

SELF DEFINITION AND MARIJUANA INTOXICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Scholarly literature and the commercial media have categorized marijuana as "the new social drug." Marijuana's historical transformation has been traced from its use in the 1940's by jazz musicians to the introduction of its use in the late 1970's even among children (Adler and Adler, 1978). Though social scientists have recognized the *social bases* of the individual's experience when "high" (Becker, 1953; 1967), they have not yet been concerned with how the *subjective* experience of being "high" on marijuana, a condition pursued for the purpose of increasing "consciousness of self" (Orcutt, 1972), relates to the user's self-concept.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Most of the effects of marijuana are potential and not inherent properties of the drug (Tart, 1971). The manifestation of specific effects depends in large part upon non-drug factors. Users must learn the inter-subjective definition of the situation of marijuana intoxication. That definition is not merely individual, but cultural — a collective representation. Events and experiences have standard meanings learned through socialization. Marijuana users, as a group, tend to recognize and understand the definition of intoxication in much the same manner. The user's definition of the situation significantly influences the nature of changes in subjective functioning. Becker contended that subjective effects from marijuana depend upon the "social links and cultural understandings that grow up among those who use the drug" (1974:74). Marijuana's symbolic meaning to the user was central in Becker's analysis.

Becker's understanding of marijuana experience was firmly rooted in Mead's theory of the self and its relation to objects. As Becker noted: "Meanings arise in the course of social interaction, deriving their character from the consensus participants develop about the object in question." (1967:166).

This is the case not only for a person's ex-

perience of marijuana, but also for his or her experience of self. In Mead's view, the self cannot arise outside social experience. Only through social interaction does an individual enter his or her own experience as an object. That conceptualization of self, as an object of the person's own knowledge, involves the person's organization of his or her perception of the social milieu. The self serves as a basis from which the person's behavior is directed toward objects. Consequently, the self is linked to the social world as both producer and product of social organization.

METHOD

As part of a larger study of the intersubjective definition of the situation of being "stoned" (Young, 1975), we wanted to discover if differences in marijuana induced experiences were related to various self-types. We have expanded the notion of social behavior to include socially based subjective experience. Based on the finding that self-perception is related to behavioral choices, we expected that the effects the users *noticed* would be consonant with their patterns of self-conception.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Self-conception was to be assessed by the *Twenty Statements Test* (TST) developed by Kuhn and MacPartland (1954), which asks the individual to respond twenty times to the question, "Who am I?" It allows the individual to give responses that can include ascribed personal characteristics, roles, statuses, interests, activities, personal evaluation, and abstract or transcendental identification.

MacPartland, Cumming and Garretson (1967) have developed a four-fold scoring protocol for the TST. Each respondent is categorized as "A," "B," "C," or "D" mode depending upon what type of statement is most often made.

'A' statements are the most concrete statements of self-reference, describe the self as a physical entity, and make only indirect inference to interpersonal transaction or identifica-

tion with social structure: 'B' statements, identify the self clearly and specifically with institutionalized statuses or roles (professor; student), and indicate that the self is involved in structural interpersonal relations including a network of rights and duties, thus implying a 'generalized other;' 'C' statements represent characteristic ways of acting, feeling, or responding in social interaction (happy; worry), and indicate that the self is not closely identified within an institutional context of norms and roles, but is relatively 'situation-free;' 'D' statements imply no particular context, acts or attitudes indicating identification with social structure or inter-personal networks, indicate that the self is removed from interactive commitment, and are vague and undifferentiating.

The A-mode self-concept can be called the "physical self." The B-mode self concept can be called the "social self." The C-mode self-concept can be called the "reflective self." The D-mode self-concept can be called the "oceanic self" (Zurcher, 1977).

PREDICTION

We expected that "B" mode individuals, those who had predominately social selves, would define their experiences with marijuana in terms of *external* effects similar to those of the socially accepted "drug" alcohol. "C" mode individuals, persons with predominantly reflective self concepts, would relate an introspective kind of experience to marijuana use, including considerable self-examination. "D" mode individuals, those who had predominately oceanic selves, would focus on the spiritual and transcendent aspects of the marijuana experience. Based on recent work, no "A" mode individuals were expected, and none were found. (Zurcher, 1977).

The second part of the questionnaire was adapted from Tart (1971). It consisted of a listing of statements which described a wide variety of experiences people have reported while "under the influence" of marijuana. The statements were grouped into categories: the senses; space and time; body and movement; thought; emotions and self control; social interaction; identity. For each descriptive statement, respondents were asked to make two ratings: first, how frequently he or she experienced a particular effect when "stoned", from

never to practically every time; second, how "stoned" he or she had to be to experience that effect. The second rating was based on the assumption that because drug experience is influenced both by properties of the drug *and* by cultural definitions, some effects can be experienced at very low levels of intoxication while others can be experienced only when the user is quite intoxicated.

The third section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to provide pertinent background and demographic information, and a brief history of their own drug use.

PROCEDURE

From a large (N = 127) introductory sociology night class the senior author asked volunteers who had smoked marijuana more than a dozen times to take part in a study of the subjective effects of marijuana intoxication. Nineteen students volunteered, and were briefed about the nature of the study. They were asked to speak with friends who also were marijuana smokers, and to invite them to participate in the study. This "branching" technique afforded the senior author the opportunity to gain entry into six groups of friends, ranging in size from three to nine people, who frequently smoked marijuana together. Drug use characteristics of the 33 volunteer respondents are presented in Table 1.

There was some degree of heterogeneity among the respondents in biographical and demographic characteristics. The group of respondents is by no means to be considered a representative sample, and generalizations to specific populations will not be made. However, the data generated from the respondents will provide indices of the relation between self-concept and the subjective experience of marijuana use.

The senior author attended gatherings of each of the six groups of friends. Marijuana was smoked during the gatherings. The senior author administered the "possible effects" section of the questionnaire to the respondents after they became marijuana intoxicated. This has been urged by investigators concerned with the scientific study of non-ordinary states of consciousness in general (Tart, 1972).

The TST and the drug use components of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents at a later time, after the gathering

where marijuana was smoked, when the respondents were not under the influence of marijuana.

FINDINGS

As shown in Table 2, 67 percent of the respondents were C-mode, reflective selves. None were A-mode, physical selves. Nine percent were B-mode, social selves. Twenty-four percent were D-mode, oceanic selves.

These results are fairly consistent with other recent studies indicating a contemporary shift away from self-definition in terms of roles and statuses of "B" mode to more reflective "C" mode conceptions of self (Sheinberg, 1974; Spitzer and Parker, 1976; Turner, 1976; Zurcher, 1977). However, there were some striking differences among self-types in the manner in which they defined the situation of marijuana intoxication. There also were some interesting processes associated with how the intersubjective experience of marijuana intoxication unfolded for the most experienced marijuana users.

REACTION TO MARIJUANA INTOXICATION

Typically, a low level of marijuana intoxication is reported to generate sensory effects associated with getting "high": ability to hear very subtle changes in sound; touch becoming more sensual; greater enjoyment of eating. As intoxication increases, there is a state of general enhancement of imagery, of social interaction, of personal awareness. At moderate levels of intoxication, the user experiences feelings of "child-like openness" to the world, both natural and social, and becomes less inhibited. With increasing levels of intoxication, the user may experience pronounced alterations in sense perception, such as sensory blending, or in thought process, thinking "intuitively," feelings of *deja vu*. At the very highest levels of intoxication there generally is a marked turning inward, cognitively, by the user. Time seems to stop, and there is a feeling of oneness between self and the world.

When the respondents' reports of the effects of marijuana were analyzed according to self-concept types, some interesting variations on the general pattern of intoxication emerged. Those variations are presented in Figure 1.

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS' DRUG USE PATTERN (Percentage, n = 33)

Sex	Male	58
	Female	42
Years of marijuana use	3 or less	18
	4-6	52
	7 or more	30
Frequency of marijuana use	Occasional	15
	Monthly	3
	Weekly	33
	Daily	48
Use of psychedelics	Never	18
	1-5 times	24
	6 or more times	58

TABLE 2: EXTENT OF DRUG USE BY SELF CONCEPT (PERCENTAGE)

Type Self	n	Drug use:		
		Extended	Moderate	Limited
Social	3	0	33	67
Reflective	22	82	9	9
Ocean	8	100	0	0

FIGURE 1: POSSIBLE INTOXICATION EFFECTS BY SELF CONCEPT

Mode B Social Self:

Visual imagery not more vivid. More subtle changes in sound not heard. No wish to move about. Movements uncoordinated, jerky. No insights into others. Play no childish games. Intoxication feeling not increased by others' intoxication. No insights into self. Thought no more intuitive. Ideas no more original. Cannot converse intelligently. Do not always feel good, intoxicated. No more childlike or open. Become more sociable.

Mode C Relective Self:

Synthesis of vision and hearing. Play childish games. Ordinary social games hard to play. Insights into self. Feel emotions more.

Mode D Ocean Self:

See patterns & meaning in ambiguous material. Sense of *deja vu*. Physically relaxed. Empathize. Insights into others. Feel more intoxicated with others who are intoxicated. Thought more intuitive. Feel capable, intelligent. Lose sense of self. Events become archetypal. More childlike & open.

INTOXICATION IN SOCIAL SELVES

Users of marijuana who responded to the TST in social, "B" mode, terms, like father, sister, law student, educator, member of American society, reported that they became more sociable when "stoned." They felt less self-conscious. They also reported that they were unable to converse intelligently, felt a loss of coordination, and had a strong desire to remain sedentary.

The respondents who had social selves also indicated that they did *not* experience several of the effects described by other individuals in the typical marijuana "high." For example, they did not invariably feel "good" when intoxicated, as did as most other users. "B" mode user's visual and auditory perception was not enhanced, nor did they believe that they thought more intuitively or had more original ideas when "stoned." They had no significant insights about themselves or about others. Feeling receptive, open, and "full of wonder" was uncommon for the social selves, and they seldom found themselves playing "childish" games like skipping down a street or making funny faces. They never experienced contact "highs." That is, they did not get "high" simply from being around someone else who was high — an interaction phenomenon which most other users have reported. Those effects which appear to be central to the cultural definition of the typical marijuana "high" seem to be lacking in the experience of the "B" mode marijuana users.

INTOXICATION IN REFLECTIVE SELVES

"C" mode, reflective selves identified themselves, as introspective, playful, flexible, concerned, sensitive, logical, and adventurous. There were some effects which "C" mode users specifically identified. They reported having powerful and spontaneous insights into themselves and their personalities. They focused on internal experiences. They felt emotions more strongly. The reflective selves found ordinary "social" games, such as engaging in polite chit-chat, to be very difficult. They often flouted convention and interacted with one another in ways which "straight" observers might call "childish," but which the users found quite enjoyable. The "C" mode users, more than other respondents, identified the exotic effect of synesthesia or sensory blending as a

significant part of their marijuana intoxication. Synesthesia takes the form of visual phenomena associated with auditory perception, hearing in color, as some described it.

INTOXICATION IN OCEANIC SELVES

"D" mode users defined themselves in such a manner as to reveal a sense of "no self": I am All; I am the Soul of Man; I am you; I am the Mother of Life; I am a particle and a wave; I am Wendy and Peter Pan; I am a thread never-ending. That at-one-ness with the world and the loss of the sense of being separate ego also characterized their definitions of the situation of marijuana intoxication.

When "stoned," oceanic selves had strong feelings that their actions as well as the events in which they took part became archetypal. That is instead of Mary Jones, a particular individual, doing a particular thing at a particular time, the experience became a human being doing what human beings always have done. Those users also reported having deep insights and experiencing empathy with other people. The oceanic selves very typically mentioned experiences of *deja vu*, feeling that a sequence of events had happened in exactly the same way before. In general, the "D" mode users were relaxed but alert, and entered a receptive, intuitive way of dealing with the world marked by unguarded openness, wonder, and awe at the "nature of things."

DISCUSSION

Taken as a whole, the reports of the effects of marijuana intoxication by the respondents in the present study differ very little from those described by an "avant garde" group of 150 experienced users in 1969 (Tart, 1971). Although today's population of marijuana smokers included only members of the middle class apparently the cultural understandings of marijuana have not been altered. Becker's (1953, 1967) thesis seems to hold. There is an elaborate body of "lore" surrounding marijuana use, and a stability of the social interactions associated with its use that does not vary much by social group. Thus, as marijuana use is diffused throughout different life styles and socio-economic classes, finally moving into the "middle class," the social expectations, have not changed.

More often than not, the effects of marijuana are expected by users to be internally oriented (Orcutt, 1972). It is thought to be a tool for self-exploration and learning about the "world within." That a majority of the marijuana users in this study responded to the TST in reflective, "C" mode, terms is not surprising. Anxiety can be associated with the "C" mode self-concept, and can encourage a search for a clearer understanding of self. Indeed the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse (1972:311) described marijuana users as having an "unsettled" sense of self: "They are critical of themselves; they have a strong desire to change themselves and the way they are." Marijuana, with its normative linkages to internally-oriented effects, can provide "C" mode, reflective, individuals a vehicle for self-clarification.

The search for self-clarification was not apparent among the respondents whose TST reports categorized them as social "B" mode selves. Those individuals were enmeshed in a web of rights and duties, and embraced a strong sense of "generalized other." Their use of marijuana appeared to be, as they themselves indicated, somewhat "out of character." They were, the least frequent users of the drug (once a month or less). The "B" mode users not only had externally oriented social, self-concepts but the configuration of effects of marijuana they identified also were externally-oriented. The marijuana experience for social selves took on aspects of a cocktail party, encouraging conviviality and sociability. Those respondents attended not to internal changes in experience, but to external events. Orcutt (1972) suggested that as marijuana becomes more widely used by middle class Americans its effects will be redefined as externally-oriented, like alcohol, the old social drug of the middle class. However, for these "B" mode users it may be a matter of limited knowledge and a non-reflective disposition, rather than a redefinition of the effects, that leads them to convey an image of being "high" on marijuana that is very similar to drunkenness from alcohol. The "B" mode respondents were the only ones who stated an unqualified preference for alcohol over marijuana because, as they said, "alcohol is legal, marijuana is not."

The oceanic, "D" mode users reported marijuana intoxication experiences which can

be termed transcendental. The phrases they employed to describe their experiences while "stoned" were expanded versions or illustrations of their oceanic conceptions of self.

In the literature on the TST, "D" mode responses are seldom discussed. Those responses are vague. They do not lead to socially meaningful differentiation. However, experience of the oceanic self may be necessary for "wholeness" of the personality (Zurcher, 1977). A self that can "hear the whispering of the cosmos" as well as be involved in social interactions in the everyday world might touch sources of deep values and might offer answers to questions of meaning in life. The constellation of effects experienced by "D" mode marijuana users might shed some light on ways of approaching the oceanic self, since the experience which those users relate borders on the mystical and spiritual.

CONCLUSION

In light of the growing prevalence of "C" mode, reflective selves, as opposed to "B" mode, social selves, in American society, we suggest that as marijuana use becomes more widespread there might be, rather than a redefinition of its effects as externally-oriented (like alcohol), a redefinition of self from reflective to oceanic as people discover the "D" mode through socially defined experiences with marijuana. This will mean *adding* the oceanic self to the repertoire of selves not adopting the "D" mode self exclusively. It would be difficult to maintain only an oceanic sense of self continually in a complex industrial society. It is important to stress again that it is not the physiological effects of the drug which might generate or influence this transformation of self. It is the *expectation* of effects, generated in a social setting and by interaction with other individuals, that can effect the transformation. Nor will marijuana use be, by any means the only influence for the evolution of the oceanic self. Religious experiences, encounters with mysticism, forms of meditation, and transcendental belief systems would also be influential. Furthermore, it may be that marijuana use predominately will become no more than recreation for "B" mode, social selves, like alcohol, and do little for self-transformation.

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human dignity values (Shah 1981 23).

The whole issue of race relations of Britain can probably be summed up in one sentence. The British have yet to accept the fact that they now have a multi-racial society. And, unless the current trend takes an abrupt turn around, the British will leave themselves with no choice but to assert white supremacy.

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