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Normalizing the Deviant?: arrestees and the normalization of drug use

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Abstract

Traditionally in the UK scant research attention has been paid to the arrestee population. The introduction of the NEW-ADAM programme has done much to change this. To date, arrestees have not featured in research that is relevant to the normalization of drug use and it is argued that they should be. This article will posit six reasons which when combined will demonstrate arrestees' suitability to the normalization thesis. First, when one explores the contemporary drug scene and observes that drug use is at the centre of youth culture, many of the distinctions that were once held to define arrestees as highly deviant due to their drug use can no longer be maintained; second, a diverse range of groups are using drugs as part of their everyday lifestyle and the addition of arrestees merely adds to the existing diversity; third, arrestees are the first to try new drugs and form new modes of drug consumption patterns which are later mirrored by other drug using groups; fourth, the features of normalization are present in the levels and patterns of arrestees drug consumption; fifth, leisure plays a key role in arrestees drug and other criminal behaviour; and finally, arrestees have a greater willingness to report use of those drug types that are considered to be normalized.

Key words: arrestees; normalization; drug use; deviance

Introduction

At the close of the last decade and into the new one, drug use has become a normalized activity in the UK (Hammersley, *et al.*, 2003; Measham, *et al.*, 2001; Aldridge, *et al.*, 1999; Parker, *et al.*, 1998, Measham, *et al.*, 1994). To date, arrestees have not featured in research relevant to the normalization thesis and it shall be argued here that they should be (Patton, 2002).

The natural focus of criminologists when researching a given sample is upon their respondents' deviant and illegal behaviour. Hardly any space is ever given to the ordinariness of a research samples' lives (Hammersley, *et al.*, 2002). Published material in relation to arrestees is in alignment with the criticism of Hammersley, *et al.* (2002) that people who consume drugs are presented in a one-dimensional manner. For example, the lifestyle addendum reported by Bennett (1998) sought information from arrestees about sources of drug purchases, gun ownership, prevalence of HIV/AIDS, accommodation type and their involvement with the criminal justice system.

The emergence of research into the dance club culture has finally forced wider cultural and lifestyle issues on to the research agenda as well as exploring the levels of drug consumption. Hammersley, *et al.*, (2002) asked their sample of former and current ecstasy users questions relating to their leisure time, how it was spent, what things they would usually buy other than drugs, how they would vote and whether or not they were religious.

The disparity in the content and nature of the two lifestyle questionnaires is immense. As a direct consequence of the type of questions traditionally asked, it is easy to see why arrestees are painted in a negative light, in terms of their drug and other criminal behaviour. Arrestees are young people and adults that participate in everyday activities and their drug and/or criminal activities form only part of a wider lifestyle. This view challenges and uproots many of the stereotypical and one-dimensional notions that have commonly accompanied discussions about arrestees and ensures that the continuance of such an approach is futile.

The case for regarding arrestees as being a relevant study population to the normalization thesis will be shown first by, re-positing arrestees' behaviour, primarily in the context of drug consumption, in the contemporary setting. Drug consumption has spread from being a highly stigmatised activity engaged in by those on the margins, to become a central element of popular culture.

Second, it shall be highlighted that a broad and diverse range of drug using groups are already included under the banner of normalization, each with their own distinct characteristics. Arrestees with their own distinct characteristics, would add to this diverse range of drug consuming groups.

Third, arrestees try new drugs and exploit new drug markets before other drug consuming groups. In this respect they are regarded as 'pioneers' of normalizing drug consumption patterns which are later mirrored by other drug consuming groups.

Fourth, normalization has affected the drug consumption levels and drug consumption patterns of drug consumers. Therefore the features of normalization are present in the level of drug consumption found, and in the drug consumption patterns of arrestees, both in terms of poly drug consumption patterns and an equal distribution of drug consumption in relation to age, race and sex.

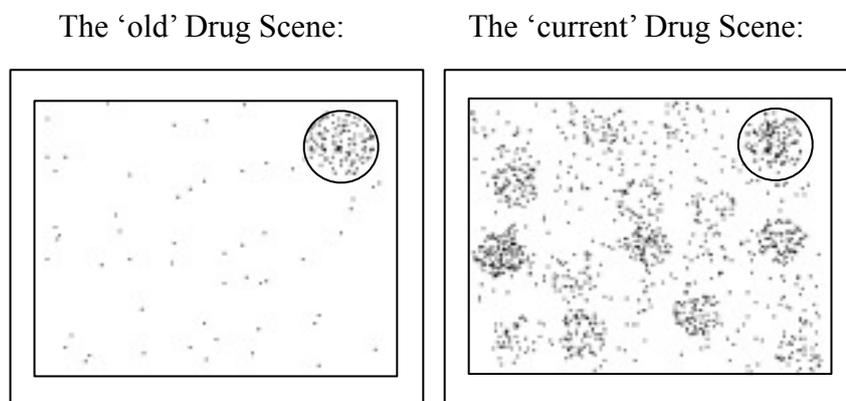
Fifth, a key factor in the normalization of drugs is that a person's drug use is neither the prime focus nor the sole determinant of the drug consumer's life. It will be argued that the levels of drug use and other criminal behaviour among arrestees may be more to do with levels of leisure time spent outside of the home as opposed to any pathological or deviancy explanation.

Sixth, the normalization thesis advocates that not all drugs have become normalized. Drugs that are included are: amphetamines, ecstasy, cannabis, nitrates, and LSD. Heroin and cocaine are not part of this phenomenon. Although, the status of powder cocaine is a little more ambiguous as it is increasingly becoming incorporated into the drug repertoires of recreational drug users (Measham, *et al.*, 2001; Ramsay, *et al.*, 2001; Ramsay & Partridge, 1999). When Patton (2002) explored the external validity of arrestees reporting practices, it was shown that more positive admissions were gained by self-report, than positive results gained by urinalysis for those drugs that are deemed to be normalized.

A Paradigm Shift

At the crux of the normalization thesis is the movement of what was previously a highly deviant activity (drug taking) into the centre of youth culture. Figure 1 illustrates the assertion that drug consumption was previously concentrated in highly deviant groups, but at present, is prevalent among other groups in society (for example, students, rising professionals etc.). A circle in the top right-hand corner of each rectangle represents the 'deviant' groups, the black dots represent the presence of drug consumption, the inner or smaller rectangle represents the centre of youth culture (which undoubtedly includes a mixture of groups within society) and the outer or larger rectangle represents wider society.

Figure 1: The Spread of Drug Consumption from Deviant Groups to The Centre of Youth culture



The current drug situation, whereby drugs are normalized is depicted on the right in Figure 1. Here, drug consumption has spread beyond the deviant/offending groups to wider groups within the centre of youth culture. Whilst the presence of drug consumption is still very evident among the formerly 'deviant' groups (as shown by

the number of dots in the circle), the contrast between the number of dots contained within the circle, and the number of dots outside the circle is less stark especially when compared to the 'old' drug scene. It is therefore time to include those groups that were originally associated with drug taking and labelled as a deviant and abnormal group, for example arrestees, as relevant to the normalization thesis. The now outdated distinction between the two groups (those in the circle and those in the centre of youth culture) can no longer be maintained. In some respects the pendulum may have swung the other way:

Over the next few years, and certainly in urban areas, non-drug trying adolescents will be the deviants (Parker, *et al* 1995: 26).

A Diverse Mix

It is a central tenet of the normalization thesis that the drug consuming population is diverse. More young people from both sexes, all social classes, races, occupational groups, sexualities are trying a wide range of licit and illicit drug types (Aldridge, *et al.*, 1999; McKegane, 1998; Parker, *et al.*, 1998; Sutherland & Willner, 1998; Leitner *et al.*, 1993). Indeed, the fact that drug use has penetrated all strata within society is held to demonstrate the normalized status of drugs. Those who have been included in research relevant to normalization so far include schoolchildren, higher education students, 'dance club frequenters', and general household members. Each have their own distinct characteristics and yet may share some similarities. The addition of arrestees merely supports and adds to the existing diversity of drug consumers included under the remit of normalization.

It is the potentially diverse make-up of arrestee samples (in terms of the differing levels of drug and criminal behaviour as opposed to their demographic make-up) that perhaps marks them out especially from other criminal justice samples traditionally studied in research relating to drugs and/or crime. The assumption should not naturally be that all persons arrested are guilty. Some arrestees will undoubtedly be innocent, some may be guilty of their arrestable offence, some may be released without charge, some will be charged, not all of those who are charged will be proceeded with by the Crown Prosecution Service, of those that are, not all who plead not guilty will be convicted by a court, and those that are sentenced will receive varied sentences. Further, there will be a mix of drug using patterns. For example, some will be drug abstainers (some may be former drug consumers while others may never consumed a drug in their lifetime), some will have only recently begun experimenting with drugs, some will have used drugs regularly over the last 12 months (whose use may be termed recreational) and some will have use patterns which are more chaotic or even dependent.

Pioneers of Normalization

It can be observed that previously drug taking was 'pioneered' by those displaying high levels of deviant behaviour (as illustrated on the left of figure 1 above), that is, they represented an extreme group where drug taking was commonplace. Whilst the gap between the former 'deviant' group and the 'non-deviant' group has reduced, arrestees must be regarded as contemporary 'drug pioneers'.

Evidence generated from the U.S.A. by the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program has demonstrated that arrestees comprise an active drug using group and therefore are likely to try new drugs and exploit new drug markets before any other group (Reardon, 1993; Wish & Gropper, 1990). Their arrestee data has proved to be an early indicator of prevalence changes in new and existing drug consumption patterns that are later mirrored among other drug using groups (Wish & Gropper, 1990).

Indicators of the Features of Normalisation in Arrestees' Drug Consumption Levels and Patterns

Normalization has radically altered the drug taking landscape (Parker, *et al.*, 1998). As the last decade progressed numerous drug surveys documented increasing drug consumption levels among a wide range of drug using groups (Burke, 2001; Sutherland & Shepherd, 2000; Wibberley & Price, 2000; Aldridge, *et al.*, 1999; Sutherland & Willner, 1998; Parker, *et al.*, 1998). By the close of the 1990's it was stated:

It is quite extraordinary... that we have so quickly reached a situation where the majority will have tried an illicit drug by the end of their teens and that in many parts of the UK up to a quarter may be regular drug users." (Parker, *et al.*, 1998: 152-153).

Arrestees were not included amongst this body of evidence, and further, traditionally in the UK, drugs research has not focussed upon arrestees. Prior to Bennett (1998) there had only been three studies that had explored the prevalence of drug use amongst arrestees in the UK (Chatterton, *et al.*, 1998 & 1995; Robertson, *et al.*, 1995; Maden, *et al.*, 1992). The drug prevalence rates found amongst the arrestees from the three studies conducted were not particularly high, with drug consumption levels not exceeding 22% (even when alcohol was included). However, Bennett (1998) found

that the overall prevalence of illegal drug consumption during the three-day period prior to testing was 64% when measured by urinalysis.

Further, the NEW-ADAM programme has continued to document high drug prevalence levels amongst arrestees (Bennett, 2000) and similarly, a Scottish version of the NEW-ADAM programme has also found high levels of drug consumption, with 71% of arrestees testing positive for a controlled drug in the three-day period prior to testing (McKeganey, *et al.*, 2000).

Utilisation of the ADAM methodology in the UK has improved current understanding of the levels of drug consumption amongst arrestees. It is clear that drug consumption features in the lives of arrestees which is therefore to be regarded to be normalized.

Poly drug consumption is another prime feature of normalization. Its effect on drug consumption patterns was also found to be evident amongst arrestees. Parker & Measham (1994) highlight that what defines current drug consumption patterns is a pick 'n' mix approach to drugs where poly drug consumption tends to dominate. Poly drug consumption, that is where an arrestee tested positive for two or more drug types when alcohol was excluded, ranged from 18% to 44%, (md = 30%). When alcohol was included poly drug consumption ranged from 28% to 45% (md = 35%).

Previously, variables such as gender, race, social class and age were believed to be good indicators of the likely extent of drug consumption (Ramsay & Percy, 1996, Measham, *et al.*, 1994). Normalization has altered this pattern and is reflected in the levelling out of drug consumption amongst the general drug using population in the

UK in relation to gender, race, social class and age (Wibberley & Price, 2000; Aldridge, *et al.*, 1999; Ramsay & Partridge, 1999; McKeganey, 1998; Sutherland & Willner, 1998; Parker, *et al.*, 1998; Roberts, *et al.*, 1995; Leitner, *et al.*, 1993; Saunders, 1993). Equally, these 'key' variables are no longer helpful in explaining observed levels of drug consumption found amongst arrestees.

Bennett (1998) found that for most drug types, females were as likely or more likely to test positive than males. Further, no differences were found by sex in the proportion that tested positive for multiple drugs. No differences were found to exist by age in relation to testing positive for any drug type, (although older arrestees were statistically more likely than younger arrestees to test positive for opiates and younger arrestees were statistically more likely than older arrestees to test positive for cannabis). In terms of race, little difference was detected between the white and non-white arrestees in terms of the proportion testing positive for any drug type or for multiple drug types even when alcohol and cannabis were excluded individually and collectively.

The high level of drug consumption, the pervasiveness of poly drug consumption patterns and the equality in drug consumption levels across age, gender, and race are attributed to the effect of normalization on drug use amongst arrestees. Interestingly, Hammersley *et al.* (2003) have recently concluded that drug use has become normalized amongst young offenders.

Leisure, Drug Consumption and Offending

The relationship between leisure and drug consumption, and leisure and offending shall be discussed in turn. Three samples that were considered by their respective authors to be 'conventional' and 'normal', (Hammersley, *et al.*, 2002; Flood-Page, *et al.*, 2000; Ramsay *et al.*, 2001) shall be used, and applied to and/or compared to, arrestees to highlight factors that may be affecting the levels of drug consumption and offending amongst arrestees. The use of these studies was necessary as to date, no research study has explored the wider lifestyle practices of arrestees.

The relationship between leisure and drug consumption, and leisure and offending is supported when leisure is defined as time spent socialising outside the home, especially in the form of number of evenings spent socialising outside the home (Hammersley, *et al.*, 2002; Ramsay *et al.*, 2001, Ramsay & Partridge, 1999; Leitner, *et al.*, 1993). The existence of this relationship may be a prime contributory factor to the levels of drug consumption of arrestees, in that arrestees have high levels of leisure time and a large number of evenings spent out of the home.

Leisure and Drug Consumption

It has been shown that leisure and drug consumption are related (Ramsay, *et al.*, 2001; Ramsay & Percy, 1996; Leitner, *et al.*, 1993). Hammersley, *et al.* (2002) found that among their research sample of mainly current and former ecstasy users that they led ordinary lives, and their drug consumption was only part of their wider lifestyle. In

addition to their ecstasy use, the other kinds of activities they engaged in on at least a monthly basis were: visiting friends, going to the pub, cinema, and restaurants. They watched movies at home, and played computer games. Overall, 69% of respondents participated in sports, and 62% had a hobby of some sort. Purchases of consumables other than drugs included: sweets and soft drinks, CDs, take away food, magazines, and broadsheet and tabloid newspapers.

The British Crime Survey (BCS) 2001 found a clear association between drug consumption and the number of evenings spent out in leisure venues such as pubs, bars and nightclubs (Ramsay, *et al.*, 2001). It was shown that young people visiting a pub or bar in the week prior to interview were twice as likely to have consumed a drug in the last 12 months when compared to those that had not gone out as often in the week prior to interview (Ramsay, *et al.*, 2001). Equally, the levels of drug consumption in the 12 months prior to interview was almost double for those that attended a nightclub at least once a week when compared to those that visited less often. Finally, Ramsay, *et al.*, (2001) also found that significantly higher rates of drug consumption for Ecstasy, hallucinants and Class A drug use was found amongst frequent nightclub attendees.

From the two findings discussed above it was shown that people's drug consumption appeared to have been arranged around their work, familial, leisure and other commitments. This adds weight to the idea that the high levels of drug consumption found amongst arrestees may be less related to the existence of a highly deviant lifestyle but more to do with high levels of leisure time and the number of evenings

spent out of the home. The attraction and engagement in leisure time is as applicable to arrestees as it has been shown to be among the groups discussed above.

Leisure and Offending

The Youth Lifestyles Survey 1998/1999 found a link between the amount of time spent in leisure and offending (Flood-Page, *et al.*, 2000). It was clear that those that went out a lot were more likely to have offended.

Interestingly, the study of ‘ecstasy users’ found that their respondents had high levels of self-reported offending for a wide range of offence types. The types of offences included: shoplifting, handling stolen goods, violence, dealing drugs other than ecstasy, fraud, mugging, and prostitution (Hammersley, *et al.*, 2002). The offending rates from the ecstasy sample and the self-reported offending rates of arrestees in the 1997 – 1999 cohort (Bennett, 2000) are compared on an ever and last year basis in Table 1 to show that arrestees and their offending behaviour is comparable to another drug consuming sample which is considered normal.

Table 1: Percentage of Ecstasy Users and Arrestees Reporting a Range of Crimes Committed 'Ever' and 'in the last 12 Months'

Offence Type	Hammersley, <i>et al.</i> (2001)		Bennett (2000)	
	Ecstasy Users		Arrestees	
	Ever	Last Year	Ever	Last Year
	%	%	%	%
Shoplift	56	26	57	28
Handling	61	39	47	27
Drugs Supply	48	40	22	12

Fraud	20	7	22	11
Theft (Person)	3	1	5	1

Offending rates amongst 'ecstasy users' on an 'ever' or lifetime basis are shown to be noticeably higher for handling stolen goods and, in particular, for drug supply. The offending rates are almost equal to that of arrestees in relation to shoplifting, fraud and theft from the person. The 'ecstasy users' sample has already been shown to be a normal group whose members led ordinary lives and participated in a wide range of leisure, social and lifestyle activities. Despite this they perhaps surprisingly achieved offending rates higher than or almost as high as arrestees. This suggests that the level of offending by arrestees does not preclude them from being considered, a normal group whereby offending forms only part of a wider lifestyle.

In summary, the variables that are contributory factors towards drug consumption and offending are as applicable to arrestees as to other samples. It is proposed that arrestees' drug consumption and offending behaviour are only a part of a wider lifestyle of leisure, familial, friendship, work and other lifestyle commitments and activities. Leisure time, venues and pursuits are integral aspects of popular culture as well as commodities that are sold by popular culture that affect and are consumed by arrestees just as much as any other group.

Positive Drug Admissions

When Patton (2002) explored the external validity of arrestees reporting practices when compared to urinalysis, evidence was found of a willingness to report use of certain drugs and not others. The self-report measurement tool detected higher rates of drug use when compared to urinalysis positives for most drug types: alcohol,

amphetamines, benzodiazepines, cannabis, and methadone. Heroin and cocaine were the only exceptions to this finding.

Interestingly, the drugs that produced more self-reports when compared to urinalysis positives are the same drugs that have consistently been identified by normalization advocates as achieving normalized status. Cannabis and 'dance drugs' are more likely to be self-reported. Heroin and cocaine which are not regarded as part of the normalization thesis, are less likely to be reported when compared to positive urinalysis detections. It would appear that arrestees do not have a problem in disclosing their recent consumption of those drugs that are regarded to be normalized which may reflect a decreased stigma associated with drugs other than heroin and cocaine.

Discussion

Many of the distinctions that are thought to exist between arrestees and other drug consuming samples in terms of the levels of deviance found are significantly less than imagined or the distinctions may be very much more blurred than is currently presented in the drugs discourse.

Ultimately, what the 'arrestee' label can usefully or meaningfully add to the understanding of the current sample is questionable. To a large extent, the very short time-span in which this label may be applied to the arrested person renders the utility of the label devoid of any real worth. Essentially, the current respondents are not an 'arrestee sample', but a sample of people that have been recruited in a very specific context and novel way. That is not to deny that there are certain characteristics that

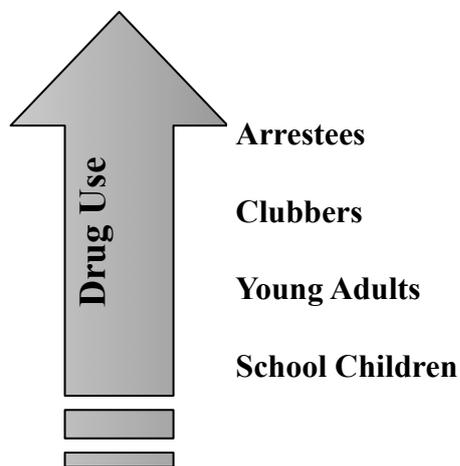
are prevalent amongst this group. However, being single, or white or unemployed or having used drugs recently is not peculiar to an 'arrestee sample'. Any one of these variables or a combination of a few or all of them can be found among many other samples. The fact that a person has been charged by the police means only that the label of arrestee has been temporarily attached to them. Sadly, this usually means that the person is then perceived through the prism of the label and its associated stereotypical features of being deviant rather than 'normal'.

Prior to arrest, an individual is regarded as being 'normal', with responsibilities, jobs, familial and friendship relations, indulging in popular culture and leisure pursuits in the same way as everybody else. It is not suggested that distinctions do not exist on some levels, nor that high levels of criminal and/or drug consumption are not found among arrestees. Nevertheless, as soon as the label arrestee is attached to a person, the wider person somehow disappears, and drugs research has done very little to reveal the full lifestyle of drug consumers (Hammersley, *et al.*, 2002), arrestees or other criminological populations that are traditionally studied.

Drug consumption has spread from a stigmatised activity engaged in by those on the margins, to become a central element of popular culture, encompassing a myriad of population types. The high level of drug use that featured amongst deviant groups has now become less stark in contrast, as drug consumption has spread on a significant level to other community groups, whether they are school, young adult, household, or leisure-based samples.

At present 'dance club frequenters' have the highest level of drug consumption and school children have the lowest amongst those groups currently included in the normalization thesis (Measham *et al.*, 2001). Arrestees would overtake clubbers when included within the normalization thesis, as represented in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: The Levels of Drug Use by Group



The inclusion of arrestees merely widens the drug consumer base making it even more diverse.

When one listens to the voices of those who consume drugs and/or participate in other illegal activities the powerful influence of leisure time and popular culture cannot be ignored (Parker, *et al.*, 1998; Collison, 1996; Parker, *et al.*, 1995). Such findings when applied to arrestees would demonstrate that the levels of offending found amongst arrestees may not be peculiar to them but can be found among other 'normal' drug consuming groups.

Arrestees are a relevant study sample appropriate for inclusion in the normalization thesis. Features of normalization are shown to operate among the current sample with regards to the prevalence and pattern of arrestees drug consumption. In addition, arrestees have a greater willingness to disclose their recent consumption of those drug types that are considered to have become normalized.

Presenting offenders as a highly exceptional one-dimensional group in relation to their drug and offending behaviour is a perception that can no longer be maintained. Offenders, including arrestees, need to be re-conceptualised beyond their drug consuming and other offending behaviour. Empirical evidence that maps the different ways in which normalization has created new pathways into drug consumption and a drug consumer's journey beyond their initial experience of drug consumption is urgently needed. The time has come to embrace the reality that drug consumers are 'normal deviants'. Previous research evidence has demonstrated that drug consumption is normalized amongst young people (Parker, *et al.* 1998), young adults (Measham, *et al.* 2001), young offenders (Hammersley, *et al.* 2003). Arrestees may now be added to this list.

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