

“A Friend With Weed Is a Friend Indeed”: Understanding the Relationship Between Friendship Identity and Market Relations Among Marijuana Users

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Abstract

The importance of friendship networks and drug sharing is a well-documented feature of marijuana use. Recent studies show an increased role of acquiring marijuana through friends, especially in settings with rather punitive drug policy. This article aims at gaining insight into the definitions and roles that marijuana users attribute to friendship. Forty-four marijuana users and retailers recruited in North Central Florida were subjected to semistructured interviews, with extensive probes on respondents' "friends." Data were analyzed with the use of inductive analysis, and were framed in identity theory. Respondents' definitions of friendship contained expectations on marijuana sharing and reciprocation, purchases for friends, and introduction to dealers—who were also referred as "friends." The study findings suggest that marijuana users' definitions of friendship include expectations for behavior that sustain the distribution chain. Role-based expectations on "friendly" behavior served as a social control tool that protected marijuana users from illicit market risks.

Keywords

illicit marijuana market, drug policy, identity theory, social supply, friendship

Introduction

This article explores the role-based behavioral expectations that are attributed to the identity of a "friend" among marijuana users, given the importance of drug acquisition among friendship networks previously documented by findings in both quantitative and qualitative research on marijuana markets (Caulkins & Reuter, 2006; Goode, 1970; Langer, 1977).

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As documented by qualitative research, relationships have long been embedded in marijuana use as accustomed rituals of sharing. Research finds that most users consider marijuana a social drug, and the act of using marijuana as a group activity (Becker, 1966; Goode, 1970; Ministry of Health [MOH], 2007; Miovský et al., 2008; Shukla, 2005; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Furthermore, its pharmacological effects are influenced by the social context or “setting” where users seek to define them as pleasurable through shared meanings that comprise “social interpretation of physical experience,” predominantly in the course of a group activity (Becker, 1966).

Despite some updates on Becker’s research showing that group definition tends to play a smaller role in normalizing individualized marijuana use of nowadays (Hallstone, 2002; Hathaway, 1997), groups still provide a strong normalizing function in marijuana use. For instance, research documents the importance of “marijuana using friends” as a predictor or co-occurring variable to one’s own marijuana use (Duan, Chou, Andreeva, & Pentz, 2009; D. Kandel, 1974; Wister & Avison, 1982). Other studies have focused on friendship networks to settle debate on whether these are important because of social selection or social influence on marijuana use (Bohnert, Bradshaw, & Latkin, 2009), the latter being linked to a salient concept in drug policy research—“peer-pressure,” describing influence of friend on one’s decision to use drugs. Another example of individual’s drug use and relationship with his social environment has been the “pusher” concept, meaning a dealer who is actively seducing individuals into drug use—a concept that has been repeatedly disapproved by scholars (Coomber, 2003; Fletcher, 2007; Langer, 1977). Despite ambiguities surrounding the extent and the influence friendship has on marijuana use, friendship networks are clearly a ubiquitous feature of marijuana use.

Friendship among users of other illicit drugs has long been depicted in drug-related research as a “dope friendship,” where drug users tend to take advantage of their nearby networks of other users (Bourgois, 1998; Bullington, 1977). Other research demonstrates that illicit drug users tend to have a greater number of “friends” than the general population, suggesting importance for this role in user networks (D. Kandel & Davies, 2006). Sharing other illicit drugs has been shown as a common practice that helps overcome prohibitive constraints to supply, generally with elevated risks to public health (Koester, Glanz, & Baròn, 2005), such as in case of shared syringes in prison settings (Vescio et al., 2007; Zábranský, Mravcik, Korcisova, & Rehak, 2006).

Social Networks on Marijuana Market and the Role of Drug Policy

In comparison with other illicit drug markets, marijuana market has been described as a “benign affaire” (Hamid, 1991). While other drug markets are rather depicted as violent (Johnson, Dunlap, & Tourigny, 2004), friendship and family bonds serve to establish a gang structure there (Bardhi et al., 2006). To this it can be added that marijuana users are generally middle class, socially embedded individuals (Osborne & Fogel, 2008), and for the most part, so are both the retail and broker markets serving them, at least if kept separated from other drugs. As Goode (1970) pointed out with respect to marijuana market in the initial stages of his research, the dealer and the seller “inhabit the same universe.” Marijuana itself is a drug with lower social and health risks than other illicit substances, and with lower addiction potential. Recently, a distinct pattern of illicit marijuana purchase has been described predominantly by the means of one’s social network (Coomber, 2010; Coomber & Turnbull, 2007; Harrison, Erickson, Korf, Brochu, & Benschop, 2007). This might especially be the case of a “closed” market, nevertheless, it remains unexplored what the relative share of the closed market is, and what types of users participate in it (Johnson, Golub, Dunlap, Sifaneck, & McCabe, 2010; Natarjan & Hough, 2004).

This article explores role-behaviors within these “social networks” that make marijuana users define their market relationships as “friendships” to help counter the risks of enforcement. On quantitative grounds, this pattern has been well observed at different locations throughout the

Table 1. Marijuana Use and Acquisitions in Countries With Data on Source of Cannabis Acquisition.

	The United States (NSDUH, 2008; U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010)	New Zealand (MOH, 2010; Police National Headquarters, 2010; Wilkins & Sweetsur, 2006)	Czech Republic (Mravčík et al., 2009)	Netherlands (Abraham, Kaal, & Cohen, 2002; EMCDDA, 2010)
Used marijuana in the last year (15–64)	12.4%	14.6%	15%	5.4%
Used marijuana every day or almost every day	1.9%	1.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Purchased marijuana from a friend or relative	83%	NA (58% gift from friends)	71%	37% (obtained)
Marijuana-related offenses per 10,000 inhabitants	27.9	35.1	0.72	5.4
User- or possession- oriented drug offenses	82%	NA	12%	0%

Note: NSDUH = National Survey on Substance Use and Health; MOH = Ministry of Health; EMCDDA = European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Use.

world. For instance, in New Zealand, 58% of respondents of the national household survey who reported they had recently used marijuana had acquired the drug as a gift from friends (Wilkins & Sweetsur, 2006). This trend is similar for European countries, such as the Czech Republic, where 71% of users purchased marijuana from a friend or a relative (Mravčík et al., 2009); Australia, where 70% of users reported obtaining marijuana from friends and acquaintances (Willis, 2008); and the Netherlands, where despite law enforcement turning a “blind eye” on low-scale marijuana transactions and the proliferation of marijuana sales in coffee shops (Bullington, 1991), 37% of survey respondents reported that their last acquisition was a purchase from a friend (Abraham, Kaal, & Cohen, 2002). The share of marijuana purchases through friends is even higher in the United States. For instance, 83% of respondents in the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that their last marijuana purchasing situation was through friends. A comparison of available data in Table 1 demonstrates that the importance of friendship networks for purchase of marijuana is the highest in the United States. Taking into account cross-cultural and methodological differences between different general population surveys, one reason for these disparities might be the countries’ varying focus on reduction of drug supply as tenet of their individual drug policies.

Federal and state drug policies in the United States use a greater extent of undercover policing tactics (Ross, 2008) and targets enforcement of illegal drug possession for personal use at a relatively higher rate than other countries (see also Table 1). Given that long-term U.S. drug policy has focused on supply reduction more than other countries in the world (Nadelmann, 1989; Pacula et al., 2005; Rasmussen & Benson, 2003; Reinerman, 2007; Reinerman, Cohen, & Kaal, 2004; Reuter, 2006), this article further explores the linkage between this specific drug policy setting, and the relationships on marijuana market.

Social Control, Role-Based Identity, and Marijuana Market Relationships

The marijuana using community aims at protecting itself against negative impacts of prohibition on the customer and the product, such as unknown product quality, elevated price, risk of robbery, arrest, and/or other harms. These objectives are understood partially as a lack of institutionalized enforcement of personal and property rights on the illicit drug market (Bretteville-Jensen,

2006; Nadelmann, 1989; Pacula, Kilmer, Grossman, & Chaloupka, 2007; Reuter & Kleiman, 1986). In response to the above-demonstrated importance of relationships on marijuana market, we will explore how they help enforce the norms of personal safety, product quality, price, and availability.

From the perspective of economics, illicit markets use informal institutions to compensate for the lack of formal ones (Coase, 1998; Wilkins, 2001; Williamson, 2000). This is similar to the social control theory, which states that punishments and rewards for deserved behavior are best enforced in a community with strong and dense social ties (Dunlap, Johnson, Benoit, & Sifanek, 2005; La Pierre, 1954; Villarreal, 2002). This article deconstructs the meaning of “friendship” in marijuana community, and by this reveals mechanisms that the marijuana using community uses to protect itself from illicit market risks.

The analysis draws specifically on identity theory, which has its roots in symbolic interactionism, and has become increasingly important to the study of deviance in recent decades. Symbolic integrationists generally follow Mead’s (1934) understanding of the self, which posits that identity is created and maintained through symbolic communication of shared meaning between individuals in the form of talk, gesture, and other displays. Symbolic interactionists generally agree that identities are important for joint action because they form the basis of expectations for how one might act.

For instance, role-based identity theory posits that individual’s identities are a relatively stable component of the self-concept that is created through structured role-based relationships (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Role-based identity theory conjectures that interactants attribute meaning to identities of themselves and others, which signify social positions and include guidelines for behavioral expectations, obligations, and responses between interactants. A second approach to identity, the negotiated order perspective, focuses on the processes of how identity is created, maintained, and changed within interaction (Goffman, 1959; Strauss, 1959). Definitions of self and others are created within interaction and are used to coordinate further action by participants. Both perspectives are complementary to this study because they demonstrate both (a) how significant meanings attached to friendship identity direct behaviors and (b) how these behaviors are jointly accomplished by interactants to safely distribute marijuana among user networks.

Identity theory in the framework of drug use builds up on several concepts summarized by Stryker (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The drug using community represents one of the networks the individuals in our study are involved in, and therefore involves one (or more) of the identities they invoke. Individual behaviors in the community are shaped by internalized role expectations that increase the probability that certain behavior will be invoked in certain situation. An important part of expected behavior is motivation (Anderson & Mott, 1998; Deaux & Martin, 2003), which can be linked to the use of resources. Stryker and Burke (2000) point out that not abiding to one’s identity has “the cost of losing meaningful relations to others” (p. 286). On illegal market, restricted access to drugs as important resources is crucially dependent on one’s relations. Abundance to norms that alleviate the risks for illicit market participants then becomes a cornerstone for anyone who wants to gain access to the resource.

Purpose of the Study

This article extends understanding of friendship network among marijuana users by considering it as a type of identity enacted for the purpose of ensuring a stable supply of marijuana under prohibition, and providing safety from detection and enforcement of penalties for selling and possessing marijuana. In doing so, the article demonstrates how behavioral expectations implied in the attached cultural meanings of friendship identity have utility for the creation and

maintenance of marijuana use and distribution networks. Furthermore, it shows that different characteristics of friendship identity are stressed by marijuana users within differing contexts and relationships, as individuals move between different points in marijuana use and distribution networks.

The aim of this research is twofold. First, it is to describe the role-based behavioral expectations that are attributed to the identity of “friend” among marijuana users within this study, and to demonstrate how construction and avowal of friendship identity facilitates a coordination of joint action that helps to create and maintain marijuana distribution networks. The article begins by showing that “friend” is a commonly used identity that includes expectations for behavior among marijuana users. Second, the study respondents show how the meanings of the friend identity are differentially stressed according to differing market activities, and corresponding behavioral expectations. By doing this, the respondents show how the friend identity is implicated in the creation and maintenance of marijuana distribution networks.

Method

This article addresses the research question through the analysis of responses to in-depth interviews of marijuana users on different levels of entrenchment within the marijuana user subculture in a moderately sized city (population <150,000) in the Southeastern United States. The first author collected semistructured interview data to explore the topic of economic behavior and social networks of marijuana users, which developed into an examination of the interesting friendship patterns among users. In this study, interview guide was designed to cover questions about participants’ sociodemographic characteristics, level of experience with psychoactive substances, social experiences with marijuana, such as receiving and sharing marijuana, market experiences with marijuana such as buying and selling, other situations such as trading or giving away marijuana for free, and self-supply including growing marijuana personally. Respondents were asked to provide descriptions of the last time they happened to be in one of the above-mentioned settings, and then probed to describe their usual experience with the marijuana market. These questions were also aimed to shed light on questions used in U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH; Caulkins & Pacula, 2006).

Recruitment Techniques and Confidentiality Issues

Recruitment of participants for the study followed a two-pronged approach that included elements of purposeful and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002), to maximize the level of participant response while minimizing the homogeneity of respondents. First, some participants were directly asked to volunteer by the first author who was in the field for a related ethnographic study of marijuana subculture. Second, the recruited participants were asked at the end of the interview by the interviewer whether they would be willing to recruit other participants they mentioned during the interview under randomly assigned names. Participants were handed a standard business card containing the interviewer’s contact information, in order that their social contacts could decide to schedule with the primary researcher themselves.

The recruitment techniques, as well as the overall research, were Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved by the Florida State University Human Subjects Committee on January 14, 2009 (HSC No. 2009.2196), and the researcher also gained additional protection of a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality issued by the National Institutes of Health/National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH/NIDA; No. DA-09-017). Only three respondents whom the interviewer came into contact with decided not to participate. The reasons given for refusal were linked to precautions with respect to the subjects’ professional position and discomfort about discussing other individuals’

Table 2. Experience of Respondents on the Marijuana Market.

Sample characteristics	No. of respondents	% total
User (only)	20	45.5
Dealer (lifetime)	14	31.8
Grower	4	9.1
Middleman	4	9.1
Other	2	4.5
Total	44	100

criminal activities. Individual interviews were conducted in a private office. The interviewer began by informing the respondents about the research and then asked them whether they consent to participate in the research project. An arbitrarily chosen name was then assigned to the respondent, and a list of randomly generated names was provided to the respondent for his or her use when talking about third subjects. Respondents were asked not to communicate information that might disclose their identity nor the identity of anybody they would mention in the course of the interview.

Sample Description

The final sample consisted of 44 participants in the marijuana market. With respect to demographics, the sample included 32 males and 12 females—1 was Black, 41 were White, and the remaining 2 were of non-American origin. The age range of the study sample was 18 to 61 years, with the *mean* age of 29 and median age of 25 years. There was great variation in the social status respondents held, ranging from students, sales assistants, and service workers to higher statuses of lawyer and college professor. None of the respondents maintained drug-related business as a sole source of income: 59% were employed, 20% were students, six in total were unemployed. When it comes to education, 43% had a college education, 23% had a master's degree, the rest were high school graduates, and one respondent had no higher than elementary education. With respect to income, 29% earned below US\$5,000 yearly income (including students) and 18% were earning more than US\$25,000 annually; 66% of respondents were single, only four had children. The greatest share of respondents (43%) lived with their friends, and additional 16% were staying on campus.

Members of the sample represented different levels of entrenchment in marijuana market. The inclusion criterion for participation in the study was the use of marijuana in the past 12 months; 54% of respondents used marijuana on a daily basis, 12% used it 3 to 4 times a week, and only three respondents did not use marijuana in the last 30 days, and two participants had not smoked marijuana at all in the past year. The median length of marijuana use was 10 years, and 61% had used another drug in the past year, along with their marijuana use.

With respect to the subjects' involvement in marijuana supply, several interviewees participated in retail marijuana transactions, in the wholesale of marijuana or in marijuana growing (see Table 2). Eight respondents sold marijuana in the past on retail level, some of them increased the scale of their dealing as the time went on. For instance, Frank and Michael were at some point of their lives buying and reselling a pound of marijuana each week for resale. Jamel started his business with buying and redistributing ounces, and progressed into buying in half pound increments for distribution. None of the dealers interviewed have ever been convicted for distribution of marijuana.

Several participants were involved, directly or indirectly, in growing marijuana. Norman started his growing operation with his roommates, intending to sell it in a different town. Roy and

Table 3. Experience of Respondents on the Marijuana Market in the Last Year and Mean Frequency of Activities (n = 44).

	Total	%	Mean number of times
Received by sharing	44	100	124
Shared their own marijuana	39	89	134
Bought marijuana	40	91	34
Sold marijuana	10	23	46
Traded marijuana for something else	6	14	5
Traded something for marijuana	2	5	2
Received marijuana for free	3	7	2
Gave marijuana out for free	5	11	3
Used marijuana by themselves	10	23	55
Grew marijuana	4	9	1

Anthony shared their stories of starting to grow for their own personal use and for their friends. Truman had grown marijuana in the past and also participated in cross-border trafficking. Others, such as William and Andrew, had observed someone else's marijuana growing operation. Michael had a close friend from childhood growing marijuana for him.

Sixteen interviewees would often take part in facilitating a marijuana purchase for someone else, which we term the *middleman* role. In addition, Terry played the middleman role in the sense that he would sell to people who came to buy from his roommate while he was not at home. Paul and Chris depicted themselves as middlemen in the interview, but through the accounts of their friends it can be derived they were actually selling on a current basis. This was similar for George, Randy, and possibly Gary.

All respondents were asked about their marijuana use, sharing, purchase, sales, growing, and receiving marijuana for free. Many provided secondary accounts of market roles that they themselves did not play, but that they came to know through their own marijuana acquisitions and relationships, for instance described their observation of their dealer portfolio or the growing facility they visited. All respondents were probed on activities of their "friends," as they defined them. The interviews conducted with participants ranged from 35 min to 3 hr, and averaged about 80 min in length.

The authors worked jointly on an inductive analysis of the data, on coding and on sorting the data until a coherent picture emerged. The study results identified friendship as a salient concept related to sharing, buying, and selling marijuana. Remarkably, all participants proffered the word "friend" without prompting when discussing marijuana market and distribution situations. Once the researchers began to identify a significant pattern around friendship emerging within early interviews, they began to extensively probe subsequent respondents about their friendship liaisons when the topic came up in interviews. A frequency count of the data reveals that a derivative of the word "friend" was used 2,723 times among all the interviews. In contrast, participants used the term *dealer* less than 400 times, *middleman* or *middle person* 30 times, and the term *marijuana user* was not used at all. The terms used came up proportionally with frequency of actions taken by respondents on the marijuana market (as shown in Table 3). It also became clear that the meanings that interviewees attributed to friendship varied with the differing patterns of social and market networks that they were asked to describe. What follows is an analysis of those variations, framed in the structure of "mainstream" ethnography approach (Adler, 2008).

Findings

This analysis delineates three unique interactional relationships of individuals within marijuana distribution networks, as they pertain to the meanings they attached to the term *friendship*: (a) meanings that individuals attach to friendship as they pertain to the relations among individuals within user groups, (b) meanings that individuals attach to friendship as they pertain to the relationship between users and the “middlemen,” and (c) individual’s meanings of friendship they pertain to the relationship between users and dealers. The article discusses how these differing definitions imply behavioral expectations that facilitate favorable conditions for the distribution of marijuana to members along all parts of the market chain.

Meaning of Friendship Among User Groups: Sharing

First, it was shown in this study that attitudes to marijuana can shape overall interpersonal relationships of marijuana users. Anthony (age 21) said, “Marijuana definitely plays a very big role in my relationship with not only my friends, but with other people in general.” Dennis talked about his “best friend” that “at the beginning [marijuana] was definitely something that brought us together.” Norman (age 18) spoke of marijuana’s centrality when he discussed general social interactions, “We don’t really hang out with many dudes who don’t smoke.” The context of marijuana usage thus provides a broader definition to the interactional space of our interest. The norms of these relationships are explained in the following section.

It Is Friendly to Share Your Marijuana. One of the core principles that are followed in marijuana culture is sharing the drug when smoking: “I mean, it’s just the culture of marijuana, at least in America. I mean, you have it, you share” (Mickey, age 36). Respondents thus often collated smoking and sharing marijuana into one thing: “I would say all of my friends share. Very, very few people that I associate with don’t smoke” (Ruth, age 27). Sharing marijuana was given a central part of the definition of friendship among marijuana users, as Truman (age 35) pointed out, “Once you become friends with somebody I think it’s just an understanding that you have something, you share it with them if they smoke, and vice versa, you know.”

Friends smoking marijuana together almost always reinforced the act of sharing marijuana with each other. The majority of respondents ($n = 40$) provided an account of their “friends” when discussing their recent sharing situations. Participants defined sharing their marijuana with others, whether by offering or by being asked, as a symbolic gesture of friendship:

Usually it’s when I’m with a large group of friends, and we generally will be just hanging out and having a couple drinks and then someone will just smile and say “do you want to smoke” and then everyone decides that they do, and sometimes several people offer to use some of their weed also. (Heather, age 23)

Participants said that they would more likely offer to share marijuana with friends than non-friends. Paul (age 26) proffered this selectivity in sharing when he says, “You are going to share more if you know the person better.” Pamela (age 22) echoed Paul’s comment by stating, “With people that I don’t know so well, you know, I’ll share but only to a certain extent. I won’t be as free with it.” Nicole more directly affirmed Paul and Pamela’s statements by offering an explanation for being selective by saying, “It’s not something that’s not easy necessarily for me to get in this town, so I’m sharing with you, it kind of symbolizes, like, I consider you a good friend.” Her emphasis on availability was an important point that will be addressed later in this section. These examples demonstrate that the decision to share marijuana is a symbolic gesture that is selectively made to enact and affirm a friendship identity between two or more people. Furthermore,

it can be an exclusive conduct toward those considered as friends: "I didn't really care to share my marijuana with people that I wasn't friendly with" (Louis).

It Is Friendly Indeed to Reciprocate. Although sharing marijuana is a gesture intended to affirm friendship identity with fellow smokers in their group, respondents expressed that it was not as free and altruistic as previous research suggested or assumed (Goode, 1970; Harrison et al., 2007; Osborne & Fogel, 2008; Wilkins & Sweetser, 2006; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). This research revealed that the normative expectations surrounding friendship identity in marijuana culture were such that one should not only share, but also reciprocate sharing in the future (immediate or distant): "I guess I could tell you some things that I notice . . . It's not as carefree sharing as what a lot of people say it is. You know you have to be within the circle" (Pamela). The circle of "friends" Pamela referred to can be, in fact, maintained to hold the rules of reciprocity; social control over this rule is better exerted in a smaller group.

Reciprocity norms were not firmly set among respondents, but did follow a general pattern. First, there was a general expectation among most respondents that sharing marijuana acted as a diffuse credit that would be returned on the spot or at later time ($n = 43$); a majority of respondents directly referenced the rules of reciprocity as a part of a "friendly" relationship ($n = 28$). Rodney (age 21) suggested that sharing marijuana among friends was based on a type of credit system:

The thing a lot of times is that you might be given marijuana by a friend, but usually the unwritten rule is that you reciprocate that and help them out so. I think that you give as much as you get with marijuana.

Andrew (age 24) elaborated this concept when he said,

So it's sort of an economic system . . . if you share now, then you will be shared with later. So you're able to share with your friends knowing that they will do the same for you later. And you can, like I said, it's sort of seems, I don't know if I'm terming it right, but buying their time to hang out with them.

Roy (age 22) reminded that the norms of "paying back" are rather salient, and expected to be followed rather than pronounced:

There's nothing more to paying him back other than the fact that perhaps I would maybe pack a pipe of marijuana another time. So it is a sort of payment system, that's the way I've come to see it, but it wouldn't be called upon, there wouldn't be like a marker called upon like "hey you got me this time can you get me back now?"

While the "credit system" helps to keep track over reciprocity in time, other measures help to reinforce immediate reciprocity. Jamel (age 21) explained what sharing means:

Well, it's not share in the way that you would say I'm going to give this to you. This is now yours to use. We share it in that we all smoke it together. So that we each put in a little bit and all smoke together.

That might be more typical of smoking blunts (Sifaneck, Johnson, & Dunlap, 2005; Sifaneck, Kaplan, Dunlap, & Johnson, 2003) rather than smoking from pipes: "A lot of times like three people get together and decide to roll the blunt and all. Each give you know put in two-hundred milligrams of grass or so," described Norman. Rodney explained that actually most of his

sharing situations involved “pitching in”: “I pitch in with everyone so often. I would say maybe 20% of the time if I’m hanging out with someone they’ll just offer me some for free.”

In several cases, respondent denied the notion of expected reciprocity in marijuana sharing. However, some respondents mentioned buying drinks, or providing monetary compensations—as Lilly (age 21) explained, “Sometimes I wouldn’t mind sharing with a stranger if they were maybe gonna come hang out with us, but if they were like oh! can I have some, then ok, well, if you wanna, give me 5 dollars maybe.” Other respondents discussed the role of marijuana in buying-out the time of people they were interested in, such as in case of men–women relationships:

Kara is the one that I’m quite fond of, she smokes in my bathroom at all the parties . . . So being able to steal Kara was very easy to do with just [saying to her] “Hey why don’t you come and have a conversation with me in my bathroom?” (Matthew, age 30)

The marijuana “credit” used for “hanging out” with people of interest actually provides a cue to some of the marijuana “friendships” establishment, as Roy (age 22) described between the lines:

Because they’re all interested in using marijuana. And so you’d be able to offer it to them in order to receive their hangout time. That’s not to say that they wouldn’t hang out with you otherwise, but it’s just something you can use to get, like I said, if you share marijuana, so if you use it at one time, you can share it with your friends and know that they might share it with you in the future.

Research participants suggested that the system featured continuous reciprocal sharing of marijuana among members of the friendship network. Norman put this succinctly, “Everyone shares, I share too. The idea is that everyone shares, so we are all sharing equally and just not have to haggle over it.” Reciprocity rules had to be maintained in order that friendship prevailed, or put in a different way, being a member of a friendship circle, reciprocity was expected from a “friend.”

Punishment for Breaking the Rules of Sharing and Reciprocation. Once the individual was unable to reciprocate, several sanctions followed—he or she could be either shut out, be labeled as a “moocher,” or be asked to contribute financially. Pamela indicated,

If you smoke with them all the time then it’s kind of like, you know, like you’re a moocher. And you should either bring your weed sometime to share or pitch in a couple dollars here and there. It’s kind of like I smoke you out, you smoke me out that kind of thing.

Mickey put the point as follows, “I would be expected to share it . . . If you are someone who is always taking and never sharing, then people notice, and they stop sharing with you.”

For those who had nothing to share, rules of reciprocity applied in financial terms. Norman indicated that people who were not able to reciprocate by sharing could contribute “throwing down a few bucks.” These forms of monetary exchange were nevertheless seen as less than optimal, and participants often discussed this scenario as being a last resort. Dennis gives an account of why asking for repayment from a friend is not desirable, “I’m going to go get high with somebody and break out the bag, I’m not going to weigh it out and make a deal like you know I want \$2.38 for this quantity of, like, a bowl.” In addition, as shown in following sections, obtaining marijuana represented an extra cost on the top of the monetary price.

When participants felt that they were not being reciprocated for sharing with other friends, their common response was to shut the nonreciprocating person out of the circle of friends. An

example of this is Kathy's discussion of her annoyance with her former friend Roy whom she felt was getting "too greedy" by refusing to share marijuana and by selling it at what she felt was an exorbitant rate:

We all smoke together, and buy from each other, so if one person, such as my boyfriend's roommate, is being greedy about it, it's really easy to just shut them out, and then they don't have anyone to sell to. They don't have anyone to smoke with. So, it's really just better to be generous about it, so everyone can get along.

While sharing marijuana was a part of friendship identity among marijuana users, quitting marijuana nevertheless did not necessarily have an impact on continuing the relationship. For instance, Aaron (age 25) stated, "we'd still be friends without [marijuana], it's just like convenient [that we smoke]." Similarly, Anthony stated of his friend that marijuana is "not a staple in our relationship." Using marijuana thus implies acting in accordance with the rules of friendship, but friendship itself can last beyond marijuana usage. It has been shown above that using marijuana implied norms about sharing and on friendship reciprocation, and the following sections provide reasoning for this.

Friendship Identity As a Compensation for Market Disruptions. Marijuana users were faced with a market situation that limited their ability to rely on a consistent source of marijuana supply due to the prohibitive regime of laws with respect to marijuana. Friendship norms helped to compensate for this. Paul put it straightforward: "The only reason that the sharing thing happens is simply that not everybody always has some with them." Truman mentioned this mechanism too: "When I have some, I take care of them. When they have some, they offer me." Monica (age 32) puts it more clearly:

I know there are times when people come over and I don't want to smoke what I have, but I do anyways, because they're my friends and I know they want to get high. There's always [the thought] that, I won't have anything to smoke tomorrow morning or something like that. But the more you share the more it comes back around to you . . . whenever I do have it, which is usually, I do share it. People remember that.

It has been shown that definition of marijuana use as a social activity among friends here served the purpose of eventual reciprocation that minimized the risks of disruptions in marijuana supply to any particular user, and role expectations on friends helped secure marijuana supply as a source of social control. Andrew summarized the principle of sharing and reciprocation:

You smoke "somebody else out" [share your marijuana with someone, who is not reciprocating at that point], and if you know they have weed or they regularly smoke it, you just kind of expect that it's coming back around, one way or another.

Drawing on the concept of sharing as endemic to the meaning of friendship, it helped to minimize the supply dilemma by creating an environment that provides increased opportunities to access and use marijuana.

Meaning of Friendship Between Users and "the Middlemen": Helping Out

Another central meaning of friendship identity was articulated as to help out fellow users by acting as an intermediary toward their dealers. Most respondents either provided an account of

the “middleman” role ($n = 5$), their personal experience with acting as the “middleman” ($n = 19$), or their experience with buying through one ($n = 9$), and two respondents stressed how they never take this role; vast majority of them associated the middleman role with the notion of “friend(s)” ($n = 30$). For instance, Robert gave an example of the connection between friendship and being a “middleman”: “We’re just friends. I had occasion to spend some time with her and I commented that I didn’t have any access. And she said that she could help me out if I needed her to.” The (helping out) norm of friendship identity partially solved the principal difficulties marijuana users confronted, which was finding a dealer and then establishing and maintaining a stable contact with him. These difficulties included not having any contact with a steady supplier because of a move or a visit to a new area, such as Frank (age 24) describes,

We used to live together and are good friends. And he just figured “well I’m gonna stop by.” I’m assuming that part of his thought was that he needs to get some pot before he goes home. And he knows I can probably find some for him. So he had shown up and we smoked . . . And then right before he left I went and picked up some bud for him. He gave me money and I went and got it.

Another possible difficulty could be that the established dealer ran out of stock or suspended his or her selling for a period of time, which was commonly caused by law enforcement activities, as Monica describes,

He [dealer] stopped selling for probably 6 months. I just kind of had to get it from other places. It was really hard to get. Interviewer: How did you get yours? During that period, through friends. Somebody would hook up and kind of share it with all of us . . . So for a while there we were just kind of dependent on out-of-town sources. People would go home and visit their family, and knowing that it was dry in the town, they would buy extra and bring it back and sell it to us.

As a result, participants used friendship identities when they were faced with the dilemma of trying to find marijuana regularly, or find it at all.

Friends who had current knowledge of where to find marijuana were expected to act as a middleman between the dealer and users. The duties of the middleman included (a) making purchases for friends and (b) introducing friends to their dealers. As James (age 19) put it,

Finding marijuana here wasn’t that hard because I already had friends that went to school here that smoked. So when I first came here and I was looking for marijuana, I would go to those friends. Either they would take me to their dealer to meet them, or I would just buy directly from them [my friends].

Rules of Middleman Role—Friends Do It for Free. The crucial expectation in the middleman role was not to gain any monetary profit from helping out and processing the transaction between individuals who did not know one another. For instance, James described a typical situation of being the “middleman”:

If it was two friends [one a dealer and the other a potential buyer] that I knew but [they] didn’t know each other . . . I definitely have gone over and picked it up and then brought it to the other person and given it to them.

Anthony recounted acting as middleman by making direct purchases of marijuana for friends who could not find a dealer on their own:

These were all very close friends; people that I knew very well, and basically, I didn't do it for any sort of monetary gain or like, I never made any profit of it, so I really kind of did it more as a service to myself and my friends.

Matthew put the norm in a practical example:

I would be upset if I found out that I had given someone 60 dollars to go pick up a bag of weed on my behalf and they were to actually only pay 50 for it and keep the other 10 themselves. When friends serve as middlemen, there's an expectation that no profit will be made.

The fact that markups could not be made was facilitated by the understanding among users that prices are relatively fixed in a given geographical area, which made markups easy to detect. As Kristen (age 25) mentioned, marking up the price would be noticeable: "Yeah I don't raise it. I mean I couldn't really even if I wanted to. Then it would be like 35/70 which is ridiculous. You know that's expensive. I mean 60 is expensive too. So no I wouldn't raise the price on them" (by 30/60 she means the price of marijuana per 1/16 and 1/8 of an ounce, respectively). On the question of price, Andrew commented, "It's not negotiated, it's set." Anthony similarly acknowledged, "The market sets it, exactly," and Paul said, "It is fixed, it is usually pretty fixed." Thus, the user can easily tell if a markup has been added. Arbitrarily raising the price of marijuana poses a risk that a friend would discover the markup and be offended.

Risks and Costs Involved in Middleman Roles. This free of charge service dedicated to friendship expectations nevertheless had its significant costs in terms of time and in terms of risks of detection. Kirsten described this dilemma:

I usually go pick it up [marijuana] for my friend Blaise. Because he works at night so it's kind of like you know, sometimes it's hard for him to go get it. Plus I know the [dealer] and he doesn't really know the guy so that's how it is with a lot of my friends. And I'm trying right now to introduce them so that they do not have to call me every week, because that gets a little old too. I feel like I'm always driving around. It's like every 2 days someone calls you and you're like why didn't you call yesterday? But they're friends so.

Due to the risks and costs involved, many users expressed their reluctance to act as middlemen, but this role was particularly hard to avoid, as Ruth put it,

I really try not to buy for my friends. If I find a really good deal I still try not to buy for my friends. Now, recently I bought for my friends. Recently I bought for Blanca, Maureen, and Sylvia. Maureen and Sylvia live together. Blanca had been feeling bad because Maureen keeps getting us pot. And so Blanca kind of talked me into it . . . I rarely do that . . . Even though they're friends and I love them and I trust them and all that. I don't like having that large quantity.

Here the risks lead to the fact that some respondents restrain from this activity and represent a negative case. Kathy said,

People who don't know where to get it, they might call me, and ask me where I can get it, but I wouldn't buy it for them . . . Because, I mean, that's not really my problem, if somebody doesn't know how to find it. It's not hard to find it, so they should be able to, really.

However, she was the only one in the sample who claimed not to conform to this norm, others were less likely to resist the pressure. For instance, Aaron commented on getting marijuana for other people: "It's dangerous. I don't. They can get it from different people," but continued, "If they can't then, I would maybe buy it for them but I would never have, like I used to, there was a time when I had a steady supply to help these people out." Matthew verified the notion, "It's really hard for me not to classify any of my close friends historically as occasionally intermediaries. Among social networks of cannabis consuming friends, anyone at any point could be called on to help a friend get some weed," and he further makes a distinction between a middleman and a dealer: "Among those people over the years it'd be . . . there's only a few who actually delt, or occasionally participated in dealing."

Why Take the Middlemen Risks—Users' Rewards and Dealers' Rules on Newcomers. With the risks and discomforts outlined above, it was of interest to see why friends took these middleman roles on themselves. First, being somebody's friend and acting as the middleman asserted the benefit of "being smoked-out" for taking on "all the hard risks and things" involved in making a purchase. Kirsten said, "They would definitely smoke with me, and then I know that even if I didn't have, and they would share with me, but since I'm getting it for them, they will definitely smoke with me. And they appreciate it." Similarly, Paul explains why in fact he was undergoing the process on being a middleman:

I usually just do it because I am their friend. Sure or if anything else I had no pot and somebody calls and says, "Hey, man can you buy me some pot?" "Sure," in hopes that if I get it for him that we'll smoke or something . . . It's kind of like one of those things that you do for all the hard risk and things.

Second, the middlemen role linked to marijuana purchases and dealer introductions was enacted into the friendship identity as a means to transfer trust in established networks. Kathy (age 19) described the process of being introduced to a dealer through a friend:

I was really nervous about finding someone, but my friend from my home town, who I used to work with, knew someone up here. So he just gave him a call, and told him about me. Then his friend was like, "Ok, I trust you, so sure, she can come over."

By purchasing for friends or, in the course of the time, introducing their friends, the users act to protect the dealers as their sole and valuable source of marijuana. Ruth justified this:

The person who introduced me [to my dealer] is a friend of mine, a close friend of mine. And that close friend of mine wouldn't put me in danger. I would never introduce somebody to my guy if he was a bad guy.

Kathy's wording was more concise: "I'm kind of like the middleman, just there to ensure that my friend is trustworthy."

In some cases, dealer introductions described by participants were an elaborate ordeal involving multiple stages. Rodney's description of introducing someone to his dealer followed this pattern:

If you're referring somebody to someone else, you just don't give them the number and expect them to call them out of the blue. You take them over there once and say "hey this is my friend." And then maybe after the first couple times that you go over there with him, then he [the dealer] knows him [the new person] well enough.

Here the reward for acting as middleman, either by purchasing in greater amounts, or by introducing friends to dealers, had a reward in the form of protecting the dealer, who required so.

In special cases, the reward for the middleman role was actually incentivized by the dealer, who can be identified as the greatest beneficiary of the middlemen transactions. Douglas (age 24), who himself was a rather occasional smoker, provided his account of dealer's reaction on his attempt to quit buying for friends:

I trust you, so I think you should go ahead and continue to play the middleman role. Whenever you do, I'll make sure to give you something. And he left it vague at the time, but the time after that when I swung by to buy for them, he gave me the little five dollar, the nickel bag.

This example witnesses the importance of middlemen to dealers' protection who are then willing to occasionally compensate for the service, to remain protected from the contact. The dealers' perspective on self-protection is described in the following section.

To summarize, participants in this study were often faced with the problem of not having steady contact with a supplier. As a result, they included the concept of helping out in their meaning of friendship, which meant that those who had a steady contact with a seller would act as a middleman between the dealer and other users. This role as a friend involved making purchases for friends, despite the associated risks, and facilitating introductions for friends who did not have current contact with a dealer. Incentives for acting as a middleman included smoking for free, getting or keeping small amounts of marijuana for free, or, and at times, being rewarded by the dealer.

Meaning of Friendship Between Buyers and Dealers: Trusting. The examples of elaborate brokered introductions between users and dealers by middlemen were suggestive of the character of the relationship between users and dealers more generally. Participants in this study articulated a need for trust in the relationship between dealer and user, which was also couched in the language of friendship. Trust was noted as an important characteristic for both buyers and dealers. One way that buyers and dealers were able to signal trust to one another was through meanings attached to friendship identity. This statement can be demonstrated by Roy's comment:

Everyone who uses marijuana, there is a certain kind of trust because it is an illegal product. I wouldn't want to purchase from someone I didn't know just because I'm not familiar with them, it would make me uncomfortable. It might make them uncomfortable to have someone purchase from them that they don't know.

Dealers and buyers often referred to each other as friends and acted in ways that extended their relationship beyond the immediate rules of the transaction. The majority of our sample characterized relationship to the sellers as *friendly*, *cordial*, and so on ($n = 40$), and most of them, when talking about the dealer, used the term *friend* ($n = 35$).

In a sole case, a respondent stressed not being a "friend" with the person who sells marijuana to her:

I don't hang out with my pot dealer. He's not my friend. It's not like I'm gonna call him for a social setting. If I call him he knows exactly what I want and why I want it and where to get it. So all I have to say is I'm stopping by. (Ruth, age 27)

This statement, however, expressed distancing from the marijuana community norms that Ruth herself characterized: "If you meet somebody and they're a good friend of yours for a couple of months, and they go, 'hey I have a friend'—that friend is their pot dealer."

Trust Comes When the Dealer Is a Friend

Marijuana transactions were often referred to by buyers and sellers in the language of friendship. Gary (age 22) provided an example of a buying situation:

All you have to do is call a friend of mine . . . Billy. Hey Billy what's going on, he'll say nothing much come over and I come over there and Billy would have some and that was that. Interviewer: What would be the extent of your relationship? Gary: Just friends, friend's business associates I guess.

Mickey and other respondents commonly used the same type of reference: "Occasionally, I'll be hanging out with friends, and they'll have a friend I don't know, and they'll have weed, and offer it."

In some cases, marijuana users and dealers relied on preexisting friendship liaisons, or deeper friendships established through repeated market transactions. "Well, I went over to a personal friend who also happens to deal marijuana in his house, I purchased an eighth of an ounce of marijuana." Jamel stressed his personal relationship here, and later on added: "Before I knew him as marijuana dealer, I knew him as friend." Terry (age 21) explained why he preferred to buy from his personal friend: "It's just more convenient, because we're going over there anyway to hang out."

More commonly, friendship bonds came solely as a result of the business relationship and attached friendship content to it: "I became friends with this guy because I was buying weed from him, and I'd often come on pot luck dinner night, hang out, eat some food, and also get the marijuana." Frank illustrated the nature of dealer–user relationships on his experience of moving away from selling: "I ended up having kind of a lot of pseudo-friends, you know, people that you know they just wanted to be my friends because I had pot." Walter (age 25), a former marijuana dealer, also had a similar experience of disappearing friends once he decided to stop selling to them: "I don't have anybody around anymore, which is usually how it goes when people sell drugs and they stop. They realize that they don't have any real friends."

Defining the Dealer and the Seller in Friendship Terms. The members of the study sample couched the language of a deal in terms of friendship gestures such as "stopping by" or "coming over to hang out." This not only worked as code language against police detection but also represented the realm of dealer and user transactions. Randy (age 61) depicted his last purchase situation:

So the next day he came by and brought me an ounce. It came in a brown paper bag. Then I paid him, we drank a beer and smoked a couple of joints and chatted about all kinds of various things, and then he drove off.

Chris (age 39) provided the same account from dealers' perspective:

Somebody called me and asked me if I could stop by their house and talk. And I just did and brought an eighth with me. So I guess just a simple phone conversation without being overt about it. "Hey come and hang out and have a beer." Ok and I may go hang out and have a beer there anyway.

Truman provided an account of the negative case, which was not often experienced:

I just think it's—cause sometimes it's sort of refreshing when you deal with someone you don't have to hang out with. You know it's going to be a quick deal. Sometimes it's easy cause you don't really want to hang out.

For users, smoking with the dealer had an incentive in getting extra marijuana. Mickey suggested, “If you're friends with someone who you're buying from, they would still probably share with you, if they smoked,” and Rodney approved, “They [dealers] take what they have from their personal stash and throw in.” Friendship identity was enacted between marijuana users and dealers to build trust. Michael (age 30) revealed, “That's another thing if you're going to come over, come and hang out. Don't walk in and walk out. Because that doesn't look good either.” For marijuana dealers, smoking marijuana was expected to build up trust on the spot, as Dennis (age 30) commented,

I'd say it's probably unwritten etiquette that if you're going to buy off somebody and they're like here hit this and you refuse then they have reason to be suspicious that you might be a cop or working with the cops.

Why Become Friends—Users' Rewards. No matter whether the friendly relationship was based on long-term preexisting basis, or on an enacted identity among dealers and users, several advantages can be derived from it for the user. Buyers described the signals of trust they looked for in dealers as important, because of their fear of being swindled in terms of amount or product purchased. James cited a type of comfort in buying from a dealer that he considered a friend,

We became friends over the summer. And throughout the summer, fall, and spring I got to know him real well. And we built up a pretty decent trust relationship, so when he decides to sell marijuana, I don't really feel sketched out or that there's any risk.

Kathy explained what it is that she wanted from her dealer in the course of a trustful relationship:

He's one of our best friends. He's trustworthy, he's cool, and he actually doesn't really smoke that much, which makes him a good businessman. That's another reason why I know I can trust him, because I know he wouldn't short me because he's not taking some out for himself, to smoke himself.

Several advantages with respect to product quantity or quality and the service provided can be gained from a friendly relationship with the dealer. Monica described her last transaction with her dealer, “I've just gotten it from that guy because he lives in my neighborhood and I trust him. He always gives me a fat bag. Like, extra [marijuana], you know. We're friends.” Apart from good price–quantity ratio, friendly relationship was also expressed in product quality. James story provided an example to such link:

There was a person in the beginning of the year that I bought marijuana from, and it turned out to be really crappy. And . . . it wasn't like a friend. It was like a friend of a friend. So after that I didn't really talk to him or go to that person again.

Roy also asserted with regard to his relationship with his dealer:

I'm not just using this person to purchase marijuana from but it's also a friend . . . I generally, I don't purchase from people I do not know well enough that I could call them up on any frequent basis.

Therefore, the relationship with the dealer represented an important market asset for each individual user.

Why Become Friends—Dealers' Rewards. Similarly, dealers described the signals of trust given by buyers as being important because it quelled their worries about detection and of being robbed. Dealers in the study sample often asserted that they would not sell to people other than those who they were familiar with, and often described these relationships as friendships. Anthony asserted this directly by saying, "I only wanted to sell to people I knew on a personal level." Similarly, Chris said, "I don't ever sell to anybody new . . . If they want to purchase [marijuana]; it's a pretty long arranged relationship." Frank also described selling to friends: "I only had a couple of people that I would sell like that to. I would also take care of any friends and most of these people were friends."

The fear that dealers had that they might be robbed by their customers was not unfounded. For instance, when Jamal discussed being robbed at gunpoint during a deal, he said regretfully that he made the mistake that he "should have known the person better." Similarly, Norman talked about his concern about being robbed, "We are more worried about getting robbed than getting our house broken in by the police." Later, Norman discussed that to avoid being robbed, he tried "not to sell to people who are like—who will run their mouths", to avoid letting too many people know that he is holding a large quantity. Thus, not only that the customer had to be a known source but he or she also had to maintain some individual characteristics that can only be spotted through numerous contacts or quality referrals, as described in the "Meaning of Friendship Between Users and 'the Middlemen': Helping Out" section. Dealers who did not follow the rules undertook significant risks. Rodney provided account of one of the numerous accidents in the town:

He lived in an apartment. And he kind of had a business arrangement with his roommate. And they literally had people coming in and out, and in and out . . . And then over the summer, he got robbed at gunpoint. Very like armed robbery . . . beat him up pretty good.

Dealers through their trusted liaisons protected themselves through their trusted liaisons against the risk of criminal prosecution as a result of selling to undercover informants. The more contacts the dealer sold to, the more risk he or she undertook, and therefore dealers often wanted to limit their sales to only a small number of known, reliable buyers. Anthony provided a picture of the risks:

The town Police Department in particular loves to use drug informants or narcs. Which I think is horrible and dangerous, but it creates a relationship between dealers and buyers where one or the other can't really fully trust the other . . . So yeah just the fact that you would know someone better and longer reduces the risk that . . . reduces the fact that you have to be suspicious about them for whatever reason.

To conclude, friendship between buyers and dealers signaled trust between the two parties. Although friendly behavior between buyers and dealers contained similar characteristics as friendship among users, it served a different purpose. Many buyers recognized trust as a meaning attached to friendships with dealers who were generous, and established a comfortable setting when making a deal. Dealers voiced a primary concern to take precautions not to get detected or robbed, and they felt that they could minimize the likelihood of being robbed by limiting their

distribution networks to people they were familiar with and claimed as friends. For a broader network, their friends would then play the middlemen roles. Monica talked about why trust was important for dealers, "It's always better to have clientele that you know and you trust. They try to find new people to buy from you." Here the definitions of friendship as shown in the previous sections interplayed in establishing a network of referrals through the middlemen, same as using the friendly acts of sharing marijuana in the course of the transaction.

Limitations of the Study

This study clearly depicts a rather "closed" drug market structure, despite some apartment sale points mentioned by the respondents were operated quite deliberately. There was no notion that a different, more open market existed in the area, and the authors believe that this would actually be the case for most contemporary Western drug markets. The study sample was restricted to a particular locale, and to predominantly White population sample; it was therefore difficult to say how the study results would apply to other places within the United States or elsewhere in the world. However, it can be assumed that the picture might be similar, at least in other middle-sized cities in the country, because the study respondents had often lived in other places in the past, and when they were asked to compare the local situation, no significant distinctions were mentioned.

As a second limitation to our study, during analysis, a doubt was raised whether the notions of friends and friendship did in fact represent a type of coded language used to maintain group secrecy and protect it from law enforcement activities (Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck, & Dunlap, 2006). Users could have referred to co-users and sellers as friends to alleviate the potential risk of police targeting, and at the same time provide a space for distancing the user from the criminal activity involved. A drug sale could then be framed as "helping out friends," and the dealer would be denoted as a "friend" in conversations with others, not to reveal his or her identity. Nevertheless, the above analysis is inclined to the point of view that friendship identity enacted in the process of marijuana sharing and market transactions was rather linked to subcultural responses to law enforcement targeting on marijuana users and sellers, in part due to the risks of undercover police work, risk of robbery to the seller, and also due to restricted availability of marijuana sales points.

As a side note, the possibility that study participants used the term *friend* to cover up their contacts identity in the process of interviewing was hardly unlikely, because they were instructed to assign randomly generated names from a list, or to create their own pseudonyms during interviews. Such practice was accepted by the respondents, as some of the interview excerpts show, "friend" notion was often used along with the cover name.

Discussion and Conclusion

This analysis contributed to the existing literature on marijuana distribution networks by offering a unique approach to understanding how actors strategically defined "friendship" to create and maintain such networks. Role-based expectations on "friendly" behavior served as an effective tool of social control that protected marijuana users from the risks of illicit market. While previous research documented important patterns of friendship and marijuana use, it often treated friendship as a static indicator of a relationship between individuals to which no marijuana-specific meanings were attributed (Caulkins & Pacula, 2006; D. Kandel, 1974; D. B. Kandel, Kessler, & Margulies, 1978; Pearson & Michell, 2000). This research addressed the meanings of friendship identity that underlie the joint action among members that helps to facilitate marijuana distribution networks, and to compensate for the risks of illicit market. According to this study, marijuana users define their friendship liaisons in terms of rules and expectations about acquiring marijuana, which can best be characterized by Paul's statement:

Someone is bound to “hey do you know where I can find anything or do you know where we can smoke?” And either you said I can find it for you or if you have it, “I got some.” You know, “I’ll smoke you out.”

With these shared expectations, marijuana users in this study built up trusting friendships that can provide them with access to a huge, but hidden and disreputable, marijuana market. The means provided by friendship norms were clear: first, sharing marijuana with someone who does not have it at the time, and sharing it back if you have been the one; second, helping out your friends by purchasing marijuana for them or introducing your friend to the dealer; and third, selling and buying marijuana under trustful conditions that protect both parties.

With respect to sharing marijuana, the constant process of reciprocation and a “running tally” made individuals less in control of their personal use, which was instead defined by outside social situations and norms of sharing, and could potentially lead to elevated frequency and quantity of marijuana used. Despite the study respondents did not provide evidence about other individuals being driven into marijuana use based on their relationships, smoking sessions of those already using marijuana were required by social control process of sustaining marijuana supply. This represents risks to public health that are an indirect result of marijuana illegality. In this respect, the study findings contribute to this broader picture with previously unreported similarities of relationships among marijuana users to users of other illicit drugs. The definitions of friendship among marijuana users this research provides, are more saddle than for other drug users, and represent lesser social and health risk to users, but nevertheless demonstrate some common patterns of drug use under prohibition.

With respect to the “middleman” role, this work relates to the previously published research on the “social supply” of marijuana (Coomber, 2010; Johnson et al., 2006), in the sense that this work explains the meanings marijuana users attribute to “friendship” at the point of purchase. Previous research took for granted that meanings of “friendship” among marijuana users are congruent with dominant cultural meanings, and ignored their use as a specific tool for creating and maintaining marijuana supply networks. For instance, a common understanding would be, that buying from a “friend” stands for buying from another, previously befriended user who is willing to sell some of his or her marijuana to cover for his or her usage (this pattern was not a focus of the analysis). This analysis rather follows the line of scholars who have reflected on different definitions and expectations on friendship, such as in comparison of friendship expectations between genders (Hall, 2010). The implications of this study are that the definition of friendship within marijuana markets expands beyond the commonsense notion of friendship shared by general culture. Findings of this study shed light on preexisting research findings about marijuana markets being operated in closed social networks where marijuana users and their friendship networks work together to safely acquire their substance of choice, and this research shows that these friendships are a by-product of the illicit market.

Findings on relationship between the dealer and the user, same as the definition of friendship among marijuana users themselves, suggest that conclusions derived from research on marijuana market structures (see, for example, NSDUH, Caulkins & Pacula, 2006) shall take into account differing meanings of friendship on these markets. “Social supply” as shown by Coomber for young Britons is the closest to the “middleman” concept defined by our respondents. For instance, conclusion made by Coomber and Turnbull (2007) that “young people’s supplies are rarely purchased via formal illicit markets” (p. 860) and “market separation appears to have been achieved naturally for our young sample” (p. 860) might be reexamined, because according to this study, both the “middleman” and the dealer can be covered in the meaning of the term “friend” (p. 855). The concept of “middleman” was previously used in another British study, where he or she purchased drugs for infrequent users (Parker, 2004). This study shows that under

strict law enforcement when marijuana availability is uncertain, this role is expected by and from all users, no matter how experienced they are on the market. Besides the middleman role, the term *friend* represented a synonym for marijuana dealer in our study, implying behavioral expectations on the dealer–user relationship. While in previous studies, a dealer who offered a drug for sharing would be understood as a “pusher” (Fletcher, 2007), here by smoking with the respondent, mutual trust was enacted. At the end, only trusted “friends” were allowed to purchase directly from the dealer, while his or her unwillingness for high traffic drive his or her “friends” into middlemen roles. As a result, an average marijuana user would be purchasing greater amounts of marijuana, carrying it over and distributing it. At the same time, what would be a simple sales situation on markets with regulated substances, here served as an occasion for marijuana use, either when the “friend” smoked with the dealer or when he or she was “smoked out” by another “friend” of his or her as a reward for the service. Comparing dealer–user relationships with other drug markets, their friendship among the dealer and the customer might not necessarily be enforced, due to stigma attached to other illicit drug use. A study on a crack market, for instance, revealed that dealers were distancing themselves from their customers (Copes, Hochstetler, & Williams, 2008). One sole respondent of our sample had experience with selling other drugs but cannabis, and his quote also suggested that addictive potential of the drug plays a role in dealer–user relationship:

Just like weed buyers are a lot more genuine. I guess you would say coke people are more trying to kiss your ass. So that you’d give them better deals or what not. But the weed people are more like they just want weed so they can go get high. (Walter, age 25)

This research suggests that description of friendship patterns discussed above may be specific to marijuana culture, which is rather normalized into general culture and carries on lesser stigma (Brochu, Duff, Asbridge, & Erickson, 2011; Hathaway, Comeau, & Erickson, 2011). More research is needed here to paint a clearer picture of dealer and user relationships on markets with different illicit drugs.

According to the study findings, the marijuana market is shifted into a predominantly closed network, and enacting friendship identity is a shibboleth for entry. In comparison with previous research, there was no other marijuana market but the “friends” market in this study. The definition of friendship on the marijuana market was altered, and incorporated expectations on one’s behavior that included marijuana sharing, acting like a middleman, or, if the dealer accepted newcomers, introducing a “friend” to the dealer. These behavioral norms helped to compensate for the risks of illicit market, and might be more sound in countries where drug policy focuses on law enforcement. As a result of stringent drug policy, individuals undergo numerous sharing situations where they might have less control over their personal marijuana use, and they indeed undergo significant law enforcement risks, just to “help out” their “friends.” This situation is not as benign as it might be considered by some scholars in the field, because the risks are now involving not only those who had entered the illegal business to make profit, but also those who, given a choice, would rather not participate in illegal market at all.

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