

'DRUG USER REPRESENTATION' IN HIGH LEVEL DRUG POLICY SETTINGS

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Background:

People who use drugs have been representing their issues in high level drug policy settings for decades, but little critical work has been done to interrogate the practices and relations involved and their effects for how 'drug user representation' is being made possible and done in these environments. In particular, I am interested in issues of 'identity' and 'authenticity' and what these mean for the making of legitimacy in this context. Specifically, this presentation will consider issues including "who are drug user representatives?", "what does it mean to represent people who use drugs?", "how important is 'coming out' and disclosure to 'drug user representation'?" and "what do notions of 'community' mean for the making of 'drug user representation' as a legitimate practice?"

Methods:

This presentation draws on accounts from qualitative interviews with 42 participants engaged in 'drug user representation' in high-level drug policy contexts including representatives of people who use drugs and other drug policy stakeholders within Australia and internationally.

Results:

My presentation shows how 'who drug user representatives are' is being made in the practices and relations of drug user representation itself and how 'coming out' or practices of disclosure should be opened for questioning for their underlying assumptions and effects including what they open up and close off or silence in relation to 'drug user representation'. I will also show how 'drug user representation' and 'community' are being co-constituted in relation to each other or to put another way, how representation needs community to be a legitimate practice but people who use drugs are not seen as being part of a legitimate community which has significant implications for the making of 'drug user representation' in these contexts.

Conclusion:

I highlight that 'authentic' or 'real' drug user representatives are not 'out there', waiting to be discovered and represented but rather, are made through the very practices and relations of drug user representation and drug policy processes. I also highlight how 'drug user representation' is constantly being delimited by attempts to represent it and the need to reflect on how the practices and relations of 'drug user representation' and drug policy processes might be delimiting what is being made possible in relation to 'drug user representation'. Ultimately, I argue that what is being made possible is important, not simply because of what it might delimit, but because of what it can potentially put at stake. Here, what is being put at stake in my view, is nothing less than the making of a legitimate collective politics for people who use drugs and what that might mean for the future of drug policy.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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