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## Marijuana-induced insanity underrated

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I like to think I'm unique, like when it comes to my political views.

But on the subject of marijuana legalization, I'm a demographic-specific stereotype: Legalize it, tax it, put the drug dealers out of business, etc. I've had the same conversation on this subject maybe a few hundred times since I was 14.

Aside from the law, there's one big reason to avoid weed, and it's your mental health. Smoking weed has an uncomfortable probability of promoting insanity. The data here are too convincing to ignore.

Anecdotally, and just by being enrolled in college, I know dozens of apparently sane people who get high on a regular basis. You probably know a few stoners, too — Americans consume two-thirds of the world's illegal drug supply. And weed transcends all income levels and virtually any social or professional category you can think of. Visiting Amsterdam was like a pro-drug commercial for me, especially after seeing a lot of white-collar, legit-looking people traveling to toké up.

But even if the last three American presidents, Carl Sagan and Michael Phelps got high, they did it at risk to their sanity. Consider:

- At least two studies published in the British Medical Journal between 2002 and 2005 linked marijuana to schizophrenia and psychotic symptoms.
- Marijuana may predispose “mentally well” individuals to schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses, according to a 2009 study at the University of Granada, Spain.
- Depression, anxiety and personality disturbances are associated with marijuana use, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- Google it; this column's too short.

If the super-skeptics are right, pot only affects people who already have mental health problems. That's still bad: One in four American adults has a diagnosable mental health disorder every year, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

Since Reefer Madness in the 1930s, there's been a lot of biased, distorted and straight-up-garbage propaganda about marijuana — largely in this country. It's disgusting to me because much of my generation thinks marijuana is safer than coffee (thanks, War on Drugs).

Someone in charge of U.S. antidrug PSAs should look to Britain's FRANK campaign for a model of how to effectively advertise drug risks. Our antimarijuana marketing must stop coming off like a let's-defend-our-stupid-laws approach.

Weed should be legal. But even if antidrug campaigns have twisted the facts about its health risk, marijuana is far from harmless.

Thousands of ASU students will smoke weed this year, if a survey conducted by ASU Wellness and Health Promotion is accurate. It found about 10 percent of students used marijuana during one month in 2008. Of those thousands, I assume many will go on to become successful individuals.

The vast majority of them will never enter a psych ward or attempt suicide for reasons relating to their marijuana use. Statistically speaking, some probably will.

When it comes to smoking pot, I don't take issue with personal choice (except for the part about financially supporting scum drug suppliers and risking unfair legal penalties — what a waste, and all because it's illegal).

But I have a problem with uninformed choice. Anyone who smokes weed should know the risk to their mental health, just like anyone who smokes cigarettes should know the lung-cancer connection.

Because this column will pop up on Google, a disclaimer for potential employers: I don't smoke or otherwise consume marijuana, do feel free to drug/polygraph test me at [matt.culbertson@asu.edu](mailto:matt.culbertson@asu.edu).

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