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Knowledge of Good and Evil: An Urban Ethnography of a Smoking Culture

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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A significant amount of research has been dedicated to examining issues of drugs, drug abuse and drug dealing. Unfortunately, nearly all of the sociological and criminological literature on drug using and selling behavior has stayed trapped within a prism that fails to conceptualize the practice as anything other than, at best, a public health issue, and at worst, a criminal problem in need of eradication. This dissertation takes a different approach to understanding the phenomena of drug use, in particular cannabis use. Utilizing non-participant observations and semi-structured in-depth interview methodology, I sought to understand the ideas, culture, motivations and rationalizations of a group of cannabis users, growers and sellers in Southern California. This qualitative approach provided an in depth, descriptive and rich understanding of the motivations of cannabis users, growers and sellers. This dissertation presents a view of drug use and selling as inherently normal, non-problematic, and utilized for spiritual, social, cultural and reflexive purposes.

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KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL: AN URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A SMOKING CULTURE

Herb is important to those who accept it, but it is more important to the people who do not accept it, because herb is a reality. Herb is not something you create, herb is a plant...Why these people who want to do so much good for everyone, who call themselves government and this and that, why them say you must not use the herb? They say you must not use it because it make you rebel. Against what? Against the men who create desire and want of material things, and captivate your mind, and offer you a pension and then keep it all...So herb make you look upon yourself and instead of wanting to work for the Man you want to be the Man too. Not in the sense of owning this, but in the sense as to why should you have to bow to these things... When the world confuses you and you're worried, and you don't have time to think, herb is the thing that gives you a little time for yourself, so you can live.

-Marley, Bob, 1979.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Life Without Parole

Its just after 9 p.m. on a cold night in Shreveport Louisiana. A homeless African-American man, Fate Winslow, approaches a man on the street and asks him what he is looking for. The man however, is no ordinary individual, the man that Fate approaches is an undercover cop. The cop tells him he wants two bags and promises him a \$5 commission. Being homeless and in need of a meal for the night, Fate takes the officers money and returns with two bags of marijuana, after which he is ushered into the backseat of a patrol car. Three months later, Winslow is found guilty of selling a schedule 1 narcotic and is sentenced to life in a hard prison camp without the possibility of parole. Winston's fate to die behind bars for a miniscule amount of pot is hard to believe, but it is not unique. While it would be comforting to think Fate's was the only of its kind, unfortunately, this is not the case. As of August 2013, there are approximately 3,278 people serving life sentences without the possibility of parole for non-violent offenses

according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) 2013 report. And, 79% of those individuals are sentenced for non-violent drug offenses (ACLU 2013).

This reality is ever more shocking when considering that 23 states have legalized the medical use of marijuana, and 3 states and the District of Columbia, have legalized cannabis for recreational purposes for individuals over the age of 21. What do we make of this perplexing contradictory view of marijuana as medicine on one hand, and a criminal substance so abhorrent that we need to lock up users and sellers for the rest of their lives on the other?

Marijuana

Some revere cannabis as the vehicle to spiritual enlightenment and consciousness (Barrett, 1997), while others consider it to be a direct revelation from God (Morningstar, 1985; Dobkin De Rios & Winkelman, 1989: 4; see also Shannon, 2008 where Shannon suggest Moses was under the influence of a hallucinogen when he received his visions.). Many advocates claim marijuana has various health benefits all the way from the treatment of asthma, multiple sclerosis, nausea and glaucoma (Grotenhermen, 2002). Still, others condemned it as the road to perdition (Peele & Brodsky, 1997). How are we to understand these perplexing, polarizing and seemingly contradictory opinions of a plant that has no acute dangerous effects and which has caused no known overdoses (Goldstein, 2001: 202)? The effects of the plant itself may be just as contradictory as the societal reaction to its use.

People have reported feeling more relaxed and peaceful and that their thoughts were more profound and deeper (Goode, 1970). Respondents generally describe the

feelings in favorable or pleasurable terms. Others, such as the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) suggest that marijuana effects are frightening and alarming, and in large enough doses can produce paranoia and anxiety, and can even trigger the onset or relapse of schizophrenia in people predisposed to the condition (2011). These same opponents suggest that to a lesser extent marijuana is correlated with depression (NIDA, 2011). These contradictory effects likely depend on the dosage, route of administration and subjective cultural context (Pihl et al., 1979). Light use tends to produce a relatively relaxed mood, while heavier usage tends to bring on strong hallucinations that occasionally frighten the user, a phenomenon frequently termed “tripping.”¹

Recent advances in the understanding of medical marijuana also points to how the strain used and Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) to cannabidiol (CBD) content heavily influences the type of mental reactions a user may experience, with the former bringing on a stimulating mental high, while the latter causes a sedative body high. Cannabis Sativas usually have a high THC to CBD ratio while Cannabis Indicas have a higher CBD to THC ratio. Sativas are frequently used during the day while Sativas are used at night. Understanding the contradictory effects of the substance helps us to understand why so many people from such diverse backgrounds use the substance for so many different reasons. It helps to understand why teenagers may smoke a small amount after school and watch funny movies, or why some smoke large amounts to induce spiritual visions.

¹ Tripping was originally used in hippy culture to denote a hallucination that brought about an inward journey, hence a trip

Far too often, anthropologic and criminologic understandings of the use of hallucinogenic or consciousness-altering substances are biased as a result of the general negative view of these substances within the broader society. However, Dobkin De Rios and Winkelman (1989) argue that in order to understand the true nature of hallucinogens, “these substances must be viewed as ancient tools that have been employed for their psychedelic (‘mind manifesting’) or visionary properties.” (p. 4).

In this project, I do not seek to understand the use of marijuana in simplistic or reductionist terms. That is, I do not seek to explain marijuana use simply within the context of altered subjective feelings, but to illustrate what the feelings and the substance means to the actual users. Thus I try to understand the multifaceted, nuanced and complex meanings users and sellers attach to their use.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to understand the practice of marijuana use from a marijuana user’s perspective I will conduct an ethnography of a community of marijuana users, growers and sellers in Costa Mesa, California. The community to be studied does not fit the stereotypical mold of drug dealers. They do not make large sums of money from selling marijuana, and they are not violent or overly deviant. Instead, many of them are married and/or have small children. The central research questions guiding my dissertation research are:

- Q1) Why do these individuals smoke marijuana?
- Q2) Considering the lack of large economic incentives, and the extremely high risk of arrest associated with the venture, why do these individuals participate in the selling of marijuana?

- Q3) How do these people come to understand marijuana use and marijuana selling in their own lives? How did they learn the trade and how they marijuana system operates?
- Q4) How is the custom of smoking understood by the members of this group?

SIGNIFICANCE

My dissertation research is unique because it addresses an under-researched area in the field of symbolic interactionism, the sociology of culture and criminology. The results of this study will provide much needed insights into why people use marijuana and why they situate themselves in marijuana culture. But more importantly, this study will give insight into the lives of marijuana users and sellers by seeking to understand the social world they live in, and marijuana use, marijuana culture and marijuana selling from their own perspective. This is one area the sociological and criminological literature has failed to adequately address. Criminological theories, as the literature review below will demonstrate, tends to view substance users and the practice of substance use in pejorative ways and conscribe overly moralistic judgments on the practice.

Marijuana is by far the most overly used illicit substance in America and the world (Goode, 2008: 240); thus, inquiries into why people use it and how those that use it view the practice is of utmost importance. Far too often the socio/criminological literature focuses on hard drug usage and the problematic use of drugs. However, a very small percentage of the drug using population are hard drug users (drugabuse.gov, 2015), the majority of the drug using population use marijuana. And an even smaller percentage of those hard drug users develop serious problems (drugabuse.gov, 2015). Most drug use is recreational and non-problematic. Although many social scientist view substance use

and selling as resulting from a corrupt social structure, or as a symbolic learning process², they all nevertheless view the behavior as deviant and a practice that needs to be remedied. By allowing the individuals that participate in the actions to have a voice and explain their actions from their point of view, I hope this can bring a new understanding of the practice of marijuana smoking and a new understanding of the individuals who use it.

Beyond the purely theoretical and academic significance of this dissertation, the topic is relevant when one considers the social and economic impact of our current perceptions and policy towards drugs and cannabis. Since the early 1980's and 1990's the U.S. has seen a marked increase in the number of people arrested and imprisoned for non-violent drug offenses. In 1990 there were approximately 327,000 marijuana arrest in the U.S. By 2006, that number more than doubled to 829,625 (Beckett & Herbert, 2008). Moreover, since the mid-1990s the proportion of marijuana only arrest grew dramatically. Prior to the mid-90s, drug arrested predominantly focused on harder more drugs such cocaine and heroin. By 2006, approximately 44% of all U.S. drug arrest concerned only marijuana (Beckett & Herbert, 2008). Moreover, marijuana arrest, reflecting the general war on drugs, has had a disproportionate impact on racial minorities. In 2002, 26% of all people arrested for marijuana possession were black. This, despite the fact that self-report measures indicate that blacks comprised only about 14% of the marijuana using population (reflecting their proportion of the overall U.S. population). Likewise, survey data indicates that blacks comprised only 17.6% of the

² (Differential association, social-control, deviant subculture and problem-prone behavior, social disorganization, anomie, strain and economic conflict theories are all examples of these perspectives)

marijuana selling population, yet comprised approximately 36.1% of those arrested for selling in 2002 (King and Mauer, 2005).

While there has not been a substantial increase in the prison population from marijuana only offenses (Beckett and Herbert, 2008), when marijuana only offenders are convicted, they are much more likely to spend time in jail than times past. On average, persons convicted of marijuana felonies in state courts are sentenced to 31 month in jail or prison (King and Mauer, 2005). Moreover, of those serving time in prison for marijuana offenses, 40% were first-time offenders and 88% had no history of violence (King and Mauer, 2005). What is even more shocking is that a small number of people are actually serving life sentences for the distribution of marijuana (Schlosser, 2003).

Beyond the direct cost to the individual user, society suffers as a result of our punitive anti-drug crusade. For one, the enforcement of anti-marijuana laws devours significant fiscal resources. The law federal drug control budget alone over a 10 years period 1991-2002 rose from 4.6 billion to 9.5 billion dollars. Since the majority of the increase in drug arrest was targeted towards marijuana, the majority of the 4.9 billion dollar increase was spent to stop individuals from using a relatively harmless plant. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that increases in drug arrest leads to an increase in other more violent offenses (Benson, Leburn and Rasmussen, 2001). Possible explanations of this phenomenon are that an increase focus on drug offenses redirect resources from more serious crimes (Benson, Rasmussen & Kim, 1998).

Again, it must be reiterated that these consequences all stem from the illegalization of a substance that through its thousands of years of use, has produced no

deaths, that is inversely correlated with crime, and that may have the ability to cure or at least treat many debilitating diseases. Again, sociologists have essentially been implicit in this racial and classist war by not challenging the commonly held, racist, classist and overly moralistic assumptions of drugs and drug users. My dissertation seeks to at least attempt to remedy these perceptions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The dominant theoretical paradigm to be applied in this study is the interactionist approach. The interactionist approach, which includes interpretive, symbolic interactionism and constructivism, believe that reality, and what people know and believe to be true about the world is created and reinforced as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010: 67). Any focus on marijuana culture and any attempt to understand the lives and actions of marijuana sellers must acknowledge the fact that culture is an abstract construct put together as individuals interact with each other and develop shared meanings and understandings.

Although this dissertation will rely heaviest on the interactionist perspective, I do not intend to discount other paradigms or disregard how the macro-level structure of society weighs upon individuals understandings of their realities. In fact, the macro-level structure of society is an integral part of this study as I intend to synthesize the macro and micro levels in order to understand the use of marijuana. This, however, is not a radical departure from the symbolic interactionist perspective as a key component of the perspective is that it always defines cultures and cultural practices as situated, that is,

located in and affected by the political, social, economic, age, race and gender of those that embrace them.

Consider marijuana use and selling from the functionalist perspective. Marijuana may serve as a type of homosocial bonding amongst disaffected youth that may feel themselves rejected by society and cut out of the formal economy. Thus, in addition to a type of common bonding and tension relief, it also serves as a way to solidify a strong, yet largely symbolic, anti-systemic rebellious identity against society. Likewise, individuals cut out of the market place, or who may wish to not participate in the formal economy can find work as a pot seller, grower or transporter. Thus, marijuana use can serve various social functions in broader society.

On the opposite side of the theoretical spectrum, I could intend to look at marijuana use from a conflict perspective. Resulting from the inequities of the capitalist economy, certain segments of society are officially cut out of the formal economy resulting from prejudice and discrimination. Thus, resulting from this anomie, marijuana selling may be the only route certain segments may be able to take to subsist (Merton, 1938). Rather than marijuana use filling an inherent rebellious spirit, marijuana use and selling may be a type of escape from the deprivation, poverty and hopelessness that characterizes the contradictions of capitalism. Many sociological theorists believe that critical theory, or conflict theory is the best paradigm to be used for ethnographic research because it helps to discover community problems and hopefully solve those problems and bring about positive change. This type of ethnography is frequently referred to as “applied ethnography.” I do not here take this stance as I do not consider

the practice of marijuana use or marijuana selling as a problem or in need of correcting. Nor do I believe marijuana users are necessarily degraded helpless individuals that seek escape from the drudgery and bleakness of life, as Kaplan's (1975) self-derogation theory would suggest.

While this dissertation can and will incorporate various sociological and criminological theories to aid in the understanding of marijuana use and selling, ultimately, the study will be descriptive and interpretive of the cultural practices of marijuana use and selling. But most importantly, this study seeks to create a paradigm shift in our common American cultural understanding of drug use. A paradigm shift is an intellectually violent revolution in which older worldviews no longer explain current realities (Kuhn, 1970). It is defined as a "dramatic change in which one scientific/conceptual worldview is replaced by another." (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010: 57).

METHODOLOGY

Ethnography

This dissertation is a qualitative study employing a multi-method ethnography that utilizes direct-observation combined with in-depth interviewing with the community of participants that allowed me to participate in their culture. This dissertation seeks to examine the marijuana culture from an interpretive symbolic interactionist lens to understand how these participants understand their participation and roles within this subculture. The reason I chose to base my study off ethnographic methods is because, as LeCompte and Schensul (2010) point out, "[ethnography] builds or generates theories of

culture-or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave that are situated in local time and space.” (p.12). As stated above, one of the biggest problems with criminological theories of substance use is its overemphasis on users as victims of abuse, socially marginalized and disaffected individuals, or people of a deviant subculture that is mired in pathology. Ethnography takes the position that human behavior and the ways in which people construct and make meaning of their worlds and their lives are highly variable and locally specific (p. 1). Thus, ethnographic methods allow me to answer the questions of my study without consigning or categorizing the population I am studying as deviants before coming to understand the way they view, interpret or understand their actions.

Furthermore, performing this ethnography will help in the construction of a new theory of substance abuse, as I claim throughout this prospectus that previous theories are outdated and in need of remedy. Consequently, this study will also employ a type of grounded theory approach to studying this marijuana counter-culture. Sociologist Kathy Charmaz (2004) describes how to perform grounded theory by, “You begin with an area to study. Then, you build your theoretical analysis on what you discover is relevant in the actual worlds that you study within this area.” (497). A grounded theory approach gives extra credence to the interactionist nature of the study because my opinions and interpretations of the practice of marijuana use and selling is not clouded by preconceived notions of what I expect to find.

Research Setting

The study will take place in Costa Mesa, California, following a community of heavy marijuana users and sellers who participate in the partially illicit (I use the term

partially because California has laws that allow for the legal use of medicinal marijuana) marijuana trade. All participants names in this study will be changed to conceal their identity. Costa Mesa is a city in Orange County with a population of about 100,000 inhabitants. It is nestled between the extremely upper class, predominantly white area of Newport Beach and Irvine (Irvine consistently ranks as one of the safest cities in America according to the *Los Angeles Times*), and the poorer, older, larger and predominantly Latino cities of Santa Ana and Anaheim³. Costa Mesa is a type of buffer zone between the haves and have-nots in Orange County and it is from this offset situation that the group gets its unique racial and class character (one white member, one Hawaiian member and two Latino members). Furthermore, this balanced and relatively stable environment allows the group to avoid the more dangerous nuances of the illicit substance trade while serving as a mechanism where they still have a constant supply of customers from both the richer and poorer elements of the county.

The main meeting place for the group is The Corner (a marijuana dispensary). The other common “kick it” spot for the group is Natty’s mother’s house. The house is near a popular pool hall in the city of Costa Mesa. It is an older wood house with a front-porch type stoop that serves as a gathering and kick it (hangout) point for the Cotton-Mouth Kings. Although just off the largest street in Costa Mesa (Harbor Boulevard), marijuana is smoked openly on the porch, and Natty Dreads Mother is surprisingly

³ I am not suggesting that the racial composition of the cities lead to crime. Rather, I imply that because of the racist structure of American society, poverty and consequently violent crime tends to be much more prominent in communities of color.

permissive of the behavior. Many nights begin at the House and end at the pool hall and many transactions occur at both locations.

The Group

The group I decided to research was a cannabis selling and smoking group based in Mid-Orange County. I decided to use the group understudy for two main reasons. One, through a social-network snowball sampling I was able to get in contact with the members of the group. And two, the members of the group each had years of experience smoking, growing and selling cannabis in both the illegal market and the semi-legal medical marijuana market. This gave me the added benefit of comparing cannabis markets before and after the medical marijuana system.

Furthermore, having access to a unique set of individuals who participate in a semi-legal, and partially illegal economic venture provided rich data for an underexplored market dynamic. This, combined with the groups unique beliefs about cannabis and its beliefs about their own cannabis selling behavior and what it meant made for a fascinatingly rich and distinctive ethnography. Moreover, I chose this group of individuals because of unique characteristics of the group understudy. For one, the group members are not young teenagers. In fact, they are in their late twenties and early thirties and many are parents. Most criminological research examining drug users and sellers focuses on teenage offenders. Two, the members are not dispossessed minorities selling drugs in a dangerous urban area for survival. The study takes place in a relatively middle class area of Orange County with other legitimate economic ventures to pursue. And three, the members are not the typical rich drug dealers documented in films like

Scarface. The relative normality (normal in the sense of not being stereotypically violent drug dealers) of the group with their unique perspective on cannabis and cannabis selling led me to study this group.

Pseudonyms

I provided confidentiality to the participants of the study. Since I as the researcher can identify the members of the study the project is not anonymous. However, all steps possible were taken to insure the confidentiality of the study's participants. The names and ages of all participants have been changed. I paid close attention to make sure there was no way to be able to discern the actual identity of the study's participants. Moreover, the city, and certain locations discussed in the preceding chapters are meant to be purposefully misleading in case anybody who is familiar with the area or with the people I study were to try to determine the actual identity of the participants of the dispensary in the study. Pseudonyms are particularly relevant for qualitative researchers to assure that deductive disclosure does not occur. Deductive disclosure occurs when individual traits of individuals or groups makes them identifiable in research reports (Sieber, 1992). Qualitative research, and ethnographic research in particular tends to be rich, descriptive and vivid. For this reason, researchers need to pay particular attention to not tipping off potential readers to the actual identities of the participants. Breaches in confidentiality also have the potential to damage the public's trust in researchers (Allen, 1997).

One famous case of deductive disclosure was Carolyn Ellis's *Fisher Folk* (1986). The research participants were able to identify themselves and their neighbors and people from neighboring communities were able to identify them. Ellis later went on to write

that the research participants felt ashamed and betrayed by her book (1995). Because of these problems, simple name changes were not enough to protect the anonymity of my informants since deductive disclosure is a possibility. Thus, other aspects such as age and location were changed as well. I employed a confidentiality approach that Kaiser (2009) termed the Dominant approach. Although Kaiser is not a proponent of the approach is was ideal for my particular study.

I chose to name the group the CM Kings for a couple of reasons. First, they do not consider themselves a gang and thus have no formal name for themselves. Rather, the Kings are a compilation of a group of friends that sold and grew in various capacities and eventually pulled their resources together to set up a marijuana dispensary. However, the name serves another purpose. I use the name as a play on Sudir Venkatesh's Black Kings. In *Gang Leader for A Day* Venkatesh (2008) chronicles the structure and practices of urban drug dealers on the streets of Southside Chicago. In this study I counter Venkatesh notion that drug markets are inherently dangerous and violent by showing the structure of suburban cannabis markets and the semi-legal medical marijuana markets and its success in stifling crime and violence in the market.

Research Ethics in Crime Settings

Although not traditionally defined as vulnerable populations such as children, the mentally disabled or individuals with low social status, research on criminal populations present unique challenges for the researcher. Because of the unique circumstances of doing criminological research, the American Society of Criminologist code of ethics states, in relation to research populations that they: a. comply with appropriate federal

and institutional requirements pertaining to the proper review and approval for research that involves human research subjects, materials, and procedures; b. do not mislead respondents as to purposes for which that research is being conducted; c. ensure subjects' rights of personal anonymity unless they are waived; d. ensure confidentiality of any data not obtained from records open to public scrutiny; e. anticipate potential threats to confidentiality, including the Freedom of Information Act, and adopt various means of coding, storing, and maintaining data to protect the confidentiality of research subjects; f. fully inform potential subjects in cases in which they are unable to guarantee confidentiality; g. make every effort to ensure the safety and security of respondents and project staff; h. obtain informed consent when the risks of research are greater than the risks of everyday life; and i. take special efforts when individuals studied are illiterate, are mentally ill, are minors, have low social status, are not comfortable or familiar with the language being used in the research, are under judicial or penal supervision, or are unfamiliar with social research and its constraints and purposes. (ASC Code of Ethics, March 2016). I made sure to follow all the research ethics and more.

Social research, by its very nature represents an invasion of people's daily lives. Moreover, criminological research ask respondents to reveal deviant behavior that may have lasting ramifications such as potential arrest and imprisonment, beyond the study. Revealing information may harm the participants so extra care was taken to shield the participants from potential harm.

Signed Consent Forms

I attained informed consent from all the study's participants. Consent forms provide valid and legitimate documentation that the subjects knowingly participated in the project. Notwithstanding, as Dixon noted several years ago research of criminal populations, "is coming under increasing threat from institutional ethics committees which have raised legal and ethical objections to proposed projects" (Dixon, 1997: p. 211). In particular, Dixon notes the inability of researchers to protect the confidentiality of research subjects, particularly when illegal activities are concerned. Unfortunately, as pointed out by Roberts (2003), signed consent forms provide an identifying link between the participant and the data. However, they were collected at the request of the University of California, Riverside Human Research Review Board. Yet, as stated earlier, the activities of the participants are legal in the state of California where the research was conducted.

Key Informant

Natty Dreads is the key informant of the group and the access I have to the group. Thus, to some degree, the study is filtered through the lens of his and my eyes. I met Natty Dreads approximately 15 years ago in high school. At that time, he did not smoke. His transition into marijuana culture was relatively abrupt. Living down the street from me made it convenient to hang with Natty on a relatively frequent basis. Having not had this contact with him early on may have made this study difficult to complete.

Interviews

In-depth face-to-face interviewing will be conducted with the study's participants, using an interview question list that will consist of three parts: history of substance and marijuana use, what marijuana culture and marijuana smoking and selling means to them and questions about why the respondent continues to participate in these acts. The interviews lasted approximately two hours each, with follow up interviews conducted as new developments that I witnessed occurred, or, if the respondents decided they wanted to share more information about their views on marijuana use. The interviews were semi-structured for the purpose of getting the conversation flowing and to learn various demographic and social history factors, but the main purpose of the interviews was to let the group members discuss what marijuana use and dealing means to them and why they participate. Other than a few preset questions, I did not script or prime the interviewees towards certain answers. I allowed the respondents to express what marijuana culture means to them. The interview questionnaire is listed in the appendix.

Data Collection

As noted before, the data for this ethnography will come from observation and in-depth formal and informal interviewing of the subjects. However, culture encompasses various physical realities as well, and I intend to study their music, physical objects and cultural styling to gain a greater understanding of their worldview. I intend to keep a journal of fieldnotes handy, and collect samples of their music. By triangulating these various sources of data, I will be able to get a better picture of how they understand this practice.

Fieldnotes

The fieldnotes were recorded in the language my informants spoke and decoded in the dissertation so that is understandable to academics. My informants spoke a form of English heavily coded in marijuana slang. The group frequently discusses marijuana openly but the coded language allows them to stay undetected by non-users. Using phrases like “gaining knowledge” to represent smoking marijuana is one such technique. After recording conversations and viewing the surrounding environment, I will take the condensed account and expand it to discuss relevant information that I did not have time to write down while in the field. Ethnographer James Spradley (1980) considers this to be an integral part of ethnographic methods because it allows the ethnographer to fill in detail and record things that were not possible in the field.

Analysis

A key aspect of “grounded theory” ethnographies is an analysis that is inductive, interactive and recursive. Inductive research identifies data and amasses them into larger taxonomies and categories. These categories are explored in interviews as well as in participation and observation to test their internal validity. New observations are compared and contrasted until stable patterns emerge that begins to explain cultural practices. Recursivity refers to the cyclical nature of this process as it moves from inductive analysis, in which the theory is created based on what is observed, and deductive processes through which the datum is compared to the theory. This iterative model is the process I intend to use while in the field to understand the practice of

marijuana use. This works by continually raising questions in the field and modifying and clarifying ideas about what is discovered.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations to this study is that by employing ethnographic study, the results found here may not be representative of the entire population or community of marijuana smokers or sellers. Thus, while the study should be highly valid, it may lack in reliability and consistency. Furthermore, it is difficult to access these populations, as marijuana smoking, growing and selling is still an illegal venture under federal law. Thus, although ethnographic data may not be as reliably consistent as other methods, it allows for an in-depth study of a relatively understudied and difficult to access population. Likewise, this study could serve as a counter to the usually negative and scornful popular ideas about marijuana sellers so abundant in American culture.

Objectivity

The question of objectivity is a common conundrum faced by researchers employing qualitative ethnographic methods. Can an individual be both objective of a group while simultaneously being deeply embedded enough to truly understand the culture and ethos of the group at hand? I believe that the only way to truly understand a group is to live like they live, think like they think, and adopt their philosophy in life. Objectively understanding the group comes through stepping back occasionally and distancing oneself. I have known the group members under study for the past 15 years. Subsequent chapters will discuss how I know them. Being both an insider from knowing the group so long, and an outsider in the sense of studying the group from a sociological

standpoint puts me in a unique position to do both. Therefore, while objectivity may be a question to be addressed, I believe that being both objective and immersed is possible and ideal.

Insider and Outside Status

As Peirce (1995) suggest, the self is an integral part of the research process and should be fully articulated in research and should not be downplayed or neglected. Krieger (1991) contends that by detaching oneself from the people being studied renders their experiences and lifestyles more difficult to see and understand. In field studies conducted today it is common to divulge how the researcher knows the research participants. Such writing helps to grapple with biases that the researcher may possess, but it also serves as a critique of positivist methods that emphasize strict scientific detached observations. One critique of this outsider scientific approach is that many claim those European anthropological and urban ethnographic studies of minority communities tend to reproduce neo-colonial relationships with their subjects (Ladner, 1971).

As will become clear in this dissertation, this research is not simple, cold, passive and neutral science. Rather, it reflects a yearning for positive change and greater understanding of a vulnerable population that participates in a demonized practice. Likewise, I did sought the opposite of reproducing domination. I sought to illustrate an understudied and poorly understood dynamic of drug use that has historically been shunned and demonized an ostracized by the scientific literature. My first experience with this group, which will be documented in more detail later, occurred nearly fifteen

years ago. At the time the group understudy were lowly cannabis dealers. They all lived in close proximity to me and through mutual friends, we got to know each other. These people were all life-long friends. In fact, even though I had access to a unique group of people, I never once thought to do a dissertation on their activities because I never thought of them as anybody other than people I knew.

Insider

With this group, I frequently saw myself as an insider. In methodological literature, an insider is any researcher that shares a similar social location be it race, class or gender (Merton, 1972). As a working class male growing in the middle class neighborhood of Costa Mesa, I shared many of the same background characteristics of the group understudy. However, I did not share the same racial status as the group. This never seemed to deter me from being a part of the group however. In fact, I personally believe they forgot that I was conducting a study at all. These were people I have known for decades and the fact that I was conducting ethnographic research did not for a short period of time did not seem to change their behavior.

The problem with insider knowledge however stems from the critique that a pure insider can never be truly objective and therefore, their observations are biased and tainted. I personally agree with both positions and sought to situation myself as best I could as both an insider and outsider.

Outsider

Many sociological researchers would contend that me being a different racial group than the group understudy would make me an outsider (Liebow, 1967). These

researchers are primarily concerned about whites studying African Americans or Latinos because of the ability of researchers to reproduce racist and neo-colonial ideas. Less attention has been paid to researchers of a minority racial group studying whites. It was a question that came into my mind as I originally formulated the idea for this dissertation. Studying the drug rituals of middle class white suburbanites seemed like more of a joke than a real study. Moreover, one thing I realized I was doing was reproducing the ideas that white drug use was inherently non-problematic. One reason I wanted to illustrate this was not to reproduce racist assumptions that white drug use is non-problematic while minority drugs use is chaotic. Rather, I wanted to illustrate that drug use itself, is normal and ubiquitous in all social classes and racial groups. The unique access I had with this group allowed me to show this other side of drug use and selling.

However, my status as an outsider comes about not so much by my race class or gendered social location, but by my position as a graduate student. As a strict observer and interviewer, I did not participate in the acts, routines and livelihoods of my subjects. The worlds of experiences that they conveyed to me could only be written down and copied to the best of my ability. I did not experience the hallucinations. I did not experience growing and caring for plants. And, I did not participate in the operation of a dispensary. Moreover, there were theories and beliefs they held that I still do not fully understand or relate too. They told me however, that one cannot understand the multiple reality of our world without experiencing another world.

Their experiences and biases are unique and different from mine. Although they, much like I am, are critical of society, they take it to an extreme that borderlines near

paranoia. When discussing their hatred of Republicans and their belief in domination of the world that only cannabis allows you to see, I did not share that view. Likewise, I am frequently critical throughout this dissertation of the factuality of their beliefs and their methods to solve the problem of domination. Yet, although our opinions frequently diverge, and the opinions of the Kings frequently diverge as well, I try to present their beliefs and activities as neutral as possible while maintaining objectivity as much as possible.

Although I consider myself an outsider within, the themes and ideas brought forth in this study are not mine, but are made possible only by the willing participation of the members at study. Thus, the thoughts and ideas are theirs, not mine yet written and told through the eyes of an outsider within researcher.

DISSERTATION OUTLINE

Chapter 2: What is Marijuana?

This chapter is a general overview of marijuana. It looks at the plant's origins, scientific classification and its unique effect on the human body and brain. Moreover, this chapter discusses the history of its cultivation, its use throughout the ages. Theories about its effects, its medicinal properties and how it was spread throughout the world were also noted. Also, this chapter touched on the effect it has on the brain and dispels some of the myths about its negative impacts on the body. It concludes with its recent history in America and California in particular as California has a unique and relatively open stance towards marijuana use.

Chapter 3: The Cotton-Mouth Kings: Narrative

This chapter introduces the group under study, the members of the group individually, and the research setting. It began with my “getting in” story, my initial introduction to the group and how I know these people. It proceeded in a narrative form describing the city and the setting and their connection to it. It will be descriptive but will incorporate various criminological and sociological macro theories to set the stage for understanding this group. Good ethnographies situate culture and experience within the broader social, political and economic climate of the time while paying attention to the racial, class and gendered dynamics of the group. Thus, the descriptive narrative introduction to the group serves as a way of introducing their life histories, and the social context in which they grew up and lived and how that led to their participation in the marijuana using and selling subculture. Various elements make this community distinctive and unique, from their self-produced music, their terminology and style of dress, to their incorporation of Rastafarian, hippie and stoner skater into their own unique infused culture. Many of these elements are directly drawn from the counter cultures seen on television and their cultural styling and marijuana use reflects that.

The theories applied to this chapter were macro-level oriented as it sought to understand how the city, the setting and the larger social environment led these individuals down this path. By incorporating this macro-level orientation at the beginning, we saw how it directly weighs upon the micro-level interactions expanded upon in the subsequent chapters. I incorporated elements of conflict, labeling, Merton’s anomie and differential association into this analysis. I also critiqued social-control

theory and various other theories to show why they may not be an adequate analysis for the members of this group.

Chapter 4: Street Corner Collective: The Organization

This chapter focuses on the dispensaries organization, the process through which they produce, transport and distribute marijuana. This literature built upon the existing literature on illegal, semi-legal and legal drug markets and their relations to crime. The marijuana trade tends to be decentralized thus making it nearly impossible to eradicate.

Chapter 5: Cannabis Culture and Ideology

This chapter builds on the scholarship of marijuana and drug subcultures as a distinctively social phenomenon. This chapter looks at the practice of marijuana use and selling from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Instead of focusing on the use of marijuana as a practice that produces a desired hallucination, this takes the perspective that marijuana use, selling, and growing is a status symbol in marijuana culture.

Marijuana viewed from this perspective, is a site of social bonding where adolescent can bond through a culturally unaccepted practice, and gain status and hierarchy through the production and selling of drugs. Thus, although the manifest or stated functions of marijuana use may be to enjoy a hallucination, many of my observations suggested a much more symbolic and performative latent function to participating in marijuana smoking. However, I do not discount the hallucination as a relevant aspect of smoking, as I do not see the two as mutually exclusive, in fact, I perceive the two as reinforcing. Rather, I drew attention to the manifest and the latent functions of marijuana and how it was used as a ritual to create feelings of bonding and

communality amongst the group. This chapter predominantly looked at marijuana use and the practice of selling from a dramaturgical perspective.

This chapter also looked at marijuana from the point of view of those who use it. This chapter focused on the use of marijuana as a reflexive critical cultural practice of the group. I suggested earlier that the reasons for using marijuana can be varied as the people who use it. Although the symbolic performative aspect of marijuana smoking is in my opinion a definite phenomenon, the use of marijuana for the hallucination is just as real. However, instead of casting marijuana use as a diversionary form of entertainment, these individuals suggest its use as a reflexive practice, a practice that allows the participants to meditate and think critically about themselves and society. Through a type of looking glass self-lens, the members of the groups view the act as a way to experience a different perception of themselves and society. This practice is understood not just as a hallucination, but as a way to be an observer of oneself and ones participation in society. Thus, reflexivity, rebellion and critical thought is the ultimate goal of this group's marijuana use.

Chapter 6: A Cultural Theory of Drug Use

In this chapter, I proposed an alternative view of drug use and selling. By countering common biological and criminological assumptions of cannabis, I was able to flesh out a new socio-cultural theory of drug use. Based on observations and data on the group, I suggest here that marijuana use is explained much more an analysis of cultural differences than through an previous criminological and sociological theories.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter is where I reiterated the main findings of the study. I reflected on what I learned, interesting and/or unexpected findings, and suggest what this study means for the discipline more broadly. Furthermore, given the recent changes in marijuana laws such as those enacted in Washington state and Colorado, this study has implications far beyond academia. Colorado amendment 64 and Washington State initiative 502 recently legalized the recreational use of small amounts of marijuana by adults 21 years and older. It could help to illustrate the motivations and reasons why people use drugs, and it can help to expand upon the meanings of drug use to individuals and people associated with drug cultures. My personal policy recommendations are legalization and taxation as the majority of problems associated with cannabis stem from societal reaction, and not the substance itself.

CHAPTER 2: THE BUSH OF UNDERSTANDING, THE SHRUB OF EMOTION, THE BLISSFUL BRANCHES AND MORSEL OF THOUGHT:

WHAT IS CANNABIS?

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.

-Book of Genesis Chapter 3: Verse 5

What is Cannabis? Is it, as suggested by Henry J. Anslinger in the 1930s, the assassin of the youth? as dangerous as a coiled rattlesnake that preempts its users to commit murders , suicides robberies, criminal assaults, holdups, burglaries and deeds of maniacal insanity(Anslinger & Cooper, 1937),? Is it a hallucinogen that serves as a gateway (DuPont, 1984) to alcoholism or to heroin, opium and crack addiction? Is it a miracle cure for depression, pain, epilepsy, and multiple sclerosis? A dietary supplement (Courtney, 2010)? The path to knowledge and consciousness? Was it the Burning Bush of Moses? The Forbidden fruit of Eden? Or, is it, as some have suggested, God Incarnate?

There are perhaps as many theories about the cannabis pants as there are theorists. What is certain is that the cannabis plant and humans have a long history. The plant predates written human history. Many have suggested the cannabis plant may have been one of the first plant cultivated by humans (Abel, 1980). It is no coincidence that the cannabis plant can be found in every nation in the world. Used as medicine in some cultures, considered a demon drugs by others, and a religious sacrament in other cultures, cannabis inspires reverence, ambivalence and scorn.

This chapter will review look at the history, origin, scientific classification and history of its spiritual medicinal and religious use throughout time. Moreover, it will look at its history in the U.S. and why it holds such social significance the world over.

Cannabis

Cannabis is the generic name for an adaptive and highly successful annual found growing throughout the temperate and tropical zones of the worlds. Cannabis is considered a part of its own botanical group Cannabaceae, in which only it and the hop (a frequent spice in beer) belong (Schultes et al., 2001). Historically there has been debate about whether or not the plant is polytypic (consisting of several distinct species) or monotypic (being of one species with different varieties) (Embodden, 1974). For the purpose of this study, we will treat Indica and Sativa as two distinct species as these are the generic names found in cannabis lingo today. However, doubts remain about the polytypic side of the argument, as the plant has been found capable of adjusting itself to the environment. It has been found that seeds taken from the European Cannabis Sativa plant and cultivated in India come to display some of the characteristics of the Cannabis Indica plant in just a few generations, and vice versa (Booth, 2005). Likewise, there are no known physiological barriers to reproduction (Abel, 1980). However, physical and geographical barriers may have lead to divergent gene pools prior to human intervention (Hillig, 2005). Scientific debate aside, the reason the study will treat the plant as polytypic is because growers and smokers frequently differentiate the two when discussing their potential effect. Indicas tend to be milder sedative effect, frequently referred to as a body high. Sativa on the other hand, for many, produces a more upbeat

stimulating effect for the user. Many strains are hybrids that combine the two. Growers frequently combine the two to counter act the sedative negative effects of Indica and the overly paranoid and stimulating effects of Sativa.

The main psychoactive component in cannabis is Tetrahydrocannabinol (or THC for short), although, there exist approximately 85 cannabinoids (El-Afly et al., 2010). In 1992, it was found that much the same way the brain creates opiate like substances called endorphins, the human body produces a cannabinoid like substance called an anandamide. Research shows that THC locks on to the same cell receptors as an anandamide (Mechoulam, 1992). The cannabis plant is the only known external agent that can activate the endocannabinoid system. The endocannabinoid system is the site of much research into the medical uses of cannabis, and, like much of the rest of the human body, is not fully understood. Many researchers go so far as to claim that the fact that the human brain and body has specific cannabis receptors to claim that nature intended for humans to use the substance. Others, however, contend the substance hijacks the endocannabinoid system and disorients its users. This system is being found to be involved in an increasing numbers of pathological conditions such as neurological, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, reproductive disorders and disorders of cancer (DiMarzo et al., 2004). Consequently, increasing research is being focused on how to influence this system.

Cannabis is unique in its hallucinogenic properties. Plants that contain psychoactive compounds are archetypally separated into two categories. The first category, psychotropic drugs operate by affecting the central nervous system. The

second, psychotomimetic, affect the mind, altering perception and reality. The cannabis plant and its cannabinoids fit neither classification properly (Booth, 2005), although some scholars contend it is of the latter (D'Souza et al., 2004). Most psychotomimetic drugs are alkaloids. However, cannabis is a non-nitrogenous substance that is unique to the plant itself. The fact that the cannabis plant operates upon the endocannabinoid system makes it non-lethal at any dose (Booth, 2005). Unlike, opiate derivatives, coca derivatives and alcohol, the cannabis plant acts upon receptors that do not control life support functions of the body or the brain such as breathing or the beating of the heart. Thus, no dosage of cannabis can cause death. It is estimated that an average individual would have to smoke approximately 800 joints to die from cannabis use, and the corresponding death would likely be the result of carbon monoxide poison rather than the THC or cannabinoids themselves. Alternative routes of administration (i.e. edibles, tinctures) would not produce death.

The majority of the THC is synthesized in and found in the resin of the plant (Mahlber & Kim, 2001). The plant is frequently smoked with the bud resin and seeds intact, yet the resin can be separated from the plant and made into a highly concentrated version mixture termed hashish or hash oil. Both male and female plants produce the resin that contains the majority of the psychoactive cannabinoid THC. This resin is produced in much vaster amounts in the female plant than the male. Production of this resin in the female plants continues to increase until the female reaches maturity and it ceases brusquely. Modern marijuana growers frequently isolate male Cannabis plants from females to produce a more powerful, abundant and psychoactive resin.

The function of the resin in the cannabis plant is the speculation of heavy debate. Some scholars suggest the intoxicating resin operates to disorient would be prey. This theory seems unlikely as insects, humans, and other animals are frequently drawn to the plant. Likewise, the fact that THC is not present until the plant flowers makes this theory all the more unlikely. Others however, suggest the hallucinogenic effect of the plant was an evolutionary adaptation to induce human beings to spread the plant throughout the world, much the same way nectar producing plants induces the bumblebee to cross-pollinate plants on its behalf (Pollan, 2001).

Origins of the Plant

Since the plant predates written human history, the exact origin of the cannabis plant is unknown. The plant flourished widely in both Asia and Africa with most scholars contending the plant originated in the temperate zone of Central Asia (ElSohly, 2007). Such an area provided the perfect climate for the evolution of Cannabis as the winds provided a vehicle for pollination. Furthermore, the winds may have aided its distributions to surrounding areas. The fact that Cannabis plant was one of the first plants to be cultivated by humankind further complicates its origins as present-day areas of wild growth may have resulted from prehistoric cultivation and trade. What is certain is that the discovery of cannabis occurred early on in human history. For millennia, cannabis has been used for everything from clothing to paper to rope to food.

Furthermore, it is logical to assume the hallucinogenic properties of the plant were discovered early on in its history. Humans were nomadic living off the land and would eat and experiment with all types of substances. It would not have taken long for

humans to discover its mind bending and medicinal properties and turn it into, as many cultures did, a religious and spiritual sacrament. Although we conceptualize hallucinogenic plants and substances in a general negative light in today's society, primitive man may have had a very different relationship with such an experience. It is plausible to assume the superstitious nature early humans may have lead them to believe it was a magical plant that had the ability to alter the very nature of reality itself (Dobkin De Rios, 1989). Although it is arguable whether or not the plant has the ability to alter reality, it certainly appears to alter people's perception of reality, thereby altering an individual's understanding reality itself. As various post-modern social constructivist scholars have pointed out, the reality we experience is as much a product of ourselves as it is anything external to us. The view of cannabis as a magical plant would likely have become a staple of religious practice and its medicinal value would have been learned not long after. Indeed, many cannabis users I have had the pleasure of speaking to argued that the plant itself, altering reality spurred human creativity and imagination, and was the reason human thought and human consciousness took such leaps and bounds approximately 12,000 years ago, although no scientific evidence suggest such an assertion. Stoner culture is actually abound with these types of theories.

Cannabis in China

The first written records and archeological evidence suggest that the cannabis plant was being cultivated at the dawn of Chinese civilization. The first semi-scientific investigation of the cannabis plant is attributed to the Chinese Emperor, and father of Chinese medicine, Shen Nung of the third millennium B.C.E. Shen Nung is credited with

the testing of plants for the medicinal quality. It is rumored he turned green and died of self-administered accidental poisoning unrelated to cannabis. Shen Nung Pen Ts'ao Ching text was the first Chinese pharmacopeia (Booth, 2005). The Pen Ts'ao Ching recommended the use of cannabis to treat a wide range of ailments from gout to malaria. It has traditionally been documented in China's pharmacopeia.

Cannabis in India

The use of Cannabis spread west out of China to the Indian sub-continent carried by traders. The ritual use of cannabis in religious practice in India spans back thousands of years and is a recurring theme in India's history (Morningstar, 1984). Legend has it that the plant was created when the gods stirred the heavenly oceans with the peak of Mount Mandara. From the stirring, a drop of nectar fell to the earth and the cannabis plant sprouted. Other legends suggest that the God Shiva brought cannabis down from the Himalayas for the pleasure of mankind (Thomas, 2011). In many traditions of Hinduism, Shiva is one of the five primary forms of God. Shiva takes on many forms, as he is frequently depicted as an omniscient Yogi that lives an ascetic life as well as a slayer of demon. However, above all, is frequently thought of as the destroyer of worlds. Shiva destroys the world to create a better one (Zimmer, 1972). Shiva is According to folklore, the god Shiva went into the fields and laid under a cannabis plant for shade. Then, being hungry, he ate some of it and it became his favorite food (Morningstar, 1984).

Indian cannabis was originally reserved for Brahmin priests and Hindu holy men. Such men of creed and conviction believed cannabis took them closer to enlightenment and the gods. Likewise, cannabis was recommended as an aid in ritualistic Tantric sexual

yoga. Cannabis was not considered an aphrodisiac, yet it was believed that cannabis had the ability to lift one into a higher state of consciousness that could enhance sexuality and sexual union. Gross described the Indians practice of smoking cannabis as, a symbolic ritual in which the sadhu⁴ absorb the substance and essence in order to become one with Him.

For centuries it is believed that Cannabis was the plant used in the creation of Soma, a plant mentioned several hundred times in hymns and chants in the Rig Veda (First book of the Vedas, the Hindu religious text). Many claimed soma helped to spur the development of the Hindu religion. Modern scholars however, contend the actual substance was ephedra sinica or the fly agaric mushroom (Wasson, 1968). Considering cannabis' prevalence in Hindu religious practice, and the religious practice of so many cultures throughout the world, I suggest such a hypothesis needs reexamination.

Furthermore, ritualistic cannabis use is still practiced in India in a form of a drink called Bhang. Moreover, some Shiva followers in South India still claim that the Vedic soma was the same as their current soma Bhang drink. Bhang is a tea made of cannabis leaves, milk, sugar and other assorted herbs and spices. The steps used in the preparation of Bhang are the essentially the same steps used in the preparation of the ancient soma. Cannabis in current context is commonly referred to as "sattvik nasha" translated as "peaceful intoxication" (Morningstar, 1985: 144).

⁴ A Sadhu in Hinduism is a religious holy man on par with a shaman or priest.

Cannabis in Judaism

Although highly contentious and open to debate, many scholars have suggested that Judaism, and as a consequence, the practice of the major three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), all have connections with cannabis. According to several scholars, Sula Benet being the most prominent, cannabis was an ingredient in the Holy anointing oil mentioned in the bible and other sacred Hebrew texts. The direct reference is to Kanesh-bosem, which many scholars have suggested was the Hebrew word for, and the origin of the word Cannabis. Although not related to cannabis, it is worth noting that Benny Shannon (2008), professor of psychology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem speculates that Moses was under the influence of a hallucinogen when he received his revelation from God. This event is considered one of the most important in all of Jewish history.

The Rastafarians also contend that the bible frequently references Cannabis and other herbs in biblical verses. As illustrated by Ras Mandito (2015) in *The Testament of Rastafari*:

It is the holy herb that features in the story of ‘Moses and the burning bush’ that was on fire but was not being consumed, and with the strong smelling fumes that drew Moses’ attention. It is the same holy herb that Moses and the elders of the tribes of Israel used to take with them to the hills, there to burn in praise and honor of the Almighty God, and to seek His counsel on special occasions.

Many Rastafarian scholars contend that the bush in flame that was never consumed, the realization of exploitation at the hands of the Egyptians and the experience of divine

communion with God are all indications of the spiritual and hallucinatory nature of cannabis. Some read that and believe such a claim refutes the divine significance of the Burning Bush, however, Rastafarian scholars believe it is illustrative of the divine significance of Cannabis as a sacred sacrament. The criticism of this line of thinking, I contend, has more to do with contemporary society's hallucinogen-phobia than with the evidence. Considering the significance cannabis and other hallucinogenic substances have played throughout the world, it is possible that the early practice of Judaism as well as Christianity and Islam incorporated the use of cannabis.

Cannabis in Islam

How cannabis came to the Middle East is the subject of considerable debate. Legends abound as to how exactly cannabis spread to this area of the world. One of the most common stories is about Haydar, the founder of the Sufi sect of Islam. Legend has it that an ascetic monk named Haydar who would never venture out of his monastery. One day, in a state of depression Haydar found a plant that seemed to dance in the sun's warmth. A complete change in Haydar's demeanor was noticeable. He had changed from a cold ascetic monk to being happy and whimsical. He told his disciples of the plant and entrusted that they only share knowledge of the plant with the Sufis (Abel, 1980).

Legend notwithstanding, cannabis was most likely introduced to the Arabic world as a medicine during Roman times. Cannabis spread throughout the Middle East with the spread of Islam. Although the Koran forbid the consumption of alcohol, cannabis had no such prohibition. The psychoactive properties of the plant were recognized as indicated by the metaphors by which it was referred to in many Arabic texts: The bush of

understanding, the shrub of emotion, the blissful branches and the morsel of thought (Booth, 2005). Ancient and modern scholars still debate the appropriateness of cannabis use. Scholars and priest that are permissive of the plant suggest that unlike alcohol, cannabis induced pacificity and did not produce a public problem the way alcohol did. Likewise, well aware of its analgesic properties, doctors recommended it for the treatment of pain as it was much less dangerous than opium (Booth, 2005).

The Sufi sect of Islam believed cannabis helped one achieve spiritual enlightenment through a state of altered consciousness. They did not believe cannabis was an intoxicant on par with opium and alcohol, nor did they perceive the plant as a stoner's delight. Rather, the Sufi's saw cannabis as a portal through which to communicate directly with Allah (Nahas, 1982). The Sufis however, were a break off ascetic sect of Islam, typically looked upon with disdain by the larger Islamic community. Their practices, including using a hallucinogenic plant that they claimed allowed them to communicate directly with Allah are considered heretical in relation to the larger Muslim community. Yet, for all this, the common strain we see through looking at the history of cannabis in the ancient world, is that it is clear that the perception we hold of it today is in stark contrast to that of the ancient world. The reader of this would probably think to him or herself that these people were superstitious and did not understand what a drug is. This may be what people say about our culture 1,000 years from now when viewing our prohibitions on this plant and other drugs. It is an extremely ethnocentric perception to believe that their view on the substance was backwards and

that our current conception of the plant is the appropriate understanding. The history of the world is the history of one belief being over turned by another.

The use of the cannabis plant was not accepted everywhere in the ancient world however. It was not always seen as a gateway to ecstasy or a communion with the divine. Indeed, its use as a hallucinogen made many societies, including our own, view it as a dangerous intoxicant in need of eradication. In the tenth century CE an Arab physician Ibn Wahshiyah wrote that the odor of hashish was lethal (Levey, 1966). This view of consciousness altering substances as inherently dangerous and anti-social more than likely stems from their association with fermented beverages and the poppy plant. Alcohol was ubiquitous throughout the ancient world and many societies considered any consciousness altering substance or plant to be on par with its effects. As such, cannabis use as a recreational drug was temporary and fleeting in many ancient societies. In China, where the plant is thought to have originated, the plant fell out of favor with Chinese traditional values. In more extreme cases, such as in Egypt in 1378, the Ottoman emir sought to stamp out hashish use. Radical measures were taken such as executions and the torching of villages (Booth, 2005). These measures did not work.

Cannabis in Africa

Much like the use of cannabis in other regions of the world, the exact origin of the practice is steeped in legends and myths. However, seeing how cannabis most likely originated in the temperate zone of central Asia (ElSohly, 2007) the plant was most likely brought into Africa through trade routes through the Middle East (Abel, 1980). The African tropical climate was an ideal growing ground for the cannabis plant and through

trade and diffusion cannabis flourished in Africa. The first known physical evidence of cannabis in Africa comes from the 1300s where ceramic smoking pipes containing traces of cannabis were discovered (Van Der Merwe, 1975 cited in Rubin). Dagga, as the African's originally called it, was chewed like one might chew snuff or the way Mayan's sucked on coca leaves. Once the Africans learned of the technique of smoking cannabis the practice spread rapidly from tribe to tribe. Moreover, after discovering the effect of smoking it, dagga transformed into a communal event (Abel, 1980).

One tribe so heavily invested in the practice of cannabis smoking formed an entire religion around the use of cannabis. The Bashilenge, after the introduction of hemp smoking by its Chief Kalamba Moukenge, changed their name to Ben-Riamba, translated as the "Sons of Hemp." This culture considered the pipe they used to smoke cannabis as a sign and symbol of peace. They believed cannabis had universal magical powers that could ward off evil spirits. As the religious tradition continued, the Sons of Hemp eventually began to regard cannabis as a God itself (Abel, 1980). Following the new religious tradition, new laws came into effect such as removing class distinctions. Likewise, the emphasis on hemp as a means to spiritual enlightenment purportedly transformed the once war-like Bashilenge people into a peaceful tribe (Wissman, 1966). The upsetting of traditional society led anti-cannabis forces to overthrow the Riambas. Eventually, the tribe returned many of its old customs but cannabis never lost its significance.

Undeniably, cannabis was not universally accepted in Africa. Much like other places in the world, cannabis smoking remained a polarizing practice. In South Africa,

following European contact and arrival, the colonial authorities sought to stamp out the practice of Dagga smoking. European colonizers believed cannabis made workers sick, lazy and unable or unwilling to work. In 1870, so fearful of cannabis' influence that the colonizers enacted a law that banned cannabis. Like other anti-drug laws throughout world history, it had no effect on cannabis use (Du Toit, 1977).

Rastafarians

The use of cannabis as medicine and as a spiritual practice is not unique to ancient cultures or old established religions. More recent manifestations of cannabis using cultures can be seen among the Rastafarians in Jamaica. The Rastafarians are a religious movement that exists in Jamaica that uses cannabis as a religious sacrament that aids in meditation. Rastafarians consume cannabis in what they refer to as reason sessions in which they sit, meditate, and contemplate the world and reality. Rastafarians use cannabis in contrast to alcohol, which they believe makes one stupid, prone to violence and susceptible to deceit and cunning. Cannabis was originally brought to Jamaica by the English plantation owners because the rich soil and tropical climate in Jamaica made it an ideal place to grow cannabis. Eventually, the English abandoned it as a cash crop and cannabis, being a weed, grew freely on the Island. It was not until Indian indentured servants arrived on the Island did the African-Jamaican population learn of its mind-bending and consciousness altering properties (Mansingh, Laxmi and Ajai, 1989).

The Indian servants taught the African-Jamaican population about the plant and its spiritual uses. In fact, many early Rastafarian prayers contained Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali words. Many of the words Rastafarians use are derived from the Indians such

“Ganja” and “Chalice.” Likewise, vegetarian dietary restrictions, ascetic beliefs and the growing of dreadlocks all appear influenced by the Indian priests (Mansingh, Ajai and Laxmi, 1989). In fact, the practice of wearing dreadlocked hair is a means by which Indian holy men attempt to replicate the depiction of Shiva. Like the Hindu holy men, dreadlocks represent ascetic life and a lack of conformity from the normative conventions of society.

HISTORY OF CANNABIS IN THE U.S.

Hemp Production

The history of cannabis in the United States is about as old as the founding of the original colonies. In 1619, the Virginia Company, by decree of King James I, ordered every colonist to each grow 100 plants for export. The colonists were more inclined to grow the more lucrative tobacco crop, yet frequent market slumps in tobacco made hemp production suitable to many farmers. Hemp became even more popular when Virginia allowed hemp to be used in the paying of taxes (Booth, 2005). Following the revolutionary war, hemp became currency itself. The union currency fundamentally undermined state currency and many considered hemp ideal barter.

It is well established that both Washington and Jefferson cultivated hemp as an important cash crop. Moreover, it is a well-established fact that the original U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence were drafted on paper made from hemp (Thomas, 2011). Folklore abound, the production of hemp for paper, rope, clothing and other necessities was ubiquitous in the colonial and antebellum American period. The end of the civil war, the production of steel, and the importation of hemp from manila

destabilized the hemp industry in The U.S. Although cannabis was common throughout colonial and antebellum America, it was not until the late 1800s that cannabis came to be used for medicinal purposes.

The first medicinal cannabis use was in the form of a tincture in which the resin of the cannabis plant was extracted (Booth, 2005). Subsequently, cannabis became a popular ingredient in many medicines and was sold openly in many pharmacies throughout the United States. Cannabis in times past, like today, was used to treat various illnesses. Ironically, in medicinal form it rarely drew the ire of politicians or law enforcement. It is important here to understand that no national drug laws had been implemented. Likewise, cocaine, morphine and opium were sold in everything from soda pop (the famous Coca-Cola) to teething syrup for infants (Mrs. Winslow's soothing syrup). Although various city and states laws prohibiting certain substances were in place in many cities in the U.S., it was not until the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 did drugs become labeled in the United States (FDA.gov, 2009). This act required the manufactures to label any medicine that contained the cannabis in over-the-counter remedies. Following this period, various drug laws were established throughout the United States.

The Harrison Tax Act

The Harrison Tax Act was the first federal drug law in the United States. Although the act did not prohibit cannabis, as it was targeted at opium and cocaine, it set the stage for the outright prohibition of various drugs in the U.S. a decision many claim goes against the core tenant of the American constitution. However, the act was not a drug prohibition measure, but rather, a tax that would require doctors and pharmacists

that provide opium and cocaine to register and pay a tax (King, 1953). Approximately 23 years later, the same type of system of taxation and self-incrimination would be implemented for marijuana.

Marijuana and Mexicans

As Doris Marie Provine illustrates in her book *Unequal Under the Law* (2007), Drug laws in the U.S. have always been predicated on racist assumptions of criminality and social control. The first drug law implemented in 1872 in San Francisco's China Town banned opium smoking. Opium smoking was a common practice amongst the Chinese laborers that worked on the railroad. Various notions about Chinese men luring white women in to opium dens and selling them into sexual slavery pervaded at the time. The Opium law was seen as a way to control the population. White opium users were frequently shielded from the law as they frequently used opium from a vile. In a similar vein, cocaine was outlawed during the Harrison tax act not because of its dangerous properties, but because racist ideas abounded that the use cocaine put black men into frenzies that caused them to rape white women. It was believed that cocaine gave black men super human strength that allowed them to withstand bullets (Provine, 2007).

Much the same way that Chinese and African-American men were demonized in popular culture, Mexicans faced a similar racial drug fearmongering campaign (Musto, 1972). Following the Mexican revolution of 1910, Mexicans flooded into the United States introducing the recreational use of cannabis. This was the first large scale use of cannabis as a recreational drug in the U.S. although it had been around since colonial times and had been in use in medical practice since the mid-1800s. However, in the

1930s, as the depression era took hold and many white Americans could not find jobs, Mexicans became the target of discrimination (Musto, 1972). The hatred of Mexicans was so severe, that in 1931 Mexican repatriation began. Much like the opium laws and ordinances that targeted the Chinese in San Francisco, and the black codes that pursued blacks in the south, anti-marijuana laws were designated primarily for controlling the unwanted immigrant Mexican population (Musto, 1972).

By 1931, based on dubious scientific studies showing links between marijuana use and violence, over 29 states outlawed marijuana. Many newspapers at the time, combined with the film *Refer Madness* in 1936 promoted this type of propaganda as legitimate. The specific reason given for the outlawing of the hemp plant was its supposed violent, effect on the degenerate races. In 1937, Congress implemented the Marijuana Tax Act, which levied a tax on anyone who dealt commercially in cannabis, hemp, or marijuana. Like the 1914 Harrison Narcotics act, the act itself did not criminalize cannabis use, it simply penalized cannabis handlers who did not get the proper marijuana stamp and pay the proper tax for handling marijuana. The act restricted cannabis use by never issuing marijuana stamps to anybody that may wish to sell, purchase or use the plant. Moreover, in order to get a stamp one would have to have marijuana in hand to get the license, effectively creating a system of self-incrimination (Solomon).

The Hippy Movement

Recent drug cultures, such as the American hippie movement, have brought our attention to another aspect of marijuana usage, “mind expansion” (Kuttner & Hickey,

1970). As illustrated in a famous quote by former UC Berkley psychology professor and Hippy spiritualist Timothy Leary:

Pursuing the religious life today without using psychedelic drugs is like studying astronomy with the naked eye because that's how they did it in the first century A.D., and besides, telescopes are unnatural. (Quoted in Miller, 2011)

Rather than simple escapism, hippies used marijuana LSD and other hallucinogenic substances as a way of experiencing the world more deeply. Another rationalization hippies give for the use of hallucinogens is the feelings of communality the substances create. Thus, as opposed to distancing themselves from the world, the hallucinogen helps to promote a type of group solidarity by integrating them into the community of hippies and creating a sense of belonging. Thus, from the cultural perspective, we see that marijuana and drugs serve a functional purpose for the community of users. Furthermore, I believe deviance and criminal behavior, particularly victimless crimes such as could be viewed as its own form of self-expression. Rather than viewing such acts as criminal, I believe they should be posited as a symbolic protest against notions of right and wrong.

The 1970s Controlled Substances Act

The fact that the marijuana tax act led to a system of self-incrimination, the law was abolished after the court case of *Leary v. United States* in which the Supreme Court held the tax act unconstitutional since it violated the Fifth Amendment (privilege against self-incrimination). However, drug laws were by this time so entrenched in the American consciousness, drug crusaders had no problem enacting a law that outright illegalized the plant. This led to the 1970s Controlled Substances Act. This act regulated the

manufacture, importation, possession, use and distribution of certain substances (King, 1970).

The legislation created five schedules (or classifications) for a substance to be included. A discussion of the classification criteria and the drugs listed in all five schedules would be far too extensive and not germane to this dissertation. Therefore, I will only discuss marijuana's classification as a schedule I drug. Schedule I substances are defined by the Controlled Substances Act as a drug or substances that (a) has a high potential for abuse, (b) has no currently accepted medical use, and (c) there is a lack of accepted safety for the use of the drug or other substance under medical supervision (Drug Enforcement Agency). What is noteworthy about this classification is that pure THC (Cannabis' main psychoactive cannabinoid) is listed as a schedule III narcotic⁵ under the trademark Marinol (Food and Drug Administration, 2004). Likewise, far more dangerous drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine and oxycodone are classified as schedule II drugs, implying that they are less dangerous and less like to cause dependence and abuse (DEA.gov).

Proposition 215 California 1996: The Compassionate Use Act & S.B. 420

In 1996, California voters passed historic legislation, Proposition 215, concerning the use of cannabis for medical purpose. The proposition was a statewide voter initiative to allow patients with a valid doctor's recommendation to possess and cultivate cannabis for personal medical use. This was the first stepping-stone in the legalization of marijuana. It also created a conflict between state and federal law, with prosecution and

⁵ Schedule III narcotics have a low potential for abuse relative to the drugs or other substances in schedule III, has some accepted medical use

imprisonment still enforceable at the federal level. In response to Proposition 215, the federal government threatened to revoke the license of any physician who recommended the use of cannabis to any patient (Chapkis & Webb, 2008, 32). Such threats did not last long as the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that, “the harm to patients from being denied the right to receive candid medical advice” and the “the harm to doctors from being unable to deliver such advice” were both insupportable.

Proposition 215 was later expanded in 2004 with the introduction of SB 420. Senate Bill 420 (SB 420) was to create a uniform system of guidelines for medical marijuana regulation (legalinfo.ca.gov, 2012). The provisions allows for an individual to possess a minimum of 6 mature or 12 immature plants and a half pound of processed cannabis. The bill established the voluntary medical marijuana identification card program and guidelines on aggregate possession and the operation of cooperatives and collectives (legalinfo.ca.gov, 2012). Theoretically, collectives/cooperatives are collectively owned non-profit establishments designed to grow and distribute cannabis on behalf of its members that have neither the time, resources or knowledge to grow on their own behalf. By operating collectively, growers and distributors, known as growing operations and dispensaries/delivery services pull together the aggregate passion of its members to grow on their behalf. Aggregate possession allows for a cooperative to grow and distribute medical cannabis on behalf of its members. This allows cooperatives the ability to grow much more cannabis than would typically be legal for an individual grower or growers. Many medical marijuana patients have not the time, knowledge or ability to grow medical marijuana plants. Moreover, the sale, purchase and trafficking of

cannabis is still illegal under California state and federal law for both medical marijuana patients and non-medical marijuana patients alike. Joining a cooperative or collective allows medical marijuana patients that otherwise would have to grow cannabis on their own or buy it from a street dealer the ability to obtain cannabis in a relatively safe and secure way. However, cooperatives are expressly non-profits that operate for the benefit of their members. Cannabis is grown for the benefits of the members and donations are made to keep the cooperative operational.

Recreational Cannabis

The passage of California's Compassionate Use Act and the enactment of Senate Bill 420 opened the floodgates for the shifting of public opinions about cannabis and cannabis legalization in the United States. As of this writing April 2016, there are currently twenty-three states in the U.S. that have some form of legalized marijuana production and distribution system either already in place or in the works. On top of that, four states (Colorado, Washington, Oregon & Alaska), and the District of Columbia (Washington), have outright legalized recreational cannabis for adult use (Norml.org, 2016), and another twenty states are working to put pot legalization measures on their November 2016 election ballots (Downs, 2016).

Although times are changing and a trend towards legalization appears inevitable, a new form of racial and class hierarchy is emerging in the recreational marijuana system. As stated earlier in the chapter, drug prohibition and the war on drugs has always relied on a system of racialized assumptions. Today, in response to mounting state debt, and a per capita prison population that far surpasses that of nation states typically considered to

be repressive, states are enacting laws to help reduce the economic cost of mass incarceration and the war on drugs. Unfortunately, as history has proven time and time again, the more things change the more they stay the same. Much of the pro-legalization and anti-mass incarceration rhetoric centers around the issue of the taxation burden on the white middleclass.

Tax Revenue

In fact, one of the most cited statistics, and perhaps one of the most significant reasons for the wild fire spread of pro-cannabis legislation has been the boon to state coffers following the Colorado and Washington's marijuana legalization. The state of Colorado alone collected nearly 135 million dollars in marijuana taxes in its first year following the institution of legal recreational marijuana. In the state of Colorado in 2015, licensed marijuana stores sold approximately 1 billion dollars worth of medical and recreational cannabis. Additionally, the state collected 135 million in taxes in year over year totals for taxes and license fees in 2015 (Colorado Department of Revenue, 2016). What is going on today is nothing short of what many have described as a modern day gold rush, or, a "Green Rush" to be exact. In Oregon's first month of legal recreational marijuana sales, the retailers sold an estimated 13.9 million dollars worth of pot generating 3.48 million dollars in taxes (Zorithian, 2016). Unfortunately, everybody does not share in the spoils of cannabis legalization equally. Similar to the way certain cities institute ordinances to effectively bar medical marijuana dispensaries in cities, many of the states that have enacted rules for the application process that effectively bars poor and middle class Americans from participating in the industry.

In addition to maintaining class hierarchy, the racial inequity remains intact as a criminal record bars individuals from working in the marijuana industry (Lewis, 2016). By barring former criminals, and in particular, criminals charged with prior drug offenses, the laws practically guarantee a middle-class white work force. Although research unequivocally shows that whites and blacks use drugs at approximately the same rates, blacks have been disproportionately arrested and convicted of drug offenses. And as a consequence of this racial targeting, a defacto system of racial segregation is emerging in this newly found industry. As Amanda Chicago Lewis (2016) so eloquently puts it, “After having borne the brunt of the “war on drugs,” black Americans are now largely missing out on the economic opportunities created by legalization.” Moreover, as the application process has become prohibitively expensive, minorities are excluded from entrepreneurial ventures as the lack of wealth of keeps many from attempting to enter the industry. It is estimated that it takes a quarter of a million dollars to start a recreational marijuana business (Lewis, 2016). Thus, the legal marijuana system, at the dispensary ownership level and the production process is still very much dominated by white upper class males. Notwithstanding, regardless of the barriers enacted by the state, city or any other type of governmental entity, it is important to understand that cannabis as a plant can not be controlled, unlike other forms of drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine, a chemically rigorous production process is not necessary. Any individual with a pot and a plant can grow cannabis and thus the system can never be completely controlled.

Arrest Rates

According to a report released by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice pot legalization hasn't done anything to shrink the racial gap in drug arrest rates. Although the study pointed to the fact that arrest rates plummeted in states in Washington and Colorado, the racial disparity between black and white arrest remains unchanged (Males and Buchen, 2014). However, it should be noted that while disparity in arrest rates remain consistent, arrest overall in states with legal recreational marijuana has seen dramatic decreases (Males and Buchen, 2014). In the state of Washington alone from 2008 to 2014, arrest rates dropped by 90 percent. Colorado during that same period saw their arrest rates for marijuana drop 60 percent (Males and Buchen, 2014).

Thus, one of the major consequences of our half semi-legalized marijuana system in the U.S. is much the same that it has been for generations, as poor and minorities are locked up for selling and using marijuana, white male capitalists get rich off from the exact same act. Thus, the cannabis industry in the U.S. today is at an interesting crossroad between legalization, taxation and regulation on end and prohibition and the war on drugs and more of the same on the other. However, it is important to understand that the inequities of the war on drugs cannot be redressed with a simple process of legalization without redressing and remediating the inequities the war on drugs produced. Unfortunately, that appears far from the case, as the modern legalization debate has been more focused on the financial opportunities cannabis provides rather than how it reproduces racial inequalities.

Conclusion

What is cannabis? As this brief analysis of cannabis history shows, the answer is not a simple one. Considered by some as medicine, others as a guide to spiritual enlightenment, others the road to perdition and still others, human consciousness. Although it would be easy to paint all these ancient cultures as naïve, superstitious and ignorant of drugs, this is an ethnocentric view of a plant that has historically held a social significance that should not be underestimated. It's powerful influence on human culture and its social significance spread it to every country on earth. And it is today still the most widely used illicit substance on earth. What I feel is particularly noteworthy about the history of marijuana is its transition from being considered a spiritual, religious and medicinal plant with the power to connect with the divine to a dangerous schedule I narcotic that is believed to lead to schizophrenia, suicide, murder and sex crimes.

Although recent years and legislation such as Proposition 215 and Colorado and Washington's legalization of the plant seems to suggest a step forward in viewing the plant as a non-addictive herb with medical qualities, there is a sense in which the power and beauty of the plant is still not recognized in our culture the way it was millennia ago. It is the goal of this dissertation to study and understand the perceptions of this plant by a group of cannabis growers, sellers and users from a relativistic perspective.

CHAPTER 3: THE CM KINGS

It was like the first time opening my eyes. I saw myself, I saw the world for what it is,
and I realized, I was alive.

Natty 2014

The first question people ask me when I tell them my dissertation work is always the same, “Do you actually do that with them?” I find this to be both a compelling and legitimate question. The question is a legitimate one for various reasons. For some, it is a question of objectivity and scientific inquiry. For those that believe science should be a socially, morally and politically neutral endeavor, my use, in addition to the hallucination, may cloud my judgement, thinking and reasoning and lead to biased results; rendering any such claims of a scientific ethnographic inquiry open to skepticism, criticism and debasement. On the other hand, those who use, or those who are friendly to the cause may see my lack of use as a lack of deeper understanding of their culture and of their worldviews.

In laymen terms, one may say, I am damned if I do not and damned if I do. However, I have always believed that there is value in understanding the world from a different perspective, and what better way to understand a different perspective than through the alteration of consciousness itself. However, for the purpose of the study and for the purpose of objectivity and neutrality it is important to divulge that I am not now, nor have I ever been a cannabis user. Luckily for me, I met the individuals I am studying for this dissertation many years ago when I had neither the desire, nor forethought to conduct a sociological ethnography on the group.

Getting In

My personal story with the group understudy spans back approximately 13 years when I met the individual who is the key informant of the group understudy. A highschool friend of mine who smoked weed on a regular basis introduced me to a small-time cannabis dealer he knew from elementary school (Natty Dreads). At the time, he was very small time, selling grams and eighths to friends he knew. It always appeared that he was more concerned about smoking than he was about selling. He was a high-school dropout and attended a continuation school on the other side of town. I remember always seeing him and his friend Dorian riding their skateboards around town. Natty had long hair. At this point, his hair wasn't dreaded, it was more in the style of a middle-class white skater. His eyes were always blood shot red and he smelt like smoke almost constantly.

My first discussions about the nature and uniqueness of cannabis were with Natty. I remember him referring to cannabis as "knowledge" and claiming that cannabis could heal the diseases of mankind. He made outlandish claims about cannabis being a magical plant. I simply thought of him as a loser drop out stoner. I remember thinking to myself that he had smoked himself crazy. However, for all of his wild and exaggerated claims, his beliefs in the plants did not seem completely unreasonable. Around that time, California had recently legalized medical marijuana and many people claimed cannabis had all sorts of healing properties. Likewise, religious groups throughout the world had used hallucinogens claiming that hallucinogens had the same vision inducing properties that Natty claimed. However, I never thought much more of it than as fun, unique and

interesting stories to tell in a smoking session. Eventually, I lost touch with Natty. I graduated high school and I did not hangout with the same pot-smoking group of friends. And Natty had been but a distant memory.

I had not thought much of my old compatriots since those times. I had been at the University of CA, Riverside for the past three years working on graduate school when I reconnected with my old friends. At the time, I had gotten to my prospectus phase and all the previous ideas I had for my dissertation had become too convoluted and complex for me to proceed. As I went home over the Winter break from school, I had a fully written, yet badly executed prospectus ready to hand into my adviser the next quarter when my cousin and I decided to go shoot pool at the local pool hall, a common hangout for old high school friends. My cousin and I stood outside, my cousin lit one up, and I proceeded to tell him about the problems I was having with my dissertation work when unexpectedly, Natty, sporting dreadlocks and hippy like worn clothes came from around the corner. He was lit beyond comprehension and spoke to me about how he was burning down Babylon (smoking weed). I was personally used to his eccentric behavior, but my cousin looked at me as if I was conversing with a random crazy person.

The moment shocked my cousin, made me laugh, and sparked the idea for this dissertation when my cousin stated, “You need to write your dissertation on whatever it is that dude is smoking” At the time, we laughed it off inside and played pool with Natty and some of his friends. Yet the more I thought about it, the more I realized the fascinating nature of studying the drug rituals of white suburbanites. Moreover, by this time my old drug running friends had moved up significantly in the game. I had assumed

they stayed small-time hustlers, buying ounces and selling grams and eighths⁶. However, when I went over to Natty's house later that night he had four pounds of cannabis in his apartment and he informed me that he and some of our other friends ran a grow-op (short for growing operation where cannabis is grown) and dispensary (the location where medical marijuana is exchanged by members of a particular cooperative). I was titillated by his success and wanted to know more.

The extensive amount of pot, Natty's eccentric and unique behavior, and the recent passage of Colorado's and Washington's marijuana legalization laws all led me to the conclusion that this idea was indeed a project worthy of study. While I reviewed the literature for studies germane to the research, I found it fascinating that previous studies of drug use were trapped in a paradigm that viewed drug use as either a criminal problem, or as a public health concern. However, my own perceptions and experiences of marijuana and other drugs, and that of my friends contrasted with the perspective of drug use that predominate the scholarly literature. I thought back on the old National Geographic films and ethnographies that I had read in college about people in third world countries that use hallucinogenic plants for spiritual awakening and was struck by the similarities between their views and experiences with cannabis use and ours. My desire to document the spiritual and other meanings of drug use among cannabis users within the contemporary United States led to the formation of this study.

⁶ These are common measurements for street level transactions. The price for each measurement varies by the type and strength of the cannabis in question, but a simple rule is that an ounce is approximately 300\$, an eighth is usually around 50\$ and a gram is about 20\$ (Sifaneck, et al., 2006). And, there are approximately 28 grams in an ounce.

Street Corner Research and Urban Ethnography

As discussed in the methods chapter, I decided to employ ethnographic and interview methods to uncover a portion of reality not commonly seen by others. Urban ethnography is particularly adept at uncovering misunderstood social groups as urban ethnographers spend years with their subjects to understand their own perceptions of reality. In (1976) Suttles suggested this about Ethnography:

Some ethnographic studies have come into most prominence when they have confronted or confounded existing theory by discovering some seeming sport or freakish example...Such studies rest less on how nearly they lead to new and more comprehensive theoretic formulations than on how they debunk old ones. (Suttles, 1976)

Ethnographic research has the ability to tap into a deeper and richer understanding of human behavior not captured in quantitative surveys. Moreover, unlike the orientalist ethnographic accounts of so many hallucinogenic using cultures carried out by privileged white males that sought to understand yet distance themselves from the people studied, my longstanding experience with my informants allowed me a level of insider perspective not granted to many. However, much like my informants, I am actively reflective and aware of how my own biases intrude on the research. This research is reflective of the views and opinions of the respondents yet told through my eyes.

NATTY DREAMS & DORIAN

Natty Dreams

Natty Dreams, as I call him, was a lanky and pale white person with long hippy like hair from Costa Mesa. He typically wore worn out LRG (Lifted Research Group) clothes. He comes a single parent household with an older brother. His older brother was

in prison at the time of this ethnography. He never told me why. Considering the fact that they looked so different, I assumed they had different fathers. His brother looked like a college linebacker. Natty on the other hand, was a self-professed vegetarian (I say self-professed because he eats fish) who believed modern food was corrupted by “the system” and that only food in its natural state should be eaten by humans. When I met him in high school, I did not think much of him. He lived down the street from me for years yet I did not interact with him until one day another student told me he was going to meet up with Natty to buy weed. He looked like a stoner but I never knew he sold until my friend approached him one day to buy a nug from him.

Natty Dreads life did not fit the typical suburban story. A single mother who had her own problems with drug addiction raised Natty and his brother. His mother dealt with meth addiction for a good portion of Natty’s life and he describes vividly his experiences watching her deal with her problems:

When my mom was doing meth, I was nine; I lived at my grandparents’ house, her parents’ house. And I would go back and forth between my mom’s house. 50/50 custody. They were divorced, so I wasn’t around her a lot. I don’t know if that’s relevant. I’ve grown up and found paraphernalia all my life. Just because my mom was like a drug user. Whether or not that had anything to do with me using or not, I don’t know. But I did find paraphernalia. Like pipes and I found weed in the closet, and I found pipes in the car. I’m sure it did a little bit because I have that false sense of, if my mom does it must be okay somewhat.

Having a destabilized family structure and being exposed to drugs at an early age appeared to influenced Natty’s definition of what is right and wrong, as he eventually came to see drug use as normal and acceptable. It was never really clear what, if any relationship Natty had with his father, or if he even knew who he was. He and his brother had different fathers, and they looked as such. Like many who go deeply into drug

culture, Natty started using at a relatively early age. Even before high school, he would tell me he would steal weed from his mother's purse, or if there was no weed available, he would steal money so he could buy weed⁷. His mother was a recovering alcoholic and meth addict and looked the part. Her face was wrinkled far beyond her age with what looked like acne marks indicative of a person addicted to meth. It is common for meth addicts to pick at their faces. His mother however was highly tolerant of cannabis. She seems to have substituted one substance for another, yet believed cannabis to be much healthy and much more natural substance that was good for the human body, unlike meth.

Natty lived in a working class region of the city. His mother's house, the house he stayed at during the later portion of his life, was a run down three-bedroom house made out of wood that looked like it had been built over 100 years ago. He went to school with me until his grades, and eventually his usage got him sent to juvenile hall and eventually a continuation school. While in juvie (nickname for juvenile hall), Natty met the people who would eventually form his pot selling and growing group who I term the CM

Kings.⁸As Natty explains:

I started smoking because in high school I started listening to a lot of Bob Marley and watching Cheech and Chong and all. And my Mom did it so I thought; it must be fine if she does it. I met Dorian in juvie [Juvenile Hall] and he had already been selling. I got caught with weed when I stole CDs from target. They labeled me high risk because of the weed and my Mom so they sent me to juvie. He [Dorian] told me he had a connect and he told me I could save money by buying ounces from him and selling the rest in grams and eighths and quads. Dorian had a connect with his dad who grew in a make shift grow room in a shed in their backyard. Dorian told me the tricks of the trade, buy 2 ounces, use one for

⁷ Natty fit Moffitt's classification of lifetime persister. He began at a relatively early age and continued use and began to use harder drugs as he got older.

⁸ It is commonly believed that Juvenile Hall serves as a deterrence to future criminal acts through rehabilitation. However, Natty's experiences suggest the opposite as his career as a marijuana seller began after he was exposed to the individuals he met at juvenile hall.

smoking, and the other one for selling. But I was the worst drug dealer when I started. I made no money. I was always selling, then smoking out the people I slanged to [sold drugs]; or, I would just smoke out people when I got bored; or, people would hit me up, hey you got any weed; and I would be like, yeah, cruise, and we would just get high. You were there. You know what's up. And the gas it cost to drive from area to the next just to slang a G [gram] cost me almost as much money to sell it as I got back. That's when I realized I couldn't sell Gs [grams, grams typically sell for 20\$] anymore. If people wanted to hit me up, they had to at least buy an eighth. It wasn't worth it. But even then, I still had to hustle. It was a different time back then. Especially in high school. California had just past the new medical marijuana law so you didn't have clinics everywhere. And even if there was, people in high school couldn't get a card because they were too young. So I was able to sell while smoking.

It was not until later on, when they started growing marijuana themselves that Natty informed me that they actually started making any real money. Natty as my key informant was my informal access to the group. In fact, he was the only reason I stayed in contact with the group so many years later. Had he not existed, I would have almost certainly not have been able to write this dissertation. His help and friendship allowed me to continue to study this group. Without him, this dissertation and the research would not be possible as I only tangentially stayed in contact with him and the other members for many years.

Dorian

Dorian and Natty were “road dogs” and “stoner homies” from the time they met in juvie. Dorian, a Hawaiian kid from the Newport Beach/Costa Mesa border grew up in another not so typical family life. Dorian's father was an alcoholic and while he worked construction, he frequently struggled with finding consistent work and had drug and alcohol problems and consistently schemed to pay the bills. Dorian spent most of his life living in between his grandparents and mother's house. His grandparents and mother had

50/50 custody of him. His father could see him anytime but was apparently not in the right place to raise a son. His father's scheming trait was unfortunately passed to Dorian. As Dorian believed the only way he would progress financially was through selling pot as Dorian explains:

I wasn't rich. And, everybody wants to be that baller that starts slanging weed. Everybody wants to be that guy that everybody hits up. Hey can you get me this sack. And, if I could sell, I could make money and smoke as much as I wanted. So that's probably the two main reasons, I could smoke for free and I could be that guy.

While many teenagers are thinking about SAT scores and which college to apply to, Dorian saw a life of drugs and selling as his avenue to financial success. Whether or not he wanted to do it for his entire life is unclear, but what is clear is that was his goal at the time. His father to some degree encouraged Dorian's drug use and eventually his drug selling. Dorian describes his first "smoke out session" with his dad:

When I was 16, I smoked with my dad for the first time. And he taught a lot of what he knew. He introduced me to medical marijuana. I would always find his jars, and how he caught me was actually a pretty interesting story. Or how he actually came to smoke with me. He would skateboard a lot so he had a backpack. And I would always go into his backpack and he would always have all this stuff in there and I would steal a little bit of weed here and there and uh, and then one day he caught me and he told me that "you stealing my stuff?, LIKE you stealing my shit?" and I was like "NO" and we had this talk. It was actually on his birthday, which is pretty interesting, and we smoked for the first time and he told me some of his tricks and that's where I guess that's where it really started to go downhill, well, not downhill at that point but that where I really started to smoke a lot. So some of the stuff he taught was about how not to get caught. He taught me how to make a piece out of tinfoil. We talked about the legality of it, the culture, he would tell me stories. He told me some stuff about some grateful dead concerts. Just a lot background information about what he knew. Kind of a marijuana bonding thing with my dad, if you can understand.

Dorian was integrated into the life with his father who, with the help of a group of investors, constructed a crude grow room. Although some may consider Dorian's father a

bad influence upon his son, it is important to note that the marijuana served as a bonding and a connection that he and his father rarely experienced outside of that context. For Dorian and his father, the cultural and emotional meanings associated with marijuana culture to some degree outweighed the money they made from cannabis. What was particularly unique about Dorian and Natty is that while they looked the part of the pot-selling hippy, they were both good family men. Both had sons. Natty's son was approximately 6 when I started the ethnography, and Dorian's longtime girlfriend had just recently given birth. Their girlfriends, neither were married, were surprisingly permissive of their line of work, frequently participated in smoking sessions and later on helped them to establish the collective.

THE REST OF THE KINGS

Dorian was the original supplier, Natty was the seller, and the rest helped the two in their business. Hi-C (nickname is a play of him always being high) and TBC (a play on THC the psychoactive cannabinoid in marijuana) were the two Hispanic street level sellers and eventually delivery drivers. While Natty ran a legal collective in Costa Mesa, Hi-C and TBC worked as delivery drivers for the collective and sold to their friends off the street. It was a way for these two to reach a larger population as many marijuana smokers in California do not have a medical marijuana recommendation, despite the relative ease of attaining a recommendation and the protection from the California law that it brings⁹. TBC and Hi-C have both a medical recommendation and a card that offers

⁹ I say protection from CA law as marijuana is still illegal on a federal level. And despite U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder's claim that the federal government would no longer go after marijuana sellers in states that have legalized medical marijuana, federal raids continue to date in CA.

them protection for holding large amounts of marijuana at a time. They are also legally allowed to transfer marijuana from one person to the next. Yet, distributing marijuana to an individual without a doctor's recommendation is still illegal and leaves them open to many risks. They negotiate these risks by keeping primary jobs as a restaurant workers and delivery drivers while selling to people they know very well. Having gone to high school in the city, they were well integrated with the local crowd.

TBC

TBC was a self-proclaimed hip-hop and reggae producer who ran a studio out of the apartment that he shared with High-C. He got his start as a street level dealer like the rest of the kings. TBC explains:

I got my start in the game when I was finishing high school. You know, we all used to smoke and hangout at the pool hall. I remember I used to like to smoke because the world felt like a video game. Like everything slowed down and we were in virtual reality. The most simple things were weird. Like shooting pool. It was different and harder and funner. Anyways, I went to the [Beach City Community College] for a couple of semesters. But that didn't work out. Ya know what I'm saying. I failed algebra like three times. I guess when you fail a class three times they don't let you take it again. And they wouldn't even let me take it in the district so they told me I had to go to another school in another district like 30 miles away to take the class. I got over it. I always had a bunch of weed on me because of the Dorian. Dorian was the connect that we all picked up off of because he and his dad had a grow [growing operation]. Then I just started slanging to the people I worked with. I didn't make a lot, and I didn't push it. I just sold to people who I knew when they were trying to pick up. Sometimes they even came to my work to pick up if they can't find anyone else. So it was easy. But I didn't get serious until I went to music school in LA. A bunch of my friends who were rappers all smoked and I always had some on me. Plus, it helped us make music. We would never play our stuff for anybody until we listened to it high. So weed was it. It was that thang that made us know if the music was good or not. Or what we needed to add or not add. It was a creativity.

TBC was recruited into the collective by Natty and Dorian. TBC was one of the original investors in the Grow-op and collective. He fronted 1,000 dollars for the original grow-op

and another 1000 dollars to help start the corner collective. When I asked him how he got in with the Kings, he explained:

I knew Natty for a long time. I knew him before he got locked up. We would hangout and kick it at Natty's mom's house, and she would let us smoke on her porch and she would buy us alcohol in high school. It was always to hang out with people. It wasn't an addiction yet. Whenever we wanted to pick up we would either hit up Dorian or Dorian would just smoke us out. But after high school, I wanted to smoke all the time. Sometimes every two hours. I would take breaks from work, smoke a spliff (a joint with weed and tobacco), and come back to work. I don't know if it was the weed or if it was the tobacco but I eventually got addicted and needed it all the time and I couldn't wait for Dorian to hangout so I would just buy ounces off him. And when I had ounces laying around and my co-workers found out I smoked I just started hooking people up and slanging. It was just natural evolution of being a serious stoner.

However, TBC would never reach the level of profitability of his other friends in the organization and he seems to have preferred it as such. TBC worked two jobs in addition to working for the Corner. His main job was serving as a waiter in a high scale restaurant in Newport Coast. He told me he makes almost as much money on tips each night as he does working as a delivery driver. His second job was working as an amateur record producer. However, his job as a producer was more of a hobby than an actual profession. To this date, I do not know if anybody beyond people he knows has bought his music.

When I asked why him why he worked for the Corner he explained:

I was doing the same thing I was already doing, selling weed. But now it was legal! And, working at the Corner gave me a steady stream of customers. And, I wanted to work there when it first started going because I wanted to make money.

High-C was the other delivery driver. High-C got his name because he smoked so much so he was always high and his real name was Carlos (names were changed for the dissertation). High-C was a light-skinned Mexican with a large protruding nose and a receding chin. The other members frequently said he looked like a Camel. He dressed

like a skater and, like the rest of the kings, is an easy target for the local police. Ironically, he was much older than a typical skater was, yet seemed to enjoy the freedom of movement that taking a skateboard everywhere with him provided. High-C made his entrance into the selling through association with the other members of the group.

I was always into smoking. That's just what we did. 'We was drinkin smoking, straight west coastin.' We'd been going hard since high school. We'd smoke and go to GMinus [a poolhall]. We'd smoke and go to Putas [a strip club] Puto. We'd get in the car and smoke behind Southcoast [a common hotbox place for the kings] until we got rolled by the cops over there. We'd smoke in parking structures but the cops kept rolling us there too. The only safe place was Natty's mom's house. But I always thought the cops were gonna roll us there too. The only time I stopped was when I was trying to get a job after highschool. I stopped for a month, I think. Yeah, a month. Then to celebrate smoking again we threw a smoke out party. That was the worst trip ever. I felt like a loser. I felt like I wasted my time wanting to smoke for a month just to feel like a loser ya know what I mean. I was tripping. But I only got in to selling because I was living with TBC. Dorian and Natty came to me with their scheme. After they had it going, and I knew I could make some money by driving, I got into it. I tried delivering for them and it was easy. Plus, it was a lot safer than I thought it was gonna be. The first couple of times I thought the cops were gonna lure me into a trap and I was gonna go to prison. After the 10th time I got the hang of it. I had some money on the side and I was helping sick people get medication, and I was helping suburban white kids burn down Babylon. Ha. It was chill big dog [High-C calls everybody big dog].

High-C's cannabis, alcohol and drug use was much more rampant than his inclination for selling. High-C used cocaine a lot and prescription pills quite often. According to my observations, he didn't appear to be addicted. He would use on the weekends or when he was trying to have fun with the homies. Yet, as a result of social influence and pressure, he joined his longtime smoking buddies on the venture.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Dorian was the main botanist that supplied the weed to the rest of the group members. Dorian ran a make shift grow in a shed in his back yard. By the time Dorian finished high school, his father was locked up on a charge unrelated to cannabis and Dorian and Natty decided to start their own grow-op. Dorian at that time was living with his grandparents since his father was locked up and so he no longer had access to the consistent stream of cannabis he once had. Natty told me he would never make enough money from buying ounces and selling eighths or grams to make any real money. Selling was more of a hobby and a fun thing to do on the side then any type of legitimate money-making enterprise. Natty and Dorian both understood that in order to make any real money, they had to establish their own grow-op and control both the production and distribution. Natty and Dorian sought out to create a growing operation in Natty's mom's closet. Natty told me:

Growing weed was way harder than I thought. I thought I would have a bunch of weed. We got a series of clones from Dorian's dad before he went away, and then we got seeds from a collective we visited. The clones are weaker then growing plants from seed but we needed weed immediately. We didn't get good weed until about three months after we started our original grow operation. It was swag. The first couple of plants didn't grow at all. We over watered them and they drowned. The second time we tried to grow, we bought a hydroponic system. The hydroponic system produced got some plants to grow. Once we started growing a little bit of weed, we started slanging. It wasn't dank [high quality cannabis], so we could only sell a little, but we made way more money than when we were just trying to slang Gs. Eventually, we noticed the weed we were growing wasn't as good. I brought one of my friends to the grow-op who was a botany major to check out the op and he told me something devastating, a hermaphroditic cannabis plant had infected the rest of the plants. By that time we had 15 plants, and we had to rip them all up, the grow op had been infected and many of the female plants started to turn.

The flowers from male plants don't produce the same quality of bud that growers want. They do not have the high level of THC that female plants have. As a result, most growers attempt to keep their grow-operations strictly female. Many growers believe the plants have the ability to think. They isolate the female and the male plants from each other. According to Natty and Dorian, the plants sense this and secrete more resin that create a stronger bud (cannabis flower) to attract the male plant to fertilize. By creating a type of harem of female plants, the resin and THC content of the plant is stronger and more potent.

Natty and Dorian had to go back to the drawing board and start over. They occasionally brought over their botanist friend to check for bugs, suggest pesticides, and check for hermaphroditic plant formation. They utilized hydroponics to accelerate the speed to growth when the plants were young, then they would plant them in soil. Natty and Dorian told me that in a hydroponic system the only nutrients that were supplied to the plants were NPK (nitrogen, phosphorous and Potassium). These were the typical nutrients supplied to plants by gardeners. Natty told me they started getting good yields until his mom found out about the grow. According to Natty, "We ripped them up and after we started again, we started getting good bud again. But my mom found out about the grow-op and got mad and made us get rid of the plants." Natty's mom was fine with the smoking but she was afraid of getting caught by the cops with a growing operation in her house. Natty explained:

We thought it was over before we started. We lost the weed connect, we lost our first grow, and when my mom found out about the grow; we thought we were going to have to get rid of the plants that finally started to bud. We couldn't catch

a break, and I eventually thought we couldn't do it. We could smoke all day long, but growing was hard.

Eventually, Dorian moved out of his grandparents house with his longtime girlfriend to a house he rented with a shed in the backyard. Natty continued, "Dorian eventually took over the growing aspects of the operation. He became the botanist of the group." The Kings created a division of labor in which Dorian ran the grow op. As Dorian explains:

They all put in a thousand bucks or so. And so, I built a grow room in the back of my girlfriend's house. And um, he [Natty] gave me an assignment. He said, your job is to figure out the best way to grow this weed. I want you to figure out the chemicals we need to put into it. There's three chemicals you put into a plant, potassium, phosphorous, NPK, Nitrogen. So he wanted me to figure out for each strain what was doing what, like when it was flowering, what it needed, when it was vegging. He basically wanted me to be the scientist of the group. That's how I started getting into it, cause I started researching it all the time. I mean I had a notebook and I would (making note-taking sound) do it all. And then he got some stuff. We had four 1000 watt lights in one room. Which is a lot, and I remember at one time, the first grow in there we had we had 45 flowering plants at one time. I mean nothing too crazy. It wasn't a warehouse or anything, but 45 flowering plants is pretty decent, especially when there all three to four feet tall. So we had this, and I was doing my job. I was still at work so I didn't have the ability to be at the house all the time. Cause I had other commitments, but I was there pretty regularly. Our first one we did okay.

I had heard stories from Natty and Dorian. They both downplayed the actual size of the grow-op. When they first showed me pictures of their grow-op I was shocked. I knew the Kings grew pot, and I knew they had a lot, but one site of the Garden can cause a person to shake. Shake for reasons of fear that at any moment the DEA can come in and raid the place, but also fear of the power and potential of the garden. In the garden was nearly 40 or 50 budding plants all of different sizes, shapes and varieties. Dorian and his girlfriend Lucy ran the garden. This combined was a full time job for Dorian. The garden was enclosed in a shed in Dorian's backyard. It is an effective cover and looks like a regular

back yard from the street. The house the Garden is located at is relatively secluded from the neighbors so it does not draw the suspicion that a grow-op would typically draw. Everything about the grow-op was legal on a city, county and state level. Furthermore, the garden was too small to draw the attention of the federal agents. There were plants of all varieties and all strains. I was surprised that the two strains never cross-pollinated. Dorian explained that cross-pollination was impossible since all the plants were females.

After the first successful harvest the Kings reached out to a connect they had at collective named 420 health that operated in Costerdam. Costerdam was an office building in Costa Mesa that harbored a large amount of collectives, a recommending physician's office, massage parlors and some regular stores like a pizza restaurant. There were approximately four floors in the office building. The physician's office was centrally located as any new patient that needed a rec could easily see the doctor. Likewise, patients needing a renewal could easily access the doctor¹⁰. The massage parlors were borderline prostitution rings and Natty recalled a time when the "po" (police) came into one of the massage parlors and shut it down, "They came in one day with a battering ram. It was a trip. I thought they were raiding the whole building, but it was just some girls prostituting in the massage parlor. Everybody in the collectives were running. We were super high and paranoid. But it was funny." Ironically, Costerdam was located not too far from the police department and a residential neighborhood. They

¹⁰ Medical marijuana recommendations last at the longest a year. After a year has passed, patients are required to visit a doctor to confirm that the medical cannabis has been effective at treating the ailment or disease. This is good for both the medical marijuana community and the doctors because renewals provide an impression of legitimacy, and the doctors have a steady stream of new patients and patient renewals each year.

could sell to 420 collective, but they were not moving as much cannabis as they had originally hoped. According to Natty, grow-ops around the city were relatively common.

Not only was there a lot of competition amongst the collectives in Costerdam, but there was a lot of competition amongst the growers trying to sell to collectives. Dorian concurred, “We used to call every dispensary in the city to try to sell. But it was hard to move. The only reason we could sell to 420 is because we knew people there..” However, the Kings were on the bottom of the list. They had a connect in the collective. They had a connect because prior to establishing a grow-op, buying from the collective was a common practice for the kings. However, after establishing a functional grow-op, the Kings quickly realized that in order to move the amount of cannabis necessary, they needed to branch out to other collectives and to delivery services.

The first step they undertook was fronting the cannabis to collectives and delivery services for free. By doing this, they both established relationships with collectives and moved the extra cannabis they had laying around. After they established a report with many of the cooperatives in Costerdam, Dorian’s girlfriend got the idea to establish a collective of their own. Dorian explains:

We were selling to the places. But we weren’t making enough, or moving enough weed. We got good at growing and we had more stuff then we could sell. And sometimes it’s hard to sell to collectives. We had an in with one, and we sold to other collectives. But it’s hard to keep moving stuff. A lot of growers sell to collectives. There were too many peeps selling. Then Lucy [Dorian’s girlfriend] said we should start our own collective [a collection of individuals that grow and distribute medical marijuana on behalf of its members]. I thought it was a good idea. We had the weed. We had connects, and we kinda knew the business. But we didn’t know where to get started. Lucy talked to some people at the collective one time we were there and they told us about this lawyer who defends medical marijuana co-ops in Santa Ana. Me, Lucy, and Natty, we all went to talk to Saul. His name was Saul [Hispanic pronunciation] but we could his Saul Goodman [a

character in the TV series breaking bad]. But this dude wasn't some shady con man in a dark sweaty office trying to take our money. He was legit; he let us know about the law, how we needed sign up with the board of equalization, how to comply with Prop 215 and SB 420 how we needed to stay up on the city ordinances. And he told us he would let us know about anything that might affect the business in the future.

However, they did not start the collective immediately; the rest of the kings did not know if the investment was worth the risk. Running a dispensary came with a lot of risk, needed a lot of startup capital for lawyers, permits licensing and, they needed a location that would rent to them. They were all doing this on the side for fun and a little extra cash. They did not know if exposing themselves to the potential legal and financial risks that are inherent in running a collective was a good idea. TBC explained:

I wasn't down with it. Collectives get raided all the time, and I had a job. Plus, I didn't want to give Natty and Dorian and his girlfriend my money. Those guys are idiots. But, they got a lawyer and they kept talking about it. They kept saying it was a good idea and that it wasn't that much of a risk. It took them like two months to convince me. They told me it would be safer if I sold for a collective. I wasn't making enough to risk selling on the street anymore. It was either up or out. And we went up.

CONCLUSION

This chapter sought to introduce the main members of the group understudy, their life histories and how and why they got into the practice of cannabis using and the business of cannabis selling. The sixth chapter that discusses theory will draw heavily upon this chapter to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of many traditional criminological theories for understanding drug using and selling behavior. The next chapter will proceed with an analysis of the structure and operation of the Kings collective.

CHAPTER 4: THE STREET CORNER¹¹ COLLECTIVE

When they finally established a successful grow-op, the CM kings focused on establishing a medical marijuana dispensary. The grow-op was successful beyond their expectations and the market was saturated to the point where they could not sell as much as they produced. Natty originally told me that he and the Kings had originally planned to get a loan from a bank to lease out a corporate office space in a slightly abandoned office building in a back alley in Costa Mesa.

Unfortunately, the banks would not front them the loan so they did not have the capital to lease an office space. According to Natty, the banks were weary for various reasons. For one, medical marijuana storefronts, while technically legal under California state law, are illegal federally, and various local, city and county ordinances put restrictions on cannabis dispensaries. Many of these ordinances are hard to keep up with and one violation of a local ordinance leaves the dispensary open to a raid by local police, or to be shut down. Likewise, federal drug agencies frequently attempt to intimidate dispensaries with cease-and-desist letters. Again, medical marijuana dispensaries operate in a grey area of the law where they are legal on the county, city and state level as long as they comply with the local ordinances and the guidelines established by Proposition 215 and SB 420. Thus, even if they are in complete compliance with the state, county and city laws, collectives are still open to federal prosecution. The second reason banks are reluctant to loan money to a dispensary, is that dispensaries are required to operate as non-profit entities. Thus, excess profit should theoretically be used to further the mission

¹¹ I decided to name the corner after what we used to call Natty's mom's house. It was on the corner of a large street close to a pool hall we frequently visited.

of the organization, and not necessarily for financial gain. It should be noted that very few dispensaries actually operate this way.

Natty and Dorian, through their contacts with cooperatives in Costerdam [a nickname for an office building in Costa Mesa that contains a significant amount of dispensaries. The nickname is a play on Amsterdam.] found a lawyer that could advise them on the steps necessary to set up a storefront collective. As stated earlier, various local ordinances are setup to make operating a collective safe for the community in which the dispensary is set up. Zoning ordinances are in place in almost every city that prevents dispensaries from operating within 1,000 feet or sometimes a mile of a school or governmental building. Other ordinances prohibit on-site consumption. Of course, with all the new forms of cannabis available, patients can use on site without anybody being the wiser (as discussed more fully below). Some ordinances limit the amount of cannabis that can be kept on hand; others are so prohibitive that they effectively bar dispensaries from operating in the city. Still, some dispensaries actually move into unincorporated areas of cities to skirt around local regulations.

The first thing the Kings needed to do was to get the money to rent out a space to setup a collective. Luckily for the Kings, the original investors in the grow operation were willing to front the cash necessary to lease an office space. Dorian's close friend hand blew glass for the Kings, and they found a series of jewelry cases off craigslist, and found distributors for non-smokable cannabis (edibles, waxes, concentrates drinks and the like) from their dealings at Costerdam to have a fully functioning collective. As discussed previously, there is a dearth of growers trying to sell their product to

collectives. The sellers combined with the grow-op the Kings already had in place provided more than enough cannabis to get the collective up and running.

Every dispensary is required to report to the California State Board of Equalization and pay taxes. The Board of Equalization (BOE) has very specific rules for marijuana sellers. Like other businesses, they request cannabis sellers to meticulously document their business transactions. Many dispensaries, including the corner, refuse to document dealings for confidentiality reasons and out of a fear of federal prosecution. In fact, the Kings did not even keep records of who worked at the collective, even though they had a regular staff. They considered the employees volunteers of a non-profit organization and every financial transaction was considered a donation.

In order to run the dispensary, Natty leaves his house at 9am and met up with his buff tattooed security guard. Natty always walked in the collective with a bodyguard and set up before opening at approximately 10am. He told me that this was a necessity since criminals like to “knock off” collectives. He also opened at 10am because he told me it is rare for patients to come to collectives at such an early hour and this prevented people from seeing how much cannabis he had in his possession. The collective was located in a small office building inside of Costerdam. The collective was relatively hidden with no identifying markers that would tip anybody off to the fact that it was a collective. There was no green cross that is characteristic of a collective and the windows were all blacked out from the inside. There was also no entrance sign or open sign on the outside, only a sticker of Bob Marley and a plaque that stated *The Corner*.

Recently passed city ordinances prevented advertising of any kind. Thus, there was no way anybody would be able to know the shop was a dispensary. Natty preferred it this way. Keeping the dispensary hidden gave the Kings a feeling that the dispensary was not likely to be raided. I have many friends that went to dispensaries to see them raided by the police right before they got there. To avoid raids, many dispensaries consistently change location and never set up shop for more than a few months. Moving dispensaries is fairly easy since the equipment to run a dispensary is relatively cheap as the product is the main draw.

GETTING KNOWN VERSUS GETTING CAUGHT

Most collectives that exist in Southern California operate in disguise. Natty told me that he had a friend that worked at a collective that was raided. Luckily, because of some technicality, his friend was not prosecuted, but they did have to shut down the collective. Because of this, Natty made sure to keep the collective as hid as possible. Although *The Corner* attempted to keep the collective hidden, Natty also tried to make sure people knew *The Corner* existed. He posted the location of the collective on a website called Weedmaps. Weedmaps is a type of social networking community for marijuana users to find, review and discuss cannabis, recommending physicians and dispensaries. Weedmaps uses a proximity map for the user to locate dispensaries and doctors around their area. They also have a link to delivery services around the area that the user is located. Weedmaps charges to list a delivery service. It appears there are a lot of amateur pot growers who wish to be listed as a delivery service without being

associated with a collective. This way Weedmaps eliminates competition and keeps the organization more legitimate.

Natty suggested there was an inherent danger with posting the collective on Weedmaps or any other type of social networking site, it alerts the police and federal agencies to the location of a collective, putting the Kings at risk of harassment by the local authorities. Although cannabis collectives are legal in California and are protected under SB420, various cities, Costa Mesa not included, have enacted local ordinances so restrictive that it makes it virtually impossible to operate within them. Any violation of a restrictive ordinance gives local police the ability to effectively shut down collectives or prevent them from operating. Furthermore, the local police have the ability to inform federal agents about the operation of a collective that they believe does not follow the rules. Since cannabis is still illegal on a federal level, federal agents can raid dispensaries at will. Despite president Obama claiming that federal agents would no longer be used to raid legal medical marijuana collectives, it still frequently occurs (Halper, 2015).

Natty told me that cops never came in to the collective, but he strategically placed a “going out of business” sign on the front door of the collective a week after it opened to make the police think the collective was going to close soon. Natty told me the cops rarely do full on raids without warning. He told me that the cops typically find a small violation by the collective and uses that as an excuse to threaten to shut it down. After the threat of a raid, most collectives shut down their operation and move them to a location nearby, typically with the same staff. Most office buildings that house collectives rent to collectives on short-term leases because of the risk involved with the business. Many of

these office buildings tend to be unused, hidden or not centrally located, and deteriorating. I believe these are usually the only office buildings that will lease to medical marijuana dispensaries. Some collectives are stationed in buildings that look like they could only be inhabited by an illegal business. Unfortunately, the only way to keep a consistent and steady stream of patients was to advertise on Weedmaps and risk harassment by local authorities.

The Corner

The entrance lobby was plain with chairs and magazines on a coffee table that looked like a doctor's office for the patients to sit on while they waited to be called in to the collective. The lobby has a series of video cameras to deter would be robbers. The front counter is where the patient shows their identification card and provides the collective with their recommendation letter (hereafter, the 'rec'). The rec, as it is frequently referred to, is examined by the front clerk and is confirmed by the recommending physician's office. While a patient waits for the collective to confirm the legitimacy of the rec, the patient fills out new patient paperwork and signs an agreement that they will not visit another collective (I am not sure why the form has this stipulation but signing this form does not actually bar any patient from joining another collective). After filling out the paperwork, and the legitimacy of the rec is confirmed, the patient becomes a member of the collective or cooperative and the plants that the patient can consume and possess are conferred to the collective. By conferring possession to the collective it allows the collective and the growers to possess much more cannabis than they would be able to legally hold without the aggregate possession. The front desk clerk

then scans and copies all of the necessary documentation and inputs them into a computer that holds a database of all of the collective's members. The front desk volunteer also serves as a bud tender (a slang term for a dispensary volunteer. A play on the word bar tender) at the shop.

After the patient becomes a full member, the patient is shown through the door. The security guard also serves as an informal door attendant. The security guard serves the dual function of making patients feel safe, while discouraging would be robbers. Once the patient walks through the door, they are greeted with a very tranquil ambiance. The ambiance is cool and mellow with reggae playing from the speakers and the smell of incense stirring the air. While the original entrance lobby was designed to give the impression of an official doctor's office or pharmacy, the ambiance inside the collective is designed to make the patient feel welcome and relaxed. In fact, Lucy Natty's girlfriend and Corner co-manager frequently shows up with her dog as the dispensary pet.

Bud Tenders

There are typically two attractive female volunteers that stand behind the counter at the shop. The Bud tenders are there to help the patients find the item they seek. Lucy is the most common tender, and her friends also help at the collective. There is a gendered division of labor that exists in the cooperative. The Kings prefer to have Lucy and her friends work the counter while the male workers serve as delivery drivers. Lucy told me many times she would prefer to be the delivery driver, but that she understands that delivering cannabis to people outside of the dispensary might put her at risk of sexual assault or injury. Thus, the females to some degree use their sexuality to lure customers

back to the dispensary, and the males deliver the goods to personal homes or other locations.

Dispensary “volunteers” as they are called are a critical component to the functioning of the medical marijuana system. There are extreme inconsistencies between strains, strengths, and potency. Thus, the employees are critical to helping the patient select the right strain, strength and potency. The volunteers of the collective are kind of a mix between pharmacist and wine connoisseurs, informing the patients of types of cannabis, to effect, potency and even flavor. A common name for a collective employee is a “Cannasouir” or Bud Tender. Likewise, the staff at *The Corner* will typically ask a patient if they are comfortable with another patient being in the collective with them at the same time. This helps the staff maintain a level of privacy for their patients. Although *The Corner* members to maintain their privacy, its typically unnecessary as anybody who is at a collective must be relatively permissive about cannabis use. Some people however are private individuals and would like to keep their use a secret and those people typically use delivery services. The Kings explained that older people and females are more likely to use delivery services. The Kings explained that it was rare for patients to not allow others to join them in the dispensary when they are present. For those that prefer privacy, it is typically the elderly and females who may feel uncomfortable around people they do not know. Likewise, they explained that people that are already high on cannabis are much more likely to use delivery services as driving to a dispensary becomes too difficult for many.

Spatial Organization

The inside of the collective is broken down into three sections. The cannabis in bud form is at the front. The bud is kept in glass cabinets like those that one would see at jewelry counter. The bud itself was kept in medium sized mason jars for the employees to pull out so the patients can smell the cannabis. Edibles, lollipops tinctures, topicals, concentrates and waxes are positioned at the left. In a mini-fridge near the edibles is a series of soda pop like drinks that contain THC. To the right there are pre-rolled joints and various souvenirs handed out to first time patients. To the furthest right is the cashier hidden behind another bulletproof glass wall where the donation to the collective is made. The back wall is donned with various contraptions (bongs, pipes, bubblers, vapes, nails and blowtorches and any new thing somebody may come up with) to help with the consumption of the medicine.

Tight security is necessary at the dispensary. Although it is a semi-legal operation in California, the fact that it is associated with marijuana, a banned substance in many areas of the world, makes it a frequent target for thieves and robbers. It is frequently suggested that the massive amount of money dispensaries hold, instead of the cannabis, is what makes the dispensaries attractive to criminals (Wieczner, 2013). Collectives typically carry massive amounts of cash, as banks will not do business with them. *The Corner* skates around this buy processing transactions under a different name. A trip through the back store of a marijuana dispensary is quite intimidating as you see pounds of cannabis in large bags littering the floor.

Natty told me that if the DEA ever raided the place that there is no paper trail linking any volunteers to the collective. He told his volunteers that if the collective was ever raided to jump on the other side of the counter and say they were patients. There was no accounting of employees' social security numbers or other information. Bud tender volunteers were paid under the table. This helped the employees avoid prosecution in the event of a raid. They typically have a lot of cash, as many patients do not like to have a credit card trail of their visits to collectives. However, when patients utilize their card and the volunteers swipe the card through their phone with a device the credit card statement is encrypted with a weird name such as garden nursery that is suggestive of a nursery rather than a dispensary.

The back wall has an assortment of bubblers, pipes, bongs, ash catchers, adapters, down stems, vaporizers, vape cartridges and percolators, many of which can be combined together. It is quite interesting to see the massive assortment of materials that can be used to consume cannabis. Marijuana can be consumed through smoking joints, bowls, pipes, bongs, bubblers, hookahs and blunts; dabbing, or vaping. These different contraptions are used to consume different types of cannabis products such as cannabis, resin and oil (Schauer et al, 2014). It is even more fascinating to think about the way these contraptions have evolved over the past two decades. One can get lost in the various methods of consumption and cannabis substances that have flooded the market in the past decade. The bud tenders of the collective help to clarify which strain and which method of consumption may be useful for their condition and let them know what they may expect from each substance.

TYPES OF CANNABIS PRODUCTS

Hemp and Raw Cannabis

Although Natty and the Kings were big proponents of the hallucination, however, they frequently told me one of the major reasons why cannabis is such a miracle cure for so many different illnesses, has nothing to do with the hallucination at all. They believed that simple consumption of the plant was enough to reap many of the benefits that cannabis had to offer. Cannabis is frequently smoked or baked into edibles to release the cannabinoids. In its natural state, cannabis contains THCA. When the cannabis bud is heated, or goes through another process that causes decarboxylation, the THCA is converted in to THC. Simple consumption of the plant does not produce the desired hallucinogenic effect that many patients desire. However, the hallucination is very powerful and too powerful for many people, and some people wish to get the medical benefits without the hallucination. This is the major reason *The Corner* sells hemp and raw cannabis products. Hemp is a cousin of the cannabis plant and has been estimated to have been cultivated by human civilizations for nearly 12,000 years. It contains miniscule amounts of THC. Although hemp does not produce the type of hallucination as its cousin cannabis plant, it is currently illegal under national law in the U.S. to grow hemp for commercial production. However, hemp can be imported and recently president Obama signed the 2014 farm bill into law that contains an amendment that allows for hemp production for research purposes. Thus, *The Corner* sells a wide variety of hemp products such as seeds, hemp seed oils, and hemp protein powder. Hemp protein powder, hemp seed oil and hemp seeds are all sold at the dispensary.

All of the Kings believed that cannabis was God's gift to man. Natty gave evidence of this by citing the plants nutritional profile. Cannabis, according to Natty, "has the most concentrated balance of nutrients, vitamins, enzymes, essential fatty acids, proteins and amino acids of any plant known to man." On top of that, it has these nutrients in the proper ratio for the human body. The seeds of the hemp plant have a perfect blend of easily digested proteins, essential fatty acids, iron, phytosterols, Vitamin Bs, potassium, zinc, fiber and Gamma Linolenic Acid GLA. It is ideal for humans to get a correct balance of omega 6 to omega 3 fatty acids; hemp seeds are the only seed that has the ideal 3 to 1 ratio of omega 6 to omega 3s. Hemp seeds have more omega 3 fatty acids than fish oils, a common supplement taken by individuals seeking to increase their omega 3 intake. Hemp seeds are also a source of all 20 known amino acids including the nine essential amino acids that body cannot produce on its own which must be consumed in a person's diet. Hemp is also much more easily digestible than other complete protein sources such as meat and poultry. Additionally, hemp and cannabis have natural protective barriers against weeds so herbicides and other poisonous chemicals are frequently unnecessary when growing.

In addition to selling hemp products, *The Corner* provides free leaves to anybody that wishes to extract the plant chemicals from the leaves. Again, the part of the cannabis frequently smoked by patients is the budding flower, frequently referred to as bud. The leaves also contain various chemical and compounds that have anti-cancer properties. Some patients go so far as to juice both the leaves and the bud. A Mendocino county physician named William Courtney recently popularized juicing and eating raw cannabis

as a way to extract cannabis' healing properties while avoiding what many patients consider to be an unpleasant high. Many patients I met claim, based on Courtney's work, that cannabis in its raw, unheated, acidic form is much healthier than its converted THC form. They also claim that the amount of cannabis an individual can digest is increased nearly 100 fold. They make this claim suggesting that in its raw unheated form, people can ingest up to 1,000 milligrams of THCA and CBDA as it will not produce a psychoactive effect. However, an individual patient could only ingest up to 10 milligrams a day of the psychoactive THC before an extreme paranoia and hallucination is produced.

Others contend that in its natural acid form, the cannabinoids do not operate on the endocannabinoid system and do not produce the same health benefits. When one uses the decarboxylated cannabinoids, one typically gets immediate relief from pain, nausea, intraocular eye relief or other ailments. The natural acidic form has no such immediate use. Indeed, Dr. Courtney himself acknowledges that juicing and eating raw cannabis takes days and sometimes even weeks before its health benefits become apparent (Courtney, 2014). Others contend that eating raw cannabis is counterintuitive because it leads patients to believe they can achieve the same health outcomes without directly activating the endocannabinoid system, the system responsible for so many of the health benefits that cannabis provides.

Debates rage in the medical marijuana community the same way debates rage in traditional medicine. However, the Kings stance on such acts is that cannabis in all of its manifestations is healthy and good for the human body and the world. Thus, *The Corner* attempts to provide various routes of administration to serve patients' varying desires.

However, the majority of people cannot afford to juice large amounts of cannabis. Thus, plant leaves and other plant materials are suggested as a way to consume large quantities of cannabis without losing a dramatic amount of money.

Edibles

A patient can easily become overwhelmed by the strength and potency of certain medicines. For example, patients unfamiliar with edibles can easily become frightened with the strength and potency of many edibles on the market today. Many patients expect an immediate high from edibles. When they do not get an immediate high, they typically double or sometimes even triple or quadruple the dosage, or more! When edibles are consumed, they are filtered through the digestive system at a slow and steady rate. The effect is delayed for about 30 minutes and the full effect is typically not experienced until about an hour after ingestion (Norml, 2015). Natty told me many stories of patients calling the collective frightened because of the extreme nature of the hallucination. He told me horror stories of cannabis highs lasting the entire day with the patient's nearly experiencing a temporary psychosis. He told me some patients claimed that his shop laced the edibles with something stronger. Natty explained:

People sometimes don't know how strong stuff is. When older patients try medical marijuana for medical problems they don't always know how strong it got since the 70s. It's gotten way stronger since we were in high school. Sometimes people smoke too much and the trip goes away, but when you eat edibles it gets too strong for some people. They don't realize how long it will last. Or, they tried a brownie their friend who didn't know how to make edibles made and they try our products and it's completely different. They get shocked. One lady called the dispensary and told us somebody laced her chocolate bar and that she was gonna sue us. I was like what? I asked her how much she ate and she said 'she ate the whole bar.' You're only supposed to eat a small section of the bar. There's eight squares in each bar. She ate eight times the amount of weed she was supposed to. We were gonna send TBC to give her some CBD oil. But she said

she would never buy from us again. That's why we always let people know how to use the medicine. Some people don't know how to use it. They see TV and they think it's all a bunch of rainbows. But it's a powerful plant.

When cannabis is ingested, the THC is metabolized in the liver. The liver converts it to a much more potent form named 11-hydroxy-THC (Earlywine, 2005). This form of THC is particularly effective at crossing the blood-brain barrier and brings on a very potent and effective high (Earlywine, 2005); In addition to the high being much more pronounced, the high last much longer (Schauer, 2014). Since cannabis is filtered through the liver, the digestive system slowly releases THC and other cannabinoids at a slow and steady pace.

Unlike some poisons that can be fixed by pumping the stomach, cannabis edibles continue to release and the only way to stop the high is to ride it out. Some suggest that CBD pills could counteract the high (Iseger, 2015). CBD has many healing properties other than counteracting a hallucination such as relieving convulsions, inflammation, anxiety and nausea in animal trials (Mechoulam, 2007). Ironically, most marijuana growers sought to actively breed out the non-THC cannabinoids out of their plants with the hopes of creating extremely potent marijuana strains. The resultant effects were strains of cannabis that produced hallucinations and lacked some of the healing properties found in many other cannabinoids.

A similar problem manifests when people unsuspectingly take marijuana edibles. Such is the case with many children that find brownies. Most edibles are disguised like regular candy, cookies, chocolate bars and drinks to not raise suspicion (most edibles have a small fine print label letting the consumer know that it contains THC or other cannabinoids). Thus, the bud tenders make it clear how to take the plant and the

appropriate context in which to use the plant. Because of their potency, and the possibility of accidental ingestion, Colorado health authorities suggested a ban on edibles (Wyatt, 2014). When the suggestion was made public, it was quickly shot down.

The pro marking and ban camp suggested that banning or clearly marking edible products is the only way to ensure that children are not accidentally exposed to cannabis. Likewise, they argue that banning or making sure edibles are marked outside of their wrappers is the only way to make sure accidental does not occur for adults as well. They point to the fact that at one Denver hospital, nine children have been admitted after accidental ingestion. Opponents of the regulations suggest that marking pot won't prevent accidental ingestions. Moreover, they contend that it is not clear whether or not children that were admitted to hospitals for accidental ingestion ate commercial products or homemade items (Wyatt, 2014). Moreover, opponents of regulations claim that attempts to ban or mark edibles may lead to increases in smoking, which itself is the one of the most dangerous aspects of cannabis consumption. Likewise, many cannabis users cannot smoke cannabis for various reasons.

Waxes and Concentrates

The, most recent trend to hit the market is the use of waxes and concentrates. Concentrates are extremely potent forms of cannabis that are produced by soaking the plant in some form of solvent such as alcohol or butane to extract the cannabinoids and resin from the plant (Loflin & Earlywine & 2014). Some people prefer this because it produces a stronger high without the burning smoke. Some of the concentrates sold at the shop are shatter, candy gummy, budder, solids and waxes. Waxes and concentrates are

consumed in various methods referred to as dabbing. Dabbing can be dangerous when using a blowtorch because of the fire risk. The most recent methods use an electronic nail that heats the wax.

Tinctures

Other trends are the use of cannabis tinctures. As was discussed in chapter two, tinctures were common in the early part of the twentieth century (Frankhauser, 2002). The tinctures are consumed sublingually (under the tongue) and allowed to absorb in the veins under the tongue. This is becoming an increasingly more common method among cannabis patients because it has many benefits with few of the drawbacks of edibles. Since tinctures are consumed sublingually, the effect of the cannabis is quicker than edibles and not as strong. Unlike edibles, the liver does not convert the THC to its more potent form 11-hydroxy-THC. Since the effects are felt almost immediately, patients are able to dose more accurately and do not have to wait an hour to begin to feel the effects as with edibles. Likewise, the high does not last as long as with edibles so the patient can medicate without being extremely high for the rest of the day. Patients referred to it as a body high that would relieve pain without extreme paranoia or psychedelic hallucinations and delusions.

Cannabis Bud

Nevertheless, the main draw of the collective is always the bud. As Schauer et al's (2014) article illustrates, combusted modes of cannabis use are most prevalent in the U.S. The bud is divided into three sections by type: Indicas, Sativas and Hybrids. The three sections are further broken down by quality and strength level. The best buds are

typically referred to as top shelf; they tend to have the most THC, give off the strongest and sweetest smell, and have the most crystals and orange hairs. Mid shelf and bottom shelf are recommended for first time patients or patients that do not want the extreme paranoid trip that occasionally accompanies powerful cannabis strains.

The patient is frequently informed by the bud tenders of the type of strain and strength. The tender typically attempts to describe the possible effect or high produced and the possible medical benefits of each strain. If the patient requests it, the tender occasionally helps the patient find a particular bud for a particular illness. Different strains are also used for different times of the day, with Sativas being stimulants and Indicas being sedatives. Although the distinction between Indicas and Sativas exist, most, if not all modern strains are some form of hybrid of the two with one, sativa or indica, being dominant. However, regardless of what the tender may say, there is really no way to predict the effect or high produced within the individual, as each person is different and everybody's high varies.

DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

Although the Kings have their own individual growing operation, the cannabis yield does not have the ability to meet the demands of the dispensary. In fact, the growing operation does not produce anywhere near the amount of cannabis needed. Because of this, *The Corner* collective relies on a series of cannabis distributors to stock the dispensary. As stated prior, collectives use aggregate possession of its members to confer large-scale growing privileges on behalf of the dispensary. Northern California growers and various others make shift-growing operations throughout California sell to the corner.

Likewise, various representatives from companies such as Bhang Bars visit the dispensary to sell to the Kings.

The relevance of the cannabis distribution system is that it illustrates that cannabis is a substantially different substance and operates as a substantially different market than other drugs. While many hard drugs such as cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and the like require an arduous production process, cannabis can theoretically be grown by anybody with adequate opportunity. Although not everybody has the capacity to grow high quality cannabis worth selling at a legitimate dispensary, everybody has the opportunity to grow it. Thus, police efforts at eradication of the cannabis market are futile since the growing and distribution system is so diffused and dispersed.

TRANSACTIONS

Natty explained to me on the first day that I visited the collective, that he was not a drug dealer, and they did not sell drugs to drug users. Natty made it clear that it was a collective of individuals that grew cannabis for medicinal purposes together for the greater good. He also claimed that the people they attended were patients and that they never sold cannabis, they only “requested donations.” Natty was seriously afraid of being arrested by the DEA and took extra precautions to make sure that did not happen.

When first donating to the collective the employee typically provides the new patient with a one-hitter quitter piece (these pieces are used at concerts and other public events so someone can smoke a small amount of cannabis and immediately throw the evidence away), jolly rancher edibles, a pre-rolled joint and a coffee mug. The jolly rancher edibles’ main function is to prevent cottonmouth and make the high more

pleasurable. The jolly rancher edibles rarely have enough THC to produce an actual high. It is quite possible that there is no THC present and the jolly rancher acts as more of a placebo when already under the influence. Pieces (pipes, bubblers, bong) range from the free one hit pipes the collective gives away free, to the 500-dollar work of art pieces molded for beauty and not functionality. The relatively expensive 200-dollar pieces tend to be the most functional and highest quality pieces.

Prices

As is common in illegal markets, the cost of cannabis does not reflect its actual value. For experienced growers, four cannabis plants can yield approximately one pound of usable bud. The Kings explained to me that they had a little over 40 plants in the grow-operation. A substantial yield could be brought about by this amount of plants. This is in turn sold at a huge mark up to the patient/consumer. A pound of cannabis can be sold on the market for approximately \$1,300-\$1,900 depending on the quality and other factors.

Top Shelf cannabis sells for \$20 a gram, \$50 an eighth, \$100 a quad, \$175 for a half ounce and \$350 an ounce. Natty told me these are the typical quantities sold at the dispensary. The dispensary typically buys cannabis from growers and distributors on a pound or half-pound basis for approximately 1,500 dollars per pound depending on the quality. However, he stated that he has sold up to half a pound to a patient before. An ounce by itself would take a heavy smoker a while to finish. A half a pound, which is 8 ounces, is far beyond what any individual patient would use by himself. These people likely sell to their friends, or sell on the illegal market. Bottom shelf product can retail for as low as 10\$ a gram. Edibles range from \$5 for suckers and drinks to 5\$0 oils. Most

edibles however, are around \$20 for a chocolate bar, cookie, brownie or some other type of candy type snack. As stated earlier, it is common at the collective to “hook it up” and provide more cannabis per bag. Thus, a first time patient many times is provided another gram on top of what they purchased. Likewise, frequent patients are likewise “hooked up” on a relatively frequent basis.

Markup

As one can see by the prices, the markup for bud is quite high. For example, the markup from a pound to an ounce is 373%. The markup from pound to Quad is 426%. The Markup from pound to gram is 653%. As one can see, dispensaries sell cannabis for an astronomical markup. In fact, the markup for cannabis is so high; it makes one question how the Kings and other dispensary owners are not millionaires. The answer lies in the cost of operating a legal marijuana dispensary. As stated prior, the medical marijuana industry is laden with risk and unique expenses not incurred by street dealers. The first substantial cost is the rent. The rent at the dispensary is approximately \$10,000 a month. Additionally, the corner hires a private security firm to patrol the dispensary at all hours of the night and be present during the day.

Moreover, the Kings use another private security firm to transfer the money each night from the dispensary to an unnamed bank where the money is dispersed to the Kings and the other original investors in the dispensary. Likewise, the employee pay, electricity and the cost of the accounting software that they use (mmjmenu) makes it so the Kings make simply enough money to have a regular middle class lifestyle. Notwithstanding, the prices are loosely followed and it is common practice at the dispensary to add an extra

gram and provide the customer with a gift such as a jolly rancher or a pre-rolled with a purchase.

Price Versus Potency

Ironically, the cost of recreational cannabis in Colorado is more expensive than both medical marijuana and the street counterpart (Culderwood, 2015). One of the major reasons recreational cannabis is so expensive in Colorado is because of the high taxes levied against recreational pot shops. Likewise, the limited number of recreational pot shops, and the lack of economic competition that came with it were able to keep prices high. However, Frank Bi (2015) of Forbes magazine points out that there is a correlation between marijuana legalization and price. In fact, in Oregon, where cannabis is legal for recreational use, the cost of an ounce of high quality cannabis is only 204\$. That is almost half the price found in North Dakota, which has no recreational or medical marijuana system (Bi, 2015). As would be expected in any industry, especially an illegal industry, sellers typically factor in the cost of doing business into the the final product price. It is a frequent belief among cannabis users that medical marijuana prices would be lower than street level prices because the illegality is taken out of the equation and thus legality should reduce cost. However, the high cost of running a dispensary (high taxes, cost to lease, security measures, and “volunteer” pay typically around \$15 an hour) has led to prices matching illegal street prices. Consequently, medical cannabis has not led to the reduction in prices that many proponents of legalization had hoped.

THE DELIVERY SERVICE

TBC and High-C were the group members that sold bud outside of the collective. They worked as a delivery driver for the collective for patients who, for whatever reason, did not want to or were unable to, come to the collective, or did not want to be seen, or just did not want to deal with the collectives. A police raid on a collective is an ever-present possibility. Yet, TBC did not discriminate when selling. He never stood on the street corner and slung, but if a friend did not have a recommendation, he would sell to him regardless. He told me he never sold to people he did not know if they did not have a rec. Moreover, this was not his only job. TBC seemed like they did this as a side project to make money. Or, to be hard and tell people he “slung nug,” as he liked to refer to it. His main job was waiting tables at an upscale restaurant in Newport Coast. He made tips and lived off those earnings. Delivery driving was more of a hobby.

The minimum amount the Kings would deliver was an eighth. TBC told me it was not worth it for him to waste his gas for anything less, especially if it was a far delivery. High-C and TBC would take turns as delivery drivers. They explained to me that they only are called for approximately 10 deliveries a day. Twenty on a good day and those are usually the weekends. They told me they stopped delivering to new patients after 7pm, but that they would deliver to frequent patients or people they knew until 10pm. TBC explained, “If I don’t know you, I’m not showing up at 10pm. That’s shady.” When they show up to deliver to new patients the procedures are similar to that of going to the dispensary, a picture of the patient’s license and rec are taken. In addition, they make the patient fill out the new member paperwork. Typically, when an individual calls the

collective, they require picture messages of that information ahead of time to make sure the person is an actual medical marijuana patient. The procedure is necessary for verification and signature purposes.

Although he rolled around with scales, and different baggies (scales and different bag with different measurements of weight were a clear tip off to the cops that the individual is a seller and not simply a smoker), TBC never feared being arrested. Both TBC and High-C had recommendations and medical marijuana identification cards (MMIC). A card helps prevent the cops from confiscating cannabis if you are driving with a large amount of cannabis. The MMIC puts a user in a statewide database and allows law enforcement to verify the validity of a patient's recommendation. Thus, the MMIC serves as an authorization document to grow, possess, transport and use medical marijuana. Recommendations let law enforcement know the doctor recommended cannabis to treat an illness. A medical card helps confirm your identity as a legal user. Moreover, the MMIC puts you in a statewide database so if the cops ever pull you over you have documentation of your right to consume cannabis. High-C told me about a friend of his who got a rec from a doctor at a cannabis convention and started growing and got rolled by the cops with a bunch of weed in his car. He said his friend's rec did not work when the cops tried to validate it and that the doctor was a fake or had gone out of business. As a result, his friend served time in jail for drug trafficking. This would not happen with a MMIC, as the patient would automatically be registered in the system and not have to rely on a doctor's office to confirm the legitimacy of the patient's rec.

Although TBC's main job was to sell as a deliver driver, he occasionally sold to his close friends that did not have a recommendation. Infrequent cannabis users, sometimes known as scavengers, rarely go through the trouble of obtaining a recommendation, especially since occasional smokers typically know somebody that possesses a rec that they can buy from. I asked TBC if he ever feared being robbed when going out for a delivery. He told me it was a possibility but that he would just give up the cannabis if he were ever robbed. He stated, "I keep a pepper spray gun on me. Besides, I'll just give shit up. We don't deliver more than an ounce anyways. I'd just give that up. No point in gettin stabbed over weed. We got a ton of that."

High-C agreed with TBC. He recounted an instance when he delivered to a group of "shady dudes." He recounts:

They didn't have enough money. They ordered an ounce and only had 150\$. That's like a bill less. But I was in their house, and it was Santa Ana. One dude had a tattoo tear, the other had a bald head with tattoos all over it. I got over that. I just took the money and bounced. I didn't even wanna fuck with those fools. They kinda robbed me. But I couldn't do shit about it.

When I asked him why he didn't call the cops he answered, "They didn't really rob me. They didn't point a gun at me and shit. They just got up in my face about it. So I let it slide." Unlike in illegal markets where robberies and getting over on somebody are considered serious transgressions (Anderson, 1999), for the Kings, they understood that cannabis was not important enough to die over and no retribution was taken. Both High-C and TBC hated delivering to Santa Ana; they told me they would frequently call each other to take the delivery to that area. TBC said, "I remember I was at work and High-C

tried to get me to take his run to Twentieth and Haitt. I told him screw that. That's all you. I'm not going over there to get robbed."

It was typical for customers to tip the delivery driver. TBC told me it was customary for patients to tip like two to five bucks and that it was also expected to hook it up with a nug if the patient tipped. Although the bags came pre-weighted from the dispensary, TBC would frequently add a little more to the package if he was delivering to a large tipper. Or, TBC would hook it up with pre-rolled joints or small edibles. TBC told me the collective was run very informally and that he could take liberty with hooking it up or smoking out patients. Patients would frequently invite him in to smoke with him. He had been delivering for a while to the same patients and he felt by hooking them up, or smoking them out, it established a report with the patients that kept patients coming back to the same delivery service. High-C concurred:

You gotta be chill when you're delivering. Nobody wants some shady twak to show up to their house and sell them drugs. You gotta dress nice, and roll in a nice car. You gotta look like a chill dude. You show up to people's house or apt in front of their neighbors so you don't want to look like a drug dealer. I keep the stash in a laptop bag so when I walk up to people's houses it looks like I'm there to study or something. Plus I keep all my stuff organized like that. And when you get in their crib, you gotta be fun and chill. I always tell the new patients a joke and make small talk. Its kinda weird. Like showing up [to] somebodies house with weed. So you gotta make them comfortable. Ya can't go in, slang, and roll right away. If you do that you look like you just sold drugs. So you gotta stay for at least a little while. If they're old, or they're new to smoking, you gotta walk em through it. You gotta show them how to use the chamber, gotta show em how to light it and suck on it. Sometimes you gotta give them their "Cherry." And once you got them chill and relaxed, and they trust you, then you rob that motherfucker blind! Haha.

High-C drove around in a grey 1997 Mercedes Benz E420. He told me he chose that car so when he showed up to people's houses they knew he was the delivery driver.

Moreover, it is a nice looking car and he believed that would deflect attention from the police. I personally thought 420 was a clear tip off that he had weed. Natty is also a proponent of establishing a rapport with the patients. They told me they do not barter with the patients, but if somebody needs medicine, they extend them a line of credit to get them through the day. Natty told me:

I take things as they come. The world takes me where it wants me to go. I don't go against it. The universe controls the world, not me. It's a business, but it's also a service to help people, so I help people. All the money that comes to us are donations. Most people require donations of a specific amount for the medicine. We keep it relaxed and help people in need. I didn't even care that High-C got jacked, we still got a little donation.

Natty explained to me that he had plenty of cannabis so a gram or two here or there was not relevant. What was relevant according to Natty was the service he provided.

THE VENDING SYSTEM

As part of the way the dispensary sought to establish a rapport with the patients, The Corner would put on monthly growing demonstrations for their patients. As stated earlier, in theory, dispensaries are designed to be cooperatives put together by patients that use cannabis as medicine. Dispensaries do not sell drugs, they pull together the possession of all of its members collective ability to possess cannabis (aggregate possession), and distribute it for free to patients who do not have the ability or know how to grow it themselves. The cooperative only requests donations for the medical cannabis to help keep the cannabis functioning and afloat. The growing demonstrations were designed to teach the patients how to grow cannabis on their own. *The Corner* also sold hydroponic systems, baby, and teenage cannabis plants. The teenage cannabis plants sold for approximately 25\$. It was expected, as Natty pointed out, that the individual with no

experience growing would mess up a couple of plants on their first try, and that the demonstration classes helped with immersing patients into the collective. The plants were typically clones, yet they also sold seeds for the more experienced grower, or the new grower that wished to dive head first into growing.

However, the demonstration classes and pot plants served another purpose. Natty explained that as former patients became experienced at growing cannabis, and particularly high quality cannabis, that the dispensary would actually buy cannabis from the patients at a discounted price and sell it at the dispensary. This is technically how dispensaries are theoretically supposed to operate. Natty told me this helped to keep the cost of the cannabis down while helping cannabis patients make some money on the side and create a sense of community and to create a real collective. This, Natty suggested, made them different from the typical dispensary and created continuity in the customer base and loyal customers. *The Corner* made sure to never have more than a few cannabis plants on hand at any given time. Although California medical cannabis laws allow for what is seemingly a limitless amount of plants, federal agents may raid and have raided dispensaries for carrying too many plants or cannabis at one time. Likewise, the Kings grow-op is not enough to sustain the needs of the dispensary. The Kings, in order to keep the product new and fresh have to buy from growers around the area.

There is no shortage of cannabis growers. Dorian told me growers come in and call him every day to try to sell cannabis to the dispensary, just like the Kings used to do. According to Natty, it was common to see people come in every day trying to sell different things, like edibles, drinks and even pieces. Although it is expected that growers

be associated with the collective prior to selling to a dispensary, growers frequently join as members only after a business transaction with a dispensary is finalized. This is another area where medical marijuana regulation is relatively lax.

PHYSICIAN RECOMMENDATIONS

After TBC told me anybody could make up an illness and get a rec, I wanted to see if it was true, so I decided to visit a recommending physician. The doctor I met was a real doctor, but the office was far from a real doctor's office. When I stepped into the doctor's office, it was in a corporate office building where they leased out office space. There was one nurse with a stethoscope and blue scrubs. He asked me what ailed me and why I believed cannabis would help. I am a relatively healthy young individual so I made up something about how I have glaucoma and that I needed cannabis to help. He told me to bend over and touch my toes. I could not reach my toes, and after that, he thought I had back problems and suggested I tell the doctor such. The nurse then went on to tell me about how marijuana never killed anybody but that prescription drugs kill approximately 100,000 people each year in the U.S. Then he invited me to an event they were holding later that day to stage protest in favor of marijuana legalization. The event was designed to prepare for the staging of the protest. I declined. Although I agreed with his position, I was uninterested in attending the meeting.

When I met the doctor I told him I had back problems and he went on to tell me about the pain relieving effects of cannabis. He told me to use certain strains to relieve back pain during the day and certain strains to use at night so I do not stay up all night because many strains of cannabis are mentally stimulating. Having me with him for

approximately two minutes, I paid the nurse 50 dollars and the doctor signed my recommendation letter. The nurse told me the rec was good for a year after which I would need to be reevaluated again.

The doctor's office seemed like a sham, but he was a legitimate doctor. Overall, I felt like I came out of that office visit knowing no more about cannabis' healing properties than when I went into it. This lack of attention to the medicinal qualities of cannabis when prescribing medical marijuana appears to be normal for doctors that make recommendations. The American Medical Board does not have the ability to take disciplinary action for simply prescribing cannabis. However, when visiting a recommending physician, the acceptable medical standards for prescribing marijuana are as follows (American Medical Board, 2004):

1. Taking a history and conducting a good faith examination of the patient;
2. Developing a treatment plan with objectives;
3. Providing informed consent, including discussion of side effects;
4. Periodically reviewing the treatment's efficacy;
5. Consultations, as necessary; and
6. Keeping proper records supporting the decision to recommend the use of medical marijuana.

Doctors that do not comply with the accepted medical standards for prescribing cannabis are open to disciplinary action by the medical board of California. Furthermore, discussions with my informants suggest to me that these types of interactions with doctors are relatively commonplace.

Patient Demographics

According to Natty, the patient demographic at the collective was much more varied than what one might expect. Indeed, the demographics defied my own stereotypes

of what a marijuana patient would be. People of all races, ages, classes and genders visited the dispensary according to the Kings. In fact, Natty explained that the majority of the patients that came to the collective were white males. He estimated that about 70% of the patients were males, most were white, with the next most being some form of Hispanic with Asians being a distant third. This accurately reflects the demographics of that area.

I expected to hear about mostly young stoners in their late teens, twenties and early thirties. I further expected to hear about mostly males from lower class backgrounds that showed up to the collective high. I believed, like I think many others still do, that the medical marijuana system was a method for potheads to get high while not getting in trouble from the law. Unlike many people however, I did not necessarily see this as a bad thing as I was not inclined to believe marijuana is a dangerous drug, or even a problem for that matter. However, I was surprised to hear about people as old as fifty and sixty years of age at the collective. Many of the people Natty told me about had serious ailments that medical cannabis helped to treat. Moreover, there was no discernible trait that linked all of them. Older individuals were not necessarily older hippies. Some of them were medical patients, some were spiritualist, and some seemed to just enjoy the feeling.

One individual Natty told me about was in his late 50s told me he used marijuana to help with his arthritis and back pain. He told me the patient used a combination of cannabis oil and prescription opiates prescribed by doctors to relieve his pain. He told me the high produced and the pain relief by those two in combination far exceeded either by

themselves. It appears, according to Natty, that medical marijuana has synergistic properties that work together as a powerful pain relief.

Another well-known female patient Natty described was in her mid-forties. He told me she had severe anxiety and that it helped her to relieve her anxiety and helped her sleep. He explained that she got into a car accident a couple of years ago and the medicine she used to ease her pain caused a significant amount of constipation. I was personally unaware that pain medicine had such an effect. The woman was on the skinny, he said, when she used prescription pain medicine she was seriously constipated and gained massive amounts of weight because she did not have consistent bowel movements. Natty stated that she said opiates led to stress, weight gain and depression. He went on to explain how she would vacillate between taking the medicine with all its concurrent side effects, and laying off the medicine and the pain rushing back. She said that except for occasional paranoia, cannabis had only positive side effects for her, and that her paranoia can be reduced by selecting certain strains of cannabis.

Although many of the patients suffered from real ailments and got significant relief from cannabis, when I asked Natty to estimate how many of the patients suffered from real ailments. He acknowledged that there was a sizable population of cannabis patients that would discuss marijuana that would get them the most “fucked up” and would make them trip. According to Natty, those types of people come in all the time and that the Bud Tenders are more than willing to discuss strains of marijuana that would produce the best high while disregarding the fact that the collective was designed for the expressed purpose of curing ailments.

Most patients of the collective believed that cannabis should be legal for the public over the age of eighteen. Natty told me about one patient that claimed he was furiously opposed to drug usage until his cousin went to the hospital for high blood pressure. His cousin was given medicine by a doctor that caused his throat to swell and his cousin choked to death in the hospital on a gurney. At that point, he lost faith in the current establishment of medicine and their dangerous and often deadly drugs. Every employee of the dispensary was opposed to traditional western medicine. As Natty explained:

Western medicine doesn't treat disease; it creates other diseases, and forces people to fix that disease with another pill. It's a sickness establishment. Capitalism dominates the system, it sells poisonous food to people, convinces people they need poison to cure the sickness they get from the poisonous food with poisonous medicine, and then fix the side effects of the poisonous medicine with another poisonous pill. It's a genius system of profits over people. Every time I turn on the TV, I see advertisements for drugs with a million side effects. Most of the side effects are worst than the disease they're trying to cure. And all the while, there is legalized drug dealing on TV, there's a war on drugs, and cannabis, which never killed anybody, is illegal.

Natty explained that cannabis did not cure every disease, but that every disease could be cured with plants. Plants, according to Natty were put on earth to cure the diseases of the world. Cannabis, according to Natty, is just one of many plants that have magical healing properties. Much like penicillin comes from fungi, and painkilling opiates come from the sap of the poppy plant, and the coca plant works as an anesthetic and a stimulant, cannabis heals diseases and eases pain. However, he pointed out that non-hallucinogenic plants have healing properties as well. He claimed that many plants have medicinal properties that are as powerful as any modern drug. Green tea is a powerful antihistamine, olive oil has anti-inflammatory properties on par with ibuprofen, and

ginseng stimulates the immune system and has various other medicinal properties. What western medicine has done according to Natty, has been to strip plants of their natural balancing properties, and leave a powerful, corrupted, and often times dangerous substance in its wake. Natty quoted Jack LaLanne by saying, “If man made it, don’t eat it.” Because of this belief in western medicine as corrupted and plants as a healing life force, Natty and every volunteer of the collective was a vegetarian.

Although I gained a valuable amount of information from Natty about his and other cannabis user’s worldviews by discussion the collective, I did not grasp the full extent of their views until I attended one of their group meetings that they call reason sessions. Reason sessions were weekly meetings held by the Kings at Dorian’s house where they discuss business matters and reason about the nature of reality. It was not until attending this meeting did I see the social significance cannabis held in the group. The reason sessions are discussed at length in the next chapter.

*LEGAL Versus ILLEGAL DRUG MARKETS*¹²

Although many opponents of medical marijuana feared it would lead to an increase in illegal dealing, the medical marijuana movement, ironically, led to a decrease in illegal outside transactions. TBC pointed this out to me when I asked about him selling to non-medical marijuana patients:

I just sell to my friends. Nobody really sells on the street anymore. Like the last of the Mohicans. Anybody can go to a doctor and get a rec. Alls you got to do is give

¹² This section of the chapter discusses The Corner and the medical marijuana movement as a semi-legal drug market. The Kings, and many in the medical marijuana movement would abhor the idea of me characterizing their organizations as a drug market. However, I refer to it as a drug market to illustrate the stark differences between legal and illegal markets.

him 50 bucks and make up some fake disease and they'll give you a rec. If you can't think of a disease the nurse will make one up for you.

A recent *Time* article by Ioan Grillo (2015) confirms this point. Grillo points out that the U.S. border patrol has been seizing smaller quantities of cannabis since 2011. The explosion of cannabis collectives and dispensaries has led to a relatively safe, stable and more regulated cannabis market. In fact, researchers studying the effect of medical marijuana laws found that crime was not exacerbated by reforming medical marijuana and pointed to the fact that medical marijuana laws may be correlated with a reduction in homicide and assault rates (Morris et al., 2014).

Paul Goldstein points out that a significant portion of the violence associated with drugs is systemic in nature. Goldstein (1985) points out that systemic violence refers to traditionally aggressive patterns of interaction within the system of drug distribution. Goldstein gives a few examples of systemic violence such as: 1) disputes over territories between rival drug dealers, 2) assaults and homicides committed within dealing hierarchies as a means of enforcing normative codes, 3) robberies of drug dealers and the usually violent retaliation by the dealer or his/her bosses, 4) elimination of informers, 5) punishment for selling adulterated or phony drugs, 6) punishment for failing to pay one's debts, 7) disputes over drugs or drug paraphernalia and 8) robber violence related to the social ecology of copping areas (places to purchase drugs).

As one might expect, systemic violence is typically not-present among medical marijuana collectives. For one, there are no formal disputes over territory. As stated earlier, *The Corner* is located in a corporate office building with a series of other dispensaries, recommending physician office, massage parlors and pizza parlors that all

seem to benefit from each other's presence. Likewise, there is no hyper-aggressive code of the street that governs interaction within *The Corner*. The bud tenders are typically courteous and flirtatious like one might expect from a bar tender. Eliminating informers, selling phony drugs and disputes over drug paraphernalia are non-existent in this social environment. In fact, the only realistic situation on Goldstein's list is the robbing of drug dealers. This of course is most likely to occur for delivery drivers than for a dispensary as dispensaries typically employ various means to protect themselves such as video cameras, security guards and alarm systems. The office building where *The Corner* resides is actually located within a mile of the police department. Kepple and Freisthler (2012), utilizing GIS spatial analysis of crime and medical marijuana dispensaries found no association between violent and property crimes and the density of medical marijuana collectives.

Unlike the illegal urban drug markets popularized in television shows and movies like *The Wire* and *Scarface*, marijuana collectives operate in a relatively safe and stable manner. It is quite fascinating to think of a series of marijuana dispensaries operate entirely unabated less than a mile from a police station. Much like the drug market documented in Jacques and Wright's (2015) *Code of the Suburb*, the medical marijuana market is relatively violence free. Indeed, the Kings took many steps to avoid conflict and violence, even to the point where one of the members, High-C was robbed through nothing more than intimidation.

Likewise, unlike the drug dealing neighborhood documented by (Venkatesh, 2008), the cannabis market is much sparser with no central hub. Cannabis growers and

sellers interact, and intermingle on a daily basis with growers coming in and out of the collectives freely, jumping from one collective and delivery service to the next attempting to sell their product. Moreover, the structure of *The Corner* and many other medical marijuana collectives operate in a much more corporate business style than an illegal market. Curtis and Wendel (2000) created a typology of retail drug markets. They suggest that drugs markets are differentiated between the social (referring to issues of cooperation, differential responsibility and power and authority among distributors) and technical (referring to the physical location, procedures, technology and equipment employed by distributors) organization of distribution.

Curtis and Wendel (2000) suggest there are three types of social organizations among drug distributors: freelance, socially bonded, and corporate. Freelance characteristics are a lack of formal hierarchy and the absence of a division of labor, and relationships between distributors are egalitarian. An example of this would be a low-level street dealer. Socially bonded businesses are typically held together through extra-economic ties such as kinship, race, ethnicity or some other common features that binds the members. This type of social organization is a type of middle ground between freelance and the more formalized corporate style. Corporate style distribution systems, in which I am placing *The Corner*, are the most complexly organized ideal types. They are hierarchical and exhibit a high degree of division of labor, and the relationships between members are based on making money. They point out that these typologies are conceptual and not mutually exclusive (Curtis and Wendel, 2000).

The Corner is much more of a corporate distribution style brought together originally through social bonds. Moreover, High-C's side business (selling other types of drugs) is a type of freelance organization as well. As was discussed, there is a very explicit hierarchy and division of labor within *The Corner* itself. Although they like to think of themselves as egalitarian, there were investors in the collective that serve as its corporate board. All of the members of the Kings were investors but some other people I do not know, and never met helped front the cash for the dispensary. I have theories about who these people are but I do not know for sure. In fact, many of the volunteers do not know the investors, and I doubt they spend time in the dispensary.

Likewise, *The Corner* has a clear and gendered division of labor. At any given time there are three or four volunteers staffing the dispensary at any one time. This includes a manager; any one of the Kings can take on that duty. Also included is the security guard (the security guard is hired from an external security company and paid hourly), and one or two bud tenders (the bud tenders are also paid hourly and do not hold much decision making power in the collective) depending on the workload at the time. The delivery drivers, TBC and High-C, work sporadically and only come to the collective when they need to replenish their stash. However, they typically have cannabis with them at all times. Other than that, the collective calls one of them to deliver the cannabis. Moreover, the bud tenders activities are heavily monitored. There are security cameras everywhere and an extensive accounting of the cannabis and money is conducted routinely at the collective. The security cameras feed to a laptop at Dorian's house so all transactions are recorded. Moreover, there are sharp divisions between ownership and

volunteers. Being a small operation, there is not much room for the bud tenders to advance. There is a ceiling beyond which the tenders could never expect to pass. Additionally, new recruits come in daily with applications to work at the collective, but because of the structure of the business, the Kings try to keep the organization relatively closed.

Risk Management Strategies

CHANGING MARKETS

Moreover, drug market research suggests that distribution organizations inevitably evolve over time (Dorn et al., 1992). They can become more, or they can become less complex over time. The Kings story is the story of changing drug markets.

Technology

Technological change is one thing that changed dramatically over the past decade, as was discussed earlier the introduction of Weedmaps.com created an easy and effective online system for medical marijuana patients to find recommending physicians, delivery services and dispensaries. As stated prior, before Weedmaps, cannabis dealing was contained almost exclusively within one's own social network. Dealers would sell swag (low quality marijuana) for 20\$ a gram if an individual did not know many dealers, they would have to buy swag.

Technological change has also helped many delivery drivers avoid robberies and police sting operations. Before delivering to a new patient, *The Corner* requires the patient to send a picture message or email a picture of the patient's license and physician's recommendation. This way, *The Corner* verifies the individual as an actual

patient and has documentation of the patients ID in case the patient tries to rob the delivery driver. This system also deters police from entrapping the drivers.

Changes in Regulation and Enforcement

Prior to the enactment of Proposition 215 and SB 420, marijuana markets in Orange County were freelance and socially bonded business that operated as a type of delivery business. In fact, this description accurately describes the Kings drugs selling behavior prior to the establishment of *The Corner*. Likewise, the legalization of cannabis has led to a much safer, cleaner, potent and more regulated cannabis market with a minimal level of violence.¹³ Prior to these new laws, finding high quality marijuana was difficult. Now, with store front dispensaries with delivery services, high quality potent cannabis is available with the THC content listed on the bag. Moreover, as was discussed earlier, new and stronger routes of administration are being developed daily. Even the most fanatical drug dealer would never dream of operating a marijuana shop the way the Kings did prior to the establishment to the medical marijuana laws. A modern cannabis dispensary, as was outlined in this chapter, is far beyond anything on the illegal market today, and far beyond what drug dealers sold prior to these changes.

Recent shifts in cannabis laws have led to an increase in delivery services and a decrease in dispensaries. While medical marijuana is legal in the state of CA, it is illegal federally and the DEA has consistently targeted large-scale dispensaries for raids. Cease-and-desist letters has led to many dispensaries closing shop one place and opening up under another name another place; others have given up on storefronts all together and

¹³ Although dispensaries are still robbed, they are no more likely to be robbed than any other business that deals with large sums of cash. Banks and liquor stores also frequently targeted by robbers and burglars.

switched over to strictly delivery services. Delivery services are much more dangerous than dispensaries and many female bud tenders consider it to be a dangerous a line of work. Delivery services are dangerous because of the lack of security guards, security precautions (video cameras, safes, bolted locks on doors) and the inability to control the environment. The Kings told me many stories of delivery drivers being robbed for their cannabis.

CONCLUSION

The Kings established a functional, competent growing operation that led to a functional, safe and profitable medical marijuana dispensary. Unlike common perceptions of drug users and sellers as indolent potheads, crazy meth addicts' urban gangbangers, my researcher has shown that cannabis users and sellers are normal in practically every way. During my ethnographic observations with the Kings, I did not see any shootouts, never saw instances of white slavery,¹⁴ and never saw a stickup kid attempt a jacking, I never even saw the police. Unlike the images perpetuated in the media of gang violence and drug fueled beefs (a grudge or conflict with another), this market was relatively subdued plain and quite normal. Instead of black and Latino gang members shooting at each other over a bad drug deal, there were pasty white people buying cannabis in sanitary shop from a cordial, happy and inviting bud tender.

The overemphasis on drug markets that reside in broken down inner-cities that lack social control and police trust has led to a mental blinder on the rampant drug use present within upper-middle class white communities. Moreover, this type of narrow

¹⁴ White slavery was a euphemism used by early prohibitionist to describe a situation where a person of color would get a white woman addicted to drugs and use her as a sexual slave.

research by criminologist has furthermore led to a pathologizing of the communities within which these studies take place. In a type of voyeuristic gaze, white Americans love stories of street violence in communities of color and seek to attribute them to drugs while dismissing the real social structural and economic barriers that give rise to this type of violence. Truly, what this chapter shows is that drug markets are neither inherently violent, dangerous, nor pathological, especially when they are legal, taxed and regulated.

CHAPTER 5: THE REASON SESSIONS

MEETINGS

Meetings amongst the members of the group are held at least once a week. They are frequently spontaneous and unplanned. The one thing that is always present at the meeting is marijuana. In fact, using marijuana is frequently the reason the meeting occurs. As stated previously, the majority of the meetings take place at Dorian's house, not far from the grow-op. To some degree, the meetings are a bonding experience to keep the group together and allow various business transactions to occur in a safe place. Thus, for the two delivery driver members that sell cannabis outside of the collective, the meetings serve as an opportunity to replenish their stash. This is necessary, as they never want to be caught by the cops with large amounts of marijuana. Selling outside of the parameters of the medical marijuana context comes with high risk. Thus the meetings serves more than one function, in addition to increasing group solidarity and maintaining a cohesive bond (many of the members have children which take time and energy), they also serve various latent functions such as maintaining a consistent supply and being kept informed about when Natty and Dorian will be getting more herb. Lastly, the meetings serve as ends in themselves to use marijuana and commune with a different reality. This is why they will tell you they come together so often. I spent many months attending their meetings, never when cannabis was present however. During their meetings, the Kings revealed to me their motivations and beliefs about cannabis and life. The structure of the reason sessions always proceeded in the same fashion.

Occasionally their girlfriends would attend the meetings and smoke along, other times they would just hangout and not partake of the rituals. Having known their girlfriends quite well I found it surprising that they never brought their kids along. All of the members seemed to believe the experience gained from marijuana is sacred knowledge for which children are not ready. It was never clear when they believed the appropriate age to start smoking, as they themselves started at a young age. But what is clear, is that they take various steps to keep their children away from Ganj until they reach the appropriate age. Friends, acquaintances, and old smoking buddies would frequently be called to these sessions. They would tickle in slowly; however, the four members were usually present.

There was a set series of practices that were strictly adhered to and deviations were sanctioned. The sessions always began after 10pm. By that time, their children were in bed, the collective was closed and everybody could meet. Although some would consider it nothing more than a smoke out session, the group took it seriously and used it as a time to discuss business and other important matters. The first time I was invited to a board meeting, I showed up to Dorian's house at 10pm on the dot. Dorian answered the door and said, "You're early." I told him, "You said 10pm." He replied, "We're stoners, everybody is gonna be late. Let's chill." He explained that he recreated the holy drink Soma. I did not know what he meant, or what he was talking about so he told me to wait. He explained to me that it is like a chai tea milk cannabis infused drink. As stated earlier, the Kings were vegetarians and were strong raw foodist. He told me he recreated the famous drink Soma from the Rig Veda. He called it Holy Soma and used it as a way to

keep the smoking high going for long periods of time. He stated, “It also helps with cotton mouth.” Cottonmouth (dry mouth) is a common side effect of cannabis consumption. The ingredient list he used was raw milk, raw honey, cinnamon stick, cannabis and peppermint. He put the cannabis in a pot of milk and boiled it for 30 minutes. The cannabinoids found in the plant are fat-soluble so when one wishes to make a liquid drink, they must decarboxylate the drink in a fat substance. Milk fit this bill. He told me holy soma is frequently consumed when they smoke together. He said it would be sacrilege to drink Soma without the other group members present.

THE SHIVA

The living room was cut off from the kitchen with hanging beads. His music was blaring from the speakers and his living room was decked out in black light Bob Marley and Shiva (A Hindu God, many of his followers use cannabis for spiritual enlightenment purposes) posters and beanbag chairs. The self-produced music was an infusion of reggae and futuristic beats. There were no words in the song, just a trippy rhythm that was meant to be heard while high. However, as I entered the most noticeable thing was the centerpiece of the entire room, The Shiva. The Shiva, as the group calls it, is a five-foot green glass on glass bong with an ash catcher, arm percolator and down stem¹⁵. The Shiva was all green except red and gold ribs every foot marking the bong's height. Dorian told me his friend made it for him as a gift. They originally had it at the dispensary as a decorative piece but moved it out of fear a patient might break it. I asked him why they

¹⁵ Glass on glass is the preferred bong type as it creates the best seal for sucking herb through the hole. Ash catchers catch ash and keep the bong clean, percolators diffuse the smoke to various contact points with water to clean the smoke and the down stem cools the smoke on the way to the water.

called it the Shiva and he told me because it is the “Destroyer of Worlds.” In the Hindu tradition, Shiva is a God that is responsible for the destruction of the world. The Kings play off this metaphor by claiming the bong, combined with cannabis destroys and transforms their conception of the world. In the Hindu tradition, destruction opens the path for a new creation of the universe. Moreover, many Sadhus believe a chilam (smoking pipe) is a representation of Shiva himself. The bowl piece (where the cannabis is mixed) is Shiva’s head the stem is his torso and limbs. Natty was the first to show up. TBC and High-C showed up shortly after together.

BOARD OF GOVERNANCE MEETINGS

In addition to discussing cannabis and its revelatory properties, the Kings would occasionally use the meetings as corporate board meetings. They discussed their own business, legalization, and general market dynamics and trends. Monthly meetings were held by the Kings to discuss various issues related to the operation of the dispensary. The Kings, Lucy and another recommending physician who was an early investor with the Kings sit in on the meetings. The physician would always skype into the meeting, he never attended in person. The meetings typically proceed with Natty giving a report on important issues relevant to the operation of the dispensary. New types of sample buds and other types of products that could be sold at the collective, changes in ordinances that effect the dispensary and occasionally employee compensation was brought up in the executive report. Natty would frequently distribute the various forms of sample provided by vendors to the rest of the Kings to try. It may be the first and only corporate board meeting where the drugs were openly passed around as samples and used. The board

would vote on whether or not the dispensary would carry the product based on the strength and potency of the product. However, the Kings were willing to give any product a shot to see how it would sell before they dismissed it. Different shelf heights let patients know about differences in the potency so potency, or lack thereof, was not a deal breaker.

Lucy would give the financial report on the dispensary. Everybody had access to the finances of the collective because of the MMJmenu system the Kings employed. However, the expenses of the dispensary frequently went beyond the accounting of product. Some of these other expenses included security for the dispensary, banking needs, employee (volunteer compensation), rent, electricity and other incidentals.

Market Dynamics

As discussed prior, Dorian, Lucy and Natty and a handful of volunteer bud tenders are primarily left to run the dispensary. However, the other Kings and other investors not named and unbeknownst to me invested in the collective and enjoy periodic updates on the functioning of the dispensary. As loosely illustrated in the previous chapter, cash is the only source of currency accepted at cannabis dispensaries. As a result of this, the money collected at the end of each day must be handled by a private security guard and deposited to a bank from which it is dispersed to the Kings and investors. A video monitor feed of the dispensary is accessible by all of the Kings and investors through an internet connection and the dispensaries accounting is kept and tracked on the MMJmenu website which is also accessible by the investor group.

One interesting feature about the operation of the dispensary is that despite the high markup on the price of cannabis, the dispensary does not make a huge profit. After

factoring in the cost of running the collective such as rent, advertising, employee compensation, security and the like, the dispensary hardly makes a profit. As Lucy explained to me, “The money has to go to a lot of places before we can turn a profit. The dispensary always makes a profit, but when considering all the competition and the cost of running a legal dispensary, it is not the green rush I think people may think it is.” It is intriguing that the Kings engaged in this risky business when their profit margins are so small. However, the Kings motivations are not as much financial as social and spiritual as will be explained below. Notwithstanding, the investors main objective was to make money and the keep tabs on the operation of the dispensary.

Legalization

The Kings were somewhat split on their feelings about legalization. Although they all felt legalization was both a good thing and inevitable, some were more pessimistic than others about the direction legalization would eventually take. Natty believed cannabis would cure all the evils of the world. Through reflection, Natty believed cannabis would cure the world of the evil intentions of men and corporations. Natty believed that after legalization there would be no more war, exploitation, corruption and greed. Weed, according to Natty, had the ability to create empathy for others and change the world. TBC, who was an undocumented immigrants believed that cannabis was like him. He explained in a not altogether coherent manner that:

See, I’ve been thinking about this for a long time. I’m like cannabis and cannabis is like me. Were both illegal. And illegalizing one is like illegalizing the other. And when you legalize one, you can legalize the other. So they’re both the same thing.

In accordance with Natty, TBC believed cannabis and cannabis legalization would create empathy and understanding of others and acceptance of differences. Both believed it was possible because showing people another world was one way cannabis creates change in the world. As Natty explained, “cannabis changes the mind, and the mind changes the world.”

When I asked High-C about whether or not he liked the possibility of legalization he told me he had mixed feelings. He explained:

When it was on the ballot a couple of years ago, I voted against it. I was still selling weed illegally. I didn't know what was going to happen if they legalized it. I thought I was gonna be out of a job. Slangin is how I made money on the side. We didn't have the dispensary at the time. Today, I'm kinda cool with it ya know. Dispensaries get grandfathered in when states legalize nowadays. But the big corporations can still beat us out. Legalization is good and bad. Its good cause people won't get locked up ya know. Um, but its bad because corporate capitalist America is gonna take it over, alter it and co-opt it. Plus, there's already too many pot shops and deliveries to begin with. If they legalize it, its gonna be packed. Prices are gonna drop and were gonna be left on the outside. But at least we got our thing up and running, so we'll see wuts up.

Although the Kings disagreed about the future and direction of their dispensary, they all agreed that legalization was coming and was inevitable. One benefit of illegalization that all of the kings were aware of was the artificially scarcity produced by prohibition.

Market entry has been the dominant force determining the profitability of the cannabis industry. And, it is the main reason cannabis from pound to gram carries such a ridiculously high mark up. The fear many already in the business have is that extra competition will reduce price and the already rich and wealthy who are in a better position to take advantage of the market will do so. However, states that have already implemented recreational cannabis illustrates that recreational cannabis is taxed at a

higher rate than medical marijuana dispensaries and that this high taxation creates higher prices that keep already existing medical marijuana collectives afloat.

After Meetings Adjourned

Each member grew their own side stash at their house. And although they ran a grow-op together, they used the grow-op for the collective, and they smoked their own personal stashes during smoking sessions. Each member of the group is expected to chip in equally, similar to an offering. They all gathered around the Shiva and one by one took their sack out and placed it in the community smoking pot. Every member of the group brought a bag of their best weed to share with the group. It was expected that members bring their best weed and share their weed freely. Reciprocation was a vital part of the session and signs of stinginess were heavily frowned upon. It was also crucial that the Kings brought their best product as individual members were judged on the strength of their grow.

Much of the interaction was symbolic and did not serve a purpose other than the meaning the group members created for themselves. But the symbolic purpose was important to the group. And any indication that a member brought swag weed to the session, or was stingy with his weed, would cause a demotion in one's status and prestige within the group. Having weak weed would indicate the member did not know how to grow or no longer prided himself on the grow, and being stingy would be a hint that the member could not yield the same level of bud as other members. Smoking status is an important component of the Kings identity, and thus, the Kings employ various mechanisms to maintain that status.

Unrelated to status and reciprocity, many smokers believe that mixing various types of cannabis strains together in the same bowl produces unique highs that cannot be produced by one strain alone. Offering greens to another member is an important symbolic gesture of deference and reciprocity. “Hitting Greens” is prized by smokers because it produces a much cleaner and much smoother smoke than a bowl that has already been lit. Much like asking somebody if they want the last piece of pizza, or offering a guest a drink, it is expected that one offers somebody else the greens.

TBC sat to the left of Dorian, and always sat to the left of Dorian, and the piece was always passed to the left hand side. The consistency in seating arrangement allowed them to easily observe the norms of reciprocity. It is expected in sessions that the Kings clear the entire chamber on each smoke. Not doing so would out a member as a weak smoker and the member would lose status within the group. After everybody smokes, they go on to taking entire bowl hits. Taking entire bowls at once typically waste the weed. However, taking a bowl in one hit shows other people that one is a serious smoker that can handle such a large hit at once.

After everybody had taken at least one hit of Ganja, they typically begin to sip the Holy Soma. Taking entire bong rips can make it difficult for many people to talk. For one, the rips inflame the lungs, and two, people typically tend to think more. Likewise, cotton mouth sets in and makes it somewhat difficult to speak. Holy soma, according to the group, clears cottonmouth and provides a long lasting high because the substance is ingested orally and is processed through the digestive system. As Natty explained, “When you drink it, it lasts so much longer, it’s a strong and consistent high. And it wets the

mouth. Smoking, vaping, waxing, that dries you up.” Each member takes small sips and passes it to the next member. The cup they use is the size of a large coffee mug but the members only drank a small amount and pass it to the next member.

I asked them why they pass it around so much and why it took so long for them to drink such a small amount of liquid and they explained that it was necessary so everybody can get some, and nobody wants to be the person to drink it all up. Consequently, it was drunk sparingly. In addition, since it helped with cottonmouth, the members would use it whenever it was needed to curb the dryness sensation. Another important aspect of drinking sparingly is that cannabis ingested orally takes up to an hour for its effects to be felt although liquid consumption is typically faster. Passing it around allows the members to taper their use and ingest it slowly. High-C described a situation where he consumed too much orally at one time and got very sick:

One time this dude made some fucked up brownies. He put way too much weed in the brownies. He gave me a brownie and I ate it, and after I ate the brownie, he looked at me and screamed ‘Don’t eat the whole thing!!!’ He gave me a whole brownie then told me not to eat it after I ate it. Who does shit like that? It had like half an ounce of weed in it. I was like what, dude, why didn’t you tell me that when you gave me that shit? For the next hour, I was puking my guts out, and I was dizzy the rest of the day. When you smoke, or vape, or wax, you feel that shit right away, and you know how much you’re smoking. When its edibles, you don’t know what’s in it. You gotta go slow Big Dog!

The smoking sessions according to the group, continues for hours. The group would start heavy with rips off the Shiva. It appeared ceremonial to the group to start with smoking out of the Shiva. And it would slow to a crawl once they began drinking Holy Soma. Some of the sessions began by smoking out of then Vaping, and then move to Vaping or Waxing through the Shiva. Various adapters allow vape to be funneled through a bong.

Vaping is a consumption technique that heats the cannabis up to 365 degrees Fahrenheit to dehydrate the plant matter and release the cannabinoids without combusting the plant into smoke. Waxing uses a concentrated alcohol base to extract the Cannabinoids. When waxing, the group used a blow torch and nail attached to the Shiva to heat the wax. New mechanisms of smoking were always being tried by the Kings. To some degree, this was necessary as they tried to stay informed about the most recent developments in case a patient had questions about a consumption technique.

CANNABIS USE AND SOCIAL STATUS

Although the reason sessions fulfilled the role and served the purposes of acting as an informal board meeting, a bonding ritual and a reflexive practice, the sessions frequently transformed into smoking matches where one member of the group would try to out smoke the other. Although never explicitly stated, there was an expectation that one would participate or lose social status as a member of the group. It was also necessary when outside members would join the group to place social pressure on the person to participate in the smoking match. An acquaintance of mine who made the mistake of trying to smoke with the group described it as tripping balls. He also claimed they got mad because he wasn't smoking as much as them.

It is implicitly understood that being able to hang (smoke a bunch of weed) was a status symbol on which the individual members of the group prided themselves. People that could not hang, or could not handle the trip were considered "soft" and never invited to smoking sessions again. For the group, knowing someone smoked, and could smoke a lot at one period of time meant that the individual was like them and shared similar

beliefs and lifestyles. Other people were simply posers, not really down for the cause, and perhaps were not trustworthy with knowledge of their organization and practices.

As stated previously, smoking sessions frequently turned into smoking matches in amongst the Kings themselves. Nobody would ever admit that one member could smoke more than themselves. Being able to “hang” (smoke the most for the longest period of time) the most was a symbol of prestige itself. Practices such as coughing after a big hit, babysitting (holding the weed for too long), or skipping a turn were all frowned upon and sanctioned by the group. High-C would frequently bring up a time when TBC tried to take a snapper (smoking the entire bowl in one hit and sucking it through the chamber) and began coughing his lungs up. The group looked at him and laughed as High-C recanted the story claiming, “He just popped his cherry” (a common term for smoking for the first time). Another member said he had “virgin lungs.” Visibly shaken and embarrassed, TBC, in an attempt to save face retorted, “These are whore lungs. I had been smoking the whole day. I was taking real hits, not like those baby hits you guys were taking.”

In addition to smoking competitions, the Kings would frequently discuss their past smoking ventures. As stated before, smoking, smoking a lot and smoking with a bunch of different people increased social prestige within the group. Although being able to smoke massive amounts of cannabis provided a level of social prestige, using other forms of drugs in the Kings eyes, lowered social prestige. High-C in particular liked to bring up old smoking buddies who went to hard drugs and screwed up their lives. As High-C turned to me and said:

Remember 'the devil' [our nickname for an old acquaintance]? The last time I saw him he was naked in a hospital gown. I let him borrow my suit for a job interview he went on but he did a bunch of meth and crashed his car and the ambulance cut my suit off of him. I took his iPhone as collateral so he gave me my suit back because I thought he was gonna steal my suit because he was a twak. I guess he left the hospital without giving them his information and got to my house somehow and started threatening me over his phone. I just gave it to him even though he kinda stole my suit. That guys a winner. Haha

Thus, while smoking gave one social prestige, other, harder drugs lowered social prestige as they frequently referred to old smoking companions that went to harder drugs (methamphetamine is a common hard drug in Orange County) as "twaks" and "tweakers." This goes against the gateway hypothesis (Dupont, 1984) that claims cannabis is a drug, in a logical succession of drugs (alcohol & tobacco to cannabis to cocaine and heroine) that leads to harder drug usage. The group frequently sees cannabis as a path to spiritual enlightenment and smoking as an act of symbolic protest against what they consider to be a corrupt materialistic world. Other drugs and alcohol are seen as the having the opposite effect and are frowned upon by the group. Alcohol and some other hard drugs are seen negatively by the group because they do not produce consciousness. Rather, they take that consciousness away. However, "shrooms" (psychedelic mushrooms), LSD and acid are occasionally indulged upon from time to time.

Ironically, High-C sold prescription drugs, cocaine, and meth as an occasional side business. The Kings were aware of this venture but they did not seem to intrude on it. High-C would go to Tijuana and buy prescription drugs from the pharmacies and coke from a dealer he knew that sold it on the street there. High-C would frequently come back with valium, Xan bars (Xanax), Adderall, Codeine and Vicodin. There was a type of

cognitive dissonance in High-C's logic as he justified his drug selling. "These are just recreational drugs. But I'm not a drug dealer, I just sell to friends. People like to sleep. If I don't do it, they'll just get it from somebody else. I don't sell drugs they sell themselves." Through a type of cognitive dissonance, High-C rationalized his drug selling by claiming people use drugs with or without him. Actually, High-C never did entirely internalize the spiritual beliefs of the group. High-C always did his own thing and never believed in the spiritual aspect of cannabis. Yet, he was a member of the group and they liked to kick it with him because he was funny. And, he had the hook up on other drugs.

SOCIAL BONDING RITUAL

Reason sessions also serve a function for the group as it allows for a bonding and communal experience. TBC explains his social motivations:

What else do you do when you got nothing to do? You kick it with the homies and you light it up. We could go drink, but I get sick from drinking and I feel like crap the next day. When I get drunk, I can't wake up and do nothing. With weed, I get high, hang out, and wake up the next day. When you're with people, you always have to do something. If you don't want to be sick all the time, you smoke weed.

Much like offering tea, coffee, or a beer to a guest that enters one's home, when the Kings meet, and hangout, cannabis is an expected offering. Smoking with, or smoking out people creates a sense of shared experience amongst the users. As High-C states:

I smoke with people all the time. I smoke with the Kings, I smoke with the patients. I smoke with friends of friends. 'I smoke two joints in the morning, I smoke two joints at night, I smoke two joints in the afternoon it makes me feel alright. I smoke two joints in time of peace, and two in time of war, I smoke two joints before I smoke two joints, and then I smoke two more.' [He was jokingly referencing a sublime song with that quote (Sublime, 1992)]. Sometimes, when you want to get to know somebody, and you know they smoke, you offer to

smoke them out. And you make a friend. It's also a way to sell. If you smoke with people, and you tell them you sell, then they know to come to you. It's like advertising. Except your smoking and kicking it. But you gotta bring that good shit. If you bring swag then they won't want to buy off you.

I asked him if it was about selling. And he stated:

Yeah. It's about slanging. But it's also about kicking it. I can't drink all the time, but I like to kick it. So this is a way to kick it, without drinking. Kinda like going to Putas. You have something to do without drinking. But you never wanna smoke too much with what I do. If you get too high, you can't get around. The dude's house that you need to drive to becomes a mission [cannabis users frequently refer to mundane activities as busting missions because it is much more difficult to do simple things when you are really high] if you get too lit.

Dorian agreed:

It's fun to smoke with a bunch of different people. It's kinda a status thang. Like Chappelle said, the only thing white people talk about when they're high is other times they're high. If you smoke with a bunch of people, you're a big-time smoker and a big time dealer. But you're also cool because you know this guy and that guy. And you're the guy they go to when they want to smoke or connect.

The Kings certainly reiterated this fact when discussing their past smoking ventures.

Similar to gaining social status, they would frequently rally off a list of people (some I knew, some I did not), that they had smoked with recently. They would frequently bring up people the group had not seen for years, and discuss how they smoked a blunt with that person the other day. Or, more commonly, discuss people that they saw at a concert that they hooked up with weed and smoked with. One claim to fame for Dorian was smoking with Wiz Khalifa [a famous pro-cannabis rapper] after a concert. He got back stage because the security guard allowed cannabis sellers to sell to Wiz Khalifa.

CANNABIS AND CONSCIOUSNESS: REFLEXIVITY

Although there are various latent functions that come along with the sessions such as bonding and establishing each person's social status and prestige within the group, the Kings stated reason for using cannabis is to use it as a way to reexamine their lives and behavior and to conceptualize a different world. Unlike the common perception in the U.S., that cannabis is a drug that kills brain cells, the Kings believe it is a plant given to humans by God to cure the world of its social ills. The significance the group attached to the plant can be seen in the various names they give to the plant. I have heard the group refer to the plant as everything from: Cannabis, Pot, Refer, Bud, Grass, Mary Jane, Dank, Dro, Skunk, Kush, the Chrons, the Chronic, Marijuana, Herb, The Holy Herb, Ganja, Ganj, Weed, Wisdom Weed, Da Buddha, Da Bush, the Bush of Understanding, and my personal favorite, "Knowledge." Natty explains:

It's knowledge because it shows you the world. Smoking weed, if you never did it, is like forgetting the world and coming back to it. It's like temporary amnesia. They say it affects short-term memory. It makes you forget. If you get really high, you forget everything about Babylon, and then you see the world again. And you're like 'whoa.' This is the world. It's shocking and frightening. But it's a reality. But you don't just forget about the world. You forget about yourself. And then you come back into your body and you're like whoa! This is me? And you think about everything, you think about your life, you think about the world, and you think about yourself. Bob Marley once said, 'when you smoke the herb, it reveals you to yourself.'

Natty explained that in ancient primitive societies, these people would usually designate a shaman to act as the spiritual and religious leader of the group. The shaman would use consciousness-altering plants and herbs. The shaman was revered as a holy man that would go to different states of being and to different worlds and different realities and bring back new knowledge, knowledge about the world that could not be revealed during

sobriety. Today, according to Natty, people are so backwards thinking with logic that they think they understand the world but they understand nothing. Furthermore, they believe it is their duty in life to show people the real world. Dorian chimed in:

Cannabis is consciousness. Cannabis is self-awareness, cannabis is reality. The first time I used cannabis was the first time I ever truly felt alive. When you smoke it, life becomes so vivid, and everything becomes so real. It's like your first breath when the doctor spansks you. It's the breath of life. Cannabis is life. It's consciousness in plant form. It's God's consciousness. God took his consciousness and put it into a plant.

Natty continued:

It's like your eyes are open for the first time and you see that world for what it is. You know good and evil. It's like you're Adam in the Garden of Eden. The true world is revealed to you. Your true self is revealed to you. Like Adam, you see that you are naked; you see the garden for what it is. The pollution and hell that is Babylon is revealed to you. You know what I mean? You've seen it before too. And once you see it, you never forget it, no matter how much you try to drink it away, no matter how much you try to ignore and pretend it didn't happen, or it doesn't exist. You will always have that knowledge of the world. It's the expulsion!

The Plant Origin Story

As stated earlier, the exact origin of the plant is up to scientific, scholarly, and popular debate. What is certain is that the plant predates written human record and may very well have been one of the first plants cultivated by human beings. This had led to much speculation about its connection to humankind as many scholars have suggested that it was the herb itself and the mind expanding hallucination that accompanies it's consumption that spurred human consciousness. This is the story I was told one day by Natty Dreads:

Marijuana is the famous plant written about in the chapter of Genesis. It is the forbidden fruit, the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But the Devil didn't give us the plant. God did. God came down from heaven with the plant to show us our

oppression. And to show us the poison of Babylon. See, that's the funny thing about the story. In the bible, God and the Devil are reversed. The Devil kept us in chains, blind and ignorant, exploiting us in the Garden of Eden, keeping us drunk through his tree of life, alcohol. It was through herb that God came and set us free and broke the chains. He opened our eyes and revealed our nakedness; he exposed the devil for what he is. It was only then that man could see the world for what it truly was. Man could know the difference between good and evil, and God and the Devil. And we could no longer see the Garden as a paradise. It was a slave field, a prison, a plantation. And alcohol is the 'tree of life.' It is the blood of Christ. If you drink, you live forever, in both Christian mythology and their story. It is the drunken stupor in the garden that makes man blind.

The factuality of this story and the origin of cannabis are not as relevant as what it says about the Kings beliefs and interpretation of what cannabis is. In the power of 420 Halon (2008) discusses how 420 origin stories are not relevant for the act of discovering where and how 420 started (the true story seems relatively mundane and unimportant), but for indoctrinating new smokers to the culture, norms and ideas of cannabis smokers in general. Likewise, the actual origin of cannabis is not known, nor could it ever be expected to be known. Other users told me the plant takes on its magical qualities because a water plant accidentally mated with a land plant and created its magical properties. The true reason it acts upon the human mind the way it does may never be known. Likewise, the story is derived from the bible, but the Kings are critical of the bible and its interpretations, although, they are not Satanist.

The Burning Bush of Moses

The Kings likewise believe that the Burning Bush of Moses and other stories in the bible directly or indirectly reference cannabis. They explained that the description of the Burning Bush is a direct portrayal of the feelings of a cannabis high. Natty pointed to quotes in the bible such as "the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed" as

an indication of the slowing of thought. Natty also claimed that the communication with the divine and the rebellious attitude Moses adopted were all products of a cannabis high. Likewise, he pointed to the passage “I Am hath sent me unto you” as evidence that God’s consciousness was alive in Moses when he burned the bush. They pointed to biblical chapters that referenced Moses going to a mountain to communicate with the Bush. They claimed this was clear indication that it was a plant Moses could carry with him. Likewise, God would speak to Moses and tell him the right and wrong way for human beings to live their lives. That is one of the reasons the Kings have reason sessions, because they believe it is a communion with God that allows God to reveal the world to them.

The Kings consider themselves spiritual but not religious, and, although it may appear so from their interpretation of the Garden of Eden story and Exodus stories, the Kings are not Satanist nor are they anti-Christian. In fact, they frequently relied on bible quotes and biblical stories to prove cannabis’ sacredness. They feel there is spiritual power and factuality in the bible, but that its true essence has been corrupted by the powers that be.

Alcohol Versus Cannabis

Alcohol plays an important yet controversial role in the belief system of the group. Every group member I spoke with contends that alcohol is a scourge of man, the opposite of cannabis, and the cause of practically all social ills that fall upon mankind. They believe it blinds human beings to the reality of their world. It makes people sick, makes people stupid, and makes people blind. Dorian once said about cannabis, I’m

pretty sure he was quoting Bob Marley, “If alcohol is the destruction of man, Herb is the healing of the world.” I say that it plays a controversial role with the group because while every member of the group feels that alcohol is a scourge of man, every member of the group delves into alcohol on a relatively consistent basis. Through a type of cognitive dissonance, every group member drinks and considers drinking a normal and unfortunate effect of human social life.

Natty explained to me once:

Alcohol is a poison, but it’s also a part of life. You can’t go without drinking forever. You gotta have fun every now and then ya know. Ya gotta take a break from reality. Alcohol does that so you’re not always thinking.

For the group, alcohol is a poison that blinds humans to the reality of oppression and life more generally. Yet, the group believes it is necessary as a temporary relief from the power of that reality. Dorian explained:

Alcohol and weed are the exact opposite of each other. They’re the yin and yang of life. You can’t have one without the other. If every day is a good day, what’s a good day? Alcohol makes you stupid, weed makes you think. Alcohol takes away the pain of life weed makes life more vivid.

Although the group believes alcohol and weed takes the individual to different ends of the life spectrum, they do not believe that sobriety leads to a greater sense of reality.

Dorian explained with a joke:

Sobriety is an illusion created by lack of DNA [Drugs N Alcohol]. There’s an equilibrium in the world. But sobriety isn’t the equilibrium. Sobriety isn’t the equilibrium because sobriety doesn’t show you the real world. You can only see the real world when you use the ganj. That’s life, that’s the world, that’s reality.

When I asked them why sobriety isn’t the real world, Natty chimed in again:

Sobriety isn’t real because sobriety is what you know. There’s so much poison, pollution and corruption in the world and it’s normal for you, so you don’t see it.

Just like a fish can't see that it's in water, we can't see the true nature of our world. You only see the corruption and evil when you step back and look at the world from a different perspective. It's like culture shock. It's like going on a journey to a different world and a different place and seeing something new, something different, and knowing a different world is possible. That's why they call it a trip. It's a journey, but it's a journey to a different world and a different reality. And you come back with new knowledge, sacred knowledge that only those who have been there before know. Sobriety doesn't do that. When you're sober, everything is normal and you're used to it.

Herb, according to the group, has the ability to produce visions and show the world as it really is. Yet, the caution that staying too high, for too long is problematic as well. TBC explains:

Alcohol is important because it brings you back closer to sobriety. It brings you back closer to balance. You don't want to stay in that world for too long. It's too powerful and it's too strong of a trip. Some people say when you trip too hard, it's kind of like going to hell. You don't want to be in hell forever, so you need to come back sometimes. You drink to balance out the trip. But you don't want to go too far, or you forget reality. The opposite doesn't work though. You can't get super drunk and then smoke and come back to the world. Since your mind is already polluted with alcohol, it makes life more vivid and it makes the alcohol drunk feeling more vivid. You get the spins. Then you're really drunk.

Alcohol is important as a remedy to the trip. The trip is important for the Kings because they believe it reveals something about the world that human beings need to see, but alcohol helps people cope with the reality of the vision they experienced. Although alcohol has its place in the group, every member believes that smoking is more important than drinking and that one should smoke more than one drinks. The reason being that cannabis provides a level of consciousness above sobriety and alcohol brings the consciousness below sobriety. However, in order to truly understand the world, an individual's level of consciousness must consistently be above the level of sobriety. Although this may seem like a stoner trip, Dobkin De Rios (1984) contends that a variety

of states of reference and cognition are important for a more complete understanding of the multiple realms of human experience.

In fact, the use of hallucinogenic drugs as a means of understanding nature and reality is not unique to this group. Andritsky, (1989) illustrates this with his examination of the hallucinogen ayahuasca. His article addresses the fact that the sociopsychotherapeutic healing ritual, the drugs becomes a means of reality construction for the Amazonian group. Moreover, Adritsky contends that drugs bring participants into a transcendental view of reality and serves as a social theory and a means of group psychotherapy and social integration (1989).

When one considers modern epistemological debates in and around physics and postmodern movements of the past decades, it is easy to understand that there is not a single meaning for any perspective of reality. Unfortunately, from our ethnocentric Hallucinogen-phobic mainstream perspective, cannabis, and other drugs are a scourge of man in need of eradication.

MEDICINE TO HEAL THE WORLD

As explained earlier, the Kings all believe that cannabis was put on earth for human use. They point to various attributes of the plant to illustrate their point. For example, cannabis has been cultivated by human beings for thousands of years (Booth, 2005). It is theorized to have been the first, if not one of the first crops cultivated by human beings (Abel, 2000). It is the most commonly used illegal substance the world over (Drugabuse.gov, 2015). It has various uses for humans. It can be used as paper, rope; it can even be used as a relatively clean burning form of biodiesel (Robinson,

1995). Furthermore, hemp is one of the most nutrient rich and vitamin dense plant foods known to man (Lieber et al., 2000). And most importantly, the Kings point to its medicinal qualities that prove its importance to human kind. Cannabis has been speculated to help treat everything from pain, epilepsy, and multiple sclerosis.

Natty explained cannabis' healing properties as such, "cannabis works on both the body and the mind." According to Natty, cannabis cures the whole body in unison. So while one person may come in for arthritis, another may come in for sleep problems, another still may come in for glaucoma, cannabis treat all them together regardless of the ailment. And the high produced by the cannabis is no different. As Natty explains:

When cannabis heals, it does not heal selectively. Some strains are better for some ailments but the cannabis plant itself fixes all aspects of the self. The hallucination aids in that healing process. The hallucination helps to heal the mind. It creates a different perception of the world and puts oneself in tune with one's own body. It gives the mind time to think, relax, meditate and show you what's wrong with yourself. Cannabis cures yourself.

Natty went on to explain that the weird feelings and side effects that come along with a high have their own healing properties. For example, the blood shot red eyes help to relieve intraocular pressure. Likewise, when people crack their knuckles and get a tingling sensation in their joints, Natty argued that they actually benefit from the cannabinoids relieving pressure and pain on the joints.

The reality Natty tried to convey was that therapeutic and recreational cannabis use are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, according to Natty, the recreational use of cannabis is therapeutic in and of itself, and the therapeutic use of cannabis is recreational. That is why Natty was so opposed to the idea that certain groups of people scam the system by claiming false illnesses. According to him, the world is full of illnesses and

pain. God put plants on this earth to help deal with those pains. “How else,” he explained, “do you explain cannabis’ effect on the endocannabinoid system?” It is one of the only known external substances that works on that key element of our body (Mechoulam, 1992). The endocannabinoid system is a complex physiologic system involved in establishing and maintaining human health. It is comprised of endocannabinoid receptors that are found throughout the body in the brain, organs, connective tissues, glands and immune cells. In each system, the cannabinoid receptors maintain homeostasis. He told me, “Even if you don’t believe in the metaphysical, you must admit, cannabis is a pure work of nature. The endocannabinoid system was even named after cannabis.”

Modulating the endocannabinoid system holds promise for a wide range of diseases (Pacher, 2006). As Natty explained:

Many people trip when they are high. It reveals something about your life and your world that you are not aware of. The trip is God’s way of letting you know what is wrong with your life, your body and your mind. It is cannabis’ purpose, to show you the way in the darkness. Why does cannabis function on so many different parts of the body? Why does it do so much good for people? Because God put this plant here for us to use. The earth is a garden. God uses plants to extract nutrients and minerals from the ground to put in to our bodies. Natty quoted a biblical verse to confirm his theory, “I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you” (Genesis 1:29).

According to Dorian, cannabis can also aid in weight loss:

Stoners are skinnier than other people. Yeah, it gives you the munchies. But it also makes you feel weird when you’re high. And if you feel weird or super fat when you’re high, then you cut back on eating. Like this one time, I was smoking with my friend at work. He started smoking cigarettes and like two weeks before that. Then we smoked. He got super sick after smoking weed and started puking. I was like, You’re trippin!!! The cigarettes made him sick. And he didn’t notice until the weed set him off. He stopped smoking after that. It doesn’t always work like that though. I know people who smoke spliffs [joints with tobacco and

marijuana] and are good smoking both. But if you're eating the wrong thing, or doing something messed up to your body. The Holy Herb is gonna let you know.

Di Leo (1975) agrees with this assertion. In his study of the hallucinogenic cultures, he emphasizes how psychotic misery brought about by powerful hallucinations can actually have therapeutic benefits. Maslow (1976) agrees with this contention in claiming that transcendental experiences perform an important role for the individual. Not just in terms of personal meaning, but also in personal growth and understating what an individual needs and what one does not need. The need of self-actualization is a critical component of the self when all other needs are met. For the Kings, being relatively well off, and having their most basic needs met, self-actualization, the higher needs are sought that go beyond basic needs and strive for constant betterment.

When I asked TBC about the medical properties of weed, TBC responded:

Smoking helps me chill out. When I don't smoke, I'm stressed out and angry all the time. Smoking gives me that release. I'm kind of an asshole without weed. I woulda fought you already if it wasn't for weed. I think its cause I'm always stressed out that weed chills me out. Or, maybe I'm restless because of addiction. But I'm not cool without weed.

TBC pointed out how for him, Ganja allowed him to escape the pressures of the day.

Although his explanation may sound recreational in nature, as Natty pointed out, the distinction between recreational and therapeutic is not as clear-cut as it seems. If smoking relieves the pressure of the day, then it is therapeutic.

CANNABIS AND SEXUALITY

Adding to our discussion about the health benefits of cannabis, Natty discussed how cannabis is an effective and potent cure for erectile dysfunction and is a powerful aphrodisiac. According to Natty, the high associated with cannabis stimulates feelings of

sexuality and makes one feel more connected to their partner. Cannabis has been used as a sexual aphrodisiac for hundreds of years. Tantric sex practitioners use it as a means to increase pleasure and communicate with the divine. But Natty explained, “Sex is just more real. It’s like it’s the first time you do it every time. It is a sensation unmatched in the world.” Cannabis has the ability to increase sexual pleasure much the same way it increases pleasure for other activities.

VISIONS: CANNABIS AND ASCETICISM

As stated earlier, the Kings believe the plant produces visions that let human beings know the truth about the world. They describe the visions as shocking and startling sometimes, but they maintain that the visions are the truth. They are the real world when the blinders are taken off. Natty explained the visions as such:

When you smoke, the world slows down and you can think. You hear more, you see more. Your taste buds are better. You feel your body more. Sex is better. Your mouth dries up. Your joints tingle and crack. Your heart races. Everything becomes so much more real and vivid. You breathe deeper and you breathe in the breath of life. At that moment, God’s consciousness is in you. And you see. And since the world is so much more real, the familiar becomes the strange. Things you would have never thought of before becomes curious. Your own life becomes curious and you think about it. Your surroundings become curious and you think about it. You sit you think and you meditate. It’s like your life is a movie, it’s sporadic, fast and jumps from one scene to the next with never enough time to live in the moment. Ganj changes that. Time slows down, you’re in the moment. Your life is still like a movie. But the movie is just one long shot. One long shot seen through your own eyes. From the first person.

The Kings believe the realness of the world shows you how to live your life. They believe that the world is in a state of disarray because of the greed and corruptness of human action. And they believe the plant was put on earth by God to show human’s the right way to live their lives. To live in a simpler way. Dorian explains:

The world is all consumerism, pollution, corruption and degradation. The plant shows you this. Shows you what we are doing to the planet, what we are doing to Mother Nature. And it lets us know to stop. But everybody doesn't see this. Only a chosen few see the world for what it really is. And these chosen ones must reveal the world to the masses. And that's why we do what we do. We live our lives the way god incarnate teaches.

The ideas produced from these visions, according to the group, create a feeling of commune with the earth that makes man want to return to a simpler and more ascetic life. Indeed, when one looks at the history of religious organizations that have used cannabis historically (followers of Shiva, Sufi Muslims, Rastafarians, Hippies), one can see that a desire for simplistic life is a common theme.

TBC chimed in:

There is equilibrium to the world that we as humans don't understand. Much like a dog can't understand our world, we can't understand God's world. But the earth understands it, and the earth gives us this and other hallucinogenic plants to communicate with it and Mother Nature. When you destroy the world, the plant lets you know to stop. It teaches you to go back to a simpler life. To live the way God wants us to.

The use of cannabis for the group is according to the group, an act of defiance to social norms of propriety imposed by a corrupt materialistic system. It is revolutionary as the group believes the consciousness, altering properties of the plant has the ability to change both perception and action. As a tool of reflexivity, it has the ability to alter ones sense of reality and show the users human oppression at the hands of Babylon. As discussed, in contrast to the common stereotypical assumptions about cannabis as juvenile party drugs, the Kings believe the plant gives them the ability to think and meditate in ways not possible while sober. As Dobkin De Rios (1984) explains:

The ASC [altered state of consciousness] provides an alternative to personally and culturally constructed states of consciousness that normally dominate human

perception and awareness. The real significance of LSD-like drugs and ASC lies in their ability to produce changes in the individual's awareness of reality and of being at one with the individual to a perception of a spiritual mystical, timeless, transcendental reality and of being at one with the universe.

Yet, the plant can be seen as much of a reaction to society as it is a revolt against it. To some degree, using the plant in opposition to existing laws, in opposition to the medical establishment, and in opposition to American anti-marijuana propaganda is a form of liberation. For the group, using the herb is one of the authentic forms of freedom. Its significance for the group however, cannot be constrained to a simple protest against established laws or established morality. If such were the case, the group could find various other symbols to fulfill this purpose. For example, Cocaine and methamphetamine are both illegal, and yet, the group (save except High-C) opposes their use. Likewise, other drugs have the ability to alter perception and consciousness, yet the group does not frequently partake of such activities. Thus, the plants most significant contribution as a symbol for the group is not just its use as a protest, nor simply its use as a mind-bending agent, but also its ability to expand the mind in a way that the group believes can fix the world.

BELIEFS AND SYMBOLS

The belief in cannabis as way to reveal the real world to the Kings gave rise to a unique set of symbols and cultural practices borrowed heavily from the Rastafarians, hippy culture and other religious movements that have used cannabis. However, cultural transmission is not a one to one process. The adoption of social and cultural practices is a common part of cultural transmission and diffusion while assimilating it into existing

culture frequently termed cultural amalgamation. They adopt various cultural practices while retaining beliefs and styles unique to Southern California's skater surfer culture.

Dress Style

Although no member of the group could be characterized as dirt poor, all of the members dress in a ragged style that I would characterize as new age hippy. I refer to such style as new age because none of their clothes are particularly old or that worn. Many clothing companies such as Lifted Research Group (LRG), predominantly cater to the style employed by the Kings. I did not know the letters LRG stood for cannabis until Natty pointed that out to me one day. Dress is a vital component of their identity as it allows the group to express an anti-conformist identity. Their clothes hang loose and are far too big for their size.

Sandals and barefooting are common features of the group. Although, considering Costa Mesa's proximity to the ocean, it is not that uncommon to see many ordinary people spend the majority of their daily lives in sandals. Yet, the Kings adopt sandals for both recreational and social reasons. Shoes, according to the Kings, are a symbolic restriction upon the freedom imposed by those who have power. It leads, among other things, according to the Kings, to stress, a myriad of health problems stemming from unnatural gait and social conformity. Thus, the very process of enclosing ones foot with shoes is an enclosure of the multiple arrays of human social patterns. This fact is best exemplified to the group by the fact that when they work, they are required to wear shoes. Clothes are thus used as a sign of disconformity and protest.

Diet

Anthropologists frequently contend food symbolism is an important index in assessing social groups. These dietary rituals, accordingly, reflect certain moral and social ideas with which social groups adhere. The King's diet is another distinctive feature of the group. They are semi-vegetarians, as they will not eat any animal that is not fish. They do not believe that the consumption of animals is inherently wrong or bad. Yet, they believe, as Natty explained to me once, that all animals in our modern corporate food system are corrupted and polluted by the poisons of Babylon. Food from this corporate system turns oneself into a corporate person. You are what you eat according to the group. They believed fish on the other hand, could not be touched by the machinations of Babylon. Thus, in their natural wild state, fish are natural and unpolluted. Furthermore, they believe that the American meat system promotes deforestation and pollution on part with the automobile and they try to not partake in changing the earth. However, they all understand to some degree altering the physical environment is a necessity to a degree. Furthermore, there appears to be an association between cannabis and vegetarianism as Indian dietary science actually believes that ganja makes the body hypersensitive to the poisons and toxins that comes from meat consumption (Lee, 1999). Consequently, many ganja using cultures, including this one, place a high priority on a vegetarian diet.

As a result, the group members, particularly Natty Dreads, are relatively skinny even though they follow their own regulations haphazardly, as I have been in the drive-through line with them at Taco Bell many times. Yet, to be fair, the food they ordered was vegetarian food, such as the seven-layer burrito. Despite this, the Kings are in

relatively good health. Although they are heavy pot users and sellers, they do not consider marijuana to be a drug. In fact, they believe the opposite is the truth. They consider the modern American drug industry to be the symbolic representation of everything that is wrong with American capitalism. As Natty explained to me, “Babylon tries to fight fire with fire and poison with poison. We don’t believe poison fixes illness. Herb fixes the body through fixing the mind. Herb shows you what is wrong and helps the body heal itself. We fight fire with water and poison with antidotes.”

Most if not all illnesses, according to the Kings are either directly or indirectly tied to Babylonian diet and the modern condition of what the group refers as the human zoo (unlike a concrete jungle which implies a measure of freedom, the Kings claim city living is more akin to a zoo in which human action is more or less contained and controlled).

Music

Each member of the group professes to be an independent artist. TBC produces music via a computer program. None of the members aside from Dorian appears particularly adept at playing instruments. Dorian plays the ukulele and guitar. The term their music Rasta funk. It sounds as if it is a cross between island reggae, modern Hawaiian music, and trance. The lyrics commonly sung over the trance like music frequently express the joy of Ganja, the love of earth, and the healing power of the plant. It is clear; the group tries to blend elements of reggae with the Grateful Dead. Perhaps the most unique part of the music is their ability to sing and write about Ganja in coded messages. In fact, very few songs explicitly use the term weed or marijuana. As one verse

from a song reads: Chant down Babylon be the lesson/ we bout to gain the truth from a reason session.

While in their board meetings, the Kings would frequently play their music. They told me it should be listened to high. Moreover, they claimed they would only know if it was “Dank” or not if when they listened to it high. The production and quality was low, as would be expected of any amateur musicians that use a closet in a spare room as a studio. When I asked them if they ever thought they would get big, they claimed he had no desire to become a Jay-Z. Mainstream corporate music, according to the Kings is corrupted and limited self-expression and artistic creativity. TBC replied:

Mainstream is alright. But, it’s the same thing over and over again. They trick you into liking music by playing the same crap on the radio over and over again until you eventually get used to it. It’s not good. It’s a trick. When we make music, it’s all about the UNDERGROUND!!!

All members said underground in unison as if they knew what TBC was going to say (they were also giving each other dap, as if there was some kind of insider knowledge that underground is the best type of music). I am assuming they had discussions about mainstream versus underground music prior to me asking about it. For the group, conformity to the establishment, whether that be music, dress, drugs, or any other lifestyle sets one apart as a poser or a conformist. Thus, a dramaturgical hierarchy developed within the group as each member tried to conform the least to common norms and practices such as listening to mainstream music or participating in mainstream culture.

Babylon

Like the Rastafarians, the group sees the U.S. as a symbol of death, hatred, racism, capitalism, consumerism, imperialism and war. A frequent topic of conversation is the stupidity and corruptness of the Republican Party. Yet, although they believe the country to be a symbol of evil throughout the globe, they feel it is a mission to cure the world and the U.S. of the problem. As High-C stated, "Some people go on missionaries to third world countries to teach poor kids about Jesus. We go teach over-privileged suburban white kids about Rastafari and Ganja." Their stance is that while in hell, it is your obligation to change it. One way the Kings believe they can change the world is by distributing cannabis to people. Cannabis has the power to change the mind and get rid of corruption and impropriety in life. Dorian stated:

Only some people can see the world and can see Babylon for what it truly is. And when you've seen it, it is your responsibility to change it. When you know the world is breaking, it's your responsibility to try to fix it. If you ignore it, if you see the truth and ignore it, it makes you a coward. And you don't deserve to see the world.

America, or Babylon as the group likes to refer to it as, is not a real world. It is a zoo where the devil puts human beings. It is the earthly equivalent to hell for the group. Natty explained his human zoo theory as such:

We live in Hell, we live in a Zoo. Bob Marley said it was a 'Concrete Jungle' But its not a Jungle. It's a zoo. Everything is controlled in our lives. They tell us when to wake up, when to go to work, what to do at work, when to go home, and what to watch. They tell us what to eat, how to eat and how to spend what we have. They put us in here to work for them, to work for the man. And they keep it all. We're like Chimpanzees in a zoo. And, just like a Chimp can't see he's in a zoo, we don't see that were in a zoo. We're in hell. And the only way out of hell is to know you're in hell so you can escape. The reason herb is illegal, is because they don't want people to see the truth. They don't want people to know reality. They want to keep people drunk and blind and in the garden to work for them. That's

why drugs are so bad in Babylon. They don't want conscious people to think on their own and live their lives the way they want. Alcohol and cigarettes kill people by the thousands each day and they're legal. But they lock people up for using drugs and commit them because they don't do what they say. That proves they don't want people to be free. Herb isn't dangerous for people, it's dangerous for Babylon.

When I told Natty that everybody that gets high doesn't see the world the same way he does he replied, "They see it. But they don't know what they're seeing. They smoke and they think what they see is a drugged fantasy. They don't know that the high is reality and sobriety is the illusion. We need to show them that."

Technology

Another belief system the group holds is that technology is a form of magic employed by Babylon to entrap and brainwash human beings. Natty stated, "Technology is what gives the Babylonians their power. We use technology because we need to use it to fight Babylon, but we oppose its use for enjoyment." Thus, in certain instances, the Kings use technology such as when producing music, running the collective, providing light for their grow, but in general, they perceive radio, television and film as a brainwashing system employed by Babylon to keep human beings trapped. Dorian illustrates this:

It's all a system to glorify materialism and the iPhone and the giving money to and working for the man. Technology is a form of magic that Babylon mastered that brainwashes your mind and steals your soul. It is evil, but it can be used against Babylon for good.

Therefore, while the group believes it to be evil, like alcohol, they believe it to be an inescapable feature of the modern world. This view of technology is related to their

stance against mainstream music and why they attempt to produce their own music as a form of art.

Finances

Aside from the group's unique belief system, one of the things I find most fascinating about the members of the group is that none of them are particularly rich, or even well off for that matter. TBC and High-C rely on a steady income from other jobs. What is more relevant to the group is the act itself. Slanging and smoking, according to them is a protest act against the system. Indeed, the group itself practices a mild form of asceticism.

Poisonous Ecosystem Theory

The poisonous ecosystem theory may be perhaps the most unique I have ever heard. Natty explained to me that in ecosystems that contain a poisonous substance, material or plant, that same eco system creates an antidote to the poison. The corruption, pollution, materialism, alcoholism and sin of Babylon, according to Natty, are the world's poison, and cannabis is the world's antidote to the poison.

The Human Bumblebee Theory

In *The Botany of Desire*, Pollan (2001) explains how plants operate on human beings. He claims that although we as human beings think of ourselves as purely autonomous in our decisions about what to grow, plants act on us in a symbiotic relation similar to the way flowers manipulate bumblebees for cross-pollination. Pollan explains this as a process of human coevolution with the plant. In coevolutionary covenants, two parties act on one another for their own interest. Yet, unlike a parasite that lives off

another organism at its expense, in coevolutionary bargains the two organisms advance each other's interest

According to the Kings, it is no mere coincidence that cannabis is the external substance that operates on the endocannabinoids system. Indeed, the endocannabinoid system was found only after research conducted on cannabis and its effect on the human body and brain. Unlike other drugs that operate on the nervous system (psychotropic), and are alkaloid based psychotomimetic (Booth, 2005), cannabis is unique in its effect on the endocannabinoid system. Natty explained:

Why did human intelligence jump leaps and bounds 12,000 years ago? Why do you think we invented agriculture? Why do we see cannabis everywhere in the world? Because cannabis brought human consciousness out of the shadows. It brought self-awareness and deep critical thought to human beings. Mother nature uses plants to A plant consciously bends to find light, gives off scents and vibrant colors to attract, and develops poisons and thorns to repel predators. And cannabis gives the gift of thought to save itself from human destruction.

The Kings explain the endocannabinoid system and cannabis as evidence of human's and cannabis' natural coexistence.

CULTURE AND CANNABIS

What is unique about the group's perceptions of cannabis is not just the elaborate stories and ideas they come up with, but how these stories fit in with their ideas or protest spirituality and counterculture. Instead of simply claiming cannabis is a plant that aids meditation, they take the Garden of Eden story and flip it on its head to reveal the exploitation and oppression in the Garden. Instead of perceiving cannabis as a substance that hijacks the endocannabinoid system, the Kings believe that the existence of the endocannabinoid system is proof that the plant was meant for human consumption. They

use the various medical benefits of cannabis as further examples. However, they tend to downplay the obvious negative health outcomes of heavy cannabis use, such as the onset of schizophrenia, depression, heart rapidity and the various health outcomes that come from smoking the substance (to be fair however, there are many ways to consume cannabis that don't involve combustible plant material). And perhaps most importantly, instead of perceiving the hallucination as a wrongful perception of the world, they see hallucinogenic plants as having the ability to create an entirely new world altogether.

The reason sessions provide various social functions for the group. From a more instrumental purpose, it serves the function of running the dispensary and serving as a corporate board meeting. Yet, it provides a site of social bonding, status seeking and a way of staying relevant and culturally competent with cannabis and cannabis culture.

CHAPTER 6: THEORIES ON DRUG USE

One goal of this dissertation was to use a unique group of cannabis users and sellers to examine the commonly held assumptions and scholarly theories about drug use and drug users. The goal was to create a shift in our understanding of drug use, which today is still trapped in overly moralistic and pejorative assumptions about the lives, perceptions, histories and motivations of drug users. Our understanding of substance use is still largely informed by models that seek to pathologize drugs and their users and to either rehabilitate or incarcerate them. As Geoffrey Hunt (2011) explains, “In contemporary Western industrialized societies, our current approach to drugs is influenced by both a medical and a criminal vision that emerged a little more than a century ago. The concepts of addiction and ‘drug control’ have imposed themselves as the unquestionable truths of drug issues.” (p.1). Hunt goes on to explain how these two perspectives create a type of mental blinder that make it difficult to comprehend or frame the issue of drug usage in any way other than a medical or criminal problem in need of regulation and/or extermination.

Moreover, this has led to a pathologizing of the individual user and the social environment that the individual exists within while simultaneously ignoring social, cultural and spiritual functions the consciousness altering substance may serve. In contrast, substance use scholars recognize that consciousness-altering substances are used and enjoyed by every known society, including our own, in some form or another. Paleontologist believe that humans may have cultivated opium and cannabis with the rise of agriculture over 10,000 years ago (Goode, 2008). And, new theories suggest that the

production and cultivation of cereals, specifically rye in ancient Mesopotamia was for the purpose of manufacturing beer, and not bread, as previously theorized (Hayden et al., 2012). Others speculate that animals used drugs before humans (Siegel, 1989), and thus, substance use predates human history. Likewise, Andrew Weil (1972) argues that the desire to induce altered states of consciousness is an innate biological human drive, on par with sex and hunger. Considering the widespread use of consciousness altering substances throughout human history (Dobkin De Rios, 1984) and perhaps even pre-human history, it is necessary to understand such uses from a more culturally relativistic perspective and to understand why these substances have such universal appeal. Despite this, the belief that drug use serves particular cultural and social functions for groups is conspicuously absent from the sociological and criminology literature.

Reviewing the literature on drug use, except for a few notable cases (Becker 1953 and a few new perspectives), I found it difficult to find criminological or sociological literature on drug usage that did not entrap the issue within the medical or crime control perspective. I frequently found myself rummaging through cultural anthropologic literature in order to find literature that considers substance use from a cultural perspective. This dissertation sought to fill in this gap in the literature on substance use. Instead of taking a criminologic and/or medical perspective on drug use, I sought to understand the behavior from a cultural and socially relativistic standpoint. However, much to my chagrin, the use of these individuals neither completely refuted nor completely confirmed either the criminologic and/or medical literature or my own assumptions. This chapter will discuss the major medical and criminologic theories of

drugs to see how they fit, or do not fit this group of cannabis users. The end of the chapter will discuss my observations of the group and propose a new theory to create a cultural and social understanding of drug use.

The Classical/Medical Model

The classical or medical model of substance use frames the issue as defined by the appearance of withdrawal symptoms. One of the first sociological attempts to explain drug use was proposed by Lindesmith (1938), although today it is regarded as belonging to the addiction model. Lindesmith countered popular notions of drug abuse at the time by suggesting that drug addiction was not the product of psychopaths' desire to escape life, but resulted from the desire to avoid the pain of withdrawal symptoms. This perspective of drug abuse dominated up until the 1970's (Goode, 2008).

Although his theory helped to counter the more pejorative psychopath label ascribed to drug addicts by many psychologists, it did not explain why individuals used the drugs in the first place. Lindesmith discussed it as prescribed by doctors yet did not adequately address other factors that lead one person and not another, to use opiates. Likewise, his theory failed to explain the high proportion of users that took drugs on a regular enough basis for some to label that use "abuse." Furthermore, the substance I am studying, marijuana, has relatively mild physical-withdrawal symptoms, and only for chronic long-time users. These mild withdrawal symptoms include restlessness, irritability, mild agitation and insomnia (NIDA). Yet, the withdrawal symptoms are usually too miniscule and irrelevant to be termed addiction in the classical sense as proposed by Lindesmith, likewise, the theory fails to explain onset and the process that

accompanies it. Lindesmith's classical addiction model proposed that addiction was defined as withdrawal symptoms when drug using behavior, primarily opiates were removed.

This failure led to the idea of psychological or behavioral dependence. This led to a psychological explanation of drug use termed the reinforcement model. Two types of reinforcement model explain drug use: positive and negative. As Bejerot (1980) explains, "The pleasure mechanism may...give rise to a strong fixation on repetitive behavior." (253). In its most simplistic form, this perspective states that getting high is pleasurable and consequently, gets repeated by the user. The negative reinforcement, similar to the addiction model suggests users take substances for the purpose of avoiding physical or emotional pain. In the classic model, this pain is associated with withdrawal, in the negative reinforcement model, any type of pain can lead someone to seek out substances, such as the desire to drink if one is depressed. As indicated earlier, both of these models fail to explain onset. And although the positive reinforcement model is particularly useful for understanding the substance I am studying, marijuana, it is telling that positive reinforcement is framed in medical jargon that seeks to situate use within an existing medical or mentally pathological framework instead of conceptualizing use as a desire for pleasure in itself.

Many theories abound about cannabis' addicting properties. Some suggest it has little to no physically addicting properties, while others suggest it has the ability to create dependence and affect an individual's life (Drugabuse.gov, 2015). Most users are recreational users that use in a social context with friends. However, heavy users have the

ability to develop mild physical and strong mental dependence. Researchers believe that overstimulation of the endocannabinoid system leads to changes in the structure of the brain that can lead to addiction. Similar to the Kings explanation of a balance to the world, researchers believe that the more cannabis one uses the more cannabis they will need to feel the same effect.

Physical addiction is typically associated with withdrawal symptoms. The typical withdrawal symptoms of a cannabis user is irritability, mood and sleep difficulties, decreased appetite, cravings, restlessness and other types of physical discomfort (drugabuse.gov, 2015). My own personal experience with cannabis prior to starting the study lead me to believe that claims of marijuana addiction were exaggerated at best and a downright propagandist lie at worst. It was not until I saw addiction first hand did I see how powerful it could be for some people. The Kings for example, would smoke on average about once every hour. Likewise, Dorian explained to me that he frequently had to wake in the middle of the night to smoke cannabis because if he did not smoke he would be too restless to go back to sleep. High-C and TBC, would frequently smoke on their way to do drop offs for the collective and the other volunteers at the collective would frequently go out back and smoke every couple of hours despite ordinances preventing on-site use at many collectives.

Indeed, Dorian once told me he could never work the typical nine-to-five because he smoked too much and the one job he had at Kmart he always showed up lit and would go to his car on his breaks to smoke cannabis. Furthermore, he claimed working a nine-to-five kept him trapped in the system as nothing more than a corporate minion.

As TBC explained to me:

There's addiction, but its weird ya know. It's like, you want to use it because its cool, you want to use it because its fun, you wanna use it cause it makes you meditate. But like, when you're on it, you don't like it. It trips you out and you never wanna do it again. And then, when you come down, you're calm and chill. And you immediately want to do it again. It's weird how it gets you. The only time you don't like the feeling, is when you're super stoned. But every other time you love it. And you want to do it when you're not high.

TBC Further illustrated:

When you work at a collective, or when you work as a delivery driver, you really see the addiction some people have. You get called by the same people. The same people show up all the time. But you get to know them and its chill. I remember one girl used to come in every single day, buy two Gs or an eighth, and be back the next day. I told her she should just buy a lot at one time, so she didn't have to keep driving back. But she said she likes to try different varieties all the time and that she wants to keep her weed fresh.

Many heavy cannabis users smoke different varieties because they feel that the body acclimates to a particular type of strain and that in order to get a head change they need different types. The Kings plant vending system was set up to have a bunch of different strains. Another reason of course was to diffuse the risk of having too many plants in one place at one time and creating a sense of community amongst the users. However, although there was quite a bit of evidence that confirmed marijuana's addicting properties in my dissertation, it must be noted that my observations were on extremely heavy users that run a collective and grow-op. The average cannabis smoker is not so invested in the cannabis lifestyle. And for most users, cannabis is nothing more than a recreational social plant.

The Antimotivation Syndrome

One of the biggest concerns of marijuana opponents is the question of motivation, or lack thereof amongst cannabis smokers. As the American Council for Drug Education suggest, cannabis leads to, “A loss of ambition and initiation, a withdrawal from customary activity, and a regression to a simpler kind of life.” (Cohen, 1982). Many consider cannabis as leading to a life of indolence, free from the cares of the world, and that cannabis users typically stop caring about their appearances. The question of anti-motivation is relevant for many reasons. For one, it is a common conservative talking point that seeks to demonize a plant that has little to no dangers associated with it besides possible mild addiction. Two, the idea is promulgated through popular culture and seems to be blindly accepted as fact by both cannabis opponents and users alike. And three, it is indicative of the conservative in the box thinking indicative of society today.

The common image perpetuated in the media of cannabis users, particularly espoused by groups such as the Partnership for a Drug Free America, is one where a productive, intelligent and highly motivated teenager uses cannabis, rebels, and retreats to a life of indolence and sloth. The user typically becomes a school dropout, working for minimum wage if working at all, all the while, living in their parents’ basement playing video games and eating junk food. Ironically, this is neither entirely truthful nor a complete lie. In order to understand the effect cannabis can have on an individual and his or her motivation one must understand the nature of drugs and drug usage.

There are a variety of factors that can and does affect the high an individual user may experience, things such as route of administration, cannabis type and strength, an

individual's expectations and predispositions and the set and setting. Perhaps the most significant of these is the type of cannabis and the type of strain and the differing chemicals compounds within each strain. Based upon the type of strain, a veteran user typically wants a certain feeling and experience. Experienced users know that indica dominant cannabis strains are more relaxing and sedating. Users typically use this to help them calm down, ease nervousness and restlessness, manage physical pain and help them to sleep. In this context, many cannabis users who consume indica dominant strains during the day can experience fatigue and antimotivation. I know many users who consume indica dominant cannabis throughout the day and these individual typically resort to a life of idleness and apathy.

Dorian told me a story about Jenna, a cannabis user he met at a collective. He told me the cannabis helped to relax her when she is around other people. Unfortunately, he also told me it makes her extremely tired and she ends up sleeping a lot. He told me she slept until 4pm each day. He said, she looked like she had slept all day, she didn't wear makeup and seemed to have shown up to the collective in the exact same clothes she wore to sleep. Natty told me he ran in to many users at the Corner that fit this description, many people did not shave and looked unkempt. This is perhaps one of the worst aspects of cannabis use, especially for medical cannabis patients. Many patients need the pain relief and anti-nausea effect cannabis provides, but experience the cannabis as working during, and temporarily after the hallucination. Many wish they could get the relief without the high associated with the plant. Cannabis plants high in CBD and low in the

psychoactive THC may help with this. CBD is a cannabinoid that mellows the mood and calms nerves while curbing the hallucinogenic effects of THC (Iseger & Bossong, 2015).

The route of administration also affects motivation. As discussed earlier, edible forms of cannabis typically tend to be much stronger and last much longer than smokable forms (Earlywine, 2005). Many edible users experience extreme body and mental highs that leads to extreme lethargy. High-C, after I asked him why she smoked so much instead of just eating an edible that would last much longer told me that edibles were too strong and that he would be completely out of commission if he consumed cannabis too often.

On the exact opposite spectrum, other users experience a jolt of energy when smoking cannabis. These users frequently use cannabis sativa. In a (1965) study conducted by Carlini and Kramer, rats performed better on maze trials after being injected with cannabis sativa. Depending on the type of strain and strength of the strain, sativa can be either mildly or extremely stimulating. Dorian took me on hikes with him. I never would have thought about using cannabis and exercising before his suggestion. It always seemed antithetical to the goal and practicality of exercise. After seeing Dorian smoke, I noticed an upbeat mentality and a somewhat jittery disposition. I am used to seeing users smoke, taking 30 or 40 minutes to smoke, and then getting so tired after smoking that they do not want to do anything. Dorian on the other hand, suggested that this strain of cannabis made him want to get outside and gave him an extreme amount of energy. He told me about a website/podcast called the StonedHiker.com. This website discusses different forms of cannabis strains that are mentally stimulating and are useful

for exercise. Sativa and hiking is particularly effective, according to Dorian, because it stimulates the mind and body while allowing for an upbeat, unique and pleasurable outlook on the surrounding landscape.

Dorian was not the only user that uses cannabis sativa for stimulation. Natty told me about a patient in his early 40s who used cannabis as a way to deal with back pain while working. He previously used cannabis at home after work, but he needed pain relief while at work but I couldn't deal with the draining effects of opiates or most cannabis. Sativa was a godsend when he found it. It kept his mood and energy elevated the entire day. Unfortunately, there is no way to completely predict the effect of a particular cannabis strain, and many users find that sativa and indica are not mutually exclusive and the effects are not as simplistic as one would hope. Cannabis growth is still an unregulated industry in the U.S. and the quality and potency of cannabis is inconsistent at best. Moreover, the prohibition of cannabis has produced a system where scientific study of cannabis is still underdeveloped. One user, a 25-year-old female patient Dorian told me about had to take Xanax mixed with indica at night sometimes because the indica was too stimulating for her and she would stay up until 4am some nights after smoking stimulating indica. Likewise, many sativa users claim they need to be careful and test their sativa because of the risk that it may put them to sleep, or make them drowsy when they have something to do during the day. Nico Escondido (2015), a *High Times* journalist suggests that our common understandings of the distinction between Sativas and Indicas are wrong. He suggest that terpenoids, which are organic chemical compounds produced by plants, may be responsible for the variations in effects from one

strain to another. Terpenes such as Myrcene are found in strains of cannabis that produce the stoned “couch lock” effect. Myrcene is also present in hops and is often credited with the sedated feeling that comes from drinking hoppy beers.

Other factors such as setting can affect motivation and user experience in general. Some people use cannabis during parties to calm social anxiety, others use cannabis to provide a jolt of energy when partying, while others like to sit and watch TV and go to sleep while under the influence. The effect of cannabis is not always what the user expects or hopes for sometimes, but experienced users know how to alter their consumption to fit their individual needs. Thus, cannabis is used in a variety of settings for a variety of reasons, and the expectations and settings are many times just as relevant as the cannabis itself.

Back to the original question, is the antimotivation syndrome real? The answer is not a simple yes or no. It is certainly the case that cannabis has the ability to affect a user’s motivation to succeed at work, take care of themselves and thrive. However, the negative perception of such an act is more indicative of a workaholic, consumerist, conformist and irrationally rational bureaucratic society than an indication about anything negative about the cannabis plant itself. Yes, cannabis can lead to less motivation to work and make money, but since when did work and money become the ultimate goal? This is perhaps most indicative in my opinion of the anti-cannabis camp. The uncritical acceptance of social conformity to the logics of capitalism, consumerism, materialism and work blinds individuals to the reality of cannabis as a unique plant that has the ability to change one’s perspective on the world in contradiction to the logic of a workaholic

capitalist model. Thus, cannabis opponents typically point to the dangers of cannabis to society, such as demotivation without critically examining the direction society is going. This is characteristic of the conservative ethnocentric views of the world that the way things are is the way things should be. Cannabis has the ability to change minds and this in my opinion is the real threat that conservatives, politicians, and capitalist fear that people will not blindly follow the logic of the system set up to exploit and oppress them.

Furthermore, it must also be noted that cannabis can have the exact opposite effect of antimotivation. Many users have told me that cannabis, and particular cannabis sativa, has a stimulating effect on par with coffee and tea. Likewise, many users state that cannabis increases their motivation to succeed at work, and leads to a type of near paranoia about one's life and ones direction in life. Dorian made this clear to me one day when talking about his original motivation for growing cannabis:

I started to think about a lot of things, like where my life is going, and what I'm doing, I started to feel like a loser. I was just playing video games all day and dropping out of school. I started to feel bad about myself and my life. It made me realize that I had to do something. I had to start making money. I wanted to be a baller [rich person] so I like started to hang out with people that grew and figure out how they did it. I started making money and started buying better clothes and started looking fresher. I came up. I don't know if I would have come to that same conclusion if I didn't trip that day and reevaluate my life.

Dorian wasn't unique in this experience. Many cannabis users shared similar stories. One cannabis patient Natty told me about, who was approximately 300 pounds 1 year ago lost 100 pounds because the high made them sick while eating fast food.

Another user Natty told me about was a television writer, a sitcom writer and a writer for children's movies who finds inspiration through cannabis. Cannabis, according to Natty, helped her to see things in unique and interesting ways and helped her be

artistic. Natty explained, “I think everybody who writes children comedies are high. How else can you explain the craziness you see in children’s movies?” As stated earlier, these accounts illustrate an interesting paradox with cannabis, the ability to excite, inspire and arouse and the ability demotivate. Each different strain, each different context and each different social setting can produce very different experiences and feelings for the users.

THE CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Cannabis may occasionally lead to lack of work, but it also leads to less crime and less violence. Researchers found that for couples, marijuana use is inversely related to intimate partner violence (Smith et al., 2014). Similarly, researchers studying the effect of medical marijuana laws found that crime was not exacerbated by reforming medical marijuana and pointed to the fact that medical marijuana laws may be correlated with a reduction in homicide and assault rates (Morris et al., 2014). Goldstein (1985) found that, early studies that sought to attribute violent behavior to the use of opiates and marijuana have been largely discredited. Indeed, cannabis has been historically recognized as a peaceful substance as Indian’s refer to it as “Sattvik Nasha” translated as “the peaceful intoxicant” (Morningstar, 1984). Furthermore, Goldstein (1985) suggest some drug may have reverse psychopharmacological effect and may ameliorate violent tendencies (p. 147).

In my own study, I cannot think of a single instance in which I saw any act of violence out of the group or their associates and customers. In fact, my interviews with TBC and Natty suggest that cannabis was used to control violent impulses. TBC explained, “I’m kinda an asshole without weed. I would have fought these guys already if

it wasn't for weed." In a similar vein, Natty confided that he did not like to drink with High-C because he was a violent drunk. Smoking helped them to maintain group interaction without conflict. However, in TBC's case, it was never truly clear if cannabis mellowed him out, or if the addiction he developed from cannabis made him agitated and restless when not smoking.

Although they participate in a semi-illegal activity, violence is relatively non-existent, but always possible in their lives. What is particularly striking is the relative banality of the Kings' behaviors and lives. When interviewing the Kings I was expecting to hear a bottom to top Scarface type story. What I got was a story of stoner hippies that seem eccentric yet ordinary in practically every way. In fact, other than the fact that cannabis and other drugs are illegal, and the occasional driving under the influence, I cannot think of a single criminal act these individuals participated in while the study was ongoing. As Kolb (1925) illustrates in his classic statement related to drugs and violence:

There is probably no more absurd fallacy prevalent, than the notion that murders are committed and daylight robberies and holdups are carried out by men stimulated by large doses of cocaine or heroin which have temporarily distorted them into self-imagined heroes incapable of fear ... violent crime would be much less prevalent if all habitual criminals were addicts who could obtain sufficient morphine or heroin to keep themselves fully charged with one of these drugs at all times (Kolb,1925:78).

Kolb points to the fact that has been known for nearly a century, that most of the violence that is typically attributed to drugs is frequently more a product of the substances

illegalization than the substance itself. A phenomenon Goldstein refers to as systemic and economic compulsive violence.

Problem Prone Behavior Theory

The main proponents of “problem-prone behavior theory,” Jessor and Jessor (1977; 1980), indicate that drug users, in comparison with those that do not partake in drug use, tend to be rebellious, hold unconventional attitudes, and are much more willing to take risks. Although these personality characteristics can frequently manifest themselves as artistic and creative in nature, Jessor and Jessor contend that these characteristics, more often than not, manifest themselves in ways that become problematic for both the individual and society. Examples of this could be deviant sexual behavior, underachievement in school and the likelihood of delinquent and criminal behavior. Jessor and Jessor explain the drug user’s personality as, “concerned with personal autonomy, a lack of interest in the goals of conventional society, and a more tolerant view of transgression” (1980: p. 109). As Jessor and Jessor explain marijuana use, “the differences between users and non-users might be termed conventionality-unconventionality” (109).

Consistent with this theory, the group I seek to studied fit the mold of a counter-culture in that they reject the norms of mainstream society and believe they are actively undermining “the system” through the sale and use of pot. Yet Jessor and Jessor (1980) consider behavior such as deviant sexual practices and underachievement in school or at the job injurious to society. This view is emblematic of the extremely conservative and conformist nature of most criminological theories. In contrast, I argue that what are

termed by Jessor and Jessor as problematic behaviors such as deviant sexual practices and underachievement in school or jobs are themselves, a form of social expression.

Deviant sexual practices are more of a cultural prescription than any inherent moral right or wrong. Likewise, schooling, in particular K-12 is in my opinion, more of a mechanism designed to promote conformity, obedience and docility to the capitalist system than it is a mechanism to enlighten minds and engender creative expression. Moreover, the Eurocentric curriculum does as much to reproduce race class and gender inequality than it does to change the structure.

Strain Theories and Social Disorganization Theories

Another theory relevant to my dissertation is Robert Merton's (1938) anomie theory. Without drawing out the various dimensions of Merton's anomie theory, the two elements that have been considered particularly useful for an understanding of substance use are, "retreatism" and "innovation." Cloward and Ohlin (1960) utilize retreatism when explaining drug addicts. From Cloward and Ohlin's standpoint, the drug addict represents the double failure in Merton's taxonomies. The drug addict failed to achieve the American dream through both legitimate and illegal means, and consequently, has retreated into a life of resignation and addiction. The other aspect of Merton's theory, innovation, appears to at least partially explain the decision to sell, produce, or transport drugs. The ability to cut different forms of drugs, disguise the transportation of drugs, and sell without getting caught is certainly an innovative process. William Julius Wilson (1996), in *When Work Disappears*, agrees with this line of reasoning. He argues that high

levels of drug selling activity within poor inner-city neighborhood is related to a lack of social organization within those areas.

Social disorganization theory posits that as neighborhoods lose resources and the positive social organizations and role models the society becomes disorganized. As neighborhoods become disorganized, the traditional mechanisms of social control, schools, families, police lose their effectiveness in maintaining social order. In addition to the lack of resources to maintain social cohesion in the community, a profound loss of trust in traditional mechanisms of social control arises and a breakdown occurs. This was documented in Anderson's (1999) *The Code of the Street*, where a violent street culture arose to govern interpersonal communication on the streets of Philadelphia. High rates of joblessness and closed economic opportunities due to racism feed drug trafficking crime and other types of gang violence. Gang violence usually arises out of the desire to control a particular market area. Attempts to lock up drug dealers usually fail to stem the violence as the structure that gave rise to the problem remains intact.

Dohan's study of a Mexican barrio also illustrates how many individuals cut out of the formal economy, view drug dealing (along with various other illicit activities) as a path towards upward mobility. Particularly in the barrio of Chávez drug dealing, stripping cars and peddling stolen merchandise was common. One aspect of Dohan's work is revealing about drug trades in general, he mentions how while many who deal aspire for upward mobility, he points out how few climb the ladder. Much like Venkatesh's (2008) documented in *Gang Leader for a Day*, few low level dealers make any significant money. Rather, drug dealing enterprises typically operate in a pyramidal structure with

middle men and those at the top holding out the allure of making it big while exploiting labor of the low level dealers. Yet, Dohan also points to how gang's in the Barrio serve as a form of social organization and control where traditional mechanisms have disintegrated. In a similar vein, Anderson suggests the code of the street is a new form of organization and control when previous systems of control break down.

Yet, Wilson's (1996), Anderson's (1999), Venkatesh's (2008) and Dohan's (2003) studies assume that blocked opportunities and economic survival is what drives the sale of drugs. Consistent with this theory, many of the members of the group have been effectively barred from the mainstream economy as a result of stints in juvenile hall and jail. However, unlike drug markets dealing with harder drugs, the marijuana market is partially legal and overly saturated. In some cities, it is possible to find 30 or 40 delivery services. Much like the cannabis market in general, many delivery drivers view cannabis selling as an effective path towards economic viability and social mobility.

The financial incentive for cannabis selling is only one component. Semi-legalization has led to increased market competition among marijuana sellers. Moreover, the high cost of running dispensaries and the extensive risk creates barriers other businesses do not face. For example, bank loans, credit card transactions, leasing units and security are all prohibitive costs for dispensaries. Moreover, in the middle class area of Orange County, one cannot claim the type of destitute and blocked economic opportunities that Wilson observed. Wilson's study was conducted primarily in the inner-city Chicago area, conditions far different from middle-class suburban white Orange County. Although Wilson's theories related to upward social mobility and economic

motivations are partially correct, the Kings motivations are not inherently financial. Rather, they view selling and smoking as a symbol of prestige and disconformity to the system. Culture, ideology and countercultural belief systems play a significant role in their motivations. As Natty explained, “We’re burning down Babylon.”

In a similar light, social disorganization theories posit that conditions within urban lower class environments affect crime rates. Criminologists working within this paradigm, a perspective popularized by Chicago school criminologist McKay and Shaw (1931), point to factors such as high-unemployment, large high-school dropout rates, deteriorated housing, poverty and large number of single parent households as contributing to despair and anti-social behavior and lack of resources to sustain social organizations and community institutions. Anti-social behavior manifests itself in ways that leads to higher crime rates in poor socially disorganized communities. Again, while it is commendable for criminologist to see delinquency, crime and drug use as emanating from social structure instead of individual pathology, an overemphasis by criminologist on focusing on poor communities has lead to a type of virtual blinders of crime and delinquent behavior elsewhere.

In the middle class area of Orange County, drug use, both cannabis and other drugs, are fairly normalized. A focus on inner-city neighborhoods ignores the extensive drug use that occurs in middle class and affluent neighborhoods. Self-report surveys indicate the drug use and selling is, and has always been a phenomenon in every race and social class. As is illustrated in both surveys and my dissertation, middle-class white Americans are just as likely to use drugs as any other racial group. It appears that the

main difference between the two groups drug selling and usage is the attention paid to each group by academics, researcher, the media and police.

Elliot's Integrated Delinquency Model

Elliot's (1985) integrated delinquency model is a synthesis of various social process and strain theories into one comprehensive theory of drug use. Elliot et al. argue that drug use is the result of bonding with deviant peer groups. As the social structure becomes more disorganized and the individual loses his/her pro-social ties to society, deviant peer groups fill the void for social interaction. This is a step above the rest as it synthesizes various approaches from the macro and micro level, yet its overemphasis on peer bonding downplays the fact that non-users report bonding with deviant peers (Kandel, 1996). Harton and Latane (1997) note the importance of social approval in the process of using drugs. Consequently, Anderson (1998) suggests that meaning systems and new definitions of the self may be the more important explanatory factors that distinguish users from non-users. Accordingly, I suggest, that when viewing the group I am studying that it is relevant to understand the meaning and symbols to this particular culture when understanding their substance use and selling. The groups cultural beliefs will be briefly recapped later in this chapter.

Labeling

Theorists working in the labeling tradition typically point to two features. One, the social construction of crime and deviance; and two, the development of a criminal identity. As has been discussed throughout this dissertation, drugs historically have not had the same type of reaction that they elicit today. Many cultures consider mind-altering

substances of all types gifts from Gods. Today, because of political and social forces, drugs are perceived as inherently dangerous and immoral.

The second line of tradition labeling theorists operate within is the development of a deviant identity. Edwin Lemert first proposed this in 1951 when discussing why certain individuals persist in their criminal career trajectory. Lemert's thesis is that, once labeled, the deviant undertakes an intellectual process that works to justify the behavior through the adoption of a deviant identity. As Lemert states:

His acts are repeated and organized subjectively and transformed into active roles and become the social criteria for assigning status.....When a person begins to employ his deviant behavior or a role based on it as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and covert problems created by the consequent societal reaction to him, his deviation is secondary.

One can clearly see this manifest itself with the Kings. Both Natty and Dorian were arrested and sent to Juvenile Hall at a relatively early age (freshman and eighth grade years). Having thus been labeled by the society as deviants, they undertook an identity as deviants, took that identity, and turned it into a career trajectory. Although many theorists working within a pro criminal justice paradigm believe juvenile hall serves as a means of rehabilitation for young kids, my research suggest the opposite. Instead of rehabilitating Natty, juvenile hall actually brought him into contact with Dorian, who would become his life-long friend and life-long cannabis business partner. In 1973, Edwin Schur wrote his seminal text *Radical Non-Intervention* in which he claimed that the delinquent label can actually increase delinquency.

Natty was sent to juvie for a relatively minor offense that today is common place (stealing music from piratebay.org and other p2p software is common place nowadays).

Moreover, juvenile hall and the process of delinquent labeling has a tendency to reproduce race and class inequality. When deciding whether or not to proceed with a juvenile trial an intake officer takes a record of the juveniles' history of mental health, history of substance use and other factors. Natty, being the child of a single mother that was addicted to drugs certainly influenced the intake officer to detain Natty. Again, juvenile hall many times has the opposite effect of rehabilitation. The fact that juvenile hall takes into account social demographics of the child into consideration when making decisions inherently reproduces racial and class inequality.

This type of experience led to a strong and profound anti-systemic feeling within Natty and Dorian. In fact, The Kings Self-conception is so heavily influenced their identity as rebels and smokers that they nickname themselves off of cannabis substances. High-C is a reference to being high and TBC is a reference to THC (the main psychoactive substance in cannabis). Natty is a reference to Dread locks. I changed the names of these individuals for confidentiality purposes, however, their nicknames in real life are somewhat similar. Indeed, being shunned by society may have led to their radical anti-American, anti-capitalist stance. Much of their behavior is countercultural in nature.

Differential Association

Differential association is highly applicable to the Kings. This theory posits that through interaction with other deviants, individuals learn the motivations, techniques, values and ideas conducive to criminal behavior (Sutherland, 1939). In fact, every one of the Kings mentioned peer influence when discussing their own motivations to use and sell cannabis. For both Natty and Dorian, their parents were drug addicts or at the very

least, appeared to use drugs on a relatively consistent basis. Dorian's father, before he was locked up, taught Dorian how to set up and run a growing operation and taught him a lot about the culture and some of the techniques on how to not be caught with cannabis. Natty's mother was so permissive of drug use that she would buy alcohol for the Kings while they were still in high school.

TBC and High-C were both experienced smokers before they decided to get in the medical marijuana business. Yet, they did not have the same family situation as Natty and Dorian. I personally doubt whether their parents or close family members were aware of their activities. However, their interactions with Natty and Dorian influenced them to fund the grow-op and collective. Moreover, it was particularly interesting how all of them seemed to have perceived cannabis as positive for society. This type of uniformity in thought may have been influenced by the fact that they discussed the nature of cannabis with each other and it is a social status symbol within the group to know about cannabis culture and history.

Deviant Subculture Theory

Bruce Johnson's (1980) subcultural model is a form of deviant subcultural theory. Johnson (1980) focused on a college setting in which users were separated from their parents and influenced by their teenage peers. Johnson argued that the more isolated an individual was from his parents and the more attached they were to the teenage subculture, the greater likelihood they would participate in drug use. The relevance of Johnson's articles is dual in that it focuses on the meanings ascribed to drug use, and the social and cultural context in which the use existed. Johnson acknowledges that there is a

competition for prestige and status within peer groups and that status and prestige are attained by engaging in activities that depart from the normative demands of mainstream society. Another relevant aspect of Johnson's study is his use of college students. Although he noted these individuals were more likely to drop out of school, it is relevant to note that the use of drugs is a product of all social and economic classes, and is not a product of a culture mired in pathology. However, although Johnson notes the inherently social nature of drug use, he digresses into moralistic judgments about how the use increases the likelihood of dropping out and participating in deviant sexual behavior, further illustrating the fact that criminology has yet to shake the conservative view of drugs as a problem in society in need of remedy.

All of these previous theories and studies pointed to the fact that substance use is correlated with various other anti-social, deviant, or occasionally criminal acts. I suggest two reasons for these findings. For one, as a result of various laws and moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963) that create anti-drug campaigns, drugs are demonized as illegal, harmful and injurious to society. Consequently, the more likely one is to hold unconventional views on society, the more likely they are to participate in unconventional behavior, of which drug use may be one. Secondly, these studies tended to focus on adolescents, who, while they experience a gap between biological and social maturity, undertake rebellious and anti-social attitudes to break out of the juvenile roles they existed in when children (Moffit, 1993). Johnson's subcultural, Elliot's integrated delinquent, and Jessor and Jessor's problem-prone behavior theories all focused on

adolescents or teens. My study on the other hand, focused on young adults that ran a competent business.

Life-Course Persisters and Adolescent Limited

All of these studies tended to focus on adolescents that were experiencing a gap between biological and social maturity and therefore undertook rebellious attitudes and anti-social attitudes to break out of the juvenile roles they existed in when children (Moffit, 1993). Moffit claims that there are two types of offenders, adolescent limited (adolescent limited offending as the behavior is heavily influenced by peer association and is limited primarily to late teens and early twenties), and life course persisters (these types of deviants begin to behave antisocially early in childhood and continue this behavior into adulthood). As adolescents transition into adulthood and take on more pro-social roles, the propensity for engaging in criminal offenses dissipates (Moffit, 1993). This is relevant to understand why we see such high correlations between drug use and other types of anti-social behavior. It has less to do with the drugs as it does with particular life stages in American culture and the age of the group studied. My study focuses on a group that consists of members that are primarily in their late 20's and early thirties. I did not see the same types of deviant behaviors that were seen in many of the other studies discussed such as ditching school or work, youth sexual activity and vandalism. Again, delinquency was normal with these individuals when younger, however, the Kings, as they aged, settled into more normal prosocial roles such as fathers and boyfriends and businessmen. Although the group was still heavily in to cannabis use and occasionally used other hard drugs and drank, there were no instances of other

deviant behavior. Indeed, alcohol use may not be considered deviant considering its widespread use in the U.S.

Problems with Criminologic Theories

As one can see by this brief analysis of some of the major theories in criminology, criminological theories are woefully inadequate to understand drug use. There are a couple of reasons why this is the case. For one, much of the theorizing that has occurred on substance use did not differentiate between use and abuse. Moreover, theories tend to focus on poor communities of color. As a consequence, many theories, especially social structural theories explain drug use as a result of social disorganization within poor neighborhoods while rich upper class neighborhoods use drugs at the same rate as poor communities. Likewise, while social learning theories adequately explain the process of becoming a drug user and adopting a drug using identity, they ascribe overly moralistic ideas to the act and lump drug use together with other types of crimes that are not inherently associated with drugs. Thus, given this situation, I propose below a socio-cultural explanation of drug use.

THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Often overlooked in the theorizing about substance use is the social and cultural meanings attributed to certain drugs by the user. Coomber (2011) argues that our broader cultural understandings of drugs are so perverted by drug myths that we fail to understand anything beyond a criminal control view of drugs. Howard Becker's (1953) now infamous study *Becoming a Marijuana User*, draws attention to the important social dimensions of marijuana use by focusing on how marijuana is learned to be appreciated,

and the various mechanisms people go through in order to learn the appropriate behavior of marijuana use. Becker explains marijuana use through the emergence of motives and dispositions in the course of experience. Although a groundbreaking study in its emphasis on the social aspects of marijuana use, Becker fails to consider marijuana use as more than recreational in nature.

While occasionally acknowledged as used for religious and cultural practice, marijuana appears to be regarded as a deviant juvenile practice utilized for recreation and fun. So ingrained is this perspective that when discussing marijuana use amongst Rastafarians in a discussion section I was conducting, a student asserted that the Rastafarian religion is a religion “made up” to justify their use of drugs.

Criminologic and sociological understandings of drug using behavior have been tarnished by the ethnocentric overly moralistic attitudes of American society. Considering the widespread use of mind-altering substances in both antiquity and modern society, and their near universal ubiquitousness, it is inappropriate to see mind-altering substance use as simply a product of biological addiction or deviance resulting from corrupt and unequal social structure. Rather, in order to understand mind-altering substance use, it is imperative to understand the viewpoints of the users themselves.

My research has found that individuals attach different meanings to their behaviors. Unlike the general mainstream society that views drug use as a scourge of man, this group sees this plant as a guide to spiritual enlightenment and meditation. This is in line with many other religious and spiritual groups throughout history. It is a common line of reasoning to believe that ancient primitive societies that utilized mind-

altering substances for religious and spiritual journeys are or were ignorant about the true nature of drugs. They claim that cultures like these were primitive and superstitious, and that our culture with its anti-drug stance is correct. This, I contend, is a wildly ethnocentric and Eurocentric view with no objective basis in reality. In fact, when one considers the historical and social significance mind-altering substances have played in both antiquity and our own culture, we see that there is significant reason to reexamine our perceptions of these substances.

Bonding

From a cultural standpoint, it is relevant to understand the behavior as a social bonding ritual amongst the group members. As illustrated in the previous chapter, each member of the Kings understood that the smoking and consumption of cannabis was as much about the interaction amongst their friends as it was about the consumption of cannabis itself. TBC for example, explained that one of the main reasons to smoke was to “kick it with the homies.” He also expounded how cannabis smoking was an act that the group could do individually and collectively without the physical ramifications (hangovers, DUI, dehydration) that alcohol and other substances could bring about. Natty told me on more than one occasion that High-C was a violent drunk and that they won’t hangout with him if he drinks. Thus, while the manifest functions of cannabis use was for the group, to smoke and meditate about the world, smoking also served the purpose maintaining group cohesion and group solidarity. Likewise, actions that undermined group solidarity such as getting drunk and wanting to fight each other or, being stingy

with weed, or babysitting, or not passing in proper rotation that may break the ritual was severely sanctioned.

Status and Big Ballin

In addition to serving as a site of social bonding rituals, cannabis usage also served as a dramaturgical status symbol. As was discussed, cannabis usage, and growing the best cannabis served as a symbol of prestige within the group. Some of the original motivations for selling when younger appeared to be to gain status. The creation of a collective and even their nicknames indicated an intense identification with cannabis and cannabis culture. Moreover, smoking with the most people, and smoking in high-risk situations were all valued and fostered status within the group.

For example, on site use at a dispensary is illegal in most cities, yet the Kings would use openly and discuss instances in which they openly smoked at the dispensary. Likewise, the Kings would frequently tell stories about getting blazed before going to work, or showing up high to jury duty, or instances of hot boxing (hot boxing is smoking cannabis in a car with the windows rolled up. This creates a situation where cannabis is consistently inhaled throughout the smoking session) and opening the door right in front of a large group of people. Likewise, clearing chambers, although it wastes weed, provides status to an individual because it shows “lungs of steel.”

This social status phenomenon is best illustrated in the fact that in states where medical marijuana use is legal, marijuana use in youth has decreased (Anderson, Hansen & Reese, 2012). Many theorists believe the reduction in teen use could be attributable to the “forbidden fruit” effect in which teens participate in illegal acts for no other reason

than for its illegality. The Kings themselves appear to echo this sentiment when discussing their early motivations for cannabis use and selling. Likewise, the Kings frequently claim the feeling of being high as frequently un-pleasurable. Yet, “handling the trip” and being able to “hang” is considered a status symbol within the group.

Likewise, the group illustrates Johnson’s (1980) subcultural deviance theory. Johnson (1980) acknowledges that there is a competition for prestige and status within peer groups and that status and prestige are attained by engaging in activities that depart from the normative demands of mainstream society. What is particularly relevant to this dramaturgical perspective is how the Kings frequently referred to the trip as unpleasurable, as their frequent references to being high as being in hell.

I believe one of the major motivating factors in cannabis use is the social prestige, because, as TBC illustrates, the high is not always pleasurable. Natty likewise told me that many people would stop using cannabis if it was legal. He claimed the negative experiences (frequently called bad trips) would deter most individuals. This phenomenon of experiencing bad trips was also documented by Becker (1953) when discussing the importance of learning how to enjoy the hallucinatory experience.

Culture, Spirituality and Reflexivity

Discussions that took place in the meetings I attended were highly intellectual and heavily influenced by stoner culture. This is relevant because much of the theories and ideas they proposed seemed creative at best and borderline schizophrenic at worst. However, the factuality of the theories and ideas they proposed to me never seemed as relevant as the information gained from discussions about cannabis. In her article, *The*

Power of 420, Halnon (2008) examines how discussions about the origin of 420 creates a collective identity for users and indoctrinates user into the ideas values and norms of cannabis culture.

I argue that the discussion about the biblical origin of the plant, its ability to change consciousness, and the naming of their bong Shiva all serve the purposes of teaching other cannabis users, and teaching me (as I was there for dissertation purposes) about the culture of cannabis. Some of the stories and theories they told me about are nothing more than fantasy, such as the plant is hallucinogenic because it a water plant fused with a land plant; others are truisms or half-truths such as hemp seeds being the healthiest plant food in the world, or the idea that cannabis has the ability to cure diseases. And others can neither be proven or disproven, such as the idea that God's consciousness resides in the plant, or the story that the Burning Bush of Moses is God.

The factuality or infactuality of what they stated and what they believe about cannabis, its origins and its effects are only partially relevant. What is much more relevant is the meaning system they hold and how these discussions inform cannabis users about cannabis culture and ideology. Discussions about God, Shiva, cannabis and the nature of reality all have the ability to cultivate, support and reinforce cannabis identity, community solidarity and reality itself. Moreover, knowing cannabis history, medicine and theories helps to create a mental and ideological explanation of cannabis use for those that are critical of the practice.

As a reflexive practice, the group uses the plant as a guide during meditation and critical thought. Although many in our society view the hallucination as nothing more

than a stoner's trip, the historical importance altered states of consciousness advises against such a belief. As was discussed in the history section, many cultures and religious denominations have used cannabis in some form or another for religious and spiritual mind-altering visions. Such actors have the capacity to be reflexive, that is, to think critically about their social situations, and thus, change it (Giddens, 1982). Likewise, rarely does one see a view of marijuana or substance use as a source of meaningful identity. Reflexivity as a process is the creation of new social forms for self-determined purposes. Experimentation with drugs, in particular marijuana, hashish, acid, mushrooms and LSD is one such form of distancing and breaking away from the normative demands imposed by society. Although symbolic in nature, this form of rejecting normative constraints by society allows one the ability to be a free individual, to think on one's own and feel the freedom to make decisions for one's own life.

One such reflexive practice is the Rastafarians' use of Ganja as a religious sacrament for the purpose of producing visions, heightening unity and communal feelings, and meditation (Barett, 1997: 129). The use of Ganja by the Rastas takes place in communal settings referred to as reason sessions where they gather to think and analyze society. Marijuana use by the Rastas can also be viewed as a reactionary response to oppression and a manifestation of an authentic form of expressing freedom from the establishment.

Other uses of marijuana as meditation span back thousands of years as in the Hindu tradition (Morningstar, 1985: 148). In various cities in India, especially in ones of religious pilgrimage, cannabis is used as a celebrant. In places such as these cannabis is

regarded as “sattvik nasha” translated as “peaceful intoxication” (Morningstar, 1985: 144). The common folk wisdom concerning marijuana is that if a drunken man is insulted he will easily fight, whereas the man who has taken hemp will walk away. Seen quite differently from the American context, marijuana in various Indian cities is viewed as a meditation practice that connects one with God. One of the few sociologists to approach drug use from a cultural symbolic interactionist perspective, Collins (2011) illuminates how feelings of euphoria and the meanings associated with drug consumption are shaped by culture. By drawing upon Durkheim (1912) and Goffman (1967), he illustrates how drugs used within the context of rituals become sacred and profane objects by which members of the group identify.

Recent drug cultures, such as the American hippie movement, have brought our attention to another aspect of marijuana usage, “mind expansion” (Kuttner & Hickey, 1970). Rather than simple escapism, hippies used marijuana, and sometimes LSD as a way of experiencing what they consider to be a more real world. Another rationalization hippies give for the use of hallucinogens is the feelings of communality the substances create. Thus, as opposed to distancing themselves from the world, the hallucinogen helps to promote a type of group solidarity by integrating them into the community of hippies and creating a sense of belonging. Thus, from the cultural perspective, we see that marijuana and drugs serve a functional purpose for the community of users. Furthermore, I believe deviance and criminal behavior, particularly victimless crimes such as drug use could be viewed as its own form of self-expression. Rather than viewing such acts as

criminal, I believe they should be posited as a symbolic protest against traditional notions of right and wrong.

Another case of hallucinogenic substances used as a basis of a spiritual reflection was documented by Carlos Castañeda in his text *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. Through the use of Mescalito, Yebra Del Diablo and Humito, respectively Peyote, Datura and Mushrooms, Castañeda discusses how under the tutelage of a Yaqui sorcerer, he was guided to use hallucinogenic substances to, as written by Castaneda, move the assemblage point to perceive a new world. Castaneda wrote extensively about his journey to other worlds through the hallucinogenic plants and his attempts to grasp the meaning of the experiences he was shown. In a not altogether cogent and coherent fashion, Castaneda elucidates the experiences of non-ordinary reality.

Castañeda appears to claim that for the shaman, awareness of oneself, and awareness of the multiple dimensions of the universe is the final issue. To transcend the limits of ordinary life and experience which is limited by organic being and to be one with energy and beyond death. They believed that awareness meant awareness as the act of being deliberately conscious of all the perceptual possibilities of man, not merely the perceptual possibilities dictated by any given culture whose goal seems to be that of restricting the perceptual capacities of its members. Perhaps the most lasting, enduring and relevant aspect of Castañeda's argument is that by entering into different worlds, and gaining different experiences and a different perception helps us to realize that our own world is also a social and cultural construction.

Rather than viewing marijuana and drug use as a correlate of delinquency and criminal activity, I sought to expand the literature on marijuana and drug use as a means of reflexive spiritual and social awakening that serves various social and cultural functions such as social bonding and communality. The common themes among all these cultures and a common theme among the group I studied was a deep sense of communion with the divine and a belief in asceticism. As Natty explained, “Babylon always thinks about logic. A plus B equals C. But they can never get to the why and how we are here because the true nature of the world is beyond what they can see with their eyes.”

The commonality of these different cultures as seeing cannabis as a path to spiritual enlightenment to me indicates a profound connection between the plant and spirituality. Within each of these motivations for substance use is a profound deeply laden understanding of cannabis as more than just a drug. The meanings, ideas and values attached to the plant are different in this culture than from mainstream society. Nevertheless, knowing that our perceptions of drug use and of the world in general is as much of a product of culture and socialization than any objective reality, points us to the realization that mainstream culture is no more exact about understanding of cannabis than this group is. Moreover, I would suggest that experiences of cannabis use gives special knowledge about the plant, and perhaps a different interpretation of the plant.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Mundaneness of Life

When originally conceptualizing this dissertation, I decided I would counter the common stereotypical assumptions about cannabis users, growers and sellers by telling the life histories, the present day life stories and the possible pitfalls of working in this line of work. I was tantalized by the idea of a “rags to riches,” “bottom to top” drug dealer Scarface story. I had thought I would tell a story where the Kings came from the bottom and made millions of dollars through the drug trade. I figured there would be intrigue, secret routes to transport cannabis, violence and the eventual drug raid of the dispensary and growing operation. This would make my dissertation that much more interesting and show the human side of the consequences of the war on drugs.

However, what I saw was a mundaneness that rivaled a trip through a shopping mall. There were no police raids, no stickup kids (criminals that rob drug dealers), and no instances of systemic violence. Indeed, the criminal justice system and the threat of imprisonment seemed relatively non-existent. This was compounded by the fact that the Kings had a lawyer and assured me that if any raid occurred, their lawyer would protect us. What I witnessed was a lax environment void of danger and drug violence. What I saw, essentially, was the effects of legalization and regulation and the amazing benefits that legalization had on cannabis markets. The Kings, as of this writing, are not in jail, on the run from the law nor did any of them die in any spectacular Scarface ending in a DEA raid. They are living their lives as any normal middle class suburbanite would.

They go to work at their unique yet uneventful jobs, they smoke weed and drink with their friends (not much different from any other group of friends and coworkers), and they go home to their wives/girlfriends and children. The lack of excitement is perhaps the most shocking aspect of the dissertation. For all the uniqueness of their beliefs and their jobs, other than an occasional scary person threatening to jack a delivery driver, violence, intimidation and the criminal justice system was an afterthought. And perhaps, that is the way drug markets should operate. What the mundaneness and calmness did show; was the promise of cannabis legalization in the United States. When I asked, all of the Kings believe cannabis will be legalized in California sooner than later. Some see great promise and opportunity, others see the coming of the end. What is almost certain however, as High-C told me a long time ago, they'll still be smoking!

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research questions that guided my dissertation were, 1) Why do these individuals smoke marijuana? 2) Considering the lack of economic incentive, and the extremely high risk associated with the venture, why do these individuals participate in the selling of marijuana? How did they learn the trade and how they marijuana system operates? 3) How do these people come to understand marijuana use and marijuana selling in their own lives? 4) How is the custom of smoking understood by the members of this group?

Typology of Users

What I found was that many of the assumptions that I, and the scholarly literature on drug use and sales held, were half-truths. The reasons the Kings, and many other users use cannabis was wide and varied. I broke cannabis use motivation into a few categories or typologies. However, it is important to note that these categories are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive. They could fit into many of these categories. For example, the Kings openly admitted to smoking in order to make new friends, but they also acknowledged that smoking a lot of cannabis with many different people was a form of prestige. Likewise, the Kings pointed to the fact that a lot of patients acknowledged cannabis for medical purposes, but enjoyed the high that came along with it, suggesting the feelings of well-being engendered by the hallucination had therapeutic benefits.

Status Seekers

Status seekers were smokers who used cannabis for the purpose of gaining status within their peer groups or from people outside their peer group. Cannabis users and the Kings in particular use knowledge of cannabis, cannabis folklore, knowledge of various strains, and interaction and smoking sessions with various individuals as a means of gaining status.

Social Bonding

As discussed at length, many users claimed that their use was motivated by social bonds and the attachments that it brought to friends and sometimes even family members. Many of the members of the Kings families dealt with harder drug problems. Dorian in particular used cannabis as a bonding ritual with his father. He believed the cannabis kept

him and his father away from some of the harder drugs he frequently used. Moreover, Dorian, being frequently estranged from his father for long periods of his life, felt that cannabis was the only thing that he and his father had in common. Many of the other Kings expressed their belief that smoking kept their friendship circle wide and varied. They explained that it was a great way to get to know people and that smoking with people creates a special bond.

Sharing in a communal experience with friends is common with many substances both legal and illegal. Much like meeting with an old friend at the coffee shop or the somewhat recent practice of smoking Hookah, the social experience is just as, if not more relevant than the substance itself. Moreover, like what occurs for other substances as well, the Kings claimed that moments of sobriety (typically forced because of drug testing) led to situations where hanging out with friends turned to an awkward venture.

Spiritualist

Another motivation for the Kings was the process of reflexivity and reality construction. The Kings believed that sobriety was just one world within the myriads of possible worlds that could be experienced. By being trapped in one world, one cannot understand or think about how different ones are possible. Thus, cannabis as a spiritual and reflexive practice provides, according to the kings, a journey to another state of consciousness that shows one a different and more real perspective. It shows them the world as it truly is. This understanding of hallucinogenic substances is not unique to the Kings as many cultures throughout the world have used hallucinogens as a coming of age ritual or as a tool of meditation or a religious practice.

Patients

The last common group of users is people who smoke or use cannabis for medical reasons. A significant portion of the medical cannabis using population use cannabis to treat various pain related issues. The Kings suggested that most patients that used cannabis for primarily therapeutic effects claimed they used it to treat pain issues. Cannabis as a medicine treats pain in various ways through the relaxation of muscles, and tingling of joints that helps with arthritis and joint pain. It has also been shown effective in reducing inflammation. Likewise, many patients with various other illnesses use cannabis as a form of medical treatment. As Natty pointed out, the amount of people who use cannabis for strictly medicinal reasons is hard to quantify, as the categories of therapeutic and recreational use are social constructions, as Natty pointed out, therapeutic use is recreational, and vice versa.

To the topic of why do people sell? In much the same way people smoke cannabis for various reasons, and in much the same way that those categories are not mutually exclusive, cannabis selling is not an either/- or proposition. However, I outlined a series of categories that I feel loosely reflects the types of sellers and different motivations of the various sellers.

Typology of Sellers

Status Seeking

Much like the smokers who use cannabis for status seeking purposes, many sellers and growers report similar motivations. Although the practice of cannabis cultivation and selling is still very much frowned upon in our society, the Kings and

many others who work in the cannabis industry openly flaunt their business. The Kings post their business on Facebook and openly advertise that they run a dispensary. Likewise, they frequently discuss cannabis and represent smoking as a lifestyle. As was frequently discussed one of the motivations for the Kings early ventures in cannabis selling was because they wanted to “ball” (general term for making lots of money) and be the person people “hit up” (contacted for weed) when they needed weed. Moreover, the Kings at one point posted a promotional video of their dispensary on Facebook and other social media sites. Although, some of their activities were advertising for the dispensary, other activities such as smoking with a lot of people, and smoking people out, were clear indications of status seeking.

High Off Own Suppliers

These types of dealers who sell as a side business to smoke for free are actually the most common type of illegal cannabis dealer out there. The Kings at one point were these types of sellers. This typology of seller typically sells cannabis not for the purpose of making money, but for the purpose of smoking for free. As was discussed earlier, most illegal suburban drug markets are closed markets that are constrained by social networks. When individuals first start to venture into cannabis selling, they frequently only sell to people they know or to friends of friends. Because of this closed network of potential buyers and smoking their own product, they only have enough money to purchase cannabis in small increments. This puts them in a situation where they don't make much, if any, money at all. Thus, many cannabis sellers quickly resign themselves to the status of “helper,” part-time dealer, or simply a user that sells to smoke for free.

Helpers

Another facet that I found unique about the group is that none of them considered themselves drug dealers. Some referred to themselves as “herbalists,” some called themselves “helpers,” but none would call themselves drug dealers or refer to cannabis as a drug. They refused to use the term drug dealer or drug because of the negative connotations associated with them. They would frequently refer to their clients or customers as “patients” even though they admitted that only some of the visitors to the dispensary were actual medical patients. Moreover, they considered the act of selling to be helping. The Kings, as discussed prior, believed that cannabis could cure all the evils of the world so any instance of selling to an individual would be an instance of helping them or helping the world. This is in direct contrast to the more economic motivations discussed by the various criminological theories of drug selling (Wilson, 1996; Merton, 1938 Dohan, 2003).

Back to the original questions of this dissertation, why do these users smoke sell and sell and how do they understand those processes. What I found was mostly inconsistent with the criminological theories prominent within the discipline. I found no instances of structural and social strain that lead to innovation. Nor did I find evidence of social disorganization among the Kings or their neighborhood.

Rather, what I found was a group of individuals who had an understanding of what cannabis is, does, and can be that was radically different than mainstream social conceptions of this plant. Although many will be quick to dismiss the act of smoking cannabis as nothing more than a juvenile stoner act practiced by a group pot smoking

hippies, mainstream culture heavily influences our outsider perception of this substance. In order to truly understand the practice of drug using and selling, it is important to take an interactionist and culturally relativistic understanding to this practice. Thus, we can see that meaning, interpretation and action is not a simple universal understanding. Instead, interpretation and meaning is socially constructed just as the Kings would suggest our social world is.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIOLOGY

Given the large and significant number of cannabis users in the United States today (about 12.5% of the United States population as estimated by Grucza et al., 2016), the fact that more research on cannabis users motivations is not so scant is astounding. Moreover given the radical social and legislative changes going on in the U.S. today, the lack of research that examines the motivations of cannabis use and cannabis dealers is even more flabbergasting. Given the social significance that hallucinogens have held throughout history (as documented in the second chapter of this dissertation) and the significance and social impact of the war on drugs, I would assume that researchers would seek to move beyond the old moralistic criminal control and pathological medical theories. Considering the overwhelming evidence of the effectiveness of cannabis for treating a myriad of diseases, and the fact that many states, four (Washington, Colorado, Alaska and Oregon) as of this writing, and the District of Columbia, have legalized recreational use of cannabis (Norml.org, 2016) it is perplexing that within the field of criminology we still hold onto theories of drug use that are clearly no longer suitable in our modern era.

Moreover, it is even more perplexing that much of the drug literature has stayed focused on problematic drug use to the detriment of cultural and social interpretations. Indeed, the majority of drug use in the U.S. is recreational and non-problematic. The majority of drug users are recreational users. Only a small percentage of the drug using population uses the heavy drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine and heroine. Moreover, only a small percentage of the hard drug using population develops serious addiction patterns. Likewise, by conceptualizing drug use as a criminal problem in need of control, and by conceptualizing users as deviants, criminals and delinquents, we as researchers, criminologists and sociologists have unwittingly, or wittingly, been complacent in the very type of thinking that produces systematic racist and classist systems of inequality.

It was the goal of this dissertation to counter our moralistic and criminological assumptions about drugs, drug users and drug sellers by focusing on the life history, practices and motivations of a unique group of cannabis users, growers and sellers. Through ethnographic and interview methodology, I sought to illustrate an understudied yet culturally and socially relevant context of cannabis use. From the viewpoint of users, growers and sellers of these substances, the criminal justice system is but an intruder on the lives of people.

This study is relevant to the discipline of sociology and criminology in three separate and distinct ways. One, it seeks to create a paradigm shift in our understanding of drug use and drug users. Two, it contributes to the interactionist and cultural understanding of drug use by examining the social and spiritual motivations of users

instead of imposing moralistic judgements. And three, it investigates an under examined and understudied phenomenon of suburban semi-legal drug markets. The findings from this study counter many of the common misconceptions about drug users and sellers. They contradict Merton's anomie theory as at no point did the Kings indicate that they perceived that legitimate economic opportunities were blocked to them. Likewise, when asked about their motivations to start selling their answers were more altruistic (they claimed cannabis "helps" people) and cultural (they made claims about meeting new people and making new friends and status seeking) than economic. The neighborhood I studied did not resemble a ghetto and none of the members discussed depression or anything of that nature that would make me believe that their use was a coping mechanism to deal with the drudgery of life.

This study contributed to sociological theories of money making in the sense that some of the members, High-C and TBC in particular, saw cannabis as a way to ball and make money. Like Dohan's (2003) study, they saw cannabis as a means of upward mobility and a way to increase their status. Unfortunately, much like the individuals in Dohan's study, the Kings are not rich and it is questionable whether or not selling cannabis is a more effective method of making money than a good paying nine-to-five job.

Rather, what I found was a complex system of beliefs and rituals that related to cannabis that rival any cultural belief system. The Kings, influenced by the Rastafarian religion and the hippy movement of the sixties, hold a set of beliefs about the healing and spiritual power of cannabis that made it appear that they believed God created the plant

for humans to use. They believe the hallucinogenic power of the plant was not merely coincidental. They believe there was a co-evolutionary symbiotic relationship that humans held with marijuana; marijuana shows humans reality, spurs human creativity, intelligence, and consciousness and cures physical and social ills, and in return, humans spread the genes of the cannabis species throughout the world.

By documenting the actual motivations and perceptions of the Kings, I seek to shift our understanding that portrays it as a public health or criminal activity to a more social, spiritual and cultural understanding.

Lastly, this study contributed to our understanding of suburban drug markets and the effect of legalization and regulation of drug markets. Unfortunately, the few studies that examine the operation of drug markets in the United States tend to focus on banal characteristics such as whether or not the market is indoor or outdoor and whether or not it is an open or closed market. This dissertation advances our understanding of the cannabis networks that grow, transport and distribute this plant. Moreover, it illuminates what occurs to markets that are in the precarious situation of being semi-legal, which has been previously under-studied by scholars. By looking at the operation of semi-legal drug markets it shows that legalization has had an overwhelmingly positive impact in reducing drug related crimes. Likewise, it illustrates the unique and ingenious mechanism dealers use to skirt around the laws. The dissertation looked at prices, markups, potency (strength of cannabis) and new types of routes of administration (ways to consume cannabis). Likewise, it looks at the various mechanisms used to stay compliant the new laws that regulate the use and distribution of cannabis. This contributes to our

understanding of drug markets and how bureaucratic organizations operate by structuring a division of labor (Natty) designed to stay compliant with the ever changing laws.

Additionally, this dissertation looks at the various mechanisms used by county and cities to curb the legality of the cannabis industry.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Race Class and Gender Politics

Although not the original goal of this dissertation, one would be remiss to not discuss the racial, classist and gendered implications of the shift in cannabis laws in the United States. As it was not germane to my main research questions, I only briefly touched upon the racialized and gendered nature of the dispensary. I discussed how the female bud tenders emotional and sexual labor is exploited to draw in and maintain the loyalty of young male customers. I also touched upon how the dispensary itself is broken down in a racialized manner with a black security workhorse and a white male running the dispensary. The Kings themselves do not openly exhibit racial bias, to my knowledge, and they do not maliciously sexualize women, to my knowledge. Rather, their behavior mirrors trends that have been occurring in the marijuana industry since its inception.

In an attempt to keep up with competition, the Kings employ physically attractive female bud tenders to work at their dispensary. This is common as most job ads for bud tenders request a photo to be sent with the application. This allows potential employers to filter out men and unattractive women. Because the job is technically “volunteer work,” anti-discrimination laws typically do not apply to this industry.

One recent study (Muirhead, 2015) on the recreational cannabis industry in the state of Washington found that the marijuana industry is mostly controlled by white males. An analysis showed that in the state of Washington, about 60% of individuals that work in Seattle dispensaries are white. However, it is important to note that this approximately reflects the racial demographics of the city. The proportion of business owners to regular employees is actually much more relevant to whether and how racial inequalities shape the industry. While the study conducted by the pot blog found that approximately forty percent of individuals that work in Washington's dispensaries are people of color, only about nine percent of those working in production and processing are non-white (Muirhead, 2015). Going beyond simple statistics, when looking at business ownership in the state of Washington, one can see a clear racial hierarchy emerging. When the state of Washington did the lottery for recreational licenses (licenses to sell recreational cannabis), there was not a single African-American winner (Muirhead, 2015). Thus, as we see in the corporate world and practically every other American social institution, racial hierarchy is emerging in the legal cannabis industry. For this reason many observers suggest that the legalization of marijuana has led to a whitening of the cannabis industry.

It is important to note that although recreational cannabis use is legal in some states, there are still various barriers to entry into the market in these states and selling cannabis on the street corner is still very much illegal. Thus, while black and brown Americans are being locked up across the country for selling drugs, a select group of rich white Americans are raking in profits and becoming millionaires for the exact same act.

Considering the fact that many states have ballot propositions to legalize the recreational use of cannabis (Downs, 2016), and the decreasing social stigma of the cannabis industry, it is important to critically analyze the racial, class and gendered dynamics of this industry. It is furthermore important that we do not reproduce the same inequality that legalization seeks to dismantle and afford former criminals prosecuted for non-violent marijuana-related crimes the same rights as other American citizens. For it is those disenfranchised and dispossessed that have the most to gain if legalization was truly an open market. Those disenfranchised and dispossessed can pull their years of experience together and compete with big cannabusiness.

Motivations and the Forbidden Fruit

I think another interesting future direction for cannabis research would be to examine the motivation of cannabis users both before and after its legalization. Do users in states where recreational cannabis is legal have different motivations than that of users in states where the practice is still considered taboo? Moreover, does legalization remove the status and prestige gained in certain social circles after it is legal? In the country of Portugal, following the decriminalization of drugs usage in many categories decreased. Likewise, HIV and Hepatitis B & C transmissions and drug related mortality have decreased as well (Greenwald, 2009). This is likely due to the fact that drug users have the ability to seek out treatment and clean needles without fear of arrest and prosecution.

Many years ago, a professor I knew contended that if cannabis were legal we would see a drop in its use. He claimed that only a small percentage of people who use cannabis do so because they enjoy the high. He claimed that the vast majority of people

who use cannabis do so because it is illegal and that removing the “forbidden fruit” aspect of the plant will make it less attractive. As documented throughout this dissertation, the motivations for cannabis use are varied. Many users and sellers claimed they used it for the purpose of “balling” and status. It is likely that legalization would remove that form of social prestige from the endeavor.

The Politics of Legalization

Additionally, future research needs to look at the consequences of cannabis legalization, regulation and taxation and its impact on various social institutions. For example, the majority of research on legal recreational cannabis has pointed to the profound positive effects of cannabis legalization such as increases in state tax revenue, decreases in the arrest rates and easing the financial burden of the criminal justice system. In addition to this narrow focus, I believe it is imperative to study other aspects, both good and bad of legalization such as; money flows to legitimate organizations instead of gangs and organized crime, product quality and safety, wider access for medicinal users, increased personal freedom and reduced systemic violence related to the sale of cannabis. Likewise, we should also study some of the negative unintended consequences of cannabis legalization to create safeguards against them. Some of these negative unintended consequences of cannabis legalization that we have seen so far are cannabis addiction, children being unintentionally exposed to cannabis products such as edibles and soft drinks, second hand smoke, respiratory issues, heart issues and triggering schizophrenia and depression for individuals that are predisposed.

Adequately studying the positive and negative effects of cannabis legalization can help to shape cannabis policy in the future. For example, mandating that bud containers, edibles and other types of THC infused products contain an appropriate label such as the surgeon general warnings required by alcohol and cigarettes will do much to reduce some of the negative health consequences of cannabis. Likewise, adequate labels and correct information can inform and educate people about the health consequences of cannabis and suggest alternative routes of administration which are both safer than smoking it for the individual and for those around her/him. I wrote correct information because the anti-drug propaganda in the U.S. is so incorrect and laden with misinformation that many users do not seriously consider its information.

And lastly, future research needs to consider how cannabis legalization may pave the way for the legalization of other drugs. One may not consider legalization of hard drugs to be a top priority. Yet it is important to understand how the racial and class politics of the criminal justice system and the war on drugs applies to all drugs, and even more so to the harder drugs. Drug prohibition much like alcohol prohibition and cannabis prohibition has been a failure of immense proportion. As of today, approximately fifty percent of inmates in federal prisons are serving time because of drug related offenses, and approximately fifty percent of those prisoners are non-violent offenders. About three quarters of drug offenders were black or African American 39%, Latinos accounted for 37% and whites accounted for 22% approximately (Bureau of Justice, 2015). Moreover, draconian three strike laws have created a situation where many prisoners are serving lifetime prison sentences for nothing other than a lifetime of untreated drug addiction.

The first national drug law (The Harrison Tax Act), was implemented over 100 years ago and after 100 years of drug prohibition the U.S. is the most imprisoning country in the world with only 5% of the world's population and 25% of the world's prison population (Alexander, 2010). Moreover, the war on drugs and imprisonment has tremendous societal effects beyond locking away non-violent offenders. For one, as Alexander pointed out, released prisoners are relegated to a life as a second-class citizen. Offenders accused of felony are not allowed to vote, and can be legally denied access to jobs, housing, public benefits and education. This along with the fact that countless young black and Latino children will grow up in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods without a positive male role model and father figure in their lives. As addressed earlier, a breakdown in the family and neighborhood structure breeds anti-social and criminal tendencies in inner-city communities. Rather than solving the problem of crime and interpersonal violence, mass imprisonment and the war on drugs exacerbates this problem.

The U.S. currently spends approximately fifteen billion dollars each year on drug law enforcement both domestic and internationally and another fourteen and a half billion for demand reduction including both treatment and prevention services (National Drug Control Budget, 2016). And, after a 100 years of drug prohibition, after billions of dollars spent each year and after millions of lives destroyed by drug prohibition, drugs are more widely available than ever before, they are more potent than ever before, and with changes in technology, communication and transportation, are more readily accessible than ever before.

It is important to understand the racial and class politics of the war on drugs, in terms of both its intent and its function. The war on drugs has never, and will never, be about the drugs. The drugs are irrelevant. They are simply plants and substances that produce altered states of consciousness. The war on drugs is not a war on drugs, but a war on the people that use and sell drugs and a system of racial, class and political control. Realization of this fact helps us to comprehend an alternative vision of drug policy. The decriminalization of drugs in Portugal are starting show the amazing social benefits that drug legalization has societal wide in health, taxation, safety and regulation (Greenwald, 2009). Since Portugal's decriminalization in 2001, drug usage has decreased in almost every category of drug, the number of reported HIV and AIDS cases among drug addicts has declined substantially and drug related mortality rates have decreased from 400 in 1999 to 290 in 2006. Moreover, the reduction in the amount of drug users arrested is astounding as well. In 2000 there were approximately 14,000 people arrested for drug-related crimes. Since decriminalization, the number has dropped to, and stay relatively consistent at about 6,000 per year. (Woods, 2011). These should be considered overwhelmingly positive social effects.

SUMMARY

Criminological and sociological understandings of drug using behavior have been tarnished by the ethnocentric and overly moralistic attitudes of American society. Considering the widespread use of mind-altering substances in both antiquity and modern society, and the widespread use of consciousness altering substances the world over, it is inappropriate to see mind-altering substance use as simply a product of biological

addiction or deviance resulting from a corrupt social structure. Rather, in order to understand mind-altering substance use, it is imperative to understand the viewpoints of the users themselves.

My research has finds that individuals attach different meanings to their drug-related behaviors. Unlike the general mainstream society that views drug use as a scourge of man, this group sees cannabis as a guide to spiritual enlightenment and meditation. This is in line with many other religious and spiritual groups throughout history. It is a common line of reasoning, however ethnocentric it may be, to believe that ancient primitive societies that utilized mind-altering substances for religious and spiritual journeys are, or were, unknowledgeable about the true nature of drugs. They claim that cultures like these were primitive and superstitious, and that our “modern” culture with its anti-drug stance is correct. This, I contend, is a wildly ethnocentric and Eurocentric view with no objective basis in reality. In fact, when one considers the historical and social significance that mind-altering substances have played in both antiquity and our own culture, we see that there is significant reason to reexamine our own perceptions of these substances.

From a cultural standpoint, it is relevant to understand drug use as a social bonding ritual amongst the group members. As stated earlier, each member of the Kings understood that the consumption of cannabis was as much about the interaction amongst their friends as it was about the consumption of cannabis itself. TBC for example, explained that one of the main reasons to smoke cannabis was to “kick it with the homies.” He also expounded how cannabis smoking was an act that the group could do

individually and collectively without the physical ramifications (hangovers, DUI, dehydration) that the consumption of alcohol and other substances produced. Likewise, Natty told me on more than one occasion, that High-C was a violent drunk and that they will not hangout with him if he drinks. Thus, while the manifest functions of cannabis use was for the group, to smoke and meditate about the world, smoking also served the purpose of maintaining group cohesion and solidarity.

In addition to serving as a site of social bonding rituals, cannabis usage also served as a dramaturgical status symbol. As previously discussed, smoking with the most people and growing the best cannabis were valued and fostered status within the group. This status may be linked to the semi-illicit nature of the drug in California. In states where medical marijuana use is legal, marijuana use in youth has decreased (Anderson, Hansen & Reese, 2012). Many theorists believe the reduction in teen use could be attributable to the “forbidden fruit” effect in which teens participate in illegal acts because their illegal nature makes them more desirable. The Kings themselves appear to echo this sentiment when discussing their early motivations for cannabis use and selling. Likewise, the Kings frequently claim that the feeling of being high is sometimes note pleasurable. Yet, “handling the trip” and being able to “hang” is considered a status symbol within the group. Likewise, the group illustrates Johnson’s (1980) subcultural deviance theory. Johnson (1980) acknowledges that there is a competition for prestige and status within peer groups and that status and prestige are attained by engaging in activities that depart from the normative demands of mainstream society. What is

particularly relevant to this dramaturgical perspective is how the Kings frequently referred to “the trip” as uncomfortable. When I asked TBC about addiction, he stated:

There’s addiction, but its weird ya know. It’s like, you want to use it because its cool, you want to use it because its fun and all. But like, when you’re on it, you don’t like it. It trips you out and you never wanna do it again. And then, when you come down, you’re calm and chill. And you immediately want to do it again. It’s weird how it gets you. The only time you don’t like the feeling, is when you’re super stoned. But every other time you love it. And you want to do it when you’re not high.

I believe one of the major motivating factors in cannabis use is the social prestige.

Because, as TBC illustrates, the high is not always pleasurable. Natty likewise told me that many people would stop using cannabis if it was legal. He claimed the negative experiences (frequently called “bad trips”) would deter most individuals. Moreover, TBC’s quote points to a phenomenon that I believed to be propaganda, that is, the addictive properties of cannabis. This one very unique finding I did not anticipate.

As a reflexive practice, the group uses the plant as a guide during meditation and critical thought. Although many in our society view the hallucination as nothing more than a stoner’s trip, the historical importance altered states of consciousness advises against such a belief. As was discussed in the history section, many cultures and religious denominations have used cannabis in some form or another for religious and spiritual mind-altering visions. Cannabis use in India for spiritual, religious and meditation purpose spans back thousands of years (Morningstar, 1984). In ancient China, cannabis was used as a form of medicine (Booth, 2005). Even in what we consider a strict religion like Islam, the Sufi mystics used cannabis for spiritual communion (Abel, 1980). The Rastafarians in Jamaica smoke cannabis as a religious communion (Barrett, 1997) and the

American hippies use cannabis as an inward journey into oneself (Kuttner & Hickey, 1970).

The common themes among all these cultures and a common theme among the group I studied was the link made between drug use and a deep sense of communion with the divine and a belief in asceticism. As Natty explained, “Babylon always thinks about logic. A plus B equals C. But they can never get to the why and how we are here because the true nature of the world is beyond what they can see with their eyes.” The commonality of these different cultures as seeing cannabis as a path to spiritual enlightenment to me indicates a profound connection between the plant and spirituality.

Although it may appear that this dissertation was an outright defense of drug use in American society, it is important to clarify that it is not my intention to promote drug abuse. Rather, the historical, cultural, and medical significance of drugs is that they engender altered states of consciousness and can promote health and stimulate feelings of spirituality. This should be understood and respected. The Kings frequently pointed to the fact that their usage was a product of a world dominated by technology, rationality and materialism that will destroy the world. For that reason, I feel it is necessary to accept the spiritual use of drugs to counteract the problems of the world as the Kings put it. Likewise, it is important to recognize the desire of individuals and groups in our own society for spiritual and transcendental experiences that may stem from a need to counteract our ever increasingly irrationally rational world.

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APPENDIX

DISSERTATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Age_____

Sex_____

Race_____

Religion_____

1. Family life?
 - a. Where you grew up?
 - b. What were your parents professions?
 - c. Did your parents ever have problems with drugs or alcohol?
 - d. Have any of your close family members spent time in jail or a treatment facility because of drug use or selling?

2. Life History and Onset.
 - a. What was your initial introduction to drug use?
 - b. When did you first start using drugs?
 - i. Please describe the process in as much detail as possible?
 1. Who did you use with?
 2. What was your motivation?
 3. What age?
 4. Where? And When?
 - c. Why did you start selling marijuana?
 - d. Have you ever been arrested?
 - e. What were your life goals before you started selling marijuana?
 - f. Have you ever spent time in prison or juvenile hall?
 - g. If you have spent time in juvenile hall, what were your life goals before you went to juvenile hall?

3. Marijuana Culture?
 - a. Why do use marijuana today?
 - b. Is there a lifestyle involved in marijuana smoking?
 - c. Do you think there is a difference between you and an occasional marijuana user.
 - d. Do you view marijuana as a drug?
 - e. How do you understand the practice of marijuana selling and smoking?
 - f. What do you experience when you are under the influence of marijuana?
 - i. Do you enjoy the feeling?
 - ii. Do you do it to medicate?

- g. Do you fear getting arrested?
- h. Do you feel stigmatized?
- i. Do people treat you differently?
 - i. How does that affect your personal identity?
 - ii. Are you open about your profession?

Selling

How did you get into the business?

How long have you had the business?

Can you describe the operation of the collective?

How did you get the money to setup the dispensary?

What were the steps to setting up a collective?

Do you fear arrest?

Where do you get the different products, cannabis, edibles?

Do you view marijuana as a drug?

How many of your customers use cannabis for medicinal and how many use it for recreational purposes?

Can you describe patient demographics?

Can you explain the rec confirmation system? How do you know the recs are real?

How do you maintain the customer list?

What type of records do you keep?

Do you keep employment records of the volunteers?

How much do you sell in an average day, week, month, year?

Why haven't the prices of cannabis gone down?

What steps do you employ for security reasons? Safes? Security? Cameras?

What is the cost to run a dispensary?

Do police ever come around or in to the collective?

Is there or have there been instances of violence at your dispensary?

What did or would you do?

Would you call the police if you were robbed?

The future?

Where do you see your business going?

Do you think the city will ban collectives anytime soon?

Do you think the business will ever stop?

What do you believe the future holds for people who sell?