

# The Trouble with Mary Jane's Gender

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## Abstract

This essay explores some of the gendered dimensions of contemporary cannabis politics and culture from the perspective of a long-time sexuality and gender scholar recently migrated into the world of drug policy reform. My essay suggests that inattention to gendered stereotypes and inequalities creates obstacles to women's full participation in drug policy reform and complicates efforts to end marijuana prohibition in the U.S.

Keywords: drug policy, gender, marijuana legalization, medical marijuana

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## Introduction

I am relatively new to the world of drug policy studies. Until about a decade ago, my research focused almost exclusively on gender and sexuality. My decision to give up sex and turn to drugs was occasioned both by geographic coincidence (living at 'ground zero' of the early medical marijuana movement) and desperation (fleeing the front lines of the feminist sex wars of the 1980s where I had served, for some, as a "celebrity apologist for pornography, sadomasochism, prostitution and other patriarchal ideals"<sup>1</sup>).

It speaks to how ugly the Sex Wars had become that the War on Drugs looked like a respite, a safer place to situate myself as a scholar and a feminist. But I discovered, of course, that sex, gender and power are everywhere, including in drug culture and drug reform. This brief essay is an initial effort to think through some of the cultural implications of those gender politics. I enter this conversation from the very particular vantage point of the early – female-dominated – *medical* marijuana movement.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I was living in Santa Cruz, California finishing a graduate degree and working on a book about prostitution.<sup>2</sup> During those years, I shared a social, political and cultural community with Valerie Leveroni Corral. I knew that Valerie, like almost everyone else in my social circle, smoked pot. I also knew that Valerie was an epileptic.

<sup>1</sup> "Chapkis, who admits to never prostituting herself, has become Santa Cruz's celebrity apologist for pornography, sadomasochism, prostitution, and other patriarchal ideals," (Simonton, 1992, p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (Chapkis, 1997).

And I knew that she said marijuana helped to control her seizures. Those three biographical details would soon thrust Valerie into the national spotlight and would change the direction of my own research.

Like most Americans of the 1980s, I had never before heard the words “medical” and “marijuana” used together. Also, like most Americans of my generation, marijuana was a familiar substance to me as a life-enhancing herb, not a medicinal one. I didn’t entirely dismiss Valerie’s claim but I filed it away as a kind of dubious California alternative cultural belief.

Then, in 1992, Valerie was arrested for growing 5 marijuana plants in her garden. It was a relief to learn that the District Attorney would offer her “diversion”: Valerie’s record would be expunged if she promised not to grow or to use marijuana and if she completed a drug education class. Valerie’s refusal of the offer shocked me, as did her explanation: she couldn’t take diversion, she explained, because she couldn’t promise not to use marijuana. Marijuana controlled her seizures.

The fact that she was serious enough about marijuana as medicine that she would risk both imprisonment and the loss of her home under federal drug forfeiture laws woke the sociologist in me up to the powerful social movement unfolding in front of me. The fact that the issue appeared, at least initially, to have nothing to do with sex or sexual politics made it all the more appealing.

### No Escaping Sex and Gender

Despite being new research terrain, the Santa Cruz medical marijuana world immediately felt familiar and not just because I was studying my hometown. As a feminist who came of age in the 1970s, the patient-caregiver group founded by Valerie and her then-husband Michael (the Wo/Men’s Alliance for Medical Marijuana<sup>3</sup>) bore a close resemblance to early Second Wave feminist health care collectives. There were other dynamics that were hauntingly familiar as well: I was queer and the 1980s were the plague years; many of the early medical marijuana patient- activists I interviewed were gay men dying of AIDS and lesbians providing material and political support.

As I started taking notes and reading the drug policy literature, I began to see other parallels between my new area of study and my previous work on gender and sexuality. Both illicit sex and illicit drug use are considered moral violations; efforts to discourage participation rely heavily on shame and marginalization. Under practices of prohibition, criminalizing and punishing prostitutes, addicts, and others are actions ostensibly taken for the participants’ own good; these practices are prohibited not only because they are wrong but also because they are risky. And, while risk could be reduced, policies don’t try to reduce harm; instead policies are enacted that ensure that sex and drugs remain as dangerous as possible (Race 2009). This strategy is justified on the grounds that reducing risk would encourage bad behavior while enhancing risk may serve to dissuade those otherwise tempted. Those who fail to resist temptation and suffer the consequences are offered as an abject lesson to the rest of us. In both

<sup>3</sup>*Dying to Get High: Marijuana as Medicine* (Chapkis & Webb, 2007) offers a detailed ethnographic account of the Wo/Men’s Alliance for Medical Marijuana (WAMM) in Santa Cruz, California. WAMM, the first patient-caregiver medical marijuana collective in the country, grew and *gave away free of charge* millions of dollars in marijuana to seriously and terminally ill patients.

the areas of sex and drugs, the AIDS epidemic only upped the ante; the cost of prohibition increasingly came to include death.<sup>4</sup>

Besides uncovering the intellectual and political parallels between my two areas of research, I found that gender politics were inescapable – if largely unspoken – within marijuana policy reform, and sex was everywhere. The culture shock was significant as I moved from gender and sexuality studies conferences populated by women of all colors and queers of all genders to drug policy reform gatherings of mostly men, mostly white, with a strong heterosexual presumption. I discovered that all of the major drug policy reform organizations in the U.S. – with the exception of those focused on *medical* marijuana – were firmly in the hands of men: Ethan Nadelman of the Drug Policy Alliance; Rick Doblin of the Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies; Allen St. Pierre of NORML; Rob Kampia of the Marijuana Policy Project.

It was heartening, then, in 2009 when the Drug Policy Alliance’s biannual conference on International Drug Policy Reform featured several sessions on the intersections of drugs and difference including “Queer Community Strategies for Ending the War on Drugs,” “Gender and Drug Policy Reform,” and “Zero Tolerance Drug War on Immigrants.”<sup>5</sup> The “Gender and Drug Policy Reform” session was packed despite being held in a large double room and had a historic feel about it. The five featured speakers included Debby Goldsberry (founder of one of the largest dispensaries in California, *the Berkeley Patients’ Group*) and Steph Sherer (Director of the largest medical marijuana policy organization in the country, *Americans for Safe Access*).

The frustration of women on the panel and in the audience was palpable. Sherer observed that she had raised \$10 million dollars for her organization “without sleeping with anyone” though she knew that the presumption was otherwise. She also expressed her dismay that, “as the Director of one of the largest drug reform organizations in the country, the only session I’ve been asked to speak at is the one about having a vagina.”

It was no coincidence that both Goldsberry and Sherer run medical marijuana organizations; medical marijuana is something of a pink collar ghetto within the drug policy reform movement. Perhaps that is because women tend to be the “go to” people in our culture both for caretaking and for informal medical information. As Goldsberry has observed “It’s [a woman’s] job in our families and in our circle of friends to be caregivers. It makes sense that women would gravitate to [medical] cannabis,” (quoted in Perdomo, 2009). Also, until recently, medical marijuana cultivation and distribution shared all of the risks but few of the commercial rewards of the illicit recreational market (Chapkis & Webb, 2007). Medical marijuana represented the highly feminized and under-resourced service sector of the movement.

<sup>4</sup>For example, according to Lurie & Drucker (1997) in the late 1990s in the US, thousands of HIV infections could have been prevented had the federal government embraced needle exchange rather than punitive prohibitionist policies toward IV drug users.

<sup>5</sup>I should also note, however, that all of the marijuana-specific sessions were overwhelmingly male: “Ending Marijuana Prohibition” – four men and one woman; “Marijuana’s Cultural Moment” – three men and one woman; “Medical Marijuana Production and Distribution” – four men and one woman; “Marijuana Messaging that Works” – 4 men and one woman; and “Medical Marijuana Research and Policy” – six men and one woman (that woman, was me).

Pleasure and profit, on the other hand, remained largely male terrain. Early in 2010, some of the effects of this gender imbalance burst onto the front pages of the news when seven senior staff members of the Marijuana Policy Project resigned over the director's alleged pattern of inappropriate sexual behavior with female subordinates (Bienenstock & Cusick, 2010). The incident led to at least some temporary soul-searching among men within the marijuana reform movement. On a segment of the NORML podcast the week of the resignations, Steve Bloom of Celebstoner.com observed "there aren't a lot of women in leadership positions.... It's all guys. And the marijuana world has a reputation as being a bit of a guy's club. ..." Medical marijuana, he suggested, might help save the movement: "The best thing about our industry is that medical marijuana has brought so many women into the movement and I think maybe we need to let them rise to the top, let them take a little more control of what we are doing. Maybe we will do a better job of what we are doing out there and won't have that predator thing out there with some of the men at the top" (NORML, 2010). But, after a brief 3-month "therapy leave" (for "hypersexualization"), Marijuana Policy Project director Kambia returned to the leadership of that organization.

Marijuana policy reform continues to be something of "a guy club." But then again so is marijuana use. As Spool (2007) argues, "smoking pot is a guy thing. Guys are the ones who deal, buy, and smoke. In 2005, the US Department of Health and Human Services stated that adult males were 50% more likely to have smoked marijuana in the last month than females" (Spool, 2007).<sup>6</sup> In part, this disparity in use may be due to different cultural expectations of men and women. As McDonald (1994) observes, women have a special responsibility for propriety, which means that those known to use drugs risk particularly low status. She argues "Women have to be models of self-control. ... For women to take pleasure in either alcohol or illicit drugs ... can still exclude them from their established roles as caregiver and moral judge" (McDonald, 1994, p. 22). On the other hand, there is only a 19% difference between men and women's alcohol use (Spool, 2007). But then again alcohol isn't illegal.

Women's disproportionate responsibility for dependent children intensifies the risk associated with illicit activity. Goldsberry, for instance, describes a conflict between mothering and being a public face for marijuana:

I think that the voices of women and mothers especially have been quieter in years past because we've had our children to protect. The War on Drugs put families in the center of the crossfire. ... I was an activist long before becoming a mother. I became a mother when I was 37. I waited that long because I was a frontline reform activist. It was scary because kids were being taken from their parents who were arrested for simple possession. After I became a stronger advocate and wanted to be a mother, my voice needed to be loud so I could get extra protection. Other co-directors (who did not have children) did not have the same fears and concerns. (*High Times*, 2011)

<sup>6</sup>A recent study of 8 California dispensaries by Reinerman (2011) suggests that medical marijuana use is highly gendered as well; only about one third of medical marijuana patients were women.



## Hot Pot Babes

Certainly women's roles as mothers may account for some of the gendered differences within marijuana reform movement. But not all women parent, nor are responsibilities of parenting equally distributed across the lifespan. Other factors must also account for the fact that marijuana use still tends to be "a guy thing" and that men's voices dominate in drug reform conversations.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps women simply do not see themselves in ways that encourage identification with marijuana; while women's voices are muted, their bodies are hyper-visible in commercial cannabis culture. Even a cursory glance at any popularly available marijuana-themed magazine in North America reveals the exceedingly narrow range of female roles and body types offered both in articles and advertisements.

Contemporary cannabis culture is at once delightfully libertine and deeply sexist. The association of marijuana with sexual liberation of the 1960s was cemented in a particularly adolescent male way when, in 1974, *High Times* magazine was published for the first time as, according to contributor Paul Krassner, a "one-shot lampoon of Playboy substituting dope for sex" (Dodero, 2005, p. 1). *High Times*, which now has a circulation of over 200,000 (mostly young male) readers, continues to run photographs and advertisements featuring naked young women alongside "sticky, crystalline buds photographed like buxom starlets" (Dodero, 2005, p. 1).<sup>8</sup>

Occasional attempts to challenge this extremely limited vision of women (and sex) offered in the pages of marijuana magazines can themselves feel like parodies. In 2005, for example, the Canadian magazine *Cannabis Culture* ran an article on "Marijuana and Women" in which the author observed, "the ganga world...until a few years ago, was a naughty boys' club characterized by an adolescent, crass, sexist view of women" (Chapman, 2005). After a quick list of names of some of the more prominent women in the marijuana reform movement, the article focuses on 20 year old Jodie Giesz-Ramsay of Vancouver, the personal assistant to Canadian cannabis activist Marc Emery and "handy girl" for Cannabis Culture magazine – and the issue's "ultra-hot nude pot-babe centerfold" (Chapman, 2005). Described in the article as "a vivacious, dark-haired, silky-skinned, lithe, luscious beauty who created a small sensation at last year's Toker's Bowl," Geisz-Ramsay acknowledges that sex-appeal has been important to her role in the movement:

I refuse to delude myself by thinking that looks have nothing to do with success. I understand how the world works... if beauty garners attention, then I feel I can use my assets to draw attention to my, and our, personal mission. If a pretty face sells Cover Girl makeup, then a pretty face can sell legalization. And it'll sell even better if there's respect for the women behind

<sup>7</sup>For example, in the 2004 anthology edited by Bill Masters, *The New Prohibition: Voices of Dissent Challenge the Drug War*, 23 of 24 contributors (including elected officials, law enforcement officers, physicians, and activists) were men.

<sup>8</sup>Once again, *medical* marijuana is gendered very differently than recreational use. *High Times Medical Marijuana Magazine*, for example, features a much higher percentage of women writers (including frequent contributors such as Debby Goldsberry and Valerie Corral) than the version of *High Times* dedicated to recreational use.

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Figure 1. Advertisement for marijuana accessories and vaporizers sold by Legalbuds.com. *High Times Magazine* (2009, February). p. 3





Figure 2. Advertisement for marijuana paraphenalia sold by Wholesaleplantbongs.com. *High Times Magazine* (2008, May 2008). p. 106

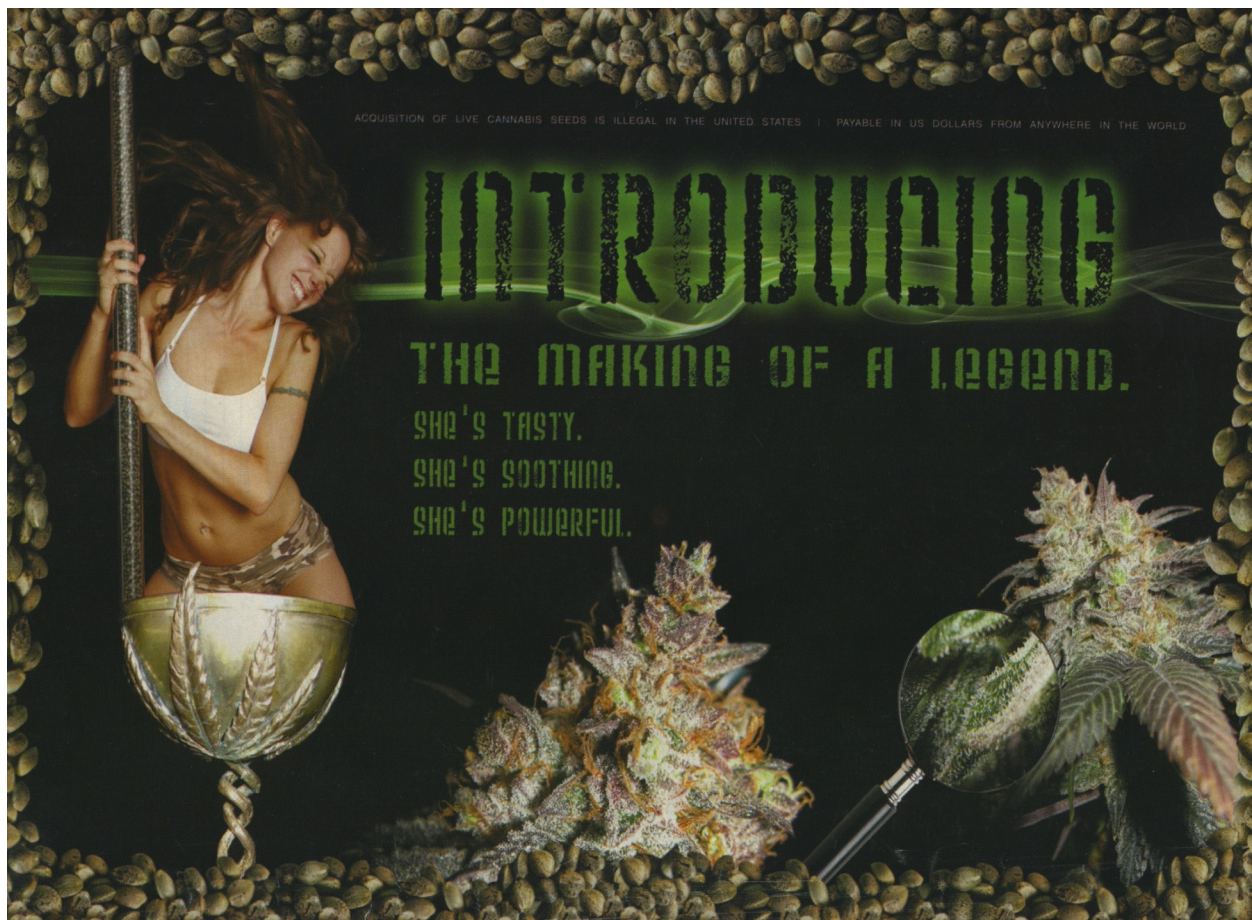


Figure 3. Advertisement for marijuana seeds sold by BCbuddepot.com. *High Times Magazine* (2009, February). p. 4



**Miss HIGH TIMES 2008**

The moment of truth has finally arrived: Out of these 12 foxy finalists, seven were chosen to fly down to Negril this February to compete in this year's pageant—and only one returned from Jamaica as the newly-crowned Miss HIGH TIMES 2008. Who will it be? Be sure to pick up our second annual HT Swimsuit Issue next month and find out!

**MISS JANUARY**  
NAME: Lauren  
AGE: 21  
CITY: Austin, TX

**MISS FEBRUARY**  
NAME: Jacquelyne  
AGE: 22  
CITY: Gainesville, FL

**MISS MARCH**  
NAME: Kimberly  
AGE: 21  
CITY: Baton Rouge, LA

**MISS APRIL**  
NAME: Ieisha  
AGE: 23  
CITY: Chico, CA

**MISS MAY**  
NAME: Belle  
AGE: 22  
CITY: Alberta, Canada

**MISS JULY**  
NAME: Sativa  
AGE: 23  
CITY: Commack, NY

**MISS AUGUST**  
NAME: Emmaly  
AGE: 21  
CITY: Miami, FL

**MISS JUNE**  
NAME: Lisa  
AGE: 20  
CITY: Costa Mesa, CA

**MISS OCTOBER**  
NAME: Vjtra  
AGE: 23  
CITY: Eugene, OR

**MISS NOVEMBER**  
NAME: Nicole  
AGE: 21  
CITY: Kingwood, TX

**MISS DECEMBER**  
NAME: Alyssa  
AGE: 21  
CITY: Springfield, MA

**MISS SEPTEMBER**  
NAME: Katie  
AGE: 19  
CITY: Windsor, Ontario

TO ENTER THE CONTEST FOR 2009, LOG ON TO [HIGHTIMES.COM/MISSHT](http://HIGHTIMES.COM/MISSHT). FOR MORE INFO, GO TO [MYSPACE.COM/MISSHIGHTIMES420](http://MYSPACE.COM/MISSHIGHTIMES420).

TO BOOK YOUR TRIP TO THE 2009 MISS HIGH TIMES PAGEANT NEXT FEBRUARY, GO TO [CSTRAVEL.ORG](http://CSTRAVEL.ORG).

34 HIGHTIMES

Figure 4. *High Times Magazine* (2008, May). p 33



Girls just  
wanna have  
buds.

## MY BEST FRIEND'S GIRL

Throughout history, the use of cannabis by women of all cultures has flourished. And studies and research conducted over the past half-century reveal that women continue to use cannabis therapeutically in childbirth and nursing, as well as for treating post-partum stiffness and menstrual ailments like dysmenorrhea and menorrhagia. Today, modern medicine is increasing its investigation of cannabis for the many clinical conditions that it may be able to address in women.

And, of course, there's no denying its capacity for stimulating eroticism. As the late author Nik Douglas (*Sexual Secrets: The Alchemy of Ecstasy*) wrote: "The spirit of marijuana is female. She is alluring, very seductive. In her presence time passes almost without one noticing. Her sweet fragrance intoxicates the senses and uplifts the mind. She is delighted by heroic men and sensual women. When a couple share marijuana, they are allowing her participation in their relationship. Accepting their invitation, the spirit of marijuana adds spontaneity and humor, and also acts as a potent initiator. By bringing the couple into her dimension, the spirit of marijuana exalts and magnifies both love and sensitivity."

Happy Valentine's Day, everybody!

### THE STONED AGE

Although the charlatans running the Drug War would have you believe that the quest to alter our consciousness is a relatively new development, humankind has been hot to get high since the early days. And we mean *early*: New proof has been discovered that tribes had an array of prehistoric paraphernalia dating as far back as 400 BC! Archaeologists have recently found ceramic bowls used for preparing hallucinogenic drugs on the Caribbean island of Carriacou. The bowls appear to have originated in South America and were transported 400 miles to the islands. Tubes for inhaling drug fumes or powders were also found.

Although there's a paucity of evidence, it's generally believed that our ancient ancestors first sought out plants and herbs—primarily for the relief of pain due to childbirth or injury—sometime prior to 5000 BC. As their knowledge of plants evolved, those with mind-expanding properties were often used to induce trances or as part of ceremonies to seek assistance from the spirit world—something that would get you busted nowadays.

Thank heavens for civilization!

DAN SKIVE, MODEL: DANIELLE, HEMP SHIRT BY KEEFE GREEN PRODUCTIONS

FEBRUARY 2009 13

Figure 5. *High Times Magazine* (2009, February). My best friend's girl. p. 13





Figure 6. *High Times Magazine* (2009, February). p 28

the face. I want to represent the movement in a new way: someone sexy but classy, serious but playful, not afraid to be outspoken, always happy to be of assistance, not your average pot-smoker stereotype. (Chapman, 2005)

### Slacker Schlubsters and Stiletto Stoners

As Giesz-Ramsay's comments suggest, there *is* an "average pot smoker stereotype" and he doesn't look or act like her. One of the most common commercial depiction of the cannabis user in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is a "slacker stoner," an unmotivated underemployed white guy moving in on middle age but holding tight to an arrested adolescence. Despite an economy in free fall, the slacker stoner isn't so much an unwillingly unemployed man but a perpetual teenager, living in the basement and working only as much as he has to, to get by. Consider this exchange in the 2008 Judd Apatow film *Pineapple Express* between cannabis dealer Saul (James Franco) and his customer Dale Denton (Seth Rogan):

Saul: You know, don't get down on yourself: You got a great girl, you got a great job where you don't do anything, you get to smoke weed all day... I wish I had that...

Dale Denton: Are you kidding— you do, you have the easiest job on Earth. You DO smoke weed all day.

Saul: ...Hahaha, that's true!

Dale Denton: You didn't think of that, huh?

Saul: I do have a good job...

Dale Denton: Yeah, you do nothing!

While the slacker stoner resists the conventional expectations of manhood that he should be an ambitious and disciplined breadwinner, head of household, and homeowner, his resistance is oddly apolitical. Unlike his counterpart of the 1960s – the counter-cultural, free-speech, anti-war hippie pothead – the slacker stoner is a disaffected (or maybe just lazy) individual with no particular vision of social transformation or collective action. The slacker attitude relies on a mis-match between expectation and condition; this is why it is most available to white heterosexual men with some measure of class privilege. As British comic Nat Luurtsema points out, pop culture presents "many instances of cool slacker guys...that make it seem so cool and aspirational to just live in your parents' basement. ... Girls are a bit more 'Come on adulthood, let's get this show on the road!'" (Hoby, 2012).

The slacker's refusal to work hard and assume "adult" responsibilities doesn't function quite the same way for people of color and women who are already saddled with a stereotype of dependency. For example, materially comfortable married women supported by a male paycheck are already seen to enjoy the other ostensibly "easiest job on earth" (outside of being a pot dealer): being a housewife. It is resistance to that identity that shapes young middle class women's lives.



If, as Spool (2007) suggests, “stonerdom is an accepted part of modern maleness,” it is particularly gender specific:

women are not allowed to be lazy, adorable stoners. Women have to go to college (which they’re now doing at higher rates than men) and then get their careers going quickly, before their biological clocks run out. Then they have to have kids and take them to all their activities. There is no time for women to be slovenly and relax. (Spool, 2007)

The few contemporary depictions of female cannabis users tend to reflect those pressures. In 2009, in direct contrast to the male slacker stoner image, *Marie Claire* magazine ran a cover story on women cannabis users who they dubbed “stiletto stoners.” Stiletto stoners are “card-carrying, type A workaholic” professional women who smoke pot but act and look “nothing like the unemployed, out-of-shape schlubsters who are a staple of the [filmmaker] Judd Apatow cannon” (Kohen, 2009).

But, of course, most women – cannabis users and otherwise – are not high-powered, highly successful professional women; even *Marie Claire* admits that, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, only one in five women who admitted to smoking marijuana in the previous month lived in a household earning more than \$75,000 a year (Kohen, 2009).

In fact, as the current recession continues, women are increasingly coming to the realization that the life of the Stiletto Stoner may be an unattainable fantasy regardless of a woman’s personal ambition and discipline. In a recent article in the British newspaper, the *Observer*, Hermione Hoby argues that slackerdom status may soon extend to women “as a whole new generation of [female] graduates fail to find jobs and return home to live with their parents” (Hoby, 2012). According to Hoby, “The version of twenty-something womanhood being reflected back at us in 2012 isn’t dressed in Louboutins, busy ball-breaking in boardrooms: she’s eating cereal, in her pants, in her parents’ basement.”

Nonetheless, the slacker identity is still challenging for women. Hoby interviews 26-year-old New York author Leigh Stein whose autobiographical novel *The Fallback Plan* featured a recent unemployed female college graduate who moves back in with her parents. Writing the novel allowed Stein to imagine what it would be to “give up and be stoned for the next 20 years ... [young women] feel like we did everything we’re supposed to, we went to college and got a degree and everyone told us that if we got a degree we’d get a good job and it’s like, ‘where is my good job, hello?’” (Hoby, 2012).

### Advantages of Invisibility

None of the images of recreational cannabis consumers and activists available to women, including the stiletto stoner, the slacker schlubster, or the hot pot babe, speak to most women. The relative invisibility of women within cannabis culture has had both individual and social effects. On the one hand, it can provide some measure of protection. Because women are less likely to be seen as drug users, women are less likely to be targeted by law enforcement.





Figure 7. Advertisement for film *Pineapple Express*, directed by Judd Apatow. *High Times Magazine* (2009, February). p. 15

One dramatic illustration of the way identity (both gender and race) frames law enforcement activity can be found in the implementation of New York's notorious "Stop and Frisk" policy; in 2011, police stopped and interrogated 700,000 individuals who were considered "suspicious"; 85% of those stopped were Black and Latino young men (Times Topics, 2012).<sup>9</sup> Women, also disproportionately of color, only represented 6.9% of all police stops (Times Topics, 2012).

Another advantage of occupying a place outside of drug user stereotypes is that women may not be as psychologically constrained by the limitations of the stereotype as men. In a 2010 study, psychologists Alison Looby and Mitch Earleywine studied male and female college students who self-identified as regular cannabis users. Their research subjects were asked to take a test after reading a summary of a journal article that purportedly showed "strong evidence that cannabis use leads to cognitive deficits even while not currently intoxicated" (Looby & Earleywine, 2010, p. 835). The intention was to study the effects of "stereotype threat" in the participants. Stereotype threat is "a type of self-evaluative threat whereby members of a group for which a stereotype exists experience performance-disrupting anxiety about the possibility of confirming that stereotype" (p. 835). Because of the widespread assumption of cognitive dysfunction associated with cannabis use, the researchers hypothesized that it was "conceivable that cannabis users may buy into this stereotype and experience stereotype threat when taking a test known to examine their memory and cognitive functioning" (p. 835).

Indeed, male cannabis users did perform less well on the memory test. Female cannabis users, on the other hand, "unexpectedly performed better [than even a control group of women who were not cannabis users] when exposed to stereotype-threat" (p. 837). The researchers postulated that this might be because women cannabis users "may not identify with the typical cannabis-user stereotype and [therefore] may not experience stereotype threat during cognitive testing" (p. 835).

### **Gender and an End to the War on Drugs**

While some of the effects of the hyper-gendering of drugs may benefit individual women, the social effects of the association of marijuana with men may undermine efforts at broader drug policy reform. While smoking pot may culturally be a "guy thing," voting increasingly is a "girl thing." If women do not see themselves as implicated in the War on Drugs – as drug users, as victims of the War on Drugs, or as drug policy reformers – attempts to end prohibition may stall out.

In the contemporary US, more women register to vote and more women turn out to vote, and the gap is growing. In the 2008 Presidential election, for example, 60.4% of women but only 55.7% of men voted. Among younger voters, the gender gap was even more pronounced: a 7% gap divided women and men voters aged 18 to 44 (Center for American Women and Politics, 2012). Marijuana legalization efforts suffer from women's disconnect on the issue. A 2010 Gallup poll revealed a 10 point gender gap nationally on the issue of marijuana legalization; 51% of men but only 41% of women supported legalization (Mendes,

<sup>9</sup>The intersection of race and gender also leads to disproportionate rates of incarceration in the United States. In 2007, the U.S. incarceration rate for black women was 3.7 times higher than that of white women; Black men were 6 times more likely to be imprisoned than white men (Sabol & Couture, 2007).

2010).

Marijuana legalization advocates acknowledge that ballot measures in Colorado in 2006 and California in 2010 went down to defeat largely because of a failure to secure the support of women. As Allen St. Pierre of NORML has argued “Historically, as soon as women really start to create a [gender] gap, a marijuana reform measure gets killed” (Michel, 2012). For this reason, more recent campaigns have specifically set out to court the female vote. According to an *Atlantic Magazine* post-election analysis of 2012 marijuana legalization ballot measures in Colorado and Washington, moms and Latinos were “the secret ingredients” for success (Michel, 2012). The magazine argues that “convincing women – mothers, especially – that legalization wasn’t simply about stoners and libertarians was essential to ending blanket prohibition” (Michel, 2012). In Washington state, for example, the final advertisement of the campaign featured a “soccer mom” making the case for regulation and taxation of marijuana as a way to keep it out of the hands of minors, to allow police to focus on violent crimes, and to increase funding for schools – “all top concerns that an average mom in the Evergreen State would seem to have about making pot legal” (Michel, 2012). Targeting women seems to have worked; exit polls in Washington and Colorado indicate that approximately 53% of female voters in both states ended up supporting legalization (Michel, 2012). In the third state with a legalization measure on the 2012 ballot, Oregon, no comparable outreach to women was made, a factor contributing to the measure’s defeat. In that state, exit polls showed that, despite the fact that women broke for Obama by double-digits, they were much less likely to support marijuana legalization than men (Associated Press, 2012).

In a *Marijuana Policy Project* posting on “The Gender Gap: Are Women the Key to Ending Marijuana Prohibition?” the author observes:

as a female working in the generally male-dominated world of marijuanapolicy reform, you’d think I’d be accustomed to the gender gap that exists between male and female support for the taxation and regulation of marijuana. And yet, I’m continually shocked when poll after poll reveals sizeable differences among levels of support between the two genders. Although nationwide support for legalizing marijuana has never been higher, we’re going to need the backing of the ladies to push the issue over the tipping point. (Marijuana Policy Project, 2011 a)

## Conclusion

In order to get the backing of the ladies, a more gender-conscious drug policy reform movement is necessary. To this end, it would help to have more women in leadership positions; as Celebrity Stoner suggests, “Maybe we should let them rise to the top” (NORML, 2010). Or better yet, we could follow the advice of Arlene Williams, a 75 year-old grandmother and medical marijuana patient, who recommends that women “bulldoze their way in and show the men exactly what we are capable of” (Marijuana Policy Project, 2011b).

Beyond more diversity at the top, Mary Jane deserves more than just a suburban makeover in the public imagination. Replacing one gendered stereotype for another – substituting the

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concerned soccer mom for the hot pot babe – may make short-term strategic sense as recent victories in Colorado and Washington suggest. But it isn't liberation.

Drug culture at its best is more than just another consumer activity, and marijuana at its best is more than simply a commodity. In much the same way as the contemporary queer marriage equality movement threatens to trade a politics of pleasure for one of respectability, so too does the “get modest for Mary Jane”<sup>10</sup> legalization movement risk repudiating the radical countercultural history of marijuana use in the US. Legal access to marijuana through a system of state and corporate control would be a vast improvement over arresting and imprisoning hundreds of thousands of Americans each year for smoking pot. But a strategy to tax and regulate Mary Jane in order to better control her offers only a limited vision of social change.

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Figure 8. Postcard (2012). Undergroundpostcardcollective@gmail.com

<sup>10</sup> This is an imagined riff on the informal “Get Clean for Gene” slogan of Eugene McCarthy’s 1968 Democratic primary challenge to President Lyndon Johnson in which male anti-war activists on the campaign were encouraged to cut their hair and shave their beards in order to appeal to a broader voting demographic.

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