Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology • 2021 | Volume 10, Issue 1

Book Review | Hurt: Chronicles of the Drug War

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Published on: Feb 01, 2021

DOI: 10.21428/88de04a1.ff6a4aa4

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Miriam Boeri. *Hurt: Chronicles of the Drug War Generation*. University of California Press, 2018; 268 pp.; ISBN: 9780520293465.

In 1971, President Nixon officially declared the War on Drugs. Flash forward to 2020 and the prison population is approximately 2.3 million people, with 1 in 5 of those individuals having been incarcerated for a non-violent drug offense (Wagner & Wagner, 2020). Among those caught up in drug offenses stemming from the policies enacted during the War on Drugs, the majority are baby boomers. Baby boomers are those that are born between the years 1946 and 1964, and whose current population is approximately 73 million, the second largest generation aside from Millennials (Census, 2019). By the start of the 21st Century, the youngest baby boomers were 36 years of age, and based on Winick's (1962) "maturing hypothesis," should have developed coping abilities that precluded the need for drug use and abuse to deal with the tenacities of life. Their inability to do so is often viewed as a personal failure, with the shame and stigma to be internalized by the individual. What is often lacking in society, however, is an understanding of the social ecology and context surrounding *why* individuals engage in drug use in the first place, and *how* they get caught up in a system that seemingly was never designed to help them succeed.

To address this gap, Boeri utilized a novel and comprehensive dataset, the *Older Drug User Study* (ODUS). Beginning in 2009, this mixed-methods study involved ethnographic field data, in-depth life histories, and retrospective survey data with 100 baby boomers in Atlanta, Georgia. Thirty-eight of these boomers' stories are included in *Hurt: Chronicles of the Drug War Generation*. Two researchers were present for each interview, one tasked with collecting the qualitative material, and the other tasked with collecting the quantitative survey data. Thus, the data contains rich quantitative information to make generalizable statements about the individuals involved, and rich qualitative information to bring to light the more intimate and complex issues these individuals face. The debate between structure and agency as it relates to drug use is prevalent throughout the text.

Beginning with a prologue from Harry, the brother of Boeri, *Hurt* is broken down into nine thematic chapters that intertwine the stories of the baby boomers with relevant context from Harry's life, and concludes with an epilogue updating the reader on Harry. Chapter one situates the historical, political, and social contexts surrounding the lives of the baby boomers being interviewed, and follows the stories of Ted, Teresa, Jordan, Moses, and Harry. The premise of this chapter is to provide evidence that drug use does not occur in a social vacuum, and rather takes on the characteristics of the environment it is situated in. Rather than acknowledging the impact that events such as the Vietnam War, the impending War on Drugs, trends in drug use among adolescents and young adults and how

stints of incarceration further impacted their use, the boomers presented in this chapter and the text more generally attributed their current lifestyles and situations to personal choice.

Chapters two and three further contextualize the structure/agency dichotomy by presenting theoretical frameworks that aid in the complex understanding of drug use. Chapter two, 'The Life Course of Baby Boomers,' focuses on the stories of Jan, Ann, and Harry in the context of life-course, self-control, and social control theories. Importance was placed on the understanding that while these boomers were progressing through the same historical and political contexts, their individual trajectories and turning points worked to either mitigate or aggravate the effects of their social environments, with social control, rather than self-control, being the dominating factor in their engagement in drug use over time. Chapter three, "Relationships," focuses on the stories of Elijah, Alicia, Abel, and Harry in the context of social bonds, and peer and familial relationships, providing evidence of macro-level factors, such as society's punitive responses to drug use, that further impact individual-level relationships, social ties, and access to resources that would otherwise have a positive effect on the lives of the boomers.

The next three chapters cover various aspects of the War on Drugs, including mass incarceration and race. "The War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration" focused on the stories of Charlie, Omar, Elijah, Abel, and Harry, and provided evidence for the impact of "charge stacking," receiving a criminal record, or even just the social stigma of being a drug user that was propagated and institutionalized by the War on Drugs. "The Racial Landscape of the Drug War" focused on the stories of Marshall, Jammie, Chief, Anthony, and Harry. The New Jim Crow was evident in communities such as the Bluff, where the effects of discriminatory and racist criminal justice system practices effectively worked to entrap boomers who were being released from prison. Chapter six, "Women Doing Drugs," continues the discussion on the War on Drugs, and focuses on the stories of Ingrid, Victoria, Alicia, Martha, and revisits Harry. This chapter brings light to the 'gendered culture of drug use' and the variety of pathways taken by women (see Daly, 1992; 1994).

The remainder of the book looks forward, emphasized by chapters on "Aging in Drug Use," "The Culture of Control Expands," and "Social Reconstruction and Social Recovery." Chapter seven revolves around drug use among older boomers, including how it furthers isolation, and how it impacts baby boomers' retirement and Social Security Income, and focuses on the stories of Harry, James, and John. Chapter eight focuses on the expanding culture of control, depicting the stories of Abel, Jordan, Ian, Moses, Alicia, Elijah, and Harry. In particular, Boeri examines the prison industrial complex, alternatives to incarceration (including drug courts and treatment), the movement into the "treatment industrial complex" (p. 162), and the lack of focus on the environmental impacts of drug use and treatment. The final chapter looks ahead to reconceptualizing drug use, particularly the need for a

paradigm shift in how society views and treats drug use and addiction, emphasizing the need to focus on recovery, rather than abstinence.

Hurt is an important contribution to the literature on the intersection of social context and drug use. Importantly, by providing detailed information about the *Older Drug User Study (ODUS)*, this book allows researchers to replicate or expand upon the findings presented to continue to advance scholarship in this area. Boeri was able to provide a uniquely detailed, holistic picture of the social and historical context that surrounds the use and abuse of drugs by baby boomers. By intertwining the intimate stories of Harry throughout each chapter, Boeri spectacularly draws the reader in, and concludes the text with a heartbreaking example of the societal, environmental, and institutional consequences of policies related to the War on Drugs.

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