

Marijuana Clouds the Generation Gap

By SAM BLUM



“In adult circles it is now deemed bad form to discuss the quality of the pot, where it came from or what it is doing to one’s head. One does not ask if others are feeling it. One does not say, ‘Oh, wow,’ or ‘Dynamite!’”

An over-30 pot-smoking gathering in Manhattan.

**Pot-smoking is not just a youth kick;
increasingly it is being tried by adults,
who should—or should not—know better**

SHOULD anyone still believe that the use of marijuana is spreading because of the Mafia conspiracy or a Communist plot to sap the will of our youth, let me tell of a 40-year-old who tried it for the first time this summer. He is a major figure in the advertising world; but despite that fact, he seldom drinks liquor and never smokes cigarettes.

What led him to pot? His 14-year-old daughter gave him three miserably rolled joints for a Father's Day present. He smoked only one of them in my presence and had to be taught by the others in his

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room how to inhale. The thing burned like a small bonfire (no one had told him to lick the cigarette before lighting it), making little explosions (uncleaned marijuana contains seeds that sometimes go "pop" when fire hits them) as the gentleman struggled to "swallow" the smoke. He nearly choked. I doubt that he'll ever go near it again.

But he has now become part of the most rapidly growing estimated statistic officially issued by the United States Government. Last October, a National Institute of Mental Health pamphlet made the "conservative estimate" that about 5 million juveniles and adults had used marijuana at least once. Five months later, in March, another N.I.M.H. pamphlet said that "more than 8 million people

have used the drug." Then, a month later, the N.I.M.H. reported to Congress that the number "conservatively was between 8 million and 12 million." In June, Dr. Stanley F. Yolles, then director of N.I.M.H., used the figure 20 million. A standard projection curve suggests that by now one could easily find someone at N.I.M.H. willing to go for 25 or even 30.

OBVIOUSLY, the N.I.M.H. figures rely on some wild guesswork, but no one at all awake throughout the last decade can doubt the direction in which they point. We Americans are using a lot more marijuana than we used to, and we will be using a lot more than that. It is now the very rare college student who has never tried the drug.

In New York and the outlying areas where daytime New Yorkers go to sleep, high-school students complain that they must either smoke or learn to enjoy solitude. A ninth-grader in Scarsdale High School estimates that 50 per cent of her friends have tried marijuana and says that not infrequently it is smoked in the school ("like during fire drill, when we're jammed into the vestibule between the cafeteria and the outside door"). She knows of seventh-graders in Scarsdale who are smoking; children in New York private schools are aware of its use in sixth grade. Juvenile-delinquency cases involving possession of marijuana get into the papers under datelines from Los Angeles to Hyannis Port.

This progression of marijuana down the age scale is extremely disturbing, and properly so, to adults. Marijuana, psychiatrists inform us, is a euphoriant and can be used as a rigid defense against the problems of growing up. It is unquestionable that a certain number of children have seriously damaged their personal development by habitually turning off their problems through drugs and never learning to solve them. Thirteen-year-olds who turn on at recess probably do themselves no more harm than 13-year-olds who get drunk at recess, but psychiatrists tend to find the prospects for both quite dismal.

In conjunction with that worrisome use of marijuana by younger and younger children, however, is its use by older and older adults. Marijuana long ago bridged the generation gap and has since been streaming across like the First Army at Remagen.

Undoubtedly, the most important reason for the sudden outbreak of marijuana use in the adult working world is that young people have grown older. The pot-smoking art student of 1965 is the pot-smoking art director of 1970. The pot-smoking coed of last year is today's pot-smoking "assistant buyer of better dresses." And Seventh Avenue is adjusting to her.

As she explains, "You go into a showroom, and there's a straight set of salesmen for the old ladies, and they offer the old ladies a drink, but there are also hip salesmen, guys with real long hair and groovy clothes; and they just take you in the back and turn you on. In some of the houses the designers, the models, everybody is spaced out of his mind. And sometimes they lay dope on you. They're very cool about it. They come over while you've got your book out and you're writing orders, and they say, 'What do you do for kicks? Do you get high? I've got some very interesting stuff here,' and they give you an ounce."

A lot more marijuana-smoking among adults can be explained as experimental in nature. As the

(Continued on Page 45)



A young girl at the Powder Ridge, Conn., music-less festival.

Marijuana clouds the generation gap

(Continued from Page 29)

father of three teen-age girls recently told me, "I've now tried pot twice, just to see what the girls are up to. I wanted reassurance that it wouldn't kill them."

ONE would have to be a man of very little curiosity not to wonder what the marijuana experience is like. Enough authorities have now indicated that the drug does no apparent harm that the risk in trying it seems to many to be solely a legal one, and people do seem willing to risk the law's wrath on this issue. A Nobel laureate recently asked psychiatrist Lester Grinspoon, an advocate of legalized marijuana sales, whether he could provide him with a few joints. Needless to say, Dr. Grinspoon couldn't and didn't; but the intellectual level of his petitioner was no surprise to him. He lists among the more enthusiastic older smokers in the Boston area "social scientists and academic people,

astronomers and physicists."

But no single explanation such as "curiosity" covers the thousands of adults who five or six years ago feared and shunned marijuana but use it today. I've recently met engineers, Wall Street brokers (one of whom, three years ago, threw his best friends out of his home for offering his wife a marijuana cigarette—the break between the two families has never been repaired) and film editors, all of whom were in their 30's before trying the drug, but who now would rate themselves as regular users. One film editor uses it in place of all other possible drugs. It is his first cigarette of the morning, his coffee break, his martini, his sleeping pill. He nevertheless manages to function.

Statistics don't exist on this matter, but it is this observer's impression that in New York marijuana is being used most widely by adults in the arts and the commercial arts, in the teaching profes-

sion (where it is argued that one could not conceivably understand the students if one did not grasp their highs), and in the "helping" professions. Four members of the New York Psychoanalytic Society recently agreed on the estimate that 95 per cent of their colleagues in their own age group (between 35 and 45) had experimented with marijuana and that many continued to use it from time to time. Moreover, to the best of their knowledge, all the psychiatrists under the age of 35 whom they personally knew, and certainly all of their own psychiatric residents, smoked pot regularly, many of them daily. Knowledgeable Bostonians suggest that their psychoanalytic community is equally turned on.

The smoking of marijuana, in other words, can no longer be interpreted as a sign of alienation. Great numbers of pot smokers are very nicely adjusted to our society. They make love; they make money; and for that matter, reports

from Vietnam indicate, they make war. (A study in February showed that one out of five front-line soldiers smoked marijuana every day.)

THIS wide use of marijuana is plainly a new phenomenon, at least in the middle-class East Coast culture. (On this sort of fad—if that is what it is—we generally tend to be two or three years behind California, two or three years ahead of Kansas.) It is causing people to ask themselves rather serious questions about their own morality and values. It is changing the nature of many social gatherings and, more important, it is affecting many social relationships, including those of parent and child, husband and wife.

I have recently been talking with middle-class adults about their own attitudes toward marijuana. I wanted to know why they were using it or not using it, and what it was doing to their lives.

Marijuana is not new to all members of the middle class. Its use by some of them in the past, however, had something to do with slumming. Throughout most of its

long history, marijuana has been a cheap pleasure of the most downtrodden poor of the poorer nations. ("In Morocco," said a man raised there 50 years ago, "we'd see the servants smoking hashish [a stronger form of marijuana]—they were forbidden to smoke in the house—but no one who had servants would smoke.")

When marijuana began to enter this country from Mexico in the nineteen-twenties, however, young people in the Southwest found it not only cheap and abundant, but good for laughs at parties. It is not at all hard to find people with pleasant memories of using "the weed" 45 years ago in Albuquerque. It is even easier to find others reminiscing happily about smoking "tea" in Greenwich Village in the thirties. Outside of Bohemia, marijuana tended to be found mostly in the black slums, where a number of white middle-class boys ran into it because of their love for jazz.

For almost everyone who smoked, decades past, it was simply a means to a good time. "We didn't make a mystique or a religion of it," said

(Continued on Page 48)



(Continued from Page 45)

a woman editor who smoked in the nineteen-thirties. "We were left-wing artists and writers, not at all mystically oriented."

"It was a form of naughtiness," explains a female physician of her high-school days in the Village in the early nineteen-fifties. "I went out with a black guitar player who brought it down from Harlem. He thought it made him Segovia; I just thought it was fun to do something illegal. But you know, I was too young to drink, too, and it was just as big a thrill to go into a bar and get served Scotch."

"Also, adults then didn't seem to get as clutched by the idea of their kids smoking pot as they do now. When I told my father, all he said was, 'Just stay out of automobiles. The driver's timing might be off.' That was the extent of it."

Many marijuana smokers of 20 or more years ago gave up the drug when they "no longer had friends in the jazz world," or "went off to college," or found that they had to put any effort at all into getting it. Many marijuana smokers appear to take pride

in the fact that they have never bought it. Now that marijuana has become so easily available, many smokers of years ago have returned to it.

It certainly can't yet be said that marijuana has been accepted by the New York middle-aged middle class. As was the case some years ago with the young, it is generally thought to be the more politically progressive and possibly more intellectual of their elders who are currently smoking. Recently this writer met with a group of 30 Long Island parents (by accident almost all liberals) to discuss the pot situation on the North Shore and found them in agreement that in their part of the world there are absolutely no right-of-center adults who use it.

Psychoanalytic evidence might back up this concept. The four analysts with whom I've discussed the matter describe those among their patients who are most against marijuana as "rigid-moralistic," "struggling to control their own impulses," "menopausal churchgoing," "the people who oppose sex education in the schools," "the same

people who never talk about sex." But being in analysis at all suggests a certain adventurousness; and one analyst said, "Almost all those I've seen in their 20's and 30's—even the conservative, rigid ones—have tried both sex and pot, though they might feel a bit guilty about both. It seems to me that my adult patients use pot very much the way I do: occasionally at a party or just for the fun of it. They don't use it the way the kids take it, which is every day or to solve problems or to deal with tension."

IT does not really make sense, however, to view the marijuana issue as simply age-related, or political, or a sign of good or poor mental health. Many people who oppose marijuana are frightened of it for intelligent reasons. Marijuana does have powerful effects on human beings. No one knows precisely how marijuana creates its effects and there is no certainty that its action is harmless. There have been scientific reports from Arab countries describing a form of psychosis traced directly to the use of hashish.

Most American researchers
(Continued on Page 55)

at the moment doubt the existence of a syndrome specific to the use of *cannabis*, and it is hard to find a New York psychiatrist who believes in it. This can be frustrating to anyone who is convinced he is suffering from it. A young writer, who is awaiting the publication of his first novel, recently described his symptoms to me as "feeling as if I've been stoned for a long time, and now I'm almost down but not quite, and I'm tired, and I have a kind of trippy feeling and a slight dizziness; and nausea keeps coming and going. This has been going on for six weeks." He blames it on three years of daily pot-smoking, claims to have friends who have similarly suffered from long-time heavy marijuana use (and they have all given up the drug as a consequence) but who have not yet been able to come up with a physician who would blame their symptoms on anything more than "anxiety." Said the writer, "The last fellow I saw told me that once my book was out and well-reviewed I'd be my old self again."

ALTHOUGH doctors, for the moment might tend to feel the *cannabis* psychosis is mythical, they do seem to agree that the use of marijuana could very well trigger a psychotic reaction in a person whose ego is already shaky. It might, however, be the case that this problem, too, is self-limiting. A study that Dr. Grinspoon made of 41 acute schizophrenic college-age patients admitted to his research ward bore out an impression that he'd had before "that schizophrenic and pre-schizophrenic people tend to stay away from the drug. Only six of them," says Dr. Grinspoon, "had ever used marijuana, which is remarkably few for that age group. In four of them, it was clear that the onset of the psychosis was so removed in time from the use of the drug that (the two) wouldn't have been related; in the last two I was unable to say one way or the other. I couldn't implicate or exonerate the drug. It stands to reason that a drug like this might precipitate psychosis. But putting it into perspective with other things, if you get someone who is psychosis-prone or is prepsychotic, any number of things might do it, such as, let's say, an alcoholic debauch, a severe automobile accident, the loss of an important loved one. . . ."

Dr. Grinspoon himself might be part of one of the more important influences leading adults to try marijuana for

cocktail parties behaving like everyone else in the room.

But one characteristic of marijuana is that it turns people thoughtful and frequently when it is smoked in small groups, people tend to grow quiet, listen to the music (a common adult reaction is, "I never understood rock music until I turned on") and investigate their own fantasies. Such quiet gatherings can drive the nonsmoker to new extremes of boredom.

On the other hand, marijuana can make such statements as "Please pass the mustard" seem fraught with hidden meanings of oracular import, and the struggle to decode them can break up everyone in the room. Absolute uncontrolled hilarity is one of the great and mysterious pleasures of group marijuana use. At times it is almost clear what is knocking everyone out. (An event that apparently brought down the house at one party was a young lady's forgetting that she had already eaten dinner and announcing that she was starved; at another party it was a young man's holding up a roast chicken and remarking that it looked like Brancusi's *Bird in Space*—everyone agreed with him, then cracked up.)

In general, what it is that amuses everyone is a total mystery. No one knows what anyone else is laughing about and the attempt to explain only makes it seem funnier—if you happen to be high. The fellow who is not finds the entire situation at the emotional level of a nursery school, and stomach-turning. He often starts smoking out of self-defense.

But gatherings solely for the purpose of smoking seem not to be part of the adult, regular smoker's world. He is far more likely to use marijuana precisely the way he previously used alcohol, and there are now middle-aged circles in which the drinking of liquor has almost disappeared. As a 40-year-old financier told me over a glass of sparkling Perrier water, "I once had a great fondness for icy martinis. They had many good qualities. Of most importance, they were lubricators of social interaction and the alimentary canal."

"Well, I can hardly remember the last time I saw a drink at a dinner party. In fact, I can't remember the last time I had a drink."

"You know, the homes to which I get invited aren't that remarkable. I'd say they're upper-middle-class, typical East Side Manhattan, South Shore folks who fear drug abuse, would shun cocaine and run from LSD, but it is a

rarity in their homes that I'm not offered pot in beautifully rolled joints. I'd say that there's a cut-off date in this: I don't see pot in the home of anyone older than his early 40's unless he's a photographer or an extraordinarily wealthy unreconstructed Bohemian.

"But it seems to me that there will be an ever-greater tendency for hostesses of all ages to provide pot as an alternative to cocktails as the word spreads that if people turn on before dinner, there are no bad meals."

"Last weekend my wife prepared leg of lamb, casseroles of rice and mushrooms,



salad and cheese. We had two other couples to dinner. The leg of lamb was huge. We expected it to last us through Sunday. Every bit of it went. Everything went. The brie was snapped up as if there were imminent danger of war with France. When dieting, I cannot smoke before I dine."

"I think," the marijuana-smoking venture capitalist went on, "that it's ridiculous to fear that pot leads to other things, at least not for grown-ups. Most pot-smokers, I find, are serious-minded family people, politically oriented, and they smoke pot because it is a deliciously communal thing to do and it tends to sharpen everything from movies to sex; but the idea that if this is terrific, wouldn't cocaine be better, never occurred to them."

SINCE marijuana smoking is so new to the middle class, there is still a certain amount of confusion as to how one should serve it, use it, and behave under its influence. But certain rules seem to be evolving.

In general, in relaxed circumstances, it's traditional to pass around a single marijuana cigarette. The stuff is still somewhat scarce. By passing it around, more smoke goes into people and less into the air. But there is something about passing around a single joint at a dinner party that resembles passing around a single glass of Scotch. Hostesses are now spending afternoons with their rolling machines making enough joints to turn on three times the number of guests expected, if they smoked economically.

The question of marijuana-high conversations is an interesting one. On first turning

to enjoy it. "I'd go to parties, and hold one drink all night," a housewife in her mid-30's told me. "I hated the taste of alcohol. And it made me dizzy, and it left me with a hangover. Marijuana was a godsend. It's much milder than liquor and much pleasanter, so I carry my own. When everyone else drinks, I open my cigarette case, pull out a joint; and everyone is very impressed: 'Barbara the swinger!' But I just smoke enough to get a slight high. I don't really like the super-boo that takes the top of your head off. I just want to feel more relaxed, more in the mood for a party. I love it."

This use of marijuana, as if it were Scotch, to get through parties, however, does not appeal to everyone. For example, says one typical long-time, weekend marijuana smoker, "I can't stand using it except with my husband and sometimes close friends. I think it's an intimate experience. You see, alcohol takes you out of yourself. It makes you cloddish and indiscriminate. Everybody's your buddy. But grass gets you into yourself. It heightens whatever it is you really feel, and if you're with someone you don't like, or with someone who is acting phony, the grass makes you really hate them."

"Grass sharpens things. The ugly gets uglier—you can't stand to listen to bad music or a raucous voice—but the beautiful develops subtleties. I personally never see colors at all; I couldn't tell you the color of your eyes; but on grass all colors are amazingly vivid for me."

"And I really have touching, personal, mysterious experiences on it. An example?"

"Well, I was walking around the block very high with a close friend one night, and suddenly he knelt down and put his arm around a fireplug. Well, you see, I found that touching, terribly significant. I still do, but I can't say why."

There are people who find that marijuana causes problems in their marriages. As one psychologist says, "Marijuana leads you to pick up a lot of non-verbal signals that you normally don't notice and that's not always good for a marriage. One of my patients has been getting along for years with a very minimal sexual life. She began to smoke pot, found that it turned her on sexually, and did nothing at all to her husband. It became completely clear to her that he didn't want her, she didn't want him."

Many pot smokers insist that the drug clearly affects their sex lives. A study made of 200 marijuana users by

sociologist Eric Goode showed that 68 per cent found that marijuana increased their sexual enjoyment and 44 per cent claimed that it increased their sexual desire. A good number of pot smokers with whom I talked insisted that it improved their marital relations, but others claimed that it cut out sex entirely by putting them to sleep.

MARIJUANA, it may be said, is now firmly rooted in our society. It helps to produce good times for influential people. Unless it should be proved that it seriously harmed everyone who smoked it, it is unlikely that the growth of its popularity could be halted. Even then, it is not certain that the American public would not accept it as it has accepted tobacco and alcohol.

Past attempts to stop the flow of marijuana into this country either came to very little or have proved actually harmful. Last year's "Operation Intercept," along with causing the most massive traffic jam Mexico has ever experienced, did create a nationwide marijuana "famine," but it also led gentlemen farmers throughout the nation to lay in crops of their own. Most American marijuana is of poor quality, but says one cannabis horticulturist, "We've only begun to research the matter. Consider how long it took to produce a drinkable New York State champagne." Last summer's marijuana famine had more serious consequences as well: with the relatively mild marijuana denied them, many young people pushed on to much stronger and more dangerous stuff.

Ours is indeed a drug culture, and marijuana is generally the second or third drug (after cigarettes and alcohol) tried in a progression that can lead to disastrous addictions and ruined lives. The middle class is for the first time becoming aware of the drug menace that has so long plagued the black ghettos, now that heroin is beginning to appear in its own colleges and high schools. Pressure must surely soon build up to redraw lines between what is acceptable and what is forbidden in our drug-taking society. But this time, let us have the sense not to misrepresent what we are doing. As Dr. Grinspoon points out, "Kids who feel lied to about marijuana's dangers tend to assume that they are also being lied to about LSD, and cocaine, and heroin."

Most of the new attitudes toward marijuana which I found emerging among middle-class Americans are to the good. As for marijuana itself . . . I much prefer booze. ■