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Navigating norms and drug use: Normalisation and neutralisation as converging perspectives

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The aims of this chapter are twofold. First, to chart the development of the normalisation and neutralisation perspectives in terms of understanding recent developments in drug use. Secondly, aside from outlining the journey these perspectives have taken and highlighting differences and similarities between the approaches, the chapter also points to how a future theoretical synthesis might improve the explanatory power of both. More specifically, the chapter outlines how the normalisation perspective first and foremost was developed to try to explain how 'sensible' recreational drug use, from the 1980s onwards, was moving from the deviant margins and towards a consumer-based mainstream, while not operationalised as a theory that attempted to explain drug use itself. Neutralisation (Sykes & Matza, 1957), on the other hand, was operationalised as a theory to show how juvenile delinquents, while subscribing to normative values, nevertheless learned and deployed various excuses and justifications enabling them to engage in 'deviant' and illegal acts, such as using illicit drugs. While these approaches, in their original conceptions, might appear fundamentally at odds, developments of these ideas have brought about the potential for convergence. The chapter concludes that while research connected to the normalisation perspective has shown its strength in contextualising drug use, it has not sought to explain drug use. Synthesis with a cognitively informed neutralisation theory could help to achieve this end.

Keywords: normalisation theory, neutralisation theory, synthesis

Introduction

The normalisation concept was advanced by Measham and colleagues (1994) almost thirty years ago and has become the go-to lens that academics employ when seeking to understand or contextualise drug use. Meanwhile, neutralisation theory was first developed in the 1950s to explain juvenile delinquency

(Sykes & Matza, 1957). The aim of this chapter is to describe the development of the two perspectives with a view to suggesting what they might achieve together. The chapter can be viewed as a prelude to future theoretical synthesis. While normalisation was never intended, *per se*, as a theory to explain drug use, future synthesis and development could achieve this end.

Normalisation and neutralisation have been chosen because they have been used prolifically in research on drug use, stimulating much discussion, but also because they operate on similar levels and share certain assumptions. Both perspectives grapple with the existence of social norms and people's adherence to them. Both are necessarily dynamic, as norms and people's adherence to them change over time. By considering societal norms, both perspectives are aligned with the discipline of sociology. To differing extents both are also psychological, as they ask how individuals view and respond to societal norms, the law, and personal risks. Against this background it is timely to try to outline the differences and similarities between normalisation and neutralisation approaches, and, more importantly, to investigate how the two approaches might complement and fertilise each other in trying to make sense of current trends in drug use.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first will seek to explain the normalisation of sensible recreational drug use, while charting its development over time in response to a growing empirical base and sustained critique from academics. This section will also include references to some of the diverse studies where the concept of normalisation has been used as a lens for interpretation. The second section will describe how neutralisation theory, initially focusing on juvenile delinquency, has later also been used to explain drug use. After some comparisons are made where there appears to have been some convergence over time, the third section will make a case for the benefits of a theoretical synthesis.

Normalisation of sensible recreational drug use

The normalisation perspective was developed from data collected by Measham and colleagues (1994) in the North West Longitudinal Study (NWLS). At the first sweep of this study, 776 young people aged 14–15 were interviewed, with further data collected at intervals throughout their adolescence and into their adulthood (Parker et al., 1998; Aldridge et al., 2011; Parker, 2005). Measham and colleagues (1994) were tentative in their interpretation of the data, only suggesting that a rejuvenation of the sociological imagination was required to explain the growing prevalence of drug use, and related cultural accommodation of drug use. As will be seen throughout this chapter, the normalisation scholarship was stronger in terms of understanding shifting social norms relating to drug use, than it was in terms of understanding how people respond to these norms.

Illegal leisure

Parker and colleagues (1998) outlined the first detailed formulation of the normalisation perspective in their book, *Illegal Leisure: The normalisation of adolescent recreational drug use*. They sought to explain increasing levels of drug use among young people, specifically 'sensible recreational drug use', which certainly included cannabis, but also stretched to amyl nitrate (poppers), amphetamines, LSD, and ecstasy. Heroin, and both crack and powder cocaine, were explicitly excluded from this proposition, as were chaotic patterns of poly-drug use. The key fact, as explained by South (1999), was that (sensible, recreational) drug use had become a more normal aspect of everyday life, while its meaning to young people and society at large was becoming less deviant. According to Parker et al. (1998), recreational use of drugs was based on rational choice rather than individual pathology or structural marginalisation; illegal drug use was becoming another leisure option, chosen especially by those coming of age. Related, it was argued that drug use was becoming an unremarkable part of adolescence and one that should not necessarily interfere with young people's life chances. As will be seen below, this view was challenged by other academics.

In their text, Parker and colleagues (1998) continued to theorise the conditions that brought about normalised drug use and contended that it might relate to contemporary humans living more individualised lives, which makes taking and managing risks a more individualised endeavour. While risk taking is needed to get along in life, research indicates that it is, today, tolerated in terms of leisure choices. Risks associated with illegal drug use are viewed in the same way as voluntary risk-taking relating to leisure-based legal pursuits, including 'edgework' activities (Lyng, 1990), such as paragliding, rock climbing and skydiving. According to Parker and colleagues (1998), drug use is part of an array of opportunities for consumption that young people use to construct their identities.

During the 1990s and early noughties further studies began to appear that sought to either assess whether drug use was becoming normalised, contribute to the development of the concept with their own qualitative data, or use the framework to interpret their data. Pearson (2001) and South (2004) used normalisation to understand drug use as well as drug dealing among older cohorts, demonstrating that drugs were, indeed, an increasingly mundane aspect of daily life and conversation, and not just among the youth.

Definitely maybe not

The normalisation perspective has, however, also been subject to criticisms. Shiner and Newburn (1997, 1999) were the most prominent critics, suggesting that Parker and colleagues (1998) simplified the views of young people who

did not see drug use as un-problematic. While Shiner and Newburn (1997, 1999) disagreed with Parker and colleagues (1998) on the nature of the shift in norms, their critique also showed that the connection between social norms and drug using behaviours could be better theorised. The use of 'drug trying' as a measure of normalisation was also criticised since it could overstate levels of drug use, which might be better captured through measures of regular use. In addition, it was suggested that a study based around Manchester, which was seen as the centre of the United Kingdom rave scene, also biased the evidence in favour of normalisation. Retorts from Parker (2005) included that Shiner and Newburn's (1997, 1999) research was qualitative and based on small samples that included younger teenagers taking part in a drug education course, which might have biased these respondents towards expressing caution about drugs. Regarding rates of drug trying, Parker (2005) made clear that the concept of normalisation was not supposed to describe a statistical norm, but rather a condition where drugs occupied a less deviant and more mainstream social position. Normalisation was relative, and a direction of travel – not an absolute. These points notwithstanding, there should theoretically be some connection between cultural norms and statistical measures of drug use.

In a further attempt to develop the normalisation perspective, Blackman (2004) used Foucauldian theory to view normalisation as a 'discourse of regulation'. While Parker and colleagues (1998) suggested that moralising adult discourses and punitive policies should have been challenged by the phenomenon of normalisation, Blackman (2004) pointed out that the opposite might be happening. Normalisation became a media and political talking point with concerns, bordering on moral panic, expressed over increasing prevalence of drug use and young people's casual approach to it. This media and policy reaction was meant to contribute to a re-stigmatisation and othering of people who use drugs and ironically might have contributed to undoing some of the processes of normalisation that had been identified. While Shiner and Newburn (1997, 1999) had, perhaps unfairly, criticised Parker and colleagues (1998) for employing a term as blunt as 'drugs', which includes several substances of varying effect and reputation, now politicians, script writers and media personalities were doing the same thing, this time using imagery related to problematic heroin use to tar all people who use drugs, and as arguments for repressive policies. This process was seen not just in the UK, but also in other European countries, such as Denmark (Hourborg et al., 2020).

Illegal leisure revisited

The Manchester-based *Illegal Leisure* research team continued to publish updates from the NWLS while seeking to tweak and clarify aspects of the normalisation thesis. Parker (2005) used the analogy of *Normalisation as a Barometer* since it was meant as a frame of reference and conceptual toolkit to understand

changes in society regarding drug use. It should not be seen as a moral device that suggests drug use should be normalised, but instead combined a number of dimensions which point towards observable changes regarding societies' relationship with drug use. Alongside this there was also clarification that normalisation was not a theory per se, but a framework for interpreting the changes that manifest in the dimensions of normalisation.

The dimensions of normalisation were originally put forward by Parker and colleagues in 1998, then developed and restated by Parker in 2005. Three of the dimensions were *availability and accessibility*, *drug trying rates*, and *recent and regular drug use*, and these remained unchanged from when they were first stated. In the later revisiting of the thesis, there was some divergence from the original presentation of normalisation by Parker and colleagues (1998) regarding social tolerance of drug use, where the focus moved from young people (and included *drug abstainers*, and *being drug-wise*) to non-users holding accommodating attitudes to drugs and people who use them. The idea of *cultural accommodation* was also developed to show how, compared to earlier days, media portrayals of drugs were becoming more sympathetic and less moralistic. Blackman (2004) has since noted how the commercial pull of drug culture should be seen as a part of consumer culture and had been harnessed by mainstream marketers of fashion and drinks, as well as television, film and music. Parker (2005) thus suggested that an extra dimension could be state responses, such as moves to decriminalise aspects of drug use or allow permissive forms of harm reduction. In line with the view that normalisation is not a theory to explain drug use, the dimensions are not integrated into a causal framework, but stand alongside one another to assess the place of drugs in society.

In 2011, Aldridge and colleagues published the book *Illegal leisure revisited*, where they discussed more recent data from their now adult cohort and discussed the normalisation concept. In this volume they did not suggest dramatic changes to the normalisation toolkit. Aldridge and colleagues (2011) did respond to criticism by admitting that they may have over-egged the rationality of youthful substance use, underplaying the sensual (Jackson, 2004) and emotional (Measham, 2004) allures. Measham and Shiner (2009) also showed that structure, as well as agency, was present with regards to whom normalised drug use might be available to, with evidence of discriminatory practices in sections of the night-time economy, and the tendency for recreational drug use to peak in adolescence and early adulthood. Contributing to this more nuanced understanding of drug normalisation, Shildrick (2002) had also, earlier, advanced the case for 'differentiated normalisation', which emphasised how structure and agency should be considered. In short, different drugs might become normalised to differing extents for different groups of young people, with social class being a key factor. This, perhaps, comes closer to connecting social norms and institutions with drug using behaviour.

In their combined work, Measham and Shiner (2009) reconnected normalisation to the sociology of deviance that pioneered appreciative research on

drug use in the 1960s and 1970s, finding that some of the theory espoused by Becker (1963) and Young (1971) was compatible with the normalisation thesis. Regarding Becker's theory on people who use drugs being positioned as Outsiders, Measham and Shiner (2009) accepted that there has been continuity as well as change since that point, and that people who use drugs learn to do so in the context of prohibition, in addition to disapproval from many sections of society. Regarding Young's (1971) work, Measham and Shiner (2009) showed that subterranean values of leisure continue to be evident with regards to normalised drug use. This means that drug fuelled leisure occurs as a form of consumption in a symbiotic relationship with the world of work, as for instance was shown by how some young people contrasted their drug use with the stresses of study or jobs. In this way drug use has continued to be the other side of the coin of mainstream workaday values and practices, rather than an activity conducted by unemployed, uneducated dropouts.

Another development advanced by Measham and colleagues (2016) was that normalisation should not be considered a linear process where drugs become ever more normalised, as was implicit in some earlier formulations of the perspective. This study also demonstrated that use of a given substance can be differentially normalised across different modes of ingestion, sources of purchase, and contexts of use. Williams (2016) sought to reassess normalisation for the contemporary era and concluded that recent findings regarding trajectories for, and cultural representations of, drug use had muddied the waters and suggested that at best the findings in her study were consistent with some sort of differentiated normalisation.

According to Blackman (2010), the normalisation thesis provides a non-pathological way to discuss drug use, and throughout the perspective's history this has remained true. As such, it has been the go-to heuristic for studies into certain forms of drug use. Many studies have sought to assess whether a particular drug has been normalised at a particular time in a particular place, often using survey data. More often, qualitative data is interpreted as evidence of a particular form of drug use being normalised. Examples include Morris' (2022) study of newspaper articles regarding self-medication with cannabis, Valdez and colleagues' (2022) exploration of perceptions of drug trafficking and adolescent substance use close to the US-Mexican border, and Pawson and Kelly's (2022) study of prescription drug misuse. These studies clearly will not bring us to any firm conclusion on the direction of travel regarding normalised drug use, as they show a patchwork of different drugs being more or less normalised in different contexts. In this light, normalisation is best described as 'a contingent process that is negotiated by distinct social groups operating in bounded situations rather than a pre-given product of macrosocial forces' (Measham and Shiner, 2009, p. 504).

In sum, the normalisation perspective is a toolkit for understanding the social context of certain forms or drug use. It does not so much intend to be a theory for explaining drug use, and indeed the causal mechanisms operating at

the psychological level have not been theorised nor is it present in the empirical studies which make use of the normalisation heuristic. Indeed, Pennay and Measham (2016), when introducing a special edition on normalisation, view it as a way of conceptualising drug use and not a grand theory of drug use. In the following section we will show how neutralisation theory has contributed to understanding drug use on its own terms and has the potential to be synthesised with key factors of the normalisation perspective to become akin to a theory of drug use.

Neutralisation theory

Neutralisation theory began as an explanation for juvenile delinquency and was based upon qualitative research conducted at a reform school for wayward children. According to the architects of the theory, Sykes and Matza (1957), delinquents subscribed to the same middle-class values as law abiders but have learned a series of linguistic devices to assuage their feelings of guilt or shame. This was set as an alternative to subcultural theory (e.g., Cohen, 1955) that described delinquent subcultures as being in opposition to mainstream values. Rather than deviance being based upon deviant values, this theory suggests that rule breaking occurs as a result of potential offenders learning a set of excuses and justifications, which serve to allay the feelings of guilt and shame that bind them to more conventional behaviour.

Techniques of neutralisation

Five techniques of neutralisation were initially proposed by Sykes and Matza (1957):

- 1) *Denial of responsibility* is an excuse deployed when an offender says they had no choice but to commit the offence.
- 2) *Denial of injury* means that nobody suffered from the rule breaking.
- 3) *Denial of the victim* excuses the infraction because the victim deserved it.
- 4) *Appeal to higher loyalties* is a neutralisation that justifies rule breaking, since a more valued priority, such as the honour of the gang, took precedence.
- 5) *Condemning the condemners* is an excuse that points to hypocrisy from those who accuse the delinquent of wrong doing.

The original paper by Sykes and Matza (1957) left questions unanswered, such as whether these techniques of neutralisation were causal and necessary in allowing the deviant to conduct their misdeed without psychic distress, or whether they were simply post-hoc justifications. To this end Maruna and Copes (2005) also criticise neutralisation theory as being misconstrued as a necessary condition of a criminal act, when somebody cannot logically neutralise an act that they have not yet enacted. Instead, they see neutralisations as relating to

persistent offending, or in the symbolic interactionist terms of Lemert (1951), secondary deviation. An interesting development on neutralisation theory, propagated by Hirschi (1969), Minor (1984), and McCarthy & Stewart (1998), is that neutralisations form part of a hardening process. Maruna and Copes (2005) further contend that in order for neutralisation theory to progress, the cognitive aspects of how guilt and shame can be neutralised require further theoretical development.

Methodologically, earlier neutralisation research has been criticised for relying on a sample of wayward, yet often middle class, young boys in Sykes and Matza's (1957) original study, with later research using largely conformist samples of undergraduate students (e.g., Minor, 1984). Topalli (2005) sought to remedy this with research using samples of, often violent offenders, such as carjackers, who participated in research while at large in their communities, interviewed by former offenders also from their own community. This research aimed to make sure that participants were not simply justifying themselves to an outsider, and apologetically telling them what they wanted to hear. Using these methods, Topalli (2005) found that street robbers, car jackers and drug dealers subscribed to values that might be anathema to middle class America, and used neutralisations when justifying, for example, speaking to police officers or showing mercy to an adversary.

A further criticism of neutralisation theory could be that the middle-class norms that deviants were apparently neutralising were not fully developed. Indeed, it could be added that the normalisation perspective described above was better suited to this, as there has been more research and theoretical development to this end. A related theoretical development is that of narrative psychology (Maruna & Copes, 2005), discursive psychology (Askew, 2016) and narrative criminology (e.g., Presser, 2009). These methodologies are also descendants of Mills' (1940) vocabularies of motive and take a great interest in the stories people tell about themselves. According to this perspective, a justification for one's behaviour is of interest, not because it tells us why you did something, but because it tells us how you view yourself and how you wish to communicate this to others. While narrative perspectives are not equivalent to neutralisation theory, they share a focus on verbalisations, and especially the justifications people offer for their behaviour. This approach to studying narratives can help to understand the cultural norms that people subscribe to. In addition, these narratives can help to reveal how people circumvent or justify to themselves acting in ways not in accordance with social norms.

Neutralisation theory and substance use

Neutralisation theory has also stimulated criminology and substance use studies, especially when manifesting in narrative criminology (Maruna & Liem, 2020). However, these studies have also revealed theoretical shortcomings of the neu-

tralisation perspective. One such problem relates to the difference between an excuse and a justification. Excuses are made when somebody believes their acts are wrong and seeks mitigation, while a justification is used when the actor believes that their act is valid. One example of a study which aimed to demonstrate the use of neutralisations relating to drug use was by Priest and McGrath (1970). They cited a paper by Becker (1955) which showed how one part of learning to be a marijuana user was learning how to verbally justify the use of a prohibited drug. However, from the qualitative data presented, it is clear that the participants considered their drug use to be acceptable conduct, and their neutralisations were much closer to being justifications than excuses.

Another example is the study by Perretti-Watel (2003) looking at the justifications employed by people who use cannabis. Perretti-Watel (2003) saw that Sykes and Matza's originally conceived techniques of neutralisation were not appropriate in this context as cannabis use was unlikely to harm others. Instead, users needed to neutralise stigma and personal risk, with Giddens (1991) work on risk culture cited. Among people who use cannabis, risk was neutralised by scapegoating other sorts of drugs and drug users and pointing to the greater levels of risk associated with their conduct, expressing self confidence in one's own ability to avoid risks, and comparing the risks of cannabis use to other activities, such as drinking alcohol. Miller (2005), in the context of people who inject drugs, found similar rationalisations to the scapegoating identified by Perretti-Watel (2003), while Copes and colleagues (2016) viewed these neutralisations as aspects of identity construction, which worked by differentiating the participants from other sorts of people who use drugs.

Discussion

While the normalisation perspective has functioned as a social barometer that has helped us to understand the place of drugs in society, neutralisation theory and the related methodologies of discursive psychology and narrative criminology have first tried to understand how people come to break rules that they might generally agree with, and secondly to understand the role of people's story telling in understanding deviant behaviour and deviant cultures. The most relevant critique of neutralisation theory was that the cognitive elements had not been developed sufficiently and that there are still questions remaining unanswered regarding how excuse making and rationalisation relate causally to behaviour. Some further developments of interest concern instances where researchers have deployed both the neutralisation and normalisation heuristics.

Neutralisation or normalisation?

Some of Shiner and Newburn's (1997, 1999) important critiques have been outlined above, however another aspect of their critique is particularly relevant to

the argument of this chapter. When suggesting that Measham and colleagues (1994) and other commentators had over-stated the case for normalisation, Shiner and Newburn (1997) suggested that neutralisation theory might be a good alternative framework for understanding youthful drug use and showed how their participants used techniques of neutralisation when discussing drug use. Interestingly, they found that users and non-users were both likely to see drug use in negative terms. While Aldridge and colleagues (2011) agree that these statements from young people who use drugs are neutralisations, they disagreed that the young people had internalised wider society's negative views on drug use. They believed that their largely conforming youth may have differed from their parents' generation on questions of morality and risk concerning drug use. Adding to this debate, in a study of people who use cannabis, Sandberg (2013) identified three competing narratives: subculture; normalisation; and neutralisation. According to Sandberg, subculture narratives glorified drug use, normalisation narratives pointed to the drugs' mundanity or how everyone is doing it, and neutralisation narratives excuse the use of something they do not think they should be using. Of note, Sandberg referenced instances of inter-discursivity where individual participants might have alluded to two or more of the narrative themes. Although Sandberg (2013) did not theorise a way to connect the three modes of engaging with societal and cultural norms on drug use, they cannot be mutually exclusive. Sandberg (2013) concluded that all responses showed that the participants felt at least some level of stigma for their cannabis use.

Neutralisation and normalisation

Some papers combined use of the concepts without any suggestion that drug use might either be normalised or neutralised. Järvinen and Demant (2011), whose analysis showed some similarities to that of Sandberg (2013), albeit explained in different terms, argued that *neutralisations* are used to *normalise* cannabis use. Specifically, they noticed how moving from their mid to their late teens, participants were more likely to describe cannabis use in terms of normalisation. This study explicitly did not seek to understand whether cannabis use was normalised with regards to wider society and cultural industries, or whether today's cohorts might feel drug use is more normalised than earlier cohorts, but simply to look for evidence of normalisation in the neutralisations of young people as they grew older. Dickinson and Jacques (2019) also, to some extent, combined the perspectives, and looked to the neutralisations expressed by drug dealers for evidence of normalisation. The scapegoating of other more criminal users and dealers was used, in the view of the authors, to normalise their own roles in the drug industry. There was a further melding of the concepts when they suggested that the normalised status of some drugs, especially

cannabis, allowed the participants to drift in and out of drug dealing without the need for a radical shift in the self-concept.

Another interesting melding of neutralisation and normalisation came in a study by Copes and Williams (2007) who examined the straight-edge movement and asked how abstainers from intoxicating substance use justified their abstinence. Rather than finding techniques of neutralisation in their participants' responses, they instead found techniques of affirmation which were used to prevent a drift towards substance use. This is of interest due to statements made in the earliest advances of the normalisation thesis (Measham et al., 1994), that non-users of illegal drugs might soon be the deviants among young people, while it also points to cognitive techniques used to maintain behaviour that is in contravention of norms.

A further attempt to understand drug use in relation to social norms was by Zhang (2022) who contrasted elements of normalisation, namely permissive attitudes to drug use, with self-control theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) and social control theory (Hirschi, 1969). In a factor analysis Zhang found that explanations for drug use differed for men and for women, while noting the failure of individual self-control to predict drug use as relating to China's collectivist culture. This did not go so far as to build of a model of how normalisation and different forms of control might together explain drug use, but the implication was clear, that these devices can work together rather than being theoretical alternatives.

Finally, another instructive paper was by Green (2016) who looked to the narratives of people who use drugs, regarding the idea of maturing out from certain patterns of drug use. Participant's voices were used to show how they responded to life pressures and societal norms, however, as tends to be the case with normalisation research, how participants negotiated norms was not theorised, with references to cognitive psychology playing only a small part in the paper.

Conclusion

Normalisation has clearly been a successful toolkit and barometer for understanding changes in the drug taking landscape, which includes not only drug taking behaviours but also the accommodation of drug use among non-users and the cultural industries. As the perspective developed through critique and response, and through numerous empirical studies utilising normalisation, it became accepted that while the use of some drugs by some people in certain contexts became more of a mainstream activity, this process was neither uniform across settings nor linear in the direction of travel. It is unsurprising considering the academic backgrounds of the key authors, but normalisation was a key and well-developed sociological enterprise which enlivened debates

around drug use. Normalisation was not intended to be a theory of drug use, however perhaps through further development it could be.

Neutralisation, which initially emerged as a theory of juvenile delinquency, has since been applied to many sorts of deviant conduct, including drug use and dealing. Developments to the theory included supplements to the original five techniques of neutralisation but often neglected to take on conceptual issues regarding whether learning and deploying techniques of neutralisation was necessary for the commission of deviance, were post hoc justifications, or perhaps related to the dynamics of a research interview (e.g., as conformity bias). In their important article, Maruna and Copes (2005) suggested that cognitive psychology should be at the heart of efforts to re-theorise neutralisation to truly understand how actors respond to norms, and to feelings of cognitive dissonance when they break rules. While it is unclear whether this theoretical effort has reached maturity, more recent scholarship aligned with this perspective has concerned itself with narratives, without the assumption that justifications are at odds with normative behaviour.

At first glance normalisation and neutralisation appear to be conflicting perspectives, since one looks at how a deviant behaviour becomes more normative while the other looks to how deviants defy norms that they subscribe to. However, over time the perspectives have converged somewhat as recent normalisation scholarship has recognised that illegal drug taking continues under prohibition, and that stigma must be deflected (see Springer, this volume). Meanwhile neutralisation research has looked to how the verbalisations of people who use drugs try to position themselves as being normal citizens doing something that everyone does.

While the sociological elements of the normalisation perspective are strong, the logics of neutralisation theory can be used to develop the psychological side. Albeit, with neutralisation theory requiring further psychological development itself. In some research, the logics of neutralisation theory, often manifesting in narrative criminology, are used to understand how people who use drugs circumvent social norms as well as risk. While the normalisation perspective has told us about the societal place of drugs, and the drug using behaviours of people, there is a missing link between norms and behaviour that a more cognitively oriented neutralisation theory might help to connect. In future research, this theoretical connection could contribute to the normalisation toolkit becoming a theory of drug use. While both normalisation and neutralisation have been endeavours largely developed in sociology and criminology departments, cognitive psychology might be of use to develop a more general theory of drug use.

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