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Contractionist Controversies. Gale Miller and James A. Holstein.

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Ronald Bayer and Gerald M. Oppenheimer (Eds.). *Confronting Drug Policy: Illicit Drugs in a Free Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. \$59.95 hardcover; \$19.95 papercover.

While few would deny that the United States has a drug problem of alarming proportions, there is little agreement about the best way of dealing with it. However, many experts believe that the 'get tough' policy of recent years has been a dismal failure. Not only has it failed to reverse the trend towards greater narcotic consumption, but it has fostered greater drug-associated violence, dramatically increased the prison population and wasted hundreds of millions of dollars on interdiction programs that have not curbed the flow of illicit narcotics.

There is no doubt that new approaches to dealing with the drug problem are urgently needed. This book suggests the most radical of all—decriminalization. Previously dismissed out of hand, de-criminalization is now more openly discussed both in politically conservative and liberal circles. Many experts now believe that a proper debate on the advantages and disadvantages of legalization is urgently needed.

Bayer and Oppenheimer's wide ranging analysis of the issue provides an examination of this kind. Contributors to this important volume deal with diverse facets of the topic and cover critical legal, political, economic and treatment issues. The book contains particularly interesting chapters on the needs of women and children, on the relevance of the Prohibition Era to the current debate, and on the experiences of other countries. This book is an extremely useful source of information and essential reading for anyone interested in the issue of decriminalizing drug use in the United States today.

Gale Miller and James A. Holstein (Eds.). *Constructionist Controversies*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993. \$22.95 papercover. James A. Holstein and Gale Miller (Eds.). *Reconsidering Social Constructionism*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993. \$74.95 hardcover.

Analyses of crime and deviance have not been accorded proper recognition in sociological circles, and the field is still

regarded as a minority sub-specialization within the discipline. While there are many plausible reasons for this state of affairs, a lack of intellectual sophistication cannot be one of them. While several other sociological specializations lack academic rigor, sociological explanations of deviance have produced numerous accounts of substantive theoretical importance.

A cursory examination of Miller and Holstein's two collections will support this assertion. The constructionist interpretation of deviance offers a conceptual view that is fascinating in its use of imagery and profound in its explanatory power. Originating in the 1970s with the work of Kitsuse and Spector, constructionism has certainly not attained canonical status and many who work in the professional field will not appreciate its analytical insights. But few would deny that its framework fosters an innovative way of viewing deviance. Its central claim that deviant behavior is not a personal or social pathology rooted in psychological or social absolutes but a relativist social construct is a critically important one.

This claim is, of course, problematic and Miller and Holstein have performed a major service by bringing together a wide variety of opinions and commentaries on the constructionist approach. Some of the contributions make fascinating reading. Anyone working in the field of deviance, or anyone who has a liking for theory in the social sciences, should read these books.