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Spring 2022

### At the End of the Day We all Want to Get High

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#### Recommended Citation

Barrientos, Karolina, "At the End of the Day We all Want to Get High". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2022.

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Karolina Barrientos

### At the End of the Day, We All Want to Get High

I came to this topic by exercising my sociological imagination and examining my personal situation at Trinity College, what some sociologists would consider my “habitus” and making some sociological sense of it. One feature of that habitus one that is not unique to Trinity College but to many other colleges and universities is the use of cannabis for recreational purposes. With the recent legalization of its use in Connecticut and its already legalization in other states, this “site of recreation” in this congregate setting will only become a more common feature of college life. My personal experiences and observations of my peers have led to my interest in researching the cannabis culture at Trinity and its role in creating opportunities for social interaction and the creation of social groups with perhaps unique patterns of interaction. Looking at cannabis culture at Trinity through a sociological lens allows us to understand how individual interactions amongst individuals create that cannabis culture. Individual interactions build one’s community and culture, so looking at Trinity, a predominantly white institution, made me wonder if the cannabis experiences are racialized in any way. This leads me to my research question, “How do students of various races and ethnicities partake in the Cannabis Culture at Trinity? Are there varying racialized experiences amongst them?”

#### **General Theoretical Perspectives:**

When considering my research questions and topic of focus, it is only natural to use a sociological lens of symbolic interactionism and critical race theory (CRT). Smoking and even consuming cannabis involve a series of social interactions that create an overall culture. Trinity, an institution that upholds white supremacy, has clear racialized aspects of college culture such

as, common majors and frat culture, majors 'marked' as white and non-white, frat culture defined as white, a racialized sports culture, and student body still enmeshed in prep culture, etc. So why wouldn't there be differences in the cannabis culture? And why wouldn't the societal concept of race be upheld in cannabis culture? Does the cannabis culture reflect and reinforce this dominant culture or does it, even in small ways, chip away at it? Looking at anything through a racialized lens is best done with a critical race perspective to look at how race, a social construct, is maintained through social interactions.

Looking at society through a symbolic interactionist lens allows sociologists to understand how individual interactions create and maintain society. This theory, developed over one hundred years ago by George Mead and Charles Cooley, argues that through social interactions people can create symbols and shared meanings that would then produce social practices and patterns. In this theory society is the setting in which individuals, the self, use symbols to create meanings. When looking at the intricacies of a culture or subgroup of a society it is imperative to seek how individuals interact with each other.

Since I will be studying student interactions within cannabis culture at Trinity, a symbolic interactionist perspective is key. Social interactionism alerts a student of cannabis culture to its nuances of social interaction in the many "cyphs" or smoke sessions. One of the ways to 'operationalize' the study of interactions in these settings, in addition to participant observation, is examining the manifold dimensions of their collective experience, best thought of as the, "who, what, why, when, and how." This then allows me to piece together what it means to be a cannabis user with others at Trinity. By looking at how students interact with one another, and cannabis would allow me to find the patterns of "sense-making" in cannabis culture. Individuals particularly in small group situations use language- itself a symbol-filled system- to orient one's

actions to the actions of another. In this way, some social order is created, and that order is premised on the shared meanings, or the definition of the situation collectively build by the group. Using a symbolic interactionist lens, we help me put formalize a cannabis culture at Trinity. However, since I not only want to uncover the culture on campus but also see if they are any prominent differences between the cannabis usage of students of color and white students; I must take also use critical race theory in my research.

Critical race theory has been a hot topic in the last year as there has been a movement to include CRT practices in K-12 public education. What the opposing side fails to understand is the meaning and implications of CRT in everyday society. Critical race theory questions the existing structures of society by analyzing economics, history, politics, groups, and self-interests to uncover any relationships of inequitable racial power relations. At its essence and in particular importance for this research, CRT would us to interrogate the ways that our “habitus” is shaped not only by the various social institutions in which it is embedded but to ask about how those institutions have been shaped by and operate according to logics of white supremacy. In sociological terms, it foregrounds institutional discrimination, racism, and backgrounds of individual prejudice. This social construction has become pervasive in everyday society that it is the norm to not see underlying structures of white supremacy. Because I will be looking at interactions of students of different races and ethnicities to see if I can find any racialized patterns in partaking in cannabis culture; this theory will be an integral part of my research.

Higher education is an institution that upholds white supremacy and is often the focus of scholars in critical race theory. Race and racism in higher education are always the focal point of research in that it is how society socializes individuals to be productive members of society. We know that the structure and function of the elite liberal arts institutions have been built on a

legacy of slavery, historical exclusion of African Americans, Latines, and women, and more recently financial requirements that favor legacy donors, their trustees, and their interests. With that larger racialized structure and culture, is it reflected in the cannabis culture, and if so, what wats or conversely does it ‘paper over’ race and racism in the collective enjoyment of “getting high.”

As stated before, one of my research questions evolves by examining whether there are racial differences within the cannabis culture on Trinity’s campus. In order for me to truly find patterns in regard to my research question, I must use a critical race lens. I’m hypothesizing that students of color and white students have slightly different experiences with cannabis. Overall, I will be using symbolic interactionism and critical race theory to analyze the social interactions of white students and students of color in cannabis culture.

### **Discussion and Evaluation of Past Research:**

Any review of cannabis culture must start with the now-classic research by Howard Becker (1953), his work, “Becoming a Marihuana User.” This research sets the stage for any study of cannabis culture in congregate settings. Most subsequent research conducted primarily by practitioners and psychologists approach cannabis use as a ‘problem’ or as an instance of deviant behavior and thus focuses on its antecedents in individual pathology or its dangers for addiction.

“Becoming a marihuana user,” is one of the only sociological articles I found that really guided my research. Its focus was solely on sharing how individuals became cannabis users from a neutral perspective through a social interactionist lens. Becker was able to conclude that there are three main steps in order for someone to become an avid marijuana user and learn the proper smoking techniques. The first one is to learn how to smoke in a manner that produces the “high”

effects. The second step is to be able to recognize the effects of cannabis and connect them with drug use and finally it is to learn how to enjoy smoking weed. Becker also found that in order to become a marijuana user one must have the guidance of an experienced smoker. Overall, Becker's article is a classic piece of literature that first laid out the dimensions of a cannabis user and helped guide future studies of cannabis.

Although a majority of past research focused on the addictive behaviors of cannabis they all did indeed point to the importance of the social context and social interaction of cannabis usage. For instance, the article, "Does social context matter?" by Phillips (2018) concluded that smoking cannabis is a social lubricant. In Buckner's (2013) "College cannabis use: The unique roles of social norms, motives, and expectancies," she found that ones' 'friends,' have a large role in the formation of both injunctive (seeking others approval) and descriptive (beliefs of others usage) norms in the cannabis usage college-aged individuals. Ginsberg and Greenly also point to the importance of "friends" and "others" in their analysis of marijuana use. In their study, they contrast four competing theories of cannabis usage by following the experiences of first and second years at a large research institution. The theories are as followed, reference group (admiring a group and influences ones own actions), commitment theory (a person is more likely to engage in deviant behavior if they are not committed to societal institutions), involvement theory (a person is too busy to partake in deviant behavior), and stress theory (people engage with deviancy as a way to cope with personal troubles). Looking at the theories of cannabis usage, prompted me to consider how these theories could manifest in my research. I developed interview questions that get at the reason behind students' usage and led me to hypothesize that reference group and stress theory will best describe the cannabis usage of students at Trinity.

Not surprisingly given the sole emphasis of past research on cannabis culture as a social problem, little past research examines the racialized contexts of cannabis culture. Mortensen's (2020) "The marijuana user in US news media: An examination of visual stereotypes of race, culture, criminality, and notification," however, is one of the few articles that focus on users of marijuana but again through a lens of deviancy and criminalization. The author found that there is a significant relationship between images that represent criminal activity and racial depictions. Although this does not directly relate to the college experiences of students of color, it does indicate the gap in existing research on the cannabis experiences of individuals from marginalized backgrounds.

The only article that looked at the same target population as my research was, "Microaggressions and Marijuana Use among College Students," (Pro, Sahker, and Marzell 2018). They argued that because microaggressions cause stress and emotional distress and since cannabis is used to cope when in distress then there must be a relationship between cannabis usage and microaggressions amongst students of color. They found that there was a relationship between the two variables but noted that there is a need for more research before making a concrete and generalizable claims. This article, however, like the rest, cited their purpose to be for college administrators as a way to prevent the cannabis usage of students.

Overall, the past research indicated gaps in research on students of color and cannabis culture in the sociological field. If a resource was about cannabis and college students, the research did not include a significant number of participants of color to make any solid conclusions regards to race. It also failed to situate the settings of cannabis use in a larger social context or did not interrogate the racialized shape of that social context. This leaves a gap to be filled in the research of cannabis and its relationship to the racialized college experience.

**Research Methods:**

In working towards building an understanding of what the cannabis culture at Trinity is like I have conducted qualitative research with students of color and white identifying students. Through 9 semi-structured interviews collected via the snowball method, 5 with white students and 4 with students of color all with prior experience with cannabis before coming to Trinity. Through these interviews, I was able to gain an understanding of what their experiences in cannabis culture are like and how they may or may not create racialized aspects of cannabis culture. Through this process, “cannabis stories” are collected that detail social interactions with others when engaging in the consumption of marijuana. Some examples of questions that provoke the storytelling of cannabis experiences are, “tell me about the first time you smoked/consumed cannabis on Trinity’s campus. Why? With Whom? Where? When? How did you smoke? How did it go?” and “describe your typical smoking session at Trinity. Thinking about people, substances, location, etc...”. These questions are very much open-ended and can lead the conversation to anywhere the interviewee would like.

However, some limitations came with this research method. As a student of color, myself that does not really engage with whiteness at Trinity in a way found it a bit difficult to find willing white students at Trinity. This methodological limitation itself reviews something interesting about the racial culture at the institution. Student interactions and even student spaces are racially segregated, some of this built into the hostile climate for students of color, and some of it necessary for students of color to seek refuge from this hostility or to ‘exhale’ from a general culture that can be hostile, dismissive, or both. The nature of my project, an illicit drug that although legal in Connecticut is still criminalized at Trinity, made it difficult for students to be willing to talk to someone they didn’t know. In order to truly get an understanding of the



cannabis culture at Trinity, I would have to have a balanced number of participants from differing social-economic statuses, gender identities, sexualities, and maybe even majors. The small population size and focus on Trinity also makes it difficult to make generalizable claims about other institutions.

With all that said, the benefit of interviewing the participants instead of saying a survey, is that it allowed me to collect stories and personal experiences about individual interactions. The interviews themselves allowed me to ask follow-up questions and gave power over the conversation to the participants. An interview allows for unpredictability, something that could be limited with a closed-ended survey or even a close-ended interview. In order to analyze my findings, I will be using the coding method to uncover reoccurring themes and segments of interviews related to cannabis culture and any social interactions that could be racialized.

## Comparisons of Cannabis Culture

	Students of Color	White Students
Role of Upperclassmen and "others in students usage of Cannabis: To socialize into culture	"my like group of P.R.I.D.E Leaders [a mentor for marginalized students on campus]... I think there's a culture of upperclassmen always wanting to be a part of someone's like first smoke at Trinity... you know the upperclassmen, always said hide it, you never have it out." Jay, Afro Latine	"learning about the covering up your smoke detector. Like the main thing ... So I learned all about that, I feel like when I joined the Mill... who really filled me in," Laura, white
Habitus Influences on Cannabis Culture	"I feel like now as a senior and just seeing the way that even I have expanded myself, I have cyphs [smoke sessions] in the middle of the day with white people and my friends of color... weirdly enough I smoke with a lot of white people now as a senior because I have white people in my inner circle now... the more you navigate these spaces, the more you meet people," Rosey	"its hard to say right now, I mostly have spoken to my roommates because I honestly don't hang out with everyone since I'm so busy all the time... I would be smoking with more diverse people on this campus but its because I don't see them as often," Opal, white
Reasons for Engaging in Cannabis Culture	"like, that's why we consume everything we consume, because it makes use feel good," Ronald, Junior  "people who say that they use like weed to medicate is definitely a lot of people of color," Sid, Senior	"we're all socializing... white people smoking, usually is really chaotic, because they all want to go out and do other drugs, like it's a primer for going in doing more," Opal, Senior
Social Interactions Amongst Cannabis Users When High	"Partially male, female, partially people of color, not people of color. Every discussion I've had about something that's like a social issue, something that's not personal... usually always a person of color. And with white people, it becomes like a very personal conversation where we want to talk about maybe ourselves," Sid, South Asian	"so just us watching T.V, talking you know, we'll talk about everything. we've all gotten to the point that where we can converse normally high. Where we're just have typical conversations about anything," Elizabeth, white
Descriptions of a Cannabis User	"there's different types of potheads, there's potheads that like to smoke different types of weed or consume different types of weed products. There're potheads that like to like collect weed marijuana receptacles like you know, I mean, like like, tools like paraphernalia like people like really like some people like bonges like DAB rigs and like artwork. Nowadays, some people like to do that like so," Ronald, Afro-Latino	"you need to smoke at least every couple days. I honestly think when you become a stoner, its like okay, I'm going to get my own piece, and I'm my getting my own products," Elizabeth, white

**Findings:**

The cannabis culture at Trinity breaks racial barriers. The students I interviewed are all upperclassman and have had some prior experience with cannabis before coming to Trinity. After conducting my interviews with various students from diverse backgrounds on campus, I came to essentially find that students at Trinity that smoke have the initial intention of getting high and enjoying themselves; for some that may have changed throughout their college career. For the most part, by analyzing the multiple dimensions of cannabis culture; I found more similarities and differences across racial groups and even more mixed racial groups than initially expected. In general, students that smoke comes together to get high that that desire – or that form of recreation trumps racial divisions that are so pervasive on campus.

Who Got Us into Cannabis?

Coming to cannabis at Trinity is a process built on social interaction. Whether it was their first-time smoking on campus, or the suggestions and “tricks” they discovered, these introductions came through formal or informal contact with students, organizations, or clubs. All of the introductions to cannabis came from experienced users and upperclassmen, or those that have already been socialized into the culture. Although some aspects of this introduction are unique to students of color; these were due to the racial basis of the groups they came into contact with. But, for the most part, they all learned the tricks, proper smoking techniques, etc... in the same way in social interactions that walked novices through the stages of the experience and the aspects of it unique to the Trinity setting.

For instance, Laura, a white student, shared that “I learned all about that, I feel like when I joined the Mill (essentially the music house on campus) ... I had a friend who really filled me

on what the fuck a cone (a way to smoke a joint without having to roll) is... and I was like can you teach me how to pack a cone? And he was like well I'll talk you through it." Laura became immersed in cannabis and drug culture on campus when they joined an organization on campus that piqued their interest. Lisa, also white, shared that her first-time smoking on campus was, "maybe like the first couple of weeks, I guess. I smoked a joint with some older gentlemen. And it was kind of a weird situation...it was really fun, I was really high on the staircase of like, Park Place... and then I went home and fell asleep." Here we can see that Laura and Elizabeth had first experiences smoking at Trinity with upperclassmen and with individuals that were already socialized into the cannabis culture at Trinity. Similarly, this can be seen with students of color such as Jay and Rosey, both seniors.

Jay's first time smoking at Trinity was with, "my like group of P.R.I.D.E Leaders [a mentor for marginalized students on campus] ... I think there's a culture of upperclassmen always wanting to be a part of someone's like first smoke at Trinity... you know the upperclassmen, always said hide it, you never have it out." The notion of upperclassmen playing a role in cannabis experiences of students can also be seen in Rosey's experience. She shared, "you look to your upperclassman to figure out where you the shit from because we know where to get it from. I also feel like, in some way, I feel like we are kind of responsible to make sure that like people have a good experience." What is interesting to note here is the sense of responsibility that comes from the upperclassmen of color. Jay introduced the P.R.I.D.E leaders to the conversation, they are upperclassmen usually of color or from a marginalized background whose job is to essentially keep an eye on students of color and make sure they are doing okay. Rosey, who is now a P.R.I.D.E leader shared those similar sentiments of taking on a responsibility to ensure underclassmen are having good experiences with cannabis. White

students did not mention anything about getting a sense of feeling protected by upperclassman while rather the opposite with Lisa stating, “that it was kind of weird.”

These findings point to some racial and ethnic differences in coming into cannabis culture. The importance of upperclassmen for students of color comes from an apparent mentoring role that has its origins in P.R.I.D.E and the importance of racial solidarity for black and brown students on campus.

### Who Do We Smoke With?

As expected, and theorized from previous research, the reference group theory stands to be true in that, participants’ close peers influence their cannabis usage. Every person interviewed essentially shared that they smoke with the same people every day, those people being mainly their roommates. This recently has become an important element in cannabis culture because of the coronavirus pandemic. Students on campus have been confined to their housing situations, most times with roommates.

When looking at who someone smokes with it is important to look at how social circles can be formed in college. Those circles are dependent on the relationships that cannabis users have with those in their life. One of the first ways cannabis users in college find each other is through their dorms and places of residents. For instance, Opal shares that currently she only smokes with her eight housemates, but freshman year she lived in a regular dorm that allowed for social interaction with multiple people thus she smoked with a more diverse population. The following quotes indicate that cannabis smokers have their set group of regular smokers and that often includes the individuals living in close proximity to them.

“I smoke with the same people every day. To be quite frank that doesn’t mean that different people don’t smoke with us but I smoke with the same people every day,” Rosey, Black

“its generally me and my roommates, always gonna be in our crescent everyone can get really high, [play] video games, [go to], the movies, a bar, sometimes on Thursdays, so generally just in our common room altogether.. but yeah mostly my roommates and my brothers,” Adam, white

“its hard to say right now, I mostly have spoken to my roommates because I honestly don’t hang out with everyone since I’m so busy all the time... I would be smoking with more diverse people on this campus but its because I don’t see them as often,” Opal, white

“so people I mostly smoke with is honestly a close group of friends of mine, that are all women of color, similar in age, they are kind of like the everyday group right now... occasionally like the other close friends that are on campus of mine that knows smoke, some of them are white men, some of them are black women, I guess the group I smoke with the least is like white women,” Ronald, Afro-Latino

One of the first ways cannabis users in college find each other is through their dorms and places of residents. That’s what can be seen in the above quotes and the various accounts of smoking with roommates or the overall increase of cannabis usage if one’s roommate is also a cannabis user. For first years, roommate assignments are completely random and can result in multiracial and ethnic living situations. For instance, Opal was randomly set up with Mary, a black student who happened to smoke, which resulted in the steady increase of cannabis usage throughout the year.

Cannabis users also tend to build their cannabis community through all of their social networks including clubs or organizations. For instance, Adam, involved in Greek life, shared, “I think a little bit mainly because I feel like, in terms of smoking with other people, with people they only interact with the most frequent, like e-board members, Greek life members.” In this quote, we can see that since Adam is mostly involved in Greek-like that is what his social circle consists of and who he mostly consumes cannabis with. In the interview with Jay, they stated something similar in that their first year at Trinity, they were involved in Imani, the Black Student Union. They shared that through the organization they predominantly consumed cannabis with other black students. This also implies that the cannabis culture at Trinity could be

segregated since Greek life, tends to only have white students and cultural organizations, students of color.

However, this also means that your social circle can expand racially and ethnically based on the involvement that a student has on campus. This can be seen by looking at the following quote from Rosey:

“I feel like now as a senior and just seeing the way that even I have expanded myself, I have cyphs [smoke sessions] in the middle of the day with white people and my friends of color... weirdly enough I smoke with a lot of white people now as a senior because I have white people in my inner circle now... the more you navigate these spaces, the more you meet people,” Rosey

In the later years of her college career, is when Rosey began to enter predominantly white spaces such as the Student Government Association and began to consume cannabis with white students. As spoken about before, cannabis is used as a social lubricant and can “break the ice” between students that may think they have nothing in common. Students of color that interact with white students on a frequent basis are more likely to find white cannabis users and eventually build a relationship with them through cannabis.

Although I do not have enough data to officially make this claim, Rosey’s quote and a few other interviews made me wonder if students of color have to be the ones to enter white spaces in order to be introduced to white cannabis users and prompt the relationship building between them. I have heard other instances of students of color joining predominantly white spaces such as Quest (Trinity’s outdoor leadership program), and even Greek life and finding an accepting community of cannabis users. However, it is on the student of color to join these spaces

## What We Do While We're High

Another aspect of cannabis culture is what happens after one consumes cannabis and begins to get high. The commonalities amongst the interviews can be embodied by the following quotes that share everyone likes to talk and be social with their peers when consuming cannabis.

“We talk about everything under the sun. We talk about sex, we talk about academics, we talk about you know, what’s going on, like in our organizations. Sometimes it’s just a time to like laugh and like joke and tell stories... its no topic off the table to be honest,” Rosey, Black

“so just us watching T.V, talking you know, we’ll talk about everything. we’ve all gotten to the point that where we can converse normally high. Where we’re just have typical conversations about anything,” Elizabeth, white

“So my best moments include like, moments where people like were talking. And like because we know we're high like we're laughing and shit like we want to have like a like a kind of a giggly time and like, be kind of feeling like free. On the other hand, instead of that it's, let's like talk about something deep that like when you know that It kind of the weed gives you like this a new perspective or like a deeper level of thinking about like, whether it's like a social issue, whether it's like you talking about your life and you and your friend or psychoanalyzing your life together,” Sid, South Asian

“I like putting on something [TV] and having a conversation, or putting on music and having conversation or playing games,” I think I can get pretty giggly. So I’m like usually laughing at everything, but I’ve had very deep conversations,” Opal, White

By analyzing these quotes, we can see that all the interviews had themes of having fun and getting high to enjoy each other’s company. Variations of the word laugh, and giggle were used throughout the above quotes and more so throughout their interviews. Commonalities in the cannabis culture regardless of race or ethnicity are the enjoyment of each other’s company while being high. Being high allowed all the interviews to destress and let loose and allow for goofy or deep conversations.

Race does make a difference in high talk in one notable respect. In general, and operating in the laughter, the one topic to another feature of all the interactions, students of color tend to focus outward – on social issues that affect them – while white students its more inclined to be individualistic. But even here some of that difference stems from already existing relationships.



In other words, because students exist in for the most part racially segregated worlds, white students talk about what interests white students on campus and non-white students talk about what interests non-white students. Because non-white students must think about race in all its dimensions that ‘high conversations’ are as whacky as they are still focusing on the social world they must navigate.

Jay for instance stated, “I’m not gonna lie, like, I’ve had my most philosophical conversations, probably with my group of people that come from my same neck of the woods, like, where we all have the same experiences where we’re all talking, not from a perspective of judging each other, but from a perspective of like, just analyzing our experiences in comparison to one another.” Here Jay is implying that they in fact have a different conversation with people of color, or those that mirror is background, in comparison to smoking with white students. In Sid’s interview, they shared a similar sentiment by stating that they see differences that are, “partially male, female, partially people of color, not people of color. Every discussion I’ve had about something that’s like a social issue, something that’s not personal... usually always a person of color. And with white people, it becomes a very personal conversation where we want to talk about maybe ourselves.” In this quote, we can see that Sid clearly draws a line between the conversations they typically have with students of color versus those they would have with white students.

In some conversations there is the ability to distinguish between those had with white students and students of different races and ethnicities, however, it was common to also hear that the topic of conversation depends on the relationship overall and doesn’t have to do with race. For instance, Ronaldo, an Afro-Latino stated, “I think it mostly depends on the relationship you have with the person,” and Rosey shared, “one of my white friends, I don’t let race get in the

way of our conversations until I can really feel like I could talk to her about anything.” Here Ronald and Rosey are in agreement that the nature of the relationship affects the topic of conversation and the overall cannabis experience.

All in all, the argument that the topic of conversation is based on the nature of the relationship can also be seen through a racial lens. Based on my interviews, I am able to make the conclusion that those from a similar background, that being race/ethnicity or class, can build strong friendships and relationships. With that, it is fair to say that students of color can form stronger relationships with other students of color because they are able to relate to one another. This, however, does not take away from the possibility of non-white students building relationships with white students.

### Why We Get High

At Trinity College, cannabis is being used both medically (self-medicated) and recreationally. All interviewees have noted beginning their cannabis journey with using cannabis for recreational purposes, but some have deviated from that original reason.

For instance, Opal shared that, “it’s probably more now. yeah, it’s definitely more. It was a lot more my sophomore year, due to the people I was living with...Whereas my freshman year, I think I really only [smoked] on the weekends, But now I’m more comfortable.” Here we can see that over the three and half years she has been at Trinity, her usage of cannabis has increased drastically. She has come to accept smoking more in her weekly life and less as something solely for the weekends. She also mentioned, “I think of it as at the end of the day, if I have a beer after a long day of work, no one would think twice about it, whereas if I come home and want to

smoke a joint instead of beer. What is the difference?” Consuming cannabis has become a normal part of her life and has come to be used to destress and enjoy life a little bit more.

The same sentiments come from non-white students, using cannabis to destress and ease anxieties that come from being students at Trinity College. Students of color had various responses, but similarly to white students, the main reason was to relax and for the reason that Ronald describes here; “Why do I smoke because I like it. Literally, because I saw that I like how it makes me feel like I don’t know how another way to put it. Like, that’s why we consume everything we consume, because it makes us feel good.” We can see here how students have normalized the act of consuming cannabis in their everyday lives and ultimately consume cannabis because of the enjoyment of the “high” sensation.

On the complete other hand, some students did mention to use of marijuana for the purposes of healing and coping with various diagnosed and undiagnosed conditions. That being said none of the participants were medically licensed to consume cannabis but acknowledged their usage for medical purposes. Laura shared that through smoking cannabis she was able to ease her insomnia and other symptoms:

“I like weed because it has a limit. Like, your brain has a limit for like, how much it will affect you. It's not like an opiate where it'll like, you know, each time it like gets you high, like, but then it like, you know, wears off or whatever. Like with weed, if you want to get super fucked up, you have to wait two weeks, you know what I mean? So you have to, like build up that time. So it's like, I kind of appreciate like where I'm at right now, where we just kind of doesn't, it kind of just calms me down a little bit. And that means I can smoke during the day. A lot of people look at me like what the fuck, but I have crippling anxiety. And when my heart starts racing for no reason, out of nowhere during the day, it's really helpful to just have that option, you know?”

Here we are able to conclude that Laura moved past using cannabis for solely recreational use and has used it as a way to ease her symptoms of anxiety. Opal shared similar sentiments to that

of Laura because she has used cannabis to soothe symptoms of an eating disorder. Both conditions were diagnosed but the usage of cannabis medically was not prescribed.

However, amongst students of color, the notion of using cannabis to cope with mental illness was a bit more common. Sid for instance shared that, “I won’t say that there isn’t a white person who told me that weed helped them in terms of mental health and emotional stuff, but most of the people of color who I’ve smoked with have said that for them and including for me [its] part of our experience.” Here Sid shares that majority of the people of color they know have admitted using cannabis for soothing mental illnesses. Similar conclusions can be made from the following quote by Jay.

“I guess I would say maybe I should say one thing. I mean, yeah, I feel like I said it again, like, it's very much a coping mechanism for a lot of us [students of color]. And I don't doubt that, again, a lot of people are just self medicating and stuff like that making up for their own problems and neuroses and stuff like that. And, I mean, we're getting to a point where it's like, it's becoming so legal. And so normal,” Jay, Afro Latine

In the quote above Jay, like many of the other participants expressed how normal the usage of marijuana is becoming, while also emphasizing how students of color are using it as a coping mechanism. We are able to conclude that at Trinity, students engage in cannabis to relax from stressors, to have fun, and for some students to cope with disorders or mental health. However, amongst non-white students, there is the understanding that they use cannabis more regularly to deal with mental health issues and overall trauma of being an oppressed being in America,

### What Makes Us Cannabis Users

A cannabis user is anyone that smokes cannabis or consumes it in any form. An avid consumer of cannabis or a “pothead” also known as a “stoner” is someone that is “smoking more than once a day,” (Lisa). This characterization is in no way racialized as non-white students use

the same definition of a cannabis user being someone that consumes and engages in cannabis multiple times a day.

At the beginning of their cannabis journeys, all of the participants relied on someone else in order to engage with cannabis. As participants began to enjoy the sensation of cannabis; they became more experienced and truly socialized into the culture. Another indicator of socialization into cannabis culture is the possession of cannabis paraphernalia that allows for independence from one's social circle. This gave participants the ability to consume cannabis at their own convenience without the reliance of anyone. These findings can be evident in the following quotes:

“you have to have like paraphernalia, like your own paraphernalia, and you’re smoking on your own... I didn’t feel like I was stoner till I was smoking multiple times a week,” Laura, white

“you need to smoke at least every couple of days. I honestly think when you become a stoner, its like okay, I’m going to get my own piece, and I’m my getting my own products,” Elizabeth, white

Once cannabis users have their own piece or method of consuming cannabis, it is common for them to collect different types of paraphernalia. The following quotes describe how cannabis users at Trinity are able to engage in cannabis culture with various cannabis receptacles and are willing to invest in the act of consuming cannabis.

“There are different types of potheads, there are potheads that like to smoke different types of weed or consume different types of weed products. There’re potheads that like to like collect weed marijuana receptacles like you know, I mean, like like, tools like paraphernalia like people like really like some people like bongs like DAB rigs and like artwork. Nowadays, some people like to do that like so,” Ronald, Afro-Latino

“you have to have smoking materials, like many smoking materials, you cant just have papers all the time... in my opinion, you gotta have like a glass item... like you gotta have different items.. gotta know how to roll, the white people I smoke with, can’t roll for shit... they always got bongs, like intricate shit, I definitely think they drop a lot more money on smoking products,” Rosey, Black

When looking at racialized aspects of what makes a cannabis user is, what comes up is the ability to “roll,” this is taking a rolling paper and filling it with weed, and rolling it into a joint or a blunt. Rosey is the one that highlights best in the quote above sharing that majority of the white students she smokes with use bong or glass pieces because they don’t know how to roll. Wealth is another factor that plays into this because glass pieces can range in price. As Rosey notes, white students are more willing to buy expensive pieces. Looking at these quotes we can see that key aspects of a cannabis user are having their paraphernalia and ability to smoke on their own time without the reliance on others.

### What other Drugs do We Use

Cannabis is not the only drug used on Trinity’s campus. Psychedelics, cocaine, and Adderall came up in the drug history of participants. Psychedelics such as shrooms are used by both nonwhite and white students but are more common amongst students of color. Only two students mentioned using Adderall. Cocaine is common amongst white students that engage in cannabis culture and is not rare for some students of color. This leads me to conclude that those that engage in cannabis culture are more likely to consume other drugs.

Opal explains the drug dynamic at Trinity in the following quote, “white culture at Trinity’s campus really has a lot to do with coke. Like a lot to do. When I was a freshman and I was primarily friends with I would say only people of color, I was only seeing weed. And the second I was introduced to like the actual white culture on this campus... that’s when I started to see like the frat life [and coke].” Here Opal acknowledges that cocaine is more common amongst the white demographic at Trinity while cannabis is popular among students of color.

For students of color that engage in cannabis, it is common that they do not purchase their own cocaine as outlined by Sid, “I never purchase my own cocaine. But if I’m offered some, I don’t really like to say no, cause why not. And that’s usually a situation where I’m in a frat, or at least in a preppy-dominated scene. I have definitely had circles of friends at Trinity kind of more like the people of color versus like kind of the more preppy or white people, and I definitely see that coke is a super white drug.” Here Sid makes it clear that cocaine is a white drug often gatekept by peppiness. Cocaine tends to be more expensive than cannabis making it less accessible to students from a lower socio-economic class. Based on the demographics of Trinity, it is generalizable to say that most students from a high socioeconomic class are white.

When it comes to psychedelics, students spoke of them in a non-racial way and only said that do psychedelics or shrooms specifically. Cocaine on the other hand definitely has a racial connotation but has been used amongst students of color. It is important to note that students of color that engage in cocaine get it from white or wealthier students and have a previous engagement with cannabis.

### **Conclusion:**

The still somewhat banned and monitored use of cannabis on campus imparts a ‘collective niche’ as rebellion and relaxation. The interactions necessary to teach it in this somewhat policed context provide a common language and common tips. For the most part, however, smoking is still segregated by race but not as segregated as other formal and informal settings on campus. Traditionally white spaces such as Greek life have become increasingly diverse but only by the integration provoked by non-white students. This feature along with the elements of cannabis culture in a social setting has the potential to for a brief period, gloss over the large-scale features of the institutions embedded in white supremacy. For a brief period of

time – like dancing, performance, and ritual, getting high releases students and particularly students of color from the day-to-day reminder that they are an oppressed body at Trinity.

Conducting this research showed me that there is a lack of data and research done on cannabis and specifically on the overall positive experiences of individuals. My research and findings leave room for more research to be done on the experiences of students of color and cannabis. It would be interesting to dive into the surveillance of cannabis and other illicit drugs at Trinity and the possible implications that have on students of color differently than white students. Overall, students that consume cannabis, at the end of the day want to get high and will accomplish this goal in whatever social setting they are in.



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