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'The More They Talk about it, the More You Feel like Doing it'. Reflections on the Discursive Production of Generational Experiences

The concept of 'generation' has become somewhat marginal to the academic study of social and cultural change [Edmunds and Turner 2002: 1]. Such neglect of the sociological study of generations would seem paradoxical given the relentless production of competing generational labels — 'Generation X', 'Generation Y', the 'Net generation', yuppies, the hip hop generation, 'the chemical generation', 'Millennials' — circulating in the media and popular discourse to describe aspects of the experience of [often overlapping] population cohorts. In a recent attempt to revive the sociology of generation, Edmunds and Turner have argued that 'generations rather than classes have shaped contemporary cultural, intellectual and political thought' [Edmunds and Turner 2002: 118]. Their understanding of 'generation' draws on Mannheim's explanation of how generational consciousness emerges through the shared experience of a traumatic historical event, Halbwachs' explication of the way in which such consciousness is sustained and reinforced through collective memories and rituals, and

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Bourdieu's insights into how social and cultural change is effected as a result of intergenerational competition over scarce resources [p. 116]. Re-engagement with the concept of 'generation' in the understanding of social change, they argue, is essential because the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 on New York and Washington will bring about a new 'September generation' that will challenge the hegemonic cultural leadership of the sixties generation.

In the light of these claims, the present article explores the usefulness of the concept of 'generation' for understanding the social experience of young people in contemporary Russia. It begins with a brief discussion of some of the theoretical and definitional problems that arise when theories of 'generation' are introduced into the sociological study of young people's experience. It then explores in detail the case for thinking about young people as a 'chemical generation' through a case study of drug use among young people in contemporary Russia.

Academic turf struggles: The sociology of youth versus the sociology of generation

For sociologists of youth, re-engaging with a theory of generations is particularly problematic. One reason for this relates to the theoretical stagnation that has characterised the concept. On the one hand this has led to the concept's popular appropriation and draining of conceptual purchase through, for example, its wide and loose use in terms such as 'the younger generation'. This is frustrating for sociologists of youth since it implants in public consciousness an essentialised notion of experiences during a particular life-stage at a particular historical point in time, thereby undermining attempts to understand, at a more theoretical level, the social construction of 'youth' as a life-stage and what, if any, role the biological category of 'age' plays in this. On the other hand, for sociologists of youth who concern themselves solely with the academic life of the term, the concept of 'generation' remains most closely associated with the description of the links in the chain of social and cultural inheritance, and, in particular, with the work of S.N. Eisenstadt for whom 'generations' are a vehicle for the transmission of social and cultural norms [Eisenstadt 1956]. This close association of the concept of 'generation' with structural-functionalist understandings of youth and youth culture — according to which horizontal ties across a generation are no more than a mechanism of socialisation or acculturation functioning to maintain social stability — is significant because it undermines an aspect of Mannheim's notion of 'generation' that often appeals to contemporary sociologists of youth — that is, the transformative potential of generational identity.

A more general problem for sociologists in employing the notion of 'generation' is definitional rather than theoretical. This is the question of whether the concept is a technical demographic description of a group of people born between particular start and end points in time, or whether it describes a historical period [a cultural generation] and, if so, what relation is then implied between the demarcation of a cultural generation and life-stage attributes. For example, if we take the commonly discussed notion of the 'Thatcher generation' in the UK, does this 'generation' consist of all those who were alive while Thatcher was in power, just those born during this period, or those of a particular age when she was Prime Minister? While for most people the last is the natural assumption, such a definition presumes that people of a certain age are particularly shaped by the experience of living through the Thatcher years and thus begs the question of how 'generation' relates to the concept of 'youth' as a distinctive life-stage.

The solution to these definitional problems arrived at by Edmunds and Turner is to differentiate between 'chronological' and 'social' generations, whereby the former are simply referred to as a 'cohort' and defined as a collection of people who are born at the same time and thus share the same opportunities that are available at a given point in history' [Edmunds and Turner 2002: ix] while a 'generation' is as 'an age cohort that comes to have social significance by virtue of constituting itself as cultural identity' [Ibid.: 7]. For Edmunds and Turner it is precisely the question of how a cohort becomes a 'generation' that makes the latter an interesting sociological category.

Understanding the process of the transformation of a cohort into a generation, however, is not without its own problems, not least because it appears to go against the sociological grain by skating over the class, gender, ethnic and other 'locations' within a specific demographic cohort of the population. This is significant because such differences clearly shape, if not determine, the capacity of young people to effect social change as well as the kind of change they will seek to effect. While the possibility of different responses to common experiences among young people forming the same 'actual generation' is envisaged in Mannheim's discussion of distinctive 'generation units' [Mannheim 1952: 306] this does not help understand intragenerational struggles to define generational consciousness. Is it, for example, the terrorist attacks themselves that constitute the trauma that defines the 'September generation' or, alternatively, the response of the American administration and its allies to those attacks? And what is the substance of this generational consciousness? Is it the recognition of the negative effects of terrorism on individual life chances [Edmunds, Turner 2002: 117] or, rather, an awakening to the quiet imperialism of American

foreign policy and the resentment felt by much of the world to it? Thus, ethnic, religious, class and gender locations are highly relevant to understanding the origins and respective resources and capacities of these generation units. Moreover, for sociologists of youth, understanding the way in which these categories intersect and cut across the subject positioning and identity of 'youth' is central to the theory and practice of the sociology of youth. That shared youthful practices, such as consumption, need to be understood as distinctively generational resolutions of particular class dislocations rather than reflecting cross-class generational experiences, for example, underpins the important notion of 'youth subculture' developed by members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies [CCCS] in Birmingham [Cohen 1972]. While recent critiques of the class-reductionism of the CCCS notion of 'youth subculture' may be justified [Bennett 1999; Muggleton 2000], theorists of generation ignore at their peril the issues of power, segmentation, and inequality that it raises [Pilkington, Johnson 2003].

The final problem for contemporary sociologists of youth seeking to re-engage with the notion of 'generation' is that the concept appears firmly locked in the sociology of modernity. This is evident from the continued focus on how generational consciousness as collective identity develops out of individual identities, and from the understanding of the active agent in this process to be a narrow stratum of 'intellectuals' shaping knowledge and acting beyond their own economic interests [Edmunds, Turner 2002: 118]. In the information-saturated conditions of late modernity such an approach appears to be missing the 'reflexive' dimension crucial for understanding the relationship between individuals and society. Although Edmunds and Turner do consider the importance of what they call 'participative' global communications for facilitating the forging of generational consciousness through the global sharing of experience, they fail to discuss the centrality of these media in the construction [and deconstruction] of consciousness through the production, circulation and interrogation of generational labels. In practical terms, such an approach fails to appreciate the implications of these very media writing about the 'September generation' for an emergent generational consciousness. Such debates have been rehearsed at length by sociologists of youth over the last twenty years in relation to the significance of the discursive construction of youth [re]produced not only by the tabloid media but through academic, government, legislative and educational institutions and rooted in material relations of disempowerment [Hebdige 1988; Griffin 1997; Kelly 2000; Mizen 2003]. Any notion of 'generation' that might be employed as part of a sociology of youth of late modernity, therefore, needs to consider seriously the discursive production of 'generational experience' and be premised on an understanding that its

generational subjects [young people] understand and articulate their experiences not outside of, but in critical engagement with, that discursive realm. This implies, moreover, a broader and more inclusive notion of the generational subject than a stratum of 'intellectuals' since active engagement with proactive forms of media goes well beyond that group. The recognition of a broader social base to active generational subjects, in turn however, requires the abandonment of any prior assumptions about the dominance of the political in defining generational consciousness.

'Generational consciousness' and youth in post-Soviet Russia: discursive constructions

The specific place of the 'younger generation' as revolutionary vanguard in Soviet narratives of modernity is well documented [Pilkington 1994; Omel'chenko 2004]. The prominence of 'generation' in public discourse is not least the product of the recent history of Russia, which has provided a series of generation-shaping events — the 1917 revolution, industrialisation, the Great Patriotic war, the 'Thaw' and the collapse of the Soviet Union — befitting its use. However, even in the 'quiet' periods of twentieth century Russian history, the younger 'generation' was ritually invoked as the object of socialization and the bearer of the baton in the next lap of the 'relay race' to modernist perfection [communism] [Pilkington 1998: 10] which kept 'generation' alive in both public and popular discourse.¹ Thus, unlike the West where it is argued that 'passive' generations regularly alternate with 'active' ones [Edmunds, Turner 2002: 117] in Russia it is only 'the last Soviet generation' [Yurchak 2006: 31]² which appears in this passive role; more precisely, it is in the case of that generation alone that the defining experience of the generation [growing up during the 'zastoi' period] became significant only retrospectively, that is after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Although Yurchak views this generation, paradoxically, as both wholly unprepared for the collapse of everything they had ever known and yet remarkably unsurprised by it [p. 1], public discourse has viewed cohorts of young people in their teens and early twenties during the late perestroika and early post-Soviet period rather differently. By the late 1980s and early 1990s youth was depicted in public discourse as morally disoriented, economically and socially marginalised and politically apathetic [Pilkington 1996]; a 'lost' or 'superfluous' [*nevostrebovannoe*] generation [Saisova

¹ This understanding of 'generation' shares the structural-functionalist underpinning of its western counterparts noted above.

² This generation is defined by Yurchak [2006] as those born between the 1950s and early 1970s who came of age between the 1970s and mid 1980s.

1990]. This notion of the 'lost generation' captured an apparent generational consciousness rooted in the experience of a cohort of people whose lives had been unhinged from the moral norms and social constants considered necessary to stabilize the already 'stormy' years of adolescence. That this generational experience is proposed to hold true for the first post-Soviet generation can be seen in the recent study by Williams, Chuprov and Zubok on the basis of which they argue that the peculiar coincidence in Russia of the shift from pre- and simple modernity to reflexive modernisation with the transition to post-socialist society has produced a set of peculiar risk production factors that have left young people 'doomed to failure and degradation' [p. 160], unable to 'integrate' and thus threatening to undermine the very mechanisms of social reproduction in Russia [Williams, Chuprov, Zubok 2003]. Effectively, in their view, the first post-Soviet generation threatens to break the chain of social and cultural inheritance in which 'generations' are the constitutive links. Meanwhile in Viktor Pelevin's novel *Generation P*, the consciousness-shaping experience of the first post-Soviet generation is portrayed as being the image saturated but spiritual thirst unquenching reality of post-communist Russia [Pelevin 1999].

Post-Soviet public discourse, however, is much more fragmented than its Soviet predecessor, and almost as diverse in its definition of generational consciousness as are the experiences of those who have come of age during the first decade or so of post-Soviet life. Given the centripetal forces that have propelled Russian society over the last 15 years, it would take a brave — or foolish — sociologist to pronounce upon which of these many experiences — the rebirth of faith, the globalization of horizons, the disappearance of security, or the reemergence of national self-confidence — might subsequently be considered to have defined the first post-Soviet generational consciousness.¹ Not wishing to be this brave, I want to consider here not the question of generational consciousness per se, but a particular generational experience that is widely discussed as defining, and — quite literally — consciousness changing; the so-called 'narcotization' of young people.

While few would claim that drug use is the single defining experience of the first post-Soviet generation, it features heavily in the characterisation of that generation in a way that simultaneously

¹ In contrast to Yurchak, I use the term 'last Soviet generation' to include the 'perestroika generation' that is those young people coming of age (i.e. reaching 15–25) during the last few years of the Soviet regime (1985–1991) while the 'first post-Soviet generation' refers to those young people coming of age since 1991. In line with the arguments set out in the first part of the article, the 'generations' I refer to are in fact demographic cohorts — whether or not they constitute 'generations' is part of the question under discussion.

separates it from the last Soviet generation and connects it with a global ‘chemical generation’ [Hammersley, Khan and Ditton 2002] of those coming of age in the 1990s in other parts of the world, for whom recreational drug use has been similarly described as ‘normalised’ [Parker et al. 1998]. Using original empirical research with young people in Russia from both the last Soviet and the first post-Soviet cohorts of 15–25 year olds, I will show that discursively young people are positioned as ‘drug users’ in a way that distinguishes them experientially from young people of the perestroika period. Moreover, I will suggest, that empirically, drug use is much more ‘routine’ for young people today than for young people at the end of the Soviet period. However, I will also argue that the diverse responses of young people today to the saturation of the youth cultural environment with drugs undermine any claim that drug use is a generation-defining moment. At the same time, the study of young people’s engagement with the discursive construction of their generation as ‘narcotised’ illustrates the point made above in relation to the problematic nature of the concept of ‘generation’; young people’s reflexive engagement with the discursive construction of themselves as a generation may be more of a shared generational experience than the so-called defining experience itself.

**Drug use in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period:
from marginal to mainstream**

The discursive construction of young people coming of age in the late 1980s featured drug use only at its margins. This debate emerged in the context of glasnost’s removal of ‘taboos’ on talking about the ‘stains’ on Soviet society, and was most frequently encountered in the form of first person ‘confessions’ in youth newspapers and magazines such as *Komsomolskaia pravda*, *Sobesednik* and *Moskovskii komsomolets*, in novels such as *Plakha (The Scaffold)* by Chingiz Aitmatov and documentary and other films such as *Na igle (Shorting Up)* and *Legko li byt’ molodym? (Is it Easy to be Young?)* [Pilkington 1994: 109]. The first sociological study in the USSR of drug abusers was conducted by researchers in the Soviet Republic of Georgia between 1969 and 1974, and repeated in 1984–5, but it was not until the onset of perestroika that it was published [Gabiiani 1990: 11]. Whilst path-breaking in its own way, this research was strictly contained within a discourse of criminality and deviance and thus related only to a minority of ‘marginal’ youth.

This domination of criminological discourse in the discussion of drug use was consolidated during the perestroika period; however, in the course of the late 1990s, medical and psychiatric discourses first supplemented, and then, in spheres such as NGO work, came to dominate, the discussion of drug use [Richardson 2002]. Although it is certainly true that the Soviet system was not keen to publish

evidence of its own 'failures' [Kramer 1991: 94], at the same time, this limited discussion of drug use did reflect the fact that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, drug use was still a marginal activity on youth cultural scenes. In 1988, official figures on the number of 'registered drug addicts' were published in the Soviet press showing a total of just 130,000 [Gabiani 1990: 9]; even taking into account Gabiani's warning that for every 1 registered drug addict, there are likely to be another 10–12 unregistered drug users, this is still a long way from the 4% of the population the Russian Federal Service for the Control of the Drugs Trade claims to be affected by 'drug addiction' today [Itar Tass 2005]. Nonetheless, drug use was disproportionately prevalent among young people. In 1989 the First Secretary of the Komsomol, Viktor Mironenko, claimed that over 60% of known drug addicts were young people [Mironenko 1989a cited in Pilkington 1994: 192]. My own small ethnographic study of youth cultural groups in Moscow between 1988–91¹ also found evidence of problem and injecting drug use. One group of punks reported conscious 'misuse' of pharmaceutical drugs given to them as part of their 'treatment' for certified mental illness [Pilkington 1994: 220] and these informants were closely associated also with circles in which *vint*² was used regularly. The punks' classification of these *vint* users as drug addicts [*narkomany*] provides an interesting example of the pervasive nature of dominant discourse: the punks sought to narrate their own 'subversive' or 'resistant' misuse of prescribed drugs as different from the 'problem' drug use of the *vint* users, despite the fact that ethnographic observation revealed that they partook of these drugs when on offer.

Notwithstanding these encounters, Moscow's youth cultural scene in the last few years of the Soviet period was remarkable for the absence of routine 'recreational' use of drugs and drugs talk. Notable too was the presence of a precursor of the 'straight edge'³ movement.

The 'softening' of borders following the collapse of the USSR in 1991 allowed widespread access to drugs for the first time, including the extensive distribution of cheap heroin from the Central Asian region. Young people coming onto the youth cultural scene in the mid 1990s

¹ For full details of this research and its methodological basis see [Pilkington 1994: 199–215].

² *Vint* is a methamphetamine solution that became popular on the Russian youth cultural scene in the 1980s. Its active precursor, ephedrine is extracted from the ephedra shrub and is part of many over-the-counter and prescription medications such as cough syrups. This is either 'brewed' at home or sold in ampules or 'ready to go' syringes for intravenous use.

³ This is a term generally used to describe off-shoots of the punk and hardcore rock scenes who consciously reject the 'drugs and sex' elements of rock and roll identities, choosing instead lifestyles in which they abstained from smoking, drinking, illicit substance use and 'promiscuous' sexual relations [see Wood 2003]. However, it might equally be applied to the group norms described by the group central to my ethnographic study in 1991, the *stiliagi*.

rather than the mid 1980s therefore encountered an environment in which drugs had become ubiquitous [Pilkington 1996: 241]. The sale and use of drugs on the newly developed club scene was largely uncontrolled [or rather was controlled only by those profiting from it], and stories of deaths from drugs overdoses or drugs-related suicides were commonplace [Ibid.]. These observations are confirmed by official Russian data. Figures from the Ministry of Health show a seventeen-fold rise in the number of 'teenage drug addicts' between 1991 and 2001 [Koshkina 2003: 126] while the UNODC has estimated that over two-thirds of 'drug addicts' are under 30 years of age [The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2003: 22]. Although these data capture specifically problem drug use as they are based on young people reporting for treatment for drug addiction, survey data provide additional evidence that a range of drugs are being used increasingly by a broader than ever cross-section of young people in Russia. In an article entitled 'Pokolenie, kotoroe teryaet Rossiya' Aleksandr Arefyev reports on research conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research under the Ministry of Education of Russia (June 2001), in which he participated. This research studied substance use among young people (aged 12–22), based on representative samples of youth in the capital cities and regional centres of Russia. The survey suggested that all young people (whether or not they used drugs themselves) were knowledgeable about drug use and that of the total sample 44.7% had experimented at least once with drugs while almost 8% were drug-dependent¹. Among the oldest cohort they studied (18–22 years) the figure for life-time reported use of drugs rose to 60% and the 'drug dependent' category to 13%. This level of life time reported use approximates that found in the UK where 50–60% of young people have experimented with an illicit substance by age 18 [Parker et al 1998: 153], suggesting that despite the fact that the rise in prevalence of drug use began in Russia around 10–15 years later than in Western Europe, drug experimentation and use is a shared experience for young people across Europe today.

These similar sociological findings, however, have had very different discursive impacts. Parker et al's study of drug use among young people in the North West of England pre-empted first an academic and then a wider public discursive shift. Recognition of the prevalence of reported drug experimentation and use led to the sociological (and to a limited extent also judicial) re-categorisation of certain drugs as 'recreational' based on a new understanding of the context of the kinds of drugs being used and the ways in which they were used by young people. In contrast, in Russia, these findings have encouraged academic discourse to shift away from study-

¹ Defined as 'using drugs at least once in two days' although no differentiation is made between different types of drugs and their relative addictive quality.

ing the drug addiction [*narkomaniya*] of youth 'at the margins' towards charting the 'narcotisation' [Zhuravleva, 2000] or '*narkotizm*'¹ [Stozharova 2003] of youth as a whole.

While this approach moves the debate forwards in terms of monitoring rates and kinds of drug use across the whole population, much sociological research continues to fail to differentiate between types of drug, frequency of use, or modes of use. This is best illustrated by the continued use of the shorthand *narkoman* ['drug addict'] to refer to drug users regardless of the addictive qualities associated with the drug used, or the frequency or length of use. Although there are exceptions to this rule [Malikova 2000; Omelchenko 1999; Omelchenko 2000] this undifferentiated approach is transmitted widely into public discourse by media reports, local administration documentation and educational interventions in a way that amplifies the original social phenomenon and reinforces the urgency and degree of social control necessary to 'control' it [Cohen 1987]. Moreover, in contrast to the debate in the West noted above, in which young people are seen as active agents making consumer choices about drug use, in Russia drug use is presented as the consequence of a combination of changes experienced by Russian society to which young people are particularly 'vulnerable' [Arefyev 2002, p.1]. Drug use is thus presented not as a conscious choice but an option that young people 'fall into' as a consequence of failure to adapt to social and economic transformation [Williams, Chuprov and Zubok 2003: 104; Bykov 2000: 48]. Alternatively, it is represented as 'deviant behaviour' that compensates for poverty of experiences [Zhuravleva 2000: 43] or reflects the 'moral dead end' of post-Soviet society [Stozharova 2003: 108].

Of course the analysis of public [including academic] discourse on drug use requires a much more nuanced discussion than is possible here. As Elena Omelchenko argues, in fact dominant discourse consists of a number of distinct but interlocking discursive strands including: 'urban folklore' rooted in the common wisdom that peppers everyday conversation and media extracts; 'moral panic' found in the media and among teachers, parents and professionals working in drug treatment and education; academic discourse within which scientific 'knowledge' about drug use is presented; state discourse detailing the political priorities and resources relating to resolving the 'drug problem'; and experiential discourse drawing on accounts of personal experience and practical knowledge about drug use [Omelchenko 2005; Omelchenko 2006]. Thus public discourse on drug use is not 'moral panic' in a simple sense. However, it is

¹ These terms are in general use in Russian sociology: *narkomaniya* relates to drug addiction as a medical state; and *narkotizm* signifies the level and character of drug use [Gabiani 1990: 214].

important for the discussion of ‘generational experience’ in this article to establish that the extension of drug-use experience to a much broader cross section of young people than ever before has not effectively challenged dominant discourse on drugs. Drug use continues to be presented exclusively as ‘problematic’ and thus it is not drug use, but the current generation of youth, that has been reclassified — as ‘narcotised’ and thus ‘lost’.

Methods

In the second half of this article, I use original sociological research to directly address the question of the degree to which it is possible to talk about a particular cohort of young Russians — those born in the last years of the Soviet regime and thus who experienced their school, student and young working lives in a drug saturated environment — as a ‘narcotised’ or ‘chemical’ generation. The empirical data drawn on comes from research conducted in the Russian Federation in 2002–03.¹ Fieldwork was conducted in three regions of the country — Krasnodar region, Samara province and Komi Republic² — and in three towns or cities within each area.³ The elements of the project drawn upon here employed three main data gathering methods: a representative survey; semi-structured interviews; and intensive ethnographic studies.⁴

The representative survey was conducted among a regionally based representative sample of 14–19 year olds [n=2814] accessed via educational institutions in each of the nine fieldwork sites.¹ Semi-structured interviews [n=95] were conducted in parallel with the survey in each of the nine towns and cities. Respondents were in-

¹ This research was conducted with the financial support of the ESRC [Ref. R000239439] and a full report of its findings is available electronically [see Pilkington 2004]. The project was a collaborative one between the University of Birmingham, UK and Ul’ianovsk State University, Russian Federation. It was designed and led on the UK side by Hilary Pilkington and, on the Russian side, by Elena Omelchenko. This article was written by Hilary Pilkington but is based on research conducted by the whole team which consisted of: Hilary Pilkington, Elena Omelchenko, Erica Richardson, Natalya Goncharova, Evgeniya Lukyanova, Olga Dobroshtan, Irina Kosterina, and Elvira Sharifullina. The team was assisted in the regions of fieldwork by Svetlana Yaroshenko, Oleg Oberemko, Dmitry Nechaevsky, Aleksandr Shekhtman and Svetlana Teslya.

² These regions were chosen to reflect a geographical spread from the far South to the far North of the country and to capture the full diversity of drug markets in Russia: Krasnodar region borders the Black Sea in the South of Russia and is a natural cannabis growing area; Samara province is in the Volga region of European Russia and is a central crossroads for drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan to Western Europe; and Komi Republic is in the climatically harsh Far North of Russia and is isolated both from domestic production areas and normal trafficking routes.

³ In each case one site was the second city in the region — Vorkuta, Tol’iatti and Sochi — and two were medium-sized cities/towns [50–120,000 population]. In Komi Republic these were Ukhta and Pechora, in Samara Region, Chapaevsk and Otradnoe and in Krasnodar Territory Belorechensk and Slaviansk na Kubani.

⁴ Expert interviews with personnel from key agencies in drugs education work in Vorkuta, Tol’iatti and Sochi formed an additional element of the project. Data from this part of the study are not drawn on for the purposes of this article.

vited to participate in interviews of 45–90 minutes duration following completion of the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted anonymously and took place either immediately after completion of questionnaires, usually in an empty classroom, school yard or on a bench close to the school, or in another (public) place at a convenient time for the respondent. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using ATLAS.ti employing a common coding scheme. Ethnographic studies were undertaken in three field sites — Sochi, Vorkuta and Chapaevsk — with a total of nineteen friendship groups of young people. A young researcher was located in each of these sites for a period of six weeks in Spring 2003. Initially contacts were taken up with respondents who had offered their help during the survey or interview work stages of fieldwork, but researchers subsequently followed their respondents into their friendship circles and were not bound by the ‘quota’ criteria of the survey and semi-structured interview elements of the project. Thus participants involved in the ethnographic elements of the project were sometimes younger than 14 or older than 19. The researchers were supported by two training sessions prior to fieldwork and used mobile phones and internet cafés to maintain frequent contact whilst in the field. Each researcher compiled a diary of observations and invited key respondents to assist the research by making their own diaries [audio or written]. Researchers and respondents also included photos in their diaries and collected local artefacts such as posters, fliers and musical recordings.

The analysis here draws primarily on the narratives of young people during interviews and upon observations and interviews conducted during ethnographic work. The relationship between generational experience and generational consciousness will be problematised in two respects. Firstly, it will be suggested that young people do not passively accept their discursive positioning as ‘narcotised’ but actively engage with, reflect on, and rework it. Secondly, young people’s responses to the drug saturated environment they routinely encounter will be discussed. Considering the wide variation — by gender, regional location, age and peer group norms — in young people’s responses to drug encounters and offers illustrates the importance of individual (and collective) reflexivity in understanding how individuals respond to social change in late modern society. This understanding of the discursive relationship between members of a ‘generation’ and prevalent discourses is, it is suggested, essential if the concept of ‘generational consciousness’ is to be reclaimed in a late modern form.

¹ These data are touched on only briefly in this paper and further details of both the results and the methodological underpinnings of this element of the work can be found in [Pilkington 2004].

A drugs generation? The illusion of discursive homogeneity

There is no doubt that the sustained and recurrent discursive positioning of the younger generation in Russia as ‘narcotised’ leaves a strong imprint on the way young people talk about themselves, at least, that is, when they, as individuals, talk about their ‘generation’ as a whole. Thus when respondents talked about the people they encountered in the wider youth cultural environment, that is ‘youth’ in general, drugs were mentioned as being ‘everywhere’ and ‘youth’ in general was represented as a drug-aware and drug-using generation. Findings from the survey element of the empirical research outlined above show that 27% of all respondents had been aware either of people under the influence of drugs or of the sale of drugs¹ in the leisure places they frequented. Young people’s interview narratives also suggest that young people consider these encounters with drug use in their leisure venues as trivial, or ‘everyday’.

However, at the same time that they reproduce dominant discourse about ‘the younger generation’ as a whole, respondents tend to position themselves within the ‘moral majority’ that condemns such behaviour. Thus, the majority of respondents in our survey [56%] considered the presence of drugs at leisure venues to make such venues *unattractive* and during interviews many respondents cited the presence of ‘drug addicts’ as a reason for avoiding certain leisure venues. The following respondents — one from Vorkuta and one from Tolyatti — illustrate this when they describe local venues well known for being frequented by drug users [and dealers] whilst dis-identifying their own leisure practice from them:

Respondent: *Here the most druggy place is... [names leisure venue]. Every other person there is a drug addict and every third is a banker.*

Interviewer: *What do you mean by a ‘banker’?*

Respondent: *I mean they’re selling drugs. But then, I don’t know — actually very few of the people I know go there, and I know a lot of people. [Vorkuta, male, 18 years, ‘regular user’]²*

¹ Of those who had come across the use or sale of drugs where they hung out, almost two-thirds [65.9%] said this drug was cannabis and 21.9% said this drug was heroin. Encounters with other ‘recreational’ drugs such as Ecstasy and other amphetamines that one might expect to find on the scene, were minimal.

² Respondents are referred to by place of residence, gender, age and drug-using status. Drug-using status is determined by responses to a question during the semi-structured interview when they were invited to choose one of 14 descriptions of their personal drug experience. These responses were used to classify respondents into four broad categories: ‘abstainers’ [*otkazniki*] capturing respondents choosing the descriptor ‘have never tried any drug and never will’ or ‘have experimented with drugs but now abstain’; ‘experimenters’ [*razoviki*] indicating respondents who described their drugs experience in terms of a single or series of one-off ‘experiments’ with drugs; ‘regular users’ [*regulatory*] designating respondents who described their use as repeated and regular; and ‘future users’ [*budushchie*] describing respondents who are current abstainers but do not rule out future use.

Interviewer: *What didn't you like about it?*

Respondent: *Well how can I put it? There are drug addicts [narkomany] there, and girls get picked up a lot — I didn't like it.*

Interviewer: *How do you mean 'drug addicts'? You mean you yourself saw drug addicts there?*

Respondent: *Well they just sit there doped up. I don't know — they can't even speak. I don't like people like that.... All the men there are doped up all the time. [Tolyatti, female, 18 years, 'abstainer']*

However, even where there is maximum continuity between dominant and youth discourse, the homogenising discursive construction of drug use in Russia is illusory. Young people, like the wider public, draw differentially on the many discursive strands of dominant understandings of drug use in constructing their own understanding of drug issues [Omelchenko 2005: 81]. Moreover, young people's engagement with dominant discourse on drug use is extremely varied, being differentiated by gender, region, educational experience and ethnic background. Above all, however, it is differentiated by young people's own (and their friends') drug experience.

Respondents with no personal (or familial/close friendship group) experience of drug use tend to treat information about drugs received from 'experts' (teachers, drugs specialists, police) as absolute truth and consider the actions of the law enforcement agencies as necessary and effective. Such 'abstainers',¹ in contrast to 'experimenters' and 'regular users', draw primarily on media discourse for their information about drugs. Consequently this group articulates a strongly 'deviant' image of drug users that depends heavily on 'moral panic' from the media, reinforced by urban myth. 'Abstainers' imagine drug use to be a phenomenon located among a particular 'risk group', which includes both people from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' [*neblagopoluchnye semi*] and from rich families. The former are described as using drugs to 'escape their problems' while the latter use drugs out of boredom, or having 'nothing to do'. In the first instance the parents are blamed, in the second, the drug users themselves. The reasons cited by young 'abstainers' for not trying drugs themselves include concerns about their personal health, future, and parental censure, as well as group norms, including the strong stigmatisation of 'other' groups in which drugs are used.

¹ Drug-using status is determined by responses to a question during the semi-structured interview when they were invited to choose one of 14 descriptions of their personal drug experience. These responses were used to classify respondents into four broad categories: 'abstainers' [*otkazniki*] capturing respondents choosing the descriptor 'have never tried any drug and never will' or 'have experimented with drugs but now abstain'; 'experimenters' [*razoviki*] indicating respondents who described their drugs experience in terms of a single or series of one-off 'experiments' with drugs; 'regular users' [*regulatory*] designating respondents who described their use as repeated and regular; and 'future users' [*budushchie*] describing respondents who are current abstainers but do not rule out future use.

'Abstainers' who not only abstain themselves, but who also have no experience of drug use in their friendship groups, include in the definition 'drug users' those employing all forms of illicit drugs, including cannabis. They are likely to refer to 'drugs' in general [*narkotiki*] rather than to particular drugs. However, those who have friends in their group who smoke cannabis tend to exclude cannabis from their understanding of an illicit drug even where they generally fail to distinguish between 'soft' and 'hard' drugs. At the same time, even 'abstainer' groups are 'drug-wise' to some extent; narratives within friendship groups contain drugs-related terms and expressions previously confined to specific subcultures, and respondents tread a fine line between portraying themselves as 'drug-wise', since this gives them a degree of youth cultural credibility, and pre-empting any suggestion that they are actually drug users.

Current 'abstainers' who had experimented with drugs in the past differ from 'absolute' abstainers in their greater tendency to draw on medical discourses of drug use (as an illness that required treatment) and to apportion more blame to friendship groups (rather than the individual themselves) for affirmative drug decisions. They tend to explain their own past use as a single, meaningless, experiment, which occurred as a result of 'the situation'. Such respondents also frequently refer to the 'lack of effect' the drug had on them to explain the decision not to repeat the experimentation.

With age, and/or increasing contact with drugs themselves or within their friendship groups, respondents encounter an increasing contradiction between dominant discourse and personal experience. Many of these young people describe themselves as 'experimenters' although their 'experiments' with drug use may be single or repeated, making the line between experimenters and (occasional) users a fine one. These respondents repeat dominant discourse that 'drugs are bad' — illegal, harmful to health — and 'not normal', but articulate openly and in detail the drug practices of 'others'. 'Moral panic' is thus replaced by a pragmatic attitude to the 'problem' and talk of the dangers of drugs in general is replaced by talk about particular kinds of drugs. They differentiate between 'soft' and 'hard' drugs and effectively remove the use of the former as a referent for dominant (negative) discourse. Cannabis use, in particular, is talked about in a way that suggests that in some regions (especially where cannabis grows wild) it has become normalised. Striking is the everyday use of terms such as 'to have a smoke' [*poiti pokurit*] which often makes cannabis use indistinguishable from cigarette smoking.

This position is evident in the following respondent's narrative when he makes clear that, on the one hand, cannabis use is *'Fine, who*

hasn't had a go? Everyone has [Normalno, kto ne proboval, vse probovali] [Belorechensk, male, 17 years, 'experimenter'], but on the other it is only acceptable when disassociated from any compulsive or excessive behaviour. Thus he describes his own past use as motivated by purely recreational impulses, 'Well, I'd have a puff, but not so as to get doped up.' This is indicative of the way 'experimenters' are keen to distinguish their own drug experience from those they describe as 'drug addicts' [*narkomany*]. The latter are described as either 'hard drug' (heroin) users or those who use more frequently than the respondent. Thus, the cannabis experimenter just referred to goes on to pick out 'hard drug users' as the kind of people with whom his friendship group would avoid all contact describing them as 'people who are out of it' [*kakie-nibud' konchen-nye*].

'Experimenters' as a rule do not uphold urban folklore about young people being forced into drug use; rather they see drugs decisions either as being part and parcel of the normal social 'situation' — '*If someone brings [a smoke]. Well, okay, we'll go try it*' [Kto-to prinset. Nu poidem, ladno, poprobuem] [Tolyatti, girl aged 16, 'experimenter'] — or as being an individual choice, enacted usually out of 'curiosity'. Consequently, many young people falling into this category describe their own drug use in terms of 'experiments' and many attribute the decision not to continue use to the fact that curiosity had been satisfied. Others cite disappointment with their first experiments, fear of addiction, or a desire to be healthy and active [especially in sport] as the primary reason for not continuing use. This group had experimented primarily with cannabis and considered the use of this kind of 'soft drugs' to be 'normal' at the frequency level that they themselves used. This group is strongly inclined also to say they might use drugs again in the future and to have no stigma attached to discussing drugs (except heroin).

'Regular users' are also a broad group ranging from occasional, but regular, to frequent and chaotic users. Most respondents in this category were cannabis users, although heroin users were found in Tolyatti and Chapaevsk, and *vint* users were encountered in Vorkuta. In all three towns and cities of Krasnodar Territory all regular users preferred cannabis, although some had experimented with other drugs (including heroin) alongside their regular use of cannabis. Regular users report frequent discussion of drug use within their friendship groups, and their narratives reveal an extended drugs vocabulary in the detailed descriptions of their own drug practices. These narratives show that cannabis use is a group activity which, in particular, serves to enhance male solidarity. In contrast *vint* and heroin do not appear as group practices in respondents' narratives and even experiments with heroin are said to be profoundly personal and are, as a rule, not shared with others.

Interestingly, even among regular users, allusion to the importance of ‘the situation’ remains a strong neutralisation technique. From regular users’ narratives it appears that nobody ever buys drugs for themselves. Drugs are used, rather, when the situation dictates — ‘*kak poluchaetsya*’ — rather than out of any conscious desire or ‘need’ for drugs. This is important in allowing respondents to separate their own drug practice from ‘drug addiction’. Thus the following respondent — who considered herself not to have used drugs because she did not consider cannabis to be a drug — describes a typical situation in which she might use cannabis:

Interviewer: *What did they say when they offered you some?*

Respondent: *‘Come on, let’s have a smoke’. [I said] ‘Let’s go’.*

Interviewer: *And where did you smoke?*

Respondent: *Sometimes in the stairwell, sometimes outside, just about everywhere.*

Interviewer: *And if you think back to the times when you had a smoke, why did you do it?*

Respondent: *No reason, just to relax. I don’t know really, it was just a normal evening. [Chapaevsk, girl, 16, ‘regular user’]*

As with the other groups, ‘regular users’ do not consider themselves to be *narkomany*. These people are labelled asocial, subculturalised, and criminalised; most frequently they are referred to as ‘out of it’ [*konchennye*]. This construction of the ‘drug addict’ reveals the fear of physical degradation, infection with HIV, and the unaesthetic manifestations of injecting drug use that continue to be deterrents to ‘hard drug’ use as evident from the following respondent’s differentiation between people like him (cannabis users) and ‘addicts’:

I don’t consider drug addicts to be even human. I don’t mean those who smoke grass or hashish, ‘soft’ drugs like that.... But those who have really hit bottom. Them and alcoholics. It is a sign of their own weakness. They are just surrendering and you can’t count on anything from them. They are just finished. They are just pointlessly living out their time. [Vorkuta, male, 18 years, ‘regular user’]

Neutralisation techniques among this group are numerous and taken together they work to remove cannabis use from the dominant discourse of drugs. Specific narrative techniques include reference to: the widespread, everyday use of cannabis (especially true of Krasnodar Territory); the less harmful health effects of cannabis use in comparison to alcohol (vodka) use; the less antisocial characteristics of cannabis (in particular its non-association with aggressive behaviour); the non-addictive quality of cannabis; and the legal status of cannabis in some other countries. Where respondents have heroin users within their own friendship group, this often acts as a mechanism of justifying respondents’ own drug use; the heroin use is portrayed as relatively more risky.

The attitude to those who use hard drugs varies from indifference to acute criticism. For some respondents heroin users are people who have overstepped the boundary of what is 'normal' but who, nonetheless, have been enriched with new life experience and thus earn respect. For others, experimenting with heroin is seen as the first step in a downward spiral leading to an individual's loss of freedom (through imprisonment), loss of health, loss of friends and family, and potentially to loss of life (through overdose, HIV/AIDS etc.). The ambivalence in attitudes towards heroin experimentation is a product of the clash between dominant and youth discourses where the dominant discursive construction of addiction resulting from a single experiment clashes with youth discourses in which the line between experimentation and regular use is much finer. In contrast, youth and dominant discourses meet and reinforce each other in relation to the concept of dependency; dependency is the defining characteristic of the drug addict [*narkoman*].

However, 'regular user' respondents are less consistent in how they demarcate the *narkoman* by frequency of use or type of drug use. The only consistently ostracised group are those who inject; and often this is further confined to heroin injectors; this leaves *vint* injectors and heroin snorters as potentially 'okay'. This group of people recount mechanisms for controlling drug use to avoid dependency, or for 'getting off' drugs if dependency has occurred. In this way the definition of *narkoman* shifts amongst regular users to become identified with 'dependency' where that is understood as a direct product of failure to control one's dose. The following excerpt from a respondent regularly using (first snorting, now injecting) heroin illustrates this narrative of control:

Respondent: *I don't know, maybe it was luck, because I didn't have time, and, well, I somehow realised that, in the long run, you can get addicted and so I controlled myself.*

Interviewer: *How did you control it?*

Respondent: *Well, let's say if I had used for 3 days on the run, I would say to myself 'You could get addicted, maybe that's enough, I'll go get some beer instead.' And that was it, no problem.*

Interviewer: *And your friend...?*

Respondent: *[interrupts]... he is exactly the same.*

Interviewer: *Exactly the same. And how long can he use without over-doing it?*

Respondent: *Well it's already been three or 4 years.*

Interviewer: *The same then.*

Respondent: *Yes*

Interviewer: *And among your friends are there people who used regularly and then managed to give up?*

Respondent: *Yes. It's not as difficult as they say. I don't know, why. Maybe in Moscow or Petersburg drugs are of a different quality and*

it is more difficult to get off them. Here ...you put up with it for a couple of days, and it's all okay. [Tolyatti, male, 18 years, 'regular user']

The 'normalisation' of the presence of drugs among the youth population thus, does not represent the formation of a distinctive, generational, drugs-approving, subcultural world counterposed to 'adult' disapproving narratives about drug use. Rather we find young people, at the general level, accepting that their 'generation' is a drug using one, and repeating dominant discourse about the negative and ubiquitous presence of 'drugs' and 'drug users'. However, at the individual and group level they rework mainstream discourses about drugs through processes of reformulation, mythologisation, resistance, rejection, ridicule, critique, and vulgarisation. While young people confirm drugs encounters and experience as something shared by the younger generation, they reject the key identification with the subject of that activity that is the '*narkoman*'. None of the respondents referred to themselves as such; for 'abstainers', 'experimenters' and 'regular users' alike, any question about drug users employing the standard Russian term *narkoman* resulted in an immediate distancing ('othering') of the respondent from this referent. Narratives focussed on the difference between 'normal' people and '*narkomany*,' where the latter were described as 'finished' [*konchennye*] in terms of their life prospects. Thus, the analysis of young people's own narratives of drugs and drug use among their peers shows that young people confirm dominant discourse that suggests that drugs and drug addicts [*narkomany*] are a real social problem, and a problem that is particularly associated with their 'generation'; but in recognising 'the problem' it becomes associated with an 'other' *deviant*, youthful population, and dissociated from their own drug use or experimentation experience. In this sense, the discursive construction of generational experience is engaged with reflexively by young people, as a consequence of which their personal experience is disaggregated from its 'generational' location.

A drugs generation? Drug use and drug decisions

In this section I want to look more specifically at the relationship between discourse and behaviour by putting what young people say about drug use in the context of their own drug use decisions. Elsewhere I have critically discussed western discourse on youth and drugs that posits young people as reflexive individuals whose knowledge of drugs and engagement with 'expert systems', which inform about the risks entailed in their use, such that they make informed 'consumer' choices about drug use [Pilkington 2007]. In contrast, contemporary Russian discourse virtually equates 'informedness' about or 'familiarity' with drugs with deviance. Arefyev [2002], for

example, notes that the defining generational difference between this generation of young people and earlier ones is that 'Young people today (in contrast to the middle-aged and elderly) are extremely well-informed about drugs' and uses the term 'acquainted' [*znakoma*] with drugs to indicate having experimented with drugs. Thus, while Western discourse overemphasises the individual, consumer, cost-benefit nature of drugs decisions [Pilkington 2007], Russian discourse overplays the mass, 'generational' aspect of drug use and credits young people with little capacity for individual (or collective) resistance to the drugs-saturated environment they encounter. In the final section of this article, I want to briefly illustrate how the diversity of responses to encounters with, and offers of, drugs among young people, as well as the group context of these responses, illustrates, on the contrary, an active, both individual and collective, engagement with, even resistance to, becoming a 'chemical generation'.

The empirical research upon which this article is based confirms a high level of informedness about drugs among young people and high exposure to drugs and drugs discourse regardless of their own drug use experience. But does this 'informedness' reflect their own use and own identification with a 'chemical generation'? The survey element of the research actually showed that, despite their knowledge about and encounters with drugs, almost 80% of respondents had never used drugs and of those 20% that had used drugs, in 80% of cases the drug used was cannabis.¹ Thus, the majority of young people are coming to drugs decisions which engage with, or indeed reject, their generational positioning as 'narcotised'. The decisions young people actually make, and the alternative norms, narratives and discourses of drug use that they develop in order to enable these decisions, however, vary considerably and it is the variety of ways young people engage with drugs talk in coming to those decisions that is discussed below.

For those who abstain from drug use, drugs-talk is often excluded from the discursive repertoire of the group as a means of protecting the group from infiltration by them, or reducing talk of drugs to the figure of the 'drug addict' as a figure of ridicule or hate:

¹ Our survey findings suggest a lower life-time reported drug use rate than some other recent Russian surveys. The survey cited by Arafeyev, for example found that only 55% of young people (12–22 years) had no life-time reported use of drugs. One reason for this is that the latter survey includes a wider age range, proportionately higher at the top end which raises the likelihood of use. It is important to note, however, that our survey used a quota-based sample and accessed respondents via educational institutions, which means that the sample does not capture young people with problem drug use who are not participating in education. However, in other aspects, our data may be more representative than other youth-targeted surveys on illicit substance use since it was collected in medium sized cities (50–120,000 population) rather than major cities (especially regional centres) which show higher than average prevalence rates.

No, we haven't talked about it. We don't talk about things like drugs. Except as a laugh like... These drug addicts [narkomany] aren't treated seriously. Everyone just hates them. [Tolyatti, male 18–19 years, 'abstainer']

However, where respondents have more experience of engaging with young people using drugs, they may develop a more critical attitude to both dominant and peer-based drugs talk. The following respondent, for example, suggests that media attention to drugs itself incites an 'unhealthy' interest in drugs among young people:

Respondent: *Drugs are something we kind of don't talk about. The more discussion about it there is, the more you feel like doing it, you see.*

Interviewer: *You mean discussion in a narrow circle of friends or more generally in the press?*

Respondent: *I think that if it was discussed less, there would be a lot less drug addicts.*

Interviewer: *I see, thanks. And what is your own attitude to those who use drugs?*

Respondent: *I just don't notice them, they don't bother me in any way. [Slavyansk, male, 17 years, 'abstainer']*

Abstainers, however, may use their discussion of drug use also to develop collective norms that can be used as lines in the sand to mark out acceptance and exclusion from the group:

Well, yeah, we said that if anyone was to start taking drugs, like, then we couldn't be friends with them. [Sochi, male, 14–15 years, 'abstainer']

Such norms can then be enacted as a mechanism to police individuals and, if necessary, to exclude them from the group:

Yeah, there is a girl like that. She got hooked on pills. And she offered everybody them, but we dumped her. Now she's with her lot over there in Sochi somewhere... We told her, 'Sveta [pseudonym], you don't need that stuff, you just don't need it.' But she was like, 'I can't do without it'. [Sochi, female, 14–15 years, 'abstainer']

In contrast those young people who have experimented with or use drugs occasionally or regularly themselves talk about drugs not as a 'problem' but routinely:

We don't talk about it as a problem, we talk about it as something normal. [Ukhta, female, 16 years, 'regular user']

Within using groups, nonetheless, group norms are established in a way that neutralises, or normalises, the specific kinds of drug use (e.g. cannabis not heroin, smoking not injecting), as is evident from this same respondent's contrasting description of cannabis use

within her own friendship group and, in the second interview excerpt, dependent drug use by 'others':

The lads get stuff for the whole group. A normal amount — I don't think you could get really doped up on it, just enough for it to be good. Of course they don't smoke every day. Every one of them could easily give it up, every one of them. [Ukhta, female, 16 years, 'regular user']

Interviewer: *And what is your attitude to those who have got seriously hooked on drugs?*

Respondent: *I don't talk to them at all. I can't, I don't understand them.*

Interviewer: *And how do you know who they are?*

Respondent: *I can tell by their pupils. Their pupils are small. Their eyes immediately go all, all kind of pearly. And their pupils are tiny, tiny. And you can tell by their voice as well.* [Ukhta, female, 16 years, 'regular user']

The point here is two-fold. Firstly, regardless of how frequent, normal or routine talk about, and encounters with, drugs have become for young people, they are not passive bearers of this discourse. In fact whilst the whole younger generation is discursively positioned as 'narcotised', in practice the majority have no life-time reported drug use and across the spectrum of the 'younger generation' there are as many drugs-related subject positions as there are individuals (ranging from those who have never tried, have never had contact with people who have tried, and have never been offered drugs, to those who are regular users and those who have been dependent users but are now abstainers). To talk about a single 'chemical generation', therefore, is frankly unilluminating. However, and secondly, the failure of young people to adopt a 'mass', 'generational' subject position should not be read as evidence that their drugs decisions are made in a wholly individualised way. Drugs discourse is mediated and drugs decisions taken first and foremost in the context that drugs talk and drugs themselves are encountered; in friendship groups. Whether decisions are to abstain, experiment or use, for young people the friendship group is the key reference point, and a safe and secure context in which they make drugs decisions, as illustrated by the following respondent discussing whether she might experiment with drugs in the future:

Interviewer: *So if you were offered what you called 'soft drugs', cannabis or something, would you refuse, or not? Or would it depend on the situation, and who was offering you?*

Respondent: *It would depend on the situation probably [laughs].*

Interviewer: *And in what situation might you say 'yes' and in what 'no'?*

Respondent: Probably I would say 'yes' if it was people I knew really well and felt at ease and confident. If it was people I didn't know, I would say 'no'. [Tolyatti, female, 18 years, 'abstainer']

Conclusions

In this article, it has been suggested that re-engaging with the concept of 'generation' in seeking to understand the experience of contemporary young people is problematised by the significant conceptual stretching undergone by the term as a result of its use in media and popular discourse to describe the experience of often overlapping cohorts of people of anything from global political events to technological innovations and popular music genres. However, attempts such as that by Edmunds and Turner to reclaim the concept of 'generation' for sociological analysis by distinguishing 'authentic' generational experiences, distilled through the process of knowledge construction by a social stratum of intellectuals, are limited by their failure to address the conditions of late modern society in which global media and communications not only bring people together to share 'generational experience' but are themselves implicit in the construction of that experience. Moreover, the changing nature of these media means that young people are increasingly not only positioned within discourse but engage with it reflexively in interpreting their own experience and enacting lifestyle positions.

This article has developed this critique of the concept of 'generation' with regard to the discursive positioning of young people coming of age from the mid 1990s onwards as a 'chemical generation'. Drawing on empirical research with young people coming of age in the last years of the Soviet regime and with those who constitute the 'first post-Soviet generation', it has been suggested that the current cohort of teenagers is much more informed about drugs, more familiar and accepting of their use and more prone to experimenting with or using drugs themselves. This cohort of young people is also likely to recognise and confirm that 'their generation as a whole' is 'narcotised'. However, when talking about their own, or their friends', drug use and when making their own drugs choices, this generational subjectivity is abandoned. Young people's narratives of drug use become diverse and closely linked to their own drug use experience; the more experience they have, the more their narratives deviate from and challenge dominant discourses of a 'narcotised' and 'lost' generation by redefining their own experience of drug use outside of this discursively constructed one. Young people are acutely aware of, and reflexively engage with, the discursive construction of generational experience and respond to this in an informed and strategic way. Thus, if the notion of 'generation' is to be revived at all, we may need to think about generational con-

sciousness as residing as much in a reflexive engagement with generational positioning as in any substantive generational consciousness derived from shared experience.

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