

Introduction

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This special issue of the Humboldt Journal of Social Relations visits one of the most polarizing policy debates in the US. In 2012, voters in Washington and Colorado passed initiatives that legalized the recreational use of marijuana. In fact, there were about 75,000 more votes cast in support of marijuana legalization in Colorado than were given to reelect President Obama. Yet according to a recent poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, Democrats are 22 percent more likely to support legalization than Republicans (Dimock, Carroll, & Motel, 2013). Clearly, these initiatives have galvanized public opinion further than earlier laws, such as California's Compassionate Use Act (Proposition 215) passed in 1996 and those in fourteen other states that legalized the medical use of marijuana at the state level. Although marijuana use and cultivation remain illegal at the federal level, the federal government has not, as of now, indicated that it will block implementation of the Washington and Colorado initiatives. In the absence of a clear federal response, the articles in this special issue become even more relevant to researchers and policy makers concerned with anticipating the myriad of impacts associated with the changing regulatory landscape.

The co-editors of this special issue are faculty members of the recently created Humboldt Institute for Interdisciplinary Marijuana Research (HIIMR). The need for a formal way to connect and focus the energy of academic researchers on the topic of marijuana became apparent when California's Proposition 19 (The Regulate, Control and Tax Cannabis Act of 2010) was on the ballot. That proposition would have legalized the non-medical cultivation, distribution and use of marijuana. At the time, important questions could only be answered through educated guesses because basic data on marijuana consumption and production were not readily available. No one knew exactly how much marijuana was produced in the state or how many people worked in the industry. There were other emerging areas of concern that lacked basic empirical data: the impacts of the marijuana industry on a region's economy, physical and social well-being, energy consumption, land use, water quality and resources, health and human services, and police, fire, and emergency services. Anecdotal data suggest major impacts, both deleterious and beneficial, of this underground economy on a regional basis; however, regulatory and economic decisions require data collected using scientific methods. Such data are critical for developing economical, effective, socially responsible, and efficient practices for addressing and mitigating the impacts of medicinal and recreational marijuana production and consumption. The HIIMR

takes an interdisciplinary approach to fill the gaps in data related to marijuana and to produce relevant applied academic research.

The eight papers selected for this edition reflect the commitment of HIIMR to provide policy makers and voters with crucial information to make informed decisions. The first group of papers focuses on individual experiences with, and attitudes towards, marijuana use. The second group of papers considers the political and structural forces that shape both policy and experiences within the marijuana policy reform and cultivation communities.

The first paper, “Inside the Gate: Insiders’ Perspectives on Marijuana as a Gateway Drug” by Rashi Shukla revisits the ongoing debate about marijuana as a “gateway” drug leading to the use of other illicit drugs, such as cocaine or heroin. Since marijuana use might increase if more states or the federal government move toward decriminalization and/or legalization, Shukla asks if we can expect to see more people using other illicit drugs. Interviews with marijuana users from a Midwestern city show that the “gateway” concept has been oversimplified. Rather than observing a “stage-like” progression of legal and illegal drug use, Shukla finds more variation in the sequencing of use.

Continuing with the focus on the sequencing of marijuana use relative to other substances, the next paper, “Patients and Caregivers Report Using Medical Marijuana to Decrease Prescription Narcotics Use” by David Peters, investigates the extent to which medical marijuana is used as a replacement for opiate addiction. Drawing on interviews with a convenience sample of medical marijuana users in Michigan, Peters finds that many users self-report substituting marijuana for prescription narcotic medicine to treat their illness. Among some users, marijuana appears to be a “reverse-gateway” drug that reduces opiate use, especially among patients who report bad side effects from prescription medicine. This notion of marijuana use as an “exit drug” (Reiman, 2013) is consistent with prior research (Swartz, 2010), but also highlights the need to reassess common—and taken for granted—assumptions about how the use of marijuana is regulated in everyday life.

The third paper, “Should Per Se Limits Be Imposed For Cannabis? Equating Cannabinoid Blood Concentrations With Actual Driver Impairment: Practical Limitations and Concerns” by Paul Armentano, critically evaluates the scientific research underlying laws regarding driving under the influence of marijuana. Many states are passing zero tolerance laws specifying legal limits for blood cannabinoid levels. Reviewing the literature, Armentano finds that, unlike for alcohol, it is difficult to infer motor function impairment from blood tests that check for past marijuana use. Armentano argues that field sobriety tests must be developed to more precisely determine impairment from marijuana use. This argument is compelling lest zero tolerance policies, which focus on past use rather than present impairment, seek to simply widen the net of social control.

The final paper in the “individual experiences” group shifts the focus somewhat to examine the social meaning of participation in marijuana cultivation. In “Small-Scale Marijuana Growing: Deviant Careers as Serious Leisure,” Craig Boylstein and Scott Maggard explore the career trajectories of indoor marijuana growers. Their ethnographic study of a closed social network of eight small-scale growers reveals that involvement is largely social rather than monetary. Boylstein and Maggard argue that the growers they interviewed are best understood as being involved in a leisure, rather than an economic, activity. This is a valuable insight into marijuana growing subcultures since it suggests more variability in the motivations for involvement. While not explicitly addressed in their analysis, the findings of

Boylstein and Maggard suggest that entry into and participation in marijuana cultivation is also a gendered activity; the involvement of the two women interviewed was largely peripheral to that of their male partners. This theme is taken up in two of the subsequent articles in this special issue.

The second group of papers, focused on political and structural forces, begins with Wendy Chapkis' reflection on the gendered dimensions of marijuana policy activism and the broader marijuana culture. In "The Trouble with Mary Jane's Gender," Chapkis identifies the narrow range of options for women to participate in marijuana politics and culture. Involvement in medical marijuana is seen as "something of a pink collar ghetto within the drug policy reform movement" as it fits with the gendered stereotype of women as caregivers. Within the broader cannabis culture, Chapkis finds that the dominant images of women—stiletto stoner, slacker schlubster, or hot pot babe—render most women invisible. Though being invisible to marijuana law enforcement efforts may have its advantages for individual women, Chapkis argues that a more "gender conscious drug policy reform movement is necessary."

Women are not just marginalized as consumers and activists; the next article suggests their participation in cultivation is also gendered. Karen August's paper "Women in the Marijuana Industry" is based on field research in rural Northern California where marijuana production is a very large part of the local community. August also conducted content analysis of *Craigslist* postings for marijuana trimmers. Drawing on her interviews with six men and three women, August finds that "women's work" in the marijuana industry generally mirrors the gendered organization of conventional occupations. Though they occupy many of the same roles as men, August notes that their experiences are very different. This was revealed in her analysis of job postings on *Craigslist* which show women trimmers are sexualized, both by growers and the women themselves.

Moving from cultivation to regulation, the author of the next article observes that regulating marijuana must acknowledge the complexities of the plant and its many uses. In "The Fallacy of a One Size Fits All Cannabis Policy," Amanda Reiman draws a distinction between the palliative and curative effects of marijuana. After reviewing the history of marijuana regulation and related uses of the plant, Reiman concludes that a dual regulatory approach may work best, with only some aspects of the plant approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and others being sold as herbal supplements.

The final article examines how very different models of dispensary regulation emerged in California following passage of the Compassionate Use Act in 1996. In "A Tale of Three Cities: Medical Marijuana, Activism, and Local Regulation in California," Thomas Heddleston looks at the development of marijuana dispensary regulation in three urban areas of California. The San Francisco Bay Area, San Diego, and Los Angeles pursued three regulatory models based largely on the political and legal realities in each jurisdiction. This detailed look at the history of reform in each city may help to predict which states will be the next to legalize marijuana use and may provide insight into how regulation will differ across the country and within states.

The dynamic marijuana regulatory landscape requires relevant empirical research to inform policy debate. Given marijuana's highly moralized political career (Himmelstein, 1983), the need for ongoing research in this area is even more pressing. The articles in this special issue make important contributions to this debate yet also highlight the need for ongoing research in this area.

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