

THE MEANING OF CHRONIC MARIJUANA USE AMONG ADULTS: A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Research on marijuana smoking among adults has raised questions about whether such behavior is essentially maladaptive. Drawing from their study of the role of marijuana in the psychosocial adaptation of long-term, heavy adult users, the authors explore the meaning this behavior appears to have for such individuals. On the basis of questionnaire results obtained from 150 chronic marijuana-smoking adults, use of the drug was not found to be linked with maladaptive functioning in any consistent behavioral sense. Intensive interviews with a smaller number of subjects revealed a quite different picture, however, pointing to a relationship between heavy marijuana use and significant adaptive difficulties in the areas of work and personal relationships. While suggesting the need to use psychodynamic, as well as social variables, in defining marijuana abuse, the authors caution against concluding a causal linkage between the drug behavior and users' difficulties in psychosocial functioning.

Recent survey reports (Petersen, 1980; Nicholi, 1984) have indicated an explosive increase of about 30-fold in the use of marijuana during the 1960s and 1970s. One-quarter of the entire United States population is estimated to have smoked marijuana, and as many as twenty million people are thought to be daily users.

With few exceptions, the information that forms the basis of contemporary knowledge of marijuana use has been derived from studies of high school and college-age youth. In a wide-ranging span of studies, marijuana abuse by young people has been correlated with such diverse variables as peer pressure and

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proximity to marijuana-smoking friends (Jessor et al., 1973; Jessor, 1976; Jessor and Jessor, 1977; Kandel, 1973, Kandel et al., 1978); values and behaviors reflective of a "youth culture" lifestyle (Grinspoon, 1971; Hochman and Brill, 1973); poor academic performance, precocious sexual activity, and antisocial behavior (Jessor et al., 1980); feelings of hostility and aggression (Allen and West, 1968); anxiety, depression, and a lack of self-control (Kupfer et al., 1973); low self-esteem (Kaplan, 1975a and b, 1978; Norem-Hebeisen, 1975); difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships with others (Esman, 1967; Mirin et al., 1971); and "amotivational" personality characteristics (McGlothlin and West, 1968; Kolansky and Moore, 1971, 1972; Kornhaber, 1971; Kolodny et al., 1974; Maugh, 1974).

Through this extensive research, much has been learned about behavioral and attitudinal factors associated with marijuana usage among adolescents. Less well understood, however, is what this behavior actually *means*. Some observers, for example, view heavy, regular use of marijuana as an increasingly normative part of an adolescent lifestyle rooted in alternative social values and attitudes. Others who emphasize the drug's negative effects on behavior and social adaptation consider marijuana smoking to be essentially maladaptive.

The relatively small amount of work done to date on marijuana use among adults has likewise suggested a linkage between regular use of the drug and maladaptive behavior. Based largely on special populations such as minorities of lower socioeconomic status (Robins et al., 1970), professional musicians (Winick, 1960), or polydrug abusers (McGlothlin et al., 1970), this work has pointed to an association between chronic marijuana smoking among adults and relatively unstructured, unstable patterns in work and social relationships. More recent examination of a general population of white middle-class adult users (Halikas et al., 1983), however, discovered no consistent direct impact of frequent marijuana use on negative social functioning, suggesting that this behavior per se may not be incompatible with societal expectations of normal adult adaptation.

In a recent study (Hendin et al., 1987), we have examined in detail the role of marijuana in the psychosocial adaptation of long-term regular users. While the essential aim of this study was to identify the functions that chronic marijuana use performs for such individuals, our findings shed some light on the meaning of this behavior for individual users, and suggest the need for psychodynamic as well as social variables to be used in defining marijuana abuse.

Methods

Based on our earlier work with adolescent marijuana abusers (Hendin et al., 1981a and b, 1982), a study method was designed through which could be obtained both a broad-based perspective on demographic, socioeconomic, social, and behavioral characteristics of chronic marijuana smokers, as well as intensive psychodynamic information about their feelings and underlying motivations for their drug behavior. In order to clearly see the essence of marijuana smoking, we focused exclusively on adults who were using the drug daily and heavily, had done so for many years, and at least for the last several years had not used other drugs on a regular basis.

For the first phase of the study 150 subjects were selected from among a pool of

several hundred heavy marijuana-smoking white adults who applied for participation in response to media advertising. The subjects included ninety-nine men and fifty-one women ranging in age from twenty to fifty-six, with an average age of about thirty-one years. As a group, they smoked an average equivalent of about three-and-a-half marijuana cigarettes per day.

Each of these subjects was seen for a brief structured interview and then completed a written questionnaire developed in collaboration with the National Institute on Drug Abuse (Huba et al., 1981). Among the topics covered in the interview and questionnaire were history and current patterns of marijuana use, as well as use of other drugs; reasons for smoking marijuana; perceptions of its effects; patterns of general social interaction; perceptions of life satisfaction and self-esteem; and psychological problems and complaints.

On the basis of these responses, fifteen individuals—eight men and seven women—were selected for intensive study, representing various types of users identified in the larger group. Among those selected were a corporate lawyer, a well-published author, a young accountant, a struggling screenwriter, a divorced salesman, a suburban housewife, an administrative assistant in a large corporation, a film maker, a secretary, a personnel manager, a graduate student, a business manager for a newspaper, a musician, a medical technician, and a photographer.

In the second phase of the study, each of these fifteen individuals participated in a series of five one-hour, open-ended interviews, which explored such topics as work, relationships, family background and early history, as well as past and current patterns of marijuana use. Each subject was followed up approximately eighteen months later and was seen for an average of two additional unstructured interviews, focusing on what had transpired in the individual's life in the interim and how this related to his or her use of marijuana.

Results

Through the initial interviews and questionnaires, the 150 subjects presented themselves as a highly normative group, in all respects other than their drug behavior. Almost three-quarters of the subjects had at least some college education, and about 93% were employed in a stable occupation. Six out of every ten subjects held professional or white collar positions; the remaining individuals were roughly equally divided between arts-related and blue-collar occupations.

About a quarter of the group (22%) were married and living with their spouse at the time of the study, and an additional 40% were involved in steady relationships. On the average, the subjects indicated going out between two and three nights per week for recreation, and going out with a date or with their spouse or living partner an average of about once a week. More than 80% said that they got together informally with friends at least once a week, and almost two-thirds (62%) spent at least an hour of leisure time alone each day.

Overall, the subjects indicated a high level of satisfaction with their lives. On the questionnaire, they were asked to rate on a scale of 1 ("absolute bottom, couldn't be worse") to 10 ("absolute top, couldn't be better") how things were a year before the interview, how they were presently, and how they thought life would be next year. The average rating of the group for how things were the previous year

was 5.6, falling between "good and bad aspects about even" (5.0) and "somewhat good; good aspects slightly outweigh the bad" (6.0). At the time of the interviews the subjects rated their lives in general an average of 6.5, approaching a level of "pretty good" (7.0) and slightly exceeding the average rating of 6.3 which, in response to a later question, they gave to the current lives of people they knew of the same age and sex. Projecting into the future, the group as a whole rated their lives in the subsequent year an average of 7.7, or close to "actually quite good" (8.0). More than eight out of every ten subjects (83%) saw an overall upward movement in considering the status of their lives over the three-year span.

When asked to assess a number of specific things which may have influenced their feelings during the immediately preceding several weeks, the subjects again indicated high levels of satisfaction. In rating how they felt about 46 separate items, using a scale ranging from 1 ("terrible") to 7 ("delighted"), they averaged scores of 5.0 ("mostly satisfied") or better on 22 of the items. These dealt primarily with aspects of work, health, spiritual life, family life, friendships, emotional fulfillment, self-expression, and sense of self-worth.

Another 22 items—focusing mainly on such things as opportunities for fun and recreation, degree of independence and freedom, success and accomplishments, and personal standard of living—received average ratings of between 4.0 ("mixed") and 5.0 ("mostly satisfied"). Only two items were rated as less than 4.0, indicating dissatisfaction, and these were matters of personal income and the standards and values in today's society.

In a related set of questions, the subjects were asked to rate a list of twenty psychological problems and complaints that people sometimes have, according to the degree to which they were currently bothered by that particular problem. Using a five-point scale, the subjects averaged scores of between 1 ("bothered by this problem not at all") and 2 ("bothered a little bit") on almost all of the items. Only three problems—"feeling blue," "feeling tense or keyed up," and "feeling most people will take advantage of you if you let them"—received average ratings of between 2 and 3 ("bothered moderately").

For virtually all subjects, marijuana smoking was seen as a regular, consistent part of their daily lives. On the average the 150 subjects first used marijuana at the age of sixteen. Two to five years after first using marijuana all had begun regular daily or almost daily use. At the time the subjects were interviewed, 93% had been smoking on a daily or almost daily basis for at least three years; almost one-third of the group had been daily smokers for ten years or more. The large majority (70%) said that they would find it hard to get through an entire week without smoking marijuana.

In response to questions about where they used marijuana, almost three-quarters of the subjects (73%) said they felt an experienced user could smoke it in virtually any context. As a group, however, they were evenly divided among those who smoked marijuana while at work at least some of the time, those who smoked at work only occasionally, and those who never smoked at work.

The large majority (75%), said that much of their social life took place while they had been smoking marijuana, and an equal proportion described most or all of their friends as regular users. At the same time, a very high proportion (89%) said they regularly smoked while alone, and almost half of the total group (45%)

said that most of the time when they smoked, they were alone. Spouses or partners were also frequently identified by subjects (76%) as people with whom they regularly smoked.

From a 12-item list of reasons why people sometimes use marijuana, the subjects most frequently identified seven reasons underlying their use of the drug:

- to get pleasure, to feel good, get high (99%)
- to relax, relieve tension (97%)
- to use with friends, to enjoy effects (88%)
- to overcome depression (61%)
- to enhance sexual interest and pleasure (60%)
- for fun, kicks, excitement (57%)
- to forget troubles (53%)

Slightly fewer than half of the subjects responded affirmatively to two additional reasons for using marijuana:

- to deepen self-understanding (49%)
- to produce intense exciting experiences (46%)

Only a quarter of the total sample or less listed the remaining three items as reasons why they smoked marijuana:

- to go along with what my friends are doing (25%)
- to make me more satisfied with myself (21%)
- to go along with what my partner or spouse is doing (20%)

As can be seen from the data in Tables 1 and 2, the subjects as a group were highly positive in their assessments of both the short-term and long-term effects of marijuana on their lives and functioning. In contrast to nine aspects of functioning which one-half or more of the group felt were usually made better on a short-term basis by marijuana, virtually nothing was identified by such a proportion of subjects as usually made worse. They were only slightly more negative in assessing marijuana's long-term effects, with more than two-thirds of the group identifying memory as being impaired.

Table 1
Short-Term Effects of Marijuana

<i>Things one-half or more of the subjects said were made better:</i>	<i>made worse:</i>
ability to relax and enjoy life (76%)	none
enjoyment of food (73%)	
ability to sleep well (62%)	
ability to avoid boredom (61%)	
enjoyment of sex (60%)	
ability to avoid feeling angry (58%)	
enjoyment of recreational activities (57%)	
physical discomforts (54%)	
ability to avoid feeling depressed (50%)	

Table 2
Long-Term Effects of Marijuana

<i>Things one-half or more of the subjects said were improved:</i>	<i>impaired:</i>
ability to overcome anxiety and worry (72%)	memory (67%)
understanding of others (58%)	
creativity (58%)	
ability to enjoy varied and numerous activities (55%)	
self-understanding (54%)	
ability to enjoy life (54%)	
overall happiness (52%)	
ability to be tolerant and considerate of others (50%)	

Consistent with their evaluation of marijuana's positive effects, relatively few subjects indicated having had frequent negative reactions to smoking marijuana during the year preceding the time of their interviews. Only slightly more than 10%, for example, said they had frequently been worried while smoking marijuana because they did not know how people were reacting to them, and about 5% said that while smoking they frequently saw themselves as they really were and did not like what they saw. No other frequently occurring negative reaction was identified by more than 4% of the total group.

If most of these subjects saw marijuana as part of an overall positive adaptation, a somewhat different perspective emerged from the fifteen individuals we studied in depth through the open-ended interviews. Most significantly, the interviews revealed a considerable degree of previously unexpressed difficulties among these men and women—difficulties which in virtually every case were seen to be closely connected to their heavy use of marijuana. The following cases are presented as illustrative.

Case 1

D.P., a 44-year-old corporate lawyer who earned in excess of \$100,000 a year, was representative of those who, while extolling the value of marijuana "to get pleasure, to feel good, get high," and "to relax and relieve tension," revealed in their subsequent interviews how hard pleasure came to them, how seldom they felt good, how often they were low rather than high, how tense they were, and how difficult it was for them to relax. In short, Mr. P. was typical of many of the adults we studied in needing marijuana to put aside aspects of himself that he could not integrate or reconcile with enjoyment.

Describing himself in his first interview as an "organized and fairly compulsive person," he said that he put everything of himself into everything he did. He related this to the fact that he had grown up in a "goal-oriented" Jewish family, and recalled his father's telling him as a young boy to "never stop running until

you've crossed the goal line." In his current job, he felt he was a "benevolent despot," and joked that he treated all his subordinates equally—"like dogs." Acknowledging he was "legally ethical but a bastard," he said he would "go after someone for the last penny for the sake of my clients."

Mr. P. related his use of marijuana to his being a driving, controlling person, saying that smoking made him mellow and diminished his sense of competition. For the last twenty years, he had smoked two or three marijuana cigarettes each evening—and often much more on the weekends—in an attempt to maintain what he saw as "two divergent lives" at home and at work.

As elaborated through the interviews, his personal life reflected little of the success which marked his career. Although currently satisfied in his relationship with a young, successful female business executive, his two previous marriages had ended in divorce. He also revealed considerable frustration and disappointment in his relationships with his two children, a daughter of fifteen and a son of eleven, whom he saw infrequently. Acknowledging that "my long suits are not patience, tolerance, and understanding of mistakes," he said he had to work hard when he was with them to control his tendency to be too critical, controlling, and hard-driving. Being high on marijuana allowed him a measure of respite from his otherwise irascible, driving style.

It also played a critical role in inducing the detachment he needed for sexual relations. Mr. P. noted that he had always been drawn to marijuana because it served as an aphrodisiac for him. He said he did not need it to stimulate his desire, but it enhanced his pleasure and made it last longer. Yet, much more was revealed in his descriptions in the interviews of how, in the last years of both his marriages, marijuana allowed sex to remain "excellent," in spite of increasing tensions and bad feelings. Marijuana, he said, often stimulated sexual fantasies of being with two women, of having one woman watch him while he had sex with another. In the process of separating from each of his wives, he had involvements with other women and had sometimes acted out these fantasies. More often, he would talk about them with the woman he was with while they were having sex. Not only his fantasy life, but his actual pattern of relationships, reflected his need to maintain a sense of distance and detachment with others.

Although Mr. P. had problems being close to others, he could not tolerate being alone. Explaining his dislike of being alone, he noted in one interview, "I prefer to have people around with whom to interact. I think that makes me feel more alive. I guess in the extreme way I think, that if I'm all alone, it's a sign that I could be dead." This strong imagery pointed to an emotional constriction and dissatisfaction with himself which left him without the inner resources to be alone. When alone, he needed to smoke; best of all, he would smoke with friends and use marijuana's effects to avoid both aloneness and intimacy. That he gave the desire to enjoy the effects of marijuana with friends as an additional reason for his smoking seems understandable in this context, as is the fact that he saw marijuana as helping him to overcome boredom. The interviews served to illuminate the relationship between D.P.'s difficulties with closeness, emotional constriction, and the need for sensory experience with drugs or sex to make him feel alive.

On the questionnaire Mr. P. indicated that marijuana increased his under-

standing of himself and others, making him more philosophical and insightful about what was going on around him. Yet, the interviews revealed how marijuana permitted him to lead an unexamined life strikingly free of introspection.

In describing marijuana's effect on his perceptiveness about people and situations, he noted, "[While high] I feel that I come out with pearls of wisdom that are absolutely original. I've had reinforcement from people who say, 'Hey, that's very perceptive.' I see things vividly. I can understand like a philosopher-king. I guess that's what I would like to be, a philosopher-king."

Yet, Mr. P. had not read a book in more than 12 years, never remembered his dreams, and repeatedly emphasized his feeling that life should not be taken seriously. In addition, his descriptions of his relationships revealed a consistent inability to look at or take any responsibility for his own role in how they turned out. Striking in the way he described his first serious relationship with a woman and two subsequent marriages, for example, was the way in which he catalogued the defects in each of the women without any sense that he might have contributed to the failure of these relationships.

When it was pointed out to him that these things appeared to indicate a desire to stand back from people and events and to avoid looking at himself introspectively, he commented on the interviewer's perceptiveness, a response which was in keeping with his need to keep distance. At a later point, he described marijuana as making it unnecessary for him to look at himself or to see any flaws. This suggested that by avoiding self-awareness, he was able to escape the responsibility of doing anything to alter himself or his situation.

Consistent with this stance was the consistently high level of life satisfaction which Mr. P. indicated on the questionnaire. Other than noting that he had frequent disagreements with his mother, and describing himself as occasionally feeling a little bit tense or "keyed up," he indicated no problems or complaints in his current life. On a scale of 1-10, he rated his life both last year and this year as a 9 ("very good, could hardly be better"), and projected it would continue that way in the coming year.

His in-depth interviews provided considerable evidence that these responses were expressing only a one-dimensional glimpse of what was really going on in his life. Rather than being true indications of high levels of life satisfaction, they appeared to reflect a desire not to confront those aspects of his life which were the source of frustration or sadness. Similarly, his minimizing or outright denial on the questionnaire of the things in his life about which he was truly troubled was in sharp contrast to the level of turmoil which was uncovered during his interviews.

Case 2

In both her life circumstances and her pattern of marijuana use E.L. represented a quite different type of subject. Mrs. L. was a 36-year-old woman who had recently married for the second time following a 13-year marriage in which she had two children. She had been brought up in a strict Italian Catholic family who had showed very little warmth or affection. She was currently living in the suburbs where she had a part-time job as the manager of a small retail store.

Mrs. L. had smoked marijuana on a daily basis since the age of twenty, beginning shortly after marrying for the first time. Although she did not usually

smoke large quantities, she began most days by getting high and smoked just enough throughout the day to maintain the effects. During the interviews she related her early use of marijuana to her unhappiness with her first husband, saying that it had kept her "mellow" and less bothered by her husband's orders, insults, criticisms and frequent physical abuse. Marijuana had also been an integral part of their sexual life together. They always got high before having sex, sometimes taking Quaaludes or amphetamines in addition to marijuana, and frequently dressed in costumes and engaged in "limited bondage." Mrs. L. considered sex to have been the best aspect of their relationship. After the birth of her second child, she said she had experienced a transformation in her life, left her marriage in order to provide a better life for her children, and began to become her "own person."

She described herself as very happy in her second marriage to an engineer. Except for indicating concern over the amount of her family's income, she characterized herself on the questionnaire as "mostly satisfied" with all areas of her life, including her relationship with her husband and children. Seeing the current year as an 8 on the scale of 1-10, she projected that next year would be a 10. Her interviews revealed a quite different picture.

Although describing her husband as sensitive and understanding and her best friend in addition to her lover, she indicated in one of her interviews that she wished he were more romantic. She thought there might be more excitement in their sex life if they were both high on marijuana, but he did not smoke and she felt that her smoking put them "on different wave lengths" which made her uncomfortable.

She regularly smoked around her children, however, saying both on the questionnaire and in the interviews, that it made her more relaxed, more understanding and tolerant of them, and better able to deal with their bickering and demands. She also felt that being high made the ordinary situations in life like cooking and housework easier to cope with, and helped her to avoid feeling angry, depressed or bored.

Later in her interviews, in response to a direct question, Mrs. L. revealed that her children objected to her marijuana smoking because it made her so "spacy," and often urged her to stop. In this context, she wondered if marijuana was not also interfering with her ambition. Although she enjoyed her part-time job, she thought that were she not smoking, she might pursue her interests more vigorously and perhaps would get an education that would enable her to do more. She feared, though, that going to school would be too much of a commitment and would restrict her freedom to do what she wanted with her time.

Mrs. L.'s equation of commitment with restriction was reflected in her elaboration during the interviews of her fantasies of having sexual relationships with people other than her husband. She said she and her husband had agreed that they should be free to have sexual affairs apart from their marriage, which she referred to as cashing in their "fantasy tickets." In describing her views on sex outside marriage, she noted that to "step outside of your life with someone, share a special hour or two and just escape totally, mentally and physically, from the norm, it's like recharging a battery, you know, and then you get back on the treadmill." She added that if her fantasy tickets were not an active part of her

relationship with her husband, she would feel she was giving up her independence. This led her to talk about her empathy with helpless creatures, like spiders caught in a web, and to reveal her frequent thoughts of death.

During the course of her follow-up interviews, Mrs. L. indicated that both she and her husband had recently cashed in on some of their fantasy tickets. While away on a business trip, he had become sexually involved with a woman for one night. Shortly thereafter, she began an affair with a man she had met at work. In discussing their first sexual encounter, she recalled that while driving to a motel to meet him, she had some second thoughts, but said she felt she had to prove something. Asked what she had to prove, she replied, "That I was still free, that nothing could stop me, not even me."

She doubted that continuing to see this man would jeopardize her marriage, saying she felt that she and her husband had "something so special" that their outside involvements would not interfere. In light of the considerable frustrations which Mrs. L. revealed in her interviews, her optimistic outlook appeared to be more a statement of will or faith than a reflection of what she actually felt.

As illustrated in these cases, the heavy use of marijuana among our subjects was consistently seen to be related to three key areas of their lives: work, intimate relationships, and their own self-awareness.

Work

Intensive study of our fifteen selected individuals established that heavy marijuana usage was not incompatible with significant career success. Indeed, in more than a third of the cases, the individual's work life was characterized by a high degree of achievement, usually accompanied by considerable competitive pressure. Like Mr. P., most such individuals had been raised with a strong orientation toward performance and had strong needs to excel. Most tended to avoid marijuana during the day; during evenings and weekends, however, they used massive quantities of the drug in an effort to put aside the aggressive, driven quality of their personalities and to achieve some measure of relaxation. For other of the high-achieving individuals, including the film director and the screenwriter, marijuana was used in the context of work to reduce their sense of fragmentation in the face of many different projects and to help them to focus and concentrate their energies.

Others of the subjects we studied were reasonably successful in what they did, but were operating well below their abilities. Like Mrs. L., several of our female subjects, in particular, felt unchallenged by their positions and spoke of their desires to pursue more promising careers. Fearing the consequences this might have, such subjects used marijuana throughout the day as well as after work to avoid the challenge of their own capabilities and minimize the conflicts they felt.

For still others, heavy use of marijuana allowed them to withdraw more fully from the competitive pressures of the working world, and fostered a resigned acceptance of a lack of occupational success. Like the unsuccessful salesman who always smoked on the way to and from work, such individuals tended to avoid active involvement in their jobs and had little expectation of ever getting ahead. As he described it, marijuana was like aspirin, helping to make the situation more bearable while not really changing anything.

Intimate Relationships

Problems in close relationships were present in virtually all of the fifteen individuals whom we studied in depth. Many, like Mrs. L. who linked commitment to entrapment, suffocation and death, evidenced strong fears of closeness and deep connection with others. Here, marijuana played an important role in making involvement possible, creating an illusion of intimacy while restricting closeness and commitment. This was particularly clearly seen among those individuals for whom heavy marijuana use was a shared part of their intimate relationships. In such cases, true intimacy could be avoided in the context of what appeared to be a conflict-free, satisfying relationship.

In the case of those subjects whose personal relationships were characterized by considerable frustration and pain, heavy marijuana use served to reduce anxiety, anger and depression. In facilitating their detachment from the unpleasant reality of their lives, marijuana enabled many of these men and women to exist for years in troubled relationships without feeling any urgency to do anything about them.

Like Mr. P. and Mrs. L., a large proportion of the subjects we interviewed saw marijuana as enhancing their sexual pleasure. In the context of the problems evident in these individuals' intimate relationships, this perception took on fuller meaning. It was clear, for example, that by helping to diminish the reality of the other person, marijuana smoking during sexual relationship permitted some individuals to achieve satisfaction with partners they otherwise found distasteful. In other cases, the perception that marijuana enhanced their sexual pleasure was seen to be linked to their need to restrict closeness. Among such individuals marijuana fostered sexual fantasies or behavior in which another person was involved, either in place of or in addition to one's actual partner. Fantasies of being watched during love-making, of having sex with other partners, and of sex with one's own partner and another couple were all frequently described.

The use of marijuana to keep emotional distance was nowhere more evident than in the relationships between the heavy marijuana users and their children. Mrs. L. was typical of the several parents we saw who smoked while caring for their children, maintaining that rather than being an obstacle to closeness, smoking marijuana relaxed them enough to enjoy being with their children. The strong objections their children had to their smoking suggested that the youngsters' perceptions were quite different. In fact, in each such case, it was clear that the subjects saw their children as a heavy burden which marijuana helped to lighten.

Self-awareness

In contrast to most users' perception that marijuana increases their understanding of themselves and others and makes them more philosophical and insightful, the fifteen individuals we interviewed exhibited a striking lack of introspection, and a strong need to avoid self-awareness. As has been seen in the cases of Mr. P. and Mrs. L., this was commonly reflected in the subjects' expressed satisfaction with their lives, even as they used large amounts of marijuana to avoid awareness of their discontents in work or personal relationships. Like Mr. P. who had gone through two long-term marriages with no sense of his contribution

to their failure, and Mrs. L. who used her "fantasy tickets" as a way of escaping from commitment, most subjects showed a clear reluctance to examine their own needs and character or to see themselves and their lives as they really were.

In those cases where frustrations and unhappiness were recognized, marijuana fostered detachment from the feelings and realities of the situation, giving these individuals the sense of transcending it. Yet, what virtually all of these fifteen men and women appeared to be transcending was their own painful vision. Detachment enabled them to see their problems as less important; the ability to minimize was consistently confused with insight.

With few exceptions, the subjects we studied rarely read anything but superficial material for pleasure. Reading which stimulated comparison to other people's lives was specifically avoided. So too was intellectual activity which was not directly related to one's work. In addition, few subjects remembered their dreams, and several appeared to smoke marijuana before going to sleep specifically to avoid troubling dreams which reflected their difficulties and conflicts. Those subjects who dreamed, often with strong affect, of their irritations and frustrations, were usually out of touch in their waking life with such feelings and tended to ignore or romanticize their dreams. One woman's reaction to her recollection of a recurrent childhood dream of being an Indian at war with whites was to believe that it reflected her existence in a previous life. Such a tendency to look for mystical rather than psychological explanations of experience was characteristic of many of our subjects.

Discussion

In interpreting the results of this study, it is worth re-emphasizing that the subject group consisted entirely of long-term daily marijuana smokers rather than casual users for whom marijuana smoking takes place strictly in social situations. Although the drug was a prominent feature in the social lives of the large majority of our subjects, the group overall tended to have a very high rate of solitary use as well. It is likely that marijuana use for those who regularly smoke alone is more centrally related to the user's overall adaptation than is true among the general population of users. Yet, our findings suggest the importance of broadening our perspective on the meaning of chronic marijuana usage to include far more than a focus on overt behavior and social adaptation.

Among our subjects, marijuana use, even heavy, daily use over a number of years, was not found to be linked with maladaptive functioning in any consistent behavioral sense. To the contrary, the large majority of these adults were clearly functioning adequately from the viewpoint of societal standards for occupational and personal success. As revealed through the questionnaire data, they were for the most part gainfully employed, their patterns of social relationships were quite normative, and their responses reflected a generally high level of satisfaction with themselves and their lives.

The unstructured psychodynamic interviews provided an opportunity to further examine these responses and to explore the motivations underlying the subjects' heavy use of marijuana. As we have seen in other of our investigations on psychosocial problems, the unstructured interviews used in this study revealed a picture which was often contrasting and consistently helpful in interpreting the

subjects' responses to the structured interview and questionnaire items (Haas et al., 1987). Indeed, it was only when chronic marijuana use was viewed from the perspective of the individual user's inner functioning and dynamics that a real understanding of its meaning was obtained.

Our intensive interviews with the fifteen selected cases revealed how for each, heavy marijuana use was bound up with adaptive difficulties in work or personal relationships, and with their attempts to deal with these difficulties through outright denial or by minimizing their significance. We found this to be as true for subjects who presented their lives as evidence of the harmless or even beneficial consequences of marijuana smoking as it was for those who, while not blaming their smoking, were somewhat more dissatisfied with their lives.

Most subjects, even if unwilling to recognize their source, were aware of their feelings of depression and tension, and indicated being somewhat bothered by these problems on the questionnaire. Similarly, their indications of being bothered by "feeling most people will take advantage of you if you let them" was consistent with the marked problems with intimacy and closeness with others that were revealed in their interviews. To the degree that the subjects were aware of such difficulties, they saw marijuana as an escape from them, as providing relief, or as enhancing their ability to cope with them. They did not consider marijuana to be the cause of their difficulties, and our observations did not contradict this view.

This finding points to the need to reexamine the linkages others have found between marijuana abuse and negative functioning, whether defined in strictly behavioral terms, or as we are suggesting through a dynamic, psychosocial perspective. While such a linkage has most frequently been interpreted to mean that the drug behavior is responsible for the individual's difficulties in psychosocial functioning, we consistently found that marijuana was used by our subjects as a way of coping with those areas of their lives in which they were not adequately functioning already.

Seen in this light, the question is raised of what exactly chronic marijuana use represents. In particular, is this behavior evidence of psychopathology which should be treated? In making any judgment about the role of marijuana in the lives of heavy adult users, one must consider how they would manage without it. If one concludes that these individuals would not have solved their difficulties in any case, marijuana can be seen as a tranquilizer in a disturbed life. In the case of those whose fragmentation was particularly marked, the use of marijuana to reduce anxiety and to provide focus appeared necessary to enable them to function in any adaptive way.

On the other hand, some of the men and women we studied seemed to have the potential to resolve their problems with psychotherapeutic help. In a sense, marijuana helped such individuals avoid the discomfort that might have motivated them to seek help. In saying this, however, it must also be recognized that avoiding looking at themselves and their problems was bound up with their desire for marijuana in the first place.

The ambivalence with which most of those whom we studied intensively approached this issue was suggested by their involvement in the interviews and their feeling that they benefitted from them. Yet, if they were not unalterably

opposed to looking at their lives, they were prone to looking at them in selective ways. What drew them to the study appeared to be, in part, their tendency to see all activity as an "experience," and this particular experience as one which held out the possibility of transformation. Whatever hopes they had for change in their lives, however, seemed unlikely to be fulfilled as long as their chronic use of marijuana continued. In sustaining the illusion of change and in soothing their frustration and anger at the lives they led, marijuana was also keeping them cemented in their current adaptation.

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