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Cannabis, Moral Entrepreneurship, and Stigma: Conflicting Narratives on the 26 May 2016 Toronto Police Raid on Cannabis Shops

Abstract
On May 26, 2016, the police raided 43 cannabis dispensaries in Toronto, Canada, making 90 arrests. This article aims to describe the narrative of the responsible state agencies concerning the police raid and compare it to the narrative of those who opposed it, such as activists, as well as consumers and sellers of cannabis. While such concepts as moral entrepreneur, moral panic, and moral crusade have traditionally been used to study those in power, I will employ them to explore both the state narrative and ways in which counterclaims-makers resisted it. In order to do so, I will further develop the concept of moral entrepreneurship and its characteristics by relating it to studies of moral panics and social problems. This article will be guided by the following question: How did each party socially construct its cannabis narrative, and in what way can we use the concept of moral entrepreneurship to describe and analyze these narratives as social constructions? I have investigated the media coverage of the raid and ethnographically studied shops in Toronto in order to study the narratives. My findings show that both parties used a *factual neutral style*, as well as a *dramatizing style*. The later includes such typical crusading strategies as constructing victims and villains and presenting the image of a dystopian social world. In order to explain the use of these strategies, we will relate them to the shifting wider social and historical context and to the symbolic connotation of cannabis shops in Toronto in particular and in Canada as a whole.

Keywords
Cannabis; Moral Entrepreneurship; Stigma; Narratives

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On May 26, 2016, the Toronto Police raided 43 cannabis dispensaries, resulting in approximately 90 arrests. People were charged with drug trafficking, earning proceeds from crime, and the violation of municipal bylaws, including zoning regulations and selling edibles without the proper business license. In this article, I will describe the anti-cannabis narrative of the responsible state agencies and compare it to the pro-cannabis narrative of consumers and sellers of cannabis and activists. Although such concepts as moral entrepreneur (Becker 1963), moral crusade (Gusfield 1963), and moral panic (Cohen 1972) have traditionally been used to study those in power, I will focus here on the counterclaims-makers and explore how they resisted stigmatization by the police and the city of Toronto. The following two questions will guide this discussion: How did the two parties socially construct their pro- and anti-cannabis narratives, and in what way can we use the concept of moral entrepreneurship to describe, analyze, and explain the social construction of both narratives? In order to address these issues, I will, first, further develop the concept of moral entrepreneurship, which I utilized in a previous article that addressed police control of coffee shops in Rotterdam (Müller 2015). I will then explore the characteristics of moral entrepreneurship by relating it to studies concerning the social construction of moral narratives, such as moral panics and social problems.

I have analyzed the Canadian media in the weeks before and after the raid and visited around 30 cannabis shops in April 2016 and July/August 2017 in order to study both narratives. In 2016, I conducted ethnographic research in Toronto, Vancouver, Nanaimo (Vancouver Island), and Seattle, studying the social worlds of cannabis shops. I continued this ethnographic research in Toronto and Montreal during 2017.

I am interested in this particular topic as a result of my general interest in the social construction of cannabis policies in the Netherlands and other countries. More specifically, I am interested in the liminal period of cannabis policy development that took place in the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s. A liminal period is, by definition, a transgressive period of transition between two states that can provide a clear insight into the social construction of norms and values (Van Gennep 1966). The Dutch government did not anticipate the commercial drive within the cannabis industry in the 1980s, and it consequently became confronted with the existence of 1500 cannabis shops, known in the Netherlands as coffee shops, in the 1990s (Van de Bunt and Müller 2017). A similar situation presented itself in Toronto, as I will explain below.

In this article, I will show how the state sought to stigmatize cannabis shops, and how activists and others fought this effort. My study shows that both sides constructed a narrative with a specific moral meaning, claiming a righteous position in the debate concerning the police raid. Before I examine this in detail, however, I will first discuss 1) the wider social context of the police raid, 2) the concept of moral entrepreneurship, and 3) the methods I have used.

The Social and Historical Context of the Police Raid

Beginning in 2015, there was a marked expansion in Canada in the number of illegal cannabis

shops, which were known as medical marijuana dispensaries. The number of such shops in Toronto grew from around 40 to around 80 in the first months of 2016 alone, many of which opened in the main public areas of the city and used familiar cannabis symbols, such as the cannabis leaf, to attract customers. A well-known former hippie area, Kensington Market, which still has a countercultural feel to it, housed at one venture between 5 and 10 cannabis shops with such names as THC, Canna Wide, Canna Med, Canna Clinic, and Cannoisseurs. Some had a clinical and almost medical appearance, while others displayed a clear reference to the counterculture, such as by having Rasta posters on their walls. A minority had an up market boutique feel to them and appeared to aim at middle class consumers. It seemed that Toronto was following the example of Vancouver, where close to 200 shops had already begun selling cannabis.

We have to look at the changing political and social context in Canada in order to understand the increase in the number of cannabis shops in Toronto. On October 19, 2015, Justin Trudeau won the national elections with his promise to legalize the recreational use of cannabis and became the prime minister of Canada. Many decided to open cannabis shops in Toronto, which were locally known as dispensaries, in anticipation of this legalization. This term came to be used because its medical connotation aligned with the existing legal market in the medical use of cannabis. Agents of public control nevertheless disputed the supposed medical dimension of the business they conducted.

The legalization of the recreational use of cannabis in Canada has been part of a recent wider development in North and South America that has led to legalization in Uruguay, the District of Columbia, and ten states in the United States as of early 2019. While the transformation in the United States is related to citizen action, a top-down approach is evident in Canada and Uruguay. In these countries, the leading political parties decided that legalizing cannabis would be the best way to deal with such issues as restricting youth access to cannabis, minimizing drug crime, and avoiding the costs of controlling cannabis. In the words of the Liberal Party campaign program of Justin Trudeau,

> We will legalize, regulate, and restrict access to marijuana. Canada's current system of marijuana prohibition does not work. It does not prevent young people from using marijuana. Arresting and prosecuting these offenses is expensive for our criminal justice system. It traps too many Canadians in the criminal justice system for minor, non-violent offenses. The proceeds from the illegal drug trade support organized crime and greater threats to public safety, like human trafficking and hard drugs. [Liberal party of Canada 2015]

Although the medical use of marijuana had been legal in Canada for well over a decade at that time, and while the Trudeau government stated it wanted to legalize its recreational use as well, selling medical marijuana via storefronts remained illegal.[1] The only legal way to buy marijuana for medical use was through companies that had explicitly been

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[1] The recreational use of marijuana was legalized in Canada in October 2018. I am here referring to the pre-legalization period.

granted permission to do so by the Canadian state. Licensed producers would then distribute cannabis by mail to those customers who possessed a Health Canada permit to buy cannabis for medical reasons. One exception to these regulations was that those possessing the necessary permit from Health Canada could grow cannabis for their own personal use.

In brief, selling cannabis in a shop for any purpose was illegal, and the existence of cannabis shops was therefore also illegal and regarded as a form of drug trafficking. As a result, police raids began taking place in 2015. For instance, the police raided three cannabis shops (out of ten) in Nanaimo in December 2015, arresting 16 employees. The net result of this intervention was counterproductive, since the three shops reopened the next day, charges were dismissed, and almost all shops began selling cannabis to any person over 18 who showed legal documentation. Customers previously had to show evidence of a medical need for cannabis and become a member of the dispensary.[2]

There were nonetheless certain local differences in Canada. For instance, the communities of Vancouver and Victoria (Vancouver Island) had a more lenient attitude towards the use and selling of cannabis for "medical" use in comparison with many other cities in Canada, including Toronto. The city of Vancouver prioritized their resources for other more serious purposes, similarly to the situation in the Netherlands in the 1970s. Vancouver thus chose to accept the presence of cannabis shops, but introduced a new system of regulation in order to control

their increase in numbers. Most other major cities adopted a stricter approach, which indicated that the prohibition narrative and the notion that cannabis was a dangerous drug remained dominant. This was consistent with the long history of the criminalization and stigmatization of the selling and use of cannabis by the various Canadian states (Boyd and Carter 2014). For instance, the government's point person on legalization was the former Toronto Chief of Police, Bill Blair, who declared that "marijuana is not a benign substance" (McArthur 2016) and acted as a "crusader" against cannabis shops.

Many shops in Toronto began selling cannabis regardless of its legal status, but more than forty shops were notified by the city in May 2016 that they were breaking the law and would have to stop their sales. All but one shop continued to do so, however. After my first exploration of the relevant media documents, I realized that this material could be relevant for an exploration of moral entrepreneurship, not only from a state perspective, but also from the pro-cannabis perspective of those fighting the stigma of selling cannabis.

I will examine the literature on moral entrepreneurship before addressing this issue. Of particular interest is how we can enrich this concept by relating it to the literature on the social construction of social problems and moral panics, after which I will proceed to the methodological section of this article.

Moral Entrepreneurship

I utilized and further developed the concept of moral entrepreneurship in a 2015 publication concerning

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[2] This information is based on my own observations and interviews.

police officers who control coffee shops in Rotterdam (Müller 2015). This provided the basis for an investigation of the social construction of moral narratives that are developed in order to either justify or attack policies and interventions concerning transgressive behavior. Becker focuses marginally on what I term moral entrepreneurship in his work on labeling, describing rule creators and rule enforcers as two categories of moral entrepreneurs who define, or socially construct, behavior as criminal. A typical example of rule creators is the political or religious activist who acts as a "crusading reformer" (Becker 1963:147), while a characteristic example of rule enforcers is the police officer, who tends to be more practical and is focused on getting the job done (Becker 1963:156,159). Most studies of moral narratives have emphasized the first of these, the crusading and stigmatizing moral entrepreneur, and do not address other forms of moral entrepreneurship that have a more neutral style and/or focus on the normalization of transgressive behavior, not on stigmatization.

My Rotterdam study expanded the concept of moral entrepreneur by focusing on the associated narratives and activities. It also sought to explain moral entrepreneurship by relating it to the wider social context of 50 years of the semi-legalization of cannabis in the Netherlands.

Rotterdam police officers do not act as moral crusaders, but rather adopt a pragmatic approach, which is in line with Becker's concept of the rule enforcer. However, the moral entrepreneurship of the Rotterdam police officers also contains layers of morality that influence their rule enforcing. For instance, the way in which they define the character and inten-

tions of coffee shop managers is decisive in how they act towards them. They are lenient towards those who transgress, but nevertheless show they are doing their best to stick to the rules. This is not a black and white situation for police officers—one of bad versus good, villains versus victims—which is instead typical for the narratives of moral crusaders.

The police officers interviewed did not have to justify their actions by using a morally charged narrative. This is explained by two factors. First, the routine (non-liminal) character of the monitoring, which developed over a period of thirty years, has created a predictable situation and a modus operandi known to all parties. Second, there has been a more strict regulation of cannabis in recent years in the Netherlands. The effect of this process is that the relation of police officers to cannabis sellers is not questioned and, as a result, they do not need moralistic narratives to support their interventions and defend their position.

In researching moral entrepreneurship in the Rotterdam police force, I realized that Becker's work and my extension of the concept of moral entrepreneurism displayed a strong overlap with a range of studies on moral panic and the construction of social problems. I was surprised to discover, however, that the theoretical and conceptual interlinkage between these different fields has not yet been brought to light.

I wish to further develop the concept of moral entrepreneurship in the present discussion by relating it to a) the police raids on cannabis shops in Toronto and b) studies of moral panic and the social construction of social problems. The publications

I have taken into consideration more closely include Agar and Reisinger (2000); Armstrong (2007); Baldwin and colleagues (2012); Best (1987; 2013); Denham (2008); Goode (1990; 2008); Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994; 2009); Hartman and Golub (1999); Holstein and Gubrium (2008); Jenkins (1994); Loseke (1987; 2011); Lowney (2008); Omori (2013); Spector and Kitsuse (1977); Weidner (2009); and Young (2009).

An analysis and comparison of these studies shows that they share a strong focus on strategies that are used by moral crusaders. The following issues are of particular interest in this regard:

1. There is a reference to social reality, including a definition of the contested social phenomenon, pertinent examples, and the *facts and figures* related to the phenomenon.

2. The narrative has a *moral and emotional* tone, which in general is marked by the use of *strong adjectives and hyperbole* to indicate what is good and bad behavior. This rhetorical description of social reality emphasizes particular aspects of the problem through the *exaggeration or denial* of certain relevant themes.

3. This rhetorical approach quite often utilizes *atrocity tales* (Best 1987) and *horror stories* (Johnson 1995) as examples of behavior. Most often these comprise "outliers" or atypical examples that are employed to gain media attention and convince the public.

4. The presentation of supposed "facts and figures" is used to list a substantial number of victims that tends to grow and is hard to verify. Cohen

(1972) refers to this as the *amplification process*, while Best (1990) terms it *domain expansion*.

5. Moral entrepreneurship is also related to the construction of (blameless) *victims* and (senseless) *villains*. This tends to emphasize cultural boundaries and creates distinctions between *us and them*, the *morally good* and the *immoral*, as well as the (law-abiding) *established* and the (law-breaking) *outsiders*.

6. There is a reference to the disruption of order or a *dystopian world*. The behavior in question is presented as threatening to society, and it will grow out of control if nothing is done.

7. There are (implicit) norms and values in the narrative that frame the contested social phenomenon. Best uses *warrant* to conceptualize this aspect of moral entrepreneurship, which defines the phenomenon as problematic and, consequently, difficult to contest upon the basis of views supposedly held by the public.

8. Suggestions are presented for *actions and interventions* that are primarily related to agencies of social control.

9. Moral entrepreneurs claim to speak for the *general public*, but this tends to be more an assumption than a proven fact.

10. Moral entrepreneurs react (implicitly) to the wider social and historical context comprised of *social and cultural transformations* that break with established norms, rules, and laws.

Joseph Gusfield and Stanley Cohen have focused on the wider symbolic meaning of moral crusades and morals panics. In *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*, Gusfield (1963) focuses specifically on the intersection of immigration and the social construction of law, relating the temperance movement to the effort to maintain cultural and political dominance in reaction to the mass immigration that took place in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. He argues that the temperance movement defined the presence of the new immigrants as a threat to American society and sought to preserve the cultural dominance of Protestant rural communities. In a similar vein, Cohen (1972) associates the construction of "moral panics" and "folk devils" with swift societal changes in *Moral Panics and Folk Devils. The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers*. He argues that the public brawls on bank holidays between mods and rockers, along with the resulting moral panic in other segments of society, were related to dramatic social transformations, particularly the rise of a youth culture characterized by an emphasis on consumerism and public hedonism that was in contrast to the post-war discipline of rebuilding British society.

When Becker, Gusfield, and Cohen wrote their classical studies, those in power were able to control the public debate, especially the media, and could construct narratives supporting the criminal justice system. Those regarded as "deviants" were thereby marginalized, and had only minimal access to the media to express their claims during the public debate.

Society's approach to cannabis has changed dramatically in subsequent years, and we see this re-flected in how (social) media now report on cannabis. Those in favor of legalizing cannabis are no longer members of a hidden underground, and they claim space in the public debate, on the Internet, on television, and in newspapers. Those in favor of legalizing cannabis are out in the open and construct a moral narrative to defend their position against the stigmatizing accounts of the state. As a result of this long-term process, the recreational use of cannabis has been destigmatized and legalized in a number of states in the United States, with the media playing a crucial role in this transformation (Weitzer 2014). The pro-cannabis narrative has been successful in gaining political power and becoming a collective narrative accessible through both traditional and new media. This change has made it possible to study not only the state narrative, but also the pro-cannabis narrative and investigate the moral entrepreneurship of those involved. Before doing so, however, I will explain the methods that I have used.

Method

This article is part of a larger research project investigating the recent global changes in cannabis policies and the subsequent reactions of the cannabis industry. For this purpose, I have been tracking the academic and public debate on policy transformations in recent years in the United States and Canada using two methods, namely, document analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. In addition, my utilization of a number of different search engines, including LexisNexis, Google, and Google Scholar, has revealed a wide range of publications, including newspaper articles, government publications, and

academic studies, concerning police raids, media coverage of those raids, and policy development.

My ethnographic fieldwork has involved visits to Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Nanaimo, and Seattle, and in each city I have observed cannabis stores and interviewed cannabis workers and key informants, such as activists and academics. The main focus to date has been on Toronto, where I have observed a total of over 30 cannabis shops during the two periods of April 2016 and July/August 2017. I also interviewed 35 persons involved in the cannabis industry. Three interviews had a formal character and lasted an hour or more, while the others had a more informal character and lasted between 5 minutes and half an hour.

I will here focus on the media analysis and refer to my ethnographic data where relevant. I have employed Qualitative Document Analysis, also known as Ethnographic Document Analysis (Altheide et al. 2008:127), to analyze the documents I have selected from my searches. Qualitative Document Analysis is an interactive and emergent method in which the researcher engages in conversation with the sampled documents and develops his concepts and questions while comparing and reflecting upon the documents utilized.

I initially searched with the code "police raid dispensary Toronto," and was primarily interested in discovering whether any of the cannabis shops I had visited were closed. But, as I went through the documents that had been collected, I realized that two competing narratives had been constructed in the media, which gave me the opportunity to compare the differing accounts in relation to the raid. Studying the media made it clear that the moral entrepreneurship of the state and the stigmatization it sought to enforce were countered by a pro-cannabis narrative that also possessed a strong moral connotation.

A methodological issue in media analysis is whether researchers can access the narratives of different parties through media outlets, such as newspapers and television news. Ideally, one should interview the moral entrepreneurs themselves or participate in the teams that construct their narratives. Because I was not able to do this in any extensive way, the next best solution was to conduct a qualitative media-analysis in which I focused on categorizing the dominant themes within the narratives, the strategies employed to convey these themes, and the styles (*factual neutral* versus *dramatizing*) of the narratives.

Another related issue is that media coverage is less a reflection of reality than a construction or representation of social reality. For instance, certain topics are rarely covered, and when they are, some elements are omitted while others are emphasized. This, of course, is a key feature of the social construction of social problems (Altheide and Schneider 2013). In the present case, rich data concerning both narratives were accessible through mainstream and fringe media.

During my research, I investigated the claims made by the various persons in the public debate concerning the police raid, focusing on direct quotes and/or video footage of the claims of the different parties.

This provided a clear insight into their narratives. In order to obtain access to a diverse range of media outlets, I studied not only the mainstream media in Canada and in Toronto, such as *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, and CBC news, but such other media as *Vice* and sites run by cannabis activists and stakeholders in the industry, including *Bankr* and *Dope*.

An important difference in the construction of the two narratives is that the police and the city have a formal organization that communicates the state narrative. For example, a day after the May 26th raid, the police and the city held a press conference in order to explain why they raided the cannabis shops. Various actors, such as Chief of Police, Mark Saunders, were present and gave their interpretations of the raid. This press conference, which was streamed live by the Toronto Police and is now available on YouTube (Toronto Police Service 2016), has become one of the main media sources for descriptions of the state narrative. I have analyzed the video that was made and also researched other media sources, such as the television channels and newspapers that reported on the state narrative.

In contrast to the state narrative, the pro-cannabis narrative was constructed by a more diverse category of persons, from well-known activists—public figures who have been involved as moral entrepreneurs for decades—to employees, owners, and clients of cannabis shops who were making their first appearances in the media. Sources for studying their narrative consisted, for instance, of videos of the press conference, the protest outside the press conference, media coverage that included inter-

views with "pot activists," and impromptu street interviews with employees and clients on the day of the raid.

In the following pages, I will describe the themes, strategies, and styles of each narrative. I will begin with the state narrative before turning to the pro-cannabis narrative.

Anti-Cannabis Narrative

> [P]eople who don't care about the law, who don't care about regulations, don't care about kids, they don't care about communities, don't care about the health of Canadians. [McArthur 2016]

The press conference held a day after the police raid was crucial for the social construction of the state narrative, not least because it mimicked a press conference held after a regular drugs raid, with the police displaying a very large sample of the products they had confiscated.

The first speaker was Mark Sraga, Director of Investigation Services, Municipal Licensing and Standards. He reported in a *factual neutral style* that, as a result of the increased numbers of "so-called marijuana dispensaries," municipal standards officers investigated 78 locations, after which they sent letters informing the dispensaries that they were in violation of the municipal bylaws. He ended his presentation by stating that the city would continue "with our enforcement actions utilizing all tools available" (Toronto Police Service 2016). His talk contained no explicit emotional or moral expressions about the violations except for the brief

negative description of cannabis shops—"so-called marijuana dispensaries." This served to *delegitimize* their health-care status and implied that, in reality, they were not dispensaries at all. In short, the overall tone of his statement was bureaucratic and formal, and it contained no explicit moral or emotional meaning.

The second speaker, Chief of Police Mark Saunders, made a direct reference to "public safety" as he framed cannabis shops in a negative way.

> This project has been ongoing for a number of weeks in response to significant community concerns and complaints about public safety issues regarding the drastic increase of these storefronts. [Toronto Police Service 2016]

When we look at Saunders' use of *facts and figures*, however, we see that there is a lack of detailed information. There is no exact description concerning either the numbers of complaints, or the increase in storefronts, even though they were qualified respectively as "significant" and "drastic" in the effort to indicate that the situation was problematic and needed to be addressed. Also unclear were the specific types of concerns and complaints reported by the community, as well as the categories of citizens that reported complaints. Saunders also referred to public safety later in his talk, relating it to health.

> And I also want to make clear that these locations have a broader impact on the surrounding locations. There is no quality control whatsoever on these products and many, as you can see, they are marketed in a way that disguises the unknown and unregulated

amount of THC in the products. And almost half of the locations are within 300 meters of schools. The Toronto Police Service has always and will continue to keep neighborhoods as safe as possible. [Toronto Police Service 2016]

This statement comprises a specific form of *amplification*, not in numbers, but in the geography of the contested problem. The public safety and health threat of cannabis was thus related not only to the cannabis shops, but also to the "surrounding locations." Again, however, no specific details were given.

The *delegitimization* strategy evident in this quotation emphasized a supposed lack of control over the products sold in the cannabis shops, including disguising their substance. Saunders thereby attacked the core legitimization of the sellers of marijuana for medical use, namely, that they are responsible citizens trying to help people in need of medication. The police narrative also related the uncontrolled nature of the substance to the presence of children, implying that children might consume cannabis and become intoxicated. By including children—the stereotypical *blameless victim*—the frame of cannabis shops as a threat to community safety was extended. The *warrant* in this citation is that children should be kept away from drugs because otherwise their health is at risk.

An analysis of the press conference appears to indicate that violating the laws and regulations concerning drug trafficking and the sale of cannabis for medical use was in itself not a strong argument in support of intervention. As a consequence, the narrative was moralized by including the claim of

threats to safety, health, children, and the neighborhood in order to stigmatize the cannabis shops as a threat to society.

Although the overall tone of the Chief of Police's statement appeared to be factual and neutral, he nevertheless stigmatized cannabis shops by associating them with endangering children and jeopardizing the safety of the neighborhood. He thereby also *delegitimized*, *degraded*, and *redefined* the status of cannabis sellers from people with a strong focus on well-being to those who endanger public health.

The next speaker was Acting Inspector Steve Watts of the Toronto Police drug squad, who continued in the same *factual neutral style*. He also began his remarks with the theme of public safety.

> [T]here is significant community complaints that generated this project. These complaints were substantive in nature, petitions in excess of 50, 60, 70 people. Just to give you an idea of the kind of complaints that were coming forward in relation to these unlawful storefront dispensaries. [Toronto Police Service 2016]

Here we can see an example of how *facts and figures* were amplified and used to indicate how serious the problem was. Once again, however, the precise number of complaints was not given—it is in fact unclear how many people voiced complaints. Nor did the speaker provide any idea of the types of complaints that were coming forward. Just like Chief of Police Saunders, Watts presented no detailed information and provided no examples of someone feeling unsafe because of the presence of dispensaries.

At the same time, he *criminalized* the cannabis shops by calling them "unlawful."

Watts employed the same strategy at the end of his brief statement as Saunders had. In justifying the raid, he *implied* there was a relation between the cannabis shops, safety, and children's well-being, thereby *stigmatizing* the shops as dangerous.

> There is no… proper measuring, there is no proper quantitative analysis…So that's when we run into health and safety implications for the people that are utilizing these products. There is no standardization amongst these products that are being either consumed by adults and/or children. [Toronto Police Service 2016]

Just as in Saunders' statement, the link between cannabis shops and children is made *implicitly*—children are possible victims. It is mentioned almost in between the lines, again with little emotional emphasis and *no supporting evidence*.

The state narrative as discussed to this point is remarkable from the perspective of moral entrepreneurship because it does not have the unmistakably explicit emotional and moral tone of the crusader. Under the guise of a *factual neutral style*, *strategies of implicit accusations* are used to *delegitimize* the status of the cannabis shops. There is no overt positioning of a victim versus a villain, let alone atrocity or horror stories, in the state narrative. However, there is a clear indication in the state narrative of a societal threat in relation to two dominant themes, namely, public safety and health. In addition, the *amplifying* and *mystifying* representation of "figures and facts"

accords with the usual strategies of moral crusaders. What is conceptually new is that the moral entrepreneurship of the speakers lies between that of an enforcer (the *factual neutral style*) and that of a crusader, utilizing strategies of implicit accusation. This serves to *delegitimize*, *degrade*, and *redefine* the status of the cannabis sellers from being persons strongly focused on well-being to persons who endanger safety and public health.

The Chief of Police was interviewed on the same day by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and here his narrative style in fact utilized certain elements typical of the moral style of the crusader. For instance, Saunders used the *dystopia strategy* when he predicted a situation in which a child became a victim of consuming cannabis.

> Let's face it, I'd be sitting here having a completely different interview with you right now if some child had eaten three or four of these jujubes.3 It would be, "Why did you not do anything after these hundreds of complaints came across to us, making it known that these places were, in fact, dealing in marijuana?" [CBC News 2016a]

There is a specific warrant underlying this claim that was also present in the well-known missing children problem (Best 1987), namely, that one child is already a sufficiently large number to justify intervention, since every child is important. Another strategy used to support his claim was the amplification of numbers, with the number of complaints now described as in the "hundreds" while a total of

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3 *Jujubes* are cannabis infused sweets.

"50, 60, 70" was noted in the press conference. Also used was the *criminalization strategy*, whereby selling cannabis was described as "dealing in marijuana."

Another important aspect of moral entrepreneurship is the creation of *the other*, which involves constructing a constellation of *us* (*good*) *against them* (*bad*). This is evident in another statement Saunders made during the interview.

> They are distributing for monetary gain, let's make no mistake about it. If they're very concerned about the well-being of people, then I would expect that they would look at the regulatory processes, have a standardization of how it's being manufactured and distributed, identify what the quantity of THC is in the product and also be able to validate through quality control that is, in fact, correct. [CBC News 2016a]

The *delegitimizing* strategy of the narrative thus had a different emotional and moral tone during the interview than in the press conference, centering on children as blameless *victims* versus immoral *villains* who sell unhealthy products for profit. This explicit construction of the cannabis sellers as *the other* described them as not caring for the well-being of their clients, whose health could be jeopardized by their actions. Their only interest would then be financial gain at the expense of their clients, similar to the *warrant* of how dealers exploit junkies.

The media coverage of the May 26, 2016, police raid contains a structural reference to the opinions of the Mayor of Toronto, John Tory, who was not present at the press conference. He in fact voiced most of his comments concerning the cannabis shops prior

to the raid, and his claims appeared to have paved the way for the police actions. While the Chief of Police utilized two main styles in his statements—the *factual neutral style* during the press conference and the *dramatization style* during the interview—the Mayor's dominant style was *dramatization*, with the theme of disorder playing a crucial role. He remarked, for example, that

> We can't just have the Wild West. [CBC News 2016b]

Furthermore, the focus in his anti-cannabis narrative was not only on chaos and disintegration, but also on a *dystopian* future in which there would be no social control over the selling and use of cannabis:

> If nothing is done…then I will be consulting our colleagues and officials about what we can do because this thing is verging on being out of control in some neighborhoods. [CBC News 2016c]

A central issue in Tory's *dystopian* narrative about cannabis shops was the accelerating pace at which the number of shops was increasing:

> The speed with which these storefronts are proliferating, and the concentration of dispensaries in some areas of our city, is alarming. [Janus 2016]

This was coupled with a theme Saunders raised, namely, the quality of life in some neighborhoods.

> I don't think it's sustainable for neighborhoods, and for life in neighborhoods that we want to be peaceful, quiet, and law-abiding, to have 20, 21, 31 medical marijuana dispensaries. [CBC News 2016c]

Here we see a *facts and figures strategy* similar to what we observed during the press conference, with no clear numbers given.

The core themes in Saunders' narrative, that is, safety and health, also played a crucial role in Tory's narrative, not least when he implied that children were possible victims of cannabis shops.

> You have to do these things in an orderly way that respects public safety and health and access to minors. [CBC News 2016c]

In addition to these references to the concerns of citizens, he also included businesses in the effort to justify his claims, although he specified no numbers.

> Over the past few months, residents and businesses in different parts of Toronto have raised concerns about the rising number of marijuana dispensaries opening in their neighborhoods. [Janus 2016]

Tory stated that the city and the police should cooperate to employ

> whatever enforcement mechanisms are currently available…to address the health and safety concerns of neighbors and businesses in the communities where these marijuana dispensaries are currently operating unlawfully. [Janus 2016]

Like Chief of Police Saunders, Mayor Tory also *criminalized* cannabis shops, defining them as "operating unlawfully" and suggesting that the health of their clients was at risk because the cannabis prod-

ucts being sold were "completely unregulated." He also used *delegitimization* strategies by claiming that there was no growing need for marijuana among the public.

> Most people are sensible enough, including me, to know that this is not happening directly in response to a burgeoning need of marijuana. [CBC 2016b]

Tory continued his *delegitimization* narrative when he questioned whether there were medical grounds for the increased numbers of cannabis shops, stating that the latter was not "a reflection of an increased demand for genuine medical marijuana prescriptions" (CBC News 2016c).

Not only were the two main themes of safety and health of the anti-cannabis narratives of the Chief of Police and the Mayor quite similar, these two dominant claims-makers also referred to the relation between cannabis shops and children. In addition, both utilized *delegitimization* and *criminalization strategies* to *stigmatize* cannabis shops, with the Mayor also employing a *dramatization strategy* in order to emphasize the threat of a dystopian future ("Wild West," verging out of control, no respect for the law). This strategy is also reflected in the name of the police intervention, Project Claudia. Constable Wendy Drummond stated this name was chosen to resemble how weather services name hurricanes, likening the growth of cannabis dispensaries to a storm that was out of control (Bastien and Grey 2016).

The final spokesperson for the state perspective whom I will mention is Bill Blair, the former Toronto Chief of Police and the government's point person concerning legalization, who played a role in the days before the raid. All of the claims presented in the anti-cannabis narrative that we have discussed come together in the following statement by Blair, but his tone is more aggressive, castigating, and moralistic than that of the other spokespersons because of his *rhetorical use of repetition* ("don't care").

> The current licensed producers are competing with people who don't care about the law, who don't care about regulations, don't care about kids, they don't care about communities, don't care about health of Canadians. They're pretty reckless about it. And so they're selling anything to make a fast buck before we get the regulations put in place. [McArthur 2016]

Blair thus uses the common strategies of a crusader in his narrative. He creates a clear division between *us* and *them*, *victims* and *villains*, and *stigmatizes* the cannabis sellers as recklessly interested only in their own financial gain at the expense of children and communities.

Pro-Cannabis Narrative

> [It's an] immoral, unconstitutional, and a ridiculous use of taxpayers' dollars to arrest people for selling medicine. [Krishnan 2016]

Those who constructed the pro-cannabis narrative used a range of strategies to attack the claims of the police and the city, and they specifically focused on health and public safety, the two dominant themes in the state narrative. A crucial strategy employed in countering the claims of the state involved rede-

fining cannabis shops in a positive way—the shops did not endanger safety and health—thereby reversing the question of health in favor of the shops. The activists emphasized the health benefits of the cannabis shops, and during the press conference they rejected and *delegitimized* claims that there were victims by asking, "Where are the victims? Show us the victims!" (Toronto Police Service 2016). They stated that the cannabis shops provided medical care instead of creating a health risk, a point expressed in the following quote from an activist present at the press conference.

> You have 54 complaints and tens of thousands of people feeling better. Where's the balance? [Toronto Police Service 2016]

This remark played a role analogous to the way in which both the Mayor and Chief of Police of Toronto presented *facts and figures*. The stated number of complaints was contrasted with a large number of people—*tens of thousands*—who benefited from the cannabis shops that was difficult to verify.

The pro-cannabis narrative centered around the core identity of the cannabis movement in Canada: that cannabis is a medicinal product, and that those involved in the cannabis retail business are helping people. Well-known activist Marc Emery made a comment about the supposed danger presented by the cannabis shops that was typical for a public spokesperson of pro-cannabis narrative when he stated that

> It's unfathomable because marijuana is a very safe substance. [Jeffords 2016a]

This was also one of the core themes of the street protest that was heard in speeches and seen on placards—"dispensaries save lives." For example, an employee of a cannabis shop stated that

> To be stigmatized as not caring about the community, our patients, and kids is a complete joke, he said, adding those who work and run dispensaries don't want to be perceived as criminals. We do everything we can to respect our neighbors. We help out our communities instead of hurting them. [Lavoie 2016]

A subtheme of this claim is that those who were involved in selling medical marijuana had been leading figures in the drive to legalize medical marijuana—they had fought for patients to have access to marijuana for medical use. Attorney Kirk Tousaw, for instance, "lauded the dispensaries for 'pioneering access' to medical marijuana for the ill" (Jeffords 2016b). An element of this subtheme is that the system which consisted of licensed producers selling by mail did not work for many clients, and that dispensaries were a solution to this problem. One of the stated advantages of the dispensaries was that one could both see and smell what they were buying, and also have immediate access to the product. One patient remarked in this respect that

> There's all sorts of things that can happen by mail. If I don't have it, my neuralgia cycles back in. It's very painful. I'm off work. [Sharp 2016]

The health claim, which has a long history in the process of legalizing medical marijuana, is associated with the right of citizens to have access to med-

ical care. This also played an important role in the pro-cannabis narrative concerning the police.

> Tell me where else in the world do you need the help of a paralegal just to access your medicine? [Sharp 2016]

The *warrant* here is quite clear, namely, people should have access to the medicine that they need.

The counter-narrative also reversed the other core theme of the state narrative concerning safety by stating in opposition to police statements that cannabis shops actually created safe environments. In this vein, one customer described the dispensary she used as "clean, friendly, and knowledgeable" (Krishnan 2016), while a pro-cannabis spokesperson pointed to dispensaries as comprising a role model for the future legalization of the recreational use of cannabis.

> We're demonstrating what legalization should look like…Peaceful, open, honest transactions between consenting adults. No force, no coercion. Simple supply and demand. And until the government can prove demonstrable harm from these businesses, we deserve to stay open, especially considering that dangerous, deadly drugs are sold in bars and restaurants every single day. [Sharp 2016]

An important strategy in the pro-cannabis narrative was to redefine the police raid in a negative way and *delegitimize* its claims. For example, activists claimed that the police action in fact created an unsafe situation, with one activist present at the conference stating that "You're sending people to the black market" (Toronto Police Service 2016). Another claim used to cast the police raid in a negative light was

that the public money spent on the raid was wasted tax revenue.

> Taxpayers are footing the bill for enforcement and possible legal challenges through the court. Instead of allocating resources to shut down dispensaries, the City should think outside the box and focus on creating a revenue stream through the eventual sale of marijuana. [Toronto Taxpayers Coalition 2016]

Another theme in redefining the police raid in a negative way had a legal character, namely, the raid was useless because those charged will not be convicted. A pro-cannabis public spokesperson thus claimed

> Mark my words, none of these charges will result in a conviction. Everyone will walk. [Krishnan 2016]

This view was also combined with the previous financial claim, with one lawyer arguing

> Let's stop that. It's a waste of money…Now that the judges have the signal that it will be legal, they will throw those charges out of court. [Dunn 2017]

An additional strategy in redefining the role of the police involved the construction of a new category of victims, with patients under medical care now being described as victims. For example, a doctor who specializes in the treatment of chronic pain and prescribes medical marijuana for that purpose observed that

> A crackdown only further stigmatizes medical marijuana…And it prevents pain patients from accessing their medicine in a timely fashion. [Jeffords 2016b]

A common voice in the pro-cannabis narrative was in fact that of patients who would suffer without their medicine. One patient thus stated that

> Most of the shops I use are shut down. Without my oil, which I finish tonight, I'm not going to be able to walk in a few days. Cannabis is the only thing that helps. [Lavoie 2016]

Although the style in most of the above statements was similar to the *factual neutral style* used in the police press conference, the *dramatization style* was also utilized in constructing the pro-cannabis narrative. A number of public spokespersons who had been activists in the drive to legalize cannabis were very skilful in employing such crusading strategies as the *construction of the villain*. Activist Jodie Emery thus claimed that

> The Toronto dispensary raids and arrests, which are supported by the Justin Trudeau Liberal government, are part of the biggest marijuana crackdown in Canadian history, worse than anything seen under the Harper government. [Krishnan 2016]

This example of dramatization, used to create a highly moral narrative by means of *hyperbole* ("biggest marijuana crackdown"), is also found in the following remark by Marc Emery.

> [T]hey are going to remember the people like [Mayor] John Tory who brought this oppression to the kind of horrible peak that we're seeing today. John Tory is finished. Let me guarantee you that. [Jeffords 2016a]

One long-time pro-cannabis activist frequently employed the rhetorical strategy of *dramatization*, and

not least in the construction of the villain. He was one of several pro-cannabis spokespersons who used such *morally strong adjectives* as "absolutely disproportionate," "criminal," and "disgusting" to redefine the police raid. An example of *hyperbole* in this regard is illustrative.

> The idea that they should continue to be raided, continue to be arrested, continue to face the prospect of being caged in jail cells for helping sick, suffering citizens of this city and this country...should disgust anyone. [Jeffords 2016b]

The elements of repetition ("continue to"), adopting a moral stance, and shaming play a central role in the phrasing of this claim, which also contains another typical element of the crusader style, namely, the creation of a *dystopian world* ("caged in jail cells for helping sick, suffering citizens").

Another key strategy was the use of *facts and figures* in defining the problem, as was the case in the state narrative as well. The number of victims/patients, which allegedly ran into the "tens of thousands," was frequently mentioned in the pro-cannabis narrative. Kirk Tousaw redefined the police raid through the use of *moralistic adjectives*, *an atrocity tale*, and *numbers* in relation to patients and tax money that are clearly difficult to verify.

> It's unbelievable, really...If there's a problem with the proliferation of dispensaries in this city, the right response is to regulate them in a reasonable manner. The wrong response is to have some sort of crackdown where you're threatening landlords and you're scaring patients and you're taking away dignified ac-

cess for so many tens of thousands of Torontonians. [Faris 2016]

It's an absolute waste of taxpayers' resources and one that is only going to cost the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario and ultimately the federal government hundreds of thousands, if not millions, in legal fees. [Jeffords 2016b]

The element of referring to *the general public* in the style of the crusader was also used in the pro-cannabis narrative, as is the case in the following comment by Marc Emery.

Canadians love these dispensaries. They're supporting them, they're spending money at them. And marijuana is a harmless, benign substance that only does good things for people. It's completely counterproductive that the government would close these down. [Faris 2016]

The various elements of the crusading moral entrepreneur discourse that have been discussed above are brought together in the transcription of a statement made by a pro-cannabis spokesperson after the police press conference.

If this is legalization, Justin Trudeau and the Liberal government lied to the Canadian people. This is a new form of prohibition. This is worse than anything we saw under the Harper government. I think Canadians should immediately call Justin Trudeau, John Tory, and Bill Blair and ask why we see more people harmed under their so-called legalization than we ever saw under Stephen Harper's anti-marijuana policy. This is about protecting the profits of stock market businesses who have sent the police to arrest peaceful

people to protect their own financial interest. That is sick and disgusting and despicable. Shame on the Toronto Police Service, and shame on the Toronto city government for harming peaceful people, because if you have 50 (five zero) complaints, you have 50,000 sick people last night who are stressed and sick and these doctors say, no, I won't give you medical marijuana. The doctors in this country are not providing access and that is why dispensaries have become so popular, because people demand it. [There is] public support for peaceful transaction, there is no coercion, there is no force, these dispensaries do no harm, the only harm being done in association with the dispensaries is the harm of patients being made to suffer and the harm of peaceful citizens being given a criminal record. The police are the biggest gang with guns that went to shut down peaceful businesses. That needs to be questioned. Who called for this? It was not the general public. [Miller 2016]

Here we find the general *dramatizing emotional tone* of the crusader, as well as the moral hue provided by such words as "lying," "sick and disgusting and despicable," and "shame." Also displayed is the construction of *victims* and *villains*, with examples of the latter being Justin Trudeau, John Tory, Bill Blair, stock market businesses, doctors, and "the biggest gang with guns," the police. An *atrocity tale* is introduced along with the image of a *dystopian world* ("peaceful people" and "50,000 sick people last night who are stressed and sick"). A final element is that the spokesperson speaks for *the public*, who did not want the police raid.

A typical claim that could have been used, but which I did not find, was that the police raid attacked

a thriving profit-making industry and was thus responsible for the loss of jobs. The claims-makers in fact refrained from any mention of financial gain related to selling cannabis. To do so would obviously be undesirable in light of the anti-cannabis narrative that the sole reason for the existence of dispensaries was making a profit.

Conclusion

In this article, I have described two conflicting narratives concerning the May 26, 2016, police raid on cannabis shops in Toronto. The concept of moral entrepreneurship, which I further developed in the introduction using the literature on the social construction of social problems and moral panics, has been employed in presenting and analyzing this case. Both parties created a moral account that justified their actions, that is, the police raid and the selling of cannabis in shops. Furthermore, both used similar styles, a *factual neutral style* and the *dramatization style*, as they implemented strategies to *legitimize* their own behavior and *delegitimize* the other.

The state's moral entrepreneur usage of a *factual neutral style*, with a minimal emotional and moral tone, was prominent during the press conference. The two dominant themes, public health and safety, were implied and addressed in an almost passing way. The *warrant* used during the press conference was that drugs and children do not go together. In contrast, the style used in constructing the state narrative outside the press conference was quite different. It resembled that of a "crusader," and it utilized *dramatization* strategies to represent social reality, including the moral and emotional usage of words, the notion of a *dys-*topian social reality ("Wild West"), the construction of v*illains* versus *victims*, and the *possible* atrocity of a child consuming cannabis edibles. The warrant in this regard was that saving one child was sufficient reason for the police to take action.

The pro-cannabis narrative also utilized the *dramatization style*, which is confrontational, emotional, and moralistic, and the *factual neutral style*. This narrative also focused on the two central themes of the state narrative, namely, public health and safety, but it redefined the cannabis shops in a positive way by stating that they contributed to health and public safety. Another strategy was to redefine the police raid in a negative manner by claiming that it in fact had endangered the health and safety of medical patients and wasted the tax money spent in the raid and in any subsequent court cases.

Pro-cannabis moral entrepreneurism thus also involved *speaking for the public*, the use of *emotional and moralistic adjectives in constructing victims and villains*, references to *atrocity tales*, and images of a *dystopian world*.

How can we explain the themes, styles, and strategies that both parties used? In order to find an answer, we have to look at the social context within which the various moral entrepreneurs were working. For example, the *factual neutral style* of the state authorities that marked the press conference was related to the role of the "enforcer" and, as such, was less moralistic and more focused on getting things done (Becker 1963; Müller 2015). In addition, the fact that the situation comprised a public press conference at which cannabis activists were also present exerted an influence upon the primary speakers, that is, the

Mayor, the Chief of Police, and the Director of Investigation Services of the office of Municipal Licensing and Standards. They strategically chose to tone down their statements in order to avoid conflict in a public setting in the presence of the media.

A crucial question to be answered concerns why the state actors used delegitimizing and criminalizing strategies at the press conference in order to *stigmatize* the cannabis shops. For instance, the police felt compelled to integrate some of the rhetoric that had been used by Mayor John Tory and Greg McArthur, even though they did not need to include any references to public safety or possible victims insofar as it was clear to everyone that the shops were in fact breaking the law. A second issue concerns the topic of safety and the *dramatization* style of a crusader, which is associated in the case of the state moral entrepreneurs with their political roles, not least with the fact that they were elected officials dependent on the vote of the public. Such figures are used to dealing with the media and, as many politicians do today, they present themselves as defenders of the public and their safety. This is consistent with a dominant trend in the western world, which Garland (2001) has described as the rise of a culture of control. At the same time, however, we have to look at the wider social and historic context if we wish to understand their reactions. I addressed this question in the introduction and will briefly return to it below.

The specific situation also played a crucial role in the case of Bill Blair, and we also need to look at the situation in which he acted to understand his stance. It then becomes clear that his moral crusade comprised a situational act of "preaching to the choir" insofar

as his audience represented the legal medical cannabis industry and licensed producers, who legally sold marijuana for medical use (McArthur 2016).

In respect to the pro-cannabis moral entrepreneurs, their crusading style was associated with the fact that they were activists. The *factual neutral style* was more appropriate to consumers and employees, who expressed their personal situational experiences and were less trained in vocalizing the activist perspective. Most of the public spokespersons had been involved for many years in the fight to legalize the medical and recreational uses of marijuana. Because of the expertise they had thus garnered, they knew a) how to play the media and b) how to counter the claims of the state authorities with the arguments about health and safety that activists had used for years in fighting the stigmatizing narrative of the state.

The police continued raiding cannabis shops after May 2016, but no longer on the same large scale, most likely because they sought to avoid creating massive media attention for the pro-cannabis activists. But, since the raids in fact continued, one might perhaps conclude that the pro-cannabis narrative had not been successful in creating its desired impact on the policy makers. The impact of the state narrative was also limited, however. The number of cannabis shops in Toronto bounced back to between 60 and 70 within a year, and this was still the case in spring 2018. Furthermore, not only were most charges related to the police raid dismissed, there was also a rise in the numbers of Internet cannabis shops and delivery services. My own observations indicated that many shops had become very lenient about selling cannabis—one only had to show their personal identification to make a purchase.

Some personnel actually stated to me that they sold cannabis for recreational use.

With the current knowledge of hindsight, we have to ask why the state continued to raid cannabis shops when the effect was minimal or even counter-productive. Why did the police raids in Toronto take place when Vancouver focused on a regulatory approach and the police raid in Nanaimo proved that the shops reopened and actually became more lenient in selling cannabis for recreational use? In addition, why did the state construct a moral narrative justifying police action when it was clear to anyone that the cannabis shops were breaking the law?

The moral connotations of the police raid become more clear when, following Gusfield (1963), Cohen (1972), and Müller (2015), we locate the state narrative within a wider social, historical, and symbolic context. In doing so, we can see the dramatic effect that the societal change normalizing cannabis had had upon the police and politicians, who for many years had embraced the prohibition policy of the Canadian Government. While it had been difficult for them to accept the planned transition to the le-

galization of such cannabis usage, the surge in the number of cannabis shops at the beginning of 2016 pushed authorities to the limit, with the anticipation of a further massive increase conjuring up images of the coming of the Wild West. Many members of the police force, especially those working in the drugs squad, viewed selling cannabis in shops as the equivalent of dealing illegal drugs. In this regard, the physical changes in the urban landscape associated with the sharply increased number of cannabis shops had a very public and therefore symbolic character which indicated that the city was changing and that cannabis had become normalized.

The effect of this process was that the position of police officers in relation to cannabis sellers was called into question and, as a result, they needed a moralistic narrative to support their intervention and defend their stance. In a symbolic sense, the aim of the police raid and the state's narrative was to reestablish their position and counter the cultural transformation that had occurred by reclaiming the city as an orderly and safe place in which breaking the law has consequences and the selling of cannabis in public is defined as not normal.

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