

Stigma and Sympathy

by Theodore Dalrymple



Dr. Nora Volkow, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

The wish is often father to the belief, never more so when our interests are in play. But even without material interests, we are often so attached to our ideas or theories that wishful thinking easily overcomes evidence that casts, or at any rate ought to cast, doubt on them. No one is immune from wishful thinking, and therefore from special pleading. Not surprisingly, the latter is easier to spot in others than in oneself.

There is a *déformation professionnelle* that is very common among practitioners of the human sciences, namely the tendency to treat the human beings who are the objects of their study as if they were no different in principle from sticks or stones or stars. A striking example of this tendency was

published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in April this year, in an article titled "[Library of Law and Liberty](#)."