

GENDER DYNAMICS AND SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION IN
HUMBOLDT'S MARIJUANA INDUSTRY

By

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ABSTRACT

Gender Dynamics and Social Relations of Production in Humboldt's Marijuana Industry

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This thesis examines gender dynamics and labor division in California's Humboldt County marijuana cultivation industry. The research and findings primarily focus on women's roles from an economic and domestic perspective and the dynamics of families working in this controversial sector. Because the marijuana industry is illegal federally, and only conditionally legal in California, a criminal stigma may be imposed upon industry participants. White heterosexual males may be less exposed to this stigma, have greater resources to deal with it than "others," and may not be as vulnerable to it as women and mothers for a variety of reasons. An additional challenge for women in this industry is coping with patriarchal attitudes that may survive, and even thrive, in such countercultural communities where the main source of income is through criminal enterprise. Intersectional feminism and theories of stigma management provide the analytical framework for this paper. This thesis fills a critical research gap regarding women's identities in the cultivation industry and how it relates to mainstream perspectives of women's economic autonomy. To complete my research, I surveyed women and men working in various capacities in the marijuana cultivation industry, conducted in-depth personal interviews, and engaged in participant-observation. The research findings provide first-hand insight into an underground, though progressively emerging, culture. The findings suggest that while gender dynamics in the marijuana industry are similar to those of other agricultural industries, the gender division of labor

in certain subsets is distinct. These distinctions specifically relate to “trim-work,” male dominance in many arenas of the industry, and the increasing ability for women to manage their own cultivation operations.

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INTRODUCTION

Dominant Narratives and Essential Questions

Humboldt County, California receives national attention from media and law enforcement for its production and distribution of high quality marijuana, which floods the rest of the United States with a lucrative and potent finished product. However, the resulting investigations from media, law enforcement, and political groups have primarily been limited to two narratives: glamorization of the marijuana lifestyle through music and alternative lifestyle, or criminalization through drug war rhetoric.

Hollywood contributes to a type of juvenile glamorization through films such as *Pineapple Express*, which portrays the antics of “stoners.” HBO’s *Entourage* portrays a group of five male friends living the good life in Hollywood, i.e., fast cars, beautiful women and around-the-clock partying, including marijuana smoking. Showtime has glamorized the marijuana industry with the television show *Weeds*, where a single, suburban woman makes a living growing and selling marijuana from her home. Perhaps the stress of a modern lifestyle has rendered marijuana smoking more permissive in mainstream culture. Surely the social stigma is lessening through younger generations, especially those seeking an alternative lifestyle to corporate America.

In contrast, various political groups such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), have

demonized marijuana through continued prohibition with the dramatic legal labeling of marijuana as a Schedule 1 drug under the Controlled Substances Act,¹ denying any legitimate medical use. Despite this labeling, people like to get “high,” and cultivation is still a lucrative business, especially in today's economy.

This study attempts to cut through the obfuscating effects of both of these dominant narratives by focusing on marginalized groups within this illegal agricultural industry whose members often lack representation, power, and voice. The industry continues to become more acceptable due to the increasing recognition of marijuana as a therapeutic herb. Simultaneously, it reproduces patterns of male dominance, as it is largely based on patriarchal ideologies. This paper uses intersectional feminist theories, interviews, and participant-observation to bring to light the experiences of marginalized (and simultaneously privileged) groups (i.e. female trim-workers, and mothers) within the marijuana cultivation industry of Humboldt County. This type of grounded analysis that employs these theoretical lenses is what allows us to transcend the dominant narratives and hopefully better understand the day-to-day social and cultural aspects of life of the participants in the cultivation industry.

Commerce & Criminalization

Humboldt County's Marijuana industry extends well beyond Humboldt County. Indeed, marijuana distribution is a formidable player in interstate commerce because much of Humboldt County's product, besides what is sold locally and to California

1 Schedule I is the only category of controlled substances that may not be prescribed by a physician. Under 21 U.S.C. § 812b, drugs must meet three criterion in order to be placed in Schedule I: The drug or other substance has a high potential for abuse; The drug or other substance has no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States; there is a lack of accepted safety for use of the drug or other substance under medical supervision.

collectives, is driven, mailed, and otherwise transported out of state. Any product that affects interstate commerce gives Congress the power to regulate it under the Commerce Clause in the United States Constitution (U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 8).

Congress has extended this power to enact legislation such as the Federal Controlled Substances Act (1970), which controls the possession, production, and distribution of drugs within the United States. Marijuana distribution has been deemed a widespread and illegal interstate commerce (more details regarding the legal status of marijuana production and possession will follow). This imposes a criminal identity upon most growers and others involved in the industry, the degree of which depends upon their specific role.

The Scope of the Industry

The marijuana cultivation industry is a prevailing source of income and employment for many people in Humboldt County. The Humboldt County Drug Task Force asset-forfeitures and profits from marijuana sales have been steadily increasing each year, peaking at \$1,288,327 in 2011 (St. George, 2012: 12). “Humboldt County, population 129,000, seizes on average at least a dozen times more money per capita than California does as a whole, according to state Department of Justice data” (St. George, 2012: 12). This statistic illustrates the breadth of the “illegal” enterprise of marijuana cultivation. The large amount of money seized far exceeds that which would be expected if the cannabis being grown were only being used for medical purposes, thus demonstrating the relative insignificance of a medical-use distinction (or Proposition 215 distinction) within the economy. The size of Humboldt County’s marijuana economy has

long been subject to debate, and exact figures are unattainable for obvious reasons. However, a study conducted by HSU Economics Professor Steve Hackett (2008), estimated that marijuana has brought in as much as five hundred million dollars to Humboldt County's economy.

For every grower apprehended, there are countless others who continually succeed, generating income for themselves and others each year, operating outside the scope of Proposition 215 and under the radar of state and federal law enforcement. Countless others still wait in the wings for an entrance into the field. Outdoor cultivation out-produces indoor cultivation in Northern California and greatly influences the sales of marijuana throughout the year. The outdoor grow operations make Humboldt County the marijuana mecca that it is. The outdoor harvests provide the bulk marijuana for national distribution every fall, and the economic effects are felt throughout the year in terms of price and consumption pattern.

The Male “Outlaw,” the Female Role, and Social Location

The criminal status of the industry encourages an “outlaw” identity that allows, if not encourages, men to position themselves as dominant. Predominantly male roles include what I will call “shot-callers,” who are the landowners and the cash holders. Shot-callers oversee production, organize initial distribution, and pay the workers. Gender-based hierarchies and inequities emerge between shot-callers and the workers as an unspoken undercurrent, as seen in other capital driven agricultural economies and other forms of criminal enterprise.

Large outdoor marijuana production sites provide opportunities for different types of labor and employ both men, for management and labor positions, and women, for trimming positions. Ownership, construction, and management have historically been masculine roles in agricultural businesses. Traditionally, trimming was reserved for women.² Now with indoor scenes, or cultivation sites within homes or other indoor spaces that women can run, more men are seen trimming for a living.

These gendered roles are often prescribed by, as well as continually reinforced by, the “social location” of the participants/workers in Humboldt’s marijuana industry. One’s “social location” is formed by the many intersecting groups one may identify with. These groups relate to one’s “gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Each group membership confers a certain set of social roles and rules, power, and privilege (or lack of), which heavily influence our identity and how we see the world” (Dick, 2002: 3).

Collins (2000: 299) views one’s social location and identity as the effects of “mutually constructing features of social organization.” In order to analyze how the complex, interwoven social locations of Humboldt’s marijuana industry participants influence, forge, and complicate the identity-formation process as well as structures of power within and beyond the industry, intersectional feminist frameworks were appropriate lenses through which to conduct the research, subsequent data analysis, and reflection. Defined by Symington (2004: 1) as “an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities

² Trimming refers to the part of the cultivation process that follows the harvesting of the fully-grown crop. Workers trim off larger leaves leaving “nuggets” of marijuana that are ready for drying.

and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege,” intersectional feminist frameworks proved to be useful tools for determining and understanding the participants’ social locations and paradigms of power within the industry and the greater Humboldt community.

That being said, as the study progressed, the intersecting social locations proved to be more subtle and nuanced than I initially expected, given that the female-participants interviewed, surveyed, and observed all identified as white and heterosexual. Because of these large similarities among the participants, the social locations, privileges, disadvantages, and power structures relating to race, ability, and sexual orientation were not as salient as those relating to socioeconomic background, marital status, and motherhood.

Essential Questions

Essential topics include white privilege, class privilege and the passing afforded by these privileges; as well as the accompanying gender roles and job hierarchies within the marijuana industry. This thesis also explores critical questions such as: Are male landowners always the shot-callers? And if this is the case, how do women respond to this inequity of power? Does working as a trimmer afford a woman, or a single mother, a quality lifestyle with economic and social support systems, or is it a tenuous occupation at the bottom of a patriarchally-controlled hierarchy that values sexual availability and exerts control? Finally, how does the current fact that more and more men trim affect gender dynamics?

The meaning of “patriarchy,” as seen through the lens of intersectional feminism, varies across different social locations and communities. Crenshaw (1989: 68) states, for example, that patriarchy and patriarchal roles differ between white and black communities: “Because ideological and descriptive definitions of patriarchy are usually premised upon white female experiences, feminists and others informed by feminist literature may make the mistake of assuming that since the role of Black women in the family and in other Black institutions does not always resemble the familiar manifestations of patriarchy in the white community, Black women are somehow exempt from patriarchal norms.” Patriarchal roles may also differ in communities comprised of different world cultures, socio-economic classes, various sexual identities, etc. For this study, I will simply define “patriarchy” as “male domination,” while recognizing that a “universal patriarchy” does not exist as it “does not account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists” (Butler, 1990: 377).

While defining patriarchy, I must also define its companion, “privilege.” Johnson (2013: para. 1) defines the concept of privilege as “any advantage that is unearned, exclusive, and socially conferred.” He gives this example of privilege: “white people are generally assumed to be law-abiding until they show some sign that they are not” (para. 1). This particular example seemed to fit within this study, as all male growers observed and surveyed identified as white, and thus took advantage of this form of white privilege despite their employment in a semi-legal industry (see following sections for more details regarding marijuana legislation). Though this thesis focuses primarily on the constructs of gender and gender roles within the marijuana industry,

Johnson's (2013) example of white privilege seems to be one plausible explanation for the lack of growers of color within Humboldt's marijuana industry, as they historically have not shared that "law-abiding" privilege, and thus attract more attention from the police force through racial profiling.

To explore gender roles in the marijuana industry, I define "a gendered division of labor" as distinct sets of labor-tasks (in this case, relating to marijuana cultivation) that are performed by either male participants or female participants based on their gender. For example, trim-work is generally designated for female participants. While gender is my primary analytical focus, this paper employs an intersectional feminist lens through which to consider (i) how modern, global capitalistic societies' patriarchal attitude translates to and affects power, privilege, and other forces that influence identity in Humboldt County's marijuana industry, and (ii) whether resource allocation and gender roles in Humboldt County's marijuana industry reflects other rural agricultural communities traditionally dominated by white men and the capitalist schemes that perpetuate their prosperity.

The enduring curiosity of Americans regarding the marijuana culture, coupled with increasing national media attention given to marijuana-related legal cases, ballot initiatives, and state legislation, have made marijuana cultivation a mainstream fascination. Insofar as I am aware, this research is among the first academic study of the gender dynamics of the commercial marijuana cultivation industry. Therefore, through this study, I am not only seeking to understand my own world as a resident of Humboldt County, but also to shed light on marijuana cultivation as an economic and social

endeavor in the hope that these shared experiences will encourage dialogue, promote community solidarity, and foster pride in the work and lifestyle. This pride will hopefully facilitate honest assessment of the constructive and destructive attitudes that exist within the industry, as well as raise awareness of the inherent gender and privilege disparity also found within the industry.

Overview of the Commercial Marijuana Cultivation Industry: Indoor versus Outdoor and the Associated Roles

The commercial marijuana industry is divided into two distinct production schemes, each with distinct socioeconomic characteristics. Outdoor cultivation incorporates rural agrarian modes of production pertaining to land ownership and capital investment requirements. Indoor “cottage industry” cultivation exists in urban areas and tends to be more accessible to women because it is smaller scale, utilizes public utilities, and requires less capital investment than outdoor cultivation. In outdoor production, the crop is planted and tended predominantly by the region’s male workforce during the summer months. As the cash crop is cut and hung to dry in the fall months, a migratory workforce known as “trimmers” travels to the marijuana patches equipped with scissors, oil, rubbing alcohol, comfortable chairs, pillows and other necessities needed for long work days trimming the crop. While some women work in the hills throughout the summer, tending to the crop, and some men make their living as trimmers, generally trimming is reserved for women.

The trimmer is not only at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy/chain of command, but trimming work is feminized within Humboldt County’s cultivation

community, as I discovered through extensive interviews and participant-observation. Reasons for this feminization may include the fact that male growers generally do not want competition from other men on their property, have an inherent distrust of other men, and a desire to focus female attention on themselves. Male growers identify with being strong and independent and avoid being associated with feminized roles in order to protect their social identity, i.e., being capable of protecting their property and livelihood. More significantly, there is a stereotype that women are better trimmers than men because of the perception that women are docile (easy to control), trustworthy (not a threat to the power or organization of the production scheme) and dexterous (smaller hand size is an advantage in fine, detail-oriented work). In sum, a combination of social and biological influences have feminized trimming.

While working for some growers, women employees can expect to camp or sleep in their trucks, packing water and food and foregoing showers, running water, and/or electricity. Other grow scenes provide dormitory conditions with showers, fully stocked kitchens, and cooks on duty. According to the interview responses, some offer a family atmosphere while others have more of a college-party atmosphere. Some women behave modestly, show up to work, and treat the experience as a pleasant job. When the focus is kept on getting the work done, the attitude is usually one of collective industriousness where the money is good and the continual conversation transcends the mundane and resembles therapy sessions and support groups for life's issues. In other cases, growers may employ female trimmers based on sexual appeal, which, in reality, is often a factor in the hiring and re-hiring process. Similar to any other workplace, drugs and alcohol,

dating, and relationships can blur the lines between work and pleasure, adding drama to the work environment.

Regardless of the external factors, women who trim together often form a bond with one another due to the extended hours spent working side by side, even though they may have dramatically different cultural and educational backgrounds. This bond is based on shared lifestyle, livelihood and societal position, as well as a set of societal norms based on surviving in this somewhat illegal industry. Survival skills and values that promote the industry serve as community foundation and identity. High value is placed on being discreet and willing to go above and beyond for another member of the cultivation community. Trimming circles often facilitate relationships that enable this type of support-based behavior developed from a shared need to “pass” in society.

“Passing” to acquire a rental house is a particularly salient need within the urbanized, indoor grow movement. In contrast to outdoor schemes, women and other members of the community who are not able to own property independently, but are able to rent a house, own equipment, and pay their bills may be able to subsist from the indoor, cottage industry. Although women frequently hire men to install their growing equipment and perform electrical and construction skills, the indoor cottage industry may be more conducive to independent female participation because it can be accomplished within city limits and with less financial resources. However, fear of theft may leave a woman more vulnerable in her home. Every year there are instances of home invasion and robbery for cash or product.

There are many hurdles when it comes to renting a house in general; such as the need for proof of income, good references, and the capital to put down a deposit as well as first month's rent. A house to grow marijuana in has to be sizable or have a garage or out-building, making it more expensive than an apartment or studio. Usually rental companies want proof that the applicant makes three times the monthly rent in legitimate income. They also want good personal references and documentation from previous landlords that show the applicant has been able to pay similar rents in the past without issue. White women are afforded the aforementioned "white privilege," which gives them a leg up when it comes to passing, and in turn, climbing the income ladder. In a rural and historically very white community such as Humboldt County, it is safe to say that it is easier for a white and middle class woman to rent a home (to grow in or not) than it would be for a woman from a more marginalized racial and/or class background. The hurdles that I spoke of are undeniably much greater for non-white and/or poor women.

For women, namely white women, indoor growing offers an opportunity for financial independence. This success may translate into respect within the community, especially if the woman establishes ties that help others sell their product as well. Women often network with men to sell the finished product, although women themselves also sell widely in the community. The ability to manage one's own cultivation scene, have adequate security, and sell the finished product determines the woman's overall financial independence. A woman with an indoor scene may not need to work outside of the home to make a living, affording her more time for taking care of her children or pursuing her own interests. This sense of security may fluctuate, however. Landlords can evict tenants

for growing. Quality of product, the ability to sell the product, and the price per pound also fluctuate. While indoor cultivation presents an increasingly more equalized playing field for women and men, in both outdoor and indoor economic culture women dominate the trimming stage of production.

Chapter One: The Context of an Illegal Social Economy

Economies of Marijuana Production

Marijuana is the biggest cash crop in the United States, generating approximately \$35.8 billion per year. Its profits exceed the combined value of corn (\$23.3 billion) and wheat (\$7.5 billion) (Venkataraman, 2006: para. 5). According to recent USDA statistics, marijuana is also California's biggest cash crop, generating approximately \$14 billion in annual sales — almost double the annual revenue of California's second largest agricultural commodity, milk and cream (Stateman, 2009: para. 1).

Rolling Stone Magazine (2010) cites the marijuana cultivation industry as one of the most viable industries in the United States today. Marijuana sales flow out of California and to the east coast, where possession is still punishable criminally and the product is less available. Indeed, notwithstanding the recent economic downturn, Northern California marijuana growers by and large continue to enjoy prosperity through the cultivation and sale of marijuana as a commodity, both medical and otherwise. Evidence of this, gained from extensive interviews with worker-participants, is the continuing winter world travel of growers and their land acquisitions in places such as Central America. According to interviewees who own local businesses, or who have friends or family who own local businesses, these businesses also have generally weathered the global recession due, at least in part, to the fact that a cash-based economy favors in-store over online (and therefore credit-based) purchases.

Marijuana Culture

The economic vitality of the cultivation industry coupled with a renegade outlaw image renders it “hot” in mainstream culture. In addition, marijuana has become a brand in and of itself. Indeed, the marijuana leaf icon appears on everything from clothing, to flags, to tattoos. So, while the marijuana industry and its counter-culture have traditionally been regarded as taboo, a perpetuating fascination regarding the same topics nevertheless co-exists. The glamorization of the marijuana cultivation industry through popular music is widespread as artists rap about popular “kush” strains of marijuana while simultaneously referring to clubbing, nightlife, money, “bling,” women, fame, and drinking.

Historical Background

Historically, industrial hemp was extensively cultivated in the United States (colonial North America) for a wide variety of applications. For example, there is historical documentation of a 1619 mandate by the Virginia Assembly requiring every farmer to grow hemp (Deitch, 2003). The use of industrial hemp for rope and fabric in the United States was ubiquitous throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and during the Second World War. Hemp was even used as legal tender in most of the Americas until the early 19th century (Colton, 2012). Marijuana was listed in the United States Pharmacopeia from 1850 until 1942, and was recommended to treat various medical conditions, including labor pains, nausea, and rheumatism. The use of industrial hemp and marijuana was omnipresent in the United States until Congress passed the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act, which effectively made the possession or transfer of cannabis illegal

in the United States under federal law, excluding medical and industrial uses. The 1937 Marijuana Tax Act was overturned by the Supreme Court in *Leary v. United States*, 5 U.S. 6 (1969), repealed by Congress in 1970, and replaced by the Controlled Substances Act, discussed below.

Relevant Legal Framework

Federal Marijuana Law. The Controlled Substances Act (CSA) (21 U.S.C. § 811) provides the framework for federal regulations of narcotics (1970). Federal law assigns each drug to a “schedule,” or ranking, which purports to determine the drug’s medical value versus its potential for abuse. Under federal law, marijuana is considered a Schedule I Substance (i.e., drugs that are considered to have both a high likelihood for abuse and no legitimate medical usage).

Federal marijuana laws are typically enforced only in cases involving large quantities of marijuana, while cases involving smaller quantities are usually prosecuted in state court. Federal prosecutions may use two types of sentencing schemes: the minimum mandatory Federal sentencing laws enacted by Congress, and the sentencing guidelines created by the U.S. Sentencing Commission. Most marijuana convictions under Federal law can result in imprisonment, although there are certain cases for which the sentencing guidelines do not provide for a prison sentence, specifically when involving possession of small quantities of marijuana by an individual without a criminal history.

In 2011, lawmakers introduced legislation in Congress that would end the federal criminalization of adult personal use of marijuana (i.e., federally deregulate personal possession and use). Entitled the ‘Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act of 2011,’

HR 2306 seeks to remove the power to prosecute minor marijuana offenders from the federal government and, instead, relinquish such authority to state and local jurisdictions. Among other things, passage of this measure would remove the conflict currently existing between federal law and the laws of states that allow for the limited use of medical marijuana. The bill would also permit states to (i) “medicalize,” decriminalize, and/or legalize and (ii) regulate the responsible use, possession, production, and intrastate distribution of marijuana without federal interference. This is the first time that members of Congress have introduced legislation to eliminate the federal criminalization of marijuana since the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937.

California Marijuana Law. As of January 1, 2011, adult possession of up to one ounce of marijuana was classified as an infraction, punishable by no more than a \$100 fine — i.e., no arrest, no court appearance, no criminal record, no prison. In other words, adult possession of up to one ounce of marijuana for non-medical purposes is not a criminal offense in the state of California (CA Health & Safety Code § 11357b). Possession of larger amounts of marijuana is a misdemeanor punishable by up to \$500 and six months in jail (H&SC § 11357, 2011). Possession with intent to sell and cultivation of any amount of marijuana is a felony (H&SC §§ 11359 and 11358, respectively). People who grow for personal use, however, may be eligible for diversion under Penal Code 1000 (last modified in 2012) if there is no evidence of intent to sell. There is no fixed plant number limitation for cultivation for personal use.

In California’s November 2010 election, a ballot initiative seeking to allow adults to possess, cultivate, or transport marijuana for personal use, and permitting the

regulation and taxation of commercial marijuana production and sale narrowly failed. Among other things, the near miss seems to indicate that while public attitudes toward and perceptions of marijuana are shifting, the mainstream voters are not ready to open production up to legal markets.

Medical Marijuana Law. The federal government does not recognize any difference between medical use and recreational use of marijuana. As noted above, the CSA lists marijuana as a Schedule I drug and, therefore, enforcement officials may prosecute medical marijuana patients for possession or use even if they live in a state where medical marijuana use is protected under state law. And, in 2005, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Congress' constitutional authority to regulate the interstate market in licit or illicit drugs extends to doctor-recommended marijuana consumed legally under state law. While the ruling does not overturn state laws that permit medical marijuana use, it does mean that such laws cannot be used as a defense to federal prosecutions of medical marijuana use and increases medical marijuana users' risk of exposure to legal action. Enforcement of California's marijuana laws is carried out by the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), a unique, multi-agency law enforcement taskforce formed in 1983 and composed of over 110 participating local, state, and federal agencies managed by the Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement. CAMP is organized expressly to eradicate illegal marijuana cultivation and trafficking in the state of California. CAMP's primary mission is to reduce the supply of marijuana involved in illegal trade by shutting down grow-sites, "increasing public and environmental safety by removing marijuana growers from public and private lands," uprooting indoor

growing scenes, and educating the public about the problems associated with marijuana.

(“Campaign Against Marijuana Planting,” n.d.)

In California, medical patients and their primary caregivers may legally possess and cultivate (but not distribute or sell) marijuana for use as a personal medical treatment under Proposition 215 (1996), entitled the “California Compassionate Use Act” (codified as H&SC § 11362.5) so long as they have the recommendation or approval of a California-licensed physician. Under Proposition 215, patients are entitled to whatever amount of marijuana is necessary for their personal medical use. SB 420 (a legislative statute codified as H&SC §§ 11362.7-11362.83) broadens Prop. 215 to transportation, allows patients to form medical cultivation “collectives” or cooperatives, establishes a voluntary state ID card system administered by county health departments, and establishes guidelines/limits as to how much marijuana patients can possess and cultivate.

It is clear from the discussion of the various, often vague, complex, and/or contrasting laws regarding marijuana possession and cultivation on the federal and state levels that Humboldt County’s marijuana industry exists and thrives in a rather murky haze of semi-legality. This murkiness certainly affects the growers, trimmers, and other participants in the industry and continues to develop the varying degrees of stigma associated with involvement in this illicit workforce. As a nationally illicit industry, worker-participants must come to terms with the fact that they may face legal sanctions should their work be compromised. That being said, due to California’s unique laws regarding marijuana, as well as the scope of the industry in Humboldt County, a palpable

gray area exists between the stigma of illegality and social acceptance within the county limits.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature: Intersectional Feminism, Identity, and Gender Construction in Marijuana Production

Intersectional feminism is a social theory that exposes how socially constructed categories of discrimination (such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sex, and ability) interact on multiple levels to create a matrix of power, privilege, and oppression that produces and perpetuates systematic and institutionalized inequality. The work of original critical theorists emerging from the feminist movement lays the groundwork for current scholars such as Crenshaw (1989), Kaufman & Johnson (2004), Collins (2000), and others whose research I cite for their analysis of identity formation, gender division of labor in rural agricultural economies, and their scholarship on stigmatized identities and “passing” in an illicit, and thus taboo, economy.

I use intersectional feminism as my key theoretical lens to make gender oppression observable. Intersectional feminism, significant in that it incorporates many angles of sociological and economic identity within a community, recognizes that any identity, whether privileged or stigmatized, is a result of intertwining internal and external forces and perceptions. In the marijuana cultivation community of Humboldt County, intersecting sociological factors including incident of birth, ethnicity, gender, ableism, sexual preference, and privilege manifest as land-ownership and participation in a hierarchy of production that tends to channel women to a lower tier. An intersectional perspective also acknowledges multi-layered, shifting, and situational social acceptance, and distinct abilities to pass and manage stigma by virtue of race, ableism, etc., as well as privilege or lack thereof. Privilege, eloquently defined by McIntosh (1988: 2) as “an

invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, ... tools and blank checks,” is created by social perception and practices, which both perpetuate and result from various economic endeavors and historical stereotypes.

“Systemic oppression,” is a key concept within intersectional feminist frameworks. Johnson (2013) defines oppression as “the losing end of privilege” and the combination of power and prejudice, which results in the “systematic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identity groups in contrast to a privileged norm” (Johnson; Ferber & Samuels: para. 2). “Systemic oppression” is seen when the aforementioned powers of this privileged norm and the disadvantaging of the other continue through time to become the status quo.

While systemic oppression is experienced and seen in many different sociological systems such as patriarchy and racism, this paper focuses primarily on industry interrelations and oppression with respect to gender and gender relations. However, it is also imperative to explore how racial and class privilege relates to stigma management and passing in the marijuana industry. Humboldt County’s marijuana industry makes for a dynamic background to intersectional feminism due to the large amounts of cash-money exchanged, its “outlaw nature,” the unique mix of participants, and the sociological phenomenon of a female workforce that is predominantly supportive to males (as trimmers or partners to male growers). Humboldt County is the perfect venue, due to the viability and popularity of the marijuana industry, to analyze intersectional feminist theory in a conceptual framework that looks at the interrelations of power, white privilege, and oppression.

An intersectional framework suggests that Humboldt County's marijuana cultivation has gendered, and specifically feminized, tasks in the production line. Some of the specific ways in which gender is produced through marijuana cultivation are similar to typical socioeconomic models of resource-extraction in rural agricultural communities. These gendered tasks contain levels of power and privilege that act simultaneously as patriarchal and capitalist systems of domination. Furthermore, this gendering of marijuana cultivation aids in the reproduction of capitalist business models that rely on North American cultural frameworks, where the "American Dream" and entrepreneurialism dominate the landscape.

During the study, I used intersectional feminist analysis in order to understand how levels of power, privilege, and identity are negotiated at every level of the production of marijuana. This framework suggests similarities with other illicit, feminized work sectors, including domestic workers, sex workers, and beauty workers. However, despite similarities, it is important to explore the distinct levels of privilege and power within illicit women's work in Humboldt County and elsewhere. It is also important to remember that work in the marijuana industry is by choice, providing a more lucrative opportunity than mainstream, hourly wages. This lucrative opportunity may come at a cost or balance. The conditional legality of marijuana, described in the preceding section regarding relevant legal framework, suggests that participants in the industry must manage social stigma.

By understanding the different ways in which gender, identity, power, and privilege are produced through the process of cultivating marijuana, conclusions can be

drawn about how feminist strategies can be used to identify oppressive practices within marijuana cultivation culture and how these oppressive practices exist even as women can simultaneously gain power and privilege through marijuana cultivation. Time management regarding family and livelihood will be examined, as well as what is expected by men and women, respectively, to fill roles that are acceptable in the community. Other topics of exploration include the amount of upward mobility afforded to women and how this may or may not threaten the status quo.

Gender Construction

To perform an analysis of gender dynamics within Humboldt County's marijuana industry, a brief overview of the social construction of gender provides a useful starting point. In our society, categories of sex and gender are distinguishable from one another. Sex is understood as being biologically constructed in terms of "the property or quality by which organisms are classified according to their reproductive functions," whereas gender is socially constructed (ed. Morris, 1979: 1187). The *American Heritage Dictionary* (1979) defines gender as "classification of sex relating to psychological associations, or some other characteristic," (i.e. behavioral, emotional, etc). (ed. Morris, 1979: 548). These definitions illustrate the now popular distinction between the more rigid, physiological definition of sex, and the fluid, socially prescribed set of traits or characteristics that "define" gender and gender roles. However, the Intersex Society of North American (see website), along with Fausto-Sterling (2000), argues that our categorization of bodies into two and only two sexes erases (at times literally, through the use of surgery) the many bodily variations that naturally occur. They support Butler's

(1990) argument that sex itself is gendered, in other words, that our attempts to categorize and name physical differences between males and females is heavily influenced by our cultural understandings of gender.

Gender can be seen as the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. In other words, one's gender can be perceived simply as the way an individual believes a male or female should behave. Gendering of an individual begins before birth when pregnant mothers paint their nursery blue or pink and buy toy trucks for boys and dolls for girls. Gender stereotypes, such as Freud's (1933: 2) notion that "when you say 'masculine,' you usually mean 'active,' and when you say 'feminine,' you usually mean 'passive,'" are often internalized by individuals, making that individual feel inadequately masculine or feminine if she or he deviates from socially established norms, or unequivocally acceptable if they perpetuate such stereotypes. Society and culture inform and reproduce individual and societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity, generally rooted in gender stereotypes. These stereotypes function to maintain established viewpoints regarding "appropriate" work-activities for males versus females.

A prime example of these stereotypes is the fact that women in the marijuana industry are generally employed as trimmers because of a combination of factors including their alleged dexterity, lack of physical threat, and because they are not landowners who are able to grow marijuana themselves. Stated differently, women are employed as trimmers because of the stereotypical perception that women are docile, trustworthy, "passive," and dexterous. It is true that some professional tasks favor the

physical characteristics of one sex over the other, and thus, “gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category” (West, 1987: 125). Whether this applies to trimming is difficult to state with certainty, but, as noted in the introduction, perhaps the most significant reason for reserving the duty of trimming for women is because male growers do not want to engage in what is generally considered feminized work within the cultivation community.

This perception parallels attitudes towards women workers in the electronics industry in East and Southeast Asia. In her book *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*, Aihwa Ong (1987) illustrates specific gender hierarchies when she examines Malaysian electronics factories, where women factory workers are hired by Japanese “transnational firms under the “Look East Policy,” for their perceived dexterity and obedience. Similarly, Kang (2010) examines the lives of beauty workers such as manicurists, also chosen for their dexterity, in her book *The Managed Hand*. Fernandez-Kelly (1984), in *For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico’s Frontier*, examines the role of women in the *maquiladoras*, or assembly plants that are subsidiaries of major United States corporations such as General Motors and General Electric and which are part of Mexico’s economic development plan. Her work further examines the fact that women are preferred for these positions as they are stereotyped to be both especially dexterous and subservient. These authors seek to put a human face on the factory workers, mostly women, who become human assembly lines in these multinational manufacturing industries. This study attempts to illustrate similar struggles regarding power and gender faced by the female workers in Humboldt’s marijuana

industry, who are often similarly cast into “women’s-work” roles for their alleged dexterity and willingness to comply to male dominance.

Gendered Division of Labor in Rural Agricultural Communities

The popular constructions of women in rural agricultural economies, disseminated through discursive practices and mainstream media, historically place women’s roles in the margins and on the periphery to the man’s role of owner, operator, farmer, and provider. The present construction of gender division of labor within legal rural agricultural economies describes women’s roles as consisting primarily of “farmwives” or “book keepers” and the “good-wife” whose work is based within the home (Trauger et al., 2008; Pini, 2005). These roles traditionally complement the man’s role on the land, “heroically, aggressively and stoically fighting the vicissitudes of nature to provide for his family, community and nation” (Pini, 2005: 74).

This division of the sex roles in agriculture draws from stereotypical notions of the relative strengths of the sexes. It is logical for the “strong man” to perform the outdoor work that requires physical strength and guard the land against animals and intruders. It is also logical to have a woman, who bears and tends to children, also performing the bookkeeping tasks in the home while preparing meals. Sex roles often develop from necessity, especially in agricultural societies. That being said, many women farmers around the world perform farming tasks that require large amounts of physical strength. Despite this fact, many farming and agriculture industries and related discourses place women as weak dependents and men as physically strong leaders. This

model of gender stereotyping continues on in the marijuana industry for better or for worse.

Historically, when discussing farm-life in the U.S., men primarily run the day-to-day operations, though women often contribute in many production-related tasks, as well as managing the domestic aspects of farm life (Miller et al., 2006). I specify the U.S. farm culture because it is important to remember that these gender roles may not be the same, or even at all similar, across different social locations distinct by class, race, ability, age, etc. There are, of course, many contexts in which women are the primary farmers. However, some argue that through the North American 20th century shift from subsistence agriculture to capitalist (and patriarchal) family farms and industrialized agriculture, women's farm work is largely dismissed as they are recast within the home.

It has been argued that the "housewife" was historically produced through United States Government-sponsored extension programs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries which sought to restructure rural farming communities from subsistence farming to a capital-intensive method of agriculture, while simultaneously enforcing gender roles by education women and girls in 'home science.' Classes and clubs focused on home-economy trained women in skills such as food preservation, tailoring, furniture-reupholstering and efficiency-management (Berry, 2003: 1057).

Both in traditional farming and resource extraction industries, and often in the marijuana industry, women take on the role of running household and community in the absence of men (the "real property owners"), requiring great emotional strength and hard work on their parts. Nevertheless, the work and contributions of women are largely still

viewed as subservient or peripheral to that of the men's work, even though they serve as invisible support to the men's labor. For instance, women are hired to work in the field with men, preparing soil, planting, watering, tending to the growing plants, and guarding the crops, much of which requires a great deal of physical strength. However, women who work in the field during the summer with men often have their ideas for improvements discredited by men or falsely attributed to other men in order to maintain the status quo of male privilege, and reinforce a limiting idea that the man is always, himself, most capable to design the grow scene on his land, make decisions about resource allocation such as water use or labor hours.

Johnson (2001) documents techniques used by males to subordinate females both in conversation and coordinated action. For men, paths of least resistance include presenting the appearance of being in control of themselves, others, and events. Johnson uses an example from his own life, a conversation with his female life-partner in which she asks him a question that he did not know the answer to, yet still mindlessly spoke as though he had authority on the subject. To illustrate how the path of least resistance operates "I [Johnson] spoke with an unhesitating flow that suggested I knew what I was talking about, that I was an expert in the subject that she'd raised. But I didn't know that what I was saying was true, at least no more true than what anyone else might say, provided of course, that I gave them the chance" (Johnson, 2001: 93). In such capitalistic systems and settings as the setting involved in this study, males who are in competition with other males (and/or females) may not even be aware of the ways communication patterns work to maintain their dominance.

To illustrate further, modern western capitalist cultural values of maleness are linked to power, ability, and control, and these values may extend to the marijuana cultivation industry as much as, or perhaps more than other capitalist endeavors. Reasons for this may include the required physical ability, possession of a large-engine vehicle to reach remote lands, possession of the financial capital to own land/equipment, and the “outlaw” aspect of the industry. Confidence and the projection of dominance, such as patrolling property on an all terrain vehicle with a gun, deter intruders. These props of militarized maleness (guns, ATV’s, etc.) further represent the industry’s culture of male dominance. The male grower, when on his land, is king of his dominion, and has power over every other person present on the land, including “his” domesticized woman and other women working for him.

Marijuana cultivation reflects traditional agrarian values and home science, with men acquiring land and labor resources and performing the physical labor, while females—representing militarized masculinity’s “partner,” domesticated femininity—perform trim-work and household duties. Other aspects of the marijuana industry, such as a desire to produce a high demand strain, resemble progressive, agricultural models which value “an absolute belief in science and technology, a promotion of capitalist relations of production, a focus on individual choice, and a belief that a higher standard of living is achieved through material acquisition.” (Berry, 2003).

The marijuana cultivation industry mirrors other agricultural economies in which the gender division of labor is based upon physical strength and access to land resources, which, at the very least in Humboldt County, are factors often associated with white,

moneyed, able males. Specifically within the marijuana industry, the necessities of physical strength and land ownership create a privileged population of predominantly land-owning and able-bodied men. Because of the previously defined patriarchal nature of the socioeconomic systems and restructuring of United States farms from subsistence to capitalistic systems, men belonging to these social “categories” are the primary physical laborers in modern agricultural industries, including the marijuana industry. White male privilege is predominate in this industry and enables passing, and even though the men are involved in illicit work, there is a presumption of innocence if white.

While this gender division reflects other agricultural industries, it is out of step with many labor settings, such as corporate America and the entertainment and hospitality industries where women often have the same job titles as men or are increasingly in positions of authority. Additionally, while both men and women in the marijuana industry may struggle to form and maintain their identities while negotiating the stigma associated with working in an illicit industry, female workers (also often white, though of various socioeconomic classes) are further stigmatized as they are not only involved in illicit work, but they often also remain at lower tiers of this particular agricultural model.

Identity Formation

In order to understand how stigmatized identities, such as those of the female and male marijuana industry workforce, are socially constructed, maintained, and managed, a concise description of identity formation is needed. Hall (1996: 3) explains that identity “does not signal that stable core of the self,” but instead is an ever-changing combination

of “superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’ which people with a shared history...hold in common.” Hall (1996: 4) describes how identity is “produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices...within the play of specific modalities of power.” In other words, an individual’s construct of identity pulls from a myriad of social, economic, racial, ethnic, sexual, and educational influences. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey (2010: 1) further discuss the intersecting systems and social locations that continually shape one’s identity: “Identity formation is the result of a complex interplay among a range of factors: individual decisions and choices, particular life events, community recognition and expectations, societal categorization, classification and socialization, and key national or international events.”

Every individual participates in a variety of differing identity “groupings” (e.g. an African American female trimmer may identify with at least three distinct sets of identity influences, including those prescribed to females, to African Americans, and to trimmers). Hall (1996: 4) explains that “identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions.”

Furthermore, even these multiple, fragmented identities are never fixed. Kirk & Okazawa-Rey (2010: 1) provide the example of an “immigrant woman from a traditional Guatemalan family ‘coming out’ as a lesbian in the United States.” This description of intersecting identities and fluid social locations can be linked to the multiple, changing identities negotiated by female workers in Humboldt’s marijuana industry, such as their identities as women, mothers, community members, and participants in an illicit

workforce. Intersecting identity is the meeting point of internal and external perceptions. Kaufman & Johnson (2004: 808) describe how “the concept of reflected appraisals, individuals’ perceptions of how others perceive them, is central in symbolic interactionist research on how social interaction impacts the self.” Based on this theory, community perception influence and shape both stigma and identity, which, in turn, continually shape one another.

Additionally, institutionalized prejudices such as racial profiling and urban poverty also affect individual identity by carving out large classes of privileged and disadvantaged, stigmatized “others.” “Others,” who continually remain “othered” by systemic oppression, can be defined in this study as people whose social locations are different from sanctioned ideas of the norm and are therefore classified as different or “other” (Crenshaw (1994)).

In sum, from an intersectional feminist framework lens, identity formation includes overlapping and intersecting identities. This view emphasizes the various subject positions that we all operate within, such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. These subject positions inform how others perceive you, your social identity, and your individual self-perception and self-expression as an authentic human being. Internal and external forces that categorize and determine the individual’s ability to pass, survive, or thrive in society shape identity and self-expression. Social identity includes innate factors such as skin color that an individual inherits from birth as well as self-created factors, perceptions, and opportunities, such as educational background.

Hall (1996) asserts that identity is an invention informed by numerous accounts of subjectivity within history and culture. Identities become real and are learned at a certain moment in history. Since identities are ‘inventions’ in this sense, and are dialogically constructed, their meanings cannot be permanently fixed (Hall, 1996; Juhila, 2004). Just as memory and history are not static nor linear, neither is identity, as it is a “construction, a process never completed—always ‘in process’ ” (Hall, 1996: 2). Yet there are social and institutionalized limitations on an individual’s ability to revise his/her identity in order to receive greater social privilege. Many classes and individuals do not experience the benefit of full social acceptance due to social and physical characteristics that diminish the social value of the identity in question—this is the construction of stigmatized identity (Goffman, 1963; Johnson, 2001).

Stigma Management

Stigmatized Identity

Because of the predominantly illegal nature of the marijuana cultivation industry, it is imperative to explore identity formation and stigma within the context of illicit work sectors. In his seminal sociological examination of stigma, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Erving Goffman (1963: 37) refers to “stigma” as any attribute that devalues an individual’s identity and hence disqualifies him from full social acceptance. The stigmatized individual is denigrated from a “whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963: 37). Stigmatized identity is typically a culturally dominant categorization linked to negative characterizations or vulnerabilities.

Because marijuana cultivation is criminalized, people working in the industry have to negotiate a shared stigmatized identity in ways both similar and unique to other stigmatized classes (e.g., people stigmatized based on ability or sexual preference). And, whether it takes the form of limited gender roles, dealing with undocumented income, or having little to no recourse from abuses on the job, all participants are at least potentially affected by this shared stigmatized identity. For instance, workplace guidelines (such as OSHA guidelines), anti-harassment, or anti-discrimination policies exist only in legal workplaces. Indeed, sexual assault, theft, or robbery incidences are rarely, if ever, reported to law enforcement within illicit industries such as the marijuana industry. Comparable to other illicit industries, women workers are less able to “find ways to exercise agency and gain personal protection and economic advantage” within the marijuana industry (Choi & Holroyd, 2007: 489).

However, it is important to remember that this stigmatized identity is a choice, unlike for example, women who are forced or sold into black market work to pay off debt. Women and men who work in the marijuana industry know the risks and choose to participate in cultivation despite these risks because it allows for a high level of autonomy and above average compensation: ultimately, another gendered, raced, classed, and privileged road to the “American dream.” Nevertheless, we must not overlook the role that the interlocking systems of power, privilege, and oppression play in people’s choice to work in this industry. Not all people have the same ease of, or access to, this choice. It is much easier for a white person who fits into the “social norm” in Humboldt County to choose to work in this illicit industry. White privilege offers many advantages,

including presumed innocence and the ability to fly under the radar, which results in much less risk; whereas, a person of color is saddled with the automatic assumption of guilt whether or not he or she works in this industry. As Peggy McIntosh says “Being white, I am given considerable power to escape many kinds of danger or penalty as well as to choose which risks I want to take” (McIntosh, 1988:138). With that point in mind, evidence suggests that there is an element of choice afforded to white people to participate in this industry.

Additionally, large numbers of Humboldt County growers and processors are highly educated people, some with advanced degrees. Conversely, the marijuana industry also provides opportunities for autonomy to undereducated or otherwise financially disadvantaged white people, allowing them a modicum of class privilege, which subsequently affords them a higher level of social participation and a way to avoid the social stigma associated with being poor. Simultaneously, the new stigma of working in a semi-illegal industry quickly replaces the former. So, how do men and women in Humboldt’s marijuana industry negotiate the complex set of social stigmas and their continually developing identities? This study aims to explore how workers in the industry “have managed stigma and negotiated identity” using various “stigma management strategies including ‘passing’ as part of the dominant group, selectively associating with supportive individuals” and other tactics, as well as how these tactics differ among and distinctly affect men and women (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004: 808, 809).

Coping Strategies

In general, stigmatized individuals are aware of the negative connotations of their social identity in the eyes of others. Thus, people feign normalcy in an attempt to achieve “social acceptance by ‘normals,’ the nonstigmatized” and protect their lifestyle (Kaufman & Johnson: 807). An individual with a stigmatized identity faces the ongoing task of accepting it and negotiating it within interactions with others who may view their character and behavior as incomprehensible, strange, or immoral. The starting point for managing the stigmatized identity relates to whether the stigma is visible to “normal” people.

The term stigma and its synonyms conceal a double perspective: does the stigmatized individual assume his differentness is known about already or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them? In the first case one deals with the plight of the discredited, in the second with that of the discreditable. This is an important difference, even though a particular stigmatized individual is likely to have experience with both situations. (Goffman, 1963: 37).

According to Goffman (1963), information control is the major issue for individuals who possess a discreditable (i.e., not immediately visible or known about) stigma — such as participants in the marijuana industry. Because considerable rewards stem from being “normal,” these individuals must decide whether to “display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where” (Goffman, 1963: 42). This is done by developing a code for revealing and concealing, with different techniques used for different audiences based in part on the audience’s

decoding capacity (Goffman, 1963: 42). Johnson's discussion of systematic privilege and how it operates helps illuminate the social construction of "normal." For example, members of privileged social groups have better access to dominant US social institutions. Once within these institutions, they enjoy having agenda-setting power, cultural authority, and the authority to have their theories and definitions taken seriously. These privileged members also have the power to influence what constitutes the "norm" in opposition to the "other" (Johnson, 2001).

One technique for controlling information as well as managing stigma is "passing" (Goffman, 1963: 42). Passing can be understood as "impersonation... masquerading or presenting a persona or some personae that contradict the literal image of the marginalized" or stigmatized aspects of an identity (Fordham, 1993: 3). Factors such as race, gender, physical ability, and self-perception influence one's ability to pass. Passing is a form of "hiding stigmatized... identities" and it can be passive or active (Howard, 2000: 377). Passive passing includes avoiding topics of stigmatized issues in conversation, remaining silent when such topics are raised or not offering personal information about oneself. Active passing includes monitoring dress, speech and behavior to maximize the chances of passing with the dominant group, hiding objects indicating the stigma, or denying the stigma or information that would reveal it. Both require the individual to constantly "manage information about other identities" (Howard, 2000: 377).

As a long-standing strategy of coping, passing can exact a high cost in terms of psychological wellbeing. Passing can also disrupt family relationships and friendships, as it involves creating distance from others to avoid revealing the underlying stigma, or if contact can't be avoided, keeping relationships superficial as a self-protective strategy. Also, passing is yet another strain, adding to problems and stresses already present in the lives of people living and working in an illicit sector (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984).

People working in the marijuana industry often hide their livelihood to varying degrees by creating and disseminating cover stories to satisfy social curiosity and feign normalcy, especially in response to the ever-present "What do you do?" questions. Women in the marijuana industry, especially mothers with school-age children, feel an increased pressure regarding passing in their community, causing them to band together to challenge the status quo and to protect themselves. In any event, with few to no exceptions, everyone within the marijuana industry makes some attempt at passing. This paper will explore the continual employment of passing and other coping strategies and the effects this has on men and women in the marijuana industry through interviews with participants and observations of their work and daily lives.

Identity as a Site of Power and Privilege

Passing requires certain levels of social privilege (see previous definition of privilege). Privilege is the institutionalized process by which certain groups or individuals benefit from unequal distribution of resources and assistances such as neighborhood safety, fire and police protection, transportation, education, and opportunities for skill-development. Benefits occur in the form of economic, political,

and cultural power and exist with or without knowledge or recognition by those in a place of privilege (McIntosh, 1988).

McIntosh (1988) states that privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do. Important too is the notion that privilege is most invisible to those receiving it. From a modern, western standpoint, “we live in a society that attaches privilege to being white and male and heterosexual” (McIntosh, 1988:140). This privilege paves the way for a sense of entitlement and acquisition of capital resources. People of privilege inherently imagine a future of privilege and have a privileged road already paved for them, whereas it takes an exceptional person to rise above being born into poverty, incarceration, or even a stereotyped (feminine) gender identity to acquire liquid cash or land ownership.

People in positions of power, whether social or economic, seek to preserve that position by controlling elements of daily and work-life, including conversation and other forms of verbal and non-verbal expression. Johnson explains, “when a system is dominated by a privileged group, it means that positions of power tend to be occupied by members of that group. Power also tends to be identified with such people in ways that make it seem normal and natural for them to have it” (Johnson, 2001: 91). This institutionalized dominance creates a class of ‘others’ who are marginalized, silenced, and constantly pressed to suppress their needs and perceptions or ignore inequities or problems. “The bottom line is that a trouble we can’t talk about is a trouble we can’t do anything about” (Johnson, 2001: 10). Johnson (2001) further asserts that privilege is

always in relation to other people in the social dynamic—those with privilege in relation to those without.

Values that support privilege include Hooks' (1994: 178) unspoken rules, which discuss the “bourgeois class bias shaping” that takes place in American higher education which is “taught by example and reinforced by a system of rewards.” In other words, one is rewarded for imitating the socially acceptable mannerisms that are consistently demonstrated in society. These socially acceptable patterns uphold mainstream, largely white, male perspectives and privilege. The individual who is able to imitate the mannerisms and adhere to socially comfortable constraints is rewarded with privilege and approval. Those who do not may become the ‘other.’

This research explores whether the marijuana industry and its accompanying culture reproduces white, male, heterosexual privilege which draws from broader systems of power and privilege that enable members of these particular social locations to take the risks necessary to become growers. These risks include legal and financial risks, as well as the willingness to bear the accompanying social stigma. These risks are easier to bear if someone has privilege such as family support, financial resources, and the benefits that accompany whiteness. I will also investigate whether the inherent hierarchy of the marijuana cultivation community rewards socially conforming behavior, such as deference to male leadership, and conforming to countercultural values, which may or may not promote equality. The research discovers and uncovers values specific to the illegal, controversial, and sometimes dangerous nature of the cultivation industry, which require a strict maintenance of order. This order suggests keeping confidences, not

drawing law enforcement attention, not reporting sexual assault, not confronting growers who do not provide a healthful work environment, and remaining silent when not receiving appropriate compensation for one's work. Many of these "values" are more often required of female workers than their male counterparts, as the men are generally in the positions of power. Indeed, female trimmers who get 'called back' to work again may often be the ones who stay quiet and act respectfully whether it is warranted or not, as well as the ones who perform well. This is well reasoned; no one wants a loud, risky or dishonest person in an illicit work setting.

In sum, when considering women's historical roles as "good-wife" and housekeeper, as well as the desire for (male) controlled order in the industry, women often find themselves at the lower tiers of production. With men occupying the dominant socioeconomic positions, what options are left open for women and how can women transcend their lower role in the production tier? This research aims to explore how workers in Humboldt's marijuana industry, specifically female workers as wives and mothers, negotiate these lower tiers and the stigma associated with them, as well as battle some of the previously described stereotypical, feminized agricultural roles by exploring other realms of independence within the industry.

Chapter Three: The Setting, Research Approach, & Design

The Research Site: Humboldt County, California

Humboldt County is the southern gateway to the Pacific Northwest. Located in Northwestern California, the county is bordered on the north by Del Norte County, on the east by Siskiyou and Trinity counties, on the south by Mendocino County, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. The county encompasses approximately 3,500 square miles, about 80% of which consists of forestlands, protected redwoods, and recreation areas (U.S. Census Bureau (2012)). The southern border of the county is located 225 miles north of San Francisco, the closest major city. Coastal Highway 101 links the county to the rest of California to the South and to the Oregon Coast to the north, and Highway 299 links the county to Interstate 5 to the east. There is one airport located in McKinleyville that runs daily flights primarily to San Francisco, Sacramento, Portland and Seattle.

A combination of geographic location, isolation, and environmental and social climate has made Humboldt County the marijuana cultivation capital that it is today. The social climate extended from the 1960s Haight-Ashbury counterculture of San Francisco combined with back-to-the-land movement participants from all over the country, including returning Vietnam War veterans and others disillusioned with mainstream American values. “Back-to-the-landers” made use of the ideal growing climate and affordable land, including abandoned ranches and mines, to begin the cultivation of marijuana in Northern California. Some of these “back-to-the-landers” traveled to Afghanistan’s Hindu Kush region, where the landscape and climate produced potent marijuana crop. Seeds from these plants were smuggled back to California and later

crossbred with other popular varieties, creating Humboldt's signature marijuana strains. These strains form the basis of Humboldt County's marijuana industry today.

This marijuana-based production economy is an extension of the entire social atmosphere in Northern California. Humboldt County's social economy of marijuana production is an economy where exchange of money (entirely cash), employment of all tiers of the industry, sales of pounds of marijuana, and basically all other business transactions depend on social interactions and relationships because trust and a certain level of acquaintance is required. You are most likely to meet your next employer at a party or through friends. You are most likely to sell that one last pound to the new female trimmer that you got along well with when you worked with her last week. And so it continues, relationships are formed, bridges maintained or burned, and the money machine keeps rolling.

Research Approach & Epistemology

To conduct this research, I worked with members of this semi-illicit community and made connections between their experiences and relevant theorists' works. The in-depth interviews I conducted exposed the day-to-day experiences of people who actually make their living in this industry, and enabled me to show how dominant dichotomies do not allow for a reality in which identities and perceptions are clearly black or white, legal or illegal, right or wrong.

Because these types of dichotomous realities do not exist within the industry and between the industry and the surrounding Humboldt community, it seemed important to take conscious measures to manage individuals' subjective and diverse ideas and

perspectives and avoid creating or maintaining a subject/object dualism present in most human-subject research. I attempted to do this by employing a mutual participation approach, rather than hierarchical subject/object approach. As Creswell (2003) asserts in his description of the constructivist knowledge claim, this perspective assumes that individuals “develop subjective meanings of their experiences, which are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas.” (Creswell, 2003: 8).

This idea corresponds with the feminist standpoint epistemology, which implies that our knowledge is shaped by our subject position and the theory of situated knowledge, both of which acknowledge the politics of positionality. In her article “Knowledge,” Fernandes (2003) claims that the dominant frameworks of knowledge production often maintain and reinforce systems of inequality. It is important to break away from these dynamics. Fernandes (2003) presents significant insight about how to deconstruct prevailing concepts of ‘knowledge’ and avoid the subject/object dichotomy. Throughout my research, I focused on real people’s experiences and the management and negotiation of multiple identities, while attempting to avoid subject/object dichotomy by being a participant-observer.

Additionally, I remained committed to ensuring that my research methods were not lacking in ethics. Hooks (1994: 44) argues that if we lack ethics in our pedagogies and actions, we perpetuate and reinforce systems of dominance and oppression, which will lead to the further marginalization of the subject of study. She explains that the subjects, in this case participants in Humboldt’s marijuana industry, “have the right to

define their own reality, establish their own identities and name their histories.” As the observer and researcher, I aimed to help the human-subjects achieve this self-identification and naming, rather than perpetuate their marginalization as participants in an illicit industry.

Fernandes (2003) discusses the idea of “witnessing,” where the researcher who is positioned as a witness (myself) is transformed by what she is observing and transforms what she is observing. Fernandes (2003) explains that the act of witnessing carries with it deep responsibilities. She argues that recognizing and accepting the responsibilities of witnessing “through the application of spiritual and ethical principles” can help to “move knowledge production beyond an exploitive form of extraction” (Fernandes, 2003: 84). My research approach was in part inspired by Fernandes’ use of the spiritual approach in her analysis; indeed, I strove to integrate a level of spirituality, as a mutual observer-participant, into my research and thesis as a whole when appropriate.

Finally, pragmatic knowledge claims are considered the “philosophical underpinning for mixed method studies” and were therefore valuable for this paper (Creswell, 2003: 11). Pragmatism affords researchers the freedom to utilize whichever methods she believes will be most successful in generating information. “Truth is what works at the time; it is not based in a strict dualism between the mind and reality completely independent of the mind” (Creswell, 2003: 12).

Perhaps reflecting the often confusing semi-legality of the industry, as well as the complex, interweaving, multiple identities of its workforce, many interweaving methods were necessary to extract and interpret information regarding the processes of stigma

management and identity formation of the study's subjects, as no one prescribed method proved sufficient. This research uses qualitative and, to a lesser degree, quantitative research methods. A mixed method approach can provide multiple and alternative options to help ascertain the most integrated and holistic information possible. Primary methods included semi-structured, open-ended interviews with prepared questions/prompts designed to encourage oral testimony and narrative, participant-observation, and a material survey.

Research Design

First, I selected participants from my community, or rather, people with whom I have had long-term relationships, either as friends or acquaintances. The reason behind this selection method, which I shall call "convenience sampling," lies in the fact that Humboldt's marijuana industry is, as previously discussed, a semi-illicit industry. Because of this, it would not have been safe for myself or for the confidentiality of the participants were I to have chosen random participants. I felt that I could only ask people who were comfortable with me to allow me to observe them and ask questions about their often stigmatized work. Therefore, I informed only persons whom I knew well of my research. I asked them to participate in my study and/or recommend people who they believed would be interested in participating. Ultimately, the sample population consisted of fifteen men and fifteen women selected on the basis of community familiarity, industry involvement, and willingness to participate. All of the participants identified as white, heterosexual, and able-bodied individuals. While I attempted to form

a more diverse sample, the overall lack of diversity within the industry prevented this from occurring.

I then designed a survey consisting of thirty-one questions regarding the outdoor and indoor marijuana cultivation industries in Humboldt County, including access, safety, vulnerability, accountability, exploitation, and positives and negatives relating to industry work. I provided a paper copy of the survey to each participant, which he/she completed at his/her convenience, and then returned to me. Confidentiality was assured to facilitate “truth-telling” (i.e., by ensuring subjects there would be no negative repercussions resulting from their participation in the survey or the interviews; see below for further discussion of this). The majority of the survey questions were designed to prompt “yes/no” answers, thus allowing for a relatively straightforward data tabulation process. All participants (both the men and the women) completed the survey.

After the survey phase was finished, I conducted in-depth personal interviews with ten of the original fifteen surveyed women (specifically, ten mothers) regarding their experience working in the marijuana industry as both individuals and family matriarchs. I asked the women questions regarding topics that included critical ethnographic data pertaining to identity formation, negotiating multiple, sometimes stigmatized identities, and passing strategies. I conducted most of the interviews at the participants’ homes, my home, or some other mutually agreed upon location. The interviews typically lasted between one and two hours. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewees were each given a form generally describing this paper and specifically explaining the interview process, including non-disclosure assurances and confidentiality guarantees.

As soon as possible after each interview, I transcribed my interview notes into more detailed transcripts.

Finally, I conducted ethnographic observations of marijuana production sites, including grow rooms and trim tables, in order to help me understand the cultural practices and negotiated power relations of gender at these production sites. The participants whom I observed included, but were not limited to, the interview subjects. These observations started in August of 2010. I observed roughly three times per week, for approximately three hours each session. The number of observation subjects varied from site to site, but ranged from five to fifteen participants. Observations slowed to once per month for approximately four hours per session during the beginning of 2012. At each session, I took hand-written notes, which included personal observations, direct quotes from participants, and reflections. I did not bring a recording device, as some participants were not comfortable with that. Through these observations, I was able to glean deeper insight to the gender roles and dynamics that the participants themselves were unable to provide during interviews or through the surveys.

Chapter Four: Participant Information and Findings

Participant Demographics

All of the women interviewed for this study have lived in Humboldt County, California from four to twenty-four years. Not one woman claimed that the reason she moved here was to participate in the marijuana industry. The majority of the men surveyed and the women interviewed have lived in Humboldt County for at least ten years. Seven women and seven men reported (via survey) to be renting their homes. The other half of the research participants (eight men and eight women) own homes or land. Some men who own property are not in domestic partnerships, while all but one of the women who own property are in domestic partnerships. Eight women interviewed operate, or have operated, an indoor grow scene with or without a partner. All subjects described their standard of living as “average” or “above average” on the survey.

Job Market and Work Environment

Employment. According to the surveys, interviews, and observation, the number and amount of trimming jobs has decreased steadily over the last few years; there are more and more young people showing up every season to Humboldt County looking for work in the industry. This is coupled with a desire to work with whom you know and trust, resulting in “old-timers” hanging on to the most lucrative and safe positions. Some trimmers have lost jobs, after years of good work, due to other people’s power struggles and relationships, such as break-ups, trouble between business partners, and/or new romantic relationships leading to new management of the trimming crew. While

trimmers may be easily cut from jobs due to various social factors, there seems to always be someone new to replace the fired trimmer.

Of the subjects interviewed, thirteen of the fifteen men and twelve of the fifteen women reported getting the main portion of their income from work in the marijuana industry, about 86% and 80%, respectively. Nearly 88% of men and 86% of women interviewed claimed to be self-employed.

Compensation. Those industry workers who receive hourly pay consistently make more than ten dollars per hour, and most earn twenty dollars or more per hour. All subjects paid per pound when trimming reported to make two hundred dollars or more per pound. Eight of the women trim a pound in less than five hours. Additionally, almost every research subject noted that the amount of time it takes to trim is very subjective and changes due to the quality and strain of marijuana being processed, therefore the amount of money earned is not always predictable.

Work Schedules. The majority of men (seven) and women (eight) typically work five to eight hours per day. Three of the men and three of the women typically work less than five hours per workday. Only three of the men and four of the women have strict work hours. Ten of the men and eleven of the women reported not having strict work hours (i.e. no specific time/hour schedule). Eleven women feel that their employment in the cultivation industry allows more non-work hours per week than a typical nine to five position.

Quality of Life. Many women stated that trimming allows them to travel the world with their families, eat organic food, and have time for more family activities such as going to

one of Humboldt's many rivers. One woman said that trimming not only allowed her partner and her to support their family, but also to be able to support "really good people," such as gardeners, contractors, massage therapists, energy workers, and other service providers by supporting local businesses and stores, which keeps cash-money flowing locally within Humboldt County. Several interviewees expressed that trimming and working in Humboldt County's marijuana industry also allows more opportunity to have the "best of both worlds" in that participants can live in an isolated rural environment but also have the money and flexibility to travel and experience diverse cultures and environments. All subjects described their standard of living as average, men 50% and women 40%, or above average, men 50% and women 60%. These are interesting responses given the data regarding gender roles and male dominance collected during the observations and personal interviews.

Law Enforcement Issues. Most female participants directly involved in cultivation, or whose husbands are directly involved in cultivation, reported they feel at least a mild risk in regard to law enforcement. That fear is amplified if there are children in the home. Two of the women mentioned the risk of losing entire crops to CAMP raids (see earlier discussion of CAMP). Both of these women are in a domestic partnership with land-owning males. In contrast, none of the women trimmers mentioned a risk of law enforcement with regards to trimming.

Work Environment Issues. Four women interviewed who trim for a living said they have felt unsafe at a job due to being isolated with male workers who were abusing substances in remote areas where they had no cell phone service. Six men and twelve

women have worked for strangers in unfamiliar places. Four men and six women reported to have felt unsafe, vulnerable or scared at a job site. Other women reported to feel nervous when they file taxes, deposit cash in a banking account, or drive marijuana product in a car. A single mother interviewee expressed how difficult it is to find a suitable rental, compounded with the fact that there is always a threat of getting evicted if the landlord forbids growing. One woman found that time spent with her partner at home caused marital problems because they do not have the space that a nine-to-five job would require/provide. If children are present, the potential stress is worse.

Compensation and Health Issues. Final concerns and issues surrounding trimming for a living include the fact that seven of the males and seven of the females have not been paid for work on one or more occasions. Trimmers can also be exposed to health hazards such as powdery mildew and mold. Years of trimming for a living can produce allergies and repetitive stress injuries.

Division of Labor, Parenting, and Childcare

Four women reported they have male partners that perform the bulk of the cultivation responsibilities. Six women perform work as trimmers and raise their children, while also working with a male partner who works in cultivation. Only one woman interviewed has an equal share of work with her male partner and economic benefits from outdoor cultivation.

Three of the women interviewed are single mothers. Six women interviewed are stay-at-home mothers. Six of the women also work a “legitimate” job or are self-employed and able to work from home. Every woman interviewed for this paper

reported that working as a trimmer in the cultivation industry generally allows for more flexible hours, which enable them to stay home with their children. One woman said, “I wouldn’t trade it for anything; it’s been the best way to raise a kid.” A second woman said that she would not be able to stay at home anywhere else. “I would have to work a more scheduled job with less pay.” Three single mothers said that they are able to support their families by trimming alone.

Another research subject enrolled a child in preschool so that she could work, but found that daycare and preschool were expensive. Other mothers trade off watching children when there is trim-work, and sometimes older children watch younger kids. Many women trimmers said that more flexible hours and large community support make it easier to obtain free child-care or barter for it. Only one woman sent her children to daycare.

For many women, Humboldt County and the opportunity to trim and work in the industry has provided a rare and supportive environment in which to raise a family. These women have given birth at home and customarily use midwives during pregnancy and birthing. Women said that while pregnant they and the midwives had concerns about contact with smoke or touching and working with cannabis. When one woman had her third child, her husband was away at work growing outdoors. She had a three year old, an eleven year old, and a newborn. Her female friends who also had babies and men who worked out of town basically ‘got by’ with potluck dinners. They also took turns holding babies so that mothers could shower. These mothers created a community support group,

which they felt would likely not have been possible to form if working in another, more traditional field.

Managing Stigmatized Identities and Negotiating Passing

The women I interviewed are mothers, business owners, partners, trimmers, growers, midwives, artists, academics, and other professionals. These roles are not divisible, but the issue of legality and risks from marijuana cultivation require identity negotiation in order to protect their image as good mothers and members of the community.

One woman interviewed has lived in Humboldt County for thirteen years. She reported that she began trimming seven years ago, and began to grow five years ago when her child became a toddler. She hid her growing from non-local family to avoid disapproval and judgment. Her involvement in the marijuana industry was seen as a crime to others that she knew. This woman was comfortable, however, discussing work with others who participate in the marijuana cultivation industry. Her husband now has a legitimate job and pays taxes, which eases her mind about what others think of them. Paying taxes also helps put her at ease regarding the legal standpoint.

Research subjects approached talking about marijuana at home with children in different ways. The aforementioned couple does not expose their children to marijuana production because they want ‘kids to be kids’ and not to have additional weight or fear on their shoulders. The parents also want to avoid having their children talk about it at school, which could risk the family’s privacy and security. Another research subject explains to her child, “daddy grows plants for people with cancer.”

A second female interview subject, who worked on farms in college and became pregnant when she set up her first growing operation, is totally open about work with her kids and family by calling it “their medicine.” Her oldest child knows that it is their family’s livelihood and that he would not have life with his mother at home, and world travel, without it. In the beginning, he was ashamed, but knew that if people asked what his parents did, he had to tell cover stories. This same female subject has never grown inside of the home and never trims nor smokes in front of the children. Additionally, she never told her own parents about her line of work and “is always worried about the neighbors.” For this female subject, whether she discusses her livelihood depends on the audience. “Some interpret this work as a crime; up here it’s pretty accepted as an underground culture.” She further reported that she did not attend her high school reunion so that she could avoid talking about work. This research participant, like others, uses stories to legitimize their lifestyle, including use of family money, real estate holdings, and owning a business, all of which are partial truths.

Humboldt County presents a community where these families can be open and proud about growing good, organic medicine. One interview subject told her mother and father immediately. Her parents were concerned about inherent risks, such as the possibility of her crashing her car in “the middle of nowhere,” where outdoor trim-scenes often take place. Her parents were also concerned about others projecting the criminal stigma onto their family.

Another participant was not comfortable letting her parents know what industry she was involved in, afraid that they would not understand, or even turn her in to law

enforcement. She also is not open with her children regarding her work, and she does not want to have to say “you can’t talk about it.” Several research participants, like the interviewee previously mentioned, concluded that whether or not they are open about work in the marijuana industry depends on the audience. Within one couple, the husband’s family from the East Coast smokes marijuana. She, on the other hand, views herself as relatively mainstream, but feels like she has to ‘play up’ how much she works at a legitimate job, even though that income is quite small compared to total income and expenses. She also volunteers at schools, religious organizations, and owns a business.

Another woman interviewed says that she has always had a “cover business” and was much more concerned about involvement in the marijuana industry when she lived in another, less-tolerant state. “It is way more relaxed here. I was raised on the East Coast where everyone is educated, has good jobs and are expected to go to medical school. Growing marijuana is not okay and people are very noseey.” This woman is open about growing marijuana with her family. Her mother initially expressed concern, but then researched California’s laws, moved to Humboldt County, and now grows marijuana as well. To alleviate fear about social services and child custody, this family keeps marijuana growing within 215 limits. Their cover story, to people outside the Humboldt County cultivation community, is that she and her partner are business owners and parents. Marijuana cultivation is not discussed with their children, but “What does Daddy do?” is a constant question.

An additional female interview participant felt comfortable talking about her livelihood in the cultivation business to her mother and certain family members but not

her father. Her children always knew that she smoked marijuana, but she did not tell them about growing it until they were old enough to understand. She also has a job teaching art in the community; being an art teacher is her “cover occupation” and what she tells the general public regarding her livelihood. Outside of Humboldt County, however, this family does not discuss growing. And while this participant has felt stigmatized as a mother, she does not discuss such feelings. She negotiated this stigma by stopping smoking marijuana, believing it manages the stigma by making involvement with the herb less obvious. Being recognized as a teacher in the community “makes it easier, even people who would guess do not want to believe it.” She also laments that when she disapproves of her teenage children experimenting with drugs, “they throw it in her face.”

Another participant reported an alternative stigma management method practiced by yet another woman: not to tell anybody. She stated that she does not feel concerned with stigma. She explained that the most important thing is to provide for her kids. She already feels stigmatized as a single mother of three. She tells her children that some people use it for medicine, “but some people think that it is really bad so you don’t talk about it.”

One participant, a stay-at-home mother, gardener, and healer living “off-the-grid” in Southern Humboldt, does not feel stigmatized by her community. She chooses to be open with her family. Her children are aware of what work their parents perform to make a living. Her partner happens to also be a contractor, but does not hide behind that profession. She sometimes worries about her teenager’s friends coming over and maybe

taking some marijuana and consuming it. The parents always call it “blessed flowers” to the children and told them, “we don’t need to tell everyone everything about our lives; there are some people that don’t like it so we don’t need to talk about it.”

In contrast, a different female interview subject is concerned about what to tell her children. Both her partner and she smoke, so they say that marijuana is their medicine. This partnership had never been open with extended family members about their livelihood. She has a business as a healer, in which she identifies more. Initially, she had not told her parents, but when she had a fight with her partner, he told her parents. Her parents were worried; her father is a defense attorney and had contributed to her support and her children’s support over a period of years. She also uses a legitimate government job as an alternative identity and as a cover story to those not in the industry. In truth, she feels that it is obvious that she grows because she is single mother who travels and possesses an abundant lifestyle. She has always tried to keep her children separate from the “weed world” and let them know that it’s not okay to talk about it at school or with anyone. She tells her children that, “it is a nice plant that some doctors recommend but not everyone is okay with it.” Her daughter asked, “Why do you do it then?” she replied, “Do you like your nice house and clothes?”

Another participant claimed that her job within the industry does not define her identity. “I’m not an advocate,” she states, “and it’s just a means to an end; a job.” She is uncomfortable with greed and abuse of energy within the industry at large. Her husband has a nine-to-five job and they would be barely making ends meet without the income from marijuana. One woman was notable in that she had pride in the marijuana

cultivation community and also in being a part of producing quality medicine. She feels that marijuana production “gives women a sense of empowerment, independence, and the ability to provide for her family, without having a forty to sixty hour per week job.”

Within the Trimming Circles: Female Workers Form Community

Based on the reflections of the female interview subjects, trimming may be the ultimate combination of business and pleasure, manifesting in desirable mid-summer jobs. Properties where trimming takes place often come with kitchens rife with fresh, local, organic food. Interview subjects reported that they often sleep in yurts above pristine rivers, take early morning walks, do yoga, and earn several thousand dollars pay for a few days work. Other benefits include satellite radio, herb smoking, wine drinking, and friendships formed while socioeconomic networks are expanded. Women may benefit financially and emotionally by garnering well-paid autonomy within the context of a meaningful social network.

According to the women interviewed, trimming can provide a win-win situation for participants on both sides of production, as well as an alternative for less accommodating mainstream employment. To illustrate, one interviewee, a local female trimmer, explained that she had decided to work for a week as a temporary worker in a well-respected law office. She was required to be at the office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. At the end of her forty-five hour work week, she netted about four hundred and thirty dollars, which was approximately what she earns in only two days of trimming in about six or seven hours per day. Additionally, she reported alcohol abuse and inappropriate

sexual comments at the law office. The next week she quit and returned to trimming where she made five hundred dollars in two days.

Based on the accounts from the female interview subjects, trimming circles seem to reflect the “homemaker clubs” or the extension programs for rural United States homemakers during the first half of the twentieth century which served to disseminate information about efficient homemaking and, importantly, became sites for the reproduction of “class-specific gender relations.” (Berry, 2003). Like these homemaker clubs, Humboldt County trimming circles support the cottage industry of marijuana production and foment an inherent trust, as every woman present takes part, at least marginally, in an illicit industry. This community in which female trim workers continue the “continually reconstructed” (Hall, 1996: 3) process of identity formation coincides with Johnson & Kaufman’s (2004: 809) ideas regarding stigma management strategies, including “selectively associating with supportive individuals.”

The hours spent in a close room with other women and homemakers, with little stimulation and a high level of required concentration facilitate a unique social honesty and communication. According to the interviewees, there is a majority sentiment that prevails during these sometimes twelve hour trimming sessions, a brutal honesty that is given enough time and patience to emerge and often serves as a catharsis to all present in the room. Anecdotal evidence from trimming circle discussions surrounding primary domestic relationships include stories of a personal nature normally reserved to the most trusted therapist, and these sharing sessions can provide a balance to the male dominated world of outdoor cultivation. According to female interview subjects, the male

dominated sentiments present in cultivation often spill over into domestic relationships, leaving the male in a position of control over the female. Those present at trimming circles may receive feedback and interaction of a support group nature. Reputations of men in the community, particularly growers are discussed, and this appears to be one of the only checks on male behavior: preservation of reputation in the community, which can be destroyed at a trimming circle.

Ultimately everybody present is there to make money and on some level, each session is impersonal as group membership constantly changes. That being said, some core membership may remain the same for extended periods of time, creating substantial community that has long-term impact on domestic trends such as partnership negotiations, living conditions, maintenance of health, and the raising of children and animals. Women also gather information on creating and operating their own indoor cultivations scenes. Growing techniques are discussed, as well as how and where to sell the product; this information is sometimes taken and applied to women workers' own marijuana production schemes.

Several female interview subjects reported evidence which indicated, despite the advantages of trimming for a living, the formation of a stigmatized identity for the female, accessorized by the dominant male, and subordinate in her relationship to him. The roles play out as the male having the power, voice, and privilege of agenda-setting because the male has the cash resources and owns the land. Women reported hearing statements such as, "Don't tell me what to do on my property," and "this is my place and the rules don't apply here," referring to a grower's ability and perceived right to

physically abuse “his women” who were on his property to work. Women have offered anecdotal evidence of being threatened to be left on the hill in order to be controlled.

This control extends from the property and production methods on the land, such as who is hired, which marijuana strains will be grown, and how to accomplish the work.

Women who are subjected to abusive relationships because they are financially dependent on the male understand the stigma of shame and often isolate themselves from other females and the rest of the community. Other women with children reported that they stay with male growers in unsatisfying relationships because they are accustomed to being at home with their children and to the freedom that a marijuana-sponsored lifestyle. This comfortable lifestyle is often hard to leave, especially when exchanged for low paying jobs that require long hours and rigid schedules, and can be difficult to obtain.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis

Women in the Cultivation Industry

The role of the female in Humboldt County's marijuana cultivation industry is intriguing from a sociological standpoint. The industry as a whole is on the cutting edge of social and political change, as it demonstrates people taking their economic reality into their own hands despite federal prohibition. It illustrates a conviction to be self-employed and independent from the need to conform to a company or to mainstream America's ideas about what a proper livelihood requires. Along with growing marijuana, the findings report trimming as one of the most profitable and flexible jobs a female can have in Humboldt County. On the other hand, roles such as trimming, which requires patience and manual dexterity, fall into dominant constructions of gender associated with women. In comparison to the "outdoor grower" role which reinforces gender stereotypes about masculinity, the feminization of trimmers unfortunately reflects Crenshaw's (1989) notion of socially constructed power relations, as seen through observations, interviews, and survey responses.

The reported benefits of growing appear to be financial and social independence, and a sense of pride in the production of an often lucrative, controversial product—the production of which was previously dominated by men.

Stay-at-Home Parenting

Marijuana production, whether indoor or outdoor, allows for stay-at-home parenting because one or both parents do not have to work outside of the home. In the

research survey, most of the women who were in domestic partnerships could be stay-at-home mothers because their husbands made enough money growing marijuana to support the family. Indeed, several of the women had nothing to do with the production, whether outdoor or indoor. Some women helped with production until they had children. In some cases, both parents are stay-at-home parents.

Trimming also seemed to facilitate stay-at-home parenting by providing significant supplemental income for many of the surveyed women. One subject stated that the main reason she stays in Humboldt County and trims for a living is because it affords her the opportunity to stay at home with her children. If she lived elsewhere, she would have to work a “real job” for less pay and longer hours. Another subject, a single mom, started trimming when her child was a year old. She noted, “the money was a savior.” Nothing else she could have done would have made as much money as trimming. She also said that she could bring her baby to work and people would watch her. She felt that she could make as much money in a short time as she would have made in a week at a traditional job. Essentially, trimming allowed her to support herself and her child comfortably.

Stay-at-home parenting was recognized by the interview subjects to provide several additional monetary and social benefits. For instance, interviewees noted that it reduces or eliminates costly daycare. Historically, daycare became more popular when divorces in the U.S. increased in the 1970s and 80s and single women had to return to or enter the work force for the first time. Daycare usage has also increased during the recent decade due to the inflated cost of living in the U.S. which requires both adults in a

household to work outside of the home. For many women interviewed, it is “not worth it” to miss key development stages of their child’s life. Additionally, for many women, weekly wages outside of the marijuana industry would not even cover the cost of daycare.

Stay-at-home parenting also facilitates home schooling, which in turn enables families to customize education, including the incorporation of travel as experiential education, which promotes values other than those advocated by mainstream North America. Stay-at-home parents interviewed felt that they had a wider range of experiences, schedules, and options for home schooling and a more holistic and integrated life.

Freedom from a full time job outside of the home gives families autonomy and a flexible schedule that affords time to pursue individual goals and achievements, such as vegetable farming, animal husbandry, or other sustainable practices. Skills learned in the realm of growing marijuana, particularly outdoors, can easily be translated into other fields, such as construction and farming. Moreover, income generated by marijuana farming can be used to achieve ecological goals, such as solar power and water reclamation.

Women and Passing

Livelihood is a primary means of social identification. Whether one’s livelihood aligns with her/his morals and the values of her/his family and peers determines whether such an individual lives with a stigmatized identity. As Kaufman & Johnson (2004: 807) point out, “the main issue for the stigmatized is social acceptance by ‘normals,’ the

nonstigmatized.” The inability to be honest about something as basic as one’s livelihood can dramatically hinder an individual’s experience of self-expression. Balanced with the desire for acceptable livelihood is a realistic need to survive in today’s society — i.e., a capitalist society whose laws and socioeconomic policies favor corporations and bottom-line profit. The counterculture that emerged in Northern California in the 1960s has provided a few decentralized socioeconomic alternatives to mainstream America that live on today, including marijuana cultivation.

In Humboldt’s community, two sets of identities have emerged for working women in the marijuana cultivation industry. One identity is open and honest and is saved for like-minded people and/or other marijuana industry workers. The other identity is a cover identity, used for people in positions of authority, extended family, friends, and acquaintances from outside of the cultivation community. Maintaining such a cover identity requires skilled and frequent “passing.”

Ability to Pass—The Influence of Class and Race

As previously mentioned, Humboldt County is an extremely white community (84% of the residents identify as white according to the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau). This is a function of historical settlement patterns as well as routine violence inflicted to maintain the whiteness of the area; including, the genocide of many Native Americans in the Wiyot massacre of 1860 (Carpenter, 2013) and the forced removal of East Asians in 1885 (Perry, 2005). So when it comes to women participants’ abilities to pass, of course, class and race play major roles. All of the women I interviewed identify as white and more or less lower-middle to middle class. White privilege and class privilege conspire to

enable passing much more easily than for poor women of color, regardless of the situation and very much so in the case of Humboldt County's marijuana industry.

Based on the interviews conducted during this study, women working in Humboldt County's marijuana industry appear to negotiate passing in this grey-market profession through the use of cover stories and expressions of other hegemonic attributes of "good mothering." Various social contexts and the relating efforts at passing often allow for more or less authentic self expression, for example, mothers may give full disclosure in social settings with other mothers working in the industry, or domestic partners of growers, thereby perpetuating Kaufman & Johnson's (2004: 809) passing strategy involving "selectively associating with supporting individuals." For a mother, what is the stigma related to being a trimmer really about? Is it failure to conform to the mainstream? Is it a sense of endangering their children or themselves as mothers? As discussed in the results section, most women interviewed who grow or whose husbands grow reported to feel mild risk in regard to law enforcement and that fear is increased if there are children in the home.

Based on the findings, a higher level of passing is afforded by the marijuana industry in Humboldt County, which is unavailable to impoverished or otherwise disadvantaged mothers, due to higher than average pay and flexible hours, as well as the day-to-day support for these women. Mothers working as trimmers or in other capacities in the marijuana industry make enough untaxed income to purchase organic food for their children and have flexible hours to avoid the need for daycare. Communities of women and mothers are established in the trimming profession: women share resources and take

turns caring for each others children, as well as garnering emotional support in terms of domestic partnerships. Female trimmers participate in clothing swaps, potlucks, and other manifestations of economic support outside of any government or institution. Socially, there is an acceptance of a variety of backgrounds, styles, and viewpoints; there is no one “best image,” as many professional women must manage, such as dressing in expensive suits, having perfect manicures, or “perfect” lives.

Additionally, mothers working in the marijuana industry do not have to collect welfare or food stamps, which often results in associations with being a ‘bad’ or unfit mother (Roberts, 1997). Models of domestic partnerships are as varied as the individuals participating in the industry. Single women with and without children work together, some women are in domestic partnerships that are unmarried, and some women are married—every conceivable permutation of the family setting. The nuclear model of a family exists but is not the only socially acceptable form of family or lifestyle arrangement. Many women who trim do not only identify themselves as a trimmer, but also through other skills and employment, such as dancers, teachers, artists, musicians, academics, and entrepreneurs.

What is Legitimate Work?

Some people within the industry reported to find growing for a living to be acceptable, while others were apologetic about it and felt a need to legitimize themselves. Men who grow and sell enough marijuana to make a living but still hold a part-time job as a “cover” appear to assuage some guilt over getting away with growing marijuana for a living. There is an additional issue of whether there is a moral difference between

cultivation for medicine and cultivation for the street market. Regardless, cultivation for medicine raises the expectations of quality.

Within the Humboldt County growing community itself, research subjects reported that they can be open and take pride in growing good organic medicine that is within the State's "reasonable relationship to recommendation" legal standard (see prior information regarding marijuana legislation). One subject stated that she was "proud, within the community," of the work that she does and that she "takes pride in being part of producing good medicine." That being said, several interview transcriptions implied that this sense of pride was replaced with a sense of stigma when discussing occupation and lifestyle outside of the community of growers.

The Appearance of Privilege in Humboldt County

What intersectional feminists refer to as an "axis of social division" (Bilge, 2010: 63) manifests in Humboldt County's marijuana culture in the form of property ownership, production roles, income from production-related activities, and relationship to the land or grower. An axis of social division forms when interlocking socioeconomic realities and characteristics divide the privileged and the passing from those without either privilege or the ability to pass or have access to the same tools for social and personal progression. This line divides community membership in terms of sex, race, hetero-ideals, privilege, money, ability to pass, social acceptance, and a fundamental belief in the self to actualize one's life course.

An example of an axis of division that is critical in illegal marijuana production is freedom, or lack of freedom, from surveillance. This is the difference between "getting

away with it,” i.e., making money and not getting arrested, and not “getting away with it,” and therefore being prosecuted for growing and not making money. Additionally, those that are free from surveillance are protected from robbery, whereas those growers who are not, including women and people of color, may be more vulnerable to theft. Who is free from surveillance and who is not can change often within this semi-legal industry. For example, female trimmers are less likely to be under surveillance from the authorities due to the changing location of their work as well as the changing times and seasons of employment. In this case, it is the white male growers, who are often stationed in one location (near their crop) who are more likely to be subject to the effects of enforcement of state and federal laws.

Women as trimmers operate at the bottom of the production scheme and can be objectified both sexually and as a replaceable commodity. Sexual objectification occurs when male growers fill trim tables with females based, at least in part, on their sexual appeal and availability. In a regulated industry this would qualify as illegal discrimination, yet there is no legal recourse in this industry. This subservient and frequently objectified role is a motivating factor that drives women to save their earnings as trimmers, and if possible, to purchase indoor cultivation equipment in order to achieve a larger degree of autonomy and progress from Freud’s “passive” feminine roles to more “active” masculine roles (Freud, 1933: 2). During the last three to five years, women have used the knowledge obtained at trimming jobs to learn how to become more independent, and many now have their own indoor cultivation scenes and may even hire

male trimmers to work for them. This perhaps points to progress, albeit slow, exhibited in the lessening of the divide between male and female roles in this industry.

Disturbing Traditional Modes of Consumption

Perhaps the most radical, yet complex, aspect of marijuana cultivation is that it at times disturbs the traditional, patriarchal and capitalist modes of consumption. These traditional modes of consumption include purchasing packaged food or eating from restaurants instead of gardens and home-cooking. It also includes waking up in the morning, buying coffee, and driving to a job, where one purchases lunch, spends money on daycare and mainstream entertainment, and buys clothes made by corporations in third world countries using sweat shop labor. Part of this traditional mode of consumption includes paying income tax to the federal and state governments, which growers and trimmers alike can avoid.

Growers, if they choose to, can reclaim the power to earn from today's corporations by reclaiming modes of consumption that actually reflect their values, such as the gardening and sustainability efforts discussed earlier. Additionally, growers have support from their community in exploring alternative values and resulting modes of consumption. That being said, many marijuana industry workers interviewed reported that some of the advantages of their work were being able to afford nice homes, clothes, and travel opportunities, which can be deemed to fit into categories of traditional modes of consumption. In sum, although some of the traits of the cultivation continue to mimic both corporate and patriarchal institutions, there is an opportunity for inclusion and the evolution of ideas beyond corporate patriarchy compared to many other industries.

My research results identify the deep contradictions within marijuana cultivation. While Humboldt County's marijuana industry participants, specifically its employees, often choose to reject many North American modes of consumption, as seen in their valuing of stay-at-home parenting, healthy eating (i.e. kitchen gardens, local, organic foods, etc.), alternative domestic partnerships, and other sociological elements, it is important to note that most choose this line of work also because of the financial and thus material benefits it affords; like nice clothes and cars, world travel, etc. Also identified in my interviews is the fact that the women's role in this industry mirrors that of many other market-oriented patriarchal agricultural industries throughout the world. Based on participant-observation and interviews with the workers involved in the industry, it appears that while women workers in Humboldt's marijuana industry are certainly creating opportunities to manage stigmas associated with their line of work, form powerful and caring communities, and gain more autonomy through production schemes of their own, there is still a long road to travel before reaching a truly non-patriarchal, egalitarian agricultural model for this industry.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this day and age, when mainstream expectations and mandates dictate how people spend their time and money, what people do for a living, how they educate themselves, determine medical care, and how they raise their children, families choosing to operate outside the mainstream system are often seen as radical and political. Based on my observation transcripts and fieldwork interviews, marijuana cultivation was credited with promoting healthy, functional families by enabling stay-at-home parenting opportunities and the many ancillary benefits resulting from them, as well as by providing financial freedom and independence. However, mainstream consumer values are also apparent in this sector. The mothers interviewed, and the men and women surveyed, indicated the desire for certain material commodities, such as nice homes, ability to travel, and property ownership.

Additionally, despite the marijuana industry's status as a non-traditional, illicit, agricultural system, it nevertheless reflects the same patriarchal construction of gender division found within most dominant agricultural industries. While several women who participated in the study knew of women who had surpassed the trimming position and achieved greater autonomy by setting up grow-systems of their own, the majority of female participants in Humboldt's marijuana cultivation industry remain in the feminized roles prescribed for them. The emerging trend of male trimmers and female growers has not yet fully disrupted the gendered division of labor within the production of marijuana.

Since the study scrutinized stigma and stigma management, I was constantly aware of the fact that I did not want to further stigmatize and/or marginalize the study

participants, as an observer looking in to a community of which I was not a part. In order to do this, I specifically requested friends and acquaintances to participate in the study. This was partially successful in mitigating the observer-subject dichotomy that can often form in studies such as this one, as participants felt comfortable opening up to me and sharing their experiences; no participants expressed feelings of objectification or marginalization. While I had initially intended to acquire the role of participant-observer, in the end, it was not possible, due to the illicit nature of the work, as well as my lack of knowledge regarding details of the production process.

If an opportunity to continue the study or to conduct it again arose, several elements of the study would change, including the role of the men involved in the study and my focus on race and privilege. Because I was primarily concerned about the women's role in the marijuana industry, I only conducted interviews with the female participants, and the male participants simply completed the written survey. While reflecting on the outcome of the study, and on the responses from female participants, I recognized that interviewing the male participants with questions regarding both their own role in the industry as well as their view of the female role in the industry may have gleaned further information and valuable responses that could have strengthened my conclusions regarding gender construction and male privilege. In addition, future research on male trimmers would enable an analysis of the ways in which they negotiate their gender identity within a feminized field of work.

Lastly, from the beginning I was prepared to explore how race and sexual orientation (specifically regarding male participants) affected privilege, stigma, and

stigma management within Humboldt's marijuana industry, yet as the study continued, this became harder to do given the breadth of the study and, more importantly, the lack of racial and sexuality-based diversity among the participants. While the participants came from many different backgrounds that brought unique points of view to both the interviews and the observation sessions, all participants were white and all identified as heterosexual; this reflects the markings of white privilege and heteronormativity within the marijuana industry. It was an outcome of using methods of personal relationships to identify research subjects. Given that neither interview subjects of color nor self-identified homosexual interview subjects were available within the participant group, I felt that I could not adequately explore the themes of race and sexual diversity and how these themes intersect with stigma and privilege within the context of this study, despite their relevance and importance while comparing the marijuana industry's race-relations with those of other agrarian industries worldwide. Future research could focus explicitly on the ways in which this industry intentionally or unintentionally reproduces whiteness and heterosexuality. Given the degree to which personal connections and relationships are central to the success of marijuana cultivation, overt and covert forms of racism and homophobia could easily explain the whiteness and hetero-centricity of the current industry.

While future implications for this study remain to be seen, the participants have encouraged me to continue to ask questions and observe from time to time, as they themselves are now looking at their work through a new lens. I will continue to discuss

my research with them as well as to explore the previously mentioned elements that I would have liked to develop further during the course of the study.

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