

BLUNTS AND BLOWTJES: CANNABIS USE PRACTICES IN TWO CULTURAL SETTINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores two modes of cannabis preparation and smoking which have manifested within the drug subcultures of the United States and the Netherlands. Smoking "blunts," or hollowed out cigar wrappers filled with marijuana, is a phenomenon which first emerged in New York City in the mid 1980s, and has since spread throughout the United States. A "blowtje," (pronounced "blowt-cha") a modern Dutch style joint which is mixed with tobacco and includes a card-board filter and a longer rolling paper, has become the standard mode of cannabis smoking in the Netherlands as well as much of Europe. Both are considered newer than the more traditional practices of preparing and smoking cannabis, including the traditional filter-less style joint, the pot pipe, and the bong or water pipe. These newer styles of preparation and smoking have implications for secondary prevention efforts with active young cannabis users. On a social and ritualistic level these practices serve as a means of self-regulating cannabis use. Since both smoking modes involve combining cannabis with tobacco, they also increase and compound the health risks posed to the user.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years the use of cannabis in the United States and the Netherlands has remained consistently more prevalent among youth and young adults than it was throughout the 1980s (Johnston, O'Malley & Bachman 1999; Golub & Johnson 2001; Korf & van der Steenhoven 1993; Cohen & Kaal 2001). National and local government agencies have been addressing this trend with traditional methods of prevention supported by new messages which utilize different forms of media and focus specifically on marijuana. The dangers of marijuana are vigorously highlighted in order to discourage new users and to persuade current users to cease using. "Primary prevention" strategies consistent with the values of a drug-free society continue to characterize the American response (Cohen 1993; Botvin 1990). Scaring youths away from drugs by illustrating their dangers and negative outcomes, and the 'responsible' choice of completely avoiding illicit drugs, are the reoccurring themes in the television and newspaper advertisements developed by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) articulates "The term 'prevention' is reserved for those interventions that occur before the initial onset of the disorder" (Center for Substance Abuse Prevention 1995). In the Netherlands, where the epidemiological trend regarding marijuana is similar, prevention efforts are

consistent with its specific policy on cannabis and its general commitment to harm reduction. Prevention is aimed at tightening up the regulations governing the coffeeshop system-where the retail sales of marijuana and hashish are tolerated and health education efforts targeted at the problematic cannabis use of youth. The intention of separating hard (heroin, cocaine, amphetamine) and soft (marijuana, hashish) drug markets, by tolerating the retail sale of cannabis in coffee-shops is to prevent young cannabis users who are experimenting with cannabis from using more dangerous drugs. In the Netherlands, the harm reduction approach to cannabis can be compared to the work done on controlled drinking and risk reduction among youth in the United States (Marlatt, Baer & Larimer 1995).

This diverse array of prevention efforts, developed in two different cultural and political settings, have been largely uninformed by research of the new and emerging groups of cannabis users which seem to be accounting for the increase in reported prevalence over the last decade. For the most part, cannabis users are typically all lumped into a single youthful category that does not differentiate from the groups that began smoking cannabis more than a generation earlier in the 1960s. American prevention efforts have undervalued the role of changing social meanings of cannabis and related use practices in the groups that are already using it.

This paper analyzes these newly emerged meanings in two contrasting social and policy contexts, the United States (US) and the Netherlands (NL). These analyses are extremely valuable for the development of future prevention strategies. Without a more thorough understanding of these meanings and use practices, it is likely that prevention efforts will be misunderstood, ignored, or even increase use through heightening the anxiety and cognitive dissonance already associated with cannabis. Furthermore, related to these meanings are specific ritualized practices that function to regulate use. Hence, the description and analysis of these rituals can also contribute to "secondary prevention" by identifying naturally occurring customs of social control which create acceptable norms of use and strengthen self-regulation. These practices provide opportunities for prevention work that is not only aimed at abstinence (primary prevention), but, also, secondary prevention, with the intent of reducing the harm associated with the use of cannabis with active users.

Generators of Meaning and Practices: Artistic, Drug, and Sacred Subcultures in the Last 50 Years

One factor for the recent international popularity of cannabis has been the emerging youth subcultures of the 1980s and 1990s which rejected the polarization between "just say no" youth and cocaine using youth. Specifically Hip-Hop and Rastafarianism (re-)emerged embracing cannabis as their primary, and often exclusive, drug of choice, but with meanings and rituals that distinguish them from earlier cannabis using subcultures (Sifaneck & Kaplan 1995). Popular culture is also portraying today's cannabis users as trend setters in the social world of illicit drug taking. A number of cover articles about cannabis users of the 1990s have appeared, including the *New York Times Magazine* (1995), the *Village Voice* (1993), *Paper* (1994), and the *Face* (1994). Feature films including "Friday," (1995) and "Kids" (1995) have illustratively depicted the lifestyles of these new cannabis users. Even though these new cannabis subcultures borrow rituals and technologies from previous drug subcultures, some of the innovations are unique.

The relationship between cannabis use and subcultures has a long tradition in socio-

logical research. In the 1970s focus shifted from subcultures largely defined by specific artistic scenes (Winick 1960; Becker 1963), to subcultures defined by the use and sales of specific drugs (Johnson 1973). Primary deviance like drug experimentation, was hypothesized only to lead to secondary deviance (drug dealing, use of hard drugs) if a person became a participant in a drug using subculture through selling drugs. Users who get involved in heavy use subsequently get involved in dealing to support their habits (Johnson 1973; Wood 1988; Sifaneck 1996). After involvement in drug dealing, users may develop connections with hard drugs. Subcultures and the behavior of drug dealing were theorized to be the intervening variables in the progression of deviant behavior (Johnson 1973). Later in the 1970s, investigations into the subculture of Rastafarianism provided an opportunity to explore a context not only where cannabis is used, but where it is truly sacred and endowed with meaning and significance (Hebdige 1979).

Beck and Rosenbaum's (1994) seminal study of MDMA (ecstasy) use recognized the often blurred lines between drugs defined in subcultures and the relationship of these meanings to the larger popular culture. Beck and Rosenbaum articulate:

Insulated well-defined subcultures gave way to larger more amorphous "social worlds" of illicit drug users....We now had user populations whose identities were substantially shaped and informed by mass communication and the media. (1994)

In a fast paced, information laden, post-modern world, subcultural practices are co-opted, marketed, and quickly adopted by the popular culture. For instance, Hip-Hop and Rastafarian styles of hair and dress are replicated and adopted by persons who are clearly outside the subculture. This happens when subcultural art forms (rap, graffiti, reggae) get marketed through the mass media to a larger audience. To a lesser extent, this is also true for subcultural drug use practices. This will later be exemplified by the practice of blunt smoking.

METHODS

Ethnographic research is extremely valuable for understanding both the subcultural features, and the ritualized use practices of

cannabis in natural settings. Ethnography is also an important tool for specifying the contexts of illicit drug use. For example, there is a growing tradition of HIV/AIDS-related ethnographic research which has been able to identify practices that both contribute to and impede efforts of a subculture to self-regulate in the interest of harm reduction (Grund, Kaplan & De Vries 1993). By relating cannabis smoking to the broader context of drug use, strategies for secondary prevention and intervention can be identified, developed, and applied. Future research with cannabis smokers should take place in the context of natural settings and most current use practices. This research can only take place after an adequate ethnographic analysis of such subcultural contexts. The following paper utilizes the analysis of both primary and secondary ethnographic data. Sifaneck and Kaplan have undertaken extensive ethnographic research on the cannabis situation in the Netherlands. Sifaneck's dissertation entitled "Regulating Cannabis: An Ethnographic Analysis of the Sale and Use of Cannabis in New York City and Rotterdam" involved extensive participant-observation with users and sellers of cannabis in the United States and the Netherlands. Sifaneck has studied and documented changes in the sale and use of cannabis in New York City over the past ten years. Kaplan has researched the drug scene, taught and lived in the Netherlands since the early 1980s. Both researchers have previous collaborations and are continuously observing developments in the cannabis scenes in both cultural settings.

Secondary ethnographic data was obtained by interviewing practicing ethnographers involved with drug research. These people included Dr. Adrian Jansen, Dr. Ansley Hamid, Dr. Richard Curtis, Errol K. James, Charles Small, and Joseph Richardson. The intention of using such secondary data was to corroborate our own observations, as well as to provide insights on developments not observed during the primary field research. The approach employed is certainly unconventional, but proved to be comprehensive and very fruitful in gathering data. It was a way to overcome generalizations generated through the observations of a single researcher in the field. Through analysis of primary and secondary ethnographic data this paper will explore two more recent modes of cannabis use practices and smoking styles:

the American "blunt" and the Dutch "blowtje." A blunt is a hollowed out cheap cigar filled with marijuana, and a blowtje is a modern Dutch style joint which is mixed with tobacco, and is constructed with a large rolling paper and a cardboard filter.

A comprehensive ethnographic approach is an appropriate methodology for this cross-cultural investigation into the subcultural influences which provide contexts for distinct cannabis smoking practices in two different modern Western cultures. Even though the phenomenon of "blunts" has been sporadically mentioned in the drug abuse literature, analysis of the cultural significance, and social and health implications that a relatively novel cannabis use practice presents have been ignored. The Dutch cannabis use practice of the blowtje has been an equally ignored phenomenon. The intention of the following paper is to shed light on these newer drug use phenomena, and discuss their implications for health, prevention, and the reduction of drug related harm.

BLUNTS AND BLOWTJES: A CROSS-CULTURAL ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF TWO CANNABIS USE PRACTICES

A Common Antecedent: The Rastafarian Spliff

One striking characteristic of the "blunt," and to a lesser extent the "blowtje," is that they both express, in terms of immenseness and design, the look, and "style" of an important symbol of the Rastafarian subculture, the Jamaican "spliff." Jamaica is the sacred center of the Rastafarian movement which has become a worldwide subculture which embraces a pan-African, anti-imperialist, and working-class revolutionary ideology (Hebdige 1979). Reggae music became a predominant vehicle of the subculture to "spread the word," and obtain supporters from a racially and geographically diverse population. Since "ganja" (marijuana) is plentiful in Jamaica, ganja smokers (often Rastafarians) prefer to roll their joints so that they are relatively large. Large rolling papers and "fronto leaves" (broad tobacco leaves) are the norm when rolling spliffs in Jamaica. The name "fronto" is derived from the opposite phonetics expressed in the word "tobacco." Since tobacco contained the sound "back" Rastafarians interpreted this to mean backwards, or non-progressive. Part of the Rastafarian ideology is the promotion of progress, and

the notion never to go backwards, thus the word "fronto" was adopted, containing the sound "front" suggesting a progressive "forwardness" (Small 1996). In Jamaica, locally grown and roughly manicured marijuana is sold by the half (14 grams) or whole (28 grams) ounce to the neophyte tourist consumer. For the American tourist these prices are at least 4-5 times lower than retail market prices in the United States. However, one must keep in mind that tourist prices are super-inflated, although they seem extremely inexpensive to the American or European traveler. For the Jamaican "spliff" smoker, marijuana is plentiful, but generally of a low and unmanicured quality, thus large joints are necessary to obtain a fulfilling high. In a number of Brooklyn neighborhoods during the 1980s fronto leaf was sold in health food stores, owned by and catering to Jamaican and other Caribbean immigrants. Large glass jars of fronto leaf were displayed next to herbal teas and dried fruit. Very often, these stores would also sell marijuana. In the New York setting, spliffs that were rolled with fronto leaf by these new Caribbean immigrants in the late 1970s and early 1980s were the predecessors to the modern blunts. In the Dutch setting, spliff smoking was an influence, spread in part, by immigrants from Suriname and the Dutch Antilles (Curacao, Aruba, etc.,) and by members of the Rastafarian subculture. These cultural forces would eventually influence the design and style of the modern blowtje.

The Demise of the Trey and the Loose Joint and the Rise of the Blunt: Instabilities of the New York Market

"Blunts" explicitly emerged as a phenomenon in New York City during the mid 1980s, where small groups (3-5) of youth would pool their limited resources to purchase generally a "dime" (\$10) or "nickel" (\$5) bag of marijuana (James 1994). During the late 1980s, in New York City's inner-city markets, these were relatively small amounts: a nickel consisting of approximately .75 of 1 gram, and a dime averaging slightly more than 1.5 grams. When rolling a traditional marijuana joint, 1 gram may be used to construct 2-3 joints. Joints of this size are meant to be consumed by one or two persons. Blunts are generally shared among larger groups of users. For the original blunt smokers, the blunt smoking phenomenon was born out of the scarce

conditions of New York's cannabis market in the mid 1980s. Today single (loose) "joints" and "trey" (3 dollar) bags of marijuana are no longer available in New York's retail market, while cannabis prices throughout the 1990s averaged about four to five times higher than prices in the late 1970s (Small 1996; Sifanek 1996; Hamid 1995). Throughout the 1980s marijuana prices gradually inflated, and peaked around 1989, while cocaine prices concomitantly plummeted (Rhodes, Hyatt & Scheiman 1994). This unique market condition of abundant and inexpensive cocaine (very often in the form of crack) reinforced the functionality of sharing expensive and often scarce marijuana.

When making a blunt, the user must first purchase an inexpensive, low-quality cigar. "Philly Blunts" from which the blunt label is derived, is a popular "old school" brand, but other cheap cigars ("White Owls," "Dutch Masters," and "Optimos") represent a fair section of this tobacco/paraphernalia market. There exists some urban street mythology concerning the effects of the highs, as well as the burning duration of the different brands. The tobacco inside the cheap cigar is hollowed-out leaving the empty shell. Since the production of these particular cigar brands is low-cost, the shell is not pure broad leaf tobacco, but a tobacco/paper composite. (However, the fronto leaf, used in the traditional spliff making process, is pure broad leaf tobacco.) The cigar is split lengthwise down the center, and the tobacco inside is emptied out. The shell is then reduced or shortened to about two-thirds of the original cigar's length. The cigar-shell is then re-filled with marijuana and rolled-up like a large cigarette. Generally, the whole dime or nickel is used in the construction, and the blunt is shared in a group of three or more users. Since "blunts" have come into fashion, however, personal blunt smoking among wealthier users is not uncommon. The original blunt smokers of the mid 1980s, predominantly African-Caribbean, African-American, and Latino youth residing in the inner-city, saw their new method of preparation as an economical way to consume expensive marijuana, and also a ritual of a group market transaction and preparation process.

The use of blunts is an integral element in the "Hip-Hop" youth subculture which has emerged in most American cities. Other ele-

ments of this subculture include rap music, dance styles, a continuously evolving argot (including unique terms for marijuana,) graffiti art, and styles of dress which include baggy pants, sport team jackets and caps, oversized jewelry, and a changing array of accessories. Hats and shirts with the "Philly Blunt" logo, and other references to blunts and marijuana smoking are common icons which are displayed prominently on "street gear" or the fashions of Hip-Hop. The argot of the Hip-Hop subculture includes many novel and innovative terms for marijuana (chronic, ism, boom, live, lah, dro), and blunts making previous slang obsolete. The new argot serves the function of keeping conversations about marijuana only recognizable to members of the subculture (Kaplan, Kampe, Antonio & Farfan 1990). In short, the social meanings and rituals of marijuana use have changed from previous American generations, as a result of different sentiments, attitudes, and ideologies regarding the drug use of youth subcultures. For example, there are rap songs about how to roll blunts and smoking them. Phallic shaped blunts are also an expression of "phatness," an important concept of the Hip-Hop subculture. "Phat" or "fat" is a term analogous with excellent, and the blunt is one expression of many, including "forties" (40-ounce bottles of beer or malt-liquor), and oversized baggy pants and sweatshirts. "Phat" also means healthy, where many overly thin folks in the inner-city are perceived either as crack smokers or victims of the AIDS epidemic.

The use of blunts may be an indication of a "stepping off" or "maturing out" pattern from using hard drugs to only using marijuana, and also a "keeping off" pattern of abstaining from hard drug use altogether (Winick 1963; Sifaneck & Kaplan 1995). While rap music lyrics are embracing marijuana use and blunt smoking, they are also being critical of cocaine and crack-cocaine use. A special type blunt termed a "wulla" or "whoolie" emerged during the height of the crack epidemic in the late 1980s. The "wulla" not only contained marijuana, but also crack and/or cocaine. Regular "wulla" smokers were predominantly former crack smokers who previously consumed their crack from a "pipe" or a "stem," where a whole "hit" would be smoked at one time. Crack or cocaine in the wulla is crushed and spread on top of the marijuana throughout the blunt shell, and

then smoked in a gradual manner, thus, titrating the cocaine dose. Peer pressures within Hip-Hop milieus encouraged wulla smokers eventually to abstain from adding crack and cocaine to their blunts (Curtis 1995). Presently, we observe a low prevalence of wulla use, while blunt use is more popular than ever. A more recent development in blunt construction is evidence to the fact that blunts attempt to replicate the look of "spliffs." A few blunt smokers were observed to place rolling paper around the blunt shell, to give it more of the appearance of a spliff (Richardson 1995). The extra paper does not serve a technical function, rather it is simply stylistic.

From the Stickje and Hippie Joint to the Coffeeshop Blowtje: The Gradual Evolution and Normalization of the Dutch Cannabis Market and Culture

In contrast to the developments in New York, the Caribbean influence on cannabis smoking practices in the Netherlands seem more limited despite a relatively large population of immigrants from the Antilles, the former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. Some Jamaican influence on the Dutch cannabis culture did occur in the 1970s with Bob Marley and the worldwide reggae movement. However, well before that time there was already active cannabis and psychedelic subcultures in the Netherlands. In the 1960s an active psychedelic culture sprung up around Jasper Grootveld and the "Magic Center." One of Grootveld's claims to fame was implanting an electrode in his brain to effect "self-stimulation." Young people throughout the Netherlands were experimenting with drugs and other types of "consciousness expansion." Amsterdam was seen as a cosmic center, possessing geodesic conditions, including the ability to contact extra-terrestrials (Bongers, Snelders & Plomp 1995). Grootveld prophesied that "Klaas" was coming, which, in a sense, came true when Princess Beatrix married Prince Klaus ("Klaas" in Dutch) from Germany. This caused much national rumbling, since Dutch-German relationships were still rather uneasy at the time. The Provos, another radical group of the time, threatened to put LSD in the water of the horses of the coronation carriage. Other subcultural groups included the "Pleiners" who hung around the Leidsplein (an urban square) in Amsterdam and were the au-

dience for the new Paradiso and Melkweg youth culture projects. The Paradiso and the Melkweg (translates to Milky Way) were the first environments where the retail sale of cannabis was tolerated by "house dealers" (Jansen 1989).

The considerable Moroccan worker migration in the 1950s provided a bridge for contact with hashish sources, which still provide the most prominent supply in present day coffeeshops (retail establishments which sell cannabis in the Netherlands). Tangier and Marrakesh were popular destinations for international beatnik and hippie travelers in the late 1950s and 1960s, and a stop-over in Amsterdam was often on the itinerary. In the late 1960s, hashish, not marijuana, was the most prominent form of cannabis available in the Netherlands. Only later in the 1970s did the substantial Surinam and Antillian migration occur, which would augment the cannabis scene with marijuana (ganja) and Caribbean influences. The origin of the blowtje was influenced by indigenous tobacco smoking subcultures in the Netherlands. In the late 1960s a trend emerged among youthful tobacco smokers who wished to distinguish themselves from conventional cigarette smokers by rolling their own cigarettes with long-cut "shag" tobacco. This was an old Dutch working class practice, which could also be observed in England, where high tobacco taxes made pre-rolled cigarettes too expensive. Youth subcultures with leftist politics and sympathies perceived the practice of rolling shag tobacco as a symbolic and practical identification with the working class. In the 1970s the practice of rolling shag tobacco was common in the Dutch and German critical intellectual scene. Colorful designer Drum and Samson tobacco cans (shag tobacco brands) were subcultural status symbols.

In the 1960s a hashish-tobacco cigarette made with one paper was called a "stickje" (translates small stick). If two small papers were used in the construction it was called a "joint," also referred to as "American hippie style." This linguistic evidence is illustrative of the American influence on the Dutch cannabis culture transplanted by traveling hippies from the United States. As cannabis smoking became more socialized and more public, larger group smoking became a trend among hippies throughout the world. In the Netherlands, the hippie-style joint made with

two papers was replaced by the blowtje, originally made with three cigarette rolling papers. When making a blowtje the user must procure a number of things, all of which are available at the "coffeeshop" where the retail sale of small amounts (5 grams or less) of hashish and marijuana to persons over 18 years of age is tolerated. The collection of essentials to construct a blowtje include: 1) a small amount of high-quality marijuana or hashish (usually about .25 of a gram), 2) a large rolling paper (equivalent to the size of 3 shag tobacco cigarette rolling papers), 3) tobacco (shag or from an American cigarette—approximately two-thirds of one cigarette) 4) a cardboard filter tip ("tipje" in Dutch). The construction process is somewhat elaborate. First, the cardboard tip is placed at the end of the large rolling paper—which is not folded in a perpendicular fashion, but at an angle. Then, the tobacco is spread out carefully inside the paper, creating "a bed" where the cannabis will be placed. The user then adds a small amount of marijuana or hashish, placing slightly more in the end opposite the filter. When the blowtje is rolled, the end which is lit is larger in girth than the end with the filter; creating a joint which is shaped like a baseball bat, and also resembles the shape of a spliff. The inclusion of tobacco in the Dutch blowtje initially served a technical function. Throughout the 1970s, hashish was the most common form of cannabis available, and tobacco was needed in order for the hashish to burn properly in the form of a joint. Modern blowtje smokers who use marijuana instead of hashish also argue that tobacco is needed in order to insure that the blowtje burns properly. Since the locally grown "Nederweit" (translates to Netherlands' weed) is extremely fresh, and often moist, the addition of the tobacco produces a drier smoking mix which burns more evenly. The addition of tobacco in the blowtje also allows users to use a small amount of cannabis in the construction of their blowtjes, which will be further discussed.

As the blowtje became rooted as the predominant smoking mode, changes in the cannabis subculture were taking place. The practice of smoking cannabis in a group lost popularity. This was reinforced by the emergence of the coffeeshops which provided a social context and a form of consumption that encouraged each patron to order and prepare their own cannabis. Smoking one's

own blowtje in the coffeeshop became the norm, and this was supported by the emergence of a new smoking style and related argot. Dutch smokers inhale or "blow" (a term reserved for cocaine in American drug argot) their cannabis in a casual manner like a tobacco cigarette. Unlike American cannabis smokers, who are likely to inhale deeply and hold the smoke in their lungs (sometimes referred to as "holding the hit,") Dutch smokers literally "blow" the smoke in and out of their lungs, avoiding deep inhalation. Thus, the blowtje, and the Dutch cannabis smoking subculture in general, has important roots in tobacco smoking styles as well as international and indigenous subcultural influences. Dutch cannabis smokers distinguish among themselves by the amount and kind of tobacco (shag or American) and cannabis (marijuana or hashish) they prefer. Light processed American tobacco and the darker and heavier less/un-processed Dutch shag tobacco can be widely observed in the blowtje mix. However, there are also a small minority of smokers who do not mix their cannabis with tobacco. Some of these smokers reject the tobacco convention, simply because they do not like the taste and/or the effect of the tobacco. Others may also be concerned about the increased health risks posed by smoking both substances simultaneously. Very often these cannabis users will use a small Moroccan hashish pipe, and avoid the rolling process altogether.

A recently emerged smoking phenomenon in the Dutch cannabis culture is the "blowtje gezond." Its name is derived from the popular Dutch bakery sandwich known as the "broodje gezond," which literally translates to "healthy sandwich." This small bakery bun is filled with cheese, a boiled egg and vegetables—not exactly fat or cholesterol free, but its vegetable laden appearance is its claim of healthfulness. A "blowtje gezond" is simply a Dutch blowtje constructed without the tobacco, and was observed being sold by a few coffeeshops in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. This is an important, although limited development, because it is an indication that the Dutch cannabis culture has come to realize the increased health risks posed by using cannabis and tobacco simultaneously. This may also be an indication of a marketing strategy to encourage smoking without tobacco, which is reinforced by the national campaigns against tobacco

use in the Netherlands. Despite these campaigns and new cannabis products, most Dutch cannabis users rarely smoke marijuana and hashish without the tobacco, and when they do, they label the joint as "puur" (pure). "I only smoke pure joints when I am in the sunshine" a young male Rotterdammer commented. "If I see someone smoking a pure joint, I say either he is an American or an old time hippie" responded a young female user in her twenties.

DISCUSSION

Cannabis Market Reinforcements, Self-Regulation and Implications for Secondary Prevention

The ethnographic descriptions in this paper underlie the importance of understanding the specific processes of how these subcultures adapt to market variations. Subcultural drug use practices must adapt themselves to specific market conditions; the subculture and the market reinforce each other in affecting the individual conduct and self-conception of the user. In the field of drug abuse research this process of multiple causality has been described as "causal reinforcement" (Swierstra 1990). Blunts and blowtjes represent two distinct emerging conceptions of cannabis use that serve different self-regulatory functions for the user than their common antecedent the Rastafarian spliff. The blunt is an attempt at economizing an expensive product in a relatively scarce market. The blowtje is the result of the opposite market condition: an abundance of high quality, moderately priced cannabis. In the New York City market, sharing the drug is part of the ritual, in the Dutch market sharing is unnecessary. They are both, however, attempts at self-regulation. In the case of blunts, self regulation takes place collectively inside a group. This also was the case for the prior hippie generation who "could not help but get stoned" through a ritual of sitting in a circle and passing a joint around with each individual taking a turn. However, one essential difference is the self in the group process. The self in "the blunt era" is characterized by the process of trying to deal with threats and insecurity in the market environment; be it crack or law enforcement. This kind of self is evidenced by the rich repertoire of argot terms. A drug argot has been argued to indicate a form of intense social control that maintains in-group cohesion by

hiding the practices which the terms refer to from normal language (Kaplan et al. 1990). The language acts as a means of strengthening the security of the self within the subculture.

In the Dutch context, new cannabis preparations are continually offered in the coffeeshop much like new beers and other alcohol are in an American bar. The individual experiences smoking cannabis from a connoisseur's perspective, not seeking new sensation, but refinements of tried and true products. The lack of drug argot terms is striking when compared to the American context. The old language is maintained with modest addition of innovation. This indicates that the cannabis subculture is being increasingly integrated into normal Dutch society and therefore has no real survival need to hide and promote in-group subcultural cohesion in any form other than a cannabis users association, an interest group protecting the connoisseur consumer self. Part of the preparation ritual in the American context is the "scoring" of the marijuana which is not necessary in the coffeeshop setting. Since generally a five or ten dollar amount is the least one can purchase on the regular retail market, it makes the phenomenon of "going in on" (willing to contribute money towards the purchase of) a function of the ritual. In this sense, the sharing of the cost becomes an integral part of the procurement process. The sharing which ensues when the blunt is smoked is an extension of this functionality. This is a process of group self-regulation, much like the type observed by Grund in his extensive field research with Dutch heroin users, where market scarcity was a determining factor in the sharing process (Grund, Kaplan & De Vries 1993). In the American context, scarcity of injection equipment has demonstrated itself as the most important factor affecting needle sharing among injection drug users (Des Jarlais, Friedman, Sothorn & Stoneburner 1988).

The self-regulation practiced by Dutch cannabis users, through the employment of the blowtje, is oriented in individual rather than the collective behavior observed by American blunt smokers. This is a result of the normalized or "pseudo-legal" market which provides the context for cannabis use (Jansen 1989). In such a normalized market, the cannabis offered is high quality, relatively low-priced, and includes a diverse array of types

of marijuana and hashish from across the globe. Today's modern Dutch cannabis users do not share joints. Such a practice is perceived by them as anachronistic and subsequently labeled as "hippie-style." "Blowtjes" are truly personal joints, and contain a surprisingly small amount (less than 1/3 of a gram) of cannabis (marijuana or hashish) mixed with about 2/3s of the tobacco in an average cigarette. Blowtjes are not passed in circles, but held personally by each user in the coffeeshop.

The potency of cannabis also effects regulation and consumption. The disparities in the potencies of cannabis available to the average consumer are an indirect result of the market conditions surrounding its use. In the Netherlands, where cultivating marijuana is tolerated, although not officially sanctioned, the most popular marijuana presently sold and consumed is "Skunk"—more formally known as a variety of cannabis -indica. This type of cannabis is generally grown hydroponically indoors throughout the Netherlands, under extremely controlled conditions. The "Nederweit" (translates Netherlands' Weed) produced possess a THC content which often approaches 20%. This widely available, high potency cannabis, which most Dutch users choose to consume, allow them to use a very small amount (about .25 of a gram) in their blowtje construction. The self-titrating behavior of using more potent cannabis in lesser amounts, observed during our fieldwork with Dutch users, has also been observed in controlled laboratory settings with American users (Heishman, Stitzer & Yingling 1989).

In the New York City blunt smoking context, the cannabis most widely available is imported from Mexico, and to a lesser extent from Jamaica. These varieties of cannabis which are grown outdoors, have a considerably lower THC content than the Dutch grower Nederweit. This helps to explain why blunt smokers use a relatively large amount of cannabis (from 1-1.5 grams) in the construction of their blunts. It is also evidence to the fact that differences in the criminality of the market (semi-decriminalized vs. pseudo-legal) seem to effect the potency and quality of cannabis normally available at the retail level (Sifaneck 1996). This in turn, has an effect on how and why users choose to self-regulate their use.

Secondary prevention strategies can be

informed by research that identifies the parameters involved in cannabis self-regulation. For instance, in an important experimental psychological study of cannabis and driving, Robbe (1994) concluded that the harm of cannabis is strongly associated with parameters such as the volume of smoke taken into the lungs and the number of puffs or draws in a smoking session in which this volume is regulated. This was also observed by Azorlosa, Heishman, Stitzer and Mahaffey (1992) in similar controlled laboratory settings. These parameters still need to be documented in their natural settings in order to identify the full range of behaviors and constraints that operate to control the volume of smoke and the frequency of puffs. In the Netherlands, courses are being given to problematic cannabis users in order to adjust their use towards a less harmful direction (Bourghuis 1994). These secondary prevention efforts are largely non-existent in the US. However, there is evidence that similar functions are being initiated by organized American groups that promote cannabis and psychedelic drugs (Jenks 1995). These groups do not promote an indiscriminate use of cannabis, but instead offer users social support and accurate information on how to use cannabis in more responsible ways. Both the Dutch courses and the American organizations rely on the experiences of cannabis users. The future development of preventative cannabis education can benefit from the input of ethnographic studies. For instance, Dutch blowtje smokers do not hold smoke in their lungs as long as their American counterparts. American cannabis users generally "hold the hit" in an attempt to economize the smoke. These parameters are in need of future elaboration in natural setting research. The qualitative results of our research provide a basis for looking in more detail at these behavioral parameters.

Clearly more research is needed in understanding how processes such as cultural diffusion apply to the situation of diverse cannabis smoking behaviors and use practices. In the literature on health behavior, there is ample evidence that healthy lifestyles can diffuse over national, class and ethnic boundaries. The same processes can apply for unhealthy lifestyles. Future ethnographic research should not only be advised to search for "common antecedents" of lifestyles and subcultures, but also to look for how current

smoking styles are anchored in the specific development of regional subcultural practices (Becker 1970). A "cross-fertilization" of tobacco and cannabis styles, as we have documented in the Netherlands may prove to be a useful hypothesis guiding future research in other settings as well.

Evidence has suggested that smokers of both cannabis and tobacco have increased risks of lung and other cancers, than do sole smokers of tobacco (Tashkin, Coulson, Clark, Simmons, Bourque, Duann, Spivey and Gong 1987). If this evidence is correct, it should call for an intervention with cannabis users by dissemination of accurate information regarding the risks posed by the different methods of consuming the drug. Such a secondary preventative effort would be aimed at current users encouraging them to adjust their practices and patterns in less harmful directions. This should include information on the harms of various use practices, as well as information to guard against harmful chronic use patterns. One suggestion might be to encourage current blunt smokers to replace the blunt shell (made of tobacco, paper, and glue) with a large rolling paper, thus eliminating the health risks posed by consumption of the tobacco. Users would still have the convenience and functionality that the blunt provided: a joint large enough to be shared in a small group. Some Dutch coffeeshops have taken the lead in providing such information aimed at secondary prevention to its consumers. Other coffeeshops are offering the use of bongs (water pipes) and water vaporizers to their customers. Water pipes and vaporizers also offer a tobacco free alternative for blowtje smokers. Previous and ongoing research has determined carcinogens and tars are filtered out through the water inside the bong, making it a safer smoking method (Doblin 1995). This is a particularly important issue for persons with AIDS (PWAs) who are using cannabis to combat the wasting syndrome. Patients with such a compromised immune system have to insure that the safest and most effective way is used to ingest marijuana.

Harm reduction measures must include cannabis users in their efforts; and the medicinal use of cannabis might provide the basis for self-regulatory intervention in the future. Just as a generation has observed the devastating effect of crack-cocaine on

many users, another generation could learn an experience based lesson in self-regulating and modifying its drug consumption (Furst, Johnson, Dunlap & Curtis 1999). While persons who smoke only cannabis seem to experience lung-related health problems infrequently, there may be an increase of health problems among persons who simultaneously smoke cannabis and tobacco. In the light of the new national and local (especially in Mayor Bloomberg's New York City) campaigns against the use of tobacco by young people, similar efforts should educate youth about the harms posed by the different ways of consuming cannabis. Such efforts, however, should not exclude those youth who have already begun experimenting with the drug.

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