

AN ANALYSIS OF RISK REDUCTION AMONG ORGANIZED GROUPS THAT PROMOTE MARIJUANA AND PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS

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This article offers an ethnographic perspective on risk reduction among the many groups in the United States that are devoted to the promotion of marijuana and psychedelic drugs. These groups as a whole do not advocate the indiscriminate use of these substances, but instead offer marijuana and psychedelic drug users social support, and accurate information on how to use these drugs responsibly. A key finding of this study is that not only do these groups attempt to reduce the physical and psychological risks associated with drug use, but also reduce what they believe to be the greater risks associated with draconian laws against drugs, overzealous law enforcement practices, and mainstream views about marijuana and psychedelic drugs that are based on misinformation and prejudice.

Introduction

During the past 20 years there has been a dearth of social scientific study of both marijuana and psychedelic drug subcultures in the United States. Although much work has been done to examine various subcultures surrounding the use of other illegal drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine, few researchers have studied the large, and sometimes well-organized and vocal subcultures associated with marijuana and psychedelic drugs. This lack of research attention is surprising given the often conspicuous nature of these subcultures, and especially in the case of marijuana given that it is by far the most widely used illegal drug in the United States.

A prominent component of marijuana and psychedelic drug subcultures consists of the many organized groups in the United States whose expressed purpose is to promote these two types of drugs. This article first provides an overview of promotional drug groups. It then offers an assessment of the extent to which, and how, these groups promote risk reduction by offering alternative drug information to their members, to users of these drugs in general, and to society at large.

There is a large variety of promotional drug groups in the United States, and consequently, their aims and methods of operation vary greatly too. Some groups focus on the political or informational aspects of marijuana or psychedelic drugs, whereas others approach these substances from a religious, scientific, or medical perspective. However, as a general rule, most groups do not advocate the

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indiscriminate, or necessarily even the illicit, use of marijuana and psychedelic drugs. For example, the Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) does not promote the illicit use of psychedelic drugs, but works instead to support legitimate scientific research with these drugs in humans—a difficult task given that, until recently, this type of research has been, in effect, banned by the government since the early 1970s. Similarly, the Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics (ACT) does not promote the recreational use of marijuana, but lobbies instead to make this drug available for legitimate medical purposes.

Methodology

The data I have gathered about “pro-marijuana” and “pro-psychedelic” groups come primarily from newsletters, brochures, bulletins, and fund-raising letters distributed by the groups themselves.¹ I have approached and analyzed these printed materials as cultural artifacts possessing important information about what these groups believe and how they operate. I believe the information contained in these printed materials represents a rich and largely unexamined source of ethnographic data for drug subculture researchers. Although many drug subcultures remain hidden to varying degrees from the scrutiny of outsiders, a distinguishing feature of the subculture(s) associated with pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups is that they actively seek to publicize themselves and their views to both drug users and to society at large.

A secondary source of data in this study comes from informal interviews I have conducted with a variety of people in New Mexico and the San Francisco Bay Area, who are associated with pro-drug groups. Most of the interviews I conducted in the Bay Area took place during the April 1993 “Psychedelic Summit Meetings” celebrating the 50th anniversary of the discovery of LSD. These meetings were covered by the national news media, and represented a mass congregation of hundreds of individuals and many groups involved in promoting primarily psychedelic drugs, but also marijuana.

I have gathered and analyzed the data in this study from an ethnographic and nonjudgmental perspective, because it is very important to describe the beliefs of the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups from *their* perspective. For the most part, these groups have views that are in opposition to mainstream or official views about drugs and, therefore, they have not received widespread attention or media coverage. Indeed, what coverage they have received has typically been negative.

Finally, for the sake of manageability, I have focused only on a few selected examples of the many existing pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups. There are many other groups eligible for further study, and I list them in the appendix.

Pro-marijuana and Pro-psychedelic Groups

The following brief, annotated list of selected pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups is intended to provide the reader with an appreciation for the general aims and wide-ranging diversity of these groups.

Pro-marijuana Groups

Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics (ACT)

An organization that supports the medical use of marijuana and works to change laws prohibiting this practice. ACT is also an umbrella organization for other medical marijuana groups such as the Marijuana/AIDS Research Service

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(MARS), Paralyzed Americans for Legal Medical Marijuana (PALM), and Mothers of Medical Marijuana Smokers (MOMMS).

Church of Hemp

A religious/political organization that worships marijuana as a divine sacrament from an almost "tongue-in-cheek" perspective. Anyone who uses marijuana is automatically a member and members are called "Cannabisians." The Church of Hemp publishes a quarterly booklet entitled "HEMP! (the Magazine . . .)."

Freedom Fighters of America (FFA)

An organization associated with *High Times* magazine that promotes the use of "hemp" as food, fuel, raw material, and medicine. FFA uses the American Revolution as a metaphor for the fight to legalize marijuana. FFA publishes a newsletter entitled "Let Freedom Ring."

National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML)

A politically-oriented organization devoted to changing current anti-marijuana laws. NORML, founded in 1970, is the oldest and best known "pro-marijuana" group. There are local chapters of NORML in many states, and it publishes a quarterly newsletter called "NORML's Active Resistance." California NORML helped sponsor the 1993 Psychedelic Summit Meetings.

Pro-psychedelic Groups

Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS)

An organization supporting legitimate research with psychedelic drugs in humans. MAPS played a crucial role in persuading the United States government recently to lift its 20-year ban on psychedelic research. MAPS also helped sponsor the 1993 Psychedelic Summit Meetings.

Peyote Way Church of God

A serious, *bona fide* religious organization of non-Indians that worships peyote as a divine sacrament. The Peyote Way Church of God works to acquire the same constitutional rights that Native Americans have to use peyote for religious purposes. The church incorporates general Christian as well as Mormon beliefs into its practices.²

The Albert Hofmann Foundation

An organization that provides information about psychedelics and consciousness through its extensive library and computer bulletin board. The foundation has many well known "consciousness researchers" with Ph.D.'s and M.D.'s on its Board of Advisors. The foundation is named in honor of the man who discovered LSD. It publishes a catalog of books, calendars, and audio and video tapes available for purchase.

The Island Group

An organization devoted to the creation of a psychedelic culture by serving as a clearinghouse for new ideas about psychedelics and other "consciousness technologies." The group is named after Aldous Huxley's psychedelic novel,

Island. It publishes a newsletter entitled "Island Views." The Island Group also helped sponsor the 1993 Psychedelic Summit Meetings.

Informational Network

Although these groups are at the forefront of promoting marijuana and psychedelic drugs, they are also part of an amorphous informational network comprised of numerous books, articles, newsletters, pamphlets, magazines, product catalogs, "zines," and computer bulletin boards that serve to keep users of these drugs informed and interconnected.³ This subcultural, drug network is national and even international in scope, and seems to replace any notions of drug subcultures being necessarily localized in a particular area or among a particular population. Some examples of this informational network include the following:

High Times

A well-known magazine written in a popular style, which focuses on information about marijuana and psychedelic drugs.

Psychedelic Prisoners Newsletter

A newsletter that serves to publicize the plight of people incarcerated for marijuana and psychedelic drug offenses.

New Age Patriot: A Quarterly Newsmagazine for Drug, Environmental, & Social Reform Activists.

The Entheogen Review: A Quarterly Ethnobotanical Update

A magazine that offers information and round-table discussions about "psychotropic plants."

Psychedelic Monographs and Essays

An articulate, annual journal that publishes material on a wide range of issues about psychedelic drugs.

Rosetta Folios, Books, and Teas

A mail-order business that sells psychedelic drug-oriented books, article reprints, artwork, T-shirts, and legal ethnobotanical teas.

Promotional Drug Group Differences

There are important differences between the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups. The most prominent difference is that the pro-marijuana groups tend to be much more politically oriented than the pro-psychedelic groups.

One of the most frequently stated aims of the pro-marijuana groups is to change current state and federal laws regarding marijuana. These aims (which differ between groups) can range from legalizing the growing of small amounts of marijuana for personal use, to legalizing the medical use of marijuana, to the complete legalization of the drug.

Thus, pro-marijuana groups engage in political activities such as holding public rallies and lobbying the general public and political officials. Two examples of this political activity are the "Hash-Bash" rally held annually at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the outspoken lobbying and fund-raising by NORML.

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On the other hand, the pro-psychedelic groups do not engage in overtly political activities as one of their primary functions. Instead, these groups are more educational in nature seeking to inform drug users and the general public about psychedelic drugs. These groups tend to be rather discrete and do not hold public rallies or actively lobby for the repeal of laws against psychedelics. However, they do actively try to counter anti-psychedelic drug information by publishing alternative information in their newsletters, by making themselves available as authoritative spokespersons to the mainstream news media, and by sponsoring educational conferences such as the 1993 Psychedelic Summit Meetings.

Perhaps the most important reason for these differences between the two groups is that while marijuana is often considered to be a "soft" drug and is decriminalized in many states, psychedelics (especially LSD) are seen as "hard" drugs requiring very stringent laws and social proscriptions. As a result of these differing views, the pro-marijuana groups have at least some hope for the relaxation of marijuana laws, whereas the pro-psychedelic groups know that the laws against psychedelics may never change. As one member of The Albert Hofmann Foundation told me:

Other than trying to loosen the regulations governing research, we are not really trying to change the laws against psychedelics. All we can hope for at this point is to try to change society's negative perceptions and show them that when used with respect and awareness, psychedelics aren't the demon they're made out to be.

An example of how social attitudes about marijuana and psychedelic drugs can differ even within their respective subcultures was demonstrated by a conference participant at the 1993 Psychedelic Summit Meetings. This person, from California NORML, described dissension among members of NORML because the organization's leadership had agreed to co-sponsor the present conference with MAPS. The objections were based on two considerations: One, as part of its operating policy, NORML does not usually associate itself with any other group or cause in order to retain its own identity; and two, the dissenters did not want marijuana to be associated with psychedelic drugs because of the much greater social stigma surrounding psychedelics.

Risk Reduction

Social Support

Pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups can be viewed as members of a deviant subculture trying to exist in a hostile society. The groups have similarities with other socially deviant organizations in that they provide social support and a sense of belonging for their members, and they work to reduce members' ostracism by mainstream society. More specifically, as Sanders (1990:10) points out, deviant groups

. . . provide access to valued activities and objects, contact with like-minded others, protective insulation from negative judgments and actions of "outsiders," and an evaluative typology members can use to maintain

positive understandings of themselves and the social objects to which they and their fellows are committed.

General Risk Reduction

Pro-drug groups promote marijuana and psychedelic drugs in many ways and for many purposes. As a general rule, most of them do not advocate the indiscriminate use of these substances—their goals are more concentrated in providing an alternative information conduit about drugs and drugs users in opposition to mainstream sources of information.

One of the primary findings of this study is that the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups believe they are promoting across-the-board risk reduction not just for their members, but for anyone who uses these types of substances. However, the types of risk reduction they believe they provide goes well beyond the usual definitions of risks associated with illegal drug use. Not only do these groups attempt to reduce the physical and psychological risks associated with using these drugs, but they are also concerned with reducing what are seen as greater risks associated with (1) draconian laws against drugs (including property forfeiture laws and mandatory minimum sentences), (2) overzealous law enforcement practices and drug testing, (3) sensationalistic government and media campaigns against drugs, and (4) mainstream views about drugs and users based on misinformation and prejudice. This broadening of the customary notions of risk reduction can be seen to expand greatly Becker's (1967) seminal hypothesis that a crucial function of drug subcultures is to educate drug users about the hazardous effects of drug use.

A good example of this broad approach to risk reduction can be seen in the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (1993) statement on the "responsibilities of marijuana use." This statement calls for individuals

to distinguish between use and abuse in regards to their own marijuana consumption before they attempt to persuade others that marijuana can be used responsibly by the general public (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws 1993:10).

The statement then goes on to list four "ethical responsibilities" that accompany marijuana use (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws 1993:10):

1. *Do No Harm* (being sure that marijuana use does not jeopardize the safety of property or people)
2. *Know What You Are Doing* (learning about the physical and psychological effects of marijuana, and differences between use and abuse)
3. *Help Others* (identifying oneself as a member of a group of persecuted marijuana users, and helping the approximately 300,000 people who are arrested each year for marijuana offenses)
4. *Help Change The Laws* (showing that marijuana users can be active, responsible citizens by getting involved in the political process to repeal marijuana laws).

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Similarly, in its newsletter *The Sacred Record*, the Peyote Way Church of God (1993:7) advocates eight ethical ways of living:

1. The sacramental use of peyote
2. A holistic lifestyle
3. The pursuit of personal experiences of the Holy Spirit within and without ourselves
4. Self-discipline
5. Compassion
6. Nonviolence
7. Selfless service
8. The recognition of the central role of the female as the giver of life.

For psychedelic drugs, Smith's (1988:202) "ethics of use" theory can be linked to these lifestyle/attitude recommendations of NORML and the Peyote Way Church of God, and it would appear that this theory, at least in the case of NORML, can also apply to marijuana:

It is noteworthy, however, that in examining the considerable volume of literature which relates the sustained use of psychedelics within a group or culture, by far the greater volume of evidence shows that certain ethics appear which are stabilizing, benevolent, and integrative, not only for the individual but also for the social group in which he or she is embedded.

Finally, the lifestyle/attitude recommendations of these pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups can be seen to reduce a broad range of risks. They do this by asking drug users to accept responsibility for their choice to use the substances, by helping users to become more aware of their own individual patterns of drug use and the physical and psychological effects associated with the drugs they use, and by asking users to help change drug laws and the negative perceptions of mainstream society, either through political activity and/or by acting as responsible citizens and role models.

Informational Risk Reduction

For both the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups one of the most prominent types of risk is misinformation, since it is information that shapes both mainstream beliefs about illegal drugs and drug users, and, to a large extent, laws and public policies.⁴ These groups believe misinformation has resulted in overwhelmingly negative stereotypes about illegal drugs and drug users within mainstream American society.

These groups want mainstream society to realize that marijuana and psychedelic drugs are less harmful than other illegal drugs (especially cocaine/crack and heroin), and therefore, they do not want users to be misrepresented and stigmatized as irresponsible and criminal drug addicts. In fact, one of the main goals of these groups is to promote an unequivocal distinction between marijuana and psychedelic drugs, and other drugs such as alcohol and tobacco, which they believe are much more harmful and destructive.

These beliefs mirror one of the main premises of the growing risk/harm reduction approach to drug policy (which has gained more support in Europe than in the United States) that emphasizes the importance of making distinctions between drugs with regard to each drug's relative potential for harm (Oppenheimer 1993; Schardt and Popp 1993).

In this way, one of the most important functions of the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups is to disseminate what they believe to be accurate information about users as responsible citizens, and that if used responsibly, the negative effects of marijuana and psychedelics can be minimized and their positive effects enhanced (Bergman 1971). As MAPS president Rick Doblin (1992:1; 1993:n.p.) states:

MAPS can continue to contribute to our society's understanding of the nature and value of psychedelic experiences, of their risks and benefits, and of ways they might successfully be integrated into our culture and regulated by our laws...[and] It is my hope that these events [the 1993 Psychedelic Summit Meetings] will communicate to the public that the psychedelic community has a positive contribution to make to society.

Thus, one of the primary objectives of pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups is to offer alternative information concerning drugs, drug usage, and drug users that is often in contradiction to the "official" drug information disseminated by the government, anti-drug groups, and mainstream media organizations.⁵ In this way, they are reducing the risks associated with their subculture(s) by providing information counter to what they believe is the hegemonic, often one-sided, and politically motivated rhetoric offered up to the American public as objective, scientific, and self-evident information.

An example of how scientific "truths" about drugs are reported to the public can be seen in Shepherd's (1981) comprehensive study of how the media covers marijuana-related issues. He shows that the majority of supposedly well-informed marijuana "experts" frequently quoted in mass media have little or no direct knowledge of marijuana research. Most often, these experts are not even health or social scientists, but rather full-time administrators whose M.D. or Ph.D. degrees are unrelated to marijuana issues. Yet, their typical anti-drug opinions are attractive to the often sensational proclivities of the mass media. For example, several of my psychedelic-oriented informants complained about psychiatrist Dr. Henry Abraham as an anti-psychedelic drug expert who likes to use the mainstream media to publicize his views. Dr. Abraham treats people adversely affected by psychedelic drugs and is an oft-quoted "expert" on psychedelic drug issues (Columbia Broadcasting System [CBS] 1993; Landers 1993; Seligmann et al. 1992; Urban 1993). One of these informants told me:

Dr. Abraham is always on TV or in the newspapers saying taking psychedelics is like playing Russian Roulette with chemicals, and talking about all these people with post-hallucinogenic sensory disorder. He says he's treated hundreds of patients with this problem, but neglects to say that this is out of many millions of people who have taken psychedelics. It's more rare than getting struck by lightning, but the media never point this out. It's absurd!⁶

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The Legal vs. Illegal Drug Matrix

The pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups exist in an oppositional relationship to mainstream American society that, for the most part, has quite different views concerning the use of both legal and illegal drugs. Part of the difficulty with changing mainstream views about drugs is that the American public is ambivalent or even unconscious about its own use of legal substances, while tending to place all illegal drugs into one harmful category. To many people the recreational drug trilogy of alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine are so ingrained in American culture that they are not even considered drugs, although this attitude has changed substantially over the past few years due to more awareness of health in general and of the detrimental effects of these drugs. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Americans use (and often abuse) these legal substances on a regular basis. But, the notion that Americans are almost always "under the influence" of some mood-altering substance gets lost in the tacit hegemony of mainstream American cultural beliefs and norms. For example, most people would not consider the drinking of coffee in the morning in order to "wake up" as a dependence on a drug. However, this is what drinking coffee actually represents, albeit a habit that is very socially acceptable and relatively harmless.

Use vs. Abuse

One of the main premises of both the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups is that these drugs can be used responsibly or abused in the same manner that legal drugs can be. This premise is in direct contradiction to conventional views that illegal drugs, by definition, cannot be used responsibly. An example of this dichotomy of opinion appeared recently at the University of New Mexico, which has an explicit "Drug-Free Campus" policy. (Alcohol is also banned on campus.) The policy states that "drug and alcohol abuse on campus poses a serious threat to the health and welfare of faculty, staff, and students . . ." (University of New Mexico 1992). A group called The Hemp Coalition (1992), an on-campus pro-marijuana organization, opposes the policy and has circulated a petition calling for the university to revise it. Here is one of the reasons they give for opposing the policy:

While we agree that drug abuse can be harmful, responsible drug use is a fact of life for many of the faculty, staff, and students of this university, as well as the general population of this country. A "Drug-Free Campus" is not necessarily safer than one where the realities of responsible drug use are recognized (The Hemp Coalition 1992:reason # 3).

Ideology and Illegal Drugs

According to the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups, the information about illegal drugs disseminated by the government and anti-drug organizations is often manipulated to fit ideological, political, social, or moral agenda. These groups believe that the Partnership For a Drug Free America (PDFA) represents the quintessential promoter of misinformation. For example, the PDFA regularly utilizes graphic ad campaigns to illustrate the dangers of using illegal drugs. The famous image of an egg frying in a pan (your brain on drugs) does make a strong, unambiguous statement, however its claim has little basis in fact. The millions of Americans who regularly use illegal drugs probably do not agree that their brains are "fried." Moreover, research has documented that media tactics such as these

are ineffective because people tend to ignore messages that appeal solely to their fears (Rothenberg 1990).

Finally, PDFA's almost exclusive focus on illegal drugs rather than on alcohol and tobacco is myopic and downright dangerous, given that alcohol and tobacco kill hundreds of the thousands of people more each year than illegal drugs (*New York Times* 1993). As Kleiman (1992:7) bluntly states: "A discussion of drug policy that omits only tobacco and alcohol is about as useful as a discussion of naval strategy that omits only the Atlantic and Pacific."

If PDFA were so concerned with the health of American citizens it would seem more logical (and ethical) to run an ad showing a corpse-filled morgue along with the punchline "Your body on alcohol and tobacco!" However, PDFA's disregard for the dangers of legal drug abuse may not be surprising given that several major alcohol and tobacco companies such as American Brands, RJR Nabisco, Philip Morris, and Anheuser-Busch are major financial supporters of PDFA (McWilliams 1993).

Musto (1987) points out that most drug policies instituted by the United States government during the twentieth century have been based on misinformation, hysteria, and political motivations. For example, the government has long used the manufactured premise of widespread drug abuse by various minority groups (opiates by Chinese-Americans, cocaine by African-Americans, and marijuana by Chicanos) to justify and implement racist and discriminatory policies against them (Cohen 1992; Harris 1990; Helmer 1975; Lusane 1991). Ben-Yehuda (1990:158) observes that:

Over time, legislation against a specific pattern of psychoactive drug use may become a means for dominant and powerful social groups to impose the moral boundaries of their own symbolic-moral universe on other groups, providing symbolic expression for existing social and moral hierarchies of dominance.

Drug-specific Controversies

Medical Marijuana

There has also been a history of government and regulatory organizations to squelch or censor information about drugs that is dissenting or does not "toe the party line." Grinspoon (1991) terms this attempt to control information "psychopharmacological McCarthyism." He provides evidence for this hegemonic domination in the controversy concerning the medical use of marijuana.

On one side of the medical marijuana debate are the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the Food and Drug Administration, and the courts who all oppose legalizing the medical use of marijuana by rescheduling it from a Schedule I to a Schedule II drug. The latter include cocaine and morphine, which can be used for medical and research purposes because of their classification. Their two primary arguments against the medical use of marijuana are (1) that its medical use would undermine the "War on Drugs," and (2) that its safety and effectiveness have not been scientifically proven (*New York Times* 1991; Hankins 1990; Treaster 1993).

On the other side of the debate are organizations such as the Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics and thousands of people with glaucoma, cancer, AIDS,

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multiple sclerosis, and cerebral palsy who attest to the fact that marijuana has effectively treated either the symptoms of their diseases or relieved the debilitating side effects of their medical treatment (Bishop 1992; Grinspoon and Bakalar 1993; Treaster 1992, 1993).

Unfortunately for these people, the government's arguments against the medical use of marijuana are difficult to answer because (1) the "War on Drugs" agenda does not seem to be open for serious debate, and (2) government funding agencies are reluctant to sponsor any research studies on illegal drugs that are not specifically directed toward uncovering harmful effects. Zinberg (1984) points out that this is a common problem encountered by many researchers who wish to study illegal drugs that are used by the American public.⁷

The Peyote Controversy

Another good example of "psychopharmacological McCarthyism" can be seen in the controversy over the use of peyote by the Native American Church (NAC). Although 23 states have passed legislation protecting the right of Native Americans to use peyote in religious ceremonies, the judicial branch of the federal government refuses to recognize such rights. In the 1990 *Employment Division vs. Smith* case, the Supreme Court overruled several legal precedents by deciding that the sacramental use of peyote by Native Americans was not protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. The court's majority ruled that the state's interest in curbing the use of illegal drugs took precedence over any religious right Native Americans have to use peyote (Bullis 1990). No mention was made in the opinion that illegal traffic in and recreational use of peyote is practically nonexistent (Pavlik 1991). However, in a "check and balance" rebuke to this decision, a bill guaranteeing the right of Native Americans to use peyote for religious purposes (H.R. 4230, sponsored by Congressman Bill Richardson of New Mexico) was passed in October 1994 by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton (Franklin and Patchen 1995).

This legislative rebuke to the Supreme Court shows that even at the highest levels of government itself, a dichotomy of opinion can exist concerning the appropriate use of an illegal drug and how government should respond to that use.

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the primary arguments against the use of marijuana and psychedelic drugs in American society is that we have not developed the sociocultural controls or ethics needed to facilitate the safe use of these substances (Smith 1988). Other cultures only take these substances in specific and highly directed contexts that almost ensure a safe outcome. However, in American society these substances are often used indiscriminately or recreationally without any regard for social, cultural, or religious function.

In terms of risk reduction, one of the primary aims of groups that promote marijuana and psychedelic drugs is to create a new context for their use—to disseminate accurate information about the effects, both positive and negative, of these drugs and to try to ensure that people use them wisely and in a controlled, responsible manner.

As we have seen, one of the primary goals of organized groups that promote marijuana and psychedelic drugs is to offer alternative views about these drugs with the hope of not only changing mainstream views about illegal drugs, but also to influence how overall drug policies and laws are implemented. By doing so

these groups are attempting to reduce a broad array of risks generated not necessarily by the drugs themselves, but by the negative perceptions and strict prohibitions adhered to by mainstream American society.⁸

The task of changing societal views concerning drugs is very difficult given the government's powerful "War on Drugs" (or as Barlow [1993] says, the "War on Some Drugs!") crusade and their almost uninhibited informational access to the mainstream media. Nevertheless, alternative views about drugs seem to be making some inroads into mainstream society during the last few years. There seem to be several reasons for this incursion: (1) alternative informational networks such as cable television, small presses, desktop publishing, and computer bulletin boards have somewhat usurped the hold traditional media sources have had on informational access; (2) many mainstream citizens, including well-known journalists, judges, and members of Congress have spoken out about what they see as an erosion of constitutional rights in the government's zeal to pursue its current drug policies (especially forfeiture laws); and (3) given the high constitutional, economic, social, and medical costs of implementing current regulatory, law enforcement, and correctional policies, public officials and citizens alike have begun to examine alternative drug policy strategies such as harm reduction and drug treatment and education.

A key belief among organized groups that promote marijuana and psychedelic drugs is that American citizens should have the constitutional right to alter their consciousness in whatever way they wish. They see the responsible use of these drugs as a right-to-privacy issue similar to the right-to-privacy issues emphasized by advocates of safe and legal abortions or by gays and lesbians. It remains to be seen if the alternative promotional campaign of these groups will have any substantial effect on changing current attitudes and laws about how marijuana and psychedelics drugs are perceived and used in American society.

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NOTES

1. For the sake of simplicity I will refer to these groups as pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic. I put "pro-marijuana" and "pro-psychedelic" in quotation marks here to emphasize that these groups have a variety of aims and methods of operation, and are "pro" only in a loose sense of promoting their specific agendas.
2. See Lyttle (1988) for a comprehensive analysis of modern American "psychedelic churches."
3. An important feature of this network is that, like the pro-marijuana and pro-psychedelic groups, the drug information circulated and discussed focuses exclusively on marijuana and psychedelic drugs. Also, many of the published materials explicitly promote risk-reduction by providing specific information about set and setting considerations, ingestion methods, dosage levels, side effects, and contraindications (e.g., see Human 1988, Presti 1992, Stafford 1992).
4. In general, mainstream views about drugs in the United States are disseminated by various government organizations, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), and the Office of National Drug

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Control Policy (ONDCP), and a few private organizations, such as the Partnership for a Drug Free America (PDFA).

5. In order to keep their members informed about how the mainstream media reports relevant drug issues, most groups discuss and/or include photocopies of actual news reports in their newsletters. This is a good indication of how seriously the groups view the importance of what types of drug information the mainstream media disseminates to the public. MAPS is even so motivated and organized as to send out special announcements to its members about upcoming television programs related to psychedelic drugs.

6. For an interesting and thorough examination of how the media can misreport drug issues see Riedlinger and Riedlinger (1989).

7. It is important to note that the current anti-medical marijuana climate within government might be slowly changing due to the lobbying and educational efforts of the "pro-medical marijuana" contingent. Clinton's former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders has said she supports the medical use of marijuana, the legislatures of 35 states have symbolically endorsed the medical use of marijuana in their states, and several juries have acquitted medical marijuana users who have been arrested and prosecuted for their practices (Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics 1993).

8. See Bunce (1979) for an excellent account of how actual drug effects can be generated by social and political forces.

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