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# **The Injustice Of The Judicial System In "Dorm Room Dealers: Drugs & The Privileges Of Race & Class" By A. Rafik Mohamed & Erik D**

In light of recent events in the past few years, have you ever stopped and asked yourself how ethnicity and class affect the attention law enforcement gives to certain individuals? Or how does an individual's social standing allow them to "get away with more" compared to people of different groups? *Dorm Room Dealers: Drugs and the Privileges of Race and Class* by A. Rafik Mohamed and Erik D. Fritsvold explores these topics by getting up close and personal into the drug dealing lifestyle of white upper-class college students that commit these crimes, while still knowing what they could lose if acted on.

The authors' intentions are to find out why wealthy students chose to sell drugs and why law enforcement ignores these acts on college campuses, despite the presence of America's ongoing War on Drugs. Using ethnography interviews to gather insight on the real world of drug, the authors exposed the privilege of certain ethnic and social groups in the eyes of the law. This brings to light that the justice system favors people that identify with certain backgrounds.

The study is concentrated on private universities in southern California, especially in coastal or near coastal areas, because of the ease of access to illegal drugs in the area due to the proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border – with an estimated 65 percent of all illegal cocaine imports crossing through the border – and California's high demand for such substances. This area also has a high tolerance for personal freedoms, including the use of drugs. The research shows that students in the area are at a lower risk of incarceration for selling and possessing illegal substances because of their parents' wealthy economic status and higher social standing.

This ties into C. Wright Mills's theory and book, *The Power Elite* (1956), which argues that small networks of people hold the power in modern day society. The wealthy have an influence, and possibly a monopoly, on how they are treated by the government and law enforcement. They can afford lawyers that can get them out of a "sticky situation" and win their case, such as in O.J. Simpson's trial.

It is mentioned several times throughout the work that the universities were aware of the students' schemes, but never acted on the findings. Many people would ask why officials turned a blind eye to activities that would surely be punished with imprisonment anywhere else. The answer has to do greatly with reputation – the institutions' and the students'. The universities feared they would get too much negative attention if a student at their school was arrested for selling illicit drugs. The consequences would be a loss of donations, lower interest in attending the school because of the criminal activity, and endless legal battles from the parents of the student incarcerated. It was easier for the universities' officials to brush aside the serious problem than to face the repercussions of something as serious as a drug bust occurring.

The dealers' backgrounds – in the position for "moving up" and to be very successful – raise

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the question of why they would risk it all and become drug dealers. The majority of the participants have been doing drugs, mainly marijuana, since high school and sold them in college to support their habit. A prime example was a dealer codenamed LaCoste had a very extensive drug habit – marijuana and alcohol – and others, such as gambling and partying. The researchers also noticed that the young adults showed signs of ego gratification, pursuing social status, recognition from peers, and greed.

The participants enjoy the thrill of getting away with breaking the law, without even consciously realizing it. The dealers knew the university will not act on their illegal activities because of their fear of a court battle with an attorney, the loss of donations, or even individuals' hesitance of going to a college that had a drug bust. They also didn't want to ruin "these good kids'" lives with a conviction their permanent record, suggest racial profiling by saying the students were good because of their standing in society.

This causes a sense of security that makes them believe that they are untouchable, and eventually causes them to demonstrate "angst, insecurities, greed, and often arrogance". However, this was different in the selling of pharmaceuticals. The participants did not see it as illegal. As Freddie said, "I don't sell drugs. But if a friend is hurt or something like that you know that I can hit them up with a few" and this seems to be the same mindset as the other dealers that sold and used behind the counter medications.

To perform this study, the researchers/authors were required to form familiar relationships with the dealers to be able to interview the students on their activities and habits concerning illicit drugs, known as ethnography. The researchers' got in on the dealings and into the students' lives through the dealer Brice and branched out from there. They referred to this method as Patricia Alder's idea of peripheral membership; they never actually participated in the activities that defined "group membership and group activity". Questions they asked included what drugs they sold, whom they sold the drugs to, what was their source, and what their profit from sales where. This is the data collection method of surveying: more specifically, interviewing.

Interviewing is one of the most popular methods of gathering information for sociological research. Advantages of interviews include being able to study a large group of people and the answers can be more easily quantified and analyzed than other methods. Disadvantages would include the time-consuming nature of interviewing. The authors of *Dorm Room Dealers* even say that their research took three years to complete.

The research findings highlight the astonishing differences in the conviction of "an individual's social position results in excessive scrutiny or, conversely, excessive leniency on behalf of the criminal justice system". The book brings up a point from *The Police and the Black Male* by Elijah Anderson – "the police may be seen primarily as protecting "law abiding" middle-class Whites against anonymous "criminal" Black males".

Recent confrontations between African-American men and police, such as the incident Ferguson, MO, people of color are more likely to be targeted by law enforcement. There is also discrimination in terms of economic and social class. Individuals of a higher class can pay their way out of being placed in custody, and even jail time in some cases, whether they're guilty or not. Individuals who have less money are forced to sit in jail because they cannot afford the bail. Therefore, they can't get a lawyer, and can't meet with an appointed attorney to discuss their case and prepare their defense. This causes people guilty of a crime to get away with it, while

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innocents spent years in prison for a crime they did not commit. There needs to be an “even ground” system where everyone can get the same quality of defense, so the guilty are sent to prison and the innocent can walk free.

In *Dorm Room Dealers: Drugs and the Privileges of Race and Class*, A. Rafik Mohamed and Erik D. Fritsvold explore the injustice of the judicial system – discrimination and the amount of the attention they give certain groups – by getting on the inside of the silent majority of drug dealers. The book exposes the loopholes and the blind eyes that officials turn regarding “non-traditional” environments for drug sales.

The authors sought out to answer the question of why certain people can get away with some illegal activities, while others can't. They concluded that there is a pattern in an individual's race, social class, and economic class to determine their standing in the eyes of law enforcement. Further sociological study may answer the question of “What are the patterns of drug dealing at other institutions in other parts of the country?” The study in *Dorm Room Dealers* only focuses on one small area of the United States, but they need to go to places that have different local cultures that could affect the conclusions they made.