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Maturing out of or maturing with cannabis use

Producing adulthood through cannabis use

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Aim



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- How people talk about their drug use is affected by the identities they bring with them to the interview situation (Manderson et al., 2006)
 - gender, social class, race and age
- Age an under-theorised location of experience in social research in general
 - Studies exploring the social meaning of age in relation to drug use are sparse
 - Bogren (2006), Demant & Järvinen (2006) how adolescents construct maturity through alcohol experience
 - Herold (2015) how young women construct maturity and decency in their stories of drug use
- *How is adulthood constructed in younger adults' stories of cannabis use?*



Theoretical starting points

- Age is ‘framed by culturally shared norms and knowledge of what is considered appropriate characteristics (..) of the people of that specific age’ (Pietilä & Ojlana, 2011:381)
- Age is something we *do*
 - age is *accomplished*; similar to how West and Zimmerman (1987) describe gender as enacted and performed
 - often subconscious or unintentional
 - mediated through mechanisms like competence, dependence or maturity, and we are often unaware that these function as proxies for age (Laz, 2003: 506)
- We accomplish age throughout the life course (Pietilä and Ojala, 2011: 381). In this article, our theoretical interest is in younger adulthood.

Cont. Theoretical starting points



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- How is age and cannabis use negotiated, in terms of belonging to the age-based group *adult*?
 - How do age structure and produce cannabis use?
- Norwegian context: strict legal regulation of cannabis

Methods



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- 25 individual interviews with cannabis users in Norway 2008-2010
- Inclusion criteria:
 - Experienced, younger adult cannabis users (age 20-40)
 - frequent use for several years, periods of daily use
 - Had reduced or quit their use of cannabis, without receiving treatment for drug- or alcohol problems
- Semi-structured interviews, themes:
 - today's use of drugs compared to earlier use,
 - the meaning of cannabis smoking,
 - the relationship to friends and family in relation to drug use,
 - experiences with reducing their cannabis use

Cont. Methods



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- The interviewees:
 - 7 women and 18 men
 - 23-40 years (mean age 30,8)
 - Employed or students. Legal income, structured everyday life, permanent residence
 - Not in contact with social authorities due to drug use

Preliminary findings



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- Adult cannabis use is produced by active distancing to what it is not: adolescent use
 - Indirectly; referring to certain ways of relating to and using cannabis as immature
- Four themes
 - Negotiating playfulness and mature use
 - Using cannabis effortlessly
 - Intake methods
 - Marijuana instead of hash

1. Negotiating playfulness and mature use

Inga (female 30-34)

- ‘it communicates that I’m not settled, compared to my friends and the adult life we’ve been talking about. Unsettled.’
- No condemnation from her friends, but surprise; ‘Oh, I see, that’s a bit odd. – How old are you, like?’
 - Linked to adolescence, student life, not yet being a ‘proper adult’
- Age appropriate cannabis use in American series or films

Cont.

Negotiating playfulness and mature use



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Inga (30-34)

- *'I've seen in American movies that a fifty year old couple on a Saturday evening have shared a joint, instead of the glorious glass of red wine. And it looked completely normalized. Maybe there are circles where it's possible to continue smoking in adult life. But the way it is in Norway, it's so stigmatized, it's so hard to get hold of (..) for normal people'*
- *'Instead of the red wine, one would say "Ey! It's the end of the week, let's relax, watch a comedy and share a joint", kind of. You see? That's how I'd want it to be'*

Cont.

Negotiating playfulness and mature use



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- The ideal adult cannabis use: adjusts to daily obligations and routines
 - a conformable way of use, parallel to mainstream use of alcohol as a marker of leisure time and passage to play (Gusfield, 1987)

Rachel (26-29)

- *'it can be nice as a marker of the transition – just like a beer after work on Friday. (..) I work until a specific hour, and then I close the laptop, move over to the sofa and take a couple of puffs, kind of. That's a nice marker of the division between work and leisure'*



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2. Using cannabis effortlessly

(Robert 30-34)

'I've never been the kind who – talking about the high has never been very...to me. (..) kind of sitting 'round talking about highs; *“and then I smoked”* - or every time you tell a story you go *“and I'd been smoking.”* - That's never been my thing! **Rather the opposite; don't make too much fuzz about it**, kind of. (..) Once, there was this jerk who told me, as I was eating chocolate and drinking milk, that I shouldn't drink milk [when smoking] 'cos it removed the drug effect from the hash. That's just so... **That kind of people who go all in, that's just typical boys' club. Who sit there and are amazingly preoccupied with that kind of thing'**

Cont. Using cannabis effortlessly



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- Too much interest in and knowledge of cannabis types and intake methods are considered immature
 - Unlike connoisseurship in relation to wine
- Adult cannabis use
 - Does not strive for expertise in cannabis variants or user methods
 - Does not 'brag' or talk unnecessary about their use
 - Are discrete and relaxed about their use



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Cont. Using cannabis effortlessly

(Nicolai 30-34)

‘I just find it lame with people going ‘round with marijuana symbols on their t-shirts – i can’t think of anything worse, like!’

‘I find the typical clichés of cannabis culture – that’s just so far from who I am. With reggae, the Jamaican freak—the freaker smoker—that’s not me! **I’m more—I remember in New York, everybody smokes there. You can be at a party with business people, and everybody smokes.** It’s looked upon like a cig. Nobody smokes cigs. They smoke weed.’

3. Intake methods: The mature high



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- Lars (30-34)

'The thing about switching to joints from pipes; now I'm too old for that – it was a deliberate choice. Now I'm kinda too old to sit and suck on a pipe and get that kind of kick, like.

Yeah, it's stronger?

Yes, it is. You inhale a lot more at the same time. It gives a kind of "AH!!" Yeah.

Cont. Intake methods: The mature high



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'But the pipe seemed a natural choice: We didn't have a lot of money, so we had to get the most out of the little [hash] we had. (..). It probably also had to do with that limit – that you feel too old for smoking pipe – of course it also has to do with how it looks. At the same time as it is enough [to smoke joints]; that it is less important to get that kick. (..)

And maybe your economy is better than when you were 18 as well. It doesn't matter if you don't get to use that last grain – you can sprinkle some to the Gods as well.



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4. Marijuana instead of hash

'I got increasingly more aware of what's in the hash, that there's, many things that aren't good for the body. Whilst in marijuana, it's not... It's much cleaner and it grows in nature, after all (..)

I saw this documentary about old age pensioners in England, who used it for their arthritis (..). There was this lady who consequently – she threw away the hash. She had to have marijuana when she baked cookies for her friends and such'.

Conclusions – so far



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- Adulthood is produced by referring to certain ways of relating to and using cannabis as immature
- Adult cannabis use
 - adjusts to daily obligations and routines. It is a conformable way of use, parallel to mainstream use of alcohol as a marker of leisure time and passage to play (Gusfield, 1987)
 - Discrete and relaxed. More about relaxation than opposition.
 - Modest high, sought by the use of joints
 - Healthier; marijuana
- Other age-producing practices that we have missed?