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Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll: Does Science Matter?

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Scientists, the scientific method, scientific data and interpretation are often employed as "buzz words" or talismans to increase the credibility of an opinion, belief, or proposition. According to at least one commonly accepted storyline, science--a few ethical or moral issues aside--has breathtakingly furthered human knowledge, the True, and the Good. Yet in the United States (US), certain issues subvert this perspective.

Sex. Scientific knowledge on sexual orientation strongly suggests that human sexual predilections seem to be on a continuum of possibilities and often are not immutable. Yet public policy and political dialogue--criteria for denying security clearances, credibility as a political candidate or a parent-- often seems predicated on sexual orientation comprising several discrete, classifications etched in stone except in the most extreme cases.

Drugs. Scientific knowledge on marijuana suggests that in some cases the drug--smoked and inhaled-- may benefit individuals with certain medical disorders. The benefits can include significant symptomatic relief from pain, nausea, ocular pressure, and loss of appetite. Yet attempts to develop public policy and political dialogue logically following from even "strict constructionist" interpretations of science may be hazardous to one's political health as an aspiring candidate for the US ambassadorship to Mexico recently discovered.

Rock and Roll. Scientific knowledge suggests that subliminal perception of antisocial messages does not have a predictable effect on behavior. The evidence on supraliminal perception--forwards and backwards--of such messages is somewhat more complex. For supraliminal backwards--probably no predictable effect. For supraliminal forwards--perhaps some predictable negative effect for certain kinds of people. (The possibility of positive effect has been less often studied.) Yet mandatory classification systems have been implemented to "protect" all people from the deluge of antisocial behavior that otherwise would certainly follow.

Doesn't science matter? Perhaps only when it serves the purposes of the ideologically driven, informed, or bankrupt. Or those in the throes of unconscious conflict, dynamics, and fantasies too threatening to surmise. And for these people, resistance, denial, discounting, and the like are in order. These days, scientists less often are burned at the stake. Instead, by pursuing science they may be burning their bridges instead. (See Boldt, R.M., Mosak, H. H. (1997). Characterological resistance in psychotherapy: The getter. *Individual Psychology: Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research and Practice*, 53, 67-80; Bryson, B. (1996). "Anything but heavy metal": Symbolic exclusion and musical dislikes. *American Sociological Review*, 61, 884-899; Haslam, N. (1997). Evidence that male sexual orientation is a matter of degree. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 862-870; Lewis, A. (October 13, 1997). Medicine and politics. *The New York Times*, p. A15; McCarthy, K. (October 15, 1997). Immigration by the numbers. *The New York Times*, p. A19; Rau, J. C., Pickering, L. D., & McLean, A. P. (1996). Resistance to change as a function of concurrent reinforcer magnitude. *Behavioral Processes*, 38, 253-264; Robbins, A., & Cooper, B. (1993). Resistance in art therapy: A multi-modal approach to treatment. *Art Therapy*, 10, 208-218;

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