

Women in the Marijuana Industry

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Abstract

This paper explores the experiences of women involved with rural marijuana production in Northern California. Using grounded theory analysis, my research explores patterns and trends in the daily lives of women participants in the growing community. Multiple dimensions are explored, highlighting divisions of labor, gender, social networking, and elements of power and class. My research aims to provide a rich and highly textured portrait of various women as they operate from different positions within a legally ambiguous economy. Though the federal government continues to judge marijuana cultivation and distribution to be illegal, the marijuana industry thrives in the progressively tolerant California state environment where it is emerging as a significant source of commerce.

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The marijuana industry of Northern California is a male dominated world where marijuana growers¹ are portrayed primarily as males, seated behind the wheels of big, late model four-wheel drive pick-up trucks and who often may carry weapons as they patrol their gardens; yet, behind this popular image is an army of women who quietly participate in the business. These women occupy a variety of roles ranging from romantic partners of male growers to entrepreneurial businesswomen themselves. They grow marijuana, trim marijuana, make a variety of cottage industry products and are often the hired labor in commercial outdoor marijuana gardens. While women occupy many of the same roles as men in the industry, their experiences are markedly different from those of their male counterparts.

This became evident during the time I spent conducting field observations within the local growing community. I pursued this area further by conducting in-depth interviews over

¹Growers are people who produce marijuana for commercial and private consumption and include owner/operators as well as laborers.

a period of 12 months following my field observations. The dimension of gender emerged strongly enough to warrant an entire chapter of my master's thesis in sociology. This paper will give an overview of my research methods, women in drug literature, a review and analysis of interviews with women in the marijuana industry and conclude with a brief discussion.

Methods

This ethnography of a marijuana growing subculture in the Emerald Triangle of Northern California is based on data collected between 2010 and 2012. During this time period I participated in 12 months of field observation, conducted 12 primary and follow-up interviews, and collected existing documents such as job announcements that provided additional insights into the structure and culture of the industry. I interviewed nine members of the marijuana growing community: six men and three women. The participants were involved in both indoor and outdoor growing operations. In the following sections I discuss the literature on women in drug economies and the interviews I conducted with women in my research.

Women in Drug Economies

Historically women are seen in the “lesser” roles of illicit drug economies, meaning street-level dealing as opposed to supplying the dealers on the streets, being the female companion of male dealers, or being an addict forced to sell drugs or themselves to support their habit (Adler, 1993; Anderson, 2005; Denton & O'Malley, 1999; Pettitway, 1987; Raphael, 1985; Weisheit, 1991). At times they are victimized as a result of their position. Even those participating in drug markets are seen as holding relatively low status positions and portrayed as incapable of fulfilling a male role. These portraits of women for the most part have been generated in more urban settings than those of rural marijuana producing communities. However, the women in these studies may share some of the characteristics seen among the women I observed and interviewed.

It is important to acknowledge the emphasis given this perspective. Gender roles in drug economies have generally portrayed males as the center of power and decision-making and women in the industry as ineffective business operators, victims in their involvement or as powerless girlfriends enticed by the lavish and hedonistic lifestyles of male operators (Adler, 1993; Weisheit, 1992).

Adler (1993) offers the following description of the women in her ethnographic work on upper level cocaine dealers in the coastal towns of Southern California:

The majority of women in Southwest County's drug world took a more passive role, however. A crowd of dope chicks formed part of the entourage which surrounded big dealers and smugglers. Universally beautiful and sexily clad, they served as prestigious escorts, so that dealers could show them off to other members of the community. (1993, p. 91)

Adler found the women were regarded as sex objects and were frequent participants in what she described as a “casual sex scene,” and although many of the male dealers were married,

engaging in extra-marital sex was common. Many of the women moved from one dealer to another when their relationships had lost their attraction.

Weisheit conducted a number of interviews around the same time frame with arrested growers in the Midwest, and of 32 convicted growers only two were females, leaving him to conclude:

As might be expected, most marijuana growers were male. In only two cases were females the primary growers, although there were several cases in which females played secondary roles. In both cases with females as the primary growers, the operations were well below average in size and complexity, and in both cases the growers were relative neophytes. (1992, p. 71)

The common thread linking this literature is that women were not found to be in positions of authority. In other words, women growers were rare and their operations were not on the same scale or level of expertise of the male growers. The women in Adler's work who were dealers were often the old ladies (wives or girlfriends) and occasionally took active dealing roles, but for the most part remained in the background of their dealer mates. Adler found this was due largely to the social constraints created by male dealers. The men were reluctant to deal with women, feeling they did not have the personality for the business. Women did occasionally work as smugglers as well, but for the most part the women in Adler's study were seen as "eye candy" for the men. In contrast, Raphael (1985) did note one woman in his work, a single mother who grew marijuana as supplemental income to support her family. In other instances, the women in Raphael's work were involved romantically with male growers.

There is, however, a new body of emerging literature that focuses on the forms of power women do hold and generate when they participate in underground economies, especially those associated within frameworks of Prohibition (Anderson, 2005; Denton & O'Malley, 1999; Murphy, 1994). Historically, moonshining has a special relationship with women, although none gained the notoriety or wealth attributed to the male gangsters of the Prohibition Era such as Al Capone. This is seen in a 1940 article in *Life* magazine, which featured photographs of 18 arrested moonshiners, seven of whom were women (*Flying Revenooers Lead Raids on Southern Moonshine Stills*, 1940). One notable exception is Bonnie Parker, although even she was not a solo operator but the partner of Clyde Barrow.

Murphy investigated such women moonshiners in the context of rural Montana and offers this interpretation of its female participants, "The independence of female bootleggers also challenged male notions of women's place" (1994, p.186). It seems that moonshining became a means to greater financial stability and independence, and at the same time reflected changes in social norms around public alcohol consumption and who was approved to participate in this American ritual. Empowerment appears to follow increased levels of economic independence along with increased self-esteem gained from providing steady provisions for one's family members. Murphy writes:

Women who made whiskey and those who patronized speakeasies were breaking both custom and the law. Their actions were deliberate and self-conscious. For working-class women, bootlegging was a logical extension of the many kinds of home work they had traditionally undertaken to supplement family income; admittedly, it carried some risks but presumably offered greater rewards. (1994, p. 187)

Anderson (2005) brings yet another dimension to women's roles in a similar context of Prohibition and the ongoing War on Drugs. In urban drug markets, women are seen as power holders in that they often provide the element of stable housing in personal and business relationships, and with it access to urban markets and networks of consumers. Anderson clearly conceptualizes the notions of empowerment and agency among women participants in drug markets and defines power concepts based on structural and relational approaches. Her assertion is that women hold relational forms of power that enable males to enact the structural power in urban drug markets, providing them with distinctly different types of power that work together to reproduce the market. Power is accorded women through the housing stability they bring to the context, access to networked urban markets, monthly purchasing power as drug consumers in conjunction with maintaining households, willingness to hold a legitimate form of employment as well as participate in drug markets and, finally, they often subsidize dependent men. Two final notes regarding Anderson's work are, first, where women do assume dealer roles, they are frequently the middlewoman and, second, they are likely to employ more strategies to avoid detection and exercise a higher level of caution than their male counterparts (2005, p. 389).

Women Dealers

Successful women dealers studied by Denton and O'Malley (1999) in Melbourne, Australia found the familial structure was replicated by these women in their business operations. Family and close friends comprised circles of trust and were depended upon in times of difficulty. Trust was critical in the buyers' perception of their dealers as well, and the women under study all agreed that their reputations for fairness and quality enabled them to maintain regular customers and reliable supplies of heroin (Denton & O'Malley, 1999, p. 521). It appears that women are more successfully able to transfer skills between their illegal and legal activities around income generation (Anderson, 2005, p. 391).

Transferring relationship skills from family and friends to business practices allow the women to create a high level of trust and a corresponding low level of violence. Denton and O'Malley note, "most of the dealings carried out by the Melbourne women never needed to resort to violence" (1999, p. 523). On rare occasions when women did feel the need for physical intervention, they often looked to criminal members of their families or trusted "enforcers" who were paid to act on the dealer's behalf. The study found women dealers were surprisingly less concerned with the lower level and peripheral workers due to potentials of risk than male dealers. Where males perceive and gauge risks in their business associates, women often do not perceive these same risks around their business associations. Males do play a role in women dealers' lives, as Maher's (1997) three year study of women participants in a Brooklyn drug market revealed. She writes, "to the extent that women do participate,

such participation will be mediated by involvement with husbands and boyfriends,” a description that is consistent with earlier narratives around the theme of powerlessness (1997, p. 88).

Arrested Women

Another perspective added to the body of research surrounding women and drug markets comes from Boyd (1999, 2001, 2004). She details her analysis from a feminist perspective, examining women in drug markets, the myths of mothers as drug users and the impact of drug policies on women. Her work illuminates the fact that the consequences of illegal drug use are shaped by the common sociological intersections of race, class and gender and asserts that the regulation of female drug users parallels the patriarchal subordination of most women in Western societies (Boyd, 2001). Boyd explores the impact of the War on Drugs on women and supports the notion it is a “War on Women” as well (Boyd & Faith, 1999, p. 196). In her examination of female inmates incarcerated for drug offenses in Canada, she found women of color, single mothers and low-income women are the most apt to be imprisoned and face potential intervention with their children from child welfare and social service agencies. She noted that in the United States 70% of the pregnant women confined and criminally charged with child welfare offenses were women of color. Her findings were valid for both women in Canada and the United States, reflecting a consistency among the female populations incarcerated for drug crimes in Canadian prisons (Boyd & Faith, 1999, p. 198). Most importantly, women in drug cultures harbor a high level of fear around losing custody of their children, and often when this does occur, personal drug use by the mother increases in an effort to cope with this loss (Boyd, 1999; Boyd & Faith, 1999; Boyd, 2001; Boyd, 2004). Mothers involved in drug cultures face the dilemma of identifying and claiming their “master status” as mother or criminal (Boyd & Faith, 1999, p. 200). This data highlights the need for critical considerations around ethical research design and a strong commitment to ensure participants’ confidentiality.

In contrast, where mothers may choose to hide drug use, Golub, Liberty and Johnson (2005) analyzed data found in a large sample of adult arrestees who participated in self-reports of drug use and corroborated their responses with urinalysis results. They found marijuana use was the most likely to be revealed by arrested individuals both overall and specifically by women. The authors speculate this may relate to the level of stigma attached to different drugs, with marijuana attracting the lowest level.

It is important to note that much drug research has an urban focus. The works of Anderson (1997) and Denton and O’Malley (1999) are based on studying urban drug markets. Given that marijuana growing is no more legal than other drug markets, it is worthwhile to scrutinize the characteristics from urban markets for similarities that may exist in the more rural and suburban settings of marijuana growers. Until there is a more substantial body of research around rural drug markets, these characteristics will have to serve as the measuring stick for all drug markets. Indeed, there is a deficit of information around all marijuana growers and in particular female growers. Women growers, as the literature demonstrates, have been deemed as too few or too inconsequential to demand study; thus, even basic conclusions about this group within the subculture warrant further investigation. My work is detailed in the following section.

The Gender Dimensions of Growing

My boss felt that I was more in tune with the plants and that I was doing a better job than him [a male coworker] and so he made me like the micromanager and this guy straight up said I will not be bossed around by a woman. He quit. Dude had made a few sexual harassment comments towards me too at some point so it's like I'm glad that guy's gone. It was like an awkward part of working and another anxiety I didn't want to have.

This quote, from a female who worked two consecutive seasons for two different male growers, exemplifies the gender divide experienced by women growers. Her experience supported discussions I had heard in the field among male growers around the appropriate work, primarily trimming, for females. While she performed a full range of tasks, she was an exception and not the rule. This was further confirmed in my field observations that revealed characteristics in line with the classic narratives of a gender divide represented primarily by powerless women, with a few notable exceptions. Powerless in this context refers to women uninvolved personally in the business but present during business operations as partners to the male operators. Generally speaking, labor was gendered as men performed heavy weight jobs, moving dirt, electrical and ventilation work, hash-making and upfront sales. Men, for the most part, did not seek female assistance when performing the heavy labor, but did enjoy female involvement in the form of providing refreshments and meals as well as running errands.

Interestingly, everyone in the field of study regarded growing marijuana as work, whether it was their primary source of income or not, and accomplished for personal use or for sale. For that reason I define the concept of work used in this study as “activities that produce goods and services for one's own use or in exchange for pay or support” (Reskin & Padavic, 1994, p. 1). A further distinction is made between paid and unpaid work, which is frequently seen in domestic employment. This is useful when assessing the roles of women who participate in the marijuana industry at some level, either as small growers, laborers or trimmers, as well as analyzing the context of the work in relation to other individuals involved in that particular grow. The women I observed who did participate in the business were most often “behind the scenes” performing labor in the garden, preparing marijuana butter and other ganja foods² in the kitchen, or trimming. Although several women were in fact growers, they marketed their product through male relationships, dealing only with close friends or having males actually sell their product. The one female I initially thought to be an independent dealer actually sold the product of her romantic partner.

Nearly all transactions were made by men, and in the few instances where women did conduct business, there were invariably situational issues that surfaced. For example, some women had just recently ended a personal relationship or a personal relationship was in turmoil, or children were misbehaving, whereas the males conducting business tended to keep the conversations more business-focused. Business conversation was not as clearly delineated for the women. Any mention of personal issues from men took the form of vague general state-

²Ganja foods are made with marijuana as one of the ingredients and are known to be very potent, providing a more intense drug effect.

rarely spoke of personal issues on the other hand, and were more likely to speak in general terms of the woman or family “being well” and elaborate no further.

In my observations, women appear to be heavily involved in cloning³ work, making edibles and trimming. There are a few successful women growers, but more numerous are the smaller marijuana-related cottage industries operated by women, often in conjunction or simultaneously with legitimate employment. Marijuana cottage industries are prevalent throughout the Emerald Triangle. There are stores devoted to paraphernalia, clothing lines, posters and other knick-knacks with marijuana themes. It is often women who create edibles, craft a variety of marijuana-inspired goods, run peripheral businesses, transport product between locations, clean indoor equipment and grow rooms, tend crops for male growers and drive water and food supplies to remote outdoor growers during their grow seasons. This group of independent women entrepreneurs tends to fit previous descriptions of small family farmers (Raphael, 1985), where profits are often invested in necessities like wood stoves or roof repairs.

Frequently, the women observed in my fieldwork were the romantic partners of male growers and were present as companions during work periods. They had little to do with the business aspect of the grow operation and were generally unconcerned with the details of growing. The various conversations I observed suggest this group tends towards a materialistic lifestyle that is similar to descriptions given of women associates of the dealers studied by Adler (1993). For instance, the women I observed wore designer blue jeans and shoes and carried expensive designer handbags. Several owned purse dogs like those of Paris Hilton, said by the women to have been purchased for \$5,000.00. It was not uncommon for these women to have had plastic surgery for everything from breast augmentation to derriere lifts. Most were not old enough to consider face lifts or surgeries to reverse the signs of aging, as they floated through a series of relationships with growers. Often the women were a decade or two younger than their grower partners. In addition, these women often were users of other drugs besides marijuana, including cocaine and prescription pills. As the intimate partners of male growers, they also maintained the appearance of the house, performing what is typically seen as domestic work such as cleaning and meal preparation. In some cases, this meant arranging for a trusted individual known to the grower to perform housekeeping duties. I thought of these women as the significant others [of male growers], quite different in their characteristics from the women growers I interviewed and describe below.

I found distinctive differences between male and female growers in my interviews. Of the nine growers interviewed, three were women, and two of these women were involved in commercial operations. Only one relied on growing for 100% of her income, and the other used growing to supplement her legitimate income from full time employment. This is comparatively different from the six men interviewed, all of whom were commercial growers, with five of the six relying on growing as their sole source of income. Additionally, three of the men were supporting families with young children, while none of the women were. Only one of the women was growing on a large-scale, and she was a seasonal worker employed by a male grower. Another of the women was a small-scale grower, and the remaining woman

³Clone work involves maintaining a mature plant, taking cuttings to be rooted and caring for the cuttings which are referred to as clones. This guarantees the genetics and sex of the young plants.

grew strictly for personal consumption. In comparison, none of the men interviewed grew strictly for personal consumption. Neither of the women who were growing commercially marketed their product, but relied on male acquaintances to sell the finished marijuana. Another difference can be seen in education and employment status. All three women held college degrees and two were employed full-time in legitimate work. On the other hand, two of the six men held college degrees with only one man employed legitimately albeit part-time. Finally, all three women were dressed very casually when they were interviewed. They wore blue jeans, work shirts, and boots, and were obviously dressed to perform manual labor. They differed very little in appearance from the men, who wore the same basic attire. Men's boots appeared a bit dirtier and their shirts torn, but otherwise there was little difference.

The two women working in commercial grows both relied on men to sell their crops. This is understandable in the case of the seasonal worker, and she was clearly uninformed about the sale of the crop she produced. She described the crop sale as being her employer's responsibility:

That's all on him. Like I really don't want anything to do with that aspect of it. Like I don't want to know where it goes--if it's legal or if it's illegal. Like I don't need--- I'm just growing it. Like I don't care about the other part of it so...

For a retired small-scale grower, selling her crop was achieved through a boyfriend or other well-known male acquaintances, greatly reducing the potential for loss. She felt she was more susceptible to being paid less than market prices or being ripped off by an unknown buyer than her male counterparts. She related her past sales this way, "One person used to buy most of my crop for his head stash⁴ so that pretty much took care of what I was selling."

Setting up grow rooms is another area that is different for women. The woman who grew strictly for personal consumption ran her grow in a mobile container, designed and constructed by her husband. The small-scale grower had paid a male to install her ventilation systems and upgrade the electrical wiring to her grow area. She used small pots and grew more plants in comparison to the males who usually grew in beds or large pots. This woman scaled her grow operation down until she could manage all aspects on her own, including moving the plants and disposing of used dirt⁵. Neither woman constructed her grow room. In comparison, all of the men constructed their own rooms themselves or with the help of male friends.

Finally, my interview with the seasonal worker, who was a Women's Studies major in college, exposed extreme gender discrimination associated with outdoor growing. She had worked the previous season for a man she described in the following excerpt:

⁴Head stash is the slang term for the quantity of marijuana (or any other drug) a grower or dealer keeps for his/her own personal consumption.

⁵Growers who grow in pots rather than beds dispose of their dirt after each harvest or up to six times a year.

Last year I worked for someone who was so greedy and just kind of a dick and like you know made me feel shitty about my gender. You know like in terms of doing this kind of work, like it's really gendered. It was like "Oh, go help the girls trim," and I'm just like "Dude!" Like if he had wimps to like help carry this *gennie*⁶ or something. It just pissed me so much 'cause I'd been working for him longer than this other dude, and this dude was acting more feminine than I am and [he] asked him to help like move the gennie, 'cause he was the only dude around. I was standing there too, and I'm just watching this dude try and lift this gennie with him, and I'm, "Are you fucking serious?" I went over and was like, "Watch." And I picked up the gennie by myself. I was like, "You're such a jerk. Why did you make that assumption that I'm a weak girl?"

At the time of the interview she had left her first employer and was working for a different grower. She had this to say about working for her new employer:

You know the gender issues I think are huge, in that men do the labor and the girls do the trimming. It's like, no. I hate that. It was a struggle to get my boss to recognize that I'm capable of like doing work. And I wanna do the work. Like, I like getting dirty and I don't like sitting in a chair all day. Like, I don't want to do that. I wanna get like down and do the work 'cause it's like rewarding to see all of that, you know.

The interview excerpts clearly demonstrate the division of labor for male and female workers, as well as the attitudes of some male growers towards female employees, but there is yet another dimension that provides even more evidence of gender differences in marijuana production—the labor of trimming or manicuring the plants to prepare the buds for sale. Trimming is the term used to describe the process of removing leaves and stems to create a visible flowering bud, which is the product then sold for consumption by marijuana smokers. The plant is trimmed after it has reached maturity and has been harvested or cut down and hung to dry in a secure location. Trimmers use small scissors; the work is tedious and requires careful focus. There is an element of criminality associated with the job, as trimmers can be caught up in law enforcement raids and be arrested and charged along with the growers. Trimmers who work for indoor growers frequently work at the grow site and usually work for long periods, but do leave at the end of the day, returning to their own homes. Many times this occurs with several people gathering to work at a home, sharing meals and conversation until the workday is declared finished. Trimmers are normally paid by the pound, meaning for each pound of trimmed marijuana they produce they are paid an amount that has been previously agreed upon with the grower.

The work sites of outdoor growers are not always comfortable places and many involve travelling to remote locations in the nearby hills where the living accommodations are often tents, bottled water, and outhouses and four-wheel drive vehicles are required to traverse dirt

⁶Slang term used for electrical generators.

or gravel roads. Workers may stay as long as two or three months, until there is no more marijuana to be trimmed. Often the growers are tense, tired, and anxious to get their crops trimmed, bagged, and sold. The end of the outdoor season is the culmination of an extended period of stress and tension for growers due to threats of both seizure by law enforcement and possible theft of their crop. There are *patch raiders* who wait for the end of the season to rip off crops. Trimmers have been known to steal from their employers. Often, a grower has a stack of household and crop production bills waiting to be paid after harvest season. This is not to say that trimmers are not treated well. To the contrary, many growers provide meals, comfortable housing, plenty of weed to smoke, and are good-natured, knowing their pay day is just around the corner. Trimmers who are fast, honest and easy to get along with in group situations can make enough money to support themselves until the next year's outdoor harvest season arrives.

However lucrative it may seem, trimming work is situated within a broader culture which confers legal sanctions upon those guilty of sexual harassment, yet places women in vulnerable positions as sexual objects. The broader culture openly disapproves yet discreetly ignores or even promotes situations where women are made vulnerable to sexual harassment. Women trimmers are sometimes sexualized and objectified by their male employers. My analysis of craigslist ads by growers seeking to hire trimmers leads to the conclusion that female trimmers are preferred for manual dexterity, speed, quality and a few characteristics outside of what might be physically required for manicuring harvested marijuana. The objectification of women in these ads is evident. An example of these sexualized characteristics can be seen in the following two posts from growers seeking to hire trimmers:

- **Girl Trimmer needed**

- Date: 2011-11-02, 1:19PM PDT

- Reply to: removed

- Need a good looking trimmer that is Dtf.⁷ And oPen minded, pay is great, lots of work, again need a good looking girls that's Dtf, mid 20's guy here, good looking and athletic build, blue eyes, come work this week, worker needed asap Send pic and info or no response, also let me know availability next few days, thankx

The first posting explicitly requires the female respondents to be attractive and willing to have sex with the grower. The definition of attractive is an ambiguous one which only that grower can determine, and a photo must be provided for the grower to assess if the respondent is adequately good looking.

- **lady trimmers sought**

- Date: 2010-10-20, 4:02PM PDT

⁷ Acronym for a term used to describe a girl who is "Down To Fuck." <<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=DTF&defid=2884963>>

- Reply to: removed
- hello there- seeking new trim ladies. previous help got greedy and lazy... maybe over-endulged. looking for new help, topless extra. haha great pay otherwise.....2-3 per depending on exp.. but may train the right girls. call now will only be in town for a few. or leave message will be back on town in a few . looking for self starters looking to earn or earn and learn call soon wont last (541)removed

This second post offers additional compensation for those ladies willing to be topless as they trim. While the ad implies this is a joke, it illustrates the experience of some women during harvest season. Women are indeed offered more money than the agreed upon per pound amount if they will labor partially nude.

Not only can this be observed in the ads placed by growers, but it is reinforced by the women participants as well. The following two ads were posted by women seeking employment as trimmers:

- **HOT Experienced Trimmer;) (Hum Co)**

- Date: 2011-11-02, 3:47PM PDT
- Reply to: removed
- I am 32, experienced, clean, easy to get along with, fast, harworking and easy on the eyes. I have my own truck live in the area and can stay the night if needed. You can reach me @ (707)removed

This first post clearly illustrates how some women may perceive advantages in getting hired by describing themselves as “hot” or “easy on the eyes.” Not only does this post announce the respondent’s appearance as hot, but the emoticon of a winking smiley face suggests other intentions as well. This emoticon can be interpreted as flirtatious and designed to attract the attention of those male growers who require their trimmers to be physically attractive and potentially willing to engage in sexual activities.

- **Hard Working and Cute Female Trimmer**

- Date: 2011-10-03, 6:54PM PDT
- Reply to: removed
- Hey there Humboldt!
I've got plenty of experience with what I do, and know how to make your product look beautiful and take off only what needs to be taken off. I've also

got my own campervan, so putting me up won't be an issue. Looking to work for a while, so if you've got enough to keep me busy for a month, that's perfect! I've also got experience with cooking, cleaning and making products, so I'm a pretty handy gal to have around... I'm willing and able to travel, and ready to start work today, so let me know! Cheers!

In this sample post, not only does the respondent advertise her appearance, but is also willing to perform other tasks far different from trimming but obviously gendered, such as cooking and cleaning. Her promise to make the product look beautiful reassures the grower she has experience and will not waste any of the finished marijuana. However, it seems being an experienced trimmer with her own accommodations may not be adequate to secure a position. The respondent perceives a combination of good looks, the willingness to perform additional tasks, and experience will be the most effective selling points for her to secure a position.

It became obvious in my analysis that female trimmers are aware the very nature of their work creates a scenario that could easily facilitate sexual harassment. In response, experienced female trimmers may join with other female workers to form crews and thus alter the environment and conditions of their employment. The posting below illustrates this point:

- **Trimmchicks**

- Date: 2010-10-07, 8:55PM PDT

- Reply to: [removed](#)

- What we offer are Experienced, Reliable, Discrete, and Honest ALL Female Trim crews. Crews are 2 to 6 workers depending on job and space. Maximum hours per day per person is 12. We provide our own equipment and food. What we expect from you is a safe, well lit, comfortable room to work in with restroom facilities. Payment is to be made at the end of the shift. You pay me, I pay the crew. The standard price is ballpark and will apply to most jobs. Little and loose will cost more⁸. Sexual Harassment will not be tolerated. All jobs have to be approved by management. You of course are the boss. If there is a conflict of personalities with any crew member, that crew member will be sent somewhere else. The job will always be done per your instructions. Each person that works for me is known personally by me for at least 15 years, most considerably longer. The more people you want the earlier you need to schedule.

- Contact [removed](#)

Notice too this post referred to the work team as a crew, fitting the description of mob, or organized crime, crews identified in research focused on the social organization of deviants (Best & Luckenbill, 1980). Mob crews form in the unified pursuit of economic gain from their activities just as trim crews come together to earn money. There is also an element of safety

⁸Little and loose indicates the work will be more difficult and time consuming.

for women trimmers who only work in crews, as the above announcement illustrates. Finally, my analysis of craigslist provides more perspective just by looking at the number and purpose of the postings, summarized in Table 1 below. As I described earlier, the postings were divided into those seeking to hire trimmers, and trimmers seeking work. Over the course of two seasons I collected a total of 125 postings specific to trim work, with 12 seeking to hire trimmers and 113 by trimmers seeking work. Of the 12 ads hiring trimmers, 10 specified only women respondents would be considered, two were gender neutral and none were seeking male trimmers. Of 125 trimmers seeking work, 32 were males, 35 females and 46 were gender neutral. The ads seeking to hire trimmers are the most revealing when it comes to gender differences.

The numbers themselves may not be all that impressive, but when one considers that three (25%) of 12 ads for female trimmers feature details that raise questions of sexual harassment, a clear pattern of male dominance emerges. In addition, this should also be balanced against the fact there were no posts for specifically male workers. While this small sample size does not allow for any generalizations to be made, it clearly makes visible the role of gender in the dimension of trimming.

Table 1 *Craigslist Trimmer Posts by Gender and Advertisement Type*

Advertisement Type	Gender of Trimmer			Total
	Male	Female	Gender Neutral	
Ads seeking trim work	32	35	46	113
Ads seeking trimmers	0	10	2	12
Total	32	45	48	125

Discussion

Within my larger study, the gender divide between male and female participants in the marijuana industry proved to be one of the most interesting features of the grower subculture. For the most part, the selling of a crop seems to be a point of vulnerability for women growers, forcing them to partner up with a male to reduce the risk of being ripped off by potential buyers. The two women who grew on a commercial basis were strongly independent and proud that they ran their own operations. This finding is consistent with the moonshining women in Murphy's (1994) work. Women are generally pushed into the tedious jobs of growing, tending crops, trimming and clone work. Since none of these particular tasks bring high wages, prestige or positional power, it is an ideal example of feminist social theory at work. The major players in the marijuana industry are males and the resultant market structure is not conducive to female success. Rarely are women encouraged to set up and maintain their own operations, and in contrast to the findings of Adler (1993) and Anderson (2005), they were rarely acting as brokers or middle-women. The small number of women I observed reinforced Weisheit's findings that the marijuana industry is primarily a male environment (1992). Women risk sexual harassment as workers and advertise their sexual qualities as much as their skills when seeking

employment in the industry. The objectification of women is not hidden in this illegal economy but blatant and unsanctioned. This creates a potentially dangerous work environment for the women. Furthermore, women who are involved in the industry as a result of their relationships with male growers can be equally sexualized and find themselves insignificant eye candy, strongly paralleling Adler's assessment of the women in her study (1993). Further examination of the gender dimensions of the marijuana industry is warranted to assess agency and power in the context of the marijuana subculture as it exists today.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in the Emerald Triangle of Northern California, where the marijuana culture is a vibrant thread in the fabric of life and unremarkable to local residents. It is a unique contextual situation reflecting a localized history of marijuana production, strong private property rights, and community values. These characteristics have evolved even further with the medical marijuana industry that emerged since Proposition 215, known as California's Compassionate Use Act, was approved by voters in 1996. Worth billions of dollars to the state economy, some would argue Proposition 215 is de facto legalization, and few would disagree that it has created an exceptional level of tolerance among citizens throughout California.

Additional limitations are imposed by the very small sample. Just three of nine participants were women; however, these women were both genuine and generous in their responses. Field observations of women were also limited in scope, as were the number of women encountered. The small number of women visible in the industry may be a contributing factor to the general lack of knowledge around women in the marijuana industry. Regardless of the limitations, these women have supplied valuable and exclusive data from which to draw an analysis that will support future work around women's roles in the marijuana industry.

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