

# **It's a Man's Weed: Mainstream Online News and Visibility During America's New Marijuana Legalization Era**

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to shed some light on the emerging mainstream news discourses connected to marijuana's legalization in parts of the United States by asking who is most involved in these discourses, what connections involvement may have to social status and social factors, most significantly gender, as well as what a few discursive themes in marijuana-related coverage might be, and what further research could be most needed. The literature review focused on critical theory, as well as feminist journalism studies, celebrity studies, and other research connected to emerging discourses, in an effort to approach a topic with limited prior social scientific research from a social scientific viewpoint. Research was undertaken with a multi-method approach, and included a content analysis of marijuana-related news coverage from *The Seattle Times* during the months before and after specific marijuana legalization events took place, highlighting the gender and expert status of sources in coverage, as well as a critical discourse analysis of newsworthy personal disclosures of marijuana consumption by American presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, and also famous musician and entrepreneur Snoop. Results from the content analysis indicate that men are more likely than women to appear as sources in marijuana coverage, that men are also more likely than women to appear as sources based on their professional expertise, and that the gender imbalance in marijuana coverage is very similar to gender imbalances found in other studies of news sources. Insights from the discourse analysis suggest that attitudes about marijuana may be shifting in such a way that marijuana consumption may still be least stigmatized in the context of regrettable youth activities, but that changing laws permitting consumption only by those age 21 and over, in concert with commercialized messages in media, may have begun to lay the groundwork for destigmatizing adult consumption. Suggestions for further research include closer looks at the nature and impact of commercialization on marijuana-related discourses, as well as studies of the relationship(s) between gender, race, industry participation, and media coverage.

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## 1.1 Introduction

Marijuana is a substance which is simultaneously highly stigmatized and the subject of massive public parties and protests. Public discourse about marijuana in the West has, in fact, been uneven for decades, as a subject either ignored or vilified in news media found a glamorized home in films like *Easy Rider* (Hopper, et al., 1969) and on albums from Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and other musicians during the 1960s and '70s (Rivadavia, 2014). After years of stigma, glamour, education, miseducation and debate, legal, political, cultural, and commercial factors have coalesced into the creation of semi-legal retail marijuana markets in the states of Washington, Oregon, and Colorado, and in de facto marijuana semi-legalization (albeit without a current retail market) in Alaska and Washington, D.C., all over the period of a few short years, beginning in 2012. Despite the fact that marijuana has remained illegal at the federal (nationwide) level, the marijuana industry in Colorado has been valued at nearly \$1 billion (Baca, 2016), just over \$700 million dollars of marijuana have been sold in Washington State over the past year (Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board, 2016), and \$11 million dollars of marijuana was sold in Oregon during the very first week of sales there (Associated Press, 2015). Mainstream news media hasn't ignored this; as a sizeable industry is coming out of the closet, refining and reinventing itself, big business has become big news.

However, while it may be a bright new day for some in search of a buck, as well as others who no longer fear arrest, nothing about the new marijuana industry or media coverage of it and other marijuana-related topics inherently exempts the industry or the news media from critique. Even if one were to consider legalization activists to be revolutionaries, entrepreneurs as pioneers, and marijuana customers intelligent rebels (overcoming stigma and choosing a substance less deadly than alcohol), there's no evidence that all this enlightenment has actually created a working environment or social culture more inclusive than society as a whole, in which women and people of color are afforded more equal opportunities and equal media representation than they may be in other industries, media platforms, and aspects of modern life. One aspect of liberalization does not necessarily beget others.

Be that as it may, some obvious significant shifts in discourse in the mass media have occurred. While keeping drugs away from youth remains a subject of discussion (Roffman, 2012), stories in mass media news outlets discussing the appropriate dosing sizes of edible marijuana (Wyatt,

2014), the effect of wildfires on local retail marijuana supply (Wright, 2014), and the legality of transporting marijuana on a public ferry boat (Mannix, 2014), are unimaginable or just not able to exist in a pre-legalization era. It's as if the discourse has exploded, and this explosion, concurrent with legalization, has given marijuana (and those with stakes in marijuana legalization) visibility in mainstream news media with a much greater frequency than the pre-legalization era. However, this is not to say that there weren't public conversations about marijuana and public images of marijuana users before these major legalization events occurred. Even during times when use was strictly prohibited, individuals, most notably celebrities and politicians, were shown consuming marijuana publicly and/or discussing their consumption in and on mainstream American media outlets, and all those discussed in this thesis were able to do so without proportionate legal consequences. They represent a part of the discourse around marijuana that, when considering the rule of law, should never have existed. However, as it did and still does, understanding who is visible in mass media discourses about marijuana as it enters this new phase is key, both to a better understanding of the discourse around marijuana in society itself, as well as to what implications this discourse may have. Old discursive binaries of health versus addiction or criminality versus good citizenship are outdated in a legalization context; attempting a better understanding of what the new discourses are and from whom they come is a way scholarship can contribute to informed discussion during a time of social change.

## **1.2 Aim and Research Questions**

The purpose of this thesis is to look at *who* is visible in emergent mainstream marijuana legalization news discourses in the United States, consider what messages have been circulating, and ultimately draw some conclusions about how the discourse is currently being shaped. The research questions are:

1. Who is visible in mass media journalism about marijuana as it undergoes an active and, at times, significant shift in legal status and a possible cultural shift?
2. Are there differences in how those with high social status communicate publicly about their own consumption versus how those with low social status communicate, and, if so, in what ways are the messages different?

3. Are there any links between the current nature of the public discourse about marijuana and aspects of life in society, such as social stigma, legal frameworks, or cultural values, that can be inferred or suggested for further research?

The breadth of the news coverage and the research questions requires a qualitative and quantitative multi-method approach. The thesis is divided into chapters, including (1) an introduction, (2) a literature review, (3) a discussion of methodology and methods, (4) a content analysis of Seattle Times coverage before and after Washington's legalization vote and first retail sales, with emphasis placed on the identities of those represented in that coverage, (5) a discourse analysis of particular statements by individuals famous in their own right, whose public identity is also either strongly connected to marijuana consumption, and/or who have made oft-quoted statement(s) about marijuana to the press, and then (6) a conclusion, including an attempt to identify key features of the new mass media discourses about legalized marijuana and propose potential implications.

## 2.1 Literature Review

At the broadest level, the thesis is grounded in perspectives on methodology from Flyvberg's "Making Social Science Matter" (2001) and Baert's "Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Towards Pragmatism" (2005). Both advocate for useful social sciences connected to the world outside the academy, but they differ in the extent to which they prioritize work for disciplinary development within the academy against work directly intended to speak to society and social conditions outside of it. The thesis itself is intended to speak partially to both arenas; as an academic document modeled on prior attempts to understand a particular subject's discourse, it attempts to conform to Baert's description of Bernstein's "dialogical encounters," wherein academics "strengthen their arguments to make them most credible and learn from them" (Baert, 2005, p.154). Further, it hopes to hold some use value, if not for society in general, but for particular interest groups, notably lobbyists, political organizations, and private companies, for whom a better understanding of the discursive landscape of the news media about marijuana may hold considerable use value. As Flyvberg says of his approach to social sciences: "The goal of the phronetic approach becomes one of contributing to society's capacity for value-rational deliberation and action" (2001, p.167). This project will surely fall short of that goal, firstly because it's a master's thesis and not a project created by an author of higher social standing or in a context held in universal high esteem, and then also because it's not intended to hold universal relevance. However, aspiring to contribute to the "value-rational deliberation and action" of particular members of society, rather than society as a whole, nonetheless retains some use value.

Three different critical theories provided the foundation for this project. In the most all-encompassing sense, Carey's "ritual view of communication" (2009, p.15) seems particularly suited, for a number of reasons. In Carey's ritual view, communication is: "the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action" (ibid., p.15). Firstly, this particularly fits the project because the ritual view offers an explanation for communication at its most basic, including person-to-person conversation, that emphasizes meaning-making alongside culture and behavior. However, in addition, the true value of the ritual view, in this instance, is in how it can expand from conversation outward to other communication methods, including one-to-many or many-to-many



communication environments. Having said that, Carey's theory may prove inadequate for describing some facets of communicative practice. "The construction and maintenance of an ordered and meaningful cultural world," would be a ludicrous way to describe the motivations behind an internet banner ad for penny slots (gambling) or the creation of the film *Jackass 3D* (Tremaine, 2010). His theory therefore seems a bit generous, and even forgiving, of the intentions of some communicators. Despite this, the theory retains use value; it may not describe communication to the extent that it intends to, but it does describe and provide insight into communicative practices relevant to this thesis, wherein communicators are active constructors of media works designed to inform or enlighten, and it can certainly be said to describe other common communicative practices, as well. While he considers the mass media specifically later on in the same work ("Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society"), here the ritual view perspective nonetheless seems to, at the very least, describe the practice of newspaper and news narrative construction and compilation (Carey, 2009). Newspapers naturally have editorial staff deciding what stories to publish and promote, they may curate incoming material using various evaluative standards and practices (Donohue, 1997), including everything from predicted reader interest, a compelling social justice motivation, or a desire to change their own public profile. Certainly editors generally have more reasons to include a major news story that is in step with their goals, than to omit it and be "scooped" (Shaw, 2006) by competitors. In making these choices, they're constructing Carey's "ordered, meaningful cultural world," with the paper itself as a "control and container."

However, the idea of an editor or editorial team building a picture of the day's news as a function of the relationship between their best interests and the material they have to work with is fundamentally incomplete. John Corner's theory of "soft power" addresses another aspect of the development of mediated information. As he says, "It is beyond dispute that media activities are deeply implicated in the broader pattern and profile of power in a society, particularly where the distribution of knowledge and the according of values are concerned" (2011, p.18). While Carey's ritual view can also be said to imply a kind of "soft power," considering the words "control and container," implicit mention of external forces is inadequate for a thesis discussing media about stigmatized and sometimes illegal behavior. The legalization of marijuana in certain states has clearly led to changes in the nature of news articles about marijuana; at the

most obvious level, there is no story about a legal marijuana store without legal marijuana. Considering this, if the media is not identified as a site which is situated in and connected to a society with its own power relations, particular aspects of this thesis lose meaning. There are certain evaluative aspects of this project, but its primary purpose is not to judge whether or not media coverage is meeting standards of accuracy based on empirical information about marijuana or marijuana consumers. Instead, in keeping with the project's intent to better understand an emerging discourse as it proliferates in mainstream contexts, considering the media as a site for reality construction that is not out of step with external forces motivates the project by situating it within society, rather than outside of it.

With the relationship between media coverage and society in mind, a theory addressing the practice of media use and meaning-making is needed. Klaus Bruhn Jensen's concept of media as important "institutions to think with" that "enable societies to reflect on and negotiate their common existence" (2010, p.16) is the third theory underlying the project, especially because it adds an important dimension without contradicting the other two theories. While this is not a study of media usage or meaning-making per se, the "institutions-to-think-with" concept motivates a study of online news; if people are thinking "with" media, it must be important to think about media. Carey's ritual view addresses the inherent communality of communicative knowledge production, Corner's "soft power" addresses the relationship between media production and society, but Jensen's theory takes on the practices of media use in a diverse, multi-faceted media environment, wherein people may also use a variety of sources, including non-mediated sources, to develop their own opinions about a subject. When considering whether or not marijuana legalization is right for their state or country, the American who compiles media reports, evaluates the content, and votes accordingly nonetheless has little reason to also disregard positive or negative personal experiences with marijuana or addiction, consultations with co-workers and friends – some of whom may be referencing media, as well – or obligations towards family members. He or she could choose to disregard non-mediated sources of information, presumably to focus on "neutral" mass media sources, in an effort to eliminate bias from his or her decision, but a 2014 Gallup poll shows that a majority of Americans distrust the media, and that a majority of Americans have actually had less than "a fair amount" of trust in the media since 2004 (McCarthy, 2014). Nonetheless, the sheer volume of news articles about

marijuana from a single newspaper (those taken up for analysis in this project), and, additionally, the frequent appearance of articles in different years as legislation progresses, as well as the existence of editorial responses to articles and to the subject, suggests that, at minimum, some people are reading and responding to these stories. Media matters, but it's not the only thing that matters, especially in the American context on this issue, since 49% of Americans have tried marijuana sometime in their life (Motel, 2015), and so many have personal experience with marijuana, or know someone who has personal experience with marijuana. Further, the stigmatization of marijuana, especially past stigmatization, has put some longtime users at odds with media coverage; for these individuals, the old "reefer madness"-style reporting (e.g. those analyzed in Griffin, 2013) can be "thought with," but never be the whole picture. The idea of media as a tool that is a part of the reasoning process, but neither the sum total nor a separate entity, fits with the way individuals are likely to consider media on "underground" or stigmatized subjects, as they may either have their own secret experiences, know of others, or even imagine that, due to stigma, there is more going on than even the reporter knows. Or they may take the coverage at face value – Jensen's theory allows for this, too. At the most basic level, Carey's theory is the "what," Corner's is the "where" and "who," and Jensen's is the "how" of this project.

Once relevant theories were considered, research models were sought out, with an eye towards previous research that addressed controversial and/or emergent discourses. The book "Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States" (Ferree, et al., 2002) has served as kind of a model for the project. While there are vast differences in scope and subject matter between the book and this thesis, theirs being a much larger project including content analysis of decades of media reports, surveys, frame analysis, and other methods, with four authors and multiple student assistants (Ferree, et al., 2002, p.xvii), one central similarity, that of using mixed methods in an attempt to understand the landscape of the discourse about a controversial subject, has been key to my own considerations as to how to approach this project, and, from that, a second set of concepts they use has also seemed particularly relevant. Ferree et al., chose to approach the relative value of the voices in discourse through the concepts of "standing" and "framing" (2002, p.35). Through these concepts they prioritize both actors with coherent voices in the media, who may also drive media coverage, as

well as the organization of statements, including those from individuals without high social status in the discussion, into coherent discourses (ibid., 2002). Without the historical knowledge necessary to determine whether or not this is an original approach to holistically understanding a discourse, it nonetheless seems to provide a perspective from which other discourses about a single issue can be viewed. As an example, the actors with “standing” in “Shaping Abortion Discourse” are NGOs – groups like Planned Parenthood, NARAL, and others that have been around and shaped policy for decades (Ferree, et al., 2002, p.87). They have “standing” because they have been treated as “an actor with a voice, not merely as an object” (Ferree, et al., 2002 p.35). Whether or not standing describes a group or an individual seems less important to the concept than the overall ability to drive all or some aspects of a conversation (i.e. interest group membership does not confer standing, position in a media discourse does).

The third and final concept borrowed from “Shaping Abortion Discourse” is their understanding of and use of the term “critical discourse moment” (Chilton, 1987, in Ferree, et al., 2002, p.24). They define it as “events that stimulate news articles and commentary in various public forums” (ibid., 2002, p.24). With this, as well as the news cycle of a mainstream daily newspaper in mind, I’ve chosen to focus my content analysis on coverage before and after particular events in recent history connected to marijuana legalization, namely, the days when public votes for a legalized and regulated market were held and their success announced, and those days when sales to the public began. While stories with marijuana as a central theme were present in mainstream dailies well before these events, and are still ongoing in a legalized era, a “critical discourse moment” provides both a practical and theoretical delimiter for a project of this size. Further, it can be said that some of the statements by celebrities and presidents concerning marijuana consumption, most exceptionally Bill Clinton’s “I didn’t inhale” statement (New York Times, 1992), are critical discourse moments in their own right, based on the amount of media attention and analysis they received.

Identifying and understanding a moment is one thing, but for more in-depth analysis, background information is needed. One of the challenges of developing the thesis was the relative lack of research on marijuana in society (with the exception of studies related to public health and neurobiological effects). So rather than rely on pre-existing topic-specific research at a macro

level, resources were chosen based on how different smaller elements of the thesis intersected with more developed fields of study. Notably, the discourse analysis addressing particular statements and their celebrity creators was informed by a few different resources, namely David P. Marshall's "Celebrity and Power" and (1997), and Chris Rojek's "Celebrity" (2001). In particular, one of Rojek's analyses about celebrities is also especially relevant to celebrities and marijuana. As he states, "To some degree the desire for celebrity is a refutation of social convention. Transgression, one might postulate, is intrinsic to celebrity, since to be a celebrity is to live outside conventional, ordinary life" (2001, p.147). Viewing celebrity as transgression, and then considering celebrities who also transgress with illegal behavior, has the neat effect of de-emphasizing the behavior itself in the context of marijuana consumption. Through this lens, when compared to the non-celebrity, the most significant transgression of the American celebrity smoking marijuana is actually their celebrity status, especially as marijuana smoking is not a rare practice in the United States. However, with this in mind, celebrities who smoke marijuana may nonetheless be considered more transgressive than other celebrities. Going further, Marshall's work makes key links between celebrity, politicians, and political power. As he argues:

The disciplinary boundaries between the domains of popular culture and political culture have been eroded through the migration of communicative strategies and public relations from the entertainment industries to the organization of the spectacle of politics. ... What is revealed is that politics, like the culture industries, attempts to play with and contain affective power through its intense focus on the personal, the intimate, and the individual qualities of leadership in its process of legitimation. (Marshall, 1997, p.xiii)

This focus on the "personal" and "the intimate" offers a partial answer to the question of why a politician would even be asked to, or feel the need to, volunteer information on past marijuana use; however, this also may be in partial conflict with the "process of legitimation" (ibid., 1997, p.xiii). Marshall also offers arguments against the "manipulation thesis," the idea that the celebrity-audience dynamic consists mostly of a mass of simpletons lured by distracting, "magical" celebrities into believing that they can have access to wealth, but emphasizes that it is not so much incorrect as it is very limited (1997, p.10). This is especially prescient and useful, since it not only moves away from an analysis wherein celebrity power is explicitly negative or mostly negative, but it also allows for power to be considered when evaluating the kind of fan-celebrity interactions on social media, an arena where a celebrity can answer a fan's question one minute, and then suggest purchasing self-branded product (which, in this context, could be

cigarette rolling papers or a particular type of marijuana) the next. While social media posts won't be considered on their own, they do form part of the media ecosystem that generates celebrity news in the mainstream media, and therefore a theoretical playing field that they couldn't logically exist within would be inadequate.

Furthermore, as a broader perspective on celebrity, John B. Thompson's article *The New Visibility* takes a poststructuralist, and sometimes Foucauldian, view of celebrity and visibility, especially as it concerns political power and vulnerability (2005). As he says of visibility that occurs without a common local or face-to-face presence, typically had by celebrities and others widely known, "If Foucault had considered more carefully the role of the media, he might have seen that they establish a relationship between power and visibility which is quite different from that implicit in the model of the Panopticon. Whereas the Panopticon renders many people visible to a few, the media enable a few people to be visible to many: thanks to the media, it is primarily those who exercise power, rather than those over whom power is exercised, who are subjected to this new kind of visibility" (Thompson, 2005, p.40). He also describes this visibility as a "double-edged sword" (ibid., 2005, p.41), an analogy that can serve as one possible explanation for the public confessions of marijuana use that celebrities, but primarily politicians make – i.e. that they may see confession as a way to "get in front of" what would be an inevitable discovery.

In addition, Ruth Penfold-Mounce's book, "Celebrity Culture and Crime: The Joy of Transgression," (2009) sticks out as undeniably pertinent to this section of the thesis. It's not a perfect fit – the celebrity criminality she focuses on tends towards those who can be truly said to be making a public spectacle of themselves, i.e. notorious hard partiers like Charlie Sheen and Lindsay Lohan. She also acknowledges the criticism her particular field, "cultural criminology," faces, in that it is sometimes considered less of a unified theory and more of a cluster of similarities (2009, p.3). She considers it a theory, and regardless of whether it is worth consideration as such, the practice of cultural criminology as she defines it is ultimately more useful in this case. As she paraphrases, "It is about looking at the collective conscience in the information age, making myths conscious, and about reconfiguring knowledge in the larger discipline" (Kane, 2004, p.305, in Penfold-Mounce, 2009, p.2). While the new-media-as-

collective-conscience concept is more extreme, and more difficult to defend, than Jensen's "institutions to think with," it nonetheless underscores the permeability between sources that can (but doesn't always) occur in a new media environment. New media may not be collective human conscience, but as it enables us to pull together dozens of different sources about celebrity behavior in an instant, ranging from original source material (e.g. celebrity's social media statements) to the most unreliable of internet tabloids and "clickbait," it can be said to provide a kind of collective (though not necessarily mutually informed) body of knowledge about an individual celebrity and even an individual celebrity's individual acts. In addition, the need for a practice of "making myths conscious" connects very clearly to some of the negative consequences that stigmatization and illegality have had on the ability to access and compile clear information on current practices and histories of illegal consumption; when a wink and a nudge is preferable to a "yes," and individuals are unwilling to speak on the record, a certain amount of confidence in the facts gathered is understandably lost. While the celebrities discussed in this thesis are here precisely because they have been so public that there is nothing doubtful (or mythical) about their marijuana consumption, this section of the description of cultural criminology addresses one of the challenges faced when trying to understand a criminalized subject in an academic context.

Some resources from journalism studies were also necessary, as both methods rely on news content as source material, and 10 of the 56 chapters in "The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism" (Allan, 2010) offer information relevant to the thesis. Highlights include Douglas Kellner's chapter, "Media Spectacle, Presidential Politics, and the Transformation of Journalism," which naturally informs the sections of the discourse analysis about presidents (in Allan, 2010). He argues that mainstream news media is increasingly dominated by spectacle, and that presidential campaigns are actively constructed as media spectacle by the media, so that readers will "stay tuned, logged on, or keep their eyes and attention on the big events of the day" (Kellner in Allan, 2010, p.118). Considering that particular past marijuana-related news-making events during campaigns may be at least partly constructed spectacles, rather than just symptoms of critical discourse moments or Thompson's consequences of "new visibility" (2005), may seem cynical, but doing so may provide insights into why particular events have gone "viral" rather than just made the news. James S. Ettema's chapter, "News as Culture" discusses Carey's

ritual view of communication, saying that it is both a “Durkheimian-inflected celebration” and that none of the conceptual issues in the ritual view are necessarily settled (Ettema in Allan, 2010, p.27). In pointing out particular aspects of Carey’s ritual view that may be more divisive, as well as contrasting it with and connecting it to newer scholarship, he offers an example of how Carey (or communications theories emphasizing culture) can continue to be relevant to contemporary theoretical discussions of journalism. Natalie Fenton’s chapter, “News in the Digital Age,” takes up common criticisms of contemporary journalism (e.g. that it favors style over substance, speed over accuracy), and finds that, despite increasing media literacy that may come from the ability to compare and contrast articles online, the internet may be changing journalism for the worse (Fenton in Allan, 2010, p.565). She also says, “To make sense of the complexity of contemporary formations of news we must combine macro-societal level analyses of news media and micro-organizational approaches to understanding contemporary formations of news” (ibid., 2010, p.564), a position that supports the continued situation of analyses of smaller news sources, like *The Seattle Times*, against the background of larger theoretical considerations.

Early reviews of the coded data indicated that information about the representation of women in news articles and the dynamics connected to women and the news media would be important; Two journal articles, *Women and News: A long and winding road* (Ross and Carter, 2011) and *Women Are Seen More than Heard in Online Newspapers* (Jia, et al., 2016) are especially relevant because they also use content analysis to consider women’s visibility in news media. Ross and Carter use data from the UK and Ireland, which they collected in connection with the 2010 “Global Media Monitoring Project” study (2011, p.1148), and combined with analyses of other content analysis studies to look at women in news media, to ground their data and suggest reasons for the gender imbalances favoring men in mainstream news media that they have found. While the article contains quite a bit of useful data and analysis, especially about the frequency of men and women as sources across different news topics, one of their conclusions about the causes of gender disparities in news media may not hold in this particular case; as they say, “We suggest that the emphasis on ‘hard’ news over ‘soft’, ‘fact’ vs. opinion, time constrained daily news over human interest features, public vs. private, all produce a gender-differentiated news agenda” (Ross and Carter, 2011). Although the “public vs. private” emphasis may yet be a



factor for other reasons, the overall perspective of the statement, that emphasizing hard news instead of soft, human-interest stories plays a major part in keeping women out of the news, seems to miss the bigger point – why is the solution to place emphasis on human interest stories, and not to put women in positions of power? Be that as it may, *Women Are Seen More than Heard in Online Newspapers* directly addresses this same concern about “hard news vs. soft news” and sexism (Jia, et al., 2016). The article begins by positioning itself in terms of these dynamics in research, saying: “Feminist news media researchers have long contended that masculine news values shape journalists’ quotidian decisions about what is newsworthy. As a result, it is argued, topics and issues traditionally regarded as primarily of interest and relevance to women are routinely marginalized in the news, while men’s views and voices are given privileged space” and then emphasizing how they sought to test this with a large-scale, computer-driven content analysis, to overcome some of the limitations of smaller studies (ibid., 2016, p.1). With over 2 million articles analyzed, the article corroborates claims of relative over- and under-representation of men and women in news articles made by Ross and Carter, and adds another dimension by coding pictures by gender, and concluding that in every genre of news – with the exception of “politics” – women are more likely to be pictured than written about in text (meaning that in political stories, men were more likely to be pictured, specifically, they were pictured 79.9% of the time)(ibid., 2016, p.5). Although pictures were not coded for the content analysis in this thesis, as marijuana legalization requires a newsworthy political process, further evidence of disproportionate connections between maleness and power in political coverage provides additional evaluative data when considering how marijuana-related stories stack up against news coverage in general, and it may also suggest a link between the practices of online journalism and the relative success and notoriety of male celebrities as they cultivate a marijuana-related public image, a decision that is not apolitical.

Another work that also links disparate aspects of the thesis is Deva R. Woodly’s, “The Politics of Common Sense: How Social Movements Use Public Discourse to Change Politics and Win Acceptance”, which addresses the mass media as “a site, not a symptom” of social change, and includes both a theoretical discussion of political communication in the mass media as well as a content and frame analysis of both gay marriage and living wage movements as they appear in *USA Today* and *The New York Times* over 10 years (2015). Woodly’s work suggests, among

other points, that specifically in reference to living wage campaigns, more ideological frames (that aren't strongly resonant with an audience) in support of the living wage are less successful when placed in opposition to one strong "anti" frame, i.e., that espousing numerous different positions can't overcome a strong, clear opposition. Coverage of marijuana legalization as a whole is multi-faceted, veering from stories showing enthusiastic partiers (Seattle Times Staff, 2014b) or the chronically ill (Martin, 2012), to discussions of crime rates (Young, 2014), teenage use prevention (Roffman, 2012), and high finance (Seattle Times Staff 2014a), and legalization campaigns haven't all been successful, including one major effort in Ohio (Jacobs, 2015), so further consideration of how diversity in coverage affects discourse and other factors in the context of emerging discourses is especially helpful. In addition, as Woodyly's work compares 2 movements whose biggest similarity was their emerging nature, it inadvertently opens up intellectual space for the academic consideration of other emerging discourses, including marijuana legalization and including those that don't necessarily result in successful mainstream adoption.

While Woodyly's content analysis has the advantage of a larger sample size, and she was able to include in her sample mainstream coverage of her subjects going back to 1994, recreational marijuana use has only been legal in the parts of the United States that it is legal in for less than 5 years. Since this thesis is, in part, an attempt at documenting a current discourse as it undergoes legal changes, there hasn't been time for a body of knowledge about post-legalization discourses to develop. Current scholarly research is naturally limited; only a bachelor's thesis comparing coverage of media narratives concerning marijuana and legalization between Colorado, Washington state, and Uruguay takes an academic approach to the subject (Festa, 2014). A significant body of neurobiological research concerning the effects of marijuana on those who consume it exists, but at best, that perspective bears only tangential connections to the nature of this project; this is not a thesis about the relative safety or harm of the plant and its derivatives. One article in the journal *Deviant Behavior*, "Sifting Through the Hyperbole: One Hundred Years of Marijuana Coverage in the New York Times" (Griffin, et al., 2013), provides useful contextual information, as well as an example of content analysis on this subject; however, the "One Hundred Years" in question are 1850 to 1950 (ibid., 2013), a fact that limits its use value

when considering discourses post-legalization – it can reasonably be used a point of reference or a site for comparison, but, naturally, not as a source for information on contemporary discourses.

Similarly, Howard Becker’s landmark work, “*Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*,” one of the most well-known and significant academic and social scientific projects about marijuana users, features interviews with those who consume marijuana, discussing marijuana as it intersects with multiple facets of their life – conversations that would be much more useful to this thesis, had the book not been published in 1963, and the conversations not so infused with the slang of the times. However, the book remains useful to a contemporary project in two ways: first, it discusses secrecy, and therefore visibility, in terms of marijuana use (p.66), and second, it grants some legitimacy to the idea of marijuana as a subject worthy of academic consideration. Harvard professor emeritus of psychiatry, Dr. Lester Grinspoon, also wrote a book well-known among those interested in the subject, “*Marihuana Reconsidered*” (Grinspoon, 1971). First published in 1971 and with a more natural scientific focus, it remains similarly interesting, but with limited use value in this case, other than the further legitimacy its precedence may grant.

With limited academic options for a cultural or social studies understanding of marijuana, a couple of popular nonfiction books by journalists and a professor emeritus were brought in to develop a background on the subject independent of news media accounts. “*Marijuana Nation: One Man’s Chronicle of America Getting High: From Vietnam to Legalization*,” a memoir by Dr. Roger Roffman, Professor Emeritus of the University of Washington (2014), synthesizes his research career as an addictions specialist with his personal experiences as an activist within the recreational and medical marijuana legalization movements from the 1970s on, as well as with his eventual decision to abstain from the drug. “*A New Leaf: The End of Cannabis Prohibition*,” by journalists Alyson Martin and Nushin Rashidian (2014), attempts to provide a well-sourced, factually sound and verifiable, summative overview of marijuana in the West, from the time when it became known in the Americas, then fast-forwarding to marijuana in the years post WWII, and eventually to the newly-minted legalization era, up to August 2013. There are, in fact, quite a few books on marijuana in contemporary and historical life available, including others like these written for popular, albeit critically-minded and analytical, audiences.

Unfortunately, the quality of the material and verifiability of the information and sources vary

widely, uncritical or self-publishing on the subject seems to be rampant, and author credentials are sometimes tenuous.

Here the two books stand out. They are built on information that cross-checks with the other, for example, Roffman says that: “Marijuana’s popularity in our country [the USA] had begun in the early 1900s when the drug was introduced by Mexican immigrants in the southwest” (2014, p.55), and Martin and Rashidian agree, saying “Recreational cannabis smoking in the United States is often traced back to Mexican immigrants in the early twentieth century” (2014, p.35). However, befitting the uneven nature of work on the subject, Martin and Rashidian crucially expand on the origin of marijuana in America, citing both the introduction of hemp to the new colonies in the 1600s (*ibid.*, p.36), as well as the widespread use of marijuana extracts, produced by pharmaceutical companies, as a common medicine beginning in the mid-1800s and continuing until at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (*ibid.*, p.16). Roffman wasn’t directly wrong, *per se*, to omit this medicinal extract use that occurred in the 1800s – he may have been trying to draw a line between recreational use of the past and recreational use of the future, and in that sense, the facts check out. However, as Martin and Rashidian show, marijuana was in common use before these Mexican immigrants arrived, so its “popularity in our country” actually began much earlier, and in this sense he is absolutely wrong. Further complicating matters, Griffin’s article *Sifting Through The Hyperbole* corroborates the belief that early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Mexican immigrants were marijuana smokers, but adds that “Caribbean and South American sailors introduced marijuana to New Orleans in approximately 1910” (Courtwright, 2001, in Griffin, 2013). Regardless, Roffman’s perspective of marijuana consumption during the Vietnam War years, as well as his accounts of postwar legalization movements, are more detailed than references from Martin and Rashidian, which is why his book remains a source of information about the plant in America in its own right, and not just a less-precise version of the other book.

Varying shades of meaning, accuracy, and inaccuracy such as these highlight the need for social scientific information concerning marijuana. There just isn’t much out there. One solution, used from time to time in this thesis, (especially for points less-central to the main arguments), is to reference journalistic articles when academic sources aren’t available. While these sources are less preferable to academic sources in many senses, especially considering their comparable

brevity and changeability compared to academic publications, the other alternative, ignoring widely-available knowledge because it comes from outside academia, is particularly imprudent considering the greater time requirements for academic publication and the contemporary nature of the subjects at hand. Information may be disputed, but ignoring it is unproductive, especially when a subject may be of greater interest to the media than to academia. Every effort has been made to find the most reliable sources; however, in this case, this is ultimately a stopgap measure until academia catches up, and this thesis intends to be an effort in that direction.

### 3.1 Methodology Introduction and Multi-Method Justification

Attempting to review and analyze the vast amount of current online content concerning marijuana directed at a mainstream, broad audience is a bit like trying to take a delicate sip from a fire hose. Legalization in individual states has made national and international news, and news articles, editorials, debates, videos, reports from scientific studies, celebrity gossip, and even movie reviews have been created, picked up and published online by major and minor dailies with print editions, on television news station websites, on sites for online-only magazines like *Slate* and *Mic.com*, on online-only news sources like *Huffington Post* (which has its own “Marijuana” page) (TheHuffingtonPost.com, 2016), and even on the website of America’s public radio broadcaster, National Public Radio (2016). *The Denver Post*, Denver, Colorado’s biggest mainstream daily newspaper (MediaMiser, 2016), also created its own unique marijuana-focused content portal, a boundary-defying online publication called *The Cannabist*, run by a career Denver Post journalist and with direct links on its front page to the *Post* – and despite these connections, with reviews of different types of marijuana prominently featured and a marijuana and sex columnist, it’s difficult to consider it mainstream (The Denver Post, 2016). Further, many of these sites aggregate information from social media, which puts online readers only a click away from original sources – sources that lack the intellectual authority of an editorial board, but which may nonetheless be informing discourses, per Carey’s “ritual view.” With all this in mind, the decision to use multiple methods was quite simple: it didn’t seem there was a single method that could provide broad access to data from the new discourses concerning marijuana appearing on online mainstream news sites, ground it in a recent historical and sociocultural discursive context, and contend with the legitimacy and reliability issues facing many projects connected to marijuana. In addition, while one method alone can absolutely account for changes in discourse, one of the points argued herein is that the discourse has changed dramatically in the post-legalization era, and it would be presumptive (though not necessarily incorrect) to believe that the same method that documents change is automatically also equipped to suit the process of better considering both newer and older discourses. Concerns about the lack of a substantive methodological link between the two methods are not entirely without merit, but neither research method has a closer “sister” or “cousin” method that seemed to be equipped to develop the answers necessary to address the scope of the material – and it can even be reasonably argued that by being linked, linked methods are therefore less

equipped to look at a diverse discourse. Regardless, the biggest link is less methodological than it is practical, which is to say that neither method seemed to offer such meaningful information that it should be expanded into the entire thesis. Half a thesis is not as good as a full thesis, but not only for technical reasons – in the practice of knowledge production, more knowledge is better.

### **3.2 Content Analysis Methodology**

Content analysis can produce the kind of positivistic data that seems to be largely absent from sociocultural and social scientific research into marijuana consumption (with the exception of research studies of marijuana use frequency and studies of the effects of use, of which there are many), and Altheide’s argument in his book “Qualitative Media Analysis” for making the development of a content analysis a reflexive process – what he calls “ethnographic content analysis” (1996, p.3) – allowed for the creation and revision of a sample and coding schematic that could be responsive to the contemporary and (relatively) unfamiliar nature of the particular sample of marijuana-related news stories. Reflection on the coding schematic changed the project significantly; original goals were focused primarily on identifying race, with gender as an afterthought, but when it became clear that race was only clearly identifiable in a minority of the sampled articles, but gender disparities were impossible to ignore, the coding plan was rapidly revised in order to make the best use of the most data (arguably, a smaller sample would have generated results that were unreliable). A project on race and visibility in the media’s coverage of the new legal marijuana industry remains compelling for a number of reasons, but may require different method(s) and/or a physical presence in jurisdictions with legalized marijuana. Another feature of Altheide’s position on content analysis that made it seem especially appropriate was his belief in its power to identify emerging patterns; as he says: “It is because documents provide another way to focus on yet another consideration of social life—emergence—that they are helpful in understanding the process of social life” (1996, p. 12). Not only is this appropriate in the sense that the project is considering an emerging public discourse, his use of the phrase “social life” suggests similarities to Carey’s ritual view of communication, where concepts are debated, spun around, considered, and added to as a function of communal interaction. While this then argues that content analysis is a more liquid method, ultimately, that position may not be very successfully sold to those who aren’t content analysis enthusiasts, who might instead

notice that the method involves a whole lot of counting and sorting, virtually stuffing sometimes multi-faceted concepts into boxes in the process.

As a kind of intermediary position, between a content analysis that, for example, labels quoted speech with particular themes alluded to, or a strictly computer-driven algorithm that can only provide statistics on programmable features, the analysis herein looks at gender, (not only the gender of those quoted, but also those otherwise present in the article), as well as standing, i.e. whether an individual was speaking in their personal or professional capacity, or as a thought leader or a community member. Using content analysis to support a frame analysis from the same sample was considered, but rejected. Going deeper into the sample might have generated additional data, but looking outside the sample using another method controls for some of the limitations of this particular sample and this method.

### **3.3 Content Analysis Sampling**

Choosing a newspaper published online from which to create a sample was fairly simple – only one newspaper, *The Seattle Times*, had consistent mainstream coverage of 2 events that seemed to be attracting a fair amount of media attention: elections in which legalization was on the ballot, as well as first day retail store openings. Other newspapers, like *The Alaska Dispatch*, had coverage of marijuana legalization on election day, but Alaskan retail recreational sales have not yet begun. Oregon also had a winning election day, and its regulatory commission has also planned to allow but not yet permitted retail stores to open, however, marijuana is available to those over 21 without a prescription from formerly medical marijuana dispensaries – but the way these sales were allowed legislatively, with dispensary owners given comparatively little advance notice (Sebens, 2015), may have prevented some of the coverage seen in Seattle and Colorado. Despite this, a perfect comparison is impossible, and had *The Seattle Times* not provided so much material, *The Oregonian* would have been the next best choice for sample data. *The Denver Post* was ultimately rejected due to their significant cross-pollination with *The Cannabist*. Washington, D.C., has legalized possession and cultivation, but not sales or public use (Marijuana Policy Project, 2016). *The Seattle Times* is Seattle’s mainstream daily newspaper, with an average daily circulation of 336,363 (Alliance for Audited Media, 2013), for a city of 662,400 people (Sugimura, 2016). It’s won 10 Pulitzer Prizes for its coverage (Seattle



Times Staff, 2016), and although the people of city of Seattle hold progressive/leftist viewpoints at a higher rate than citizens of many other American cities do, so do those in Portland and Denver (Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2014). If sampling from a single newspaper published online is to be considered meaningful or sensible for a content analysis like this, there's no real reason it shouldn't be *The Seattle Times*, especially considering the limited number of total options.

The sample for the content analysis was comprised of every article on the *Seattle Times*' website that their site search engine pulled up using any of the terms "marijuana," "cannabis," "weed," "pot," "I-502," "502," "Amendment 64," and "64," that actually contained any content related to marijuana, and was published 30 days before and after the election day that marijuana was legalized in Seattle and Colorado, which was November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, as well as every related article with those terms that was published 30 days before and after the first day of legal retail sales of marijuana to recreational consumers in Washington state, which was July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Other synonyms for marijuana were searched, but failed to generate any articles. The decision to limit the search to 30 days before and after each event was admittedly made without knowledge of any recommended time periods for a content analysis related to a critical discourse event for a project of this size; however, after a few sample searches it was predicted that these boundaries would generate approximately 75 articles from a single newspaper for analysis. Instead, there are 206 articles (4 of these were not coded because they were missing text, 3 because they were photo galleries, an additional 1 article was not coded due to a system error by *The Seattle Times* rendering it unreadable). Shortening the time period to make the sample size smaller was considered, but doing so posed certain risks to the data. In particular, there was concern that by cutting the dates on the sample size (those dates that bookended each major event) data from the events themselves would be hyper-emphasized. A content analysis that considered visibility on only those dates and the few days before and after would not necessarily be of less merit than this one, but as some discussions of the nuances of marijuana-related issues understandably received less media attention than the events themselves on those dates, it would have a different focus. That project would likely have something to do with the representation of activists, customers, and the industry; this project casts a wider net in order to better understand a larger

group of participants in the discourse, as well as potentially have a chance to observe any changes over time.

### **3.4 Content Analysis Coding**

In keeping with this wider net, as well as with the “standing” and “framing” concepts from “Shaping Abortion Discourse,” the actual coding process consisted of reading each article and labelling each individual person in the article, whether mentioned by name or anonymous, with descriptors based on age, gender, and status as a consulted “expert” in relation to the topic at hand, or as a non-expert. “Experts” are not necessarily marijuana experts, or even labelled as such because they are believed to be correct; in this instance, the term is there to denote someone quoted or discussed because they have some particular expertise related to subjects discussed in the article and/or a professional stake in the marijuana industry. Examples of people considered “experts” include police officers, governors, city and states’ attorneys, psychologists, social workers, marijuana growers, shop owners, frequently-appearing leaders of activist campaigns, and spokespeople of all kinds. Non-experts include parents, customers, arrestees, community members, and others whose position in the article rests on their existence as private individuals.

Articles were coded with one code for each of the age categories: 0-12, 13-20, 21-39, 40-64, and 65 and older, as well as a code for “age unknown,” when age was indiscernible. Age brackets on Kimberly A. Neuendorf’s *Content Analysis Guidebook* website were used as models, particularly Neuendorf’s “TV/Film Character Demographics Analysis Codebook” sample (Neuendorf, 2000). Notably, Neuendorf’s 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> age brackets are between ages 13-19 and 20-39 (2000), however, as recreational marijuana has only been legalized for those age 21 and up, adjusting the brackets such that no 20-year-olds were included in the same category as hypothetical legal marijuana consumers, industry members, etc., made more sense. Age was not coded based on estimates of pictured individuals, rather, an individual was coded as “age unknown” if there was no numerical age or descriptive age (e.g. “a couple of middle-aged guys,” “senior citizen”) in the article text. Articles were also coded for gender, using the codes for “male,” “female,” and “gender unknown,” (used infrequently and typically when an individual was described by title, e.g. “a parent,” rather than by name, and lacked gendered pronoun or other references). A code

was created for any individuals who claimed a non-binary or alternative gender, but was never used. Individuals were also respectively coded as “experts,” “non-experts” or “expert status unclear;” this last code was used rarely.

People who might be mentioned in an article but not coded include descriptions of groups of people, e.g. “Four police officers” or a “long line of customers;” these individuals may have had a presence in the media, but the lack of gender, age, and status markers, as well as the lack of an individual voice, perspective, or existence as a subject for discussion, suggests that the data that coding these groups might generate would be vague and skew the more precise results to be gained from coding more identifiable individuals. Others not coded include historical figures, such as Presidents Jefferson, Washington and Reagan, as it was difficult to justify placing them in the same category as the living, and the relationship of individual influencers to the discourse is to be taken up using the other method in this thesis. A small minority of individuals mentioned in the articles were not coded, notably a few who appeared in marijuana-related crime reports, but were not quoted or shown to have any involvement with marijuana or marijuana-related issues (e.g. bystanders). This was done in order not to skew the data with details about individuals whose appearance in the media may not only be coincidental, but also against their own will and without any self-initiated personal connection to marijuana (whether for, against, or otherwise). In addition, if the article was a “roundup” type piece that summarized a number of different stories, e.g. *The Seattle Times*’ “Today File” bulletin of news of the day (2015c), only those mentioned in context with a marijuana-related story were coded.

Another intentional omission in the research design that may seem more significant is the decision not to code each person’s opinion. So why not code each person’s opinion of legalization? While it would be interesting to know how many women, men, members of different age groups, experts and non-experts, express certain perspectives for or against legalization, this is actually slightly out of step with the goals of the process, and would require a significant additional time investment. This project is not intended to show how many women support legalization, or how many of those over 65 are opposed to it, and so to be in step with the goal of showing who has a voice in the debate, and whether they’re speaking as a consulted expert or a private citizen, *who* must be prioritized over *what*.

### 3.5 Discourse Analysis Methodology

Since the project seeks to better understand the online mainstream news environment (and not just *The Seattle Times*), as it relates to marijuana, a method that allows for the consideration of those people with standing in the conversation, those who drive coverage based not just on their openness about their use, but their openness in connection with other aspects of themselves or actions that have made them famous is necessary. With this in mind, a method that considers identity, but more specifically identity as it relates to outward communication, is necessary. In Norman Fairclough's "Media Discourse," wherein he discusses his method of critical discourse analysis, he argues that analyzing the language of texts addresses three questions, namely:

1. How is the world (events, relationships, etc.) represented?
2. What identities are set up for those involved in the programme or story (reporters, audiences, 'third parties' referred to or interviewed)?
3. What relationships are set up between those involved (e.g. reporter-audience, expert-audience or politician-audience relationships)? (1995, p.5)

In addressing representation, his first question connects to the issues of visibility key to considering the history of marijuana consumption as a subject for public discussion. People smoked marijuana long before there were first day retail sales totals to report, but they didn't always talk about it. Fines, parole, and imprisonment were, and remain in many jurisdictions, the legal consequences of using or owning marijuana in the presence of a police officer (at least in the postwar United States). As this is very widely known, marijuana consumers without activist goals and in criminalized jurisdictions seem to have much to risk and relatively little to gain from public consumption or discussions of personal use with a broad audience. Further, marijuana consumption carries some stigma (Becker, 1963, pp.66-72), and consuming is not a universally respected practice (to say the least), even in states that have legalized doing so. Some people have brought, and sometimes continue to bring, discussions of and images of personal marijuana use, especially enjoyment, even in criminalized jurisdictions, to wide audiences. As individual marijuana use among adults in the United States in this century has been invisible enough, common enough and/or not interesting enough to be news in its own right (here I'm referring to the practice of use, and not reports of arrests of users or dealers, or reports on new studies of marijuana use frequency), it's those that have wide audiences, namely,

celebrities and politicians, whose individual consumption garners the most attention in mainstream mass media news outlets. Fairclough's second and third questions are especially relevant here; considering the construction of identities as a function of journalistic practice is one way to make the information produced by the media covering celebrities and politicians subject to analysis – that this is not just some kind of pure transmission from figurehead to viewer most honestly approached with psychoanalysis, but an “institution to think with” (Jensen, 2010, p.16), that has genre-specific conventions involved in its construction.

To speak generally, a celebrity or politician's decision to make the disclosure of their own marijuana use part of their public persona can be argued to be as much stagecraft as confession (or both, or neither). The presumption that there is a pre-existing or co-created relationship with an audience, one that may be effected by disclosure, is also addressed in the audience-relationship aspect of Fairclough's third question, though it is debatable to what extent a relationship between a celebrity and a fan is “set up” (the relationship between a celebrity in the news and a less-interested, broader general audience is arguably more intensely constructed). What is clear, though, is that the risk-benefit analysis for those who have been extremely artistically, financially, and/or politically successful to disclose marijuana consumption is simply not the same risk-benefit analysis that those without means and platform may make when deciding whether to disclose. While some individuals may be seen to clearly benefit from their disclosure and even enthusiasm for consumption, e.g. by connecting themselves to elements of style and culture that broaden their base of support, or by cultivating a reputation as someone who maintains honesty despite obstacles, all high-profile Americans who disclose may find the legal and financial consequences of doing so (e.g. via loss of job or clients) in criminalized jurisdictions easier to overcome than individuals in the middle- or lower-classes, due to aspects of the American legal system that privilege those with the means to afford expensive lawyers and bail demands. In a nation with comparatively common rates of use (UNODC, 2011, and SAMHSA, 2015), some press of a marijuana arrest and the potential to drop from the upper-income tiers of society to what – maybe the middle class? – is simply not the same consequence as years spent in jail. Further, as fines for violations of anti-drug laws in the United States are not determined based on income, a fine that's a month's rent to one is a drop in a bucket to

another, meaning that in a very literal sense, adult celebrities can generally afford to get caught with marijuana.

In John E. Richardson's "Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis," the relationship between social dynamics like these in discourse analysis is taken up. As quoted, Fairclough "attributes three dimensions to every discursive event. It is simultaneously text, discursive practice – which also includes the production and interpretation of texts – and social practice" (Titscher, et al., 2000, pp.149-150, in Richardson, 2007, p.37). This second triad is close, but not wholly analogous to Fairclough's three questions; however, the addition of "social practice" further expands the arena of analysis beyond relationships constructed as a function of journalism. In this case, some examples of the relationship of social practice to discourse include particular dynamics surrounding some of the celebrities and politicians that have disclosed enthusiastically. These dynamics might be (but are not limited to) a post-disclosure boost in attention, a buffer against some of the harshest legal consequences, and the pre-existing interest by mass media news outlets in their activities (driven by fans and sometimes the general public). In addition, when compared to the relative lack of pre-legalization mass media interest in publishing news about marijuana use by individuals of average or lesser means, as well as the potential consequences of public disclosures these individuals may face, the contributions of these dynamics to the limitation of the pre-legalization mainstream news discourses about marijuana carry additional weight. Instead of stories about average marijuana consumers, celebrities and politicians were once primary public figureheads discussing or showing marijuana consumption, and as they haven't abdicated their standing in the conversation in the new legalization era, understanding the discourse historically further underscores that legalization has not just changed the discourse in mainstream news articles, but expanded it. Considering this, describing the nature of the current mass media discourse means attempting to understand *what* it was in the years just before legalization, but the *what*, is, in this case, dependent on the *who*, which I am proposing are a select few individuals who are notorious for their image as public consumers, or who have had to negotiate public admissions of marijuana consumption with lofty political goals.

As Fairclough says, “The wider social impact of media is not just to do with how they selectively represent the world, though that is a vitally important issue; it is also to do with what sorts of social identities, what versions of ‘self,’ they project and what cultural issues and what cultural values (be it consumerism, individualism or a cult of personality) these entail” (1995, p.17). One particular version of humanity in the mainstream news media, articles covering the activities and perspectives of celebrities, has also brought a discussion of marijuana consumption by individuals to an arena, the daily news, where it otherwise does not have much of a reason to exist, most significantly so in jurisdictions where marijuana legalization was, or is currently, a political non-starter. In truth, the amount of American celebrities and politicians who have made public disclosures of marijuana consumption or who maintain a public image based, at least in part, on frequent marijuana consumption is quite large. Jazz musician Louis Armstrong was a well-known frequent smoker, both discussing his habit in interviews and writings he made (Jones and Chilton, 1988), and even joking about it on an episode of the TV game show *What’s My Line* (CineGraphic, 2011), but more modern examples of entertainers who have connected their public image to marijuana consumption include: musicians Willie Nelson, Wiz Khalifa, Chief Keef, Method Man, Redman, Rihanna, the groups Three 6 Mafia, Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, the Grateful Dead, Cypress Hill, actors Seth Rogen, Woody Harrelson, actress/musician Miley Cyrus, actress, TV host, and Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony award winner Whoopi Goldberg, actor Matthew McConaughey, TV host Bill Maher, comedians Sarah Silverman and Doug Benson, director Kevin Smith, actors Kal Penn, John Cho, Cheech Marin, Tommy Chong, and the actor/rapper Snoop. These are not just individuals and groups who have disclosed public use, rather, they have all made it a repeated subject of their public messages, whether as the subject of song lyrics, public use while playing concerts, the repeated portrayal of “stoner” characters on film, writing and directing comedy connected with marijuana consumption, discussing their enthusiasm for marijuana in interviews, and some sell their own line of marijuana or marijuana accessories, capitalizing on their personal brand.

### **3.6 Discourse Analysis Sampling**

Deciding whose messages in the mainstream news media merit the most consideration is not an exact science – arguably, relative newcomer to the open-about-marijuana club Whoopi Goldberg may be having a larger influence on the audience of her mainstream nationwide coffee klatch

talk show *The View* (ABC.com, 2016) than longtime marijuana enthusiast Snoop has on hip hop and reggae fans – but some key factors were considered in order to construct an analysis in line with the scope of the project. The celebrity must have consumed marijuana publicly or mentioned their own consumption publicly, their statement(s) about consumption had to appear in mainstream news outlets (emphasis on the plural), to the extent that a particular celebrity’s use of marijuana would be well-known to fans, and could also be reasonably considered to be known to those who may be familiar with a celebrity through passive engagement with their work (e.g. seeing a quick blurb about an upcoming film/album, watching/listening to the work itself) but who might not consider themselves fans. Of all the celebrities, the rapper and entertainer Snoop, and his statements, was deemed to be the most significant site for analysis based on his prominent level of fame, in combination with a long, visible career that includes activities and statements that meet these criteria.

In addition, as the “standing” of the speaker is also a key methodological unifier for this section, it’s important to consider those whose standing, as it refers to the ability to generate news, is quite high, and who don’t have public identities primarily tied to marijuana consumption, but who have disclosed nonetheless, and, in the U.S., this generally only refers to politicians. There’s no great civil rights leader of American marijuana legalization, no unelected individual who is a nationwide household name based on their activism, who didn’t also have prior access to media outlets through their careers in entertainment. However, as the media and constituents vet a political candidate during the campaign, disclosures about marijuana consumption have made the news, and while numerous American politicians have disclosed, those with the greatest name recognition are naturally the American presidents, two of whom, Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, have made oft-repeated statements about their own past consumption. Although neither of them incorporate marijuana into their current or recent public persona in any way, to leave their statements out of the analysis would mean omitting consideration of two of the most significant events in the American mainstream news media’s discussion of marijuana, and so remains relevant in step with the goal of better understanding what messages have been circulating. Further, in describing past activity that occurred before they entered politics, these politicians can also be said to be describing marijuana consumption that is associated less with a hypothetical “lifestyle of the rich and famous” and more in tune with consumption patterns and



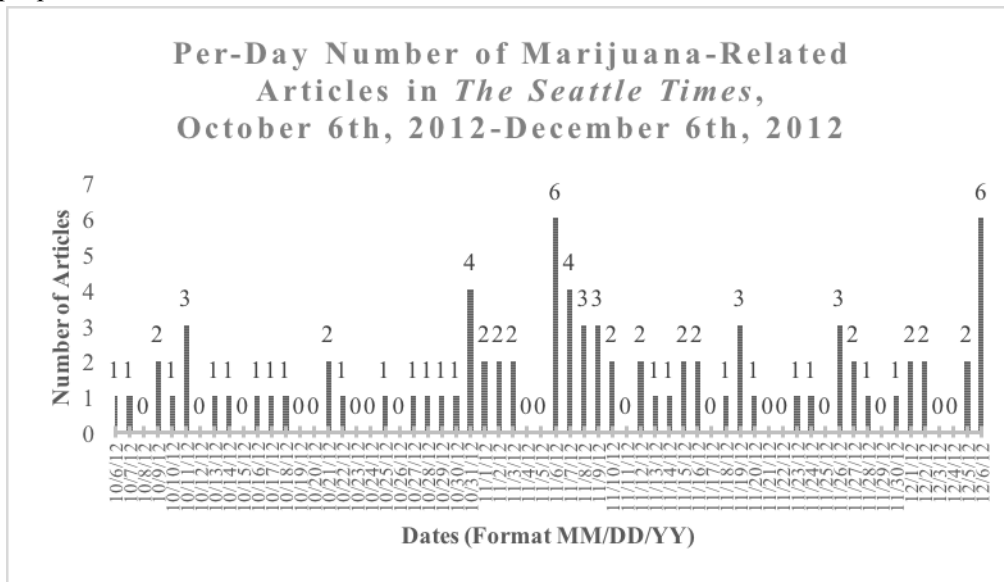
behaviors in the context of everyday life, a dynamic that arguably (and possibly accidentally) does more to normalize marijuana consumption than a wealthy musician lighting a joint while performing.

Considering the sampling for the statements themselves, those chosen for analysis are those statements about marijuana consumption that have been repeated the most, that have clearly been identified as newsworthy and given widespread coverage. Comparatively minimal attention has been paid in the discourse analysis to the whole article, much less the newspapers or genres articles may occupy themselves. A quote reproduced multiple times across different (but similar) short articles from different media outlets can be reasonably presumed to be one of the aspects of the article considered by journalists to be the most engaging – at least one of the “engines” driving the creation of the news story, if not the primary one. With this, as well as space, reader considerations, and the goal to look at the messages shaping the national conversation in mind, these statements are more of an analytical priority than the rest of the text in the article. Context, surrounding text, and genre conventions still matter, however, but unless the tone of the article obscures the individual’s message or presents a particularly unique take on the statement, a celebrity or politician’s repeated quote is a richer site for the analysis of conversation-driving data than the patterns and practices of mainstream journalism that surround that quote.

#### 4.1 Content Analysis

One of the first concerns of this content analysis was whether or not it could show some evidence that a “critical discourse moment” (Chilton, 1987, in Ferree, et al., 2002, p.24) has occurred. While there is no clear numerical bar to reach in order to qualify, there does appear to be a correlation between legalization events and an increase in the amount of coverage given marijuana-related topics. The first graph, Figure 1, shows a count of how the 83 articles over 62 days, or an average of 1.34 articles daily, that were in the sample taken from October 6<sup>th</sup> to December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, were distributed.

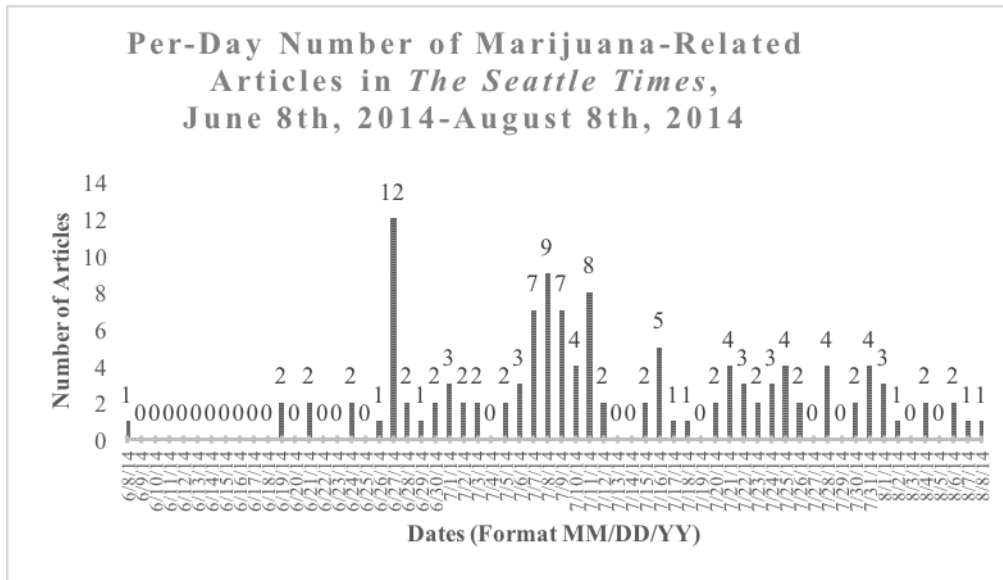
**Figure 1. Per-Day Number of Marijuana-Related Articles in *The Seattle Times*, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012.** Each single date in the sample is represented on the horizontal (x) axis, and the data on the vertical (y) axis represents the number of articles published that day, with the topmost number of articles on the y-axis label greater than the maximum per-day total in the sample for display purposes.



Regarding the outlying dates with the largest per-day numbers of articles, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, was the election day in Washington when marijuana was legalized, and the largest per-day article totals (6 articles) in this time period were published then and also on December 6<sup>th</sup> (also a total of 6 articles), which was the day that initial aspects of the law concerning the legalization of possession for those over the age of 21 went into effect. In addition, the average article-per-day total pre-legalization, from October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 to November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012, was 1 per day (total of 31

articles over 31 days). From November 6<sup>th</sup> 2012, to December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the average article-per-day was 1.7 articles (total of 52 articles over 31 days). To compare, as shown in Figure 2, from June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 to August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 there were 123 articles over 62 days, an average of slightly less than 2 articles daily.

**Figure 2. Per-Day Number of Marijuana-Related Articles in *The Seattle Times*, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 – August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014.** Horizontal and vertical axis labels remain the same as in Figure 1, with corresponding adjustments made for different sample dates and the greater maximum per-day number of articles.



Two peaks in the data shown in Figure 2 are quite apparent; one, with a total of 9 articles per day, marked July 8<sup>th</sup>, was the first day of legal retail sales of marijuana to non-medical consumers over age 21 in Washington state. The second peak, regarding the 12 articles that were published on June 27<sup>th</sup>, seems like it may have been a special story package discussing and explaining the issues to readers, as articles published that day include: “The Basics of Pot Today” (Bush, 2014a), “What You Should Know About Legal Pot Stores in Washington” (Bush, 2014b) and “Where the Money From Legal Pot Goes” (Bush, 2014c). The average-per-day article total from June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 to July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014 was 1.5 articles (44 articles over 30 days) and the average-per-day article total from July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 to August 8<sup>th</sup>, was 2.5 (79 articles over 32 days). This 2.5 average is 2.5x the once-daily average coverage frequency of the October 2012 pre-legalization article frequency totals, and a 32% increase in coverage over the post-election

November-December 2012 totals, which suggests that even though the amount of content produced does not maintain its event-day peaks, the overall day-to-day frequency of marijuana-related articles published has increased since marijuana was legalized. Both the peaks in the data and the lack of a return (visible in this data) to lower pre-legalization article-publishing frequencies support the identification of marijuana legalization as a critical discourse moment, and suggests that there is greater overall interest in marijuana-related news content post-legalization, whether from *Seattle Times* staff, their readership, or both.

Naturally, the content analysis within the articles generated significantly different data. Out of 202 articles coded, 644 individuals met the coding criteria, and, most notably, a great majority of those who appeared in coverage (72.5%) were men, as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Gender and Expert Status.** The largest sample generated a total of 644 coded individuals, charted in accordance with gender and expert status. Percentages are in terms of the total sample (n=644).

	<b>Men %</b>	<b>Women %</b>	<b>Gender Unknown %</b>	<b>Total # of People %</b>
<b>Expert</b>	64.1	19.6	1.7	85.4
<b>Non-expert</b>	8.2	5.1	.9	14.3
<b>Expert status unclear</b>	.15	.15	0	.3
<b>All expert statuses</b>	72.5	24.8	2.6	100 (n=644)

Regardless of whether the disparity between the amount of female voices (24.8%, n=160) and male voices (72.5%, n=467) appearing in the sample is because of sexist journalists who prefer to interview men, a lack of female involvement in marijuana-related issues or businesses, greater numbers of women than men fearing the stigma a connection to marijuana may carry, women preferring not to speak with the media in greater numbers than men, or some combination of these and other reasons, the disparity nonetheless shows that there is a problematic inequality in representation within the sampled data. Those who oppose marijuana legalization may have the opposite view – they could, for example, argue that this is evidence that women have been

(relatively) spared participation in an industry that does more harm than good. However, as the articles sampled included voices from those against marijuana, as well as statements from attorneys, regulators, ministers, police officers, and other professionals on the potential or perceived impact of the legislation, the relative exclusion of women from the broadest aspects of the data set does not necessarily mean that women are less-frequent participants in the marijuana industry, just that their voices are underrepresented. Notably, of the women in the sample, 78.8% (n=126), of women are “experts,” 20.6% (n=33), are “non-experts,” and 1 woman’s expert status was unclear. Of the men in the sample, 88.4% (n=413) are “experts,” 11.4% (n=53) are “non-experts,” and one man’s expert status was unclear/ambiguous. While the women in the sample are consulted less often on the basis of professional expertise than men, they are slightly more likely to appear based on their personal opinion. The voices of the men in the sample may have generally higher standing over women’s voices, as they appear more frequently and are more likely to be “expert” voices – 64.1% (n=413) of people in the sampled articles were male experts and 19.6% (n=126) of people in the sampled articles were female experts, and, nonetheless, as so many of the articles included commentary from members of the marijuana industry, it follows that the marijuana industry, or the marijuana industry’s public face, is more likely to be male – and, at least, the face of marijuana coverage in *The Seattle Times* is more likely to be male.

In spite of this, the data does not definitively exclude the possibility that women are dramatically underrepresented (whether because they participate less or because they are covered less) in the industry, either. To wit, 27.3% (n=55) of the articles in the sample of 202 featured exclusively male speakers, and 1.5% (n=3) featured exclusively female speakers. In addition, all the articles in the sample were also “typed” with a brief descriptor of the genre the article might fit in, e.g. “international news,” “crime report,” “editorial,” and “marijuana issue report” (which was often used to describe articles about the challenges of creating and conforming to new regulatory frameworks) and one of the reasons this has not been pursued as an extensive site for analysis is that many, but not all, of these genres were quite porous – for example, is an article about the transportation of marijuana by legal growers from Washington state’s islands on the federal waterways of Washington’s ferry system (Mannix, 2014) a “crime report” because doing so is illegal, or a “marijuana issue report” because it represents a unique business hardship? One type

of article, however, labelled an “industry profile,” was readily identifiable and relatively unique (among other article types). An industry profile generally was an article describing the challenges, opportunities, and everyday practices involved with participation in a particular aspect of the industry, featuring statements from members of that aspect of the marijuana industry, e.g. an article on marijuana growers (Mozingo, 2012), or glassblowers (Schwab, 2014), or investors (Martin, 2012), or marijuana-related tech startups (Schwab and Spencer, 2014). Out of the 200 articles coded, 26 were deemed industry profiles. While the sample size is small, the trend of greater male representation continues, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Gender and Expert Status in Industry Profiles.** The smaller sample of 26 articles generated a total of 135 coded individuals, charted in accordance with gender and expert status. Percentages are in terms of the total sample (n=135).

	<b>Men %</b>	<b>Women %</b>	<b>Gender Unknown %</b>	<b>Total # of People %</b>
<b>Expert</b>	68.1	18.5	2.2	88.9
<b>Non-expert</b>	5.2	5.2	0	10.4
<b>Expert status unclear</b>	.7	0	0	.7
<b>All expert statuses</b>	74.1	23.7	2.2	100(n=135)

Unlike in the greater sample, “experts” in industry profile articles are much more likely to be actual members of the marijuana or marijuana-related products industry (e.g. glass pipe manufacturers), rather than individuals who hold other jobs but are commenting on marijuana-related issues in a professional capacity. With male experts appearing in this smaller sample 68.1% (n=92) of the time a person is mentioned, male experts can be said to appear at a slightly higher rate in industry profiles than they do in in the broader sample of all marijuana-related articles, where they appear 64.1% of the time. However, a 4% difference is not overly compelling, considering the sample size. More interestingly, in keeping with the previous statistics showing a greater percentage of female speakers as non-experts, in industry profiles, 21.9% (n=7) of female speakers are non-experts, and 7.61% (n=7) of male speakers are non-experts (in the larger sample, 20.6% of women are non-experts, and 11.4% of men are non-

experts). As an industry profile can be said to be an introduction for the lay reader to a particular aspect within the marijuana industry, and is typically written in a slightly longer format than other articles in the sample, it's especially significant that the "tradition" of a gender imbalance favoring greater male representation in news media continues here, in a type of news article that may be especially conducive to opinion- and perspective-forming about the marijuana industry as a whole. Of additional concern, out of the 202 articles, only 10 articles mentioned more women than men, and only 1 was an industry profile (the article titled: *Bellingham pot store manager: 'Who feels like a drug dealer now? I don't'*)(Mannix and Spencer, 2014). Regardless of the extent that women are actual participants in the marijuana industry as professionals, readers are less likely to "meet" female industry members than male industry members in *The Seattle Times*.

However, in comparison to other data, the overall gender ratio in *The Seattle Times* is almost perfectly normal. According to Ross and Carter, in 2010 the global average percentage of female sources in newspaper journalism, as measured as a part of The Global Media Monitoring Project, was 24% (WACC, 2010, in Ross and Carter, 2011, p.1158), and in this study, the total percentage of female sources ("experts" and "non-experts") was 24.8% (n=160). A part of Ross and Carter's own, more recent study, a content analysis that produced 450 sources that were identifiable as male or female, from 216 articles from UK and Irish newspapers, had results slightly more favorable to women, with 30% (n=138) of sources being female, and 70% (n=312) male sources (Ross and Carter, 2011, p.1158). In the 2016 study from Jia, et al., a content analysis looking at gender, approximately 2.35 million articles were used as a sample, and researchers concluded that there was "an overall probability of 77.0% that an entity mentioned in the text is male" (p.8). In addition, Ross and Carter also looked at the relative status of their sources, coding them based on their "function in the story" as "subject," "spokesperson," "expert or commentator," "personal experience" "eyewitness," and "popular opinion" (2011, p.1160) (these last three categories, and sometimes the first, would all have been coded as "non-experts" had they been in this content analysis). They found that if the source or speaker was female, she was more likely to be speaking from personal experience (48% of sources speaking from personal experience being female, 52% being male), as an eyewitness (46% to 54% female/male ratio), or representing popular opinion (56% to 44% f/m), that she was a spokesperson (25% to

75% f/m), subject (31% to 69% f/m) or expert/commentator (25% to 75% f/m) (Ross and Carter, 2011).

This study shows a similar imbalance in percentages; out of all the female sources from marijuana-related articles, 20.6% (n=33) of women are “non-experts,” but out of all the male sources, 11.4% (n=53) of men are “non-experts.” An argument can be made that this disparity is actually a result of an effort to include women as sources, despite the fact that a greater percentage of men of working age (69.2%) than women of working age (57.0%) participate in the labor force in the United States (Women’s Bureau, USDOL, 2015), and so American men are hypothetically more likely to be available for comment than American women based on a job they may hold (unfortunately, the coding for age data that took place in this content analysis didn’t generate enough data for reliable results). However, the fact remains that a gap of approximately 12 percentage points in labor force participation isn’t adequate to explain why men are used as sources/speakers in marijuana-related articles about 3x more than women, and male experts appear about 3.25x more than female experts. As Ross and Carter say of the Global Media Monitoring Project, “Over the 15-year time period during which the GMMP has been taking place...the relative visibility of women to men seems stuck at 1:3, suggesting that men’s lives continue to be regarded by the world’s news media as three times as important than those of women” (2011, p.1161). This may be true, but it’s a wholly different matter to say that the journalists, or even the management, at *The Seattle Times* see men’s lives as three times more valuable than women’s – these are real people, rather than massive conglomerates. A more easily defensible position, however, is to suggest that such blatantly discriminatory ratios, reproduced on both large and small scales, likely represent a number of different sociological dynamics, some of which the media may not be exempt from and can certainly be doing more to interrogate, as an “institution to think with” (Jensen, 2010, p.16). The news media doesn’t bear responsibility for eliminating all sexism from society, at least not more than any other institution; Corner’s “soft power” is not a theory of total dominance and therefore total responsibility (2011, p.18). However, news media agencies are responsible for the content they produce, and it’s especially unfortunate that sexist dynamics are being reproduced in an emerging discourse, even as this newness can also be used as a wedge to argue that, in fact, *The Seattle Times’* reproduction of the 1:3 ratio as described by Ross and Carter (2011, p.1161), is representative of



societal factors rather than a function of poor media practice, i.e. that the existence of sexist male/female visibility ratios in new marijuana-related coverage suggests that the 1:3 ratio is not a product of bad media tradition continuing down the timeline of a discourse, but other factors, including those that implicate news media less harshly. Despite this, an argument that news media sexism is somehow inevitable is neither sensible nor fair, considering that news media is changeable and *The Seattle Times* isn't published every day with a mandate to disproportionately silence women. The persistence of these dynamics in a new discourse is, at minimum, a missed opportunity for greater steps towards equal representation, but further data about women's participation in the legal marijuana industry is also necessary to understand to what extent each industry – news media or marijuana – needs to be held accountable for under-representation as the post-legalization discourse continues.

## 5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

### Bill Clinton

The history of high profile, attention-getting voluntary disclosure of marijuana use arguably begins with Bill Clinton, during his successful 1992 presidential campaign. Other public figures may have chosen to disclose before, but never when they had so much to lose and without an imminent threat of disclosure occurring against their will (as happened during the 1987 Supreme Court confirmation hearings, when Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg withdrew his candidacy after a journalist reported that he had consumed marijuana while a professor at Harvard Law, and several sitting politicians quickly disclosed past consumption to relatively minor fanfare)(Sabato, 1998). Clinton famously told a CBS television interviewer who was asking if he had ever broken international law that: “When I was in England I experimented with marijuana a time or two, and I didn't like it, and didn't inhale and never tried it again” (New York Times, 1992, and MarijuanaSafe.org, 2012). The phrase “I didn't inhale,” even if a slightly inaccurate version of the original, has since become a cultural touchstone of sorts, often mentioned to imply that a speaker is being less than direct in their honest response, that they are attempting to avoid sanction based on a technicality, or as a quick punchline. It has been described as “oft-quoted” in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Winn, 2016), “laughable” in *The Chicago Tribune* (McManis, 2016), and the UK's *Telegraph* claims Clinton was “widely mocked” for the statement (Sanchez, 2014). The phrase is still in use; MSNBC's article, “‘I didn't inhale' for a new generation,” discusses politicians who oppose same-sex marriage but nonetheless attend same-sex weddings and/or feel that sexual orientation is not a choice (Benen, 2015), and during his campaign former 2012 presidential candidate Mitt Romney told audiences at both a nationally-televised Republican debate and a conservative conference “I didn't inhale” – meaning that he still supported minimizing the role of government after four years as a governor – to loud, supportive laughter (Sands, 2012, and Fox News, 2011).

Clinton's statement is mysterious for a number of reasons; first, as the full interview is very difficult to access, there's no way to be fully certain of the context for the question about violations of international law, but asking a candidate if they have ever personally violated

international law in a television interview is nonetheless quite unusual, unusual enough that the possibility that these questions were agreed upon ahead of time, and Clinton's response pre-planned – that he wanted to disclose – can't be excluded (though of course it wouldn't be fair or reasonable to definitively conclude that the statement was orchestrated with only this question as evidence). Second, the belief that audience knowledge that "he didn't inhale" was important is entirely contrived, there doesn't seem to be any precedence for this kind of pseudo-consumption absolving the consumer from any legal, moral, or stigmatizing consequences of drug use, but other politicians who fully disclosed past use in 1987, including his Vice President, Al Gore, and Newt Gingrich (Sabato, 1998), still had successful careers in 1992, at the time of Clinton's statement. And finally, of course, there's the obvious linguistic and practical contradiction caused by the relationship of "I didn't inhale" to the other aspects of his statement. He used the verbs "tried," "experimented," and "like," and by mentioning that he's not inhaling, he suggests a marijuana cigarette (commonly called a "joint") or pipe to the popular imagination – but a person can't be said to have tried, have experimented with, or gathered enough information to determine whether or not they personally enjoy a joint or pipe if they don't inhale it. Had he mentioned disliking any odors or smoke, that might make more sense, but he still couldn't say that he had tried the drug. However, even as it confuses, each aspect of his statement serves to minimize his consumption. To "try" and to "experiment" is more tentative than to "use," or "smoke," even though trying marijuana or "experimenting" with marijuana is using marijuana or smoking marijuana. He didn't like it, and though it wouldn't have been any more legal if he had, enjoying drugs carries more negative stigma than active dislike of them, especially in 1992, and along the same lines, inhalation is surely less preferable than not doing so.

The statement is, essentially, one long sentence of five clauses describing how he has not actually "done drugs," even if he has done something illegal related to drugs (here I'm referring back to the question about violating international law), suggesting that disclosing criminality is important, but that morals are still negotiable even in criminalized contexts. By admitting what could be a difficult disclosure for a top-level politician, a violation of international law (which could, in fact, be said to be more accurately described as a violation of a foreign local and national law, rather than a treaty violation), Clinton had a chance to be seen as an individual honest to the point of self-sacrifice, and by minimizing the amount of use to an unprecedented

extent, relatively innocent and unsullied by negative influences – providing audiences accepted the contradictions inherent in “I didn’t inhale.” Complicating matters, controversial author Christopher Hitchens, a classmate of Clinton’s at Oxford University, where Clinton was a Rhodes Scholar, claimed in his memoir that Clinton actually ate marijuana-laced brownies (Shea, 2010), and then as a public speaker claimed that this was due to an allergy to smoke (MrMindFeed, 2012), and his allergy to smoke was also confirmed by the Senior Policy Advisor to Al Gore while he was Vice President, Elaine Kamarck, who claimed that Clinton “didn’t inhale” due to his allergies, and that she doesn’t know why he kept this reason a secret (Dews, 2013). Interviewer Jorge Ramos revisited the issue with Clinton in 2013, and Clinton claimed, “I never denied that I used marijuana. I told the truth. I thought it was funny. And the only journalist who was there said I told the truth” (Fusion, 2013). The jury may be out on what the truth is (as well as what, specifically, was funny), especially while his wife is running for his former office, but it is not out on the infamy of “I didn’t inhale,” which has been demonstrated and reinforced by one of Obama’s own confessions.

## **Barack Obama**

Obama’s public confessions about his own use come in stages, with statements that have gotten attention, but have not taken on much of a life of their own. One of his most instantly recognizable comments on the subject (so far) began its life at a 2006 appearance only three days after he had announced he was considering a run for the presidency, when Obama was an interviewee at a meeting of The American Society of Magazine Editors. During the interview he said, “Look, uh, you know, I...uh, when I was a kid, I, uh...I inhaled. Frequently. That was, uh, that was the point” (Mead, 2012). The original statement didn’t receive much attention at the time, with the most significant coverage coming from an article in *The New York Times* (Seelye, 2006), and a segment on *The Chris Matthews Show* (Mead, 2012). He then repeated a version of the statement while campaigning in 2007. As reported:

...on Saturday—after a question on medicinal marijuana—Obama was prodded a bit further and asked whether or not he had ever inhaled. ‘I did,’ the senator from Illinois said to light applause. ‘It’s not something I’m proud of. It was a mistake as a young man.’ The question was a reference to a line made famous by former President Bill Clinton

who, while admitting to trying marijuana, said he did not inhale. 'I never understood that line,' Obama continued. 'The point was to inhale. That was the point.' (CNN.com, 2007)

Versions of the statement, generally summarized as, "I inhaled. Frequently. That was the point," were then also quoted in articles in other major outlets, including again in *The New York Times* (Zeleny, 2007), on *The Huffington Post* (Pitney, 2008), and then the original 2006 statement was quoted in *CBS News* (Harwell, 2008). "I inhaled" has even had a kind of "third act," appearing in summative articles like *CNN's* "Presidents and politicians talk about smoking pot" (Krieg, 2016), *Politico's* "9 Politicians Puffing About Pot," (Lee, 2012), *Fortune's* "All of These Presidential Candidates Have Admitted Smoking Marijuana" (Huddleston, 2015), and *The Hill's* "Obama, 2016 hopefuls listed as 'most influential' pot users" (Richardson, 2015).

The 2006 statement wasn't his first disclosure, however. Obama's line in his 1995 memoir, "Dreams From My Father," regarding his youthful consumption, that "Pot had helped, and booze; maybe a little blow when you could afford it. Not smack, though," received some attention on his first presidential campaign trail and was repeated in articles from *The New York Post* (Chavez, 2007), *CNN* (Barrett and Mooney, 2007), *CBS News* (Harwell, 2008) and *Gawker* (Pareene, 2008), but it appears to have been the slightly-less-quoted of the two confessions in the years since Obama's first campaign. Either or both quotes ("I inhaled" and "Pot had helped...") were also occasionally mentioned or alluded to again in 2012, when a number of articles appeared in *Time* (Sorensen, 2012), *Buzzfeed* (Laessig, 2012), *ABC News* (Karl, 2012), *Washington Post* (Jennings, 2012), *NPR* (James, 2012), and other outlets, all discussing a newly released biography of Obama, which featured interviews with high school friends of Obama's describing extensive teenage marijuana consumption by the American President, as well as specific marijuana-related lingo Obama had used, and some that he had even invented (Maraniss, 2012, in James, 2012). Parts of the biography were excerpted in each of these articles, including a particularly ironic link between Obama and Clinton's statement (that appeared in all but *Time*), specifically: "Barry Obama was known for starting a few pot-smoking trends. The first was called 'TA,' short for 'total absorption.' ...TA was the antithesis of Bill Clinton's claim that as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford he smoked dope but never inhaled" (Maraniss, 2012, in James, 2012). While not a confession, and while Obama chose not to publicly comment on the book, the appearance of these details in the media kept Obama's past consumption in the public eye. It is

so known, in fact, that when Obama made the joke, “The last time I was this high, I was trying to decide on my major,” during his speech at the 2016 White House Correspondent’s Dinner, the only mentions of it were in *Huffington Post*, which published a short article on it (also mentioning that Obama had discussed his past consumption in “Dreams From My Father”)(Sheppard, 2016), *Politico*, which included it in a headline but never discussed it (Allen and Lippman, 2016), and *CNN*, which made it the subject (and most of the body) of a Twitter post (CNN, 2016).

It’s clear that marijuana has been through a period of relative normalization in the United States since Clinton first disclosed, though the term “relative” must be emphasized considering its criminalized status in most of the United States. By the time Obama said, “I inhaled,” the quote “I didn’t inhale” was about 14 years old, and the American people had had plenty of time to accept the possibility that their chief of government had actually engaged in youthful consumption, as well as see “I didn’t inhale” reverberate through pop and media cultures to the extent that it became a recognizable trope. While Obama’s first verbal disclosure at the American Society of Magazine Editors’ meeting was quite hesitant, as he (and quite possibly his advisors) made the decision to repeat the “I inhaled” sentences on the campaign trail – had it been poorly received, he surely would have changed tactics – it’s evident that the need to address his consumption publicly was considered likely and possibly necessary. The decision to frame his past consumption in terms that simultaneously connected his use with the patterns of a popular, albeit scandalized, former president, but highlighted his character, presented him as more honest by comparison. Revising Clinton’s statement, rather than coming up with a more specific answer or an original quip of his own, may have minimalized and normalized the disclosure by making it less interesting (something people have seen and de facto accepted before), and it invites fewer questions, than, say, a reference to his “total absorption” method ((Maraniss, 2012, in James, 2012) might have. It emphasizes a change in attitude, and “change” was one of the major themes of Obama’s 2008 campaign (Obama, 2008).

Obama has not changed federal policy on marijuana, however, and over 100 medical marijuana dispensaries (operating in states with laws permitting the dispensaries) have been subject to raids by federal law enforcement agencies under his control, and dispensary owners and state-

regulated marijuana growers (for the medical market) have had their assets seized and been prosecuted by the federal government for the violation of drug trafficking laws (Zilversmit, 2016). Raids of medical marijuana dispensaries in medical-only states by Obama's Justice Department have even continued after the U.S. Congress specifically passed laws de-funding the practice, but recreational shops in Washington and Colorado have operated without federal interference (Halper, 2015). Obama's "I inhaled" quote appears in a few articles covering the raids (Zilversmit, 2016, and Weissmann, 2012, and Fernholz, 2011) and it's clear that the belief that there is some dissonance between his former personal practices and how he exercises his current prosecutorial discretion is not a particularly unique one. While it's ironic that facing legal consequences for his use may have made him less electable, this is not to say that he is necessarily a hypocrite (one can commit a crime without being opposed to its criminalization), or that the gap between his youthful practices and values and adult regulatory decisions is any wider than Clinton's gap; Clinton can't definitively be said to be any more or less permissive, as there is no way to know whether he would have made the same choices, had he, rather than Obama, been president during a time when state marijuana laws have shifted so significantly. However, one of the other commonalities of both Clinton's and Obama's statements is an indication that the marijuana was consumed during the speaker's youth; for Clinton, this requires the additional (but not unavailable) information that "When I was in England" meant when he was a student at Oxford (Shea, 2010), but for Obama, this is more direct, with the word "kid" used when he said "I inhaled" in 2006, and "young man" when he repeated the phrase in 2007. As there are a few obvious reasons why current use (had it even occurred) would have been a political non-starter in a 1992 and a 2008 presidential campaign, it's natural that the candidates chose to distance themselves from their past decisions. Be that as it may, if there can be said to be any kind of cumulative effect of the disclosures by political figures on the public perception of marijuana consumption (as well as possibly the public perception of politicians, considering that this includes not just Obama and Clinton, but also the 1987 disclosures connected with Ginsburg's failed confirmation)(Sabato, 1998), understanding the effect must include a consideration of how these disclosures have framed marijuana as a drug of youth and youthful mistakes, rather than something adults could enjoy (at least somewhat) responsibly. Powerful people disclosing youth consumption may stigmatize adult use, but their framing of youth use as regrettable is a much harder sell, as marijuana – at the frequency they used it, and the time in

their lives they used it – can't be reasonably described as an impediment to their success, since an American politician can reach no higher office than the presidency. With this in mind, the mass media exposure of adult consumption, rather than just youthful hijinks, may be one of the more significant shifts occurring as the country moves towards legalization.

## **Snoop**

There are few celebrities more closely identified with marijuana consumption than the 44-year-old rapper, DJ, and actor who goes by Snoop (as well as Snoop Dogg, Snoop Lion, and other aliases). He's had a long career, rising to fame after an extended guest appearance and collaboration with fellow rapper Dr. Dre on Dr. Dre's 1992 album, *The Chronic*; "chronic" being Snoop's term for a type of potent marijuana that was available at the time (Dearden, 2014). Since then he's sold over 30 million albums worldwide (Bainbridge, 2015), earned over a hundred acting credits (including frequent cameos as himself, in both documentary and fictional contexts) in film and on television shows (IMDb.com, 2016), has an estimated net worth of \$135 million (Tuttle and Osborn, 2015), and has been described as "more of a figurehead, a mythological figure, than an artist" (G., 2015). His lyrics are frequently about marijuana, and with song titles like "Smoke The Weed," "This Weed Iz Mine," "Smokin' On," and more, spread out over more than dozen albums and mixtapes, his position on the substance is quite clear (AZlyrics.com, 2015). For a part of his life, including while he was also a successful musician, he facilitated and benefitted from the prostitution of women (firstly as an actual "pimp," and then through hit singles discussing the "lifestyle")(Rolling Stone, 2013), and yet he recently appeared in a commercial for the all-American shopping-mall-mainstay budget clothing retailer Old Navy (Fashion Show, 2015) and is releasing a documentary, *Coach Snoop*, about the youth football league he founded (Blum, 2016). Feminist writer, lawyer, and founder of a charity dedicated to ending violence against women, Julie Bindel, wrote in *The Guardian* that she believes Snoop "hates women," and "is a misogynistic creep" – and that she's loved his music for 20 years (Bindel, 2010). He has made statements to the media that are less than polished; including: "To pimp a bitch is a craft. You couldn't pimp a bitch if I put you in a room with a hundred hos. It's a craft. Some have it, and some don't" (Hattenstone, 2013), and (regarding pictures and video circulating online wherein he and his 18-year-old son help each other light a 2-foot-long marijuana water pipe), "What better way to [learn] than from the master?" and "My kids can do



whatever the hell they want...I'm his father, so I wanna show him the proper way because he looks up to me" (Halperin, 2012). However, this is not to say that these are the messages, or the tone of the messages, from Snoop that receive the most repeated attention on mainstream news sites. In fact, his recent creation of two companies garnered significant attention outside of the gossip columns or arts sections, the first of which, Leafy by Snoop, his brand of several different varieties of marijuana, was covered by *Time* magazine (Plucinska, 2015) and discussed in *The Atlantic* (Schwab, 2015), *Forbes* magazine (Stone, 2015), and *Newsweek* (Bort, 2016), among others, and the other, Merry Jane, an online content platform with a variety of marijuana-themed articles and videos, was covered by *Forbes* (Huet, 2015), and *Time*, as well (Rivett-Carnac, 2015), but also the *Metro* free daily that appears in major cities (Tumola, 2015), nationwide daily *USA Today* (Guynn, 2015) and tech news sites *TechCrunch* (Crook and Tepper, 2015) and *Venturebeat* (Yeung, 2015).

Notably, Snoop's statements in connection with his product launches were quite a bit more refined; the oft-quoted line from the Leafy by Snoop launch was "Leafy by Snoop is truly the first mainstream cannabis brand in the world and proud to be a pioneer...LBS is blazing a trail for the industry" (Plucinska, 2015), and the statement made from the stage at *TechCrunch's* "Disrupt" conference announcing the launch of Merry Jane, and then repeated in the articles covering the launch, keeps the same polished tone, but connects his venture to a slew of cultural references via linguistic allusions. As Snoop says: "There are so many people in the closet, and we are giving them an opportunity to come out of the closet and just admit they like to smoke...I'm a smoker, my name is Snoop Dogg, and I'm a stoner" (Tumola, 2015). The mixed allusions to sociocultural practices herein are particularly rich, however, their use may be rooted in more than a desire to make the product appealing to a wide audience, but also a recognition of the conventions of the place he's speaking (to an audience at a tech conference, while being filmed), as well as the practices of mainstream journalism. Simply put, it's a sound bite – and without knowing whether or not it was scripted ahead of time, there's nonetheless no reason to believe that it was not, at minimum, spoken with a certain amount of consideration or forethought. In referencing "the closet," he connects undisclosed marijuana consumption with aspects of the LGBT rights movement focused on living openly and overcoming stigma, and he also draws a line between his own practices and culture – and not just any culture, but one that has moved from a position of marginalization to a less-discriminated, more visible role in

American society. The reference he makes in the second part of the sentence, an allusion to statements from addiction recovery meetings, is particularly complex. The cadence is virtually identical to the “My name is \_\_\_\_, and I am an alcoholic” statements typical of Alcoholics Anonymous (and Narcotics Anonymous) meetings (Ebert, 2009), which have entered popular culture to the degree that they would be recognizable to many Americans.

However, in this case, the statement is hardly a path to abstinence. The word “stoner,” describing someone whose frequent marijuana consumption has made them lazy and intellectually impaired, also carries negative stigma (Curran, 2013), and whether calling someone a “stoner” arguably carries more or less stigma, than, for example, describing someone as an “active alcoholic,” is likely context-dependent as well as anyone’s guess, but, nonetheless, the latter half of Snoop’s public statement represents an attempt at a reclamation of sorts, not only of the term “stoner” itself, but also of public, frequent marijuana use as negative behavior. Considering that none of the articles criticized him for recasting frequent marijuana consumption in the context of a liberatory social justice movement, or for subverting addiction recovery language to promote a website celebrating intoxication, he may have had a measure of success in appropriating the concepts. Had he been more direct with the connections to outside cultural elements, e.g. by making either reference more literal, or had he chosen one reference and stuck with it, the allusions would be more difficult to ignore, and therefore more likely to offend. By mixing references he creates something simultaneously familiar but destabilizing, a statement that’s neither a direct connection or the proverbial wink and nudge. This is two steps beyond Obama’s “I inhaled;” Snoop doesn’t “inhale,” and in this case he doesn’t mince words – he “smokes,” he likes it, and if his fellow marijuana enthusiasts want, they have an “opportunity” to “come out,” presumably via interactions on the platform he’s come to the tech conference to discuss, Merry Jane – which naturally also has an online store selling clothing and accessories with the Merry Jane logo (MerryJane.com, 2015). It is, of course, implicit that taxation and regulation of marijuana exists in concert with open sales, and open sales with a certain amount of commercialization, but the presence of this commercialization in discourse (even indirectly, via the “opportunity” in Snoop’s statement) so soon after sales have begun, suggests that commercialization may be an inseparable feature of the discourse surrounding legalized marijuana going forward, provided regulatory structures aren’t changed to prohibit it.

## 6.1 Conclusion

The legalized marijuana market is in its infancy, but not everything about marijuana's post-legalization discourse is new. Most of the people taking part in the conversation are male, which fits in with larger (and older) patterns and practices of sexism in the developed Western world. It also means that, at the broadest level, one of the central questions of this project, the question of who is visible in mainstream news coverage about marijuana legalization, actually has a very simple answer: mostly men are visible. The gender ratios of sources in mainstream news articles in this content analysis are very close matches for the gender ratios of sources in news articles reported in other large- and small-scale content analyses, notably the Global Media Monitoring Project (but also others) (Ross and Carter, 2011, and Jia, et al., 2016). As these other analyses were also focused on a broad range of news, as well as news sources, rather than a single subject and source, this suggests that there are aspects of marijuana coverage, particularly news genre-specific, societal, and possibly discursive elements that privilege male voices, that are less unique than legalization's newness, geographical specificity, and relative controversy in society might imply. In addition, the reproduction of the gender ratios from other studies, this time within a context (the legalization era) that is also a product of progressive drug policy reforms, and additionally sampled from the main newspaper in the city that's considered America's third most liberal (Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2014), may also mean that all boats really are not rising with the tide. And, of course, so far, 100% of American presidents have been male, as is Snoop, who is easily the most well-known and wealthiest individual to fully embrace public consumption over a long career in the public eye.

Disproportionate maleness in itself is not the only prominent aspect of the new discourse; how maleness works in concert with expert status is another, but less-gender-centric themes include discussions of marijuana in terms of youthfulness (and conversely, adulthood), as well as an emphasis on commercialization and industry. The establishment of particular marijuana related events (the day marijuana is legalized by vote, and the day retail sales begin) as a coverage-generating critical discourse moment (within the larger framework of legalization as a critical discourse) is also significant, as is the greater per-day incidence of marijuana-related news articles after retail sales began, as well as the injection of marijuana-related businesses and discourse into a previously unrelated – and well-connected, and heavily covered by news media

and industry-specific media – segments of society, the tech industry. The second main research question was if those with high social status communicate publicly about their own consumption differently than those with low social status, and if so, how, and these differences are often seen more clearly through some of those most noteworthy aspects of the discourse.

Looking at the content analysis to better understand how those with higher and lower social status communicate is a somewhat indirect tactic, as issues of “standing” and “framing” were more directly applied to the structure of the thesis as a whole, and not the dynamics within each method, but there is an access point through the coding of “experts” and “non-experts.” Of course, though defining social status in terms of experts and non-experts is imprecise, since non-experts could potentially have great wealth and social capital “in real life,” it’s not valueless, and the framework can nonetheless offer some insights, since non-experts were speaking in news articles from personal, rather than professional authority, and so personal disclosures of consumption were almost always from non-experts in the content analysis, and those with higher social status may also tend to appear based on their professional opinion or status (e.g. the Attorney General was always coded as an “expert,” even when holding a ceremonial bag of marijuana he bought). Be all that as it may, the content analysis showed that a female source is more likely to appear as a non-expert in marijuana-related news articles than a male source is, and while there are fewer total female non-experts than male non-experts, this nonetheless suggests a link between lower social status, womanhood, and a relative increase in communication about personal consumption, preferences, desires, opinions and concerns. A larger total amount of men disclose consumption and/or are speaking based on their personal opinions, but if an individual is a woman, she is slightly more likely to do so. The cumulative effect of tending to show men speaking on professional terms and women on personal terms in marijuana-related coverage may over-represent women as individuals who consume marijuana or are worried about the consequences of consumption, while conversely presenting men as individuals who tend to have greater professional agency and more professional stakes in the booming new marijuana industry.

Another major facet of the content analysis that can be connected to status is the age of the coded speaker in news articles. While the sample didn’t provide enough age data to draw meaningful

conclusions about different stages of life and media visibility, it is important to note that no one in the sample taken from *The Seattle Times* was under 21 (the legal permitted minimum age for recreational use in Washington state) and chose to speak about their own consumption.

Although it isn't exactly an immediate crisis that those under 21 aren't making statements to the media about a substance that they legally can't use, this actually represents a functional shift in discourse. Instead of marijuana consumption appearing in the mainstream news media as the illegal substance of choice for youthful indiscretion, as in Obama's and Clinton's statements, media disclosures of personal consumption are now made by adults of all ages (Mannix and Spencer, 2014), and one group of individuals with a generally lower status, youth 20 and under, are not speaking publicly with the mainstream news media (at least *The Seattle Times*) about their use. Ironically, however, the election of those two politicians to the nation's single most powerful office, despite their disclosures, suggests that the stigma of illegal consumption by youth, if cast in terms of self-discovery and eventual regret, can be overcome on a nationwide scale, but as regret, a young age, and the passage of time seems to be a crucial component of "forgiving" the consumer, unapologetic or even enthusiastic admissions of legal use by adults in legal jurisdictions may carry more stigma than illegal consumption by those under 21. The marginalization of youth voices may also be one of the consequences of commercialization; in the years pre-legalization adults and youth faced the same legal penalties for personal consumption, but now an industry has sprung up, with some legalization advocates arguing for legalization based on the idea that drug dealers do not have a problem selling to teenagers, but retailers bound by law would (Ferner, 2012). Youth marijuana consumers' lack of media presence makes it more challenging for adults to understand why young people are making the choices they do, which may affect the ability of local communities to develop meaningful tailored public health programs addressing teen consumption, or just prevent parents from speaking more effectively with their teenagers.

Snoop's response to the stigma of legal adult consumption also speaks directly to how people of high and low social status communicate about marijuana consumption. As someone heavily invested in the legal marijuana industry, when he urged marijuana consumers to "come out," it can only be inferred that he was encouraging those over 21 to do so, as a dramatic increase in the visibility of teenage consumers post-legalization would threaten legalization efforts. Snoop, in

this case, is a highly visible figure, using his visibility and attempting to lead the charge towards adult visibility. In theory, the inverse is absolutely possible – unapologetic adult consumers could run a campaign of sorts, asking celebrities (and politicians) who are rumored to consume to “come out” themselves, in order to connect successful individuals with marijuana consumption on a highly visible scale. This is not happening as of yet, which positions a celebrity not just as a generator of news articles (as a person with “standing”), but as an individual attempting to create a discourse himself, and those without standing, non-celebrity audience members and readers, then in a reactive position in terms of their own disclosure.

One of the other elements of Snoop’s statement, its context within a product launch, suggests another major turn in the discourse, this time towards commercialization, a quality that’s also partially supported by the content analysis. Moving beyond the obvious, which is that now it’s legal to verbally advertise, and then sell, marijuana and related products and once it was not, commercialized discourse can reasonably be seen as a natural outgrowth of permitting sales, but not necessarily a guaranteed or required feature of the conversation, or of marijuana legalization. While the United States has a strong tradition of free speech, the fact remains that communication regarding cigarette sales is heavily regulated, and Washington, D.C.’s legalized marijuana legislation constructs – and possibly imagines – a “gift economy” wherein marijuana sales are illegal, but gifts of marijuana between individuals, freely given without any kind of remuneration, are allowed, so long as the giver gives no more than an ounce of pot (Barro, 2015). Understanding commercialized marijuana discourse as natural, but not native, allows for greater critique of the discourse itself, including as a site for further research. Likewise, within the content analysis the construction of the term “industry profile” was the researcher’s, but the reoccurrence of articles devoting significant time and attention to business development was one result of the staff of *The Seattle Times* efforts in combination. Without going deeply into the articles themselves, emphasizing business development as news, interviewing and consolidating the statements of business owners as valued perspectives, and discussing the net worth of the marijuana industry, implies that the creation and expansion of capital is a benefit to society, especially within an American context that favors the so-called free market. While the creation and expansion of wealth may not be bad, per se, the “more money” position as a discursive counter-argument to concerns about social changes, or as a precedent for further legalization,

ultimately has some real weaknesses and may obscure discussions of other factors and groups impacted by legalization.

Thankfully, however, industry profiles, and even the texts discussed in this thesis, do not comprise the sum total of marijuana-related discourse. Concerning the thesis's third research question, opportunities for further research are numerous. As black individuals bore (and may continue to be bearing) the brunt of legal penalties under criminalization (Young, 2014), studies looking at race, consumption, industry participation and media presence are necessary, but need to be performed on the ground in legalized jurisdictions, due to the limitations of both professional research data, as well as the limitations of data on race in material available remotely. Several "think pieces" on race and racism in the new legal marijuana industry have been published (e.g. Voynovskaya, 2016, and Lewis, 2016), but more information can only enhance the abilities of writers to make their claims. Better understanding the advertising-inflected fan-celebrity interactions on social media regarding marijuana may help researchers see to what extent and in what ways conversations connected to legal marijuana are commercial, and if this is changing attitudes towards marijuana, especially in younger people. Interviews and/or surveys could be particularly useful here. The lack of widespread public knowledge about women's constant under-representation in news media remains troubling (as well as, of course, the actual under-representation), but the quality of the research by groups like The Global Media Monitoring Project demands a better public relations strategy that exposes more people to the work being done, but not better research itself. Sociological research and research in business that takes a closer look at women's participation in the marijuana industry, and additionally any barriers they may face to full and profitable participation, in concert with specific content analyses of print and TV news shows labelling industry members (and not just "experts"), may be particularly useful in addressing issues of female under-representation and likely real-world gender disparities in an industry that's generating considerable profits for its leaders. There's no good reason why a new marketplace can't be new and improved, or why a new discourse can't do more to shed old conventions that aren't serving it particularly well. Academia shouldn't shy away from evaluating the marijuana industry, marijuana conversations, and related subjects; as they all evolve, they offer an opportunity for real influence, before new practices become settled conventions.

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