

Dialogue

Understanding the Motivations for Recreational Marijuana Use Among Adult Canadians¹

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The Canadian Special Senate Committee on Illegal Drugs (Nolin, 2003) noted that little ethnographic research had been devoted to exploring why people use marijuana recreationally or the social contexts in which it is used. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative research is to better understand both of these neglected topics through interviews conducted with 41 adult Canadian users between 2005 and 2006. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 61 and included 25 males and 16 females whose consumption patterns ranged from sporadic use to regular daily use. They were predominantly middle class, employed in a wide range of occupations, and used marijuana recreationally to enhance relaxation and concentration while engaged in leisure activities. Implications for drug laws and policies are discussed. The study's limitations are noted.

Keywords marijuana; motivations for use; social context; recreational use; enhancement; qualitative methods; semistructured interviews

Introduction

This exploratory qualitative research seeks to better understand both the motives for the use of marijuana by adult Canadians* and their learned “drug experience” expectancies through an examination of their subjective experiences with the drug. This neglected area of research has implications for drug consumption prevention educators and treatment counselors, particularly those who are wary of “statistical reductionism” and sensitive to the clinical value of gaining an understanding of the subjective experiences of those who use and misuse drugs (Feinstein, 1999).† Appropriate intervention strategies require not only an understanding of motivation but also a determination of what the drug is providing

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*The authors are aware that this sample is not and cannot be representative of either adult Canadians or adult Canadian marijuana users. Editor's note.

†The journal's style utilizes the category *substance abuse* as a diagnostic category. Substances are used or misused; living organisms can be, and are, *abused*. Editor's note.

the individual, their expectations of the “drug experience,” how it makes them feel, why they like it, and how it is being used. It is argued that only after personal motives for the use of a drug are identified can counselors begin to explore attractive alternatives (Pomazal and Brown, 1977).

However, the primary value of this research lies in its implications for current drug control laws. Marijuana use is best described as a conflict crime in Canada. That is, while marijuana is currently prohibited by the state, large numbers of Canadians continue to engage in its consumption (Hagan, 1994). As such, for the past 10 years the topic of marijuana use has garnered a significant amount of public attention in Canada with much of the legal and social debate centered on the discussion of decriminalization.² For a century, the expensive enforcement-based drug prohibition strategy has been a failure having done nothing to curb illegal drug use or reduce the organized crime associated with it. Furthermore, between 1989 and 2002, the numbers of Canadians who have tried cannabis has doubled (Tjepkema, 2004, 43) and although the rate of drug related offences dropped 6% in 2005, driven by a 12% decrease in cannabis offences, the possession, trafficking, importation, and cultivation of cannabis continue to dominate overall drug offences. In 2005, of a total of 92,255 drug offences, more than half, 59,973 were related to cannabis (Statistics Canada, 2006). Indeed, the marijuana industry in Canada is highly lucrative and has become, according to Stephen Easton of the Fraser Institute, Canada’s “most valuable agricultural product.” Using surveys and health and census reports to determine the number of users in Canada and their consumption patterns, as well police intelligence reports of the number of grow-ops in Canada and the frequency of their annual harvests, Easton has estimated that the marijuana industry in Canada is worth approximately “\$5.7 billion dollars wholesale and \$19.5 billion if high end-retail pricing is assumed” (Mulgrew, 2005, 1–2).³ No wonder an opinion poll found approximately 59% of Canadians believed that marijuana use should be decriminalized (Angus Reid, 2005).⁴

Several Canadian scholars, such as Alexander (1990); Boyd (1991); and Hadaway, Beyerstein, and Youdale (1991), have advocated reforming the existing drug laws in Canada. For example, as Boyd (1991, 221) argued, “this war on drugs is a statement of human failure. . . . The task is to dismantle the costly and violent criminal apparatus that we have built around drug use and distribution, mindful that our overriding concern should be public health, not the self-interested morality of Western industrial culture.” Ten years later, in 2001, the Canadian government did take two dramatic steps toward reconsidering its marijuana laws. First, it established a Special Senate Committee on Drugs to examine the government’s policy on cannabis; the policies, and approaches followed in other countries; the implications of international conventions and treaties; and the social and health effects of cannabis use. Second, recognizing the benefits of marijuana in treating the symptoms (especially nausea and pain) of life-threatening and chronic illnesses, such as cancer, AIDS/HIV, glaucoma, and epilepsy, the Canadian government granted access to medicinal marijuana, under certain conditions, to people with specified medical problems (Nolin, 2003, 91–94).

Like the earlier Le Dain Commission of 1972, the Senate Committee concluded: “the continued criminalization of cannabis remains unjustified based on scientific data on the danger it poses” (Nolin, 2003, 184). Although favoring decriminalization, and eventual legalization, the Senate Committee noted how their investigation had not “answered the fundamental question of why people consume psychoactive substances, such as alcohol, drugs or medication” and was “surprised, given the quantity of studies conducted every year on drugs, that this area has not been researched. It is almost as if the quest for answers

to technical questions has caused science to lose sight of the basic issue!” (Nolin, 17).[‡] They suggested that more research, especially “ethnographic” research, on how current users incorporate marijuana into their day-to-day routines needed to be conducted before decriminalization could proceed (Nolin, 60). One review of the literature (Sussman and Stacy, 1999, 715), concluded that although researchers have learned a fair amount about the predictors of marijuana use, far less is known about what motivates people to try and keep using this drug. Others, such as Husak (2002) have commented on the lack of qualitative ethnographic research on “recreational” marijuana use and its value to users. “To inquire more deeply into the nature of this value,” Husak argues, “we need to be more precise about why so many people use drugs—licit or illicit—for recreational purposes. Surprisingly little research on this topic exists” (131–132). Such ethnographic research has important implications for substance use interventions. As Buscema (1998) has argued, because substance use, like any human behavior, is complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and bounded by culture, ethnicity, age, gender, place, time, and space, the reliance on linear models to study nonlinear phenomena often results in inappropriate interventions. That is, approaching substance use from the assumption that all substance use is misuse and is a result of some underlying pathology, may lead to inaccurate conclusions about why people use drugs and may result in inappropriate interventions and policies. An understanding of the subjective experiences of marijuana users, especially their reasons for using and the social contexts in which they use, will provide a different quality of information that drug consumption prevention educators, treatment counselors, and drug policymakers will find helpful in their development of appropriate strategies for dealing with drug use and misuse in democratic pluralistic societies.

Previous Research

Although several biological, psychological, and sociological theories have been forwarded to explain why people take drugs, relatively little qualitative research has been devoted specifically to understanding what motivates adults to use marijuana on a purely recreational basis.⁵ Nonetheless, some important contributions have been made. Within the sociological study of marijuana use, Howard Becker’s (1953, 1955) work remains the most well known and most influential.⁶ Becker interviewed 50 users, mostly jazz musicians, and explored the process by which they became marijuana users and how they controlled their use. He was more interested in the social learning process than he was in understanding the motivations of individual users. As such, Becker’s central contribution was his claim that marijuana users did not share a particular psychological trait that predisposed them to a specific criminal behavior, but were rather average people who had learned to derive “pleasure” from a substance that “moral entrepreneurs” had designated illicit. In determining why people use marijuana, Becker suggested that some users had learned to regard the initial “ambiguous sensations” of being “high” as a pleasurable experience; so much so, that they continued to engage in it as a noncompulsive recreational activity.

[‡]Horst Rittel has suggested that problems can and should be usefully categorized into two types: “tame problems” and “wicked problems.” The former are solved in a traditional known and tried “water fall paradigm”: gather data, analyze data, formulate solution, implement solution. The latter “wicked problems” can only be responded to individually, each time anew, with no ultimate, repeatable solution (Rittel and Noble, 1989). The cyberneticist Heinz Von Foerster posited that there are two types of questions: *legitimate questions* and *illegitimate questions*. The former are those for which the answer is not known. An illegitimate question is one for which the answer is known (Von Foerster, Mora, and Lawrence Amiot, 1960). Editor’s note.

Over the years, Becker's seminal work provided the impetus for a number of qualitative studies on marijuana use, including two that corroborated his thesis that marijuana is an object from which individuals learn to derive pleasure (Hallstone, 2002; Hirsch, Conforti, Graney, 1990).⁷ However, very few qualitative studies have concerned themselves specifically with why adults use marijuana recreationally. Goode (1970) interviewed 200 adult recreational marijuana smokers to identify the most common effects of smoking marijuana. He found that most of the widely believed claims made about marijuana users were largely myths and were a consequence of marijuana being portrayed as evil and immoral. Users reported a range of whimsical effects including feeling happy, silly, euphoric, relaxed, hedonistic, sensual, and foolish. Goode argued that marijuana users were a diverse group of people, and the only common trait they shared was using marijuana recreationally for pleasure, that is, while engaged in such activities as eating, sex, listening to music, watching movies and television, and socializing. Moreover, users reported, not surprisingly, that they felt serious activities were impaired while intoxicated. Goode concluded, "marijuana use is the product of the same essentially normal values and beliefs of large groups of people that guide other kinds of everyday activities and choices" (310). Goode's observation that marijuana users were a diverse social group was corroborated by Plant's (1975) qualitative investigation of 200 cannabis users in an English town in that "the great majority" of those he encountered during fieldwork and interviews were unlike the "junkie stereotype." Zimmerman and Weider (1977) conducted a year-long ethnographic study of marijuana users in one "counterculture" community in California to understand how marijuana was defined as a social object, the ritual and etiquette of marijuana smoking, the nature of social gatherings, and the structure of "smoking occasions." They found that while participants insisted that marijuana smoking "just happened" and was "unavoidable," in fact, participants "did not, to the last individual, get stoned at each and every opportunity"; rather, they "often made careful provisions to ensure that smoking would occur on specific occasions," such as parties, going to certain movies or rock concerts, or introducing someone to marijuana for the very first time (Zimmerman and Weider, 199).

Finding that marijuana users engage in a broad range of leisure activities when using has been corroborated by others. From their interviews with 65 regular marijuana users, Weller and Haliks (1984, 186) found that the majority "reported increased sexual pleasure and satisfaction with marijuana." Erikson (1989, 179) found that for nearly all participants "cannabis use was predominantly a social activity, engaged in with friends and partners during evenings, weekends, and other leisure time." Similarly, Hathaway (1997b, 230), from interviews with 30 middle-class users, found that the motivations behind people's patterns of use originated "in their common and basic need to effectively meet and manage the challenges of daily living."⁸ In particular, the majority of participants (70%) reported using marijuana primarily for relaxation, ordinarily at the end of the day to take one's focus off work related concerns and relieve stress. Many of Hathaway's participants (43%) also noted that what the marijuana user experienced heightened their mental awareness which made leisure activities and some mundane tasks more interesting and, consequently, more enjoyable. However, little detail was provided on the nature of these leisure activities and in what ways participants perceived them to be enhanced. Finally, 50% of participants reported that marijuana provided them with a different, less serious, outlook on life, which was useful for solving everyday kinds of problems. A later study (Hathaway, 2003) using interviews with 104 marijuana users found that relaxation and the enhancement of leisure activities, such as listening to music and watching television and movies, were the most prevalent reasons for marijuana use. Hathaway concluded that participants were motivated to use drugs because they perceived certain benefits from doing so.

Building on studies examining the “normalization” of drugs by British youths and adolescents, Pearson (2001) used ethnographic methods to explore the normalization of drugs by adults in Britain, which he rightly identified as a neglected area of study. He found that drug use among his 28 core participants was normalized in that the use of these illicit drugs, especially cannabis and cocaine, “was seen as an entirely routine aspect of everyday life,” and “an entirely normal practice” when used in the appropriate circumstances (Pearson, 192). Appropriate circumstances included recreational drug use to enhance such social activities as socializing at the local pub, parties, weddings, funerals, boxing matches, or football matches. It was also used to make mundane tasks, such as household chores and yard work, more bearable. Shukla (2005) used semistructured interviews to examine marijuana involvement among 29 adult users in Oklahoma City. Unlike problematic or compulsive marijuana users, these individuals controlled their marijuana use by carefully keeping it from interfering with other responsibilities and limiting their consumption to free time and conventional recreational activities, such as watching TV, reading, and playing golf (Shukla, 175–177).⁹ But other than noting that the majority of users enjoyed using marijuana when socializing with others, no attention was given to exploring the full range of recreational activities in which people were engaged or how marijuana was perceived to be enhancing these activities.

Although these studies have provided valuable insight into marijuana use, drug consumption prevention educators, treatment counselors, and drug policymakers have a pressing need for a more precise explanation of why people use marijuana. In particular, research needs to investigate what it is about the physical sensations, of being “high” or “stoned,” that users find pleasurable, as well as the social contexts of such use. That is, a more detailed and robust understanding of why it is people use marijuana through an exploration of the subjective experience of those engaged in the behavior and the meanings that it has for them.

Methods

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is especially suited for studies when little is known about the topic, when variables are difficult to identify, when there is an absence of developed theories explaining the behavior of participants, and where the aim is to capture the subjective experience of the participants (Creswell, 1998, 17–18). In addition, qualitative sociology has a tradition of providing a voice for marginalized people and social groups and describing social life in ways that challenge popular and often inaccurate understandings and stereotypes (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, 11–13). Marijuana users fall into this category. Since the early 20th century, marijuana users have been presented to society as being uniformly lazy, unhealthy, and/or dangerous. Consequently, it has been easy for powerful religiously devout moral entrepreneurs and criminal justice officials to label them as deviant and criminal (Becker, 1963; Booth, 2003; Zimmer and Morgan, 1997).

In conducting qualitative research, it is crucial that the researcher takes the role of an active learner eager to explain the behavior from the participant’s perspective. Indeed, as Mason (2002, 227) argues, the interview is a process of co-participation in which both parties regard it as “a site of knowledge construction.” As such, qualitative interviewing is useful for understanding human behavior, including marijuana use, because it “allows researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives” (Berg, 1989, 7). Accordingly, the research reported on here relied on 31 personal, semistructured face-to-face interviews and

10 e-mail interviews. A synthesis of analytic induction and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to guide the collection and analysis of the qualitative data provided by the sample.

Recruitment of Sample

A nonrandom purposive sample was used in that we selected people based on our judgment of which people would facilitate the research: adults 21 years of age or older who have been using marijuana for at least 3 years; who have used marijuana during the last 12 months for nonmedical purposes; and who are employed full time, or part time, or are enrolled as graduate students in university. To some extent, the sample can also be considered convenient as it includes people who shop at local cannabis shops that are conveniently located and readily accessible to the researchers (Berg, 1989, 34–37).

Individuals were contacted in one of two ways. First, owners of local cannabis head shops were contacted and informed of the nature of the research. They gave permission to leave advertisements for research participants and agreed to inform their clients about the research project. Potential participants were responsible for contacting the researchers and setting up an interview. Second, after being interviewed, the initial participants were asked for referrals. This “snowballing” technique is very useful in gaining access to individuals who are reluctant to talk to strangers about secretive behaviors that are considered deviant and criminal by society and the criminal justice system (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Because of its illegality and deviant status, marijuana use remains an essentially secretive activity and having users introduce researchers to other users to secure additional participants was a highly appropriate technique. Some of these referrals were not conveniently located and consequently e-mail-based interviews were used. The search for additional participants was ceased when it was felt that the saturation point had been achieved and knowledge would be unlikely enhanced by additional participants (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Description of Sample

Between July 2005 and December 2006 a total of 41 participants were interviewed. Sixteen were female and 25 were male. The youngest participants were 21 years of age while the oldest was 61. The average age was 29, the modal age was 24, and the median was 31. Although participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, the majority of them ($N = 37$) were Caucasian, and four were visible minorities. Most of the participants ($N = 33$) resided in Alberta, although there were four from Quebec, two from Ontario, and two from Newfoundland.

Although there are a variety of ways in which to measure social class, participants in this study were asked to self-identify. Accordingly, 26 participants identified with being middle class, seven as lower middle class, five as upper middle class, and three as working class. In terms of employment, 36 were employed full time; whereas three were employed part-time, and two were graduate students (one Ph.D. and one M.A.). Employed participants worked in a wide range of occupations and professions, including the retail and service industry ($N = 14$), skilled and semiskilled trades ($N = 9$), white-collar clerical work ($N = 10$), health care and social work ($N = 4$), and media and communications ($N = 2$). A significant portion of the sample was well educated with 68% having obtained postsecondary degrees (18 undergraduate degrees, 2 graduate degrees, 2 in the process of obtaining graduate degrees, and 6 college degrees). Another 11 participants held high school diplomas, whereas 2 had achieved their Grade Ten.

With regard to marital status, 28 participants were single, 7 were married, 1 was in a common-law relationship, 2 were engaged, and 3 were divorced. Thirty of the participants had no dependents, although 7 had 1 child, and 4 had more than 1 child. Lack of membership to any formal religion was strongly correlated with marijuana use with only 3 participants identifying as belonging to a religious denomination. The majority ($N = 25$) claimed no religious affiliation, whereas another 13 identified as being spiritual but not belonging to any organized religion or religious belief system.

The length of time that the participants had been using marijuana ranged from a minimum of 5 years to a maximum of 40 years, whereas the average was approximately 13.5 years. Almost all the participants ($N = 37$) had begun their use of marijuana when they were teenagers, with only three commencing use in their early 20s and one in their mid-40s. Approximately two thirds ($N = 24$) had been introduced to marijuana by a close friend, whereas the remaining third ($N = 17$) were introduced to the drug by a relative.

In terms of frequency of use, 22 participants were *regular* daily users (five or more times a week), 14 were *frequent* weekly users (one to two times a week), 3 were *occasional* monthly users (one to two times a month), and 2 were *sporadic* yearly users (five or fewer times a year). Inhalation was the most frequently reported method of administering marijuana. Most participants ($N = 23$) preferred smoking it in "joint" form, although several used some form of pipe ($N = 10$) or water bong ($N = 8$). Of those who smoked joints most ($N = 19$) rolled some tobacco in their joints, although 5 did not for health reasons. Although 11 participants had experimented with eating marijuana, it was not very popular, as the amount required to get intoxicated was deemed too expensive. Several reported not enjoying the physical sensations associated with the "body high" as much as the psychedelic experiences of the "mental high." Five expressed interest in obtaining vaporizers because of their dislike of inhaling smoke. Participants were asked how much marijuana they consumed, on average, in one sitting: 14 reported one joint; 12 reported "two to three hoots" or "puffs" or "drags" or "hits"; 5 reported half a gram; 4 reported half a joint; 3 reported two to three joints; whereas three individuals reported 1 g, 1/3 g, and 1/4 g, respectively. Generally, it was found that the greater the quantity consumed, the less regularly the participant used. Similarly, those who use more regularly, tend to be younger and have no children.

Marijuana was not the only substance used by the participants in this study. Most of the participants ($N = 37$) described themselves as either regular or occasional alcohol users and 22 participants viewed themselves as either regular or occasional nicotine users. Almost all ($N = 37$) of the participants had experimented with 1 or more other illegal substances (mushrooms, LSD, cocaine, ecstasy, and crystal meth) and 16 of these reported using such drugs occasionally (once or twice a year). Those who chose not to do so claimed that marijuana was their "drug of choice" because it was "safer" or "less intense" and "easier to control."

Interview Approach

The primary investigators and their research assistants interviewed participants. In general, the e-mail interviews took several months to complete because of people's general tendency to not reply immediately to their e-mail, but overall they provided high-quality data as participants and interviewers had more time to reflect on their answers and probing questions respectively.¹⁰ The face-to-face interviews took approximately 1 hour to complete, and were taped recorded and fully transcribed. Researchers began with an initial list of 30 questions designed to solicit information relating to the central research question regarding people's motivations for using marijuana and the social contexts in which it was used, but this grew to 52 as new avenues of investigation were revealed through the interviewing process, as

is often the case with this type of qualitative research. As such, it was often necessary to conduct follow-up interviews with those previously interviewed in order to provide them the opportunity to answer the new questions.

The principal researchers and the research assistant were all trained in qualitative methodologies and knowledgeable of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 1998). Prior to the interview, the principal researchers or the research assistant provided the interviewees with written and verbal information about the aims of the research and of their rights: to privacy and confidentiality, their freedom to decline to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable; to end the interview at any time; or to withdraw entirely from the research prior to its collection and dissemination. Participants were not provided any form of remuneration and were told that their participation was unlikely to benefit them directly.¹¹ However, to encourage participation, they were informed that sharing their experiences would contribute to the understanding of why and how cannabis is used. Interviewees were not required to sign a consent form confirming participation and information, as is required by many research ethics committees, because this could potentially expose the interviewees to legal prosecution. Consequently, only verbal consent was sought and obtained. Interviews were primarily conducted with just the interviewer and interviewee present. However, in two cases the interviewee had a friend or partner present at the interviewee's request. None of the participants refused to participate after hearing the nature of the research, nor did any withdraw from the research during the interview process, or before the data had been collated.

To encourage treating the interview process as “a site of knowledge construction,” interviews were semistructured and interviewees and interviewers were provided with a significant deal of flexibility to explore issues and concerns prompted by the basic set of open-ended interview questions that did not require any particular order (Mason, 2002, 231–233). Participants were not provided with a list of options when asked why they used marijuana or what activities they preferred to engage in while under the influence as this was seen as biasing their response. As reported earlier, a few structured questions were asked to identify key demographic characteristics and consumption patterns. A semistructured interview was employed to discuss a wide range of core themes: reasons for drug use; perception of effects; effect on personal and work relationships; effect on physical, emotional, and mental health; responsible and irresponsible use; the portrayal of marijuana in the media; coping with stigma; and thoughts on decriminalization and legalization. What follows focuses on an essential and neglected question: Why do adults use marijuana and what are the social contexts in which it is used?

Findings: Why People Use

In 2006, Ricky Williams, the 1998 Heisman-trophy-winning running back, was picked up by the Toronto Argonauts after being placed on suspension by the Miami Dolphins for his continued use of marijuana. Williams has always maintained that he used marijuana for relaxation purposes and to alleviate symptoms of a diagnosed social anxiety disorder.

I did it to deal with the stress. Playing football is very stressful. I wasn't a total pothead. I wasn't getting up in the morning and smoking before going to practice. It was just like when you watch old movies and the father comes home from work, sits down on the couch and says, “Honey, can you get me a drink?” It was the very same thing. I would come home from a physically draining day at work and roll a joint, sit back on the couch, smoke a joint, and play on the computer. You know, just to help me relax, help me unwind. When I smoked I

was much better to be with. I was much more relaxed. I wasn't thinking about all these other things that weren't really that important. I can't say that my time with marijuana was a bad time. (Rosen, 2006, 65)

In October 2006, *Maclean's* reported on Dr. Doug Hutchinson, a University of Toronto philosophy professor, who smokes up to 10 joints a day for relief of a diagnosed ailment that he chose not to reveal. Hutchinson, a self-professed "pothead" all his life, including his time as a Rhodes scholar, found that marijuana contributed positively to his teaching.

I smoke a spliff at the break in my three-hour class to restore my concentration and focus. I'm lower when I go back into class, not higher. And I have way better short-term memory. If you took one whiff of my spliff, you'd forget where your car is. It has a very different effect on the virgin head and the seasoned head. (Intini, 2006: 50)

Essentially, these are two different people reporting two very different experiences with marijuana: one reporting how relaxation is enhanced; the other, how concentration is enhanced. The participants in this study would likely be able to relate to the claims made by Williams and Hutchinson because of their own shared experiences with the drug. Participants in this study did not use marijuana compulsively, but to enhance a wide range of experiences and activities. A legal secretary in her mid-20s explained this in depth:

In my humble opinion, weed is not a drug; it's a seasoning . . . like salt for your life. So, just the same as a person would use salt to enhance a bland soup or what have you, smoking weed can make things more intense and enjoyable, like watching the Northern Lights. They are magnificent without weed but they are a little more mind blowing when under the influence. A comedy may be funny to start with but add a little doobie before you see it and it becomes a non-stop laugh riot. A book may pass time and be interesting in normal circumstance but get stoned and read something like *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World* and you can personally connect with every point . . . I think that the only thing that wouldn't be enhanced by weed is being with my daughter; she is miraculous and just the ultimate coolest thing in her own right. Anything else though is up for debate.

The belief that marijuana enhanced a wide range of activities was echoed by a 29-year-old participant who had been using for 16 years: "Just about any activity is enhanced while under the influence of cannabis. I like hiking, cycling and dancing when I'm stoned or high and . . . I enjoy art, music, philosophy and meditation while intoxicated. Going to a museum is one of my favourite activities under influence."

How certain activities and experiences are enhanced by marijuana is a central focus of this research. Interviews with the participants revealed that they are using marijuana in conjunction with other activities because it enhances their enjoyment of them in two specific, yet related, ways. First, for some participants, in some instances, marijuana enhanced their ability to relax by allowing them to take their minds off their daily stresses and pressures and simply enjoy the activity in which they were engaged, such as watching television or movies, listening to music, having sex, or socializing with others. In other words, under the influence of marijuana they were better able to "tune out" or "zone out" and just relax. Second, for some participants in some instances, marijuana enhanced their ability to concentrate by allowing them to relax, and, additionally, allowing them to block out negative thoughts,

insecurities, feelings, of self-doubt, traditional or “normal” ways of thinking and doing things, as well as the criticisms of others. Consequently, when using marijuana they were better able to achieve a sustained focus on the activity or experience and access more creative thoughts and ideas; they were able to “tune in” or “zone in” to the activity or experience.

Whether a participant used marijuana solely to relax or concentrate, to “tune in,” or “tune out” largely depended on the social context, especially the activity in which they were engaged and/or with whom they were using marijuana. For instance, one 48-year-old daily marijuana user viewed marijuana in a utilitarian manner: “I think it’s what you bring to marijuana, not so much what marijuana brings to you. I do. . . . Sometimes I use it to tune in and sometimes to tune out. But, by in large, I’d say tune in. You know, I would smoke some to enhance the experience of cycling around on a sunny day and I think I’m enjoying it more than I would if I weren’t high.”⁸ Similarly, a 33-year-old federal civil servant, who uses marijuana occasionally, explained how sometimes she smokes marijuana with her brother to “relax and just watch funny things on TV” that he tapes. On other occasions she smokes with her best friend while they “talk and do puzzles.” She added, “[w]e did four, one thousand piece puzzles in four days. I was better at night when I was high (laughs). The puzzles were like a drug too.” This was echoed by a 33-year-old social worker who reported that she found marijuana better suited for some activities and experiences than others.

I can’t really play my violin when I’m stoned. . . . Renovating houses which we’ve been doing for the last ten years (laughs), that can be pretty boring, like dry walling. It can make it more fun if you smoke a joint. Any work like that. I like to work around the house and with the lake just there it’s nice to just take a break and have a few puffs. I like to smoke outdoors, anytime of year. If I go outside with my son to play I won’t smoke a joint. If we have friends over it might be different. I put my son to bed, go back outside, smoke a joint and watch the fire. I don’t like to walk alone in the woods, especially if I’m high and I’d never go for a drive either. I’d go for a kayak ride. In the summer I go kayaking and bring my joint with me. It’s my alone time. I do that. It’s nice and quite. It’s my ritual.

All the participants thought of themselves as responsible recreational marijuana users. For most, responsible use entailed using moderately in the appropriate social context and not allowing one’s use to cause harm to others.¹² Participants reported using marijuana while engaging in a broad range of leisure activities, including listening to music (N = 27), sex (N = 18), socializing, playing cards, doing jigsaws (N = 17), watching movies and/or television (N = 16), sports and outdoor pursuits (N = 8), writing, playing music and painting (N = 7), reading (N = 6), playing video and computer games, blogging, surfing the Web (N = 5), doing housework, home improvements, and gardening (N = 5). For some participants, some of these activities and experiences were enhanced by marijuana because participants were better able to relax, whereas for others the relaxation brought with it the added benefit of heightened focus, attention, and concentration.

Relaxation: Tuning and Zoning Out

To better understand the motivations for using marijuana, participants were asked to explain why they used marijuana, to describe being high, what they liked about the experience, and

⁸The reader is reminded to distinguish between a “drug’s” pharmacological actions and a “drug experience which is the result of the interaction between a chemically active substance—whatever its legal status—the person and the site of use and experiencing the “drug” (Zinberg, 1984). Editor’s note.

to discuss the kind of activities they liked to engage in while high.¹³ The most reported reasons (N = 36) given by the participants for why they use marijuana was that it enhanced relaxation, relieved stress, and provided them with the opportunity for reflection and introspection. Participants commonly reported that marijuana was “an amazing stress reliever” or “a natural anti-anxiety medicine” that kept them “calm and level,” or provided “relaxation after a hard-day’s work,” or helped them “unwind at the end of the day.” A single mother, who works as a legal secretary fulltime and takes university classes part time, had a particular fondness for recreational marijuana use.

Running around after a one year old is tiring, mix that with working a full-time job and finishing university via correspondence, and life gets pretty hectic. I find that I don’t have time for ‘real’ recreation so my recreation is to smoke a joint, lay in bed and read a book. Smoking weed is my meditation, my relaxation, my therapy, and my hobby all wrapped in one neat little white paper.¹⁴

The same was true for a married mother of one child and fulltime social worker. “It’s the same reason why I’d have a glass of wine at a big party. It helps me relax. It calms me down. I find that when I get home from work after a big stressful day, I come home after seven o’clock and I want to unwind and cut from my work day to now I’m home, now I can relax.” For others, using marijuana relaxed them because it allowed them to “step back,” or “take some time out for myself,” or “relax my mind” or take their “mind off things,” or “escape from the hectic world.”

Four participants employed in retail and service industry, where they experience a considerable degree of “emotional labour” (Hochschild, 1983), found their marijuana use particularly relaxing. For example, according to a 34-year-old male, marijuana allowed him to relax after a hard day’s work dealing with customers. “I work in retail sales and I have to be nice to people all day long, you know people you don’t want to be nice to. I’m an ambulant fellow and sometimes that takes energy on my part and so sometimes, after work, I like to just zone right out and take a puff and read the paper. Like that really is a good feeling.” This was echoed by a 40-year-old sales manager who has been using marijuana for the last 23 years. “I am able to unplug myself. A problem I face almost daily is this inability to relax or stop my head from whirling with thoughts. I feel marijuana allows me to relax more and also allows me to shut down my brain and not think for a few hours. The mild euphoria is nice too. . . . I use pot to relax, unplug, and unwind.”

Reflection and Introspection

In both of his studies, Hathaway (1997b, 2003) found that half of his participants reported gaining a different outlook on life or change in perspective as a result of using marijuana. Other studies found that marijuana encourages contemplation and global self-evaluation, sharpens the contrast between the ideal and the perceived self, and focuses attention on aspects of the self that are most troublesome (Hendin, Hass, Singer, Ellner, and Ulman, 1987; Zablocki, Aidala, Hansell, and White, 1991). This has led some researchers to suggest that highly introspective users are more likely than less introspective users to develop mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, because of the greater propensity for intense self-evaluation and self-criticism (Zablocki, Aidala, Hansell, and White). Evaluating the mental health of participants is not the concern of this article, and although the participants may not be the best judges, it is worth noting that they reported no significant long-term mental health problems associated with their marijuana use.¹⁵ Moreover, the participants in this study were inclined to view the reflection and introspection provided by their marijuana use as having positive consequences.

Approximately one fourth of the participants ($N = 12$) reported that their marijuana use provided them with varying degrees of reflection and introspection. Some commented on how the relaxation provided by marijuana allowed them to put their day-to-day stresses into "perspective" by "slowing down" their mind and providing them "a different view." Participants used marijuana to "decrease hyperactivity" and to provide a "release for your constantly wheeling mind." As one participant put it, "being high is a nice release from that worry, you can still think about those things, it just let's you see them from different, less threatening perspectives." For a 24-year-old social worker,

It separates me from my emotions. Normally I think on a very emotional level and when I get stoned, my thought patterns go all erratic, which isn't a bad thing. Smoking pot gives my mind some time off. And if there's something I've been obsessing over, it gives me a chance to separate myself from that and look at the problem from a different angle. Often times, I go "oh, I'm being silly." You don't realize that until you take a step back from it.

A 61-year-old white-collar clerical worker believed marijuana made her a kinder person by giving her a broader perspective on life:

I think it makes me relax and puts me, usually, into a better space. It's almost like anger management in a funny way. You come home and you haven't had a good day and you have certain anxieties and after I smoke it is like, "Come on what's the big deal here? Be nice." It puts it all in perspective. . . . I think you look at things differently, in and out. You, kind of, start thinking of the bigger picture. I swear to God I become a better person, nicer. It's like I said, anger management. Lately I've been experiencing a bit of conflict with this person within the office and I know I'm not very nice about it at all, I'm angry about it. I come home every night, smoke some pot and I tell myself it's not a big deal. "Be nice. Just relax." . . . I see things closer, differently, than when I'm not high. That's what I like about being high. It's also that escape you know? Why not? Am I supposed to carry on what's going on in my office at home?

Escapism in this regard is not necessarily viewed as retreating from one's problems and not dealing with them, but simply escaping from a single, often limited way of perceiving one's problems. For example, according to a sales manager who used frequently,

I think part of it is just an escape. . . . if something is bothering me I like to get high because usually when I'm high, maybe I just either don't think about it . . . or, if I do think about it, I don't find it so alarming. I find I can be okay with whatever is kind of bothering me. I can maybe work out things. It just gives you a different perspective. . . . It's a good way to relax and see things differently and kind of hang out in your head. . . . Like its escapism but you don't run away. It's like reading a book to escape or something like that. I can get more escapism out of a book than I can from smoking a joint because I'm generally consumed by the book. I don't think about much else other besides what I'm reading. When I'm on weed, or whenever I'm stoned, usually I'll still think about whatever's bothering me. But, like I said, it gives you a different perspective. It just shows it in a different light or something like that. It's not just totally avoiding it or anything like that.

For some participants marijuana sometimes provided an almost therapeutic opportunity to reflect on character flaws and bad habits from a different perspective:

[Marijuana] helped me look at my life. Look at it completely openly, from an outside perspective and see some of the damaging patterns that I had and I began to address them. So I do think it can be very healing. . . . Sometimes I like to smoke and sit quietly and listen to music, not have anything on and not do anything. Just sit. And in moments like that, I'll find myself going, "Wow, you need to watch that" to myself. Sometimes it does help. I think that's an ongoing thing . . . always discovering new coping mechanisms that I had that were generally unhealthy. Now it's not all the time but, certainly I'll be sitting and smoking and being like, "Yeah, yeah, okay. Let's work on that one." So, certainly, it is still like that for me. . . . Personal growth is a really, really key factor in my life. I don't want to stagnate. I want to be a dynamic human being that's growing and evolving. Sometimes marijuana gives you an outside perspective.

For another participant, the different perspective provided by marijuana had an almost spiritual dimension to it:

There is a bit of spirituality to cannabis use. I prefer to think it helps me as a person, to grow and to look at myself in a way that I can be honest and look at what needs to be improved. It allows my mind to explore concepts and put pieces of life together in my head like a puzzle. These epiphany moments would not have happened if my mind was not wandering free and freely associating different experiences.

Altered States and Euphoria

Marijuana has a wide range of physiological, psychological, and behavioural effects that can be attributed to the 80 separate chemical compounds of which it is composed. Among these cannabinoids, the primary psychoactive compound, and the active ingredient that produces the intoxicating effects, is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC (Nolin, 2003, 37–41). All of the participants used marijuana because of the euphoria it provided, particularly, the altering one's consciousness and sensory perception. When asked what he liked about smoking marijuana, a 34-year-old retail worker replied: "I can't deny the intoxicating aspect of marijuana. It is certainly there . . . I don't do it because it tastes good (laughs). I like to get stoned!" This was echoed by a 53-year-old male reporter who replied, "It feels good and I enjoy the high and there are no after effects." A 48-year-old white-collar clerical worker reported that he didn't really think about why used marijuana anymore, and although part of the reason involved "habit," he also enjoyed "altering my consciousness slightly." Others preferred the bodily and mental sensations that marijuana provided, especially feeling "tingly," "fuzzy," "lighter," and "carefree." As one 25-year-old female provincial civil servant put it, "it just makes things lighter, funnier, more easy going . . . carefree for the most part." This was echoed by a 33-year-old federal civil servant who felt "light and heavy at the same time (laughs). When I'm sitting I feel heavy and when I stand and walk around I feel light. . . . I just like that different feeling; feeling *gelée*,¹⁶ feeling relaxed and light, and laughing a lot." Similarly, a 32-year-old hairdresser found marijuana's "dream-like" effect allowed her to relax:

Well, I think, of course, the feeling it gives you. And it's not a major feeling. It's not an incoherent, you don't know what you're doing state. It just makes you feel very relaxed and comfy . . . comfortable. And I don't even know if you can really call it a high because it just mellows you. . . . You know when you're sleeping and you have a dream and in your dream you're in control and you think it's so real, but you have that light feeling over you. Your mind is awake but your body feels as if you're in a dream world. . . . Just relaxed and almost . . . well, I don't want to say floating, but almost, just a weightlessness about you. . . . It's different from anything else, from alcohol or anything. It doesn't depress me anyways.

For a 29-year-old customer service employee, the lightness contributed to feeling less inhibited and being able to be one's self. "It's a lightness and it's also a feeling of being rooted. . . . I feel less inhibited and, at the same time, I feel more grounded in who I am and my ability to be myself There's a playfulness, you enjoy things." Other participants shared feeling carefree and able to enjoy life's simple pleasures, and consequently feeling more relaxed. One 40-year-old married male with children stated that when he is being "impatient with my kids" marijuana allows him "to loosen up, forget why I am all pinched at the world, and it allows me to be free and play like a kid and have fun." Another participant echoed this:

You can handle anything, but rationally and slowly, the stress goes away and things become manageable. It's really hard to describe . . . it's like . . . being stoned lifts a weight off, a weight that there always is because the world has these certain demands of people in general—like that it's not okay to go running around jumping in mud puddles when you are over a certain age or something but being stoned you don't care anymore if you are not supposed to do things like that—it looks fun so it's allowed. That's what I like about it—it sort of excuses everything. Passing a whole day coloring is a little childish, but if you're stoned then it's okay.

Socializing

Several relatively recent qualitative studies (Erickson, 1989; Hathaway, 1997b, 2003; Pearson, 2001; Shukla, 2005) have found that marijuana use was predominantly a social activity for the majority of adult users. For approximately half of the participants in this study, one of the "simple pleasures" that marijuana enhanced was socializing with others. Although 23 participants had no preference with regards to using alone or with others, 14 preferred to use with others and 4 preferred to use alone. In practice, however, 21 participants reported that they primarily used alone, 16 with others, and 4 used with others and by themselves with equal frequency. Generally, participants who did use with others described their marijuana use as a "social thing" that enhances "going out" or "hanging out," or "chilling with others." As a 23-year-old bar tender explained,

As far as I can recall, I have never smoked by myself. I think this is sort of the explanation of why I smoke weed: it's a social thing. . . . I wouldn't think smoking up alone would be all that fun. You'd just sit there being a little bit hungry and a little bit horny but ultimately way too tired to do much of anything about either. I think for my generation, or, at least, my social-political segment

of my generation, marijuana has replaced going to the pub. We don't drink much as a group, but if a bunch of people show up at a house together you smoke weed to break the ice. . . . In fact, I would say smoking weed is almost more socially acceptable than drinking in my social group. . . . I think we drink less because smoking marijuana is much less, um, white trash. We find drunks distasteful: quite nice people become smelly, misogynistic, mouth-breathing, red-faced messes when they've been drinking. Give these guys a joint, though, and the worst they can do is fall asleep watching *Family Guy* on DVD As for why we smoke up, it's for the same reason that people get together to drink or watch hockey or read the Bible or whatever else people do with their friends. It's an excuse to get people together. I think marijuana is a very socially conducive drug. Unlike alcohol or cocaine it actually does make people easier to get along because of the "mellowing out" effect.

This sentiment was shared by a 42-year-old business owner and mother who smoked marijuana once a week:

I would say it's more of a social thing. If I have to go to a social gathering—I don't want to say parties because it's not like I go to a lot of parties—but if I'm going over to someone's house for dinner or a couple of drinks, or to a function, then, oh yeah, I have to. I just think I'm more fun (laughs). Yeah, definitely, if it's a social gathering, any formal gathering, for sure, any formal gathering that my husband is involved with, I have to. I've never been to one yet that I haven't got high before.

For one participant, using marijuana with others was no longer possible because of her responsibilities as a mother and because most of her marijuana using friends lived too far away for convenient get-togethers. But she and her friends had designed an original way of recreating the social experience of using marijuana:

Lots of times though, we do what we call "hoot calls." Since the majority of my friends now live quite far away and we still want to get stoned together without having to drive for three hours just to smoke a joint, we pick a time and call one another and smoke on the phone. It's not the same but it's almost as good. And with lots of us having three way calling we can get quite a few people on the line, the biggest hoot call we ever had was eight people. So, in some ways it's even funnier than being in person because it's really hard to figure out what the hell is going on with all those different voices on the phone; who is talking? What the hell are they talking about? Stuff like that.

For other participants marijuana was useful for social situations because it helped "break the ice," "brings people closer together," and created "something of a camaraderie between users." A 61-year-old frequent user enjoyed getting together with her girlfriends "every couple of weeks to garden and smoke a little pot." For a 26-year-old oil field worker, marijuana enhanced social situations because "it inspires thought and conversation and it just relaxes you. Sometimes when you're talking, you get thinking because you feed off each other if you get into that. That's the thing, too. Everyone can kind of zone in on a thing. It's not necessarily just one person that zones in. Especially if it's with people that you have a rapport with."

Concentration: Tuning/Zoning In

Hathaway (1996) found that 43% of his adult participants described marijuana's effects as heightened mental awareness. Although most participants in this study reported using marijuana recreationally to relax, or zone out or tune out, approximately one third ($N = 13$) stressed how, on some occasions, it seemed to heighten their senses and levels of concentration, permitting them to tune in or zone in or focus while engaged in certain activities, like listening to music, watching movies, being outdoors, playing sports, and engaging in sexual activity.

Music

The use of drugs by 20th-century musicians, particularly jazz musicians, to enhance creativity is well known (Blake, 2007; Shapiro, 2003,). Although there has been little physiological research done on marijuana and music perception, one of the more common subjective effects noticed in the state of consciousness experienced through marijuana use is a greatly enhanced appreciation of music (Becker, 1953; Fachner, 2006; Goode, 1970; Tart, 1971; Winick, 1959–1960) and what Webster (2001, 95) has termed “musical empathy.”¹⁷

Twenty-seven participants reported that they enjoyed listening to music when using marijuana, and 13 of them made special reference to how the musical experience was enhanced. They attributed this enhancement to their altered perception, which allowed them to either hear the music differently or in a more acute manner. “I find that I can really get into the music and hear it more clearly,” reported a 48-year-old employed in the forestry industry. Similarly, for a 27-year-old computer technician and avid soccer player, music, “whether it is attending a concert or listening to an album at home,” was his favorite thing to do while high because the “music seems to come alive a little more after a joint. . . . probably from the increased levels of focus and clarity in the mind.” This increased focus attributed to the influence of marijuana was noted by another participant who explained how marijuana alters your perceptions so you kind of hear it differently than you normally would or it sounds different or everything is kind of more strong And that kind of zoning in thing . . . you just kind of get immersed in something and you just kind of become a part of it sometimes . . . you can really zero in on stuff.” Similarly, a 53-year-old journalist who used frequently found that “If I’m listening to a CD when I’m high it’s a much different experience and I really get more from the music. It’s a similar experience if I’m watching videos or movies. It seems that the surround sound was made for someone who’s stoned because you really do get deeper into the sound and the soundtrack.”

Another participant, a 24-year-old legal secretary, listening to music was a “touch-and-go thing” dependent on the situation and the type of music.

I find that big outdoor concerts and weed go together quite well—in that sort of situation the music is enhanced, but . . . if it’s a CD I have that I am listening to and the other factors are good, like my daughter is sleeping, maybe I’ll smoke and listen to music. If it’s music I am playing . . . it’s easier to write a song stoned, playing my guitar sounds way cooler stoned and I don’t notice if I fuck up. It all depends on the music too . . . something like Green Day for example, I would not get stoned and listen too—wrong vibe—Pink Floyd, sure, CCR, sure, Janis, sure, Ani DiFranco, definitely . . . but not the newer, angry music—they just don’t go together.

It would seem that for some participants marijuana permitted them to relax and focus on their creativity:

I find that it helps me relax and I focus better when I smoke up . . . I find that when I am sober that my mind is easily distracted. I will be working on my guitar . . . and I can sit there for maybe half hour and then I go do something else because I just cannot concentrate on my task at hand. Then I go and have a puff and I get into a zone and I can just focus cause my mind is not thinking about a million things at once, just on the task at hand.

For a 23-year-old musician, marijuana helped him “pick out the intricacies” in music, helped him to write songs, and enhanced his ability to concentrate when in the recording studio:

What we’ll do lots in the recording studio . . . is we’ll do a mix and listen to it and spend a couple hours getting this mix all ready, and we’re sober and totally lucid. And you’ll do this mix and you’ll have everything just exactly the way you think it is and you’ll go smoke a joint and you’ll come back and listen to it because it almost just like gives you a different set of ears to listen to it through. It just kind of changes your perspective on what you’re hearing. I don’t know what it is but all the sudden, like lots of times I’ve been doing something and thought it was just great, smoke a joint, go back and listen to it and I’m like, “wow, that one guitar in there is just really cheesy.” All the sudden that will stand out to me like a sore thumb that this is cheesy or that’s kind of a silly part or that note I didn’t notice was flat.

Sexual Behaviour

Marijuana has long had the reputation of being an aphrodisiac from the early days of prohibition when users were portrayed as “sex-crazed dope fiends,” to the more recent depictions of “turned-on hippies” and sexually liberated “middle-class swingers.” In *Good Medicine, Great Sex* (2003), journalist and broadcaster David Ford discusses his extensive use of marijuana and how, among other things, it raised sex to an “art form.”¹⁸ Early studies by Goode (1970) and Tart (1971) found that for practically all experienced users, marijuana intoxication greatly intensified the sensations experienced with sexual behaviour. Weller and Halikas (1984) conducted a qualitative study on marijuana use and sexual behaviour because of their dissatisfaction with previous research that had relied too heavily on anonymous questionnaires and samples drawn from student populations. Their research corroborated the previous research; over two thirds of the adult participants interviewed experienced “increased sexual pleasure and satisfaction with marijuana use . . . with touch and taste being most often reported as enhanced” (Weller and Halikas, 189–190). A third of Hathaway’s (2003) participants reported that sex was either a very important or important reason to use marijuana, while over half thought it s unimportant or very unimportant.

It is no surprise, therefore, that 18 participants (9 females and 9 males) in the present research reported that sex was enhanced when using marijuana and reported positive effects such as increased “libido,” “more control,” “lowering of inhibitions,” and increased sensitivity to touch. “I am a better lover to my wife when I have a bit of a buzz there is no question about it,” commented a 34-year-old retail worker, “It enhances my level of

pleasure. I don't know if it necessarily enhances hers but I'm certainly able to make love for a longer period of time . . . damn straight." Marijuana was seen to especially enhance or intensify the sexual experience because it relaxed participants and allowed them to focus on the physical sensations. For a 29-year-old male:

I quite like being sexual when I'm high because, again, with the inhibitions, again with the not questioning. You're in the moment. You're allowing yourself to be in the moment and not second guessing and not going "Am I doing this right? Is this what this person wants?" You're just there and you're enjoying the moment and the person you're with is enjoying the moment and you're not questioning.

As a 50-year-old female explained, sex was enhanced by marijuana because of the "relaxation and a quieting of the mind that allows sensation to be at the forefront." Similarly, a 53-year-old male explained, "I find my skin is much more sensitive to the touch and my level of excitement is much higher and the orgasm is more intense. I hope that's not too much information." A 61-year-old female reported that she had used marijuana to enhance sex when she was younger not only because she would focus better but also because she wasn't analyzing herself as much: "I used it to enhance sex definitely. Definitely, it was generally better. I would lose inhibitions and just focus on the sensations, you know? It just felt better. I wasn't analyzing myself while I was having sex. I think that's why it was better. I have no idea how it works scientifically, but it definitely made sex better." A 33-year-old participant noted how smoking marijuana before sex made her feel more comfortable and confident:

The feelings are more intense. I can say that definitely, for me anyways. I first noticed that when I was sixteen years old. [Now] if my husband and I know we are going to have sex then we'll smoke a joint. Not all the time because you can't always plan it (laughs). I don't care as much when I smoke. It's like some people turn off the lights. When we smoke before I don't worry about what I look like. My body's not perfect but I don't care. If I smoke a joint I just feel more comfortable with myself which does help in the end. But the physical sensations are better, definitely, oh yeah.

Seventeen participants reported either not having experienced sex while using marijuana or did not feel that there was significant difference. Six participants (one female and five males) thought marijuana hindered them or detracted from the sexual experience because it made them "lazy," took "the focus away," or they became "too self-conscious and introverted." For example, a 33-year-old participant who reported that sex was her favorite activity to engage in when high, recounted an experience where she and her boyfriend did not share the same sexual experience while using marijuana:

You feel more. It gets rid of inhibitions a little bit, I think. But mainly the sensations are enhanced. I have more intense orgasms and more of them. One time with my boyfriend we smoked and the sex was really incredible and I was making a lot of noise and yelling 'this is incredible' (laughs). But when I asked him he said it was just normal for him. I could tell from his face that he wasn't having the same experience as me. But for me it was really incredible.

A 32-year-old male believed that, although he enjoyed sex while high, it did affect his performance:

Me, I know when I smoke a lot before having sex I'm not as good as I can be. I don't say I like it less, but I know my performance is . . . worse. Like I'm not as hard, I think, as I can be when I'm not stoned. I know for a fact. I've never had any complaints about it, but I know it. And most of the time these days, it's with myself (laughs).

Movies

Hoberman and Rosenbaum (1983) have explored how, beginning in the 1960s, marijuana affected the aesthetics of movies for both filmmakers and spectators in the way it fostered "a wider and more hedonistic spirit of aesthetic openness" (Rosenbaum, 2001, 119). Marijuana changed the way movies were made, becoming less linear, more fragmented, more experimental with sound and visuals, and generally altered the ways that people looked, listened and experienced movies. Of the 16 participants who liked to watch movies and television while high, 9 reported that the experience was enhanced because their perception was altered in such a way that they were able to "pick up" or "zone in" to certain aspects of the cinematic experience, particularly those meant to be humorous. "Certain TV shows are much funnier," explained a 48-year old weekly user, "I seem to understand and pick up on more of the subtle humour buried within them." Another weekly user, a 23-year-old female reported that,

[w]hen I smoke marijuana it definitely enhances my ability to see details especially in movies or music or writing or reading. I pick up more things when I smoke pot. It definitely does enhance your perception. You watch a movie sober and the next day watch it stoned and you pick up things you hadn't the day before.

A 26-year-old oil field rigger noted how "The movie kind of absorbs you. It's that zoning in thing again. It just really enhances it and you just kind of melt into it. It definitely stimulates the sense of humour, for sure. Or makes you see the humour in things." The drug's tendency to make movies more humorous was noted by others. A 32-year-old hairdresser reported that marijuana "makes everything so funny. And I like to watch movies because, for some reason, with movies it just makes everything appear funny . . . It just tells your brain that it's funnier. I don't know why." This was echoed by a 33-year-old federal civil servant who reported that, "movies that I wouldn't normally laugh at, I find funny. Everything's funnier after you smoke."

For some participants, they reserved marijuana for comedies because they did not want to spoil the experience of serious movies. For example, a 41-year-old business owner explained that "if it's a funny movie, I'll laugh harder. If it's a serious movie I won't smoke before. We went to the Da Vinci Code the other night and I didn't think marijuana would enhance it." This sentiment was shared by a 24-year-old retail worker who used marijuana because "it enhances the cinematic experience with the loud noises and sharp motions on the big screen. Unless it's a thinking movie then I don't smoke before." Other participants refrained from using marijuana when watching a movie because it detracted from the experience. "I find that you actually get less out of it because you're attention

span is shorter or you get distracted so easily. So the movie doesn't flow as nice. It's more disjointed . . . if I really want to get something out of a movie, I'll watch it sober."

For a 29-year-old customer service employee, marijuana was "an exploratory drug" that was put to better use when engaged in more active pursuits such as dancing, singing, walking outdoors, or writing, and considered watching a movie alone after smoking marijuana to be a "waste of a high." He did, however, see the merits of watching particular movies with others when high. "Movies sometimes with friends because, you know, you're all high and you're going to watch a film together. And it's usually a goofy kind of movie, like "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" or something like that that's visual and it's got color and fun elements and good music and a fun story." This corresponds with Rosenbaum's (2001, 121) discussion of how "The Movie as Trip," which began as an almost tribally shared collective pastime, has become with the advent of videotapes and later DVDs, primarily an individualistic experience.

Artistic and Creative Endeavors

Participants noted how on some occasions marijuana altered their perception and contributed to their creativity and capacity for original thought. A 48-year-old construction worker reported, "I use it sometimes to relax and to think deep thoughts. You can really concentrate on abstract concepts when you are stoned." Similarly, a 34-year-old male, who enjoyed reading newspapers and magazines while high, believed that marijuana made "things clearer" enabled him "to make linkages between things." The ability to make linkages and be more creative was noted by a 41-year-old male health care professional, who has been using marijuana daily for the last 15 years:

Marijuana, in a sense, allows me to let go of being too linear, but it also allows me to step out of my own regular boundaries of what I consider "this is so" and "that is so." It allows me to be somewhat more creative. And I am a bit of an artist in that sense as well so I would say that a part of that culture of using marijuana to make connections that you wouldn't normally make . . . I would say that I'm an enhancement user. I do not zone out on pot. . . . I'm definitely in the camp of the more creative, more interactive. I cannot hang with people who just doze out or get paranoid. I'm kind of the opinion that if the drug has that effect, it's not the right drug for that person. You're not the kind of person who should take that drug.

A number of participants found that marijuana enhanced their artistic endeavors. "I used to paint a lot and music is a big part of my life. So yeah, cannabis does enhance these things for me because it makes me more relaxed and open minded." Another participant, who had experience with a wide range of illegal drugs, enjoyed writing while high:

Just doing any sort of writing or drawing or that kind of stuff I find that you come up with a lot more interesting things when you are high, especially on hallucinogens. Usually when I write it's mostly just what is going on . . . kind of like a journal but I also . . . I have been trying to write a book forever and I am not getting anywhere, but a lot of it centers around drug use, and it's more of like a fiction. But I do like to work on it when I'm high.

This was echoed by another participant who found that marijuana allowed him to be more confident in his ability as an artist:

All my life it's been very much "You can't do that. I can't do that" and I had all this self-talk and I have a lot of inhibitions built up around allowing myself the freedom just to be creative, just to let it happen . . . so marijuana really does help me to let go of those inhibitions and just let the painting or the writing or the drawing happen and not to judge it as it's becoming. Anything that I've ever accomplished smoking I've always found myself to be really quite pleased with in the end because I didn't second guess everything. I didn't go, "Oh, that's not right!" and want to crumple it up and throw it away. I just say, "Okay, we're just going to move. We're just going to go through this." So, yeah, it does help me with that.

For others, it enhanced their appreciation of the arts. For example,

I enjoy the effects, enhancement of my appreciation of art, music and philosophy. . . . You become more impressionable, suggestible and open-minded while being stoned or high, so you are able to access and appreciate a wider range of music and art. . . . It also seems to induce a more meditative state of mind sometimes, allowing one to achieve a kind of trance while dancing or drumming more easily. It also seems to stimulate an interest in science, mathematics and philosophy. Somehow these things often seem more fascinating while being stoned or high. Watching a documentary on art or science and technology can really blow my mind while I'm high or stoned. So for me it's a kind of mental tool to tweak my brain in various ways in order to optimize or intensify certain experiences or activities.

Computer Games, Household Chores, Sports, and the Great Outdoors

The notion of using marijuana to relax and focus and thereby achieve a "deeper" or enhanced appreciation of music and movies was echoed by others who applied it to other activities, such as playing computer games, household chores, and enjoying the natural environment. A 21-year-old pipe-welder noted that he was better at video games when "high" because marijuana "relaxed" him, allowing him to "zone into them and have a better mind set for the game." Similarly, he thought that marijuana helped with daily chores and odd jobs around the house: "I find it helps with my music and with my concentration level on daily tasks. I work and clean up at home and help build things; like we just redid our porch floor. . . . I find that pot allows me to concentrate on the task at hand better." Others noted how marijuana helped with household chores and gardening because it allowed them to focus on the more pleasurable aspects of the task:

I like doing, you know, the dishes, anything it seems that permits contemplation, like sweeping the floor. . . . Gardening you know, I am great with that too; I enjoy doing that. Stuff like that I enjoy doing with a little buzz on because it just makes it nice and the roses seem smellier and the birds chirp a little louder. It is nice . . . really, if I have some free time and I don't have anything going

on or I'm just puttsin' around doing housework or yard work or something, I don't mind indulging a bit more.

A 41-year-old business owner could only "zone out at the cabin" where she was away from her work and household chores. Otherwise she used marijuana to zone-in and get household chores accomplished:

I'm very different from my husband who will smoke in his den quite contentedly and just watch TV for the next three hours. For me, I can't sit still. I've got to clean the house, do this, do that, go take the dog for a walk . . . for sure, I get more housework done, I know that. Especially if it's in the evening, a Wednesday night or whatever, and I think, I'm bitchy as all hell, so it's probably better for my family if I do have a puff. I do get more done and I'm lighter with my family.

Not everyone found marijuana to enhance chores. "It doesn't enhance everything," reported a 30-year-old frequent user, "Like boring, really boring things, like especially cutting the grass or shovelling and stuff like that, I really hate it when I'm stoned. I hate it more, I think, because they're boring anyway, so pot makes it more boring."

Canada's Ross Rebagliati retained snowboarding's first-ever gold medal at the 1998 Winter Olympics after testing positive for marijuana. Although officials determined that marijuana was not, at least in this case, performance enhancing, in Canada, the decision reignited the debate over marijuana's prohibited status and to what extent it enhanced or inhibited an individual's perception and motor skills (Harris, 1998; Williamson, 1998). In this research, eight participants enjoyed using marijuana to enhance playing some sports, such as soccer, softball, and hockey, and/or engaged in some outdoor activities, such as biking, canoeing, hiking, and walking. Participants were selective with the sports they chose to play while using marijuana. For example, a 32-year-old carpenter and father of two, who has combined marijuana with sports for most of his adult life, recognized how it affected his performance adversely in some sports because his heightened awareness of being center-stage in certain circumstances:

If I am going to play beer league baseball I am going to get high, it is fun to do that. Not serious sports. Like I play like fun ball now, so on the way me and my buddy will smoke a joint and get high. But if I was going to play fastball I would not get high because it would affect my performance for sure. I have done it high and I am useless, basically. Now hockey is different, I can play hockey high no problem [How come?] I think . . . I don't know, maybe it's the individuality in fastball . . . you're up at the plate by yourself. If a ball is hit to you it is right to you. So maybe it is in my mind a bit more. In hockey, I wouldn't say I am any better or worse without it, but I do enjoy it more because I'm just into the game.

This was echoed by a 27-year-old computer technician who occasionally, and unintentionally, played soccer while high:

I do play soccer high sometimes. . . . I would say that some of my best performances have been while stoned. I can't say that the game is different, or that I see things differently, but I suppose again there is a focus that comes with being high that can alter the way one plays. I wouldn't call it *performance-enhancing*,

but just in the way that ones' thinking patterns are different, one might see the game differently (emphasis added).

Those who enjoyed being outdoors when using marijuana reported feeling they were more aware of the natural environment while under the influence:

Actually, I prefer to smoke marijuana outside, I don't like being inside when I smoke marijuana. Most of the times that I have smoked marijuana it's been outside. . . . I think marijuana has definitely, for me, been something that makes me appreciate nature more. It's like I'm grounded when I am outside. I definitely prefer to go outside and do it. . . . I think it also helps you get into the right frame of mind when you're surrounded by nature. You appreciate it more . . . marijuana helps you become more aware of and want to take care of the Earth.

This sentiment was shared by a 25-year-old social worker whose appreciation of nature was so heightened when using marijuana that it became a meaningful spiritual experience:

When the weather is nice I would rather go out and smoke marijuana outdoors and go for a walk or go and sit down somewhere. Right by a lake would be great but I can't do it most of the time. . . . Marijuana actually, what it does to me beyond all the other social aspects of it, it actually really combines me with nature. A lot of my religious experiences have actually come through marijuana. It is just that connection, an awareness of yourself, I think, and that you are part of nature. . . . It basically makes you want to go out into nature. Even when you are in the urban environment you are in a different realm. You become more aware of the tree that is growing out beside the street or the plant in your room. . . . but the best experiences are when you can connect yourself with the sun, the tree, and the fresh air. Just going out into nature itself is a good experience, but marijuana enhances it. . . . Like say, if I was walking down the road and I was not high I would not be like "oh what a nice tree" or "oh what a beautiful flower." But if I was high I might start thinking about nature and the connection that we have to it. . . . I believe that there is some kind of natural spirit in us and after using marijuana it either enters your spirit or stimulates that spirit that is in you and marijuana makes you conscious of the whole natural spirit that surrounds you. . . . I drove a motorbike from my home to a little lake and I smoked a joint. I just sat there by the lake and my thoughts hit the bottom of the lake and came back to me. It was like a circular motion. I achieved a very calm state. It had been a very stressful day for me, but just smoking weed and being in nature gave me such a wonderful experience.

Finally, for a 34-year-old retail worker and father of one, using marijuana in the outdoors was particularly relaxing and enjoyable, especially when he considered the perception others in his community may have of his practice:

I do like to walk and smoke dope. Everything is more vibrant. And it is exhilarating to go to a public place and smoke. I like to go to the park here in [his city] which is such a devout place. . . . You know all of these people write letters and they sit in their homes and they're nervous about what is going on out there. And then there's me and my dog, and I'm sitting under the tree having a little

puff, and to these people this is anarchy. They can't imagine anything worse than some pseudo-hippie sitting around with his dog off a leash smoking a hash pipe . . . like this is their worst nightmare and that makes me laugh, laugh, laugh. So I like to do that.

This last comment reflects the discord between marijuana users and those who support the continued prohibition of marijuana. The participants in this study did not regard their use as criminal, deviant, or immoral but rather as an accoutrement to their recreational activity in which they indulged in a responsible manner.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of what motivates a selected group of adult Canadians to use marijuana and to explore the social contexts in which it is used. What is evident at first is that there is no such thing as a typical marijuana user. Second, it is clear that marijuana, like other drugs, affects different people in different ways. The sample consisted of 41 male and female adult marijuana users between the ages of 21 and 61, with varying levels of education and employed in a wide range of occupations. In addition, the participants differed in terms of their frequency of use, the amount consumed as well as the type of recreational activities that they engaged in while under the influence and the manner in which they perceived these activities to be enhanced. The only significant commonalities they share as marijuana users are their middle-class status and disassociation with organized religion, the latter having been found by others to be common among illegal drug users (Adlaf and Smart, 1985; Cook, Goddard, and Westall, 1987; Hardert and Dowd, 1994; Merrill, Folsom, and Christopherson, 2005; to name but a few).

The findings support the "rational choice" view of drug use. Using interviews to gain insight into the subjective experiences of the participants, this research corroborated the results of previous studies that found that most adult marijuana users regulate use to their recreational time and do not use compulsively. Rather, their use is purposively intended to enhance their leisure activities and manage the challenges and demands of living in contemporary modern society. Generally, participants reported using marijuana because it enhanced relaxation and concentration making a broad range of leisure activities more enjoyable and pleasurable. That most participants made rational decisions to enhance recreation through moderate use, and reported no dependency or addiction problems, is probably related to their middle class status: they are well educated, gainfully employed, can afford to be engaged in a host of hobbies and interests, and as one participant put it "have more important things to do than just sit around stoned all day." In other words, there was nothing in their immediate social environment to suggest that they were using marijuana as a way of escaping or retreating from any significant social or psychological ills. Although middle-class users may develop dependency problems, generally, "heavy users" tend to be poor and socially marginalized, using drugs regularly as a means of regular escape, and consequently running a greater risk of developing serious drug problems (Peele and Brodsky, 1991; Zimmer and Morgan, 1997).

Although previous studies have noted that most users are motivated to use marijuana because of the relaxation and euphoria it provides, and have noted the leisure activities in which these users are engaged, the present study focuses on exploring in more detail and describing more precisely how participants perceived these leisure activities to be enhanced by marijuana. For the participants in this study, marijuana enhanced relaxation by allowing them to disengage from their daily stresses and worries and "tune or zone out" while

watching television or movies and listening to music. In addition, some participants reported that marijuana allowed them to reflect on their daily stresses and worries and provided them with alternative, often less antagonistic perspectives. Moreover, marijuana was viewed, like alcohol, as a social lubricant, useful for reducing anxieties in social situations and making people more open and friendly.

Some participants also used marijuana because, in addition to relaxing them, or perhaps as a consequence of the relaxation, it also enhanced their ability to concentrate. Marijuana reduced their inhibitions and insecurities, heightened or intensified their level of awareness, and allowed them to “tune in” or “zone in” to the activity or experience. As a result, some participants reported that marijuana enhanced watching movies, listening to music, art, literature and philosophy because it facilitated a deeper or more intense appreciation of them. Similarly, some participants found that daily chores, such as gardening and housework were more enjoyable because attention could be focused on things other than the mundane nature of the task. Other participants noted how marijuana relaxed them and improved their ability to focus on the natural environment or the physical sensations associated with sexual activity.

Finally, these findings inform the “normalization of drugs” research, which suggests that for many users illegal drug use has become a “normal” part of their day-to-day experience, a way of life. They are making reasoned choices^{§§} about using marijuana to enhance leisure activities. Moreover, as we elaborate elsewhere, these users are able to incorporate their marijuana use into their daily routines successfully without significant negative consequence because they establish and follow an informal set of rules dictating the responsible and irresponsible use of marijuana (Osborne and Fogel, forthcoming). Drugs affect different people in different ways and to assume that a drug like marijuana has an identical behavioral effect on everyone which they cannot control is to succumb to “pharmacological determinism” (Husak, 2002, 79) or “voodoo pharmacology” (Sullum, 2003, 101, 267–268).

Although these findings are not generalizable given the small sample size, if they are corroborated by further ethnographic research there may be a compelling reason to reconsider present laws that prohibit marijuana use and treat recreational marijuana users as criminals. These recreational marijuana users do not consider their marijuana use as a compulsive behavior resulting from some form of pathology such as boredom, alienation, or depression, as is often asserted by those who support the current drug laws. Rather, the participants in this study used marijuana to enhance relaxation and/or concentration and to make various recreational activities more pleasurable. They are no more escaping reality through their use of marijuana than those people who are engrossed by novels, enthralled by television and movies, mesmerized by religious prayer and devotion, captivated by playing online role-playing games, thrilled by roller-coasters and theme-park rides, or engaged in any other mind- and mood-altering behavior. From our earliest days as children twirling around in circles or rolling down hills to make ourselves dizzy, we have sought to alter our consciousness and perception; to play with reality. The point is, although there are different

^{§§}Behavioral economists have posited the concept and process of “rational addiction,” which is based on an economic analysis of individual behavior in which individuals will not voluntarily take actions which they expect will make them worse off. This challenges the moral, criminal, and medical models which are based on a posited existing “impairment.” The individual, in this thesis, judges when s/he is better off or worse off; a dynamic, multidimensional, subjective, a more than likely nonlinear process which is also bounded (culture, time, place, etc.) (Vuchinich and Heather, 2003). The reader is also reminded to consider the work by Daniel Kahneman, who received the Noble Prize for documenting the irrationality underpinnings of man’s judgments (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky, 1982). Editor’s note.

degrees of “escapism” that vary from individual to individual, it would seem that the desire to alter our perception, to create alternative realities, from which we derive pleasure, is intrinsic to our human nature. The participants in this study view their drug use not as an escape from reality, but rather as an enhancement of reality, or altering of reality, that they find particularly pleasurable.

As Husak (2002) argues, pleasure is intrinsically valuable and should not require an elaborate defence even if it involves the use of a drug. Alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, Viagra, and many other legal drugs are used daily by millions to enhance the pleasure of recreational activities. Humans have ingested drugs for thousands of years and very few societies have refrained completely from using them. Researchers, such as physician Andrew Weil, have speculated that “the desire to alter consciousness periodically is an innate, normal drive analogous to hunger or the sexual drive” (cited in Husak, 128). In a modern, liberal, pluralistic society, citizens will have very different views about which recreational activities are valuable. Therefore, as Husak contends, if we wish to have a just society then we must not only be prepared to recognize that many people will decide to engage in activities that seem strange and unusual to others, but also ensure that these activities are not made more dangerous by our political institutions and policies.

As such, the decriminalization and eventual legalization of marijuana and the adoption of a harm reduction strategy are prudent policy options, especially considering the mounting evidence that suggests that current prohibition strategies are counterproductive and a waste of human and financial resources that could be put to better use (DeBeck et al., 2006; Gerber, 2004; Gray, 2001; Miron, 2004; Nolin, 2003; Valance, 1993; Zimring and Hawkins, 1992). In addition, growing medical evidence suggests that although marijuana has adverse health effects, these are no more dangerous, or perhaps less dangerous, than those posed by controlled legal substances such as alcohol and nicotine (Earlywine, 2002; Nolin, Nutt et al., 2007, 2003; Single et al., 1998; Zimmer and Morgan, 1997).

After considering many of the harmful effects of enforcement-based policies, the Senate Committee concluded that prohibition had been unsuccessful at reducing consumption or problematic use and that the continued prohibition of cannabis jeopardizes the health and safety of Canadians. Moreover, they advised the Canadian government to treat drug use as a public health issue and to move towards a regulatory approach for controlling cannabis (Nolin, 2003). Similarly, the Health Officers Council of British Columbia (2005: 2) has argued that “the removal of criminal penalties for drug possession for personal use, and placement of these currently illegal substances in a tight regulatory framework, could both aid implementation of programs to assist those engaged in harmful drug use, and reduce secondary unintended drug-related harms to society that spring from a failed criminal-prohibition approach.” It makes little sense to criminalize people who use marijuana responsibly to enhance their recreation. If Canadians are truly concerned with reducing the harms associated with marijuana use they should consider supporting the harm reduction movement that essentially treats drug use and misuse pragmatically as a public health issue rather than a crime issue (Hathaway and Erickson, 2003). This includes encouraging the study of the acute and chronic effects of marijuana use as well as further ethnographic and qualitative studies that investigate why marijuana is used, the meaning it has for users, how it is incorporated into their daily lives, and the overall impact it has on the quality of their lives. Although this research collected the basic demographic information of the participants, there is a need to collect more detailed information regarding their background characteristics in order to achieve a fuller appreciation of users as complex dynamic persons, each occupying a number of social roles, with various resources at their disposal, and who are adapting daily in a variety of social contexts. Only then will researchers have a

more complete understanding of the nature and role of marijuana in the everyday lives of users.

RÉSUMÉ

Selon le Comité spécial sur les drogues illicites (2003) peu de recherches ethnographiques ont été réalisées afin d'examiner pourquoi et dans quels contextes sociaux les gens consomment de la marijuana de façon récréative. Le but de cette étude qualitative préliminaire est de mieux comprendre ces deux questions grâce à des entrevues effectuées entre 2005 et 2006 auprès de 41 Canadiens âgés de 21 à 61 ans. Les pratiques de consommation de ces 25 hommes et 16 femmes varient d'un usage épisodique à quotidien régulier. La majorité des participants font partie de la classe moyenne, détiennent un emploi et consomment de la marijuana de façon récréative pour rehausser leur expérience de détente et de concentration durant la pratique d'activités de loisirs. Les conclusions de cette étude et leurs liens possibles avec la législation et les politiques concernant les drogues y sont discutés. Les limites de cette étude sont dûment notées.

RESUMEN

El Comité Especial del Senado Canadiense Sobre Drogas Ilegales (2003) destacó que hay pocas investigaciones etnográficas dedicadas a considerar por qué las personas consumen la marihuana recreacionalmente o los contextos sociales en que la consumen. El propósito de esta investigación de exploración cualitativa es mejorar el entendimiento de estos ignorados temas, a través de entrevistas llevadas a cabo entre el 2005 y el 2006, con 41 adultos canadienses consumidores de marihuana. La edad de los participantes oscilaba entre los 21 y los 61 años de edad e incluyeron 25 hombres y 16 mujeres, cuyos patrones de consumo variaban entre consumo esporádico y consumo diario. Eran en su mayoría de clase media, empleados en diversas ocupaciones, y usaban la marihuana recreacionalmente para mejorar la relajación y concentración mientras ejecutaban actividades de recreación. Las implicaciones sobre las leyes antidroga y sus políticas son discutidas. Las limitaciones del estudio son reconocidas.

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Glossary

Conflict Crime: deviant acts that the state defined as illegal, but the definition is controversial in the wider society.

Decriminalization: the repeal or amendment of statutes, which made certain acts criminal, so that those acts no longer are crimes subject to criminal prosecution but may be subject to some form of regulation, such as a fine.

Normalization of Drugs: the extent to which drug users have incorporated drug use into their day-to-day routines with little or no ill-effects and the cultural acceptance and accommodation of such drug use by the rest of society.

Pharmacological Determinism: the belief that illegal drugs affect behaviour in specific ways solely as a result of their chemical properties.

Regulatory Approach: refers to how the state would legalize marijuana and then control the quantity and quality of marijuana produced, control, and monitor the behavior of manufacturers and distributors, tax cannabis sales, and restrict sales to minors.

Saturation Point: when further interviews no longer provide any new insights because the information provided by the participants become highly repetitive.

Voodoo Pharmacology: the belief that illegal drugs cause people to behave in particular and uncontrollable ways.

Notes

1. This research was made possible by an Augustana Faculty Research Grant and a Roger S. Smith Student Award. The authors would like to thank Trudi Lorenz for her research assistance and Stan Einstein and an anonymous reviewer for their editorial suggestions and comments. Elements of this article were presented at the Pacific Sociological Association 77th Annual Meeting, Hollywood Hills, Universal City, California, April 20–23, 2006.
2. Marijuana was first prohibited in 1923 and over the proceeding years the question decriminalization has been debated with some regularity. For accounts see Solomon and Usprich (1991), Giffen, Endicott, and Lambert (1991); Fischer, Ala-Leppilampi, Single, and Amanda (2003); and Martel (2006).
3. Similarly, according to Gettman (2006, 3) “Marijuana is the largest cash crop in the United States, more valuable than corn and wheat combined. Using conservative price estimates domestic marijuana production has a value of \$35.8 billion. The domestic

marijuana crop consists of 56.4 million marijuana plants cultivated outdoors worth \$31.7 billion and 11.7 million plants cultivated indoors worth \$4.1 billion.”

4. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the reader should consider the motives of various stakeholders (individuals and systems) for making recreational drugs more available and accessible. For instance, according to Mulgrew (2005), some marijuana growers and various other cannabis product entrepreneurs support legalization, because they expect to benefit financially, however, others are resistant to legalization because it would eliminate the need for their services.
5. For thorough reviews of current research on various aspects of marijuana use see Sussman and Stacy (1996), Zimmer and Morgan (1997), Iverson (2000) Earleywine (2002), and Green, Kavanagh, and Young (2003).
6. Becker’s (1963) qualitative research on marijuana use, deviant subcultures, and the social construction of deviance was largely responsible for the development of labelling theory.
7. A few qualitative studies have focused their attention on marijuana subcultures (Golub, 2006; Johnson, 1973), marijuana and sexuality (Weller and Halikas, 1984), illegal marijuana use by those suffering from chronic illness (Coomber, Oliver, and Morris, 2003), marijuana argot (Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck, and Dunlap, 2006), marijuana use by Jamaican women and children (Dreher, 1984a, 1984b), the consequences of marijuana abuse (Baum, 1998; Hendin, Hass, Singer, Ellner, and Ulman, 1987), social meanings of marijuana use for Asian youth (Lee and Kirkpatrick, 2005), and the “normalization” of drugs by British youths and adolescents (Measham, Newcome, and Parker, 1994; Parker, Alridge, and Measham, 1998, 2002; Shiner and Newburn, 1997; Williams and Parker, 1991), Canadian adolescents (Warner, Room, and Adlaf, 1999, Warner, Weber, and Albanes, 1999), and Canadian adults (Hathaway, 1997b, 2004a).
8. Hathaway has published five articles based on two qualitative studies. See Hathaway (1997a, 1997b; 2003, 2004a, 2004b).
9. This is echoed by Sullum (2003, 134), a journalist in the United States, who interviewed 32 “controlled drug users,” when he argues that “marijuana’s compatibility with a wide range of activities is one reason for its popularity and, moreover, that the “use of marijuana to enhance various kinds of experiences belies the notion that pot smokers do nothing but lie around in a stupor.”
10. E-mail interviewing is obviously a very recent research strategy. For a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of e-mil interviews, see Murray and Sixsmith (1998), Mann and Stewart (2000), Hamilton and Bowers (2006), and Meho (2006).
11. Although participants were told that it was unlikely they would benefit directly from participating in the study, approximately one-fourth of them (N = 10) reported that the interview process was personally useful because it provided them the opportunity to reflect on why they used marijuana and the impact their use had on their lives. In addition, it is possible that participants were motivated to participate because they believed that this study might contribute to the legalization of marijuana in Canada making it more accessible and available and eliminating its criminal status. For a discussion of the ethical implications of collecting data from individuals who are not very likely to benefit directly from their participation see Kleinig and Einstein (2006).
12. Participants differed slightly in their opinions as to what constituted responsible use. Although most agreed that moderation was important, a small number (N = 10) believed that it was acceptable to use at work, depending on the nature of the work and the level of intoxication. Seven participants thought it was not irresponsible or slightly irresponsible to drive while under the influence of marijuana. A more detailed analysis

and discussion of participants' perceptions of responsible marijuana use can be found in a forthcoming article by the authors.

13. Interestingly, almost all of the participants stated that it was very difficult to describe what it felt like to be under the influence of marijuana. As one participant put, "I don't really know how to describe it. It's like asking someone to describe . . . I don't know . . . what it feels like to be in love."
14. When asked what she meant by "real" recreation the participant replied:

Real recreation would mean—finding the time to go out and do things like movies or go hiking or camping. It takes more time and effort to plan an activity like that than it does to find the time to roll a doob and smoke it. Some recreational activities are non-child friendly so . . . a lot of my friends like to spend their time at the bar, not so much fun for me, as it entails a sitter and usually a hangover in the morning.

15. The minor physical, emotional, or psychological problems associated with marijuana use as reported by the participants are discussed in a forthcoming article by the authors.
16. *Gelé* literally translates as "frozen" but is commonly used by the Québécois for "stoned."
17. For a concise overview of cannabis and auditory perception research see Fachner (2006), who has written extensively on the topic.
18. Other personal testimonies to marijuana's sex-enhancing properties have been recorded by sex columnist Dan Savage on his website Savage Love: <http://www.thestranger.com/savage/pot>

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