

GROUP FORMATION, GROUP COHESION, AND MARIJUANA USE

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Using a symbolic interactionist perspective, this paper approaches marijuana use not as a social problem but as an integrative element in group formation and cohesion. The group members under study, all of whom live in the same locality, banded together to ensure the acquisition, purchase and use of marijuana. Their cohesion as a group is enhanced relative to the availability of marijuana, as this dictates the frequency and intensity of the group's interaction; the degree to which the members adhere to group norms and values; and the degree to which the group fulfills the member's needs and interests.

Most studies on drug addiction in the Philippines have consistently depicted drug use, especially marijuana use, as a reprehensible act which leads to other kinds of anti-social behavior. Textbooks in social problems, for instance, see marijuana use as a dangerous act which leads to the commission of other misdemeanors and felonies, all of which cause harm to the life and property of both the user and the society at large (e.g., Agpaoa and others 1979; Apolinario and others, 1982). Supported by findings reported by the National Bureau of Investigation (1973) and the Dangerous Drugs Board (n.d.), these texts further view drug users as victims of poverty, broken homes, and other forms of social disorganization. Users are also seen as persons who take drugs as a way to experience new thrills, get rid of boredom, eliminate shyness, or find temporary relief from personal problems. Less value-laden analyses of drug use, but still within the social problems framework, also appear in the literature. One example is the work of Zarco and others (1973) on drug use among college students. The authors find, among others, that one out of three students use or have used marijuana and these students are usually males, 18 years old, and are either freshmen or sophomores in college. Higher incidences of marijuana use were found among those who reside with their parents than those who live in dormitories, and among members of Greek letter fraternities and sororities. The authors also find that marijuana is positively related to premarital sex experience, and nega-

tively associated with scholastic performance, favorable parent-child relationships and church attendance.

This paper approaches marijuana use not as a social problem but as a social ritual, one in which marijuana becomes an important source of group formation and group support. Consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective, this paper looks at marijuana use from the viewpoint of the users rather from that of outside observers. Seen from this perspective, marijuana use appears less as a reprehensible act, but as a form of social interaction which reinforces bonds of friendship, develops group loyalty, and establishes group identity. None of these results have direct implications for agencies bent on eradicating marijuana use; they do, however, challenge the stereotyped picture of marijuana users and permit a less hostile view of the so-called drug problem.

Conceptual Framework

Three tenets of the symbolic interactionist perspective guide this study. The first assumes that human beings act toward societal objects in terms of the meanings they attribute to those objects; these meanings are then codified through verbal and non-verbal symbols which people learn through the socialization process. The second tenet deals with the concept of intersubjectivity: people in society are able to understand, interact, and communicate with one another if they share the same meanings

attributed to societal objects. The greater the degree of consensus of these meanings, the greater the possibility of group life. The third tenet stresses the importance of "perceived reality" as the basis for group action, a notion akin to W.I. Thomas' "definition of the situation." What matters most of group life is not objective reality, i.e., the observable facts about a social situation, but the manner in which objective reality is perceived and interpreted by group members. Group action springs from this perceived reality: if members perceived a problem in a common way, they will develop the necessary behavior, attitudes, and language to solve that perceived problem. All these tenets, when used empirically, require an emphasis on the subjective rather than the objective aspects of group life. In doing so, this paper pays special attention to how members' perception of marijuana, and their interpretation of their drug experiences, affect the formation and cohesion of a deviant group.

Group formation refers to the process in which individual members come together to share a common life. It is conditioned by several factors, among them: geographic proximity, common interests, and common problems. In most cases, geographic proximity is an important precondition since it facilitates interaction among prospective group members. Perceptions of common problems and common interest arise from this interaction and set off the formation of a social unit, or a group. A parallel process appears in understanding how culture arises. To paraphrase Cohen (1955), a group, like a culture, arises in response to a problem faced by people in so far as they are able to interact and communicate with each other effectively.

The formation of a deviant group, or alternately a deviant subculture, occurs in a similar manner. As Becker (1963:80) states, "whenever a group of people have a bit of common life with a modicum of isolation from other people, a common corner in society, common problems, and perhaps a couple of common enemies, there culture grows." Becker then describes the subculture of heroin addicts who

"share a forbidden pleasure, a tragedy, and a battle against the conventional world (*ibid.*)." In this instance, a deviant group or subculture arises in response to a set of common interests which is not shared by the larger society. A sense of isolation keeps the group away from outside infringement, increases group solidarity, and helps to maintain a common perception of reality, deviant though it may be.

Group cohesion is the degree to which group members have the ability to function and interact together towards the fulfillment of their goals. One determinant of cohesiveness derives from Georg Simmel's (1955) notion of a "code of honor." According to Simmel, the degree to which a group is tied together may be gauged on the basis of whether, and to what extent, it has developed this code. In this sense, an association possesses a collective sense of honor "whose charges are reflected in the sense of honor of each member (Simmel 1955:163)." Examples of the concept of honor are family honor, the honor of an officer, or the businessman's reputation for honest dealing. Applied to a deviant group, Simmel's code takes the form of the member's conformity to a set of group norms. One example is the code of "secrecy" in the purchase and use of marijuana. Inability to conform to this code leads to ill-feelings among group members which, if unresolved, may bring about the demise of the group itself.

Another important determinant of group cohesiveness is the extent to which the satisfaction of the individual's needs and interests are fulfilled in the group, and the extent of the individual's loyalty to the group. In the case of marijuana users, the greater the group satisfies the member's need for the drug, the greater will be the degree of group cohesion. In turn, members contribute towards the fulfillment of group needs and interests. They should perform vital tasks, particularly those related to the purchase of marijuana. Examples of such tasks include finding new sources of the drug, protecting the identity of their sources, and knowing whether marijuana is of a high or low grade.

In sum, the symbolic interactionist perspective treats group formation and group cohesion as a subjective rather than an objective process. Applying this to the study of marijuana use, the paper gives emphasis to how the member's perception of marijuana and their interpretation of their drug experiences affect the formation and cohesion of a deviant group. Group formation is determined, in most cases, by three factors: geographic proximity, common needs and interests, and common problems. On the other hand, group cohesion is conditioned by the following: a notion derived from Simmel's "code of honor" which, when applied to a group of marijuana users, takes the form of the member's conformity to a set of group norms particularly the honor of "secrecy;" and the degree to which the group satisfies individual's needs and interests.

Methodology

For the study, I used two methods: participant observation and unstructured indepth interviews. I did not encounter "entry" problems because I had been acquainted with the group for over two years and knew most of the members personally. My observations and interviews took place during the first week of December 1983 to the last week of March 1984. I visited the group two times each week, and attended their sessions each time. To record their responses and my observations, I used a note pad and with the permission of the group leader, a tape recorder. These statements were transcribed after each session and later analyzed in terms of the symbolic interactionist framework.

The Setting

The town of Victoria (the name is fictitious) is situated outside of Metropolitan Manila. It is a relatively prosperous place, as evidenced by the presence of various commercial establishments and government offices. It also boasts of a university whose students come from all over the country. The migrant students stay in various dormitories situated within and outside

the school campus resident students stay in their respective homes.

Group Formation

Group Profile

The group studied has ten members. The leader, Ronald, is 27 years old and the oldest in the group. He is also one of the original members of the present group under study. A former student of the town's university, he now works as an employee of a government office. Roland comes from a province in Mindanao. He has had the most experience in marijuana dealings and has endured the long history of the group. Knowledge and experience make him the most influential in the group. As a leader, his tasks are to find sources of marijuana, settle differences among the members, protect the group's secrets and impose sanctions to those who violate the group's norms. He also interacts with leaders of other "deviant" group of marijuana users.

Next to Roland in both leadership and influences is Paco, 26 years old, a native of the town, and an employee in the same office where Ronald works. Paco has also acquired much experience in marijuana dealings. Like Ronald, he was one of the original members of the group. According to Ronald, Paco will take his place as group leader when he leaves for his home province in Mindanao.

The ones who directly deal with the drug pushers or middlemen are Jake, 22 and Robbie, 23. Both are residents of the place and are also college students. They head the "procurement" committee and are the contacts and the "contact-seekers." They take the responsibility of purchasing marijuana with money chipped in by each group members. Actually, Jake was a former middleman. According to him, the bulk of the "stuff" comes from the northern and southern provinces of Luzon. An unknown party gets the stuff from these places, brings it to Manila, then distributes it to the pushers and middlemen. Robbie did not know who these middlemen and pushers were at first; he was

introduced to them by Ronald and Jake who eventually gave him the task of making deals with the pushers. Being a good conversationalist and a user himself, Robbie was able to earn the trust of these men.

Middlemen usually purchase marijuana from pushers by the kilo. The pushers then sell it to the users by the "guhit." One "guhit" is equivalent to one-tenth of a kilo, and costs from ₱150-270 depending on the quality or grade of marijuana. These two persons also purchase the "papel" or the rolling paper from a nearby store. A pack of this paper costs 75 centavos and each pack contains 50 pieces of paper. After buying the drug, Jake and Robbie now turn the "stuff" over to Alex and Mon who act as the "custodians" of the marijuana. Alex is 23 years old, a college student and hails from a province in Central Luzon; he also lives in a campus dormitory. Mon is 22 years old, a student, and is a resident of the place. They keep the purchased marijuana in a secured place and never use it without permission from the other members of the group, particularly Ronald. To avoid losing its flavor, they either wrap the marijuana in an aluminum foil or put it in a small plastic cannister. Most of the time, they hide it in between stacks of clothing that Alex keeps in a locked cabinet at the dormitory.

The other members of the group perform miscellaneous tasks. These tasks range from ensuring the security of their sessions to calling other members of the group when they are needed. These men are also the group's younger members: Sal, 20 years old, Terio, 21 years old; Savio, 19 years old; and Rico, 20 years old. All of them are students. Both Sal and Salvio are residents of the town, while Terio and Rico come from nearby provinces. Like Alex, they live in dormitories. Though they do the legwork and the "dirty jobs," they do not feel inferior to the older members. In fact, they add that the others have a right to impose their seniority on them. They also feel that what the older members decide and do are beneficial to the entire group.

Beginnings

The group was formed in the 1970s. Originally, it composed 13 members. Nine of the 13 were students while the rest were employed in government offices. Unlike formal organizations, this group did not start out with an existing structure and a mode of recruitment. Rather it underwent a process of formation which took about three to four years before the members actually identified themselves as a group. A look at the beginnings of the group clarifies this observation.

The members that made up the group in the late 1970s were originally cliques of two or three persons, each either functioning independently from one other or serving as members of other groups. Most of them were residents of the locality; nine of them as stated, were students of the town's university. Because of their geographical closeness, most of them eventually got acquainted with each other and later became friends. More opportunities for interaction brought these cliques together, and it was only a matter of time before they banded together as one group. These interactions took the form of parties, school activities, and eventually marijuana dealings. These dealings were made possible because of two reasons: a) their sources of marijuana were almost always the same persons, and they often met each other while purchasing marijuana from these persons; and b) since some of them are friends and acquaintances, they also bought marijuana from each other. These activities continued until the cliques of two's and three's merged to form a single group. As Ronald recollects:

Dati noon iba-iba kami. Kanya-kanyang lakad. Kanya-kanyang trip. Katulad ko, dati tatlo lang kami sa grupo. Dito namin sila nakilala. Kasi mas madaling bumili ng 'ish' (marijuana) kapag marami kayo, 'pag isang group kayo. Siguro isa ito sa mga dahilan kung bakit nagbuklod kami. (Before, each of our groups had its own activities. Like me, before, we were only three in the group. If we want some marijuana, we buy from other groups. This was how we met them. It is

easier to buy marijuana when you are in one group. I think this was the reason why we formed one group.)

Most of the group members share this feeling. One member, Paco, cites another reason why the group banded together. He states:

Ang 'feeling' ng isang gumagamit ng marijuana ay iba. Alam namin na maraming tao ang ayaw nito. 'Yun bang iba ang 'trip' (preferences) nila sa buhay kaysa sa amin. Kaya ang pakiramdam namin ay parang iisa. We feel alone and so few na marami kaming kalaban. Kaya nagparami kami. (The feelings of a marijuana user is different. We know that this is prohibited. We know that most people do not like it. They have different preferences in life relative to us. So we somewhat feel alone. We feel alone and we feel that we are so few that we have many enemies. So we grouped together.)

Paco claims that there was a need to form a single group because the larger society condemns marijuana use and impose harsh penalties to users. If they are too few in a group, social pressures become harder to bear. There is, according to Paco, safety in numbers. Membership in a larger group also facilitates the purchase of marijuana. Not only is the job shared by other members; these members are also more likely to get the stuff because they have contacts with middlemen or pushers. This feeling is shared by all group members.

Since the late 1970s, the group has experienced various changes, particularly in membership. The older members have either gone home to their respective provinces or are presently working in government offices. The only original members left in the group are Ronald and Paco. With this in mind, let us turn our attention to the topic of membership in the group.

Membership

As cliques of two's and three's, the members felt that the secrecy of their activities was more ensured. While an increase in num-

ber may jeopardize this secrecy, it would also mean greater accessibility to the sources of marijuana. Because of their need for the drug, they opted to merge with other cliques, and increase membership size.

Despite this increase, the group remains relatively small. Why so few? An important reason is that since their activities are defined by society as deviant, the members have to be careful in admitting new recruits. In accepting new members, two important criteria should be met. The first and obvious criterion is that the person should be a marijuana user. He should be able to be "with" the others in enjoying the effects of the drug. Corollary to this is that the new member should be a "ka-trip," which means that he should not "flip-out." Being "ka-trip" means that he should be able to enjoy marijuana by following the group's "trippings" (moods). In one session, for example, the group's "trippings" after smoking enough joints is music. An applicant should be able to appreciate this. He is expected to be knowledgeable about the music and its artists. "Flipping-out" is to be unruly when the drug takes its effect on the person. This takes the form of shouting, boisterous laughter, and in extreme cases, crying. This turns off group members who give the "flipped-out" person a cold shoulder. A second criterion is that a regular member should personally vouch for the person seeking entry into the group. At least one of the regular members should know the applicant well enough before considering his membership. The regular member should sense that the applicant should be able to follow the group norms, particularly that of secrecy. The group's secrets, such as the sources of marijuana, group meetings and drug dealings, should never be divulged to others outside the group (except for other "deviant" groups that they interact with). Upon satisfying these two prerequisites for membership, the applicant is accepted into the group. He then has to prove his worth and will be given tasks to perform; if he fails in these tasks, his credibility is lost. In extreme cases, he may even be expelled from the group.

Group Norms and Sanctions

Five terms sum up the group's norms: sharing, honesty, secrecy, courage and daring. We discuss each one briefly.

First, one is expected to share whatever he has (marijuana, or in some cases, acid tablets) with the group. If he fails to share this and gets "busted" (i.e., the group finds out about his selfishness), sanctions are imposed by Ronald and the other members of the group. Sanctions take various forms of ostracism: snobbing, isolation, and in extreme cases, removal from the group. One incident illustrates how the group applies sanctions. An ex-member, Lito, "scored" (purchased) a few acid tables from a friend who just returned from the United States (during that time, the group was experimenting with tablets but eventually ceased to do so because they did not like its effects). As agreed, the money that he used to purchase the tablets was to be reimbursed by the group upon seeing the "tabs." What Lito did instead was to tell the group that his friend was unable to buy them. The group discovered the deception three weeks later from Lito's friend. The members got furious, and did not talk to Lito for weeks. Lito was unable to tolerate this sanction, left and joined another group.

The second norm, corollary to the first, is honesty. Honesty is being frank and open to the other members of the group. Sal's case illustrates how the norm is practiced. A year ago, Sal faced serious family problems. As this affected his relations with the group (he was not conversing with them), Ronald confronted him and asked what the problem was. At first, he did not want to talk about his problems. Ronald then invited to treat him to a few bottles of beer to loosen him up. While drinking, Sal told Ronald that his parents fight, argue and shout at each other a lot. Later, when Sal was able to let it all out, Ronald reminded him that to be consoled and helped by the other group members, he should be honest about his problems and not let these bog him down to the point of affecting his relationship with his fellow members.

Secrecy is a third important norm that the group stresses. Since the group engages in secret marijuana deals, they should learn to keep their mouths shut and not to reveal anything to "squares" (non-users) or people not in their confidence. How do they hide it from their families and relatives? For one, they do not bring home paraphernalias used in the preparation of marijuana (e.g., rolling papers). Also, to prevent any suspicion which may arise when people see their bloodshot eyes (which normally occurs after smoking marijuana), they either wear tinted sunglasses or use eyedrops to remove the redness of the eye. Secrecy, among other traits, comprises one of the most important of the five traits. Since the bloodline of the group lies in the purchase and use of marijuana, secrecy is imperative for group survival.

The last two traits, courage and daring, are also rated highly by the members. Since they illegally deal with pushers and middlemen, members should have the guts to do these jobs effectively and "cleanly." Should any of them get busted, for example, that member should be courageous enough to keep mum about confidential matters, especially their marijuana sources. He should face the authorities boldly and accept whatever consequence. The group, in turn, will do all they can to help their troubled associate.

In sum, the group has developed several norms and sanctions in the process of banding together. These are sharing, honesty, secrecy, courage and daring. Each of these norms is highly regarded and failure to follow these leads to the imposition of sanction. These sanctions reflect various form of ostracism like snobbing, isolation, and in severe cases, dismissal from the group.

Group Cohesion

To maintain a high degree of group cohesion, it is necessary for the members to follow these norms and values. Most important of these is secrecy since the group's activities, particularly their dealings with their illegal sources, are defined by society as illegal. As in Simmel's

code of honor, each member of the group should develop, among other things, a "secrecy honor" so as to merit greater group acceptance. When all the members follow this code and the other norms, greater cohesiveness arises.

Beyond these, group cohesion is also enhanced when the individual's needs are fulfilled by the group. This takes the form of the acquisition and use of marijuana. Marijuana is the most important, if not the main, thing that binds the group together. Indeed, the group was formed because of the need to procure and use the drug. The group members usually hold their session in a private room three times a week on the average, and usually have separate smaller group sessions outside their private room. But many sessions like these can only occur if there is a constant supply of marijuana. When the supply is cut off, these meetings will occur less frequently and group cohesion tends to weaken.

The lesser the member's needs (marijuana) are fulfilled, then, the lesser will be the degree of cohesion. Conversely, the greater his needs are fulfilled, the greater will be the cohesiveness of the group. In the latter case, the frequency of the group's meetings or sessions will increase. If the group happens to have a considerable amount of marijuana on hand, that is, about one-tenth of a kilo (which is enough to last for a week), their thrice a week session is observed. With an even greater amount of marijuana, the group meets more than once a day for a whole week. Alex, their "custodian", reports that when they once got hold of half a kilo of "sensimilla" (a strong grade of marijuana) from the north, they smoked it about three times a day. They describe this as *tag-yaman* (days of plenty). Thus, with a considerable amount of marijuana, the frequency of their meetings as well as their interaction increases. The enhanced interaction also helps to bind them closer.

But there are also times when the most that they can smoke in a week is only about six to eight joints. When this happens, the group is forced to meet only once a week. Spacing six to eight joints into three sessions, would mean that they can only smoke about two or three

joints per session. This is an insufficient dosage to get a "high" (intoxication due to marijuana), and members will feel *bitin* (unsatisfied). During these *tag-tuyo* or dry days, the frequency of group meetings as well as the frequency of their interaction decline. It is during these times that they drink a considerable amount of alcohol to supplement the drug. But seldom does the group meet for the sole purpose of drinking. In short, if marijuana comes in limited quantity, the frequency and intensity of the group's interaction, and eventually their cohesiveness, lessens.

Individual and group interests are also other determinants of cohesion. An individual labeled as deviant by the society is predisposed to find security in numbers. Since their kind are relatively few in a society, they should find solace in people who share the same sentiments. Related to this is a group feeling of non-conformity towards society's conventions, most especially those which pertain to the illegal purchase and use of the drug. To illustrate these two points, a discussion of their activities as a group, particularly a typical pot session would be useful.

Group members are engaged in two separate marijuana related activities. One is their regular thrice a week session held at Alex's dormitory inside the school campus. The second is a brief and smaller session held at the back of a school building, a place they call the "bat cave." This is held either at 10:00 o'clock in the morning or at 3:00 in the afternoon. It is done discreetly since the risk of getting busted is greater compared to their sessions inside Alex's room. In the "bat cave" sessions, only one-half of the group is present because those who are not with them are either in school or at work. What is more important to describe, however, are the group's room sessions because it is in this activity whose members are freer to move.

The group's usual time to meet in Alex's room is at five-thirty in the afternoon. At this hour, school and office work are over. Alex waits for his group mates inside his room. The first to arrive is usually Mon, who, as men-

tioned earlier, acts as the "custodian" or keeper of the drug. Alex and Mon start to roll about six to eight joints. While they do this, the other members arrive one by one. Mon lights a cigarette, puffs it, then lights up the joint with the burnt end of the cigarette. It is allowed to smoke a joint or two before all the members arrive. After taking a drug, the joint is passed around to the others in the room. When all the members are present, these marijuana sticks are lighted one after the other. While smoking, Alex plays the guitar and the other sing along. They usually sing folk, rock and occasionally jazz pieces. After 6-8 joints, the drug takes its effect. At this time, some members are singing relatively loud, while the rest either laugh or listen to the music. After smoking all the rolled joints, the atmosphere in the room becomes more charged. The intensity of the group's singing, talking and laughing is greater. At this part of the session, the fellows feel as one. They appreciate almost the same things, feel the same way and share in the "floating" sensation that marijuana has induced. They feel united as a group knowing that they are so different from other people, that they have the guts to do what society prohibits, that the pleasure they get from the drug is terribly missed by other people, and that being different, they share the feeling of being unconventional, of enjoying an activity which is out of bounds from what society defines as "normal." A "leave us alone" attitude prevails in their minds. As Terio noted:

Alam namin na bawal ito. Pero, pare, gusto pa rin namin dahil okey ang trip. Okey ang nararamdaman namin 'pag 'high' na. 'Yun bang ibang pakiramdam. Ang gaan ng katawan mo saka naa-'appreciate' mo ang mga bagay. (The author then asked what he felt about other people). Sa isip namin, malaki ang nawawala sa ibang tao. Hindi nila nararamdaman ang 'tripping' o ang masarap na tama ng 'ish'. Mali sila doon. Masyado silang pa-'good.' Minsan nga, 'nung naglalakad kami nang may tama, sabi ng isa sa amin, 'Kawawa naman sila, walang tama.' Ang masasabi ko lang, hindi namin sila pakikialama-

nan basta hindi nila kami pakialamanan. (We know that this is prohibited. But we still like it because the 'trip' is good. You really get a different feeling when you are 'high.' Your body is so light and you get to appreciate more things. To our minds, a lot is missed by other people. They miss the good effects of marijuana. They are really wrong. They follow society's norms too much. There was one time, while we were walking, one of our groupmates said: 'I pity those people, they do not have a 'high.' As far as I am concerned, we won't bother them so long as they don't bother us).

Terio's feeling is shared by the other members of the group. They believe that they belong to a separate, select and exclusive group.

When the room session ends at about 10:30 in the evening, the members leave Alex's room, and while still high, proceed to the large football field of the university. They walk around the field smoking a joint or two. They do "nature tripping" and feel the cool air pass through them. They sit on the grass, and with Alex on his guitar, sing again. They do this till midnight and then head for home, chatting on the way. If they chose not to go out of the room after the session, they play a game of russian poker or bridge.

Relations with Other Groups

The group members do not perform their activities alone. They interact with other deviant groups within Victorias town. As Ronald stated, members of other groups sometimes join them in their sessions, although this is not encouraged. What these groups do together most often is purchase the drug. There was a time when one group lacked the money to buy half a kilo of marijuana. A member of Ronald's group heard of it and called a meeting. They each contributed an amount of money to fill in the amount that the other group lacked. Eventually the purchase was done. The leader of the other group divided the purchased drug to the amount Ronald's group gave. "A deal within a

deal," to use their phrase, was done. These other groups reveal the possible sources of marijuana; sometimes, however, members of these groups do not reveal all of their sources, for fear of losing them. The names exchanged are the "in" sources. The names that they cannot freely divulge are those "outside" sources whose positions are so delicate that one uncalculated risk would lead to their arrest. These are the professional pushers who are not members of their groups. In sum, then, interaction with other groups is restricted to marijuana deals and rarely to marijuana use.

The group members also immerse themselves with members of other "normal" organizations. Majority of Ronald's group are members of one or two formal organizations like fraternities and academic organizations. Most of them are members of the same fraternity. Three of them actually are key officers of this group. Aside from this fraternal organization, some of them are officers and members of different academic organizations. They even boast of being the ones who initiated productive and worthwhile activities of these organizations. Examples of such undertakings are Broadway musicals, choir competitions, charity activities and community service.

Summary and Conclusion

The group under study was formed because of the need to acquire and use marijuana. The fact that the members lived in the same town and bought the drug from the same sources facilitated the formation of a stable group of marijuana users. Originally separated as cliques of two and three members each, they developed into one group to gain more access to marijuana. Although a larger group size may threaten the secrecy of their ritual, the group members chose to be together since more members helped guarantee greater access to marijuana. Moreover, aware that social conventions ban drug use and punish users, they found solace

and security with others in similar conditions. In the process of group life, members developed rationalizations for their actions and invented their own linguistic terms.

The availability of marijuana dictated the frequency and intensity of the group's meetings and interactions. The greater the supply of the drug, the greater the frequency of the meetings and the intensity of the group's interaction. The degree to which the members adhere to group norms and values also helped to promote group cohesiveness. Group cohesion is also determined by the degree to which the members's needs and interests are fulfilled by the group. If these two are adequately met, then members have every reason to stay and function effectively with the group. Failure to meet the needs and interest lead to group deterioration.

In conclusion, unlike most researches which view marijuana use as a social evil, this paper highlights marijuana's integrative role in group formation and group cohesion. Ideally, a strict legislation and enforcement of drug laws would eventually lead to a cut down on the supply of marijuana. This, in turn, may lead to the demise of groups of marijuana users. But despite strict drug laws and legal enforcement, marijuana use continues to thrive in Philippine society. And while a more vigilant enforcement of drug laws will help lower the addiction rate, it will not stop users from seeking alternative sources of marijuana and from developing strategies to keep their activities outside the public eye. This observation justifies the necessity to pursue studies which take a less stereotyped view of marijuana users as victims of unfortunate social conditions or unhealthy psychological dispositions. It requires instead a greater appreciation of the role that marijuana plays in the lives of the users. By looking at marijuana use from the viewpoint of the users rather than from that of outside observers, the symbolic interactionist framework helps to present an alternative analysis.

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