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# Don't fear the reefer : producing the unproductive body in sport, film and advertisement

Nikolas Dickerson  
*University of Iowa*

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DON'T FEAR THE REEFER: PRODUCING THE UNPRODUCTIVE BODY IN  
SPORT, FILM, AND ADVERTISEMENT

by  
Nikolas Dickerson

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Health and Sport Studies  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

July 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Susan Birrell

This is a project that examines dominant conceptions about productive and unproductive bodies. This dissertation deconstructs how the typical unproductive marijuana using body is represented in film and anti-drug advertisements. It then situates these representations within historical discourse of marijuana prohibition. Finally, this project examines how the athletic body, a body that usually connotes health, is understood when it uses a substance that is supposed to make the corporeal unproductive. In addition this project also asks how does race and masculinity shape these understanding? By analyzing the narratives of five athletes: Michael Phelps, Tim Lincecum, Ricky Williams, Josh Howard, and Joakim Noah, this project hopes to deconstruct dominant understandings of the marijuana using body. This project seeks to generate new knowledge about the marijuana using body to help sick people obtain a helpful medicine and stop the imprisonment of non-violent drug offenders, who are disproportionately the poor and minorities.

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE :WHO IS THIS MARIJUANA USER? .....	1
The Body .....	4
Understanding the marijuana user through popular culture .....	7
Making Change.....	9
Chapter Outline.....	12
CHAPTER TWO: WEEDING OUT THE BODY: COPOREAL REPRESENTATIONS OF MARIJUANA USE IN FILM AND ANTI-DRUG COMMERCIALS .....	16
Methodology .....	19
Fear the reefer: Marijuana and Above the Influence Advertisements .....	21
Loss of control .....	22
Loss of future .....	25
Pain .....	30
Everybody must get stoned: A reading of stoner films .....	33
Pot cures all: A way to achieve one’s goals .....	41
Conclusion .....	46
CHAPTER THREE: THE APATHETIC STONER: A GENEALOGICAL EXAMINATION OF MARIJUANA USE IN AMERICAN CULTURE .....	48
Genealogical analysis .....	50
Marijuana and Industry .....	52
Medical marijuana part one .....	53
Minority marijuana users and the poisoning of America .....	57
The politics of truth .....	65
Marijuana and the stepping stone hypothesis .....	68
Marijuana and the counter-culture: It’s not so bad .....	69
Marijuana as a violation of morality .....	72
Medical marijuana part two .....	81
Conclusion .....	88
CHAPTER FOUR: SPORTING THE UNPRODUCTIVE BODY .....	90
Methodology .....	93
Sporting the unproductive body .....	95
Won’t somebody please think of the children?Phelps and his bong .....	99
Let Timmy smoke .....	109
Ricky and the stick icky .....	115



The kids are listening: Josh Howard .....	124
Like father like son: Jaokim Noah .....	129
Producing the new marijuana using body .....	131
CHAPTER FIVE: DISRUPTING THE UNPRODUCTIVE BODY .....	136
Marijuana use and the body .....	142
What is at stake for keeping the drug war alive .....	152
REFERENCES .....	157

## CHAPTER ONE: WHO IS THIS MARIJUANA USER?

I stood there taking it all in, full of excitement about the experience I was about to have. I was at my first Phish concert and could not wait for the first notes to be played. The anticipation of hearing some great music and being part of a community-oriented experience like this had me energized for days. I am too young to have had the opportunity to see the Grateful Dead during the 60's or 70's, a fact that disappoints me not only because I have missed the chance to hear some great music, but also because of the social environment I would not get an opportunity to be a part of. Meeting people who were following the band on tour and being amongst a large group of people who could be considered part of the counter-culture is an experience I often wish I could have been a part of. The Grateful Dead and Phish are two different bands, but share many similarities in terms of style, performance and the community oriented atmosphere of their fans. So as I entered the stadium I was happy that I would be attending a show that would be in some ways similar to a Grateful Dead concert.

Looking around this large crowd, I saw men and women with long hair, tie-dye shirts, and hemp jewelry everywhere. It was a crowd of modern hippies or at least people who took on this aesthetic. What was also quite noticeable was the crowd was predominantly white. There were a handful of minorities (including myself) here and there, but the largest number of men and women of color made up the security and wait staff. These sights caught my eye as the aroma of marijuana filled my nose. The abundance of white bodies smoking pot without any repercussions further solidified my

belief that some of my experiences were similar to attending a Grateful Dead show during the 1960's.

Smoking pot at a rock concert is a common occurrence, so at first I did not think too much about it. Then within fifteen minutes of the music starting I was offered a large quantity of marijuana for the temporary use of my ticket stub. It was at this point that I realized how open people were with their marijuana usage. I also came to the conclusion that despite sticking out in this crowd as a mixed raced man with long dreadlocks, I did not have to slip away into a sea of people to smoke pot at this show. If I chose to I could do it openly. The people smoking marijuana were dancing to the music enjoying the company of others and overall having what looked to be a good time.

Upon this recognition I had to wonder what if this was a large group of dark skinned bodies smoking marijuana, surveyed by white security? Would this pot-smoking atmosphere be allowed to take place? How would we understand or characterize a large group of minority concertgoers smoking marijuana?

This of course is a hypothetical question that is difficult to answer. In my own experiences outside of a concert like this I would think seriously about whether or not to engage in this activity in a public setting because I already have two strikes against me: I have long dreadlocks and I am a black male. Given the statistics of drug arrests my fear seems reasonable. In regards to drug use as a whole, blacks constitute 13 percent of drug users, and they represent 35 percent of those arrested for drug possession, 55 percent of those convicted, and 74 percent of those sent to prison (Small, 2004). These statistics emphasize the racialization of drug enforcement. When specifically looking at marijuana charges the numbers do not get any better.

Marijuana is the most widely used illegal drug in the US, and the US government reports that over 100 million Americans over 12 have admitted to smoking pot at some point (Fox, Armentano, Tvert, 2009). Even with so many Americans using pot, not all groups use this substance equally. According to the National Organization for the Reform for Marijuana Laws (NORML), in 2005 African Americans made up 8.8% of the US population, 11.9% of annual marijuana users, and comprised 23% of all marijuana possession arrests in the United States. Things are not any better for those of Latino descent. According to Deborah Small (2004) almost half of the annual marijuana arrests (700,000) are of Latino origin. These statistics raise a serious question: do minority groups use marijuana at a higher rate or is it a problem only when minorities decide to use this substance?

Federal laws make smoking marijuana for recreational purposes illegal in all 50 states, but in sixteen states and Washington D.C., it is a legal form of medicine at the state level. The medicalization of marijuana once again brings up the question of who gets to be a pot smoker. In November of 2010, California tried to pass Proposition 19, which would have made marijuana legal for anyone over the age of 21. This initiative failed but the fact that it was up for a vote symbolizes what appears to be a changing cultural climate towards this controversial plant. As the medicinal marijuana movement continues to grow and some states such as California consider widespread legalization, how are we to understand the contemporary marijuana using body? How can one plant be both a threat to the morality of our nation and a form of palliative medicine?

Through exploring various discourses of marijuana use, I hope to understand the different ways in which the marijuana user is constructed. Stigmatizing a body such as

the marijuana user as apathetic, unintelligent, and unproductive, renders the body that does not use marijuana as productive and “normal”(Terry & Urla, 1995). The whole concept of unproductive bodies makes visible a “normal” or productive body. In order to trouble notions of “normal” productive and unproductive bodies, this project examines the ways in which various media forms construct images of the marijuana-using athlete. If the athletic body connotes health and productivity (Madalinski, 2009), how are we supposed to understand the athlete that uses marijuana?

I believe the athletic body can be used to disrupt general conceptions of marijuana use and be a starting point to advocate for the legalization of medical marijuana in all fifty states, or at the very least, the decriminalization of the plant across America. If our society’s healthiest bodies are using marijuana and are still able to achieve extraordinary success and be physically fit then it might be time to stop locking up our citizens for this practice and provide an effective medicine to those who need it.

### **The Body**

The body is a focal point for this project. The two bodies in question, the marijuana user (unproductive body) and the athlete (productive body) are at opposite ends of the spectrum. The pot using body is often feared because of the belief that the user will slip into a passive fantasy world from which he or she will not be able to return, hence leaving the user unfit to be a productive member of society (Auld, 1981). The legalization of this plant could then be considered a move towards a whole nation of unproductive bodies and hence, justifying the need for the criminalization of this particular substance.

In contrast, while inactive bodies are seen as slothful and self centered (Madalinski, 2009), the athletic body is believed to be the epitome of health, and sport is the highly public arena in which the fit bodies in motion is on display. According to John Hargreaves (1987)

Although the degree of physical input varies from sport to sport, the primary focus of attention in sport overall is the body and its attributes...it is the body that constitutes the most striking symbol, as well as constituting the material core of sporting activity. (p. 141)

If a healthy and highly efficient body is a central component of sport then it would seem unlikely that athletes would chose to use a substance that would diminish the functionality of their bodies

These descriptions highlight how representations of the body carry significant social meaning (Terry & Urla, 1995). The pot using body is stigmatized while the athletic body is valued and celebrated. The binary that constructs the drug user as bad and the healthy athletic body as normal, even exemplary, make it difficult to understand marijuana users as anything but deviant people. This narrow conception of marijuana users is a perception this project hopes to disrupt through the examination of the healthy and successful bodies of athletes.

The recent surge of publicity around athletes who have smoked this plant is a starting point in this process. In 1998 Canadian snowboarder Ross Rebagliati had his gold medal taken away after testing positive for marijuana usage. He would later have his medal returned when it was deemed that the drug was not performance enhancing. Athletes such as Ricky Williams of the National Football League (NFL), Shaun Ellis (NFL), and Josh Howard of the National Basketball Association (NBA) have admitted to,

or been caught using marijuana. Olympic superstar Michael Phelps, NBA star Joakim Noah, and Major League Baseball (MLB) pitcher Tim Lincecum have also been in the news for their usage of the drug. Most recently, Miami Heat player Udonis Haslem and NBA rookies Mario Chalmers and Darrell Arthur have also been caught with marijuana. Dana Larsen (2009) also states that world class athletes such as Rob Van Dam (professional wrestler), Sir Ian Botham and Phil Tufnell (professional cricket players), and basketball players such as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Charles Oakley, and Rasheed Wallace have all discussed their usage of marijuana.

Athletes who use marijuana are not a new phenomenon though. The number of National Football League players who have been caught using the drug is expansive enough for ESPN.com to have put together an all-star team of pot smokers (<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=gallo/040802>). The National Basketball Association (NBA) seems to have the capacity to make its own all-star team of pot smokers as well. According to Josh Howard (Townsend, 2008), as well as Gerber (2004), 60% of the NBA uses marijuana in the off-season.

Former NFL player Mark Stepnoski has gone a step beyond simple admission to pot use and has publicly spoken out against marijuana prohibition (Gorman, 2003). Stepnoski is also the president of the Texas chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana laws (NORML). In an interview with *High Times*, Stepnoski makes it clear that he never used marijuana as a way to alleviate pain, however it was a substance he regularly used while playing (Gorman, 2003). While Stepnoski may not have used the plant as a painkiller, it is a pertinent point of discussion given his profession. Notable superstars such as Brett Favre have been addicted to painkillers, and

the risks of high impact sports such as football and hockey leaves one to wonder whether the widespread legalization of medical marijuana might be helpful to such athletes.

Despite the number of athletes who have used marijuana there is a gap in the literature addressing this issue. Most of the literature that discusses drug use and sport deals with the role of performance enhancing drugs in athletics. The scholarship on steroids on sport discusses these drugs as a threat to the health and integrity of sport (see Blake & Pape, 1997; Burke & Roberts, 1997; Edwards, 1986; Magdalinski, 2009), as well as how narratives of steroids are connected to ideas about race (see Jackson, 1998), and gender and sexuality (Davis & Delano, 1992; Lock, 2003). The drug policies of major sport leagues (NBA, MLB, NFL, WNBA), the International Olympic Committee, and the NCAA clearly indicate they consider the steroid using body is a threat to the natural order of sport. Steroids is seen as a form of technology that enters the “natural” body, to give a competitor an advantage and disrupt the perceived level playing field of sport (Magdalinski, 2009). In other words steroids are thought to enhance the athletic body in an unnatural way and disrupt the moral playing field of sport.

The literature on recreational drug use differs from some of the previously mentioned scholarship on steroids in that the focus of this work has mostly dealt with how to implement preventive measures in relation to illicit drug use. The current scholarship on athletes who use marijuana consists mostly of quantitative studies that attempt to predict marijuana use among different sporting participants in order to implement preventive drug programs (see Denham, 2011; Ewing, 1998; Evans, Weinberg, & Jackson, 1992; Pan & Baker, 1998; Peretti-Watel, Guagliardo, Verger, Mignon, Pruvost, & Obadia, 2004). To date, no scholarship explores social constructions



of the marijuana-using athlete. In this project, I address that gap. By examining the discourses of athletes who use/used marijuana, I hope to challenge dominant conceptions of what the traditional drugs user looks like. Further, I hope this can begin to demonstrate the diversity of experiences of the marijuana user.

### **Understanding the marijuana user through popular culture**

In order to examine these different discourses, I look to popular culture. It is through various forms of culture that my own knowledge of marijuana was first formed, and it is within popular culture where the struggle for hegemony happens (Hall, 1981). The very first information I received about recreational drugs came through the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program, a program that instilled in me what could be considered the dominant position on drugs in this country.

It was here I learned to “just say no to drugs”, and began to believe that if I used them in any shape or form my brain would indeed turn into a fried egg. Adding to my fear of drugs was the large role athletics played in my life as an adolescent. I did not want to take drugs or even associate with anyone who used drugs because I believed all the images and discourse that were presented to me. I thought drugs would make it impossible to succeed in the classroom, or on the athletic field, as well as destroy any future ambitions I had. I was fully convinced that even trying something such as marijuana would lead me down a road of indifference, and my athletic, intelligent active body would transform into a lifeless apathetic corporeality.

The more I heard this particular argument, the more I believed this message. However, as I grew older, I discovered stoner films, where I received a different message about pot use, and that caused me to rethink my own beliefs about the plant. I watched

movies such as *Half Baked*, where the consequences of marijuana use were in some ways detrimental, but at the same time the user was characterized as comedic and loveable. Different messages about marijuana use began to slowly chip away at my original fear of pot smoking.

Additionally, as I became engrossed with rock and roll I grew interested in the music of the 1960's and 1970's, as well as the social movements and counter culture that went with it. Pot use was a central part of this movement. I began to understand that common misconceptions about marijuana and its users were a strategy used to demonize the progressive thinking of some of the social movements of the 1960's (Provine, 2007). The more I have thought about the narratives of drug use in this country, the more I realize that the United States' stance on drugs is culturally and politically motivated rather than grounded in a sound scientific argument for prohibition.

Drug prohibition then is grounded within political agendas. Derrida (1993) takes this argument further as he argues drug use is not criminalized because of the individual act but because of the fear that users will escape to a world outside of reality and reason. Marijuana is thought to turn the user into a person who can not think rationally, or even worse, marijuana will take the user into in an inescapable dream world. Without the ability to reason or live in reality, it becomes difficult for an individual to function on a daily basis, a condition that would also hinder his or her ability to participate in the workforce (Derrida, 1993). The marijuana user is thus constructed as a roadblock to the continued advancement of society.

These are not the only negative consequences that have been constructed about marijuana use. Historically, the marijuana user has been connected to a variety of

discourses that create knowledge about what it means to use this substance. This knowledge then functions as a form of truth, which can be used as a tool of power, in order to control the marijuana using body (Markula & Pringle, 2006). When marijuana users are continuously characterized as violent, dangerous, apathetic, or unproductive, this discourse constructs a particular form of knowledge about people who engage in this practice. This knowledge then begins to be taken as the “truth” about pot smokers and then can be used to justify practices such as prohibition or the criminalization of the plant.

Moreover, this practice can not be separated from aspects of race, gender, and class. A constant theme within anti-marijuana movements has been to connect the plant to already disempowered social groups such as Mexicans, African Americans, and white women (Campbell, 2000). By examining the numerous discourses concerning marijuana users I hope to illustrate how understandings of this plant are entwined with politics of race, gender, and class.

### **Making change**

Popular culture is where struggles over meaning, identity, and power happen (Hall, 1981). For this reason I examine representations of the marijuana user in film, advertisements and sport. Through these cultural sites people are taught about what it means to be a marijuana user (Giroux, 2001). I focus on these popular sites to understand the different meanings about marijuana use that are disseminated to our society. But I also examine these meanings of marijuana use in order to deconstruct them as a first step toward social change. If culture functions pedagogically then deconstruction dominant representations of the marijuana user can construct new knowledges and identities

(Giroux, 2000). Constructing new knowledge about the marijuana user is a central part of this project and something I believe is a necessity at this current moment.

Despite a growing amount of literature that points to the benefits of medical marijuana, particularly for the terminally ill (see Baumrucker, 2001; Bock, 2000; Chapkis & Webb, 2008; Cinti, 2009), only sixteen states and the District of Columbia allow citizens to obtain this form of medication. Confounding matters is that even in those states where patients can obtain medical marijuana, it is still illegal under federal law. This contradiction makes the protection of medical marijuana patients a gray area.

Take for example the case of Joseph Casias. Casias lives in Michigan, where medical marijuana is legal. Casias had been an employee of Wal-Mart for five years and was their Associate of the Year in 2008 (Tahmincioglu, 2010). Casias, however, also uses medical marijuana to alleviate the pain he suffers from sinus cancer and a brain tumor, and in November of 2009 he was fired for testing positive for pot. Despite the fact that Wal-Mart knew he took the drug for medical reasons and Casias never used the drug on the job, he was fired out of concern for the company's reputation with its customers and associates. The official word from Wal-Mart spokesman Greg Rossiter was "We are sympathetic to Mr. Casias' condition. However, like so many other employers, we have to consider the overall safety of our customers and associates, including Mr. Casias, when making a difficult decision like this"(Tahmincioglu, 2010 ¶ 7). A Michigan court upheld Wal-Mart's decision to fire Casias. Casias' case shows that while patients have some protection from arrest under state law, they have no security from private employers such as Wal-Mart (Agar, 2011). Widespread legalization of medical marijuana would force

states to deal with this gray area and develop a plan to protect both patients and employers.

Medical marijuana patients are not the only ones who suffer from our country's extreme stance on drug use. Each year over 700,000 people who are not using marijuana for medical reasons are put in jail just for possession of marijuana (Benavie, 2009). The large number of arrests is due in large part to the United States War on Drugs, a campaign that costs \$50 billion annually, with an estimated \$10-15 billion used to uphold marijuana law (Nadelmann, 2005). Despite the surplus of money poured into the never ending War on Drugs the United States seems to be no closer to eradicating drugs or their usage by millions of Americans.

In fact the Global Commission on Drug Policy released a report in June of 2011 declaring the drug war a failure and recommending the experimental legalization of some drugs particularly in regards to marijuana (Davis, 2011), an option that seems wise to consider, given increasing rates of marijuana use. Marijuana is the most widely used recreational drug (Earlywine, 2002) and between 1998 and 2008 the number of users has risen from 147.7 million to 160 million (Jahangir et al., 2011). Despite such widespread usage by many Americans, the government still continues to wage a costly and ineffective campaign against a plant.

This plant is a medicine, a euphoric substance, a tool of comedy when used by lovable stoners in film, and a criminalized substance. The variety of different categorizations of marijuana would seem to suggest that it might not be as dangerous as it is often made out to be. Yet, the consequences of getting caught with this highly controversial plant are often dire. Besides the threat of incarceration, a drug charge on

your record can result in the loss of federal funding for college, as well the inability to obtain welfare, or subsidized housing (Provine, 2007). These are drastic consequences for anyone, but it is the poor and minorities who suffer the most from the United State's stance on drugs. These drastic discrepancies make this an important political project.

Focusing on the various representations of the marijuana user in popular culture I hope will demonstrate the complexity and contradictions that exist about this plant. By looking at the discourse surrounding the athletic body that consumes marijuana I plan to trouble the dominant conception of pot users as apathetic and disinterested in anything but pot use (Himmelstein, 1983). In this way I hope to intervene in the political landscape of marijuana use and hopefully turn the tide towards an environment where people who need this medicine can get it and those who choose to indulge recreationally can do so without fear of penalty.

### **Chapter outline**

Chapter Two "Weeding out the body: Corporeal representations of marijuana use in film and anti-drug commercials" examines the representation of marijuana use in two cultural sites aimed particularly at adolescents: the Above the Influence advertisements and stoner films. This chapter will be important in establishing the binary that exists between marijuana as a dangerous substance to body and soul and marijuana use as creating the comedic and harmless body. The athletic body seems to fall outside of both of these categories, suggesting the need to disrupt this binary. Thus, this chapter will be important not only to set the context but also to serve as a reference point that marijuana using bodies exist that fall outside of this binary.

Chapter Three “The apathetic stoner: A genealogical examination of marijuana use in American culture” draws on the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault to come to an understanding of how the marijuana user has come to be conceptualized as a deviant member of society. A genealogical approach focuses on taken for granted scientific truths (such as the apathetic stoner) and demonstrates how they are constructed as a result of specific political and historical contexts (Foucault, 1984). In other words constructing a genealogy of the marijuana user makes evident how this particular identity has been constituted at different points and time throughout history, revealing that the marijuana user was not always thought to be apathetic and unproductive. This chapter reveals how marijuana has gone from a medicine to a violence inducing substance, to a symbol of the counter-culture, to a criminalized substance, and to a plant classified as both medicinal and criminal.

In chapter Four “Sporting the unproductive body,” I use a critical method to read five athletes who have been caught or admitted to smoking marijuana: Michael Phelps, Tim Lincecum, Joakim Noah, Josh Howard, and Ricky Williams. By examining the narratives of these athletes within the context of patterns discussed in previous chapters I hope to establish who gets to count as a marijuana user in our society. I pay specific attention to the ways in which race and gender are a part of the narratives of each of these athletes. By exploring the media representations of athletes who use marijuana, this chapter will trouble the notion of what constitutes a pot user, as these are highly successful athletes who are using a substance that supposedly renders the body unproductive.

Chapter Five “Disrupting the unproductive body” starts with an auto-ethnographic account of an experience I had as a suspected drug trafficker, just based on the facts that I am a multi-racial man with dreadlocks. I use this story to illustrate the significance of the War on Drugs particularly in regards to people who look like me. In this chapter I will also bring all the previous chapters together to put together a larger narrative of how we understand marijuana use in our contemporary moment. From this synthesis I plan to construct a counter narrative of how we understand the marijuana using body, drawing particularly on the stories of professional athletes who have used this substance.



CHAPTER TWO: WEEDING OUT THE BODY: CORPOREAL  
REPRESENTATIONS OF MARIJUANA USE IN FILM AND ANTI-DRUG  
COMMERCIALS

I am a product of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E). I am a child of the 1980's who was told that if I used drugs, my brain would resemble eggs in a frying pan. In other words I grew up terrified of drugs and the people who used them. I thought that if I ever used drugs, I would become an addict and destroy all my future opportunities. I was scared of the consequences of drug use and I was completely convinced that people who used drugs were not respectable people. I also was an athlete, and I didn't believe this part of my identity would lend itself well to drug use. The fear of marijuana damaging my ability academically and athletically became a large deterrent not to try drugs.

Yet, while the D.A.R.E program and public service announcements made me terrified of drugs and its users, other forms of popular culture eventually led me to question my thoughts on this topic. In my late teenage years I became obsessed with rock and roll. Eventually, I became quite captivated with bands such as The Doors, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, and Creedence Clear Water Revival among others. Their music opened doors for me into the political and cultural happenings of the 1960's and 1970's. This new found curiosity along with the viewing of popular "stoner" films such as *Half Baked*, *Dazed and Confused* among others led me to associate marijuana use with free thinkers, advocates for change, and comedians. In essence I began to wonder

whether marijuana is really as detrimental to society as I had come to believe. What does it mean that D.A.R.E tells me one thing while these movies tell me another?

In order to begin to answer these questions this chapter examines popular representations of the marijuana using body in Above the Influence anti-drug advertisements and popular stoner films. Following Stuart Hall (1981), I explore popular culture as the site for the struggle over cultural meanings. *The Above the Influence* advertisements represent the hegemonic construction of the marijuana user, while stoner films challenge these constructions. In essence stoner films are the site where the struggle between dominant and resistant meanings of the marijuana user are contested. This does not mean that these films are wholly resistant or wholly conformist, instead they are contradictory (Hall, 1981). It is precisely this clashing of meanings that allows for transformation to take place.

The struggle over meaning within culture takes on great importance due to its pedagogical function. Through culture “people imagine their relationship to the world” and are taught to “think of themselves and their relationship to others” (Giroux, 2001, p. 13). Popular culture is thus a site where the population can be taught societal values and where racial, gendered, sexual, and nationalistic identities are formed. This does not mean as citizens we are brainwashed by cultural industries, but it does recognize that culture is produced with meanings and values that are recognizable (Hall, 1981). Therefore, individuals may conform, resist, or even transform the knowledge that is presented to them.

This the power of culture to act as a form of pedagogy makes Giroux (2001) argue that the terrain of culture should be used to intervene in the world to disrupt current

arrangements of power. I see this project as a way to intervene or construct new knowledge about the marijuana using body. I see this as a pressing political project given that many citizens that could benefit from medical marijuana are unable to access, unless they live in one of the sixteen states or the District of Columbia where it is legal. Adding to the urgency of this project is the number of arrests each year for marijuana. On average there are 700,000 arrests per year in relation to marijuana; roughly 600,000 are for simple possession (Nadelmann, 2005). These arrest rates are very high but take on even greater significance given the racial make up of the perpetrators.

Even though minority marijuana users such as African Americans and Latino's do not use the substance at a higher rate than Caucasians or other racial groups, they are arrested at a higher rate. African Americans make up 23% of the annual arrests ([www.norml.com](http://www.norml.com)), while Latino's make up half of the annual arrests (Small, 2004). I believe providing an effective medicine and curtailing racially skewed arrest rates are an essential political project. Giroux (2001) argues cultural work such as this should focus on utopianism. Essentially, in order to improve societal conditions you have to continuously ask how things could be better. The transformation of structures of power and oppression is made possible when a society continuously questions itself and believes that changes can still be made to reach a more democratic and equitable social world (Giroux, 2001). The overall goal of this project is to question our understandings of productive and unproductive bodies in order to make things better for the sick and minorities of our society.

Social change is the goal of this larger project, but this chapter starts by examining the representation of marijuana and its users in *Above the Influence* anti-drug

advertisements and popular stoner films. I believe both of these forms of culture represent marijuana in descriptive and categorical terms, which conceals the ways meaning about this plant and those who use it have been shaped by history and discourse (Cole, 1993). My analysis focuses on what these representations are. While the previous chapter demonstrated how understandings of the marijuana user have been shaped by history and various different discourses, this chapter demonstrates how current representations are void of this more complex understanding of what it means to be a marijuana user.

From this analysis it then becomes possible to ask new questions in order to create a progressive discourse that can transform structures of power and oppression (Giroux, 2001). Within these two cultural sites I focus on the significance of the body. Terry and Urla (1995) argue that historically and culturally deviant social behavior has been manifested through the body through identifiable traits or characteristics. Given the illegal status of marijuana in part due to the effects it has on the body, I believe it is important to put the body at the center of my analysis. The body has been used to emphasize the dangers of marijuana at different points in time of pot's history and these constructions have racial overtones. Black and Mexican marijuana users were constructed as inherently violent and sexually deviant (Helmer, 1975), while members of the mostly white counter-culture of the 1960's were categorized as apathetic and unproductive members of society (Himmelstein, 1983). In each case the body is a site where the purported and racialized deviance is marked.

### **Methodology**

This chapter examines popular stoner films and Above the Influence commercials as its central point of analysis. For each film and commercial I attempt to answer the

following series of questions: What kinds of meanings are communicated through the body of the particular drug users in these films and advertisements? What is the place of drug use in the film, what is its purpose in the movie/advertisement? What are the different attributes given to the drug user and finally what is the result of drug use in these films and advertisements? In this way I illustrate the importance of narratives of the body in understanding the United States' stance on marijuana and its users.

Twelve commercials were analyzed from the Above the Influence anti-drug campaign that ran from 1998 to the present. Twelve commercials were used in this analysis because these were the advertisements that were found that focused on marijuana use. Five of these commercials appeared on the website ([www.abovetheinfluence.com](http://www.abovetheinfluence.com)), while the rest were found through the website [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). All of the commercials deal with teen usage of the drug and feature boys and girls from various different ethnic backgrounds.

I examined ten different stoner movies for this project. A stoner film was defined as a movie that “shows serious commitment to smoking and acquiring marijuana as a lifestyle choice” (Meltzer, 2007, ¶ 1). In order to determine what films to use I googled “top ten stoner films”, and from the first two pages of results, I cross-listed all the results in order to make my own top ten list. The following films were used for this project: *Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke (1978)*, *Fast times at Ridgemont High (1982)*, *Dazed and Confused (1993)*, *Friday (1995)*, *The Big Lebowski (1998)*, *Half Baked (1998)*, *How High (2001)*, *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle (2004)*, *Smiley Face (2007)*, and *Pineapple Express (2008)*. All of these films appeared on numerous top-ten lists with the

exception of *Smiley Face*; I included this movie because it was the only one with a female lead character, and I believe this is an important aspect to include.

### **Fear the Reefer: Marijuana and Above the Influence advertisements**

Drug (alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs) education within the United States has existed for over 115 years (Beck, 1998) The type of educational program has varied at different points in time and depends heavily on the particular socio-historical context. Different historical attempts to prevent the use of drugs and alcohol has ranged from the total abstinence approach of the Women's Temperance Union in the early 1900's, to the scare tactics of the 1930s and 1960s, to harm reduction during the 1970's, and to zero tolerance during the Regan and Bush era of the 1980s (Beck, 1998). While approaches to educating the youth of America about drug use have varied over time, a constant occurrence has been the use of fear tactics in order to persuade people not to use drugs. The Above the Influence advertisements rely on this strategy in order to perpetuate the message that marijuana will destroy your life.

The Above the Influence advertising campaign is the largest public health campaign in history, and the federal government has spent over \$1.5 billion on this crusade (Carpenter & Pechmann, 2011). This drug prevention strategy began in 1998 and continues to run today. Its main goal is to prevent drug use, but it also has some larger and very specific objectives. According to Hornik et al.(2008), the Above the Influence antidrug campaign is designed to develop resistance skills in youth to increase their confidence in their ability to reject drug use, by addressing the benefits of not using drugs

suggesting positive alternatives, and displaying the negative consequences of drug use, which includes detrimental effects on academic and athletic performance.

In the early phase of this campaign the ads did not concentrate on a specific drug. However, beginning in late 2002 the focus of the campaign turned to marijuana, resulting in the majority of the commercials depicting the potential harmful consequences of marijuana use. (Hornik, et al., 2008). The advertisements I examine come after this policy change. My analysis includes twelve advertisements from this campaign. Marijuana and its effects are the focal point of all these commercials. I found three themes of danger within these commercials: loss of control of ones mind and or body, loss of a future, and creating pain to oneself and others. What is particularly noteworthy is all of these themes were depicted through the body. In all of these advertisements a division was created between a normal, non-drug using body and an abnormal marijuana using body.

### **Loss of control**

The prohibition of marijuana can not be separated from the stereotypes about the exaggerated effects of pot on both mind and body. In short the fears about loss of control can be separated into two distinct categories: the loss of inhibitions and the escape of the mind into an alternate reality. More specifically, as John Auld (1981) argues, the usage of pot is thought to bring about two observable changes in behavior:

uninhibited 'acting out' of impulses and ideas over which the subject would normally exercise restraint but which he now had little power to control; or - and equally undesirably - it could have the effect of enveloping the subject in a passive fantasy world from which he would be either unwilling or unable to return (Auld, 1981, p. 60)

According to this logic marijuana users are expected to lose the ability to control their mental or bodily impulses, possibly even sending the participant into a drug induced dream world, from which he or she may never return.

Many of the Above the Influence advertisements follow this line of thought depicting marijuana users as unproductive bodies and minds, who have fallen into a state of passivity from which they can not return. In one ad entitled *Flat*, a young woman is positioned on the couch in a two dimensional form (think no bones). Her friend who appears as normal (three dimensional), is sitting across from her on a chair. When the narrator attempts to contact the woman on the couch (Sarah), her friend tells him that Sarah will not answer because she does not have the ability to do so. When the narrator inquires why this is the case, her friend responds, “this is how it’s been since she started smoking pot. She’s all lazy and boring and...you know we used to have so much fun together.” When the narrator asks Sarah’s friend what they do now, she says, “we just sit here.”

Sarah has completely lost the ability to use her mind and body. She has traveled to a space completely beyond a functioning reality. She is situated within an immobile body that has no bones, and she does not have the ability to speak or hear. How could this particular body ever contribute to society if it can not even move!? Sarah is depicted as someone trapped in a drug-induced haze. By exaggerating the aesthetics of Sarah’s body the audience is told that pot smoking is not only dangerous, but it will also have severe consequences in terms of the users ability to function mentally and physically.

The explicit illustration of the loss of mental control is also present within another commercial called *How did she get home?*. In this ad a male teenager is



awakened by a phone call. The young man's demeanor quickly changes from happy to disturbed when he apparently learns he has left a friend stranded. With a look of terror on his face, he asks his friend how the girl he left stranded got home. He proceeds to say "I was really high. Are we cool? You know me, Tim. That was not me." There is no response from the friend, but the commercial ends with the teenager staring off into space, as he seems to ponder the mistake he has made. In this commercial smoking pot has caused this user to forget about his friend. It is unclear whether the teenager in this ad was driving, which would be a cause for concern. However, what is apparent is that smoking pot has clearly rendered the user irresponsible as he operates outside a state of his "normal" demeanor. He even says, "You know me Tim. That was not me," solidifying that marijuana caused him to do something he would not normally do.

Neither of these advertisements shows actual marijuana use. Instead they both emphasize its effects on the mind and body. After viewing these commercials the audience is left to believe that marijuana use will render them unable to use their body and lead them to make decisions they would not normally make. The deviance of the marijuana body is clearly marked aesthetically in these commercials. In *Flat*, Sarah's friend's body is understood as normal through the unfavorable attributes ascribed to Sarah's own body (Terry & Urla, 1995). Overall the audience learns that smoking pot impairs your ability to function as your "normal" self, and that impairment can impact both mind and body.

Both of these commercials imply that a part of you is lost due to marijuana use. This symbolism is even more clearly depicted in the commercial *Shadow*. In this commercial a young African American boy is shown playing basketball, and every move

he makes is copied by his shadow. A young white male then appears in the distance smoking a joint. When the African American boy walks toward this other young boy he leaves behind his shadow and the narrator asks “If you smoke weed, how much of your self are you leaving behind?” While the previously mentioned commercials depict a loss of coherence or control, this advertisement suggests that you physically lose a part of your self if you smoke pot. In other words marijuana destroys your identity as well as your physical body.

Using any substance that can alter consciousness without a doubt has the potential to cause users to act differently than when in an unaltered state. However, these commercials also suggest that using marijuana will cause a permanent rather than merely temporary change to one’s self. These commercials position marijuana users as deviant since they can not function as a “normal” healthy body could. Sarah has been unable to get off the couch since she started smoking pot, the boy in *Shadow* loses a part of himself due to usage of this substance, and the young man in *How did she get home?* turns into a person who is unreliable as a friend. None of these characters is engaging in what could be considered positive or moral behavior. They are also unable to make any positive changes because the commercials reflect these damages to their body as permanent.

### **Loss of future**

The loss of a bright future or the dismantling of previous achievements is a second major theme that appears. This theme continues the message that smoking pot will have a permanent impact on your life, even if the substance is used only once. These particular advertisements rely on the general belief that marijuana makes the users

apathetic and disinterested in anything but smoking pot (Gerber, 2004), which of course will render them useless to take their place as productive members of the labor force.

For instance, in a commercial called *Cocoon*, a young man loses track of his life due to his pot smoking. In the ad a boy sits in his room smoking pot. Literally, as he gets increasingly older until he is engulfed, in a cocoon of marijuana. Once he is fully enshrouded by this marijuana cocoon a tagline appears that says “What you choose today...” When he breaks out of the cocoon he has transformed into a middle aged, fat bald man and then another tag line appears that says “..affects who you are tomorrow.” The ad closes with the now middle aged man looking confused by what he has become as his mother calls to him asking if he took out the garbage like his father asked. Finally, a narrator says “Live above weed, live above the influence”.

This commercial suggests that pot can overtake you and in the process you will lose all sense of what is going on in your life. Hence, a young man all of a sudden wakes up one day to find he has aged terribly and still lives with his parents. The user has destroyed his opportunity for a bright future since so much of it has slipped away. This message is most clearly demonstrated through his body. While a caterpillar emerges from a cocoon into a beautiful and desirable butterfly, the marijuana user transforms from a vital young man into an unattractive, undesirable fat, bald middle-aged man who still lives at home. In other words if you want an attractive body and if you want to do something with your life, do not use marijuana, as its usage will have a lasting impact on your life chances.

Not only is marijuana depicted as overtaking one’s life so a prosperous future is unattainable, but it also becomes responsible for annihilating the achievements and

ambitions one already has. This sentiment is clearly illustrated within the commercial *Fire*. Marijuana is never pictured, but its apparent effects are demonstrated through the actions of the young people in this advertisement. As two teenage boys and one girl burn personal possessions such as guitars, trophies, certificates and even a car, a narrator says “marijuana costs you more than you think.” Marijuana is now responsible for erasing the accomplishments of its user.

It is notable that this commercial depicts the burning of a guitar, given the place of the plant within the music industry. Yet, the act of burning prized possessions or accomplishments seems to indicate that you will lose the desire or the ability to do these things once you start smoking marijuana. Pot can cost you the opportunities to be successful because, as this commercial suggests, even if you have been traveling down a productive and successful road, marijuana will take you off of that track, preventing any chance of accomplishment in your life.

This point is clearly made in the advertisement *Shoulders*, whose setting is a house party. A teenager makes his way through the party until he reaches a longhaired male who offers him a joint. When presented with this decision the boy’s conscience (good and bad) arrive to help him come to a conclusion. At the end of the commercial the narrator states that “the only voice that matters is your own” at which point the young man refuses the joint. What is incredibly telling about this commercial is the different characters that appear on the shoulders of this young man as he is trying to reach his decision.

On the side of the devil appear a longhaired teenager, a pizza delivery guy, and a woman who looks like a slacker (read tattered clothes). All of them try to convince the

young man that marijuana is not that bad, they all turned out all right, an assertion their appearances belie. On the other shoulder appear an angel, an astronaut, a theatre professor, a basketball team, and his parents. The astronaut tells him this will destroy his future, the basketball players ask him to think about the team, the teacher tells him this won't get him into a good school, and finally his dad asks him if he enjoys making his mother cry.

The overt message is if you do not use pot there will be a window of opportunities for you (college, sports, high-profile careers), but while choosing to indulge will close these doors. Yet again, you are also a bad person if you decide to use marijuana. You will make your mother cry, you will be unproductive and work at a meaningless job, which reinforces the perception that not only are drugs bad, but so are the people who use them (Grinspoon, 1971). Athletes, college graduates, and astronauts are highly respectable, while people who deliver pizzas, and men and women with long hair and tattered clothes are not. Once again, the notion that just choosing to try marijuana will close the doors to a successful future and will send an individual down a road of mediocrity or underachievement.

This concept is taken further in the commercial *Pete's Couch*. In this ad three young men are pictured sitting on a couch. Two are marked as marijuana smokers, as they are slouched down on the couch and do not move or talk throughout the entire commercial. The third guy sits upright and does the narration. He states "I smoked weed and nobody died, I didn't get into a car accident, I didn't O.D. on heroin the next day, nothing happened. We sat on Pete's couch for 11 hours. You know what is going to happen on Pete's couch?, Nothing." This ad seems to suggest that marijuana use is

somewhat banal and the worst that will happen is you will sit around for a while, but as the three young men continue to sit on the couch the background changes to various potentially dangerous scenarios. As the narrator describes situations where your body may be at risk the audience sees people mountain biking, playing basketball, and ice-skating. The couch appears to be a place that will keep you safe, but at the end the narrator decides that he would rather take his chances out there (reality) and gets off the couch, where his friends remain.

This commercial downplays some of the more dramatic perceptions of marijuana use described earlier, yet it continues to perpetuate the belief of pot smokers falling into a permanent state of apathy. There is no room for moderation or occasional use in this description. You either choose to abstain from smoking marijuana or you make the decision to smoke and never recover from the laziness that comes with it. Yet, while the commercial seems to present an either or scenario, the narrator is able to do both. He smoked pot and was still able to make the decision to go out and participate fully in life, a more hopeful scenario which would suggest that choosing to smoke is not going to render one permanently unable to participate within society.

In reality the effects of smoking pot are temporary, but all of these commercials rely on depicting the consequences of pot use as permanent or addictive. The everlasting impact of smoking marijuana will destroy your future and chance to succeed, according to these ads. The *Cocoon* commercial tells the audience that smoking marijuana will put the user in such a haze that his/her life will pass them by, *Fire* leads one to believe that all of your accomplishments and dreams will be destroyed, *Shoulders* draws the conclusion that pot users will not be able to play sports, go to college, or have a successful career if

they indulge, and finally *Pete's Couch* acknowledges that while pot is somewhat banal, its permanent impact on motivation will cause the user to miss out on a lot of life's opportunities.

The focus on eternal lethargy helps to position pot users as immoral and unproductive. The previous set of commercials focused on the ways a person loses his or her ability to function both physically and mentally due to marijuana. All of the advertisements in this section have built on this idea and reinforce the long-term consequences for deciding to use pot. Together this set of commercials position marijuana use as detrimental not only to an individual's health, but also to their ability to have a prosperous future.

### **Pain**

The commercials to this point have depicted drug use as debilitating, and a barrier to future success. They invoke morality, or the responsibility an individual has to remain in control in order to ensure a prosperous future. A final theme in these ads focuses on pain, or the emotional or physical grief placed on friends and family due to an individual's drug use. Connecting the individual's decision to use drugs to inflicting pain on family and friends sends a powerful message that to abstain from smoking pot is an obligation not only to yourself, but also to your friends and family members.

For example, the commercial *Hurt* depicts both the physical and emotional pain of drug use. A little boy is first shown with a glowing burn mark on his neck. As the scenes progress the mark switches to different parts of his body. Finally, the glowing mark is reflected in his eye and transforms into the end of a joint which his older sister is smoking. As the little boy looks on the narrator says, "Smoking weed hurts more than

just you.” The continued appearance of burn marks on the little boy would suggest that she is inflicting physical pain in some way by smoking marijuana. The strong emphasis on the bodily pain inflicted on this young boy heightens the symbolic message that marijuana will damage your future as well as those who look up to you, because this may lead them to believe that using pot is ok.

While this commercial indicates both physical and emotional damage due to pot, the ad *Achievements* focuses on the emotional damage users inflict on friends and family. In this ad the camera cuts to a variety of smiling teenagers who discuss what they have done due to smoking pot: “I stole from my little sister,” “I got straight D’s,” “I left my ex-girlfriend 27 messages,” “I made my mother cry,” “I let people draw on me (after falling asleep at a party),” “I ditched my friends and let them find their own way home.” Except for the teenager who let his friends draw on him, all of these statements reflect emotional damage to friends or family members.

Most of the teenagers pictured have bright smiles and when they stand in front of the vibrant, colorful backgrounds it suggests that these are good kids. They appear to be teenagers whose only act of transgression is their pot smoking. This image is in contrast to the deviant looking pot smoker that is abundant in many of the previously mentioned commercials. The teenagers present here are innocent looking and the audience is led to believe it is the evil marijuana that is leading to their downfall. Otherwise, why would we expect any of these very wholesome looking teenagers to receive all D’s in school, make their mother cry, or ditch their friends?

Damaging friendships and losing a part of yourself are also themes that are prevalent in the final commercial *Dog*. In this commercial a young adolescent, white girl



opens and closes the refrigerator door while her dog looks on. The dog then starts talking: “Lindsay, I wish you wouldn’t smoke weed. You’re not the same when you smoke and I miss my friend. I’ll be outside.” As the dog jumps off the chair the phrase “how would you tell a friend” appears on the screen. The irony here is that this is an anti-drug ad, yet there is a talking dog, a scenario that might only seem plausible when under the influence of drugs. Nonetheless, the dog is supposed to symbolize a good friend and his commentary is indicative of the pain that is done to people who are friends with pot users. The problem is the user is not the same when she decides to smoke, and this identity is inherently negative. There is no discussion of possible benefits from a substance that alters ways of thinking. Instead through these advertisements mind-altering is only thought to cause negative outcomes such as bad grades, or the ditching of friends.

Even with such a focus on highly negative consequences for marijuana use, it is unclear how effective these ads are. The first study done to examine the effectiveness of these commercials found little evidence that these ads helped reduce adolescent drug use. In Carpenter and Pechmann’s (2011) study of adolescents boys and girls between the ages of 12-17, only eighth grade girls showed lower rates of marijuana use after high-exposure to these ads. This result is not surprising given literature that points to the ineffectiveness of media campaigns such as *Above the Influence* (Cho & Boster, 2008; Hornik, 2006; Wallace, 1981). Given its apparent ineffectiveness why would this billion-dollar campaign continue?

While it is too early to tell how effective the campaign will be in reducing marijuana use among the youth of America, what is clear is that these advertisements get

a very specific and very political message across to a widespread audience. Taking into account all of these different ads, one could conclude that smoking marijuana will result in the following: the loss of control of an individual's mind and body, the inability to succeed in life because of an eternal state of apathy, and this action will cause physical and emotional pain to the self and loved ones. Put simply, marijuana is bad and this plant is framed as damaging because of its ability to disrupt the health and morality of an individual, a perspective that is turned on its head in stoner films.

### **Everybody must get stoned: A reading of stoner films**

In the Above the Influence commercials the focus is solely on the perils of pot smoking. Whether it is the loss of control of body or mind, the loss of a bright future, or the hurt done to family and friends, the message was clear that smoking pot is a detrimental act. The portrayal of marijuana users in stoner films differs drastically. Even though both the anti-drug commercials and stoner films are both directed at teenagers, they both take drastically different approaches towards marijuana use. The anti-drug advertisements stigmatize marijuana use, while in stoner films marijuana usage is normalized and is seen as something that is pleasurable, not immoral (Boyd, 2010). In part this is due to the fact that these films are meant to be entertaining, and not public service announcements concerning the usage of pot.

All of the stoner films are comedies and use humor to make light of marijuana use. More specifically, as Susan Boyd (2010) argues instead of positioning marijuana and its users as roadblocks to the advancement of society, stoner films use parody to “reveal the absurdity of illegal-drug regulation and narratives that represent illegal-drug use as essentially damaging” (p. 179). In what follows I address the exaggeration of the effects

of marijuana use, the personality of its users, and the general purpose of marijuana in these films to demonstrate the resistive qualities of these movies.

These films are about the enjoyment of marijuana. The plot advances through either the search for marijuana, the usage of marijuana, or the selling of marijuana. In *Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke (1978)*, the two main characters spend the majority of the film smoking or trying to obtain pot. Their search for pot comes to symbolize a state of rebellion as the police (i.e.. the state) are in a constant search to bust marijuana users and smugglers. The police end up in a large-scale pursuit of Cheech and Chong when they inadvertently come into possession of a van entirely made up of marijuana. Cheech and Chong's new found van carries an estimated 9 billion dollars worth of marijuana according to the police chief. Obtaining marijuana either by the harmless hippies or the treacherous police officers is the main conflict of the film. In an ironic twist of fate the two characters escape incarceration when the police officers become intoxicated from the fumes when Cheech and Chong's van burns to the ground, symbolizing a win over the authority.

In a similar vein marijuana smoking in *Dazed and Confused (1993)* connotes a rebellion against authority, as well as a rite of passage for the students involved. Set in a high school, the overarching theme of this film is the coming of age for various groups of students. Middle school students are making the transition to high-school freshman, while High-School juniors are become seniors and thinking about what they are going to do with the rest of their lives. The central tension is between the youth who are trying to find their place in the world and the adults who want them to fit a certain mold. Pot smoking is a symbol of their rebellion against authority and is embodied in the character Randall.

Randall is a member of the football team and on the last day of school he is asked to sign a pledge for next season that he will refrain from doing drugs or drinking alcohol. While most of his teammates do not have a problem with this, Randall refuses to sign the papers. He sees this as adults attempting to tell him how to live his own life. He doesn't want to live up to somebody else's expectations of him. He wants to be his own person. His pot smoking throughout the film only furthers this sense of revolt. His rebellion comes to fruition at the end of the movie when he is caught smoking pot on the fifty-yard line of the high-school football field. When his coach confronts him, Randall tells him he may play football, but it is going to be on his own terms, he is not going to sign the pledge. Randall has refused to give in to authority and his usage of marijuana emphasizes his defiant personality.

Marijuana is a central component of the story in *Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke* and a symbolic substance in *Dazed and Confused*. In *Half Baked*, *Pineapple Express*, and *How High*, marijuana is the central point of the story and all the main characters are potheads. In *Half Baked*, when one of the main characters Kenny gets arrested for accidentally killing a diabetic horse, his friends decide to sell pot in order to raise enough money to bail him out. In *How-High* the main characters, Silas and Jamal, get into Harvard after they ace their entrance exam, which they took under the influence of a strain of marijuana that produced a ghost who gave them all the right answers. During the rest of the film marijuana plays a strong role in their everyday lives and in their challenging of authority, and it helps to resolve the main conflict of the film.

Finally, in *Pineapple Express* two stoners named Dale and Saul must solve a murder mystery. Dale Denton witnesses a murder (while intoxicated) as he waits to serve

a subpoena. In his rush to flee the scene, he drops a joint filled with a type of marijuana called pineapple express, a strain sold only by his dealer Saul. In his haste to get away Dale also manages to run into a row of parked cars, which alerts the murderers to his presence. When the murders find the stray joint they are able to trace Dale back to his dealer. As a result Dale and Saul encounter a series of crazy escapades as they try to solve the murder and flee from the murders that are now pursuing them.

In most of these films the usage of marijuana or the search for pot play intricate roles in the plot line. In *Dazed and Confused*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, and *The Big Lebowski*, there are characters who consistently use marijuana, but it is not the central component of the film. For the rest of these stoner movies, the effect of marijuana use that becomes the central storyline. For instance in *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*, the two main characters (Harold and Kumar) get stoned and decide they should head to White Castle in order to eat the perfect food while high. The adventures they encounter on their journey are the major plot lines of the film.

Pot-induced adventures furnish the plot line for *Smiley Face*. Jane an out of work actress is sitting at home smoking pot when she gets the munchies. When she looks in the fridge she finds a whole tray of cupcakes made by her roommate for an upcoming party. After devouring the whole tray, she realizes she has actually just eaten pot cupcakes. Jane's already intoxicated state combined with her ingestion of pot cupcakes sends her into what seems like a never ending high. The rest of the story deals with her attempts to make more cupcakes, pay back her dealer, and make it to an acting audition all while under the effects of a heavy dose of marijuana.

A variety of different characters inhabit these ten stoner films. *Dazed and Confused*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Half Baked*, *Pineapple Express*, and *Smiley Face* feature white characters while African Americans are shown as pot smokers in *Friday*, *How High*, and *Half Baked*. *Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke* features a Chinese- Canadian and a Mexican American and *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle* casts a Korean American and a South Asian American in the lead roles. What connects all of these characters is they are all male, except for Jane of *Smiley Face*.

The abundance of male characters is a common occurrence in stoner films. One of the central characterizations of these narratives is the use of two male buddies and their excessive marijuana use as a central component of the plot, while women are usually reduced to sexualized objects (Sears & Johnston, 2010). *Smiley Face* offers the only challenge to these masculine oriented films. However, I believe all the different social identities featured in these films are important to understand the larger social meaning present. In this section I discuss these corporeal identities and personas draw attention to the films usage of “deviant” bodies- female body, emasculated white male, a black masculinity entwined with hip-hop- in order to make light of the marijuana using body.

In *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the usage of marijuana is specifically communicated through the body of a character named Spicoli. Spicoli is depicted as smoking in only one scene, but his image as a pothead is communicated through his actions. He has shoulder length blonde hair and his eyes are always glazed over. He is also obsessed with surfing and his surfer talk makes him appear either to be on drugs or lacking in intelligence. Besides these visual and audio clues, which would be codes of marijuana use, he is constantly late to class (often because he is searching for food) and

even has a pizza delivered to his history class. The antics of Spicoli are behaviors that would not be expected of someone who was not under the influence.

The first time the audience sees Spicoli he is falling out of Volkswagen bus that has a cloud of smoke pouring out of it. This is the first direct visual clue that suggests possible marijuana smoking. The second is when he is sitting in his room talking to a friend on the phone. During this scene he has a bong in his lap, and asks his friend if this stuff causes brain damage, to which his friend responds not unless you smoke it everyday for like a month. Even without these direct clues it is clear that Spicoli is a pot smoker based on his apparent laziness, relaxed nature, and apparent disregard for authority.

In the *Big Lebowski*, the main character, the Dude, smokes marijuana at various times throughout the film, but as in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, his appearance and actions emphasize his connections to pot. From the onset of the movie the Dude is depicted as a low life with no ambitions. He goes to the grocery store in slippers and a bathrobe, he has long hair, he drinks straight from the milk carton, he does not have a job or significant other, and he has a crummy apartment and car. The Dude is clearly an unproductive member of society. He is a prime example of what the Above the Influence commercials depict as the consequences of marijuana use.

Spicoli and the Dude embody a type of masculinity that differs from dominant perceptions of how men should act. Their performances of masculinity are connected to characterizations of men involved in the counterculture of the 1960's, where such men, with their long hair, passivity, and stance against the Vietnam War, were seen as sissies, or threats to traditional masculinity (Grinspoon, 1971). . They embody a masculinity that is not thought to be able to thrive within American society. How could one expect Spicoli

to enter the corporate world when at the end of the film it is revealed that he saved Brooke Shields from drowning, only to blow all of his reward money to hire Van Halen to play at his birthday party? How are we to take the Dude seriously when despite his lack of a job, his crummy car and shoddy apartment, his largest concern is the performance of his bowling team?

The use of deviant bodies for satirical purposes is also present in *How High* and *Friday*. In both these films the main characters are black men who personify elements of hip-hop culture. Their use of slang, the wearing of chains, Timberlands, baggy pants, and flannels are signifiers that can be read as a form of resistance to mainstream white culture (Boyd, 1997). This performance of masculinity, however, is also often experienced by white society as threatening and dangerous (Leonard, 2006). This black male body becomes even more menacing when read within the historical construction of black male marijuana users, since black male pot smokers have been depicted as sexually deviant, mentally unstable, and violent (Gerber, 2004). Yet, this persona is used as a form of satire in *How High*.

In *How High*, hip-hop is embraced as a symbol of resistance against the rigid authority of whiteness and is entwined with marijuana smoking. The two main characters Silas and Jamal have a major conflict with the black dean of this college. The dean hates these two because of how they look and the threatening form of black masculinity they represent (hip-hop). In contrast Silas and Jamal see the dean as a black man who “acts” white. More accurately, the dean can be thought of as what has been historically known as the “race man”, a black male who does not pose a threat to the interests or values of white culture (Brown, 2005). In an effort to return him to his “roots”, Silas sends the dean



a batch of pot brownies. Upon eating them the dean begins to speak in a black vernacular and dance in a more “authentic” black style.

The anti-authority attribute of hip-hop and its connections to black masculinity and marijuana is a running theme throughout the film. At the end of the film, when the dean is still resistant to this form of black masculinity, the college president a white man who has appropriated this form of masculinity fires him. Thus this black aesthetic or way of living life is positioned as superior to the rigid straightness/whiteness embodied by the black dean. Marijuana is also a catalyst for this behavior, which can be seen through the black dean and various minor white characters who change their personality once they smoke pot. Black masculinity and marijuana then become symbols of resistance against the unfavorable status quo as opposed to impediments to keeping it intact.

*Smiley Face* features another deviant body often used to support keeping drugs illegal, the marijuana-smoking female. Women, especially, white, middle-class women have been used consistently in anti-marijuana propaganda films. *Smiley Face* is the only stoner film I was able to find that featured a woman as the lead character. Anti-marijuana propaganda films often portray white women as innocents who are easily seduced by men of color into smoking marijuana and as a result enter a life of sexual deviance and addiction (Boyd, 2009). The sexual promiscuity of the female drug user amplifies her meaning as a threatening body.

In those films white women who used pot grew increasingly promiscuous, increasing the possibility that men of color could seduce them. The pot using woman then ran the risk of having a mixed race child or a baby who was addicted both highly immoral acts (Campbell, 2000). In *Smiley Face*, Jane is not seduced by any men of color

and does not engage in any immoral sexual behavior. There is a white male character (Brevin) depicted as a nerd and unthreatening that has a romantic interest in Jane. Jane is not seduced by him, but instead uses him for a ride and monetary funds. Thus *Smiley Face* takes a detour from the traditional masculinity of traditional stoner films.

Yet any transformative qualities are somewhat erased with the conclusion of the film. While all the male protagonists in these stoner films are able to complete their journeys because of, or regardless of, their excessive pot smoking, Jane's highly inebriated state lands her in jail.

Out of all the films examined for this project, this female character is the only one to suffer serious consequences for her drug use. Even though Jane ends up going to jail, it is difficult to imagine she is a threat to anyone but herself. Furthermore, based on the film's use of comedy and exaggeration it also is hard to believe she would be a risk to herself if she hadn't mistakenly eaten a whole tray of pot cupcakes. All of these films exaggerate the use of marijuana's effects and the incompetence of its users in order to make marijuana seem non-threatening. Nonetheless, not all of these characters are the same. Historically and presently the meaning of marijuana using bodies differ depending on aspects of race and gender. These racialized and gendered aspects of pot smoking are exaggerated in order to help make these "dangerous" bodies seem less threatening.

According to the Above the Influence commercials, smoking marijuana has no positive effects. Instead users will lose a part of their identity, destroy their hopes and dreams, cause physical and emotional pain to their family and friends, and damage our society. In contrast the stoner characters in these films saw marijuana use as a way to achieve goals, and marijuana smoking as a way to improve one's self image.

**Pot cures all: A way to achieve one's goals**

In the films *How High* and *Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke*, pot helps the characters achieve their central goals or resolve the main conflict of the story. Cheech and Chong spend the entire film on a search for marijuana. In the climax of the film, Cheech and Chong are getting ready to go on stage for their performance in the battle of the bands, when their marijuana van accidentally catches on fire. The whiff of the marijuana smoke intoxicates the cops who have been pursuing them who immediately abandon their pursuit. When the smoke finds its way into the auditorium it also gets the audience high and seemingly makes them happy to hear whatever Cheech and Chong are playing, regardless of what they are playing. In the end marijuana helps the two characters avoid arrest as well as win the battle of the bands. A similar result happens in the film *How High*.

Marijuana is responsible for some of the most important achievements of the two major characters Silas and Jamal. Silas and Jamal would not have gotten into Harvard without Silas's special strain of marijuana that helped them on their entrance exam. During their first couple of weeks this special marijuana also helps them do well on their homework and exams. When this plant is stolen, Silas's and Jamal's grades suffer and they are kicked out of Harvard. Silas then uses his botanical skills to develop a truth serum whose secret ingredient is, of course, marijuana. He pumps this serum into a room full of Harvard faculty at an award presentation, which causes the ghost of Ben Franklin to appear and not only reveal that Franklin invented the first bong, but also recommend that Silas and Jamal be let back into Harvard. The truth serum also earns Silas an A in

botany class and a re-admittance into Harvard. In both *How High* and *Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke*, marijuana helps advance the future of the users as opposed to hindering it.

Despite marijuana helping some of the characters in these films, there are some depictions of the negative attributes of marijuana. In *Friday*, one of the main characters, Smokey, can not control himself from smoking and ends up smoking the very pot he is supposed to sell. This of course creates a large problem for him and his friend Craig, as they now must find a way to pay back Smokey's boss Worm. While this problem is eventually solved it is a crisis that could have been avoided if Smokey were not dependent on weed, a consequence that has been a consistent part of the argument for marijuana prohibition (Gerber, 2004), despite evidence that suggests pot is not inherently addictive (Earlywine, 2002).

Perhaps more than anything else, the movies make light of the distorted sense of reality that is equated with marijuana smoking. At one point in *Cheech and Chong Up in Smoke*, Cheech is so inebriated he asks if he is driving ok despite having just crashed his car into a parking sign. Craig from *Friday* starts to hear things that are not there and at one point sees the head of a drug dealer in a cabinet. The two protagonists from *Pineapple Express*, Dale and Saul, become so paranoid after smoking pot that they smash their cell phones because they believe the criminals that are chasing them will be able to triangulate their phones and find their location. In *Smiley Face*, Jane turns up in a meatpacking factory, where she gives what seems to be an impressive speech about labor unions. However, the camera then rewinds the scene and the audience sees what Jane really said is just a series of incoherent sentences.

These scenes are meant to be funny and the act of being high is depicted as something that is enjoyable, a conclusion that can be inferred from most of the characters constant search for marijuana. Even more specifically, in *Half Baked*, the representation of people smiling and floating in the air is used to illustrate the greatness of a particular strain of marijuana. When individuals smoke pot in these films the effects wear off at some point, and in most instances pot does not completely derail an individuals life opportunities. In only two circumstances does anyone have to deal with any major consequences for smoking pot. In *Half Baked*, Thurgood is a regular pot smoker but in order to keep his girlfriend, he must stop smoking pot, a decision that he makes peace with because as he says at the end of the film, the only thing he likes more than pot is having sex. Thurgood's statement is thus, linked to the masculine and heterosexual norms of these films.

In *Smiley Face*, Jane suffers serious repercussions for her marijuana use. Jane unwittingly becomes incredibly stoned and at one point, forced to talk to a police officer she panics and runs away to a safe place, which in this case is the house of a former professor. Through a case of mistaken identities, she is given an original copy of the Communist Manifesto to deliver to his office.

Given her high level of intoxication Jane has a hard time processing things, and consequently ends up destroying the Communist Manifesto, which results in her arrest for grand larceny. So while she is not arrested for marijuana, it is the effects of using this substance that leads to her arrest. This outcome seems to punish the female pot user and can not be separated from the fact that she is the only leading female and the only lead character to go to jail.

This is a rare occurrence though and in fact the usage of this intoxicant more often results in a moment of self-actualization, or it helps the character become a better person. In *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*, the character Harold is very smart but he is also very shy and passive. Harold is an embodiment of stereotypical Asian masculinity (Boyd, 2008). Yet, after smoking and getting in a wide variety of altercations he is finally able to talk to the girl he likes. The journey he goes on while under the influence is a way for him to believe in himself, or more simply assert his masculinity and heterosexuality in accordance to dominant societal norms.

Similarly, in *Pineapple Express*, after a lot of pot smoking and various encounters with the law, the main characters realize they are not fully functional and do not always make the best decisions while under the influence. While it is unclear if Saul and Dave will continue to use pot after the conclusion of the film, it is apparent that they are trying to move forward in their lives by taking steps to get new jobs. Saul wants to be a city planner, while Dale would like to pursue a career in radio. It is unclear whether these new careers will happen, but it is apparent that they came to the realization that they needed to move forward in life through their self introspection via marijuana.

Not only does pot help some of the characters have a moment of self actualization but some of the characters are quite different from the stereotype of the apathetic and seemingly unintelligent marijuana smoker. In *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle*, Harold holds a job at a top accounting firm and his best friend Kumar is a top medical school candidate. In *Dazed and Confused*, Randall is a pot smoker, but he is also highly socially conscious and very adamant about trying to understand his social world seemingly the opposite of a slacker. Silas in *How High* is a highly talented botanist.

Before he enters Harvard he grows various strains of medical marijuana and sells them to customers for a wide variety of ailments.

### **Conclusion:**

The Above the Influence advertisements construct pot smokers as immoral characters who hurt their friends, families, and themselves because of their decision to smoke. This is not the case in the stoner films, in fact most of the time the users in the film are trying to help their friends in some shape or form. It is important to note that the cooperation of friends is needed in order to advance the story, however, even while some films have brief altercations between friends (see *Friday*, *Harold and Kumar and Pineapple Express*) they always resolve things in the end.

In an effort to create a drug free nation the state has adopted policies that outlaw what they consider dangerous substances such as marijuana. The Above the Influence advertisements also rely on another form of power: self-surveillance, a form of power where the individual feels like they are constantly under the watchful eye of authority and thus survey their own behaviors to become compliant with aspects of normality (Markula & Pringle, 2006). The Above the Influence commercials tell individuals that marijuana-using bodies are abnormal, or deviant. The constant viewing of these ads becomes an extension of authority and pushes individuals to adhere to the norms presented. A system

designed to create self-responsible citizens and a manner to ensure a healthier population through individuals policing their own behavior (Markula & Pringle, 2006).

The emphasis on prevention and the bleak picture these ads paint for those who use marijuana make it appear to be a very serious issue. Yet, when watching popular stoner films it becomes hard to believe that pot smoking has the dire consequences that the aforementioned commercials would lead you to believe. These movies depict marijuana users in the same way as some of the commercials- pot smokers are shown as lazy, forgetful, and oblivious. These are not characteristics for concern though; instead they are attributes that are supposed to make the audience laugh. These are bodies that are harmless, not coporealities that we are to believe will cause a detriment to society.

In effect, stoner films normalize marijuana. These films then use comedy in order to parody current positions about marijuana. Using bodies that are often considered deviant such as the lazy hippie, the black male engrossed in hip-hop culture, and the pot-smoking woman and having them engage in over the top behavior, such as giving incoherent speeches, about labor rights at a meat packing factory help position these characters as non-threatening. The stoner who is easily made fun of makes it hard to believe that the current climate about marijuana is as dangerous as it seems.



CHAPTER THREE: THE APATHETIC STONER: A GENEALOGICAL  
EXAMINATION OF  
MARIJUANA USE WITHIN AMERICAN CULTURE

In the United States marijuana is illegal at the federal level in all fifty states. Given the illegality of the substance, the implied danger of the plant, must be seen as the dominant perspective regarding marijuana in this country. Derrida (1993) argues the reason for drug prohibition is the belief that the drug user will cut him or herself off from the world and escape into “a world of simulacrum and fiction” (p. 7). This fear of the drug user slipping into a state outside of reality was demonstrated in the analysis of the *Above the Influence* commercials in the previous chapter. Similarly according to the White House’s, Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), marijuana changes the way the brain works, and is associated with addiction, cognitive impairment, and is especially unsafe for children (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/marijuana>). This chapter argues that these perspectives regarding marijuana are disconnected from historical and political forces that have helped shape this particular perspective. Thus, this chapter asks how did the marijuana user become to be understood as apathetic and a detriment to society?

In order to answer this question this chapter constructs a genealogy of the marijuana user. A genealogy “investigates taken for granted scientific truths and demonstrates how they are historical constructs that have their roots in specific social and political agendas” (Saukko, 2003, p. 115). This chapter constructs a genealogy of the apathetic stoner to make evident how this particular identity has been constituted at

different points in time throughout history. Genealogy, however, is not a search for origin, but instead it is a mapping of discontinuities (Foucault, 1984). There has not been a progressive linear understanding of marijuana, but instead marijuana and its users have taken on a number of different and contradictory meanings throughout history. There was not one event that led to an understanding of the marijuana user as deviant, rather a variety of historical forces have helped shape knowledge about marijuana users.

A genealogy then becomes a form of analysis by mapping the multi-directional and multi-dimensional lines that will create an understanding of how an object such as the marijuana user has come to exist (Grossberg, 1992). In this chapter I draw these various lines in order to illustrate how we have come to understand that marijuana user as deviant. In the process I will illustrate how the marijuana using body has been constructed in a variety of ways and how lines of power have been marked on this body, by the production of discourses that are perpetuated as the truth about marijuana (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In short this chapter will detail how political and social struggles over marijuana have been marked on the body.

This approach to understanding how we have come to conceptualize the marijuana user as apathetic and deviant is essential in order to make social change. Foucault (1972) argues making social change is not a matter of changing “people’s consciousness-or what’s in their heads-but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (p. 133). This chapter takes the first step in this process by demonstrating that our accepted truth about marijuana (it is a detrimental substance) is not a constant, but a construction. In this chapter I detail the ruptures from the understanding of the marijuana user as apathetic and detriment to society. I illustrate how

the cannabis plant has been used for industrial purposes, medicine, constructed as an evil substance of minorities, a stepping-stone to harder drugs, a symbol of the counter-culture, a medicine, an immoral substance, and a medicine yet again.

### **Genealogical analysis**

The purpose of genealogy is to “provide a counter-memory that will help subjects recreate the historical and practical conditions of their present existence” (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 203). In the case of marijuana this means thinking differently about the dominant conception of the marijuana user as apathetic by examining the historical and social forces that have helped constitute this particular meaning. This is not a form of analysis that is searching for the origins of meanings, or one essential truth. Instead genealogy examines an idea such as the apathetic marijuana user have emerged from very specific circumstances to demonstrate that the meaning is not innate, which thus provides a space for new forms of comprehension (Saukko, 2003). In the context of this project detaching marijuana from hegemonic constructions of the plant is then a necessary step for imagining new ways to think about this substance and the people who use it.

The use of genealogy is helpful for more than just demonstrating how the meaning of objects has been socially constructed though. A genealogical analysis looks to see how people have become subjects through discursive formations of knowledge (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In other words how do lines of power form subjects through the discursive process. Foucault makes this connection through the relationship of knowledge and power. For Foucault power is “created, maintained and exerted by the production and circulation of discourse” (Andrews, 1993, p. 157). The discourse about an

object such as marijuana becomes to be accepted as a form of truth through the production and circulation of statements.

Power is thus, productive in the sense that it produces subjects, knowledge, and discourse (Foucault, 1972). When Foucault makes the turn to genealogy the body becomes a central point of analysis concerning the productive effects of these power relations. Through the genealogical process Foucault is interested in the relationship between power, knowledge and the human body, specifically in the ways the body is controlled through discourse (Andrews, 1993). Genealogy traces the manifestation of power within the body through the concepts of descent and emergence.

The concept of descent deals with the ways the body has been situated in various discourses across history. In this manner the tracing of the body through various discourses is meant to illustrate the notion that how we have come to understand an object of knowledge such as the marijuana user, is not the result of one incident, but from many different discontinuities and continuities (Foucault, 1984). The task of emergence is to demonstrate how aspects of power have functioned over time. Like the idea of descent an emergent analysis is not meant to trace power back to a single group or entity, but instead is linked to the multitude of forces and processes that lead to subjectivity (Tamboukou, 1999).

In this chapter I demonstrate how both prohibition discourse and the implementation of policy regarding marijuana are entwined with fears of what the marijuana using body will do, as a result of using this substance. Additionally I demonstrate that these discourses can not be separated from concerns regarding race, gender, and sexuality. It is the dismissal of origins and focus on the relationship between

power, knowledge and the human body that make this genealogy of the marijuana user different from some of the existing histories concerning marijuana use (see: Abel, 1980; Booth, 2003; Goldman, 1979; Herer, 2007; Sloman, 1979). This chapter is somewhat similar to Jeffrey London's (2009) book *How the use of marijuana was criminalized and medicalized 1906-2004: A Foucaultian history of legislation in America*. London (2009) draws on medicalization theory as well as Foucauldian principles to understand how the marijuana user has been labeled deviant during the last 100 years.

London (2009) also focuses on aspects of legislation and uses a genealogical approach only to understand the modern medical marijuana movement. I use genealogy to understand how the marijuana using body has been criminalized and include discourses of medical marijuana within this discussion. In the process I try to follow the concepts of descent and emergence. Showing how the marijuana using body has been situated within a wide variety of discourses historically and demonstrating the shifting workings of power that have been mapped onto the pot smoking body.

### **Marijuana and industry**

Marijuana often is considered a marker of the counter-culture, but it has actually been in existence since early civilization. It is estimated that it was first cultivated in China as early as 4000 B.C. (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997). Early usage of marijuana was often for medicinal and practical purposes. Chinese Emperor Shen Nung is credited with the discovery of marijuana's therapeutic possibilities for various ailments in 2700 B.C. (Aldrichm, 1997). Earlier civilizations used all parts of the plant in order to fulfill their daily needs.

In both China and India the stalks of the cannabis plant were used to strike the beds of the sick in order to drive out disease and demons (Aldrichm, 1997). China and India were not the only early civilizations to use cannabis for medical purposes. Cannabis has also been documented as a medicine in Africa, the Ancient Middle East, Central Asia and Europe during the Middle Ages (see Abel, 1980; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997; Roffman, 1982). Despite the somewhat widespread use of marijuana for medicinal use the functionality of the plant for industrial needs would be a critical part of marijuana's role in early America.

Hemp, the non-intoxicating part of the cannabis plant, can be used to make paper, oil for paints, and rope, and its seeds can be eaten (Deitch, 2003). For some of these more practical reasons marijuana made its way to the United States. The cannabis plant was introduced to the United States by British, Spanish, and Portuguese colonizers (Rubin, 1975). The British relied on the cultivation of hemp for military needs. The need was so great that in 1611 Virginia colonists were each required by King James I to grow 100 plants for export (Deitch, 2003). The cannabis plant could thus be considered a valuable commodity for industrial use. One of the reasons cannabis continued to be a cash crop in the United States until the Civil War, is because of the use of hemp for ship sails, rope, and fabric for covered wagons (Grinspoon, 1971).

### **Medical marijuana part one**

After the Civil War the production of hemp in the US began to decline because of competition with higher quality Russian hemp, a loss of free labor due to the freeing of slaves, as well as the Union's embargoes on southern ports (Grinspoon, 1971). Even though marijuana had been used medicinally in other parts of the world for centuries, it

was at this time that it became popular as a medicine in the United States. Between 1840-1900 more than 100 papers were published in Western medical journals documenting the effectiveness of marijuana for pain relief for headaches, migraines, menopause and as a sedative for insomnia, hay fever, and rabies among others (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997). The most common way to take medicinal cannabis was in liquid form.

Medical marijuana in the early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was most commonly used as an extract in tonics that could be bought at a drug store, but it was smoked as well, just at a lesser extent (Aldrich, 1997). When cannabis was used as an extract in a tonic or elixir it was often unpredictable. For one there was often a variation in potency from tonic to tonic and since it had to be taken orally there was often a delay in how long it would take for the medicine to take effect (Roffman, 1982). These complications made it difficult for marijuana to remain a popular medicine as the medical field begins to become professionalized. Grinspoon & Bakalar (1997) argue that the medical use of cannabis was already in decline by 1890 in part due to the invention of the hypodermic syringe. The syringe was an instrument that allowed for medicines to instantaneously enter the bloodstream. Cannabis, however, is not soluble in water, which made it difficult to inject with a needle.

In nineteenth century America outside of the very rich, women healers were doing most medical work (Ehrenreich & English, 1978). Women healers also had a specific way of sharing and administering their therapeutic practices. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English (1978) argue women healers predominantly used herbal remedies and gained knowledge of what was most effective by sharing their findings with other women. Through this process a network of medicinal knowledge was formed through the

sharing and passing down of healing information. However, this effective forum of medical data comes into question as America moves into more modern forms of medicine.

The professionalization of medicine in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century put men and science at the forefront. In the process women and their practices (such as botanical healing) are discredited (Chapkis & Webb, 2008). A move towards science meant a more systematized way of conducting healing. This shift made it difficult to continue to use herbal remedies since it is difficult to control the dosage of a plant. Additionally, it detached personal relationships from the healing process and directed it to a for profit business, which at this time puts it in the hands of men, since they were the ones who were allowed to make a profit in the market (Ehrenreich & English, 1978). In order to convince people that medicine was a commodity that should be paid for, the types of medicine prescribed had to change.

To give citizens incentive to buy medicine it had to take effect immediately and had to be quantifiable in order to convince people to pay different amounts for a range of healing (Ehrenreich & English, 1978). These rigid standards make it difficult for plant-based forms of medicine, which can not as easily fit these types of principles. Thus, the combination of the hypodermic syringe and the changing medical field worked together to send the use of medical marijuana into a decline. Marijuana was still the same plant, however, what changed was how knowledge was constructed about effective forms of medicine. The change in what is considered efficient healing practices does not allow marijuana to be understood in the same way.



Even with changes to who administered medicine and what counted as a useful form of medication, marijuana was still used medicinally. Changing conceptions about drug addicts also made the use of medical marijuana a difficult process. Early understandings of drug addicts were connected to medical usage, not recreational indulgences. The image of the drug addict was constructed through images of white middle-class and rural females, whose bodies were seen as accidental addicts (mostly to morphine) and were perceived by both the public and doctors as innocent victims (Chapkis & Webb, 2008). The people who became addicts may not have been seen as deviant, however, accidental addiction was becoming a growing concern.

Entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is estimated that one million Americans were addicted to opium and morphine in part because the drug was inexpensive, readily available and prescribed regularly (Abel, 1980). Accidental addicts may have been characterized as innocent, but the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act suggested otherwise.

The 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act required certain drugs to be sold only through prescription, required medicines to have labels that detailed the amount of cocaine and morphine within a substance if it was shipped across state lines, and also established the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), granting it the authority to approve food and drugs (Mead, 2004). At first glance this seems like a piece of legislation aimed to improve the health of the nation, but it is based on the fear that Americans were becoming increasingly addicted to opiates (Abel, 1980). Thus, this legislation also suggests a need to control the use of opiates by Americans, because of the perceived negative consequences. Even though these accidental addicts were seen as innocent victims the

fact that the government passed legislation in effort to prevent this behavior suggested it was a larger issue.

Foucault (1972) argues a growing population in Western Europe and a need to preserve and upkeep a healthy labor force led to government involvement in health practices during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The policing of the bodies of society are the focal point of this intervention. Strong and healthy bodies are more valuable because they have better life expectancy, can be trained, and can be productive members of the labor force (Foucault, 1972). Therefore, greater steps were made in order to ensure a healthier population. By the early twentieth century 3-5 percent of the American population were dependent on the morphine found in patent medicines and the labeling of medicines were thought to be one way to help citizens be more aware of what they were ingesting, and also circumvent accidental addiction (Chapkis & Webb, 2008). Therefore the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act could be thought of as a step in the right direction in order to ensure a healthier population.

### **Minority marijuana users and the poisoning of America**

The first shift in how discourses about marijuana use were constructed can not be separated from issues of race and masculinity. Additionally labor issues in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century helped shift concerns about drug use from accidental addicts to people of color who used this substance. One of the first groups to be targeted by discussions of morality, were Chinese immigrants in the western part of the country.

Residents of western states, such as California and Nevada, blamed Chinese immigrants for spreading opium into mainstream America, and in particular, the complaints were from the white working class (Mead, 2004). The Chinese did bring

opium to the United States and did set up opium dens, but this was not the only source of resentment to this group. In California, industrial labor and mining began to be taken over by Chinese immigrants. This shift is due to the willingness of these immigrants to work for very low wages, something their white counter-parts would not do (Helmer, 1975). Racial tension already existed between these two groups and the division of labor only added to it. The rise of an economic depression and the competition for jobs helped to start the campaign against the Chinese and opium (Helmer, 1975). Drawing a connection between drug use and minorities not only constructs the drug using body as deviant, but also positions recreational drug use as a behavior the “other” engages in.

In 1914 the Harrison Narcotic Act was passed. This act did not outlaw the use of narcotics, but it did require doctors and pharmacists to record their drug transactions (opium, cocaine) and pay a tax on them (London, 2009). Marijuana was not included under this act, but sets the stage for the campaign against pot, led primarily by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. By taxing the distribution of drugs the government was trying to indirectly regulate the possession and sale of drugs in the United States (London, 2008). Mapping illicit drug use and immoral behavior onto the bodies of minorities increased after the passage of the Harrison Narcotic Act, particularly due to the efforts of Harry Anslinger.

Harry Anslinger got his start combating recreational drugs as the Assistant Commissioner of Prohibition in 1929. The next year he became the head of the newly formed Federal Bureau of Narcotics (Sloman, 1979). Anslinger did not immediately wage war on marijuana once in office. Rather his campaign to demonize marijuana started when outside forces began to pressure the newly formed commission to take

action against the plant (Sloman, 1979). Citizens from the southwest region of the United States began to advocate that, the bureau take action against marijuana smoking Mexicans.

During the 1920s in southwest America many Mexican laborers would cross the border to perform seasonal farm work. These same farmers also had a reputation for smoking marijuana (Helmer, 1975). Marijuana use was not immediately cited as a contribution to the negative perception of these laborers. In the southwestern United States Mexican laborers were perceived by whites as criminals, knife wielding, and disorderly drunks, even without any connection to pot usage (Himmelstein, 1983). It was not until the Great Depression that pot became part of the campaign against Mexicans.

The labor shortage during this period led to the characterization of Mexican laborers as bodies that were taking jobs away from more deserving Americans (Helmer, 1975). The perceived threat of Mexican laborers is very similar to the hostility faced by Chinese immigrants in the west mentioned previously. Before this labor crisis Mexicans were not seen in the most positive light, but it appears that they were at least tolerated (Sloman, 1979). The onset of the depression and shortage of jobs became an easy way to vilify them. The stereotype of the violent pot smoking Mexican then became one more reason why Mexicans and their evil plant should not be tolerated (Helmer, 1975). In this case marijuana was vilified in order to perpetuate and create fear about an already disliked minority group.

This racialized rhetoric was not just reserved for Mexicans, or Chinese; black men were also often situated in this sort of discourse. A prevalent argument for prohibition perpetuated the notion that marijuana made black and Mexican men hypersexual (Gerber,

2004), a threat that appeared even more heinous when understood in relation to white women. Anti-marijuana propaganda characterized white women as innocent individuals who were susceptible to “marijuana pushers and the pleasurable experiences of smoking pot” (Boyd, 2009, p. 44). In most instances the pleasures of marijuana smoking for women are connected to sexual promiscuity. Women who were seduced into smoking marijuana were thought to head down a road of sexual immortality, where white women would have sex with men of color, and have babies out of wedlock (Boyd, 2009). All of this racialized rhetoric was constructed on the body of minorities and contributes to the demonization of marijuana.

For instance, a report from the Missionary Educator Movement in California blames the lack of morality of Mexicans on marijuana use

The use of marihuana is not uncommon in the colonies of the lower class of Mexican immigrants. This is a native drug made from what is sometimes called the ‘crazy weed.’ The effects are high exhilaration and intoxication, followed by extreme depression and broken nerves. [Police] officers and Mexicans both ascribe many of the moral irregularities of Mexicans to the effects of marijuana (Abel, 1980, p. 211).

The characterization of the immoral behavior of Mexicans under the influence of marijuana is also circulated via law enforcement. According to Harry Anslinger law enforcement in the south west states reported to him that Mexicans “got loaded on the stuff and caused a lot of trouble, stabbing, assaults, and so on” (Sloman, 1979, pp. 43-44). These descriptions and others like it situate the Mexican marijuana using body as one to be feared as it is likely to engage in violence and immoral behavior due to their marijuana smoking.

These racialized discourses were similar to the yellow journalism of William Randolph Hearst whose newspapers would produce articles that claimed black men were

raping white women under the influence of marijuana (Herer, 2007). Similar to Mexicans these types of discourses created a scenario where the African American marijuana user should be feared because of the possibility of that body committing a serious transgression such as sexual assault. These discourses of violent Mexicans or hypersexual black men under the influence of marijuana produce knowledge about the marijuana user and turn them into subjects (Foucault, 1972). Through the construction of such discourses an understanding about what it means to smoke marijuana is created. In this case marijuana was synonymous with violence and a deviant form of sexuality within these already marginalized bodies. The fact that this discourse exists does not guarantee that it is accepted as truth, but exists within what Foucault (1972) calls the political economy of truth.

The political economy of truth is categorized by five traits: “the form of scientific discourse and the institutions that produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement; it is the object under diverse forms of immense diffusion and consumption; it is produced and transmitted under the control of a few great political and economic apparatuses; and it is the issue of whole political debate and social confrontation” (Foucault, 1972, p. 131). These are the traits that help perpetuate what is considered truth. In other words these are mechanisms that help distinguish what counts as true and false statements within society (Foucault, 1972). All of these traits play a role in establishing the deviance of the marijuana-smoking minority, as the following pages demonstrate.

The Federal Bureau of Narcotics is a political institution that plays a large role in the production and circulation of this information. At first the pressure to regulate

marijuana comes not from Anslinger, but from citizens in the southwest and the Gulf Coast. The reason for this is most US citizens were unaware of marijuana except for the people in these areas. Citizens in the southwest were aware of marijuana because of its usage by Mexican laborers and Americans in the gulf coast were aware of the plant due to its usage by black jazz musicians (Booth, 2003). In those areas of the United States pot was a topic of political debate. The unrest that minority marijuana use brought in this area, led to citizens of these parts of the country, asking the Federal Bureau of Narcotics to step in (Booth, 2003). However, Anslinger still believes the control of marijuana was a state issue, not a federal one. Therefore, the Bureau does not intervene. The Federal Bureau, however, would not remain out of this debate for long.

During, the depression the Bureau's budget was cut and as the head of the department Anslinger needed a way to free up resources. Therefore, Anslinger began to emphasize the deviance of marijuana and its users in order to secure the passing of the Uniform State Act (Sloman, 1979). The Uniform State Narcotic Act was passed in 1934 and essentially made the laws concerning the usage and selling of drugs the same across the states. Not all states were aware of what marijuana was and it was Anslinger's anti-marijuana campaign that helped convince states to sign onto this legislation (Sloman, 1979). The passage of this act secured two important details. The Uniform State Act gave all states permission to make drug arrests and opened the door for federal regulation of marijuana (Booth, 2003). Federal regulation of marijuana would give the Bureau something to police and to facilitate the need for regulation, Anslinger relied heavily on racialized narratives.

Anslinger began to keep files such as “Marijuana and jazz”, and even ordered surveillance and file keeping on musicians such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Cab Calloway (Herer, 2007). In order to spread these fear and racial based narratives Anslinger relied on the popular media. Yellow journalism in the southwest and gulf coast had already begun to create sensationalized stories about marijuana and its users, but Anslinger also began to write newspaper articles that discussed the relationship between minorities, crime, violence and pot. These papers would then be issued to the press (Armstrong, D., & Paranscandola, J., 1972). Sensationalized stories that emphasized the danger of marijuana and its users helped to create a sense of fear about this unknown plant. In articles such as “Marihuana: Assassin of Youth”; “Marihuana as a Developer of Criminals”; “Exposing the Marihuana Drug Evil in Swing Bands”, Anslinger argued that marijuana users would become suicidal and insane, which would create a threat to the stability of the nation (Gerber, 2004, p. 5).

These types of stories also made it into cinema. Anslinger helped create films such as *Reefer Madness*, *Devil's Harvest*, and *Marijuana: Weed with Roots in Hell*. These movies were supposed to represent “case studies” from actual police files and emphasized how marijuana seduced white youth into a downward spiral of addiction, criminal activity and insanity (Boyd, 2008). The spreading of these stories via film and newspapers allowed for a more widespread diffusion and consumption of the negative perception of marijuana. Additionally, since the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and the newspaper industry were the only ones disseminating these ideas, the ability to shape this discourse was in the hands of only a few. Furthermore, since Anslinger had close connections to William Randolph Hearst a leading publisher of newspapers the two



people shaping these marijuana narratives were closely related (London, 2009). The ability to spread these ideas to the larger population helped bring this issue to the public's attention.

The targeting of minorities and foreigners is representative of the racism of the time period, but is also emblematic of the fear of the dismantling of a white Christian oriented society (Boyd, 2008). Connecting marijuana to larger political and social concerns of the nation at the time helped to perpetuate it as a serious social problem. For example, African American men already dealt with the stereotype of being hypersexual, but adding marijuana to the mix makes them appear even more sexually promiscuous (Gerber, 2004). The problem is not so much that these men were thought to be hypersexual the greater concern arises about who these men may engage in sexual relations with.

Many of the early stories produced by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics dealt with interracial rape and sexual encounters in general between black men and white women (Booth, 2003). Framing the narrative in this manner portrayed white women as the victim of black male sexuality. Which generated fears about the destruction of a homogenous nation and a threat to the purity of white female womanhood. White women and men of color were both constructed to be susceptible to sexual depravity when under the influence of marijuana. White women were thought to be innocent and naive, which are also traits that would make them more likely to try marijuana, resulting in an abandonment of sexual morality (Campbell, 2000). The loss of sexual morality by white women had the potential to create dire circumstances for the nation.

A white woman who engaged in sexual relations with a minority threatened to corrupt the white race through the possibility that she would give birth to a mixed raced infant who might then be a drug addicted baby, damaging the advancement of society. This discourse makes white women who smoke marijuana deviant subjects as well, because of their responsibilities as reproducers, any woman who smoke marijuana become a possible corruptor of the homogeneity and productivity of the nation (Campbell, 2000). Society is now at risk not only because of violent and hypersexual brown bodies, but the dangerous marijuana plant may also now damage the future population of America.

### **The politics of truth**

Foucault (1972) argues “Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements” (p. 133). It is this system of procedures that helps perpetuate the fear of the brown skinned marijuana user. Some of the earliest campaigns against marijuana come from citizens who feel their jobs are under threat from minorities who happen to smoke marijuana (Helmer, 1975). This helps to make marijuana both a political and economic concern. Marijuana is further drawn into a political and economic discussion when the Federal Bureau of Narcotics needs to find a way to generate funding and make their department seem viable (Booth, 2003). Both of these factors help to make marijuana use an economic and political concern.

At this point, the stories released about this plant were really coming from only two sources: Anslinger and the popular press. The connection between Anslinger and press then allows him to spread the narrative to a broad audience. The narratives created

by Anslinger and yellow journalism all touch on political and social concerns about race and the nation to help situate marijuana as a problem that needs to be solved. The combination of these factors situated the discourse about marijuana as a detriment to society as an accepted form of truth. What is also important is most of these stories are not based on what is known about cannabis, but instead are constructed through exaggerations (Grinspoon, 1971). The connection between Anslinger, truth construction and power can be clearly seen. Truth can not be separated from its system of production and Anslinger had direct access to institutions that were producing stories about marijuana use (Tamboukou, 1999). The truth that was generated from a variety of outlets and institutions about marijuana is meant to help control a particular body, as opposed to investigating the possible positives and negatives of the use of this plant.

The seeming necessity to control these pot smoking coporealities helped contextualizes the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act. The tax act was a creation of Harry Anslinger. The new tax required users of hemp to pay a tax of one dollar an ounce for specified medical or industrial use, and a fee of one hundred dollars an ounce for unnamed uses (Chapkis & Webb, 2008). This tax did not make marijuana distribution illegal, but it did make the process of obtaining it an expensive one. To secure passage of this act the Treasury Department alongside Anslinger had to make a convincing case to Congress that marijuana should be illegal. However, they used no scientific data, but presented as evidence the exaggerated stories of marijuana use created by Anslinger and the press (Abel, 1980). The presentation of this evidence and the passing of the tax begin to shift understandings of the marijuana user as a menace to society. As London (2009) argues even though this act did not make it illegal to buy or sell pot, it can be thought of

as a way to regulate behavior, since it made the buying, selling and cultivating of the plant difficult due to the high economic cost.

Perhaps, what becomes most important is how as time moves on this particular narrative about the marijuana user remains an accepted truth, despite challenges to the contrary. In 1939 shortly, after the passage of the Tax Act, NY mayor Fiorello La Guardia put together a research panel of New York medical practitioners that included physicians, pharmacologists, chemists, and public health officials (Gerber, 2004). The purpose of this study was to investigate the physical and mental effects of marijuana in New York City, particularly in relation to what Anslinger had purported the drug to do.

Five years later, the panel reported that marijuana had negligible physiological effects, did not cause the user to engage in physical, mental or moral deterioration and did not cause sexual overstimulation (Gerber, 2004). This report complicated understandings of marijuana at this point, but it was not used as a point of discussion, and was categorically dismissed by Anslinger, who characterized the report as pseudoscience (Booth, 2003), and used his personal connections to spread his version of the truth. The Federal Bureau of Narcotics publicly denounced this report (Grinspoon, 1971), and given the Bureau's position as a part of government gave a sense of legitimacy to this claim. The findings of La Guardia were confirmed by smaller studies done by the US public health service and US Army (Booth, 2003). But, it is the Bureau's greater access to the system of message production allowed for a more widespread diffusion of their narrative, and their message became the hegemonic one.

The continued demonization of marijuana and its users thus has little to do with the actual effects of the plant and everything to do with access to different institutions of

power. Since Anslinger worked for the government and had connections to the right wing press he had the ability to control how knowledge about marijuana was produced, regulated and distributed (Foucault, 1972). Moving into the 1950's and 1960's knowledge about marijuana begins to shift again, and historical and political forces play central roles in the accepted discourse concerning marijuana and its users.

In the time leading up to the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, marijuana was seen as a threat to society. It was believed to be a plant that induced violence and sexual deviance among its minority users. Marijuana was also thought of as a substance that was threatening the morality of the white youth of America. Marijuana was considered a plant that threatened the nation. Entering the 1940's and 1950's the construction of marijuana as a substance threatening the lively hood of the nation would not continue. To do so would suggest that the Bureau was not doing its job. Thus, this marks another rupture in discourses concerning what it means to be a marijuana user.

### **Marijuana and the stepping stone hypothesis**

Anti Communist sentiments in Cold War America helped shift understandings of marijuana and marijuana use. Harry Anslinger believed that opiates such as heroin were a tool implemented by the Chinese in order to take over America by making all of their citizens into passive people (Sloman, 1979). The FBN then at this time used marijuana to connect passiveness, heroin, and the threat of communism together. Instead of constructing the pot user as violent, the narrative shifted to construct pot smokers as passive citizens, who used marijuana as a stepping-stone to heroin (Booth, 2003). This connection brought new life into the marijuana debate. By the mid 1940's marijuana arrests were hovering between 1,000-1,500 a year, and to continue to present marijuana,

as an epidemic would suggest the Bureau was not doing its job (Sloman, 1979). The stepping stone theory helped to perpetuate that there was a new problem that had to be solved concerning marijuana use, without making it seem like the Bureau had not been doing its job.

Marijuana was now constructed as a stepping-stone to harder drug use. The theory was that after prolonged use of the plant people would become addicted. However, the relative weakness of pot would compel them to move to a harder substance, such as heroin (Sloman, 1979). Marijuana almost then becomes more dangerous because of its potential to lead marijuana smokers down an even more self-destructive path of heroin use. Jerome Himmelstein (1983) speculates this shift in construction of pot helps to perpetuate the plant as a dangerous substance in light of challenges to the contrary, such as the La Guardia report. The connection between marijuana and heroin was not just the result of the brainstorming of Bureau employee's such as Harry Anslinger though.

Himmelstein (1983) proposes that factors such as the large increase in heroin users, the resurgence of the availability of heroin after World War II (most likely sold by those who dealt marijuana as well), as well as the Bureau's own efforts to maintain control over pot even while its characterization as dangerous is beginning to be challenged all could contribute to the stepping stone hypothesis. The understanding of the marijuana user as apathetic would continue to gain momentum moving into the 1960's.

### **Marijuana and the counter-culture: It's not so bad**

During the 1960s marijuana usage became more widespread, particularly on college campuses, by white, middle class, students and became a symbol of the counter culture movement (Gerber, 2004). The changing demographic of pot smokers would in

turn modify the discourse concerning the substance. Despite a growing number of users, pot was still seen as detrimental to the fabric of the nation. What changed though was how that picture was constructed. Instead of seeing these mostly white middle class youth as inherently violent, these pot users were constructed as unproductive or people who have no initiative to be productive members of society (Auld, 1981). One of the effects of this new form of knowledge is the modification of existing marijuana laws.

The more widespread the usage of pot by middle class youth, the greater the possibility that a government official, police officer, judge, teacher, etc., could have a son or daughter who was a user. Arrest records documented the large increase in marijuana smoking. In the early part of the decade there were about 10,000 arrests per year, but by the end of the 60's that number increased to 100,00 per year, with many perpetrators facing a felony charge and mandatory sentencing (Fox, Armentano, & Tvert, 2009). With such an increase in the number of arrests any middle class white youth who was caught with pot would not likely have the same opportunities to succeed as their parents if the laws remained the same.

By 1974 most states had reduced the transgression of marijuana possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. The change in policy was connected to the belief that the middle class marijuana smoker was a respectable human being except for their drug use (Gerber, 2004). This of course was quite different from Mexican and African American users who were not seen as having the same respectability. So while marijuana use was still seen as a negative behavior the whiteness of its users helped in changing the rules for possession.

In addition to the shifting representation of the marijuana user the white middle class college student who smoked pot had more cultural capital to fight drug law compared to minorities and because they were seen as respectable and moral people (Himmelstein, 1983). These attributes became powerful assets in changing perceptions of the marijuana user and altering drug policy. It also illustrates how historical forces such as changing demographics help to perpetuate a shift in the truth or knowledge that is constructed about marijuana.

Policymakers and law enforcement agents began to see their sons and daughters arrested for marijuana, which in itself helped foster a campaign for decriminalization. Since, the white youth were seen as members of the general population they also appeared more deserving of empathy. These were not deviant minorities engaging in destructive behavior, these were “normal” teens that just happened to be involved with some deviant behavior (Himmelstein, 1983). Minorities did not have the social capital to be treated this way; they were not a group of people the general population could relate to.

In 1970 Congress passed The Controlled Substance Act, a bill that finally eliminated mandatory minimum drug sentencing, reduced pot penalties, but also established federal scheduling system of illicit substances (Fox, Armentano, & Tvert, 2009). Marijuana received the most dangerous classification, Schedule I. Any substance that is in the category Schedule I, is understood to have no current accepted medical use, have a high potential for abuse, and is thought to be generally unsafe (Earlywine, 2002). By classifying marijuana as a Schedule I drug the government contradicted itself within the same bill and clearly illustrates the social construction of meanings of marijuana. On



one hand there seems to be some acceptance of marijuana as a banal substance given the reduction in penalties, but at the same time it is classified as inherently dangerous drug.

Even with marijuana's classification as a Schedule I drug it seems as though the conception of it as a dangerous substance is being challenged based on the softening of legislation. Yet these apathetic white Americans still posed a threat to the nation.

Marijuana in the 60's and 70's became more than a substance used to achieve a moment of bliss, it became a symbol of the counter-culture, a population of people who posed a threat to the status quo (Auld, 1981). The counter-culture was a threat because of the ways in which they challenged traditional American ideals.

The women and men of the counter-culture began to challenge conceptions about American policy abroad and domestically, as well as ideas about femininity and masculinity. The women and men of this movement were then seen as detrimental to the greater good of America, thus creating a situation where if a group of people is constructed as deviant than the substances they use must also be detrimental (Grinspoon, 1971). Just as minorities who smoked marijuana posed a threat to white America, members of the counter-culture and their marijuana use were also positioned as damaging to the current social order. The key difference is because the majority users were now white they had more power to challenge the dominant conceptions of marijuana.

In 1970 The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) was created by, attorney and activist Keith Stroup, in order to advocate for the reformation of federal and state marijuana laws (Fox, Armentano, Tvert, 2009). Despite, the actual reduction of sentencing in 1970 and the onset of political groups such as NORML who challenged legislation concerning pot use, marijuana is still seen as a plant

that is detrimental to the fate of society. The large difference from the construction of the marijuana user from the 1930's is that the white college student that uses marijuana is believed to be a morally sound person, unlike the minority users from earlier decades.

### **Marijuana as a violation of morality**

The understanding of the marijuana user as a moral citizen except for their drug use would undergo another rupture, once President Nixon took office. In 1972 President Nixon put together a Presidential Commission to investigate marijuana and drug abuse. Nixon, however, was not searching for objective knowledge about the plant. Rather, he saw all drugs including marijuana as a detriment to the stability of the nation and was looking to find negative consequences of pot use (Gerber, 2004). Even though the LaGuardia commission had already demonstrated in 1944 that marijuana use was relatively harmless, a search is put together to find the negative affects that prohibitionist are so certain exist. The commission concluded that marijuana should be decriminalized. Overall, the commission found the use if pot to be of little damage physically or mentally, there was little evidence for amotivational syndrome, and they believed policymakers had limited amounts of knowledge about the effects of pot (Gerber, 2004). Despite more evidence of marijuana's banality, Nixon did not act on any of the commission's recommendations.

For the second time a scientific study has demonstrated the relatively harmless effects of marijuana, only to have the results rejected by a member of the government. The commission is provided empirical evidence to support the decriminalization of marijuana, but this knowledge was rejected, and the official government position was that

marijuana was inherently dangerous. Continuing to position marijuana as detrimental to society coincided with the beliefs Nixon had about drug use in general.

In 1969 Nixon declared the abuse of drugs a national threat, and as a result of this new “danger” facing the US Nixon began taking drastic steps to curtail this “epidemic”(Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe, Andreas, 1996). In order to construct drugs as a national threat, drugs and its users needed to be situated within a discourse, that Americans perceived to be dangerous. Therefore, Nixon created vivid connections between crime and drug use, constructed drugs as a source of crime, and criminalized drug addicts as well (Betram et al., 1996). Constructing drugs as a source of crime, or its users as criminals, stigmatize drugs and its users as something that needs to be policed. Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) during his presidency to serve that very purpose. Given such harsh perceptions about drug use, it does not seem surprising that Nixon would reject the findings of his own Presidential Commission on marijuana and drug use.

What is ironic about Nixon’s stance towards drug use is that even though he had a tough stance on the use of these substances, funding for treatment increased during this period. Crime was Nixon’s largest concern and he saw punishment and treatment as two ways in which to combat this issue (Betram et al., 1996). Taking this approach seems to be counter-intuitive. How can you provide funding to treat drug addiction, while at the same time say it is a crime? While it may be contradictory in nature it does produce a discourse that constructs the drug user as criminal, a belief that would be difficult challenge from this point on.

President Carter directly dealt with the external social forces that made it difficult to challenge conceptions about drug users as anything but criminal. Although President Carter wanted to decrease the number of marijuana users, he did not want to criminalize this population (Betram et al., 1996). Even though Carter wanted less Americans to take up smoking pot, he did not believe it to be a harmful substance. Carter wanted to reduce severe penalties for marijuana possession, because he believed it was no worse than tobacco, but he would not endorse it because he felt the health consequences were unknown (Gerber, 2004). Carter may have had the best intentions, but he would see his attempts to decriminalize marijuana defeated because of perceptions of morality and the previous steps taken by the Nixon administration.

During his first term Nixon had increased funding for law enforcement to fight the war on drugs by 1000 percent (Provine, 2007). The large increase in funding is not something law enforcement groups such as the DEA wanted to see go away. When Gerald Ford took over as president in 1974 the drug budget was \$382 million. By 1981 that budget had reached \$855 million and the agencies that received this aid put pressure on the new Carter administration to continue this funding. Then a victory demonstrates an interest in retaining federally supported funding and perhaps less about what might be best for the citizens of the United States (Gerber, 2004).

A second source of adversity Carter faced in trying to ease the hard stance on marijuana were parental groups. In the late 70's an increase in the number of high-school students who smoked marijuana led some parents to develop and organize anti-drug organizations at the grass-roots level. Led by people such as Marsha "Keith" Schuchard many of these groups claimed the government needed to be tougher on marijuana laws in

order not to undermine the discipline of parents (Gerber, 2004). Parents who taught their children drug use was bad, felt their authority was weakened, by the government decriminalizing or legalizing pot. President Carter did not want the youth of the America to do drugs, but he also did not believe the penalty for possession of a drug should be more damaging than the actual use of the substance (Gerber, 2004). However, the pressure of parental groups created a situation where the softening of marijuana laws could be construed as the government not caring about the youth of America.

The parents' position assumed that marijuana is inherently detrimental to those who use it, and that any attempts to soften marijuana laws were a failure to protect the future of the nation. Activists such as these parents make it difficult for politicians, such as Carter to take a more humanized approach to drugs, without appearing, to not care about the future of America (Betram et al. 1996). The influence of parents on political agendas is one factor that helps demonstrate the external forces that are contributing to the understanding of the marijuana user as a dangerous person, as opposed to specific scientific evidence.

The politics of the 1980's would help to sustain the belief that drug use was immoral and that citizens that engaged in this act deserved to be punished. Ronald Reagan's election marked a shift to the right in national politics. It is also a time of growing racial tension. Entering the 1980's the belief that discriminatory economic and social systems are barriers to poor minorities getting ahead was eroding (Alexander, 2010). The hostility towards racial minorities who are seen as taking advantage of a system that is no longer necessary is part of the larger narrative of American life as Reagan is entering office. America is thought to be soft due to the disappearance of

fathers in the household, the perceived failures of former president Carter in domestic and international policy, and individuals abusing social welfare programs (Jeffords, 1994).

There is a sense that individuals who are taking advantage of the system are holding America back.

Part of Reagan's campaign focused on constructing rhetoric about individuals cheating the system. Welfare queens, drug addicts, and single mothers were constructed as part of a discourse that connotes gendered and racial images of people taking advantage of government assistance (Alexander, 2010). Through this discourse the minority body is labeled as a leech on the federal government. These individuals are not working their way up the social ladder and instead waiting in line for a government hand out (Jeffords, 1994). These are thus bodies that are not helping the nation move forward.

The fear of minorities and more specifically African American bodies threatening the morality of the nation plays a large role in the criminalization of drugs during Regan's presidency. Bertram et al (1996) argue Ronald Regan's anti-drug campaign took shape through the emergence of crack cocaine in American cities. The rise of this new drug (a cooked form of cocaine) was made visible through negative images of poor minorities, specifically African Americans. In an already heightened racial moment these representations were used to create a moral panic about crack and its users and creates a justification for harsh penalties for the possession and selling of crack (Bertram et al., 1996). Increasing penalties for crack would prove to have a devastating impact on the lives of poor, urban, minorities.

The moral panic created around crack helped perpetuate the fear that crack addicts would leave the ghetto and spill into mainstream (white) America (Provine, 2007). The

media was largely responsible for creating the moral panic about crack. “Between October 1988 and October 1989 the *Washington Post* alone ran 1,565 stories” about the drug (Alexander, 2010). Many media outlets capitalized on constructing crack as a central issue impacting the future of America. In 1986 *Newsweek*, declared crack the biggest story since Vietnam/Watergate, while *Time*, declared it the issue of the year (Alexander, 2010). The story of crack cocaine was only told through selected bodies. The majority of these mediated representations of crack were told through the bodies of black men and women (Alexander, 2010). Since, crack is the major drug concern of the nation, and the stories of crack use, are told through the black body, drugs become equated with blackness.

African Americans were selling and using crack at this point though. However, as Michelle Alexander (2010) notes the 1980’s were a time where many industrial jobs were leaving the inner cities of America, leaving very few opportunities for employment for poor and often undereducated members of these communities. The lack of employment opportunities helps create an incentive to sell drugs. Many people in the inner city were selling and using crack, however, most documented users are white. According to the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health an estimated 871,000 Americans used crack in 2010, of that population, 554,000 were white, 256,000 were black, and 84,000 were Hispanic. Yet crack use is framed through black bodies and under the Reagan administration, framing crack in this manner provided support for the war on drugs and it also helped sustain the belief that minorities were facing social inequity due to their own misguided choices (Alexander, 2010).

This characterization of drugs and drug use is very narrow. However, it is aligned with Reagan's belief that drug use was a moral issue. He believed the drug user made a deliberate choice to engage in immoral activities and therefore should be punished (Gerber, 2004). Reagan's belief that a person whose decision to use drugs was a detriment to the values of society was reflected in the policies enacted during his reign. In 1986 Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which required mandatory sentencing for many drugs including marijuana. The passing of this act prohibited judges from taking a person's age, record, or social position into consideration when determining a punishment for a drug arrest (Provine, 2007). The introduction of mandatory sentencing reinforced the notion that drug users are inherently disruptive to the moral fabric of the nation. There is no need to take a drug user's age, history, or prior record into account because any use of illicit substances is a symbol of innate deviance.

The War on Drugs is part of Reagan's and the New Rights' gendered and racialized rhetoric that reduced social inequity to a failure of individuals (Cole & Denny, 1994). It also marks a strong shift in the construction of the drug user from the morally sound (except for drug use) white middle class marijuana user to the immoral, poor, minority. Moreover, the draconian approach to narcotics during the 80's has helped shape the prison industrial complex and has had a devastating effect on minorities in the United States.

According to Arthur Benavie (2009) in 2002 blacks made up about 47 percent of the population serving time for drug offenses, despite the African American population constituting only about 15 percent of all illicit drug users. The disparity between the number of blacks in jail for drug offenses and the percentage of African Americans who



use illicit substances only to illustrates how the War on Drugs disproportionately targets poor minorities. The disparate sentencing between drugs such as cocaine and crack cocaine play a large role in this. Traditionally, crack has been associated with poor African Americans, while cocaine has been linked to upper class whites. In order to receive a five-year prison term an individual only has to be in possession of five grams crack, but to get five years for cocaine, an individual had to be caught with 500 grams of cocaine powder (Provine, 2007)! The large disparity in sentencing was reduced when President Obama signed The Fair Sentencing Act in 2010, which increased the amount of crack needed to receive the mandatory five-year sentencing. The Act was a step toward a more equitable sentencing between these two drugs of the same origin. However, the environments where the drug war is fought still leads to poor minorities getting caught in the web as opposed to whites.

Police target poorer urban communities where the selling and usage of drugs is more visible in public spaces than in suburbia (Provine, 2007). The focus on these communities helps lead to more arrests of minorities and ignores the reasons why these populations are susceptible to the drug industry. Economically disadvantage groups that do not have many options for financial stability, have an incentive to sell drugs, because of the large profit margin, due to the prohibition of these substances (Betram et al., 1996). So instead of fighting a war on poverty that might keep members of these vulnerable populations away from drugs, there is a constant push to be tough on drugs, which results in furthering the adverse conditions of poor minorities.

Marijuana has not escaped the harsh eye of the War on Drugs. Nearly half of all drug arrests are for marijuana (close to 700,000) (Benavie, 2009). The amount of money

it costs to enforce this prohibition is enormous. According to economist Jeffery Miron total costs for marijuana arrests now equal \$7.6 billion, with \$3.7 billion going towards police costs, \$853 million to judicial costs, and \$3.1 billion to the prison system (Regan, 2011). The amount of money spent on arresting non-violent drug offenders seems excessive, but what makes this practice seem even more senseless is the emerging discourse concerning the medical usage of marijuana.

### **Medical marijuana part two**

The vast amounts of money spent enforcing marijuana prohibition as well as the arrests of users simply for possession, rather than use, promotes the image that marijuana is a dangerous substance that needs to be outlawed. However, the increasing acceptance of medical marijuana represents a direct challenge to this understanding of the plant as harmful. Instead of positioning the marijuana user as criminal this pot smoking body is constructed as sick. Moreover, there is also widespread support for marijuana as medicine. According to two 2010 national polls 80 percent of Americans support the legalization of medical marijuana (Geluardi, 2010), and sixteen states and the District of Columbia have approved this plant for medical use. In the midst of the War on Drugs, how are some users ok, while others are criminalized?

The growing popularity of the medical marijuana movement almost makes it seem like a new phenomenon. However, as this chapter has demonstrated so far marijuana has been used historically by a number of different populations. The more modern medical marijuana movement has been shaped in some ways by the actions of Robert Randall. Robert Randall is a former schoolteacher who cultivated marijuana for his glaucoma and was arrested for this act in 1975 (Aldrich, 1997). He fought this arrest

in court and eventually won. Under the premise of compassionate use, Randall's legal team argued that the harm he was doing by growing marijuana was outweighed by the benefits he received medicinally from pot (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997). This victory allowed Randall to receive hand rolled joints each month from the government in order to ease his glaucoma.

Randall's victory in court marks the shifting to a focus on the legalization of medical marijuana among activists (Geluardi, 2010). Despite, the great significance of this victory, very few would benefit from the groundwork laid by Robert Randall. In the next 13 years only six other people would be able to claim this defense and be placed in the Compassionate User program (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997). Which allows the sick to receive marijuana from the federal government just like Robert Randall.

The onset of the AIDS epidemic during the 80's created a new population of people who could benefit from the medical properties of marijuana. Marijuana is consistently linked to positive effects of AIDS patients as it helps counter-act AIDS wasting syndrome. Wasting syndrome is a side effect of this disease that results in the loss of body weight, fevers and diarrhea, and pot helps to stimulate the appetite of the people suffering from this symptom, which leads to weight gain and gives the body more strength to deal with any possible other infections (Krampf, 1997). The possible benefits for AIDS patients who used marijuana lead to a large number of requests to be put into this program. However, during the George H.W. Bush administration this program was closed due to the belief that it contradicted the government's stance in pot, and therefore was sending the wrong message (Gerber, 2004). Shutting down this helpful program stalled the medical marijuana movement for a few years.

The medical marijuana movement began to pick up momentum again after the writing and passing of Proposition 215 in California in 1996. Many of the early activists in the medical marijuana campaign were both patients and people who had been actively involved in, as well as influenced by, the gay rights movements of the 1970's (Geluardi, 2010). Just like the gay rights movement, many of these activists involved in the medical marijuana movement, were trying to build a better life for themselves and others. Many people involved in the writing of proposition 215, a form of legislation that sought to legalize medical marijuana in California had experience with activism and were also patients themselves. A lot of the people involved in the writing of Proposition 215 were trying to help friends and love ones obtain a medicine that would help them make it through each day (Geluardi, 2010). The narrative created by these activists once again highlights the contradictory discourses that exist about marijuana use.

On one side the marijuana using body is used to connote a breach in morals, while the other positions the marijuana user as a sick patient. The passing of Prop 215 in California helps this latter discourse circulate to a wider populace. In 1998 Alaska, Washington and Oregon adopted their own medical marijuana laws following the lead of California. There are now currently 16 states as well as the District of Columbia where doctors can legally recommend medical marijuana, even though the plant itself remains illegal at the federal level. Public opinion of marijuana is changing though. The medical marijuana movement would not have accomplished as much as it has without the dedicated work of many activists.

The new aesthetic of many of the activists involved in the movement has played a large role in legitimizing the advancement of medical marijuana. Geluardi (2010) argues

that the new marijuana advocate is “clean cut, wears a suit and tie, and often has an advanced degree or years of experience in the corporate sector” (p. 15). This clean-cut, formal dressing activist with experience in the business world is drastically different from stereotypical images of hippies. Geluardi (2010) argues that this change has been helpful in shaping opinions in the court-room and with the general public. This shift is reminiscent of the change in public opinion regarding marijuana during the 1960’s when middle-class white college students became the primary users of pot. The change in representation of the aesthetics of marijuana users does little to combat stereotypes of marijuana users or activists who resemble members of the counter-culture, but it does appear to be helpful in shaping opinions regarding medical marijuana.

The legalization of medical marijuana has helped develop the medical marijuana industry. In order to obtain medical marijuana patients must go to a medical marijuana dispensary. There are over 700 medical marijuana dispensaries in California alone (Geluardi, 2010) and it is estimated that they each bring in \$3 to \$4 million in annual sales revenue (Regan, 2011). The rising medical marijuana industry has helped create jobs and the more traditional business atmosphere has helped legitimize and professionalize medicinal marijuana. More specifically, Geluardi (2010) argues a new generation of professionals is migrating from careers in science and corporate America to jobs as lobbyists, managers, teachers, and non-profit fundraisers to the marijuana industry. The people moving into these jobs are bringing their more corporatized identity to the movement and it is this image that is considered to help the medical marijuana industry appear more legitimate.

The new image of marijuana seems to have helped its cause. In April 2010 a poll by the Pew Center showed that 73 percent of Americans were in favor of allowing their state to provide medical marijuana if prescribed by a doctor, while 23 percent were opposed (Regan, 2011). Yet, despite the positive spin on medical marijuana there is still a large discourse that shines a dark light on the plant. For instance, while this poll suggests many Americans would be in favor of medicinal marijuana obtained through prescription, under the current law doctors can only recommend pot, not prescribe it, since the plant is still illegal at the federal level (Regan, 2011). Ironically marijuana is also still categorized as a Schedule 1 drug, a label that characterizes it as unsuitable for medical use.

What complicates the understanding of medical marijuana even more is the fact that there is a legal pill form of pot. The pill Marinol is a synthetic THC pill often given to AIDS and cancer patients 4-6 times per day to control nausea and vomiting (Mack, A., & Joy, J., 2001). The irony of course is that by making a synthetic THC pill there is an acknowledgement that components of marijuana do in fact have medical value. Yet, marijuana remains a Schedule I drug, while Marinol is Schedule II, a category where there is an acknowledgement that the substance has some medical significance (Earlywine, 2002). How can a pill contain THC be legal, while a plant that carries the same component be criminalized? The factors that contribute to the acceptance of the Marinol pill are heavily influenced by conceptions of modern medicine.

To think of marijuana as a form of medicine can connote a form of dissonance. The legal medicinal form has become standardized, synthetic and pure, while cannabis consists of over 400 components and grows in the earth (Chapkis & Webb, 2008). The organic form of marijuana makes it difficult to fit into the sterile and standardized

understanding of medicine. Since it is difficult to pinpoint the exact component that leads to a person feeling better it appears to be a product of pseudoscience, particularly given its intoxicating properties (Chapkis & Webb, 2008). Classifications such as this often ignore the fact that prescription and over the counter drugs can be as dangerous as any illicit substance.

According to Mary Mathre (1997) since legal medicine is assumed to be safe, people do not bother to learn about what they are taking. The assumption about legal drugs is there can not be much of a risk if it is available for purchase and prescribed by doctors. However, as Mathre (1997) goes on to explain, 70% of emergency room visits for drugs are for legally prescribed substances. In the case of marijuana it is impossible for a human to overdose from the plant (Fox et al., 2009) and when used on its own it has been classified as one of the safer substances humans consume (Earlywine, 2002; Fox et al., 2009; Grinspoon, 1971; Petro, 1997). Given this information it would seem like medicinal marijuana would not face as much controversy as it does. However, the stigmatizing of recreational pot use and modern understandings of medicine make the acceptance of an alternative form of treatment complicated.

The standards of modern medicine make it difficult for some to conceptualize marijuana as an effective treatment. However, legal activists and patients must also counter-act the negative stereotypes associated with recreational users and the action of smoking, a primary source for the ingestion of this medication (Bock, 2000). Even though marijuana has been used as a medicine throughout history and is gaining acceptance currently the stigma of the plant and the ways in which it is consumed make it easier to dismiss pot as a helpful medication.

Smoking marijuana is not the only way to ingest it; there are also two other alternatives. Patients who want to use marijuana can also eat baked goods that have been made with marijuana oil or butter or the sick can use a vaporizer. A vaporizer is a device that boils marijuana into vapor, making it less irritating than inhaling smoke. Both of these alternatives to smoking still do not fit the standards of what has become modern western medicine. The American framework of medicine emphasizes specific cures for specific diseases by singular molecule drugs that can be strictly regulated and controlled (Bock, 2000). In other words a plant that produces psychoactive effects, whose dosage cannot be strictly regulated, and which has a complex chemical structure does not come close to societal understandings of what a medicine should be. These are important talking points when thinking about a substance people put into their bodies; however, such strict definitions make the acceptance of new and alternative medicines a difficult task.

The body is a critical component of the medical marijuana movement. In order to make a case for the legalization of medical marijuana the movement relies on the construction of discourses that position the sick as bodies that benefit from this form of medicine (London, 2009). It is the ability of the activist and industry workers to distance themselves from deviant constructions of marijuana users that allows them to seem more normal and add a sense of legitimacy to their project (Geluardi, 2010). The use of the body within the medical marijuana campaign demonstrates the importance of the corporeal in discourses about drugs. It also represents a growing challenge to dominant constructions about marijuana use.



## Conclusion

The path through the history of marijuana and its prohibition in this country has demonstrated that there are numerous ruptures from the dominant understanding of the marijuana user as apathetic that we have today. This chapter has illustrated that the marijuana using body is a discursive construct shaped by various historical, social, and political factors (Terry & Urla, 1995). The shift to modern medicine, the fear of the dismantling of a white oriented society, communism, the counter-culture, concepts of individualism, and the contemporary rise of the medical marijuana industry have all been factors that have shaped different discourses about what it means to be a marijuana user. The shifting knowledge of the marijuana user demonstrates that there is not a fixed meaning for our understanding of this social identity; rather it illustrates how the marijuana user is situated in “historical network of ideas, events, and processes” (Saukko, 2003, p. 120). By illustrating this construction of the marijuana user I intend to use this as the building block for social change within this project.

Foucault (1972) argues that the political goal of the intellectual is to determine how to establish a new politics of truth. The goal of a political project such as this truth is not to change how people think about marijuana. Rather, the aim is to detach aspects of truth from their hegemonic institutions, a process that starts with genealogy (Foucault, 1972). Genealogy is the basis for this project because it disrupts the notion that an object of knowledge such as the marijuana user is an innate fact. This analytical project builds the base for social change by showing how something such as marijuana use has been shaped by political and social factors (Saukko, 2003). I plan to build on this disruption of general comprehension about marijuana using bodies by examining representations of

athletes who use this substance. From my critique of this representation I hope to lay the groundwork for a new politics of truth concerning pot-using bodies.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: SPORTING THE UNPRODUCTIVE BODY

Each of the previous chapters has discussed marijuana use in relation to acceptable moral forms of behavior for American citizens. In the Above the Influence commercials marijuana users are depicted as outcasts of society. These advertisements instruct young adults not to smoke pot in order to ensure themselves a bright and prosperous future. The message of these commercials that marijuana use will not enable young people to reach their full potential within society. On the opposite end of the spectrum, stoner films use satire to make commentary on the illegality of drugs and their perceived threat to society (Boyd, 2010). Therefore, these films make the case that marijuana use is not a behavior people should be criminalized for. Instead marijuana users are represented as bodies that do not pose a threat to society.

Anti-marijuana legislation and propaganda more directly deals with notions of morality. The propaganda created by Harry Anslinger and yellow journalism demonized African American jazz musicians and Mexican marijuana users. Violence, crime, and sexual deviance were constructed as the outcomes of these groups marijuana use (Booth, 2003). These were immoral behaviors seen as detrimental to the advancement of society. However, these were groups that were already stigmatized and not considered to be full members of society and their marijuana use became just another reason to ostracize them (Booth, 2003), their marijuana use became another flaw in the perceived character of minorities.

When white middle class college students took up marijuana use during the 1960's the narrative concerning this substance and the morality of its use began to

change. Marijuana use was still vilified when white college students began to use it; however, unlike African Americans, and Mexicans from the 1930's, these college students were seen as good citizens who just happened to have made a bad decision (Himmelstein, 1983). In order to ensure this particular group of people could still be productive members of society, marijuana laws had to change. By 1974 most states had reduced the transgression of marijuana possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. The change in policy is connected to the belief that the middle class marijuana smokers were respectable human beings except for their drug use (Gerber, 2004). It also excuses the use of marijuana by white college students, which was more acceptable than the marijuana smoking of minorities.

Therefore, instead of thinking of the apathetic marijuana user as a fixed identity, the marijuana user can be thought of as fluid and hierarchical. Conceptualizing marijuana use as a fixed category ignores the way in which power is exercised (Dworkin & Wachs, 1998). As the last chapter indicated understanding the marijuana user as deviant has been socially constructed. Put differently, the last chapter demonstrated how the marijuana using body has been constructed in a variety of ways historically and how lines of power have been marked on this body by the production of discourses perpetuated as the truth about marijuana (Markula & Pringle, 2006). The differential treatment of minority marijuana users and Caucasian marijuana smokers also indicates a hierarchy of tolerance in regards to this behavior.

To this point this project has examined how knowledge about the marijuana using body has been constructed historically, and the representation of marijuana and its users in contemporary film and advertisements. The marijuana-using athlete offers another

cultural site to explore how knowledge is constructed about the pot user (Giroux, 2001). Marijuana is not a substance that can be considered performance enhancing. In fact given marijuana's association with laziness, de-motivation, and passivity (Auld, 1981), it could be understood as a substance that would threaten an athlete's ability to perform at the highest level. How, then, are we to understand the marijuana-using athlete then?

The current scholarship on athletes who use marijuana consists mostly of quantitative studies that attempt to predict or figure out marijuana use among different sporting participants in order to implement preventive drug programs (see Denham, 2011; Ewing, 1998; Evans, Weinberg, & Jackson, 1992; Pan & Baker, 1998; Perretti-Watel, Guagliardo, Verger, Mignon, Pruvost, & Obadia, 2004). To date, no scholarship explores social constructions of the marijuana-using athlete. In this chapter, I address that gap.

I use a reading sport methodology in order to understand the narratives of five different athletes: Michael Phelps (Olympic Swimmer), Ricky Williams of the National Football League (NFL), Tim Lincecum of Major League Baseball (MLB), Josh Howard of the National Basketball Association (NBA), and Joakim Noah also a player in the NBA. Through a reading of the narratives of their marijuana use I hope to answer the following questions: How do we understand the athletic body that uses marijuana? More specifically, what are we to make of a body that is thought to be the epitome of health and productivity when it uses a substance that is thought to render the body apathetic and useless? And, finally, how are these narratives constructed along the lines of race and gender? Are there certain bodies whose marijuana smoking is accepted?

By answering these questions I hope to complicate the understanding of the marijuana user from the simple conception of a burnout, or unproductive member of

society to a more complicated understanding. Through a deeper and more comprehensive conception of the marijuana user, I hope that a new discourse or knowledge about the use of this plant can be created. New understandings of marijuana use would provide the grounds to help more states legislate the use of medical marijuana, as well as stop the imprisonment of non-violent drug offenders.

### **Methodology**

Susan Birrell and Mary McDonald (2000) argue that reading a sporting celebrity or athletic event like a text offers a unique point of access into our larger social world. The reading of the athletes in this chapter, offer insights into societal understandings of marijuana use, as well as relations of power. McDonald and Birrell (1999) argue that an emphasis on one line of power such as race results in only a partial analysis and ignores the ways in which lines of power work together. Therefore, it is necessary to read lines of power in relation to one another. Within this project I pay particular attention to the power lines of race and gender in the narratives of these different athletes.

It is important to note that within this methodology, lines of power are seen as fluid, not static. In this manner the reading of a sport star or an athletic event can give insight into understandings of race, gender, social class, etc at any given moment. This perspective emphasizes the fluidity of identities and relations of power, thus the importance of social context (Birrell & McDonald, 2000). The narrative constructed about specific athletes or events is the point of analysis for understanding these relationships of power.

Cultural texts such as a newspaper story about an athlete are ideologically coded; they produce forms of knowledge about race, gender, the nation, social class, and

sexuality (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). This, however, does not mean there is only one way to read these particular narratives. Rather, as David Andrews and Stephen Jackson (2001) argue, the sporting celebrity is a negotiated terrain of significance, meaning that at any moment an athlete could be a “representative of social class, the nation, race, gender, or sexuality, through which individuals fashion their very existence” (p. 5). Therefore, a sporting celebrity can give insight into what it means to be a black man, or an Asian woman, at that particular moment.

The narratives constructed about these athletes may not always be in line with the status quo, and consumers will not always accept the dominant meanings embedded within these texts. However, reading sport provides an opportunity to develop a counter-narrative through the analysis process (Birrell & McDonald, 2000). By analyzing the dominant narrative, a critic can not only to explain what the main narrative is, but also to produce another way in which to read or understand a particular athlete or sporting event. One of the central goals of this chapter is to produce a counter narrative to dominant conceptions of the marijuana using body.

For this project I searched the databases Lexis-Nexis, newsbank, and ebscohost for newspaper articles discussing the marijuana use of each of these athletes. I also searched the hometown paper of each individual, which included *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Miami Herald*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Dallas Star*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. Finally I performed, a Google Search in order to find additional articles concerning these athletes and their pot transgressions. Overall, I found a combined 153 articles discussing the marijuana use of these five athletes. All of these athletes’ marijuana transgressions occurred between 2008-2009. However, Ricky Williams back and forth struggles with

marijuana spanned from 2004-2008. The time frame of all these athletes' marijuana transgressions is also situated within a time period when the medical marijuana movement is growing.

Despite, the large number of articles overall, it was difficult to find a substantial number of articles concerning Josh Howard and Joakim Noah. I speculate that one of the reasons for this is that these athletes could be considered to have a lower profile than the other three. Therefore, the media would not pay as close attention to them as an Olympian such as Phelps, a multiple offender such as Williams, or an up – and - coming young pitcher like Tim Lincecum. Nevertheless, there were still enough sources to gather some understanding of how the marijuana use of these two athletes was talked about.

### **Sporting the unproductive body**

All of the athletes included in this study were caught, or admitted to smoking marijuana, yet the punishments or repercussions for these athletes differed. The goal of this chapter is identify those differences and try to account for why they exist. The athletes included in this case study represent USA Swimming, Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL), and the National Basketball Association (NBA). All of these leagues also have different rules and regulations concerning drug use.

In November of 2008, Michael Phelps was pictured on the front page of the British tabloid *News of the World* with his mouth wrapped around a bong. Even with this incriminating evidence Phelps never publicly admitted to smoking marijuana. Phelps was not in season when the picture of him smoking a bong appeared, but he was still suspended for three months by United States Swimming. This could be seen as a minor



punishment, as Phelps missed only a few minor meets but was remained eligible to compete in the US Nationals and The Federation Internationale De Natation (FINA) World Championship later that year.

The use, possession, or distribution of illegal substances, such as marijuana violates USA swimming's code of conduct. A violation of this code can result in probation, the denial of membership, a fine, or expulsion from the organization ([usaswimming.org](http://usaswimming.org)). Given that Phelps is a member of USA swimming even while not competing, the organization had the ability to suspend him for any amount of time.

If Phelps had tested positive for marijuana during the competition he would have violated the International Olympic Committee's list of banned substances. Marijuana is classified as a banned "in competition substance" by the World Anti-Doping Agency (overseer of Olympic and international drug testing) (Valkenburg & Fuller, 2009). If Phelps had tested positive for marijuana while competing, he would have, at the very least, had his medals taken away from him. This precedent was set after the 1998 Olympics, when Canadian snowboarder Ross Rebagliati tested positive for marijuana after winning a gold medal. Rebagliati was initially stripped of his gold medal, but it was later returned to him because marijuana was not on the list of banned substances at the time (Valkenburg & Fuller, 2009). Marijuana has subsequently been added to the banned "in competition" list, but it is not banned outside of competition. However, since the use of marijuana is against USA swimming's code of conduct, Phelps was suspended by this organization for his extracurricular use of the plant.

Tim Lincecum was cited for possession of marijuana in 2009 in his home state of Washington, after getting pulled over for speeding; the arresting officer found a pipe and

marijuana in Lincecum's possession. Lincecum received a fine of \$372 for his drug and paraphernalia possession from the state of Washington (where pot is decriminalized). Lincecum, however, did not face any sanctions from MLB. MLB has a unique approach regarding substances such as marijuana. Illegal substances such as marijuana, cocaine, LSD, PCP, ecstasy, and heroin are all prohibited drugs. Nonetheless, there is no testing policy for these substances. The only way an athlete can be tested for these drugs is if there is probable cause to believe that the athlete is selling or abusing them (<http://mlbplayers.mlb.com/pa/pdf/jda.pdf>). This policy is quite different from MLB's approach to steroids. Performance enhancing drugs are tested for, and the first positive test results in a 50 game suspension.

Ricky Williams declared an early retirement from the NFL in August of 2004 after testing positive for marijuana for a third time. Williams, unlike Phelps, publicly admitted to smoking marijuana, attributing his use to his social anxiety disorder (Colbourn, 2006). If Williams had decided to stick with football, he would have been suspended for the first four games in accordance with league protocol. In 2005, when Williams came out of retirement and returned to his former team (Miami Dolphins), he had to serve a four game suspension at the beginning of the season. In 2006, Williams violated the NFL's substance abuse policy for the fourth time (unknown substance) and was suspended for a year. Williams used the 2006-2007 season to play for the Toronto Argonauts of the Canadian Football League (CFL). The following year Williams returned to the NFL and remains there today as a member of the Baltimore Ravens.

The NFL tests for both performance enhancing drugs and recreational drugs, such as marijuana. NFL players are tested for recreational drugs once a year. If an NFL player

tests positive for marijuana he enters into the league's substance abuse intervention program. In this program athletes are subjected to random tests. Once players are in this program, a positive test, results in a fine and a four game suspension (<http://images.nflplayers.com>). Another failed test, while in the intervention program will result in a four to six game suspension, and a third failed test while in this program will result in a one-year ban (<http://images.nflplayers.com>).

In contrast, NFL players are tested multiple times during the regular season and off-season for performance enhancing drugs. The first positive test results in a four game suspension without pay. The second time a player tests positive results in an eight game suspension without pay, and a third violation constitutes a year long ban without pay (<http://images.nflplayers.com>). Thus, the NFL unlike baseball has a fairly consistent stance on recreational drugs and steroids. However, given that the NFL tests multiple times for performance enhancing drugs, and only once for substances such as marijuana, it appears that steroids are the larger concern.

Josh Howard admitted his marijuana use publicly on the Michael Irvin radio show in August of 2008. A year before, Howard had been interviewed by an NBA blogger about his alleged use of the plant during his college career at Wake Forest. A week before his appearance on the Michael Irvin show an article in the *Dallas Morning Star* referenced the interview from the previous year. When he appeared on the radio show he was questioned about his alleged marijuana use, and admitted to using the substance. Howard, did not test positive for marijuana, he simply admitted to smoking it in the offseason. For this reason Howard did not face any punishment from the league.

Finally, Joakim Noah was charged with possession of marijuana and an open container of alcohol in May of 2008, in Gainesville, FL. Noah was arrested for walking around downtown with an open container of alcohol, and police then found one joint in his back pocket. Noah also did not face league punishment for his marijuana possession conviction.

The NBA tests players at random four times a year for both performance enhancing drugs and steroids. The first positive test for marijuana places a player in a drug-counseling program, a second results in a \$25,000 fine, and the third results in a five game suspension (Townsend, 2008). The NBA's steroid policy is a little harsher than their stance on recreational drugs, such as marijuana. The first positive steroid test results in a ten game suspension, the second, a twenty-five game suspension, and a third positive test results in a yearlong suspension (Woods, 2009). Since neither Howard nor Noah tested positive for marijuana, neither faced any repercussions from the NBA.

Out of the five athletes, only Michael Phelps and Ricky Williams were suspended from their sport for any amount of time. Lincecum and Noah faced fines from the state because they got caught in public with marijuana, while Josh Howard did not face any sanctions for publicly discussing his personal use in the offseason. In the following section I analyze the narrative of each of these individual athletes marijuana story.

### **Won't somebody please think of the children?!: Phelps and his bong**

One of the most prevalent themes in the (British Tabloid) coverage of Michael Phelps smoking a bong positioned Michael Phelps as an athlete who failed in his duty to be a role model. By engaging in this act, Phelps disappointed the people who looked up to him and bought his products. Within this narrative it is not the perceived health risks of

marijuana that fuel the fire of disappointment rather, Phelps is reprimanded for not adhering to the image he and his sponsors have constructed. Within this narrative there is no discourse that explains why marijuana is a potentially damaging lifestyle choice, especially for an athlete. Instead the main reason thread of the overall narrative is how Phelps is at fault for not upholding a specific image, particularly to young people.

Disappointment in Phelps for setting a bad example for the youth of America was a central component of organizations, such as USA Swimming and the USOC. The USOC publicly stated it was “disappointed in the behavior recently exhibited by Michael Phelps” given he is a role model who is “well aware of the responsibilities and accountability that come with setting a positive example for others, particularly young people” (Crouse, 2009, p. 8). The commentary put forth by the USOC is in line with the response given by USA swimming in regards to their decision to suspend Phelps for three months.

This is not a situation where any-anti-doping rule was violated, but we decided to send a strong message to Michael because he disappointed so many people, particularly the hundreds of thousands of USA swimming member kids who look up to him as role model and hero (Randhawa, 2009, ¶ 2)

Yet, it is unclear from either of these sentiments whether or not Phelps’s failure is due to his using an illegal substance, or using a harmful substance, or both.

The criticism Phelps received from journalists tries to explain this conundrum. Phelps’ failure is constructed as not smoking marijuana per se; rather his main shortcoming is his decision to smoke marijuana, while receiving payment to endorse corporate products. Thus, Phelps cannot be a marijuana user and simultaneously, a corporate pitch man. It has to be one or the other. For instance Christine Brennan (2009)

of *USA Today*, notes that Phelps is not the first 23 year old to smoke pot, however, it was his decision to be the “All-American role model and pitchman” that has gotten him in the trouble he is in today. As Brennan (2009) argues, once Phelps decided to take all of his endorsement deals he had to put away the pipe.

If you’re going to make millions as the all-American boy selling cereal and Subway sandwiches to the nation, no matter how young you are, you really must be able to stop yourself from taking a hit off a marijuana pipe (Brennan, 2009, p. 13c)

In this case the problem is not that Phelps decided to smoke marijuana, it is the fact that he decided to do it as someone who has made money, endorsing products as an athletic hero. If someone such as Phelps is paid to perpetuate a clean-cut all American image, then marijuana is a substance he must refrain from using. David Steele (2009) of the *Baltimore Sun* makes this same argument. Steele (2009) argues that smoking marijuana is not the biggest transgression committed by an athlete, nor is it the first, but he believes that even though Phelps is young, when he is handed so much money for endorsements, a lot more is expected of him. Furthering this narrative is Laura Vozzella (2009) of the *Baltimore Sun* who argued that, Phelps does not have to “give up swimming to walk on the wild side. What he has to give up is his fake corporate goodie-two-shoes image” (¶ 2). Within this discourse there is no discussion of how marijuana may be detrimental to his physical or mental health, rather, the regrettable action comes from failing to uphold a manufactured identity.

Andrews and Jackson (2001) argue that while the celebrity is often a figure we are unlikely to ever meet, the celebrity driven culture we live in creates a virtual intimacy between celebrity and audience that often “has real effects on the manner in which

individuals negotiate the experiences of their everyday lives” (p. 2). This appears to be what is happening with Michael Phelps. Through his endorsements and his public appearances he has both adopted and been situated as an All-American, Leave – it - to Beaver persona. People who have bought the products he has endorsed have consumed this image, and the betrayal of his wholesome image seems to be the biggest issue concerning his marijuana use.

Marijuana becomes both a banal and an immoral substance in this discussion. Phelps’ marijuana smoking becomes a banal act because it is something he can do as long as it is not in public. There is no discussion of possible mental or health risks; it is just an act that cannot be done if you are in the spotlight, rendering the act of smoking marijuana a commonplace behavior. Yet, even while this discourse seems to authorize marijuana use if Phelps had not been endorsing an assortment of products, it still positions marijuana as a detrimental substance. If marijuana was a socially approved substance, then Phelps could endorse all the products he wants and smoke it. However, the argument is positioning marijuana as a plant that is okay to use if you remain out of the public spotlight, a characterization that still implies marijuana is a stigmatized substance.

Yet, for all the concerns that Michael Phelps was sending a dangerous message to children, almost all of his sponsors stuck by him. Speedo, Omega, Hilton Hotels and PureSport all released statements stating they would support Phelps and keep him on as an endorser of their products, even though they did not agree with his actions (Valkenburg & Walker, 2009). The sandwich company Subway also maintained their endorsement deal with Phelps, although they decided to delay their television ad campaign featuring the swimmer (Sandison, 2009). Even though Phelps was positioned

as somebody who failed to uphold his corporate image, his sponsorship deals did not seem to take a hit. The only endorsement that Phelps lost during this time period was Kellogg's decision not to renew his expired contract.

The failure of Kellogg to renew his contract is significant given that after winning eight Olympic gold medals, Kellogg featured Phelps on the cover of the cereal boxes, Corn Flakes and Frosted Flakes (York, 2008). This move usurped the General Mills Cereal Company, and producers of the cereal Wheaties. Traditionally, Wheaties featured high achieving Olympians on its box cover (York, 2008). Michael Phelps was thus, a commodity highly sought by the Kellogg company. After the appearance of his bong photo, he became an athlete the company apparently did not want to associate with.

Responses to the loss of his Kellogg sponsorship constituted one of the most visible ways in which the general public showed their support for Phelps. On the social networking site Facebook, a group of 4,600 members called for a boycott of all Kellogg's products. The protest on Facebook was also supported by organizations such as the Marijuana Policy Project, the Drug Policy Alliance, Students for a Sensible Drug Policy, and the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, who all also called for a boycott (Valkenburg, 2009a). Many of those opposed to Kellogg's decision not to continue their contract with Phelps pointed to contradictions within the company. For instance, Marijuana Policy Project executive director Rob Kampia, quoted in the *Baltimore Sun*, stated,

Kellogg's had no problem signing Phelps when he had a conviction for drunk driving, an illegal act that could actually have killed someone. To drop him for choosing to relax with a substance that's safer than beer is an outrage, and it sends a dangerous message to young people ( *The New Zealand Herald*, ¶ 2)



While the point made by Kampia is pertinent, the contradiction between the legality of marijuana and alcohol in our culture, make it difficult for our society to fully understand this argument. Drunk driving is criminalized, but it is the fault of the individual to use alcohol appropriately that is the issue, as opposed to alcohol itself. In the case of marijuana both the substance and the use of the plant are criminalized. The fact that unlike alcohol, marijuana itself is criminalized, complicates the point Kampina is trying to make, as the belief that marijuana is a more dangerous substance is institutionalized in our society through its illegality.

The decision not to continue business with Phelps was even significant enough to be featured on the sketch comedy show Saturday Night Live. Comedian Seth Meyers questioned if there was a discrepancy between Kellogg and marijuana when he stated “Every one of your mascots is a wild eyed cartoon character with uncontrollable munchies. Every one of your products sounds like a wish a genie granted at a Phish concert” (*The New Zealand Herald*). As in stoner films, comedy is used to disrupt perceptions about marijuana use. Public displays of support such as Meyer’s commentary as well as large boycotts point to the support Phelps received from some of the general public. But the distinction that is drawn between his supporters and his naysayers is similar to the binary created in popular culture in chapter two.

When organizations such as USA swimming, USOC, or even sport journalists critique Phelps’s actions (see Brennan, 2009; Crouse, 2009; Randhawa, 2009), the criticism is based on the basic belief that marijuana is bad, while popular support, such as the comments above by Seth Meyers, fall in line with the simply positive support seen in stoner films. When the status of marijuana is positioned as either morally corrupting or as

a substance meant to be enjoyed, it becomes difficult to understand the plant's complex position within the US culture. Characterizing marijuana as a lifestyle choice that is either positive, negative, or neither also makes it difficult to develop a critical public discourse about the plant.

The discourse of Phelps' bong photo seem to position him as a marijuana user more aligned with hippies of the 1960's than anything else. Phelps embodies the discourse of the mostly white, college - aged student who has taken a misstep with marijuana, but is otherwise a respectable human being (Gerber, 2004). Phelps' whole ordeal seemed to be about a decent kid who just made a mistake. After Phelps' apology, Speedo, one of his largest sponsors, released this statement; Michael Phelps was "a valued member of the Speedo team and a great champion" (Michaelis, 2009, p. 13C). Even USA swimming believed Phelps deserved a second chance. After criticizing Phelps, USA Swimming would later issue a statement that said, "we realize that none among us is perfect. We hope that Michael can learn from this incident and move forward in a positive way" (Shipley, 2009, p.E01). In light of all of this, it seems difficult to cast Phelps as a public villain. Phelps kept the majority of his sponsors, he faced minor sanctions from USA swimming, and he also had a lot of public support for his circumstance (facebook supporters, NORML, SSDP). Phelps may have disappointed many people, but in the end his marijuana smoking was excused. The pardoning of marijuana use for Phelps became particularly evident through the comparison of Phelps to other athletes and users of other drugs.

For example Rosie Dimanno (2009) of the *Toronto Star*, argues that the public has essentially shrugged their shoulders at Phelps' marijuana smoking, except for some

misguided sport columnists. She goes on to say “Phelps isn’t Michael Vick or Marion Jones or any number of athletes caught committing a myriad of crimes from manslaughter to rape to steroid use. It’s silly to place him among that firmament of felons” (p. S02). In this brief commentary Diamanno does two things. First she draws a distinction between steroid use and marijuana use in sport and positions marijuana as the less dangerous of the two, despite its criminality. Second, she subtly introduces aspects of race. Both Michael Vick and Marion Jones have been convicted of criminal offenses. However, by mentioning two black athletes within a tirade about crime and sport stars she connotes pre-existing stereotypes about the black body. Essentially, she draws on discourse that already situates black athletes and criminals as one and the same (Cunningham, 2009). Thus, her comments position the white body of Michael Phelps as engaging in an acceptable form of deviance, while at the same time drawing on black bodies to illustrate the real targets of concern within professional sport.

In her concluding thoughts Diamanno brings up the possibility of Phelps receiving the “token white guy” treatment. “Conversely, a few are griping over a purported imbalance in outrage, seizing on race as the muting factor, Phelps allegedly chastised as a ‘token white’ guy. Spare me” (p. S02). Her argument is based on her belief that marijuana use is irrelevant in the grand scheme of things, and that, rather than his race, is why Phelps has received a free pass. This characterization again returns to the dominant binary about marijuana use discussed in chapter two. When marijuana is considered as either immoral or banal, it is difficult to unpack the complex ways that forms of power, such as race, contribute to our understandings of marijuana use. In this case, the banality

of using marijuana erases any possible connections to race and gender. Dimanno (2009) is also not the only author to allude to race, refusing to engage critically with the matter.

Rick Maese (2009) of the *Baltimore Sun*, comes to Phelps's defense by comparing him to athletes in the National Football League (NFL). Maese's (2009) central argument is that Phelps's marijuana smoking is not a large concern, even though it has been a central topic of discussion within the media. He sees this as a farce, as greater transgressions such as the use of performance enhancing drugs in the NFL goes unnoticed. Maese (2009) uses his concluding paragraph to accentuate this point and it is worth quoting at length.

Phelps isn't a bad guy. He might not make the kind of decisions you wish for your son or daughter, but he still competes the right way. Let's not confuse ourselves: In the sports world, partying is not a hanging offense. And anyone who misguidedly thinks marijuana is more harmful than steroids is smoking something much stronger. There are plenty of worse things out there worth all the ire and fury you can muster. But judging by the eyes and hearts that clung to Sunday's Super Bowl, undeterred by suspicions or doubts, we're willing to ignore the elephant in the room, preferring to focus on a pesky fly (¶ 5).

Once again, this author positions marijuana as pale in comparison to the use of performance-enhancing drugs. However, by grafting the problem of steroids onto the entire NFL, where 80% of the players are black men, Maese is indirectly making racial references and mapping the most sensitive drug transgressions onto the bodies of black men. In contrast, marijuana use is labeled as a minor infraction of the sporting world, and mapped onto the white, male body of Michael Phelps. Marijuana use is thus constructed as something that is banal in comparison to steroid use, at least when done by bodies such as Michael Phelps.

While these two articles do not directly address the role of race in perceptions of Phelps, they subtly invoke racial narratives. A few other authors discuss the notion of race more directly. For example Bruce Arthur (2009) of the *National Post*. Arthur (2009) states

Overall, Phelps has been defended more often than he has been castigated, including in this corner. And the point has been made: What if, instead of Phelps, it was a photo of Olympic gold medalist LeBron James rocking a bong? What if it was Usain Bolt? Would the sponsors melt away? Would the firestorm begin? Probably, yes. That's not Phelps' fault, though; it's the responsibility of the rest of us (p. B8).

Arthur brings up a critical point, but then leaves it unexplored. It is not Phelps' fault that he may be treated differently, Arthur argues, but by failing to interrogate the issue further, Arthur has dropped the very ball we need to pick up.

A similar theme is illustrated in Denis Staunton's (2009) article in the *Irish Times*. Staunton discusses the possibility that Michael Phelps might face legal repercussions for his bong photo. In order to set the context for this dialogue, he points out the rates of arrests for marijuana in the United States. He mentions that in 2007, 800,000 Americans were arrested for marijuana and nine out of ten of those incarcerated were men. He goes on to state that "83 percent of those arrested were black or Latino, despite the fact that most pot-users are white" (p. 11). Yet, this point is not used to discuss the gendered and racial politics of America's drug war. It is also not used as a way to speculate on how race and gender may be used to further understand the case of Michael Phelps. The point is left for the audience to put together for themselves.

The absence of a critical discussion of marijuana laws and their impact on bodies that differ from Michael Phelps' is not surprising. This absence also explains why

critiques such as this are necessary. Michael Phelps disappointed fans because he was not able to uphold the image he and his sponsors helped to produce. However, he was also forgiven for this transgression. He is the middle class college student from the 1960's who decided to smoke pot. He messed up by deciding to smoke pot, but at heart he is a good person (Himmelstein, 1983). In the end the use of marijuana by Phelps is excused.

### **Let Timmy smoke**

Just as the smoking of marijuana was excused for Michael Phelps, the narrative concerning San Francisco Giants pitcher Tim Lincecum also pardoned his marijuana use. More precisely in the case of Lincecum, the discourse he was situated in normalized his marijuana use, as opposed to excusing it. A large part of this seems to be because of the relationship between San Francisco, marijuana, and the counter-culture. For instance in discussing the National League Championship series between Lincecum's San Francisco Giants and the Philadelphia Phillies Frank Fitzpatrick (2010) opened with this:

To some degree, the 1960's will always survive in San Francisco, where the hippie movement bloomed. On Thursday, the national anthem was sung by Phil Lesh and Bob Weir, two surviving members of the Grateful Dead, the ultimate hippie group (p. D02)

This brief introduction illustrates the link between San Francisco baseball and the counter-culture. In doing so it marks San Francisco as a space of progressive politics and as a place where marijuana use is normalized, given its connection to the hippies of the 1960's.

Later in his article Fitzpatrick (2010) offers this description of AT & T Park (home of the Giants) "the aroma of marijuana in the concourse beneath the cheap-seat grandstands was as thick and pungent as the smell of garlic fries elsewhere in this

downtown ballpark” (p. D02). Within this environment, the smoking of marijuana in the ballpark also becomes normalized, despite its illegality. Fitzpatrick uses this cultural context to set-up a discussion of Tim Lincecum the starting pitcher in the next playoff game against the Philadelphia Phillies. However, this cultural conversation along with others like it positions Lincecum’s previous marijuana use on par with the everyday activities of people in the Bay area.

This thread is also picked up Scott Ostler (2009) of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Ostler (2009) admits that Lincecum’s behavior was stupid but not worthy of being characterized as criminal.

I do know that if you are a sports hero busted for pot, you should be thankful if you play for a Bay Area team. Remember how, not so many years ago, Warriors’ fans (NBA team) would convene at halftime on the ‘dope ramp’, turning the Oakland Arena into the world’s largest bong? This much is evident: As a regional group, we seem to agree that the sports world has more pressing moral issues than a long-haired, pot-smoking pitcher (¶ 5)

Marijuana becomes a component of what it means to live in the Bay area through characterizations such as this. Ostler (2009) also positions marijuana smoking as a low priority, at least for the public in this particular area of the country. Marijuana even seems to be a part of sporting culture. These direct references to the political and cultural climate help to normalize marijuana use and this theme is also perpetuated through public support of Lincecum, and his perceived persona as a hippie himself.

Michael Phelps had fans who tried to organize boycotts of Kellogg’s products. In defense of Lincecum, fans created a website and t-shirts. The website [www.lettimmysmoke.com](http://www.lettimmysmoke.com) started in 2010. Supporters can purchase t-shirts on the website with the phrase “let Timmy smoke” in seven different variations, some of which

have a pot leaf in the background. There is also a link to the blog [www.lettimmysmoke.blogspot.com](http://www.lettimmysmoke.blogspot.com) and above this link it says “for more information on the movement, check out our blog.” The phrase “the movement” seems to be referencing those who supported Proposition 19, a bill that would have legalized all uses of marijuana for adults in California. It should be noted that this blog has no direct connection to Lincecum himself, his persona is simply being adopted for the promotion of this political movement.

Fans were not the only ones trying to capitalize on the celebrity status of the marijuana using Lincecum. Michael Hughes (2009) of *High Times* believes that Lincecum, like Michael Phelps, wasted an opportunity to endorse pot as a substance that is banal enough to allow athletes to compete at the highest level. Monte Poole of *The Oakland Tribune* (2009) argues athletes such as Tim Lincecum and Michael Phelps have the potential to enlighten minds about marijuana use and perhaps pave the way for marijuana to become an alternative to prescription drugs. Even though Lincecum did not publicly endorse marijuana, the production of the “Let Timmy Smoke” t-shirts and the blog by the same name suggests others have seen the potential of adding an athlete such as Lincecum as an unofficial representative for more progressive marijuana legislation.

Lincecum’s pot conviction was also used as a way to confirm what others already suspected of him. “With his long hair and goofy grin and overall slacker appearance, Lincecum looks like an X Gamer who swapped his skateboard for a baseball uniform. He fits the pothead stereotype” (Poole, 2009, ¶ 10). Put more eloquently by Mark Kiszla (2010) of the *Denver Post*, Tim Lincecum’s “shaggy hair flows like free love in the Haight Ashbury during 1967 and, as best as we know, the only drug Lincecum might



have a hankering for is marijuana” (p. B9). The appearance of Lincecum becomes one of the other ways in which his pot use is normalized. He has long hair just like a hippie, dresses like a slacker, so of course he smokes pot.

John Geluardi (2010) argues that the persona or at least the constructed identity of the marijuana user as a slacker/stoner has been detrimental to the medical marijuana movement. In fact, Geluardi (2010) claims, the medical marijuana movement has been taken over by people who have a “corporate” aesthetic as opposed to the typical stoner look Lincecum embodies, thus helping to legitimize the business of medical marijuana. In the case of Lincecum, his “stoner” persona is not seen as detrimental by the mediated press. Additionally his “stoner” appearance and personality seem to be a way to make light of his marijuana conviction.

San Francisco Giants beat writer Andrew Baggarly (2009) used his blog to make this point. Baggarly (2009) notes that while he does not condone drug use himself, he believes Lincecum’s possession charge would not be a big deal:

The embarrassment might be the worst thing to come out of this. I’d be surprised if Lincecum loses any endorsements. And besides, it’s not like this comes as a shock. Lincecum dresses like he’s a cross between Jimbo Jones from the ‘Simpsons’ and Jay from ‘Clerks’. Maybe he’ll drop all pretenses and start wearing dreads (¶ 2)

In this Lincecum’s appearance is again used as proof of his marijuana use. In the case of Lincecum this does not produce negative sentiments. Instead the appearance of Lincecum is used to make light and dismiss the seriousness of marijuana use.

Tim Lincecum’s appearance identifies him with characters within popular stoner films. Instead of positioning marijuana and its users as roadblocks to the advancement of society, comedy is used to demonstrate the absurdity of current stances on marijuana, and

to position marijuana users as legitimate members of society (Boyd, 2010). By making light of Lincecum's appearance and hence, expected drug use, these authors are doing similar work as these films. Making fun of the ways in which Lincecum embodies a stereotypical stoner becomes a way to downplay the seriousness of his marijuana smoking.

Lincecum's stoner appearance and the cultural climate of San Francisco work to normalize marijuana use, at least in San Francisco. Marijuana use is also normalized by authors who consider pot a lesser evil than steroids, and by those who use Lincecum as a way to personify the argument for the legalization of marijuana. For Mark Kiszla (2010) of the *Denver Post*, marijuana pales in comparison to performance enhancing drugs.

For more than a decade, steroids turned baseball into a bad cartoon, where all the fake heroes swaggered toward home plate, their forearms the size of hams...Every time Lincecum takes the mound and unleashes a fastball, I feel like chuckling with delight. Is it just me, or does this dude look like the Roadrunner? (p. B9)

Lincecum's marijuana use is mentioned in the article, but only as evidence of his hippie persona. For Kiszla (2010) the 170-pound, marijuana smoking Lincecum is the hero who has finally arisen to take baseball out of the steroid era. The title of the article is "Lincecum slays steroids dragon: Lanky giants ace helps baseball turn page on era of cheaters, cheap HR's"

The marijuana user is unequivocally celebrated as the hero in this instance. Marijuana does not carry the same stigma as steroids of giving an athlete an unfair advantage. Dave Perkins (2009) also elaborates on the evil of steroids compared to the banality of pot.

This isn't a carefully orchestrated regimen of knowingly cheating with performance-enhancing drugs, of trying to gain an edge in competition that is expressly against the rules. It's about getting high, and it comes with youth, money, idle hours, the urge to have fun, all those things that are a part of the sporting life at a certain level (p. S02)

Perkins' (2009) point is not that everybody does it, but that enough athletes do for all the reasons mentioned that the public should not be surprised when this does happen.

Lincecum received very little negative press. The one blatant negative article I found was Leland Gordon's (2009) "Don't let exception obscure the truth" published in the *Redding (CA) Record*. In this piece Gordon (2009) argues that athletes such as, Michael Phelps, Andre Aggassi, and Tim Lincecum who use drugs and perform at a high level are rare: they should be thought of as the exception and not the rule. Gordon mentions athletes such as Len Bias (died of drug overdose), Dwight Gooden (addiction), and Daryl Strawberry (addiction) as indicators of what is most likely to happen to a young athlete who tries drugs.

Gordon collapses all drugs into one category, a point of view aligned with the dominant belief that drugs are inherently bad, which is why he believes only a small number of athletes or people are able to balance drug use and high performance. This point of view neglects the ways in which fear of drug use has been constructed historically in this country. Yet, what is more telling about reactions to Lincecum's marijuana use is that this is the only article that positioned him in this manner. That alone would seem to suggest the banality of the act. However, the number of printed press articles I was able to find on Lincecum was small in comparison to Phelps, which also might help explain the lack of negative press.

All in all, while there may not have been as much press coverage of Tim Lincecum as there was of Phelps, what is there works to normalize the behavior of smoking marijuana. Whether it is the discussion of the counter-culture climate of San Francisco, the hippie persona of Tim Lincecum, the use of Tim Lincecum in the marijuana movement, or the comparison of pot to steroids, all of these narratives work to normalize pot use for Lincecum. The white, masculine body of Lincecum is a body that is allowed to smoke marijuana. He is different from Phelps however. Lincecum is not the good guy who made the mistake of getting caught with marijuana. Lincecum is the guy whom everyone expects to smoke marijuana, and he is accepted and loved for it, because it is San Francisco after all.

### **Ricky and the sticky icky**

Through the bodies of both Michael Phelps and Tim Lincecum marijuana becomes acceptable. In the case of Tim Lincecum his appearance and personality became ways in which marijuana use was signified as normal behavior. The persona of Ricky Williams was also used to understand his marijuana use. The strangeness of Ricky Williams' personality is used to illustrate the likelihood that he would smoke marijuana. However, for Williams, this persona is seen in a negative light as opposed to the jocular characterization of Lincecum. This shift in classification of personality also marks marijuana use as a damaging behavior. Williams is not the loveable hippie like Tim Lincecum; instead, he is the weird and deviant guy who would of course smoke pot.

Williams was drafted by the New Orleans Saints in 1999, as coach Mike Ditka traded all of the Saints picks for that year in order to draft the young running back. That same year Williams and Ditka posed for the cover of *ESPN the Magazine* with Williams

in a wedding dress and Ditka as the groom. For, Dan Daly (2004) of *The Washington Times*, this marked the point where he realized something was off with Williams. As he says

After the Williams-Ditka nuptials, it hardly seemed strange at all that Ricky would conduct postgame interviews with his helmet on. Nor was it the least bit surprising when he tested positive for marijuana. The guy had to be on something, right? (p. C01)

Daly (2004) uses Williams posing in the wedding dress as the symbol of his weirdness, and perpetuates the notion that Williams is strange because he has crossed a line of traditional masculinity and put on a dress.

Williams's performance of non-traditional masculinity is continuously marked as a symbol of his peculiar personality. Williams first coach, Mike Ditka, is quoted in the *Toronto Star*, saying, "Ricky's personality is the furthest thing you'd expect from a football player. He's more like a writer, a poet" (Colbourn, 2006, p. C04); this is a personality that heavily contrasts with the dominant conceptions of how football players perform masculinity. High contact sports such as football usually reinforce ideas about male physical superiority over women and subordinated men (Dworkin & Wachs, 1998). A male writer or poet contrasts with this understanding of masculinity. Therefore, as his former coach points out, Williams does not come across as a football player, because he does not demonstrate the common traits of masculinity usually associated with this sport.

Williams also did conduct interviews with his helmet on as mentioned previously, a fact that journalists use to emphasize the severity of Williams' anxiety disorder (see Fitz-Gerald, 2006; Myers, 2007). This seems like a plausible explanation, but it is unclear how Ricky Williams personally categorizes this act. Williams' struggles with social

anxiety and depression are in part what led to his early retirement from the NFL.

Williams has admitted that at that point in his life he was lost, and one of the ways he tried to fill the void was with marijuana (Naylor, 2006). It is important to note though, that he did not retire simply to smoke marijuana all day. During his retirement Williams backpacked through Thailand, India, and Australia in order to find some meaning in his life as well as to learn how to teach yoga and holistic medicine (Gonzalez, 2008).

Williams' rejection of football in order to figure himself out manifested in a hostile backlash, which was only confounded by his marijuana smoking.

Sean Fitz-Gerald (2006) of the *National Post* seems to understand how Williams' personality made it difficult for many to accept him. Fitz-Gerald (2006) argues

Williams has been controversial in part because he can not be defined. He walked away from the NFL in the prime of his career two years ago because he wanted to seek the Truth. That the search also happened to include copious amounts of marijuana only served to stoke the fire of moral indignation among those he had left behind (p. B9).

Williams was a Heisman trophy winner from Texas and a proven talent, and the ease with which he was able to give it all up is difficult for people to understand, particularly because of the privileged place of male sports like football at the cultural and economic center of athletics (Messner, 2002). The status of professional male sports such as football makes it seem inconceivable that Williams would walk away from the game in the prime of his career. Williams' relationship with football is already difficult for some people to understand and the addition of marijuana makes Williams appear to be self-indulgent.

Greg Cote (2007) a reporter for the *Miami Herald*, appearing on National Public Radio (NPR) said in reference to Williams' indifference to football

He's a man who has a lot going on in his life and sometimes manages to fit football in. And that's what people in football sort of can't fathom, is the idea that this guy is not as passionate about their beloved sport as they want him to be (quoted in Chadwick, 2007, ¶ 3)

Williams' interest in other things besides football became a way to criticize his personality. His decision to walk away from the game at an early age is so outside of the norm that marijuana became the way to explain this decision.

Dewayne Wickham (2004) of *USA Today*, takes this direct stance. Wickham (2004) uses the downfall of Mike Tyson to issue a cautionary warning to Williams. He does not think Williams has wasted his talents in the manner of Tyson at this point, but as Wickham argues

If it is his pot-smoking—and not a sober desire for a different life—that has driven Williams to give up his NFL career, his behavior is as self-destructive as that which pushed Tyson's career onto the scrapheap of history (p. 11A)

In this case the decision to incorporate marijuana into his life at the expense of football is depicted as a sign of a serious problem. Wickham (2004) does give Williams the benefit of the doubt, that perhaps he did not quit football just to smoke marijuana; however, Williams' apparent disinterest in football is what he is often criticized for.

Greg Colbourn (2006) who tries to characterize Williams as different as opposed to detrimental, makes this connection. Following a quote by one of Williams' former teammates, who believed Williams was going to go crazy one day, Colbourn (2006) states "Williams did, mailing himself overseas and walking away from the NFL and millions of dollars. He preferred to regularly smoke marijuana like his hero, Bob Marley, and to search for the other side of himself" (p. C04). This statement characterizes

Williams' retirement as a crazy decision, given that he walked away from the game of football and the millions of dollars he would have received for his participation in the sport. It also makes him appear to be lost in the haze of his marijuana smoking, a practice that is not worthwhile, particularly in light of playing in the NFL.

A search for self-renewal, marijuana smoking, and early retirement all make Williams appear to be more interested in himself than football. This is a personality that is in conflict with the overall atmosphere of the NFL. The sport of football has become a way in which men learn to "sacrifice their bodies for the benefit of the collective, suppress their creative individualism through routinized labor, and submit to the will of authority" (Andrews, Mower, & Silk, 2011, p. 83). Williams' decision to leave football early and his apparent refusal to place football as his highest priority made him seem opposed to these dominant attributes of the game. Even after his return to the NFL after a yearlong suspension, Williams was unable to overcome this characterization. For instance Antonio Gonzales (2008) commenting on Ricky Williams' return to the NFL in 2008 after a year suspension (4<sup>th</sup> failed drug test/not marijuana) stated "He still has that quiet demeanor that can make him seem detached from football, appearing as if he doesn't care about the game or how he's perceived" (p. S04).

Beyond his perceived indifference to the game, Williams' status as a black male athlete added fuel to the fire. Cunningham (2009) argues that within the contemporary sporting landscape the black athlete and black criminal have been fused together, so that to many, the black male athletic body connotes criminality. Kyle Kusz (2007) takes this argument further, claiming that the white male masculinity of athletes such as Pat Tillman is constituted as the embodiment of America in contrast to the characterization of



black male athletes as arrogant, selfish, and greedy. Tillman also gave up his career to serve as an Army Ranger after September 11<sup>th</sup>. However, Tillman's retirement is seen as heroic and selfless (Kusz, 2007), while Williams' leave of absence from football comes across as a selfish decision. When he abruptly decides to retire, he is walking away from his team and his teammates to go smoke pot. Williams is thus situated within the discourse of the self-absorbed black male athlete.

The belief that Williams only cared about himself and his marijuana smoking is further perpetuated through his connections to Bob Marley. Ricky Williams is a huge Bob Marley fan. He has Bob Marley tattoos and even named his first child Marley (Le Batard, 2004). Bob Marley was much more than a marijuana smoker. He was a talented musician, whose music was often rooted in the political struggles of Jamaica, his home country. Yet, the complexity of Marley is erased when he is connected to Ricky Williams. For example, "Ricky Williams, whose pot history is positively Marleyesque" (Perkins, 2005., p. E01) or in discussing the marijuana smoking of Randy Moss another NFL player, Jon Saraceno (2005) calls Ricky Williams the "Bob Marley of football" (p.6C). In these one-liners, Bob Marley is reduced to a heavy marijuana user. In turn Ricky Williams, like his hero, also is just a heavy marijuana user. What is missing from these narratives is any discussion of why people such as Williams or other professional athletes, or artists like Marley, may decide to smoke marijuana, outside of getting high.

The variety of reasons why a person might make the decision to smoke marijuana is especially important for a complex figure such as Williams. Williams himself is quoted as saying "I didn't quit football because I failed a drug test. I failed a drug test because I was ready to quit football" (Myers, 2004). This statement is in opposition to his

characterization as someone who just wants to get high. Rather this comment is indicative of someone who is not quite satisfied with where he is in life. In regards to his early retirement, Williams has also said that he used marijuana at that point in time to fill a void in his life (Naylor, 2006). Once again, this statement illustrates why it is important to understand why people use drugs such as marijuana. Williams himself speaks to the importance of understanding why people decide to use drugs

I'm a guy who truly believes in "to each his own." I smoked for a couple of years, but I wouldn't necessarily tell someone to smoke because it's obviously illegal and it's a drug. But if a teammate came up to me, I wouldn't berate him, yell at him or tell him he's a bad person. The problem is we always tell people what to do and not look at why they do it (Naylor, 2006, p.S.1)

Ricky Williams has openly discussed his difficulties in dealing with severe anxiety disorder as well as depression. While many articles mentioned his use of marijuana to deal with his social anxiety (see Colbourn, 2006;Fitz-Gerald, 2006; Haselden, 2007; Myers, 2004; Myers, 2007; Wickham, 2004; Wyld, 2007), only four of those articles mentioned that Williams himself believed marijuana worked better than the prescription drug Paxil, and two of them denied the validity of that possibility. Out of all the athletes in this analysis, Williams is the only one who publicly stated he used marijuana for medicinal reasons. Given this, it should be the case that Williams would be discussed within the growing medical marijuana movement, but for the most part it is not. However, as was the case for Phelps and Lincecum, pot was included in the discussion of performance –enhancing drugs and other deviant behavior within professional sport.

Williams took a year off in 2004 to find himself. He returned to the NFL in 2005 and was suspended for the whole 2006 season, due to another failed drug test. It is

unclear what the substance was that made Williams fail this test, but it was not pot. During the year he was suspended, he played for the Toronto Argonauts of the Canadian football league. In the midst of a discussion of whether or not the NFL should reinstate Ricky Williams for the 2007 season, Dave Myers (2007) of the *La Crosse Tribune*, argued the NFL should. As Myers (2007) argues “I hope the NFL is able to distinguish between the marijuana use of Williams and the dangerous and violent behavior of players such as Chicago’s Tank Johnson and Tennessee’s Pacman Jones” (¶ 7). Marijuana in this instance becomes an accepted form of deviance. It is less of a concern than some of the violent and other criminal behavior that has gone on in the NFL.

Adam Radawanski (2006) echoes this same sentiment in response to some negative responses to Williams appearance in a Toronto Argonauts uniform.

Unlike several other players currently on the Argos, Williams has never been convicted of a crime, never had problem with hard drugs, never come to blows with his teammates. His big transgression, aside from having a personality disorder that makes him unusually shy, is that –like many of his fellow athletes, and the people who pay to watch them—he likes to smoke pot (p. A19)

This statement places marijuana at the bottom of the list of transgressions athletes and non-athletes commit every day. In fact Radawanski (2006) goes on to argue that those who attack athletes for marijuana smoking are the issue not the athletes, because the real issue exists in the hypocritical act of chastising people for an act that millions engage in.

In an editorial in the *National Post*, and in an article written by Adrian Wyld (2007) of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Williams’ marijuana smoking was also positioned as less of a problem than performance enhancing drugs. Wyld (2007) takes the

hierarchical ranking of drugs in sport a step further to argue that the NFL should not concern itself with substances such as marijuana, but should instead concentrate on performance-enhancing drugs and painkillers. Marijuana is thus constructed as a substance that is a small concern because it does not enhance athletic performance, and does not have the potential for abuse that painkillers have. Absent is any discussion of how marijuana could be used as a way to treat chronic pain that may come from participating in a sport such as football. The potential for medical marijuana to help any athlete deal with pain or injury was absent from all the articles discussing Williams. Yet, these articles at least positioned marijuana use in a more banal manner.

Williams' habitual marijuana smoking in general seemed to be categorized negatively. However, this negative characterization was often veiled by its link to the weird and strange personality of Williams. There was a small thread of more direct criticism at him. The main attack on Williams came from former NFL and Toronto Argonauts, quarterback, Joe Theisman, who called Williams a "disgrace to the game" of football and said he was "embarrassed" to be a former Toronto Argonaut (Koreen, 2006, p. S7). With these comments Theisman assumes moral authority. His statements were dismissed for the most part, because, of his reputation as a blowhard, and he was also labeled a hypocrite because his own son had been arrested for cocaine trafficking (Noonan, 2006). Others followed Theisman's lead (see Haselden, 2007; Whitley, 2004; Wickham, 2004); asserting that professional athletes should not engage in illegal activities such as smoking pot.

Ricky Williams occupies a somewhat different place in the marijuana discourse than Michael Phelps and Tim Lincecum. Although Williams' marijuana use is also

excused just as it is for both Phelps and Lincecum, it is stigmatized in relation to the normal and accepted pot use of Phelps and Lincecum. The white male bodies of Phelps and Lincecum are absolved of the stigma of marijuana use, while the already “othered” black male body of Williams is not ( Dworkins & Wachs, 1998).

The mediated narratives constructed about Ricky Williams thus, help to situate his marijuana smoking within discourse of the selfish, black male, athlete. Williams’ retiring early, not making football his highest priority, and using marijuana to self-medicate become emblematic of selfishness, but Lincecum’s speeding with marijuana and a marijuana pipe was not cast as deviant. In part this seems to be because Williams already occupies a body that connotes deviance within sport (Leonard & King, 2011). The use of marijuana by Ricky Williams then seems to be more closely associated with the dominant criminalized discourse of marijuana use. At least in comparison to Michael Phelps and Tim Lincecum, Williams does not seem to occupy a body that is “allowed” to smoke marijuana.

### **The kids are listening: Josh Howard**

Josh Howard has somewhat of a history of smoking marijuana. The press speculated that he initially slipped in draft status, because of his rumored marijuana smoking at Wake Forest (Townsend, 2008). His first admission of pot smoking was on the Michael Irvin radio show. Before appearing on the show an article by Brad Townsend (2008) surfaced in the *Dallas Morning News*, bringing to light an interview Howard did with a blogger in the 2007 playoffs, about his alleged marijuana use during his college career.

It is unclear whether Howard was scheduled to appear on this show before or after this article surfaced; but the first question Irvin asked was directly related to the previously mentioned newspaper article. Here is the transcription from the first few exchanges between the two athletes:

MI: We want to, let's first go straight to this article, and I was just reading it, and actually reading it for the first time about these rumors of your marijuana use. I guess they all come from this article, and this article is written, and it says here, and you responded a lot of people have that problem. Somebody was talking to you about the problems that NBA players have with the use of marijuana, and it has you in quotes. "A lot of people have that problem." Is all of this true that I am reading?

JH: As far as like players in the league having that problem?

MI: Yes.

JH: Yeah, I don't think it's nothing that's hidden. Like everybody in the media world, and at this point would know that NBA players do smoke marijuana.

MI: Well, also in this article, you were talking about that you don't feel that you have a problem, that you don't smoke during the season, but you do smoke in the offseason. How true is that?

JH: Yeah, it's true. But, you know, like I was saying to the guys that has nothing to do with what I do as far as basketball. You know, when I go out there, I go out there and perform. That's how I feel about it.

(www.espn.com)

The majority of the interview goes on to discuss Howard's use of marijuana and more specifically the possible ramifications of this public admission.

The media coverage of this incident mainly focused on Howard's decision to publicly voice this information. The main thread of the narrative characterized Howard as using poor judgment and bad timing, given that the Mavericks were in the middle of a playoff series. Kevin Sherrington (2008) of the *Dallas Morning News*, used this as an opportunity to equate Howard's admission to marijuana smoking with his decreased

performance in the playoff series taking place at that moment. The title of Sherrington's (2008) article was "Howard's shot, and his timing, are a little off." This title conflates the poor athletic performance of Howard with his perceived lack of judgment. This emphasis is made with comments such as "Howard didn't consider any of the possibilities when indulging this reefer madness, which tells you all you need to know about his leadership qualities" (Sherrington, 2008, p. 1C). Howard's interview with Michael Irvin, however, clearly demonstrates that Howard was aware of the repercussions of his statement.

After Josh Howard argues his marijuana use has nothing to do with what he does on the basketball court, Irvin's co-host (Kevin Kiley) responds with

KK: Well, and therein lies the problem. You're not having a great series against the Hornets to this point -- 13.5 points per game, and I think you're shooting about 27 percent. You realize when you admit to this, that the media, people out there are going to assign the problems that you're having on the court to the fact that you've admitted that you, at times, smoke marijuana, you realize that?

Howards admits he understands that and later goes on to acknowledge that even though basketball is a team sport, it is likely that the media will try to put the blame on an individual.

JH: Oh, yeah, they're going to try to find somebody to put it on.

MI: Where should they put it though, Josh?

JH: On the whole team. This is a team game. You go out there and play five on five. You know, you have to respect each man that puts on his uniform. That's how I feel about this game. This season is different from last season and the season before that. Teams just start getting better in the NBA. Players are getting better in the NBA. It ain't just the top 10 guys every year. There's guys on each team that will get you 30 and 10 a night. We ran into the high team right now, and we're going to get back on track tonight. That's all I'm worried about is just winning games.

In this exchange it seems evident that Howard does understand the position he is putting himself in by admitting to smoking marijuana and while not explicitly stating he will be the fall guy, seems to understand that it is likely he will be that guy.

Another article titled “Pot confessions spark controversy: Timing of forward’s latest admission a real buzzkill for Mavericks” also alludes to the poor timing of Howard’s admission. This point is cemented within the article by the inclusion of a quote from teammate Jerry Stackhouse who states

When you start to look at what kind of person he is and where his heart is, hopefully, you can let some of this stuff slide by. But it’s not the ideal situation. It’s not what we want to be talking about coming into Game 3 down 0-2 (Sefko, 2008, p. 9C)

In the same article, Howard’s head coach, Avery Johnson, is also quoted in reference to Howard’s marijuana discussion “It’s what I call poor timing and poor judgment” (Sefko, 2008, p. 9C). Is Howard’s admission to marijuana smoking a bad choice because the Mavericks are in the middle of a playoff series, because marijuana is believed to be detrimental, or both? This article insinuates that it is the timing of this discussion that is the worst offense.

Howard may have had bad timing, but to some, what was an even worse transgression was his failure to the youth of America. Throughout this whole process, Howard persisted in arguing that he was raised to always be truthful, so since he was asked about his marijuana use, he was going to be honest about it. Jean-Jacques Taylor (2008) of *The Dallas Morning News*, uses Howard’s commitment to honesty to argue that what Howard really needs to do is be honest with the children of his basketball camp.

Howard needs to explain to each of the camp’s 137 kids why they should refrain from using marijuana, any other illegal drug, and avoid underage



drinking. Perhaps he'll do it during the daily sessions about life skills, in which Howard or a guest speaker discusses of education or decision-making. His words should be direct and honest. No ambiguity should exist when he's done (p. 1C).

In this article there is no discussion of any perceived dangers in reference to marijuana smoking. As with Michael Phelps' involvement with marijuana, the worst-case scenario is not Howard's health of Howard but his possible influence over children. Yet, how are the children of this camp supposed to take him seriously, when the use of this substance has not had any visible impact on his life?

Scott Sexton (2008) of the *Winston Salem Journal*, has the answer to future conundrums such as this. He maintains that athletes should not be considered role-models, but also mentions that being labeled as a role model is just the nature of the business. Therefore, Sexton (2008) argues "Here's a message for Howard and other unwitting role models: Smoke all the dope you want, as often as you want. Be prepared for a hard fall. And until that happens-and it will-shut up. Kids are listening" (§ 13). Two central points come from this statement. First, marijuana will lead to a personal collapse, though why marijuana will lead to a downfall is never explained. Sexton (2008) just implies that marijuana is a drug, and hence it is a bad substance that will lead to a downfall.

The second point appears to be that individuals such as Howard can make the personal choice to smoke pot, but they must not publicly admit to it. Publicly admitting to smoking marijuana sends a message to children that it is a substance that is fine to use. Yet, this comment would also seem to suggest that smoking is an activity adults can chose to indulge in, as long as children do not know about it. Therefore, Sexton's (2008)

criticism seems to be more intent on protecting an image than contextual evidence of the detrimental athletic effects of the choice to use marijuana.

Perhaps this is why most of the coverage of this event focused on portraying Howard as someone who failed as a role model and used bad timing in discussing the matter. This places the blame on Howard and allows becomes a way to perpetuate the demonization of the substance in the absence of any substantial punishment. Of course, it is also hard to punish Howard, because all he did was talk about marijuana use. Therefore, there is not much the league could do anyway.

In this coverage he was demonized for his decision to speak publicly about his marijuana use, but in the end it was excused. Howard's decision to smoke marijuana never constituted the main problem. Rather the timing of this admission was problematic because the Mavericks were in a playoff series at the time. Finally Howard was constructed as failing to be a role model for children. Josh Howard does do a lot for children. Howard is a man who turned down an opportunity to play on the USA Olympic basketball team because of his obligation to run a basketball camp for children in North Carolina. This is the same camp that hands out free uniforms to all of its attendees. It would seem from these gestures that Josh Howard does care about the youth of America, and wants to give something back to him. Yet, some of the journalists writing about his marijuana use imply that he does not care, simply because of his choice to use marijuana in the off-season.

#### **Like father like son: Joakim Noah**

Joakim Noah's marijuana slip-up received even less attention than Howard's public admission. After arresting Noah for an open container of alcohol, police officers

found a joint in his back pocket. Noah received a six-month probationary sentence, as well as a \$200 fine. Additionally a New York City school where Noah worked out at as a youth asked Noah not to continue a youth camp he ran there, out of a concern for the image of the school (Brockway, 2008). The loss of this opportunity seems to be the biggest repercussion Noah faced.

The largest narrative of Noah featured his father more prominently than it did himself. Noah's father, Yannick Noah is a former professional tennis player who created a controversy of his own after admitting after he won the French Open in 1983 that he enjoyed marijuana (Associated Press, 2008). The elder Noah came out in support of his son after this incident. Yannick Noah is quoted in *The Australian* (2008), in response to his son telling him he believed he had messed up "Yes, it's a mistake but it's not serious. Don't change. Make me happy, don't let it happen again" (p. 017). This casual response apparently did not set well with some journalists stateside.

Nick Hut (2008) of the *Northwest Herald* argues that while the elder Noah was able to rationalize his marijuana use by saying it had no performance enhancing capabilities there is still cause for concern. Hut (2008) goes on to say "The mere fact that people can speculate about 'what might have been' with Yannick (one grand slam win) is a problem, and one Joakim should want to avoid. If he uses again, he can not get caught" (§ 5). Pot is then situated as a factor that could have derailed Yannick Noah and has the potential to do the same to the younger Noah.

Kerith Gabriel (2008) takes this speculation a step further. Gabriel (2008) characterizes Yannick Noah's reaction as uncharacteristic of a typical father, but then justifies the response by stating "It isn't as if Yannick set any kind of example" in

relation to the elder Noah's own admitted marijuana use. However, the seriousness of this rant is dropped pretty quickly. The rest of the article drops this tone and simply discusses the charges Joakim Noah faces for his marijuana possession.

The emphasis on Yannick Noah's response to his son's marijuana smoking, accentuates the point that, like all the other athletes in this case study, Noah's marijuana use is excused. His arrest also happened early in his rookie season with the Chicago Bulls. Therefore, Noah had not had the opportunity to reach the status of the other athletes involved in this study, a fact that might be another reason for the minimal press coverage. The coverage that does exist though, suggests that this was a small time offense that not many seemed to care about.

### **Producing the new marijuana using body**

Beginning in the 1930's marijuana smoking became a type of behavior thought to place the user outside of a productive lifestyle. Marijuana is believed to make users slip into a world of unconsciousness where they would be unable to return, preventing them from becoming productive members of the labor force (Auld, 1981). The stigma of marijuana use has also taken on different meaning depending on what types of bodies it is associated with. When it was Mexicans and African Americans who were using marijuana, the plant was thought to make the user violent, sexually promiscuous, and criminal (Booth, 2003). Based on supposed negative effects of marijuana use on already demonized bodies, the campaign against marijuana began.

When marijuana use was taken up by white middle class college students the act of smoking pot was still seen as deviant, but the story of users deviance began to change. Since these white bodies were seen as representing the general population, they also

appeared more deserving of empathy. These were not deviant minorities engaging in destructive behavior, these were “normal” teens who just happened to be involved with some deviant behavior (Himmelstein, 1983). So even while the act of smoking marijuana was still demonized, these white bodies became more acceptable users. In some ways this same idea is reflected through actual arrest records of contemporary marijuana users.

According to a 2006-2007 US Department of Health Survey, among people 18-25, the percentage of whites who used marijuana was 10 percent higher than the percentage of blacks, but young black people are arrested at seven times the rate of their white counter-parts (Lennard, 2011). This structural inequity exemplifies how certain marijuana using bodies are perceived as more of a threat. Using the methodology of Reading Sport, this chapter set out to gain an ideological understanding of marijuana use among athletes in this current historical moment (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). The differences among the discursive constructions of athletes in this analysis in some ways reflect the acceptance of certain bodies that engage in marijuana use.

Michael Phelps is chastised in the press for his marijuana use. He faces this response not because of any perceived mental or physical health risks, but because he has decided to smoke marijuana as a celebrity who endorses a multitude of different products. The rationale is that since he helped to produce an image of himself as an all-American boy, he should not disrupt that image by smoking pot. Therefore, the solution is to give up the endorsements if he wants to smoke marijuana (see Brennan 2009; Steele, 2009; Vozzella, 2009). Marijuana use is still portrayed as detrimental, but it is acceptable for Phelps if he removes himself from the public spotlight. Overall Phelps is someone who

has merely disappointed some of his following by his marijuana use, and at the end of the day that behavior is pardoned within the mediated discourse of this event.

While the marijuana use of Phelps is excused, the marijuana use of Tim Lincecum is normalized. The construction of San Francisco as a space where the counter-culture flourishes helps make the Bay area seem like a place where marijuana is a normal part of cultural life. The narrative of Lincecum also demonstrates that marijuana has been present in the sporting landscape of San Francisco (see Fitzpatrick, 2010; Ostler, 2009). The location of San Francisco is constructed as a welcoming place for marijuana users such as Lincecum. Lincecum's "stoner" appearance is also a way to explain his marijuana conviction and dismiss the seriousness of his actions. All of these factors work to make marijuana use an accepted behavior through the white, male body of Tim Lincecum.

Unlike Lincecum's image, marijuana use is less acceptable for the black body of Ricky Williams. Williams' persona is not emphasized to make light of the situation. Williams' strange personality cast his marijuana use, in a negative light as opposed to the more light hearted characterization of Tim Lincecum. Williams' decision to retire early, his uneven performance of masculinity, his choice not to make football his highest priority, and his use of marijuana to self-medicate is constructed by some members of the press as emblematic of selfishness. These characterizations also situate Williams within racist discourses about African American male athletes (Andrews, Mower, Silk, 2011). Unlike Phelps or Lincecum, Williams is constructed as a less acceptable marijuana using body. To a degree his marijuana use is excused, but not to the extent of Phelps and Lincecum, given that he is situated within negative discourse of the black, male athlete.

The cases of these three athletes demonstrate different levels of acceptance of marijuana use. The ordinariness of Phelps' marijuana use is constructed in part through comparisons to what are considered more "serious" transgressions committed by black athletes such as Michael Vick and Pacman Jones (see Dimanno, 2009; Maese, 2009). Marijuana use in this case is validated through the body of Michael Phelps, while at the same time marking black male athletes as the real criminals in sport. The narrative of Tim Lincecum does not draw any direct connections to race, but the way he is situated within the discourses of liberal San Francisco, hippies, and stoners, all work to connect him to the white, middle class college students of the 1960's, whose marijuana use was characterized as more morally acceptable than that of minority users (Himmelstein, 1983). The narratives of both Phelps' and Lincecum's marijuana use position this act as more acceptable than the marijuana use of the black male body of Ricky Williams.

The media coverage of Josh Howard and Joakim Noah was too small to allow for a confident comparison, perhaps because they are less prominent athletes than Phelps, Lincecum and Williams. Still, perhaps the cases of Phelps, Lincecum, and Williams do provide some insight into whose marijuana use can be excused in this current moment. The narratives of these different athletes does draw some parallels to historical constructions of marijuana users and is indicative of structural inequities in terms of race concerning the imprisonment of marijuana users.

That said, the narratives of Phelps, Lincecum, and Williams were situated in a marijuana discourse that positioned the plant as less harmful than steroids. Even though it is important to account for the role of different lines of power, this seems like a promising thread. In the next chapter I plan to draw on this more positive construction of

marijuana use in order to think about how new knowledge can be constructed about the marijuana using body in order that the marijuana using body can be an accepted citizen within the United States.



## CHAPTER FIVE: DISRUPTING THE UNPRODUCTIVE BODY

January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 I am in hour ten of my 13-hour car trip from Rochester, NY to Iowa City, IA, which means I am in Illinois. By now I have done this drive more than ten times and currently I am feeling pretty good, minus the fact that I am a little bored from being in the car by myself for so long. I have gotten used to the mental and physical tolls of this drive, but even my built-up tolerance to these drains does not make this drive any easier. Besides caffeine, a key to managing this drive is to try and never go any more than five miles over the speed limit. To get a speeding ticket would only add time and money to this already tedious drive.

The speed limit is currently 55. I am doing 60 in the left lane as I am pulling past the car on my right. All of a sudden the speed limit drops to 45. I down shift and immediately get into the right lane. I have to abide by my own rules after all. I check my rearview mirror as a force of habit, when I notice a car right on my bumper. I take another look and I realize it's a cop car. My heart begins to race and I just wait for the inevitable, not a second later I see the red and blue lights. I pull over and immediately get my drivers license and registration ready for the officer. I know the routine and I do not really want to prolong this any more than need be. Yet, as I am doing this I can not recall really exceeding the speed limit for any extended amount of time. Am I really going to get a speeding ticket for this?

On the side of the road I am surrounded by darkness, except for the occasional headlights, of another car passing by. I am immersed in this secluded space and when the officer's knock comes on my passenger's window it startles me. I roll down the window

and without any sort of greeting I hear “this is just going to be a warning. You swerved a little bit back there and I just wanted to make sure you weren’t falling asleep or intoxicated”. A rush of relief falls over me as soon as the officer says this. I am not getting a ticket. This whole thing should be over with pretty quickly.

Even though I am relieved I do think to myself, I wonder what sort of warning this is? I was stone cold sober and if anything I was just hyper caffeinated. In fact I did not even remember jerking my car at all, let alone in such a manner that would suggest I should be pulled over. Yet, this particular officer was friendly from the start and told me I was just going to get a warning, so I told myself not to worry about it. I did not want to dig myself into any holes and I also wanted to get the whole thing over with, so I just answered the officer’s questions.

I get the standard form of questioning. Where are you coming from? Where are you going? What do you do in Iowa? How long have you been driving? What do you study? After my series of answers the officer who has been nothing short of friendly, and sympathetic of my long day of driving, then tells me I am just going to write this up, but do you mind coming back to the car with me I have a few more questions for you?

There are no witnesses out here. It is dark and late at night. No one knows my exact location at the moment. This is not a situation where I want to be sitting alone in a police car, on the side of the road. As far as I understand I have not done anything that warrants this trip. I want to ask why he wants me to do this, but I do not. All of my paranoia about police officers, and their mistreatment of minorities come to the fore. I cloak my fear in the belief that he just wants to make sure I am sober and make my way back to his car.

I have never been in a cop car until this moment. The Smashing Pumpkins, one of my favorite bands from my adolescence, is playing on his satellite radio as I sit down. At first this is somewhat comforting. Then I see the large rifle right next to me and the larger, white police officer sit down next to me and my heart begins to race. The officer asks me a few more questions about graduate school and even asks me about my dissertation. I hesitate before I answer this question. On one hand this officer has been really friendly. The officer is a young guy. Maybe he would appreciate the ways in which I am trying to complicate understandings of marijuana use. The side of me that wins, though, tells me do not even think about telling him your dissertation has anything to do with illegal substances. You do not want to be labeled as someone who has any interest in marijuana.

I am on guard, but I appear calm. I am in some ways impressed at how quickly I am processing the repercussions of such a statement, and make my decision not to tell him what my dissertation is actually about. I instead tell him it is about Canadian nationalism and hockey. Purposely avoiding details, in hope that my short answers will be sufficient and I will be able to get this whole thing over with.

So do you have anything in the car I should be worried about? *What?! Where did that come from? So, this is where this situation is going...No I don't.* No weapons or anything? *Nope.* No drugs or anything? *Nope.* I am a graduate student, you have checked my criminal record, the car is mine and yet still this is the kind of questioning I am subjected to. I want to answer these questions with a question of my own. Why are you asking me all of these things? I of course know the answer. I am a young brown skin male with dreadlocks, who has a car with out of state plates, full of luggage from

spending a month back at home. I would really like to hear his answer though, but this is a question I can not ask. I would be straddling a line that could only make things worse. All I can do is politely comply.

The officer finally finishes writing out the warning and I think I am finally done with this and can just get out of this tense situation. All he needs to do is hand over that warning and I will get back in my car. Fate was not so kind. Are you sure you don't have anything I should worry about in the car? *Once again I respond no.* No weapons or anything? *Nope, just my goalie stick.* He then laughs and asks briefly about my hockey career. Ok, I think we both had a laugh, clearly he understands that I am not a criminal. Just let me out of this car! Please just let me out!

So you don't have any marijuana in the car? *Nope.* Not even any for personal use. *No.* Do you think one of your friends may have dropped a roach and that's why it smells like marijuana? *Hmm, I think to myself what an odd question because my car does not smell like marijuana and this is the first time you have mentioned it, but once again I just say no.* Do you smoke marijuana? *No.* This time my blood level is rising not because I am scared, but I am getting more agitated by the moment. This officer is supposed to protect citizens, but here he is trying to get me to incriminate myself. Even more so as far as I understand I have not even done anything that warrants this type of questioning. How can this be legal? The only thing I am guilty of is being a black man with dreadlocks.

Well do you mind if I take a look just to make sure? At that moment more than anything I want to say in my most sarcastic tone: *No, I do not mind that at ten o'clock at night on the side of the highway in complete darkness you want to go through all my luggage, my guitar case, and the groceries I brought back with me. I do not have*

*anything better to do than to watch you do that. Instead, I just say no, I do not give you consent to search my car.*

NO! The officer says. As I sigh internally, I think it should all be over now. I did not give him consent there is nothing else to discuss. He presses on though. What do you mean no? *No, I don't give you consent to search my car and to myself I think I actually know the law you bastard. You can only search my car without consent if you have probable cause. I have not done anything illegal, I am not intoxicated, I am not giving you consent. But, I simply say I do not give you consent.* The cop does not give up though. He keeps pressuring me to let him search my car. You know when people say no that usually means they have something to hide. *I look him dead in the eye and say no, I don't have anything to hide I would just really like to get back on the road.* At this moment the cop knows he doesn't have any legal recourse and hands me my warning and says "well I won't hold you up anymore". Somewhat relieved I walk back to my car.

As sit back down in my own car. The adrenaline melts into sadness and fear. I start my car and pull back onto the highway. The cop soon follows. There is an exit a quarter mile away and all I want to do is get off and try to collect myself. However, the cop is still behind me and I become paranoid that if I immediately get off at this exit, this will raise his suspicion. I press on and luckily the cop gets off at that very exit. The feeling of being under the watchful eye of the law is finally over and now I am left with my own thoughts as I try and process the situation.

For the next hour I do not even turn any music on. I am simply lost in a sea of thoughts. I know exactly why things unfolded the way they did, but feel so completely powerless. I have no criminal record and broke no laws, but yet I was subjected to this

harassment and there was nothing I could really do about it. To broach this topic with officer would only make my situation worse. I can not decide what makes me feel worse. The fact that I know I was profiled and I could not do anything about it, or that an officer that was supposed to protect me spent all of this time trying to incriminate me.

I gain a slight feeling of satisfaction based on the premise that I knew that you have to give consent for an officer to search your vehicle without a warrant. But, at the same time what kind of society are we living in when an officer of the law does not have to inform you of your right to refuse such searches?! How many lives have been ruined because of these same underhanded tactics? For a brief moment I consider cutting off my beautiful locks. But I realize this won't change anything. I will still have brown skin and it would still be likely that in certain situations I would be racially profiled. It is not my appearance that is the problem. It is not my appearance that is the problem....

This project has focused on understanding the marijuana using body through various forms of popular culture. The previous story is an example of how my own body is situated within the discourse of marijuana. It is a vastly different tale than the one I told to begin this project. On a bright summer day surrounded by fellow dread heads, men and women with long hair, tie dye and various other aesthetic markers that could be conflated with pot use, I fit right in. People probably assumed I smoked marijuana, but this was not a detrimental attribute, if anything the perception that I smoked pot might have validated me as a member of this particular social group.

Late at night, on the side of the highway, in a thinly populated area of Illinois, my brown skin and dreadlocks label me as a suspect. The physical body communicates social and political issues (Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2007), and as a male, with brown skin, and

dreadlocks in the latter situation my body labels me as a criminal. I use my own body to demonstrate not only the complex understandings our society has regarding marijuana, but also to illustrate how race, masculinity, and the body are entwined with understandings of drugs and drug use.

### **Marijuana use and the body**

Telling these stories has helped me to conceptualize the prohibition of marijuana in more depth, as I try to situate my own experiences into the larger social context concerning marijuana use. These stories are also emblematic of the different forms of knowledge about marijuana use that are produced and reproduced through popular culture. The *Above the Influence* commercials are most similar to the experience I had when I was pulled over. While, these commercials do not deal with the criminalization of the plant the inherent negative perception of marijuana in these advertisements helps to justify why marijuana should be considered an illegal substance. On the other hand the narrative recounting my experience at a Phish show is very similar to the representation of marijuana in stoner films. The people smoking marijuana at this concert were not threats to society. They were people having fun, relaxing and listening to music. This scenario depicts a very different version of marijuana use than the dominant perception that this substance is inherently damaging.

The Phish show is a material challenge to the hegemonic ideology concerning marijuana use, while stoner films challenge this message through popular culture. Yet, despite these challenges the belief that marijuana is damaging to society and its users is the accepted form of 'truth' about this substance. This message maintains its status as the accepted form of knowledge concerning marijuana not because it is inherently true, but

because there are political, economic, and cultural apparatuses that help to produce and reproduce this particular form of knowledge about marijuana (Foucault, 1984). These various institutions thus help keep the hegemonic perception of marijuana in place.

Richard Nixon started the modern war on drugs in the 1970's (Betram et al., 1996). Therefore, the drug user (including the marijuana user) has been characterized as a criminal for over forty years. Since the belief that drugs and their users are detrimental to society is so engrained within our culture it can become difficult not to think about substances such as marijuana in this manner. Through the criminalization of drugs, the D.A.R.E. program, anti-drug campaigns such as *Above the Influence*, the belief that drugs are inherently dangerous has been institutionalized (Alexander, 2011). It is within the context of this institutionalized belief that politicians must run for election, govern, and make policy.

The immoral and detrimental characteristics of illegal substances like marijuana are so engrained within our culture that it is in the best interest of politicians to support the war on drugs, as opposed to speaking out against it (Betram et al., 1996). While it is one thing for President Obama to talk of trying marijuana as a adolescent coming of age (Seelye, 2006), it is a whole different story to come out opposed to the criminalization of drugs and drug users. To talk about the legalization of marijuana or changing the focus of the war on drugs would risk making Obama appear soft on drugs. Taking this perspective would put him in direct contrast to the United States long standing stance on drugs. This characterization was applied to President Carter when he tried to soften marijuana legislation and was labeled as disinterested in the health and future of the youth of America (Gerber, 2004). This pressure not to appear soft on drugs forced him to move



away from his reformation of marijuana laws. Regardless then of what a politician may believe, there is a large risk in advocating for the reformation of drug policy.

Economic factors also play a large role in keeping the war on drugs intact. According to the Drug Policy Alliance the US annually spends more than \$51 billion on the War on Drugs ([www.drugpolicy.org](http://www.drugpolicy.org)). This large amount of money includes costs for supply reduction, prevention of drugs from crossing the border into the United States, domestic law enforcement, as well as treatment. Marijuana prohibition is estimated to cost the United States \$7.6 billion annually, when police costs, judicial costs, and prison costs are accounted for (Regan, 2011). At such a high price there has to be an incentive for continuing this costly program, especially since the United States seems to be no closer to eliminating drugs from our society, which is a central goal of this crusade (Benavie, 2009).

Regardless of how well the war on drugs is going, law enforcement must keep this battle going, because it is their job to do so. At the same time, law enforcement agencies receive financial benefits for continuing the policing of illicit substances, such as marijuana. Under the Reagan administration in order to build a consensus between state and local law enforcement to make the policing of drugs a top priority, cash grants were given to institutions that followed this practice (Alexander, 2011). The possibility of receiving federal money makes drugs a central issue, but also validates the belief that drugs are a major concern because of the monetary reward. Federal money received in this manner not only helps different departments enforce drug prohibition, but it also helps law enforcement create new sub-divisions to help address this issue.

For example, in 1988 at the urging of the Reagan administration Congress renamed the federal aid given to law enforcement the “Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program after a New York City police officer who was shot to death while guarding the home of a drug-case witness” (Alexander, 2011, p. 72). This revision of federal aid for law enforcement gives it a direct connection to the policing of drugs. The connection between this funding and drugs is made even more evident given that nationally 40% of Byrne funding is used to create narcotics task forces (Alexander, 2011). Therefore, it is in the best interest of law enforcement agencies to continue the war on drugs because it ensures government funding and helps pay for the many sub-divisions such as a narcotics task force that may arise from the enforcement of drug prohibition.

The media also plays a role in perpetuating this form of truth about marijuana through anti-drug advertisements, such as *Above the Influence*. The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) conducts this mediated campaign. This office is a branch of the US government headed by a drug czar who leads the war on drugs on behalf of the president (Beltram et al., 1996). The ONDCP is thus a government program that receives funding not only to enforce the criminalization of drugs but also to *perpetuate* it. The *Above the Influence* commercials became a way to widely circulate this government sanctioned message about marijuana. The fact that the government sponsors these commercials and this message makes it a lot easier to spread this particular form of knowledge than it may be for activists advocating for the legalization of medical marijuana as the government has easier access to major outlets in which to disseminate this message.

Discourses of modern medicine also help to perpetuate the dominant form of knowledge about marijuana. Modern medicine is predicated on the belief in specific dosages of specific medicines for particular symptoms (Bock, 2000), an understanding of medicine that privileges something such as pills, whose chemical compounds can be reproduced and whose proper dosage can be easily controlled. Plant based forms of medicine such as marijuana do not fit neatly into this model. The inability to specifically outline what parts of the plant are helpful combined with the psychoactive effects of the substance and the inability to ration out a controlled dosage make marijuana in plant form seem like a more primitive form of medicine (Bock, 2000). Complicating matters is that fact that if marijuana were to be legalized as a medicine in plant-based form, it would most likely be subject to a lot of rigorous regulations by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The cost of getting a single molecule drug through FDA approval costs between \$200-600 million (Mack & Joy, 2001). Earning government approval for marijuana in its plant-based form is estimated to cost even more. The extra costs would come from more extensive testing for possible abuse (due to marijuana's classification as a Schedule I drug). Even more problematic, since marijuana can not be patented it could be difficult to find a drug company to fund the required testing (Bock, 2000). Medical marijuana in plant form is thus not a high priority for the pharmaceutical industry due to high costs and obstacles to generating a large profit. The industry has more to gain by trying to develop synthetic forms of THC such as, the pill Marinol.

Marinol fits the standards of modern medicine. It is a synthetic pill that has made it through a rigorous screening process, and its dosage can be easily controlled. All of

these factors tend to make Marinol seem more favorable in comparison to the actual cannabis plant, given our society's dominant discourses concerning medication. Nonetheless, this synthetic form of THC is often believed to be not as effective as marijuana in its natural form. Patients often prefer smoking marijuana for some of the following reasons: swallowing pills is difficult and sometimes impossible for patients who are nauseated and vomiting, Marinol acts more slowly than marijuana, many patients who find Marinol ineffective obtain relief with marijuana, and marijuana contains a component, cannabidiol, which has anti-anxiety effects that patients find helpful. This ingredient is not found in Marinol, and adjusting the dose is easier when puffin than when taking pills (Benavie, 2009, p. 52). Despite user testimonials to support of plant based medical marijuana (also see Bock, 2000; Chapkis & Webb, 2008), the rigors of the FDA, modern medicine, and the legal system serve as roadblocks to legalizing medical marijuana in its plant-based form.

Politicians, law enforcement, the media, and the medical industry are all pillars of society that help produce, reproduce and circulate the message that marijuana and other drugs are inherently damaging (Foucault, 1984). Making social change is not simply a matter of convincing people that the understanding of marijuana presented in stoner films is the proper view of what society should believe about marijuana and its usage. Instead Foucault (1984) argues forming a new politics of truth is a matter of “detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (p. 133). In other words the road to social change must detach the current ‘truth’ about marijuana from the institutions that help to perpetuate this form of knowledge and benefit from it.

I believe this project has been a step in this direction. By examining advertisements, film, and sporting narratives I have been able to identify the different messages about marijuana communicated through popular culture, but I have also been able to connect this analysis to institutions such as the prison system, law enforcement, and the medical industry, and the ways these organizations help perpetuate the criminalization of marijuana. I also believe the analysis of the athletes' marijuana use in this dissertation is a central component to disrupting cultural understandings of what it means to be a marijuana user.

The narratives of Michael Phelps, Tim Lincecum, and Ricky Williams situated their marijuana use as less harmful than steroids. More importantly, in each of these narratives there was no thread about marijuana as a substance that was damaging for body and mind. Nor was marijuana constructed as a performance enhancing substance, nor a plant that was going to diminish athletic performance. The absence of this discourse is incredibly significant. Professional athletes depend upon their bodies to make their living. A main discourse concerning marijuana use deals with the deterioration of the body (Auld, 1981). If athletes who use marijuana are not believed to be putting their bodies and hence their careers on the line by using this substance it makes illegality and stigmatization of the plant seem incredibly overblown.

Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in an Olympics, Tim Lincecum is a two time Cy Young award winner and a World Series champion, and Ricky Williams is a Heisman Trophy winner who is entering 13<sup>th</sup> year in the NFL. These are not bodies that sit on the couch all day, nor have they slipped into a passive fantasy world. Instead they actively use both body and mind on a daily basis in order to make a living. The fact that

these athletes are able to use marijuana without any serious repercussions and the absence of any discourse discussing the potential damage to these bodies due to the use of this substance clearly disrupts the dominant cultural understanding of marijuana use.

The absence of any serious critique of these athletes is emblematic of the many inconsistencies in how the drug war is enforced. The downplaying of the seriousness of these athletes marijuana transgressions is connected to their status as sporting celebrities. These individuals have more cultural capital and more economic resources to deal with any legal issues concerning the use or possession of this plant. Everyday citizens do not have such privileges. The policing of the drug war also does not target the upper class, but instead focuses on enforcing drug policy in poor urban neighborhoods (Alexander, 2011). This discrepancy is also made visible through professional sport leagues rules concerning the use of marijuana.

The International Olympic Committee punishes athletes only if they test positive for marijuana during competition, the National Football League tests once a year for recreational drugs such as marijuana, in the National Basketball Association an athlete is punished only after a third positive test for marijuana, and Major League Baseball does not test for marijuana. These official stances clearly indicate that marijuana use is not perceived as a serious concern in professional sports. There are repercussions for the use of marijuana, but not anything that would suggest that marijuana is inherently dangerous to the daily functioning of these athletes. Yet, these policies make it appear that the leagues do not condone marijuana smoking just by having them place, a step they apparently think necessary in order to adhere to the dominant conceptions about marijuana use in the United States.

While rules may be in place to keep up appearances it also seems to be the case that smoking marijuana as a high profile athlete does not come with much risk. The ability to use marijuana without fear of repercussions is also highly visible within politics. The last three presidents of the United States (Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama) have all discussed smoking marijuana in their adolescence and have still been elected to office. The list of politicians who have admitted smoking marijuana in their past also includes Al Gore, Bruce Babbitt, and Newt Gingrich (Gerber, 2004). What makes these admissions even more indicative of the paradox of drug enforcement is when these statements are paired with arrest records. For instance, in 2002 the current mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg was asked by a reporter if he had ever smoked pot; Bloomberg responded with ‘You bet I did. And I enjoyed it’. This response was then used alongside a picture of Bloomberg for a drug liberalization campaign, but while he suffered no repercussions for this statement, 52,000 New Yorkers were arrested for marijuana that same year (Gerber, 2004, p. xvii). Just like professional athletes, the ability of politicians to speak more openly about their marijuana use highlights the inequity of the war on drugs.

These discrepancies are also what make constructing new forms of knowledge about marijuana so important. I think a way to start is by looking at the narratives concerning athletes’ usage of this plant. While this study focuses on only a few athletes, their narratives help to complicate dominant conceptions of marijuana and the marijuana using body. The narratives I use at the beginning and end of this project are also instructive. The description of marijuana use at the Phish concert also helps to detach prevailing conceptions of marijuana users as criminals or unproductive members of

society, while the story I tell about getting pulled over illuminates the racial and gendered components of drug enforcement. The final story also opens the door to make larger connections to the detrimental effects of the belief that marijuana should be criminalized, such as racial profiling and the prison system.

I argue that more narrative accounts such as that can serve as interventions that move our cultural discourse on marijuana in new directions. My own stories and the narratives of athletes represent only a small portion of the general population. There needs to be stories from women, other people of color, as well as medical marijuana patients. There also needs to be stories about people who use marijuana for religious purposes, or people who use it as a fun, communal, substance (Boyd, 2008). Narratives from different social groups would illuminate other detrimental effects of the War on Drugs and illustrate how those with various social identities may use marijuana without inherent damaging consequences.

Story telling is important because as Margret Duncan (1998) argues, stories allow for us to see people who look different than we do as fellow human sufferers. Story telling does not allow for someone to understand what it means to be gay or a lesbian, a woman, or a person of color, but it does offer the possibility to imagine those who are not like us as fellow sufferers, whose form of plight is an issue of concern (Duncan, 1998). I believe understanding that we all suffer in different contexts develops empathy and allows people to begin to conceptualize that we all suffer in different manners in our society. Personal essays also speak from the inside, relying heavily on emotion, and in doing so promote closeness as opposed to the distance that comes from traditional



academic texts (Krieger, 1996). Speaking from the inside I believe has a large potential to be a part of the process of detaching marijuana use from its hegemonic conceptions.

Stories from medical marijuana patients, victims of the drug war, as well fully functional adults who use this substance touch on the different parts of society that are impacted by the belief that marijuana is inherently detrimental for society. They also have the potential to highlight the various consequences this form of truth about marijuana has on different social identities. However, story telling alone will not create a new politics of truth. There also needs to be more scholarship like this project as well as grass roots political campaigns combined with story telling. This is without a doubt a long arduous process. However, the current cultural climate regarding drugs and even more specifically the growing medical marijuana movement, are creating a context that is right to make social change.

### **What is at stake for keeping the drug war alive**

Continuing to operate under the assumption that marijuana is an inherently dangerous substance poses a large threat to many members of society. When President Obama entered office he stated that medical marijuana should be left to state and local governments, however, in his first three years the federal government has raided over 100 dispensaries and is on pace to pass the number of raids by President George W. Bush (Dickinson, 2012). The fear of a government shutdown of dispensaries has a drastic impact on both business owners and patients. Top banks such as Chase, Wells Fargo, Bank of America will not do business with dispensaries, out of fear of prosecution (Dickinson, 2012). Medical marijuana providers not only have to live in fear of the federal government shutting down their dispensaries, but when banks refuse to conduct

business with them then it will be more difficult to keep their operations open, regardless of government involvement. Meanwhile, the patient suffers. When medical marijuana dispensaries close down the sick do not have a safe place to obtain their medicine.

Even though some states have legalized medical marijuana, the illegality of the plant at the federal level makes the enforcement of marijuana prohibition, a large part of the war on drugs. Marijuana accounts for 45% of the 1.7 million annual drug arrests (Nadelmann, 2010). These arrests are not all created equal. In Washington, D.C. African Americans are 8% more likely to be arrested for marijuana than whites (Smith, 2011), in California 62% of marijuana arrests are minorities (Gutwillig, 2009), and between 1997-2007 in New York City 52% of the marijuana arrests were African Americans (<http://www.nyclu.org>). These discrepancies do not have an association with a higher rate of use either. Marijuana use is actually believed to be relatively the same across these different racial groups (Nadelmann, 2010). How do these differences occur then?

These discrepancies are not based on differences in the amount of marijuana used between racial groups. The disproportionate number of minority arrests has much more to do with how the drug war is being waged. In the suburbs or on college campuses, drug deals often happen between friends in private homes or apartments, while in the inner city they often happen on the street (Provine, 2007). This exposure of course makes it easier to police the inner city, where the surveillance of mostly minorities in the inner city has been a consequence of the war on drugs (Betram et al. 1996). Legislation that has come into effect as a result of the drug war has also played a role in the large number of minority marijuana arrests.

It is legal for police officers to stop and search anyone on the street and to use traffic stops as a way to check for drugs (Alexander, 2010). I encountered this first hand, during my traffic stop in Illinois. Minority bodies, particularly the bodies of black men, have come to connote criminality, and the use and selling of illegal drugs is part of this equation (Alexander, 2010). People who look like me then become likely targets for random searches and traffic stops. Most people also do not know that they legally have the right to refuse these searches. The absence of this knowledge helps to perpetuate more drug arrests as opposed to helping protect citizens.

Finally, anyone who is convicted on a drug charge, such as marijuana possession, can be refused federal aid for college, food stamps, and public housing assistance (Provine, 2007). Denying citizens an effective form of medicine, targeting minority users for arrest, and denying access to federally funded programs to non-violent drug offenders: how is this helping the citizens of our nation? It is estimated in California alone that the legalization and regulation of marijuana could bring in an estimated \$650-760 million in tax revenue (Abramsky, 2010). This would also create numerous jobs at a point in time where unemployment is a serious social problem. Yet, despite all these financial benefits, a larger focus should be directed at helping those who have suffered because of the stance on this plant.

### **The changing cultural climate**

The previously mentioned effects of the current discourse concerning marijuana use create a number of barriers to making social change. However, the changing cultural climate in regards to marijuana will be useful in trying to disrupt current knowledge about marijuana. In 2011 the Global Commission on Drug Policy declared the war on

drugs a failure. The Global Commission is truly global and has representatives from Pakistan, Mexico, Columbia, Brazil, Greece, USA, Spain, Ghana, Canada, Switzerland, Peru, Germany, France, The United Kingdom, and Norway. According to their website the purpose of the commission “is to bring to the international level an informed, science-based discussion about humane and effective ways to reduce the harm caused by drugs to people and societies” ([www.globalcommissionondrugs.org](http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org)). This focus on reducing harm and emphasizing humane strategies differs from the criminalizing approach of the United States.

The commission believes the incarceration approach has done a great deal of harm to society without reducing the availability of illicit drugs. For this reason they argue that the usage of drugs is connected to a complex set of health and physical challenges that have “to be managed rather than a war to be won” (Jahangir, et al. 2011). To start this process the Commission believes societies need to end the marginalization and stigmatization of bodies that use drugs and do no harm to others, particularly in regards to marijuana. In this same manner a goal of this project was to begin to construct new narratives about the stigmatized marijuana user in an effort to create social change. The recent publishing of a report such as this indicates that now is the time to challenge dominant conceptions of marijuana use.

The current public opinion regarding medical marijuana is also helping to create a climate where social change seems possible. The American public widely supports the use of medical marijuana. According to a poll by the Pew Center in April 2010, 73 percent of Americans are in favor of their state allowing the sale and use of medical marijuana. Additionally a Gallup poll in 2009 notes that 50 percent of Americans aged

18-49 were in favor of the legalization of marijuana for all purposes for adults (Regan, 2011). A large part of the American public is demonstrating that they are in favor of changing the country's dominant stance on marijuana. The time is right for change.

The government shut down of medical marijuana dispensaries, racial profiling, incarceration, the denial of access to federally funded programs are all effects of the current 'truth' concerning marijuana and its users. In order to construct a new politics of truth, the understanding of marijuana as a harmful substance must be detached from the social institutions that produce, distribute, regulate and profit from this form of knowledge (Foucault, 1984).

This project has demonstrated how the dominant perception of knowledge has been produced and circulated both historically and presently. The analysis of athletes in this project is a step in the direction of challenging cultural understandings of marijuana and its users. This is part of the larger process of beginning to construct new knowledge about marijuana and its users. If marijuana use is excused for professional athletes, why can it not be a medicine for anyone that needs it? If marijuana use is excused for professional athletes then why are we continuously locking up people for possession of this plant? Finally if the last three Presidents of the United States can admit to their usage of marijuana and still become president, why are we still criminalizing this plant and denying sick people the opportunity to try an alternative form of medicine? The time is now to construct a new form of knowledge about marijuana and its users.

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