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Crystal methamphetamine use among American Indian and White youth in Appalachia: Social context, masculinity, and desistance

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Abstract

Rural areas and American Indian reservations are hotspots for the use of crystal methamphetamine (“meth”) in the United States, yet there is little ethnographic data describing meth use in these areas. This study draws upon three years of ethnographic work conducted with American Indian and White youth in Appalachia during the height of the meth epidemic. It describes how historical, cultural, and socioeconomic processes influence vulnerability to meth use in Appalachia, and highlights the role of social relationships and meaning-making in facilitating desistance and recovery from meth use. The first section shows how crystal meth filled a particular functional niche in the lives of many young men, alleviating boredom and anomie linked to recent socioeconomic changes and labor opportunities in the region, and intersecting with local understandings of masculinity and forms of military identity. Here, ethnographic and interview data converge to illustrate how social role expectations, recent socioeconomic change, and meth’s pharmacological properties converge to create vulnerability to meth use in Appalachia. The second section draws upon two American Indian narratives of desistance. These youth described recently severed social relationships and acute feelings of social isolation during the initiation of meth use. Both also described dramatic close calls with death that facilitated their eventual desistance from use, involving repaired social relationships and the establishment of new lives and hope. These interviews illustrate how changes in social relationships were linked with both initiation and desistance from meth use, and how religious interpretations of near-death experiences structured narratives of cessation and redemption.

Keywords

crystal methamphetamine; masculinity; desistance; Appalachia; American Indian; rural

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas and American Indian reservations are especially rife with the manufacture, trafficking, and use of crystal methamphetamine (Iritani, Hallfors, & Bauer, 2007). For example, the 1999 lifetime prevalence of youth meth use was 14.3% in the mostly rural state of West Virginia, versus 2.9% in New York City (including Manhattan and surrounding boroughs), and these rural-urban differences have persisted over the last several years (Centers for Disease Control, 1995). Between June 2002 and September 2005, I lived and worked near an American Indian reservation in Appalachia. This fieldwork occurred during the height of the meth epidemic in the U.S.; in 2001 9.8% of all youth in the U.S. had used methamphetamines (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). With a few exceptions (Pach &

Gorman, 2002; Sexton et al., 2005), there is little ethnographic work on meth use in rural areas or on American Indian Reservations. Based on three years of fieldwork, this paper documents meth use among Appalachian youth, and includes two extensive narratives from American Indians, the ethnic group in the U.S. with the highest rates of youth meth use (Iritani et al., 2007).

In the first section of this paper, I describe “functional” meth use among young, primarily single men in the region (Boys, Marsden, & Strang, 2001). I focus on how the experiential and behavioral effects of crystal meth are interwoven with local constructions of masculinity, including exhibiting prowess in skilled labor jobs, practicing forms of identity with military overtones, and engaging in “bachelor male” risk-taking behaviors. Also, I suggest that the prominent role of crystal meth in young men’s lives is partially facilitated by recent demographic and socioeconomic changes in Appalachia, which has disrupted local life ways and created a changed field of opportunity that is out of step with many youths’ sense of self. The ethnographic voices in this section come from participants who are mostly still involved with meth use. These participants generally felt ambivalent about crystal meth – aware of its dangers but also deeply attracted to its potential for enhancing physical performance, psychological enjoyment, social interactions, and a positive sense of the masculine self. Our conversations about meth use often took the more disjointed form of what Spicer calls “chronicles” of substance use more typical of current users (Spicer, 1998).

In the second section, I focus on two American Indian narratives of long term crystal meth use and eventual cessation. These two youth describe the psychodynamic, phenomenological, and social aspects of initiation, use, and cessation. Similar to existing work on American Indian narratives of substance initiation (Watts, 2001), both of these youth experienced the loss of significant social relationships as precipitating events for the initiation of meth use. While using, both youth faced circumstances in which close friends or family members died or narrowly avoided death. They describe such experiences as transformative, triggering the first steps towards cessation. During cessation, these two youth also describe repairing social relationships and eventually being able to establish new lives, families, and careers. More coherent and developed in form, these conversations very much take the form of what Spicer has coined “redemption narratives” (Spicer, 1998).

During the height of the meth epidemic and in one of its geographical epicenters, I conducted ethnographic research with a population of American Indian and White adolescents and young adults. During interviews, tales of addiction and recovery from meth sometimes formed the central theme, framing a pivotal series of events around which religious, moral, and personal loss and redemption occurred. Much of the material in this report also comes from youth not involved in the study that became friends and acquaintances while living in the area.

In the following pages, I draw upon ethnographic experiences and life history interviews to explore the complex set of dynamics - from structural and institutional to individual and psychological - that contribute to initiation, use, and cessation from meth use among Appalachian youth. Collectively, these voices begin to give us insights about how meth use begins in Appalachia, as well as what processes are involved in the maintenance or cessation of use over time.

METH, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND THE CULTURE OF WORK

Crystal meth arrived in Appalachia during the 1990s, during a time of demographic and socioeconomic change (Thorn, Tickamyer, & Thorne, 2004). Much of this change involved an increase in the tourism sector, vacation homes, and wealthy retiree developments. Such an influx of wealth and population came at a time when traditional lifeways linked to skilled

labor and agricultural work had all but disappeared. This socioeconomic and demographic change has disrupted local identities in a wide variety of ways. Clark¹, a 22-year old White male neighbor, explained the impact of these changes during an evening at a local bar:

Here's the way it is. My dad was made fun of for being the rich kid because he had an extra nickel at the end of the day to buy ice cream. Back then, if you had a 600 acre farm you had it made. There wasn't no Ingle's [local chain grocery store] down the street selling you a bunch of stuff that come up on a truck from Greer, South Carolina. It was so-and-so's grocery store, and his corn, his lettuce, all his stuff! And we had a 600 acre plot in the most pristine valley. . . .

Somewhere between 1945 and 1970, things just went, "Woop!" [imitates tipping a scale], and where you used to be on the top of everything, now you was dirt poor! I mean, nowadays, owning a 600 acre farm?! You ain't shit. I mean, my family's been on the same plot of land for 250 years! Now, you've got all these actors come in and buy up the whole valley, and we can't even afford to pay the property taxes!

Thus, many people in the region had experienced the loss of their sense of place and ownership, and felt they were stuck working for the gain of "outsiders" who have very little concern or respect for the local lifeways or people.

Many of my acquaintances worked on seasonally active carpentry teams, building the new, elaborate homes Clark described for wealthy transplants to the area. Such construction teams were a frequent site for the initiation of meth use, as illustrated by the following excerpt from my field notes:

I sat down at a table of six young men; four of us were White, and two American Indian. . . .Before long, a short, wiry member of the group began telling a story about a co-worker. I remember Clay's eyes lighting up in a mixture of surprise, humor, denigration, and fear at one point in the story. "What?" he said, "I thought Thomas was *stronger* than that."

It turned out that another co-worker from their carpentry team had become addicted to crystal meth, and had ended up in rehab. The reason for Clay's mixed emotions was that almost everyone on the carpentry team used meth from time to time. Men in the region have historically participated in agricultural trades, logging, and other forms of labor that demanded not only physical endurance but skill and an ability to engage in risky behavior on a daily basis (Dunaway, 1996). In the case of this carpentry team, work became both a place to enhance notions of masculinity, productivity, and skill, but also a place for the entry of crystal meth into their lives. These young men were engaged in a strenuous and dangerous seasonal job that demanded 10–12 hour days and was highly competitive, with no guarantee of job stability. Furthermore, many of these men faced ongoing social pressure for display of young, bachelor male behavior (e.g., late-night parties, fast motorcycle riding, etc.).

Crystal meth both objectively (Scott et al., 2007) and subjectively (Lende, Leonard, Sterk, & Elifson, 2007) enhances physical and cognitive performance. This means that meth users very often integrate use into multiple aspects of daily life. A recent multi-site epidemiological and ethnographic study of crystal meth use in five urban centers found that, "Methamphetamine use was related to perceptions that it enhanced sexual, social and occupational performance; thus, it was often integrated into the social fabric and identities of users' lives" (Pach & Gorman, 2002, p.96). Given these multiple demands for physical performance and alertness, crystal meth seemed like the "perfect" functional drug to many working men in the region.

¹All names have been changed to protect the identity of participants.

BOREDOM

Continuing his explanation of recent socioeconomic change, Clark recognized that global socioeconomic change was in the process of steadily removing traditional skilled and unskilled labor opportunities in the region:

Clark: You've got people who came in here, and when all the plants came through, they worked there, and they got some *big* money there, I mean, we are talking working their way up, and the retirement! Whew!

[author]: But now all those are closing down...

Clark: Ohh, it's *gone*. . . . I mean we had [names five plants previously in the area], but that's over now!

Notably, this situation is not specific to Appalachia; across many cultural contexts, global socioeconomic change confronts youths with job opportunities that clash with notions of appropriate, venerable work (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000). This places strain on the identities and everyday experiences of youth, many of whom are suddenly left with a dearth of meaningful work experiences. In place of a sense of skillful engagement with the world, these youth often face a palpable state of boredom, comprising some mixture of anxiety, disengagement, anomie, and a sense of purposelessness with regard to the world. According to Goodstein (Goodstein, 2005), boredom is an affective state that has emerged partially during the modern era as a product of rapidly changing lifeways, and is intimately linked to modernity's capacity to remove individuals from meaningful modes of production. Importantly, boredom is not a neutral affective state, but is generally experienced as aversive and can create the urge for emotional and cognitive escape (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The general feeling of malaise from real and perceived lack of opportunities creates a palpable air of hopelessness and disconnection among many young men. Storm (whose interview I will address further) began his addiction and recovery narrative with a theory of why the region had become such a hotbed of crystal meth. He primarily focused on boredom as cause for the initiation of drug use among youth in the area; "I mean – around here drugs are the main source for people's entertainment here. . . 'cause people sit around and say, 'Oh there ain't nothing to do.'" Jervis and colleagues (Jervis, Spicer, & Manson, 2003) describe similar perceptions of boredom on reservation life in the Great Plains. They also link boredom to changing lifeways, limited job opportunities, and the increasing role of popular culture (and associated expectations) in the lives of American Indian youth, and show how boredom is associated with substance use and other forms of "problem" behavior on the reservation.

Crystal meth provides an immediate escape from boredom. By increasing the bio-availability of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine, meth allows individuals to engage in almost any activity with a greater sense of purpose - hence the notorious mechanical "tinkering" of meth users (Logan, 2002; Scott et al., 2007), who will often spend hours building and taking apart non-functional combinations of mechanical and electronic components. Meth's pharmacological properties thereby assist simple and immediate escape from boredom and anomie, and into intense and pleasurable engagement with the world. For many youth in the area, who were either employed part-time in jobs they dislike (or are simply unemployed), crystal meth seemed to function as a way to more easily tap into the kinds of experiences produced by engaged, skillful work.

MILITARY IDENTITY AND MASCULINITY

The rapid disappearance of venerable, masculine opportunities for work stimulates a sociocultural redefinition of masculinity in thematically related but different terms, including new currencies that are readily attainable. Bourgois (1996, 2003a) explores how the patriarchal agricultural culture of rural Puerto Rico is reproduced on the streets of East Harlem, New York in the form of substance abuse, drug trafficking, and violence. Meanwhile, Fremon (2004) describes how a similar search for the currencies of manhood (respect, economic independence, sexual attractiveness, etc.) sustains prolonged inter-gang violence in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. In Appalachia, these sorts of urban images and identities are available, but not as heavily endorsed. In their place, youth often turn to alternate forms of identity with more military overtones.

Ever since the institution of an all-volunteer force, the poor (especially the rural poor) have been substantial contributors to U.S. military exploits around the world (Janowitz, 1973). This may be for cultural as well as economic reasons; military work intersects conveniently with modes of masculinity in rural areas; it readily taps into personal experiences and the expertise with firearms produced by hunting and agriculture, and also readily accesses notions of risky, honest male work. Participation in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars by Appalachian youth has been significant.

However, the impact of the U.S. military on rural America does not stop with those directly involved in military service. Non-military youth also used military metaphors to give meaning to their everyday lives and also to describe aspects of the self. The expectation of aggression and proximity to death embedded in such understandings of self and the world often meshed very well with forms of local masculinity. This frame of military meaning-making and identity was strongly represented amongst young men using crystal meth.

Notions of military work and a soldier-like identity as acceptable, masculine, and proud pervaded the everyday lives of many local men. In the middle of a day-long bout of drinking, I asked John Ross how the group was still planning to make it out to eat dinner if they were so intoxicated. He staggered up to me and proudly yelled, “*Listen, son! We soldiers! Ain’t nothin’ can touch us, we soldiers!*” implying that no amount of substances could diminish or adversely influence his ability to act and perform in everyday life. He was a soldier - protected, masculine, and impervious to the insults, stressors, daily hassles, or pain of life. This constituted a sort of hyperreal masculinity, an almost comic book-like heroic image of the impenetrable, performing individual (Boyd, 1996).

Pharmacologically, crystal meth can produce both the motivation and skill to engage in military-like activities; it activates neurochemical pathways that increase aggressive drive, as well as paranoid tendencies (Sekine et al., 2006). Both of these are accentuated by the sleep deprivation that accompanies chronic meth use. The combination of aggression, hypervigilance, and sleeplessness produced by crystal meth can help fuel behavior that looks very much like the mission-focused behavior of small, elite military units. The military or “special forces” mentality and behavior pattern is readily apparent in the following interview with a 24-year old American Indian male, Chaz described a long bout of manufacturing and using crystal meth with his uncle while in Texas.

Chaz: You get a lot of paranoia from the dope [crystal meth]. But if you’re making dope, everybody knows it for some damn reason. They know. They ain’t gotta smell the fumes or nothing, they just know the dope’s too damn good to be coming in from other places. It’s gotta be made right there to be that good.

So everybody knew it and the damn policemen were watching us and shit. I remember - I used to hallucinate a lot on it, and the only way to keep myself from hallucinating was to get night vision. I went and bought some night vision goggles.

I'd walk out into the weeds and I'd think I'd see a man in the shadow. And I'd look at it with night vision. And it would just be a tree or something. But it got so bad that I was making it like twice a week. So much dope was getting pumped out of that place, that I used to go stand out there in the middle of the cow field - out there right across from my uncle's house - and just look out in the woods with that night vision. And it had a zoom on it too. It cost like a thousand dollars for this little kit.

[author]: Like military grade, basically.

Chaz: Yeah, and I was looking way out in the fields. And there was a tree line way out through there. And sure enough you could see a cop car sitting right over there, you know? They were trying to see what my uncle and them were doing, but they were doing it in the shed where it was enclosed. Like it had a tin coming this way and a tin coming this way, so you had to walk in between the tin to get inside -

[author]: Right, right, almost like a cattle gate kind of thing.

Chaz: Yeah, and they couldn't never see what was going on in there. They could film all they wanted to. I bet they've got me on film a lot.

In many men using meth, this militaristic identity was accompanied by a deep sense of hopelessness and a drive to annihilate the self. For example, one day before Clay was picked up by police for suicidal threats with a firearm, I spent an evening with him watching "We Were Soldiers," a dramatic film filled with graphic re-enactments of violence from the Vietnam War. During the days leading up to this event, Clay had isolated himself inside the house, covering all of the windows with plastic bags and displaying the intense paranoia often associated with prolonged meth use. As we watched the film, Clay repeatedly emphasized his desire to be on the front lines, and "in the thick of it." The next day, he was hospitalized for attempted suicide.

Among some men, meth use itself was a conscious form of aggression against the self. At the beginning of 2002, Jerry, a jumpy and aggressive 19-year-old White male, sat in my office, nervously fingering the stun gun on his hip. Describing the aftermath of an argument with his fiancée, Jerry said, "I just wanted to buy a hundred dollars worth of dope and . . .and smoke it up just to see if I can bust my heart. . . . After my fiancé left me and took my child, I just didn't know what to do, so I figured that was the only way I could get out of it [through overdose]."

DESISTANCE AND REDEMPTION

The following narratives come from two American Indian youth who initiated use in moments of despair and disconnection from the world, became consumed with using for many months, and then experienced a dramatic rebound and rehabilitation. Storm, a 22 year-old male, grew up both on and off the reservation, attending a local county school rather than the Tribal high school. Meanwhile, Candy, a 23-year old woman, grew up on the reservation her whole life, and had participated consistently in Tribal events and organizations throughout her life.

Storm and Candy described strikingly similar sets of life circumstances, emotional states, and themes related to the initiation of meth use, prolonged use over time, and eventual cessation. Describing their initial use of meth, both set the scene by describing a sense of hopelessness and lack of direction in life. At this time, both Candy and Storm had

experienced a recent shattering of personal relationships, similar to the findings of Watts (2001) in her discourse analysis of American Indian substance use narratives. Storm's descriptions of the personal events surrounding his initial use of meth focus on his impending failure from school and the simultaneous rift in his relationship with his mother:

Storm: I got caught up with that meth my senior year of school, because I wasn't gonna pass. I wasn't gonna get to graduate. I missed it by one credit, and they wouldn't let me.

And, well, I just went out on my own. I left the house, and - mom kicked me out. She goes, "You ain't got a job, you ain't in school," and I was like, "Alright." So I left. I didn't have nowhere to go, but I left. And well, I went to this one dude's house with my buddy, and he introduced me to it. And I was like, "Why not? I ain't got nothing to lose." So I did it.

[author]: Meth you mean.

Storm: Yeah. I ain't got nothing to lose. And I did it, and it just took a toll on me. I mean, it was there for a year straight I was on it.

In Candy's description of her first encounter with meth, she also highlighted a major social loss; separation from her long-term boyfriend of several years¹.

Candy: Well, before I got on meth - two - about two weeks before I got on meth, we had broke up.

[author]: OK.

Candy: And - so the whole time I was on meth, we weren't together. He was on meth too.

Gabe: How long a period of time was that you were on meth?

Candy: About 8 or 9 months. Yeah. He was on it also.

Similar to Storm's story, Candy describes a very casual, almost happenstance initiation to meth use. This was enabled by both the availability of meth via existing networks of friends, and the absence of usual "checks" on risk-taking due to her deep sense of hopelessness in life.

The beginning of it...just went so quick. I went into a house one day. They were, they were doing it. I had no - had no idea what it was. Never seen anything like that in my life. I mean, I seen pot before and stuff like that. But I mean hard stuff, you know, never seen none of that in my entire life. And there it was laying on the table, and they said - they done what they done in front of me, and then they said, "There's a line. If you want it, you can have it. And if you don't, just leave it there." And [they] got up and left the room.

And me - at that time in my life - thinking, "Well, who am I? What am I going to do with my life? Where do I belong?" I mean, completely lost, not knowing what my next step was going to be. Looked at it [the line of meth], and thought, "Well, what's it gonna hurt?" Had no idea the impact of it, and it was *on* from there.

During her first experience, Candy's feeling of aimlessness and hopelessness were instantly transformed into purpose, prowess, and feelings of omnipotence. Through a continuous, expanding set of social relationships, she was able to prolong this initial rush and thrill throughout the night and following morning.

[author]: What was that - that first experience like? I mean -

Candy: I felt like for the first time in a very, very long time - empowered. I felt like I had tons of energy. I felt unstoppable. I felt like - it wasn't like a whole, you know, hallucinogen, where you feel like, "Oh I can fly, and I'm seeing this, and seeing that, and stuff." It was more of - I felt like I was 10 feet tall. And I could do anything I wanted to. And I had the power. And I was full of energy. And I wasn't worrying about what my next step was. And I - and it didn't matter. It didn't matter what was going to happen next, because I felt good at the moment.

[*author*]: How long did that first experience last? You did a whole line...

Candy: I done a line, and it lasted until that evening. But by that point we had went to another house, and they had a line. And then from that house, they had a line, and everywhere I went they had a line.

Spicer (1997) describes similar properties regarding alcohol consumption in American Indian contexts, while Frank et al. also highlight the collective nature of drinking among American Indians (Frank, Moore, & Ames, 2000). Specifically, availability is provided through networks of friends, and reciprocal sharing enables drinking binges over the period of several days, prolonging not only the physiological but the social "high."

TRANSITIONAL MOMENTS: PROXIMITY TO DEATH

Proximity to death formed critical moments of life transition for both Candy and Storm - in Candy's case, narrowly avoiding her own death; in Storm's case, the actual death of a cousin. In these cases, proximity to death was transformational, creating a change of life course, and opening the road to cessation from meth use, also similar to patterns observed by Watts (2001). Leading up to her personal transformation, Candy describes becoming involved increasingly risky situations while using meth:

Candy: I lived - breathed it - stayed awake for a month straight.

[*author*]: No sleep?

Candy: No sleep. Looked bad, I looked really bad. Lost all kinds of weight. That time was kind of - it's a big - kind of a blur. . . . Situations that would happen, that a normal person would not put themselves in. We would just go out and shoot up a car -

[*author*]: - Just firing pistols -

Candy: Yeah. Had a gun in my face, and stood there and dared them to pull the trigger. And then chased them around the house. And then when my cousin had gotten into an argument, and there was a sawed off shotgun laying on the kitchen counter - I picked it up, held it to the guys head, and pulled the trigger [long pause].

Dropped the gun, and realized it was like everything had frozen in time. Everyone was just standing there with their mouths hung open. I guess they were waiting for the boom. Realized that if that gun had been loaded, I could have taken somebody's life, and I wouldn't be where I am right now. Situations like that - that stuff. I would not wish my worst enemy to do that.

Next, Candy describes another close call that portended the necessity of her eventual cessation from meth. In these cases, the theme of divine intervention comes clearly into play.

Oh yeah, and then there was one time that I could have wrecked and killed all of us in the car. We were right beside the mall, and I - where I hadn't been asleep in three or four days. I fell asleep behind the wheel, and I could have swore that my cousin

sitting beside me reached over, grabbed the wheel, pulled us back over onto the road. We'd started swerving off, and he said, "Cous, wake up."

We got where we was going. A couple of hours later I looked at him and said, "How long did I - how long was I asleep?" And he said, "What are you talking about?" And I said, "How long was I asleep when we come by the mall?" I said, "I fell asleep." He said, "I didn't know you did. And I said, "Didn't you reach over and grab the steering wheel and tell me to wake up." He said, "No."

And I mean, I've always been raised up in a Christian home - very Christian - very strong Christian values. So I always believe in the power of prayer and things like that. So, I truly believe that it was God watching over me.

Storm also had a close encounter with death, not his own that of his cousin and close friend:

*Gabe*²: What - what was your inspiration for getting off the meth? What caused -

Storm: My cousin Clark. He was 24 years old. He just got his CDL - it's a truck driving license. And he went to a - one of his buddies' house. He was an older dude, about 60, 70 - and he cooked up some bad stuff on purpose. Because my cousin Clark, he just sat there quiet all the time - I mean - he didn't say not one word the whole time. . . . Well, somebody told David [the man who owned the house] that he [Storm's cousin] was a narc, so he cooked up some bad stuff. And he got a hold of it, and he started puking up blood. Well, they wouldn't let him leave, but he forced his way out the door - still puking up blood.

Drove hisself all the way on over where grandpa lived and went to bed, and didn't wake up. My granny tried to wake him up - [she] didn't know what was wrong with him. They took him to the hospital. He stayed in there maybe a month - if that - three or four weeks. He was in a slight coma, couldn't come out of it, 'cause whatever it was ate his liver up and ate his insides up.

But he come out of it - about - he come out in December, and in July we found out - he was waiting on a liver, and if he stayed clean he would have got a liver. He had to wait a year, and he straightened up. He got right with the Lord. He was in church everyday. He carried the Bible. He carried the Bible - had one scripture in it - highlighted out of the whole Bible and...well...I seen him the happiest and cleanest I ever seen him in that short period of time he had to live. And that was a different cousin I seen... 'cause I grew up...he was like my brother.

And he went back in the hospital, and he - they said he was laying in bed and started throwing up, and his throat exploded, and as soon as his throat exploded, Granny said he just looked at her. He didn't say nothing. He wasn't acting up. Soon as it did, he just looked at her, and closed his eyes slowly. And he passed on July 2nd at 3:30 in the morning. . . .

And I done a bunch of stuff with him. I done drugs he'd done. I drank with him - I mean - he was there when nobody was there for me. And I was there when nobody was there for him. 'Cause he wanted his mom - his mom brushed him off. I mean, Granny and Grandpa had to adopt him. I mean, he had nobody.

As with Candy, the theme of divine intervention figures prominently in Storm's narrative.

Storm: And his death, it opened a lot of eyes. It opened my eyes. I mean, it tore me up, because I don't want to see that. I mean, I done seen my Grandma going the

²"Gabe" is Gabe Cyr, a collaborator and field interviewer who originally connected me with Storm and helped conduct the interview.

year before that, seen my uncle 3 years before that, and I just didn't want a - I told myself I wasn't going to another funeral.

And, well I did. I seen him laying there, and he looked peaceful. He really did. Because I knew he got right. He did. I mean, I believe he talked to God while he was in that first time. He knew what he had to do, 'cause in that scripture, it said, "He has fought a good fight. He - he has earned the right to wear the crown of righteousness."

[author]: That's what he had highlighted [in the bible]?

Storm: Yeah. There's other parts too, but I can't really tell you what it was, 'cause I don't remember. And they put that on his tombstone.

I don't know. It was like it opened my eyes, and turned my life into something good instead of something bad. And, well that's what I did. I mean, I got off alcohol. I got off drugs. I got off everything.

Storm's cousin seems to have reached out from the grave to save him, and to put him on the "right path." At the end of his narrative, Storm leaned back, sighed and said, "He, let's see... blessed me. Let's say that, he blessed me. With his death, he brought a lot of blessing on a lot of people."

DESISTANCE AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Candy and Storm described social relationships as critical facilitators for initiating meth use, but also to cessation. In Candy's case, this involved repairing the relationship with her boyfriend repairing as well as receiving critically timed support from her mother. In Storm's case, this also involved repairing his relationship with his partner, starting a family and the new sense of purpose and direction that this granted his life and sense of self.

Candy recounted her own decision to abstain from meth and to extricate herself from the social circle that was enabling and perpetuating her use; "I remember it being like two or three in the morning. . . and I sat straight up in the bed, and I looked around. And I thought, 'I don't want to do this no more' - still high - I thought, 'I don't want to do this no more.'" Here, Candy faced a critical moment, when she could either re-enter the using and selling culture, or make a change.

Candy: I got in my car. I got out of driveway. I topped the hill. Got onto the interstate, and got out to the red light. And I said, "Where am I going to go?" I thought to myself, "OK, I can go to a buddy's house. Rest up a couple days, and get back on the road, and sell and stuff like that.

"Or," I thought, "I can go to my mom's." And I remember driving. And the next thing I knew, I was knocking on her door squalling. And she looked at me, and she said, "Are you here to rest, or are you here to stay?" And I didn't answer her, 'cause I didn't know. And I went to bed, and I slept for 2 weeks straight.

[author]: Wow, didn't leave the bed -

Candy: Didn't leave the bed. I was so dehydrated. My body was - and my mom didn't know what to do. She had never been around anything like that - had to deal with anything like that. I do remember her helping me drink water and things like that, but I was in bed for two weeks.

At this point, Candy turns from her mother's support to her mending relationship with her boyfriend (the break-up of which coincided with the beginning of meth use). Critically, Candy's relationship with her boyfriend was revived upon her recovery from meth; "And

when I woke up I had finally – you know – come down. That part right there is kind of a blur. Me and my husband had gotten back together. We weren't married, but we had gotten back together as a couple."

Candy's boyfriend was critical to her making it through the period of withdrawal without returning to meth. Together, they engaged in detoxification rituals that he learned during the time he spent in a rehabilitation facility. Traveling to a local vacation spot, Candy's boyfriend steps her through this process in his own version of rehabilitation.

Candy: Me and him took the rest of the money and went to Tennessee for two weeks and just rented a motel room, and hung out at the pool. . . . We went through detox together. Well, he had already went through it. But that was when it hit me that my body is detoxing, and it was the worst experience I can ever remember.

I can remember walking down Gatlinburg, and the craving hit me, and I broke out in sweats. And it was all he could do to get me back to the car and to the motel room. And I laid in bed for three days.

[author]: So he imposed - basically imposed the regime that he had. He helped you go through it, holding your hand through it?

Candy: Yeah. And if it wasn't for him - and I think the prayer of family and friends - I wouldn't have been able to get through it. But when me and him returned from Tennessee, we were two completely different people.

That next week he got a job. I got a job. We got us a place. And we were on the road to recovery. We weren't completely sober because we were still smoking pot, but that was - to us that was a whole lot less than being on that hard stuff that we had been on.

Storm also experienced a transformation in his social relationships during the process of ceasing meth use. He re-established relations with his (now) wife, Sandy, conceived a child with her, and purchased a house. Comparing his new life to the life he had while using meth, Storm shows pride in his accomplishments and a sense of hope for the future; "I wanted more for myself, and I knew I could have more for myself. And well...now I've got more for myself. I've got a kid, I've got a beautiful wife, and I've got a land and a house to call ours. Two, three years ago I didn't have nothing but the clothes on my back."

This new life transformed Storm's perspective on boredom and anomie. Storm originally described having "nothing to do" as the main reason for youth substance use in the region. At the end of his narrative, Storm looked around his trailer, cradled the baby in his lap, glanced at his wife, and said, "Now I realize that there *is* stuff to do. I mean, cut a - cut a yard! Clean something! I mean, there's a lot of other stuff to do besides that negative stuff, which in time took me a little while to realize."

CONCLUSIONS

Crystal meth in Appalachia - much like other substances in other regions (Bourgois, 2003a) - is embedded in a complex web of historical tradition, economic change, geographical particularities, institutional conditions, social relationships, and individual life trajectories. This analysis of meth use and desistance in Appalachia began with descriptions of recent demographic and socioeconomic change in the area, which have resulted in threats to the masculine sense of self and a dearth of gender-appropriate opportunities that create a subjective sense of engagement with the world. In often very seasonal and unpredictable labor jobs, meth use provides access to a hyperreal world of masculinity (Boyd, 1996), whereby extremely long hours can be coupled with a vigorous social life. Meanwhile, for

men who do not have access to these increasingly limited labor opportunities, engagement in a pseudo-military sense of self (often coupled with manufacturing or trafficking drugs) forms another route for the production of a meaningful self, an Appalachian form of “lumpen masculinity” (Bourgois, 2003b). In these cases, crystal meth use adds critically to the set and quality of experiences necessary to achieve a masculine sense of self and the world.

Pharmacologically, meth’s association with focus, motivation, and aggression through increased bio-availability of dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine are critical components of this experiential enhancement (Scott et al., 2007). Youth in Appalachia struggle, as many youth around the world, with the malcontent produced by a rapid socioeconomic change and the low availability of job opportunities that are deemed culturally acceptable, especially for young men (Mains, 2007). Such anomie and disconnection takes on the characteristics of boredom (Goodstein, 2005). Crystal meth’s pharmacological properties provide a ready escape from this sense for youth who otherwise feel that “getting a life” is simply out of reach. For many Appalachian youth, the biochemical properties of a single drug, crystal methamphetamine, filled a particularly empty experiential niche, patching a tear in the fabric everyday experience ripped open by the structural changes of modernity and globalization (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000).

For recovery from crystal meth use, narrative coherence in finding (or re-discovering) purpose in life is particularly important. The form of this meaning may have a particular shape among American Indian youth. Echoing themes found in other American Indian narratives of substance use and recovery (Watts, 2001), Storm and Candy also described transformational incidents, in which a brush with death initiated a series of consequences that led to cessation of use. Critically, desistance also involved the establishment of a new life, the repair of severed or broken social relationships, and a renewed sense of purpose along with reinvigorated social support.

Despite its stereotype as an inexorable scourge that permanently ruins the lives of its users, it is important to keep in mind that many individuals find hope after meth. With her rich set of experiences, Candy is studying to become a counselor, and plans to use her experience with crystal meth to design a reservation-wide campaign against meth use. After two decades of repeated abuse and neglect and one-year of intensive crystal meth use, Storm has begun a new chapter in life with his wife, child, and home, hopeful about his future while maintaining deep humility and a spirit of perseverance.

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