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Marijuana Users in Their Own Words: Explaining the Continuation and Cessation of Habitual Marijuana Use

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Marijuana Users in Their Own Words: Explaining the
Continuation and Cessation of Habitual Marijuana Use

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts

Landon Shane Bevier

May 2009

Marijuana Users in Their Own Words: Explaining the
Continuation and Cessation of Habitual Marijuana Use

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Marijuana Users in Their Own Words

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May 2009

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This study is a qualitative examination of twenty current and former users of marijuana, using in-depth interviews as the units of analysis. The relationship between the participants' perceived costs and rewards, type and amount of linguistic accounts used, as well as frequency of use are explored using Homans' exchange theory and Lyman and Scott's theory of accounts. Reasons for continuation, regulation, and cessation of use are also studied. It is found that the participants use marijuana for a varied amount of reasons; these reasons directly influence how they account for their behavior as well as their frequency of use, particularly whether or not they use marijuana on a daily basis.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the decision-making process through which individuals proceed in regard to using marijuana. Individuals choose to use marijuana for varied reasons, and these reasons influence how frequently they take part in this behavior as well as the accounts they give for their behavior. This study will compare and contrast the behaviors and attitudes relating to the drug of daily and occasional users. The goal of this study is to provide an insight into the decision-making process that influences an individual's choice to use, regulate use of, or cease use of this illegal substance. What are the perceived benefits that individuals associate with using marijuana? What are the perceived costs? How do the answers to these questions relate to the frequency of an individual's use of marijuana? I attempt to answer these questions by examining the actual words used by marijuana users. This research can be used to shed further light on various conclusions made by quantitative means by allowing

marijuana users to explain their part in these trends in their own words. Marijuana users' decisions will be examined using George Homans' (1961) exchange theory, and their explanations of these decisions will be examined using Lyman and Scott's (1968) use of accounts. The results of these two theoretical methods of study are then compared against one another in order to examine the relationship between motivation of behavior and explanation of behavior. This process was accomplished by differentiating between linguistic accounts based upon whether or not the speaker assumes or denies responsibility for his or her action; the type of account used (and quantity thereof) will be examined in relation to motivations as well as frequency of use.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1961 George Homans published a set of propositions to be used in the explanation of human behavior that represent what has since come to be known as exchange theory. When studying exchange theory, it is important to note Homans' major influences in the construction of his propositions: behaviorism and rational choice theory.

Behaviorism

Homans was influenced extensively by the work of B.F. Skinner, especially his theory of operant conditioning. The basic tenet of this theory is that an actor's behavior in any situation will have an effect on his or her environment. The actor's behavior will alter his or her environment in some noticeable way; and this reaction by the environment, whether it be positive or negative, will influence the actor's future behavior. If the actor perceives the reaction to be a positive one, he or she will view it as a reward, and it will re-inforce the behavior; if the actor perceives the reaction to be a negative one, he or she will view it as a cost or punishment, and it will

lessen the likelihood of the behavior.

Rational Choice Theory

Homans (1967) was also greatly influenced by rational choice theory, which added the element of the purposive, human actor. The intentionality displayed by the actor goes past the absolutes of costs and rewards because of his or her preference hierarchy. According to rational choice theorists (Ritzer and Goodman 2004:401), there are constraints on action that behaviorists would not consider. An individual could have received nothing but positive and re-inforcing reactions as a result of a certain behavior, but he or she will no longer perform the behavior if it is much more difficult due to a scarcity of resources. Another constraint on behavior is due to the behavior's opportunity cost, which is the loss of opportunity to perform any other action that comes with every decision. The last constraint on behavior is the effect of social institutions on the individual within society; throughout a person's life his or her actions are constricted by normative rules and restrictions that include anything from walking in a straight line in elementary school to wearing clothes in public.

Exchange Theory

Homans borrowed basic tenets from both of these major

theories. He took the crucial idea of an actor behaving based on anticipated rewards and costs from behaviorism and added to that the complexities of the preference hierarchy due to the purposive, human actor from rational choice theory. Homans (1967) believed that the assumptions of behaviorism pertaining to individual behavior held true in regards to social behavior, citing human interaction as a major aspect of an actor's environment. As mentioned earlier, he outlined six propositions to be used in the study of individual and social behavior.

The first of these is the success proposition, which says that the more often an actor is rewarded for a particular action, the more likely the actor is to repeat that action. Homans' second, the stimulus, proposition says that the more an actor's environment and stimuli resemble a past situation in which a particular action was rewarded, the more likely the actor is to repeat that action. The third, value, proposition says that the more valued an anticipated reward, the more likely an actor is to behave in a way that will permit him or her to receive that reward.

The fourth proposition is the deprivation-satiation proposition; this tenet says that the more often a person receives a particular reward, the less likely he or she is

to continue to value that reward to the same degree, therefore decreasing the likelihood of repeating the action to enlist said reward. Homan's fifth, the aggression-approval, proposition says that if a person does not receive an anticipated reward or incurs an unanticipated cost, the person will become angry and is more likely to become aggressive. The person will then come to value the results of his or her aggressive behavior. Homans' last proposition is the rationality proposition, which says that people do not only look at anticipated rewards but also take into account the probability they will actually receive those rewards.

Homans added to this:

The greater the profit a person receives as a result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action. (Homans 1974:31)

To understand completely Homans' conceptualization of human action, there is another basic tenet of his work that must be acknowledged, which is the interplay between behavior, reward, and cost (or punishment).

Punishments are actions with negative values; an increase in punishments means that the actor is less likely to manifest undesired behaviors. (Homans 1974:18)

Every action that is manifested by an individual has a perceived profit, which takes into account the anticipated reward as well as the anticipated cost of the behavior.

In this research Homans' propositions are used to study the behavior of using marijuana. The theory will be applied in order to understand how users of marijuana decide how often they will use the drug as well as their decision to use marijuana in different situations. While Homans' exchange theory is adequate to study the decisions made by marijuana users, this study also attempts to understand how they account for these decisions.

Accounts

Accounts are linguistic forms and patterns that social actors offer when they feel as if their behavior could be viewed as problematic in some way; Lyman and Scott (1968) distinguish between two types of accounts: excuses and justifications. They said that excuses "are accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility" (Lyman and Scott 1968:406). The authors separated excuses into different types. An actor may appeal to accident, citing the lack of control within a particular situation. An actor may appeal to defeasibility, citing that some information was not available to him, in light of which he or she would not have behaved in such a way. An actor may use the excuse of biological drives, citing that his or her behavior was something natural that could not be avoided,

or an actor may use scapegoating, citing that someone or something else should be held responsible for his or her actions.

Lyman and Scott defined justifications as "accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it" (1968:406). The justifications that the authors use that are to be used in this study include: appeal to higher authority, self-fulfillment, condemnation of condemners, and denial of injury. Actors may appeal to a higher authority by citing that their behavior is permissible because it is necessary for a goal whose attainment is more important than their behavior in question. Actors can account for their behavior in terms of self-fulfillment; in these cases it is important to note that actors do not consider their behavior to be "wrong," and actors may use this justification in addition to the denial of injury, citing that their behavior did no noticeable harm to anyone. Another way actors justify their actions is by condemnation of condemners; actors may cite that their behavior should be acceptable in light of the fact that different people commit the same or worse acts frequently without any repercussions.

Lyman and Scott's work will be used in order to

examine how users of marijuana account for their frequency of use as well as how nonusers account for their decision not to participate in this behavior among those who do. I will also examine the relationship between smoking frequency and the use of different accounts.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marijuana has been illegal in all states since the Marijuana Tax Act was passed by congress in 1937. In 1970 it was classified as a Schedule I substance, which defined it as a very dangerous and addictive drug (Debondt 2006), and during the Reagan administration, large scale marijuana distribution crimes required a mandatory minimum jail sentence. While it is legal to use for medicinal purposes in some states, users can still be prosecuted by the federal government, and none of the participants within this study reside in those states. The individuals within this study were at different levels of risk. The possible consequences associated with their behavior depended on the amount of marijuana with which they would potentially be caught. Simple possession (under half an ounce in the relevant states) and paraphernalia charges could result in a one-year jail sentence and a \$500 fine, but those within the study were able to plea this charge down to a one year probation sentence. Possession of over half an ounce or "intent to distribute" charges would result in a felony,

which would require jail time of up to five years if convicted (Kentucky Marijuana Laws 2009; Marijuana Law Reform 2009).

There has been a large amount of literature devoted to the study of marijuana use, starting with Howard Becker's "Becoming a Marihuana User" (1953). This study is one that outlines the necessary decisions that a person must make in order for him or her to become a regular user of marijuana. A person must learn the proper technique required in order to produce effects from using marijuana, recognize that the effects felt are a result of using the drug, and define the effects as pleasurable. A major point to be taken from Becker's work is his observation that a marijuana user is not a specific type of person who is psychologically predisposed to marijuana use. Instead, individuals learn to derive pleasure from the drug. This point has been illustrated by other research as well (Hallstone 2002). While Becker studied the process that leads up to becoming a regular user of marijuana, this study examines the costs and benefits the user must contemplate in the midst of the process as well as the process of ending such use.

Becker went on to elaborate on the subject with "Marihuana Use and Social Control" (1963). In this study Becker picks up where he left off by examining the

individual who has come to enjoy the effects of marijuana; he outlines the process through which one becomes a "regular" user, the first of which is the process of finding a steady supply of the drug. The second step that he outlines in becoming a regular user deals with understanding the possible implications of using marijuana. There is an initial fear that originates from negative societal stigma, and initial users are afraid of possible societal punishments, legal as well as social. The second step happens when a person comes to terms with possible punishments and regulates his or her expectations and behavior according to his or her own personal life. The third and final step happens when an individual makes a complete change about how he or she think about marijuana; the individual rejects negative societal views of marijuana and adopts the view of the social group that introduced him or her to marijuana. Becker (1963) studies only those who regulate their use; his participants all differentiated between times that they could and times they could not use marijuana. While my study examines these individuals as well, it also covers those who do not differentiate between times they can and times they cannot use marijuana. Also, Becker's study does not cover what could possibly motivate someone to cease using marijuana.

Another study that examines users' goals and motivations is one done in 1978 by Bearden and Woodside. Their research looked at an individual's overall decision-making process and compared it to their decision to use marijuana. The study divided individuals into two groups: the attitudinal group, those who were more likely to base their decisions on their own beliefs and experiences and the normative group, those who were more likely to base their decisions on the normative beliefs of those around them and society at large. While one's normative beliefs did influence marijuana use, the study found that the attitudinal group was much more likely to use marijuana. This study examined participants' normative as well as attitudinal beliefs about marijuana usage.

Another study that deals with marijuana use is Lee and Kirkpatrick's study of Asian youth in the San Francisco area (2005). Through conducting interviews within the principally low-income neighborhood, the authors found that one's social environment played a major part in the decision to use marijuana. Many youths interviewed used marijuana to cope with stress stemming from problems at home or within the community. Contrary to Becker's (1953) focus on the entire process, Lee and Kirkpatrick's (2005) research examines only the initial step and the motivations

to take that first step within said process.

While the study of Asian youth shows the connection between using marijuana and participating in other deviant and illegal behaviors, Rashi Shukla's research highlights a completely different community of marijuana users (2005). Shukla studied responsible, adult marijuana users. The people within his study do not let their marijuana use interfere with any of their responsibilities and define their use of the drug as a leisure-time activity to be shared with close friends. Other studies have also shown that many individuals do not typify the "junkie stereotype" (Plant 1975), and that the majority of users' motivation is based upon relaxation or leisure (Erikson 1989; Hathaway 1997a; Hathaway 1997b). This research is relevant in that it studies the actual behavior of marijuana users and touches on the users' goals and motivations that drive their behavior.

The best prescription for cessation of use, according to Leonard and Homish, would be to marry someone who does not use the drug (2005). Their study on marijuana users during the transition into the married lifestyle shows the importance of relationships and environment when weighing out costs and benefits associated with using marijuana. Their study showed that when a marijuana user marries

someone who does not use the drug, he or she is much more likely to stop using, with men being influenced by their wives much more frequently than women being influenced by their husbands.

A study done by Lee, Neighbors, Hendershot, and Grossbard (2009) sought to explain, just as this study, the relationship between motivations for using marijuana and frequency of use. The authors found that boredom, altered perception, relative low risk, and sleep/rest were all associated with a higher frequency of use than reasons such as conformity, alcohol, celebration, and availability. This study differs from mine in that it did not connect these factors to linguistic accounts or cessation of use, and it was conducted using quantitative methodology.

In 2008 Osborne and Fogel conducted a study very similar to this one; they interviewed recreational marijuana users in an attempt to understand an individual's subjective motivating factors. They were inspired by Sussman and Stacy's call for more research to be done on motivations for continuation of use (1999) as well as Husak's call for research on recreational use in general (2002). The individuals within this study also said that they use marijuana as a mainly social, leisure-time activity. Their study is different from my own in that its

main focus is on the implications of the Canadian national drug policy, and it does not discuss motivations for cessation of use.

All of these pieces of research are relevant to my examination of marijuana users. While there has been a vast amount of research done on marijuana use, the overwhelming majority are clinical studies of the psychoanalytic properties of the drug or risk factors associated with the onset of use. Most of the research on the subject has been of a quantitative nature. These different types of studies do not take into account how actual marijuana users define and account for their behavior. I acknowledge that it is not possible to positively repute or qualify past findings due to my non-representative sample, but it is, however, still possible to gain a better understanding for the actual causation of these past findings by letting actual drug users explain them in their own words.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODS

My tool of analysis was the in-depth interview; these interviews were conducted by using an on-line social-networking chat service. These interviews took place over a three-month period, and each lasted between forty-five and seventy-five minutes. The decision to use on-line interviews rather than face-to-face was based upon feasibility. My nonrandom, snowball sample consisted of individuals over a vast geographical area. The majority of participants were located in southcentral Kentucky or middle Tennessee, but there were also participants in North Carolina and Texas. There were both positive and negative aspects of doing an on-line interview. One negative aspect was the fact that I could not as easily gauge the amount of emotion that a participant felt about a subject; there are certain visual cues on which one cannot follow up within an on-line interview.

One positive aspect that came with conducting an on-line interview was the change in the social dynamic of the interview. Neither I nor the participants had to worry

about how we were presenting ourselves, which led both parties to focus more on the actual wording used within the interview. In a face-to-face interview the social pressures of face-to-face conversation exist; there is a pressure to respond within a certain amount of time that does not influence the participants as strongly in an on-line interview. During the interview I was able to look back at previous answers and determine what exact aspects of an answer I wanted to explore. In this way my questions were more calculated and purposive, and I believe that this held true for the participant as well.

As stated, the sample of participants is a nonrandom, snowball sample. The initial participants were individuals whom I had encountered throughout the past decade that I knew to use marijuana. These individuals were able to connect me with other individuals who would be willing to talk openly about their own marijuana use. The sample consisted of individuals who ranged from the age of twenty to thirty-two. Fourteen of the participants were men, and six were women. The majority of participants were in some type of educational program at the time of the interview: three were in some type of graduate program, and nine were still in undergraduate programs. Of the other eight, one had a law degree, five had bachelor's degrees, and two were

taking time off from school. The one thing that all participants had in common was that they had all previously used marijuana on a regular basis, regular being defined as multiple times per week; and all but one participant had been daily users at some point in their lives. This study, therefore, can only be representative of my very limited sample that can be classified demographically as white; middle-class; and, for the most part, educated. One shortcoming in this fact is that marijuana users from different, less-privileged backgrounds could and most likely do use marijuana for different reasons, which cannot be explained by this study. What can be explained are the motivating factors of using marijuana by individuals that live within a comparatively privileged world. The participants in this study are not using an illegal drug to escape from a seemingly hopeless world; these individuals have jobs, academic futures, spouses, and children.

The units of analysis used for this study were the answers given to specific questions as well as other statements within the interview that pertain to those questions. How do you feel that you benefit from using marijuana? Do you feel that using marijuana has any negative consequences? The answers to these questions were the basis for the analysis. Through these answers, the

individual participants gave linguistic accounts explaining their behavior, and they also told me the different costs and rewards that they associated with their action.

Throughout the interview I also attempted to create a timeline in regard to the history of marijuana use for each participant. I let them guide me through different periods of their lives in which they used marijuana more or less frequently or quit altogether. Using this method, I was able to provide some descriptive findings to compare to past quantitative literature that attempted to explain why people use or cease to use marijuana.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSES

The discussion and analysis of my findings is broken down into three sections: the descriptive findings, the cost and benefits analysis through Homans' exchange propositions, and the exploration of the participants' use of accounts in explanation of current or former daily marijuana use.

Descriptive Findings

The descriptive findings that are explored are in reference to the participants' stated reasons for the continuation of use after the initial use, complete cessation of use, as well as regulation of use, which, for the purpose of my study, is defined by making a conscious decision to use the drug less frequently. These stated motivations are then compared to past quantitative findings when applicable.

Continuation of Use

Past research has found that individuals continue to use marijuana after their initial encounter with the drug for a few different reasons. The first of those reasons is

Table 1. Continuation of Use

Reason for Continuation	N/20
To Cope with Stress/Anxiety	8
Peer Pressure	0
As a Leisure-Time (Social) Activity	15
To Help Sleep	3
To Ease Temperament	4
To Help Focus	3
To Think Abstractly	2

to cope with high levels of stress and/or anxiety; past studies (Lee and Kirkpatrick 2005) have measured these high levels of stress within urban, low-income neighborhoods that lead to sustained marijuana use. Such an explanation is greatly concerned with the environmental factors that produce sustained marijuana use, in specific, the stress associated with living in a low-income, high-crime urban neighborhood. This type of environmental factor did not come into play within my limited sample, which consisted of mainly middle-class college students whose highest level of stress or anxiety came from their academic life. The participants who did associate their marijuana use with an attempt to cope with stress or anxiety did not usually talk about any environmental, external factors. Rather, they would talk about their *abnormally* high levels of stress or anxiety, which they could cope with through their use of marijuana:

I think a lot more [when not smoking], which is sometimes bad for me because I can think myself into a hole and fuck my whole world up. I think weed helps me not over-analyze and realistically look at things instead of going crazy in my head. (12)

I worry a lot and have major stress issues and marijuana calms me down and helps me keep focus. (2)

Past research has also found that many people use marijuana as a leisure time, mainly social, activity (Shukla 2005). This theme is one upon which participants within this study touch continually. More than half of my participants openly acknowledged the fact that they were modeling their behavior after a certain group of friends or after an older sibling. One participant says this about his first time:

I didn't know about it before I got there. We just went outside, got into a circle, and started passing around a joint. I don't think I actually felt the effects the first time I tried it...although the experience was fun. It was a half day at school and I spent the afternoon with my friends. I could tell some of them were high, and it was funny. (8)

It is interesting to note that, although peer pressure was found in past literature to be a factor of sustained use of the drug (Lee and Kirkpatrick 2005; Smith 1984), only two participants mentioned peer pressure as influencing them in any way, and each one of them was speaking only of his or her initial encounter with the drug, while three others went out of their way to say that they were not peer

pressured. The interpretation of these findings completely depends on how one is to define peer pressure. To the participants in my study, it was not an overt pressure that was felt but was rather a positive reinforcement that was felt by the shared meaning that the experience had to its participants:

Smoking, for me, is best enjoyed with one or two other like-minded people looking to relax and goof off or relax in whatever way. (1)

There was a sense of camaraderie amongst my group of friends, a certain sense of gaining experience. I never really saw myself gaining anything from it but a good time. (1)

It provides a social time accent. It gives the times that I have with friends an activity that allows us to relax. (10)

Regulation or Cessation of Use

Table 2. Regulation/Cessation of Use

<u>Reason for Regulation/Cessation</u>	<u>N/13 Who Quit</u>
Fear of Legal Consequences	2
Societal Norms	0
Pressure from Loved Ones	2
Friends Quit/Moved Away	4
Drug Test for a Job	3
"To See if I Could"	2
<u>Amplification of Negative Mental Tendencies</u>	<u>2</u>

Past research has found that individuals choose to regulate or cease using marijuana for a variety of reasons. One such reason is the fear of legal consequences (Smith 1984). This particular fear was not mentioned within any

of the interviews conducted unless it was to account for quitting due to a court-ordered probation or rehabilitation program. Six of my participants had been arrested at some point in their lives for a marijuana-related crime; these crimes ranged from the misdemeanor charge of simple possession or paraphernalia to the felony charge of possession with the intent to distribute. Only three of these six individuals received a court-ordered probation period that included urinary analysis (of the other three, one case was dropped, and the two others were minors). These three people who were forced to take drug tests are the only ones whose use of marijuana was in any way affected by the fear of legal consequences, and their cessation of use lasted only as long as the probationary period. One other person did regulate his use as a response to being arrested, but this regulation was an attempt to maintain his image in a small-town community.

He said this:

We got arrested. Everyone who I smoked with was there and after that we were very paranoid to do it again. It was a small town too. Everyone found out and we felt like we were always being watched after that. We basically didn't want people to think it was something we did regularly. (18)

After this individual left the community he describes and came into contact with a new social circle who used

marijuana, his regulation of use ended, and he became a daily marijuana user once again.

While the participants in this study did not express any change in opinion or understanding of their own marijuana use as a result of being arrested, the three who were forced to quit due to urinary analysis did express a change in their view of the marijuana laws in our country. The topic of legalization or decriminalization of marijuana was not one of my desired topics, and I asked no questions to my participants regarding this issue. Nevertheless, without being prompted, the three individuals who had been forced to stop using marijuana by government-mandated urinary analysis had developed distinct opinions about this subject that they felt obliged to express:

Failure. I think the current marijuana policy is a failure. The fact that marijuana is not even legalized for medicinal use is a crime in itself, and I think that the fact that if you get busted for marijuana you cannot get government-backed student loans is terrible. Our drug laws far outweigh the offense. In fact, it is such a victim-less crime that the fact that drug laws even exist has a negative effect on society because it causes a fear of authority in a lot of college students. (7)

[Getting arrested] made me slightly more militant in my desire for change of our laws...as much as 30 percent of local prosecutions are for minor drug offenses. I was aware of that before but never took the time to consider the implications of turning such a significant portion of the population into criminals. (1)

Had the marijuana been legal...I doubt that I would have used the other substances...I wouldn't have come into contact with them. I wouldn't have internalized the attitudes of a criminalized drug culture. I would have had to go out of my way to seek out something I didn't know I wanted in the first place. (3)

The government lists one of the major side effects of pot...over hydration from cotton mouth. In all their pamphlets they list that you can grow man-boobs, apparently the government thinks you can grow man-boobs. I think that kind of tells you how not bad pot is for you.(7)

Past research (Bearden and Woodside 1978) has also found the reaction to societal norms to be a reason for the cessation of individual marijuana use. This finding did not hold true for my participants; one actually says "Fuck the social stigma. Who gives a shit about that?" (11). While social norms did not seem to be an influential factor in the complete cessation of use, it could be said that they influenced individuals to quit for a short-term basis. These two individuals both said that they had quit using marijuana for a short time (under a month) simply to see whether they had the ability to quit. Their motivation, while it was not explicitly expressed, could be associated with the negative social norm of using marijuana or any other substance perceived to be addictive. It was not their practical experience that made them believe that they had become addicted to marijuana; it was the societal norm that associated the drug with the possibility of addiction.

Although social norms were not shown to influence my participants to cease using marijuana completely, they did influence some to regulate their frequency of use at some point in their lives. This point is evidenced by a preceding quote about the effect of a possible negative perception within a specific community. The influence of societal norms, more than anything, caused my participants to regulate the social groups or specific individuals with whom they would or would not associate while under the influence of the drug. These participants acknowledged that their marijuana use carried with it a negative social stigma, but they also acknowledged that they would only be affected by this negative social stigma if certain groups of people or individuals were aware that they were indeed using an illegal substance. These individuals or groups usually consisted of family members, co-workers, boyfriends, girlfriends, potential employers, or other figures of authority:

It's the people I would be around. Church, no. Parents, no...I didn't want to be stoned around a certain crowd...out of respect, really, because I know they don't approve of it. (6)

As far as others who haven't been around it...that's why I wouldn't smoke before a job interview, because I wouldn't want to hurt my chances of advancing myself socially because of something fun I do. It's like an alcoholic going drunk. I'm just not going to be that dumb. (9)

Every time you go out in public when you're high, you're exposing yourself to authority. So, I just don't want to take a chance of being arrested for going out high. If I get busted for being high then I lose my job. (7)

The subject of societal norms also relates to another reason for cessation of use that was found in past research: pressure from loved ones (Leonard and Homish 2005), which many times results from a perception of the drug based on the negative social stigma surrounding it. It is important again to differentiate between a causal factor influencing a person to completely cease the behavior and one that influences a person merely to regulate his or her behavior. Only one person said that she had ever quit due to a particular relationship, and this was for a very short period of time (less than three months). She (16) quit using marijuana while she was dating a person, and immediately continued use after these three months of dating were over.

Another person (14), at the time of his initial use, was in a serious relationship with a person who did not approve of marijuana: "she told me she would break up with me if I ever did it again...I went behind her back a few times." The pressure he felt from her was enough not to become a regular user, which he became soon after the

relationship ended, but it was not enough to cause a complete cessation of use even for a person who had no history of marijuana use. For my participants, instead of cessation, pressure from loved ones resulted in one of three things: regulation of use, hiding and/or lying about their behavior, or even a secondary deviation.

I still smoked because I knew it wasn't nearly as bad as she she believed it to be, and that she would never understand...because she grew up around friends that had never even seen it, must less use it. She had only heard negative things about it...I didn't want to be high while spending time with her...I didn't want to fight if she asked me if I was high. It was mainly just an inconvenience. (5)

My father definitely disapproved...Stray (marijuana) seeds were one factor in his decision to get me into military school...If anything, his disapproval increased my sense of rebellion. (1)

It is important to note that many of my participants do not feel pressure from loved ones because they differentiate between those who would and would not pressure them to quit. When they believe that a loved one has a negative opinion about marijuana, which acknowledges the social stigma, they will preemptively hide from and lie about their behavior to that loved one in order to avoid a confrontation or lose respect in the eyes of someone they care about.

Apart from causal factors of cessation grounded in past research, there were other influences that affected my

participants' decisions to regulate and/or cease their use of marijuana. The most prevalent reason that was cited was the dissolution of the social group with whom a participant used the drug as a social activity. It was rather common for individuals to quit completely for a time simply because they moved somewhere where they no longer had any friends who used marijuana or in the response to a social group's cessation.

When I went to college I didn't really have any friends who smoked pot so I stopped for the most part then I met a good friend and found out that he liked to smoke, so I started smoking heavily again. (7)

My friends decided that it would be a good idea to cut back on smoking as much. Most notably, the person I had the most in common with and related to the best out of my group of friends stopped smoking almost completely. After that, it just wasn't as much fun anymore because I've always seen pot as a social activity...when one of your best friends quits smoking its usually a good impetus for you to stop. (18)

There was one motivation for cessation of use that was unique to two individual participants; this motivation was the amplification of negative mental tendencies. While this factor was only mentioned in two instances, it is relevant in that those were also the only two cases whose cessation was ongoing. Both participants spoke of already existing negative mental tendencies, such as depression and manic depression. One individual spoke of how using marijuana, in the past a "euphoric" experience, became

something that amplified whatever feeling he was having at the time. He said that using marijuana when his feelings of depression began would make him "obsess over ideas that (he) didn't want to think about" (14). After a complete cessation of his marijuana use he still fought feelings of depression for several months. After eight months he said that he "was bored and happy at the time and thought (he) should have another go at it." His marijuana use continued for over three years until he encountered depression again, which in turn led him to another complete cessation. He did not blame his depression on his marijuana use, saying:

My girl went back to school and that sucked, and I was living with my parents, two to three hours away from my friends. I was alone for the first time. (14)

He was, however, very adamant in his belief that using marijuana while going through bouts of depression made it a more difficult experience. While this observation is in no way conclusive, it does shed some light upon and offer a possible explanation for the confusion within medical studies regarding the relationship of marijuana use and depression because for these individuals it did not create the negative mental tendency, but it did amplify it to a level that was no longer bearable.

Cost and Benefit Analysis

This section's purpose is to demonstrate fully the

relevance of George Homans' exchange theory pertaining to an individual's decision-making process in regard to marijuana use. There is a subsection for five of Homans' six propositions that includes quotations that exemplify the particular propositions as well as further elaboration on these quotations. The sixth proposition, which is not covered within this section, the Aggression-Approval Proposition, deals with the way individuals respond when they fail to receive a response that they expected. It is not covered because my participants, for the most part, did not speak of any instances in which they did not receive from marijuana what they expected to receive. The only exceptions to this statement were the participants whose marijuana use amplified existing negative mental tendencies; and in their cases, instead of inspiring aggression, it caused a further sinking into a depressive state.

Success Proposition

For all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action. (Homans 1974:16)

Rewards can be quantified in a myriad of ways. A reward for one individual might not be considered a reward to another; a reward at one point in time might not be considered a reward at another time by the same individual.

The frequency at which individuals are rewarded by their marijuana use is dependent upon their stated reasoning for using marijuana in the first place. Those who used marijuana the most frequently used it for different reasons than those who used it on a nondaily basis. For those who were using the drug multiple times per day, it was to remedy a pre-existing condition such as an abnormal level of anxiety/stress, a "short fuse" temperament, or insomnia. Because these conditions are continuously existent, every time these individuals use marijuana they find it rewarding because it is fixing "ailments without having to pop pills for it"(17), which is better because "pills...have to be made by man because they don't come naturally... Marijuana is natural" (12).

These individuals' use of marijuana does not have the same reasoning as used by those who use the drug less frequently. Because these daily users are using marijuana to remedy a perceived ever-present condition, marijuana becomes an ever-present fixture in their lives. To relate this observation to the value proposition, every time the effects of the drug wear off, daily users can find a reward in using it again.

This conceptualization of rewards is different for

those who use marijuana for reasons that are not perceived to be ever-present needs within their daily lives. Those participants who use the drug on a nondaily basis most frequently cited reason for using the drug was because they enjoyed the occasion; it was a social activity, "a hobby within itself" (18). Many of these nondaily users cited "boredom relief" as being one of the main reasons that they used marijuana; one participant (18) said that "smoking pot when you're bored makes you not bored anymore." While some of these participants defined their marijuana use as "just something to do" (9), others defined it as an event. Some of these participants viewed the event as merely something to look forward to, while others actually used marijuana as a type of incentive to motivate themselves to get their academic and organizational work accomplished.

It made the mundane routine more interesting and gave me something to look forward to...It was always an event...It was more of something that my friends and I could look forward to than anything. (18)

It was an excellent way to relax in the evening, so long as you had a cause to relax. (3)

It always gave me something to look forward to...There are many different ways I have managed to be able to get everything done and still enjoy smoking. I would say the best is being consciously aware of what it is that needs to be done and when, setting deadlines for yourself, setting reminders and using a planner, and getting the important tasks knocked out first, using smoking only as an incentive and reward for getting it all done and knowing everything else is good makes it all the more enjoyable. (5)

Notice that this participant (5) actually used the word "reward" when defining his marijuana use; it was only rewarding for him when he had everything accomplished. This participant, when accounting for his weekly schedule, listed a forty-hour work week, eighteen hours of scheduled classes, an average of eight hours spent on homework and fifteen hours spent on extracurricular activities and student organizations. He spoke very highly about the effects of marijuana, calling it:

A sense of relaxation like none other, like a security blanket over all the reality of life, sort of like an easy way to calm down and look at things from a calmer perspective. (5)

Even though he felt so strongly about the potential rewarding effects of marijuana, he could find it rewarding only whenever it would not affect his academic and organizational life; therefore, he used the drug only on average about once or twice per month. If he were to use the drug more frequently, it would lose the rewarding factor of having something to look forward to; it would no longer have the rewarding status of an "event." Compare his use to that of a daily user. While the daily user will find using marijuana rewarding directly after its effects wear off because he desires the actual effects, an occasional user is less likely to do use the drug this

frequently because it would not have the same rewarding value of being an "event"; nondaily users would have had no time to look forward to it. Because they would not receive the same reward, they are less likely to perform this behavior. Daily marijuana users' behavior is rewarded with more frequency.

Stimulus Proposition

If in the past the occurrence of a particular stimulus, or set of stimuli, has been the occasion on which a person's action has been rewarded, then the more similar the present stimuli are to the past ones, the more likely the person is to perform the action, or some similar action. (Homans 1974:23)

The stimulus proposition, within my particular study, is useful when attempting to analyze how participants decided when was a good time to use the drug. What stimuli's presence or nonpresence affected an individual's decision to use marijuana at a particular time? The environmental factors are very different, depending on the individual participants.

Participant 4 (a nondaily user) used marijuana to "relax and not stress"; he said it helped him to "expand [his] mind and think about things abstractly." It is important to note that, although he spoke of using marijuana as a form of stress relief, he did not speak of having an *abnormal* amount of stress, which has been

associated with daily use. His stress was not ever-present; he speaks of stress building up over time, and he says that the "calming effect" of marijuana usually lasted for weeks. This observation demonstrates the stimulus proposition because the stimulus that prompts him to perform the action of using marijuana is the high level of stress that he experiences only occasionally. He said that he had been a long time ("just shy of a year") without using marijuana because the person that he usually called when he got stressed had moved. This quotation describes what built up in that time, which led him to find a new social connection:

I could tell I was letting some of the small things bother me more, fighting with the girlfriend, school was getting overwhelming...Having smoked last weekend has made this week of tons of homework and tests better. I am less worried and more focused on getting the job done. I honestly believe it made a difference. (4)

For some of the participants in my study, the set of stimuli that prompts them to use marijuana is a not the presence of certain factors but is actually the lack thereof. This statement is true for participant 7, a daily user, whose reasons for using marijuana include ever-present conditions such as a bad temperament and the ability to "focus better on one thing." However, there is a difference between this participant and other daily users

who use marijuana to remedy ever-present conditions; remedying one of those conditions is desirable only during certain times of the day, which leads him to differentiate between times that he can be under the influence of marijuana and times that he cannot. The ever-present stimulus of "clearing [his mind] of all the other shit going through my mind" is no longer a reward when he is at work.

I wouldn't be able to do my job...I wouldn't be able to multi-task... [marijuana] allows me to focus better on the task I'm working on, but I become so focused I forget there's other shit to do (7)

For this participant the stimulus that prompts him to use marijuana is actually the lack of a need to multi-task, which, for him, marijuana inhibits. The particular stimulus that he associates with being at home after he gets off work is similar to the feelings he experienced every other time that he came home after he got off work when he found using marijuana rewarding.

Value Proposition

The more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action. (Homans 1974:25)

It can be difficult to quantify the value an individual places on the result of a particular action. I chose to look at the sheer amount of rewards that individuals spoke

of during the interview as well as how many times they mention those specific rewards. Both of these factors must be taken into consideration because individuals attach a different amount of value to different results of behavior. A high perceived value can be signified by a very high amount of rewards associated with the behavior or by the very high value of one specific reward, which is denoted by the amount of times a person mentioned this reward. Most of the rewards that the participants verbally expressed were prompted by questions in regard to how they benefited from using marijuana or why they found it enjoyable, but rewards were mentioned throughout the interview. In order to demonstrate this observation, I will first look at some of the heaviest marijuana users in the study.

Participant 17 uses marijuana at multiple times per day; in fact, she says that she does "as much as [her] budget allows." While other participants acknowledged that they would probably never quit using marijuana forever, they did say that they could potentially cease their use if they needed to for a great job or to become a better parent. This particular participant was the only one who was very adamant about the fact that she would not quit, saying "No, I've had multiple conversations about this one. I won't do it." If we are to judge how much value a person

places on a particular action by how many rewards he or she verbally express, then this participant provides a great example of the value proposition.

I figured out that pot is more than just for fun...it helped me relax all around, but I was a very high strung teenager...it helped me enable my creative side...I smoke pot pretty much every night to go to sleep. I used to take Ambien before...helps me with body aches, cramping, and various other ailments...helps me focus when I can't, and I probably wouldn't have met ¾ of my friends I have today without it. (17)

Notice also that the rewards that this participant mentions affect every facet of her life. She mentions the ever-present conditions of insomnia and high levels of stress as well as other physical ailments. She also mentions the social aspect of her use of the drug, saying that it has created many valued relationships. She even speaks of it as being valuable within her academic career, helping her to focus when nothing else can.

Participant 12 can also be examined in order to demonstrate the value proposition. Out of all participants he used marijuana with the most frequency, mentioning using the drug up to ten times in an average day. He lists various ways that he defines his behavior as rewarding:

I do have a bad temper, but when I smoke the temper is not there...weed helps me not over-analyze and realistically look at things instead of going crazy in my head...relaxes my mind and body...sometimes its necessary for me to go to sleep...I smoke because if I

don't I could go off the handle, or go outside and hurt myself on the punching bag like I have before...I don't deal well with stress without it... (12)

This participant does not list as many different rewards as participant 17 did, but notice that he does mention the same rewards multiple times. If the value individuals find in a certain action can be measured by the sheer amount of times that they mention the same reward, then this participant (12) is another who demonstrates the value proposition. While he does not mention a vast amount of rewards, he very adamantly expresses just how valuable those rewards are to him, saying that without marijuana he could think so much it would "fuck [his] world up," as well as mentioning that without it his temper could be so difficult to control that he could physically hurt himself.

The status of these two cases as examples of the value proposition is further strengthened when they are compared to a participant on the other end of the spectrum. First, take the example of participant 8, who said that he uses marijuana once every two to six months. He said that "it was always a social thing," and when pressed to define a benefit from using marijuana or a reason that he enjoyed it apart from the social aspect, he could only say that it made "small things fascinating like music and stuff on TV." To him, smoking marijuana does not have a high value, and

he, therefore, does not use the drug on a regular basis. He says that he simply does not have "the desire to go out and find pot."

The value proposition can also be applied to the complete cessation of marijuana use, such as the case for participant 14. For this individual the decision to stop using marijuana is a very conscious one, and because this decision must be repeated day after day, it can be looked upon and studied as an action. In his case the rewards that he associates with his cessation of marijuana use have such a high value that his decision to cease use is continually reinforced. Both ways of quantifying value that I have already used apply to him; he lists a great number of rewards as well as emphasizing their value to his everyday life.

I have lots more energy. My music is doing better. I'm not uncomfortable around strangers, more productive, less depressed...I write more...I read more...(marijuana) sedates you...It stifles the human spirit. (14)

Deprivation-Satiation Proposition

The more often in the recent past a person has received a particular reward, the less valuable any further unit of that reward becomes for him. (Homans 1974:29)

This proposition can be looked upon in a few different ways. If we are to view marijuana, as many of the participants do, as fulfilling a certain ever-present need,

then the point of satiation occurs when that need is fulfilled. The action of using marijuana becomes less valuable if it is within the time period of its rewarding effects. Because people use marijuana to accomplish different goals, they will also have different points of satiation. For instance, if a person's sole goal is to alleviate his or her anxiety, then the act of using marijuana will only be valuable to him or her as long as his or her anxiety still exists. As soon as it is alleviated, then the action is no longer valuable. When the anxiety-repressing effects of the drug wear off, they reach the point of deprivation, and the act of using marijuana becomes valuable yet again. This point is evidenced by the previous discussion of participant 4, who placed a high value on his marijuana use if he needed some type of stress-relief, but he said that the "calming" effect of marijuana lasted for weeks. During those weeks he was within a period of satiation.

Participant 8 is also a case that can be examined in order to demonstrate this proposition. This individual valued marijuana almost solely as a social activity. After his initial use of marijuana with a certain social group, he used the drug only within that specific social setting. He found this activity rewarding enough to continue using

marijuana a couple of times per week, also saying that he "would have smoked less than [he] did, except that many of [his] closest friends were habitual users." This social group's behavior changed from the time when the participant initially used the drug with them; they started using the drug much more often. According to my participant, this change in the group's behavior changed the dynamic of the experience for him.

I started to get bored. When I would get stoned, it seemed that I was stuck in the same routine. It was isolating in some ways. Neither I nor the people I was with would want to leave the house, go to parties, or anything aside from watch TV and play video games. Kind of the opposite of what I liked about smoking pot to begin with...after it got to the point where several of my friends were habitual users, they were content doing the same things over and over. (8)

Rationality Proposition

In choosing between alternative actions, a person will choose that one for which, as perceived by him at the time, the value, V , of the result, multiplied by the probability, p , of getting the result, is the greater. (Homans 1974:43)

There were very few instances mentioned by participants in which they questioned the probability of receiving a reward from using marijuana they deemed valuable. There is one concrete example of this proposition that comes from participant 13.

This individual enjoyed using marijuana, defining it as a "free and easy fun time with friends." He was an

occasional, nondaily marijuana user for years until he:

started experiencing nearly incapacitating panic attacks after smoking. It very suddenly lost its fun.
(13)

For a time this participant said that these panic attacks would occur "8 out of 10 times" that he would use marijuana. Although he had a strong value (V) that he attached to his marijuana use, he took into account the probability (p) that he would actually receive that reward from his actual use of the drug. It is also important to note that these panic attacks did not cause a complete cessation of marijuana use. He says that he will still try to use the drug occasionally, openly acknowledging it as a "gamble." This behavior further demonstrates the fact that he takes both the probability as well as the value into account when making decisions. That strong value, when multiplied by the slight (perceived as 2 out of 10) probability that he will receive the reward still results in attempting to use the drug once every month or two. Before these panic attacks started, he was using marijuana multiple times per week. The value he places on this behavior has not decreased, but the probability of receiving that value has, which in turn decreases the frequency of his overall marijuana use.

Accounting for Current Use

Within this section I examine how participants account for their current marijuana use by using different excuses and justifications. I then examine any patterns that are observed or relationships between variables such as the number and type of accounts used and an individual's frequency of use.

Justifications

An individual is using a justification when he or she claims responsibility for an action but denies that the act in question is a negative behavior. The justification that was used more than any other linguistic account was the appeal to self-fulfillment; every participant who still currently used marijuana accounted for his or her behavior in this way at least once. It was the only account that was used by all of the current users. Lyman and Scott found similar results when interviewing other deviant sub-cultures.

Drug users and homosexuals interviewed who invoked the justification of self-fulfillment did not appear to find anything "wrong" with their behavior. They indicated either a desire to be left alone or to enlighten what they considered to be the unenlightened establishment. (Lyman and Scott 1968:414)

Many of these types of justifications that were found during those interviews directly referenced self-

development, expansion of consciousness, and overall personal fulfillment. This very same attitude was prevalent throughout the body of data collected within this study. Below are some examples of some appeals to self-fulfillment:

I think that the fact that I smoke marijuana does make me a better citizen, not because I'm smoking marijuana, but because of how it affects me...It allows me to be more idealistic. I'm not as crushed in reality...It makes me more of a happy and altruistic person. (7)

I was more or less able to expand my mind and think about things abstractly...like taking a different perspective on a problem you have been staring at for hours. (4)

Another justification that was used frequently was the practice of the "condemnation of condemners" (Lyman and Scott 1968:412). Individuals use this linguistic account by pointing out that their behavior is not so very negative when it is compared to the action of others who are doing worse without repercussion. It is interesting that this justification was used only by daily users; the most frequent behavior that was comparatively condemned was the act of drinking alcohol. All daily users were quick to point out that, although their behavior might not be legal, it had far fewer negative consequences than alcohol did.

How many people die every year from alcohol?...Has there been a death from smoking too much weed? Is it even possible? Even with pot brownies and smoking as much as you can, you'd pass out before you'd die.

You'll fall asleep, eat too much food, but with alcohol, death happens every day (12)

Before, I liked to go out drinking and whatnot...That affected my going to class and getting up in the morning. I ended up doing things I regretted, making bad decisions, driving, stuff that I wouldn't normally do, I would do while drinking, then I started smoking pot. (6)

It's better than drinking. It's cheaper. It's healthier for you. You don't throw up, pass out, and do stupid things like when drinking, when you smoke too much pot you fall asleep. It's safer in that sense; you're not a threat to yourself, you're not a threat to anyone else. It's just all around better than alcohol. (9)

There was one more type of justification, and that was the attempt to make a "denial of injury" (Lyman and Scott 1968:412). When individuals use this linguistic account, they are basically making a claim that no one is hurt by their behavior. This justification was used to claim that there was no harm done to themselves, the people around them, or society at large (a "victimless crime"). Below are some examples of individuals claiming a denial of injury:

I think that, even as kids, we have a certain ability to discern what's really important and what's not. I always had a sense that pot wasn't a big deal. (1)

I've known people to flunk out of college because they aren't able to concentrate and smoke instead of writing papers...but I think that is more their choice than a negative consequence of [marijuana]. (16)

I can get as high as I want at night, get up at the crack of dawn in the morning and feel fine...as long as I feel like it's not influencing me, or making me

make bad decisions or doing anything, taking away from anything, then I will not quit smoking. (6)

Excuses

An individual is using an excuse when he or she accepts the fact that the behavior in question is negative but denies the full responsibility for acting in such a way. The only participants in this study who used an excuse in order to account for their behavior were those who used marijuana on a daily basis. These participants used two types of excuses extensively; the first one of these is blaming their action on "biological drive" (Lyman and Scott 1968:406). The biological conditions that are blamed by these daily users are based on what they perceive to be ever-present conditions such as an *abnormally* high level of stress or anxiety, an *abnormally* uncontrollable temper, or consistent bouts of insomnia.

My temper...I would just get set off easier. For instance, one time my roommate's dog chewed on my couch, and that really set me off, and it happened a different time and I was able to come home and get high, and everything was okay. So when I wasn't able to smoke I was angry and we got in an argument and the time I was able to smoke, everything was okay. (7)

It helps me calm my nerves. I have a short fuse and it tends to help me keep that under control. (15)

I worry a lot and have major stress issues and marijuana calms me down and helps me focus...I am constantly second-guessing myself. When I smoke, that little annoying voice goes away. (2)

It was the first time I smoked so I didn't even know

what was going on, I just knew that I felt too good to be angry...I had a smile on my face and I couldn't take it off and I was just too happy to ignore it. So I just let it go and brushed it off my shoulders. Before then, I would've fought, it would've been over because I do have a really bad temper, but when I smoke the temper is not here. (12)

This method of appealing to biological conditions was used by participants mostly in reference to an overall mindset, and some of them even gave specific examples of a particular situation through which marijuana helped them work to attain some sense of normalcy, which is the main point of their excuses. Marijuana is what helps them feel normal throughout their daily lives. They feel as if they have these abnormal, ever-present conditions that are not experienced by the majority of people, and they counteract these biological conditions by using marijuana on a daily basis.

While the first excuse deals with seemingly internal forces, the other deals with perceived forces external to the individual. This second excuse used by participants was the practice of "scapegoating" (Lyman and Scott 1968:406), which consists of putting the responsibility of one's own action into the hands of another person or some other outside force. It is important to differentiate users who used the excuse of scapegoating from users who said that they viewed using marijuana as a social event with friends.

The difference between the two groups is whether or not they accepted the full responsibility of their action. Those who excused their behavior implied that they would not have used marijuana if not for the direct intervention of a particular person or social group, while those who took responsibility for the action emphasized that it was something that they valued as a group activity and about which they had made a conscious personal decision. Below are some examples of the use of scapegoating.

I started hanging out with the crowd of people who smoked, and so I ended up smoking more often...it was more of the crowd I was running with...they were cool people, I liked them, I respected their opinion about things, and they seemed adamantly positive in their opinion of smoking... (6)

I remember wanting to fit in, not wanting to sound like a snitch or an idiot...I took the twelve-step program seriously for a little while, but eventually I preferred to be with my friends...I had no friends in the twelve-step program, just old drunks and creeps, and smoking was the easiest way to ingratiate myself to my friends. Weed was a sort of social currency. (3)

Yeah, I've tried [to quit]. After three or four days something happens and I have to. I don't know what it is, something just happens. (12)

Notice that these external forces do not necessarily need to be understood by the speaker; it is simply that he defines his marijuana use as outside of his locus of control. He feels some undefined external force that causes him to smoke marijuana onto which he, in turn,

deflects the responsibility of his action.

Frequency of Use, Profit, and Accounts Used

The purpose of this section is to provide a description of the relationship between participants' frequency of marijuana use, their perceived profit that results from their use, and the quantity and type of linguistic accounts they used when explaining their behavior. The results are listed below within two separate tables; one is for daily users and another is for nondaily users.

Table 3. Daily Users

#	Frequency of Use	Profit	Justification	Excuses
12	8-10 per day	5	18	10
17	6-8 per day	6	10	7
6	4-5 per day	7	9	8
15	4+ per day	6	7	5
2	2-3 per day	4	4	6
7	2 per day	5	13	4
11	2 per day	3	7	3
19	1-2 per day	3	5	4
10	1-2 per day	4	6	3
16	daily	3	4	3

Above are the results gathered from those who use marijuana on a daily basis. As a general trend, as profit (perceived rewards - perceived costs) increases for an individual, so does his or her frequency of use, and, as frequency of use increases, so do the sheer number of accounts used by an individual. This trend is especially true for the use of excuses. The patterns mentioned become

all the more noticeable when we compare the daily users to the nondaily, occasional marijuana users, who have starkly different results, as are seen below.

Table 4. Occasional Users

#	Frequency of Use	Profit	Justification	Excuses
1	1-2 per week	0	2	0
9	1-2 per week	1	6	0
4	1 per 1-2 weeks	1	3	0
5	1 per 1-2 weeks	-1	5	0
20	1 per 2-4 weeks	-1	2	0
18	1 per 2-4 weeks	-2	2	0
13	1 per month	-1	1	0
8	1 per 2-6 months	-3	1	0
3	Quit	-5	0	0
14	Quit	-7	0	0

As the perceived profit that a participant believed resulted from his marijuana use decreased, so did his frequency of use, and we notice the same trend for the use of accounts in general. Also, notice that no occasional marijuana user denied the personal responsibility of his choice to use marijuana by using an excuse to account for his or her behavior. I feel that it is important to point out and explain the fact that some participants still use marijuana although they associate more costs than rewards with the behavior, resulting in a negative profit. This discrepancy can be explained by my method of quantifying the costs that participants associated with using marijuana; some of these costs were unrealized ones. By unrealized, I mean that they were defined by the participants as only being incurred as a result of

excessive use, which they made a point to avoid specifically so they would avoid these costs, so they would remain unrealized. The definition of excessive use depended completely on the participant. Nine of the ten occasional users had been daily users at one point or another in their lives. When they spoke of these unrealized costs resulting from excessive use, they were referring to a previous time in their lives.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

I have discussed many topics relating to the participants' use of marijuana, but there are still unanswered questions about the patterns that have shown themselves through the data. These questions will be explored in this section.

Why do individuals choose to use marijuana? What influences their frequency of use? These questions, which have been asked before by many other researchers, can still not be answered with any single causal explanation. The one common factor that unearthed itself throughout the course of my interviews was this: using marijuana is a conscious decision made by a specific individual that depends on how profitable he or she perceives his or her action to be. As profit increases, so does an individual's frequency of use. If this is true, then we must examine what individuals find profitable about using marijuana. To accomplish this objective, we need to examine what individuals find rewarding about using marijuana as well as what they find costly about it. This determination, again,

depends on the individual. How rewarding participants found using marijuana depended on the reasons that they gave for using the drug in the first place. If an individual was using the drug in order to alleviate an ever-present condition, then he or she could find it rewarding every few hours; if their motivation was strictly social, then he or she would only find it rewarding when the occasion arose. One also has to look at the costs that participants associated with their behavior because the quantity of costs will affect the overall profit that they associate with their action. This point was another difference between the daily and occasional users; the latter had many more unrealized costs. They were much more likely to associate a cost with excessive use, which in turn decreased the profit that they associated with their behavior.

Another pattern that needs to be explored is the observed relationship between the frequency of use and the quantity and type of linguistic accounts used. Why does the sheer number of accounts used increase with frequency of use? This pattern can be explained by examining the exact contents of an account. Lyman and Scott (1968:406) tell us that accounts are specific types of explanations. What is an explanation other than an attempt of an

individual to list the reasoning behind his or her behavior? Participants did this by listing how they found it rewarding; therefore, every reward listed (which increases profit and frequency of use) was an account within itself. Hence, as frequency of use increases, so does the sheer number of accounts used.

The last pattern that is left unexplained is the fact that only daily users offered excuses to account for their behavior. They were the only ones to deny responsibility for their action, and every one of them did. At first examination it seems counterintuitive that the more one uses marijuana, the more likely he or she is to both claim as well as deny responsibility for his or her action. Why is this? This incongruity can be partially accounted for in the same way that the sheer number of accounts increase is explained. Half of all the excuses used were appealing to biological conditions. These biological conditions are perceived to be outside of their locus of control, and, because of this, they deny the full responsibility of their decision to use marijuana. As has been stated, these excuses were associated with alleviating an ever-present condition, which is still considered a reward, which, in turn, increases profit and frequency of use.

However, this factor does not fully explain the

pattern because, as frequency of use increases, it is not only the appeal to biological conditions that increases but also the use of scapegoating, which is the only way of accounting for a behavior while not simultaneously listing a reward (or at least negating a cost). In order to explain this observation, another major difference between the daily and occasional users needs to be pointed out: the daily users are the only ones who ever use the drug alone, outside of a social setting. To coincide with this fact, we must look at Homans' concept of *cohesiveness*.

Cohesiveness is a value variable; it refers to the degree of reinforcement people find in the activities of the group. (Homans 1958:599)

An overwhelming majority of participants spoke of the value they received from the social aspect of using marijuana. Remember that the most frequently cited reason for cessation or regulation of use was a participant being separated from his social group. Why does this matter? Because occasional users use marijuana only within a social setting; this social setting creates an increase in value in itself by reinforcing the specific activity of the group, which is, in this case, using marijuana. There were no daily users who started out as daily users. Their reasoning for initial use was always social; the value associated with the alleviation of negative biological

conditions was found upon further use. These daily users are the only ones who moved on from using marijuana in strictly a social setting. They lack that continual reinforcement that occasional users experience in every instance of use. Because their behavior is not continually reinforced by the cohesiveness of a social group, they begin to account for their behavior by referring to forces outside of their control. They justify and excuse; they take responsibility for the fact that marijuana is in their life, but they blame forces larger than themselves for the fact that they have to use it on a daily basis.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

How old are you?

What is your occupation? How many hours do you work per week?

Are you in school? How many hours does this take up per week? (class, homework, extracurricular activities, etc.)

Do you remember the first time you smoked marijuana? When was this?

What made you decide to try it?

Did you find it enjoyable?

Did you start using marijuana regularly after this time? Why/Why not?

When did you start using the drug regularly? Why?

Has your frequency of use varied or remained stable throughout that time? Why/Why not?

Have you ever quit? Why?

Did quitting have any effect on your day-to-day life? How so?

What made you start back?

How often do you use marijuana now?

Do you ever use marijuana alone?

How do you feel you benefit from using marijuana?

Do you feel that there are any negative consequences of

using marijuana? Why/Why not?

Have you ever had anyone close to you disapprove of your using marijuana?

Have you ever been arrested for a marijuana-related crime? What were you charged with? Were you convicted? What was your punishment? Did that have any effect on you?

Did that have any effect on you?

Do you think you will ever quit?

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