

January 2013

## Book Review: Using Women: Gender, Drug Policy, and Social Justice

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### Recommended Citation

Attell, Brandon K. (2013) "Book Review: Using Women: Gender, Drug Policy, and Social Justice," *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jpps/vol3/iss2/2>

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Book Review: *Using Women: Gender, Drug Policy, and Social Justice*

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Nancy Campbell's *Using Women* traces the socio-historical development of female drug use in the United States. Specifically, Campbell analyzes the changing culture that surrounds gender roles, which in turn shapes drug policy and social justice. Ultimately, the three become an intertwined pathology that manifests as the face of female drug use. To trace this development, Campbell generates four main themes in the text: The Politics of Women's Addiction and Women's Equality, Gendering Narcotics, Mother Fixations, and A Politics of Social Justice. These four sections are sub-divided into eight subsequent chapters.

Campbell foremost discusses the controversy that surrounds biologically based drug theories. Throughout this discussion, it becomes clear that there are some biological differences in drug use between men and women. However, Campbell's claim is that many of these theories are based on research that may often ignore sociological factors such as race, previous drug use, or social location (both geographically and within stratifications). In a section entitled "A Window on Women's Addiction", Campbell argues that this dissension may result from women's roles as being historically "behind closed doors" (Campbell 2000: 29) when compared to men's roles.

Campbell continues by examining the inequality that arises from governmental policies. Campbell makes her argument by examining what she terms "postpositivist policy" and "policy monopolies". She concludes that government policies are the cause of a multitude of social inequality, not just among female drug users. She makes it clear that much of our governmental

power is put into place by white men, who may often overlook the needs of marginalized populations.

In an interesting section entitled “Primitive Pleasures, Modern Poisons” Campbell attempts to dislodge stereotypes that were once held in regards to femininity amongst female dope users. For example, Campbell speaks of two films: *The Pace That Kills* and *Narcotic*. *The Pace That Kills* involves a white prostitute who convinces a man into heavy drug use and then commits suicide after telling him she was pregnant, while *Narcotic* tells the story of a drug addicted physician who has somewhat of a cult following of feminine women. Through these examples and her arguments in this section, Campbell debunks such stereotypes and discusses that female drug users are normal people who cannot be categorized into specific typologies due to the changing face of addiction and drug use.

The section of the text entitled “The Enemy Within” was somewhat atypical of Campbell’s writing. Campbell held a discussion on the Kefauver Hearings and the Boggs Act (both of which occurred in 1951). Campbell also included a discussion on New York heroin use amongst juveniles and a section on adolescent boys. From this chapter, the only clear conclusion that can be drawn is a trace in the historical development of America’s so called “drug war”, in which criminal sanctions came into place for having drugs.

Campbell discusses some of the sociological issues surrounding female drug use in the section entitled “Representing the Real”. In her own words: “symbolically, they (women) could witness and reproduce the truth of addiction; politically, they were situated as knowing agents of its spread; materially, they commanded little attention; discursively, their ‘truths’ were regarded as less credible” (Campbell 2000: 135). Interestingly, Campbell takes much time to inform the reader of the likelihood of females causing drug addiction in others. She speaks of *The Road to*

*H*, a study that found that drug addicts were likely to come from mothers who were insecure, prone to preaching, judgmental, and authoritarian. Campbell also briefly discusses the ways in which females cause neonatal addiction.

The text continues with a “Regulating Maternal Instinct”, a section that was somewhat of a carry-over from chapter “Reproducing Drug Addiction”. Here, Campbell traces the trend in social justice of regulating female neonatal/ infant decisions. We see a trend where the government begins to remove mother’s rights of parenting by taking children from parents whom are deemed unfit or harmful towards their children. Campbell sees this trend to be a “miscarriage of justice” (Campbell 2000: 191).

The text is concluded with Campbell examining the various ethnographic drug-related research that has been funded by the government. Here again, she concludes that the government and its policies are ultimately responsible for shaping our knowledge production, culture, and understandings of one another.

### *Critique*

Campbell clearly accomplishes what she set out to: it becomes very evident that drug use among females has centered on a historical trend in controversial drug policy and social justice. That being said, finding the points to understand this argument is difficult. At times, these elements are not necessarily clearly represented, but rather the reader is forced to join everything that Campbell presents by reading in between the lines and drawing broad conclusions.

Overall, *Using Women* is written very well. The division of the sections and chapters is logical and flows decently. Campbell writes very diligently. Admittedly, this text is definitely not a “fast” or “easy” read. In fact, some may find that her more lengthy paragraphs must be re-read for full comprehension. The only suggestion to make here is that *Using Women* could

greatly benefit from a summary or conclusions section after each chapter. Campbell sometimes becomes overwhelming with what is presented, and a designated place for her final thoughts and arguments would be extremely helpful for the reader.

Nonetheless, *Using Women* does not contain any methodological or theoretical flaws. Indeed, the text reads almost like a doctoral dissertation based on qualitative research and case studies: a quick flip through the references section of the text reveals hundreds of sources. Unfortunately, this may be one of the pivotal downfalls of *Using Women*. That is, Campbell's voice as an author and researcher is sadly lacking. It comes to seem that she is merely presenting a multitude of case studies without any critical analyzing or interpretation.

The intended audience for this text should arguably be someone with at least a college level education. It is safe to say that this person should also hold an extreme interest in either sociology or political science. Someone with a strong foundation in sociological theory will appreciate the social conflict theory that Campbell utilizes in her writing. However, someone without this background knowledge may benefit from a more understandable text that utilizes either a structural-functionalist or symbolic-interactionist approach.

What is admirable about this text is that although a social conflict theory approach is used, Campbell does a surprisingly good job at staying neutral with her opinions. It is far too often that authors writing under this pillar of thought intertwine their own beliefs when presenting the reader with their arguments. This is definitely not the case with *Using Women*. That being said, the reader should be aware that a strong feminist approach is present, but should be appreciated given the topic.

It is also admirable that Campbell fills the text with pictures of political propaganda, movie ads, and book covers while making her arguments. This gives the text a more personal

feel, and allows the reader to be exposed to the social thought of different eras. It sounds elementary, but this simple idea makes the text much more enjoyable and aids in demonstrating what Campbell is writing about.

### *Discussion*

Campbell's biggest contribution to the area of sociological thought is the idea that female drug use is tied to a combination of race, class, gendered thought, power, and political and social culture. I find this thought to be logical, understandable, and at the crux of such social-conflict theories. However, Campbell is not the first to come to such a conclusion. While reading the text I was frequently reminded of ideas presented within Collins' "matrix of domination" (see Collins 2000). Be that as it may, Campbell makes it abundantly clear the need in understanding the social situations that surround drug use.

This can be seen within what is the second contribution that Campbell makes: recognizing and understanding the methods behind social research. Much of Campbell's arguments are made by debunking studies that focus solely on biological differences between men and women. I appreciate that Campbell heavily criticizes such research. All disciplines could benefit from the understanding that human behavior is resultant from a complex intertwinement of social, psychological, and biological factors. Throughout the text, Campbell utilizes this understanding and shows the reader that not all research should be interpreted as the truth or solely "right" in its conclusions. In other words, one should question the methods and theory before assuming that research is correct.

Overall, Campbell's *Using Women* does add to my understanding of female drug use. Although I already held a firm understanding of the complexity and roots of social problems, this book only further added to that knowledge. What I took away most from this text is the

important role that media plays in shaping public opinion and public policy. I already had an idea of inequality and slanted thoughts that arise from capitalism and groups with vested interests, but I never fully made the connection between something like media coverage and drug use. It is without a doubt an interesting tie to make, and one that I am not surprised to have been made by a sociologist.

## References

Campbell, Nancy. 2000. *Using Women: Gender, Drug Policy, and Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Collins, Patricia H. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.