

Cannabis-Infused Dreams: A Market at the Crossroads of
Criminal and Conventional

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2023

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Sociology

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Abstract

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Moral legitimacy of market activities is important in determining how commodities are traded and market success (Anteby 2010; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Zelizer 1979). Economic sociologists studying morally contested markets document how market actors actively work to construct new moral meanings of their activities and align their practices with these narratives (Chan 2009; Quinn 2008a; Turco 2012). However, much of this work treats the organizational spaces where these exchanges take place abstractly, overlooking how these narratives operate in real time by employees who are classed, gendered, and racialized individuals. As such, we undertheorize how power and status manifest in moralizing labor through interactions in these spaces that ultimately matter for market development and inequality.

In this dissertation, I use the emerging recreational cannabis market as a case of a morally contested market to present three empirical chapters that together, begin to address this gap by highlighting the central role employees play in the moral and social construction of markets. Specifically, I draw on sixty semi-structured interviews with cannabis retail staff, managers, and

owners across twenty-six state licensed cannabis stores in Seattle and 107 hours of ethnographic observation within three of these stores to understanding how staff engaged in moral meaning making around how products were sold and how this shaped inequality in these market organizations. In doing so, I make important empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of markets by showing how the market moralization process is carried out at the level of the employee through interactions with consumers and other market actors in these organizational spaces.

Table of Contents

List of Tables & Figures.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
<i>The Present Study</i>	2
<i>Methodology</i>	7
<i>Ethnographic Case Selection: Jane’s Corner & Eddie’s Pot Shops</i>	8
<i>Extending the Case to New Sites: Semi-Structured Interviews</i>	14
<i>Overall Analytic Strategy</i>	18
<i>Conclusion</i>	20
Chapter 2.	22
<i>Introduction</i>	22
<i>Historical Background: Recreational Cannabis as the Villain</i>	27
<i>Missing the Mark: (Mis?) Measuring Cannabis Consumption</i>	34
<i>Methodology</i>	35
<i>Findings</i>	37
<i>Discussion & Conclusion</i>	46
Chapter 3.	49
<i>Introduction</i>	49
<i>Literature Review</i>	54
<i>Cannabis as a Case</i>	60
<i>Methodology</i>	61
<i>Findings</i>	63
<i>Conclusion</i>	86
Chapter 4.	88
<i>Introduction</i>	88
<i>Literature Review</i>	91
<i>Emerging Legal Cannabis Markets as a Case</i>	97
<i>Data & Methodology</i>	100
<i>Findings</i>	103
<i>Discussion</i>	114
Chapter 5. Conclusion.....	117
<i>Policy Implications</i>	118

References	121
Appendices	129
<i>Appendix A. Recruitment Materials</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Appendix B. Oral Consent Form</i>	<i>132</i>
<i>Appendix C. Interview Protocol + Demographic Survey</i>	<i>134</i>

List of Tables & Figures

Table 1. Field Site Comparison.....	11
Table 2. Type of Stores Participants Worked at or Owned.....	14
Table 3. Demographic Characteristics.....	15
Table 4. Interviewee’s Occupational Roles.....	16
Table 5. Annual Income.....	17
Figure 1. Theoretical Model Gender & Moralizing Labor.....	52

Acknowledgements

I first want to acknowledge all the individuals and organizations that made this work possible. I am grateful for the activists and advocacy groups that fought hard for the decriminalization and legalization of cannabis, for continued protection and safety for medicinal consumers, and those that work every day to make this industry more equitable and just. I am continually motivated by the work these folks do to carve a pathway forward in demanding justice for the Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and Asian individuals that have been brutalized by our criminal legal system and other oppressive institutions. Second, I am also grateful for the individuals who shared their time with me as research participants. The vulnerability, excitement, and experiences you shared informs my advocacy work as every worker in this industry deserves to have their immense contributions compensated, their work valued, and to have a safe space to work.

Next, I want to highlight my immense gratitude for my co-advisers, Drs. Alexis Harris and Sarah Quinn. I have been so incredibly fortunate to have both of your support. You have both pushed me to be a better activist-scholar: to think critically about my methodologies and use of theory, how to navigate complex issues as they arose, and how to use my expertise to impact policy. Your brilliance, generosity, collegiality, and encouragement - not only to keep pushing myself when I was in-the-weeds, but to set healthy boundaries when I needed to take breaks - were so vital to my success.

Third, I want to thank my other committee members, both past and present. Dr. Katherine Beckett was my first-year adviser and has always had my best interests at heart. If it was not for your feedback on my NSF Grad Research Fellowship application at the start of grad school, I doubt I would have been selected. Dr. Jerald Herting has stepped in numerous times to help

support me when I life happened and I needed additional departmental or faculty support. To Dr. Oliver Rollins, thank you for agreeing to serve on my committee. Even in our first, brief meeting, you provided so many incredibly helpful insights and showed so much enthusiasm for my work. I'm so grateful for your feedback and support. Dr. Karen Boxx, thank you so much for stepping in to serve as my Grad School Representative. I thoroughly enjoyed speaking in your Cannabis Law class each Spring.

Fourth, I owe so much to the past and present members of the Context Working Group, particularly the faculty facilitator Dr. Kyle Crowder. I cannot overstate enough how incredibly helpful and important these weekly working group meetings were to my graduate education. I also consider Kyle to be another champion for rigorous graduate education and I am so grateful for his support over the years through this working group.

I want to give a special thanks to my colleagues Maria Vignau Loria, Tyler Smith, Gabriela Kirk, Rebeca de Buen Kalman, Aliyah Turner, and Maxine Wright, you all played an important role in keeping me accountable and moving through the program, helping me work through my ideas and getting over roadblocks, and generally supporting me in getting through graduate school and the job market. You all pushed my thinking in so many ways, reading drafts of my statements for fellowships or research grants and reminding me on multiple occasions to say no to opportunities when I was getting overwhelmed with the work I already had on my plate.

I also want to acknowledge additional support I received throughout the years from the following folks: Dr. Erin Carll, Dr. Rebeca de Buen Kalman, Dr. Emmie Obara, Dr. Annie McGlynn-Wright, Dr. Charles Lanfear, Dr. Savannah Larimore, Dr. Iris Daruwala, Dr. Rene

Flores, Dr. Jelani Ince, Dr. Theresa Beardall, Dr. Magda Boutros, Dr. Steve Pfaff, and Dr. Sara Curran.

Finally, I would not be anywhere if it were not for the support of my family. For my late grandmother, Doris Melvin, who was the center of my universe as a kid with one of my earliest memories being her teaching me to scream “I am woman, here me roar!” at the top of my lungs. For my brother, Matt Cadigan, who I have always looked up to as someone with an incredibly big heart, who is unbelievably charismatic, and is so incredibly smart and witty. For your daughter, my niece, Lydia Cadigan, she is so strong and fearless, I am so excited to see what kind of future she builds for herself. To my father, Terry Cadigan, who was always there for me growing up and taught me to work hard and persist through challenges. And to his partner, Linda Anderson, who taught me how strength and compassion can co-exist. For my mother, Mary Chambers, who showed me that women can be fierce leaders and that I should always reach for what I want, even when it’s out of my comfort zone and I’m feeling like an imposter. To my stepfather, Steve Chambers, who is such an important part of my life, teaching me to cook and how to do handy work like setting tile or making pinewood derby cars, I deeply value our discussions. For my partner, Jason Garza, who saw me through this entire process with the many late nights and stressing over deadlines. I am so incredibly grateful for your love and support. And to his family, who treated me like their own from the jump. Finally, for my two dogs, Roxie and Ollie, without whom I do not think I would have gotten through the pandemic.

Thank you to the organizations that funded this research: Washington Center for Equitable Growth Foundation Dissertation Research Grant, Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy Research, National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies Washington State Labor Research Grant, the Addictions, Drugs, and

Alcohol Institute Small Grant for Marijuana Research, and the James McCann Graduate Student Research Award from the UW Department of Sociology. Partial support for this research came from a Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development research infrastructure grant, P2C HD042828, to the Center for Studies in Demography & Ecology at the University of Washington. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

Chapter 1. Introduction

In 2012, Washington State voters passed Initiative 502 (I-502) and joined Colorado in becoming the first two U.S. states to legalize the sale and use of recreational cannabis for adults 21 years old and older. Proponents of legalization framed I-502 as addressing a failed costly criminal legal policy. Criminalizing cannabis failed to stop dangerous illicit market actors from profiting off its sale, diverted limited resources of courts and police agencies towards enforcing cannabis laws instead of pursuing more serious cases, and was disproportionately enforced on young Black and Latinx individuals despite evidence that their use rates are lower than White populations (Beckett and Herbert 2008; Levine, Gettman, and Siegal 2012; Pflaumer, Alsdorf, and Levinson 2011). In a *Seattle Times* (2011) op-ed written in support of I-502, former U.S. attorney Katrina Pflaumer, retired Superior Court judge Robert Alsdorf, former Municipal Court judge and Seattle deputy mayor Anne Levinson explain:

Decriminalizing cannabis would allow our state and local governments to refocus limited police and court resources on more important priorities than arresting, jailing, and trying adult cannabis users. It would redirect hundreds of millions of dollars that are currently flowing to criminal organizations each year to legitimate businesses. It would restore respect for our laws and law enforcement. And it would decrease the disproportionate criminalization of people of color who have historically been harmed most by the existing laws. (Pflaumer et al. 2011)

Legalizing recreational cannabis would bring the illicit market under strict state control, free up police resources, and decrease arrests and convictions of non-White individuals.

New Approach Washington, the group that managed Washington's legalization campaign, emphasized that I-502 was not an endorsement on cannabis consumption (Martin 2012). This was a matter of creating a more equitable and effective justice system. Charles Mandigo, the former head of Seattle's FBI office, was featured in a campaign ad in support of I-

502 along with former U.S. attorneys Pflaumer and John McKay. In his endorsement of I-502, Mandigo writes:

I do not personally support or condone the use of marijuana. However, as a 27-year veteran of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, I believe it is time to reform our marijuana laws. The prohibition of the purchase and possession of small amounts of marijuana by adults has caused more harm than good. Like alcohol Prohibition did in the last century, marijuana prohibition has enriched criminal organizations and compromised public safety here and abroad. (Mandigo 2012)

For Mandigo and others, legalizing recreational cannabis would potentially create greater public safety than existing laws. With this framework, I-502 passed and Washington got to work on creating a regulated market for recreational cannabis. The first licensed recreational cannabis retail shop opened for business in July of 2014 in Seattle's SODO neighborhood and as of 2022, fifty-three retail stores are in operation citywide.

The Present Study

The making of a market for recreational cannabis presents a unique opportunity to seek answers to research questions related to market formation and moral legitimacy. Markets and morality have traditionally been considered hostile worlds where markets are characterized as utilitarian spheres of self-interest and morality is about serving the greater good (Zelizer 2011). However, economic sociologists studying morally contested markets find that markets both shape and are shaped by moral meanings as market actors align their activities with normative beliefs about appropriate market behavior (Anteby 2010; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Healy 2006; Turco 2012; Zelizer 1979). In this line of work, scholars show how regulatory structures, formal organizational rules, and profit-generating motives are not sufficient to explain how market organizations are structured and operate (Anteby 2008; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Turco 2012). Rather, market activities, prices, and commodification processes are profoundly impacted by the constructed moral legitimacy within a market (Anteby 2010; Cohen and Dromi 2018; Fourcade

and Healy 2007; Healy 2004; Livne 2014; Turco 2012). Moral legitimacy is defined as a positive evaluation of an organization and its activities (Anteby 2010).

For example, the market for the exchange of human organs and tissue is not dominated by profit-seeking motives but is dependent on the social value of altruism and gift-giving (Healy 2006; Titmuss 1971). Organizations selling human sperm and eggs promote their industry's activities by drawing on ideals of motherhood (Almeling 2007). The hospice industry finds success by moralizing scarcity in spending and treatment in end-of-life care (Livne 2014). Market projects fail to achieve success when organizational actors or their potential consumer base view their revenue generating practices as immoral (Turco 2012; Zelizer 1979).

Together, this work highlights how markets and moral meanings are co-constitutive and challenges the idea that markets are inherently asocial institutions dominated by rationality (Krippner 2001; Zelizer 2012). Instead, economic exchanges are important sites for constructing and reinforcing boundaries around normative beliefs and relationships (Bandelj 2009; Krippner 2001; Zelizer 2012). Thus, examining morally contested markets allows scholars to understand how these boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate market activity come to be constructed, contested, and/or reconfigured and how this structures markets (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Zelizer 2011).

While Zelizer (2012) and others argue that this conceptual model necessitates a close examination of the interactions between buyers and sellers for theorizing about market structure, organizational spaces where these exchanges take place are often treated abstractly. Much of this work focuses on the moral frameworks market actors employ but overlook how these narratives operate in real time by employees who are classed, gendered, and racialized individuals. As such, we end up missing the more relational work that takes place within these organizations and

undertheorize how power and status manifest in moralizing labor through interactions in these spaces that ultimately matter for market development and inequality.

In this dissertation, I use the emerging recreational cannabis market as a case of a morally contested market to present three empirical chapters that together, begin to address this gap by highlighting the central role employees play in the moral and social construction of markets. I focused on the organizational space as a site where staff engaged in moral meaning making that determined how products were sold and how this structured inequality in these market organizations. In doing so, I make important empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of markets by showing how the market moralization process is carried out at the level of the employee through interactions with consumers and other market actors in these organizational spaces.

Specifically, I draw on sixty semi-structured interviews with staff and owners of twenty-six licensed cannabis retail shops across Seattle and 107 hours of ethnographic observation within three of these stores to answer the following separate, but related research questions in each respective chapter:

1. How do recreational cannabis retail market actors frame cannabis consumption?
2. How does gender shape who can make moral claims regarding their market activities and how does this shape their experience in the market?
3. How do these moral claims grapple with the deeply racist roots of cannabis criminalization, if at all, and how does this shape racial equity within these organizational spaces?

In each chapter, I address one of the above questions and summarize below each chapter's main findings and how these findings each contribute to sociological knowledge about market

structures. I then present my methodological and analytic approach to addressing these questions. Finally, I conclude by considering how the findings from each chapter together make an important contribute to our sociological understanding of market organizations.

Chapter 2. Legal Boundary, Resource Competition, or Moral Legitimacy? Blurring the Lines between Medicinal & Recreational Cannabis

Sociologists find that categorization is a core process that defines market niches, which are some of the foundational principles of economic life (White 1981, 2005). In the cannabis market, the most essential categorical divisions include medical versus recreational consumption. Hsu et al. (2018) find that recreational market organizations blur the lines between medicinal and recreational use in markets where both co-exist. However, like other scholars examining the development of market niches and categorization, they argue that this is driven by profit-seeking intentions and a desire for market expansion (Hsu et al. 2018; White 1981). In this chapter, I critique this “resource competition” argument as an uncritical recapitulation of outmoded ideas of market-makers as reducible to economic interest.

Leveraging my interview and observational data, I examined how these boundaries come to be constructed on the ground within Seattle’s retail space as they sell cannabis directly to consumers. I found that seller’s pursuit of a moral market identity drove them to invoke a “wellness” framework as a category of consumption vague enough to invoke health and recreational practices. Retail owners and upper management struggled significantly to incentivize staff to sell products they needed them to sell. Instead, staff sold products they believed would elicit positive experiences as a matter of moral principal, even skirting regulatory boundaries barring them from providing advice on more medicinal consumption practices. Turco (2012) finds similar attitude among employees in her case study of a maternal support market

organization where employees refused to upsell products to mothers using their programmatic services, seeing the practice as immoral and exploitative but ultimately leading to market failure. In my case, retail organizations and vendors adapted to staffs' resistance by catering directly to staff interests and incorporating them into the decision-making processes regarding product inventory. Thus, these organizations came to blur the boundaries between recreational and medicinal because of how staff constructed ideas about what constituted a moral market practice. Together, this challenges the idea that market organizations develop identities and frame their market niche to capture a wider consumer base and provides an alternative mechanism at play.

Chapter 3. Ganja Girls & Bimbo Budtenders: Defining the Moral Market Actor in Contested Markets

As argued discussed above, economic sociologists have shown that legitimacy is an important part of market success and that workers play a central role in establishing a contested trade as legitimate (Anteby 2010; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Turco 2012). However, researchers have yet to adequately theorize how the process of working within contested or newly moralized markets matters for employee's sense of dignity and occupational status. This is a problem because we know that a person's job has profound ramifications for their sense of value. This chapter addresses this gap by investigating the experiences of workers in a newly formed market for recreational cannabis. I found that workers participating in constructing a moral market can gain immense emotional returns and a sense of dignity as moral market actor and elite tastemaker. However, these positive emotional returns were not evenly distributed. In the case of recreational cannabis, men were better able to position themselves as experts with unique scientific knowledge and insight into how cannabis interacted with the body while women were typically met with suspicion by customers and sometimes coworkers. Women in these spaces

were viewed as sexual objects and thus, were not authentic experts but marketing ploys hired to manipulate men into buying specific products. This indicates that working in a moralized market matters for workers, but who can claim moral market actor identity is moderated by social status.

Chapter 4. A Theory of Racialized Moral Entrepreneurship: Market Moralization and Racialized Organizations

In Chapter 4, I investigate how market moralization is a racializing process. I found that those working in the industry viewed their work as central to constructing the identity of a moral cannabis business establishment and cannabis consumer. However, this construct was made in direct contrast to the racialized narratives used to criminalize Black and Latinx market participants during prohibition. This disadvantaged non-white store staff, business owners, and consumers while privileging the mostly white male owners and staff I encountered. Using this work, I develop a theory of racialized moral entrepreneurship to characterize the relationship between market moralization and racialization as an important meso-level process working to uphold racial capitalism.

Below I outline my case selection strategy and data collection methodology. Further, I describe my cases and the demographic characteristics of my interview respondents. Finally, I provide a detailed account of my analytic strategy. While the following Methodology section focuses on the dissertation as a whole, I provide more specific details about how I constructed the findings for each empirical chapter within each respective chapter.

Methodology

To understand how these new market organizational spaces were being constructed and organized, I implemented a grounded theory, multi-method approach where I gathered qualitative data from ethnographic field work and semi-structured interviews. Employing

qualitative methodologies allowed me to leverage thick descriptions to characterize the narratives constructed by workers (Geertz 1973; Small and Calarco 2022). Interview data is ideal for understanding how individuals see themselves and understand their circumstances (Small and Calarco 2022). Moreover, my ethnographic field work of retail spaces allowed me to directly observe how these organizations operate in real time and triangulate my findings from the qualitative interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Small 2011; Small and Calarco 2022). Taken together, I was able to construct a picture of how market actors defined cannabis consumption, how they worked to align their market practices with these definitions, and how this ultimately shaped the organizational space.

While each chapter details the specific analytic strategy used to construct each respective chapter, below I provide an overview of my methodology for the broader project including my approach for case selection and recruitment.

Ethnographic Case Selection: Jane's Corner & Eddie's Pot Shops

Initially motivated by questions about how cannabis was being defined in these new market spaces and how this gendered worker's experiences compared to medicinal cannabis dispensaries (see [Chapkis 2013](#)), I designed an ethnographic field study to get at the tacit culture and embedded meanings within these organizational spaces (Maanen 2011).

When I first started to search for potential stores where I could conduct field work, there was not a lot of information about the demographic characteristics of this new workforce or knowledge about what kinds of organizational structures, roles, and rules I would potentially encounter. However, the state's publicly available licensing database and product surveillance system known as "Seed-to-Sale" allowed me to track where stores were located, when each store was licensed, how many times the stores' license switched ownership (if at all), how many

regulatory violations the store had and the nature of these violations, and how much tax revenue and profit each store brought in each month. Using this information, I visited a few of the roughly thirty active cannabis retail licenses that were active.

The stores I visited were single-site companies (i.e., the licensed cannabis company did not have multiple store locations), were in the top two quartiles for monthly earnings, and had been in existence for about a year. I wanted to pick a store that had some longevity relative to the market and that likely had a larger consumer base so I could observe various customer interactions during my site visits. I selected Jane's Corner¹ as my first field site after having visited the store several times and having positive interactions with the store's manager who allowed me to drop off customer surveys that were part of a separate study.

Jane's Corner is located on one end of a long, one-story building occupied by a string of small businesses near a major freeway and several universities. Jane's clientele was a mixture of blue- and white-collar workers, tourists, older individuals and couples, college students, and homeless individuals from a nearby encampment. Additionally, customers appeared to be a mix of native-born racial and ethnic minoritized individuals and White folks as well as foreign-born individuals from various countries of origin as evidenced by the different passports used to validate customers' age. Apart from Roger, the security guard who was a Black man born outside the U.S., all staff were native-born and White and at the time of my entry, was made up of four women and five men. Jane's Corner was also highly rated on customer-based review sites and were in the top third of monthly gross profits, so they likely had more customers coming in than smaller stores. Moreover, the store had been open for business for about a year by the time I started my field work in 2016 and was looking to expand, indicating some stability.

¹ All store and individual names have been changed to protect respondent confidentiality.

To recruit the store, I approached the store manager and assistant manager – Evan and Art respectively and told them I was interested in understanding how cannabis was being talked about and defined in this new market space. Once I was granted permission, I brought several copies of an IRB-approved information sheet that outlined what I was doing and what they could expect (see Appendix A). Each time I encountered a new staff member at the site, I would give them this document and ask if they were alright with being included in my observations of the store to which no one declined.

After about a month of field work, I noticed workers expended a significant amount of energy establishing occupational norms that worked to distance use from stigma and elevate the cultural status of cannabis. In addition to writing detailed fieldnotes of my observations at the store, I continuously did in-process analytic writing and recording of asides, commentaries, and in-process memos (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Within my field notes, I would write notes to myself about the interaction I was observing, or things staff would say to me. These asides and commentaries helped me keep track of things I wanted to clarify with staff later or look out for in future observations. For example, early on in my fieldwork at Jane’s Corner, I noted there seemed to be tension between different staff members. As my fieldwork continued, it appeared there was an “inner circle” of privileged staff that had access to free samples and more freedom to do what they wanted in the store and that these lines seemed to mostly be drawn along gender lines. During my interviews, I was able to follow-up on these observations where I learned what I was observing and noting down reflected what women at the store felt and experienced. After each observation, I would write up memos summarizing the observation, filling in my hand-written notes, and/or record voice memos.

After documenting several themes within my first case, I extended my ethnographic approach to two additional field sites to see if the same themes held across different types of shops. These additional two stores are part of one parent company I call Eddie’s Pot Shops: Eddie’s Weed Emporium and Eddie’s on 5th Avenue (Eo5). These comparative cases allowed me to examine the potential effects of organizational structure on the themes I was observing (see Table 1 below). Staff at Eddie’s Pot Shops had well-defined roles and was highly routinized. Contrastingly, Jane’s Corner was loosely structured with ill-defined roles and organizational structure. For example, Mick, an employee at Jane’s Corner, created the position “Inventory Specialist” and took over handling shipments. At Eddie’s, there was an entire inventory team in which inventory staff spent their workday processing products and updating online menus.

Table 1. Field Site Comparison

Company Name	Employ Structure	Routinization of Work	Customer Base
Jane’s Corner	Loosely structured	No routines embedded in organizational structure	Diverse customer base
Eddie’s Pot Shops	Well-defined roles & hierarchy	Highly routinized	Diverse customer base

Entry into these additional sites was relatively easy just as it had been at Jane’s Corner. As a white female graduate student who appeared similar in age to staff, I was not met with suspicion. Instead, staff were incredibly enthusiastic and often told me they felt my work was important and exciting. It seemed obvious to them that researchers would be interested in their work.

Staff would sometimes refer to me as the resident ethnographer or note taker when customers probed, which was a rare occurrence. Although similar in race to the staff at Jane’s Corner, my position as a researcher equipped with pen and paper sometimes impacted the types

of comments made in the shop, particularly insensitive comments about race or gender. As one employee at Jane's Corner explained, many of her coworkers would commonly make racist or sexist jokes, with some directed at her for being queer. Although I did not directly observe a lot of these statements, interviews with staff that took place outside of the store helped elucidate staff feelings towards racial and ethnic minorities and women. At Eddie's Pot Shops, the staff used an online messaging application where they could be social with each other outside of the public eye. I did not have access to this community and likely missed relevant data.

Furthermore, both the type and amount of information most staff did reveal to me was likely a function of my position as a researcher coupled with the moralizing labor they engaged in. Employees wanted to be seen as legitimate, culturally refined, and destigmatized. As a doctoral student from a prestigious local university researching their work, I was signaling to them that they were worth studying. They were the experts who were able to teach me, an aspiring academic. I often felt like many saw our conversations as opportunities to assert themselves as authorities on cannabis. This is likely one of the reasons much of my ethnographic data is made up of informal conversations with staff. However, these conversations were similar to those I observed between staff and customers, just amplified and elaborated on. For example, early on my field work, Mick told me customers at Jane's Corner were often looking for "free tuition" when they come into the shop. In this scenario, Mick was the professor and customers and outsiders like me were his students.

As some staff hovered around me, excited to tell me about their take on the industry, this complicated my ability to navigate my relationships with all staff members. At Eddie's Pot Shops and Jane's Corner, cliques that existed at the shop meant that talking to one individual for too long could potentially alienate me from others. To stay neutral in visible spaces while trying

to capture the stories employees wanted to tell, I physically position myself away from more talkative individuals while simultaneously providing them space to tell their stories. I did this by leveraging my one-on-one interviews to have deeper conversations about the workspace and allowed employees to vent their frustrations in a neutral setting. Additionally, I tried to make clear that I was observing the whole picture and cannot show preference to one individual while I'm at the store.

Although this may have impacted the store as these employees would shoot me looks when something happened that I knew they were frustrated about, I conditioned my reactions in a way that validated their frustration while attempting to stay out of it. For example, when a conflict erupted at Jane's Corner one afternoon, not wanting to take sides, I physically repositioned myself to create distance between me and the frustrated employee. I shot the budtender² a look back to validate his frustration while keeping my distance to signal that I was staying out of it. At Eddie's Pot Shops, there did not appear to be too many instances of conflict, but to avoid spending too much time with one employee, I purposefully sought out a variety of staff and spread my time evenly among both different physical locations in the store and in conversations with staff.

While I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork, I also began recruiting staff and store owners for semi-structured interviews at shops around Seattle to further understand how the themes present in my observational data extended to other industry folks' experiences. Interviews with staff lasted between one to two hours and were conducted at location selected by the interview respondent or over the phone.

² Budtender refers to sales staff; in other words, budtenders are the staff selling products to customers in the stores and is derived from "bartender."

Extending the Case to New Sites: Semi-Structured Interviews

Using some early findings identified in my fieldnotes and several one-on-one interviews, I refined my interview protocol and began recruit interview participants from stores across Seattle (see Appendix C for interview protocol). Interviews lasted between one to two hours with the longest interview being over four hours long. Respondents received a \$30 gift card as a thank you for participating (see Appendix A for recruitment flyer). While some respondents tried to decline the gift card, I let them know when they redeemed the gift card, they could opt to donate it to a non-profit.

Table 2 below outlines the number of stores represented among my participants and the type of store. Overall, I interviewed sixty store owners, managers, and staff from twenty-six unique licensed cannabis retail locations. These twenty-six shops were part of twenty-four unique cannabis companies and six stores were part of companies that had multiple locations throughout Seattle and/or Washington State. This does not mean that all six stores were part of the same chain. For example, I interviewed the company director and a medical cannabis consultant from one Urban Cannabis store location, but this company has several storefronts throughout the city. However, I did interview several staff from both Eddie’s Weed Emporium and Eddie’s on 5th Avenue.

Table 2. Type of Stores Participants Worked at or Owned

Stores	N
Unique Stores	26
Unique Cannabis Companies	24
Cannabis Chains	6

**Authors calculations*

Table 3 describes the demographic characteristics of my interview participants. Most respondents were White (n=39), male (=37), college educated (n=27), and under 30 years old (n=23). Out of 60 semi-structured interviews, 19 respondents identified as a cis-woman, two as

nonbinary, and 1 individual identified as a transgender woman. While only one individual identified as Black, seven identified as being multi-racial or bi-racial. Five respondents identified as Asian, three as Latinx/Hispanic, and five either declined to respond or the study team did not record their answer. Two-thirds of respondents reported being under 40 years old with the oldest participant being over 60 years old. Almost half of respondents (n=47) had a bachelor's degree with 17 additional respondents reporting having some college and seven having advanced, post-bachelor's degrees.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics

		N=60
Sex / Gender		
	Cis-Woman	19
	Cis-Man	37
	Trans-Woman	1
	Non-Binary	2
	Unknown	1
Race / Ethnicity		
	White	39
	Black / African American	1
	Asian	5
	Hispanic/Latinx	3
	Bi- or Multi-Racial	7
	Declined to Respond / Unknown	5
Age		
	21-29	23
	30-39	17
	40-49	7
	50-59	5
	60-69	2
	Declined to Respond / Unknown	6
Educational Attainment		
	High School Diploma / G.E.D.	4
	Some College*	14
	4-year College or University Degree	27
	Graduate or Professional Degree	7
	Declined to Respond / Unknown	8

**Includes A.A. Degree & Certificate Program
Author's own calculations*

Table 4 displays the breakdown of respondent’s job roles. Almost half of the staff I interviewed were floor-level staff including twenty budtenders, 3 medical marijuana consultants, and five shift leads. Medical marijuana consultants are individuals who have obtained a certificate from an educational program endorsed by the Department of Health to be able to consult patients with medical cannabis prescriptions and sell medicinal-grade products to these individuals. Shift leads are individuals who directly oversee and manage staff on the floor, including budtenders and sometimes medical marijuana consultants. I have categorized these staff as “floor staff” due to their limited explicit power in making decisions for the store and are mostly focused on customer-interactions. Eight respondents had job titles at the mid-management level including two assistant managers, five purchasing managers or inventory specialists, and one medical program manager. Inventory specialists and purchasing managers were responsible for managing the company’s inventory and job duties included placing new orders for products, making decisions about how much of given products to purchase, and managed vendor relations. Above these folks included store managers (n=7) and one individual who reported being “Operations and Purchasing Manager” which had the same role. These individuals oversaw managing all employees within a specific store including the purchasing manager. Two respondents were “Directors” who are individuals that manage multiple store locations for one company and were one step above the store managers. Finally, I was able to interview thirteen individuals who owned one or more stores in Seattle with some owning a Seattle shop and additional stores in a nearby city.

Table 4. Interviewee’s Occupational Roles

Job-Level	Job Title	(N = 60)
Floor Staff (n=28)	Budtender	20
	Medical Marijuana Consultant	3
	Shift Lead	5
Mid-Level Management (n=8)	Medical Program Manager	1
	Purchasing / Inventory Manager	5

	Assistant Manager	2
Upper-Management (n=10)	Operations & Purchasing Manager	1
	Store Manager / General Manager	7
	Director	2
Owners		13
Declined to Respond / Unknown		1
<i>Author's own calculations</i>		

Most respondents I spoke with worked full-time (n=46) with most working full-time at the cannabis store they were recruited from and some working part-time at multiple jobs (see Table 5 below). A few folks worked part-time (n=6) only. In 2018, the median household income for Washington State was \$40,000 a year and in Seattle, it was about \$92,000 a year (U.S. Census Bureau). About half of the respondents (n=26) reported earnings below \$60,000 a year, with four full-time staff reported earning between \$10,000 and \$19,999 a year. Most of those that declined to respond were cannabis store owners and most of those reporting earning over \$100,000 a year were either shop owners or their partners worked well paying jobs in the tech industry.

Table 5. Annual Income

Income	Part-Time (n = 6)	Full-Time (n = 46)	Unknown (n = 8)
Less than \$10,000	1	-	-
\$10,000 – 19,999	-	4	-
\$20,000 – 29,999	1	5	-
\$30,000 – 39,999	-	5	-
\$40,000 – 49,999	1	4	-
\$50,000 – 59,999	1	5	-
\$60,000 – 69,999	-	3	-
\$70,000 – 79,999	-	-	-
\$80,000 – 89,999	-	2	-
\$90,000 – 99,999	-	1	-
More than \$100,000	2	8	2
Declined to Respond / Unknown	-	9	6

Author's own calculations

Overall Analytic Strategy

Overall, I took a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to research where the researcher is simultaneously involved in data collection and analysis, purposefully theoretical sampling, engages in early data analysis in to pursue emergent themes, developing abstract categories to explain social processes observed in the data, and integrating those categories into a theoretical framework (Charmaz and Mitchell 2014; Glaser 1992; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Throughout the course of my observations, I constructed detailed fieldnotes that included descriptions of what I was directly observing as well as what Emerson et al. (2011) defines as asides, commentaries, and in-process memos. While I was writing fieldnotes, I often included my own thoughts and reactions. These asides and, more detailed, commentaries took the form of early theories or potential abstract categories that I could then track and refine in future observations. In addition to doing this in my fieldnotes, I also scribbled similar asides while taking notes during my interviews with staff and owners. Finally, I also constructed in-process memos periodically throughout my data collection which were my early attempts at constructing a theoretical framework explaining what I was observing (Emerson et al. 2011). Together, these in-process analytic writing provided helpful direction to look for instances that deviated or confirmed my early analyses and helped me decide on what types of comparative cases I needed for Jane's Corner and who I should be recruiting for interview respondents at additional stores.

Even more, these asides helped me to express moments when I felt my own boundaries being pushed or frustration when encountering sexist or racist remarks or even sexual harassment. Hanson and Richards find that researchers frequently experience sexual objectification and harassment while conducting fieldwork (2020). Many of the women I spoke

with throughout the course of my research reported on the prevalence of sexual harassment, mostly by customers but also by vendors and co-workers. As a woman, I was not immune to this experience and with this in mind, I was able to set boundaries around the situations I was willing to put myself in without compromising the quality of my findings. For example, I was invited to an industry-only party hosted by a vendor during my fieldwork, but declined the invite as the situation would have perhaps been compromising given the reports from other women I interviewed.

Once data collection was complete, I engaged in a multi-step coding process. After each interview took place, the audio files were transcribed by Rev.com and then transcripts were de-identified. Responses to a demographic questionnaire were entered into a Google Form using anonymized respondent identification numbers and then uploaded the transcripts and demographic profiles into NVivo Qualitative Analysis Software for descriptive open coding.

The first round of coding focused on organizing my data into descriptive codes for further analytic coding. These descriptive codes included codes like “first use,” “standards,” “gender,” “quality,” and “THC” and were only meant to organizing responses into these broad buckets (Richards 2014). I then reviewed my in-process memos and conducted deeper, analytic coding within these descriptive codes (Richards 2014). Examples of these analytic codes include “gender: selling sex” where I coded instances where respondents discussed cannabis workers or organizations as sexualizing their staff. This was different than “gender: sexual harassment” which included conversations about sexual harassment by customers, co-workers, or other industry folks like vendors.

From these more analytic codes, I then wrote memos summarizing these analytic themes and went through my field notes to identify instances that diverged or affirmed these themes. I

then incorporated these fieldnotes into a new summary memo that attempted to create abstract categories to explain the emergent theme (Charmaz and Mitchell 2014; Emerson et al. 2011; Glaser 1992; Richards 2014). Finally, I took these memos and constructed the findings sections of each chapter of this dissertation.

Conclusion

Overall, each individual chapter makes important theoretical and empirical contributions to the understanding of the relationship between morals and markets.

In Chapter 2, I empirically test the assumption found in recent work by Hsu et al. (2018) that the blurring of the boundaries between medicinal and recreational cannabis consumption by market organizations was driven by resource competition and motivations to expand market control. However, other scholars have found that profit-seeking motives are not sufficient explanations for how markets are organized and operate (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Turco 2012). Examining how these interactions operate in real time, I similarly found that market actors blur the lines between medicinal and recreational. However, this blurring was not the result of a purposeful tactic to expand market control and develop market niches. Rather, employees were motivated by moral imperatives. Thus, to understand market boundaries, it is important to understand how employees contribute to the construction of market boundaries.

In Chapter 3, I examine how market moralization shapes the experiences of those working in these markets, providing an immense sense of dignity and elevated occupational status. However, this is moderated by gender as women had greater difficulty making moral claims in this market compared to men. Finally, in Chapter 4, I show how market moralization is a racialized process. While the gendered narratives emerged from normative beliefs about women's sexualized bodies in sales settings and reinforced by customer sexual harassment,

racialized narratives were drawn from the criminalization of these populations through cannabis stigma during prohibition. Together, this shows how moralizing labor shapes inequality, but also how it makes this inequality seem morally legitimate.

When we consider all three chapters together, I show how employees matter for the moral and social construction of markets. When new markets emerge or contested markets deal seek moral legitimacy, it is those that interact directly with consumers that shape how these markets are framed that matters for who is seen as belonging in these market spaces.

Chapter 2.

“I’m not a doctor, but...”

Legal Boundary, Resource Competition, or Moral Legitimacy? Blurring the Lines of Medicinal & Recreational Cannabis

Introduction

Public health and policy scholars examining emerging legal recreational cannabis markets find cannabis legalization leads to increases in the number of new consumers, the availability of higher potency products, and daily use among habitual users (Kilmer et al. 2022; Smart et al. 2017). They argue that together, these trends constitute a greater risk for poor public health outcomes (Everson et al. 2019; Hall and Lynskey 2016). This has led to many public health agencies and researchers to discuss how either existing or proposed regulations may mitigate both known and unknown harms by curbing use (Firth et al. 2020; Hall and Lynskey 2016; Hall and Weier 2015; Landon et al. 2019). However, in much of this work, researchers often differentiate recreational and medicinal cannabis using state regulatory frameworks or imply that increased cannabis consumption in states that have legalized recreational markets is linked to recreational consumption (Burgard et al. 2019; Everson et al. 2019; Kilmer et al. 2022; Landon et al. 2019). The often-unspoken assumptions in this work are that purchasing products legally categorized as recreational are used recreationally.

Hsu and her colleagues (2018) argue that it is important to understand how market organizations frame their activities by observing consumer interactions to understand the boundaries of medicinal and recreational consumption beyond regulatory schemas. Using web-scraped data from WeedMaps³, they find that stores in Washington State and Colorado often

³ WeedMaps is an online platform for cannabis businesses to market their stores.

blur recreational and medicinal frameworks for consumption. They argue this is due to resource competition between existing medical markets and new recreational markets in these states as each vies for control over the market (Hsu et al. 2018). While this challenges the idea that regulatory categorization of cannabis products as medicinal *or* recreational maps onto the reality of consumption in these markets, this characterizes market organizations as driven by profit-seeking activities.

This work reifies the belief among public health scholars that market actors are, at their core, centrally concerned with profit and market expansion and thus cannot be fully trusted with having consumers best interests at heart. During the 2016 Symposium on Marijuana Research in Washington, public health scholar Dr. Beatriz Carlini of the Addictions, Drug, and Alcohol Institute was asked about using cannabis stores as sites where consumers could be given information to motivate them to reduce and ideally stop their consumption. She responded:

I don't think there is a necessarily, as a setting, a problem with [these stores as a site for getting information about harm reduction], but there is a very reasonable assumption that when you have a for-profit organization with the purpose to sell its product, there was some reasonable concern that the information given there may have some bias towards using it so that has to be kept in mind... (Carlini 2016)

This concern has led to scholarship comparing and advocating for different regulatory schemas that focus on downstream interventions such as limiting product potency (Firth et al. 2020; Fischer et al. 2017; Hall and Lynskey 2016).

However, economic sociologists and socio-legal scholars find that regulatory structures, formal organizational rules, and profit-generating motives are not sufficient to explain how market organizations are structured and operate (Anteby 2008; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Turco 2012). We know that law on the books does not always extend to law in action and formal organizational rules are not always reflective of how market spaces are organized and operate

(Kagan 2008; Kagan, Gunningham, and Thornton 2003; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Parker 2006). Markets are not utilitarian institutions driven by self-interest; broader cultural beliefs and moral values can shape and constrain markets in important ways (Zelizer 2011). Individuals working in taboo or morally contested markets often work to align their market activities with moral narratives to construct legitimacy (Fourcade and Healy 2007). This moralizing labor can defy formal organizational rules, constrain profit-seeking goals, and can even result in market failure (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Healy 2004; Livne 2014; Turco 2012). Even in Hsu et al.'s (2018) study, they emphasize the importance of observing consumer interactions to better examine organization-level dynamics, yet do not directly observe these retail spaces. Instead, they rely on data from an online source without knowing how market actors in this new legal context are using this resource, if at all, and if the customers posting to these sites are representative of a typical transaction.

Some public health scholars and practitioners have called for more detailed information on how individuals are consuming cannabis. Stith et al. (2023) find that most nationally representative surveys that track and report out cannabis use fail to capture important details about consumption. Not only do these surveys often fail to denote differences in medicinal and recreational consumption, but they also do not account for the full spectrum of modes of consumption for various products (Stith et al. 2023). This is important because these surveys are widely used to assess health behavior and if they are not accurately measuring consumption, they may be overstating or even mislocating risk. For example, vaping has been a controversial topic since the 2019 outbreak of vaping-related lung injuries, yet vaping dried flower and oils has been cited to reduce exposure to tar and carbon monoxide when compared to smoking dried flower through a pipe or as a joint (Gieringer D, St. Laurent J, and Goodrich S 2004) and the incidents

of vaping-related lung injuries was lower in state-regulated recreational markets and in markets where allowed to grow cannabis plants at home (Friedman and Morean 2021). Thus, Stith et al. (2023) argue that we need much more accurate measures of consumption if we are to identify potential harm and therapeutic benefits of consumption.

In sum, it is important to directly observe how market actors frame consumption within these organizational spaces. If organizational actors are blurring the lines between medicinal and recreational, is this motivated by a profit-seeking agenda? Additionally, how does this shape definitions of risky cannabis use, if at all? Specifically, I draw on 107 hours of ethnographic observation across three licensed cannabis retail shops in Seattle and sixty semi-structured interviews with Seattle retail shop owners and staff across twenty-three shops to answer the following research questions:

1. How do licensed cannabis retail stores frame cannabis consumption in a recreational market?
2. How does this shape how they sell products to consumers?
3. How do they define risky consumption?

In this study, I directly observe the recreational market spaces and talk to folks working in the retail industry to answers to these questions. Using a grounded theory approach to understanding cannabis consumption, I am better able to clarify how these markets operate and address the assumption made by recent work on cannabis consumption.

I found that retail staff saw educating customers how to approach cannabis consumption properly and safely as central to their occupational role. They were the point of contact between the industry and the public and as such, they reported feeling responsible for diffusing this knowledge, which was acquired most often from personal consumption experiences, co-workers,

producers, and processors that made the cannabis products, and Leafly.com—a company with detailed information about specific cannabis strains⁴. For both new and long-time consumers, this education entailed reframing cannabis consumption in ways that distanced it from being viewed as a simple intoxicant and instead as a wellness product that could be matched to any lifestyle.

Drawing heavily on moral narratives from the medicinal cannabis movement, this framing of cannabis use as wellness blurred the lines between recreational and medicinal. Furthermore, they felt as a wellness and health product, it was a moral imperative to help individuals find products that would meet their needs. In doing so, they skirted legal regulatory structures prohibiting them from providing medical advice by often starting their recommendations that were more medicinally focused as “I’m not a doctor, but...” or “I can’t give you medical advice, but this is what I do...”.

Not only did staff subvert regulatory rules, but store owners and general managers also reported issues in getting their staff to sell certain products or upsell. Staff felt they were selling experiences and told me that destigmatization could only going to be achieved by ensuring consumers were educated, that they had proper motivations for consumption, and had great experiences. This meant that staff refused to sell products they believed would not provide the right experience. I saw products sit on shelves the entire year I conducted field work at one of the stores because it was characterized as poor quality.

Further, in reshaping consumer motivations and approach to cannabis, staff actively tried to divert folks away from using THC percent as a measure of quality. Additionally, they

⁴ Strains encompass the classification schema in cannabis markets used to distinguish the aroma, effects, and appearance of a specific variety of cannabis plants from other cannabis plants. For example, some popular cannabis strains include Blue Dream, White Widow, and Sour Diesel.

provided information for new consumers to lessen the chance they would over consume as a novice. Many respondents were deeply invested in this education and spent down time or personal time outside of the store learning more about cannabis.

This framing of cannabis as a wellness product also made it challenging for individuals to define cannabis abuse or risky consumption. Frequency of use or product potency were not indicators of problematic consumption if individuals were continuing to successfully fulfill their responsibilities such as holding down a job, functioning at work, and maintaining their relationships. These individuals consumed for medicinal or wellness reasons and thus, were dependent on cannabis just as others are dependent on doctor prescribed medications.

Overall, these findings indicate that how and why people consume cannabis is more complicated than our current models for understand use trends can capture. This study does not make claims about the therapeutic or harmful aspects of cannabis consumption; that is outside the scope of my expertise. However, reports from the ground indicate individuals find a multitude of therapeutic benefits from consuming cannabis and a strong desire to learn more about how to consume safely and effectively. Thus, the potential to partner with industry workers may be incredibly beneficial to understand potential therapeutic uses of cannabis, creating safer cannabis products that take into consideration how people are consuming, and develop interventions as data reveals potentially harms. Finally, these partnerships or the findings from this work can be used to develop more accurate survey measures to track consumption overtime.

Historical Background: Recreational Cannabis as the Villain

The history of cannabis in the United States is one marked by deeply moral debates over its value and place in market society. During a global opium and cocaine epidemic, the Bureau of Narcotics was formed under the U.S. Treasury Department in 1927 to control the flow of drugs

deemed too dangerous for the open market (Becker 1973; Musto 1972). Henry J. Anslinger was named head of the Bureau and launched a rigorous campaign to garner public support for increased state control of cannabis, a substance that was previously not considered a priority for national or international narcotics control efforts (Becker 1973; Hudak 2016).

Anslinger as well as local government agencies and news outlets spread anti-cannabis propaganda across the nation using questionable statistics and over-the-top anecdotes to generate fear and concern over cannabis (Becker 1973; Galliher and Walker 1977; Musto 1972). This campaign claimed cannabis use resulted in the inhibition of moral values and led to sexual deviance, murderous tendencies, insanity, and violent outbursts (Anslinger and Cooper 1937; Becker 1973). For example, reports published in New Orleans during this time claimed that most crimes in the region were largely motivated by cannabis consumption. These studies “implicated [cannabis] particularly in the most severe crimes, for they believed it to be a sexual stimulant which removed civilized inhibitions” (Musto 1972: 103). Reporters and anti-cannabis advocates commonly implicated children as vulnerable targets of an uncontrolled market and played on xenophobic fears over increased Mexican migration in the wake of the Mexican Revolution (Musto 1972). The message in these reports and the broader campaign was clear: cannabis was a threat to the moral fabric of the nation and must be stopped.

Moral panic over cannabis led to state legislatures to support increased control over its trade. Cannabis users’ lack of moral values and criminal tendencies were a threat to national safety. Even with expert testimony from pharmacists, scientists, and doctors such as the head of the American Medical Association and the Division of Mental Hygiene claiming cannabis does not produce the deleterious effects assumed by anti-cannabis propaganda and thus, should not be federally controlled like other narcotics, Congress passed the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 with

relative ease (Galliher and Walker 1977; Musto 1972). When the Treasury Department asked Dr. Treadway of what is now called the National Institute of Mental Health, “What are the indications and positive proofs that such addiction [to cannabis] develops socially undesirable characteristics in the users?” he responded:

As to the social and moral degradation associated with cannabis it probably belongs in the same category as alcohol. As with alcohol, it may be taken a relatively long time without social or emotional breakdown. Marihuana is habit forming although not addicting in the same sense as alcohol might be with some people, or sugar, or coffee. (Musto 1972: 106)

Treadway strategically compares cannabis with mundane household goods like sugar and coffee to communicate the lack of danger cannabis poses to society. However, the victory in the moral battle over the value and place of cannabis in society went to Anslinger and others who pushed hard for strict federal control. About two decades later, sociologist Howard Becker used Angslinger and his campaign to coin the term moral entrepreneurs, which are individuals that make a deliberate effort to create “a new fragment of the moral constitution of society, its code of right and wrong” (Becker 1973: 145). Cannabis use, and in affect, its users, became successfully classified as immoral and expelled from the legal open market.

During the 1960s counterculture movements, cannabis use became further defined as deviant and immoral as it was associated with anti-establishment and anti-war groups. The youth who participated in the counterculture, anti-Vietnam War movements were seen as immoral and ungrateful citizens compared to their drafted counterparts (Hudak 2016). The government response to these radical youth deeply associated with drug use was to enact harsh penalties for narcotic consumption (Hudak 2016). Drug use was again seen as an epidemic plaguing the nation. While President Johnson attempted to reframe the solution to the drug epidemic away

from criminalization and toward a public health framework, his failure to get reelected and the subsequent election of Richard Nixon meant that this view would fail to materialize.

Nixon, in employing the Southern Strategy meant to vilify racial minorities and other outgroups, tied the drug epidemic to Black and immigrant communities along with the counterculture movement by declaring a War on Drugs (Alexander and West 2012). It was during this time that Nixon helped passed the Controlled Substance Act in 1970 that created five drug schedules that remain the current federal classification system for narcotics. Schedule I narcotics were defined by Congress—not medical or scientific communities—as the most dangerous and highly addictive drugs with no accepted medical use.⁵ Cannabis was listed in this category along with opium, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), heroin, and methamphetamines despite scientific evidence suggesting cannabis does not fit this categorization.

This scheduling and continued prosecution of those selling or using cannabis was based on moral grounds rather than scientific. In a report released in 1972 by the National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse, most Americans were found to believe:

Use of the drug [cannabis] is linked with idleness, lack of motivation, hedonism and sexual promiscuity. Many see the drug as fostering a counter-culture which conflicts with basic moral precepts as well as with the operating functions of our society. The ‘dropping out’ or rejection of the established value system is viewed with alarm. Marihuana becomes more than a drug; it becomes a symbol of the rejection of cherished values. (Musto and Korsmeyer 2002: 113).

Although the Commission recommended decriminalizing cannabis due to a lack of evidence that it was as harmful to people and communities, cannabis was never removed from Schedule I.

Once again, cannabis use was cast as a deeply immoral project of deviants and drug addicts. By removing cannabis from legal markets and enacting harsh punishments on those who engage in

⁵ 21 USC § 812 1970.

illicit ones, cannabis was defined as an illegitimate commodity and danger to individuals and society.

By the 1990s, however, a social movement to create a legal and morally legitimate medicinal cannabis market gained significant victories on the West Coast. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, the AIDS epidemic was wreaking havoc on San Francisco’s gay population (Hecht 2014). Medicinal cannabis was identified as a powerful tool to ease a plethora of painful medical issues facing AIDS patients as their health deteriorated (Hecht 2014; Hudak 2016). In 1991, San Francisco passed Measure P, which called on the state to legalize cannabis for medicinal purposes.

In the years to come, battles over the medicinal qualities of cannabis ensued and pushed the medicinal cannabis movement to international headlines. One such prominent case was the arrest of 70-year-old “Brownie” Mary Jane Rauthburn. Rauthburn made international headlines after being arrested on two counts of felony possession of cannabis in Sonoma County, about thirty miles north of San Francisco (Hecht 2014). Known locally for making cannabis-infused brownies and delivering them to patients suffering from AIDS in the well-known Ward 5B and Ward 86 at San Francisco General Hospital, she was acquitted of all charges after successfully using a medical necessity defense, arguing in court that “her deliveries were made to assist others in need, not to advance individual greed, that the nobility of her actions outweighed the reprehensibility of her offense according to the law” (Mathre 1997). AIDS had taken the lives of thousands in San Francisco alone and thus, her lawyers argued that her actions were not about furthering a criminal or greedy enterprise, it was about finding relief for those with little hope. Mary’s success—as well as the success of others charged with similar crimes—in using the

medical necessity defense defined medicinal cannabis as morally legitimate, a necessary social good.

Throughout the 1990s, medicinal cannabis advocates continued to frame their market activities as fundamentally about providing critical care to the terminal and seriously ill. While local battles continued over the legality of medicinal cannabis markets given federal regulations, a statewide campaign ensued in 1996 for Proposition 215: the Compassionate Use Act of Medical Marijuana. Under Prop 215, cannabis could be legally consumed by California residents suffering from “cancer, anorexia, AIDS, chronic pain, spasticity, glaucoma, arthritis, migraine, or any other illness for which marijuana provides relief” (Hecht 2014). Proponents pushed heavily to reframe cannabis as a needed social good that could alleviate the pain of AIDS patients, stimulate hunger among cancer patients nauseous from chemotherapy, and as an alternative to prescription drugs without negative side effects for patients who suffered from recurrent seizures (Hecht 2014). The campaign used personal stories of those who used medicinal cannabis to pull at the heartstrings of Californian’s and the act passed in California with Washington, Alaska, and Oregon passing similar laws two years later.

Cannabis advocates were pushing back on the long-institutionalized narrative that cannabis was a dangerous narcotic and cannabis market participants were immoral criminals and addicts that must be punished. These victories signaled the beginning of a new moral narrative constructing cannabis markets as morally righteous regarding their ability to comfort and heal people with serious illnesses. Medicinal users were consuming cannabis for the right reasons: not to get high, but to get relief. However, over the next decade, this market would continue to face legal and moral challenges in their fight to exist as a legitimate market.

Throughout the 2000s, federal Drug Enforcement (DEA) agents and prosecutors pursued legal action against medicinal market participants. In 2002, the founders of Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana, one of the first medicinal cannabis gardens in Santa Cruz and leader in California's medicinal cannabis community were arrested and their property seized in a highly publicized DEA raid (Hecht 2014). In San Diego in 2010, a former Navy officer running a medicinal cannabis delivery service was arrested and prosecuted for selling cannabis. The federal prosecutor and DEA characterized him as a dishonorable drug dealer operating under the guise of a poorly regulated medicinal market to take advantage of military families (Hecht 2014).

Narratives contesting medicinal markets largely defined them as medicinal on paper, recreational in reality. Medical market actors were simply illicit drug dealers trying to get state protection so they could sell cannabis to kids and recreational users. These were opportunistic tax evaders with unsafe products, shady business tactics, and dishonest motives (Hetch 2014). Again, the narrative put forth to contest the value of a cannabis market to society implicated children, crime, and greed. For both the medicinal cannabis advocates and federal government actors, recreational market participants were the vice that plagued the state legitimized markets.

While debates continue over the medicinal qualities of cannabis, the recent emergence of a legal recreational cannabis industry in several states has directly challenged the villainization of recreational markets. Unlike the medicinal cannabis market actors' attempts to frame their market activities as a needed social good, advocates for a legal recreational market focused instead on the moral value the state could bring to the immoral illicit and ambiguous medicinal market. Full legalization advocates claim that existing laws controlling cannabis are ineffective at reducing consumption and preventing minors from accessing cannabis, and as such, they are

fiscally irresponsible (Hecht 2014). Money that could be spent on pursuing more serious criminal activities such as violent crime is being wasted on the enforcement of a failed cannabis policy.⁶

Furthermore, the racial disparities in arrest rates for cannabis-related offenses and the rise of mass incarceration made legalization a social justice issue. Prosecuting cannabis-related crimes was a hefty and ineffective financial burden on the criminal justice system while the conviction itself ruined people's lives, particularly people of color who were arrested at higher rates than whites despite lower consumption (Levine, Gettman, and Siegal 2012). Thus, legalizing recreational cannabis was not about moralizing recreational consumption or granting moral legitimacy to recreational markets. Rather, the narrative was constructed around the ways a state-managed market could moralize the actors and practices within existing illicit and medicinal markets and minimize harm to the community.

One piece that was missing in this narrative, however, was a definition of morally legitimate recreational consumption and market activities. Monitoring the movement of cannabis products within this market was paramount, however, how cannabis was packaged and sold to consumers was left to the retail sector to figure out. Thus, to understand how and why individuals consume cannabis in a recreational market, it is important to directly observe these new spaces where these exchanges are taking place.

Missing the Mark: (Mis?) Measuring Cannabis Consumption

Scholars that look at the sociological dimensions of knowledge creation and expertise find that in the absence of scientific knowledge, laypeople can play a powerful role in constructing their own kind of expertise. AIDS treatment activities in the 1990s had a profound impact on how clinical research on AIDS treatments was designed, implemented, and interpreted

⁶ See Yes on I-502 (<http://www.newapproachwa.org/>)

(Epstein 1995). Epstein argues that “the credibility of any knowledge claim can depend on who advances it, how plausible it seems, or what sort of experimental evidence is invoked to support it” (Epstein 1998: 3). The lack of progress in addressing the AIDS epidemic created what Epstein (1995) calls a credibility gap and treatment activists were able to mobilize and intervene in important ways in shaping the ethical development of treatment and intervention strategies.

However, the development of lay expertise can also unfold in harmful ways. In the absence of readily available information about the risks associated with synthol oil, bodybuilders construct lay expertise by employing medicinal narratives legitimizing their use of synthol oil to make their muscles look bigger (Hall, Grogan, and Gough 2016). While synthol oil has been reported to cause nerve damage, cysts, and muscle damage, these individuals justified personal use and in teaching others to use it as well (Hall, Grogan, and Gough 2016).

Recreational cannabis in a legal context presents a credible gap as the therapeutic benefits as well as deep understanding of potential negative health outcomes remains unclear. This is not a systematic study of how public health agencies and scholarship frame cannabis consumption, nor do I make claims about the therapeutic benefits or harms of cannabis consumption. Rather, I argue that bringing in the voices of individuals working with cannabis everyday can enhance our understanding of use patterns and move towards creating a safe and healthy industry that maps onto the reality of consumers.

Methodology

Below I present an argument for why my methodological approach is ideal for answering the research questions presented in this chapter and my analytic strategy for constructing this chapter’s findings. For a detailed overview of my case selection methods and demographic

breakdown of my observational and interview data, please refer to the Introduction of the dissertation.

To answer my research questions, I draw on 107 hours of observational data across three cannabis retail stores in Seattle and sixty semi-structured interviews with shop owners, managers, and staff at twenty-six stores. Being centrally concerned with the meaning-making individuals in these retail shops engage in, I leverage the thick descriptions produced by this type of qualitative data. Thick descriptions enable me to understand the different meanings folks attribute to consumption without imposing my own perspectives (Geertz 1973).

During my interviews, I asked respondents questions about what their day-to-day work entailed and about their customers and their own consumption. Some of my interview questions include: why people consume cannabis; what are the biggest misconceptions of cannabis; what types of questions do customers have; how do they go about find the right product for a specific individual; how/where do they learn information about cannabis; how do they measure product quality; and is it possible to abuse cannabis with follow-up questions to understand how they define cannabis misuse or why they don't think it is possible. I also asked respondents to walk me through a typical transaction.

During my observations, I noted down the language used by respondents when interacting with customers and how they spoke with each other about different products or things they learned about. When things slowed down in the shops, I asked staff follow-up questions about transactions I observed that I wanted clarity on or talked about their background and thoughts about cannabis. These observations and informal conversations allowed me to triangulate my findings as what people say and what they do can sometimes be at odds (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

For a detailed description of my broader analytic approach such as my in-process memos and use of grounded theory please review the methods section of the Introduction to the dissertation (see pages 7-20). In constructing the findings for this chapter, I implemented a multi-step analytic strategy that started constructing descriptive codes while open-coding my interview transcripts (Richards 2014). These codes were meant to organize my data into broader descriptive buckets and included codes such as “cannabis abuse,” “motivations for consumption,” “personal use,” “too high” “jargon,” “quality,” and “THC.” I then went back through these descriptive codes to do deeper analytic coding to identify more theoretical or conceptual themes within these descriptions (Richards 2014). For example, after identifying respondents’ mentions or conversations about “cannabis abuse,” I re-coded these conversations into analytic buckets that related to how cannabis abuse was being framed such as “individualization” where respondents explained what qualified as abuse as being dependent on the individual in question.

As I was doing this second-wave, more analytic coding, I went through my ethnographic field notes and in-process memos looking for both alignment with themes emerging in the analytic codes and moments when my observations diverged from these themes (Emerson et al. 2011; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Richards 2014). I then wrote summarizing the relevant codes and sub-codes and incorporated the findings from my field notes. From here, I brought my evidence together to present the findings below.

Findings

Moralizing Cannabis Consumption through Consumer Education

Overwhelmingly, I found through my observations and interviews that consumer education was a central part of the work done by staff in licensed cannabis retail stores. In line

with Becker's (1953) findings, these educational experiences were identified as a mechanism used to construct new moral meanings of cannabis consumption and distance users from stigmatizing stereotypes. In Becker's work, potential users had to first develop new moral framings around consumption before they became regular consumers (Becker 1953). Similarly, retail staff discussed navigating around the stigma of cannabis by employing moral narratives regarding consumption and their market activities. After telling me about how customer education is important for combating stigma in the industry, I asked Avery, a non-binary manager at CannaBliss, to elaborate.

Avery: To summarize the way that even regular smokers sometimes feel is that they're still a "stoner" or something that is a negative connotation about them or their motivation or their goals [for consuming] or something. ... That's the whole point of trying to change their minds so that their frame of mind involves less guilt basically.

Me: ...so what kind of words do you use them to build that frame?

Avery: Using the word medicinal or therapeutic. We can't describe the medicinal benefits, but we can anecdotally describe how it helps people that we've experienced or ourselves [or] people that we know... Trying to use more delicate language, lessening [the stigma].

Avery, White Non-Binary, Manager, CannaBliss

Avery, like most retail staff saw customer education as vital to framing their market activities as morally legitimate and often drew from medicinal frameworks to redefine cannabis. Joe, a budtender at Odyssey, similarly explained how stigma and prohibition constrained consumers ability to see cannabis beyond a drug and intoxicant and it was the retail industry's job to help consumers move past this stigmatized view of consumption. When I asked Joe how he helps customers find the right product, he said the following:

[I ask them] "What do you want to feel?" That's a very weird question to people, especially because it's been such a lucrative drug for so many years, people are like, "Well, I've never been asked how I want to feel, I want to feel high." ... There's that stigma that when you smoke weed you get dumb. ...so, [I tell them] "Let me ask you that question then, how do you go about, like, what you want to feel?"

Joe, Latino Man, Budtender, Odyssey

While recreational cannabis was legalized, market actors across all interviews and observations still felt the industry needed morally legitimate frames of consumption just as scholars studying taboo and contested markets find (Fourcade and Healy 2007). Retail staff, like Joe, worked actively to get both new and longtime customers to view cannabis as providing unique experiences and feelings, not just as something that makes you “feel high.”

On any given day, it doesn't take long for me to directly observed how this education unfolded at Eddie's Pot Shops or Jane's Corner. For example, during one of my observations at Jane's Corner, an older White woman came in the store asking if they had “CPC capsules.”

Helen, a White female budtender, responded:

Helen: Yea, we do.

Helen grabs a product from the shelf and puts it down in front of the customer.

Helen: If you like the ratio on this, it's 8:12.

Helen points to the package and is referencing the ratio of THC content to CBD listed on the package. Matt, a White male budtender and key holder, interjects.

Matt: CBD, it's the non-psychoactive, anti-anxiety, and anti-inflammatory. We even have suppositories for actual CBD. It's a super nuanced feel, it helps if you are already high. They call it the entourage effect – using CBD and THC together. If you want to avoid intoxication but want anxiety or pain relief, go for the 5:1 ratio. You feel something, but not totally incapacitated. Adds a calmness to the high, it can bring you down towards baseline.

Jane's Corner, April 28, 2017

These types of interactions occurred during every observation period across my field sites and were both initiated by staff unprompted by customers or customers would ask questions that would open the door for staff to go deeper into the science and technical aspects of consumption.

More common, however, was the way staff would ask customers questions like Joe claimed to do to match products to customers – they would ask customers what they wanted to do with their day or what did they have planned and how they wanted to feel. During an observation at Eddie’s on 5th Avenue, I overheard one of the budtenders helping two young women wearing workout clothes find a good joint for working out. At Jane’s Corner, Nick, a budtender at the store, had told me about different products he likes to use to improve his workouts as well and how he helps university athletes all the time find products to help with workout recovery. On a separate observation at Eddie’s Weed Emporium, I observed Stan, another budtender at the shop, help a group of three guys that look to be in their early 20s.

Stan: What are you planning on doing?

Customer: Oh, we were planning on going hiking and what to have this when we get to a good spot on the trail.

Stan proceeds to ask questions about what type of feeling they want to elicit and if they would rather have edibles instead of smoke something. The group of guys want to get a pre-roll and Stan presents a couple options and recommends one of them. They take his recommendation and complete the transaction.

This was an incredibly common transaction across these field sites. In fact, a couple respondents told me they liked products from Sweet Water Farms because they put information about the likely effects each strain will elicit as well as the description of terpenes and “suggested activities” on their product labels.

However, this education and framing often conflated medicinal and recreational cannabis by defining cannabis as a wellness product. For example, cannabis was said to inspire creativity by clearing the mind, however, this was grounded in discussions around managing anxiety and stress. When I asked Mark, the White male owner of Dr. Teeth’s Pot Shop, why people consume

cannabis, like almost all other interview respondents he couched his response in more of a wellness framework.

So, probably the closest analogy is like people have a glass of wine when they come home from work to unwind, you know, and de-stress. Like is that medicine? Well, not exactly. But is it for the mental well-being of the person whose drinking that glass of wine? Like, most definitely. Like, kind of like how Tylenol like mild pain relief, right? Cannabis kinda fills a lot of those roles for a lot of people. Around sleep, sexual function, anxiety, and pain, are probably the four kind of like areas where folks basically self-medicate to some varying degree, [it's] between recreational and clinical.

Mark, White Man, Owner, Dr. Teeth's Pot Shop

Mark's statement is representative of the types of narratives around consumption that were common in my field notes and interviews. These narratives conflate the medicinal and recreational consumption and promote consumption as engaging in a type of physical and mental "wellness" activity.

During downtime at Eddie's on 5th Ave, Chelsea, a White female budtender at the shop, talked at length about the different ways and reasons for consuming cannabis.

Author: So, what is cannabis? What do people use it for?

Chelsea: Cannabis, you can customize it to any type of lifestyle. It works well with your brain in so many different ways, it just depends on what you want to use it for. Like, if you just want to chill out after work or whatever or perhaps you want something to help energize you. Some people use it to go to the gym. Some people use it to focus and get work done and that's all they use it for. Other people use it for pain or whatever. There are too many different things.

Eddie's on 5th Ave, November 2, 2017

In Chelsea's description, cannabis is not an intoxicant. Rather, cannabis is described as providing consumers with energy, focus, pain relief, and a variety of other effects and users are defined as employed, physically active, and focused workers. I witnessed Chelsea and other workers across sites ask customers what they were planning to do while consuming and what they wanted to feel

to figure out what products to recommend. In this way, these frames are imposed by retail staff to push customers to see cannabis consumption as wellness-oriented rather than intoxicating.

Skirting Regulations

This blurring of the distinction between recreational and medical use is supported by the findings of Hsu and her colleagues work on organizational identity among cannabis dispensaries post-legalization (Hsu et al. 2018). However, Hsu et al. (2018) argue that this blurring of boundaries was due to organizations purposeful response to resource competition between the existing medicinal market and the new recreational market. On the ground though, it was clear that this conflation was employed to distance cannabis from the idea that it was a dangerous narcotic rather than organizational efforts to capture a wider consumer base.

In fact, store leadership and retail staff both reported that retail store owners and managers had difficulty in getting staff to sell products when those products were viewed by staff as poor quality and thus would be ingenuine and immoral for them to sell to customers. During an observation at Eddie's on 5th Ave, I encountered Kelly, a White female budtender, on her first day with Eddie's. Kelly had worked at another cannabis shop that ended up going out of business before coming to Eddie's. When I asked her if she knew why it went out of business, she told me it was because the staff didn't believe in most of the products the owner was purchasing for the store and refused to sell them. At Jane's Corner, I observed products sit on the shelf for the entire year I observed the store because the staff saw it as low quality and similarly refused to sell products they deemed unfit for their customers. Lily, co-owner of Dr. Teeth's Pot Shop and Mark's wife, best sums this dynamic up:

Without those people on the front lines, nothing happens. You can have all the packaging, you can have the best weed, you could have the cheapest weed. You could have all that, but there's no one there to, it comes back to educate the customer about that product, it's not going to work.

Lily, White Woman, Co-Owner, Dr. Teeth's Pot Shop

Not only did staff subvert organizational directives and ignore incentives when selling cannabis products they felt were appropriate, but they also skirted regulatory lines barring retail staff from providing medical advice to customers. Matt, a white male Key Holder at Jane's Corner, explained how he approached this distinction during our one-on-one interview:

Matt: Hopefully with every shop, the budtenders are knowledgeable enough to get them the right thing without stepping over that border of the doctor patient border per se.

Author: Can you go into a little bit of elaboration on that, because I think I'm having a hard time understanding? It seems like, I know that there is a law you can't provide medical advice, but how did you guys draw that line?

Matt: Me personally, when I deal with someone who needs medicinal health, depending on how, it's always suggestions. A lot of times, you have to come across it, depending on what the person is talking about, if we get more into in-depth of what their pain is, what their symptoms are, then I always just give them a little disclaimer verbally of, "I'm not a doctor, I can't give you give advice, but these are what I would use. This is my suggestion to try." I always kind of throw in cannabis is always different, there is variables because everybody is different. That's kind of just how you get around it and say, that's like security anything.

Matt, White Man, Key Holder/Budtender, Jane's Corner

Matt, like most of the retail workers I encountered acknowledged that providing advice related to medicinal consumption or advising on healthcare decisions is prohibited grounded their approach in anecdotal experiences – either their own or others. John, the owner of Green Flower Shop, reported a similar approach.

John: I think people get legitimate medical benefits from it. We get a lot of people coming in saying, "What do you got that will help put me to sleep?" So, we can go through a range of options, or recommend something. Maybe you want to try an Indica rather than a Sativa. Maybe you want to try this rather than that. Again, not giving medical advice.

Interviewer: I was just gonna ask about that. Where do you draw the line?

John: It's not that difficult. You can just, how you couch things matters in that perspective. To say, "I've heard of some people..." We have some customers come in and

have, I'm thinking of one woman who is a runner, and she has lower back pain. She gets a specific product that we have, and she really likes it and swears by it. I just related that story to you. I think that's permissible under the law.

John, White Male Co-Owner, Green Flower Shop

While staff and owners like John and Matt recognize the legally grey area in this type of interaction yet navigate around this regulation to help individual customers achieve their desired experience or outcomes from their consumption. Taken together, I found that resource competition was not the primary motive for the blending of recreational and medicinal narratives into a wellness framework for this new market context. However, this blending did create problems for defining what constitutes as misuse or abuse of cannabis.

Defining Misuse in a Wellness Market for Cannabis

Understanding cannabis as a wellness and medicinal product even within recreational contexts made defining cannabis abuse difficult for folks I interviewed. While one of the symptoms of Cannabis Use Disorder is accidentally consuming more than intended (Fischer et al. 2017), interview respondents discussed this as a common experience that had to do more with unclear figuring out one's tolerance level or ideal dosage. Tanya, a Black budtender at Seattle Skylines, described what she considered an overdose, adding that this did not indicate addiction.

...one time, my girlfriend, I know, several years ago, a few years ago, she had these edibles that she always got...they were mild, she's not super high tolerance. But she had one on a day that I think she hadn't eaten enough before, and just really did not have a good time – really overwhelmed, really anxious, not doing well. It's a bad time, but it's not like, I would say that a cannabis overdose is not necessarily a sign of cannabis abuse, which is not the same as other overdoses.

Tanya, Black Woman, Budtender, Seattle Skylines

For Tanya and others, they talked about overconsumption as a form of overdosing. Comparing overdosing on cannabis to other substances that can be life threatening is a similar finding in other studies of cannabis, even Becker's (1973), to frame cannabis as “not as bad” as other

substances. However, Tanya, like most other respondents, explicitly talked about overconsumption experiences as accidental and not an indication of abuse.

Even more, when I asked Luis, a Latino male budtender at Miss Mary Jane's Pot Shop, to define cannabis abuse, he told me defining abuse is more about the individual rather than frequency and amount consumed.

Luis: I actually have a friend who abused. What it looks like, he is the same age as me, which is 21. He's never had a job. Ever. Not even under the table. He stays home most of the day, plays video games, smokes weed all day. That's pretty much it. Doesn't really do much. That's how it looks like. Yeah, of course you can be abuse it. ... you even got guys that they don't smoke flower anymore, because they smoked so much flower over the years the only thing that gets them a good high is oils, which is concentrated oils that they smoke. So yeah, you can abuse it.

Author: For sure. Do you think that people that are using a lot of oils are maybe crossing that line?

Luis: No, I wouldn't say just because you smoke oils, you're bad. It depends on you and your character. My buddy, the one that's the stereotypical pothead, versus my co-workers, yeah, it's a dramatic difference. I have a co-worker that only smokes oil because it's the only thing that really gets them high but they're on their shit. They come into work, they do their work, they go home, they show up on time. It's not like if you smoke oils, you're going to become a stereotypical pothead. It's not the case. It depends on you.

Luis, Latino Man, Budtender, Miss Mary Jane's Pot Shop

Luis' statement echoed other respondents in claiming abuse should be defined by how productive someone who consumes is rather than the frequency and amount consumed. The difference between Luis' friend who was abusing cannabis and his co-workers was their employment and productivity outside the home.

The challenge of defining cannabis abuse was not only due to differences in tolerance levels or understanding the difficulties in dosing, but it was also linked to the blended medicinal framework around cannabis consumption. When I asked Shane, a White male budtender at Jane's Corner, what cannabis abuse looks like, he responded:

...it varies. I know people in the industry who can smoke all day every day, just inhuman amounts, and they're still there, they're still functioning. My old friend who's the GM of my old shop, who had severe sciatica, and he's a young dude, but basically couldn't walk straight or function if he's not high. He just needs it to manage his pain, and he was always there and always lucid.

Shane, White Man, Budtender, Jane's Corner

The medicinal framework was seen as legitimate in these recreational spaces complicated the way individuals understood cannabis abuse. Staff across interviews often decoupled risky consumption with frequency, potency, and amount consumed. When considering many of the recommendations from public health scholarship and how the alarm over increased product potency or heavy consumers, it may be that some of this is related more with medicinal use in a recreational context and measuring risky consumption should take this into account.

Discussion & Conclusion

In conclusion, I found that employees, not organizational management or store owners, blurred the lines between recreational and medicinal cannabis consumption. In fact, retail owners and management struggled to incentivize staff to sell products they needed them to sell. Instead, staff sold products they felt would help build the moral legitimacy of the market by eliciting positive experiences and providing wellness to customers. This challenges the idea that market organizations are purposefully blurring these lines because they are attempting to capture a greater share of the market. Instead, this blurring is motivated by a desire to build moral legitimacy in this market and thus, I argue that frameworks developed in morals and markets provide an alternative explanation for the development of market niches and categories.

For public health agencies and scholars, cannabis consumption in a recreational market context is often defined and treated as substance use rather than a medicinal activity. Many of the nationally representative surveys that track cannabis consumption in the U.S. do not differentiate

between medicinal and recreational use and do not consider important details about the products being consumed (Stith et al. 2023). While the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) does ask cannabis consumers if any of their use was recommended by a doctor, they do not differentiate between medicinal and recreational cannabis use and could be missing folks who may see their consumption as medicinal but did not have cannabis directly prescribed. In the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHNES), respondents are asked about “the use of drugs not prescribed by a doctor” starting with the amount and frequency of cannabis consumption. However, nowhere in the NHNES does it ask if respondents are consuming recreationally or medicinally. It took until 2017 for the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) to add a question asking if all or part of an individual’s cannabis consumption was recreational, medicinal, or both. While this helps to differentiate how individuals may be approaching their consumption, it is unclear if respondents define “medicinal” and “recreational” in the same way researchers do.

These surveys are often employed by public health agencies and scholars to study substance use patterns over time and develop targeted policy interventions. For example, a 2019 report on the impact of recreational cannabis legalization in Washington State used the BRFSS to look at trends in adult use from 2011 – 2017 (Landon et al. 2019). Because the BRFSS data did not distinguish between medicinal and recreational consumption until 2017, the report does not make this distinction (Landon et al. 2019). Further, nationally representative surveys also largely fail to measure the scope of use or details about the product itself such as product potency or the frequency of using different modes of consumption (Stith et al. 2023).

I highlight these previous studies and survey tools to showcase the need for improving our understanding of the scope and nature of consumption. In this study, I empirically examined

how cannabis consumption was framed and defined within recreational contexts given the deep stigma and contradicting narrative of cannabis as medicine, not as inherently deviant or problematic. I found that for most, cannabis is a wellness product, somewhere in between medicinal and recreational, and that most consumption can be framed as a health practice rather than substance use. Thus, to track trends more accurately in use, we need measurements that are grounded in empirical reality.

Chapter 3.

Ganja Girls & Bimbo Budtenders: Defining the Moral Market Actor in Contested Markets

He's easily able to raise the volume of his voice to get the point across with customers and they will more likely accept it from him. Whereas if I were to do something like that, then I'm a bitch or then I have an attitude.

Amelia, Budtender, Eddie's Weed Emporium

I know we have the most female CEOs than any other industry and that's awesome, but this doesn't reflect what's happening on the ground, here in the stores. ... Customers would not respect me. guys would get promoted all the time over me that didn't know shit or weren't good at their job. ... the manager was just an asshole. He told me one time that he thinks women are not good leaders, but they're great at multi-tasking. What the fuck!? Ugh! it makes me so mad just thinking about it.

Chelsea, Budtender, Eddie's on 5th Ave

Introduction

Economic sociologists find that the moral legitimacy of market activities plays an important role in determining both how commodities are traded and market success (Anteby 2010; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Zelizer 1979). Leveraging morally contested markets, scholars document how market actors actively work to construct new moral meanings of their activities and align their practices with these narratives (Chan 2009; Quinn 2008; Turco 2012). However, much of this work treats the organizational spaces where these exchanges take place abstractly, undertheorizing who and under what conditions different market actors can successfully make moral claims when interacting with customers. This is important because we know the ability to claim authority, particularly when it pushes the boundaries of what is considered acceptable market behavior, is shaped not only by one's position within the market organization, but their social position such as one's gender (Bandelj 2012, 2020; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Quinn 2008; Roscigno 2011).

Further, moral framings of occupational identities and activities are important for personal feelings of dignity and status, even outside of economic compensation and particularly in taboo markets (Cohen and Dromi 2018; Hoang 2015; Lamont 2000; Ocejo 2017).

Understanding who can successfully make moral claims regarding their market's activities then has consequences for who gets to be a moral actor imbued with dignity in these spaces. In the market moralization process, it is not just market success that is at stake but who can access dignity through work in these contested spaces and who remains stigmatized it simultaneously being constructed.

Using Seattle's emerging legal recreational cannabis market, I address this gap by examining how market actors in licensed pot shops work to construct moral narratives within these new, yet contested market spaces, how these narratives shape who can embody the dignified and moral market actor, and the consequences this has for who invests in these new occupational identities and who feels pushed out. To answer these questions, I draw on 107 hours of ethnographic observation across three licensed cannabis stores and sixty semi-structured interviews with licensed cannabis retail shop owners, managers, and staff from twenty-six of the roughly thirty licensed stores in Seattle at the time of my field work.

I found that store staff saw themselves as educators working to construct moral legitimacy in this new market context by reframing cannabis consumption in ways that distanced it from being defined as a narcotic that's sole purpose is intoxication. Instead, these workers expend a significant effort getting both new and long-time consumers to see cannabis as a complex commodity with unique flavors and properties meant to enhance one's daily life and activities. In doing so, workers sought to elevate cannabis and constructed a new category of consumer to reflect this elevated status: the cannabis connoisseur. The cannabis connoisseur was

defined as someone who consumes for the flavor of various strains and to have new experiences. Through this reframing, staff became the arbiters of the connoisseur, elevating their own status to elite-tastemakers in this new industry which provided immense feelings of dignity that these service workers often reported they were not able to access in previous jobs.

However, I found that women attempting to reshape consumer preferences often had their expertise challenged in ways that men did not and as a result, were not able to access the same emotional returns and status enhancements as men. Most women I interviewed found that their expertise was challenged by customers, co-workers, and vendors more regularly than their male counterparts and sexual harassment, mostly by customers, was common. Even more, the “bimbo budtender” and “ganga girl” were often used by respondents to negatively define women in the industry perceived to be using their sexuality to manipulate men, retail owners and managers included, into buying specific products. Male staff and supervisors that claimed to be concerned with gender equity and safety in the store had difficulty decoupling women as a sexual object from their expertise in the broader industry. These terms would be employed by respondents to contrast their own company image as more morally legitimate than other companies because they were focused on de-stigmatization through elevating the status of cannabis consumption while these other companies used cheap sales tactics to turn a profit. However, women across all sites were still often sexualized in these spaces and had a harder time reshaping consumer preference without being seen as trying to manipulate consumers.

While men often told me they envisioned their retail jobs would lead to successful future careers in the industry, many of the women I interviewed felt disconnected and disinvested from their occupational identity and market space. For some, this disinvestment was not solely the result of the sexual harassment all women told me they had to navigate as a retail worker. Rather,

it was how they saw their male co-workers imbued with dignity while they were degraded that made them feel like outsiders or feel they were being pushed out.

In Figure 1 below, I depict this process to show how gender shaped retail staff’s ability to claim expertise and a moral occupational identity, which then shaped who was able to access dignity and status through their moralizing labor and who felt degraded and disinvested from these occupational identities. While male co-workers I interviewed did report standing up for women being harassed in the industry, all men benefited from this harassment as they had spent significantly less emotional resources and time navigating instances where customers challenged their claims while women had difficulty decoupling their sexuality from their moralizing labor.

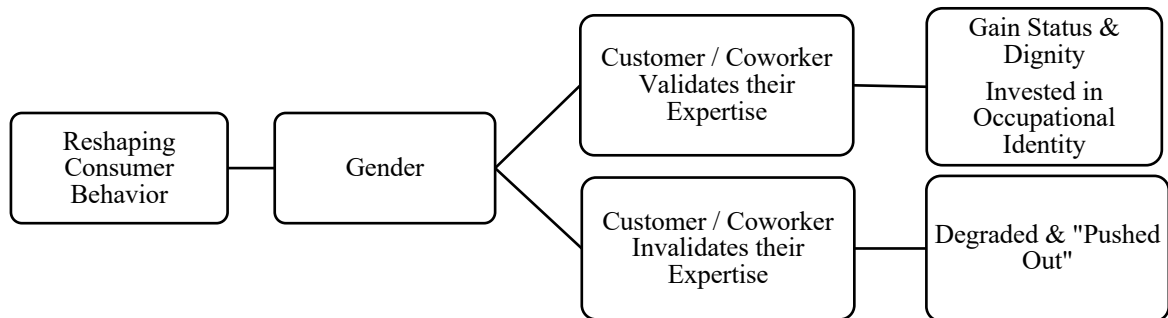


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

Being able to access status and dignity through moral framings of own’s occupational identity and practices is not a new finding. Professionals working in the stigmatized industry of advertising frame their work in euphemistic discourses expressing a deep care for clients, products, or customers which allows them to see themselves as moral actors contributing to the broader social good (Cohen and Dromi 2018). Lamont (2000) finds that White working-class men derive a strong sense of dignity by claiming to have high levels of personal integrity and

sincerity compared to professionals and managers who have a higher occupational status as well as a superior work ethic compared with Black men and the poor.

What this work adds is a greater consideration of the interactional and relational aspects of moralizing labor and dignity that not only reproduce inequality, but make it feel morally legitimate. Participants in an economic exchange assess the appropriateness of the transaction in terms of the value and mode of exchange as well as the value of exchange partners which is often influenced by existing status hierarchies such as gender (Bandelj 2020; Roscoigno 2011). When these evaluations map on to our expectations, we *feel* they are appropriate. Riveria (2015) finds that law firm and investment banking recruits often “go with their gut” when making hiring decision and that these feelings of who “fits” facilitates homogeneity within these firms. Scholars examining morals and markets argue that a market is not just about rational exchange, but how commodities are evaluated and traded has to do with whether potential customers and market actors *feel* their activities are morally legitimate (Turco 2012). Thus, it would follow that market moralization projects also work to legitimize market participants as appropriate or inappropriate for particular occupational roles. When there is a match between what is expected within an exchange and the valuation of the parties involved and their roles, these exchanges *feel* right (Bandelj 2020).

When we consider the important role of these framings for individuals’ ability to access dignity, how morally legitimate market activities are defined play a central role in the value these narratives can provide for the individuals employing them through their work. Even more, power asymmetry come to be seen as morally legitimate. Thus, it is important to understand how these framings are shaped by one’s social position. In my case, I found that gender interacted with the market moralization project in profound ways that had consequences for who was seen as the

moral market actor. Overall, this work highlights the need for understanding how and when status characteristics enter organizational spaces in ways that structure market inequalities, making them appear morally legitimate.

Literature Review

Moral Markets

Economic sociologists find that markets and moral values are co-constitutive (Fourcade and Healy 2007). Moral legitimacy of market activities is vital for market success) and market actors play a central role in establishing a contested trade as legitimate (Aldrich and Fiol 1994; Anteby 2010; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Quinn 2008; Turco 2012). Morality is defined here as a shared understanding of right and wrong, worthy and unworthy, with moral legitimacy being a “positive normative evaluation of an organization and its activities” (Anteby 2010: 608; Durkheim and Bellah 2009; Hitlin and Vaisey 2013).

Life insurance markets are successful because market actors are able to align their market activities with culturally acceptable frameworks such as enabling individuals to fulfill their parental role of taking care of their families in the event of an unexpected early death (Zelizer 1979). Further, these actors often draw from their institutional position relative to the market in ways that favor their participation in it (Zelizer 1979; Chan 2009; Quinn 2008). Hospice in the U.S. found success only after the industry moralized scarcity in spending and treatment for end-of-life care (Livne 2014). Organizations dealing with the exchange of human tissue expend a significant effort motivating potential donors to engage in altruistic behavior via one-time gift giving. Even the framing of such an exchange as gifting is a way economic exchanges in taboo markets more broadly obfuscate transactions to make them appear more morally legitimate (Rossman 2014).

Markets expansion into domains of caregiving is made possible by framing this endeavor as a remedy for decreasing availability of community and familial support (Hochschild 2003). Markets for surrogacy and sperm and egg donations draw on symbols of motherhood and gender to construct legitimacy around the exchange of human genetic material (Almeling 2007). Children's removal from the labor market transformed their value within families from economic asset to priceless and sacred (Zelizer 1985).

Additionally, the actual performance of market activities is critical in constructing a moral legitimacy (Anteby 2010). For example, academically-housed cadaver procurement professionals distanced themselves from for-profit organizations believed to resemble the immoral characterization of their profession as greedy "body snatchers" that degrade the dead (Anteby 2010). It was not solely the act of trading cadavers that became the site of moral contention and struggle. Rather, it was how these cadavers were being traded that was important.

In the case of Motherhood Inc., Turco (2012) documents how the company framed their market activities within broader social and cultural contexts: new mothers that once relied on community support to help them transition into motherhood now need to find this support elsewhere and the market can provide the solution (Turco 2012). Despite public acceptance of this market project, Motherhood Inc. ultimately failed because the company's maternal support professionals refused to upsell products they deemed unnecessary or expensive, casting that practice as exploitative and counter to the market's stated moral grounding.

Together, these studies provide powerful evidence that markets draw on cultural evaluations of the sacred and profane to frame their activities, participants, and commodities as morally legitimate to promote market participation and success.

Moral Market Actors

Most of the work examining the relationship between morals and markets focuses on professionals. Anteby (2010) attributes this tendency to the characteristics of professions and professional boundary setting. Professionals are delineated from non-professionals in large part by their ability to control their domain of work and exclude others outside of this domain from working within it (Abbott 1988). Professional identities are often intertwined with social identities and a challenge to the morality of the market is thus a challenge to both the legitimacy of control over their domain of work and the morality of the professional who engages in these market activities (Anteby 2010).

The academically housed cadaver procurement professionals that defined their organizations market practices as morally legitimate also worked to define themselves as moral market actors in this contested industry (Anteby 2010). In refusing to decouple their occupational identity as first and foremost supporting mothers from the profit-generating sales work Motherhood, Inc. needed them to do, the maternal support professionals derived a sense of dignity from claiming to be a moral market actor even though it undermined the organization's success (Turco 2012). Studying how advertisement professionals grapple with the stigma tied to their industry, Cohen and Dromi (2018) find "ad-men" assert their own sense of moral identity by framing their work as being fundamentally about caring deeply for clients, products, and consumers. This narrative distanced their professional identity from the image of a deceptive and manipulative marketing agent (Cohen and Dromi 2018). Collectively, this work finds that constructing moral narratives around market activities is important for claiming to be a moral and worthy actor. While this work highlights the importance of morality to professional identities, we can see similar patterns outside of these types of occupations.

In Hoang's ethnographic work on the Vietnam's sex work industry, bars where sex workers were employed "operated according to strict moral codes oriented toward freedom and consent rather than forced labor" (Hoang 2015: 105). Sex workers, aware of the stigma surrounding their occupation, construct their market activities to align with widely accepted moral values associated with both work and sex: consent. These workers reported feelings of economic independence and liberation, indicating that aligning market practices with broader moral values shapes their sense of moral being (Hoang 2015).

Seim finds that paramedics and EMTs construct differences in value between their two job titles that places paramedics in a more socially valued and dignified position than EMTs (2017). Through the use of their discretion, paramedics take the lead in more "legit" cases characterized as dealing with medical issues requiring the delivery of actual medical care while allocating "bullshit" cases not requiring such care to the EMTs (Seim 2017). In doing so, the paramedics use their work to reaffirm their value as a medical professional (i.e., highly valued occupation) instead of someone that merely transports the drunk and disorderly (i.e., less valued occupation).

The working class's stunted economic success leads to locating their dignity outside of material evaluations. Their moral identity becomes paramount in granting them dignity and superiority compared to their wealthy counterparts (Lamont 2000). Through the construction of a moral identity not linked to economic success, workers are able to align personal feelings of worth with their material reality.

In service work such as retail, organizations increasingly demand their workers embody a caring and happy personality that signals authenticity, even if it is feigned (Hochschild 2012; Leidner 1993). This creates an internal conflict as being considered a "phony" is to be considered

immoral (Lamont 2000; Leidner 1993). Even more, many service industry occupations are devalued in society which makes it difficult for individuals in these occupations to access dignity. For example, fast food workers and insurance agents commonly encounter angry customers challenging their intelligence and integrity (Leidner 1993). The routinization of work inhibited individuals from making decisions and problem solving while also constraining their sense of selfhood and worth. This detachment from personal agency makes it difficult to derive a dignity and meaning from one's work (Garson 1988).

However, more recent work finds that through reframing occupational activities, low-status jobs can be elevated in ways that provide meaning and dignity to those within these occupations. Ocejo finds well-educated young men working as craft cocktail mixologists and distillers, whole-animal butchers, and upscale barbers in New York City took these traditionally low-status service jobs and bolstered their occupational status by constructing and employing a specific set of cultural repertoires around their job activities (Ocejo 2014, 2017). These men positioned themselves as elite-tastemakers and as a result, they derived an immense sense of dignity and value out of their work despite occupying traditionally low-status occupations (Ocejo 2017).

What remains missing is a greater consideration of how this work – reshaping moral evaluations of market activities in ways that benefit market actors – is shaped by statuses outside occupational and professional identities. Specifically, how do status hierarchies matter when moralizing new market projects and what are the consequences for market inequality.

Status Hierarchies & Moralizing Market Projects

In her theory of economic activity, Zelizer (2011) argues that within all economic activity, people “erect a boundary, mark the boundary by means of names and practices,

establish a set of distinctive understandings that operate within that boundary, designate certain sorts of economic transactions as appropriate for the relation, bar other transactions as inappropriate” (Zelizer 2011: 145). Her theory of relational work builds on her earlier work of morals and markets as market actors draw on cultural beliefs to draw and maintain these boundaries in ways that promote economic success. Building on this conception, Bandelj (2012) argues that “Power is ... part and parcel of relational work...conveyed through subtle linguistic expressions that give away the asymmetry between the participants in relational work” (p. 180). Power shows up within interactions designed to establish and reinforce boundaries. When relational work is successful, we feel the exchange is appropriate and when it is not, we may feel strong negative emotions such as betrayal, anger, shame, or disappointment (Bandelj 2020).

Turco’s maternal support professionals felt the misalignment between their role as trusted experts supporting new mothers and using this relational trust to upsell expensive products (Turco 2012). Ocejo (2017) focuses his analysis on the men that make up most of the distillers, mixologists, butchers, and barbers he encounters, but does briefly note that women did seem to have their expertise and taste-making labor challenged more often. However, he argues that part of the reason men was able to elevate these occupational identities and derive a sense of dignity from their jobs is that these spaces require less emotional labor than female-dominant service jobs and allowed for more authentic exchanges. However, I argue that it may be more likely that women’s structural position with the gender hierarchy coupled with the sales nature of the work, men may be able to do this work because, in-part, men are granted more authority in interactions.

Cannabis as a Case

Adding to the historical background of recreational and medicinal cannabis markets in the United States outlined in Chapter 1, during the time of my field work, local municipalities as well as federal officials made moves suggesting cannabis remained contested.

In January of 2018, then-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded two Obama-era memorandums that directed federal prosecutors to allow state-legalized cannabis markets to exist. Sessions, a known opponent of cannabis, wrote in this in January memorandum:

Congress has generally prohibited the cultivation, distribution, and possession of marijuana. ...These statutes reflect Congress's determination that marijuana is a dangerous drug and that marijuana activity is a serious crime. ...Given the Department's well-established general principles, previous nationwide guidance specific to marijuana enforcement is necessary... (Sessions 2018)

Even within states where recreational cannabis has been legalized, local governments and communities fight over whether to allow cannabis businesses to operate in their counties. In 2018, voters elected officials in Calaveras County in California that promised to reverse the prior board's decision to allow cannabis businesses in their county (Elias 2018). Following through on these promises early into their tenure, they terminated all cannabis licenses within the county, which totaled \$7 million in licensing fees (Elias 2018). Moreover, some members of the medicinal cannabis community continue to mobilize against legalization efforts for recreational markets (Hecht 2014). Taken together, the recreational cannabis market's moral legitimacy remains contested on multiple fronts despite gaining legal legitimacy.

Seattle's Cannabis Retail Market

In 2012, Washington State voters passed Initiative 502 (I-502) legalizing the sale and use of recreational cannabis for adults 21 years and older and in July of 2014, the first licensed recreational cannabis shop opened in Seattle. Washington's Liquor and Cannabis Control Board

(LCB) oversaw the business licensing process and barred retail business license holders from holding other types of licenses such as a license to grow cannabis or make cannabis-infused products. Even more, medicinal dispensaries that existed prior to I-502 were forced to obtain a recreational license or close by July 1, 2016. Thus, cannabis retail spaces are the only point of contact between the public and the industry for purchasing products. This positions retail stores as spaces of power in terms of what products get sold in the emerging market. Therefore, the power to decide which and how products are sold to customers lies with the retailer.

As a new market with a deeply stigmatized history, licensed recreational cannabis retail stores (i.e., cannabis stores) are sites where market actors are concerned with the morality of their industry and expend some amount of effort on moralizing the products or services they provide. Particular spaces embroiled with moral meaning can activate a sense of moral identity (Stets and Carter 2012). As described in Chapter 1, cannabis markets continue to be the focus of national and local moral debates on their place in society and thus, workers in these sites are likely making decisions about how they will engage in work activities to promote moral legitimacy.

Methodology

Understanding how staff create occupational norms in this emerging industry is thus important to understanding how they construct the market's moral legitimacy. Occupational norms are the standards of practice by which individuals of a particular occupation that does not fall under the category of profession orient towards (Habenstein 1962). Although occupational norms can mimic professionalization techniques such as employing particular language and techniques for executing job tasks, the occupations attributed to these norms do not align with the definition of professional—restriction of entry; standard measures of competency; and

participation in professional organizations (Abbott 1988; Habenstein 1962). Cannabis shop staff similarly do not constitute a profession. Thus, occupational norms best define the market practices that can help answer my research questions.

To investigate the development of occupational norms by store staff, I examined the way they talked about cannabis with various customers and amongst themselves in addition to the types of tasks they engaged in. I noted down differences in the types of tasks and informal roles women played in the store. Finally, I asked them what they considered are the most important aspects of their job and what their job means to them both in informal conversations during down time at the stores and in more formal semi-structured interviews taking place outside of the store.

Throughout the course of my observations, I had informal conversations and interactions with a total of thirty-three staff members. Moreover, I conducted one-on-one in-depth semi-structured interviews with fifteen staff across my sites as well as interviews with the owners of each shop (n=2). Taking the information from these interviews, informal conversations, and observations at Jane's Corner and Eddie's Pot Shops, I identified emerging themes and refined my interview protocol. I then expanded my study to other shops, conducting semi-structured interviews with an additional forty-five owners and staff across twenty-six other licensed recreational cannabis stores in Seattle (see Tables 2-4 for demographic characteristics of interview respondents).

During these interviews, I asked staff about their store and its customers, their personal experiences with cannabis, and their general perception of Seattle's industry and legalization. For example, I asked staff how they go about matching people to the right product, how did they start working at their stores, and where do they see themselves in five years. After transcribing the interviews, I manually open-coded each transcript. My final set of codes included items such as

“gender,” “meaning of work,” “measuring quality,” “education,” “job duties,” and “types of users.” From here, I went back to my field notes and combed through the data for instances that both confirmed and contested my findings to contextualize my interview data. Finally, I created memos outlining my major themes and present the analyses of these memos below.

By focusing on the process of constructing moral legitimacy, my sites do not represent typical or atypical cannabis shops. In fact, as the industry is so new and laws vary between states regarding market structure, representativeness of actual stores may be unobtainable at this point in the industry’s development. Instead, I am looking at common processes and meanings constructed across sites to build upon existing theories of the morals and markets literature (Luker 2008).

Findings

Overwhelmingly, store staff felt that educating the customer was a central part of their job. Observations and interviews revealed education entailed teaching consumers—both new and long-time users—new language for talking about cannabis, new ways to measure product quality, and constructing worthy motivations for consuming. Mick, the inventory specialist at Jane’s Corner curtly summed up this sentiment:

I’m going to put you in your place and let you know where you went wrong, you know I’m not going to do it in a demeaning way, but I’m going to let you know. I’d rather have you become an educated consumer by learning you’re wrong and adjusting your preferences and making everybody’s job easier in the shop than have someone continue to be ignorant about a topic. ... I spend a lot of time talking with people letting them know what they are looking at because it makes my job a lot easier to educate the customer.

Mick, White Man, Inventory Specialist, Jane’s Corner

Much like veteran cannabis users taught novices how to become a cannabis user by showing them how to properly consume and enjoy cannabis in Becker’s seminal study, *Becoming a*

Marihuana User, staff in these new spaces were teaching customers how to become a cannabis connoisseur (1953).

Many staff interactions observed were educational encounters where staff attempted to reframe how new and longtime users enjoyed cannabis. Cannabis consumption was conceptualized across my field sites and interviews as a set of complex chemical reactions that produce particular feelings that can be paired with any lifestyle to enhance one's daily functioning and/or activities. Specifically, the rising popularity of terpenes⁷ and cannabinoids⁸ in the legal market to characterize quality and make distinctions among various products and strains is one way these workers employ science and language to bolster the status of cannabis from a simple intoxicant and street drug to a complex commodity. Tim, the Store Manager at Eddie's Weed Emporium told me about how he sees the role of the retail shop and retail workers in the development of the cannabis industry.

Everything, we're still learning about what cannabis can actually do for people. With that being said, we're the ones that have to be informing the public. There's still people who are strictly looking at certain things such as THC percentage, but there's more to it than just THC percentage. That's really where I feel like we come in. We have to be educators to them. Hey, it's not just about THC, there's terpenes, there's flavonoids, there's all these other things that go into what cannabis is.

Tim, White Man, Store Manager, Eddie's Weed Emporium

It only takes a few minutes of sitting in a store to see how workers attempt to redirect consumer preferences away from an interest in simple intoxication and instead, direct them toward viewing cannabis as having complex flavors that elicit specific effects. During one of my observations at Jane's Corner, a customer walked over to the extracts case and bent over to get a

⁷ Terpenes were described as chemical products of the plant found in many other plants and were said to hold the flavor and scents of cannabis that define the type of effects of various cannabis products.

⁸ Cannabinoids are a group of C₂₁ terpenophenolic compounds found to be in (until recently) uniquely in cannabis sativa (ElSohly 2007) and was also said to shape the way consumers are affected by particular cannabis products.

closer look at the different products on display. Tyler, a budtender at the shop, immediately walked over and without asking the customer any questions, starts describing what hash is with a level of detail and depth that does not seem necessary, let alone requested by the individual.

Tyler: "...you get high from this [hash] and the terpenes... with hash, more of the plant actually carries over into the product. You can't dab it because it has too much plant matter in it. I call this [hash] a complex high."

He goes on to talk about the plant's trichomes and how terpenes are made as the customer looks at the different products with a furrowed brow and confused look on his face.

Jane's Corner, April 19, 2017

Tyler talks about terpenes in the context of hash and characterizes it as a "complex high" to what he perceives as a novice user. He goes into great detail about what terpenes are, how they are made, and how this relates to hash. These interactions were incredibly common across all three sites and characterize the way individuals redefine the purpose of cannabis. It is not about getting high, it's about having complex experiences (i.e., highs that go beyond simply getting intoxicated). Being able to fully explore the complexity of cannabis meant knowing the science behind consumption. Casey, an assistant manager at Eddie's Weed Emporium, launched into a similarly elaborate explanation about terpenes and cannabinoids when we first met at his store after I asked him how he makes recommendations to customers.

Casey: It's really all about the genetic make-up of the plant, the terpene profile. ...I've been trying to educate [customers] and steer them away from using [THC] numbers. I love these guys because they show so much information on the packages. You get to see the terpene profile, it goes through all the names and gives me a description of flavor- this is a really earthy flavor: piney, lemony.

Me: It sounds like you know a lot.

Casey: I don't know everything; I just act like I do! I think every company should label their products like this. That would help me find the right thing for people. If was able to, I could ask [the customer] what they smoked last time and make a recommendation based on the genetic make-up of the plant. The math's all there. ... Like CBG is the happy cannabinoid, it's what brings you that happy feeling.

Eddie's Weed Emporium, August 22, 2017

Casey, along with many other staff I encounter, use science to understand and tease out specific effects of particular products. Ensuring customers have the best possible experience consuming in the recreational market was characterized as key to constructing legitimacy and they did this through learning about plant biology. In fact, all staff lamented customers that used the amount of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in a product as a measure of quality. THC was defined by most staff as the chemical that creates an intoxicating effect, but one that is one-dimensional.

Understanding how terpenes and cannabinoids worked meant injecting complexity into the framing of cannabis consumption. However, this complexity also enabled workers to create class distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate consumers and the construction of the cannabis connoisseur.

Appreciating Cannabis for the Flavor: Constructing the Connoisseur

By grounding cannabis consumption in science, specifically using terpenes and cannabinoids to measure quality, effects, and flavors of various products, staff begun to create categories of class distinction. After talking at length about the different ways to consume cannabis, Chelsea, a budtender at Eddie's on 5th Avenue, described cannabis' multidimensional qualities to me during down time at the store.

Me: So, what is cannabis? What do people use it for?

Chelsea: Cannabis, you can customize it to any type of lifestyle. It works well with your brain in so many different ways, it just depends on what you want to use it for. Like, if you just want to chill out after work or whatever or perhaps you want something to help energize you, some people use it to go to the gym. Some people use it to focus and get work done and that's all they use it for. Other people, use it for pain or whatever. There are too many different things.

Eddie's on 5th Avenue, November 2, 2017

In this description, cannabis is not an intoxicant. Rather, cannabis is defined as a way to improve one's overall health and wellbeing or increase productivity. This is characteristic of the way medicinal and recreational consumption was conflated as cannabis is described in this excerpt to provide consumers with energy, focus, pain relief, and a variety of other effects. In couching consumption in particular "lifestyles," however, staff such as Chelsea begin to create distinctions between types of consumers. For example, the types of lifestyles commonly listed by staff that when defining various motivations for use evoked images of a sophisticated, motivated, and successful consumer. In Chelsea's description alone, users are defined as employed, physically active, and focused workers.

Moreover, staff will often commensurate cannabis with high status cultural symbols such as wine, wealth, and professionalism, which all hold high cultural or economic value (Bourdieu 1984). Helping a group of young male customers, Stan, a budtender at Eddies' Weed Emporium, was asked what his favorite strain of cannabis is.

Customer: Yea, what's your favorite?

Stan: Everything I smoke pretty much ends up being my favorite and then I get over it. On one day, I could say something is my favorite, but I smoke it that day and the next day it's the last thing I want. It just depends. This AK-47. I love this strain by Helena! I like to pair this with food, like a chef pairs their food with wine. They do this with all their products on their website, I love that. They also have recipes on their website. It's great.

Eddies' Weed Emporium, August 22, 2017

In this interaction, Stan reveals he prefers to explore different strains rather than having favorites. He draws an explicit connection between wine and cannabis, a common practice within the sites I visited. Cannabis, with its subtle scents and flavor profiles as distinguished by the terpenes, made for a good comparison with wine, a mark of distinction (Bourdieu 1984). This coupled with the emphasis on pairing cannabis with lifestyles became a salient tactic employed by

workers in an attempt to bolster cannabis' cultural status and develop its legitimacy. This was not a market for criminals, addicts, immoral characters, and unmotivated heavy users. Rather, cannabis was a commodity for the culturally and economically privileged class and through their efforts to bring complexity to consumption, workers provided the framework necessary to draw this distinction. It is in this context that the connoisseur emerged.

The cannabis connoisseur was a symbol of a sophisticated pallet yearning for different experiences. Nathan, the store manager at Eddie's on 5th Avenue, defined the connoisseur as someone who understands and leverages the complexity of cannabis to achieve particular effects.

Nathan: Usually, it's the connoisseurs that are really going for quality ...

Michele: Can you explain to me what a connoisseur is?

Nathan: Someone who's willing to smoke cannabis for flavor, instead of its THC percentage, or if it's for a particular effect that no other strain can offer ...As connoisseurs, they appreciate cannabis for the flavor, because terpenes in cannabis is where the flavors are, and that goes in hand with the THC, and so if you have something that's rich in terpenes and high in THC, then that high is going to be long-lasting and consistent, whereas if you have something that's not very flavorful but high in THC, that high would probably be a strong high, but it would be very short-lasting.

Nathan, Asian Man, Store Manager, Eddie's on 5th Avenue

Connoisseurs, a term typically employed to signify high status consumers with mastery of judgements in taste and quality (Bourdieu 1984), in this market are those who move beyond simple intoxication and can employ the language necessary to do so. These individuals embody the most legitimate consumer, someone who can properly appreciate the product through the use of refined taste. Furthermore, the connoisseur brings together the science and sophistication to locate regular consumption within a highly valued cultural status.

Becoming the Expert Connoisseur: Embodying the Refined and Sophisticated Consumer

While pulling from culturally accepted values and norms to reframe a contested market as legitimate is not a new finding, the staff in these stores elevate themselves by aligning their approach to consumption with the connoisseur. Despite being low paid wageworkers in a retail setting, through their engagement in moralizing labor, they elevate their own occupational identities with their elevation of cannabis. Mick, the assistant manager at Jane's Corner, told me during a one-on-one interview the differences between motivations for consumption.

...in regular use, [cannabis] is a medicine, it is a way to sustain your body. ...Yea, it may have a psychoactive effect at first, but you know I can smoke a joint and go back to a very important task if I need to and it doesn't have that psychoactive affect that it used to.

Some people that are consuming are still chasing that [high], but the people that can afford to regularly smoke are not using cannabis anymore as an intoxicant. ... that's a very important point there, it's for people that can afford it. If you're to use cannabis as a medicine and use it as a way to regulate your mood, body, etc. it's expensive. It's not something that everybody can just go out and do.

So, a lot of our customers that do come in and smoke, even our regular customers because they are, you know, living on the street or whatever, they've got \$10 a day and they want the strongest shit they can get because it's their intoxicant, it's their sweet release for 45 minutes to an hour. But I do see a general trend towards, it's not about getting fucked up anymore, it's about regular consumption, it's about feeling good...

Mick, White Man, Assistant Manager / Inventory Specialist, Jane's Corner

In his description of the different types of users, Mick draws a distinction between different types of regular consumers by delineating who is using for intoxication and who is not. Those with wealth regularly consume to enhance their lives while those who were homeless are interested in intoxication. The conflation between recreational and medicinal consumption is present in the high-status consumers, while low status folks are framed as addicts. However, what's even more telling about this description is how Mick aligns himself with the high status, wealthy consumer. Despite the fact that Mick makes \$12.50 an hour and works a hefty amount of overtime to be

able to afford his own apartment, he still aligns himself with wealthy consumers. Staff aligning themselves with high status consumers was common among those who were viewed as experts.

It is not just how these individuals align themselves with high status symbols, but it is in their ability to discern low-brow consumers as well. Darius, a budtender at Eddie's on 5th Avenue was helping out an older customer who asked for the most expensive and thus most powerful strain.

Customer: [Loudly] I need something that has some power in it. The most expensive stuff you have!

Darius had told me earlier that day that he gets frustrated and disappointed by customers who use simplistic assessments like price and percent THC to evaluate product strength. He drags his feet as he grabs some product off the shelf. The product is not too expensive, and the customer is initially suspicious when he hears the price, raising his eyebrow as he picks up the package and examines the label that states the product's THC levels.

Darius: [Reassuring the customer] This is some pretty good stuff for what you're asking for.

Eddie's on 5th Avenue, October 21, 2017

In this interaction, Darius attempts to redirect the customer's assessment of quality away from price and towards more technical understandings of cannabis. He assesses the individuals' needs and using his discretion, offers the customer a product he feels is a better match for the customer's needs. In this interaction, Darius is simultaneously attempting to reshaping the customer's preferences while asserting himself as an expert and someone who knows what the customer needs better than the customer does. This is incredibly common to witness, and customers generally agree with the budtenders assessment. However, with hundreds of different products from different vendors and budtenders being highly selective in what they offer, unless you know what it is you want before you go in or are assertive yourself, the staff are going to

show you an array of products based on their own subjective interpretation of what you really want. It is this discretionary work where they are best able position themselves as experts.

When customers ask about cannabis-infused gummies (i.e., gummy candy like gummy bears or gummy worms), it became easy to predict worker responses, which centered on reshaping and refining preferences. One interaction I observed between Brody, a budtender at Jane's Corner, and a couple vacationing in Seattle from Canada exemplifies this type of refining labor.

Brody: Why the fuck are tourists obsessed with gummies! We have so much other shit! When you're 30-45 years old asking for some gummies, you sound like an idiot! You sound so ridiculous.

Tyler: I totes agree!

Moments later two tourists come in and show their passports to the security guard. They go up to Brody and ask if they have any gummy bears. Brody shoots me a look and smirk, rolls his eyes, and proceeds to redirect their request. The customers look back at me confused.

Brody: The only gummy thing we have are these [*places package on counter*] and cream savers. But you should dream bigger than gummies! You're in a cannabis shop!

Brody continues to show them a variety of cannabis products and after they leave, he turns to me and yells out in excitement.

Brody: Did you see that? Take notes because that's how it's done! They came in wanting \$25 of gummies and left with \$155 of some good stuff! Did you see how I did that? I expanded their horizons. People are naturally closed minded and need someone to help them open up to new choices and experiences.

Jane's Corner, May 19, 2017

Brody sees consumer preference for cannabis-infused gummy candy as childish and lacking sophistication. He was visibly pleased with his work not just because of his successful upsell, but because he was able to reshape these customers' preferences and get them to purchase products he deemed as more sophisticated and worthy of their money. Reshaping customer preferences serves both to define cannabis as a sophisticated and culturally valued product is something

workers are deeply and personally invested in. Brody is not just telling me he broadens the customers' horizons, but that he is open minded and has the type of refined and sophisticated understanding of cannabis that makes him best equipped to do this work. Brody, along with Mick, Darius, and many other staff, not only help other's come to a sophisticated understanding of cannabis, but they come embody this refinement and sophistication.

When workers engage in this kind of work, they are asserting themselves as experts and the individuals who hold the valued knowledge and refined tastes that make up the ideal connoisseur. By tying their labor to this connoisseur identity, others that do not engage in this type of labor or at least do not do so according to their standards are seen as ill-equipped, illegitimate, and in some cases, harmful to the industry itself. Matt, a key holder at Jane's Corner, explained to me during a one-on-one interview his disappointment and the frustration he experienced when he found a budtender at another store couldn't answer his more complex questions.

...But you go in and ask for, you know, you ask questions that someone, a connoisseur would ask, something about terpenes and different flavor profiles. There are some people that are really knowledgeable and there are others that are just kind of like, "eh, well, I'm just going to give you a suggestion because I don't really know what I'm talking about." Yea, I would hope that it would be standard across the board, being super knowledgeable, knowing the connoisseur details I should say.

Matt, White Man, Budtender / Key Holder, Jane's Corner

In this statement, Matt identifies as a connoisseur which he also ties into his occupational identity as a cannabis industry worker. Matt and the budtender he encountered have the same job and yet, because the individual did not share his approach to the work, he was deemed as not worthy of the position. In talking with budtenders and staff like Matt, being able to understand and employ the "connoisseur details" developed as a desired occupational norm. Individuals I spoke to across my field sites had surprisingly similar comments about their experiences with

and perceptions of retail workers at other cannabis shops. Workers would often tell me how their store was unique because of the level of expertise they bring to the industry or how frustrated and disappointed they were by other stores' lack of quality budtenders. This boundary work that positions them and their store above others deemed illegitimate directly ties into their attempt to establish the occupational identity as an expert and connoisseur rather than a retail worker. The frustration they feel is expressed as a mismatch of what they expect, or at least wish to expect, and what they find. To the regular consumer, this distinction may not be obvious. However, to these workers, this categorization and boundary work is deeply personal as it validates their self-perceived expertise and brings immense positive feelings of self-worth.

While they construct occupational norms that position themselves as elite taste makers, it is important to remember that these are first and foremost retail workers. Almost all staff across the three sites worked in food service or retail as baristas, cashiers, and sales associates. Most work tasks observed align with low-status retail work. Staff spend much of their time reorganizing shelves, dealing with “go-backs” (i.e., putting the products they recommended to customers that customers did not buy back on the shelves), handle cash, and cleaning countertops and floors. While workers reported earning up to an extra \$5 an hour in tips, wage structure was relatively flat across the sites. Staff made a base wage between \$12 and \$14 an hour, meaning that even with a \$5 an hour bump due to tips, they still make well-below the median household income for Seattle. However, as Lamont has shown in her work, individuals that lack economic means can derive a sense of status and value from their work.

“To Be an Expert, It’s Amazing” : Positive Emotional Returns

Individuals that invest in these occupational norms and engage in this moralization project often talk about the joy they get from being identified with the occupational role of an

expert cannabis connoisseur. Miguel, an assistant manager at Eddie's Weed Emporium, would constantly follow me around the store, excited to tell me all the great things about his job and his "journey" to his management position. He would tell me repeatedly it was his great work ethic that enabled his success at the Emporium. In one of these conversations with Miguel, I asked him directly what this job means to him.

I feel like I now have freedom. ... This job has really let me be who I wanted to be. ...at this point, I want to make a career out of this. It is so much easier waking up in the morning and say, 'yea! I get to go to work today!' This right here [*lifts both his arms up just above his waist with his palms open, facing the ceiling as if praising the store*] is my dream job. ...To be an expert, it's amazing. It's something I only dreamed about and would only talk about with a few of my friends. Now, I literally have the whole world coming up to me! Japan, Paris, they come in and say 'hey, I'm new to this, I want to get totally blitzed, what are you smoking?' Going from where I didn't want people to know I'm a pothead to now, I want them to know I'm a smoker, that I work at Eddie's, and that I get high off of the best weed, we do have the best weed! I still get high as hell, I mean, I still get my CBD gel and topical and pills and stuff, everything I need is here!

Eddie's Weed Emporium, August 29, 2017

Miguel expresses enthusiasm when talking about what this job means to him. He feels personally validated by the industry and his occupational role as expert. Similar to most other staff I encountered, Miguel's previous job was in the food industry working as a store manager of a local fast-food chain. He is an expert in an emerging field who gets to determine what is the best weed and make recommendations to a global community of new and long-term users. The sentiment Miguel expresses about his job validating and moralizing his sense of self was expressed by others as well. During one observation, Tyler eagerly tells everyone in the shop about his father coming to visit from Massachusetts. He plans to take him by the shop and show him what he does. I wonder what his family thinks about his work and career plans in cannabis as other workers have brought up conversations with family in regard to their work and trying to renegotiate stigma using the moralizing constructs they employ at the shop.

Tyler explains that his dad, although initially disapproving of his cannabis consumption and financial dependence on his parents has since come around.

Tyler: Oh, well he's cool now. Mostly because now, I can afford to live on my own, pay my own rent, take care of my girlfriend and my dog, all of that. It's a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. He accepts me now. It's not like I'm sitting around all day on my couch getting high. I mean, I still do that, but it's different. I can be myself now. I am so much happier now.

Jane's Corner, May 19, 2017

Similar to Miguel, Tyler feels like his job enables him to express his personal identity while also providing him opportunities for a career and economic success. Although he admits to engaging in the same behaviors he did in an illegal context, he claims that through legalization and his job, he is able to personally redefine his behavior as socially acceptable. When he continues to talk about the benefits of regular consumption, it is clear that he finds his job critical to moralizing his personal identity as a heavy consumer.

Although Tyler was a heavy consumer prior to legalization, these types of attitudes and feelings are common among staff that invest in the moralization project and did not consider themselves heavy consumers. Evan, the Store Manager at Dr. Teeth's Pot Shop, told me he had rarely consumed cannabis before starting his job at Dr. Teeth's. However, Evan found immense satisfaction in his job that he failed to find in his last position.

It really satisfies me because it makes me feel like I'm doing something that's a public good. That was one of the most satisfying aspects of teaching for me when I used to teach, was that I felt like I was helping to make the world a better place in a very small way. Helping people learn more cannabis, it's such a taboo subject and most people, they don't have good information. They don't have good access to information about cannabis. Sometimes people make bad choices because they don't have good information to be able to help people find more accurate, more valid information that'll influence, hopefully, their lives. That's really satisfying.

Evan, White Man, Store Manager, Dr. Teeth's Pot Shop

It is clear there is a link between this moralizing labor and personal feelings of worth.

Ben, a medical marijuana consultant for Urban Cannabis was someone involved in the wine industry before getting involved with cannabis. Even for Ben, the ability to moralizing the market and construct new frames that elevate cannabis to the status of “luxury sensory good” provides immense positive emotional returns.

For me, it’s how precious it is to be able to work with this plant in this moment and like, selling a new kind of luxury sensory good, there’s a lot of nice things about being in that part of the retail market, but there’s a huge change for me going from wine to cannabis. Like, it’s one of the few drugs that people do use for fun that I could really feel the positive effects, sleep soundly at night, and I definitely couldn’t say that about wine.

... to be a part of an industry that so far is successfully eroding the stigma around the plant, increasing education about how valuable this is as a lifestyle tool, a wellness tool and as, like, a specific, concrete, appropriate medicine in certain cases. ... I’m still in the honeymoon phase well over two years in with that reality. I’ve got to say, I’ve never had a job where I felt that way two years in.

Ben, White Man, Medical Marijuana Consultant, Urban Cannabis

The personal benefits these individuals derive from moralizing cannabis, in effect, moralizes their occupational identity and thus themselves. Their work as morally and socially valuable is tied into how they moralize cannabis and engage in their work. This moralizing labor in turn provides personal, non-monetary benefits such as adding a sense of self-worth and dignity.

In sum, individuals in this industry, in their embodiment of the expert connoisseur, position their occupational identities as experts. This then informs personal feelings of value and worth as they transcend state regulations to deliver medical advice they deem as moral and reshape customer preferences toward sophisticated products worthy of consumption. However, not everyone experienced these positive returns.

Moralizing Labor as a Gendered Process

While workers able to engage in moralizing labor felt increased feelings of worth, these returns were not evenly distributed between men and women. As men typically expressed

enthusiasm for their work and increased feelings of worth, women often reported feeling demoralized and devalued and many spoke about plans to leave the cannabis industry. This was attributed to two main concerns: customers harassing women and devaluing their knowledge in addition to reports of sexual harassment and discrimination by colleagues.

“He’s an Expert and I’m a Bitch” Expertise and Authority

Being able to redirect consumer preferences towards their own definitions of quality as well as being able to recommend specific products for medicinal consumption required the budtender to be viewed as an expert and authority by the customer. However, when making recommendations or attempting to establish themselves as experts during their interactions with customers, women reported being met with suspicion.

Women at Eddie’s Pot Shops told me they would often see customers wait for male budtenders to become available. Tyler spoke about a regular customer at a cannabis store he worked at prior to starting at Jane’s Corner.

We used to have this one guy ...the line would always be crazy long and he would always stand at the front of the line and wait until there was a guy available. There was one day this girl was calling him down, "I can help you, sir. We're kind of busy. I can help you down here." And he finally snapped. He was like, "I'm waiting for an educated man!" I was like, "Whoa, buddy! No way!"

Tyler, White Man, Budtender, Jane’s Corner

At Jane’s Corner, I saw this occur several times when customers would wait for Mick or Tyler to become available while ignoring or declining help from Helen and Breanna, two female budtenders at the store. Although a few male staff across my three sites claimed the opposite was true, they cited one main reason for preferring female budtenders was based on sexual attraction and not expertise.

Moreover, even when women were helping customers, female staff reported that customers would often ask for a male budtender's opinion on their recommendation before accepting it as legitimate. During my observations, this occurred several times as customers would lean over and ask Mick what he thought of Helen or Breanna's recommendation while I never observed anyone asking Helen or Breanna what they thought of their male co-worker's choices. Amelia, a budtender at Eddie's Weed Emporium, characterized this best during our one-on-one interview.

Casey has a tendency to talk over people. He's easily able to raise the volume of his voice to get the point across with customers. And they will more likely accept it from him. Whereas if I were to do something like that, then I'm a bitch. Or, then I have an attitude. In which case, the customer is going to have more of an inclination to then retaliate towards me. It's going back and forth.

Amelia, Budtender, Eddie's Weed Emporium

In the above narrative, Amelia is describing what happens when she tries to correct a customer who has what she defines as inaccurate information or when she attempts elaborate on her recommendations. For Casey, a tall, slender white man, getting his point across is easy, even when he raises his voice to drown out any resistance from customers. However, for Amelia, customers are not only less likely to take her advice seriously, but that they actively push back.

Even though women in these retail spaces may have the similar or even greater levels of expertise as their male counterparts, they feel customers do not invest in their narrative and consequently devalue their knowledge and labor. Amelia, like many other women I spoke with, was incredibly frustrated and hurt by their inability to access the same positive returns as their male counterparts that came with claiming expertise in interactions. She revealed to me that she seriously thought about quitting several times and either leaving the industry altogether or moving to a different state to work in another legal market.

Chelsea from Eddie's on 5th Avenue who had worked at a medical dispensary before recreational cannabis was legalized, discussed her experience working for a different recreational retail store post-legalization.

I mean, I know we have the most female CEOs than any other industry and that's awesome, but this doesn't reflect what's happening on the ground, here in the stores. ... Customers would not respect me. guys would get promoted all the time over me that didn't know shit or weren't good at their job. I was doing so much shit at that store outside my paygrade and didn't get any acknowledgement. They would be like, "Oh yea, you deserved this [promotion], but I did too." And I'd be like, "No you didn't!" But they would be like "Well, I got is, so that means that he [the boss] thought I was right for the position and that I did deserve it." But the manager was just an asshole. He told me one time that he thinks women are not good leaders, but they're great at multi-tasking. What the fuck!? UGH it makes me so mad just thinking about it.

Chelsea, White Woman, Budtender, Eddie's on 5th Avenue

Chelsea's statement perfectly sums up the experience of women I spoke to working in cannabis retail. Not only do customers disrespect her in ways similar to what Amelia described, but men who were praised and promoted ahead of her felt entitled to their advantages. A shift lead at Eddie's on 5th Avenue expressed a similar frustration at how long it took for her to get promoted despite having extensive experience as a store manager in the food industry prior to coming to Eddie's. She explained in a side conversation during an observation that she felt she continually needed to prove herself while men around her were being promoted faster.

Women within these spaces were not viewed as experts and their authority and leadership skills were delegitimized. Both women's frustration and discontent, although not unique for service jobs, serves as a stark contrast to the blissful evaluations of their jobs and work environments made by their male counterparts. In fact, almost all women I spoke with considered their job typical of any retail except for the type of product being sold. This evaluation of their job as "typical retail" when compared to Miguel's perception of this as a "dream job" reveals how positive emotional returns can be moderated by gender. At Jane's

Corner, Helen and Breanna shared a similar sentiment although this was mostly due to harassment and discrimination at the hands of their management team.

Sexualized Bodies & Expertise

In addition to delegitimizing female staff's expertise, I also found evidence of sexual harassment was a common experience. Rochelle, the floor manager of CannaCo, told me how she can often tell immediately what type of male customer will be sexualizing her or other female co-workers in the store.

Rochelle: A lot of the times you might get the pervy guy that's always fantastic, but I was in the car business, so that's a not a worry for me.

Author: So, what's a pervy guy like? What is that?

Rochelle: For me, every girl in this store has their type. Mine is geriatric black male. That's the one that comes at me a lot. "What time do you get off? Can I watch?" That kind of thing. So, because there are certain customers that we know are like that, again, the regulars, things of that nature. For example, my brother will be like, "Here, take this paper upstairs." And I'm like, "This paper? What the ... are you talking about?" And then I'll see, "Oh." And then I'll go upstairs, and I'll watch the cameras until he leaves, you know what I mean? So, we're still retaining the rapport, but we aren't putting anybody in an uncomfortable position where they're selling to somebody that they don't enjoy selling to.

I always tell my girls as well as my guys, "If you're uncomfortable with selling to somebody, I don't care about them in that moment because you're my priority." ...I don't have a problem saying something. I can put people in their place. "Look, you can't talk to us like that. We're still running a business." ...

But there are some that are just not appropriate and because we're aware of those, we usually divert the females away from that if we need to.

Rochelle, Mixed-Raced Woman, Floor Manager, CannaCo.

Interview respondents often talked about some female staff being “creep magnets” and being sexually harassed by customers.

When interacting with customers, I observed harassment towards women on several occasions and heard stories during interviews of customers' objectification of female employees. Again, Amelia was a prime example of how customers shape the experiences of women in the retail space and their ability to access positive emotional returns. During an observation, a group of customers were talking loudly and taking pictures of Amelia as she pulled products from the wall behind the counter.

I was standing a few feet away from Amelia as she waved over a group of four rowdy customers, two men and two women, to her register. As she started pulling products from the wall behind her, one of the men started recording a video of the store, including Amelia.

Amelia: Excuse me, but we don't allow customers to take pictures of staff without their permission. I need you to either put the phone away please or focus the camera on products only.

Dissatisfied with this response, the man started yelling at Amelia.

Male Customer 1: You're trippin'! I'm fine. Who are you anyway?

Amelia: I don't care what you do, you just can't take pictures of me.

Their voices blur together in a loud, angry rant directed at Amelia. Amelia, distraught, burst into tears and ran out of the back door of the shop. Emma, a female assistant manager, attempted to resolve the issue, however, one of the female customers in the group told her she wanted to see a "real manager." Another female employee jumped in to support her, informing the customer that she is the "real manager" and the highest level on staff at that time, which was a lie. Feeling uncomfortable with my notebook in hand and a highly visible "Visitor Badge" sticker on my shirt witnessing this hostile interaction, I also walked into the back of the store as I could feel the conflict escalating. At the end of the interaction, Tim, the store manager, brought Amelia back in the store and was updated by Emma on the situation.

Tim: Oh man. I have no tolerance for that bullshit. Next that happens, tell me *immediately* and I'll come and kick them out. I have no problem kicking out a customer that is inappropriate with my budtenders.

Miguel, who is an assistant manager like Emma and is now standing right behind me chimes in.

Miguel: Yea, we need to know if that kind of stuff is going on so we can take care of it then and there and make sure they don't come back.

This type of interaction happened three times while I was observing Eddie's Pot Shops – twice at the Weed Emporium and once at Eddie's on 5th Avenue – and I heard many more stories from staff across my three field sites and interviews with folks outside of these stores. Amelia, like other female staff, are not granted the ability to regulate behavior and actions in the retail space. Even more, instead of commending Emma for diffusing the situation, Tim and Miguel believe they were more capable than her in protecting female staff. This paternal nature of male staff was prevalent at Eddie's Pot Shops and to some extent, Jane's Corner.

Male staff would proudly tell me how they “don't tolerate bullshit” and kick rowdy or unruly customers out of their stores. This diverges from the customer service orientation of caring for customers by elevating their moral obligation to protect women. However, this defines women's position in the store as inherently subordinate. In these stores, they will always need a male superior capable of “handling” out of control customers. Multiple male respondents that held upper-management positions proudly told me how they never put women on closing shifts because they are looking out for their safety, however, this limits the opportunities available for women as they are only able to compete for a narrow range of hours.

Even more, this sexualization of female retail staff appeared to be reinforced by respondents who thought of themselves as advocating for a more equitable industry. During our interview, Avery talked about how they felt their shop was morally righteous than other shops that they perceived to be using women's bodily capital to increase their revenue.

This store is more of ... It's more about quality of service than it is about cheap deals. Some shops try to hire girl budtenders that are cute blah blah blah. I'm trying to remember, there's even a nickname that one company uses to describe their female-only staff...like ganja girls, or something. ...The people that we hire here are not like that. We're definitely not trying to fit that stereotype when we're trying to care for the customers.

Author: What is that stereotype that they are?

Avery: The stereotype, it's like the female sportscaster that doesn't know what she's talking about, she's just reading the lines, you know what I mean? That "how could you know, you're a woman acting."

Avery, White Nonbinary Manager, CannaBliss

Here, Avery, like others, see "ganja girls" as attractive women in the industry who are only offering their bodily capital to the transaction. This perverts the transaction as it becomes less about "care for the customers" and instead is makes this about "cheap deals."

Women in sales that are perceived to be hired because of their physical appearance are also said to inhabit immoral qualities such as lacking a good work ethic and are unknowledgeable at best and inauthentic at worse when it comes to caring for customers and the industry. Frank, an assistant store manager at Herbal Treatments, employed this framework when talking with me about women he sees employed in the industry outside his shop.

Every now and then you get some girl coming in with yoga pants and doing like, all right, that's not helping you. That's not helping your product or whatever, but sex sells in all categories. So, there's certain stores that are more prone to higher girl budtenders from Instagram profiles, you know what I mean? ...there's always going to be some creep show somewhere where it's just like, "Oh, well, hey, look." Like these stupid people that are just like, "I just want to stock my bar/restaurant with pretty girls, and then we'll get all the guys here to spend a bunch of money." It's just like, yeah, but then you get a bunch of people that don't have any work ethic or attitude. It's just like misconceptions I feel like and there's plenty of men that think with their genitalia rather than their brain. Some of them are actual business owners too. ...Not the store that we're at.

Frank, White Man, Assistant Manager, Herbal Treatments

At Jane's Corner, the store manager, Mason, was one such employer. Matt told me during his one-on-one interview that Mason wanted to hire more attractive female staff to increase their profits and tips.

There was a couple of people who used to work here, a couple of females used to work there who were very cute. The argument was like, they would get more tips there than if it was just guys. Counter argument is well, when it's myself and Mick and Brody, we are busting ass, we actually end up getting more tips than if it was just attractive females.

For Matt, he was frustrated at Mason's suggestion that attractive females are better equipped to do their job than men. He even expressed frustration at the lengthy time it took him to get hired relative to several "very cute" budtenders who he felt were hired on much faster because of their looks. Matt went on to say that although he does not believe attractiveness makes a quality employee, being an attractive woman doesn't hurt your chances as getting your foot in the door. This statement reveals the attitude of store staff towards women. Female employees at Jane's Corner are not good at their jobs and are only valuable for their looks, which still is not enough to help them at work. Ashley Mears' work on the global VIP party circuit shows how men attempt to appropriate women's bodies as a resource to generate profit (Mears 2015). This was clearly the strategy employed by some employers, much to the dismay of female workers who wanted to be equally valued for their work as their male counterparts were.

Women, in being sexualized by customers and employers, had a harder time being seen as a moral market actor and accessing dignity in their work. When women attempted to engage in moralizing labor by reshaping consumer preferences, they were met with suspicion as if they were trying to upsell products or their knowledge was called in question. This resulted in very different feelings about their jobs than men expressed. Kayla, a female medical marijuana consultant at GreenStar, expressed her deep frustration with being sexualized at work.

...sometimes I feel like a sex worker in a way, in like the way you're treated, the way you are like an object. It's definitely awkward. I'm gay and I get hit on constantly by guys. It's very, very tough. And it's hard, because if you're in a shop that doesn't have a security guard, then you're just, you're on your own.

...So, you have to be confident, you have to be experienced. I definitely train other young women and stuff, like I've been a trainer, and you have to build up their confidence and you kind of have to be someone who's by them or guiding them, showing them like, when you are having a tough interaction, you can signal the security guy, or you can get a

coworker to come up, or you can just say, "I'm not comfortable with this transaction." But even just saying, "I'm not comfortable with this transaction", makes you feel like shit to say. It's like you don't have the right to say. I feel like as a woman we just let down all of our boundaries all the time, just because we don't want to start a thing, we don't want to seem sensitive. I was fired from my last company because of my emotions. And because I was bullied and lied to... I am an assault survivor ... It has basically been the downfall in every aspect of women I've known in this industry. You have to be someone who's willing to roll with the guys and be a sex object, or just be told what to do. The, like, "marijuana model girls." All this stuff that's like, save us like a Corona Girls kind of a thing. They're like the Playboy Bunnies for marijuana type thing. And then that becomes like an image that we're expected to put on us. But yeah, it's also just being in a service industry job, like being a waitress or a bartender, or anything.

Kayla, White Woman, Medical Marijuana Consultant, GreenStar

For Kayla and others, this experience of being devalued and degraded was incredibly frustrating and for some, traumatizing. One store manager that was interviewed reported that he fired a female bartender because she "got jacked" and then spent the rest of her shift hiding in the store restroom "like a pussy." While these experiences may be extreme, the fact that almost all women reported having to navigate sexualized interactions on some level indicates this is a prevalent issue.

When evaluating past research on workplace dynamics and gender, my findings are not surprising. Both women's frustration and discontent, however, served as a stark contrast to the blissful evaluations of their jobs and work environments made by their male counterparts. In fact, many women I spoke with, like Kayla above, considered their job typical of any retail job except for the type of product being sold. This evaluation of their job as "typical" when compared to Miguel's perception of this as a "dream job" reveals how moralizing labor can be a gendered process. Positive emotional returns within my field sites were moderated by the worker's gender. While women having a difficult time claiming authority and legitimacy in the workplace is not a new finding, the literature on morals and markets has yet to explore potential ways status characteristics like gender determine who gets to engage in moralizing labor and how one

experiences working in a contested market. Furthermore, this work reveals that through these gendered interactions, women feel pushed out of the industry while men feel more deeply invested and that the lack of women succeeding in the industry is a morally legitimate outcome.

This is important to address for several reasons. First, workers were shown to derive a sense of worth and value from engaging in moralizing labor. While most research on morals and markets deals with professional trades that have pre-established some level of prestige derived from the professional status, examining moralizing labor in the context of low-wage work shows how deeply meaningful this work can be for establishing personal feelings of worth. In their prior occupation, most workers reported being incredibly discontent, feeling demoralized by their rote, meaningless work activities. However, in this moralizing market, they were able to construct new forms of cultural capital that bolstered their sense of worth. Although it is unclear based on the data at hand whether others viewed them as validly occupying the role of expert, this research focuses on how they perceived themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that the moralizing market project cannabis retail organizations engaged in was driven by store employees not only to bring moral legitimacy to the market, but also in pursuit of their own occupational status and dignity. Like Ocejo (2014, 2017), I found staff experienced immense emotional returns from constructing elite taste in this contested market. However, I found that this was a gendered experience. Women were not able to access the same emotional returns as men. Customers as well as store staff viewed women through a sexualized lens that made it harder for them to embody a moral actor in this contested market. They were met with suspicion and had their expertise devalued as they were seen as “bimbos” and “ganja girls,” employed for their looks alone. For many women I interviewed, this

experience combined with seeing men's larger emotional returns resulted in many feeling pushed out.

This is important because work on morals and markets does not consider how status characteristics outside of a professional occupational identity can shape who can engage in market moralization processes and how this shapes market organizations. Here, I document how gender profoundly shaped who embodied the moral market actor and the consequences this had for women in the market. Thus, in this market, the absence of women is not only driven by the market moralization process, but it also contributes to seeing this absence as morally legitimate. In the following chapter, I extend this analysis to more specifically examine how race was constructed within this market and through this process.

Chapter 4.

A Theory of Racialized Moral Entrepreneurship: Market Moralization and Racialized Organizations

Introduction

Historically, morals and markets have been characterized as hostile worlds each representing contradictory logics: markets being utilitarian spheres of self-interest and morality requiring one to think and act in ways that benefit the greater good (Zelizer 2011). However, work leveraging contested or recently moralized markets reveal markets are “explicitly moral projects, saturated in normativity” (Fourcade and Healy 2007: 299-300) with morality both shaping and being shaped by markets. Further, economic sociologists show that legitimacy, particularly moral legitimacy, plays a vital role in structuring the activities of market organizations (Aldrich and Fiol 1994; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Meyer and Rowan 1977) and that workers play a central role in establishing a contested trade as legitimate (Anteby 2010; Quinn 2008; Turco 2012). What remains undertheorized is a greater attention to how the cultural frameworks used to construct moral legitimacy are embedded within racist systems and the implications this has for racial inequality within markets.

Victor Ray’s (2019) recent theorization of racialized organizations highlights the important role meso-level organizations play in reifying racial hierarchies by constraining the agency of subordinated groups and magnifying that of dominant groups (Ray 2019). Linking racial schemas, or the cognitive assumptions that provide ideas about how resources should be accumulated and distributed, with actual material and immaterial resources operates through organizational structures that then become institutionalized (Ray 2019; Sewell 1992; Jung 2015). Ray (2019: 35-36) argues that individuals’ “ability to shape their lives and react to larger social forces is partially determined by their location in organizations” and that those at the top of the

organizational hierarchies can “bind the collectivity with their actions.” However, scholars examining market moralization find that this is not always the case. The narratives used to construct moral legitimacy of organizational activities can constrain the ability of markets to commodify certain aspects of social life and can shape organizational practices, even in self-destructive ways and with opposition of organizational leaders (see Turco 2012).

By combining the morals and markets scholarship with race and racialization in the case of cannabis legalization, I build on Ray’s work on racialized organizations through an empirical examination of how market moralization is one mechanism that works to embed racialized meanings within organizational structures. Further, I add to the body of literature on market moralization by highlighting how the process of constructing boundaries between morally legitimate market activities is a racialized process and how normative frameworks that structure markets legitimate or challenge the racial paradigm (Bandelj 2020). Finally, I locate this work within the broader theoretical framework of racial capitalism by arguing that this racialized market moralization, or what I call racialized moral entrepreneurship, plays an important role in supporting the durability of racial inequality through legitimation crises.

Leveraging sixty semi-structured interviews with retail staff and owners across twenty-six cannabis retail establishments in Seattle and 107 hours of ethnographic field work in three of these stores, I examined how these actors framed their market activities, paying particular attention to how these narratives and practices shaped and were shaped by racialized meanings.

All staff and owners reported engaging in constructing moral legitimacy as they attempted to redefine broader moral evaluations of the legal cannabis market and its consumers. They accomplished this by implementing organizational practices and constructing narratives around market participation they felt brought the market moral legitimacy, even when it did not

help business' profits. These narratives worked to distance the market from previous perceptions of cannabis as a "criminal" or "shady" enterprise and users as "lazy, dumb stoners," drug addicts, and "dangerous drug dealers." In doing so, they created the moral cannabis consumer identity and business establishment in direct contrast to racialized and stigmatized narratives used during prohibition to legitimize the criminalization Black and Latinx market participants. This disadvantaged non-white store staff, business owners, and consumers while privileging the mostly white male owners and staff I encountered.

I argue these findings constitute a racialized theory of moral entrepreneurship. Howard Becker (1973) coined the term "moral entrepreneur" in his groundbreaking study of the social construction of deviance to describe how Henry J. Anslinger of the Bureau of Narcotics and associates launched a publicity campaign to generate moral panic over cannabis consumption to criminalize the product and its consumers. Moral entrepreneurs are individuals or groups that make concerted efforts to form "a new fragment of the moral constitution of society, its code of right and wrong" (Becker 1973: 145).

Bridging this concept with work on morals and markets and racialized organizations, I put forth a theory of racialized moral entrepreneurship, or the process of constructing moral boundaries around particular people or practices in ways that draw on racial schemas and allocate resources accordingly. While, like Becker, I use cannabis as a case to highlight how moral entrepreneurship works to stratify markets and embed racial meanings within organizational practices, this work has broader implications beyond cannabis. I argue that racialized moral entrepreneurship is a potential mechanism that explains how organizations come to be embedded with racial meaning and how racial capitalism endures legitimation crises.

Finally, I end by considering how racialized moral entrepreneurship could also work to disrupt the racial paradigm.

Literature Review

Racial Projects & Racial Capitalism

A racial project is “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines” (Omi and Winant 2014: 125). Since race lies at a crossroad between social structure and cultural representation, racial projects are the ideological and practical linkages between the two which explain racial meanings and organize resources. Organizational actors in contested markets are likely drawing on these racial meanings to construct moral legitimacy (Bandelj 2020; Ray 2019). This is important because scholars of racial capitalism argue that moments where boundaries between legitimate market activities shift, new racial meanings emerge that continue to support the racial order even as social institutions change (Gilmore 2007; Wang 2018).

Racial capitalism is the idea that “racial ideology (with its overvaluation of whiteness and extra- demonization of Blackness) and contemporary capitalism conjointly arose and cannot and should not be separated or disaggregated analytically” (Hudson 2013: 94). Factories in Europe were dependent upon the labor of enslaved Black individuals and imperialist endeavors for land and natural resources motivated the decimation of Indigenous peoples (Du Bois and Mack 2012; Marx 1963; Mintz 1985; Robinson 1983). When slavery ended, the criminal legal system was used to fill the void through convict leasing programs and continued to racialize criminality to maintain white dominance and supply cheap labor (Alexander 2012; Wacquant 2009). In the 1970s, President Nixon’s War on Drugs further criminalized Black and Latinx communities and

legitimized their continued subjugation. In the following decades, lawmakers from both political parties passed policies that vastly expanded the carceral state (Alexander 2012; Hudak 2016).

While these case studies highlight the enduring nature of racist racial projects through criminalization and carceral expansion, cannabis legalization represents a case where the boundaries of legitimate market and state activities shift in ways that attempt to limit the carceral state. Legalization advocates successfully argued that the expansion of carceral control over Black and Brown individuals and exclusion of these folks from economic opportunities is no longer morally permissible with regards to cannabis markets. However, racial capitalism would posit that these boundaries between moral and illegitimate market activities would be redrawn in ways that support the racial order. To understand how moral legitimacy is constructed within this emerging market and how these moral narratives shape racial inequality in these new market spaces, I turn to the cannabis retail space. Specifically, I ask how are legal cannabis markets constructing moral legitimacy? Who are the new moral entrepreneurs and how are they framing legal cannabis market activities? What role does race play in this process?

I focus on licensed cannabis retail stores in Seattle for several reasons. First, as Ray (2019) theorizes, organizations are important meso-level sites that can operate to reify or challenge racial hierarchies and structural inequality. Second, researchers find market organizations are key locations where moral boundaries around market activities are constructed (Turco 2012). Finally, within Seattle's market, there is no vertical integration, so all cannabis products must be sold by independent retailers. In other words, owners of retail establishments cannot hold other types of licenses such as a license to grow or make cannabis-infused products like cannabis-infused cookies or sodas; and farms and producers cannot sell directly to the external market. Therefore, retail stores are the only point of contact between the public and the

industry, making these spaces likely sites where the market aims to recast cannabis sales and consumption in a morally permissible light.

Leveraging sixty semi-structured interviews with retail staff and owners across twenty-six cannabis retail establishments in Seattle and 107 hours of ethnographic field work in three of these stores, I examined how these actors framed their market activities, paying particular attention to how these narratives and practices shaped and were shaped by racialized meanings.

Across all store locations, staff and owners engaged in constructing moral legitimacy as they attempted to redefine broader moral evaluations of the legal cannabis market and its consumers. They accomplished this by implementing organizational practices and constructing narratives around market participation they felt brought the market moral legitimacy. These narratives worked to distance the market from previous perceptions of cannabis as a “criminal” or “shady” enterprise and users as being lazy, dumb “stoners” and drug addicts. In doing so, they created the moral cannabis consumer identity and business establishment in direct contrast to racialized and stigmatized narratives used during prohibition to legitimize the criminalization of market participants, specifically Black participants. This disadvantaged non-white store staff, business owners, and consumers while privileging the mostly white male owners and staff I encountered.

I argue these findings constitute a racialized theory of moral entrepreneurship. Howard Becker (1973) coined the term “moral entrepreneur” in his groundbreaking study of the social construction of deviance to describe how Henry J. Anslinger of the Bureau of Narcotics and associates launched a publicity campaign to generate moral panic over cannabis consumption to criminalize the product and its consumers. Moral entrepreneurs are individuals or groups that make concerted efforts to form “a new fragment of the moral constitution of society, its code of

right and wrong” (Becker 1973: 145). In this paper, I bridge this concept to work on morals and markets, racialized organizations, and racial capitalism to showcase how the construction of moral legitimacy plays an important role in stratifying markets, and like Becker, I turn to cannabis as a case.

Morals & Markets

Markets both shape and are shaped by moral values (Fourcade and Healy 2007). Morality is broadly defined as a shared understanding of right and wrong, worthy and unworthy, legitimate and illegitimate (Durkheim and Bellah 2009; Hitlin and Vaisey 2013b). Scholars studying morally contested markets find that market activities, prices, participants, and commodities are all shaped by moral narratives (Anteby 2010b; Cohen and Dromi 2018; Livne 2014b; Turco 2012; Zelizer 2017). Further, this work locates market practices as key sites where moral legitimacy can be constructed by market organizations as well.

Markets attempting to commodify a particularly sacred space of social life or stigmatized commodity often require moral legitimacy to achieve success. Moral legitimacy is a “positive normative evaluation of an organization and its activities” (Anteby 2010: 608). Despite gaining legal legitimacy, life insurance markets in the U.S. experienced success only after overcoming deeply held cultural beliefs that individuals should not profit from the death of a loved one (Zelizer 1979). Life insurance markets drew upon culturally embedded meanings surrounding their market’s activities to combat initial resistance and promote industry success (Chan 2009; Quinn 2008b; Zelizer 1979). The success of hospice in the U.S. was a result of the moralization of scarcity in both spending and treatment for end-of-life care (Livne 2014). Despite public support for organ donation, the bureaucratic process of organ harvesting and transfer is often met with revulsion (Healy 2006; Titmuss 1971). Thus, organizations involved in this trade focus their

efforts on producing the contexts that promote potential donors to engage in altruistic behavior via one-time gift giving (Healy 2004). Taken together, markets are capable of manipulating the meaning of market activities to generate moral legitimacy in contested contexts. Even more, individuals within contested markets draw from their institutional positionality and cultural understandings of broader social contexts to construct moral narratives that favor their market participation (Cohen and Dromi 2018; Quinn 2008).

To examine how moral legitimacy is constructed in the case of newly legalized cannabis retail outlets, I both examine the narrative constructed by the store owners and leadership as well as how products are exchanged within the store itself. This allowed me to understand the multiple levels through which moral legitimacy is constructed within these organizational spaces as both broader narratives framed by store leadership and market practices can work together to construct moral legitimacy within contested markets.

Moving Towards a Theory of Racialized Moral Entrepreneurship

As various groups within market spaces contend for the definition of what and who is morally legitimate, “the distribution of power and resources plays an important-- but non-determinative-- role in who gets heard and what gets taken for granted” (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013: 59). The struggle over being able to legitimate market practices and moral definitions is a struggle of who can exercise power in these spaces (Foucault 1980); being able to define moral value within a market in favor of one’s position can have consequences for racial inequality.

Scholars of the Black Radical Tradition highlight the power of “normative” frameworks applied in politics, judicial institutions, and epistemological traditions in sustaining racial capitalism and white supremacy (Mills 2022; Robinson 1983). In Mills’ (2022) *The Racial Contract*, he points to centrality of “morality” in upholding white supremacy. The moral

contract, a crucial component of the Racial Contract, affords those defined as “white” full personhood with an objective sense of morality while the remaining “subset of humans as ‘nonwhite’ and of a different and inferior moral status ...” (Mills 2022: 11). Throughout history, this distinction has justified racial violence and subjugation of minoritized populations “for the ‘benefit’ of the nonwhite natives, who are deemed childlike, incapable of self-rule and handling their own affairs, and thus appropriately wards of the state” (Mills 2022: 13). While Mills describes this process in the context of slavery, colonialism, and conquest, modern examples reveal the continued use of moral narratives to support white supremacy.

The racist trope of the “Welfare Queen” is a powerful controlling image used to caste poor Black mothers as immoral and incapable of making good decisions about their lives or that of their children (Collins 1991). This justifies increased state surveillance of poor Black families, force many Black women into low-wage, precarious work through welfare retrenchment and workfare, and criminalize Black women as likely perpetrators of welfare-fraud (Collins 1991; Kohler-Hausmann 2015; Roberts 2014). For formerly incarcerated Black women, Gurusami (2017) finds that labor market participation is an important way to demonstrate to the courts a commitment to moral rehabilitation. However, morally legitimate employment is defined by state actors—stripping and gig work although paid more, was morally illegitimate while low-wage precarious work such as night shifts at a warehouse was deemed permissible. In a similar vein, Hoang (2015) and Parreñas (2011) find that sex workers in their field sites (i.e., Vietnam and the Philippines respectively) grounded their work activities in moral narratives of consent. However, Western normative assumptions about sex work, womanhood, and consent defined them as victims of human trafficking and exerted international pressure to criminalize them and their work (Hoang 2015; Parreñas 2011).

Bringing this work to bear on the morals and markets literature, I argue that the construction of moral legitimacy in markets both shapes and is shaped by racialized narratives. In other words, what new moral narratives are being constructed and who can claim authority to construct these narratives is a racial project and that this process necessitates an understanding of historical context. However, work on morals and markets can also speak to how constructing moral legitimacy in new or contested spaces can be opportunities for imagining potential futures that could perhaps challenge racial paradigms.

Therefore, I revisit Becker's theory of moral entrepreneurship to bridge these two literatures together. Moral entrepreneurs are individuals or groups that make concerted efforts to form "a new fragment of the moral constitution of society, its code of right and wrong" (Becker 1973: 145). I bridge this concept to work on morals and markets, race and racism, and racial capitalism to showcase how the construction of moral legitimacy plays an important role in reifying (or disrupting) the racial order.

Emerging Legal Cannabis Markets as a Case

It has been nearly five decades since Howard Becker (1973) first introduced the concept moral entrepreneurs by describing how government officials came to define cannabis as a threat to the moral fabric of the U.S. despite a lack of support from the medical community. Henry J. Anslinger, the first head of the Bureau of Narcotics in 1927, used questionable statistics and over-the-top anecdotes to promote propaganda claiming cannabis use resulted in the inhibition of moral values, leading to sexual deviance, murderous tendencies, and violent outbursts (Anslinger and Cooper 1937; Becker 1973; Galliher and Walker 1977). These reports commonly implicated children as vulnerable targets of an uncontrolled market and played on xenophobic fears of

Mexican migrants (Musto 1972). This led to the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 that classified cannabis use, and in affect, cannabis users, as immoral and unfit for the open market.

Since then, various groups have espoused the role of moral entrepreneur to fight over the morality of cannabis and its place in market society. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, cannabis consumption was associated with the counterculture movement and minoritized racial and ethnic communities in an attempt to vilify communities of color and respond to radical youth (Alexander 2012; Hudak 2016). In 1970, President Nixon helped to pass the Controlled Substance Act (CSA), classifying cannabis as a Schedule I narcotic, defining it as a dangerous and highly addictive drug with no accepted medical use. A year later, Nixon declared a War on Drugs and targeted Black and Latinx immigrant communities (Alexander 2012). By 1972, most Americans believed using cannabis was linked to “idleness, lack of motivation, hedonism, and sexual promiscuity” and that cannabis “conflicts with basic moral precepts as well as with the operating functions of our society” (Musto and Korsmeyer 2002: 113).

Then in 2012, advocates campaigning for legalizing recreational cannabis in Washington and Colorado argued that legalization was not about one’s personal attitudes toward cannabis but was a matter of reforming ineffective laws governing cannabis markets. The existing medicinal market’s legal structure was too ambiguous and limited in scope. This ambiguity and lack of constraint on who could participate in the market enabled immoral illicit actors to thrive. By legalizing recreational cannabis, the state could construct a market that would rival the illicit and eliminate its need to exist. One piece that was missing in this narrative, however, was a definition of morally legitimate recreational market activities and consumption. This is important because even while state governments continue to grant legal legitimacy to recreational markets, for markets to thrive, they need to moral legitimacy (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Zelizer 1979).

Even more, at the time I was in the field (i.e., 2016-2018), local municipalities and federal officials continued to contest the moral and legal legitimacy of the market.

In January of 2018, then-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded two Obama-era memorandums that directed federal prosecutors to allow state-legalized cannabis markets to exist. Sessions, a known opponent of cannabis, wrote in this in January memorandum:

Congress has generally prohibited the cultivation, distribution, and possession of marijuana. ...These statutes reflect Congress's determination that marijuana is a dangerous drug, and that marijuana activity is a serious crime. ...Given the Department's well-established general principles, previous nationwide guidance specific to marijuana enforcement is necessary... (Sessions 2018)

Even within states where recreational cannabis has been legalized, local governments and communities fight over whether to allow cannabis businesses to operate in their counties. In 2018, voters elected officials in Calaveras County, California that promised to reverse the prior board's decision to allow cannabis businesses in their county (Elias 2018). Following through on these promises early into their tenure, they terminated all cannabis licenses within the county, which totaled \$7 million in licensing fees (Elias 2018). Moreover, some members of the medicinal cannabis community continue to mobilize against legalization efforts for recreational markets (Hecht 2014). Taken together, the recreational cannabis market's moral legitimacy remains contested on multiple fronts despite gaining legal legitimacy.

Seattle's Cannabis Retail Market

In 2012, Washington State voters legalized recreational cannabis and two years later, the first licensed cannabis shop opened in Seattle. I focus on retail stores for several reasons. First, Victor Ray (2019) theorizes that organizations are important meso-level sites that can operate to reify or challenge racial hierarchies and structural inequality. Second, researchers find market organizations are key locations where moral boundaries around market activities are constructed

(Turco 2012). Third, Washington's recreational market does not allow for vertical integration and the medicinal market was forced to be subsumed by the recreational one in June of 2016. Without vertical integration, companies making cannabis consumables must sell their products to retailers rather than selling directly to consumers. Retail stores thus have the power to define what products are permissible for market exchange and how this exchange occurs.

Data & Methodology

To answer my research questions, I draw on sixty semi-structured interviews with staff and store owners across twenty-six retail stores and 107 hours of ethnographic research in three Seattle cannabis shops. Qualitative methodologies were chosen over other methods as they produce thick descriptions that can best capture the narratives constructed by workers and owners (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Moreover, direct observations of work being performed helped to reconcile potential discrepancies between what respondents said and what they did, a known problem in both qualitative and quantitative research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

For my field sites, I selected Jane's Corner because the store had a diverse clientele and a mix of men and women on staff. All store names and names of respondents have been changed to protect their confidentiality. Jane's clientele was a mix of blue- and white-collar workers, tourists, older folks, college students, and homeless individuals from a nearby encampment and were racially and ethnically diverse. Except for the security guard who was a Black man, all staff were native-born white individuals and at the time of my entry, was made up of four women and five men. Following a multi-site ethnographic approach (Buroway 1998; Small 2009), I extended my field work to two additional store sites to see if the same themes emerged at these other locations.

These additional stores are part of a cannabis retail chain I call Eddie's Pot Shops and include Eddie's Weed Emporium and Eddie's on 5th Avenue (Eo5). Eddie's Pot Shops have a hierarchical organizational structure with well-defined roles for all staff as well as highly routinized processes for most tasks such as receiving shipments, clocking in and out, and how to store surplus products. In comparison, Jane's Corner was very loosely structured with ill-defined roles for staff and almost no standardization. For example, Mick was initially a floor manager at Jane's Corner until he created the position of "Inventory Specialist" by printing off a name tag with that title one day started handling shipments and influence purchasing decisions despite being paid the same amount. At Eddie's, there was a formal inventory team whose only job was to deal with processing product and updating menus and internal databases. The strict structure and hierarchy at Eddie's Pot Shops allowed me to test if the way employees engage with the moralization project was a function of Jane's loose organizational structure where workers had incredible freedom to define their roles or if the themes observed were present across sites (see Chapter 1. Introduction Methodology Tables 1 for information about my field sites).

How workers engage with their work is central to constructing moral legitimacy in a contested market (Anteby 2010; Turco 2012). Understanding how staff create occupational norms and language in this emerging industry is important to understanding how they construct moral legitimacy. Occupational norms are the standards of practice by which individuals of a particular occupation orient towards (Habenstein 1962). Although occupational norms can mimic professionalization techniques such as employing particular language and techniques for executing job tasks, the occupations attributed to these norms do not align with the definition of professional—restriction of entry; standard measures of competency; and participation in professional organizations (Abbott 1988; Habenstein 1962). Cannabis shop staff similarly do not

constitute a profession. Thus, occupational norms best define the market practices that can help answer my research questions.

To investigate the development of occupational norms by store staff, I examined the way they talked about cannabis with various customers and amongst themselves in addition to the types of tasks they engaged in. Additionally, I noted down differences in the types of tasks and informal roles white and non-white workers played in the store. Upon leaving the field, I would spend time filling in the gaps in my written notes, audio record additional notes and reflections, and type up memos bringing these thoughts and notes together (Emerson et al. 2011).

Throughout the course of my observations, I had informal conversations and interactions with a total of thirty-three staff members. Moreover, I conducted one-on-one in-depth semi-structured interviews with fifteen staff and the store owners of Jane's Corner and Eddie's Pot Shops. From here, I expanded the study and conducted formal interviews with additional retail staff and shop owners from across twenty-six stores in Seattle between 2017-2018 (see Tables 1-5 in Chapter 1. Introduction for demographic data of interview respondents). I asked staff about their store and its customers, how they match customers with products, and their general perception of Seattle's industry and legalization.

After transcribing the interviews, I went through an iterative coding process where I open-coded transcripts using NVivo qualitative software analysis until I reached saturation with codes (Richards 2014). My final set of codes included items such as "gender," "race," "meaning of work," "measuring quality," "education," "job duties," "shady," "stigma," and "types of users." From here, I went back to my field notes and combed through the data for instances that both confirmed and contested my findings to contextualize my interview data. Finally, I created

memos bringing together my coded interview transcripts, field notes, and field work memos that outlined major themes and present the analyses of these thematic memos below.

By focusing on the process of constructing moral legitimacy rather than if the selected stores represent typical or atypical cannabis shops. In fact, as the industry is still new and laws vary between states regarding market structure, representativeness may be unobtainable at this point in the industry's development. Instead, I located common meaning-making processes across sites and as themes emerged, I used these themes to construct a theory of racialized moral entrepreneurship (Luker 2008; Small 2009).

Findings

Retail Space as Transforming Moral Narratives of Cannabis Markets

All staff and store owners across retail shops believed they were playing an important role in promoting the moral legitimacy of the newly legalized recreational market by distancing it from stigmatized perceptions. Nick, a budtender at Jane's Corner, best exemplifies this sentiment:

The recreational markets need legitimacy. And the image that a lot of companies have ...are becoming models for this, about what does a legal pot shop look like? What does cannabis look like when it's removed from the shady element it's always been associated with?

Nick, White Man, Budtender, Jane's Corner

Store owners and staff had similar responses and framed their store, and broader market success as advocacy for cannabis legalization in and outside of Washington State. The mostly white wealthy store owners I spoke with often talked about feeling a moral obligation to get involved in cannabis despite most having little to no experience with cannabis with some even admitting to being inexperienced consumers. Vincent, the owner of Elemental, explained to me his motivation to apply for a retail license when Washington first voted to legalize cannabis.

...I feel an obligation. If this thing passes, I think I need to consider applying for a retail license because I think I'd be good at it. And I'd be horribly embarrassed if Washington State legalized and then the whole system failed because everybody who got involved was flaky and a stoner, or they were all people that didn't have anything to lose.

Vincent, White Man, Shop Owner, Elemental

Mark, the owner of Dr. Teeth's Pot Shop, felt similarly even though he had only consumed cannabis a handful of times before opening his retail shop.

There's clearly social justice implications to legalizing cannabis. People of color are disproportionately convicted even though use rates are, for petty drug crimes across races, is about constant. So historically, cannabis has been a kind of like catch all tactic where if law enforcement wants to bust you for something, they'll bust you for holding a gram of weed. ...but at the same time, the legalization was, *is* in some places, controversial. So, it's important to have people that are upstanding, law-abiding professionals [that] will run safe establishments kind of be the model for this so that it ultimately succeeds.

Mark, White Man, Co-Owner, Dr. Teeth's Pot Shop

Both Mark and Steve had never sold cannabis before nor consumed regularly, however, they felt a moral obligation as "law abiding professionals" to run this industry. Drawing distinctions between themselves and the stigmatized drug dealer, "stoner," or "people that didn't have anything to lose," they framed their business success as a moral endeavor and social justice work.

Other business owners echoed their statements, with Eddie, the owner of Eddie's Pot Shops, discussing how he not only was bringing legitimacy to the cannabis market, but that his pot shops were responsible for cleaning up the Black neighborhoods his stores operated in and clearing out dangerous "drug dealers." To these almost exclusively white wealthy male owners, racial biased lived in the criminal legal system with the market being a cleansing force so long as it ended up in the right hands.

Not only does this narrative cast a distinction between the moral cannabis shop owner and racialized and stigmatized "dangerous drug dealer" and "stoner," but it allowed them to feel

good about prioritize the maximization of their profits over promoting racial equity in the industry. For example, all four shop owners above told me during our one-on-one interview that they tried working with Black farmers or producers, however, these individuals were characterized as inconsistent, shady, untrustworthy, or not business-savvy in the way they needed. Furthermore, their products were too expensive, and they needed to keep their profit margins up because, as stated, the success of their business was a moral imperative that provided proof to other states that legalization would lead to a legitimate, safe market. This disadvantaged poor, minority-owned businesses as it made it difficult to get stores to sell their products.

Moral Entrepreneurship Within the Retail Space

Selling Cannabis as a Moral Practice

In the retail space, what products were sold and how they were sold was largely determined by budtenders. Eddie of Eddie's Pot Shops told me about his early futile efforts to determine what staff sold. Even when he offered sales incentives, he said "I had absolutely no ability to control what we sell at all. The budtenders sell products they like and stand by it." While Eddie is slightly overstating budtenders control as owner's can and did limit the variety of products that came through the store such as those by non-white farmers or producers as mentioned above, my observations and interviews did confirm that budtenders held immense power over what ultimately got sold in the store. I watched several products sit on shelves for the entirety of my field work at Jane's Corner because staff thought it would not provide consumers with positive experiences and recommending such a product felt disingenuous.

Furthermore, despite the fact companies can be fined a hefty amount if they are caught providing medical advice to customers at a recreational store, staff felt morally obligated to do so. In an almost scripted response to customers' medical questions, all employees started these

conversations as some variation of: “I’m not allowed to give medical advice, but...” or “I am not a doctor, but...”. Respondents claimed this was not an organizational directive, but a moral obligation. Although they acknowledged that legally they were not allowed to provide such medical advice when talking to customers, they almost always followed up with language or various techniques to subvert the law to provide medical recommendations. Like what other researchers find, it was the staff defined as appropriate for the market in their interactions with customers and they took this role very seriously (Turco 2012).

Constructing Symbolic Power through Language: The Cannabis Connoisseur

Almost all staff felt educating the customer played a central role in their job duties and in building moral legitimacy. This was done through teaching customers—both new and long-time users—new language for talking about cannabis, new ways to measure product quality, and reframing consumption goals as experiences versus intoxication. As Rochelle, a Black woman and floor manager at Odyssey, explained, “...it’s not just about getting high...[Education] is important because people are just like, ‘I want to get high.’ They don’t realize ... there are actually particular strains that are beneficial, just like aroma therapy... you know the same kind of factors tie into cannabis.” Rochelle along with most staff at retail stores explained that their central role was to help all cannabis consumers, novice and regular users, learn a different way to think about their consumption. Specifically, cannabis consumption was conceptualized across stores as a set of complex chemical reactions that elicit “feelings” and “experiences” that can be paired with any lifestyle to enhance one’s daily functioning and/or activities. It was in this space the “cannabis connoisseur” arose.

It only takes a few minutes of sitting in a pot shop to see how workers attempt to redirect consumer preferences away from an interest in simple intoxication and instead, direct them

toward viewing cannabis as having complex flavors that elicit specific effects. During one of my observations at Jane's Corner, a customer walked over to the extracts case and bent over to get a closer look at the different products on display. Tyler, a White male budtender at the shop, immediately walked over and without asking the customer any questions, starts describing what hash is with a level of detail and depth that does not seem necessary nor requested.

Tyler: ...you get high from this [hash] and the terpenes... with hash, more of the plant actually carries over into the product. You can't dab it because it has too much plant matter in it. I call this a complex high. He goes on to talk about the plant's trichomes and how terpenes are made as the customer looks at the different products with a furrowed brow and confused look on his face.

These interactions were incredibly common across all three sites and characterize the way staff redefine the purpose of cannabis consumption. It is not about getting high, it's about having complex experiences (i.e., highs that go beyond simply getting intoxicated) and being able to fully explore the complexity of cannabis meant knowing the science behind consumption.

Much like veteran users taught novices how to become a cannabis consumer by showing them how to properly consume and enjoy it in Becker's *Becoming a Marijuana User* (1953), staff in these new spaces were teaching customers how to become "cannabis connoisseurs." In line with Becker's findings, these educational experiences were identified as a mechanism used to construct new moral meanings of cannabis consumption and distance users from stigmatizing stereotypes. The cannabis connoisseur was a symbol of a sophisticated pallet yearning for different experiences. Nathan, Eo5's store manager, told me during our interview that connoisseurs are those who "really go for quality."

Someone who's willing to smoke cannabis for flavor instead of its THC percentage or if it's for a particular effect that no other strain can offer. ...As connoisseurs, they appreciate cannabis for the flavor because terpenes in cannabis is where the flavors are and that goes in hand with the THC.

Nathan, Asian Man, General Manager, Eddie's on 5th Avenue

Connoisseur is a term typically employed to signify high status consumers with mastery of judgements in taste and quality (Bourdieu 1984). The connoisseur used a product's terpene⁹ profile and cannabinoids¹⁰ to measure quality and make distinctions among various strains. This bolstered the status of cannabis from a simple intoxicant and street drug to a complex commodity. In constructing the connoisseur, workers were creating class distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate consumers. Moreover, while elevating the cultural status of cannabis, they came to not only embody the cannabis connoisseur, but became its arbiters, determining what was and was not legitimate expertise. This new, elevated cultural meaning of cannabis worked to elevate their own occupational identities. Staff transformed from service workers to elite tastemakers, cannabis experts, and health professionals in an emerging field through their reliance on scientific language describing cannabis consumption.

It was common to hear staff associate cannabis with high status cultural symbols such as wine, wealth, and professionalism, which all hold high cultural and economic value (Bourdieu 1984). Helping a group of young male customers, Stan, a budtender at Eddie's Weed Emporium, was asked what his favorite strain of cannabis was.

I love this strain by Swiss Alps! I like to pair this with food, like a chef pairs their food with wine. They do this with all their products on their website, I love that. They also have recipes on their website. It's great.

Stan, White Man, Budtender, Eddie's Weed Emporium

In this interaction, Stan drew an explicit connection between wine and cannabis. Tucker, a Black male budtender at the same shop similarly told me with excitement how he has been developing

⁹ Terpenes were described as chemical products of the plant found in many other plants and were said to hold the flavor and scents of cannabis that define the type of effects of various cannabis products.

¹⁰ Cannabinoids are a group of C₂₁ terpenophenolic compounds found to be in (until recently) uniquely in cannabis sativa (ElSohly 2007) and was also said to shape the way consumers are affected by particular cannabis products.

a list of foods that pair nicely with particular strains. Cannabis, with its subtle scents and flavor profiles as distinguished by the terpenes¹¹ made for a good comparison with wine, a mark of distinction (Bourdieu 1984).

It was common to hear staff complain about other stores not engaging correctly with efforts to “educate” consumers on the proper language and more complex measures of quality. These other store staff were characterized as ill-equipped, illegitimate, and in some cases, harmful to the industry itself. Matt, a budtender and key holder at Jane’s Corner, told me during an interview how frustrated he was after a budtender at another store couldn’t answer his questions.

...You go in and ask questions that someone, a connoisseur would ask, something about terpenes and different flavor profiles. There are some people that are really knowledgeable and there are others that are just kind of like, “eh, well, I’m just going to give you a suggestion because I don’t really know what I’m talking about.” I would hope that it would be standard across the board, being super knowledgeable, knowing the connoisseur details I should say.

Matt, White Man, Budtender / Key Holder, Jane’s Corner

For Matt and many others, the cannabis connoisseur identity is bound up with the occupational identity as a cannabis industry worker. Being able to understand and employ the “connoisseur details” developed as a desired occupational norm among most staff. Across most stores, staff had surprisingly similar comments about their experiences with and perceptions of retail workers at other cannabis shops. Staff would often tell me how their store was unique because of the level of expertise they bring to the industry or how disappointed they were by other stores’ lack of quality budtenders, including making direct comments about the other field sites in my study. This boundary work that positioned them and their store above others and the common consumer represents the cultivation of symbolic power in this new space (Bourdieu 1991). Symbolic power

¹¹ Terpenes were described as chemical products of the plant found in many other plants and were said to hold the flavor and scents of cannabis that define the type of effects of various cannabis products.

includes language or symbols within specific spaces that signal belonging and placement in a social hierarchy within these spaces (Bourdieu 1991). Ocejo (2017) found similar application of language as symbolic power in elevating traditionally blue collar jobs into occupations of elite taste making in New York.

While the construction of the cannabis connoisseur was a way workers distanced recreational cannabis from negative consumer stereotypes of the “lazy stoner” and the shady “drug dealer,” not all staff could make moral claims and assert their expertise. Moreover, not all consumers were provided with the same care and education to “elevate” their consumption. In other words, the construction of the connoisseur enabled some workers to create class distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate consumers that relied on racialized and stigmatized tropes of cannabis market participants that made it difficult for poor, non-White users, and staff to access the symbolic power that was privileged in this space. Women and Black individuals had greater difficulty accessing authority when attempting to educate customers, getting push back that sometimes escalated into verbal harassment.

“It’s for People that Can Afford It.”

The cannabis connoisseur was constructed in direct contrast to the drug user and addict and often associated with folks who were perceived as poor or homeless. Mick from Jane’s Corner best describes this sentiment:

Some people that are consuming are still chasing that [high], but the people that can afford to regularly smoke are not using cannabis anymore as an intoxicant. That’s a very important point there, it’s for people that can afford it. If you’re to use it as a way to regulate your mood, body, etc. it’s expensive. It’s not something that everybody can just go out and do. ... [Customers that] are living on the street want the strongest shit they can get because it’s their intoxicant.

Mick, White Man, Assistant Manager / Inventory Specialist, Jane’s Corner

In his description of the different types of users, Mick differentiated between those using for intoxication and those that were not. Wealthy regularly consumers used it to enhance their lives while those living on the street were interested in intoxication. The conflation between recreational and medicinal consumption was present in the high-status consumers, while low status folks were framed as addicts. During my observations, it was much more common to see staff engage in extensive “educational” conversations with folks appearing to be middle-class who were often white.

Further, most staff I spoke with would often distinguish their store from low-brow chains, most commonly Walmart, and instead align their store to more high-status stores like Whole Foods. Tim, the store manager at High Top, best captures this common sentiment.

We're not out there to be anything huge or Walmart. We're here to be more like, I don't know, Whole Foods, I suppose. We're just like, "Yeah, we're just trying to provide stuff we really like and offer some really good customer service."

Tim, White Man, Store Manager, High Top

This distinction between more cultured Whole Foods shopper and the low-brow Walmart shopper added to the moral legitimacy that cannabis was a cultured and prized commodity, but only for the group of folks who could afford to consume in perceived legitimate ways.

Beyond class distinctions, researchers find Whole Foods has been characterized as a symbol of gentrification and whiteness (Sublette and Martin 2013). As these class distinctions were constructed to distance cannabis from stigmatized perceptions of immoral drug users or low-brow consumer, I found evidence that these categories were also used to link Black market perceived as “that gangster type” into these devalued categories while privileging white consumers and staff. In other words, this racial schema became tied to the perception of belonging in these cultured spaces that privileged white staff.

“That Gangster Type”

The moralized cannabis worker and connoisseur disadvantaged Black individuals as both consumers and staff. In my observations, staff seemed to try to avoid helping customers that wore baggy jeans and oversized t-shirts who were often Black. There were several instances at Jane’s Corner when staff would make fun of Black customers and even the only Black employee once they left the store, either making fun of their vernacular, clothing, or knowledge of cannabis. One day at the shop early on in my field work at Jane’s Corner, Mick told me of an interaction with a Black customer wearing a “big chain.” He told me how this Black man came in “acting like the shit” threw down a hundred-dollar bill and asked for “the best shit you got.” Mick proudly told me how he laughed in the man’s face because according to Mick, this guy obviously “had no idea what he was talking about, he probably just wanted something he heard in a rap song.”

Across the stores observed, helping customers who had perceived low-brow or basic tastes was to be avoided and often male staff got away with avoiding these tasks as women typically took on most of the undesirable work. To avoid these interactions, staff would avoid eye contact, escape to the back of the store, or pretend to be busy when I had just seen them doing nothing. This association between low-brow tastes and racialized stereotypes of cannabis consumers who use slang instead of the language of the connoisseur also disadvantaged Black staff who are read in a particular way as they try to assert their expertise in interactions with customers or be seen as belonging in these spaces.

During an interview, I asked John, a store manager at OneLove, if he thought his experience in the cannabis industry would be different if he was not white and his answered centered around what he thought of the Black manager at their other store location.

...the store manager over at [our other store], he's Black. He's had no issues with it whatsoever. But I'm not exactly sure. I think it's more so how people represent themselves in the industry. If you are trying to be in the industry as you know that gangster type, like, "Oh yeah, I sell a bunch of pot and this and that." I don't care what race you are, that's not gonna over pretty well for you.

John, White Man, General Manager, OneLove

Most folks I spoke with often told me elatedly how excited and in awe they were that they get to legally sell and profit off the cannabis industry. However, for John as well as many other store staff I spoke with believed there was a wrong way to participate in the industry as a seller or consumer that was drawn in direct contrast to racialized images of the “gangster,” “ghetto,” “drug dealer” or “shady” character. John’s distinction between the Black store manager that “had no issues” with the “gangster type” mirrors the respectability politics that push individuals with minoritized identities, particularly Black individuals, to adopt White middle-class ways of being as the correct way to command respect and authority (Lee and Takako Hicken 2016). Here, it is being employed by moral entrepreneurs distancing the cannabis market from these stigmatized images used to justify violence against Black communities during the War on Drugs.

When I asked Evan how he got promoted to store manager at Dr. Teeth’s Pot Shop, he explained he filled the role after the previous manager quit over an incident that happened in the store. Darrell, an employee at Dr. Teeth’s, was accosted by a customer and called racial slurs. When the incident had ended, Darrell, along with other staff including the store manager at the time, felt the owner did not support him in the way he and the other Black employees needed. Evan, a white man in his mid-30s explained:

No one was against Darrell. Very few people I think disliked Darrell. The real issue was whether or not this was a race issue or whether it was just an issue of an upset customer who happened to use racial slurs.

Evan, White Man, General Manager, Dr. Teeth’s Pot Shop

Like how the owners attributed racial inequality and injustice as external to the market, Evan believed that it was not possible to tell whether the issues Darrell faced at the shop was rooted in racism or an “upset customer” characterizes how both mostly white male staff and owners externalize race and racial meaning. However, evidence from my observations as well as my conversations with staff across different stores showed how racialized language used to legitimize the criminalization of cannabis users was weaponized by some white staff as they drew distinctions between their high-brow tastes and indicates how racial meanings were being imported into this new market.

Discussion

Recently, scholars have called on economic sociologists to grapple with issues of race and take a more intersectional approach in their work, incorporating important theoretical and empirical contributions of scholars marginalized in the subfield (Bandelj 2020; Hirschman and Garbes 2019; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020; Reyes 2022). By bridging critical work already in existence that focus on the intersection of racialization and markets, we can better grapple with the causes and consequence of inequality and explain how it persists overtime even as institutions change. For example, Bandelj (2020) argues that work on morals and markets and relational sociology needs to more seriously consider how status characteristics like race shape these processes. In this study, I work towards addressing this gap by pulling from this scholarship as well as the broader field of racial capitalism and racialized organizations to enhance our understanding of how moral legitimacy shapes market inequality. Moreover, using the theoretical tools of morals and markets, I contribute to the work on racial capitalism and racialized organizations through an empirical study of moral boundary shifting to highlight how

moral entrepreneurship can use white supremacist historical narratives to bring moral legitimacy to contested markets.

While I do believe this work points to the important role moral entrepreneurship plays in maintaining racial hierarchies, it does not necessarily mean this process always works to maintain inequality. There is evidence that Seattle may be a unique case as more states legalizing cannabis center racial equity during market creation that may promote organizational spaces that promote equity and inclusivity rather than degradation and devaluation.

Importantly, not all Black budtenders I encountered experienced a significant backlash or verbal abuse as described above. In fact, many also reported that when Black customers would come into the store, they preferred to be helped by Black budtenders on staff. Furthermore, outside of my field sites, there are currently spaces, in Seattle and beyond, being cultivated by and for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous peoples of all genders that are purposefully engaging with the harmful racialized narratives to bring new moral practices to cannabis markets centering around healing systemic and intergenerational trauma. However, during the time I was in the field in Seattle, there was no equity program and little work being done within the shops I visited to bring more equitable narratives into being. While some people of color have found success in cannabis, in the stores I visited, white men had the easiest time accessing authority and laying claims to expertise.

An obvious extension of this work would be to explore how different organizational structures, demographic distribution of staff and owners, and policy contexts potentially shapes how racialized moral entrepreneurship could operate to challenge the racial paradigm. The benefit of a theory of racialized moral entrepreneurship is that it is not a determinative theory where inequality and violence is always the result of new moral narratives. It leaves the door

open for new actors to work towards constructing moral narratives that void the present Racial Contract and bring about new, more inclusive moral codes.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Using Seattle's legal recreational cannabis retail industry as a case of an emerging and contested market, I show how employees within these market organizations played a key role in market formation through their moralizing labor. For workers and owners in this industry, constructing moral narratives around consumption and moral identities among market actors and business establishments was incredibly important to their work.

In the first empirical chapter, I show how this moral construction, formulated at the employee-level through interactions with consumers, blurred the boundaries between recreational and medicinal cannabis consumption. This work challenges the assumption that market niches and categories emerge from organizational action motivated by resource competition (Hsu et al. 2018; White 2005). Rather, staff blurred these boundaries because they felt it was their moral imperative and a way to construct moral legitimacy in this market space.

In the second and third empirical chapter (Chapters 3 and 4 respectively), I show how the moral project of the market is gendered and racialized. In Chapter 3, I found that engaging in the moralization project enabled staff to elevate their own occupational status to elite tastemaker, like the barbers, butchers, and mixologists in Ocejo's work (2014, 2017). This gave workers an immense sense of value and dignity through their work that they had not experienced in other occupations. However, gender played an important role shaping who could make moral claims in this market. While men were viewed as experts and more often reported immense positive emotional returns from their moralizing labor, women were met with suspicion, sexually harassed, and had their expertise devalued. This led many women to feel pushed out by the industry, lacking similar emotive experience that men often had. This chapter shows that the

ability to make moral claims in a contested market can be shaped by status characteristics in ways that impact those working in these spaces.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I show how the moral narratives constructed by staff were drawn from racial schemas in ways that privileged White individuals and disadvantaged Black and Latinx staff, business owners, and consumers. Specifically, moral narratives in these cannabis retail spaces were constructed in direct contrast to the stigmatizing and racialized narrative used to justify the criminalization of cannabis and its consumers during prohibition. In this chapter, I advance a theory of racialized moral entrepreneurship to highlight the important way moralization is racialized.

Together, I add to the literature on market formation and moral legitimacy by empirically interrogating the role employees play in the moral and social construction of markets and the consequences this has for inequality. Across my three empirical chapters, I show how the market moralization process was carried out at the level of the employee through interactions with consumers and other market actors in these organizational spaces in ways that defined the market, structured gender and racial inequality, and made these inequalities and market structures appear morally legitimate. This is important because prior work often treats these organizational spaces abstractly and my work highlights the need for more empirical explorations of the construction of moral narratives in the spaces where these activities are being played out.

Policy Implications

Additionally, my work has important policy implications. First, my work complicates the idea that recreational cannabis is solely used for recreational purposes as I empirically show consumption is framed in ways that blurred the lines between recreational and medicinal. For

public health agencies interested in monitoring consumption, this has consequences for how they measure recreational versus medicinal consumption. Many surveys used to measure trends in use often use measures developed by public health scholars rather than in conversation with folks who use within these market spaces. This may mean that how public health agencies and scholars are defining recreational versus medical consumption is different from how individuals participating in the survey make these distinctions (if at all). Thus, I argue that we need a more grounded approach to understanding and measuring consumption if we are to get accurate picture of consumption practices over time.

Second, the common experience of sexual harassment of the women workers in these spaces by customers indicates the importance to have workplace policies that protect workers from customer-side harassment. Additionally, this highlights the importance of changing the way we education and socialization men or make greater structural changes to make this type of behavior less common.

Finally, my work has implications for how we address racial inequality in economic markets. In this work, cannabis retail staff and owners recognize that the stigma of a criminal record is racialized in problematic ways and that this stigma is illegitimate. However, the removal of criminal stigma was not enough to promote equity in the market. Rather, there needs to be a direct, concerted effort to recognize how racial schemas inform moral legitimacy within market organizations and market structures. One way cannabis markets have been doing this is through the creation of cannabis business licensing and employment programs that privilege Black and Latinx individuals with criminal records and promoting their success in the industry. While these programs are new and success is still yet to be determined, it is an important step

towards creating purposeful opportunities for individuals that continue to be marginalized in this industry despite the acknowledgement that their marginalization is unjust.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Recruitment Materials

Flyer for Semi-Structured Interviews

University of Washington Multi-State Study of Cannabis Markets: Interview Participants Needed



\$30 IN COMPENSATION PROVIDED FOR YOUR TIME

**Budtenders, Managers, Shop Owners and other Industry Workers Needed
Looking for both industry newcomers & those with more experience**

This study seeks to understand the experiences of those working in the growing cannabis industry. Specifically, this study seeks to provide a descriptive analysis of how economic opportunities were widened or narrowed with legalization, the reasons and ways individuals use cannabis, and how industry workers came to work in the industry.

Eligibility Criteria:

Individuals 21 and older who work for a licensed cannabis retail store in any capacity.

Sample questions: "What types of cannabis products do you sell?" "How did you come to work at your store?" "What are the biggest misconceptions about the cannabis industry?"

*****Your responses are confidential*****

We will destroy any information that identifies you and any store names mentioned within a month of the interview. You can refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Your name will never be used in any report or publication. Interviews will last about 1 hour and can be conducted via phone or Zoom.

If interested in participating, please call or email* Michele Cadigan at **707-321-3034** or mlcadig@uw.edu, or scan the QR code to the right to schedule an interview



*I cannot guarantee confidentiality of email

Interview Recruitment Talking Points:

Talking Points

I am relatively new here and not sure I have a lot to say?

We are interested in hearing from individuals working in the industry from a variety of backgrounds. To accurately capture how people experience working in the industry, we want to hear from both the more seasoned staff to industry newcomers. We have found that many individuals are coming to work in cannabis from outside of the industry and really want to make sure we have their voices heard.

What do you want to know?

We are interested in understanding the different types of questions and concerns customers have regarding cannabis and how staff go about make recommendations to customers.

We are also interested in learning how folks came to work in the cannabis industry and how they learn about different products.

Lastly, we are interested in learning about the different challenges and success of Seattle's market from those on the ground doing the work and interacting with customers every day.

I'm very busy and don't really have time for this.

I understand and we try to be flexible with our schedules. Do you think you would have 30 - 45 minutes to talk over the phone at some point in the next two weeks?

Store Observation Recruitment Flyer (Content Only)

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

This study provides an in-depth exploration into the cannabis industry in a handful of cities across the U.S. I see this growing industry as a key segment of the labor market, providing both economic opportunities and positions of employment.

As part of this study, I am interviewing folks working in the industry and observing select stores to understand the daily experiences of employees across different recreational industries.

WHAT IS MY ROLE IN THIS PROCESS?

During the observation, I will never write down any names or identifiable characteristics of anyone in the store and all observations will never be linked to this specific store in any publications or documents. However, any employee can opt out of the observation, and I will not include him/her/them in any of my notes. Outside of that, I hope to have a limited impact on the store as I want to observe the daily routine. I may ask some questions of store employees to clarify industry-specific jargon, get information about the different products in the store, and understand the store policies and state regulations.

HOW WAS THIS STORE SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE?

Your store was identified as a licensed recreational cannabis business and has been selected based on this criterion. I hope to observe several licensed stores and have taken steps to ensure your store's confidentiality and your employees' and customers' anonymity. All results will be reported on an aggregate level that does not identify your store or individual customers or employees.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS INVOLVED WITH PARTICIPATION?

I anticipate minimal risks in participating with in this study. I have received approval from the University of Washington's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about our observational work or potential risks, please feel free to reach out to the IRB directly (206-543-0098) or you can reach out to me directly at (707) 321-3034 or mlcadig@uw.edu.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS?

Although these observations will help me understand the landscape of this booming industry, I do not anticipate any direct benefits to participating in the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions the study, please feel free to contact me, Michele Cadigan, at mlcadig@uw.edu or 707-321-3032.

Appendix B. Oral Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR CANNABIS MARKETS STUDY

Researchers:

Michele Cadigan, PhD Student Sociology, University of Washington (707) 321-3034

Dr. Alexes Harris, Professor of Sociology, University of Washington (206) 685-4763

RESEARCHERS' STATEMENT

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research that is not clear. When I have answered all of your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study provides an in-depth descriptive exploration of the recreational, medical, and underground sectors of Washington State's cannabis industry. We seek to outline a descriptive narrative of both buyers and sellers across all three markets. We also seek to understand the extent to which the current three-market cannabis industry in Washington State is stratified across racial and socioeconomic lines by analyzing I-502 and its role in widening or narrowing the range of opportunities available for individuals who are currently part of or are seeking entry into this booming industry.

STUDY PROCEDURES

I would like to interview you about your experiences in the cannabis industry. If you are working in the industry, I will ask you about the why and how you participate in the market that you are in, and what led you to join this market. I will also ask you about your customer base and what type of questions they may have about the cannabis you are selling. I will also ask you about the standards in the market you are in and if (and how) your profits have changed since the passing of I-502. If you are a customer in the industry, I will ask you about your buying habits and if they have changed since legalization. I will also ask you about your perceptions of the markets you are not involved in, and your perceptions of I-502.

The interview will be audio recorded. We will not ask you to share any identifiable information about yourself or others. The recording will be transcribed within 30 days of the interview after which the recording will be deleted. After the interviews are transcribed, I will delete from our research material all information that might identify you and anyone else. You have the option to stop participation at any point during the study and may refuse to answer questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Participation is voluntary.

I expect that the interview will take between one hour and no more than two hours.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

These questions may make you feel uncomfortable. The most personal and sensitive questions will be: “What was your annual income last year?” “How have your profits changed?” “How would you describe your current and past cannabis purchasing habits?” and “How did you get into the cannabis market?” You can refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. Although precautions are taken to provide confidentiality regarding your participation in the study, no system for protecting confidentiality is completely secure and information and the information provided by participants could be inadvertently accessed by someone outside the research team. The research team will protect all your responses for such a breach in the following ways:

All participants will be unnamed (given pseudonyms) in all notes, transcripts and written papers. In order to protect your privacy, if you happen to disclose any identifying information while being audio recorded, we will not transcribe that information into the transcripts. All audio recordings will be deleted after transcribed and will be accessible by the research team prior to transcription.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

I hope that this information will help me to better understand the different dimensions of the three cannabis markets. You might not experience individual benefit from participating in the study.

OTHER INFORMATION

The information you provide today might be used for future studies. All of the information collected will be treated confidentially. Your name or the name of the store you work at will never be used in any report produced. We will not link name and contact information (which was collected for purposes of scheduling the interview) to any kind of study data.

At the end of this interview, you will receive a \$30 Tango gift card that can be redeemed at a variety of different stores, or you can donate the money to several non-profit organizations as compensation for participating in the interview. You will receive a link to claim this gift card within 24 hours after the interview has ended.

SUBJECT'S STATEMENT

“This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research or feel I have been harmed by participating, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.”

Appendix C. Interview Protocol + Demographic Survey

Your Store and It's Customers

The first few questions I'm going to ask you is about your store and the types of customers you serve on a day-to-day basis.

1. What kinds of products do you sell?
2. Within your market what do you think are the most important "standards"?
 - a. When it comes to how employees do their work, what do you think are the most important standards or what should be an important standard?
 - b. How many employees do you have? What is the employee structure of the store? /Are there "shift leads" or managers on duty at all times? /Is the owner hands-on? Etc.
3. What kinds of concerns or questions do customers ask you regarding your cannabis?
(Testing, organic, type of soil, GMOs, potency)
 - a. What types of customers do you typically get?
[If they talk about someone in a demeaning way or a very specific gendered manner or something, prompt]
 1. Can you talk about your most recent experience with XX?
 - ii. Have you noticed a change in the types of customers or types of questions they ask?
4. Can you walk me through a typical customer transaction?
 - a. Do customers typically ask for your recommendation?
 - b. How do you go about recommending a product to a customer?
 - c. How do you measure quality cannabis products? How do customers measure quality?
 - d. How important is it that you/your employees try different products?
5. Why do you think people use cannabis? Is it for medical reasons, daily use, etc.?
 - a. [PROBE about medical users]
 - b. Can you tell the difference between someone who has been a long-time cannabis user and someone who is new to it? [Someone who has been using cannabis prior to legalization]. How?

Your personal experience and history in the Cannabis industry

This next set of questions focuses on your own personal experience working in the cannabis industry and opinions about cannabis legalization.

6. Have you ever grown or sold cannabis before you started [your business/working in at the store you work at now]?
[GROWING]
 - a. How did that start? Are you still growing?
 - i. [NO] Why did you stop?
 - ii. [YES] Why do you still grow?

[SELLING]

- b. How did you get involved in selling?
 - i. [PROBE here for experience selling in their market/differences now]

[USING]

- c. When was the first time you used cannabis? Set the scene for me – how old were you, what were you doing, how did it come about.
 - i. How has your use changed over time?
 - 1. [PROBE]: After that first use, through milestones if they mention them, when they started working in the industry, now.
7. Have you ever gotten in trouble with the police because of cannabis? Any other contact? If you're comfortable sharing, what happened?
8. Why did you choose to get involved in the cannabis industry?
 - a. What were you doing before? What is your role at the store now?
9. [OWNER] Can you walk me through your process for getting a license [for each of your stores]?
 - a. [PROBE: finding location, taxes, navigate legal, vender relations/stocking shelves, interact with other store owners/business associations/lobbying, startup costs, finding staff, insurance, security, LCB-rules/relationship]
10. [STAFF] How did you get your current job?
 - a. [PROBE] Is this typical? / Are there other ways employees have gotten jobs?
 - b. What is the hiring process at your store? What about promotion?
 - i. Who is in charge of making these decisions?
 - c. [NO POLICE] Do you think contact with the police would have prevented you from getting this job?
 - d. [POLICE CONTACT] Did your contact with the police effect the hiring process?
11. What qualities and work experience do you find most important in a potential job candidate?
12. Was there any formal or informal training for this position? /
 - a. [MANAGERS] Do you provide any formal training for your staff?
 - b. What does that training look like?
 - c. How do you learn about the different products in the store?
 - i. [If mention education/cannabis-specific knowledge] How do you learn /maintain your knowledge about cannabis?
13. What type of discounts do you get as/give to employees?
 - a. When was the last time you bought something at this store?
 - b. What did you end up getting?
 - c. Is that typical? How often?
 - d. What is your favorite thing to get – either your favorite strain or type of consumable and why?

14. What does your family think about your occupation?
 - a. What does your family do (job)?
 - i. [NEG] How do you mitigate that stigma?
 - ii. [POS] Why do you think they are so open to your work?
 - b. How does it feel when they react like that?
15. Do you think it's possible to abuse cannabis?
 - a. What would that look like?
 - b. Why not?

Industry

Thank you for taking this time to speak with me. I only have a few more questions to ask regarding your opinion on the industry in general and where do you think it's going.

16. What is the best thing about working in this industry? What about this store?
 - a. If you could change one or two things about the industry / this store, what would it be?
 - b. What are 2 or 3 things you see as challenging about working here?
17. How do you think your experience working in this industry would be different if you were [opposite sex]?
 - a. What about a [different race]?
18. What do you think is the role of your store in the [Seattle/Washington] cannabis industry? What about in the legalization movement?
19. What is the biggest misconception about cannabis and cannabis use?
20. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? Why?
 - a. Where do you see the industry headed?
21. Are there any questions you think I should have asked but did not?

Respondent Demographic Survey

DATE: _____ **RESPONDENT ID:** _____

1. What is your gender?

- Female (cis) / (trans)
- Male (cis) / (trans)
- Other (Specify): _____
- Declined to answer

2. What is birthdate, just the year and month? Year _____ Month _____

3. How long did you attend school?

- Less than high school
- Some high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Some college (includes AA degree or technical certificate)
- College graduate
- Graduate or professional school

4. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

- White
- Black/African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Indian, etc.)
- Hispanic/Latino (Mexican, Central American, Puerto Rican, Cuban)
- Native American
- Other _____
- Declined to answer

5. Were you born in the United States?

- No
- Yes
- Declined to answer

6. What is your current marital status?

- Married
- Living with a partner
- Separated/divorced
- Widowed
- Never married/no partner
- Declined to answer

7. Do you have any children under the age of 18?

- No
- Yes

7a. How many children do you have? _____

8. Are you currently a student?

No

Yes

9. Employment Status (Check all the apply)

Employed for wages (salary or hourly)

Self-employed

Declined to Respond

11. Do you work full time or part time?

Part time (Less than 35 hours per week)

Full time (35+ hours per week)

12. What is your official job title(s) / occupation(s): _____

13. What is your total (pre-tax) household income for the most recent year?

Less than \$10,000

\$10,000 to \$19,999

\$20,000 to \$29,999

\$30,000 to \$39,999

\$40,000 to \$49,999

\$50,000 to \$59,999

\$60,000 to \$69,999

\$70,000 to \$79,999

\$80,000 to \$89,999

\$90,000 to \$99,999

More than \$100,000

Declined to Respond