

EQUALITY IN ECSTASY?

Young women and drugs

The classic studies of youthful deviance and rebellion in the 1960s and 1970s have traditionally concentrated on young men's gangs; their fighting, fashions, drinking and drug use. Young women's participation has been largely confined to the sidelines of the action; dressing up, dancing and dating. It was not until the 1980s that young women's drug use was constructed as 'problematic'; that is problematic in terms of their relationships with men (partners, pimps, pushers), their relationships with their own bodies (addiction, mutilation, reproduction) and in terms of the inequalities women face in wider society.

One of the most important social changes of the 1990s has been the spiralling use of recreational drugs by young people. Research is starting to sketch the outlines of a picture of drug use where growing numbers of young women are involved and where these young women do not see their use primarily as problematic.

'Official' statistics

Official statistics on persons found guilty of drugs offences show the gender difference to be fairly stable throughout the 1980s and early 1990s with 9-13% of offenders being female. However, despite around one in ten drugs offenders being female, young women under 17 are the fastest growing group of offenders in Britain: female cautions and convictions for drugs offences for this age group increased by over 600 per cent from 1983-93 (Home Office, 1994).

Self report surveys

Surveys of young people which include questions on self reported drug use reveal changes in young women's use which are less apparent in Home Office statistics on drugs offenders. The gender gap in self reported lifetime prevalence of drug use is narrowing, with evidence of a fragmentation of traditional gender differences in drug use. A comparison of the most recent surveys of young women's and men's drug use is provided in the table.

One of the largest national surveys of young people's drug use, conducted on an annual basis, shows 28 per cent of young women in Britain report having tried a drug at the age of 15-16, compared with 35 per cent of young men (Balding, 1994). The British Crime Survey includes a wider age range and results in a larger gap between young women's and young men's drug use than Balding's survey, but nevertheless still results in a much

narrower gender gap than is suggested in official figures (Mott & Mirrlees-Black, 1993).

Ongoing longitudinal research at Manchester University with a sample of teenagers suggests young women from all socio-economic backgrounds were **equally as likely** to have been in offer situations and to have tried illicit drugs as young men. The research found that there was no significant gender difference in reported lifetime usage of illicit drugs: 36 per cent of 14-15 year olds reported having tried a drug rising to 47 per cent by the age of 15-16. The unprecedented levels of use in these surveys are indications of a process of 'normalisation' of illicit drug use amongst young women as well as young men in Britain (Measham, Newcombe & Parker, 1994; Parker & Measham, 1994).

Recreational drug use

The most dramatic increase in drug use in Britain in the early 1990s according to both official figures and self report surveys has been in the use of cannabis and the 'dance drugs' or 'sociable' stimulants (amphetamines, nitrites and Ecstasy) and LSD. Small, portable, easily consumed in social settings, the use of these 'dance drugs' has become increasingly popular, spreading from the distinctive 'rave' subculture of the late 1980s and early 1990s into mainstream nightclub culture in many British cities by the mid 1990s. As the 'dance drugs' are associated with dancing, fitness, fun and sociability it makes this new wave of use particularly appealing to young women. The three least popular drugs for young women throughout the longitudinal research underway at Manchester University were heroin, cocaine and tranquillisers. The young female users interviewed by the Manchester research team very much distanced themselves from the daily, dependent or intravenous use of opiates and tranquillisers.



ers. The users considered their drug use to be relatively unproblematic, as a rational, informed choice of consumption from a repertoire of recreational drugs taken primarily for pleasure. If problems were mentioned by young users interviewed, they came largely in the form of other people; police, parents, teachers or unscrupulous dealers.

Despite this apparent growing 'equality' in drug use with the numbers of young women users spiralling upwards towards men's levels of use, localised, ethnographic studies of the context and dynamics of young people's drug use show gender is still relevant. More or less equal numbers of young women are using drugs but in different ways to young men, with different meanings, motivations, expectations and consequences. Observational research suggests young women tend to choose from a smaller repertoire of drugs, consume drugs less frequently and in smaller quantities per session. There are also clear gender differences in attitudes surrounding excessive drug use. The social taboos and restrictions sur-

Table: Lifetime prevalence of drug use by gender

SURVEY AUTHORS	YEAR OF SURVEY	AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
Balding	1993	15-16	28	35	31
British Crime Survey	1992	16-29	23	33	28
Parker, Measham & Newcombe	1992 1991	15-16 14-15	48 38	46 35	47 36

MATCH OF TODAY

rounding women's alcohol consumption, combined with concern for physical health and appearance, appear to be relevant in the illicit drugs arena. The stigma women feel regarding loss of self control in relation to excessive drunkenness is mirrored in illicit drug use. Thus we may find that whilst young women's drug use during the 1990s reaches equal lifetime prevalence with men, it will remain less excessive.

Academics, service providers and the media continue to emphasise the 'problematic' for drugs users in the 1990s, (and there clearly are criminal, health, education and employment implications), again focusing the spotlight of social concern on working class young men. Less research and attention has been paid to the new users, however, and the issue of self-perceived 'unproblematic' drug use for young women (and those from 'middle-class' socio-economic backgrounds), these weekend users who still maintain their weekday careers. Many of these young women see themselves as active participants rather than passive victims (of themselves, men or wider society) in a new drug scene, where their occasional or regular use of illicit drugs is seen as an integral part of their social world.

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Men, women and the 'new football'

Writing recently in *The Guardian* the paper's football correspondent, David Lacey, recalled a photograph from *Charles Buchan's Football Monthly* of November 1952, an image which he argued 'sums up an age'. In it a small boy dressed in full home kit watches intently from a folded seat in front of small terrace railings. Behind him stand adults who could be his mother, father and grandfather. Another child is being passed over the railings for a better view. The picture caption reads: "They are typical of the millions who watch football each week stirred by its drama, their hopes rising and falling with the ebb and flow of excitement".

This Arcadian scene of cross-generational fan harmony is taken from Hillsborough, Sheffield, where 37 years later, 96 Liverpool supporters died, crushed in a penned enclosure, arguably towards the end of a period of quite different traditions of active football support. Recent football oral histories show that you don't need to swallow wholesale the 'golden age' valedictions to the 1950s to see that unsegregated and unfenced football stadiums crammed with 60, 70 or even 80,000 spectators and 'monitored' by fewer than the number of policeman who, in the 1980s, took charge of football crowds *one quarter* the size, were then rough *but* reasonable places for working people to take their kids. But, as we all know, times, and football, changed.

The fan as hooligan

From the late 1960s onwards, televised coverage of English football, increasingly desperately tried to reflect the 'family values' which the commercial arm of the game so craved; remember all those half-time *Match of the Day* shots of bright-eyed kids in bobble hats and scarves amiably perched on terrace walls or peering through fences?

By this time, however, such images had begun to hide more than they revealed; most fans knew that behind the TV gloss could frequently be heard the not-too distant rumble of testosterone warfare. If on-screen was a slightly tacky warm glow, off it in too many places was likely to reveal the malevolence and violence associated with the struggle for honour and status in defence of local 'neighbourhood nationalisms' among 'The Lads'. It was very much football's 'Age of the Hooligan'.

By the late 1980s away match travel to, and facilities at, many major English grounds were a bit of a nightmare to all but those 'in the know' or young men in search of, in Nick Hornby's words, "a quick way to fill a previously empty trolley in the masculinity supermarket". The routine threats and assaults, the racism and ugly sexism of many young, male fans, and the police indifference or brutality towards almost all visiting supporters went largely unreported and unremarked upon. Only the real spectaculars - often involving the violent racism of the English abroad - disturbed what seemed to be quite widely held assumptions *within* spectator cultures about the *context* in which major matches should - and could - be staged. When more public debates about football spectating *did* occur they did so largely and 'naturally' through the 'fan as hooligan' prism.

The public mourning in Liverpool and that which joined football fans from around the world, suggested nothing less than a deepfelt family loss.

After Hillsborough

The Hillsborough disaster changed some of this. At the level of the *personal* the tragedy had the effect of displacing, or at least disrupting, prevailing media notions in England of 'football fans as morons/beasts', substituting instead discourses focused through a sense of 'family' and



'belonging'. The victims of Hillsborough were revealed not as hooligans but rather as 'ordinary' people, men *and* women, with homes, jobs and relatives, drawn from 'ordinary' backgrounds. The public mourning in Liverpool and that which joined football fans from around the world, suggested nothing less than a deepfelt *family* loss which was experienced by the international 'community' of football followers. As Rogan Taylor argued, "Hooliganism was the word that many, perhaps most, people associated with foot-