Mary Jane Essay, Research Paper

“Marijuana is the second most popular drug after alcohol in the country today. So many people smoke marijuana that the numbers alone seem to legitimize and condone its presence in people’s lives. Yet, even in moderation marijuana is not ’safe.’ Somehow this information had not filtered down to people who think they are smoking a fairly innocuous drug. Our society perpetuates the myths about pot being a fun, harmless, recreational drug. These myths feed into people’s denial of marijuana’s problems” (Baum 6). However, the abuse of marijuana is a problem. It is not only a personal problem, but also more importantly a social problem. Throughout history marijuana has been used to serve various purposes in many different cultures. The purposes have changed over time to fit in with the current lifestyles. The cultivation of the marijuana plant in the United States began as far back as the Jamestown settlers around the year 1611. At that time the main focus was on survival rather than for psychoactive purposes. Medicinal uses of marijuana eventually changed to enjoyment manipulation. Beginning in the 1960s marijuana use saw a reemergence with the rebellious youth, and the “hippie movement.” This evolved into increased use among the older population as well. This trend continues to this day. Marijuana use can be termed abuse. Today the debate over marijuana is a major controversy that affects our society as a whole. During the 60’s it was easy to depict marijuana as a beneficial and completely harmless substance because there was not enough scientific research done during this time (Grolier Wellness Encyclopedia). Today we know that the levels of THC, the psychoactive component of marijuana called tetrahydrocannabinol, in marijuana are four to ten times more than they were in the 60s. We also know that THC had shown negative affects in the learning process. It’s destructive to the learning performance, memory, and attention span. It has insidious side effects including lung damage and cancer risks. It also impairs ability to work, drive, and make clear decisions, not to mention, the lack of motivation, depression, and paranoia. In addition, “daily marijuana use has been associated with a doubling of the risk for psychosis. The most common type was a brief acute organic reaction characterized by mental dulling, distortion of time, dreamlike euphoria progressing to fragmenting thoughts, and hallucinations. More potent marijuana can cause even more severe reactions” (Baum 16). This means marijuana has tremendous costs on those who use it as well as society. The effects of marijuana abuse on an individual can be substantial, but the costs to society are innumerable. The effects can be felt in the rising of health care to increased insurance premiums. As the number of marijuana users increase, the number seeking medical attention also increases. In addition, being treated for various illnesses caused by marijuana abuse, results in missed days at work. Productivity levels fall not only because of absenteeism, but also as a result of impaired abilities. Workers under the influence of marijuana suffer from cognitive disorders that hampers their productivity. Further, as a social problem, marijuana costs society billions of tax dollars every year in an effort to obliterate drugs. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) estimates that drug abuse costs the United States as much as $246 billion each year (Torr 12). Functionalist theorists would see marijuana abuse as a social problem in that it causes a disturbance in the equilibrium of society. Functionalist theory states that the many institutions (government, education, religion, etc.) of society must be integrated in order to operate effectively and proficiently. In essence, if members of society were all under the influence of marijuana, the functions of the structures could not be carried out. If one of the structures is poorly integrated, it becomes dysfunctional to society. In terms of marijuana abuse, many institutions of society would be dysfunctional if its members were marijuana users. For instance, family would be dysfunctional if parents were not able to raise future productive members of society. This would be true if either the parents or child were marijuana abusers. Likewise, the same outcome could be seen in the other structures of society such as members of the educational system, or government institutions, and production in the workplace. Functionalist theorists would view marijuana abuse as a potentially far-reaching social problem given that every structure would be involved. Conflict theorists would consider marijuana abuse as a social problem because of the power struggle involving law enforcement and drug abusers. “This perspective focuses on the creation of rules, especially criminal law”(Herman 83). Specifically, by making the commodity of marijuana an illegal substance it creates an atmosphere of control. Thus, when members of society are forced to commit illegal acts it allows law enforcement agencies to wield power and force against them. This in turn creates conflict. Additionally a power struggle ensues between people who have and control the supply of marijuana and people who want it. This is a classic example of “the haves” versus “the have-nots,” of the powerful versus the powerless. Conflict theory seems to fit best in examining the issue of marijuana abuse. Conflict theory addresses the many issues surrounding marijuana use. For example, due to the fact that the powerful control the marijuana industry there is a disparity in the criminal prosecution of certain classes, races, and socioeconomic groups. These less powerful groups are victims of discrimination. While the use of marijuana definitely inhibits an individual’s life, the abuse of power surrounding marijuana, is far more harmful to society. Conflict theory addresses this on a macro level. Functionalist theory examines the issue from the standpoint that society as a whole feels the same about the problem. It assumes everyone’s values are identical. Therefore, marijuana abuse as a social problem is better examined from the conflict perspective because it doesn’t take peoples values into consideration. Conflict theorists would most likely solve the problem of marijuana abuse by suggesting legalization. When considering the underlying current of a major power struggle between the groups who control the drug supply and the groups who are in need of the drugs, legalizing marijuana would virtually eliminate this. Control of this illegal substance would no longer be in the hands of the huge drug cartels, but would be readily available to anyone. Additionally, the power struggle between law enforcement agencies and drug users would no longer exist either. All the laws and prisons used against groups of lesser power would be useless. This move would go a long way towards removing the disparity between races, classes, and socioeconomic groups now in prison for drug offenses. On the other hand functionalist theorists would opt for a more conventional solution. They would lean towards eliminating marijuana usage. Their approach would include drug education in the schools and treatment facilities, thereby decreasing the drug demand. This would cover all the levels of society. Functionalists perspective focuses on micro, middle, and macro levels in society, thus a full-scale war on drugs would be their ideal solution.

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