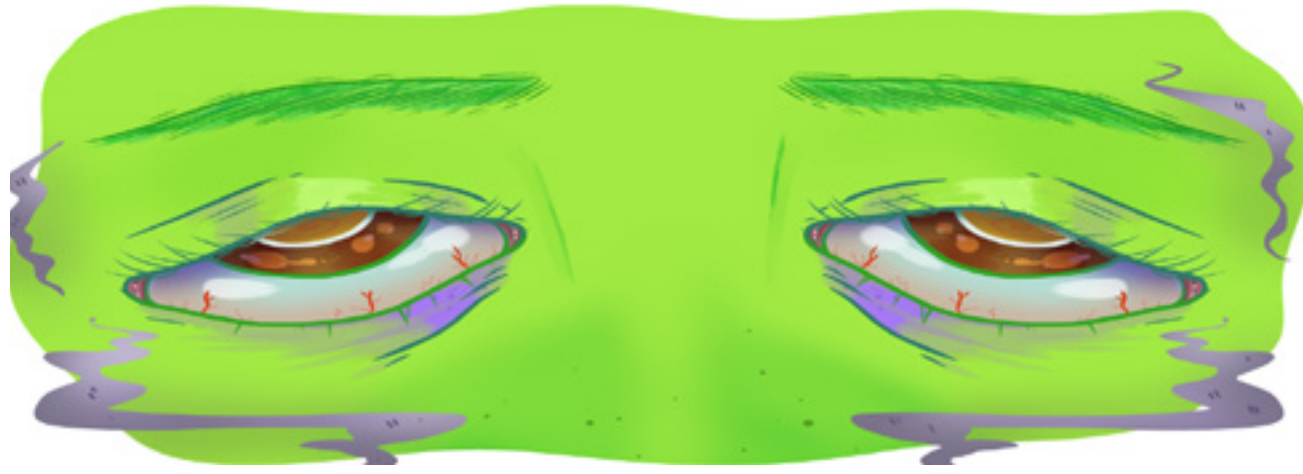


Marijuana Mentality

Exploring a South student's marijuana use and its role in a generation



GIA AGOSTA, BRIDGET DOYLE, AND MADDIE WEEKLEY ALL '21
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**This name has been changed to protect the anonymity of this person. Marijuana use is illegal for anyone under 21 years of age in the state of Michigan.*

"Weed is more than a drug. It's a business. It's a medication. It's a lifestyle."

Mary Jane* started smoking marijuana her freshman year of high school. The decision was made out of pure curiosity, she said, between her and an old boyfriend. The two asked around until they found a local dealer who sold them an oil cartridge and, on a half-day of school, tried it for the first time in her boyfriend's living room.

Jane said she didn't get high the first time. She decided to try it again. It was during this second

session when the effects set in. Now, three years later, Jane is still fascinated with the substance. She smokes every day, has stock invested in the cannabis industry and plans to major in cannabis studies at

college this fall.

"A lot of my personality comes from my creativity and I think that weed really helps me express (that)," Jane said. "My room is decked out and I just love color. (Marijuana) makes everything exciting, so I feel like if I were to stop now, it would take some excitement out of my life."

However, Jane's greater reason for her continued marijuana use stems from a diagnosed anxiety disorder she's struggled with since seventh grade. Jane said she relies on marijuana to relieve her of daily obstacles she faces in school, such as conversing with peers and focusing in class.

"If I'm having an anxiety attack, (marijuana) really helps to calm my nerves because I'm the type of person that gets flustered really quickly if I have a minor inconvenience. I overthink, and that's my anxiety," Jane said. "If I smoke, it levels me out and brings me back to reality. It opens my mind a bit, and doesn't put this gate up like a lot of people think it does."

Pediatrician Dr. Laura Clark said when minors try marijuana, even just a handful of times, they do not realize they are conditioning themselves for worsened mental disorders, even as serious as psychosis and psychotic breaks.

"I really try to counsel (my patients) that (marijuana) is not a good treatment for anxiety and depression," Clark said. "There are actually medications out there that can

be

helpful or other ways of dealing with (their illness such as) making sure you exercise, meditate-- those sorts of things."

Jane, on the contrary, believes marijuana will actually benefit her in the future. She said she is not addicted to marijuana, but rather has a strong dependency on the substance.

"I wouldn't consider it an addiction because I know that I can stop (using marijuana)," Jane said. "I feel like I could definitely cut down, but, in the past, I have been able to stop smoking during points in my life for sports or drug tests."

According to Clark, marijuana is proven to be a highly addictive substance, especially in adolescents. She said even with occasional marijuana use, any adult is vulnerable to addiction, further supporting the idea that teenagers are at an even higher risk.

"Teenagers have receptors in the brain where the marijuana can bind--more than adults have--so they can get a higher high," Clark said. "Plus, the marijuana that's around these days is much more potent than years ago, so it very easily trains the brain to be addicted to it."

Along with the potential negative health effects that pertain to marijuana usage, there are various negative legal effects, according to Grosse Pointe Youth Division Sergeant Christopher Cotzias. Although Cotzias said most first-time offenders receive a phone call to parents and community service, misdemeanors can cause long-lasting impacts.

"As you start applying for colleges or scholarships, (college admissions officers) are going to ask if you have a misdemeanor conviction-- they don't want to see something like that," Cotzias said. "It'll harm your chances of educating yourself further on down the road. I wouldn't want to risk all your hard work for a little bit of marijuana."

Assistant principal Cynthia Parravano said South's approach to handling students caught in possession of marijuana involves ensuring there are no second offenses and the overall welfare of the student caught is intact.

"One of the things (we may do) is speak with a substance abuse counselor who can give (student marijuana users) information and educate them so they can either make better choices," Parravano said. "We can also find out if there's something going on that is causing the student to veer towards (marijuana use)."

Cotzias said the intense consequences-- both legal and physical--faced from underaged marijuana usage far outweigh any temporary benefits an adolescent may receive while under the influence.

According to Cotzias, there are many risks that potential marijuana users might not consider.

"(Underaged marijuana users are) putting themselves in a dangerous situation they might not be able to get out of-- even just obtaining the marijuana is risky," Cotzias said. "They might think it's okay, but it's usually not. Someone had to go into a situation where they could get in over their head. You're dealing with strangers who are handling (these drugs) and you don't know what's actually in that

marijuana, so it's risky."

Another risk, Cotzias said, is driving under the influence of marijuana. Jane said she is aware of this risk, but continues to drive high since she does not feel a difference in her abilities.

"Your body is your own body, and it will react to all kinds of substances differently, but specifically weed in general, its (effects are)

22%

Of 12th-graders reported using marijuana in the past 30 days

different for everyone," Jane said. "I do have a high tolerance, so if I'm coming down from a high then I'll go and drive, but if I'm stoned out of my mind, I'm not going to get behind the wheel. That's stupid."

Parravano said students who drive under the influence of marijuana often compare it to the seemingly more dangerous statistics of drinking alcohol while driving in order to justify their behavior. This, combined with not knowing where these drugs are coming from, can make marijuana use even more concerning, according to Parravano.

"In some instances, (the situation) turns out horrible. Kids could smoke marijuana laced with something and end up institutionalized because they didn't know what it was that they were smoking," Parravano said. "It's just not safe."

Jane, however, said she only uses marijuana from licensed dispensaries. In a recent doctor's visit, Jane said her lungs were deemed healthy and she attributes this to their trustworthy source.

"I'm not smoking fake products that are made in people's basements," Jane said. "I don't trust street dealers because we never know where they get their stuff from."

Jane said her mother also uses marijuana and supports her use of it. This dynamic alarms Clark, though, due to her concern that marijuana is being normalized for underaged users through their parents.

"I think there's a difference if it's an adult making the decision (to use marijuana) versus an adolescent who doesn't understand the consequences," Clark said. "I think talking about the facts (of marijuana use) and other ways of coping with issues (helps to reject marijuana's normalization)."

Jane said she hopes marijuana continues to become normalized since she finds it to be far safer than alcohol and other stronger drugs.

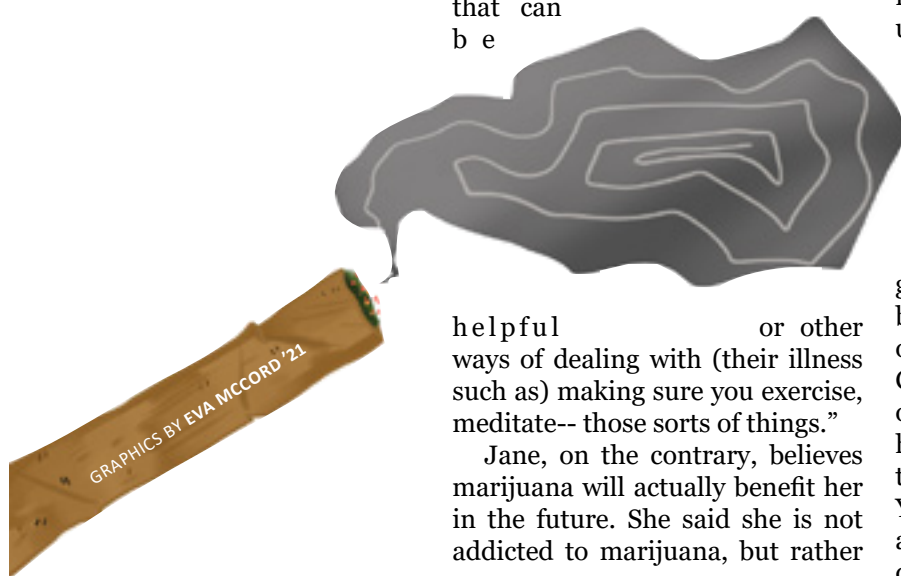
"I'm very educated (on marijuana)," Jane said. "Not only that, but I'm also educated on what it has to offer financially and globally for everyone, health wise and economically. It's something that I want to pursue as a career. It's not just something that I do for fun."

(Marijuana) is not a good treatment for anxiety and depression.

DR. LAURA CLARK
PEDIATRICIAN

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ANONYMOUS STUDENT



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