In good time others followed the lead, accepting some of the same terms and metaphors and adding more of their own, until eventually a full-fledged jargon of the familiar sort came into being" (Grace, 1986:20). The turn-of-the-century moral crusades against opiates, cocaine, and marijuana set the foundation for popular perceptions of and professionally inquiry into illicit drugs and drug use. Criminologists have simply built upon it.

The concepts of drug users and subcultures have been reified, coming to seem as if they are real entities. Research is partly to blame for this. Criminology, in its reliance on legalistic definitions of drug users and abusers, its study of the poor and powerless "users," and its exoticization and differentiation of their objects of study has helped construct particular images and definitions of drug users. The audience is led to conclude that since certain distinguishing variables have been identified, drug users as a definite and real category must exist as portrayed; we believe that "whatever received a name must be an entity or being, having an independent existence of its own" (John Stuart Mill, from Gould, 1996:181).

Language and the Drug User

It is easy to see that the drug user can have a residual effect on the lives of family members. A portrait of the drug user is provided in Chapter 14, but experience has shown that the dependent drug abuser will lie and steal if necessary to support his or her habit. In many cases an occurrence called '**backstabbing**' takes place in families in which a member uses drugs. Here, young and middle-age drug users who have depleted their own resources will turn to family members for drug money. In some cases, the family the unaware of the seriousness of the situation and provides money to the user only to realize that more will be required soon (Lyman and Potter, 1998:7; bold in original).

Drugs and, even more so, drug users, have been constructed through legal and cultural processes. In popular media as well as the academic research, people who use legal drugs are not called drug users while those who use illegal drugs are. Someone who smokes tobacco is a smoker, but someone who smokes marijuana is a drug user. Though both substances are recognized as drugs, one "smokes" cigarettes, while someone else "uses" marijuana.

The academic literature often uses drug use and abuse interchangeably when discussing illegal drugs. Legal definitions of drug abuse - any use of illegal drugs - have come to provide the analytical definitions for many researchers, regardless of the actual behavior patterns under study. Scholars talk of certain populations being at a "higher-than-average *risk* of drug use [emphasis added]" (Zimring and Hawkins, 1992:198). "Risk" emphasizes only the potential dangers of drug use. Moreover, it clearly would seem inappropriate to discuss one's risk of coffee use. Danger is reserved for "hard" or unconventional drugs.

Language plays a most important role in society and culture. It constructs reality (Grace, 1986). Criminologists, while in the process of studying a reality, actually play a role in creating it through the discourse of the field and use of language. The contexts of discussions involving drugs or drug users influence their conceptual elements and thus their very meaning. The issue here is not so much “faulty” research on drug use as it is the importance of how drug use is talked about even if it is not the object of study per se.

For instance, a criminological essay about domestic abuse off-handedly mentions the importance of arresting “drug dealers, thieves, and rapists” (Hirschel, Hutchinson, Dean, and Mills, 1992) The idea of drug users now includes, at least peripherally, murderers and rapists. Likewise, a textbook on criminal justice lists the “basic rules of society: do not murder, rob, sell drugs, commit treason” (Cole and Smith, 1998:404). Again, selling drugs is associated with the most serious predatory crimes and even treason against one’s country.

In a discussion of peacemaking methodology, Caulfield and Evans (1997) list the “core issues” related to “drug-oriented behavior” including “alienation, a drug-oriented culture, an addiction-based culture, instant gratification, cure-alls via over the counter medication, and economic structures that place more value on drugs than on employment with a realistic minimum wage” (106-107). Doubtlessly such variables are associated with drug *abuse* and some drug use, but the absence of any benign or even neutral “causes” of drug use represents cultural assumptions rather than any attempt at a thorough listing of variables associated with drug use.

Another example is provided in Wonders’ (1999:118) discussion of an aspect of ‘positionality,’ through which we attribute meaning to things which then take on those given meanings:

...if the state claims that young people who use drugs are criminal (rather than 'ill,' as is done in many other industrialized countries), then the state has played an active role in shaping the identity of teenagers and others who used drugs - it has changed who they are.

While describing how the state imposes a criminal meaning on drug use, Wonders charitably offers up an alternative identity - sick person. In her own discussion of positionality, she has criticized one definition and suggested another (a dubious improvement for the user) to take its place. Rather than merely criminal, a drug user may now instead be sick. This is exactly how scholars can unreflexively construct identities of their objects of study - even while being critical of how others are doing it. These are studies where drug use is not even the focus of study, yet it is talked about in ways that conform to popular images of illicit drug use thereby further reifying those images.

Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation can help illustrate the point. At the simple, descriptive level of denotation (Hall, 1997) drugs are simply, in a broad sense, "any chemical entity or mixture of entities, other than those required for the maintenance of normal health, that alters biological function or structure when administered" (World Health Organization, 1981:227). And a drug user is any person who ingests such substances. At the connotative level, however, "drugs" and "drug users" are terms loaded with a complex of culturally specific meanings.

Supporting the continued prohibition of illicit drugs, Wilson (1990:28) argues that if illicit drugs are legalized: "to the lives and families destroyed by alcohol we will have added countless more destroyed by cocaine, heroin, PCP, and whatever else *a basement scientist can invent* [emphasis added]." In a sentence Wilson manages to perpetuate particular images of the illicit drug scene (even if made licit). First, as discussed earlier, it is not likely accidental that marijuana or LSD were not

mentioned in the list of illicit drugs which will destroy lives. Again, the “hard” drugs heroin, cocaine, and PCP stand in as representatives for the whole gamut of drugs that are used illicitly.

More importantly, the imagery of a “basement scientist” connotes something unsavory or dirty about the class of drugs to which he refers. Although pharmaceutical companies are responsible for the development or current production of the majority of illicitly used drugs, Wilson clearly distinguishes legitimate drugs from those brewed in a basement.

The use of this sort of imagery both draws on cultural preconceptions about illicit drugs and concurrently adds new dimensions to the connotations of “drugs.” Drug users are not just people who ingest chemical entities which alter their physiology, they are symbolically associated with disease, the subterranean, and low self-control. These sorts of contexts involving drugs build the readers’ repertoire of drug related images which they bring to their next encounter with images of drugs or drug users. In this way, criminology defines through connotation what drugs and drug users mean.

Disciplinary Integration

There is an increasing pressure from the critical periphery of criminology to rejuvenate the field through utilizing new methodologies and approaches. Many have recognized that criminology cannot “renew itself from within” and should therefore stop any attempts at policing “its ever-porous boundaries with other disciplines” (Sparks, 1997:411). Feminists insist that criminologists escape the narrow confines of the discipline and its journals, “otherwise we will continue to suffer from common-sense and *ad hoc* interpretations of data (Daly and Chesney-Lind, 1988:506). The compartmentalization of knowledge through increasing specialization has prevented criminologists from

fully grasping the totality of the social world (Taylor, et al., 1973). Building on the interactionist perspective and culture studies, cultural criminology notes how enforcement officials, criminals, public perceptions, media presentations and cultural style interconnect to create criminal definitions and images. It attempts to describe “the ongoing process by which... subcultural symbols flow from and, in turn, circulate back through the mediated channels of news reporting, advertising, and consumption” (Ferrell and Sanders, 1995:299). Criminology itself can be added to this list.

Cultural criminology must include recognition of the interaction between researcher and subject and the research and audience in further constructing images of drug users. Unfortunately, its proponents have neglected to consider the criminologist’s own role in the production of meaning. A more reflexive approach informed by other disciplines such as culture studies will help the researcher avoid some of the problems already discussed.

In his seminal work on *Orientalism*, Said (1967) suggests that a scholar is just a specialist in a particular field of knowledge already constructed historically and culturally by an entire society. Before criminology or sociology began studying illicit drug use, American culture had already developed a fear of drugs - particularly when associated with disadvantaged/feared groups. Past moral crusades in the early 20th century had already created a sense that drugs other than alcohol and tobacco - staples of the American culture - were dangerous (Musto, 1997).

The anecdotes of the early 1900's telling of violent crimes committed by kids while high on marijuana and of violent black males who could not be stopped by bullets while high on cocaine helped to build a tradition suspicious of unconventional drugs. Therefore, studies of disadvantaged minority drug users and studies aiming to “correct” the drug use problem speak to a common sense notion of

drugs held by the general public and its professionals. New continuing studies of the same style further reinforce and restate cultural norms already over half a century in the making.

The field of culture studies may offer a plausible framework from which to engage in the project of analyzing this interaction between author and audience within a culture. Stuart Hall's (1993) theory of communication involving production, circulation, consumption, and reproduction can be applied to criminological production of meaning. Hall discusses the importance of the encoding of messages through the dominant language (publishing in journals) and the consequent decoding by the audience. Acknowledging this process allows researchers to recognize the importance of semiotics in the academic texts.

So we can begin a deconstruction of criminology's construction of drug users. As a cultural and linguistic construct, drugs are especially open to this sort of re-analysis. This view of criminology as a unique version of communication or media allows the deconstruction of academic texts. Learning from film studies' approach to deconstructing film by placing the film within its culture, a new cultural criminology can allow us to place certain criminological texts and their chosen metaphors and vocabulary within the broader cultural constraints.

This travels well beyond critical criminology's traditional focus on the state and class structure in defining and oppressing certain groups through the war on drugs. Manderson (1995) argues that we must get away from this focus on logic and political subtexts for understanding drug laws and move toward a discourse of aesthetics. "For, like war, the contention, anger, and ferocity which drug use continues to generate is above all a function of semiotics. The images which we associate with drug use

have taken on profound emotional significance partly because of the kinds of thing they have come to symbolize and partly because this symbolism is fraught with ambiguity” (Manderson, 1995:800).

He analyzes the importance of the symbolism associated with drugs. As symbolic objects, illicit drug use may represent the violation of boundaries (e.g, the hypodermic needle’s cross between the outer and inner worlds) or exclusion. Manderson suggests that the drug subculture represents an “unwanted construction” which makes the uninitiated uncomfortable. “There is always a certain unpleasantness occasioned by being present at an alien ritual (Manderson, 1995:803).

These seemingly “unwanted constructions” are, rather, *necessary* to counteract our fear of actual similarity with “drug users.” The Other is not opposed to and facing the subject. It is next to it, too close for comfort (Young, 1990:144). “...[T]he most dangerous Other is always the one least distinguishable from oneself, the one that might really *be* oneself (Lenson, 1995:8 [emphasis in original]). It is precisely because anyone can suddenly become a drug user, by the simple act of having his or her recreation labeled as such, that constructing the drug using Other is so necessary. It establishes one’s own identity in contrast, and in the process legitimates one’s own means of fulfilling desire. Meaning is the result of difference and relationship (Storrey, 1998:74). Good and moral cannot exist without bad and immoral, nor clean without dirty, and so on.

Public policy has defined certain users of certain substances as the dangerous Other. This serves the dual purpose of defining everyone else’s legitimized substance use as normal and safe while also providing a dangerous other. Fighting to eliminate (or cure) this other makes us feel safer. “It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created” (Douglas, 1966:4).

We have reified a drug subculture and exoticized it. In the process of exoticizing, we have distanced ourselves so far as to make ourselves uncomfortable -both because we no longer understand it and because we sense its actual impending closeness.

The Users

Importantly, research must seek appreciation for the subjective realities of drug users themselves. For instance, a cultural criminology should account for “crime in... its entertainment value - its construction as pleasure and fun...”(Ferrell and Sanders, 1995:312). Yet, Oakley (1981:40) complains that a “sociology of feelings and emotion” does not exist.

Young (1990) argues that “modern reason,” upon which social sciences such as criminology rely so heavily, contains a self-made opposition to desire. It is because of the particularity of feelings that they must be rejected by positivism. It is no coincidence that criminology’s rejection of feeling and pleasure mimicks a culture which also fears pleasure. “Readers and TV viewers are apparently able to ingest limitless representations of violence and loss, but they cannot tolerate an account of what a hit of crack does to a user... The problem is that it says: this happens, this exists, people do this and enjoy it with no regrets” (Lenson, 1995:20). Consequently, our social sciences seek to explain what kind of person would violate observed values. It is a science deeply embedded in cultural expectations about proper fulfillment of desire.

The challenge lies in finding ways to conduct research with and learn from illicit drug users without objectifying or pathologizing them. Peacemaking criminology and its emphasis on balanced

conversation, or drawing out the voices least heard (Pepinsky, 1998), can provide a foundation for new approaches.

Drawing out the voices of drug users suggests looking for ways to allow them to tell their own stories. It becomes a discourse *of* drug users rather than *about* them. The academics' job, then, is to use their unique knowledge or training to help the participant better understand and better communicate his or her own unique knowledge. In this way, criminologists can enter into discussions of drug use more critical of the role they play in creating the object which in turn may open up new representations of the issue historically ignored within the criminological discourse.

Within any discourse there resides a "hierarchy of credibility" (Becker, 1967). This means simply that some individuals have more power to define truth than others (Goode, 1972). Currently, the criminologist or other such professional has the most power in presenting the drug question while the users themselves seem to fall somewhere close to the bottom. Researchers control the stories of their objects of study (drug users) through structured surveys, editing, and interpretation. So we continue to get researchers' images of drug users instead of the drug users' own reality.

The post modern project of diversity and alternative voices, however, has enfranchised a "new body of intellectuals" (Storrey, 1998:177). Voices from the margins are increasingly speaking from positions of difference. The more criminology engages in this politics of difference the more difficult it will be to marginalize certain drug using segments of the population. Ironically, it is the voices of the middle-class user or the controlled user which represent the margins in drug use research. New effort must be made to identify and listen to such users.

Works such as Pettway's *Honey, Honey, Miss Thang* (1996) demonstrate how a researcher can step back from the objects of study and allow them to tell their own stories. By concentrating on keeping the "the essential narrative expression of the individual" the work attempts to halt the usual subjugation of the participants' knowledge. It asks the question "What do the hustler, the 'queer,' the addict, and those who have fallen outside the mainstream of American life reveal and teach us?" (xiii).

Until the dominant cultural constructions of drug use and drug users are recognized and dispensed, there is little hope for meaningful policy reform. Without new methodologies and approaches in research to build links with drug users of all types, rather than just those in prison or treatment, policy will continue to reflect the assumptions of prejudice and ignorance.

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