PCP in the American Media:
The Social Response to a Forgotten Drug Fad

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A Thesis

In

The Department

of

History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

January 2011

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: PCP in the American Media: The Social Response to a Forgotten Drug Scare

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (History)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

PCP in the American Media: The Social Response to a Forgotten Drug Fad

Jacob Taylor

Between 1977 and 1979, American society experienced a sudden, fearful reaction to the discovery that PCP, a dangerous new hallucinogenic drug, was in widespread use. This social response, powered by a surge in alarming news discussions of PCP, was intense, but it was also brief and quickly forgotten; PCP has since faded from popular memory and garnered little historical attention. Yet PCP's transience obscures its important role in the broad shift in American attitudes towards drugs that began in the late-1970s.

This thesis examines the social reaction to PCP through an analysis of the national news. Drawing from examples of newspaper, periodical, and television reporting, it traces the roots of public attention to the PCP issue and the evolution of PCP's cultural image. The first section focuses on the dramatic media representations of PCP as a cause of violence and madness in its users. I argue that despite the sympathetic manner in which PCP users were often portrayed, media depictions of crazed and violent users dehumanized their subjects and contributed to a stigmatization, not so much of drug use, but of madness. The second section focuses on media images of youth PCP use. Situating the PCP issue in the context of shifting American attitudes to drugs, I argue that images of young PCP users as victims contributed to the re-emergence in the late-1970s of a pervasive intolerance of drug use.

Contents

Introduction

A Brief History of PCP

PCP (phencyclidine) is a synthetic drug that is used illegally for recreation. It was originally created as an anaesthetic for surgery in 1956, but was immediately abandoned for human use due to the strange psychedelic side effects it triggered. It was then successfully redeveloped as an animal tranquilizer, and remained a common means of sedating large mammals until 1979, when it was removed from the American market because of fears that veterinary supplies would be commandeered for illicit human consumption.[1] Recreational use of the drug began in the United States in the late-1960s, and grew steadily but, as far as most of the American public was concerned, unnoticeably throughout the following decade.[2]

Then, in 1977, PCP, or 'angel dust' as it was popularly known, was suddenly thrust into the public spotlight. The previously obscure drug moved to the centre of media, government, and public attention. This dramatic increase in interest was powered largely by the national media: sensational news coverage of PCP brought the issue to the notice of politicians, bureaucrats, and the general public. At the heart of this sensationalism was PCP's reputation for causing outbursts among its users of startling violence and insanity. Stories circulated in the news about the PCP psychosis, which caused users to behave in bizarre and dangerous ways, and, in certain instances, to lash out violently at the people around them. PCP users were depicted committing horrifying

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1 Marilyn Carroll, *PCP: The Dangerous Angel* (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), 21-2.

2 Approximately 2.5 million Americans had tried the drug by this time. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, *2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (Department of Health and Human Services, 2005) http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/reports.htm.

murders for no reason: in news accounts, they turned on strangers, loved ones, and even children. Media accounts also suggested that users became inhumanly strong and impervious to pain when under the influence of the drug, and were thus all the more dangerous when on a violent rampage. In addition to these images of violence and madness, media interest in PCP was also propelled by the idea that its popularity was growing quickest among teenagers. Anxiety was expressed at the youth and vulnerability of these users, and at the harm that the drug was likely to cause them. News accounts described the disastrous consequences of PCP addiction on the lives of young users and discussed the forces that drove the teen trend for the drug.

The sudden rise in media attention in 1977 led to increased political and public concern about PCP and to a spate of official responses to the problem. Beginning in 1978, city police departments and the Drug Enforcement Agency instituted crackdowns on manufacturers and sellers of PCP. Legal penalties against these persons were increased at local and national levels, while Congress imposed new legislation in an attempt to control the chemicals needed for PCP production. Wide-ranging federal research projects were also initiated on the subject of PCP, as were nationwide public education campaigns. In 1979, however, this furor began to die down. Media interest in the drug declined quickly, perhaps due to the brief attention span which journalists attributed to their audience. Politically and federally, PCP also quickly became a non-issue. These developments were influenced by the drug's declining popularity, which fell steadily in most American cities during the late-1970s and early-1980s. Certain pockets of high use remained, notably in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., and here PCP

continued to make headlines until 1987. Yet at a national level PCP ceased to be an important topic starting in 1980. The drug had been a prominent issue for only a few years, and it quickly faded from the American popular consciousness.

PCP in the American Media

PCP is almost never mentioned in histories of American drug use and drug policy.[3] This lacuna should perhaps be attributed to the forgettable nature of the American experience with PCP: unlike the big three drugs in American history – heroin, cocaine, and marijuana – PCP was a major social concern only briefly. Yet the rapidity with which the PCP issue disappeared belies its historical impact. It emerged at a critical point of transition, both for federal drug policy and social drug perceptions, during which a relatively tolerant approach to illegal drug use was about to be replaced by a much more hostile one. Social reactions to PCP both demonstrated the reigning spirit of tolerance, itself a new development in the American experience with illegal drugs, and showed evidence of mounting opposition to this tolerance. Additionally, the alarming nature of the PCP issue itself contributed in several important and previously-overlooked ways to the growing social hostility towards drugs.

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[3] PCP is given little or no attention in: David Musto and Pamela Korsmeyer, *Quest for Drug Control: Politics and Federal Policy in a Period of Increasing Substance Abuse, 1963-81* (Newhaven, CT: Yale, 2002); H. Wayne Morgan, *Drugs in America: A Social History, 1800-1980* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981); David F. Musto, *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control 3rd Ed.* (New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Dan Baum, *Smoke and Mirrors: The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1996); and Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker, eds. *Altering American Consciousness: the History of Alcohol and and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 2004).

This study examines the coverage of the PCP issue in the national news, focusing specifically on reporting from 1977 to 1979, the years during which media attention to PCP peaked in the United States. It involves a focused analysis of the news coverage itself, tracing how PCP's media image originated and evolved. It also extrapolates from the coverage, linking media discussions of PCP to broader developments in American society, and especially to changing social attitudes towards illegal drugs. Finally, it examines the effects of the larger PCP phenomenon, particularly its contribution to the re-emerging social hostility to drug use at the end of the 1970s.

The primary sources used in the research of this thesis include examples of newspaper, periodical, and television news coverage. The newspaper reporting is the best represented of these three categories: using the *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* digital database, I analyzed approximately 650 articles that mentioned PCP between 1969 and 1986; of these, 46 were primarily focused on the PCP phenomenon. The majority of these articles were published in four newspapers – the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. I studied ten articles from periodical magazines, including those published in *Time*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Newsweek*, *Human Behavior*, *New Times*, *People*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Rolling Stone*. Using the *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, I examined six television newscasts on PCP produced by *ABC Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *CBS Evening News*. Finally, I analyzed one made-for-TV documentary on PCP, entitled *Angel Death*. This last source differs from the others in that it is not an example of news journalism;

nevertheless, it was analogous in format and content to news magazines on PCP and presumably had a similar impact on its audience.

Throughout this reporting, and especially during the key years of 1977 to 1979, there was a striking consistency in content. Journalistic attention typically focused on certain of the most interesting aspects of the PCP phenomenon, including the drug's clandestine manufacture (it was reportedly simple and highly-profitable to make, but carried greats risks of explosion and poisoning) and its changing legal status. Yet two issues were by far the most prominent: the drug's violence and madness-inducing effects, and its popularity among teenagers. This essay will be divided into two sections that focus on these themes.

The first section will begin with a brief discussion of whether or not PCP-induced reactions of violence and madness were exaggerated in the news. Although this debate is something of a quagmire, it has been the focus of all previous historical analyses of the PCP phenomenon and therefore needs to be at least briefly addressed. This will be followed by an investigation of the origins of PCP's frightening media image, one which demonstrates the importance of depictions of madness and violence in generating broad social interest in the PCP issue. Special attention will be directed at the roles of physicians and police, as these professionals were the primary authors of PCP's image in the news. Finally, a more abstract analysis of the madness/violence theme will attempt to determine its attractions for the news-consuming audience and its implications concerning the morality of drug use. I will argue that despite the surprisingly sympathetic manner in which PCP users tended to be portrayed, media depictions of crazed and

violent users dehumanized their subjects and contributed to a stigmatization, not so much of drug use, but of madness.

The second section will begin by situating the PCP phenomenon within the historical context of evolving American attitudes towards drugs. Identifying a growing backlash against the social tolerance of drugs, it will then demonstrate how, in a manner that has previously been overlooked, the PCP issue contributed to this backlash. The chapter will go on to discuss the prevalence in the PCP reporting of the image of the teen-aged user as a victim. This prevalence suggests a changing American conception of drug use, one in which the drug problem was increasingly defined by a more tolerant, empathetic approach. Paradoxically, this image of the drug user as victim also contributed to the backlash against drug tolerance, and was at the heart of the radical new direction that American drug policy would take beginning in the 1980s.

Section 1: Violence and Madness

PCP: a Moral Panic?

For the purposes of this essay, it is important to note that the American social response to the PCP issue roughly corresponded to a pattern, one which sociologists have termed "moral panic." Debate continues about what exactly constitutes a moral panic, and certain critics have questioned the accuracy and utility of the concept. The general consensus, however, is that modern Western societies tend to be gripped periodically by intense reactions to high-profile threats, reactions which, due to their basis in fear and outrage, are out of proportion with the actual danger involved. These social responses resemble that concerning PCP, in that they all involve the sudden onset of widespread alarm about some new or newly-discovered problem. This alarm spreads by way of media publicity, leading eventually to the introduction of repressive legislation and dissipating soon afterwards. For example, the first such panic to be identified was about brawling among youth gangs in England in the early-1960s. Sociologist Stanley Cohen argued that the actual violence involved was isolated and relatively minor, but that media hype followed by public outcry led to the creation of harsh and discriminatory legislation, a reaction that far exceeded the degree of the threat.[4] Since Cohen's pioneering study, a number of other moral panics have been identified, including those over muggings (Britain, 1972-3), paedophile activity (Britain, 1994-2001), and ritual child abuse (USA,

[4] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers*, 3rd Ed. (1972) (New York: Routledge, 2002).

1985-92).[5] Certain social reactions to drug use have also been examined from the moral panic perspective, and these include LSD (USA, 1964-70), crack-cocaine (USA, 1986-91), and ecstasy (Britain, various periods).[6]

Considering how well the American response to the PCP issue fits the pattern, it can be accurately characterized as a moral panic. In this essay, however, I will refrain from referring to it as such, as the term involves certain misleading connotations. For one, the word "moral" suggests that such responses are necessarily based on moral indignation. In fact, in the traditional conception of moral panic there must be a group of people, termed "folk devils" by Cohen, who through violation of ethical norms provoke the anger as well as the fear of the popular majority. In the case of PCP no such group existed. The drug was a potent source of fear, especially among protective parents, but it was never associated with a particular public enemy. Users were portrayed with surprising sympathy in the news, and even manufactures and sellers of PCP tended to be depicted simply as average persons caught up by the lure of easy money.

Equally problematic is the word "panic," in that it implies that fears about PCP were both irrational and widespread. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following sub-section, PCP presented a very real threat to its users and those around them: fear therefore was an entirely reasonable reaction. It is also difficult to determine

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[5] Summarized in: Chas Critcher, *Moral Panics and the Media* (Philadelphia; Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 1-19.

[6] Erich Good and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "Drug Panic of the 1980s," in *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Blackwell, 1994); C. Reinerman and H.G. Levine, "The Crack Attack: Politics and Media in America's Latest Scare," in *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems*, J. Best ed. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1989); Jimmie L. Reeves and Richard Campbell, *Cracked Coverage: Television News, the Anti-cocaine Crusade, and the Reagan Legacy* (Durham; London: Duke University, 1994); S. Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); and Chas Critcher, "'Still Raving': Social Reaction to Ecstasy," *Leisure Studies* 19 (2000), 145-62.

how widespread this fear actually was. It clearly affected a certain portion of the public, as is evidenced by references to PCP among grass-roots anti-drug organizations. Yet the PCP issue also emerged during a time of historically low levels of public concern about drugs in general.[7] Although it played a role in the eventual reversal of this trend, it did not generate the immediate, widespread anxiety that, for example, crack-cocaine did a decade later.

For these reasons, I will refer throughout this essay to the surge in anxious social reactions to PCP spanning 1977 to 1979 as the "PCP response" rather than the "PCP panic." It remains productive, however, to conceive of this response within the framework established by moral panic theory. The theory provides insight into many features of the PCP response, including its sudden onset, brief duration, media-driven nature, and dependence on accredited experts. Most importantly, existing moral panic studies provide valuable context for the investigation of the youth theme in the PCP reporting. The youth concept – and specifically the idea of youth in danger – played a central role in almost every modern moral panic that has been identified to date.[8] This repetition suggests the unrivalled power of the threatened youth image.

The Debate Over PCP's Effects

Two previous studies have been made of the American social response to PCP, and both have been conducted from the perspective of a moral panic analysis. The first is "The Dusting of America," an article by John Morgan and Doreen Kagan that was published in the *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* in 1980. As with this essay, it is an

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7 As indicated by Gallup Poll results summarized in: Good and Ben-Yehuda.
8 Critcher, *Panics*, 148-62.

examination of PCP representations in the national news. The authors argue that PCP was portrayed in the media in the stereotypical manner common to all new drug trends: heavy emphasis was placed on horror stories featuring sensational anecdotes of murder, suicide, and insane behaviour resulting from drug use. They claim that in fact these horror stories were based on rare or even fabricated events, and in this way were indicative more of a cultural fascination with horror than the reality of PCP use.[9]

A similar argument is made by historian Philip Jenkins. His essay on PCP makes up part of his book *Synthetic Panics: The Symbolic Politics of Designer Drugs* (1999). This monograph has as its subjects many lesser-known American social reactions to drug use, including those concerning speed, ecstasy, methamphetamine, and GHB; it includes a chapter on PCP titled "Monsters." In this chapter, Jenkins draws from broader source material, surveying primarily the media accounts of PCP from the 1970s and 80s, but also congressional hearings and PCP depictions in film, television drama, and young adult fiction. Like Morgan and Kagan, Jenkins contends that PCP was not as deadly and frightening as these sources made it out to be. He too disputes the accuracy of the PCP horror stories, demonstrating the misinformation contained in some of the more common ones, and comparing them with the mundane reality of most actual PCP experiences. For Jenkins, however, these distortions signify more than the public appetite for the macabre: they also show how social reactions to synthetic drug fads such as that which concerned

[9] John P. Morgan and Doreen V. Kagan, "The Dusting of America: The Image of Phencyclidine (PCP) in the Popular Media," *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 12.3-4 (Jul-Dec 1980), 195-204.

PCP contributed to the increasingly reactionary and harmful American approach to combating illegal drug use.[10]

Central to both of these studies is the issue of exaggeration: the authors devote most of their attention to proving that PCP was not as dangerous as it was represented in the media and elsewhere. In this pursuit, Jenkins makes a particularly determined effort. He cites a series of studies conducted in the 1980s that dispute the connection between PCP use and violent behaviour. He also suggests that, once PCP's frightening reputation had been established, criminals used the drug as an excuse to try to absolve themselves of responsibility for their violent crimes. The media then reproduced such claims unquestioningly, when in actuality the crimes were financially or pathologically motivated, and often were premeditated. Additionally, Jenkins notes that the discrepancy between PCP's widespread use and the infrequency of medical emergencies associated with the drug suggests that the vast majority of PCP experiences involved neither psychotic nor violent reactions.[11]

As part of their criticisms of the media horror stories, Jenkins, Morgan, and Kagan also call attention to the uncanny similarities between the 1970s accounts of PCP and media depictions of cocaine and marijuana use in the 1910s and 1930s respectively. The exaggerated nature of these early-20th century drug portrayals is now well established and the implication is that the dangers of PCP were similarly embellished. In addition to the cases cited by these authors, there are other, more recent examples of

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[10] Philip Jenkins, *Synthetic Panics: The Symbolic Politics of Designer Drugs* (New York; London: New York University Press, 1999), 54-75.

[11] Jenkins, 69-71. Jenkins estimates that by 1978 Americans had experienced 20 million PCP trips, of which only 6 000 had resulted in visits to hospital emergency rooms.

extreme reporting where drugs are concerned, such as the claims in the 1960s that LSD caused chromosome damage, the fear in the 1980s that crack-cocaine was instantly addictive, and the assertion in the 1990s that ecstasy created holes in the brain. In all of these instances, the claims were held to be true at the time by both scientific and popular opinion, and only later were shown to have been based on faulty information.[12]

The case for a distorted image of PCP, however, is less straightforward. The effects of phencyclidine on the user can be dramatic and incredibly varied. They can include: **anaesthesia** (loss of physical sensation and immunity to pain), **depressant-like properties** (feelings of calmness, psychic numbing, impaired concentration, and loss of muscular control), **stimulant-like properties** (feelings of euphoria, invulnerability, anxiety, and insomnia), and **hallucinogenic properties** (body-image and time-sense distortions, sensory illusions, feelings of unreality and a lack of personal identity, and paranoia). All or some of these effects may be experienced during any given instance of PCP use, making each "trip" highly unpredictable.[13]

One rare but well-documented negative reaction to PCP is the onset of something similar to a psychotic episode. This was first observed during clinical trials using phencyclidine in the 1950s.[14] These early results created interest among psychiatric

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[12] William Braden, "LSD and the Press," in *The Manufacture of News. Devience, Social Problems, and the Mass Media*, Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, eds. (London: Constable, 1973), 205; Herbert Cleber, "Interview," *PBS Frontline* (1994-2011), http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/interviews/kleber.html; "Studies Damning Ecstasy 'Flawed,'" *The Gaurdian* (Apr 18, 2002), http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2002/apr/18/drugsandalcohol

[13] David A. Gorelick and Robert L. Balster, "Phencyclidine (PCP)," in *Psychopharmacology: The Fourth Generation of Progress* (The American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, 2000), http://www.acnp.org/G4/GN401000171/.

[14] E.D. Luby, *et al.*, "Study of a New Schizophrenomimetic Drug – Sernyl," *AMA Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 81 (1959), 363-9, summarized in Betty L. Davis, "The PCP Epidemic: A Critical Review," *The International Journal of the Addictions* 17.7 (1982), 1144.

researchers, who believed PCP had great potential as a tool for investigating schizophrenia. While other psychedelic drugs have been known occasionally to trigger latent neurological conditions such as schizophrenia,[15] phencyclidine is particularly suited to producing schizophrenia-like symptoms in otherwise healthy people. The reaction involves confusion, paranoia, agitation, and other thought disorders, and will usually last for a period of two weeks, although symptoms sometimes persist for more than a month.[16] These episodes have been extensively studied, and were of particular interest to researchers in the 1970s when social concern about PCP was highest.[17] In the literature on PCP from that period the term "behavioral toxicity" was often used to describe the self-destructive actions that were believed to accompany the PCP high and the PCP psychosis. When victims of car crashes, falls, drownings, and other accidents tested positive for PCP, their deaths were attributed to the impaired judgement and muscular coordination that accompanies use of the drug. The more extreme cases of behavioural toxicity involved the same horror stories that appeared in the news. Physicians observed instances in which PCP users, responding to drug-induced delusions, purposefully mutilated or damaged their own bodies without registering the resulting

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[15] LSD, psilocybin, and other hallucinogens as well as marijuana have been linked to psychotic attacks in rare instances. There are, however, some major differences between these episodes and the PCP psychosis. In examples of the latter, the severity of symptoms appears to be dependent on the dose of phencyclidine taken, and the length of the illness remains consistent for most patients. This is not the case for other hallucinogens, which suggests that the PCP psychosis is a direct effect of the drug, rather than a period of abnormal mental functioning initially triggered by a traumatic drug experience. Beverly Fauman, *et al*. "Psychiatric Sequelae of Phencyclidine Abuse," *Journal of Clinical Toxicology* 9.4 (1976), 534-7.

[16] Fauman, *et al*., "Psychiatric Sequelae," (1976), 536.

[17] Paul V. Luisada and Bernard L. Brown, "Clinical Management of Phencyclidine Psychosis," *Journal of Clinical Toxicology* 9.4 (1976), 539-45; Fauman, *et al*., "Psychiatric Sequelae," (1976), 529-38; R.M. Allen and S.J. Young, "Phencyclidine-Induced Psychosis," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 135 (1978), 1081-4; David E. Smith, *et al*., "The Diagnosis and Treatment of the PCP Abuse Syndrome," in *Phencyclidine (PCP) Abuse: An Appraisal*, R.C. Petersen and R.C. Stillman, eds. (Rockville, MD: NIDA, 1978), 229-40.

pain. Other cases included fatal confrontations with the police, in which PCP users were killed after exhibiting threatening behaviour and failing to comply with the instructions of arresting officers.[18]

The abundance of medical observations of the PCP psychosis suggests that there is a scientific basis to PCP's reputation for causing insanity. There is less agreement on the issue of violence, however. During the mid-1970s, Dr. Paul Luisada, who was recognized as one of the earliest authorities on the PCP psychosis, drew attention to the aggressive, assaultive, and paranoid behaviour manifested by many of his PCP-using patients.[19] In subsequent publications other researchers also noted these characteristics in association with the PCP psychosis.[20] In 1979, by which time the media image of PCP-induced violence was well known, Fauman and Fauman published the results of a study which firmly connected violent behaviour with chronic PCP use.[21] Yet, as Jenkins notes, in the 1980s many researchers came forward to challenge these findings. In one article, the authors surveyed the pre-existing medical literature on PCP, and reassessed individual cases in which violence had been reported in connection to the drug. They found that in almost every case a connection could not be conclusively established, as most individuals had taken additional psychoactive drugs at the time of the behaviour, and many had

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[18] Use of the term "behavioral toxicity" occurs in R. Stanley Burns and Steven Lerner, "Perspectives: Acute Phencyclidine Intoxication," *Journal of Clinical Toxicology* 9.4 (1976), 498-9. A critique of the behavioral toxicity concept is included in Davis, 1145.

[19] Paul V. Luisada and C. Reddick, "An Epidemic of Drug-Induced Schizophrenia," presented at *The American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting* (1975); Luisada and Brown, "Clinical Management," (1976), 539-40.

[20] Allen and Young, "Phencyclidine-Induced Psychosis," 1081-4.

[21] Micheal A. Fauman and Beverly J. Fauman, "Chronic Phencyclidine (PCP) Abuse: A Psychiatric Perspective," in *PCP (Phencyclidine): Historical and Current Perspectives*, ed. E.F. Domino (Ann Arbor: NPP Books, 1981), 424-32.

previous histories of violence outside of their PCP use.[22] An extensive ethnography of PCP use published in 1979 also disputed the link with violence. In his summary of the findings, author Harvey Feldman notes that PCP users themselves considered the drug's violent reputation to be laughable. They were much more concerned with negative effects such as memory loss and impaired concentration, almost never associating violence with PCP.[23]

Based on the studies reviewed here, Jenkins may be correct when he states: "the evidence for a linkage between PCP and uncontrolled violence is at best tenuous."[24] He is on shakier ground, however, when he suggests that reports of flashbacks and psychotic episodes can be attributed to the PCP users' previous experiences with other drugs, such as LSD, or to factors unrelated to drug use.[25] This kind of speculation is not convincing, especially when the medical literature indicates that PCP is unique in its potential for producing schizophrenia-like symptoms, and can remain stored in a user's body for much longer than most intoxicants.[26] Jenkins is forced to speculate – both here, and in some of his other arguments – because it is impossible to be sure about how PCP affected its numerous users during their many experiences with it. This is the major difficulty with Jenkins's approach: he attempts to contrast the media image with the reality of PCP use, and yet the reality of PCP use is too complex for this comparison. He states: "there was no justification for the idea that a single or occasional experience [with PCP] transformed

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22 Martin Brecher, *et al*., "Phencyclidine and Violence: Clinical and Legal Issues," *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology* 6.8 (1988), 397-400. These researchers note that the only drug that has ever been conclusively linked to violent behavior is alcohol.

23 Harvey Feldman, "Overview," in Feldman *et al*., *Angel Dust, an Ethnographic Study of PCP Users* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1979), 29-52.

24 Jenkins, 69.

25 Jenkins, 69.

26 Smith *et al*., "PCP Abuse Syndrome," (1978), 237.

an individual into a raging monster." Yet, assuming the phrase "raging monster" is a hyperbolic reference to media accounts of user violence and insanity, there is much anecdotal evidence of such extreme behaviour as a result of ingesting PCP. There are hundreds of records, not only in the media but also in the medical literature, in coroners' reports, and in legal records, documenting extremely negative reactions to the drug. Because of their sheer number, it is impossible to dismiss all of these reports as overblown or as the result of unrecognized extraneous factors. Moreover, PCP's highly varied effects suggest that many different types of user reaction were possible. A drug that can cause delusions and paranoia will certainly lead to bizarre behaviour, while PCP's stimulant properties increase the chances that users will become agitated and mobile. In encounters between PCP users and authority figures, the drug can also be considered particularly dangerous. The strange or unresponsive actions of people high on PCP often cause police and doctors to feel threatened, resulting in a rapid escalation of force used by these professionals during such encounters.[27]

These criticisms are not meant to suggest that Jenkins is wrong about the exaggerated nature of the PCP reporting. His main argument – that the media represented violence and insanity as common or even inevitable reactions to PCP use, when in reality they were rare occurrences – is well reasoned. As Jenkins explains, for PCP to have become such a widely-used drug, the vast majority of angel dust experiences must have been relatively innocuous. Mental breakdowns, unprovoked assaults, and gruesome murders were not the normal outcomes of a PCP trip. And although Jenkins at times has difficulty proving that the reporting was exaggerated, his attempts to do so are central to

[27] Davis, "PCP Epidemic," 1147.

the larger argument he sustains throughout his monograph. By demonstrating that the dangers of synthetic drugs such as PCP have been consistently exaggerated, Jenkins exposes some of the false justifications for the American war on drugs. He posits that successive social reactions to synthetic drugs have played a role in the militarization of American police forces, and in creating drug policies that punish drug users rather than getting them the help they need. In light of his findings, Jenkins proposes the urgent need for a re-evaluation of American drug policies, and for increased caution and scepticism among journalists and policy makers on issues related to synthetic drugs.[28]

The sensational nature of the reporting inspired criticism from other sources as well. In the 1979 ethnographic study, Feldman refers disparagingly to the ridiculous way in which PCP was presented by the media.[29] A variety of medical commentators also challenged the media depictions, including J. Thomas Ungerleider in "PCP – A Rational Perspective" and Betty L. Davis in "The PCP Epidemic: A Critical Review."[30] Among all the analyses of PCP's harmfulness relative to its media image, I believe that Davis's perspective is the most balanced and precise. After a thorough survey of the medical literature on the subject, she cautiously concludes:

> While the potential of PCP for causing serious adverse psychological and behavioural consequences has been documented, evidence indicates that only a very small proportion of users will suffer these more extreme effects. ... [Although PCP] use should be discouraged, ... this does not justify the scare tactics currently used by the media.[31]

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[28] Jenkins, 183-97.
[29] Feldman, 38.
[30] J. Thomas Ungerleider, "PCP – A Rational Perspective," *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 12.3-4 (Jul-Dec 1980), 191-4; Davis, 1137-55.
[31] Davis, 1151-3.

It seems most likely that PCP was neither as deadly as the media made it out to be, nor as harmless as Jenkins appears at times to be suggesting.

I would also stress, however, that there is an element of the obvious in arguments about the exaggerated nature of the PCP reporting. Media accounts of PCP were rarely intended as balanced assessments of the drug. For everyone involved in the creation of these stories – journalists, physicians, police, and even drug users – the most dramatic effects of PCP were also the most important. Reading or viewing some of the media accounts, it is easy to doubt their veracity. One striking description from the *New York Times* stated: "PCP destroys brain tissue. It puts you either into a God syndrome or it makes you depressed and violent. It's created a situation where a young woman can kill and eat her own children."[32] The hyperbolic nature of such statements is self-evident. This suggests that a more productive strategy than trying to disprove media exaggerations is to assume that, to a certain degree, they will always occur.

The Emergence of the PCP Phenomenon

It is difficult to determine exactly how and why the media image of PCP came into being, as this process involved a large number of diverse social actors, journalists, and news organizations. For moral panic studies in general, causation is a troublesome issue. Cohen's original thesis is vague on the topic, and panic studies often focus on the mechanisms by which a panic gains momentum rather than those that give it the initial push. The tendency among American media organizations to look to one another for

[32] Lawrence Christon, "Stage News," *New York Times* (Nov 18, 1979), 61-2.

guidance is well recognized: once an issue has been established as news, media interest often rises and falls collectively, with little variation in content, emphasis, and source selection.[33] More obscure is how an issue becomes established as news in the first place.

In the case of indefinite news topics such as drug trends, some researchers point to a key event – this could be a high-profile death, dramatic crime, presidential speech, etc. – which serves to sensitize the media to a larger problem.[34] Others argue that there needs to be not only a specific sequence of newsworthy events, but also a group or groups of people working to bring the issue to prominence.[35] This perspective emphasizes the importance of journalists and their sources in the creation of the news. Some moral panic theorists suggest that agents of the state and other powerful elites tend to dominate this process, and that the news that is produced serves the interests of these elites by reinforcing the *status quo*.[36] In this scenario, politicians and police call attention to issues such as drug abuse in order to generate positive publicity for their own actions in these matters. Yet non-state actors such as independent experts and special interest groups also exert considerable influence on media content. And while these individuals also tend to use the news to advance their own agendas, this ensures a certain diversity of opinion in news content. Thus, as Reeves and Campbell note, although the news is

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[33] Stephen D. Reese and Lucig H. Danielian, "Intermedia Influences and the Drug Issue: Converging on Cocaine," in *Communication Campaigns About Drugs: Government, Media, and the Public*, Pamela J. Shoemaker, ed. (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), 29-45.

[34] Critcher, *Moral Panics*, 140, summarizing Molotch and Lestor, "News as Purposive Behavior: the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents, and Scandals," *American Sociological Review* 39 (1974), 101-14. A series of such events has been linked to the initiation of the crack-cocaine panic of the 1980s. They include: President Reagan's incendiary anti-drug speeches from June to September 1986, the cocaine-related deaths of sports stars Len Bias and Don Rogers in June 1986, and the anti-drug political oneupmanship of the 1986 Congressional election. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 205.

[35] Critcher, *Moral Panics*, 144.

[36] This interpretation was first proposed in Stuart Hall et al. in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), as summarized in Critcher, *Moral Panics.*

generally aligned with the forces of normalization and social control, it also reproduces the viewpoints of the less powerful, leading to content that is often multifaceted and contradictory.[37]

In the case of the PCP response, no one particular event appears to have triggered widespread media interest: there were no deaths of high-profile persons due to the drug, nor alarming press releases issued by government agencies. Rather, news reports on PCP appeared on a regular basis but remained brief throughout the 1970s, and then became more detailed and provocative from about the middle of 1977. This change seems to have been in response to a growing recognition among journalists of the newsworthiness of the story: news producers gave increasing attention to PCP in 1977 as details surfaced concerning its rising popularity, its deadliness, and especially its links with violence and insanity. At this point, most of these details had already been in existence for a number of years. It took time, however, for members of the media to become aware of them, and then for their full dramatic potential to be recognized. Thus, although the makings of the PCP story were probably in place in the early-1970s, little media attention was paid to the drug until much later in the decade.

One significant feature of the media's mid-1977 discovery of PCP is that it predated any large-scale interest in the drug among federal agencies. The first enquiries about PCP in the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) did not occur until July 1977, and PCP did not become a major priority for the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) until

[37] Reeves and Campbell, 33-4.

the following year.[38] Richard Petersen, a NIDA researcher, admits that the two agencies were caught off guard by the PCP phenomenon in 1977. He explains that during government efforts at tracking drug trends in the mid-1970s, PCP had originally been lumped into a larger category containing all hallucinogenic drugs. Because of this, and because users themselves did not broadcast their activities, the growing popularity specifically of PCP was overlooked. Peterson remembers that when "newspaper accounts describing the drug first appeared, some [NIDA workers] were inclined to see the new emphasis as 'media hype.'"[39] Yet by 1978, PCP had become a key concern for both NIDA and the DEA, as millions of dollars were quickly directed into PCP-related research and law enforcement initiatives. The timing of these programs, and of the political response to PCP which also began in 1978, highlights the central role played by the media in the making of the PCP reaction: it suggests that among drug authorities and politicians, the sudden growth in interest in PCP that occurred in 1978 was the result of the surging media coverage that directly preceded it.

Among the news sources I surveyed, two articles best represent the moment when journalists recognized the newsworthiness of the PCP issue: "'Angel Dust' Use Sending More Youths to Hospitals" by Harry Nelson, and "'Angel Dust': Schizophrenia 'Epidemic' Here Linked to Youths' Use of PCP" by Alice Bonner. The former was printed in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 31 1977, and the latter in the *Washington Post* on June 11, less than two weeks later. These were two of the earliest of the highly-detailed articles on

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[38] Peter Koper, "Angel Death," *New Times* (Mar 20, 1978), 48; Lee I. Dogoloff, "Federal Response to the PCP Problem 1979," *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* (12.3-4) Jul-Dec 1980, 185.

[39] Richard C. Petersen, "Phencyclidine: A NIDA Perspective," *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* (12.3-4) Jul-Dec 1980, 205.

PCP, and they were the first to link PCP to violence and insanity. Soon after their publication media interest in the issue grew rapidly: both the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine printed articles on PCP in July, *U.S. News and World Report* did so in August, and the *Chicago Tribune* in September. In October, the first network television coverage was broadcast, with reports appearing on *ABC News* and CBS's *60 Minutes*. Coverage continued to increase in 1977, peaking with the congressional hearings on PCP in the summer of 1978.

In this acceleration of the PCP coverage, "Schizophrenia 'Epidemic'" by Alice Bonner is of particular significance. It was the first front-page article to be printed with PCP as its subject and the first news story to connect PCP so explicitly with insanity. The article focused on PCP-related admissions to a District of Columbia psychiatric hospital called St. Elizabeth's, and relied mainly on the expertise of Dr. Paul Luisada, deputy medical director of the hospital. He described how beginning in 1973 doctors at the hospital noticed a sudden upswing in new schizophrenia cases, which he eventually determined was caused by the patients' use of PCP. The article provided disturbing stories of PCP-induced madness, including an interview with one user who leapt naked from a second story window in his house.[40] "Schizophrenia 'Epidemic'" heavily influenced subsequent *Washington Post* articles on PCP: in the months following its publication, *Post* writers often referenced its contents, in some cases briefly summarizing Bonner's findings and in others adding to her observations.[41] Additionally, its influence

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[40] Alice Bonner, "'Angel Dust': Schizophrenia 'Epidemic' Here Linked to Youths' Use of PCP," *Washington Post* (Jun 11, 1977), A1, A4.

[41] Eduardo Cue, "14 Arrested, Drug Lab is Closed in Rockville Area," *Washington Post* (Jun 16, 1977), B11; Robin de Silva, "PCP: Killer Weed is 'Status' Drug," *Washington Post* (Jul 3, 1977), H4.

appears to have extended beyond the *Post*, as many of the same details and quotations were used in the *U.S. News* article from August, and in a *Newsweek* article from March 1978. Bonner's piece also established her primary source, Dr. Paul Luisada, as a nationally recognized expert on PCP. Luisada would later be quoted in a variety of other articles, including ones in the *New Times* and *Human Behavior* magazines.[42]

Because of the impact of "Schizophrenia 'Epidemic'" on the early PCP coverage, I asked Alice Bonner through personal correspondence about the origins of the article. Bonner indicated that it was Dr. Harold Thomas, chief spokesman for St. Elizabeth's Hospital, who first called her attention to the PCP story in 1977. He suggested she talk with some of the hospital's treatment professionals, which is probably what brought her into contact with Dr. Luisada. Bonner noted that she had written about PCP before this in 1974, but it was the tip from Thomas, a reliable source for St. Elizabeth's news, that inspired the closer examination of PCP in "Schizophrenia 'Epidemic.'"[43] This originary story offers what is probably a prototypical example of how PCP came to the attention of journalists. It suggests that at the outset of the response, the newsworthiness of the issue was discovered on an individual basis, when knowledgeable professionals such as Dr. Thomas began to alert certain journalists to the dramatic nature of the PCP problem. The fact that the PCP-schizophrenia connection was first established by Dr. Luisada in the early-1970s, while the issue only came to light in the media in 1977, indicates a time lag

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[42] "PCP: Infernal 'Angel Dust,'" *Washington Post* (Feb 27, 1978), A18; B.D. Colen, "Use of PCP in D.C. Metropolitan Area Called 'Endemic' by Drug Officials," *Washington Post* (May 26, 1978), C12; Koper, 50; R.W. Dellinger, "High on PCP," *Human Behavior* (June 1978), 41.

[43] Personal correspondence with Alice Bonner from Sep 9, 2009. See also: Alice Bonner, "Lab Operator Accused Of Making Illegal Drug," Washington Post (Jan 22, 1974), A1; Alice Bonner, "Drug Case Lab Owner Held Insane," *Washington Post* (Aug 9, 1974), D24.

in this process. Luisada's information was important enough to be considered front-page news, even in 1977, when, according to the doctor, the "epidemic" in southeast D.C. had begun to subside. What is not clear is whether Dr Luisada had made any previous attempts to bring the story to the attention of the media.

A similar story in all likelihood lies behind the other pioneering PCP article in my survey: Nelson's "'Angel Dust' Use Sending More Youths to Hospitals" from the *Los Angeles Times*. This article resembles Bonner's in a number of ways: it too focused on an influx of PCP-using patients at one specific hospital, in this case Rancho Los Amigos in Los Angeles, and it too expressed the longtime concerns about PCP held by one individual, Dr. Leon Marder. In this case, Marder warned that the hospital, which specialized in drug abuse treatment, had seen a "sharp upswing" in PCP-related admissions over the previous two years.[44] The similar settings of these articles suggest that serious concern about PCP first developed in localized medical treatment settings. St. Elizabeth's and Rancho Los Amigos represent likely sites for this initial recognition of the PCP problem, as both hospitals served as hubs for specialized treatment in large metropolitan areas, and each therefore became the destination for a particularly concentrated population of PCP users. The issue remained obscure because the medical professionals who identified it were essentially isolated, but as attention grew in 1977 more and more experts came forth to testify publicly about the problem. A similar situation probably existed in law enforcement: newspaper reports indicate that as early as 1974 certain police officers and DEA agents, based on their personal observations, had

[44] Harry Nelson, "'Angel Dust' Use Sending More Youths to Hospitals," *Los Angeles Times* (May 31, 1977), D1.

become particularly alarmed by PCP.[45] Yet policing organizations as a whole did not turn their attentions to the drug until it had become a widely recognized problem in 1977.

Altogether, this information suggests a scattered, bottom-to-top origin for the PCP response: no one high-profile event triggered it, nor did any particular government organization or citizens' group work to bring the issue to prominence. Rather, disparate professionals on the front lines of drug work first alerted the media to the issue, and the media then brought the issue to the attention of the public, the government, and other authorities. In this way, the PCP response can be considered almost as self-propelled: it burst into prominence due both to the urgent problems it was creating for drug users and those who worked with them and the fascinating nature of the PCP high itself.

Medical Expertise and the Creation of PCP's Media Image

Essential to the sudden increase in media interest in PCP was the widespread recognition of the dramatic nature of the PCP "high." Before 1977, newspaper articles on the drug tended to be brief and obscure. Although a number of observers at the time identified the growing threat posed by PCP, the most compelling aspect of the story – the drug's association with insanity and violence – was missing. This changed in 1977 with the publication of "Schizophrenia 'Epidemic'" and other sensationalist articles. In these new examples, madness and violence became the central features of the PCP story. A common template emerged in the news: journalists tended to begin their reports on PCP with attention-grabbing horror stories and then move into detailed expert analyses of the

[45] "'Heroin of Suburbs:' Police Arrest 2, Seize Pound of PCP Drug," *Chicago Tribune* (Jul 28, 1974), 32; Thomas Grubisich, "Fairfax's 2d Drug Problem: PCP," *Washington Post* (Jun 8, 1975), B1, B6.

problem. “Schizophrenia 'Epidemic'” followed this scheme exactly, as it started with a detailed account of one user's crazed antics and continued with explanations and warnings about PCP from Dr. Luisada and psychiatric nurse Catherine Reddick. The latter part of the article included additional anecdotes of bizarre user behaviour: Luisada told of one patient who “attacked everyone in sight,” another who was discovered “singing naked in a supermarket,” and a third who was found “choking a boy in an apartment corridor.”[46]

Although subsequent reports were even more lurid and alarming, these initial tales, in combination with Luisada's expert testimony about PCP's effects, helped establish the drug's reputation in the media as madness-inducing. It is interesting to note that this reputation was not mythical in its origins, as Morgan, Kagan, and Jenkins suggest, but was based rather on the clinical observations of Luisada and Reddick. In fact, reading “Schizophrenia 'Epidemic'” and other examples in which Luisada was quoted in the media, it is clear that journalists often copied information directly from the medical literature on PCP. A comparison of one of Luisada's publications on PCP – “The Phencyclidine Psychosis: Phenomenology and Treatment” (Luisada, 1980) – with media sources reveals that there were at least three instances in which the text itself was quoted in the news.[47] These references to Luisada's writings suggest that the media image of PCP, for all its sensational attributes, was to a surprising extent based directly on the

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[46] Bonner, “Schizophrenia 'Epidemic,'” (Jun 10, 1977), A4.

[47] Luisada, “The Phencyclidine Psychosis: Phenomenology and Treatment,” *Phencyclidine (PCP) Abuse: An Appraisal*, R.C. Petersen and R.C. Stillman, eds. (Rockville, MD: NIDA, 1978), 243; Colen, “'Endemic'” (May 26, 1978), C12; “On the Drug Scene: New Rival for Heroin,” *U.S. News & World Report* (Aug 9, 1977), 65; Dellinger, 41. Although “The Phencyclidine Psychosis” actually postdates this coverage, much of its content was probably reprinted from earlier medical publications by Luisada. It seem likely that one article in particular – “The PCP Psychosis: A Hidden Epidemic” (Luisada, 1977) – served as the basis for much media information on PCP.

authorized medical view of the drug.[48] They also show how well Luisada's research lent itself to dramatic representation in the news. Some of the more sensational conclusions reached by the doctor included: that PCP had "no equal" among drugs in its ability to induce a schizophrenic attack; that it caused sudden transformations in which seemingly tranquil users turned violent; and that it produced a paranoia so powerful that users sometimes armed themselves with weapons against imagined enemies.[49] These ideas, first described in Luisada's medical publications, became important components of the frightening media image of the PCP user.

In later news coverage, a variety of medical experts in addition to Luisada testified about the link between PCP and insanity. These included physicians who, like Luisada, specialized in PCP research, and professionals who worked in emergency medicine and dealt with frequent cases of PCP overdose. Certain critics have suggested that these doctors' collective emphasis on the insanity theme stemmed less from real experience and more from personal bias, resulting in an excessively negative image of PCP. In "PCP: A Rational Perspective" (1980), Thomas Ungerleider accuses doctors of making sensational statements to the media in order to 1) ensure continued financial support for PCP research from the government, 2) gain the positive publicity conferred by the status of "PCP expert," and 3) discourage the popular use of a dangerous drug, even if this meant knowingly exaggerating its dangers.[50]

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[48] Another example of this phenomenon occurs when a journalist quotes from an unidentified article on PCP published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*: Matthew L. Wald, "Teen-Age Use Of 'Angel Dust' Stirs Concern," *New York Times* (Nov 10, 1977), 48.

[49] Luisada, "The Phencyclidine Psychosis," 249-52.

[50] Ungerleider, 191-4.

Ungerleider's arguments appear plausible, especially in light of some of the more extreme testimony from medical experts. The most notable example is Steven Lerner, a psychology student who, after treating cases involving PCP overdose at rock concerts in the mid-1970s, co-founded a research company that specialized in the study of PCP. When media interest grew suddenly in 1977, Lerner's expertise was much in demand: he was eventually quoted in all four of the newspapers surveyed, as well as in *Newsweek*, *New Times*, *Human Behavior*, and *People*, and in the *NBC Evening News* broadcasts.[51] Lerner also ended up testifying as an expert witness in multiple court cases, working as a consultant on PCP documentaries, and co-authoring an educational book on PCP prevention.[52] His fledgling career greatly benefited from PCP's sudden notoriety, and he worked harder than any other expert to reinforce the drug's frightening image. In dozens of media appearances, Lerner again and again described PCP in the most sensational terms. He spoke of chronic users "never be[ing] normal again," and of kids as young as nine years old taking the drug.[53] He repeatedly told two horror stories, one in which a PCP user murdered his mother, father, and grandfather; and another in which a user randomly entered a private home, assaulted its resident, a pregnant woman, and killed her

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[51] Newspaper examples include but are not limited to: George Estep, "PCP: Killer Drug in Comeback," *Chicago Tribune* (Sep 11, 1977), 42; William Overend, "Dangerous New Drug: PCP: Death in the 'Dust,'" *Los Angeles Times* (Sep 26, 1977), F8, F9; Brad Knickerbocker, "New Alarm Heard on Drug Abuse," *Christian Science Monitor* (Oct 7, 1978), 11; Evan Maxwell "Standard Police Control Tactics Don't Work," *Los Angeles Times* (Aug 20, 1978), B1, B3; Joyce Wadler, "Police Say Man Chased to His Death Had Acted Oddly," *Washington Post* (Jul 3, 1981), A7. Lerner was also interviewed in a number of television programs in addition to those surveyed for this paper, including one appearance on CBS's *60 Minutes* (Oct 23, 1977), and two on NBC's "Tomorrow" (May 24, 1978 and June 5, 1978).

[52] It was probably Lerner's consulting work on one of these documentaries – "The PCP Story" (1977) – that initiated his media exposure: one early newspaper article references and quotes from the film, while the *NBC News* broadcast contains clips from it; both of these news items also include interviews with Lerner. Overend, "Death in the 'Dust'" (Sep 26, 1977), F8; "Today," *NBC Nightly News*, (Feb 21, 1978).

[53] Overend, "Death in the 'Dust'" (Sep 26, 1977), F8.

infant child.[54] In a three-page interview with Lerner in *People* magazine – perhaps the best demonstration of Lerner's status as a temporary celebrity – he insisted that PCP was more dangerous than all other recreational drugs, including speed and heroin.[55]

A look at Lerner's collective media contribution, however, suggests less a purposeful strategy of exaggeration on the part of the young researcher than a genuine belief that PCP was the worst drug out there. Lerner appears simply to have become caught up in his mission to educate the public about the dangers of PCP. Statements from other medical experts, though generally less extreme than Lerner's, were made from a similar viewpoint; because these experts worked mainly with overdose victims and other extreme examples of PCP intoxication, they tended to see the drug in an especially negative light. In media interviews, clinical researchers in particular were apt to discuss the insanity-inducing potential of PCP, as it was this effect and its relationship with schizophrenia that was the focus of their research. For these reasons physicians and other medical professionals were essential in the creation of the media image of the crazed PCP user: they alerted journalists to the dramatic threat posed by PCP, they furnished many of the horror stories that circulated in the news, and they provided technical explanations of PCP's bizarre and complicated effects.

PCP and American Policing

As with medical experts, law enforcement professionals also played a key role in creating PCP's media image. During the late-1970s and early-1980s, police were involved regularly in violent encounters with people high on PCP, especially in certain urban areas

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[54] *NBC Nightly News*, (Feb 21, 1978).
[55] Steven Lerner, "In His Own Words," *People* (Sep 1978), 47.

where use of the drug was most prevalent. Word of these confrontations spread, and this, in combination with testimony from medical professionals, helped establish PCP's reputation for causing unpredictable, irrational, and violent behaviour. Yet these incidents also added a new element to PCP's media image: the idea that users of the drug, once on a violent rampage, were almost impossible to stop. Users could not be reasoned with, as they were often paranoid and delusional; they could not be subdued through the application of pain, as the drug made them immune; and, most frighteningly of all, they could not be subdued through physical force, as they seemed to be in possession of super-human strength. Reports spread of assaultive PCP users being shot repeatedly and yet continuing to advance upon their victims. Police spoke of being thrown around "like rag-dolls," and of needing six or more officers to physically restrain one intoxicated individual. Most notoriously, several incidents were documented in which arrestees high on PCP broke free of handcuffs by simply tearing apart the steel-link chains.[56]

This image of the super-powerful, belligerent user was the most sensational aspect of PCP's depiction in the media, and the most derided by critics of that depiction. Morgan and Kagan refer to it as the "Frankenstein's Monster" component of the PCP myth. Both they and Jenkins point to its similarity to stories about black cocaine users that circulated in the 1920s, stories which featured super-human strength, immunity to pain, and a heavy dose of racist fear-mongering. Jenkins suggests that in the case of PCP, as with that of cocaine in the 1920s, this image was popular among police officers because it provided them with a convenient excuse: when facing charges of excessive use of force, officers could claim that extreme measures were necessary in taking down a given suspect,

[56] Phil Garlington, "Growing Use in San Diego Alarms Police," *Los Angeles Times* (Aug 27, 1978), D1.

because the suspect appeared to be crazed and hyper-strong due to PCP use. Jenkins cites the example of the Rodney King beating in 1991, after which officers blamed their actions on the belief that, due to his aggressive behaviour, King was a "PCP-crazed giant" (the toxicology report later showed that King had ingested alcohol but not PCP). Jenkins argues that, had the King incident not been filmed, "anti-drug text books might well be citing it today as an example of the disastrous effects of PCP," and he speculates about the number of similar encounters that must have occurred in the 1970s, before "alert citizens ... were equipped with video cameras."[57]

Although Jenkins takes a particularly jaded view of American policing, his point is a valid one: once established, PCP's monstrous image was used to defend police violence. An examination of the newspaper reporting from the 1970s and 1980s reveals that the drug was cited in order to justify the police use of force in a number of incidents. One particularly well-publicized case was that of Ronald Burkholder, a man high on PHP (a PCP analog with presumably identical effects) who was shot to death during a struggle with a lone arresting officer in Los Angeles in 1977. The event garnered controversy because the victim was unarmed, and in fact naked, and had been shot six times. No charges were brought against the officer, a decision that district attorneys defended on the grounds that the he was "confronted by a person under the influence of a dangerous drug" and had "every right to feel that he was in imminent threat of great bodily harm or death."[58] Similar justifications were offered in other incidents. In 1978 a San Diego police chief defended his officers' use of mace and nightsticks on an arrestee high on

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[57] Jenkins, 67-9.
[58] Dorothy Townsend, "Data on Burkholder Released to Public," *Los Angeles Times* (Apr 7, 1978), F2.

PCP, arguing that the level of force employed was "necessary to control violent, drug-induced actions and resistance."[59] And in 1982, when a suspect high on PCP died due to blows from police nightsticks, a Montgomery County police chief insisted that the deceased "was so violent and uncontrollable, nothing less would suffice."[60]

It is important to note, however, that the frightening image of the PCP user was not simply a convenient excuse for police: in the majority of cases, including those cited above, officers probably did fear for their lives, and with reason. Newspaper articles indicate that police were severely injured in a number of confrontations with PCP users throughout the late-1970s.[61] In 1978, twelve officers from a single Los Angles police department substation were said to be simultaneously recuperating from PCP-user inflicted injuries, while in a separate incident an officer was reportedly choked into an unconscious state by an attacker high on PCP.[62] Moreover, even in cases in which police did appear to use excessive force, the excuse that the victim was PCP-crazed did not always absolve police of responsibility. During the 1980s, lawsuits against a number of police departments succeeded in proving that police had overreacted in confrontations with suspects high on PCP. Large cash settlements were awarded to the families of the deceased: Ronald Burkholder's family, for example, received $425,000 in 1982.[63] In fact, as a growing number of PCP users were injured or killed during confrontations with

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[59] "Probe Absolves Officers of Using Undue Violence to Subdue Suspect," *Los Angeles Times* (May 19, 1978), E6.

[60] Leon Wynter, "PCP: Use of Mind-Warping 'Angel Dust' Rampant in Maryland Suburbs," *Washington Post* (Apr 28, 1982), D1.

[61] "Naked Man Injured 4 Officers in Fight," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 10, 1977), B3; "4 Officers Hurt in Melee in Reston," *Washington Post* (Aug 8, 1979), B6.

[62] The officer's partner testified that he had delivered heavy blows to the attacker's head throughout the incident, with no effect. E.W. Oglesby, Samuel J. Faber, and Stuart J. Faber, *Angel Dust: What Everyone Should Know About PCP* (Los Angeles: Lega-Books, 1979), 57.

[63] Ron Harris, "PCP Users Present a Special Problem for Police," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 11, 1982), B3.

police in the late-1970s and early-80s, police departments were increasingly criticized and pressured to reform their arrest strategies. The situation was particularly urgent in cities such as Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., where a large proportion of PCP-related confrontations occurred, and many fatal encounters involved black users. These deaths fostered accusations of police racism, and worsened the already unhappy relationship between the police departments and the black communities in these cities.[64]

For police, then, confrontations with PCP users presented a complicated problem. The use of too much force might lead to the injury or death of an arrestee, and to liability for the department, while the use of too little might risk the personal safety of bystanders and of the arresting officer. This situation was made all the more complicated by the inherent difficulties involved in physically restraining PCP-using suspects. Because of the drug's pain-blocking properties, common police holds that inflicted pain were not effective. One alternative was for police to try to render the suspect unconscious through the application of a choke hold. This was a technique once widely employed in law enforcement, but increasingly abandoned in the twentieth century due to its dangers to the arrestee. Despite this trend, some police departments, notably the LAPD, continued to sanction the use of choke holds in the late-1970s, and in fact justified the holds' use as necessary for controlling crazed suspects such as PCP users. In the case of the LAPD, however, the controversial choke hold was finally banned in the early-1980s, in part because it seemed particularly likely to cause accidental death when applied to PCP

[64] Linda Wheeler and Margaret Engel, "PCP: Cheap High, Heavy Burden," *Washington Post* (Jan 14, 1986), A14.

users.[65] In other departments, the only approved procedure was to have five or more officers pile on top of a belligerent PCP-using suspect, a strategy which, as one policeman noted, gave "the impression [of] excessive force,"[66] but in reality was the safest for users and police alike. A third option was the use of non-fatal weaponry. In the late-70s and early-80s, partly in response to the PCP problem, many departments intensified their use of tasers, and experimented with "grabbing-sticks," nets, water-cannons, sound-wave guns, bean-bag guns, and, in a surreal example from New York City, mace-spraying robots. In many news reports, however, police expressed doubts about the utility of this equipment, suggesting that the weapons required a degree of cooperation from their targets which PCP users were unlikely to supply.[67]

The broad effects of this difficult situation were various. On the one hand, the PCP phenomenon induced police departments to develop better strategies for arresting delusional and intoxicated suspects, and to provide better training for officers on how to handle such encounters. It played a particularly important role in the eventual ban of police choke holds in Los Angeles. On the other hand, it created a culture of fear among police which must have had a lasting, negative impact on their work. This fear is evident in news items from the late-1970s and early-1980s – in interviews, one officer explained that the prospect of dealing with someone high on PCP caused "you [to] get a knot in

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[65] Harris, "Special Problem for Police," (Nov 11, 1982), B3; Ted Vollmer, "No Alternatives to Choke Holds Found," *Los Angeles Times* (Mar 10, 1978), D4; Dorothy Townsend, "Doctors Oppose Choke Hold on Drug Suspects," *Los Angeles Times* (Feb 24, 1978), B3; Charles P. Wallace, "New Rules on Choke Holds Spelled Out," *Los Angeles Times* (Apr 20, 1982), C1.

[66] "A Death in Police Custody," *Washington Post* (Dec 20, 1983), A20; Harris, "Special Problem for Police," (Nov 11, 1982), B3; Garlington, "Growing Use in San Diego" (Aug 27, 1978), D1; Sally A. Strickland, "'Ax-Swinger Shot in Legs by Policeman,'" *Los Angeles Time*s (Oct 18, 1977), C8.

[67] Richard West, "Long Sticks of the Law Grab Their Man From Afar," *Los Angeles Times* (Mar 14, 1980), A4; Harris, "Special Problem," (Nov 11, 1982), B3; Ed Bruske, "Police Puzzle: Subduing PCP Users," *Washington Post* (Dec 2, 1984), B1.

your stomach," while another asked himself: "What do you do with a guy on dust?" and answered wryly: "Run like hell."[68] Such fearfulness no doubt caused police in certain situations to overreact, whether during confrontations with suspects high on PCP, or confrontations with suspects who appeared to be so. One interpretation of the Rodney King incident is that the officers involved really did believe King to be high on PCP, and this belief was a motivation in their excessive use of force. This possibility does not excuse the brutality of their actions, nor does it preclude racial prejudice as a concurrent motivation;[69] it does, however, suggest the lasting damage done by the image of the super-strong, hyper-violent PCP user, an image which persists to this day and continues to represent a worst-case-scenario in the imaginations of American police.[70]

The Significance of the User's Image

The previous sections have demonstrated the importance of the image of the crazed and violent PCP user, both in the emergence of media interest in PCP, and in the experiences of the medical and police sources who informed the media. What remains missing from this picture is a discussion of this image itself. Why was it so fascinating to journalists, and presumably to the news-consuming public? And what are the implications of its primacy in the PCP reporting?

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[68] Harris, "Special Problem," (Nov 11, 1982), B3; Garlington, "Growing Use in San Diego," (Aug 27, 1978), D1.

[69] In fact, racial prejudice and PCP's image could easily have overlapped in this case. In Los Angeles, PCP use throughout the 1980s was primarily associated with lower-income blacks, an association which could only have been strengthened by the emergence of the drug scare over crack-cocaine, a scare heavily steeped in racist imagery. Thus in 1991 a prejudicial fear of black criminality, and especially of the violent offenses believed to be committed by young black men, was closely related in the minds of certain whites to a prejudicial anxiety about black drug use.

[70] Suzanne Smalley and Debra Rosenberg, "'I Felt Like I Wanted to Hurt People,'" *Newsweek* 140.4 (Aug 22, 2002).

One classic theory about the image of drug users in the media is advanced by Jock Young in his essay "The Myth of the Drug Taker in the Mass Media" (1973). Young suggests that the most common public response to depictions of drug use is highly ambivalent; on the one hand, members of the public are innately attracted to the perceived pleasure and adventure of drug use, and on the other, they are innately repulsed by its perceived immorality and irrationality: they are at once fascinated and hostile. This simultaneous attraction/repulsion "is the basis of moral indignation," Young writes, in that the wicked are seen to be "undeservedly realizing the covert desires of the virtuous." Thus, in order to meet the needs of their audience, journalists tend to pair depictions of drugs' forbidden pleasures with depictions of the horror and suffering that also result from their use. This allows the news audience vicariously to experience the thrill of getting high, and then to feel vindicated when drug users are shown to suffer for their habit in the long term. According to Young, it also resolves a problem for mainstream journalists, who, he suggests, are committed to interpreting the news "within a consensual frame of reference." Drug use, though highly newsworthy, violates the social consensus, and therefore cannot be portrayed as overly positive. Images of horror and suffering add a necessary warning, showing that, despite its attractions, drug use is irrational and ultimately destructive. By following this formula, Young writes, the media act as "unwitting guardians of consensus," reinforcing the idea that drug use is immoral and dangerous and reinforcing the image of drug users as an abnormal and irrational minority.[71]

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[71] Jock Young, "The Myth of the Drug Taker in the Mass Media" in *The Manufacture of News: Devience, Social Problems, and the Mass Media*, Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, eds. (London: Constable, 1981),

Young's theory can be criticized as too simple – the national news does not always reinforce consensus – and dated – social consensus about drugs has changed and diminished since Young's research in the late-1960s.[72] Despite these shortcomings, however, the theory yields interesting results when applied to the news coverage of PCP. Certain news items seem to demonstrate perfectly Young's idea of attraction/repulsion: one *Los Angeles Times* article, for example, began with a description of a local youth's trip on PCP at a community dance. At first Dave felt "powerful, fearless ... His usual shyness ... gone, he danced with one girl after another, asking them with such insistence and aggressiveness that even the most popular could not refuse him a turn on the floor." Later, however, this strength deserted him. His consciousness began "to float out of his head – a sensation that made him feel uncomfortable and finally, panicky." Dave descended into a bad trip, knowing suddenly he would "die if someone did not hold onto him," and perceiving hands pulling him, "trying to drag him farther out of his body, towards a cliff at the edge of the dance floor."[73] The language employed in this retelling dramatized Dave's experiences for the reading audience. At first, the positive transformative potential of PCP was displayed, as Dave shed his inhibitions and gained an almost magical social mastery. Quickly, however, the price of this ascent was revealed, when, Icarus-like, Dave plunged into a nightmare. In this way, readers were

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328-333.

[72] Sociologist Philip Bell tests Young's theory, and finds that it provides an accurate but incomplete formula for the portrayal of drug use in the Australian media. Philip Bell, "Drugs as News: Defining the Social," *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* 1.2 (Sep 1983), http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/serial/AJCS/1.2/Bell.html.

[73] Bob Williams, "Trip on Angel Dust Detoured," *Los Angeles Times* (Jul 9, 1978), C1.

able to experience vicariously the thrill of Dave's transformation and yet were also able to feel justified and satisfied in their own non-use of PCP.

It should be noted, however, that this example did not exactly follow the formula laid out by Young. While PCP's positive effects were evoked with just the kind of romance that Young might predict, its negative effects were described in a manner that did not suggest repulsion, or at least not repulsion as Young conceives it. Absent was the kind of focus on Dave's suffering that might have satisfied a fearful and hostile reading public eager to see Dave punished for his transgression. Absent, in fact, were any of the trappings of moral condemnation. Dave was presented as a highly sympathetic figure, driven to PCP use by emotional problems, and now in need of professional help to overcome his habit. No drug dealers or other villains were featured; no subject for outrage was supplied. In fact, the manner in which Dave's negative reaction to PCP was portrayed was very similar to that of his initial positive feelings: both were depicted in a dramatic, romanticized fashion. Dave's frightening hallucinations were detailed such that even a non-drug user might be able to imagine his experience. Thus two vicarious thrills were provided for the reading audience, one in the form of Dave's pleasurable "high," and another in the form of his "bad trip."

This deviation from Young's formula was characteristic of the PCP coverage as a whole: there was a distinct lack of moral censure. Even adult PCP users – including PCP users who had committed horrific crimes under the influence of the drug – tended to receive sympathetic treatment. In one instance, a *Human Behavior* article called "High on PCP" began by telling the story of Philip, a man who randomly attacked a stranger in a

public place, slashing her throat with a razor. The near-fatal assault was apparently the consequence of PCP psychosis: for three weeks prior to the event, Philip had been smoking five joints a day of what he believed was a strong strain of marijuana, but was later discovered to be PCP-laced pot. The article made it clear that PCP, and not Philip, was responsible for the incident. It went on to label PCP the most dangerous drug in recreational use and to detail the mechanisms by which PCP causes psychosis. It also argued for Philip's essentially good nature, describing him as an elementary school aide who loved working with kids, and emphasizing that he did not use drugs other than marijuana and thus would never have knowingly taken PCP.[74]

Of course, not all media portraits of violent PCP users were as sympathetic as Philip's. In many cases, and especially in shorter news anecdotes, no attempt was made to show the vulnerable side of the users who committed violent acts: instead they were depicted as pure embodiments of madness and violence. Yet even these examples did not lend themselves to outraged or even fearful audience reactions. Journalists paid little attention to issues of remorse and punishment and focused only rarely on the threat that psychotic users posed to the public at large. Instead, most of the emphasis was placed on how strange, and fierce, and illogical such episodes of violence were; the dominant attitude adopted by journalists was awe at the extreme mind-altering power of PCP. In fact, in another deviation from Young's formula, the majority of news items on PCP devoted no attention whatsoever to PCP's positive effects, foregoing the appeal such descriptions might have had for the audience. Instead, they focused almost completely on

[74] Derringer, 38-40.

the reactions of violence and psychosis, which suggests the powerful attraction as well as repulsion that such horrifying stories must have evoked.

Morgan and Kagan, in their analysis of the PCP response, attempt to explain this appeal. They note the striking similarity of PCP horror stories, not only to the horror stories told about other illegal drugs, but also to the violent myths found in most cultural traditions. Anecdotes of PCP-induced castration, self-blinding, patricide, and matricide clearly resemble Greek mythology, while tales of PCP-fuelled invincible killers recall Frankenstein's monster, and perhaps the Yiddish Golem and Vodou Zombi. Without delving too deeply into psychoanalytic theory, Morgan and Kagan argue that all such stories serve the same function, in that their retelling provides for the cathartic expression of archetypal human terrors.[75] This argument draws on a longstanding belief, held by individuals within academia and without, that cultural depictions of violence offer a cathartic outlet for the aggressive tendencies natural to human beings but denied them by the impositions of modern society.[76] It is a speculative argument, and Morgan and Kagan take it no further than this, but it does offer an interesting explanation for the oft-repeated and psychologically-suggestive nature of many PCP horror stories.

Yet there was more at work in the proliferation of PCP horror stories than a universal attraction to violence. Underlying all media representations of the PCP high – both those of its good and its bad effects – was an attraction and repulsion to the idea of radical transformation. PCP promised to change the user from a normal person into a

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[75] Morgan and Kagan, 195-204.

[76] Joseph Grixti outlines and analyzes this tradition in "Catharsis and the Myth of the Beast." Joseph Grixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty: the Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 77-107.

super-confident Casanova, or a paranoid schizophrenic, or an unstoppable killing machine; it allowed the user to play out a real-life version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. As theorist Richard Blum, discussing attraction and repulsion, writes, drugs – and especially psychedelic drugs – "represent keys to forbidden kingdoms inside ourselves."[77] They appear capable of unlocking something within, something powerful, primal, and dangerous.

In certain instances, media representations of transformation invited audience identification with PCP users. We have already seen how the vivid description of Dave's trip helped evoke the PCP high for the news audience. The same was true of other examples. Quotations were provided from users and from drug experts that were designed to make the PCP experience more knowable for non-users. In some cases, users were quoted extensively about the drug's positive effects. They spoke of beautiful hallucinations, feelings of omnipotence, and increases in physical strength.[78] More often, however, users and experts were quoted about negative transformations, detailing the frightening descent into PCP psychosis. In the *Human Behavior* article, for example, Philip talked of entering a never-ending dream in which his actions were controlled by monkeys inside his head.[79] Philip's story was augmented by the surreal art that accompanied the article's text. These pictures show distorted and stylized human figures battling with monsters, adding a visual compliment to the descriptions of Philip's inner-

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77 Richard H. Blum, *Society and Drugs* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969), 335.

78 Judith Valente, "Ex-Users of PCP Recount Horrors to Panel of the Senate," *Washington Post* (Jun 8, 1978), C1; Matt Clark and Susan Agrest, "The Deadly 'Angel Dust,'" *Newsweek* (Mar 13, 1978), 34; Arnold, "Terrifying Behavior" (Aug 20, 1978), B6.

79 Dellinger, 38.

struggles.[80] Even more compelling were news accounts about Lt. Peter Chmelir, a naval officer who was accidentally dosed with PCP after his clothes became contaminated in an airport baggage check. Articles provided the full story of Chmelir's struggle with PCP psychosis, describing his torment at the hands of "unnamed fears and half-formed, swirling horrors." Because Chmelir really believed he was going crazy, his narrative offered an especially powerful picture of PCP-induced transformation.[81]

Yet even as certain discussions of transformation invited audience identification with PCP users, others promoted the opposite reaction: they dehumanized users by making them into grotesque spectacles of abnormality. These news items dwelt on the crazy and unnatural behaviour which PCP produced. Users were described cooking infants to death, biting off the noses of bystanders, and prying the teeth from their own mouths. Such news accounts also discussed the "nude syndrome" – the compulsion in users to remove their clothes – and the "toxic psychosis" – the strange ways in which users died simply from irrational behaviour.[82] In one newspaper article, a social worker talked about users being "gentle one moment, then suicidal or homicidal the next." He explained: "You look into their eyes and you can actually see them change. They've become angry, hostile with you."[83] Particularly degrading were videos of intoxicated PCP users. Footage of tranquil users zoomed in on their glazed eyes and slack mouths, filling

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[80] Similar surreal images were included in the *New Times* article on PCP.

[81] Gerald Moore, "Lieutenant Chmelir's Deadly Wardrobe," *Reader's Digest* (October 1979), 152-7; Robert Welkos, "Navy Flier Fights Discharge After Ordeal With PCP Poisoning," *Los Angeles Times* (Oct 11, 1978), A1, A4.

[82] One article gave the story of a PCP-intoxicated man who, believing himself to be a gopher, died when the hole he was digging collapsed on him. "Burrowing Man Dies In a Hole in His Yard," *New York Times* (Sep 13, 1982), B13.

[83] Roxanne Arnold, "Terrifying Behavior Puts Increasing Number of Users in Hospitals," *Los Angeles Times* (Aug 20, 1978), B6.

the screen with their vacant faces, while footage of combative users showed them grappling naked with police and raging against five-point restraints. In the *Angel Death* documentary, one sober user was shown a video of himself shot when he was high. On the small screen, he struggles with hospital staff, repeatedly shouting "I'm not crazy" in a voice that is slurred and strangely sluggish. In the larger picture, he weeps with shame, later resolving never to use PCP again.[84]

The most obviously dehumanizing aspect of the PCP reporting was that it often presented users as if they were animals. This occurred in part because of PCP's legitimate use as a veterinary tranquilizer, a fact that invited comparisons between users and animals. The *Angel Death* documentary dramatized this link by interspersed shots of a laboratory monkey, a caged jaguar, and an adolescent boy – all high on PCP. As these images were shown, the voice-over alternated between scientists describing the debilitating effects of the drug on the animals and users describing similar effects on themselves.[85] More important, however, were the animal-like responses that PCP was said to produce in humans. These included strength, aggression, and insensitivity to pain, and also irrationality and inarticulateness. According to news reports, PCP could turn a human being "into a raging semblance of a cornered wild animal."[86] It made users impossible to talk to, as they became incapable of "judgement or reason."[87] It also forced police and doctors to treat users like animals, hunting them with nets and tranquilizers, and then strapping them down to keep them from attacking anyone. One article told of

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84 *Angel Death*, director John Cosgrove, narrated by Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, videocassette (syndicated, 1979).
85 *Angel Death*.
86 De Silva, "'Status' Drug" (Jul 3, 1978), H4.
87 Dellinger, 41.

how "it took five persons to lift [a 95-pound, female user] and carry her down a hall to a tiny cubicle, where she was tied to a cot. Only when her ankles, wrists and belly were bound by leather straps did she subside [sic]. The lights were doused and she slept."[88] Other news items described animal-like reactions in scientific terms. According to these reports, PCP caused "indifference to pain; sweating and flushing; drooling; distorted vision; bulging eyeballs; and ... a muscle rigidity that users call[ed] 'moon walking' or 'zombie walking.'" Users might "start speaking slowly, just grunt, or stop speaking altogether."[89] PCP in fact had the power to "switch[...] off the functions of the neocortex – the most recently evolved part of the brain," transferring power to the "'animal' brain, the seat of primitive instinct and emotions."[90] The drug destroyed social inhibitions, allowing "man['s] violent animal ... impulses [to be] released."[91]

These dehumanizing depictions of the insane behaviour of PCP users constituted an important part of the drug's media appeal. Intoxicated users were exhibited in the news, the disturbing details of their madness placed on display for the titillation of the audience. Such exhibitions strongly recall the archaic practice of publicly displaying the insane, a custom in Western societies from the Middle Ages through to the nineteenth century. In a surprising parallel with PCP, this custom also involved the treatment of people as if they were animals: the mad were displayed like animals in a zoo, often naked or semi-naked and bound by various restraints.[92] This similarity demonstrates a cultural

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88 Arnold, "Terrifying Behavior" (Aug 20, 1978), B6.
89 Koper, 49.
90 Sandy Rovner, "PCP: Finding the Key To Tame the Tiger," *Washington Post* (Nov 14, 1984), D6.
91 Ronald Kotulak, "Angel Dust – Sniff of Madness," *Chicago Tribune* (Feb 17, 1980), 1.
92 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 68-194.

continuity both in the fascination with madness and the trappings with which madness have been associated (irrationality, dangerousness, animal-ness). It also suggests a special popular appeal contained in the PCP issue: during an era in which it was no longer acceptable to exhibit the mad, PCP allowed a spectacle to be made of madness without a spectacle being made of people with real psychological problems. In the performance of this function, PCP was the ideal drug because of its extraordinary schizophrenia-mimicking properties. Psychotic PCP users could be exploited for entertainment in a way that the mentally ill could not because, unlike the mentally ill, users were viewed as at least partly to blame for their psychoses. In addition, news-makers had a legitimate reason for displaying the madness of PCP users: such exhibitions, though demeaning for users, were viewed as necessary warnings about the dangers of PCP.

One effect of these dehumanizing depictions of user insanity was that they created exactly the kind of stigma that Young describes in his attraction/repulsion theory: users were depicted violating the social consensus and being punished for this behaviour. It is important to note, however, that the focal act of violation in the reporting was the insane behaviour rather than the drug consumption of PCP users. A distinction was made between PCP-induced behaviour – dangerous, irrational, and reprehensible – and PCP-use itself – dangerous, but often an entirely rational response to life's problems. When users expressed shame, it concerned their foolish and crazy PCP-induced behaviour rather than their use of an illegal substance. Thus the dominant consensual narrative in the PCP reporting concerned sanity rather than drug use.

Section 2: Youth

Drugs in the 1970s

The late-1970s was a period of great volatility in the American experience with illegal drugs. The popular use of drugs, which had undergone a sudden resurgence in the 1960s, became increasingly widespread and socially acceptable in the 1970s. The growth in public experimentation with drugs, in combination with constant media discussions of their use, made the average American more familiar than ever before with drugs and their effects. Youth drug use, which had emerged as a potent source of adult anxiety during the 1960s, was viewed with less alarm by many adults in the 1970s. Because of the dissipation of 1960s radicalism, youth drug consumption lost its threatening associations with youth rebellion and anti-Americanism. These developments combined to create a public perception of drugs that was more nuanced than in previous decades, one which recognized that drugs, and especially marijuana, were not as dangerous as had once been believed.[93] This effect was heightened by a surge in ambiguous and humorous cultural representations of drugs, and by new medical studies which disputed the dangers of marijuana.[94] The late-1970s was in fact a heyday for the movement to decriminalize marijuana – that is, to remove criminal penalties against the possession of small amounts

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[93] H. Wayne Morgan, *Drugs in America: A Social History, 1800-1980* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 158-66; David F. Musto, *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control 3rd Ed.* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 248; Jerome L. Himmelstein, *The Strange Career of Marijuana: Politics and Ideology of Drug Control in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), 106-124.

[94] Stuart Auerbach, "U.S. Marijuana Study Finds Few Ill Effects," *Washington Post* (Feb 12, 1972), A1; "Study Discounts Marijuana View; Test Indicates Drug Has No Direct Role in Motivation," *New York Times* (May 10, 1972), 11; Jean M. White, "Marijuana: New Tales of Two Intoxicants," *Washington Post* (Feb 25, 1973), K1.

of the drug. As of 1977, eight states had enacted decriminalization legislation,[95] and the pro-marijuana lobby group NORML (the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) was exerting a strong influence with the Carter administration.[96]

Many observers in the late-1970s were convinced that the full social acceptance of drugs, or at least of the so-called "soft" drugs such as marijuana and cocaine, was near at hand. Yet, in reality, the new tolerance of drugs was not as ingrained or as extensive as it appeared. Many Americans in fact remained deeply antagonistic towards drug use, continuing to associate it with the perceived hedonism, disorder, and anti-Americanism of the 1960s. Many also saw it in light of new problems, attributing to it a growing immorality and permissiveness that were seen to be afflicting American culture. This opposition was increased both by the new cultural visibility of drugs and the recent successes of the decriminalization movement, each of which provoked a backlash from conservative-minded citizens, politicians, and commentators. In fact, along with a host of other perceived social evils (abortion, gay rights, pornography, feminism, etc.), the idea of drug tolerance contributed to the larger conservative movement that was gaining momentum in the late-1970s. In this way, a growing public hostility towards drugs both fuelled – and was fuelled by – the emergence during these years of New Right conservatism.[97]

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[95] These were Oregon, Alaska, Maine, Colorado, California, Ohio, Minnesota, and Mississippi. Elaine B. Sharp, *The Dilemma of Drug Policy in the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 40.

[96] Don Shannon, "Carter Backs Pot Decriminalization," *Los Angeles Times* (Aug 3, 1977), B1.

[97] Matthew D. Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zeliger eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 13-28.

Other developments in the late-1970s served to augment this hostility towards drugs. A number of new medical studies, for example, linked marijuana to new health risks, contradicting earlier scientific pronouncements about its safety.[98] Additionally, a political scandal erupted in 1978 that caused President Carter to distance himself from the decriminalization cause, and to replace his ultra-liberal director of national drug policy with a much more conservative official.[99] Most influential of all, however, was the discovery of what was perceived to be an epidemic of drug use among American teenagers and adolescents. Teen drug consumption had been growing steadily since the 1960s, and reached an all-time high in 1979.[100] As adults, and especially parents, became aware of the extent of this problem, many grew increasingly hostile to the idea of drug tolerance.

A particularly dedicated opposition emerged in the late-1970s in the form of grass-roots organizations of middle-class parents. These groups were created in isolation in communities across the country as parents banded together to combat both teen drug consumption and drug paraphernalia sales. The scope of these efforts soon broadened. Parent activists began to lobby Congress for stricter drug policies and campaign against state decriminalization laws. They also began cooperating on a national scale, forming

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98 Harold M. Schmeck, "Marijuana Link to Sterility Seen," *New York Times* (Apr 18, 1974), 14; "Higher Cancer Risk Found in Marijuana Than in Tobacco," *New York Times* (Dec 3, 1975), 47; Peggy Mann, "Say It Isn't So – There's Bad News About Marijuana," *Los Angeles Times* (Aug 6, 1978), H3.

99 The scandal involved incidents in which the then-director Dr. Peter Bourne wrote false information in a drug prescription slip and allegedly used cocaine at a political function. Dan Baum, *Smoke and Mirrors: The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1996), 104-5, 112-7, 126-7; Fred Barbash, "President Warns Staff Against Use Of Illegal Drugs," *Washington Post* (Jul 25, 1978), A1.

100 In that year, surveys indicated that 24 percent of American 12 to 17 year-olds had tried marijuana, as had 47 percent of 18 to 25 year-olds and 9 percent of those 26 and older. NIDA, 1989, in Good and Ben-Yehuda, "Drug Panic," http://www.psychedelic-library.org/panic.htm.

PRIDE (the Parent Resources Institute on Drug Education) in 1978, and the NFP (the National Federation of Parents for Drug-free Youth) in 1980. Collectively, these anti-drug organizations became a powerful political force that historians have since labelled the Parents' Movement.[101] Movement members exerted a strong influence over federal drug policy in the late-1970s and early-1980s, helping to push the prevention of teen drug use to the top of the list of federal priorities.[102]

The growing conservatism of the age, together with the increasing visibility of the teen drug problem and the spreading influence of the Parents' Movement combined to create a renewed opposition to drug use in the late-1970s. This antagonism became more entrenched in the following decade, contributing to a hardening of public attitudes towards drugs, and to the fierce war on drugs that characterized the Reagan presidency. In the late-1970s, however, the direction of this change was not yet readily apparent: advocates and opponents of drug tolerance vied with one another in the public spotlight, while public and official opinion was deeply divided on drug issues. This volatility can be seen in the national news, which, depending on the issue at hand and the politics of the newsmakers, presented drug issues with progressive tolerance,[103] with conventional alarmism,[104] or with reactionary hostility.[105] It can also be seen specifically in the PCP

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[101] Examples of this power include: when in 1978 Parents' Movement members helped orchestrate the defeat of incumbent Maryland Congressman Newton Sears over his pro-decriminalization stance; and when in 1979, despite having no scientific qualifications, Movement leader Keith Schuchard was invited to draft the new NIDA handbook on teen marijuana use.

[102] Baum, 89-122; Musto and Korsmeyer, *Quest for Drug Control*, 230-3; Musto, *American Disease*, 265.

[103] For example: Elizabeth Larson, "A Teen-Ager Goes to Pot, But Feels His Way Out," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 21, 1977), D7; William Greider, "'Is It Possible That Dope Is Not the Future?'" *Washington Post* (Aug 7, 1978), A23.

[104] For example: Marc Starr, "Dull Evening Ends in Drug Tragedy," *Chicago Tribune* (Mar 12, 1978), 1; Irvin Molotsky, "L.I. Finds a 'Tremendous Increase' in Its Youngster's Abuse of Drugs," *New York Times* (Dec 1, 1978), B2.

reporting, which simultaneously showed the influence of the liberalizing and anti-liberalizing impulses. An examination of the PCP coverage in fact reveals firstly that, to an extent that has not been acknowledged by historians of drug use, the PCP response contributed to the backlash against drugs that emerged in the late-1970s. Secondly, it shows that at the heart of this backlash was a watershed shift in the perception of the drug user.

Federal and Parental Responses to PCP

PCP does not figure prominently in histories of the evolution of American federal drug policy. It is absent even from David Musto and Pamela Korsmeyer's *Quest For Drug Control*, an otherwise very comprehensive monograph that deals specifically with the developments of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, as Philip Jenkins suggests in *Synthetic Panics*, the now-forgotten social reactions to PCP and the fentanyl analogs (synthetic painkillers) in the 1970s "did much to create the conditions and rhetoric of the [coming] drug war," in that "they allowed for the revival of an idea that had been all but discredited during the 1970s – that illegal drugs were not merely a harmless social indulgence, but a genuine social menace deserving immediate government intervention."[106] In more specific terms, PCP was important in that, during a period when federal drug policy lacked clarity of purpose, and one in which the public position on many drug issues was uncertain, the PCP problem inspired unanimous reactions of alarm and extensive federal action. In terms of the federal response, PCP had the effect of contributing to the

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[105] For example: Phil Kerby, "Muddled View of Drugs and Society," *Los Angeles Times* (Dec 14, 1978), D1; Juan Williams, "High Living," *Washington Post* (Oct 27, 1979), A13.
[106] Jenkins, 23.

maintenance and expansion of federal anti-drug capabilities in the late-1970s, years during which illegal drugs were otherwise a low political priority. Federal initiatives included the launch of a million-dollar PCP research program by NIDA in 1978, and the creation of a special PCP task force by the DEA that same year. The PCP issue in fact helped justify the continued existence and funding of the DEA: during the mid-1970s, in a move unthinkable now, certain Congressional critics called for its disbandment.[107] The successes of the anti-PCP task force, which by the middle of 1979 had made 474 arrests and shut down 65 PCP laboratories, offered strong evidence of the agency's necessity.[108]

In terms of the development of federal drug policies, the anti-PCP drive was also significant in that it gave early experience to two bureaucrats who were to play crucial roles in the war on drugs in the 1980s: Dr. Lee Dogoloff, the director of national drug policy appointed by Carter after the scandal of 1978, and Dr. Peter Bensinger, the director of the DEA. At the time, Dogoloff headed an inter-agency federal commission on PCP and Bensinger led the special anti-PCP task force in the DEA. Both of these influential men soon became fierce opponents of drug tolerance: in the early-1980s, Dogoloff abolished federal distinctions between “hard” and “soft” drugs, while Bensinger became an outspoken proponent for stricter laws against marijuana possession.[109] The PCP response exposed both men to the kind of intense anti-drug campaigning that would later be extended to all illegal drugs; it may also have strengthened their dedication to implementing tough anti-drug policies.

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[107] Baum, 88.
[108] Dogoloff, “Federal Response ,” 188-90.
[109] Baum, 126, 135.

Going beyond its impact on federal drug policy, the PCP response also contributed to the backlash against drugs by inspiring parental fears. Parents in the late-1970s, especially those active in the Parents' Movement, tended to be more concerned about marijuana than PCP: marijuana was by far the most popular drug among teens at this time, and was at the centre of what critics viewed as the insidious and growing social acceptance of drugs. Yet PCP was also a potent source of parental anxiety in that the news coverage of the drug was extremely visible and influential between 1977 and 1979, and tended to emphasize not only PCP's sensational violence- and madness-inducing properties, but also its particular popularity with teenagers and children. Beginning with the earliest media reports on PCP, youths were portrayed as the primary – and in some cases the only – users of the drug. Often, angel dust was represented as a kind of deadly adolescent fad, identified in various articles as being "all the rage," "the 'in' drug among teenagers," and "the drug of the '70s."[110] This image of PCP's popularity with youth was generally accurate, although news items tended to provide exaggerated information about the youthfulness of users. One study frequently cited in the coverage suggested that the average age at which users first tried PCP was 14½;[111] more recent statistical estimates for the late-1970s indicate that initiates were not quite so young, with an average age of first use of approximately 18 ½. These data, however, still support the image of PCP as a

[110] *ABC Evening News* (Oct 12, 1977); *CBS Evening News* (Mar 30, 1978);.Dellinger, "High on PCP," 45.

[111] U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, "Phencyclidine Use Among Youths in Drug Abuse Treatment" (Jan 1978). This statistic is included in: Overend, "Death in the 'Dust'" (Sep 26, 1977), F9; Knickerbocker, "New Alarm Heard," (Oct 7, 1977), 11; Lerner, "In His Own Words," 48; Michael Sneed, "PCP: Heroin of the Suburbs," *Chicago Tribune* (Arp 30, 1978), 24; Dellinger, "High on PCP," 40; "The Ultimate Low" (Jul 10, 1978), C6; Florence Isaacs, "'Angel Dust' – The Unpredictable Killer," *Reader's Digest* 113 (Sep 1978), 128.

youth drug: of all illegal intoxicants popular in the '70s, it is estimated that only marijuana use began at a younger average age.[112]

After madness and violence the images that were most prevalent in the PCP reporting concerned youth and vulnerability. The way in which these images were presented suggests that they too were designed to evoke an emotional response from the audience, but in this case, rather than awe and titillation, the dominant intended reaction was alarm. Thus, unexpectedly, the most frightening aspect of the PCP reporting was not the depictions of monstrous and violent adult users, but the depictions of troubled and vulnerable young ones. These images catered to the protective instincts of the audience, drawing on the powerful urge among adults, and especially among parents, to shield society's young people from danger. This was achieved through constant reminders about the young age of users – reported to be as young as thirteen in one ABC newscast, and nine in *People* and in the *Los Angeles Times*[113] – and through juxtapositions of youthful innocence with PCP's destructive powers. In these news reports, bright-eyed, well-adjusted kids became despondent sociopaths under PCP's influence. They grew sullen and quarrelsome with parents, stole from family members, dropped out of school, and ran away from home.[114]

Most striking of all, however, were the televised interviews with very young users. In the made-for-TV documentary *Angel Death*, 12-year-old Kim described her experiences with PCP while smiling shyly at the camera. As with most of the young users

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[112] SAMHSA, *National Survey*.
[113] *ABC Evening News* (Oct 12, 1977); Overend, " Death in the 'Dust,'" (Sep 26, 1977), F9; Lerner, 47.
[114] Ray Moseley, "'... Really bad. I got scared,'" *Chicago Tribune* (Nov 13, 1977), 6; Alan Maltun, "Angel Dust User Shows Effects of Trip to World of the 'French Fries,'" *Los Angeles Times* (Jul 23, 1978), GB1.

in the film, she demonstrated a wariness of the drug's negative effects, but explained that "when the chance comes up it's just out of control – you just smoke it." This admission of compulsive drug use coming from a frail little child must have been powerful and disturbing for parents in the audience. Another interviewee, 15-year-old George, was questioned both before and after sneaking away to get high with some friends. The latter images were shocking. George's eyes went from clear to glassy and his expression from animated to vacant; coherent in the earlier interview, he became unaware of the date or his surroundings and unable to follow the drug counsellor's finger with his eyes. This transformation was made all the more unnerving for the audience by the extreme youthfulness of George's face.[115]

The potential impact of such images was further heightened by media statements about the race, ethnicity, and class backgrounds of young PCP users. In many instances, these statements indicated that PCP was most popular among suburban white youth, and in others, that youth of all races, backgrounds, and living situations were using the drug. The latter information was more accurate,[116] yet in effect there was little difference between the two statements: each made it clear to the white, middle-class parents in the audience that their children were at risk. Thus one news item explained that PCP was becoming "in white neighborhoods what heroin has been in the black ghettos;" another that PCP "cuts across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines;" and a third that the drug's use extended to all teens, not just to those living on "the wrong side of the tracks."[117]

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[115] *Angel Death*.
[116] Carroll, 82; Jenkins, 61.
[117] "New Rival for Heroin," *U.S. News*, 65; Lerner, "In His Own Words," 47; *ABC Evening News* (Oct 13, 1977).

Each example focused on PCP's spread into the suburbs, a focus which occurred because the information was both unexpected – drugs were normally associated with inner-city minority populations – and particularly relevant to the lives of middle-class whites, the target audience for the national news. The effect of such reports was to raise alarm among suburban parents, the demographic which was at the time peopling the Parents' Movement, and which would soon provide the grass-roots impetus to make the teen drug problem a federal priority.

Other aspects of the coverage must have had a similar impact on parents in the audience. Some of the more troubling information included the facts that: most youth were first using PCP while at school, during the hours in which they were completely beyond parental control; PCP could be purchased easily and cheaply by young people ("It's everywhere," explained a teen in one televised interview);[118] youth were under pressure from their peers to try PCP; and even normal, well-adjusted young people were experimenting with the drug. Perhaps most upsetting of all, however, was that these characterizations were accompanied in the news by graphic stories about the (primarily adult) reactions to PCP of violence and insanity. A newspaper editorial by Judy Mann demonstrates the visceral reaction that PCP's two main media images – as psychosis-inducing and as a teen trend – may have produced in parents. Mann described her shock when one day her 12-year-old child suddenly asked: "What's PCP?" She recounted her immediate thoughts on hearing the question:

> Angel dust. Killer weed. The drug that sends its hallucinating users to psycho wards for months, the latest fad drug ... that some authorities say is more

[118] *CBS Evening News*, (Mar 30, 1978).

> dangerous than LSD. PCP: the scariest drug around, and my 12-year-old is asking about it, casually, telling me he heard about it at school.[119]

Mann's response was clearly informed by sensational media depictions of PCP, as well as by a strong protective parenting instinct. Her reaction suggests that PCP, though less important to the growth of national parental anxieties than marijuana, was uniquely alarming in its combined reputation for deadliness and popularity with youth. It is of course difficult to prove how common such parental reactions were in the late-1970s, but an article from the *New York Times* demonstrates that, in at least one incident, PCP's reputation inspired the anti-drug mobilization of the parents of an entire suburban community. The article concerns the town of Westport, Connecticut, where an incident occurred in 1979 in which six high school students had to be hospitalized after overdosing on PCP. The event caused the parents of the community to form, *en masse*, a local anti-drug group of the type that became the foundation of the Parents' Movement. According to the article, the group's first meeting had a turn-out of almost 1000 participants. One resident teenager noted that this intense response was due specifically to a fear of PCP: "It all got started with the Angel Dust thing. Everybody went totally berserk. All the parents went wild and said all the kids are taking Angel Dust."[120]

PCP's Contribution to Anti-Drug Ideas and Rhetoric

In addition to the federal and parental responses to the issue, PCP also contributed to the late-1970s backlash in that it offered strong evidence of the dangers of drug

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[119] Judy Mann, "Informed Generation Struggling as Parents," *Washington Post* (Aug 25, 1978), B1.

[120] Diane Henry, "Westport Combats Alcohol-Drug Abuse," *New York Times* (Sep 7, 1980), CN1, CN22. Philip Jenkins offers a second example: a parents' anti-drug campaign in Dublin, GA, which he explains "began in response to PCP use but soon spread to condemn other, milder kinds of substance abuse." Jenkins characterizes this progression as "typical." Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 128.

tolerance. As Jenkins suggests, PCP was proof against the idea being advanced by certain groups in the 1970s that drugs were "merely a harmless social indulgence." Here instead was a substance that all experts and even most users agreed was deadly. In the reporting, PCP was described as more dangerous than every other drug of abuse – it was said to cause more aggression than LSD, create a longer-lasting paranoia than speed, and carry a greater risk of overdose than heroin.[121] It was condemned by even the most liberal-minded physicians: in *Newsweek* in 1978, Dr. David Smith, founder of the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic in San Francisco, called it "the most toxic of all the substances" he had encountered since he "started working with street drugs in 1965."[122] Some commentators found it particularly worrying that this dangerous drug was growing in popularity at exactly the moment when public attitudes towards drugs were at their most permissive. Dr. Mitchell Rosenthal, the president of a New York youth drug rehabilitation clinic, told the *New York Times*:

> We have a population which believes the drug abuse problem is not what it used to be, that kids use a little pot or alcohol, but it's no big deal. In the midst of that quiescence, to have a very potent psychoactive drug become widely available is very dangerous.[123]

Similar alarms, though not always specific to PCP, were being raised by other critics. In a *Los Angeles Times* editorial, one angry writer decried the new culture of drug tolerance, linking it to the plethora of drugs now available at high schools, which

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[121] John Feinstein, "Area Focus Of PCP Drug Crackdown," *Washington Post* (Aug 24, 1978), C10; Lerner, "In His Own Words," *People* , 48; Overend, "Death in the Dust," (Sep 26, 1977), F1.

[122] Clark and Agrest, 34.

[123] Wald, "Stirs Concern," (Nov 10, 1977), 48; Rosenthal was also quoted explaining that "the tragedy of [PCP is that] the country has gone soft on grass, so that kids think angel dust is not dangerous, that it's just a kind of superjoint." Abigail Van Buren, "Teens Get Straight Story on Angel Dust," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan 7, 1980), SD3.

included, he wrote, "the murderous angel dust."[124] A second editorial, this time from the *Washington Post*, described, among other worrying drug trends, the teen fad for PCP, blaming all such developments on "a free and easy attitude towards drugs that is seeping down to younger and younger children."[125] A third news item, a *Chicago Tribune* article very much concerned with teen PCP use, suggested that teen drug-taking reflected the increasing adult tolerance, and even use, of drugs such as marijuana and cocaine.[126] In these various indictments of the social acceptance of drugs, PCP use, and specifically teen PCP use, was used to prove the dangers of such permissiveness. In this way, the PCP issue provided strong rhetorical ammunition for those promoting the backlash against drug tolerance.

Additionally, an examination of the PCP reporting reveals that this backlash extended beyond illegal drugs to the abuse of legal medications; in a related development, Americans at this time were becoming increasingly wary of prescription drugs. Consumption of these drugs had been rising steadily since the 1950s, and now, in the late-1970s, at the height of the popularity of powerful tranquilizers such as valium, misgivings were being voiced by doctors and lay commentators alike. These critics were concerned about the prevalence of over-prescription, addiction, and overdose,[127] but also about the moral implications of, as one *Post* reporter wrote, "a society intent on providing escape from all discomfort."[128] Such criticisms often called attention to the connection

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[124] Kirby, "Muddled View," (Dec 14, 1978), D1.
[125] Williams, "High Living" (Oct 27, 1979), A13.
[126] Ray Moseley, "Teen Drugs Here: Bad, Getting Worse," *Chicago Tribune* (Nov 12, 1977), 6.
[127] Steven Manners, *Super Pills: The Prescription Drugs We Love to Take* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2006), 75-85, 155-6.
[128] Robin de Silva, "The Young American and the Flight Toward Drugs," *Washington Post* (Jul 3, 1977), H5.

between legal and illegal drug abuse, noting that the two problems were equally harmful, and that both were rooted in the American society's growing dependence on mind-altering chemicals.

Thus to observers of the growing teen drug problem, the American reliance on prescription drugs, like its tolerance of illegal ones, was viewed as a cause of the teen epidemic. In news reports, one physician noted that "[d]rugs are not frightening to [teens]. ... All their lives they've been raised on it: progress through chemistry," while another simply stated: "They see their parents use Valium. It is our culture."[129] A number of news items linked this cultural weakness specifically to youth PCP consumption. In an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, one doctor cited "the $2 billion a year" that the pharmaceutical industry spent on advertising arguing that "the use of PCP is not surprising in a society that urges chemical solutions to life's problems."[130] In the *Human Behavior* article on PCP, an investigator noted that it is human nature to self-medicate through drugs, but stressed that it is "especially Americans" who are likely to do so.[131] One *ABC News* episode even demonstrated that teens themselves internalized this connection: "Mike," a teen-aged dealer who supplied PCP to his peers, was asked if he felt guilty about doing so. "I don't care," he replies, "'cause for me it's like being a doctor. I give them medicine for that illness. [The ones who get sick from it simply] took too much of the medicine."[132]

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[129] Anna Quindlen, Diane Henry, and Ronald Sullivan, "Teen-Agers Call Illicit Drugs One of Life's Commonplaces," *New York Times* (Jul 19, 1981), 38; Molotsky, "L.I. Finds a 'Tremendous Increase'" (Dec 1, 1978), B2.
[130] Garlington, "Growing Use in San Diego" (Aug 27, 1978), D1.
[131] Dellinger, 45.
[132] *ABC Evening News* (Oct 13, 1977).

Of course, we should remember again that, as well suited as the PCP issue was to demonstrating the dangers of drug tolerance, the drug at the centre of the backlash was marijuana. It was the rampant teen use of marijuana that had largely inspired the Parents' Movement, and it was the social and political advances of the pro-marijuana cause that had provoked the ire of other activists; the culture war over drugs in the late-1970s was for the most part a conflict about marijuana. Yet it is also important to note that the PCP response directly affected this conflict in that it subtly undermined marijuana's new benign image and added to the rhetorical arsenal of marijuana's critics. It had these effects because of the very visible connection between the two drugs, a connection which concerned the method by which PCP was ingested: it was usually added to marijuana, tobacco, or an inert herb such as parsley and smoked. This meant that PCP "joints" were created and consumed in much the same way as marijuana, and that the two drugs were often smoked in combination. It also meant that, when PCP was sold already mixed with marijuana or with parsley, it was often unclear to users and even to dealers exactly which drug was being purchased. Confusion was fostered by the multitude of names given to various batches of street drugs: "wobble weed," "killer weed," and "super-joint" often signified PCP-laced marijuana or PCP-laced parsley, but were also used to market strong strains of pure marijuana. Additionally, PCP was sometimes sold as a pill or powder under the name "THC" (or "tic"), causing users to believe it was a pure form of the psychoactive component of marijuana, a substance in fact too chemically unstable for recreational consumption.[133]

[133] Because PCP was for a time so cheap and available, it was often used as an adulterant or replacement for other drugs as well, including LSD, heroin, and cocaine. Harry Nelson, "Testing Lab Points to

There were two implications to this marijuana-PCP connection which must have been especially disturbing for late-1970s observers, and which were apparent throughout the news coverage of PCP. The most obvious was the idea that marijuana users, and especially very young marijuana users, might end up accidentally consuming PCP along with their pot and suffering the ill effects of the much more powerful drug. In a *New York Times* article on PCP, NIDA director Dr. Robert DuPont identified this accidental use as his greatest concern. DuPont noted that "most people experience angel dust as some unusual form of marijuana, and associate it with the benign patterns of marijuana, but it's anything but that – it's a real terror of a drug."[134] Similar fears were expressed by experts in articles in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*,[135] and proof of these fears was published in an article in the *Washington Post*. This last example provided the information that D.C. police were finding traces of PCP in the urine of 64 percent of minors arrested in the city; most of these arrestees claimed to have only ever tried marijuana, leading to the conclusion that the kids' pot supplies were being clandestinely laced.[136]

It is interesting to note that these comments about PCP-laced marijuana served to simultaneously reinforce and undermine marijuana's new image as relatively harmless. On the one hand, they contrasted PCP's obvious dangers with marijuana's lack thereof, and in doing so implied that marijuana use was not really so bad. In fact, for DuPont,

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Hazards," *Los Angeles Times* (Feb 27, 1972), B1.

[134] Wald, "Stirs Concern" (Nov 10, 1977), 48.

[135] Moseley, "Teen Drugs Here," (Nov 13, 1977), 6; Larry Stammer, "Panel Told of 'Angel Dust' Crisis," *Los Angeles Times* (Feb 14, 1979), B31.

[136] Sandra R. Gregg, "More Junkies Starting Younger; Barry Faults Parent Ambivalence," *Washington Post* (Mar 12, 1981), DC4.

wielder of considerable influence over national drug policy, to speak of the "benign patterns of marijuana" here indicates just how far the social acceptance of marijuana had progressed by this time. In other articles, DuPont exhibited a similar liberalizing streak, suggesting that the scare stories that had once surrounded marijuana were false, but that those that currently surrounded PCP were true.[137] On the other hand, comments about PCP-laced marijuana also suggested that marijuana, though relatively harmless when pure, now carried all the same risks as PCP, as there was always the chance that the latter drug would be a hidden adulterant in the former. The story of Philip, discussed in the previous section, provided the most disturbing illustration of this possibility. His unwitting PCP use and subsequent psychotic attack on a stranger showed what horrors might result from a simple marijuana habit. His example in fact offered a strange contradiction to Dupont's statements: it suggested that all the scare stories that once surrounded marijuana might very well be true due to the lurking threat of PCP.

The second implication of the PCP-marijuana connection which must have alarmed observers was that marijuana users, again especially the young users, might knowingly move from the weaker drug to the stronger. This idea is an incarnation of the gateway theory, which holds that marijuana's greatest danger lies not in its own inherent risks but in its propensity for introducing young users to other, more harmful drugs. By this reasoning, marijuana is an easy "first step" for children because its effects are mild; once taken, it leads to curiosity about other drugs, confidence about drug-taking and law-breaking in general, and contact with dealers ready to supply the stronger intoxicants.

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[137] Overend, "Death in the 'Dust,'"(Sep 26, 1977), F8; "PCP: A Terror of a Drug," *Time* (December 19, 1977), 56.

Although the theory has been consistently disputed by experts,[138] in the late-1970s it held particularly firm in the case of PCP. During an interview with the *Washington Post*, one rehabilitation worker explained: "PCP is very widespread among adolescents. ... The ones who are into PCP see it as the next step from marijuana.'"[139] In another instance, drug officials told a *Post* reporter: "Because [PCP] looks like marijuana and is smoked, many youths ... who would otherwise stay away from hard drugs are tempted to try it."[140] Users themselves also supported this conclusion. During hearings before the House Narcotics Committee, later broadcast on *CBS News*, one teen-aged user testified that he had turned to PCP because of "peer pressure, personal problems, and boredom with marijuana."[141]

Given the prevalence in the media of these two alarming ideas – that any given batch of marijuana might secretly contain PCP, and that youth marijuana use might lead to youth PCP use – it is likely that the PCP-marijuana connection did much to undermine the positive public image of the latter drug. Certainly, activists on both sides of the marijuana debate recognized this connection's importance to their arguments. Keith Stroup, director of the decriminalization lobby group NORML, was quoted in two separate articles on PCP. This subject was clearly not Stroup's area of expertise, and thus the inclusion of his comments in these articles should perhaps be attributed both to his prominence as a public figure (he was at this time the premier spokesperson for the pro-

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[138] The best criticism of the theory stems from evidence that, although most users of hard drugs begin with marijuana, the vast majority of young pot smokers do not go on to try harder drugs. Neil Hunt, "Young People and Illicit Drug Use," in *Sex, Drugs, and Young People: International Perspectives*, Aggleton, Ball, and Mann, eds. (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 91-2.

[139] Bart Barnes, "High Schools: A Stage for Drugs, Undercover Agents," *Washington Post* (Nov 30, 1978), A1.

[140] Judith Valente, "Life Devastated For PCP User's Family," *Washington Post* (Jul 9, 1978), A4.

[141] *CBS Evening News* (Aug 8, 1978).

marijuana movement) and to the obvious connection between marijuana and PCP. Stroup, recognizing the dangerous implications of this connection, directed his comments at trying to downplay it. In both articles, he vehemently condemned PCP, calling it a "terribly dangerous, foolish, *idiotic* drug to take." His statements created an implicit contrast with the less-dangerous marijuana, and also made it clear that Stroup and NORML were not indiscriminately pro-drug, but rather recognized a very real difference in danger between marijuana and PCP. Stroup also made remarks that blamed the PCP trend on the mistrust created by previous government scare tactics regarding marijuana. Referring to the "ridiculous drug literature" that was propagated ten years earlier, he stated that "most kids don't want to destroy themselves, [but] they don't trust government information and don't realize that what they learn on the streets is no more valid."[142]

With this argument, Stroup took the gateway theory indictment against marijuana and turned it on its head. In his scenario, PCP use was caused, not by marijuana use, but by the repressive laws and inaccurate propaganda that the government directed against marijuana. Other decriminalization advocates in the late-1970s employed the same tactic, as can be seen in the "Letters to the Editor" columns of various newspapers. Taking issue with the anti-marijuana allegations of a *New York Times* article, one respondent argued that it was because of such "absurd" claims that "kids go on to hard drugs." He writes: "Having been lied to about marijuana, they scoff at warnings against the truly dangerous drugs such as methaqualone and PCP."[143] In another example, this time in the *Washington Post*, the writer referred to the hypocrisy of a society that failed to

[142] De Silva, "'Status' Drug," (Jul 3, 1977), H5; "New Rival for Heroin," *U.S. News*, 65.
[143] Jon D. Silberman, "The Hazards of Marijuana," *New York Times* (Feb 25, 1979), LI10.

distinguish a difference between "trying a little pot" and "trying a little PCP." He described how this both "breeds contempt for 'stupid drug laws'" in children, and also places young people in contact with criminal drug dealers who are "eager to promote higher profit PCP [and] speed." The suggestion was that if marijuana were dispensed legally in a manner similar to alcohol, such contempt for the law and contact with PCP-dealers would not occur.[144]

Yet even as decriminalization advocates attempted to distance the PCP problem from marijuana or to blame it on marijuana's prohibition, their opponents instead capitalized on the connection between the two drugs. Thus some anti-marijuana activists cited PCP when advancing the gateway theory. One, in a *Washington Post* editorial, argued that "regular use of marijuana – though not addictive – often leads good souls into hashish, cocaine, mescaline, and, nowadays, that dangerous stuff called 'angel dust.'"[145] Another, the Parent's Movement leader Sue Rusche, stated before a congressional committee: "Alcohol, PCP, cocaine, heroin, solvents, all form the deadly and nightmarish supplements to the joint smoked during recess in the school playground."[146] Other activists drew attention to the idea of PCP as a hidden adulterant. In one case, a high school principal wrote two articles printed in the *New York Times*, the first about marijuana and the second about PCP. While the first was a lengthy condemnation of teen marijuana use, the second only briefly dealt with PCP itself as the writer was more

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[144] Stephen J. McClure, "On Chief McHale's Views on Marijuana," *Washington Post* (Apr 3, 1980), A18. Similar arguments referencing PCP are also presented in the letters: Michael Hannon "War on Marijuana," *Los Angeles Times* (Jul 25, 1978), D4; and David Litwack, "Legalize Marijuana," *Los Angeles Times* (May 10, 1979), D6.

[145] Nick Thimmesch, "Facing Up to the Evidence on Drugs," *Washington Post* (Aug 2, 1978), A15.

[146] Nov 1, 1979, before Congress' Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control. Musto and Korsmayer, 232.

concerned about the threat of PCP-laced marijuana. In this way the author used the lacing issue to bolster his overarching anti-marijuana argument.[147] A second example was an Ann Landers column published in the *Washington Post*. Asked to clarify her position on marijuana, Landers explained that she opposed its use, especially by young people, and cited dangerous inconsistencies in marijuana potency and content. She wrote: "Some dealers mix the pot with alfalfa or hay. This weakens it. Others may lace it with angel dust. This could produce a crazy trip and blow your mind."[148]

Of course, while these examples demonstrate how each of the opposing camps in the marijuana debate attempted to put their own spin on the PCP issue, they cannot prove the extent to which the news audience – or anyone else – was convinced by such PCP-referencing arguments. It is most likely, however, that the PCP response had the overall effect of badly damaging the decriminalization position. The sheer number of horrifying news items about PCP, combined with PCP's conceptual associations with drug tolerance and marijuana, had the probable effect of subtly shifting many Americans' views concerning marijuana. This shift is perfectly demonstrated in the example of Dr. DuPont, the above-quoted, liberal-minded NIDA director. In 1977, at the time of DuPont's PCP statements, he was a public supporter of the decriminalization cause; in 1978, due to arguments such as those connecting marijuana to PCP, he recanted this position; and in the early-1980s, he became an outspoken opponent of marijuana tolerance, publishing a book titled *Getting Tough On Gateway Drugs*.[149]

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[147] S.J. Gulino, "Marijuana: The Hazards for Young Users," *New York Times* (Dec 31, 1978), LI8; S.J. Gulino, "The Effects of Angel Dust," (Dec 31, 1978), LI8.
[148] Ann Landers, "Ann Landers," *Washington Post* (Jun 15, 1979), B7.
[149] "Pot Users and the Law," *Chicago Tribune* (May 12, 1972), A2; Baum, 153.

PCP and Shifting Perceptions of Drug Users

At the heart of the changes in American attitudes towards drugs in the late-1970s was a shifting social perception of drug users. Throughout the twentieth century, users were commonly perceived in one of two ways: as either debauched perpetrators or helpless victims. These two images were important in that they gave the majority of Americans – the non-drug-users – explanations as to why drug use occurred in the face of the strong social consensus against it. Perpetrators were those users who were seen to purposefully flout the prohibitions against drug use. From a mainstream perspective, these users were deviant outsiders, immoral in that they embraced the hedonism and illegality of drug consumption, and irrational in that they took drugs despite knowledge of the dangers involved. They were convenient targets for blame and outrage. Victims, on the other hand, were users who were seen as blameless in their drug consumption. For mainstream observers, victims were essentially normal people who had been forced or tricked into deviant behaviour. Young users in particular were identified as victims as it was these users who were considered especially vulnerable to the illicit lure of drugs. During periods of heightened concern about drugs, young victims inspired widespread protective sentiments; their threatened status was always the most persuasive element of anti-drug rhetoric.

During the early- and mid-twentieth century, this perpetrator/victim dichotomy dominated cultural representations of drug users. The perpetrator image was especially prominent. Because drug use was largely confined to urban criminals and minority

groups (e.g. Mexican migrant workers, black jazz musicians), prejudice against these groups further encouraged a hostile view of users.[150] The victim image existed to a lesser extent, applied usually to white middle-class teenagers. Although this demographic was not a major consumer of drugs, isolated instances of white teen use still provided potent ammunition for anti-drug reformers. Often the mere idea that drug use might spread from criminals and minorities to privileged white youth was enough to raise alarms about specific drug trends.[151]

In the 1960s, perceptions of drug users changed dramatically when a generation of young people, the first cohort of baby boomers (born circa 1946 to 1955), embraced the use of drugs. Most importantly, this development placed youth drug use at the centre of all social reaction: from the 1960s onwards the standard image of the American drug user was that of a teenager. In an immediate sense, this shift caused the greater proliferation of the victim image. Drug use among white teens became for the first time truly widespread, a situation which provoked an intense protective response from their parents and thus from white middle-class society as a whole. Yet the perpetrator image also endured, now applied for the first time to young middle-class whites. This new attribution of blame was related to the inter-generational conflicts of the 1960s. Youth drug use was a focal point in these struggles, and was often viewed by adults as proof of

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[150] Historians David Musto and David Courtright demonstrate how growing legal and social prohibitions pushed drug use to the fringes of American society, which in turn encouraged increased legal and social intolerance. David T. Courtright, Dark Paradise: A History of Opiate Addiction in America (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2001), 1-6; Musto, *American Disease*, 244-5.

[151] Rufus King, "Hysterical Beginnings," in *The Drug Hang Up, America's Fifty-Year Folly* (1972), Schaffer Library of Drug Policy, http://www.druglibrary.org/special/king/dhu/dhumenu.htm; Richard J. Bonnie and Charles H. Whitebread, II, "The Forbidden Fruit and the Tree of Knowledge: An Inquiry Into the Legal History of American Marijuana Prohibition," *Virginia Law Review* 56.6 (Oct 1970), Schaffer Library of Drug Policy, http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/library/studies/vlr/vlr5.htm.

the threat of youth revolt and the immorality of the new generation. Outrage was directed at a number of deviant youth behaviours including drug use, and at specific youth antagonists such as student dissidents and hippies. In this way, representations of young drug users in the 1960s included both victims and perpetrators, and the viewpoints often fluctuated depending on the politics of the observer and the appeal of the observed. This situation was further complicated by the growing cultural influence of users themselves. Because of their large numbers and powerful social position relative to previous drug-using groups, drug takers of the boomer generation were active in the construction of their own public image. In one way, this encouraged representations of the perpetrator image, as some youth employed conspicuous drug use as a means of visibly rebelling against adult authority. Yet this new influence also helped undermine the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. It allowed users to argue with some credibility that drug use was neither immoral nor irrational, that it in fact could be harmless or even beneficial. These arguments were not universally accepted, but they did present an alternative view of drug use which was important to the emergence of more tolerant social attitudes.[152]

During the PCP response, the social perception of young users was in many ways a legacy of these 1960s developments. Although users were now from a new generation – the second cohort of baby boomers (born circa 1956 to 1964) – the teen drug culture itself was similar to that of the previous decade. Young people continued to use drugs as a means of expressing independence and challenging adult authority, and adults continued

[152] Marcel Martel, *Not This Time: Canadians, Public Policy, and the Marijuana Question, 1961-1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006), 13-25; Himmelstein, 107-23.

to react variously with hostility and protective concern. Within the news coverage of PCP, teens demonstrated a defiance that was very much a product of the larger youth drug culture. During television interviews, they boasted to journalists about how easily they could acquire PCP and how adept they were at handling the high. One teen described overdosing on PCP with casual bravado, while another dismissed her interviewer's suggestion that the drug would "rot" her brain cells. "I smoke dust, like, constantly, every day," she said. "It's just like that."[153] Such unapologetic admissions of PCP use were meant to be provocative. In the tradition of 1960s youth insurrection, teen users challenged adult prohibitions against drug use through highly-visible acts of defiance. The goal of many teen interviewees was to shock: to show off the simultaneously radical and casual nature of their drug-taking.

As was the case during the 1960s, certain adults reacted to these teen provocations with hostility. One aspect of the news coverage that demonstrated such reactions was the theory, presented by various drug experts, that PCP's popularity could be attributed to a teen-aged attraction to danger. Experts identified "a PCP teenage culture forming based on a kind of daredevil challenge."[154] This hypothesis explained the contradiction that a drug could become increasingly popular despite producing so many unpleasant and dangerous side-effects. In this scenario, rather than being deterred by PCP's risks, teens sought out the drug because of them. This theory also contributed to a specific, hostile view of young drug users, one which constructed teens as inherently irrational and reckless. A second aspect of the reporting that demonstrated a hostility towards young

[153] *ABC Evening News* (Oct 12-3, 1977).
[154] Dellinger, 40; "Terror of a Drug," *Time* (December 19, 1977), 56; *CBS Evening News* (Aug 8, 1978).

users was a particular series of *Chicago Tribune* articles. These reports were heavily influenced by police sources and linked PCP to what police believed was a massive, clandestine culture of drug use among teens in the Chicago suburbs. Owing to its potency and deadliness, PCP was offered as evidence of the new "anything goes" attitude among youth in which the object was "to get messed up any way you can."[155] As with expert testimony about the dare-devil hypothesis, these articles focused on the recklessness of teen PCP use. They drew heavily on images of inter-generational conflict and displayed a strong adult antagonism towards young users.

Within the PCP coverage as a whole, however, these displays of adult hostility were exceptional. They occurred far less frequently than during similar discussions in the 1960s, and this scarcity was in fact true of all cultural depictions of young drug users in the late-1970s. Although drugs were even more popular among youth than they had been in the previous decade, adult reactions were markedly less fearful and hostile. In part, this change was due to the decline in youth interest in political protest and counter-culture. Members of the second cohort of baby boomers did not seek to radically transform American society, and were viewed as less threatening by adults because of this. Their drug use too was less alarming: it tended to be recreational rather than political, and was no longer most visible among specific fringe groups like hippies and protestors. Also important was the growth in popular knowledge about drug use and its consequences. The experiences of the 1960s had shown that widespread teen drug use, while perhaps dangerous for the individuals involved, did not have catastrophic consequences for

[155] Mark Starr, "Skeptical of 'Good News': Experts Here Dispute Drug Study," *Chicago Tribune* (Dec 5, 1976), 12; Moseley, "Teen Drugs Here," (Nov 12, 1977), 6; Mark Starr, "Teens' Use of PCP Makes a Bad Drug Problem Worse," *Chicago Tribune* (Dec 14, 1977), 5.

American society as a whole; in the 1970s, drug experimentation was more often viewed as a phase which youth would grow out of.

Altogether these developments ensured that inter-generational conflict over drugs in the late-1970s was less fierce than in the previous decade. Youth continued to employ drugs as a means of goading adults into battle, yet adults tended to be more concerned with protecting teens than combating them. This disconnect was true of news portrayals of defiant young PCP users; although these teens struck a confrontational stance, due to the larger news focus on the deadliness of PCP, they still appeared more as victims than perpetrators. In light of PCP's toxicity, their heedless consumption of the drug seemed more tragic than brazen, an impression which was underscored by the air of knowing sadness with which journalists conducted the interviews. In fact, because of PCP's unparalleled deadliness and unpredictability, the drug generally did not encourage inter-generational hostilities. Compared to other recreational intoxicants, adults were less inclined to react with outrage at the hedonism of youth PCP use, as by most accounts teens did not particularly enjoy the drug's effects. Similarly, adults were unlikely to desire that defiant young users be punished, as PCP's unpleasant and damaging properties appeared penalty enough. Within the news coverage of PCP as a whole, occasional hostile reports such as the *Chicago Tribune* articles should thus be seen as anomalies, demonstrative of local police frustrations rather than wider social sentiment.

In the absence of a perpetrator image of youth PCP use, and due to PCP's undisputed lethality, the victim image dominated media representations of PCP users. This predominance was further encouraged by the spirit of tolerance that characterized

1970s attitudes to drugs, and specifically by the emergence of a new, more compassionate approach to combating drug use. Earlier in the decade, the federal government had responded to a spike in heroin addiction by shifting its policies to emphasize treatment as opposed to punishment of drug users. As a result, hundreds of new drug rehabilitation clinics were funded, and psychiatric professionals grew to dominate the official discourse on drugs.[156] These professionals were increasingly of the opinion that addiction stemmed from situational factors – that users were driven to take drugs by unhappiness in their lives rather than psychological or biological weaknesses.[157] Regarding teen drug use, psychiatrists and also many youth workers promoted the idea that teens took drugs in order to cope with the emotional hardships that accompanied growing up. These experts advised parents not to overreact if they discovered their children had tried drugs. Parents were instructed instead to speak calmly with their kids, to try to understand why their children were taking drugs, and to make sure their kids knew the risks that were involved. In cases of persistent and debilitating drug use, therapy was offered as the solution. Parents could enrol their children in rehabilitation programs where youth were taught to deal with the emotional problems that caused their drug consumption.

PCP provided fertile ground for this new, psychiatric approach because it seemed as though many young users turned to the drug specifically as a means of self-medication. Experts and teens alike claimed that the drug's anaesthetizing properties

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[156] Baum, 29-47.

[157] William White, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* (Bloomington, IL: Chestnut Health Systems, 1998), 272-8; Stanton Peele, "Addiction: Relief From Life's Pains; –Social and cultural factors – not body chemistry – are keys to dependency," *Washington Post* (Oct 1, 1978), C1, C3.

numbed negative emotions and that its consciousness-altering high took users away from their unhappy realities. Like the dare-devil hypothesis, such accounts explained the seeming contradiction of PCP's popularity: in this version, young users were wary of the drug's dangers, but were drawn to its promise of mind-numbing relief. As one youth worker explained to the *Los Angeles Times*: "We can tell [young people] that PCP destroys brain cells and burns out their bodies, and maybe it will. But as far as these kids are concerned, escape is more important."[158]

In the reporting, the focus on teen self-medication had the effect of foregrounding the victimhood of young PCP users. Youth in fact appeared to be twice victimized: once by the emotional problems that drove them to use PCP, and then again by the drug's debilitating effects. News items linked PCP to the many stresses that modern teens faced, including increasing instances of parental divorce and early exposure to adult responsibilities.[159] In one episode of the *NBC Nightly News*, PCP was even connected to child abuse. Dr. Gerald DeAngeles, the director of a youth rehabilitation clinic called Pride House, explained that young users commonly had histories of "incest, beatings, stabbings, divorce, separation, alcoholic parents, [and] prostitutes for parents." The episode also featured an interview with one anonymous teen user, herself a survivor of sexual abuse.[160] Throughout these discussions, reporters and experts characterized youth as blameless in their PCP use and sought a compassionate response from parents and

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[158] Williams, "Detoured," (Jul 9, 1978), C1.

[159] Koper, 51; Williams, "Detoured," (Jul 9, 1978), C1; Bob Williams, "City Mounts Campaign Against Angel Dust Epidemic," *Los Angeles Times* (Dec 28, 1978), C1; *Angel Death*.

[160] *NBC Nightly News* (Feb 21, 1978). In 1978, DeAngeles coauthored a study which found that 31.8 percent of the chronic PCP users enrolled at his clinic had experienced sexual molestation and/or incest earlier in their lives: G.G. DeAngelis and E. Goldstein, "Long Term Treatment of Adolescent Phencyclidine (PCP) Abusers" (Apr, 1978).

other adults. In the *Angel Death* documentary, Dr. DeAngeles insisted: "It's important to understand that your child and all the kids who use PCP aren't terrible kids – they're not rotten adolescents – they're troubled, they need someone to understand them, and to help."[161]

These discussions, in addition to ensuring the predominance of the victim image in the PCP coverage, also signalled a significant change in the composition of this image. Earlier cultural representations provided only a superficial analysis of youth drug use; as a concept, young victims served mainly as rhetorical ammunition for the arguments of anti-drug campaigners. In its new incarnation, the victim image was more complex and intimate. It was based on a deeper understanding of the nature of drug use, and encouraged empathetic as well as protective reactions from the news audience. News consumers were presented with the rational motivations that lay behind youth PCP use. They were also shown in sympathetic detail how PCP destroyed the lives of its young users and their families. In addition, the new image involved a greater degree of realism. Little attention was given to the idea of drug use as a corrupting force, and more emphasis was placed on its immediate physical dangers. Blame also was shifted from easy scapegoats such as criminals and minorities to the complicated social and psychological phenomena that motivated users.

In its deeper, more empathetic view of drug users, this new victim image clearly demonstrated the spirit of tolerance that characterized the 1970s. It should be noted, however, that this tolerance was of a limited nature: while it encouraged a more compassionate treatment of users, it did not go so far as to condone drug use. PCP

[161] *Angel Death*.

consumption was still presented as a thoroughly negative activity – a behaviour caused by a desperate desire to escape from unhappiness, but serving in the long term only to intensify that suffering. In fact, the focus on the victimhood of young PCP users did much to undermine the most tolerant image of all: that of drug use as a benign or even beneficial activity. By comparison, portrayals of youth marijuana use – which more often cast teens as perpetrators – provided far greater leeway for the introduction of pro-drug perspectives. In the perpetrator role, youth were given more opportunities to present the positive side of drug-taking and were placed in a better position to challenge the social consensus against drugs. A series of *Washington Post* articles from 1978, for example, described fierce teen resistance to police raids aimed at curbing the rampant use of marijuana at local high schools. Although teens were for the most part depicted as being in the wrong, their pro-marijuana arguments were treated with seriousness.[162] Young users of PCP, on the other hand, were given only rare media opportunities to defend their drug use and were never presented as credible when they did so. Thus for all its emphasis on communication and understanding, the new empathetic victim image provided little agency to young users themselves. In effect, victimhood simply shifted from a concept employed by activists for promoting anti-drug campaigns to one employed by psychiatrists and social workers for promoting the better treatment of youth. Young users themselves remained in a passive role.

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[162] Judith Valente and Loretta Tofani, "7 Pupils Arrested In Drug Busts at B-CC High School," *Washington Post* (Sep 19, 1978), C1; Loretta Tofani, "Student Leaders Tell Bernardo Drug Raids Fail," *Washington Post* (Sep 30, 1978), B1; Jackson Diehl and Loretta Tofani, "Montgomery Drug Raids Net 92, Stir Dispute," *Washington Post* (Sep 29, 1978), A1, A5; Barnes, "High Schools" (Nov 30, 1978), A1, A3.

Moreover, despite its foundations in 1970s attitudes of tolerance, the empathetic victim image contributed to the revival of more hostile views of drugs at the end of the decade. Its overwhelming focus on young, vulnerable users had the effect of narrowing debates over drugs, edging out the less disturbing images of drug consumption that had been introduced in the 1960s. In particular, it drew attention away from the image of adults using mild illegal drugs such as marijuana in a responsible manner. This was the conception of drug use that decriminalization advocates sought to promote, as they argued for the relative harmlessness of such behaviour. The image of the responsible adult pot smoker allowed reformers to make favourable comparisons with adult alcohol consumption and to call attention to excessive punishments being meted out to otherwise law-abiding citizens. The proliferation of the young victim image was devastating to such arguments, for few adults could believe in the harmlessness of drug use among minors, no matter which intoxicant it involved. Anti-drug campaigners were able effectively to equate leniency towards adult drug consumption with the promotion of teen drug-taking, dealing a fatal blow to the rhetoric of the decriminalization movement.

It should also be noted that the tolerance of the new victim image was not embraced by all; many commentators voiced disapproval of the hyper-compassionate treatment of users, and these criticisms were an early indication of hardening social attitudes towards drug use. As is demonstrated in the PCP reporting, parents in particular tended to be unhappy with the new emphasis on communication, empathy, and therapy. Some criticized it for distracting from – and even excusing – the problem behaviour of children, while others expressed impatience with its slow and counter-intuitive approach

to dealing with teen drug abuse. In one newspaper article, a father complained of therapists: "They'd ask us a lot of questions, but if you ask them what can be done, they don't give any answers."[163] Certain parents even reacted with defensive hostility, as the empathetic treatment of young users often shifted the blame for drug problems from youth to parent. These tensions were displayed in a particularly dramatic manner at the end of the *Angel Death* documentary. The film finished on a hopeful note by showing the story of Ken, a teenager who recovered successfully from PCP addiction at the Pride House rehabilitation centre. Ken, his therapist, and narrators Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward all attributed this triumph to Pride House's self-esteem-building activities and counselling sessions. These characters were shown discussing how this therapy allowed Ken to identify and defeat the emotional problems which were the cause of his addiction. Ken's father, however, appeared less enthusiastic. During clips of family counselling, Ken blamed his misbehaviour on his overbearing, emotionally-closed father. When the father interrupted to defend himself, the presiding therapist chastised the father for this rhetorical bullying and accused him of being, deep down, a "pretty lonely guy." The father denied this charge, and lapsed into a sullen silence as Ken continued to list his grievances.[164]

Even parents who embraced the new emphasis on communication and empathy had trouble figuring out where to draw the line. This uncertainty was expressed in the *Washington Post* editorial by Judy Mann, a self-proclaimed "enlightened parent" who had decided to tell her children the full truth about drugs, including admitting to her own

[163] Valente, "Life Devastated," (Jul 9, 1978), A4; De Silva, "The Young American," (Jul 3, 1977), H7.
[164] *Angel Death*.

youthful experiments. Despite having committed to this approach, she was fearful that it was too liberal. At the same time she believed that a more old-fashioned strategy was equally dangerous. She wrote:

> We don't know and that's the point: the generation that had all the answers, that expanded its mind with LSD and paved the way for PCP and other lethal drugs abounding now, doesn't know how to keep its children from destroying themselves. Once again, we are experimenting.[165]

For Mann, part of the problem was a paralysing excess of knowledge. She and other new parents had "more information" about child-rearing than ever before, yet they were doing "a worse job of raising the next generation than [their] predecessors." Similar insecurities were expressed by other parents in the PCP reporting. They spoke of attempts at empathetic communication with their children that were continually shut down by stubborn youth resistance. One mother wanted her son to enter into counselling, but felt so intimidated by his "outbursts of anger and bizarre actions" that she feared insisting that he do so. In general, parents spoke of feeling guilty about the drug use of their children and at the same time powerless to do anything to prevent it. They admitted that they alone were no longer capable of controlling their kids and complained about a lack of support from schools, police, and government. Overall, a sense of helplessness and frustration pervaded the parental contribution to the PCP coverage.[166]

For many parents, however, this helplessness was short-lived. A different strategy for combating youth drug use emerged in the late-1970s to challenge the empathetic approach: this was the tough love method, a strategy that was promoted by many Parents'

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[165] Mann, "Informed Generation" (Aug 25, 1978), B7.
[166] De Silva, "The Young American" (Jul 3, 1977), H5; Williams, "Detoured," (Jul 9, 1978), C1; Valente, "Life Devastated," (Jul 9, 1978), A1.

Movement groups and later championed by Nancy Reagan.[167] Under its prescriptions, parents were to place teens under constant surveillance and punish any drug use swiftly and severely. Authority was to be privileged over empathy, as parents were advised to resume the role of domestic disciplinarian, no matter how distasteful it might be. Cooperation between parents was also encouraged, the idea being that each in the community could help to spy on the kids of the others and all could consistently enforce curfews and other regulations. Accompanying this new emphasis on strictness was a shift towards harsher forms of youth drug rehabilitation. Certain popular new programs, most notoriously the Straight, Inc. chain that originated in Florida, relied on brutal punishments and brain-washing techniques to cure their young charges. Problem children were duped into entering these programs and bullied into staying there, released only after months of conditioning had effected behavioural transformations.[168]

On the whole, this harsher approach to youth drug use had attractive features which made it more popular among parents than empathetic strategies: it involved decisive action, achieved immediate results, and shifted focus from the emotional problems of teens back to the real parental concern – the teen drug use itself. It also was appealing from a political standpoint, as it placed the bulk of the responsibility for combating the teen drug problem on parents. Politicians were able to pledge their firm support for tough anti-drug parenting without having to commit scarce resources to expensive policing and rehabilitation programs. Thus as anxiety about youth drug use

[167] "Mrs. Reagan to Parents: 'Be Tough' on Drugs," *New York Times* (Nov 10, 1981), A1.
[168] Molly Moore, "Parents At Odds Over Straight," *Washington Post* (Jul 14, 1982), VA13; Eve Zibart, "Drug Patient Wins $220,000 Award," *Washington Post* (May 26, 1983), C1, C13.

grew in the late-1970s and early-1980s, the tough love method became the new orthodoxy among anxious parents and federal authorities alike.[169]

One essential component of this tough love approach was that it involved the reintroduction of blame to issues involving drug use. This was something that was uniquely upsetting for parents and other observers during the PCP response: news narratives provoked fear through disturbing depictions of youth in danger, yet they provided no emotional outlet in the form of an enemy to take the blame. None of the traditional perpetrator groups were held responsible for the problem, and even PCP itself was removed as an antagonist, relegated to the status of a by-product of teenage emotional problems. As hard-line attitudes to drugs became dominant at the end of the decade, this disconcerting ambiguity came to an end. Drug use once again was recognized as thoroughly immoral, and, to a certain extent, users again were held responsible for their illicit actions. It should be noted, however, that this shift back towards intolerance did not immediately cause a corresponding resurrection of the perpetrator image of the drug user. During the early-1980s, popular anti-drug hostility tended to be directed instead at drug dealers, paraphernalia vendors, and decriminalization advocates. The dominant image of the user remained that of the vulnerable youth, the victim of these forces of drug promotion.

In essence, this was a victory of emotion over reason. The liberal approach to drug issues that briefly prevailed in the 1970s was based on the latter. It involved a number of unappealing logical admissions – some drug use must inevitably occur, penalties against drug use often do more harm than good – and it advanced complicated

[169] Baum, 134-50.

anti-drug strategies that varied depending on the type of drug in question. This highly-nuanced perspective collapsed in the face of growing anxiety about teen drug use. Suddenly, any ambiguity on drug issues appeared unethical as equivocators could be accused of sending the wrong message to impressionable youth. Concern for youth safety came to dominate public rhetoric and federal policy, ushering in a new era of hard-line prohibition.

In 1977 and 1978, at the height of the PCP response, this transition was still in progress. A spirit of tolerance continued to influence drug discussions, as was evidenced by the forgiving and empathetic news portrayals of PCP users. Yet change was also brewing, as was demonstrated by media expressions of both frustration at this tolerance and alarm at youth PCP use. One event in particular demonstrated the power of the newly-prominent young victim image and presaged the coming shift from reason- to emotion-based drug policies. When, in 1978, legislation was proposed to place strict controls on a key ingredient for PCP production, Dr. Peter Bourne, the soon-to-be disgraced liberal director of national drug policy, raised objections. Bourne argued that the controls might hinder American industry, and pointed out that PCP still accounted for only two percent of drug-related deaths in the country. Countering Bourne's relativistic argument about deaths, Senator Culver, a Democrat from Iowa, stated simply: “Dead is dead.” Referring to a heart-wrenching anecdote that they had just heard in testimony, he asked Bourne: “What do you do when your kid comes screaming through the glass

door?" There could be, of course, no rejoinder. Because of the compelling idea of young lives at stake, the legislation passed with full support from both political parties.[170]

[170] "Carter Health Aide Assailed on PCP Stand," *Los Angeles Times* (Jun 21, 1978), A1.

Conclusion

In 1979, news reporting about PCP declined sharply, and from 1980 onwards PCP ceased to be a major focus in the national news. In part, this drop can be attributed to the short attention spans of news producers and their audiences; as the PCP problem became a familiar news story at the end of the decade, journalists shifted their attentions to subjects that were more appealing for their novelty. Falling news interest can also be linked to the spate of legislation passed in 1978 and 1979, laws which tightened restrictions on PCP's chemical ingredients and increased the legal penalties for PCP manufacture and sale. This type of legislation often coincides with the final phase of a moral panic, a trend that suggests to sociologists that such laws provide society as a whole with a sense that social problems have been successfully addressed. Additionally, the decline in news coverage can be attributed to the real decrease in rates of PCP use: the drug's popularity peaked in 1976, and then fell steadily during the late-1970s and throughout the 1980s.[171]

Media coverage, however, did not cease entirely beginning in 1980. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post*, for example, continued to produce reports on PCP, with the latter actually increasing its coverage briefly during the middle of the decade. These articles corresponded with the persistent, localized popularity of PCP: while use rates declined elsewhere in the United States, they actually grew in certain inner-city neighbourhoods during the 1980s, causing a spike in the drug's popularity

[171] SAMSA, *2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*.

among low-income blacks and Hispanics.[172] This demographic change resulted in a change of emphasis in the news coverage. While discussions of PCP-induced madness and violence remained a fixture,[173] the focus on the drug's threat to youth became less common. In its place there arose a new focus, one which concerned the relationship between drugs, race, and poverty. In stories that echoed earlier accounts of teen self-medication, destitute addicts were said to use PCP as a cheap means of escaping from the harsh realities of ghetto life. Other articles described how vicious PCP-dealers ruled entire neighbourhoods, terrorizing the law-abiding but downtrodden local residents.[174] In some cases, inner-city populations were clearly blamed for the PCP problem. One *Washington Post* article featured a police officer complaining about "the whole community banding together to protect the people who sell [PCP],"[175] while a *New York Times* article held that a "wave of violent crime associated with the drug has swept the housing projects and ghettos that ring the national capitol."[176]

These discussions strongly prefigured the anxious reactions to crack-cocaine that erupted on a national scale in 1986. The emergence of this new drug threat caused a further reduction of media interest in PCP and hastened the onset of popular amnesia

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[172] A compilation of coroner's statistics in 1982 showed PCP-related deaths slowly rising in Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Washington, while rapidly falling in New York, Miami, San Francisco, Chicago, and Detroit. Ron Harris, "PCP: LA Caught in Its Grip," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 11, 1982), B3.

[173] See for example: "Burrowing Man Dies In a Hole in His Yard," *New York Times* (Sep 13, 1982), B13; Molly Moore, "Va. Fisherman Sentenced to 20 Years For Drug-Related Slaying of Infant," *Washington Post* (Jul 2, 1983), D2; John Mintz, "'Quiet' Man's Violent 8-Day Nightmare Began With 'Angel Dust'" *Washington Post* (Apr 7, 1984), B1, B5.

[174] Scott Harris, "Black-Led Rallies Help Stem PCP Sales," *Los AngelesTimes* (Jun 29, 1981), OC_A14; Ron Harris, "Drive Out Dope Dealers," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 12, 1982), C1; "Modern-Day Plague," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 17, 1982), D10; Linda Wheeler, "PCP Dealers Rule Block of Sixth Street NW," *Washington Post* (Mar 13, 1983), C1, C8; Linda Wheeler, "A Life Lived in Shadow of PCP," *Washington Post* (Mar 11, 1984), A1, A14.

[175] Wheeler and Engel, "Cheap High, Heavy Burden," A14.

[176] "'Angel Dust' Use in Capital Said to Reach Epidemic Proportions," *New York Times* (Dec 9, 1984), 60.

regarding angel dust. As Philip Jenkins suggests, crack in all likelihood also replaced PCP in many inner-city drug markets. As far as drugs of escape are concerned, crack was far more desirable: it was just as cheap, produced far fewer unpleasant side effects, and created an instant, energetic, intensely-pleasurable high.[177] Surging concern about crack also led to the triumphant revival of the perpetrator image of the drug user. No longer constrained by associations with white teenagers, and riding the crest of anti-drug sentiment which had been building since the late-1970s, hostility towards drugs and drug users flourished in the latter half of the 1980s. Crack users – perceived primarily as impoverished urban blacks – became objects of outrage in a way that PCP users never had been, such that Nancy Reagan could pronounce them in 1989 "beyond the point of rehabilitating and teaching."[178]

But despite the reactionary 1980s response to crack-cocaine and its revival of the image of drug users as perpetrators, the image of the young victim persisted in media rhetoric,[179] and in fact continues to this day to dominate American cultural conceptions of drug use. Because older youth have mounted progressively successful challenges to the idea of their victim status, this victim image has devolved onto younger and younger candidates.[180] Yet it remains in other respects largely unchanged from the 1970s. Cultural depictions of drug use continue to focus on white middle-class youth, emphasize their vulnerability, sympathize with their plight, and at the same time deny them an active role

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[177] Reeves and Campbell, 129-30.
[178] From a story by Louis Sahagun and Carol McGraw from the *Los Angeles Times* (Apr 7, 1989), as quoted in Reeves and Campbell, 136.
[179] Notable during media coverage of the crack crisis was a focus on the tragedy of crack-babies, infants who, due to the crack use of their mothers, were reportedly born already addicted to the drug.
[180] Critcher, *Panics*, 162.

in the definition of their situations. In this sense, the image of the young PCP victim from the 1970s was the prototype for portrayals of today's modern drug user.

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