

**Weed, Need and Greed:**  
**Domestic Marijuana Production and**  
**the UK Cannabis Market**

by

**Gary Richard Potter**

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University of Sheffield, Department of Law

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## Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of domestic cannabis cultivation in the UK and examines its impact on the wider cannabis market. Cannabis growers were studied using both traditional and on-line ethnographic methods. Data was analysed both to produce a description of cannabis cultivation (and cannabis cultivators) in Britain and to analyse how domestic production of cannabis fits into our wider understanding of illegal drug markets.

The thesis explores UK cannabis growing on a number of levels. Firstly it seeks to describe *how* cannabis is grown in Britain. Some is grown outside in natural conditions but most British cannabis is grown indoors with increasingly hi-tech cultivation methods being utilised. The method employed by an individual grower will depend on his opportunities, his intention for the crop and any ideological position which may influence his choice.

We then explore *who* is involved in cannabis growing. At a basic level features – demographic and ‘ideological’ – common to cannabis growers are considered. At a deeper level a typology of cannabis growers is offered based predominantly on motivation and ideology. The key point here is that a large number of cannabis growers seek no financial reward whatsoever for their involvement in what is essentially an act of drug trafficking. Others grow cannabis to make money, but are equally motivated by non-financial ‘drivers’. Still others are mostly or entirely driven by financial considerations. These growers often display the same hall-marks as other organised crime outfits. Consumer concerns can be seen to influence the market with smaller independent ‘social’ and ‘social / commercial’ growers offering an ideological – ethical, even – alternative to larger scale organised crime outfits.

Finally explanations for the recent surge in domestic cannabis cultivation are offered along with predictions for the future domestic production, not just of cannabis but other drugs as well.

## Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Contents	4
Glossary	5
0 – Into the field... (Introduction)	9
1 – Preparing the Ground: A review of the UK cannabis market	32
2 – A Growing Industry: The emergence of domestic cannabis cultivation	63
3 – Sowing the Seeds: How cannabis is grown in the UK	87
4 – Fertile Ground: An introduction to UK cannabis growers	121
5 – Roots: Ideological cannabis growers	147
6 – The Budding Business: Commercial cannabis growers	169
7 – Bearing Fruit: Conclusions	195
References	221
Appendix: Interview schedule/Case-study guide	227

## Glossary

This glossary provides definitions for technical terms and slang terms encountered within the thesis. It also includes some common words that have a specific meaning within the context of this dissertation. Words appearing in the glossary appear in **bold** when first encountered in the main text.

**Bottom bud** The flowers from the lower parts of the plant (those which get least light). Generally not as sought after or valuable as the top bud.

**Bouncers** Door security staff at night-clubs and pubs.

**Bud** See premium bud, top bud and bottom bud.

**Bush** Colloquial term for non-sinsemilla, non-skunk, non-premium varieties of herbal cannabis. Grown outdoors bush usually originates in ‘traditional’ producer nations but the term also applies to cannabis grown outdoors in the UK.

**Bust/Busted** Slang for police (or other authority) action leading to a grower (or other criminal) having their activities detected.

**Cannabinoids** The collective name for the active chemicals found naturally in the cannabis plant of which THC ( $\Delta$ -9 tetrahydrocannabinol) is the best known.

**Cannabis cafés** Also known as coffee-shops these establishments are common (and officially tolerated) in Holland. A few have also been set up in the UK, but are usually quickly shut down by the police and local authorities. They sell cannabis over-the-counter and provide surroundings for people to consume the drug. They also operate as cafés, selling beverages and snacks.

**Coffee shops** See cannabis cafés.

**Compassion Clubs** Another name for medical marijuana co-operatives, common in the US.

**Dance-drugs** Those drugs used in conjunction with dance-music events (night-clubs, gigs, parties etc). Predominantly amphetamines and ecstasy type drugs, but also cocaine, hallucinogens and even heroin (used as a ‘come-down’ drug, usually after the event, to counter act the stimulating effects of the other drugs). Cannabis, alcohol, nicotine and caffeine are also widely used in relation to dance-music events. See Potter, 2000.

**Diversifying farmers** Farmers who supplement their income through growing cannabis to sell.

**Drivers** Motivational elements. Conditions or reasons encouraging a person to participate in drug trafficking or cannabis growing.

**Grow-light** High power ‘artificial sunlight’ lamps providing the optimum spectrum range for indoor horticulture. Used, theoretically at least, for the indoor cultivation of any plant, they are particularly popular with cannabis growers.

**Grow-ops** Growing operations. Often referred to in the news media as ‘cannabis factories’ a grow-op is a single cannabis production site. Individual growers may have multiple grow-ops.

**Grow-room** A room (or cupboard or other space) devoted to cannabis growing. A grow-op may consist of one or many grow-rooms.

**Head-shop** Shop that sells legal highs (legal drugs, usually herbal) and books and paraphernalia relating to drug use such as pipes, bongs (water-pipes), cannabis-cigarette making equipment (rolling papers, roach cards), lighters and cocaine-taking paraphernalia (mirrors, razor-blades etc). Many also sell cannabis seeds.

**Hemp** Hemp is another name for the Cannabis plant usually used specifically to refer to the varieties grown for industrial purposes, such as for seed or fibre harvest, and with a very low THC content.

**Hydroponics** A technique of growing plants where the roots are suspended in nutrient-rich water with no soil or other growing medium. Cannabis growers would also use the term to describe growing in some artificial non-organic medium (such as rock-wool) soaked with a constant supply of nutrient-rich water.

**Medical Marijuana** All cannabis comes from the same plant and it all has similar drug properties. However the term medical marijuana is usually used (especially in the US) to distinguish cannabis intended for medical use from cannabis intended for recreational use.

**Medical Marijuana Co-operatives** Network of cannabis growers, dealers, users and associates who aim to supply cannabis (illegally) to those who use the drug to alleviate medical conditions.

**Middleman** In drug markets a middleman is one who connects the upper-levels (wholesalers, importers and producers) with the lower-levels (dealers). Middlemen often also connect different supply networks to each other and connect markets for different commodities.

**Mother plant** A mother plant is a cannabis plant of known and established quality from which cuttings are taken. Mother plants are known to be female, and as such all cuttings will also be female. Mother plants – kept from flowering through lighting controls – can be kept for a long time. However growers do occasionally report that mother plants kept for too long may start to decline in quality or may even begin to develop hermaphrodite qualities. At this stage they need to be destroyed and replaced.

**Outfit** An outfit is a group of individuals working together in the drug trade – producers, smugglers or distributors or any combination thereof.

**Premium bud** The most potent parts of a cannabis plant are the flowering tops (preferably unfertilised), or buds. Premium bud is top bud from premium varieties of cannabis.

**Roach** The roach is the rolled up piece of cardboard inserted into the end of a cannabis cigarette in the same way as a filter in a normal cigarette. Head-shops often sell special roach-cards for this job, but usually any handy piece of card such as from a cigarette-paper packet will be used.

**Runners** Usually employees (but sometimes core members) of drug distribution outfits responsible for transporting drugs or money or running other errands.

**Shake** The leaves and occasional bits of bud left over from the harvest and trimming process. Not usually saleable most growers either use this themselves or throw it away. Some make food or alcohol preparations with it.

**Sinsemilla** Also spelt sensimilla. Derived from the Spanish ‘sin semilla’ meaning without seed sinsemilla is herbal cannabis from unfertilised female flowering buds. Unfertilised females produce greater amounts of resin and cannabinoids than fertilised females or male plants. Sinsemilla is highly sought after and usually attracts a premium price compared to non-sinsemilla herbal cannabis.

**Skunk** Originally the name of a specific strain of high-potency cannabis it is now a generic term for all high-potency pedigree varieties usually designed for growing indoors. Skunk is usually also sinsemilla and fetches a premium price compared to non-skunk ‘bush’ weed.

**Soap-bar** Slang term for cheap, inferior cannabis resin widely believed to be cut (adulterated) with a wide variety of non-cannabis additives. Usually originates from North Africa and is imported to the UK via the Iberian Peninsula.

**THC** Delta-nine ( $\Delta$ -9) tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, is the main psychoactive ingredient in the cannabis plant. It is customary to measure the strength of cannabis by its THC content. The focus on THC misses the importance of the many other psychoactive cannabinoids – it is possible to have low THC cannabis that will still get people high.

**Tick-lists** Records kept by a drug dealer as to who owes him money. To 'tick' drugs is to give them on credit, to be paid for at a later date.

**Top bud** The flowering buds from the top of the plant – the densest flowers on the plant and the most sought after.

**Trichomes** The hair-like glands on the cannabis plant which produce the resin. The resin and trichomes have the highest concentration of THC. The trichomes are densest on the flowers (buds) of the cannabis plant.

**Weed** A slang term for cannabis (usually not including cannabis resin).

**Weedrot** A slang term for a fungal infection on a cannabis plant (either growing or harvested).

## 0 – Into the field...

### 0.1 Introduction

Cannabis, or marijuana,<sup>1</sup> seems to be in the news a lot these days. Prevalence rates for cannabis use within the UK population seem to be ever increasing and have reached particularly dizzying proportions amongst the young. In a reflection of its popularity (or perhaps a cause thereof) cannabis is also well established – through both direct and oblique references – in British (and other western) culture, particularly youth culture. This all attracts much comment, often negative, especially in relation to the many scares associated with cannabis use. Health risks and social harms are often highlighted – in particular the apparent link between cannabis use and some mental health problems<sup>2</sup> but also possible links between cannabis use and crime, marijuana’s effect on productivity and motivation, cannabis use and driving, and cannabis as a ‘gateway’ to harder drugs. The growth in the popularity of cannabis is condemned because of the potential related harms. Cultural references to cannabis are equally condemned for encouraging widespread use.

At the same time we have seen a lot of interest in the benefits of cannabis, primarily its medical uses. There are two major aspects to this. On the one hand we have seen the development of synthetic **cannabinoids**<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, medicines made from extracts from the plant for use in mainstream medicine – after rigorous scientific testing and under supervision from the government. On the other hand the UK, along with many other developed nations, has seen the emergence of ‘**compassion clubs**’ aiming to support (and often supply) those who use cannabis in its raw form as a medicine and for which they feel there is

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<sup>1</sup> There are many synonyms for the word cannabis. The word marijuana (also spelt marihuana) is commonly used in America, both in the cultural mainstream and the academic literature. The word ganja appears in many Caribbean studies. Hash, or hashish, refers specifically to cannabis resin. It is common practise to use the word cannabis in the UK and in much of the rest of the English language literature. To avoid monotony I shall use cannabis and marijuana interchangeably, occasionally employing other terms in certain circumstances. A comprehensive (although by no means exhaustive) list of synonyms for cannabis, historic and contemporary, scientific and slang, appears in Forsyth, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Most notably, in the media coverage, psychosis and schizophrenia amongst young male cannabis users.

no adequate medically acceptable<sup>4</sup> alternative. Such medical uses – and particularly the associated distribution – generally fall foul of national laws yet medical users often receive widespread public support. Common conditions for which marijuana is claimed to be beneficial and is often used illegally in the UK and other countries today include AIDS (not least as a stimulant to appetite), Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, asthma, depression, emphysema, epilepsy, glaucoma, herpes, insomnia, migraines, multiple sclerosis, muscular cramping and nausea (including nausea associated with chemotherapy and other treatments). This list was taken from 'Mel' (2000) but is by no means exhaustive – historically and contemporarily the number and variety of ailments for which cannabis has been claimed as medically beneficial is, to say the least, impressive (see e.g. Booth, 2003; Herer, 1994).

An area which has perhaps received less public attention but has nonetheless cropped up fairly regularly in the news media is the renewed interest in industrial **hemp** – which is cannabis by another name, albeit derived from strains which have a supposedly negligible drug content. Aside from its uses as a recreational drug or a medicine there are, according to some sources, over 25,000 products and uses to which hemp can contribute (*ibid.*). Historically cannabis was probably one of the earliest plants to be domesticated by man with cultivation most likely emerging in central Asia (where cannabis is believed to have originated). Early uses were probably centred on cannabis fibre – archaeological evidence from Taiwan includes pottery shards dating to between 10,000 and 3,000 BC which bear impressions of hempen cord (Booth, 2003). Throughout much of history cannabis has arguably been the most useful plant known to mankind – primarily useful as a fibre crop for making paper, cloth, rope, ships' rigging and the like, but also useable in construction (as an alternative to concrete), as an alternative to petrochemicals in paints, dyes, fuels, cosmetics and many, many more products (see e.g. Booth 2003, Herer 1994 for more detailed

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<sup>3</sup> Words appearing in **bold** when first encountered in the text are defined in the Glossary.

<sup>4</sup> That is to say accepted formally by the medical fraternity. Individual doctors in most countries are split as to whether marijuana is beneficial as a medicine in its own right. No national medical authority in any western nation that I know of promotes or recognises marijuana as a widely acceptable medicine, or recommends general use of the drug, although some (e.g. in Canada or Holland) recognise its beneficence for certain individuals with certain conditions in certain situations. Historically medical uses of cannabis date back at least to Emperor Shen Nung in ancient China in the third century BC and, then, now and throughout intervening history, it has been used to treat an enormously vast range of medical conditions (Booth 2003, Herer 1994).

coverage of the range of uses for hemp and hemp products). Aside from industrial products cannabis also produces the highly nutritious hemp seed and the plant has, it is often claimed, ecological uses in reclaiming marginal soils for farmland, providing a bio-mass fuel source or for reclaiming and locking carbon-dioxide from the atmosphere. British politicians have been known to support wider production of hemp as a non-food crop as a way of re-invigorating British farming. Given all these uses of the plant it is understandable that Jack Herer includes the phrase 'How Hemp can still Save the World' in the subtitle of his book 'The Emperor Wears No Clothes' (1994). It is also little wonder that hemp has so many enthusiastic supporters aside from those who advocate its drug properties. It should be no surprise that hemp is seeing something of an agricultural resurgence in the UK, the EU and elsewhere in the world.

Perhaps the most criminologically significant recent cannabis related issue to catch the public eye is the downgrading of cannabis from a class 'B' to a class 'C' legally controlled drug – and the more recent debate as to whether this downgrading should be reversed. Following years of public and political debate (dating back to before, and finally implementing some of the recommendations of, the Police Foundation (2000) report into illegal drugs and the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971) cannabis was reclassified (downgraded) on the 29th of January 2004. This move has been seen by some as a sensible re-alignment of drug priorities reflecting the relative dangers and harms associated with different drugs (a primary policy justification being to free up police time to pursue more dangerous class A drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, and those that deal in them). Others saw it as a mistake bound to lead to increased use of the drug and thus increases in the alleged harms (hinted at earlier) associated with cannabis use. Still others saw it as a 'fudge' (to use the buzzword of the time) which fails to adequately address the complex issues of cannabis use and drug control. Downgrading happened after I had completed the bulk of my field work (although the intended downgrading was announced a few years earlier and could be seen to have had some influence on some of my research subjects) – if nothing else it served the purpose of keeping cannabis topical during the time it took me to complete this thesis!

My own specific area of interest has also featured heavily in the news in recent years: domestic cannabis production has soared since the mid-1990s from being

the preserve of a few ‘hippie throwbacks’, activists and cannabis connoisseurs to the current position where as much as 50% of the cannabis consumed in the UK is now thought to be grown here. Previously the market relied almost entirely on imported (i.e. smuggled) cannabis. This change in market structure – in the sourcing of cannabis – has been recognised in popular culture perhaps quicker and more significantly than it has in either political or academic debate. Recently the popular BBC radio four soap-opera ‘The Archers’ featured two of its characters involved in growing cannabis. Two popular British films at the end of the last century – ‘Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels’ (1998) and ‘Saving Grace’ (2000) featured commercial cannabis cultivation centrally to their plots long before any official or academic notice was given to the issue. A key aim of this thesis is to redress the balance and give domestic cannabis cultivation the academic recognition – and analysis – that it deserves.

Although this domestic production is the focus of my study it cannot be considered in isolation from other topical areas of the greater cannabis debate. Increased use obviously relates to supply factors (growing may be seen either as part of the response to increased demand or part of the stimulus for it) and the culture surrounding cannabis (and marijuana’s prevalence in wider popular culture) is mirrored in much of the supply network as well as amongst those who use the drug. Medical and industrial uses inform and sometimes encourage those who promote, cultivate or use cannabis. The change in the law can be seen as both a response to and a cause of changes in the climate in which cannabis consumption and distribution (including cultivation) takes place. All these contemporary cannabis issues have their place in relation to domestic production. But for me the central questions relate to drug distribution. If a significant portion of the cannabis market has shifted from being import-led to domestic-led then we need to ask what effect this has had on the cannabis market as a whole, what, if anything, has changed about the market, and what implications does this have for our understanding of cannabis distribution in particular and drug distribution in general?

## 0.2 Aims

Ultimately this is a study of a drug market; a selection of networks and individuals related by their involvement in the distribution of a single commodity

– cannabis – grown, distributed and consumed within the UK<sup>5</sup>. As such the aims of the research, and of this thesis, are multi-layered. On a first, basic (but arguably most important), level cannabis growing and cannabis growers are of interest in their own right. There has been little awareness of the extent of domestic marijuana production until relatively recently. There has been even less academic study into either the associated market or those that operate within it. Given that the cannabis market in the UK has been valued at between £1.5 and £13 billion per annum (Atha *et al.*, 1997) and that domestically produced cannabis is now believed to account for as much as – if not more than – half of that market (personal communication, Independent Drug Monitoring Unit) it seems fair to say that a study of cannabis growers is valid purely on the grounds of shedding light on an under-recognised and barely understood yet vast and valuable section of the black-market economy.

From this perspective my aims are to describe as much of the domestic cannabis growing scene as possible – covering those involved, the methods employed and the structure, dynamics, features and mechanics of the home-grown market. I aim also to begin to explain, where possible: why domestic production and related distribution operates in the way it does; why this surge in domestic production has happened in recent years; and what we might expect in the future. These aspects of the thesis, to me at least, meet the core elements of any ethnography – to describe and try to explain a given population or sub-culture – and would probably constitute an interesting and valid thesis in their own right. But my intention is to take things further.

Cannabis cultivation is primarily an act of drug distribution<sup>6</sup>, albeit a slightly unusual one. In the UK, and indeed in most studies of drug distribution in the west, drug markets are largely assumed (often for good reason) to operate within

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<sup>5</sup> Predominantly, at least, although there is some evidence that marijuana cultivated within the UK is exported to European and even global markets.

<sup>6</sup> Cultivation for personal consumption may not technically be an act of drug distribution as there is no supply element to the drug offence. However it would be wrong to exclude personal-use cultivation from the overall analysis or to separate it from the issue of distribution. There are two reasons for this – firstly, as will become clear, growing *purely* for personal use is rare (smoking cannabis is usually a social experience – at the very least we may expect the grower to pass cannabis cigarettes around amongst friends) and secondly growing for personal use only (where it does happen, and whether or not cannabis is shared socially) still effects distribution patterns and market dynamics in that for such incidences a customer and his/her cannabis consumption is removed from the distribution network and presumably therefore has some effect on the wider market.

certain parameters. One such parameter or assumption within much of the literature is of a *distribution* market. The origins of a drug, or the acts of *production*, are usually assumed to exist outside the country and as such are left out of much of the literature. Drug markets and drug distribution are studied from the point of importation, onwards and downwards to the level of consumption. Most studies do not cover the whole of the market but focus instead on ‘layers’ within the market – smugglers, or street-level dealers, or middle-market distributors – but even here the unwritten assumption is often that drugs originate from elsewhere, from outside the local market and (usually, in the UK at least) outside the host nation. This assumption is justified for many western (developed world) drug markets – cocaine (including crack) and the opiates (including heroin) originate from plants that grow primarily in developing regions of the globe as did, until recently at least, the majority of marijuana. Even man-made narcotics such as amphetamines and ecstasy style drugs are often sourced, or assumed to be sourced, from certain key producer regions (e.g. South East Asia or the European Lowland countries). Certainly from a UK perspective the assumption has almost always been that drug production occurs elsewhere and that domestic drug markets take importation (smuggling) as their starting point (see e.g. Pearson and Hobbs, 2001).

Even where domestic production is known to occur in the west – such as with amphetamines and ecstasy-style tablets in Western Europe or cannabis production in North America or Australia – it tends to be largely ignored, presumably because it is deemed insignificant compared to the importation market (perhaps understandably given that the big ‘problem drugs’ of cocaine and heroin and their derivatives *are* almost entirely imported into the western industrialised nations). An early aim for the current study then is to focus on a particular UK market where domestic production, alongside importation, is the top layer of the market and to try to focus on every level of this market from production through layers of distribution to the final consumers.

Another assumption for most drug studies is that the top end of the market – either taken as the level of importers or, occasionally, taken as the level of production – functions only (or predominantly) on a large scale. The common view is of the pyramid model (discussed more fully in *Chapter One*) with large quantities of drugs being handled by a small number of players at the top end of

the market whilst the subsequent lower levels see increasingly more individual dealers but each handling smaller quantities of drugs.

Both of these central assumptions can be seen to be misplaced when we consider domestic cannabis production in the UK. Firstly, by definition, the market is *not* an import market. Secondly, as we shall see, although there are large scale operatives growing vast quantities of cannabis who may fit the pyramid model there are also numerous small scale operatives who still fill the top spots on the distribution chain (again by definition: they are the producers) but in no way fit the model or stereotype of the large-scale distributor. They may supply only very small circles of consumers, or even just themselves, but they are so numerous as to account for a sizeable chunk of the total cannabis market in the UK. And if these basic assumptions of drug markets are so radically different in the case of home produced cannabis then it seems fair to expect other features of the home-grown cannabis market to differ from those identified in other illegal drug markets. As such a further aim for this project will be to compare the features, structures and mechanics of the market being studied here with those of markets studied elsewhere and operating under different conditions, or for different substances. In identifying, and discussing, both the differences and similarities between this and other drugs markets we may further develop our understanding of both specific drug markets and drug distribution more generally. In particular I would point briefly to some very pertinent findings from my study.

Within the broad umbrella of the home-grown cannabis market I would identify a range of individual motives and methods. Cannabis growing **outfits** are structured in a variety of ways from the highly organised to the completely disorganised – something we find elsewhere in the world of drug dealing (this, and other issues mentioned here, will be discussed in more detail in *Chapter One*). Individuals and groups may be involved in other forms of crime and other drug dealing or may stick with cannabis growing alone. Some see violence as an integral part of their trade; others will avoid it at all costs but accept it is an occupational hazard or feature of the job. Still others will deny that violence is a feature of their drug market at all – for many violence is seen as counter-productive and harmful to their successful participation in the market. Again these different approaches to drug dealing have been identified and commented upon in other studies and will be discussed later (*Chapter One*). Those involved

in cannabis growing may be motivated entirely by aspects we may see as ‘traditional’ motivators (**drivers**) in the drugs market – a combination of money and lifestyle benefits ranging from the large (untaxed) incomes and exciting, hedonistic aspects of outlaw living at one level (see e.g. Adler, 1993) to the economic and social needs and pressures in the day-to-day life of the street-level user-dealer supporting his or her<sup>7</sup> own habit and giving his (her) life meaning at another (see e.g. the classic study of street-level heroin user-dealers by Preble and Casey, 1969). Again this is not new although I would suggest that the UK home-grown cannabis market is a particularly good example of the range of individuals and their attitudes and motivation, and of the variety of sizes, structures and types of drug distribution operations that exist in many drug markets. However as well as representing the range of approaches to distribution and types of distributor my study of cannabis cultivation reveals some new approaches to illegal drug distribution. In particular I would highlight an ideological aspect to much of the cannabis cultivation and related distribution I have encountered – an ideological aspect that sits alongside financial concerns as being a key driver for many involved in cannabis growing and which itself often relates to the structures and mechanics of different growing/distributing outfits and of the wider cannabis market. It is this ideological element of much cannabis cultivation that is the first major issue that I hope my study will address.

This brings us onto another area of interest. My study also serves as an example of how different individuals and groups fit together in wider drug distribution networks. Although each individual cannabis grower could stand at the top of his own distribution chain (which may be very short) and, theoretically at least, control an enclosed market for cannabis by being the sole supplier to a group of users this is rarely the case. Rather different growers and groups of growers, and different users and groups of users, and different distributors at different levels of different chains of supply are all part of the wider cannabis market. All exist in networks of contacts which, although they may cluster around certain points (i.e. local markets) also extend outwards, linking with each other, to cover, eventually, the entire cannabis market (or at least a major chunk thereof)

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<sup>7</sup> Drug use and distribution are not the sole preserve of male participants, but as with many criminal activities men seem to dominate. As such male pronouns are generally used throughout this thesis.

incorporating both home-grown and import-led elements. The market, for cannabis at least, is a network of networks of growers, dealers, users and their associates. This can be seen on local, regional, national and even international levels.

This leads us on to another area I aim to explore in this study. There are particular features of the market I have studied that are similar to features of drug markets elsewhere. There are other features that are new in the context of studies of drug distribution, and may even be unique to the market for home-grown cannabis. I aim to look at the differences to be found in markets for different drugs. Some features of the networks and markets in this study relate to the nature of cannabis itself – it is a plant that is easy to grow. Others relate to the culture of use associated with the drug. Cannabis is the most popular illegal drug, with a degree of cultural ideology attached to its use. Other features relate to the legal and political climate surrounding the drug: the recent downgrading of cannabis suggests a wider tolerance of its use, in relation to other drugs if not in absolute terms. The question is which of these features, or the situations from which they arise, are unique to cannabis. Which (if any) other drugs and their distribution networks may possess, or be expected to take on, those features identified here such as wide-spread small-scale production alongside occasional commercial scale production, ideologically motivated as well as financially motivated distribution, and distribution networks capable of self-perpetuation and resistance to attack? The hypothesis, if you like, would be that given the right conditions other drug markets in other contexts could take on features similar to some or all of those identified here.

### 0.3 Methodology

Cannabis growers, like others involved in illegal activity, are not apt to advertise their activities or to invite research. Not much is known about this group of drug-criminals to date. The challenge, as a researcher, was to gain access to these people and acquire as much information as possible about this as-yet under-documented group. I adopted an ethnographic approach seeking to gain both a depth and breadth of data through utilising a variety of research methods. These were centred around witnessing – and participating in – as much of my cannabis growers' day-to-day lives as possible. The ethnographic approach has a long

history in the study of deviance dating back at least as far as Henry Mayhew's studies of London's urban poor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Based on the idea that 'investigative field research (Douglas, 1976), with emphasis on direct personal observation, interaction, and experience, is the only way to acquire accurate knowledge about deviant behavior' (Adler, 1985:11) ethnographic methods involving close participant-observation have given valuable insight into deviant groups that would otherwise be inaccessible to researchers. This has been particularly true of drug research. As Hobbs says '[t]he appreciative stance generated by ethnographic work has been particularly effective in studies of drug use, which in direct contrast to alternative methodologies, tend to stress elements of autonomy, and intelligence being applied to developing strategies designed to cope with the rigours of the political economy of urban street life' (2001:213). This is equally true of studies of drug *distribution* – indeed drug use and drug distribution often overlap and are inseparably co-dependent. An early example, Preble and Casey's (1969) ethnographic study of urban heroin users, highlighted both the importance of the drug deal – and hence the dealer – in the daily life of drug users and the importance of the role of the social environment in understanding and explaining the routines of these street-level user-dealers. At the other end of the market Adler's work (1985, 1992, 1993) is perhaps the only detailed study of upper level drug dealers that doesn't rely on interviews with convicted dealers (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001). The insights it provides into drug dealing as an integral part of a wider hedonistic lifestyle are unique. The only other works that have revealed such detailed information about upper level drug dealers and their lives are those written by the dealers themselves (e.g. Marks, 1997) – which although valuable are obviously subject to doubts around issues such as accuracy, honesty and bias.

The ethnographic approach may, in theory, provide the right methodology to research the complexities of cannabis growers and their lives but how to apply this in practise? Cannabis growing is, as said, an illegal activity. Those involved face the very real risk of detection, prosecution and penal consequences – in some cases very severe consequences. As Downes and Rock point out, 'most deviants would not choose to advertise themselves' (1995:28), a situation which is enhanced with crimes carrying more serious penalties. Such risks lead to criminal populations existing as 'hidden' populations which turns a recurring

problem with ethnographies in general into a more serious problem for ethnographies of deviance in particular: the problem of access. As already suggested deviant groups are not readily open to outsiders, especially not those that ask too many questions. In addition, as Hobbs says, '[a]ccess to deviant youth can be gained via local schools, community initiatives etc. However, non-incarcerated deviant adults are not usually subjected to the same levels of surveillance as deviant youths, and so constitute hidden populations, who by utilizing both various forms of cultural capital and violence are able to protect their privacy.' (2001:211).

However it is this very barrier that can make ethnographic studies so valuable: 'Investigative techniques are especially necessary for studying groups such as drug dealers and smugglers because the highly illegal nature of their occupation makes them secretive, deceitful, mistrustful, and paranoid.' (Adler, 1985:11). By its very nature cannabis production – like other forms of illegal drug distribution – is not (usually) done in the open, and growers do not widely advertise their involvement to outsiders. Equally, 'deviants... are unlikely to be immediately co-operative when they are detected. After all, they have little to gain from exposure' (*ibid.*). That is to say that even if cannabis growers can be identified in the first place there is little reason to believe they will be co-operative. They are unlikely to invite researchers, as outsiders, into their personal lives and drug related activities. 'In fact, detailed, scientific information about upper-level drug dealers and smugglers is lacking precisely because of the difficulty sociological researchers have had in penetrating into their midst.' (Adler, 1985:11) Official statistics are largely limited to police and court data on arrests and prosecutions and to other indicators such as seizure rates of drugs by law enforcement bodies. Whilst prisoners and other detected dealers may be accessible for interview (such as for Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Reuter and Haaga, 1989; Ovenden *et al.* 1995) research based on evidence from such sources is inherently limited. This data is drawn from drug dealers who are either ex-dealers (no longer involved) and/or, more importantly, *failed* dealers. This can lead to both a time lag between knowledge of drug dealing and the current situation and to knowledge only of the types of drug dealer which law enforcement agencies are having some success in detecting. Genuinely new insights are likely to be limited in both cases.

A key feature of many outstanding deviance ethnographies is an element of serendipity in gaining access. For Ditton (1977) there was the fact that he already worked, in student vacation, in the bakery that was the setting to his study of work place pilfering. For Becker (1963) it was being something of a jazz musician whilst studying sociology that helped give initial access to the dope-smoking jazz-playing world of his 'Outsiders'. For Adler (1985) it was the chance of living next to, and being able to socialise with, a key figure in her local drug dealing community. All these are examples of what I would call 'foot-in-the-door' access – where the researcher has access prior to the decision to conduct research. Indeed it is often the existence of such access – and the familiarity with the deviant activity – which suggests the research project in the first place.

My own access to cannabis growers followed similar lines. As an undergraduate I became fairly involved in a local underground 'dance-music' sub-culture, not just attending club-nights, free-parties (raves)<sup>8</sup>, local festivals, gigs and other events but helping to organise a few and also being a regular face at peripheral pub visits and other social events. Drug use, particularly cannabis and '**dance-drugs**', was quite widespread in this cultural 'scene' (and elsewhere in student life) – arguably integral to it. Taking advantage of a ready-made on-the-doorstep drug-using sample, many of whom knew or at least recognised me, I conducted a study of drug use in this population for my undergraduate research project. The study not only helped secure my undergraduate degree – it also gave me a foot in the door as a researcher in that setting.

For my Master's dissertation (Potter, 2000) I returned to this group, this time approaching people involved in *dealing* drugs within this scene. One of the key findings from that study was very unexpected. The study had concentrated on the motives of these drug dealers, the mechanics of the market they operated in and the relationships between different players (consumers and suppliers) in this market. However a significant finding emerged that highlighted many of the points to be made in relation to these issues and also showed a major and (at the

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<sup>8</sup> Free parties are (usually) large, illegal parties thrown on public or private land, indoors (e.g. warehouses) or outdoors (e.g., in South Yorkshire, in peak-district national parkland). Participants find out about their existence and the location (normally revealed only once the organisers have set up the sound-system) through word-of-mouth or by ringing a designated phone number. As a phenomenon free-parties, and their association with dancing, music and

time) un-researched trend in the recreational drug market – the emergence of domestic cannabis cultivation. Seven of my subjects had turned out to have been involved in cannabis cultivation, six of these with the express intention of growing cannabis to sell. Four of these individuals were well known to me even before I began that research. I knew that these people grew cannabis and that they sold much of what they grew to other people – one of them had even spent three months in a young offenders institute on growing-related charges. I also knew other cannabis growers who hadn't featured in that study. With hindsight I consider myself slightly naïve at not having recognised earlier what turned out to be a fascinating criminological pattern amongst part of my circle of friends! Nevertheless this earlier study brought the subject of cannabis growers, and the fact that I had access to a number of them, to my attention. It was only with a small amount of deliberation, and a few hints from my supervisor, that I decided to pursue this issue further for my doctoral research. Access, in short, was very much as a result of serendipity.

With an existing base of about ten cannabis growing contacts (not all of whom had featured in the earlier study) and a number of cannabis dealers who knew or suspected that much of their cannabis was grown in the UK, often locally, I began my study of cannabis growers. At this point the plan was very much to do an ethnography of local growers. My earlier study had shown that cannabis growers often existed in networks (i.e. knew of and interacted with other growers) and were rarely isolated individual cases. As such it was meaningful to talk about cannabis growing *populations* as well as separate individuals who grew cannabis. I proposed to undertake this the usual way – a combination of fitting in with the target population and using snowball sampling, starting with my initial contacts, to expand the size of my sample.

As I got to know my existing contacts better, and began to mix with them more in both their social and more private lives, I developed some of them into key contacts and began to conduct formal and informal interviews and observational research on (with) them. From these I built up some detailed case studies and also improved my understanding of how cannabis growing and dealing worked within this scene. I gradually got to know some of my contacts' contacts as well.

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drugs, date back at least as far as the 1920s (Kohn, 1992).

I now had a passing knowledge of cannabis growing as well as of the wider drug using and drug dealing cultures overlapping this scene. I also had dreadlocks, dressed somewhat scruffily and had been known to smoke cannabis myself on occasion. In short I was able to slip in to these new circles with comparative ease, very much as an insider, and found that I was soon able to watch my contacts and their connections in various aspects of their day-to-day lives. Following the approach used by Becker (1963), Polsky (1969), Douglas (1972) and Adler (1985) (amongst others) I developed new friendships by giving people the chance to get to know me and to form their own judgements.

A recurrent problem with the ethnographic approach in deviance studies is the question of whether to pursue covert or overt techniques. Adler discusses this problem in relation to drug smugglers. On the one hand '[t]he highly illegal nature of dealing in illicit drugs and dealers' and smugglers' general level of suspicion [makes] the adoption of an overt research role highly sensitive and problematic' (*ibid*:15) – as already discussed dealers are naturally secretive. Carelessness or openness with information is a risky business that may well lead to an increased chance of detection. On the other hand covert research has the ethical problems associated with spying and deceit, and carries the question of how people will react if they find out you have been studying them, without their knowledge, and probably have information about them that could potentially get them into serious trouble. As is the norm in ethnographic studies I actually employed a combination of overt and covert research methods throughout the project (and developed my own guidelines on when each approach was suitable). As Adler describes (*ibid.*) research with particular subjects tended to start covertly and then develop into an overt research relationship.

With my key informants, of course, all of my research was overt. And as I established newer contacts I discovered that the questions of if, when and how to declare my research interest was less problematic, often, than I might have expected. Small scale cannabis growing in England and large scale cocaine smuggling in America do not carry the same levels of risk in terms of potential penalties following detection by law enforcement agencies! I found firstly that some people were generally more open about their clandestine activities in front of unknown strangers who were obviously cultural insiders (including myself) – but also I observed that some growers could be very loose tongued in front of

outsiders. Others were much more cautious and there were often incidents of friction when a loose-tongued individual talked shop with their more cautious counterparts in public places or in front of unknown individuals. A second advantage was that many of my key informants would explain the research I was doing as they introduced me to new contacts. Generally amongst my subjects, and especially my initial key informants, there was an interest, indeed a fascination, in my work. This enthusiasm, along with strong endorsements of my motives and reassurances of my trustworthiness from mutual acquaintances meant that many new contacts already knew what I was doing and were already willing to be involved. Nevertheless there were times when I had to 'come out' all by myself and in any case I tried to broach the subject as soon as seemed reasonable. This meant that whilst I was happy to make covert observations before this point (especially where observations involved brief occurrences or encounters at large social gatherings and/or in public places – in such cases they had acted or spoken in front of me of their own free will, and I could be anyone) I would bring up my role almost as soon as I got talking to any individual involved in cannabis growing about any subject even loosely linked to cannabis. This may have scared off a few people who may have been happy to talk more to a non-researcher (or a covert researcher) but generally seemed to be appreciated by individuals who realised I was being very open with them. After this it was normal for interest in my project, my views and my expected findings<sup>9</sup> to be sparked, usually followed quickly by a willingness to participate. The fact that we had mutual acquaintances who were involved in cannabis growing undoubtedly helped to secure trust and recruitment to the overt side of the research. Of course some people balked at the idea of being researched and were not forthcoming at all. This situation mainly occurred with larger scale growers and in situations where the mutual acquaintance formed only a weak relational link between me and the subject.

Once contacts were recruited two main research tools were used: participant observation and interviews. Participant observation was conducted into all the areas of a contact's life into which I was allowed access and included both cannabis related and seemingly non-related aspects. This included observation of

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<sup>9</sup> Not that, at the earlier stages of research, I had any particular 'expected findings'!

and participation sessions in actual **grow-ops** (setting-up, day-to-day running, harvest and dismantling), observation and participation in the shops where growers bought equipment for their growing operations, observation of dealing events, participation in social events both between growers/dealers and other growers/dealers and between my contacts and their non-grower/dealer friends and acquaintances. In all cases I tried to make notes as and when I could. On the social side in particular (but also in some **grow-room** maintenance and harvesting sessions) observation events could go on very late and include fairly heavy consumption of alcohol, cannabis and other drugs. As such note-taking was sometimes left for the following day. On the one hand the atmosphere was not always conducive to note taking (especially when lots of people were intoxicated in one form or another or where there were large crowds of people). On the other hand even if note taking had been practical it may well have upset the research setting, breaking the flow of conversation and interaction and reminding all present that they were being researched. Whilst I would never want them to forget this fact – I considered my largely overt approach to be very important in the ethics of my work – I didn't necessarily want constant conscious awareness of this affecting my subjects' thought processes and behaviour patterns. As many ethnographers have discovered it is best to take notes whenever possible – developing some innovative methods of surreptitious and/or improvised note-taking methods<sup>10</sup> – and to fill in the gaps as soon as possible after an event.

Interviews with key informants began almost straight away – some of the early ones were very important in setting the later research agenda. With other contacts interviewing began as soon as the relationship reached a suitable stage and interviews became mutually convenient. I did not use a consistent approach to interviewing and although I had a fairly well structured interview guide (see Appendix) both the methods and contents of interviews varied to suit individual respondents and different situations. Where possible I conducted formal, semi-structured, recorded<sup>11</sup> interviews. In other cases I adopted a different approach

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<sup>10</sup> Scribbling on **roach**-cards, rizla (cigarette paper) packs and cigarette packets was a strangely satisfying solution in some instances!

<sup>11</sup> Although most respondents involved in formal interviews were happy to be tape-recorded not all were, and not all interview locations were suited to tape-recording (and sometimes interview opportunities arose when I didn't have recording equipment with me, although I carried a

conducting series of short informal interviews on an ad-hoc basis, or combinations of formal and informal interviews as appropriate. This method was particularly suited to unexpected research opportunities, but also to those contacts that I got to know well over a period of time and that I encountered on regular occasions. It was both possible and suitable, for example, to discuss a specific issue as or shortly after it came up in observation, or to return at a later date to issues raised in previous meetings. With many of the growers that I had most contact with both formal and informal interview methods were used and follow up interviews were possible.

Whether conducting a single formal interview or whether going through my interview guide over a series of informal conversational opportunities my approach was guided by a few key principles. I had an interview guide which evolved over time as new issues came up (and wherever possible I returned to previous interviewees to go over these new issues with them) against which I could keep a check list of areas covered with different respondents. Where it was appropriate I cross-checked responses from different sources who knew each other to check each one's reliability and to get a better understanding of issues. I tried to stick to a conversational and flexible approach – following issues and tangents as and when they came up and exploring topics which I hadn't thought of or which seemed largely irrelevant at first but were seemingly important or relevant to the interviewees.

One problem with sociological research of this type is that of reliability of data. In depending largely on self-reported data we are in danger of getting a lop-sided picture of what is going on. Individuals may mislead – consciously or unconsciously – for a variety of reasons. Even when we can cross reference points through direct observation or third party information we are still limited to the internal view: all our data is collected from within the target population. In an attempt to balance this bias I utilised a variety of other sources who were informed about cannabis growers but were not within their ranks. I talked to the management and workers of businesses that were related to cannabis production – **head-shops** that supplied cannabis seeds, literature and paraphernalia, and

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recorder and tapes around with me as a matter of course for much of the research period). Where tape recording of formal interviews was not possible I made detailed contemporaneous notes – and after an incident where a recorded interview was lost I made notes in all formal interviews.

shops that supplied growing equipment and supplies (although it would be somewhat naïve to consider many of these to be outside the cannabis growing population – many head-shop and grow-shop employees also grow their own cannabis). I kept tabs on the local and national media, in particular their coverage of police detection of cannabis growers. I approached the police and the forensic science services (FSS). From these sources I got expert opinion on what was going on in the South Yorkshire area through interviews with police officers and FSS scientists<sup>12</sup> and also gained access to local data concerning cultivation-related arrests in South Yorkshire.

One of the inherent problems with ethnographic research is that it is usually focussed on a single population. This means that whilst the researcher may find out a lot about the particular group studied there are limits as to how much he can extrapolate from these findings. In my own situation the question would be how representative of UK cannabis growers generally are the South Yorkshire cannabis growers I got to meet. One solution is to study multiple groups – different sample populations that fit the main criteria of the study. Related to my own field Melanie Dreher achieved some success with this approach when she spent time with three different groups of people – three different villages with different geographic and socio-economic positions – in her ethnographic study of ‘Working Men and Ganja’ in Jamaica (Dreher, 1982). But rarely does the ethnographer of a deviant, secret or hidden population (such as criminals) get access to multiple examples of his target group.

I managed to supplement my ‘traditional’ South Yorkshire based ethnographic study in two ways. Firstly I encountered and studied – through interview and/or participant observation – cannabis growers from elsewhere in the country. In particular I gained access, albeit to a lesser extent, to a small population of cannabis growers, users and dealers on the south coast of England and another handful in East Anglia. I had other contacts, in ones and twos, dotted around the country. More significantly I conducted research with another large population of

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recorded or otherwise.

<sup>12</sup> Although the FSS are not involved in all cases brought against cannabis growers they get sent samples from many of them to verify substances as cannabis and they get involved in more detailed analysis of many of the bigger operations uncovered by the police

cannabis growers accessed via the internet in what I have called an ethnography<sup>13</sup>.

I was already using the internet as a source of information for my research, for which it proved invaluable. Typing the word 'cannabis' into the Google search-engine brought up well over a million hits in significantly less than a second<sup>14</sup>. Many sites were dedicated specifically to growing cannabis whilst cultivation featured as one of many cannabis related subjects on others. Both the study of web-based information relating to cannabis growing and the monitoring of news and discussion groups became valuable sources of information: I signed up to a dozen or so chat- and news-groups and looked at well over a hundred cannabis related websites whilst conducting this research.

However the Internet was to prove more useful than simply as an information source. Whilst conducting some research for the Independent Drug Monitoring Unit (IDMU)<sup>15</sup> I got talking to one of their questionnaire respondents. It transpired that he was himself thinking of becoming a cannabis grower – he used cannabis primarily for treating a variety of medical conditions – and that he was an active member of an online community of cannabis growers. He offered to introduce (and vouch for) me on their web site which hosted a large number of message boards and discussion forums and suggested that I might be able to recruit some people into my study. He was as good as his word and after his introductions (we set up a new message board topic for my purposes and waited for interested parties to respond to postings) I introduced myself, explained my research and invited people to participate. The response was better than I had anticipated, and as well as those volunteering to participate in online interviewing the message boards relating to other topics proved to be a mine of information. It was usually possible to cross-reference those who responded directly to me with their postings elsewhere on the site as they generally seemed to use consistent virtual identities.

It became apparent that some of the people associated with this web site community were also participants in some of the chat lists I was a member of. It

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<sup>13</sup> As in an electronic ethnography.

<sup>14</sup> Exact numbers are meaningless here. The same search, using the same one-word term, conducted minutes later brought up a different total number of hits, although still well over a million.

<sup>15</sup> Administering questionnaires at the Glastonbury festival of the performing arts – discussed

also became apparent that one or two of the members of the online community were people whose physical identities overlapped with my core South Yorkshire sample. Two at least I met and got to know quite well in both virtual and real-world studies. Others, such as my initial contact in this on-line community, I at least met in both their 'real' and 'virtual' guises.

What was interesting was that the idea of an on-line community (that is spanning multiple online cannabis sites and groups rather than the specific community of a single website and its computer mediated communication (CMC) forums) seemed to be a valid one. As such a second target population could now be included in my research thus, hopefully, strengthening the reliability, validity and generalisability of my ethnographic findings. In combining the two source groups – united by their involvement in cannabis growing yet different in terms of the parameters that both defined and influenced them as a population – I could introduce a dimension of triangulation that could only strengthen my research. The fact that there was some overlap between my virtual and real populations (my e-ethnographic and ethnographic studies) could only add to the data-strengthening obtained from the triangulation: there were situations where I could cross check data in my two approaches.

Alongside the interviews it was also possible to conduct forms of observation on-line. The different message boards, chat rooms and email lists I was monitoring enabled a certain degree of observation of how participants in these online forums interacted with each other – a method similar to that employed by Mann and Sutton in their innovative study of the dissemination of criminal skills and knowledge on a website devoted to lock-smithing (and lock-picking) and another devoted to hacking smart-card based satellite TV receivers (1998).

Just as the ethnographic approach incorporates a multitude of sociological research methods so does the e-ethnographic approach – primarily, perhaps, forms of interview and participant observation but also use of a variety of online documents and other online sources of information – brought together in a focused and intimate study of a targeted population and/or subject over a period of time, paying particular reference to interaction between the members of this population.

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elsewhere in the thesis.

The use of multiple populations – my South Yorkshire group, my other contacts around the country and my on-line growing populations – allowed for a significant degree of triangulation which, hopefully, improved the validity and reliability of my data and allowed generalisations to be made with a greater degree of confidence than would be possible from a traditional single-population ethnography.

#### 0.4 Thesis Overview

Having justified the research and outlined my aims and methodology in this introduction *Chapter One* kicks off the thesis proper by reviewing the cannabis situation in the UK in terms of both demand and supply. Official statistics and other data sources are considered in a demonstration of how demand for cannabis has rocketed over the latter part of the last century, is currently at an all time high, and doesn't look likely to decline significantly in the near future. This demand is met by supply networks – drug dealers – and the second part of this chapter reviews the literature relating to cannabis and other drug distribution in the UK and elsewhere. Once again this is set into a temporal context considering how drug distribution has evolved over the years and what the situation appears to be now. In essence *Chapter One* sets out a model, or models, of drug distribution to which the emerging models associated with domestic cannabis production are to be compared and contrasted.

In *Chapter Two* the emergence of cannabis production in the UK – both legal (for industrial and medical purposes) and illegal cultivation – is looked at in more detail. Cultivation on both sides of the legal fence has expanded rapidly in the last decade or so. As well as documenting this expansion the chapter also introduces some of the issues related to cannabis cultivation. The versatility of the plant and the uses that have led to a resurgence in *legal* cultivation of both medical marijuana and industrial hemp are often cited by many of those who get involved in illegal cultivation in defence or justification of their actions.

The ethnographic element of the research develops in *Chapter Three* where we take a look at how cannabis is grown illegally in Britain. One of the key distinctions between the home-grown cannabis market and other domestic drug markets is the fact of domestic production – obvious, maybe, but an important influence on the structure and dynamics of the market as a whole. Production of

cannabis as a drug crop is inherently tied to the biology of the plant itself and this chapter aims to show how knowledge of this biology along with low-tech or, increasingly, high-tech cultivation methods are utilised by growers to achieve the drug crop required for their purposes. *Chapter Four* complements this overview of how cannabis is grown by looking at who is involved in its cultivation. As well as considering demographic factors we also look at other personal characteristics common to many cannabis growers and discuss what is needed to become a grower and how the process of initiation into growing takes place. The basic point here is that cannabis growers come from all walks of life, but that certain lifestyle characteristics are common to many of them.

A simple, and probably fair, assumption about drug distribution to date has been that drug markets are essentially economic markets driven, in the main, by two elements: a high level of demand and a desire for profit amongst the principle actors (i.e. the dealers). *Chapter Five* demonstrates how this is not the case for substantial numbers of domestic cannabis growers. Rather, for many cannabis growers, various ideological motives and non-financial incentives or drivers encourage participation in this particular drug-distribution activity.

Domestic production of cannabis is, of course, a top-level drug distribution activity by definition. In many (most) cases domestic cultivation occurs only on a relatively small scale and is (again somewhat obviously but also significantly) fundamentally different to other 'top-level' drug distribution as may be encountered elsewhere. However some domestic production does occur on a large scale and is more obviously akin to large scale import-led distribution. In reality cannabis cultivation occurs on both small and large scales, and every scale in between. A key distinction can be made between those who do not grow for any financial profit (as covered in *Chapter Five*) and those who are financially motivated. Even within the group of financially motivated dealers we still have a range of growers differentiable by the size (in terms of financial return and/or physical size of operation) and structure of their growing operations, and also the approach to cultivation and distribution of their domestically cultivated cannabis. As we shall see in *Chapter Six*, financially motivated growing operations may maintain some of the ideological elements of the not-for-profit growers of the previous chapter but, and particularly for the bigger operations, are increasingly akin to more established forms of drug distribution outfits. In essence we can

draw a distinction between lower level forms of cannabis cultivation which may be seen largely in the terminology of ‘social supply’ and the traditional view of upper level drug dealing or ‘commercial supply’ with the related elements of involvement in other drug distribution, violence and aspects of ‘organised crime’. Even within these different conceptual levels there are differences in approach – the range of approaches across all levels of cannabis cultivation can be seen, in part, to reflect different models of drug distribution encountered in studies of other drug markets whilst other patterns encountered here seem to be new approaches not found in other studies. *Chapter Seven* aims to show how all the different types of cannabis grower fit with our wider view of the drug black-market(s). It deals with the question of why cannabis cultivation has taken off as it has, and also with the questions as to what effect this has had on the wider market and what implications this all has for the structure of cannabis (and other drug) markets as we move into the new millennium.

# **1 – Preparing the Ground:**

## **A review of the UK Cannabis market.**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Before we proceed with the study of cannabis growers in the UK I intend to outline the wider cannabis situation in Britain around the beginning of the new millennium. Cannabis is Britain's most popular illegal drug by some considerable margin and is consumed by a wide cross-section of society. It has a significant cultural presence and features blatantly or subtly in numerous films and on TV, in books and music, and even in, or on, clothing<sup>16</sup>. It regularly takes centre stage in political and public debate. Some commentators even go as far as to say that cannabis has been 'normalised' into modern living, at least for certain demographic groups. Although still illegal recent changes in UK law suggest a softening in the approach to policing the drug which in turn suggest a greater tolerance to use of the drug and an acceptance that its effects – both short and long term and in both personal and social contexts – are relatively benign, at least when compared to other illegal (and legal) drugs. Although the law in relation to possession has eased somewhat there are still substantial penalties associated with trafficking (dealing) the drug<sup>17</sup> implying that whilst users may be looked upon sympathetically dealers are often still seen as serious criminals although, interestingly, there is very little hard information relating to cannabis dealers in the UK.

This chapter will start off by considering the demand for the drug – looking not just at use rates but also at past and possible future trends in cannabis prevalence rates. It will then look at the distribution of cannabis by considering the (limited) available data and reviewing the (equally limited) literature on drug distribution in general and cannabis trafficking in particular.

### **1.2 Demand**

“Because I see it more as a public service. It's not doing anybody any harm. The laws of supply and demand, there's thousands and thousands of people

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<sup>16</sup> E.g. clothing made of hemp, or clothing bearing the cannabis leaf logo or some kind of (pro-) cannabis slogan or picture.

<sup>17</sup> When cannabis was downgraded to a class C drug from a class B drug early in 2005 the penalties relating to supply offences for all class C drugs were increased.

all over this country who smoke cannabis, and they're being poisoned on a large scale by crap hash imports that are full of plastic and things. It's doing the population a darn slight more damage than a bit of hydroponic skunk is doing, and, you know, free the weed, man!

I'm not too bothered about the other drug laws, but particularly the hemp thing for the potential benefit it can do the world." ('Weedhopper', a cannabis grower, explaining why he grew cannabis.)

The demand for cannabis is large, and it is this demand that is probably the major impetus behind the cannabis market – both its very existence and the trends and changes explored in this thesis. This quote from one of my sources summarises the position of many cannabis growers. The ideas that home-grown cannabis is preferable to imported cannabis resin, and that cannabis production is somehow ideologically justifiable, are important and will be returned to throughout this thesis. But for now we must consider Weedhopper's first point. As he says, and as I repeat, the demand for cannabis is enormous.

Economic markets are essentially divisible into 'supply' and 'demand' – with one of the basic laws of economics being that where there is demand for something, supply is sure to follow (where possible). Especially when a profit can be made by suppliers. As I have already mentioned cannabis is the UK's most popular illegal drug – and prevalence rates have only recently begun to level out after many years of continuously rising. Obviously an increase in demand for cannabis has an effect on the market in paving the way for an increase in supply – which in turn relates to the increase in domestic production.

### ***1.2.1 Prevalence of cannabis consumption***

Drug use is notoriously hard to measure – even for legal drugs admission of use may be perceived as socially undesirable, and consumption rates in particular may be subject to inaccurate recall<sup>18</sup>. When the substance is illegal consumers may also be unlikely to admit their own use for fear of negative repercussions or social stigma.

One way round this is the anonymous self-report survey. The British Crime Survey (BCS) takes such an approach and has asked respondents about their own

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<sup>18</sup> For example it is widely recognised that many people underestimate or deliberately understate their own alcohol consumption.

illegal drug use since 1992<sup>19</sup>. Although still flawed in some respects the BCS is probably the most reliable source we have for measuring prevalence of drug use in the population of England and Wales<sup>20</sup> and it is BCS figures that I will use for illustrating the demand for cannabis.

Table 1.1 – Estimate of number of users of selected drugs, by use in last year and last month.

Substance	Last year	Last month
<b>Cannabis</b>	<b>3,040,000</b>	<b>1,752,000</b>
Any drug	3,544,000	2,100,000
Amphetamines	430,000	161,000
Cocaine	635,000	279,000
Crack cocaine	32,000	16,000
Ecstasy	556,000	213,000
Heroin	38,000	21,000
LSD	66,000	11,000
Magic Mushrooms	337,000	113,000

Data taken from Roe, 2005.

The latest available BCS figures<sup>21</sup> for reported drug use were published in 2005 and taken from the 2004/2005 sweep of the BCS (Roe, 2005). It was found that 3,040,000<sup>22</sup> people had used cannabis in the last year – significantly more than any other illegal drug, especially the recognised ‘problem drugs’ such as heroin and crack cocaine (see table 1.1). This equated to about 10% of all 16-59 year olds having used cannabis in the last year (see table 1.2). This compares to the 3,544,000 people who had used *any* illegal drug in the last year showing how cannabis use accounts for the lion’s share of all illegal drug use<sup>23</sup>. Last month

<sup>19</sup> Questions about cannabis use first appeared in the 1982 survey, but it was in 1992 that the self-report section on drug use appeared as a substantial section in the BCS.

<sup>20</sup> The BCS does not cover Scotland or Northern Ireland – both jurisdictions have their own national crime surveys which also deal with self-reported drug use.

<sup>21</sup> At the time of writing.

<sup>22</sup> To the nearest 1,000.

<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that the remaining 504,000 people are divided between all other drugs as many users are poly-drug users.

figures – indicative (to a degree) of regular use – suggest just over 1,750,000 regular cannabis users.

Table 1.2 – Prevalence rates for selected drugs (16-59 year olds).

Substance	Use in last year	Use in last month
<b>Cannabis</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>
Any illegal drug	11.3%	6.7%
Amphetamines	1.4%	0.5%
Cocaine	2.0%	0.9%
Crack cocaine	0.1%	0.1%
Ecstasy	1.8%	0.7%
Heroin	0.1%	0.1%
LSD	0.2%	0.0%
Magic Mushrooms	1.1%	0.4%

Data taken from Roe, 2005.

If anything the figures suggested by the BCS are likely to be underestimates of the total amount of cannabis use (or drug use more generally) in Britain. I have already mentioned that the survey covers only England and Wales – Scotland and Northern Ireland users will add to the total. On top of this the BCS is a household survey and as such misses potentially key non-household populations:

‘[N]otably the homeless, and those living in certain institutions, such as prisons or student halls of residence. Nor, in practice, does any household survey necessarily reach people whose lives are so busy or chaotic that they are hardly ever at home. Lastly, household surveys usually have age criteria; in the BCS, from 1994 through to 2000 [and beyond], those aged under 16 were not eligible for interview, while those aged 60 or over were not asked to complete the drugs component (the decision to exclude the latter was an economy measure, reflecting their very low prevalence rates for the use of prohibited drugs)’ (Ramsay *et al.* 2001).

Finally it must be considered that despite the anonymity and confidentiality assurances that go with the BCS some people may still under-report or not report their illicit drug use due to perceived potential repercussions, through failing to recognise the extent of their own use, or through denial of (extent of) own use. It is not important for our purposes to develop a more accurate picture of the extent

of cannabis use, merely to observe that at over 1,750,000 monthly users there is a considerable consumer demand for cannabis – significantly more so than for any other illegal drug.

Due to changes in the methodology of the BCS it is not possible to meaningfully measure trends across all the years in which it has been asking about drug use. However it is possible to make some comparisons from 1996 to the 2004/05 sweeps of the survey as shown in table 1.3 (Roe, 2005).

The change in ‘last year’ and ‘last month’ use between 1998 and 2004/05 were found to be statistically significant at the 5% confidence level although the changes between 2003/04 and 2004/05 were not (Roe, 2005).

Table 1.3 – Prevalence of cannabis use and total number of users by ‘used last month’ and ‘used last year’(16-59 yr. olds) 1992-2003.

<u>BCS sweep</u>	1996	1998	2000	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Used last month %	5.5	6.1	6.4	6.6	6.7	6.5	5.6
Used last year %	26.0	28.2	27.0	26.9	25.8	24.8	23.5

Data taken from Roe, 2005.

The table suggests that cannabis use – both in terms of last month and last year – has peaked, and is now declining. Nevertheless rates of use are still very high, reflecting high levels of consumer demand. This trend in cannabis consumption – an increase across the final years of the last century but with some levelling out or decline in use in recent years – seems to be mirrored across the globe, particularly the developed countries of North America, western Europe and the Antipodes. Global prevalence rates for cannabis use were reported as 3.88%, representing 162.81 million people, in 2000-2001 (UNODC, 2003). There is no shortage of users – and therefore no shortage of demand for cannabis – in either the UK or the wider world.

### ***1.2.2 Size of the cannabis market***

There have been various attempts to estimate the value (size) of the UK cannabis market. This is a difficult task as the market is a black one – both users (buyers) and distributors (sellers) of cannabis are, of course, likely to try to keep their activities secret and are certainly not expected to keep official records<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless there are assumptions that can be made which can lead to workable estimates of the market's value.

Estimates can be calculated from the demand side of the market. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) did this in the 1990s<sup>25</sup> as part of an exercise considering the effects of illegal activities on the UK economy. Using street-level cannabis prices averaged from police forces around the country and from the national drugs advice agency Release (which amounted to approximately £15 per 1/8<sup>th</sup> of an ounce of cannabis) and BCS figures of 1,734,000 'regular' ('last month') users and 1,387,000 'occasional' ('last year') users with the assumption that regular users spent £600 per year on cannabis and occasional users 1/6<sup>th</sup> as much it was calculated that the total UK spending on cannabis was £1,179 million per year. The Independent Drug Monitoring Unit (IDMU) attempted their own estimate of annual spending on cannabis – using their survey data findings of an average monthly spending (for self-defined 'regular users') of £823.20 per year (£68.50 per month) and the ONS assumption that occasional users spent about 1/6<sup>th</sup> as much (nearly all the respondents to the IDMU survey of 'Regular Drug Users' came under the ONS/BCS definitions of 'regular' users). On this reckoning the annual spend on cannabis comes to £1,618 million per year (Atha *et al.* 1997). A third estimate comes from the Home Office publication 'Sizing the UK market for illicit drugs' (Bramley-Harker, 2001), which estimated the UK cannabis market at £1,578 million per annum. Again it was noted that the methodology used in arriving at this estimation was experimental and as such

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<sup>24</sup> Various cannabis (and other drug) dealers I encountered during this and other research did keep records of one form or another. Although these were usually temporary records one middling level dealer who I encountered kept records on his computer, and would even produce graphs of how well his different clients performed (i.e. how much cannabis they each bought off him) over time. He didn't seem bothered about the potential risks to himself should this data fall into the wrong hands. Other dealers I spoke to would try to avoid any kind of records. Where records had to be kept (for example 'tick lists' keeping track of money owed and by whom) they would usually be recorded on scraps of paper, often in some kind of short-hand or code, to be destroyed as finished with.

<sup>25</sup> Referred to, although not cited, in the IDMU report "Regular Users II" (Atha *et al.*, 1997).

unlikely to be wholly accurate. This number is very close to that arrived at by the IDMU and all three estimations are of a similar magnitude.

Alternatively estimates can be calculated from the supply side of the equation. Using this method assumptions are made as to what proportion of all imported and domestically produced cannabis is detected by law enforcement agencies – namely the police and customs and excise. Under this approach the ONS calculated a value in the range of £3 to £13 billion (the lower value for an estimated seizure rate of 20%, the higher for an estimated seizure rate of 5%). The IDMU produced an estimate range of between £1.5 and £7 billion – the difference between this guess and that of the ONS is suggested as being primarily due to pricing assumptions and assumptions as to the amount of home-grown cannabis on the market<sup>26</sup>. The differences between supply-led and demand-led valuations are large and reflect the inadequacy of some of the assumptions made in the two methodologies – a complicated balancing act can be employed which is beyond the scope of this section but which allows the assumptions of expenditures and seizure rates to be played off each other and (hopefully) therefore improve both (Atha *et al.* 1997). For our purposes all that needs to be recognised is that the cannabis market is (or at least was at the end of the last century) probably worth *at least* £1.5 billion per annum and possibly nearly nine times this much. There is, in short, a *lot* of money to be made for the cannabis-supplying entrepreneur.

### 1.3 Supply

Over two million people are using cannabis every month: they must all be getting it from somewhere. Obviously some users now produce their own cannabis – one of the central points on which this thesis is based – but this is a relatively new phenomenon and is probably true of only a small proportion of all cannabis users. For the rest acquiring cannabis depends on having access to distributors who in turn must have access to the distribution chain that links imported<sup>27</sup> cannabis to the end users. It is the nature of this distribution – the structure of the

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<sup>26</sup> A key difference in the two bodies calculations is the consideration as to how much home-produced cannabis gets sold – and how much is non-commercial (i.e. consumed by the grower or distributed for free).

<sup>27</sup> Or, increasingly, domestically cultivated.

chain and the characteristics and practises of those who are involved in it – to which I now turn.

Little is known about drug distribution or drug distributors – much less than is known about drug use and drug users. There are some obvious reasons for this. Drug dealers are open to more serious repercussions in the criminal law than users – more so the greater their level of involvement – and so are more likely to be secretive, both hidden from and wary of researchers. It is also a reasonable assumption that drug dealers are significantly fewer in number than drug users – each dealer presumably having multiple customers. The problem is one of access<sup>28</sup> and the result is a dearth of accurate and reliable information on the nature and structure of drug distribution. However it is possible to identify a widely-recognised model of distribution based partly on acquired knowledge and experience, and partly on oft-inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes.

### ***1.3.1 The pyramid model of drug distribution***

The pyramid model reflects the popular view of the workings of drugs markets. This model is based on a common pattern found in legitimate commodity markets and reflects a market structured in tiers, each tier having more customers (the next tier down) than suppliers (the next level up). Production occurs in one or more locations, each distributing the product on-mass to wholesale distributors. Distribution occurs through successive levels of wholesale distribution – operating at international, national, regional and down to local level (although from the point of view of an importing nation the market can equally be seen as starting at the level of importation rather than at the point of production). The last level of distribution is the retailer – supplied by their local wholesaler and selling to individual consumers or end-customers. Each level of the distribution pyramid has more customers than suppliers – except the peak of the pyramid, which is all supply, and the base of the pyramid, which is all customer. As we move down the pyramid each individual distributor deals with smaller quantities of goods (as they are only one of many customers to the distributor above them), paying a higher cost per unit than the layer above and charging a higher cost per unit than the layer below. As individual unit price increases so total number or size of units dealt with (number and size of

transactions) by individual operatives decreases through the layers. The market is hierarchical in structure in that operators at different levels can be seen to be 'higher' or 'lower' in the market or distribution chain in terms of position, but also in terms of control (each layer ultimately exercising a degree of control over the layer below it whilst being subject to a degree of control by the one above) and in terms of financial return (higher layers may sell products at lower prices per unit, but sell far greater quantities of the product and at a greater total return). We may even recognise a hierarchy of status – those who control production and large-scale distribution (i.e. often big businesses) may be perceived to be of a higher social status than those who only operate at a local retail level (e.g. the corner-shop owner).

This all seems to apply to illegal drug markets quite reasonably and intuitively. From the British perspective – where the general assumption has always been that drugs originate in and are smuggled from foreign producer countries – drug markets are seen as import-led. Distribution is then facilitated by layers of drug dealers operating on the pyramid selling model, each subsequent layer having more active members selling less of the drug each but at greater value per unit. We expect few drug importers, dealing in large quantities of drugs, but many retail- or street-level dealers each selling a small amount of the drug to the individual drug users who represent the end of the chain.

From this model we would expect descending layers of the distribution chain to be populated by greater numbers of people – each supplier or distributor presumably having multiple customers. We expect the cost-per-unit of a commodity to increase down the chain (so that each operative can make a profit) whilst the total quantity of product handled by individuals decreases down each chain (each distributor splitting the quantity of product purchased amongst their different customers).

Features associated with this common view of drug distribution include the hierarchical features associated with the model as applied to legal markets. Those higher up the distribution chain have some control over the market (and operatives within it) below them in the pyramid. They make more money and their position and influence is greater than for (and often aspired to by) those

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<sup>28</sup> As discussed in the introduction.

further down. Violence is usually assumed to be a feature of drug markets – seen as inevitable in a market that is otherwise unregulated – and unregulatable – due to their illegal nature. This violence is seen to be a feature at all levels of the market. At the top level of the market this is illustrated by the picture we have of drug-related civil war, terrorism and lawlessness in producer countries like Colombia (cocaine) and Afghanistan (opium). At the top level of domestic markets we have the image of Mafia-esque organised-crime networks with the violence this implies. At the other end of the market we have images – and press reports – of turf-wars and drug-related violence between gangs in the streets. Other forms of criminality are also assumed of members of the drug market. At the bottom end we have the association between drug use and street crime such as burglary, robbery and shoplifting committed to fund drug-use habits. At the top level of the market we have an expectation of involvement in fraud and money laundering, and also of corruption. The operatives in the drug market are seen to follow patterns of organised crime in terms of the structure and nature of relationships and market operation. At the top level we have drug barons and cartels controlling the market and at lower levels we have drug-dealing syndicates and gang-controlled distribution: again with associated violence and other crime.

Other assumptions coupled with the pyramid model of distribution concern the drugs themselves. It is widely believed that drug use increases down the pyramid – certainly we have a common picture of the retail-level user-dealer and the idea of the drug user who turns to dealing to help fund his or her own drug habit. Another common assumption is that drug use is limited amongst higher level operatives – a commonly quoted maxim here being ‘never try your own supply’, as featured in the 1983 drug-gangster film *Scarface*. It is assumed that to be a successful drug dealer, particularly at the higher levels, you need to avoid developing a habit yourself.

Purity of drugs is also assumed to alter with level of involvement in the pyramid model of drug distribution. In an effort to increase profit margins many lower-level dealers are presumed to adulterate their drugs to make them go further. This may happen at multiple levels of the market – the upshot being that purity or quality of drugs, particularly powder drugs like amphetamines, cocaine and heroin, decreases down the layers of the market.

The picture I have painted here reflects beliefs about the structure and nature of drug markets in Western societies which are common both to the general public and many experts in the field including many academics, law enforcers and policy makers. It is deliberately over-simplified; we might reasonably expect differences to occur for markets dealing with different drugs, in different geographical locations and across different time periods as well as between different drug traffickers and trafficking outfits. With this in mind I will now take a more detailed look at the limited literature relating to drug distribution with focuses both on cannabis and the UK market.

### ***1.3.2 Drug distribution and organised crime***

As I have said already the literature and available research on drug markets is limited. However certain patterns, and a degree of knowledge, can be extracted from what research there is. The first point to be made is that many of the popular assumptions set out above turn out to be wrong, or at least inadequate in describing all drug markets. One of the key elements of the pyramid model is the assumption that drug distribution is a form of organised crime with an associated hierarchical structure. But in the UK at least this is often not the case. Although we don't have a widely accepted definition of exactly what constitutes organised crime (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001) there is some agreement that such an entity would consist of 'tightly organised, hierarchical forms of organisation' and that there is a 'common tendency... to view organised crime networks as extensive in their geographical reach within any given country, while also reaching beyond and across national boundaries' (*ibid.*: 11). This view is attractive to those trying to understand drug distribution as many drugs consumed in Western societies are, traditionally at least, produced in nations other than those in which they are consumed. Opium for western markets (usually processed in the form of heroin) comes largely from Central and South East Asia, cocaine from Latin America and cannabis from various tropical and sub-tropical countries around the world. It is assumed that a high degree of criminal organisation is needed to successfully negotiate such trans-national distribution, co-ordinating supply in the producer nations, smuggling between nations, and distribution in the destination countries. But a succession of researchers have challenged this view. Reuter and Haaga, conducting research in the US, stated that:

‘The arrangements described were not so formal and permanent as either legitimate business or the traditional criminal organisations described... Most of the arrangements would be better described as small partnerships... Hierarchical organisations may exist, but they are not necessary for lucrative careers... Successful operation does not require creation of a large or enduring organisation... The trading relationships described by our informants were more like networks than like hierarchical organisations.’ (Reuter and Haaga, 1989: pp. 40, 54 cited in Pearson and Hobbs, 2001:12).

Similarly Pearson and Hobbs themselves said of the UK-based drug distributors featured in their own research that: ‘Hierarchies do sometimes exist, but they are by no means necessary, and individuals often occupy different positions within the system at different times. Most of the networks brought to our attention consist of a small number of individuals, freely trading with other groups of individuals.’ (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001:12). Dorn *et al.*, again researching in the UK, found a similar lack of hierarchy:

‘We began this research with no more than a nagging suspicion that, contrary to mythology and media presentation, domestic drug markets might not be organised as neat, top-down hierarchies controlled by a “Mr. Big”.

‘By the time we were half-way through this research, we were sure of this. At the end, it no longer seems at all remarkable: no cartels; no Mafia; no drug barons; and, correspondingly, relatively little corruption...’ (1992:x).

Drug distribution networks which *do* match the stereotypes outlined above do exist – but these seem to be less common in the UK than in other countries. Dorn *et al.* suggest that such networks are more common in developing countries – they cite Colombia and Afghanistan – where ‘loss or weakness of authority of the central state has been the pre-condition for the emergence of trafficking on a large scale (Garcia Marquez 1990:91-91; Blok 1974: 10-11)’ (Dorn *et al.* 1992:x). They also recognise such networks in developed nations citing Didion’s (1987) novel set in Miami – a Mafioso model that we might also find in Italy’s recent history. Where such networks do exist in developed nations they are often characterised by a common ethnicity (Hough and Natarajan, 2000:12), as hinted at in the Pearson and Hobbs quote above. Pearson and Hobbs note that drug distribution networks can also be based on family and ethnic groupings, and also

on pseudo-familial networks such as contacts made through prison or '[night-clubbing]' based fraternities (2001:27-32).

### ***1.3.3 The structure of UK drug markets***

Structure along the lines of 'organised crime' may not be a necessary or even common feature of UK drug markets but the market can be seen to be structured in other ways that are reminiscent of the pyramid model. It is possible to draw distinction between different layers of the market although the boundaries between them will never be either clear nor rigid. Pearson and Hobbs (2001) proposed a four-tier classification of UK drug markets (figure 1.1): importers, wholesalers, middle-market drug brokers and retail level dealers (I would necessarily add a fifth classification – producers – although not a fifth tier as either production will occur outside the UK or importation will not be a feature of the market). These categories are not supposed to be rigid, nor do they suggest either a maximum or minimum of four links in any distribution chain. Studies have shown how individual operators can move between roles at different stages in a career – often many times – or cover multiple roles at the same time (e.g. Adler, 1985; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Potter, 2000. This situation can also be seen in Marks, 1997). Others have highlighted the blurring of boundaries between retail- and mid-level dealing (Curcione, 1997; Jacobs 1999; Williams 1989; Ward and Pearson, 1997). Intra-level distribution is also known with members of the same conceptual level of the market selling to and buying from each other at different times (Adler, 1985; Potter 2000). My own research featured individuals who had operated as smugglers, producers (within the UK), wholesale and middle-market distributors, and retail level dealers, often in a variety of different substances.

Figure 1.1 gives some indication of how these four different layers fit together and interact. It also serves to illustrate another feature of drug markets that needs to be addressed: mono- versus multi-commodity markets.

The extent to which markets are mono- or multi-commodity based varies both within and (noticeably) also between layers with a general (but by no means rigid) rule being that importation (and production – the top tier of the model) is largely mono-commodity: growers and producers obviously have their specialist substance. Upper-level wholesale distribution is often equally mono-commodity

– a reflection perhaps of the family and ethnic based distribution networks that often populate the drug-plant markets of heroin, cocaine and cannabis and provide the necessary contacts between producer country and the UK. A key point here, for the plant-based drugs, is that coca, marijuana and the opium poppy all originate in – and prefer (but are no longer confined to) different parts of the world. This is less significant for chemical-based drugs (which are often produced in Europe, including in the UK) at the production level and across the range of drugs at the middle-market layer. The middle-market broker plays a key role in joining markets together and opening them up (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001). At this level drug markets are less commodity-specific with the middle-market dealers (conceptually, and as a whole, but not necessarily individually) linking the full range of potential users to the full range of potential suppliers across the range of drug types (Pearson and Hobbs, *ibid.*, document a range of both mono- and multi-commodity middle-market operatives.) At the retail level, in reflection of the **middleman** role, drug markets are much more commonly multi-commodity orientated, as the bottom row of figure 1.1 suggests.

Having outlined the basic structure of the UK drugs markets as a whole (or generally) I will now look in more detail at the workings of each level, paying particular attention to the workings of the UK cannabis market but informed by other drug markets where they are relevant or where there is an absence of information relating to cannabis and/or the UK specifically.

Figure 1.1 – Mediating role of the middle market multi-commodity drug broker.

<b>Heroin</b>	<b>Cocaine</b>	<b>Ecstasy</b>	<b>Amphetamine</b>	<b>Cannabis</b>
100 to 200 kilos	100 to 200 kilos	100,000 to 200,000 tablets	100 kilos plus	200 kilos to multi-tonnes
Import (Turkey)	Import (Colombia)	Import (Holland)	Laboratories (UK etc.)	Import
Wholesale buy in 20-40 kilo loads	Wholesale buy in 20-40 kilo loads	Middle-men deal or import from Holland in 50-100,000 tablets and/or 50 kilos plus of amphetamines		Wholesaler/distributor trades 75-100 kilo parcels
1 to 5 kilos	1 to 5 kilos	20-25,000 tablets	5 to 10 kilos	10 to 20 kilos
<b>Market converges on the multi-commodity drug-broker, who buys and sells in variable quantities</b>				
Heroin sold in ounces to retail-level heroin dealers		2,000 ecstasy tablets 2 kilos cannabis 1 kilo amphetamine 1 to 9 ounces cocaine etc. to various [retail] dealers		

Source: Pearson and Hobbs, 2001:50

## 1.4 The UK cannabis market

### ***1.4.1 Sources of UK cannabis***

Traditionally, and until quite recently, the majority of cannabis consumed in the UK will have originated from foreign countries. Cannabis differs from other common plant-based drugs (namely opiates and cocaine) in that source countries are distributed fairly evenly across the globe (whereas cocaine production is

concentrated in South America, primarily Bolivia, Peru and Colombia<sup>29</sup>. and opium/heroin production in Asia, primarily Afghanistan and Myanmar<sup>30</sup>). Most of the cannabis trade is therefore intra- rather than inter-regional. Most cannabis consumed in Europe originates from Europe and North Africa although cannabis is also exported to Europe from most other producer countries of the world (UNODC, 2003). Total global cannabis production cannot be reliably measured or even guessed at but seizure rates of cannabis plants may be a useful indication. In this case we can say that global cannabis seizures rose through the mid-1980s, declined in the late 1980s, levelled out in the early 1990s before shooting up from just under 20,000 tons in 1994 to around 115,000 tons (a nearly six-fold increase) in 1996 (UNDCP, 1999).

Returning to UK sources of cannabis a distinction can be made by *type* of cannabis. The IDMU record cannabis types consumed by their respondents – whether the cannabis used is herbal cannabis or cannabis resin and, if known, what the country of origin was. The results from the 1997 survey found that approximately two-thirds of the cannabis consumed in the UK was cannabis resin (all except a negligible amount being certain to originate outside the UK) with 42% of the total cannabis consumed being hashish<sup>31</sup> of Moroccan origin. The rest of the cannabis consumed in the UK was herbal cannabis, of which around half was either ‘home-grown’ or ‘pedigree’<sup>32</sup>. This was the situation in 1997 and, as we shall see in the next chapter, this has changed somewhat with a surge in domestic production and a corresponding decline in imported cannabis (leaving hashish, or resin, with a significantly smaller share of the cannabis market than it had before, and, now, a smaller share of the market than non-resin forms of cannabis). The aim of this section, however, is to consider the situation in the UK as it was understood before the recent surge in domestic production and to look at cannabis distribution as it functions in relation to an import-led market.

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<sup>29</sup> See Vellinga’s (2004) edited collection “The Political Economy of the Drug Industry” for a detailed account of the international cocaine market.

<sup>30</sup> Increasingly opium is also being grown in the cocaine-producing regions of central America (Thoumi, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Hashish and hash are common words for cannabis resin. As with cannabis/marijuana I shall be using different terms to avoid monotony.

<sup>32</sup> Much, but not all, of the ‘pedigree’ cannabis would also be grown in the UK.

### ***1.4.2 Importation and upper-level distribution***

The literature at this level is scarce indeed even when we consider all sources internationally and across the range of drugs. Upper level studies concentrating on cannabis in the UK are practically non-existent. The most pertinent study at this level is Patricia Adler's (1985; 1993) ethnographic study of an upper-level dealing and smuggling community in America in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Her respondents were characterised by their 'existential' approach to drug dealing – although operating on this level required a high degree of organisation to achieve success organisational structures and relationships were largely informal and very flexible with individuals moving between organisational groups (often conceptualised as 'outfits'), working with different people and performing different roles at different times. The lifestyle associated with dealing was largely hedonistic – profits being spent on the 'good life' represented by expensive possessions (cars, boats, houses) and activities (holidays, parties). This community started out primarily trafficking cannabis from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean into the US but moved into cocaine in response, at least in part, to American-led drug control efforts. Two important points to make here are that this community was, or at least became, a multi-commodity market (cannabis and cocaine): the idea of top-end operators dealing in single commodities may be generally true but is not absolutely so. The second point to make is that Adler and her research population noted a marked change across the years of the study. The original cannabis smugglers in her group could be characterised as happy-go-lucky hippie-type hedonists who enjoyed the money and excitement of smuggling but who eschewed guns and violent crime in relation to their trafficking activities. However the market changed; smugglers switched from cannabis to cocaine, partly in response to increased difficulties in cannabis smuggling due to US government efforts (cannabis is a far bulkier – and smellier – substance than cocaine when considered in terms of size of effective doses and therefore harder to transport – undetected – in profitable quantities), partly in response to changes in drug demand and partly, presumably, for financial considerations (cocaine is worth more). With the switch to cocaine and the increase in anti-drug efforts came an increase in violence and firearm use

in relation to the market. I will return to this issue – the emergence of violence and guns in drug markets – later in this chapter.

Reuter and Haaga produced an ‘exploratory study’ of high level drug markets in the US based on interviews with convicted offenders who had been involved in high level cocaine and marijuana distribution. The study was not carried through to its intended conclusion due to non-compliance of interviewees. The conclusions they did reach based on a limited – and not-necessarily-representative – sample were: ‘(1) drug dealers face few barriers to entry into the higher levels of the drug markets, (2) successful operation does not require the creation of a large or enduring organization, (3) it is possible to function as a high-level dealer without recourse to violence and (4) the wholesale drug market is national rather than regional’ (*ibid.*:1).

Dorn *et al.* (1998) conducted a small study of convicted smugglers in the UK and identified two distinct approaches to smuggling distinguished by the approach to risk management. It is worth noting that Dorn *et al.* identified a range of degrees of organisation in smuggling operations with an inverse correlation between degree of organisation and risk of detection. Smuggling outfits and relationships between and within different organisations were based on balancing trust with risk assessment – ‘trust’ sometimes being enforced, or re-enforced, with violence or threats of violence.

Aside from these few studies of upper level drug traffickers there are the reports of smugglers themselves. Howard Marks, a notorious UK based cannabis smuggler in the 1970s and 1980s published a detailed autobiography of his own smuggling career (Marks, 1997). The scene he described (which may well be a lop-sided account designed to improve his own image – and to avoid potential legal proceedings) was one of a disorganised and flexible loose network of individuals around the world coming together in different combinations for different smuggling projects as and when suited the individuals. Trust – based on friendship and past experience, a kind of ‘old boy’ network of cannabis smugglers<sup>33</sup> – was the cement of operations with most of the individual operators

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<sup>33</sup> Given that Marks was initiated into cannabis smuggling as a post-graduate at Oxford University and developed many of his contacts directly or indirectly through his Oxbridge associates the ‘old-boy’ network analogy is a particularly strong one.

seemingly motivated as much by the glamour and excitement of the lifestyle as by the profits. In the words of one observer who analysed his account:

‘Marks’ career demonstrates that the capacity to broker and seize information benefits needed and sought after by others allows some participants to achieve more control of entrepreneurial opportunities in illegal trades as well as explaining variations in success from one phase of the career to the next. This relational argument offers an alternative to more conventional instrumental violence explanations concerning the attainment of competitive advantage in illegal business settings.’ (Morselli, 2001:203)

Operating in the background of the social revolution of the 1960s and 1970s Marks implies an ethos to his smuggling involvement that reflected the liberal and hedonistic ideals of the time and the mind-expanding yet peaceful effects associated with cannabis use. Marks describes how violence began to enter the scene in the early 1980s – again at least partly in relation to international law enforcement and drug control efforts (especially the actions of the US DEA, the Drug Enforcement Agency) – and how his generation of smugglers responded either by getting out of dealing or by embracing the new approach. Some, like himself, tried to carry on with their original ideals but found the new climate unsuited to this approach. Editorial liberties aside there is a surprising amount of correlation between the scenes described by Marks (1997) and Adler (1993).

The picture that emerges from all this is slightly muddled. On the one hand the stereotypical ‘drug baron’ led organised dealing network appears to exist – identified by Dorn *et al.* (1998) and also, in some respects<sup>34</sup>, by Adler (1993). Such networks show the hallmarks of organised crime (Dorn *et al.* 1998) and of violence used in protecting drugs and dealers from interception and detection or by protecting markets from rival dealers (*ibid.*, Marks 1997, Adler, 1993). On the other hand Adler, Marks and Reuter and Haaga recognise disorganised, flexible and non-hierarchical smuggling networks which avoid, often as a matter of principle, violence. A difference can be drawn between cannabis and other drugs with cannabis smuggling seemingly less associated with violence. There seems to have been a temporal change in the smuggling scene with violence becoming more of a feature through the 1980s and 1990s than earlier decades in correlation with increased international policing activity, increased international demand

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<sup>34</sup> A social hierarchy was suggested in Adler’s study although not so much of an organisational one – although over the time period studied, and as the market moved from a cannabis-dominated

(i.e. increasing levels of drug use), and increased financial value of the drugs markets. This seems to be a response to increased risk in smuggling and also relates to increased value (profit) in smuggling with some smugglers switching to more profitable (by volume) drugs such as cocaine rather than cannabis as a response to policing activity. The increased value of the markets also, of course, relates to the increase in prevalence of drug use – demand for drugs – across the latter half of the last century (and into this one).

Whilst writing this thesis the Home Office published a review of the literature on upper level drug trafficking (Dorn *et al.*, 2005) which was far greater in scope than any review I could hope to conduct on my own. Literature on the subject was reviewed in six different languages<sup>35</sup>. This covered distribution of all types of drugs and covered markets around the world (concentrating on South America, North America and Western Europe) and as such may be of uncertain relevance. Nevertheless the central findings of this review are pertinent, and neatly summarise – and reinforce – much of that discussed above.

Dorn *et al.* structure their findings around a typology based on the ‘priority, objective, motivation or “driver”’ behind the individual trafficker’s (or trafficking outfit’s) involvement in the market (2005:9). They note that the most common ‘driver’ recorded in the literature (particularly the English language literature) is ‘financial gain for personal enrichment’ (*ibid.*), as we might expect from a populist view of drug trafficking. However they note two other drivers or motivational forces that are also commonly found amongst drug traffickers, ‘both of which link financial gain to other issues’ (*ibid.*). The first of these is linked to political motivations. ‘Drug trafficking linked to political transformation (or action to prevent political transformation) is very well established in relation to many regional and national situations’ (*ibid.*). Examples given include South America (where the Colombian situation is perhaps the best known), South-East Asia and Afghanistan. In all these cases there is a strong link with drug-trafficking profits funding one or both sides of local, national or international political struggles. The link is normally established at the production level of the drug supply chain – the regions and countries mentioned here are some of the key producer nations for cocaine (South America) and opium/heroin (south-east

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to a cocaine-dominated one, organisational hierarchy seemed to become more important.

<sup>35</sup> French, Dutch, German, Italian and Spanish as well as English.

Asia, Afghanistan and, more recently, South America) – but also manifests itself in both local and international distribution. Whilst involvement in heroin and cocaine – the most profitable drug crops – is most common there are examples where cannabis cultivation and distribution is linked to political movements. An example would be Nepal, where Maoist insurgents are said to control, and derive finance from, cannabis cultivation in many of the rural areas of the country. Increasingly, however, it seems they too are turning to the opium poppy as a source of funding.<sup>36</sup> It would seem that although cannabis can and does have a role as a source of funding for armed political groups around the world such groups have a preference for the more profitable drug crops of cocaine and heroin.

The final driver noted by Dorn *et al.* is risk-taking. ‘The literature points to people who are socially and economically marginal, for whom risk seems a “normal” part of life (Ruggiero, 2000), including some facing debt or coercion (see for example: Zaitch, 2001, 2002).’ (*ibid.* p.10). Again the risk driver, as with the politics driver, is coupled with the more usual financial element, but again the identification of an extra motivational element shows how there can be more than simple financial interest in explaining involvement in drug distribution.

Dorn *et al.* use this recognition of different motivational aspects to construct a basic typology of upper-level traffickers:

““Politico-military” traffickers, having aims of restructuring the political field, or achieving or maintaining a dominant position in existing political structures/states/failed states.

““Business criminals”, driven by financial considerations, whose political aspirations are limited to their own quiet enjoyment of the proceeds of crime. They do not seek wider political change but may attempt limited corruption for defensive reasons.

““Adventurers” for whom a relatively high level of risk-taking is the norm for a variety of reasons – because they may feel they have little alternative (e.g. due to debt or coercion), or they may experience a sense of excitement yet do not fully understand the risks being run.” (*ibid.* p.iv)

This typology, given the source materials, is constructed with upper-level traffickers in mind – yet non-financial, or extra-financial, motivators are to be found at all levels of drug distribution. The classic study by Preble and Casey (1969) of street-level heroin user-dealers finding meaning and structure for their

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<sup>36</sup> Asia Times Online, 21/04/2004.

lives, as well as financial returns, through using and dealing drugs illustrates this at the bottom end of the market. However although these non-financial motivations are often recognised their importance is still largely *under-recognised* – much of the academic literature, as most of the popular commentary, on drug distribution still looks at the market only in economic terms assuming profiteering to be the primary driver behind drug trafficking. This is of course true in many – perhaps most – cases. Dorn *et al.* (2005) make the point that the political and risk-taking elements are found *in conjunction with* a desire to make money. But we must be careful not to ignore these other drivers or to reduce everything to economics or we will miss the bigger picture. In particular non-financial drivers are, as will (hopefully) become apparent, of considerable importance to many cannabis growers in the UK.

Upper level dealing and smuggling is often structured at a national or trans-national level and individual operations are often highly organised with clearly defined hierarchies and roles for individual participants. However arrangements and organisation are flexible, varying from smuggling incident to smuggling incident. Dorn *et al.* in their review (2005) recognised three groupings of organisational structure in upper level trafficking with corresponding differences in degrees of permanence. At the one end, and with a high level of permanence (possibly spanning decades) are those structures with ‘Strongly defended hierarchies, openly operating in their own areas; using cells or “representatives” outside.’ (taken from Dorn *et al.* 2005:19, Figure 2.2). At the next level are those structures with ‘Core groups, centred on relations between principals, durable over several years; others being drawn in as and when needed for specific projects.’ (*ibid.*). Finally there are those structured around ‘Individuals and friends drifting in the market (may sometimes work for core groups).’

The conclusion to be drawn is that the upper levels of drug markets conform to, or can be seen in a spectrum between and represented by, two patterns:

‘Customs and police operations working at the upper level of importation and wholesale dealing do sometimes reveal tightly-organised, hierarchical systems that endure over long periods of time... Equally, it is possible to work at the importation and wholesale level of the UK drugs markets as part of much smaller, flexible trading partnerships.’ (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001:12).

Essentially there is a bifurcation in structure that we will see occurring at all levels of the drugs market, and (to a greater or lesser extent) in markets for all drug types.

With the advent of large-scale domestic cannabis production we may expect cannabis smugglers to diminish in number, or for operations to get smaller (in terms of quantities of drugs smuggled). Home-produced cannabis will take a larger share of the market leaving less demand for imported marijuana. At the same time domestic producers, especially those working on a sufficiently large scale, may be seen to take their place at the top of the domestic distribution chain – producing instead of importing but still serving as the first tier of distribution within the UK.

### ***1.4.3 The middle-market***

There is no clear or widely accepted definition of exactly what constitutes the drug middle-market (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001:13-14). In somewhat tautological terms it is perhaps best described as the area that connects the upper and lower echelons of the drug market – the link between importation and large-scale wholesale distribution with the retail end of the market. Pearson and Hobbs found a distinction between two structural approaches to middle-market distribution that reflected the two sides of upper-level distribution outlined above.

‘At lower levels of the middle market... one does sometimes find well-embedded criminal networks organised along the lines of the traditional “family firm” (Hobbs, 2001a). However this would appear to be increasingly less typical of the drugs middle market. Our evidence suggests that individuals can often find a niche within the middle market and establish themselves quite quickly, in terms of a secure network of suppliers and customers. This would not be possible within strictly hierarchical and centralised structures, which create what Arlacchi (1986:p. 195) in his study of the Mafia, describes as ‘protective enclaves’ to discourage the entry into the market of rivals and competitors. The most useful way to characterise serious crime networks operating within middle market drug distribution is as small, constantly mutating, flexible systems (Hobbs, 1997).’ (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001: 12-13).

The middleman acts as a broker and a buffer between different (horizontal) levels of the market, but also as a link between different vertical strands of the market. Middlemen are often multi-commodity brokers (see fig 1.1) in which respect

they differ from upper-level dealers (who, as we saw earlier, are often but not exclusively single-commodity operators). However some middle-market operatives deal in only one substance or specific combinations of substances which may reflect the scene in which they operate (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001). Dealers operating around the English clubbing scene, for example, might trade in ecstasy, amphetamines and maybe cocaine (*ibid.* p.34). Those supplying to inner-city street-level markets might combine heroin and crack-cocaine.

Middle-market distribution networks were seen sometimes to be structured around family or ethnic ties, through connections made in prison, or through a 'clubbing fraternity' (*ibid.* p.31) which again reflect the positions of 'trust' and 'friendship' in such networks – although as was noted earlier there is room for the individual entrepreneur in the middle-market. Networks of middle-market distributors can be both extensive – with contacts stretching from group to group across regions, nations and international borders – and small – with identifiable units consisting of only a few core members. Often one individual will be in charge of an operation – he will have contacts, arrange deals and control finances – with trusted partners or 'employees' acting as 'runners', security or warehousing staff (*ibid.* p.33).

Pearson and Hobbs identify violence as a key element in middle-market drug distribution as the only means members have of ensuring deals are kept to and debts paid. However they note that 'actual levels of violence are lower than often assumed in popular images of organised crime' (*ibid.* p.41). And as with higher levels of dealing there were also those who 'made it clear that they walked away from violent conflict as a matter of business principle' (*ibid.*).

To summarise: middle-markets, like upper-level markets, may either be highly structured or highly informal or somewhere in between. They may or may not be characterised by violence and other criminal activity. Some middle-market dealers are multi-commodity brokers, others specialise in one commodity, and others in groups of commodities that are related through their use within a certain drug using scene or culture. Middle-men provide the vital link – and a vital cushion – between upper and lower level distributors breaking down bulk quantities of drugs for wider distribution, making their money through mark-ups related to the size of unit of drugs dealt with.

We might surmise that the role of the middle-market dealer would be little affected by the emergence of domestic cannabis production – there will still be a role for middlemen to connect large-scale cannabis producers to wider markets – although the total volume of cannabis going through a ‘middle-market’ might be lessened with an increase in small-scale domestic production.

#### ***1.4.4 The retail end of UK drugs markets***

It is at the retail end of drugs markets generally where we have the widest range of academic studies however it is rare to find a study dealing with cannabis distribution specifically – either in the UK or elsewhere. Most retail markets studied seem to be poly-drug or multi-commodity markets where cannabis may or may not be one of a number of substances dealt. Many drug using scenes will employ a multitude of drugs – one example would be the ‘clubbing’ scene and its use of dance-drugs (predominantly amphetamines and ecstasy type drugs) along with cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens and even opiates<sup>37</sup>. Research studies of mono-drug distribution tend to concern the ‘hard’ drugs – primarily centring on urban, ‘street-level’ heroin, cocaine and crack-cocaine markets. There is also some work on ‘sub-urban’ middle-class cocaine distribution (e.g. Curcione 1997). Usually however there is a substantial overlap at this level between the markets for different drugs. Cannabis, arguably, is one of the drugs we might most expect to be distributed in a mono-drug market – most cannabis users do not use other illegal drugs (although most users of other illegal drugs probably do also use cannabis). However cannabis, particularly when associated with mono-drug use and distribution, is perhaps less visible and/or less interesting to researchers as it is less related to other forms of crime and disorder. Cannabis has not generally been a glamorous drug<sup>38</sup> – problem drugs, like crack and heroin, or newer drugs, like ecstasy and ketamine tend to get all the attention. If nothing else it is hoped that this thesis will go some way to filling this gap in the literature by providing a study which deals almost exclusively with cannabis markets in the UK.

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<sup>37</sup> A study focussing on a single night-club in an English city found that 40% of the drug users there had used opiates of some form, normally heroin, in conjunction with clubbing activities – primarily as a post-club ‘come-down’ drug. (Potter, 1999)

<sup>38</sup> Although the recent surge in interest particularly in the relationship between stronger varieties of cannabis and mental health problems has changed this somewhat.

There have been many attempts to construct typologies and models of retail-level drug markets. Some of these may be of relevance to this study, particularly those relating to poly- and/or soft-drug distribution<sup>39</sup>. A useful starting point is Curtis and Wendel's (2000) two-dimensional typology which differentiated drug markets according to social organisation – freelance distributors, socially bonded businesses (which can include family businesses and communally organised businesses – Hough and Natarajan, 2000:7) and corporation style businesses – different styles of organisation within drug markets which correspond with the different types of organisation found at the upper- and mid-levels of the market, discussed above. Their second dimension was technical organisation – they identified street-level distribution, indoor distribution and delivery based distribution. This second dimension highlights a key distinction between 'open' and 'closed' markets (Hough and Natarajan, 2000:4) – the former being open to and visible to anyone and representative of the typical street-level markets, particularly hard-drug street-markets, mentioned above. These markets operate with dealers approaching likely looking users and offering drugs, or users approaching likely-looking dealers and asking for drugs. Similar open and semi-open markets operate in certain public areas other than the streets – such as at rail or bus stations, or in cafes or night-clubs. Open markets, by their very nature (as a consequence of being open to *all* buyers and potential buyers), are also more vulnerable to law enforcement activity (*ibid.* citing Eck, 1995). Open street markets develop defensive characteristics to limit the risk of police activity (including undercover police activity) (Jacobs, 1996). Transformation into a closed market is seen as one such form of defence (Hough and Natarajan, 2000; Johnson *et al.*, 2000). Closed markets operate through pre-arranged meetings to transfer drugs – with dealers usually only selling to people they know or those who have been introduced by trusted third parties. Local retail markets can be fairly robust in the face of concerted law enforcement efforts with little positive change<sup>40</sup> in purity, availability or prices of drugs following such efforts (Best *et al.*, 2001) regardless of any change in structure or market mechanics.

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<sup>39</sup> As opposed to those dealing with harder drugs such as heroin and crack-cocaine.

<sup>40</sup> That is positive change from the point of view of the law enforcers. This would equate to negative change from the view of the drug users!

Markets are also distinguishable by drug type, or user culture. Returning again to the example of dance-drug (and other-drug) use around the clubbing scene, and recreational drug use by young people in general, we see a pattern of purchasing where users either buy drugs at the venue or arrange supplies for collection or delivery before going to the night-spot. Such purchasers are usually made from or through 'friends' rather than 'dealers' – a distinction is made by the users, the distributors and many other observers between 'social suppliers' and 'real' dealers (Parker, 2000). Whether or not there is a distinction between 'social' and 'commercial' supply, and if so what the difference is and how, if at all, this should be reflected in law enforcement and sentencing has been the subject of some debate in recent years. The dance-drug distribution scene also features distribution controlled by and centred on night-club **bouncers** (Morris, 1998; O'Mahoney, 1996). This distinction between the dance-drug social supply network and that centred on bouncers, which shows characteristics of organised crime networks, again has similarities with the different organisational approaches found in the middle- and upper-level markets.

A different approach to categorising UK drug markets, particularly at the retail end, was that adopted by Dorn *et al.* (1992). In their book 'Traffickers' they identified a range of approaches to retail distribution that seemed to correlate to an extent to periods of recent history – a kind of temporal typology. In the 1960s they found the market to be characterised by 'Trading Charities' and 'Mutual Societies' The former are described as 'those traffickers who, initially at least, are not primarily (and definitely not solely) financially motivated. What financial ambitions they have tend to be thwarted by a lack of business skills and/or by their other, 'social' intentions.' (*ibid.* p.3). Mutual Societies are described as 'a friendship or acquaintance-based network of drug users, some of whom, some of the time, will supply drugs to others. Reciprocity is the name of the game (Auld 1981)' (*ibid.* p.10). Both approaches are reminiscent of the 1960s 'hippie' culture and ideals, with drugs and drug use seen primarily as an integral part of the culture of peace, love and hedonism. Drug distribution here is not only seen as socially acceptable but as a socially desirable element of the counter-culture fuelled by the belief in an inherent 'goodness' in drug use (particularly, at the time, cannabis, LSD and other hallucinogens). Distribution is seen as a favour to the end-users (side-stepping establishment efforts to control drug use and thus

seen as inherently 'good' by those in the counter-culture scene and inherently 'bad' by those in the mainstream). Dealing, or distribution, is more about facilitating the social and cultural scene and its related values than it is about profit – values, not value, if you like. Here again we see parallels with the reports of smugglers from the same era such as Howard Marks (1997) or those documented by Adler (1993).

Dorn *et al.* (1992) document how these early ideologically-driven distribution networks transformed through the second half of the last century – primarily as a response to increased law-enforcement efforts which in turn can be seen as a response to the increased social, public and political concerns about increased drug use. Dorn *et al.* show how drug distribution reacted initially by becoming more secretive – traffickers would operate their drug businesses under the cover of or as an aside to more legitimate businesses and employment. Again this is mirrored in the accounts of Howard Marks and his smuggling cronies who had to develop increasingly sophisticated businesses as covers to their illegal enterprises and as facilitators in money laundering. Around this time Dorn *et al.* also note how established criminals begin to move in to drug markets which were becoming increasingly profitable (due in part to increased demand and in part to increased risks stemming from increased police action). By the 1980s drug distribution is seen primarily as a criminal activity in that those involved are largely criminals for reasons other than drug distribution. The organised crime model of distribution begins to emerge as the dominant model: the increased policing and increased sentencing attached to drug distribution led to those who were ideologically motivated to see the risks as too great leaving the market open for the financially-motivated hardened-criminal type dealers. By the 1990s the pattern of street level distribution as associated with criminal gangs and related violence becomes the dominant distribution pattern with drugs, customers, markets and territories being fought over by distributors often affiliated to organised crime gangs often structured on ethnic, familial or other socially-bonded lines. As with the middle and upper level of the markets there can be seen to be both disorganised and organised groups involved in lower-level distribution, and also those who employ and those who eschew violence. The interesting thing about Dorn *et al.*'s reading of these markets is that over the years the organised-crime and gang-land types, with associated violence, has

become the dominant model. It is worth noting, however, that rarely if ever in either Dorn *et al.*'s or other's accounts of retail-level distribution in the UK over the years have distribution scenes or networks been centred on cannabis as the sole or primary drug of that market. How home-grown based distribution fits into this picture of drug distribution controlled by gangs or organised outfits and characterised by violence and other criminality remains to be seen.

#### **1.4.4.1 New approaches to retail-level cannabis distribution**

A final point to make on the UK cannabis market aims to draw attention to two 'new' approaches to retail-level distribution. Over the last few years the UK has seen the emergence of some Dutch-style 'coffee-shops' or 'cannabis cafés' – shop-style premises which offer cannabis over the counter, usually also offering hot and cold beverages and snacks, and often also selling smoking paraphernalia (such as tobacco, rolling papers and pipes). As far as the author is aware there have been no academic studies of this phenomenon to date, however as many of them seem to retail UK grown cannabis I shall be returning to them briefly later in the thesis.

The second recent development in retail level drugs markets concerns internet-based drug sales – I have seen (although not tested) numerous internet sites which claim to deliver cannabis by mail-order and there have been some media reports of arrests and charges relating to internet-based drug supply. I did not encounter any cannabis growers who used this retail medium<sup>41</sup> nor did I encounter any hard evidence that such sites supply UK grown cannabis<sup>42</sup>.

### 1.5 Summary

The account I have just given of drug distribution is by no means complete – there are numerous other studies which I have not mentioned here – but it is a useful review of the literature relevant to drug distribution in the UK, or specifically to cannabis distribution. I have focussed primarily on the issue of market structure, where a picture begins to emerge. At all levels of the market

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<sup>41</sup> Some medical-use suppliers (*Chapter Five*) did advertise their services, and recruit clients, using the internet, but this was not a retail market in the traditional sense.

<sup>42</sup> There is no reason why they shouldn't, although the received wisdom of people I spoke to about such sites was that they probably operated out of the Netherlands as this would be more viable in terms of law enforcement avoidance.

(insofar as the market can be split into levels) we see a range of structural approaches that can be seen to correspond to a spectrum with highly organised distribution, reflecting the ‘organised crime’ model, on the one end of the scale and disorganised, maybe ‘social’-distribution on the other. At all levels of the market both approaches – and a range of intermediate approaches – are to be found. Some markets and parts of markets are highly structured, hierarchical in character, characterised by organisation and motivated primarily by the potentially vast profits to be made from drugs. Other sections of (and operatives within) the market are less structured or even disorganised with individual entrepreneurs and loosely structured co-operative or communal groups of individuals drifting across roles and in-and-out of the market. Often here financial considerations are not the only motivational aspect. Instead we have dealers driven by more ideological concerns and involved in what has been termed ‘social’ rather than ‘commercial’ supply. For the market as a whole we see elements of the pyramid model – with related price and quantity structures and differing degrees of organisation – but primarily we see a muddled and disorganised structure. At all levels we see both organised and disorganised elements operating alongside and often overlapping with each other. In the last half of the last century we see in particular an apparent drift from a market primarily dominated by ideological, disorganised entrepreneurs to one dominated by more organised, profit motivated criminal outfits. This has been documented at both the top (e.g. Adler, 1985 Marks, 1997) and bottom (e.g. Dorn *et al.* 1992) levels of drug markets. This change can be seen to correspond with increased law-enforcement efforts against the drugs markets stemming from public and political concerns with expanding drug use: the ‘War on Drugs’. However although this temporal change has been commented on at all levels of the market, the organised and disorganised elements of the market and those reflecting a range of motivational drivers are all still to be seen across these levels.

Alongside these developments – the increasing (criminal) organisational aspects of the market and those involved in it – we also see an increase in violence and other crime in the markets. There may be a degree of correlation between the increased violence and associated crime and the increased organisation of markets but it would be a mistake to over-state this: violence is an element for some of the least organised and least structured markets and some highly

structured distribution organisations eschew the violent side of the market. Violence also seems to be less common across drug markets generally than popular images would have us believe. However it seems likely that both increased organisation and increased violence are in some way related to increased law-enforcement activity – both in that the traffickers need to be more organised to successfully operate in the market now there is more law enforcement activity and in that increased profits, related both to increased demand and increased policing, make drugs more attractive to organised crime networks. Increased profits, especially when accompanied by increased sentencing for those that are caught, makes violent defence of both drugs themselves and individuals within the market more attractive with more to lose (both financially and in terms of potential incarceration) if drugs or individuals are caught by law enforcement agencies.

The cannabis market in particular is fuelled by unprecedented levels of demand. However compared to other, harder, drugs profit margins are smaller and risk levels are in some ways higher. Cannabis, being both bulky and pungent, is harder to smuggle in profitable volumes. This is particularly true for herbal cannabis. With the emergence of large-scale domestic distribution I hope to paint a picture of a market that exemplifies a ‘bi-polar’ market operated by profit-hungry organised criminals on the one hand and ideologically motivated co-operative or communal growers on the other. With home-grown cannabis in particular I would suggest that not only are the ideological equivalents of the ‘Trading Charities’ and ‘Mutual Societies’ of Dorn *et al.*’s 1992 model still around, but that they are fighting back against the criminogenic, violent, organised drug-dealing outfits which were supposed to have replaced them.

## 2 – A Growing Industry:

### The emergence of domestic cannabis cultivation

#### 2.1 Introduction

“Half of cannabis smoked by Britons is home-grown<sup>43</sup>.”

Cannabis production in the UK is undoubtedly not a new phenomenon. Archaeological evidence suggests that cannabis cultivation was probably started in Europe by early man, and has certainly been around since the Iron Age (Godwin 1967a, 1967b cited in Edwards and Whittington, 1990). Evidence of hemp seeds has been found at Neolithic sites across Europe. Cultivation had certainly become commonplace with the expansion of the Roman Empire (Booth 2003) and is believed to have reached the UK by 400 AD (*ibid.*) to become well established here by Saxon times (*ibid.*; Edwards and Whittington, 1990). This early spread of agricultural cannabis, or hemp, would have been based around the utilisation of hemp fibres for a variety of industrial purposes and/or highly nutritional hemp seed and oil (Booth, 2003; Herer 1994). Although the drug properties of the plant would not have been the major reason for its cultivation it is probable that spiritual, medical and recreational drug use would have constituted a bi-product or sideline of some early cannabis cultivation. Recorded medicinal uses of cannabis certainly date back to the Chinese Emperor Shen Neng in 2737 BC (Booth, 2003). Medical use in Europe was recorded by the Greek physician Pedanius Dioscorides (c. AD 40-90) in his book *Materia Medica* and the Roman doctor Claudius Galen (c. AD 129-99) (Booth, 2003; ‘Mel’, 2001).

However the current situation – where cannabis production in the UK accounts for a significant proportion of all the cannabis consumed *as an illegal drug* in this country, rather than as a source of food or fibres – is a new phenomenon. Although this current trend in domestic cultivation probably has its roots in the counter-culture era of the 1960s (when cannabis first began to emerge as a recreational drug of increasingly widespread use in western societies) the trend for large scale domestic production seems to have only taken off in the last decade or so.

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<sup>43</sup> Daily Telegraph Headline 10th February 2002

Traditionally the UK cannabis supply has originated from overseas under the supervision of smugglers and distributed around the country by a network of dealers, as discussed in *Chapter Two*. These days some sources claim as much as 50% of the cannabis consumed in the UK is now produced within the country (personal communication, IDMU). Cannabis cultivation for drug purposes in this country probably dates back quite a long way through history – possibly in parallel to its cultivation for food and fibre – but up to and including the 1950s and 1960s the practice would have been largely restricted to a select few: bohemians and artists, a few cannabis connoisseurs. Cultivation would not have been on a commercial or money-making scale but would rather be for the use of the grower himself and maybe their friends. However in the latter part of the last century evidence shows that commercial level domestic production began to emerge, and rapidly expand. When we consider how much cannabis is currently used by the British population (*Chapter One*), and return to the claim that 50% of the cannabis consumed these days now originates in this country, we can see that both the extent of domestic cultivation and the rate of expansion in just the last couple of decades is phenomenal.

It is worth noting that as we have seen this explosion in illegal cannabis cultivation we have also seen an expansion in legal cannabis production, both in the form of hemp (grown for a range of industrial/agricultural purposes) and, more recently, the licensed cultivation of the cannabis plant for medical research. This represents something of a return to the historical situation outlined above. This chapter aims to explore the extent to which cannabis is now being cultivated in the UK – both legally and illegally.

## 2.2 The extent of cannabis growing in the UK

“In the [19]70s there were practically no cases [of cannabis growing in the UK]. In the [19]80s cultivation would be allotments, greenhouses and windowsills. Commercial growing kicked-in in the early [19]90s and grew steadily, with hydroponics and Dutch cannabis technology perhaps contributing to this.” (Forensic Science Service Scientist with responsibility for the area in which I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork.)

There are two – perhaps three – points to be taken here. The nature of cannabis growing has changed in recent years with both the methods employed (location

of growing and technology involved) and the reasons for growing (commercial intent rather than personal use) altering in the last couple of decades. These two aspects are discussed at some length later in the thesis. But the primary observation to make at this stage is that the extent of cannabis growing in the UK has noticeably increased in the eyes of those experts concerned with this issue. Police officers I spoke to echoed this view, as did the director of the Independent Drug Monitoring Unit.

As the head-line quoted at the beginning of this chapter suggests some sources claim that up to 50% of the cannabis consumed in this country is now grown here rather than imported from traditional overseas sources. The police force responsible for the area where my ethnographic research was carried out now expect “60 to 100 grows a year, of which about 30% are ‘big’” (Drugs Liaison Officer). Of course the cannabis market is a black market, and its users and distributors (including growers) are hidden populations. This makes every aspect of the market – the numbers of users and the numbers involved in trafficking or cultivation; the quantities consumed and distributed – difficult to measure. Figures such as the ones quoted need to be considered with care. However there are a number of indicators which do suggest that whatever the final market share of UK grown cannabis there has been a significant increase in domestic production in the last decade or so. We shall return to these shortly. Firstly however I shall look at one area of domestic cannabis production that is less secretive and hence more easily documented: legal cannabis cultivation.

### ***2.2.1 Legal cannabis cultivation in the UK***

Although seemingly irrelevant to a criminological perspective of cannabis growers it must be recognised that some legal cannabis growing does occur in the UK. The law on cannabis cultivation is strict but there are exceptions to an outright ban. A certain amount of industrial grade hemp is grown for commercial and ecological reasons. Further to this the UK government recently permitted large-scale cultivation of more potent strains of cannabis for medical research.

Although these legal growing scenarios are strictly controlled so as to minimise the risk of leakage into the cannabis black-market it is not true to say that they play no part in that market. There have been numerous reports of industrial grade hemp plants being stolen either by naive individuals believing they can get high

or by unscrupulous drug dealers who may mix the low-grade hemp with illegal strains of cannabis to improve their profits – or even by some knowledgeable cannabis users who know how to utilise industrial grade hemp as a drug crop.

The legal position on cannabis cultivation is governed primarily by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (MDA). The Act was designed to fulfil British obligations under a variety of international treaties largely consolidated by the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961). Current law stems primarily from the domestic Act but both the Single Convention and later international treaties on drug control, as well as other domestic legislation, all inform the overall legal position.

Growing cannabis is prohibited under two different sections of the 1971 Act: *Production* is prohibited under section 4 and *cultivation* under section 6. The key difference is that being charged under section 4 (production) constitutes a trafficking offence under and for the purposes of the Drug Trafficking Act 1994. This means that anybody convicted under section 4 is liable to asset confiscation and, on a third such conviction, is subject to a mandatory seven-year prison sentence. Neither element holds for charges brought under section 6. It is of course also illegal to possess (section 5), supply, or intend to supply cannabis (section 4) or its derivatives. After the recent downgrading of cannabis, in January 2004, from a class B drug to a class C drug the maximum prison sentence for possession of cannabis stands at two years, and at 14 years for production, supply or intent to supply.

A further relevant section of the act is section 8 which makes it a crime for the occupier or controller of a premises to ‘knowingly permit’ certain drug related activities including the use, supply or cultivation/production of cannabis.

Although unlicensed cannabis growing – whether legally classified as cultivation or production – is illegal it is not illegal to supply either the seeds or equipment to grow the plants. As Hough *et al.* observed (2003):

‘In their marketing material, British-based seed and equipment companies usually stress the illegality of cultivation and emphasise the licit horticultural uses to which this equipment can be put. This presumably confers some protection against prosecution under section 4(2)(b) of the MDA [supply or offer to supply a controlled drug]. Some such disclaimers are low-key, others heavily sardonic:

*Please note germination of these seeds is illegal in the United Kingdom. With legislation concerning the legality of this collection being inconsistent,*

*contradictory and ever-changing across the globe, we strongly advise all potential customers to check their national guidelines before placing any orders. All customers are responsible for their own actions. We have no wish to encourage anyone to act in conflict with the law and cannot be responsible for those who do.*

*The lovely F1 cannabis seeds we supply are only to be grown in sensible countries where it is legal to do so, such as Holland, Belgium and Switzerland. If you live in the UK, we will be able to sell you some very expensive fishing bait or budgie food, but you must under no circumstances grow them. Remember just because it is all right for Jack Straw's son to get caught dealing or for the 3rd in line to the British throne to get wasted on cannabis, it is not all right for you to do this. We cannot emphasise this point strongly enough!' (pp.12-13)*

Cannabis seeds are widely available from head-shops (shops selling drug-taking related paraphernalia and legal highs) which are equally adept at adding disclaimers to their pipes, bongs, cigarette papers and the like, presumably in a nod to section 9A of the MDA (added by the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986) which makes it illegal to supply 'articles for administering or preparing controlled drugs'. Seeds are also widely available by mail-order with adverts often to be found in magazines or on internet sites. Cannabis or hemp seeds are also often present in bird-seed mixes. Similarly growing equipment is easily bought from specialist shops or mail-order businesses again often advertised in magazines or on the internet.

### **2.2.1.1 Cannabis cultivation and international law**

As previously mentioned Britain is a signatory country to various international conventions and treaties governing illegal drugs. These treaties give Britain certain obligations in relation to drug control, including the control of cannabis. A full analysis of signatory countries' obligations under international law is contained in Dorn and Jamieson's (2001) 'European Drug Laws: The Room to Manoeuvre'. A brief summary of the legal situation will suffice here.

The main points concerning supply related offences, including cultivation, come from the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffick in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988. Under this convention:

'Each Party [signatory country] shall adopt such measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences under its domestic laws, when committed intentionally: (a)(i) The production, manufacturing, extraction, preparation, offering, offering for sale, distribution, delivery on any terms

whatsoever, brokerage, dispatch, dispatch in transit, transport, importation or exportation of any narcotic drug of any psychoactive substance contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention, the 1971 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention; (ii) The cultivation of opium poppy, coca bush or cannabis plant [...]’ (UN 1988, Article 3(1), Offences and Sanctions, as quoted in Dorn and Jamieson, 2000:9)

As such cultivation of cannabis *must* be subject to control under criminal (not merely civil) law. However there is a fair degree of leeway over the nature of control and any severity of punishment as well as scope for national constitutional law to have precedence over the international treaties.

### **2.2.1.2 Legal exceptions**

There is also an important rider contained in the series of conventions allowing exceptions to the restrictions on drug use, possession, supply and production when carried out for medical or scientific purposes. It is under these exceptions which we find some legal cannabis cultivation in the UK and other signatory countries around the world. In effect in the UK this means that cannabis production is permissible when done so under license from the Home Office under the MDA.

### **2.2.1.3 Hemp cultivation in the UK**

As I have said not all cannabis cultivated in the UK is done so illegally – and although this thesis focuses on illegal cultivation it is important to deal also with legal production, both to appreciate some of the broader issues associated with cannabis culture (and hence cannabis cultivation) and also because, at times, legally produced cannabis plays a role in the illegal black market. Cannabis is a versatile plant with many, many more uses than as an illegal drug. Historically cannabis is believed to be one of the oldest agricultural crops to have been domesticated by humanity (Booth, 2003; Herer, 1994; ‘Mel’ 2001). Grown, historically, both as a food crop (cannabis oils and seeds are very nutritious – see e.g. Herer, 1994) and as a source of fibre for a wide range of industrial purposes (see e.g. Herer, 1994; Booth, 2003) cannabis is arguably one of the most versatile plants known to mankind. Some sources state that there are over 25,000 products and uses to which hemp can contribute (*ibid.*). As human civilisation has advanced it is perhaps no surprise that the recognised uses of this plant have

increased over the centuries even as cultivation of the plant has decreased, particularly in recent history. Alongside the numerous industrial uses of the plant we must be aware of the versatility of cannabis as a drug – not just the obvious use of cannabis as a recreational drug, or a drug of abuse (depending on the context, or the individual viewpoint) but also, and again this is the case throughout the history of humanity, as a spiritual drug, a religious sacrament and an extremely versatile medicine. In late-modern times, even as we have seen the global war on drugs try to restrict the production of *cannabis* recent years have seen something of a resurgence in interest in the cultivation of both industrial *hemp* and *medical marijuana*<sup>44</sup>.

In the UK previous restrictions on the cultivation of commercial hemp were lifted in 1993 due to pressure from British farmers worried about losing out to their European counterparts. However cultivation is still restricted – industrial hemp is still cannabis and as such subject to the MDA. In the UK<sup>45</sup> two main restrictions exist on the cultivation of industrial hemp. EU rules only allow certain approved varieties of cannabis being grown as an agricultural crop – such varieties must have a **THC**<sup>46</sup> content of less than 0.3%. Even when an approved variety is cultivated the grower must obtain a licence (costing £387.00 p.a. in 2002) from the Home Secretary (official communication from the Home Office Drugs Unit, 2002). Both these restrictions stem from the international laws limiting the legal cultivation of cannabis to scientific research or other special purposes. The Home Secretary makes the decision as to whether the necessary criteria are met, and thus whether a licence is to be granted, on a case by case basis.

According to *motherhemp*, “the only commercial hemp seed grower in the UK” (taken from the *motherhemp* web-site, [www.motherhemp.com](http://www.motherhemp.com), 1<sup>st</sup> September

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<sup>44</sup> Although all three are the same plant – *Cannabis Sativa* L. – there are important contextual differences between the three groups of uses of the plant and its products. Throughout the rest of this thesis the term hemp will be used when talking about the largely drug-free variant grown as a food-stuff or for industrial or ecological purposes. The term medical marijuana will refer to the drug-variant of the plant grown specifically or primarily for medical purposes (whether legally or illegally). The terms cannabis and marijuana refer to the drug variants grown illegally whether as a recreational drug or as a medicine.

<sup>45</sup> Similar restrictions exist elsewhere in the EU and much of the rest of the world – for many countries this is fulfilling their responsibilities under international treaties as mentioned early.

<sup>46</sup> THC, or  $\Delta$ -9 tetrahydrocannabinol, is the main psychoactive ingredient, although by no means the only one. It is conventional (although sometimes misleading given the wide range of other psychoactive components) to measure the strength of cannabis by its THC content.

2004), “Hemp has been grown in the UK for many hundreds of years prior to the ban on Cannabis in the early part of this [20th] century. It was always regarded as a hardy versatile crop. The ban on hemp was lifted in 1993 when Hemcore Ltd were granted the first license for trial plots. There are now approximately 80 hemp farms growing a total of 2,500 hectares in the UK” ([www.motherhemp.com/cultivation.html](http://www.motherhemp.com/cultivation.html), 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004).

Britain is now the only EU country which still requires licensing for hemp cultivation – a situation that some commentators have observed as causing UK farmers to miss out on ‘a booming world market’ (Bowers, 2002). Certainly industrial hemp production is increasing over much of Europe (notably in France and Germany, *ibid.*) and the rest of the world.

#### **2.2.1.4 Medical cultivation in the UK**

There is another area where cannabis cultivation is expanding legally in England. GW Pharmaceuticals, a medicines company, have started growing cannabis under license for medical experiments. Unlike industrial licences there is no restriction on the THC content of the cannabis grown for these purposes – indeed the trend is to grow stronger varieties to provide more of the raw ingredients for potential cannabis based drugs. At the moment it is mainly cannabis derivatives and extracts that are being used in official trials in the UK rather than the raw plant. This approach to medical cultivation is one of three models we can identify around the world. Whereas GW Pharmaceuticals are licensed to grow cannabis but are only using extracts of the plant in their medical trials other approaches involve using the whole plant (or parts thereof) to treat some medical conditions - basically using the same cannabis products as those available on the black-market and often used by ‘traditional’ cannabis users (although usually, for medical users, to be consumed orally in food or drink rather than smoked). Trials have been conducted in UK hospitals into the benefits of cannabis (usually cannabis oils) for a range of ailments, especially Multiple Sclerosis (MS). In other countries this approach has been taken further – both Canada and Holland have government-grown<sup>47</sup> cannabis available, in raw form, for certain certified medical users to obtain on prescription. Canada also allows a number of patients

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<sup>47</sup> In Holland the government employed existing – i.e. previously illegal – cannabis growers to provide the government supplies.

with certain conditions to grow their own cannabis up to a pre-agreed monthly quantity, or to nominate somebody else to do this for them for self-treatment. This approach is also found in America – where medical marijuana is legalised (although still controlled) in many states. However in the US this approach still contravenes Federal (national) law. Aside from these two variants on government-supplied medical-marijuana (i.e. prescription drugs using extracts from cannabis plants grown under license and legal cultivation and distribution of cannabis in its raw form for certain specific medical uses and users) there exist numerous variations on illegal **medical marijuana co-operatives** or compassion clubs. These are at their most advanced in the US, particularly where medical marijuana is legal at state level. Similar set-ups exist in US states which have no legal marijuana framework, and in Canada, the UK and elsewhere. Basically these co-operatives involve groups of people who co-ordinate growth and distribution of cannabis for those with recognised medical uses for the drug – usually this involves having a doctor’s certificate or some other evidence showing that other treatments have been tried and have failed, and that cannabis is recognised as having some medical benefit for the patient (this benefit may be in improving quality of life or alleviating pain and suffering rather than an actual ‘cure’ for the problem). Usually the medical-marijuana patients – the end users – are not involved in the cultivation process (it is often the case that those patients with conditions requiring medical marijuana, such as MS, are not best placed to carry out the actual cultivation) although some cultivators will be medical users themselves. Growers – usually there will be more than one grower and more than one growing location serving each co-operative – and end-users are united by intermediaries. The intermediaries – managers, if you like, of the co-operatives – are usually the only public face of the co-operative with both growers and users maintaining anonymity, confidentiality and secrecy<sup>48</sup>: usually the users and growers, especially the growers, are breaking the law in their involvement although sometimes the use and even the cultivation and distribution are legally sanctioned, as we saw above. These intermediaries organise the distribution from growers to end users. Users often pay only a nominal fee, or no fee at all, with

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<sup>48</sup> Although some make a point of going public, or are forced to go public due to legal action (arrest and charge), in an attempt to draw attention to the plight of medical marijuana users and the perceived injustices of the law.

the whole operation usually being run on a not-for-profit basis. How these medical marijuana co-operatives operate in the UK – on a wholly illegal basis – will be returned to in *Chapter Five*.

A final approach to medical marijuana distribution that is worth noting here because it has some bearing on arguments put forward by medical marijuana growers (as we shall see later) is the development of synthetic cannabinoids for medical treatment – that is creating man-made replicas of the active ingredients in cannabis as medical developments. Drugs with similar chemical structures, and similar effects, to cannabis are manufactured artificially without any involvement of naturally occurring cannabis or cannabinoids.

### **2.2.1.5 Legal cannabis cultivation and the black-market**

The question might be asked what relevance does legal cultivation have to a study of illegal drug production. The answer is three-fold. Firstly legal cultivation is included for a sense of completeness. Although this thesis is primarily a criminological study concerned with criminal production and distribution of cannabis the title relates to marijuana production in the UK – and that should consider *all* cannabis cultivation in the UK. But the reasons for considering legal cultivation go deeper than that – legal and illegal cannabis cultivation cannot be entirely separated. We shall see throughout the rest of the thesis that for many cannabis, and its legal status, is an ideological issue. The versatility of the plant and the many perceived benefits that cannabis can provide for humanity are often seen as *de facto* evidence that prohibition is morally wrong. The legal production of cannabis for industrial and, perhaps especially, medical purposes is seen as justification by some for illegal production. This is the second reason why it is important to look at legal production alongside illegal production and this is an area which will be returned to periodically. The third reason for considering industrial hemp and legal medical marijuana involves a more tangible and direct link between legal production and the market in illegal cannabis.

There have been numerous well documented stories – in local and national news media and also anecdotally – of such crops being raided illegally and I have had direct reports from those who have done this themselves or know of others that have done so. Reports range from those who do little more than grab a handful of

flowers from the hemp fields for personal consumption – an activity akin to the scrumping of fruit from orchards – to those who drive vans into the often unfenced hemp fields to load them up and take their harvest back (usually) to the city. In the former approach it is often the case that the hemp is mistaken for drug-grade cannabis: some thieves of this type have said that they assumed the fields were associated with cannabis being grown for medical trials. The latter approach is usually not the result of misidentification of cannabis/hemp but a deliberate appropriation of hemp intended to deceive other individuals who think they are buying cannabis. Such an approach is predominantly carried out by individuals and groups who are actively involved in cannabis and other drug dealing and other criminal activity. The hemp thieves will either use the stolen hemp as a substitute for non-hemp cannabis – selling the low THC hemp as if it were normal black-market cannabis – or use it as a supplement to their non-hemp cannabis deals – mixing the hemp with the cannabis in a way akin to those who ‘cut’ powder-type drugs<sup>49</sup> to bulk out their supplies. Either way the hemp-thief/cannabis dealer improves their financial returns from drug dealing through theft of agricultural grade hemp. Little has been said about the phenomenon of hemp-theft as an element of cannabis dealing in this way although one news report I encountered did have a police spokesman saying that there was little that they could do – but that those involved would get their comeuppance from disgruntled customers disappointed with their purchases!

The assumption underlying this observation, and the general lack of concern over hemp-theft, is that industrial hemp is not effective as a drug and therefore is not relevant to drug related concerns. Rather it is considered merely an annoyance for the farmers who are victimised to be dealt with in terms of trespass and theft. However this assumption may be misplaced. Hemp-theft is generally seen only to be an adulterant in terms of cannabis use rather than a potential source of THC and other cannabinoids for drug users to get high with – at 0.3% THC it is often noted that one would need to consume 10 to 100 times the usual amount of cannabis to get an equivalent effect<sup>50</sup> (one news report suggest that you would have to smoke a joint ‘the size of a telegraph pole’ to get a noticeable high).

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<sup>49</sup> E.g. Heroin, cocaine, amphetamine sulphate.

<sup>50</sup> Cannabis on the black market usually having a THC content in the 3% to 30% range (FSS source).

However there are ways to concentrate the THC and other active ingredients in *any* cannabis strain which can render even industrial grade hemp an effective drug<sup>51</sup>. Examples include the manufacture of cannabis 'butter' or hemp milk:

'Take the leaves and flowers of one average size hemp plant. Chop fairly finely and simmer in milk<sup>52</sup> for about half an hour or so. It makes a slightly strange but not unpleasant green milk drink and the effect is quite noticeable. It's still illegal of course...' (member, UKCIA e-mail distribution list)

Indeed some cannabis users have developed quite sophisticated ways to extract the THC content from any form of cannabis (even weak industrial grade hemp) and are keen to point out the benefits of side-stepping smoking and its related harms:

'Essentially, you will be able to get stoned from cannabis of any level of THC if you have enough of it. To remove the health-hazards of smoking a lot of material though as you say, extracting it into something edible or drinkable is very much a good idea.

Something I have seen done very successfully with very low THC plant "waste matter" is making butter out of it in the following way, which you can then use to make cakes or anything you wish...

- 1) Boil a pan of water and add however much butter you want.
- 2) Add the low THC cannabis and allow the mixture to simmer for a while (approx 30 mins has been recommended to me - just don't let than pan boil dry).
- 3) Sieve (e.g. through a muslin bag) the resulting liquid into a container (tall and thin is easiest, along the lines of a pint glass).
- 4) If you wish to minimise wastage, reboil the plant material sieved out in boiling water and re-sieve to add to the liquid in 3.
- 5) Throw away the expended plant material. Put the sieved liquid in the fridge and wait.
- 6) It separates into 2 layers - the top one is your "magic butter", the bottom liquid can be thrown away.

This is much better for low THC cannabis than making cakes etc. directly out of cannabis or some other methods of magic butter creation as you throw away the mass of plant material you would otherwise have to eat - and as you see from the colour of the bottom layer of liquid you are also removing other "undesirables"! My associates claim the high is also more "cerebral" and less "rendering you immobile for hours" if done this way - but this is just rumour :-)

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<sup>51</sup> Cannabis connoisseurs often maintain that only the flowering buds of the unfertilised female plant are worth smoking, with seeds decreasing the strength of the female and males being next to worthless. With preparatory methods such as the ones given here even the 'useless', low THC males can be used to produce an active substance.

<sup>52</sup> Cannabinoids such as THC are soluble in fat.

As for the milk, it will work that way as well (using milk instead of butter + water) but be sure to use full-fat milk and take care that you don't boil it to the extent the milk turns nasty.' (Member, *ibid.*)

Knowledge of measures of extracting cannabinoids from even the least potent of cannabis plant material was particularly common amongst those that grew their own cannabis, particularly those that did so on a small scale. Such techniques allowed them to maximise the amount of drug material they could get from any one plant. This issue will be returned to in the next chapter.

So despite the assumption inherent in the licensing system associated with its cultivation hemp can have a role in cannabis consumption and the associated black-market. It is certainly true that in some areas at some times some industrial grade hemp makes it in to the cannabis chain but it is equally true that this level of infiltration is probably so small as to be largely insignificant. If large quantities of industrial hemp were to be making their way in to the cannabis supply chain then some farmers somewhere would be reporting entire crops missing rather than losing just a few plants here and there! Equally there have been no reports, to my knowledge, of medical crops finding their way into the black market. Although it is possible that some of the crop is siphoned off by those who come into contact with it (just as there are persistent stories and occasional investigations concerning redistribution of police-confiscated cannabis and other drugs, and tales of medical practitioners siphoning off prescription drugs for personal use or black- or grey- market distribution) it seems unlikely that this has any noticeable effect on the cannabis black market. A few cannabis users may be getting their supplies from these rather than more traditional underground sources. Either way, from my perspective of looking at who is growing illegal cannabis and what effect this is having on the marijuana market licensed farmers – of low-grade hemp or of medical marijuana – are of little further interest, but will be returned to when they are.

### ***2.2.2 Illegal cannabis cultivation in the UK***

We now move on to the real area of interest for this thesis – illegal cannabis cultivation in the UK. Cannabis cultivation is, usually, as secretive an affair as other forms of drug distribution. Again there is a shortage of accurate data showing how much cannabis is grown in this country. However there are a

number of indicators. Perhaps the most directly relevant data is that of the Independent Drug Monitoring Unit (IDMU). It is their figures which informed the headline quoted at the beginning of this chapter and which are also referenced in Hough *et al*'s 2003 report 'A growing market'. The actual figures were that 47% of the cannabis used by IDMU respondents in 2001 was 'home-grown'. This compares to a figure of 13% in 1994 and backs up one of the central concerns of this research: that domestic cannabis cultivation has increased significantly over the last decade or so. But how accurate is this figure, and where exactly does it come from?

### **2.2.2.1 The IDMU 'Regular Users Survey'**

The IDMU conduct an annual survey of 'Regular Drug Users'. Surveys like the British Crime Survey (BCS) give us a fairly reasonable picture of how many people have taken various drugs, and how recently they have done so (from which we can reasonably infer, to an extent, the frequency of drug use), with some demographic data for these users (such as gender, age, area and type of accommodation, and ethnic background) it tells us little about either the nature of their drug-taking or where they get their drugs from. The IDMU surveys aim to fill these knowledge gaps by targeting self-acknowledged 'regular users' (which we can roughly equate to 'past month' users in surveys like the BCS although such comparisons should be treated with care) and asking them about their own drug using and drug buying (or otherwise obtaining) patterns. The survey concentrates most heavily on cannabis and includes a set of questions which ask respondents to state what percentage of their cannabis comes from what sources, offering a list which covers all the major traditional source countries/varieties of cannabis (e.g. Moroccan hash, Thai weed) and also includes categories for 'home-grown' and for 'premium-bud (e.g. **skunk**)' from which the figures quoted above (and the graph, fig. 2.1) are taken.

There are some good reasons for questioning the accuracy of the IDMU data on what share of the cannabis market is taken by home-grown cannabis. Drug users are, as I have said, a somewhat secretive bunch and conducting representative samples of such hidden populations is fraught with difficulties. The IDMU in their research opt for an opportunity sample. The bulk of their annual survey is

conducted at two main annual events<sup>53</sup> – the annual cannabis festival (running since 1999) located in Brixton, South London and the Glastonbury festival of the performing arts (which has been running, although not every year, since 1970) – on the not unreasonable grounds that these events are likely to attract a lot of drug users and that people are perhaps more willing to be open and honest about their drug use at such events. However both festivals have a somewhat problematic slant to their sample bias. Attracting a disproportionate number of drug users is not a problem as the survey aims to target regular users, not the general population, but the sample is unlikely to be representative of all drug users for various reasons. Glastonbury festival is quite an expensive event and as such will not attract the full range of social groups (although the Brixton event is free and perhaps has a wider cross-section of the population in terms of social and economic demographics). Both festivals occur in the south of the UK and so are likely to have disproportionately fewer northern representatives. Both are festivals and as such will only attract those drug users who are also festival goers. More pertinently for our purposes the Cannabis festival especially, and Glastonbury to some extent<sup>54</sup>, are both likely to disproportionately attract those who are perhaps greater-than-average users of the drug and who are certainly more involved in a wider ‘cannabis culture’ than more typical users. Those which are more involved in this wider cannabis culture – e.g. those who actively campaign for changes in the law, or who define large parts of their social (or even professional) lives around their interest in or use of cannabis, or who are particularly heavy or frequent users (especially daily or near daily users) – are probably more likely to either know somebody who grows cannabis or to grow it themselves. Heavier users are probably more likely to know domestic producers than lighter or occasional users of cannabis. The IDMU, both deliberately and through in-built biases in their sampling locations, target heavier (regular) users more than occasional or light users and as such their figures for market shares of different types of cannabis may be a more accurate representation of the market shares of heavier users than for *all* cannabis users. The IDMU researchers make the point that in economics there is a standard model, the Lorenz curve, which

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<sup>53</sup> Although these two main research sites are supplemented with various other sources.

<sup>54</sup> I base this assertion on the location of the IDMU stand within Glastonbury festival where it is sited in the ‘Green fields’, away from the main musical stages and near to other cannabis-related

shows that for most commodities regular users account for 80-90% of total consumption of that commodity and as such a view of the market (such as market shares of different varieties of cannabis) based on regular users will be very close to the view of the overall market including occasional users (Atha *et al.* 1997). This bias towards heavier users is therefore not as problematic as first appears although it does seem probable, from this perspective, that the IDMU may slightly over-estimate the proportion of the market given over to home-grown cannabis.

A second area of concern with the IDMU data is related to the definition of 'home-grown'. As well as the 'home-grown' category for market shares of different types of cannabis IDMU also have a category for 'premium bud (e.g. skunk)' in the questionnaires. Premium varieties of cannabis are those that are specially bred for potency (and for other specific characteristics – see *Chapter Three*) and are often grown indoors under optimal growing conditions. Although such premium cannabis is wide-spread in Amsterdam, for example, and is often imported from there or elsewhere my own observations (as well as those of the police, the Forensic Science Service and other respondents) suggest that much domestically produced cannabis is actually of these **premium bud** varieties. This means that some respondents to IDMU surveys may well have indicated premium bud varieties as home-grown whilst others may have indicated home-grown (but still premium) sources in the 'premium bud' categories. The approach taken by the IDMU is to include both 'home-grown' and 'premium bud' categories in their final 'home-grown' figures which leads to the obvious problem of 'premium bud' which *isn't* produced in the UK. Certainly anecdotal evidence, common sense and observations made by me and also by many of my informants would suggest that we do still import premium strains of cannabis from elsewhere, especially Holland. This means that the cited figures for 'home-grown' market shares may well be higher than the actuality. This bias is mitigated somewhat in a number of ways – firstly although the figures themselves may be in error the underlying trends should be reasonably accurate as the same methodology has been used consistently across the years. Secondly imported premium bud may not be grown in the UK but it is almost certainly

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stands.

grown in Western Europe (probably predominantly Holland) rather than ‘traditional’ producer countries in the third world and as such reflects the wider global trend of the emergence of domestic production in developed Western nations. Thirdly observational evidence, again backed up by the opinions of certain experts, suggests that importation of premium cannabis is declining and forms a relatively small part of the total premium cannabis market in the UK (although the importation of premium cannabis still exists and is probably greater than negligible in scale). It seems reasonable to believe this to be the case – premium grade herbal cannabis is comparatively bulky and incredibly pungent making it a difficult drug product to smuggle: the advances and advantages in domestic production techniques, to be discussed in *Chapter Three*, would make this the preferred method of introducing premium cannabis to the UK market for any distributor who has the choice. Finally there were verifiable reports from my own research respondents of premium grade cannabis produced in the UK being *exported* to Holland, and to other (mostly European) countries which would offset some of the discrepancy caused by importing premium quality cannabis.

A final point to make here is that users do not always know where their cannabis originates and that some users/IDMU respondents may well assume their cannabis to be an overseas variety when it is actually a domestically produced variety, premium or otherwise. This confusion could, of course, work in reverse with imported cannabis being mistaken for home-grown cannabis but this seemed less likely to my various respondents on both sides of the law<sup>55</sup>.

In summary, then, it is not possible to say what proportion of cannabis consumed in the UK is grown here. The figures available from the IDMU annual surveys suggest that up to 50%<sup>56</sup> of all the cannabis grown in the UK is *either* grown in the UK *or* premium grade cannabis varieties probably grown in the UK and

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<sup>55</sup> For the less knowledgeable cannabis users the default assumption seemed still to be that the cannabis they bought or consumed was imported unless they knew otherwise. For more knowledgeable users and dealers it was frequently pointed out that fresher, locally grown herbal cannabis is often less compacted than cannabis which has been transported over greater distances, especially that which has been imported. For smugglers especially space is often of a premium, hence the need to compact the cannabis. From this it follows that imported cannabis is usually (but not exclusively) compacted whereas domestically produced cannabis may or may not be compacted when purchased. Or, when looked at the other way, compacted cannabis may come from domestic or overseas sources, but looser cannabis is more likely to come from domestic sources than from overseas.

<sup>56</sup> Early indications are that the 50% mark will be passed when the latest data sets are fully analysed (personal communication, IDMU)

almost certainly grown somewhere in Western Europe. Although we cannot be completely sure as to what proportions originate in the UK there is evidence for a strong and steady increase in domestic/premium cannabis varieties available in the UK over the last decade.

### 2.2.2.2 Official views on domestic cannabis production

Table 2.1 – Number of seizures of cannabis plants and total number of plants seized by year:

Year	Number of seizures of cannabis plants.	Total number of cannabis plants seized.	Average number of cannabis plants per seizure.
1990	818	34,031	41.6
1991	1,045	8,896	8.5
1992	1,910	11,839	6.2
1993	4,124	71,324	17.3
1994	5,684	57,865	10.2
1995	6,128	94,382	15.4
1996	4,936	116,301	23.6
1997	3,791	115,057	30.4
1998	2,832	123,043	43.4
1999	2,288	55,810	24.4
2000	2,040	47,950	23.5
2001	1,880	71,590	38.1
2002	2,440	57,070	23.4

Sources: 1990-1999 Corkery, 2002:57; 2000-2002 Ahmad & Mwenda, 2004: table 2.6a. (No. of plants seized rounded off to nearest 10 for years 2000 to 2002.)

Although the IDMU surveys are the only surveys which ask cannabis users about the type and country of origin of the cannabis they smoke they are not the only available data relating to cannabis cultivation in the UK. The most obvious source is the police's own records of drug seizures although these are as much a reflection of police successes and police priorities as of actual levels of cannabis

growing, recording only those cultivation operations that are detected (and recorded) by the police.

Interestingly whilst the IDMU have been recording a steady increase in the domestic sourcing of cannabis which implies a parallel increase in domestic production, police seizure data does not reflect this. As table 2.1 shows seizures (by all UK police forces and HM customs and excise) of cannabis plants increased steadily through the first half of the 1990s, peaking in 1995, and then decreased in the second half of the decade (although seizure rates remained significantly higher at the end of the decade than at the beginning).

This is not to say, however, that the decline in seizures reflects a decline in actual cannabis production in the UK in this period. On the one hand the decline can be seen as a reflection of changing police priorities – certainly in the South Yorkshire Police force area where I conducted most of my ethnographic research one police contact explained how cannabis was an increasingly low priority, particularly in the light of growing concerns over class A drugs, especially heroin and crack cocaine. Enforcement in relation to cannabis growing was often the result of accident<sup>57</sup> (such as investigating a burglary or broken window, or suspicious activities or smells reported by neighbours) or a response to requests for action by family or neighbours. Pro-active policing in relation to cannabis growing would normally only occur with the biggest operations, or when those involved in cultivation were also involved in the distribution of other, harder drugs. On the other hand the figures also hide a change in the approach to growing. An FSS scientist with responsibility for the South Yorkshire area explained how in the 1970s there were practically no cases of cannabis cultivation. In the 1980s, when the phenomenon began to emerge, growing occurred largely out-doors (in allotments, gardens and greenhouses, and occasionally on a larger scale in secluded rural areas) or on window-sills indoors. Through the 1990s indoor growing techniques – most significantly the use of artificial lights – began to take off and later dominate the scene, as discussed in the next chapter. Obviously with indoor cultivation, out of sight from casual observation by the police or potential informants, the chances of detection – especially given the low priority attached to cannabis cultivation – is very much

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<sup>57</sup> This point was also made by a senior FSS scientist with responsibility for cannabis.

slimmer than with outdoor cultivation. Whereas the increase in seizure statistics in the first half of the 1990s – and certainly the increase from the 1970s through 1980s into the 1990s – is probably a reflection of increased cultivation activity the decrease in seizures seen in recent years probably does not indicate a decrease in production, rather changes in policy (on the enforcement side) and cultivation technique (including security measures) on the part of the growers. The figures, then, can be seen to mask a potentially serious problem. Official figures on seizures are not reflecting the apparent vast expansion in domestic production of cannabis – and although the police and other observers recognise that the domestic growing situation is far greater than that revealed in detection patterns (one police officer told me ‘considering how much it [cannabis growing] happens we don’t get many busts’) there is a real risk that the size of the discrepancy is under-appreciated with growing rates, as suggested by the IDMU, being greater even than anticipated by those police officers who do recognise that official figures already considerably under-represent the expanding cannabis cultivation situation. This, of course, is good news for cannabis growers who have come to recognise that, statistically at least, their chances of getting ‘busted’ are not only small but seemingly decreasing.

### **2.2.2.3 Further indications for the increase in domestic cannabis cultivation**

Cannabis dealers I spoke to in the South Yorkshire area were generally of the opinion that more and more of the premium cannabis they were handling originated from the local area. This seemed – to them – to be a recent trend:

“Well these days it’s all grown in the area. You occasionally get the odd little bit [of imported cannabis] here and there” (Slacker, cannabis dealer)

The IDMU surveys sometimes include questions about respondents’ experiences in cultivating their own cannabis. In 1997 63% of respondents reported having grown their own cannabis at least once (Atha *et al.*, 1999:16) which was slightly but not significantly higher than the 60% figure recorded in the 1994 survey (Atha and Blanchard, 1997:49). These figures do not tell us much about the prevalence of cannabis growing amongst all cannabis users (or the wider population – as will be seen later not all cannabis growers are themselves

cannabis users, although the vast majority are). The survey is aimed at ‘regular’ users and as discussed earlier there are reasons to believe that respondents to the IDMU surveys are likely to be more immersed in a wider cannabis culture and/or heavier users than the wider population of regular users, and especially the wider population of *all* cannabis users. However they do suggest that cannabis growing is a wide-spread phenomenon, at least amongst a certain type of drug user.

Of more interest is the number of plants grown at a time by different growers. This gives some indication of the amount of consumable cannabis (as a drug product) produced by growers, although it must be noted that similar amounts of cannabis can be produced by many small plants or a few bigger ones. Methods of growing, including numbers of plants and their productivity (the amount of cannabis produced by each) are discussed over the following chapters. Nevertheless the number of plants grown gives a broad indication of the amount of cannabis produced. In 1994 the average number of plants grown by individual cultivators was 19 (Atha & Blanchard, 1997:49) which rose to an average of 23.9 in 1997 (Atha *et al.*, 1999:16). Even if the number of growers identified in the IDMU surveys has increased only marginally between the 1994 and 1997 the amount of cannabis they are growing, at least in terms of numbers of cannabis plants, has increased more significantly.

The increase in cannabis cultivation identified by the IDMU is only part of the story. Cannabis growers can be broadly divided into two categories – commercial and non-commercial growers. Commercial growers are those that seek to make financial profit from their growing activities – *Chapter Six* is devoted to these growers. Non-commercial growers are largely unconcerned with financial returns, usually growing predominantly for their own use (or that of their friends) and are discussed in depth in *Chapter Five*. The IDMU argue that the vast majority of the growers identified in their surveys are non-commercial growers on the grounds that the average numbers of plants being cultivated would not be sufficient to sustain a commercial interest. This may be true although the averages they cite will include a number of growers operating on a relatively large scale and, as we shall see, it is possible to operate as a successful commercial grower whilst only growing a small number of plants at a time. Nevertheless it seems likely that those operating on a larger commercial scale

would be less likely than non-commercial or small-scale commercial growers to participate in the IDMU surveys.

Table 2.2

Year	Total seizures	1-50 plants	51-100 plants	101-500 plants	501-1000 plants	1001-10,000 plants
2000	2019	1841 (91.2%)	94 (4.7%)	73 (3.6%)	9 (0.4%)	2 (0.1%)
2001	1890	1690 (89.4%)	100 (5.3%)	70 (3.7%)	10 (0.5%)	0
2002	2440	2210 (90.6%)	130 (5.3%)	90 (4.1%)	10 (0.5%)	10 (0.4%)

%s are % of total seizures for that year.

Sources: 2000 – Corkery (2002); 2001 and 2002 – Ahmad & Mwenda (2004)

If we return to table 2.1 we see that the average number of plants per seizure has, in general, increased across the last decade or so. The pattern is not straightforward with 1990 in particular bucking the trend, and plants per seizure peaking in 1998. The figures, of course, once again reflect policing activity as much as actual patterns of cannabis cultivation but, and especially given the fact that cannabis seems to have been given a much lower priority by many police forces in recent years, there is some evidence that larger scale operations are on the increase. The last three years of data available from the Home Office seizures of cannabis plants have been broken down by number of plants seized (table 2.2) which neatly illustrates how a small percentage of all growers may account for a sizeable proportion of all plants grown – the IDMU data, in failing to cover the larger-scale commercial growers, under-represents the total amount of cannabis growing that may be going on in the UK.

It is difficult to know to what extent larger scale commercial cannabis growing has taken off in recent years – available official statistics are limited in their utility with most years' data not broken down by size of seizures, and the data in any case reflecting policing practises as much as the actuality of cannabis cultivation. However other sources – including police officers themselves and members of the Forensic Science Service suggest that larger scale growing.

particularly indoor growing, has been increasing steadily over the last few years (personal communications). It also seems to be the case that businesses manufacturing and supplying specialist lights for indoor horticulture have seen a large and steady increase in demand for their products over the last ten years or so. One manager of a grow-light manufacturing company explained that the industry had grown from “three hydro[ponic] specialist shops to about 80 in the last 17 years in the UK” with his own business seeing “steady growth of about 25-50% per annum” (interview conducted in 2003). This expansion is not entirely due to the growth in cannabis cultivation – grow-lights have many legitimate uses – but the implication was certainly that a lot of this extra business was due to illegal marijuana production. As he said the “industry ignores the fact that a lot of customers abuse equipment... Not so much ignore it as not entertain [this idea]”. As a member of staff at another grow-shop explained “customers talk about growing tomatoes. They’re not growing tomatoes. We know that, they know that, we know that they know that we know that. But you can tell by the questions they ask. Not many people grow their own tomatoes indoors!”

Expert observers and other evidence all seem to agree that the biggest trend is for indoor growing under lights (discussed further in the next chapter). This trend coupled with changing police priorities relating to cannabis growing (leaving the police acting largely reactively rather than proactively and instead prioritising ‘harder’ drugs) could well mean that the amount by which official statistics underestimate the extent of cannabis growing in the UK is actually increasing: not only are the police not actively looking for cannabis growers but, due to the increased secrecy available to the indoor grower they are not encountering as many through serendipitous detection.

A further indicator which suggests an increase in cannabis growing activity – both commercial and non-commercial – is a steady increase in media reports on the subject, particularly in the local press but also in national papers. This is difficult to quantify for a number of reasons – and a full analysis of news coverage of cannabis-growing related stories is beyond the scope of this research – but a pattern was definitely observable by the author. News stories relating to cannabis cultivation seem to fall into three broad categories. Firstly there are those stories which report on the phenomena itself – focussing on the emergence of cannabis cultivation, the availability of seeds and equipment for cannabis

growing and, especially in the period since the down-grading of cannabis, stories reporting on the apparent increased strength of cannabis (measured, usually, by THC content) particularly those premium breeds of cannabis bred for indoor growth often in high-tech conditions. The phenomenon of indoor growing is discussed in the next few chapters; the issue of increased strength of cannabis relating to indoor growing is returned to in *Chapter Seven*.

The second area which news-stories focus on is police busts of large-scale commercial cannabis growing operations. These are discussed in *Chapter Six*. The trend seems to be that these are on the increase – or at least reporting them is on the increase. How this fits with the police figures of an apparent decrease in the number of seizures across the second half of the last decade (Table 2.1) is difficult to see but it would appear that whether or not cannabis growing activity as detected by the police is on the increase media interest in cannabis cultivation is. Referring again to Table 2.1 it would seem that the size of growing operations detected by the police (as indicated by the average number of plants seized per operation detected) is on the increase: there is a focus on larger scale growing operations. Other focuses of news coverage in this area of cannabis cultivation relate to the increase in violence and other criminal activity related to large scale cannabis cultivation, particularly in London, and the perceived link between large-scale cultivation and South-East Asian immigrants, particularly those from Vietnam. The form of large-scale cannabis cultivation in the UK and its links to organised crime more generally is discussed in *Chapters Six and Seven*. The final area where media interest seems to be booming is in small-scale growing operations which often have a human interest element – those who grow cannabis to support a medical need, or to raise some extra cash for a specific reason (rather than on-going and/or large-scale ‘greed’ orientated commercial growing), or who are involved in cannabis cultivation through some kind of accident. These growers are discussed at length in *Chapter Five*.

## 3 – Sowing the Seeds:

### How cannabis is grown in the UK

#### 3.1 Introduction

The last chapter looked at the ‘big picture’ of cannabis growing in the UK – indicators of recent trends and current rates for domestic production. This chapter begins to focus on what goes on behind those figures: what exactly is involved in cannabis growing and how does it manifest itself in Britain. I will start with a look at the science behind cannabis growing – the biology and natural history of the plant itself and its natural growing environment. I shall then look at the conditions, natural and artificial, indoors and out, under which cannabis is grown in the UK.

For outdoor growing we will look at both the methods employed by cannabis growers and the different ‘types’ of outdoor grower, as classified partly by motivation behind (and anticipated outcomes of) involvement in growing and partly by methods utilised in cultivation. It will be seen that the two can and do influence each other. It is my contention throughout this thesis that *motivation* is a significant element for us to consider when trying to understand domestic marijuana production. The different motivational factors – drivers – which encourage an individual to become involved in cannabis cultivation inform that individuals approach to production and their role in and influence on the wider cannabis market. This will become apparent as the thesis develops – in this chapter the focus remains more on describing the *methods* growers employ in growing cannabis but will also begin to show how a grower’s preferred method of cultivation is influenced by his motivational or *ideological* drivers.<sup>58</sup>

For indoor growers we will consider the ranges of methods employed by growers in producing and harvesting a drug crop. Classification of indoor growers – along a motivational framework but informed by practicalities such as the size of an operation – will be the subject of *Chapters Four* and *Five*.

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<sup>58</sup> Akin to the drivers identified by Dorn *et al.* (2005) as discussed in the *Chapter One*.

## 3.2 How cannabis is grown

Cannabis growing is quite easy. Cannabis is an adaptable and versatile plant and it is sometimes called ‘weed’ – perhaps – for the good reason that it grows very well as a weed in many countries. The challenge lies in growing it well. This section looks at how cannabis is grown and processed as a drug crop, how growers can and do manipulate growing conditions to meet their preferred crop criteria – and how growers balance the needs of producing a good crop with the demands of keeping it secret/secure. But we start by considering how cannabis grows in nature – and the science of the plant itself.

### ***3.2.1 The cannabis plant***

Three chapters in it may seem a little late to ask the question ‘What is Cannabis?’. We know that it is the UK’s most popular illegal drug – but that it is also a plant used in traditional and contemporary medicine as well as being an agricultural crop supplying the food, textiles and other industries throughout much of human history. I now intend to take a step back and to consider the biology and natural history of the plant itself. There are three reasons for doing this. Firstly a treatise on cannabis growing would be incomplete without some consideration of the properties of the plant itself. Secondly, and more pertinently, we will continue to explore how for some cannabis growers there is an important ideological element in their motivation to grow, or at least in their self justification for doing so. This ideological element rests partly in the nature of cannabis *as a drug* (and the related cannabis-culture) and partly in the nature of cannabis *as a plant*. A consideration of the plant itself should serve to provide a better understanding of the nature of the plant element of the related ideological position. The final reason for addressing the scientific aspects of the cannabis plant is that these dictate how the plant should be grown – especially if a grower wants to maximise the drug output of a crop – and therefore heavily influence how cannabis growers operate.

#### **3.2.1.1 Species and varieties of Cannabis Sativa L.**

It has to be said that the controversies, contradictions and debate associated with cannabis are not limited to its use and distribution as a controlled drug. Even at

the levels of naming and classifying the plant there are competing views and apparent uncertainties. The substances known colloquially as cannabis (i.e. herbal cannabis, cannabis resin, cannabis oil and other cannabis extracts and derivatives) come from the plant *Cannabis sativa*<sup>59</sup> - sativa being Latin for “cultivated”, a reminder of the plant’s utility in human history. Having at times been classified as *Urticaceae* (a relation to the nettle) and later as *Moraceae* (the plant family that includes the fig) it is now regarded by most as a herbaceous plant of the group *Cannabaceae* of which only it and *Humulus lupulus* (the hop plant) are seen as members (Booth, 2003). This link to a plant that is widely used in the brewing of beer – a common form of the legal drug alcohol – is not lost on some pro-cannabis campaigners and cannabis growers and is sometimes cited as reason for, or justification of, the cultivation and use of marijuana: why one plant-based drug and not the other if they are so closely related?

There has been much debate – in the scientific community if not amongst cannabis growers themselves – as to whether there is more than one species of cannabis or merely different varieties. *Cannabis indica* and *Cannabis ruderalis*, the former being the variety of the plant common to the Indian sub-continent and the latter to central Asia, Western Siberia and Eastern Europe, have at times been recognised as separate species – and at least one text<sup>60</sup> refers to *Cannabis americana*, the variety common to Mexico and also found growing wild in the United States. Modern commentators still do not agree – Weisheit, for example, goes along with the idea that all varieties of cannabis are of the one species *Cannabis sativa* (1992:53) whereas Booth says that the ‘polytypic [multi-species] side of the argument has mainly come to be accepted’ (2003:2). Either way it is known that cannabis adapts very quickly to its habitat and that seeds of any variety sown in a specific area will, over the course of a few generations, evolve to resemble the variety best suited to local conditions. That is to say that *Cannabis sativa* planted in India will eventually produce descendants with the characteristics of *Cannabis indica* (Booth, 2003; Tyler, 1986). From the point of view of western cannabis-growers-as-drug-producers whether the different

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<sup>59</sup> Sometimes referred to as *Cannabis Sativa L.* after the naturalist and classifier Carl Linnaeus who gave it its name in 1753 (Weisheit, 1992; Booth, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Schofield (1971).

major<sup>61</sup> varieties constitute separate species is a matter of semantics, but the fact that there are different major varieties suited to different conditions (and giving different psychotropic effects through different combinations of the many psychoactive ingredients found in cannabis) is recognised, welcomed and utilised by growers. Many actively breed cannabis plants mixing parental lineage to produce different varieties suited to different growing conditions and/or providing a different ‘high’. Cannabis breeding has become a major pastime amongst some western cannabis growers seeking to develop strains of the plant that (a) meet their own preferred balance of active ingredients and hence produce their preferred ‘high’ when consumed; (b) best suit their own growing conditions (particularly important for those wishing to grow outdoors); (c) meet their preferred standards of growing speed (different strains will grow at different rates – quicker growing plants mean more frequent crops), and/or; (d) for the sake of variety (particularly important to some connoisseurs). Plants may be specially bred by individual growers to meet their own requirements – not uncommon amongst experienced growers. Most growers without the expertise or opportunity to breed their own strain still have the opportunity to choose from hundreds of varieties of seed on the open market<sup>62</sup>, each offering its own unique balance of active ingredients (affecting the ‘high’, but also the taste and smell) and each best suited to particular growing conditions<sup>63</sup>. One South Yorkshire grower I encountered developed his own variety which became the stable variety for many of his growing colleagues, and was actively sought out by many local cannabis users (and actively avoided by others who found it just a bit too strong). The reputation of this variety extended at least as far as London.

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<sup>61</sup> I insert the word ‘major’ here to differentiate the widely recognised and classified varieties mentioned in this section (possibly different species) from the countless strains bred by western growers discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>62</sup> Advertised on the internet or in magazines for mail-order, or sold over the counter in head-shops.

<sup>63</sup> Specially bred strains available on the market have a wide variety of weird and sometimes wacky names such as Skunk, Super-skunk, Skunk no. 1, White Rhino, White Widow, Northern Lights, Purple Haze, AK 47 and Kriss-Kross (to name just a few of the more common varieties grown by the growers I met). Alternatively you can buy seed varieties taken from cannabis varieties that grow wild from around the world – such as Afghan or Thai.

### 3.2.1.2 Natural growing conditions

*Cannabis sativa* is a hardy annual<sup>64</sup> plant which now grows wild on all the continents except Antarctica. Its origins are unknown for certain but most expert opinion agrees that it probably evolved in central Asia (Booth, 2003; Weisheit, 1992), but as one of the earliest plants to be cultivated its distribution has been greatly aided by man. It certainly prefers the temperate and tropical regions of the globe but its spread has not been limited to these areas with (outdoor) growth having been known in colder climates – even within the arctic circle in Norway (Fairburn, 1976). During my research I met people who grew cannabis outdoors in Scotland.

Cannabis is certainly very successful, capable of adapting (as mentioned above) to a form that best suits local conditions. It prefers open areas and warm weather and needs very little water beyond the germination and early growth periods. It can tolerate a wide range of temperatures and moisture conditions and can grow at altitudes of up to 8,000ft (2,500m). It has a life cycle of 3-7 months (in natural conditions) and germinates within a few days. It grows quickly and is well established as a seedling within a couple of weeks. It can grow at up to 15 cm a day although between 2 and 5 centimetres is more normal. As such it easily outgrows other plants if early competition for sun-light is avoided – cannabis is heliotropic (prefers direct sunlight) and doesn't like the shade. It will grow in almost any soil conditions, although it is more successful on loam. As one observer has noted “marijuana grows best under the same conditions of soil and climate that favor corn” (Goldman, 1979:34, quoted in Weisheit, 1992:55) – a fact which has not gone unnoticed by the cannabis growers of America's corn belt and other outside cultivators around the world, including amongst my own UK sources. Growing cannabis alongside (and concealed by) corn or other legitimate crops has become fairly common practice in the US (Weisheit 1992; various news sources) and the UK (news sources; personal observations and informants).

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<sup>64</sup> That is to say that the plant lives only for one year or, more accurately, one growing season. Tropical and sub-tropical countries may have more than one growing cycle each year, but countries of more extreme latitudes – such as in Central Asia, Europe and North America have only the one growing season running from Spring to late Summer. Either way new plants spring up each year/season from the seeds of the previous generation.

### 3.2.1.3 Description of plant

*Cannabis sativa* – the most widely spread variety – can grow to six metres high with long thin flowers and spiky, light green leaves (Weisheit, 1992; Booth, 2003; ‘Mel’, 2000). *Cannabis indica* grows to about one metre, is conical in shape and has denser branching. The leaves are broader, shorter and of a darker colour (sometimes with a purplish tinge) with flowers that are tighter than for *sativas* (*ibid.*). *Cannabis ruderalis* grows to about three-quarters of a metre, has few branches and flowers earlier than the other varieties (generally growing in more northern climes this is a reflection of shortening day length). In all cases bigger plants form under better growing conditions – particularly when more light is available but also dependent on water and nutrient supplies.

As many people, both interested parties and laymen, are aware the leaves of the cannabis plant are very distinctive being palmate, consisting of five to eleven smaller leaflets of five to fifteen centimetres in length (the central ones being longest, and getting shorter as you move outwards) and pointed at both ends (Schofield, 1971). This shape is very familiar to many people and has become an important cultural symbol, ubiquitous in popular ‘alternative’ scenes<sup>65</sup>. The leaflets are serrated along the edges with the upper surface being of a darker colour than the underside. The stalk is angular, hollow and branched and has been reported as growing up to ten centimetres thick (*ibid.*) although five centimetres or less is more common (Booth, 2003). Cannabis is dioecious which means you get both male and female plants. Hermaphrodites are known to occur although there is some debate as to how common these are – scientific commentators and other experts suggest they are rare (Booth, 2003; ‘Mel’ 2000; personal communication with FSS scientist) whilst many growers claim to have encountered them (‘Mel’ 2000; personal communications with research subjects). Male plants are generally taller in all varieties and, for reasons to be discussed later in this chapter, are generally considered to be undesirable in a drug crop. Both plants produce flowers – the male flower is smaller and releases pollen for wind dispersal. The female flowers are larger and grow in tight clusters and, once pollinated, produce the seed. Both plants are also covered (flower, leaf and stalk, but densest on the flowers) in tiny hairs called **trichomes**

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<sup>65</sup> Consider certain types of music, particularly rap/hip-hop, references in film and television.

which secrete a sticky resin (which is harvested to produce cannabis resin or hash). The female plant produces far more of this resin than the male.

It is not certain why trichomes – and the resin they produce – evolved in nature or what purpose they serve. A popular view is that the resin serves to help retain water by reducing evaporation – a view supported by the fact that, in general, hotter, drier climates lead to more resin production (Booth, 2003; Merlin, 1972 cited in Weisheit, 1992:56). Other theories suggest that the resin acts as a sun screen protecting the seeds and/or plant from harmful UV-B radiation (Booth, 2003; [www.overgrow.com](http://www.overgrow.com)<sup>66</sup>); to help the female trap pollen from the male (Booth, 2003); to deter or protect against insects, animals or some fungal infections ([overgrow website](http://overgrow.com)). Another theory postulated by a member of one of the on-line communities I monitored is that:

‘quite possibly, the most important reason for the evolution of the THC laden capitate-stalked trichomes is the intercession of man in the natural selection process, favoring genotypes that produce copious amounts of THC laden trichomes’ (list member)

– that is to say that cannabis produces THC to attract humans so we, in turn, will help the plant flourish! Such a view is held by many growers and activists (but definitely not a majority – even of those who have given thought as to why trichomes have evolved as they have) who cite ideological reasons associated with the plant and its natural occurrence and its effects on humans when consumed. The argument is certainly another example of the idea that many involved in cannabis cultivation see an ideological justification: here the argument is that the plant seems to have evolved a symbiosis with humanity, evidence that use of cannabis is beneficial to humans and therefore evidence that the prohibition of cannabis is morally unjustifiable. This argument, to me, doesn’t necessarily hold water – other organisms benefit from involvement with humans but are not of benefit to humans. The obvious examples would be viruses and parasites. However as with many of the ideological arguments we will encounter in this thesis the point is not so much that the argument is true, but that

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designs on t-shirts and other clothes etc.

<sup>66</sup> As this thesis was completed the overgrow website ceased to be available – apparently shut down by the Canadian Police at the beginning of February 2006 (various internet sources). The cached pages of the overgrow website were available at:

[www.google.com/search?q=cache:uRg4ajVED-QJ:www.overgrow.com+overgrow&hl=en&lr=&strip=1](http://www.google.com/search?q=cache:uRg4ajVED-QJ:www.overgrow.com+overgrow&hl=en&lr=&strip=1)

many of those involved in cannabis cultivation or campaigning for legalisation believe it to be true.

Whatever the real reasons behind the evolution of trichomes and their heavy production of THC-laden resin the knowledge of their existence, and role, and the conditions that cause them to flourish become very important to those growing cannabis as a drug crop.

The heliotropic cannabis plant regulates its development by sunlight. It grows in daylight hours, growing quickest when days are longest and brightest. When night time length increases and the plant receives around 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness each day the flowering cycle is triggered – as such flowering occurs in late summer/early autumn (around the autumn equinox) in natural growth settings. In equatorial regions when day-length is largely constant flowering can occur at any time (once the plant has reached maturity), hence the multiple cannabis crops each year. It is in the flowering stage, particularly for the female plant, and especially if it remains unfertilised, that the most resin (and therefore the most THC) is produced. When the female is fertilised seeds are produced and the plant's energies go into seed development rather than further growth or flower development – when unfertilised the female produces bigger and bigger flowers and more and more resin in an attempt to attract male pollen ('Mel', 2000). In these areas as well as in other aspects of climate and growing-condition control we can see how the cannabis grower can utilise knowledge of the plant in creating optimum drug production conditions. The indoor grower in particular can exercise great control over nutrient levels, moisture levels, air temperature and humidity and, using artificial light, light intensity and day-length – the latter enabling the grower to dictate growing and flowering stages of the plants life. The grower can also ensure the absence of male plants ensuring greater levels of drug production. Such techniques – and the extent to which they are utilised – are discussed later in this chapter.

### **3.2.1.4 Active ingredients**

The active ingredients – that is the elements that produce the psychotropic effects of cannabis, or the 'high' – are rather complex. Cannabis contains cannabinoids, chemicals unique in nature to the cannabis plant and which have a

psychotomimetic or psychedelic<sup>67</sup> effect on humans. There are well over 400 known chemical constituents of cannabis (and I have encountered sources which claim over 600), of which 60 or so have the form of a cannabinoid. The most important of these is  $\Delta^9$ -tetrahydrocannabinol or THC. It is the level of THC which differentiates legal hemp from illegal cannabis, which is looked for in identifying substances as cannabis in criminal proceedings, and which is most commonly measured in scientific studies into the properties and effects of cannabis. There often seems to be a misplaced assumption that THC is the only, or only important, psychedelic constituent of cannabis (for example in attempts to isolate THC for medical uses or in measuring only THC content when deciding the 'strength' of a cannabis sample) but this is simply not the case. Connoisseurs – both cannabis users and cannabis growers – have preferred strains of cannabis which have different balances of THC and the other active ingredients and as such give different psycho-active effects. However THC is the major active ingredient and, the exact science of both the plant and the drug being outside the scope of this thesis, it is THC which I will usually refer to (and have referred to) when talking about the active drug constituents of cannabis. THC (along with the other cannabinoids) is found throughout the plant, with the exception of the roots, stalk and seeds, but the highest concentration is found in the resin producing glands (the trichomes) and the resin itself.

Different varieties of cannabis produce different balances of cannabinoids and different strengths (i.e. amounts) of THC (and other cannabinoids). Cannabis breeding to suit not just conditions but to tailor the strength and nature of the high achieved from the plant is common and has been elevated to the level of high science amongst some members of the cannabis growing community (including those legally developing strains for medical use) and is particularly well established in Holland and California. Another factor (aside from the strain or breed) that influences the drug content of a given plant is the growing conditions. Hotter, drier climates produce more resin and hence more THC. Altitude also has an effect with, apparently, plants grown at higher altitudes producing more THC and hence, appropriately, a 'higher' high (Booth, 2003:14)!

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<sup>67</sup> Often, although strictly speaking erroneously, known as hallucinogenic.

UK growers may not have much choice over the altitude they grow at, but climate control is within their power.

### 3.2.1.5 Maximising drug production in cannabis growing

A central theme for most cannabis growers is maximising the drug return from their crop. There are two aspects to this – maximising the amount of THC (and other cannabinoids, and also the balance between the different cannabinoids) in the plant (concentrated in the flowers and the smaller leaves surrounding them) as a percentage of total mass and maximising the overall size of the plant (primarily the size of the flowering tops). As our discussion of the science of the plant has suggested female plants are better for drug production. Females produce more THC than males, and unfertilised females produce more still through their efforts to attract pollen. Unfertilised females do not develop seeds and so this higher strength variety of the drug – known as **sinsemilla** or **sensimilla**, from the Spanish *sin semilla* meaning ‘without seed’ – is easily identified. Other factors influencing the THC production are the genetic make up, or strain, of the plant. ‘Skunk’ is a general term<sup>68</sup> used to describe pedigree strains of high-potency cannabis usually grown indoors, under lights. Skunk bought on the market will almost invariably be sinsemilla, although skunk does not have to be sinsemilla and sinsemilla does not have to be of a premium ‘skunk’ variety. This difference in quality is reflected in prices paid for different varieties of cannabis as we shall see in *Chapter Seven*. The two aspects of maximising the drug output of plants is a key element of any cannabis grower’s methodology of growing. Although not all cannabis growers may appreciate the science behind the plant and maximising drug production many of them do and will employ this knowledge to maximum effect. And many, seemingly most, of the less knowledgeable growers learn the ‘tricks of the trade’ either consciously (i.e. through being told so by other growers or by books or other growing guides) or unconsciously (i.e. through purchasing equipment, fertilisers and the such which have been designed to maximise drug production for cannabis growers).

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Skunk’ was originally the name of a specific strain of cannabis and some die-hard connoisseurs still use the term in its original context however most cannabis users, dealers and growers – and most commentators – now use the word as a general term for any high-strength pedigree variety of cannabis.

### 3.3 Methods of cannabis cultivation in the UK

A would-be cannabis grower has a range of options as to how they grow their crop. At a basic level cannabis growing is easy and straight forward. Using the ‘natural’ method – planting a seed in the ground and letting it grow – involves minimal effort and can be moderately or even very successful in terms of quantity although quality (including potency) control can be very hit-and-miss. Alternatively a range of ‘artificial’ methods can be employed: plants can be grown in greenhouses or indoors where the grower can execute a degree of control over a range of environmental conditions. The actual method employed by a grower will represent a range of factors – the resources available to the grower and his personal preferences; the intended purpose of the crop (i.e. whether or not the cannabis is intended for the growers’ personal consumption, for social supply or for the commercial market, or even whether or not the cannabis is intended for harvest at all), and; the safety and security concerns of the grower.

#### ***3.3.1 Outdoor growing***

The most obvious distinction between growing methods – and one of the first decisions to be made by a grower – is whether to grow indoors or outdoors. The preference depends on the desired outcome and on the ideology of the grower, but the preferred method will not always be the method that is actually employed. Cannabis users who had a preference and/or were aware of the differences – particularly the heavier users and connoisseurs – usually cited a preference for cannabis grown outside in the ‘natural’ way – or maybe in a greenhouse but grown in soil and under natural light. This would appear to be partly for reasons of quality – naturally grown cannabis using organic methods and sun-light is perceived as being purer and more potent – and partly for aesthetic or ideological reasons – outdoor growing is seen as ‘nature’s way’. Outdoor growing also has the scope for bigger plants. Indoor growers’ plants will be restricted to a certain maximum size dependent on the available space whereas outdoor plants are restricted only by the plants genetic make-up, the quality (fertility) of the soil and how much light and water it receives. As one grower in a web-based forum said: “Growing outdoor is so much more fun [because] the

plant's are like 6 foot high monsters and they simply look...better.” However the preference to growing outside is rarely reflected in the reality. As another post on the same thread in the same forum commented: “betcha 50p the vast majority grow indoors, but not from choice... ..it would be lovely to have one big grow outdoors, or in a greenhouse to last the year.”

The reasons why many growers don't grow outdoors despite the preference are varied but basically boil down to practical considerations which outweigh any ideological position. Firstly many growers – particularly those in urban areas – simply do not have the outdoor space available. Although all the populations of growers I conducted research with showed a clear majority growing indoors – mirroring the findings of both the IDMU (Atha *et al.* 1997) and Hough *et al.* (2003) – this was particularly pronounced amongst the largely urban South Yorkshire sample. Secondly there is the purpose of the crop to consider, which relates strongly to the third factor – the degree of control the grower wishes to exercise over the plants. Practically all growers<sup>69</sup> worry about the risk of losing some or all of their potential crop, whether by compromising the quality or quantity of the harvest (through bad growing conditions, parasites, fungus or disease), or from theft, legal actions or social repercussions (these latter three factors being dependent on whether the crop is detected – and by whom), or any other way. All of these potential ‘growing pains’ are more severe for those for whom some kind of financial return is a major element in the motivation to grow and less worrying for those who are not financially motivated (see *Chapters Five* and *Six* respectively). All of these risk factors can be controlled to varying degrees by the grower although the amount of control varies depending on the growing method. The outdoor grower has less control over environmental conditions – and less chance to directly protect his crop which is, almost by definition, more visible to unwanted observers than that grown indoors<sup>70</sup>. On the other hand the outdoor grower, especially if not growing on his own land, has to worry less about any detection leading to legal (or social) repercussions as he will be less easily linked to the crop. In balance to these considerations we have

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<sup>69</sup> The exception being those ‘guerrilla growers’ discussed later in this chapter who grow as a form of political activism and never expect a harvest in the first place.

<sup>70</sup> There are two elements to this. Firstly the outdoor crop is not concealed from view in the way that an indoor crop can be, and secondly the outdoor crop – in natural growing conditions in the UK climate – has a longer growing cycle and so is visible for longer.

the purpose of the crop – where the financial incentive is a major element the grower will be less inclined to lose his crop to natural or human causes and so is less likely to grow outside. Equally the greater controls offered to the indoor grower mean higher quality yields and a more marketable product. These factors would seem to be of particular importance in a country like the UK which has a dense, largely urban, population. Outdoor growing, even on large commercial scales, appears to be much more common in countries like America, Australia and Canada – and in Central and Eastern Europe. Holland, the Mecca of Western cannabis growing, like the UK tends to host predominantly indoor cultivation. So despite the ideological preferences outdoor growing is less common than indoor growing – the Independent Drug Monitoring Unit found that 18% of their respondents who grew cannabis grew exclusively outside and 28% grew outside as well as indoors (Atha *et al.* 1997). Surveys I carried out on the two UK based cannabis cultivation web-forums showed that only 5% of growers grew exclusively outdoors (a further 27% grew mainly indoors but occasionally outdoors or in greenhouses and 9% regularly grew both indoors and outside). Those that did grow outside tended to fall into three broad categories (which reflect, to an extent, the broader typology of growers presented in the *Chapters Five and Six*) employing different growing methods – different approaches to the detection and control problems outlined above – and reflecting different motivational and ideological positions.

### **3.3.1.1 Gardeners**

Gardeners will cultivate a few plants in their own back-garden or some other available and reasonably safe piece of land. The number of plants will be kept small so as to mitigate the risk of detection: such growers reason that the chances of any serious penalty (i.e. a custodial sentence) *if* the plants are detected are minimal. These growers will tend not to be involved in any other cannabis cultivation at that moment and will generally not have any previous convictions that may count against them if they are detected. They will be primarily be ‘personal use’ or ‘social supply’ growers although a small quantity of any crop may be sold or otherwise traded. Plants may be well tended – certainly all available horticultural skill will be brought to bear – but hi-tech growing aids, including chemical pesticides and the like, will rarely be employed. Gardeners do

not worry over much about detection and would not be particularly troubled by failure of the crop for any reason: any successful crop is largely seen as a bonus with enjoyment and satisfaction being derived as much from the act of growing as from the resulting harvest. Such growers will nearly exclusively be users of cannabis and will largely get their cannabis from other sources – their own product may mean they do not have to buy cannabis from other sources for a while but the majority of their annual consumption will continue to be sourced from the black-market (or at least from friends).

### **3.3.1.2 Guerrilla growers**

Guerrilla growers plant cannabis where they can – on other people's or common land. This may involve actively planting seeds, cuttings or baby plants, or may simply involve the random scattering of seeds. There are two types of guerrilla grower – **activists** and **chancers** – both employing similar methods but differentiated by motivation and ideology.

The **activists**, who aim to make a political point or to promote cannabis, make no effort to nurture their plants or even to ever harvest them yet a lot of effort can go in to the distribution of seeds or plants. One pair of guerrilla activists I talked to in South Yorkshire would generally scatter seeds at random – making sure they always had 'a pocketful of seeds' so they could scatter them as and when they had the chance. This included parks, roundabouts, streets and gardens in the neighbourhoods they frequented. These two even went through a period, when both regularly travelling around the country, of trying to scatter some seeds near every station and in every town centre they visited. They also employed a more complex method where they attached small open containers of seeds to helium-filled balloons which were then released into the air to come down – and hopefully take root – wherever the wind took them. Other guerrilla growers would prepare 'seedballs' – balls of clay-heavy soil with seeds imbedded in them to be distributed as and where. The seedball would ensure that the seeds ended up in (or remained in) a suitable growing medium so that the seeds would stand a better chance of germination. This method is also employed by other activists with seeds from rare (and often legally protected, patented or 'owned') varieties of vegetables and other plants as a protest against the patenting and ownership of plant strains. This is one of many areas where cannabis growers are involved in

other forms of ideological or political protest or direct action and again illustrates how cannabis cultivation can be an ideological position.

**Chancers** employ the same methods as activists but hope to harvest the cannabis (or at least some of it) at a later date – primarily for personal use and some social supply (e.g. sharing with friends). As such they will make a greater effort to ensure the seed or seedling is planted correctly and may even go back to the plant or plants occasionally to check on their progress and carry out some basic maintenance such as removing competing weeds. They will certainly return to the growing site(s) at the end of the growing season to harvest their plants. For the chancer the trick is to find a good site or sites – planting in more than one location – thus improving the chances that at least some cannabis will be harvested even if some sites are discovered or are stricken by disease, hungry animals or some other natural cause of crop failure. Sites must be suitable for cultivation (i.e. sunny, not too wet etc) and accessible (and known) to the chancer yet inaccessible to potential detectors (who may steal the crop or report it to the police), which basically means somewhere other people rarely go. This often means growing in some wilderness area known to the grower, usually set away from any nearby paths or thoroughfares. A group of Welsh mountain-bikers I got to know planted one or two plants at periodic intervals along – or just off – some of their favourite trails. Even if none of the plants succeeded at least they would be enjoying themselves whilst checking the end-of-season results! The chancer hopes only to harvest cannabis for personal use for them and their friends, unlike the ‘farmers’ described below.

For all guerrilla growers the chances of any legal repercussions as a result of their cannabis growing activities are very slim. Firstly in most cases the chance of discovery of the plants by anyone was itself slim – although those growing in urban and sub-urban areas as a political statement actively sought a certain level of plant discovery in order that their message would be noted (as shall be demonstrated in the *Chapter Five*). Even if they were discovered (and recognised – many members of the public would not recognise a cannabis plant if they came across one although I suspect a sizeable proportion of the population would) the chances are that the plants would not be reported to the police (although they might be harvested by the discoverer). If reported the chances of linking the plants back to the grower would be very low (unless they were caught either

planting or harvesting them) and even if they were (although I know of no instances where this did happen) the guerrillas' chances of any serious repercussions (such as a custodial sentence or even a fine) would appear to be slim. All in all chances of detection leading to any repercussions (beyond losing the crop) were perceived, quite reasonably, to be practically zero. With such a low risk the fact that the crop may turn out to be both small and of relatively low quality was not seen to be a problem – like the gardeners discussed earlier any crop would be seen as a bonus.

### **3.3.1.3 Farmers**

Farmers are those outdoor growers who do actually strive for some kind of saleable harvest from their cannabis – that is to say that the intention is to grow cannabis to sell for profit. As such they pay more attention to ensuring a successful maturation and harvest which means paying attention to both horticultural and security issues. This means finding a private or secluded and sheltered growing spot – even more so than for guerrilla chancers as plant survival and maturation is deemed more important and also because farmers tend to grow greater numbers of plants on each growing site – and at least some repeat visits to ensure the well-being of the plants. One grower, who seemed fairly typical of this type of grower (although the total number of 'farmers' I encountered was very small) told me how he grew plants in the woods near the beach near his parental home on the Scottish East Coast. He would grow the plants – from seeds or cuttings – to a few inches high indoors and then transplant them to pre-selected sites in the local countryside in the late spring time. He described how he knew the land from childhood days. He would find some area in deep brush, clear the earth and plant the cannabis. He chose three or four separate but nearby sites each time so that even if some plants were discovered (although none ever were) he would have others that were not. He would cover his tracks on leaving the areas so that they would look undisturbed – the plants themselves would always be well hidden from any paths by intervening trees, bushes and undergrowth. The seedlings (first established indoors) would be started off covered by plastic bottles with the tops cut off to protect them from rabbits or deer. He would return two or three times in the first couple of weeks to keep the weeds down before removing the protective bottles – once established

the seedlings would out-grow weeds and should survive being nibbled – and to remove any male plants once they were mature enough to judge the sex<sup>71</sup>. After this initial period of maintenance the plants could then be left for the entire summer and only returned to around September when he would reap his harvest. Further visits to check on and maintain the crop are not necessary but can be beneficial: this same grower would occasionally make extra check-ups which on one occasion allowed him to identify a plant that had developed a fungal infection (known colloquially to growers as ‘weedrot’) and remove it before the infection had a chance to spread to the other plants at that location. On other growing occasions this grower did not worry about interim checks and although he did lose three plants to weedrot in one particularly wet year he always managed to successfully harvest the majority of plants. Although there was a constant but small threat of detection and theft the risk of detection and legal repercussions were limited to the planting period, the harvest period and – crucially in his view – the transporting of the harvest from grow sites to his residence at the end of the season. This task would be carried out late at night when it was dark and the chances of other people being around were lower. Both risk and effort of maintenance here can be seen to be higher than for the other types of outdoor grower, yet are still kept to a minimum whilst accompanied by a good chance of a successful, profitable crop. The grower cited above would harvest two or three ounces of cannabis per plant each year, which he recognised to be not of the best quality (he compared it negatively to ‘skunk’) but which would see him through a few months of personal cannabis use and enable him to sell a few ounces as well. This grower also frequently grew indoors.

The previous example could be seen to incorporate elements of guerrilla growing in his farming approach – growing for financial return and investing time and effort, but taking a chancer’s approach to choosing his growing sites. Another approach to ‘farming’ involved real farmers. **Diversifying farmers** are those farmers who turn to cannabis cultivation to supplement their legitimate (and often meagre) farming incomes. For these growers the effort and risk factors can

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<sup>71</sup> Sexing cannabis plants is very difficult before the flowering stage (by which time, if the intention is to weed out any males, it may be too late). The fact that this grower, and many others (but by no means all) could sex plants at such an early stage of growth reflects the detailed knowledge and experience many cannabis growers have – and the attention they pay both to their craft and to their crops.

both be kept to a minimum in ways similar to the example above – certainly I encountered a few stories of farmers in remote rural parts of the UK who would plant cannabis in hard-to-access valleys in spring for harvest at the end of the year. Risk of loss can be mitigated again by use of multiple sites; risk of legal repercussion by minimal contact with the crop. However other such diversifying farmers opt for a more risky approach – or have it forced upon them through shortage of utilisable hidden valleys. A common method would be to plant cannabis in the centre of fields of tall plants such as beans (as discussed earlier), to make the risk of visual detection almost nil, except maybe from the air (which is recognised as a big problem and major source of detection for American cannabis growers). Although this approach is more risky in terms of both detection and of any detection leading to serious legal repercussions the relative proximity and ease of access means the farmer can maintain the crop better, encouraging an improved quality and quantity of harvest and therefore more sizeable financial return. Diversifying farmers can employ all their farming know-how and agricultural equipment to ensure a reasonable quality and quantity of crop. Outdoor growing of this kind can happen on a very large scale – one case reported by the BBC involved the seizure of 1,500 cannabis plants in a field close to the M5 motorway. It reportedly took officers more than five hours to remove all the plants! (story on BBC news web-site<sup>72</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2002).

### ***3.3.2 Greenhouse growing***

The greenhouse offers a compromise between indoor and outdoor growing. It provides the grower with environmental control and limited protection against predators – be they animal or human – and against accidental pollination of females. Greenhouse growing was even rarer than outdoor growing in the IDMU surveys of cannabis growers (Atha, 1997) and in my own research. This seems to represent something of a change in recent years – certainly the FSS and the Police both told me that greenhouse-growing, along with cannabis growing in gardens and allotments, was more predominant in the 1980s. This may be a reflection on the increased opportunities for indoor growing (see below), or a reflection on changing policing tactics and priorities, or even a result of cannabis growers moving indoors in response to police action. It may even be a reflection

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<sup>72</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news)

on the fact that more and more people would now recognise cannabis plants (as the drug becomes more widely used, and more culturally ubiquitous, more people are going to know what they are looking at). Certainly the main drawback of greenhouse growing is that greenhouses are less safe being sited (usually) on one's own land and, by definition, being visible to passers-by (those who did grow in greenhouses tended to have very private gardens). Of course it is difficult to be certain as to why greenhouse-growing has apparently declined in popularity as I didn't interview many people who had ever used greenhouses.

Where I did encounter greenhouse grow-ops they were mainly conducted by those growers who were growing primarily for personal use or social supply reasons and who also had a more general interest in horticulture. Growers would produce one crop per year using greenhouses, reflecting the natural (outdoor) growing cycle. Greenhouses offer the possibility of growing particularly sizeable plants of very high quality – but this would be limited by the available space. Greenhouse growers are akin to the **gardeners** of above and, like gardeners, would employ all their available horticultural skills but would generally shun hi-tech and chemical growing assistance preferring to use organic and traditional growing methods. Greenhouse growing can be seen as a play-off with increased security issues and risk of detection accompanied by increased quality and quantity. As such those involved in greenhouse growing were unlikely to have criminal records that may count against them should they get caught growing cannabis.

Greenhouses are not really suitable for large scale commercial growing (although there may be limited financially-motivated distribution of cannabis grown in greenhouses) due to limitations on space and risk of detection. However one Norfolk based team of growers I spoke to did grow on a large scale using polythene tunnels normally used for the cultivation of strawberries. News reports from Italy suggest that commercially motivated greenhouse-based growing is quite common in some of the wine producing regions of southern Italy, seemingly with a strong Mafia link (various news sources). The key to successful commercial greenhouse-based growing might depend on secluded greenhouses – in relatively vast rural tracts such as southern Italy or East Anglia – and, to an extent, organised-crime links. Either way it doesn't seem to happen often on a large scale in the UK.

### ***3.3.3 Indoor growing***

Most cannabis growers conduct their activities indoors. The IDMU found that 71% of their cannabis-growing respondents grew indoors (compared to 23% growing outside and 14% growing in greenhouses<sup>73</sup>) in their 1999 survey which included a large section on cannabis cultivation. The evidence from them also suggests that this proportion has increased further in recent years (personal communications). My survey of two online cannabis growing forums showed that 55% grew cannabis only indoors with a further 27% growing ‘mainly’ indoors and 9% regularly growing both indoors and outdoors. The South Yorkshire group grew almost exclusively indoors, although some members grew both indoors and outdoors, indoors was the preferred option especially for commercially orientated cultivation (*Chapter Six*). Other evidence – my contacts elsewhere in the country, press coverage and reports from experts in the field – reflected this pattern of a significant majority of growers growing indoors, especially in urban areas. There are two main reasons for this; the space and resources available to the grower and the degree of control they wished to be able to exercise (both in terms of wanting to produce a top-quality crop and in wanting to keep it secure).

Indoor growing is the method of choice of the commercial (financially motivated) cannabis grower although some commercial growers (like the Scottish grower mentioned above) will grow outdoors (the grower mentioned grew sporadically both indoors and outdoors, sometimes at the same time, but most of his growing was conducted indoors). Equally not all indoor growers – probably not even most – are primarily motivated by financial returns. Indoor growing can be almost as simple as outdoor growing and many indoor growers who are growing primarily for themselves do no more than grow from seed in a flower-pot on a sunny window-sill. Indeed for many growers this is their first (and often only) experience of cannabis growing. Like the gardeners and greenhouse growers mentioned above growing maintenance is limited to simple transferable horticultural skills. For others – and especially for those with commercial intent – more hi-tech methods are employed: there is a noticeable correlation between effort (and technology) put into the growing operation and

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<sup>73</sup> Totals come to more than 100% because some growers operate in more than one type of

outcomes in terms of crop size and quality. The IDMU surveys show a steady increase in the use of high-tech methods such as grow lights and **hydroponics** systems between the years of 1994 and 2000 (reported in Hough *et al.* 2003) – a situation that reflects both the increased availability of such equipment and also the increased dissemination of information on how to use these techniques.

Indoor growers, then, have many decisions to make as to what methods they are going to employ in cultivating cannabis which will be influenced by their available resources and skills, the quality and quantity of cannabis they are after (and the intended purpose of the crop), their fears relating to getting busted (detected), and the amount of effort they want to put in!

The first requirement is space. Cannabis plants, as we have seen, can grow many metres tall. But this is not necessary for a successful drug crop – one particular growing technique known as ‘sea of green’ actually relies on growing many plants but each to only a foot or so in height. Indeed the number of plants is less important to the final production total than the total space: within its maximum dimensions a cannabis plant (or plants) will grow, in time, to fill the available space (subject of course to the other growing conditions). Space is particularly relevant to those with financial motivations – those intending to profit from their cannabis – although even small-scale indoor growers can make a sizeable return on their effort and investment (see *Chapter Six*). For indoor growers the size of the growing area can range from a windowsill with a plant or two in pots (usually intended for personal use, or maybe to share with friends). At the other end of the scale commercial grow-ops often utilise warehouses and barns (or other rented or ‘disused’ industrial or agricultural buildings), or domestic houses (empty or occupied). In between these extremes growers utilise sheds, attics, cellars and wardrobes – or whatever other space they have access to.

Not that a grower even needs this much space to cultivate cannabis, whether growing with commercial intent or not. Indeed the basic unit of space for the indoor cannabis grower seems to be the wardrobe – the most common grow-room set-up I witnessed was the bedroom wardrobe or cupboard-under-the-stairs with between two and half-a-dozen plants – a set-up that was also common in media reports and the view that cupboard-growing is the most prevalent was

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location.

echoed by both the police and the IDMU when I spoke to them. Other growers built specially designed cabinets ranging from about two-foot a side up to maybe 30 square feet demonstrating skills in carpentry and, with in-built lighting and watering systems, in electrics and plumbing.

Sometimes growers utilise more than one grow-room in their grow-op – especially in larger scale commercial set-ups. This may involve having plants at the same stage of growth in different locations but it is common, especially for those growers who are particularly into their cannabis growing (whether or not with commercial intent) to have different rooms for different stages of growth – usually one room (or more) for plants in the ‘growth’ or ‘veg’ stage of development (i.e. between seedling and flowering) and one (or more) for the ‘bloom’ stage (i.e. when flowering). This distinction is based on the different lighting requirements of the different growing stages of the plants cycle. It will be remembered that cannabis flowers when the day-length approaches twelve hours – a fact that indoor growers utilise to regulate their crops’ development. But we shall return to the issue of lighting shortly. The use of multiple rooms allows the grower to decrease the time between harvests as different crops can be staggered – as such some growers may be harvesting some plants as often as once a month. Some growers also employ a third room (or set of rooms) for seedlings, cuttings and **mother plants**.

Which brings me nicely to the next issue for the indoor grower. Having found space the next vital ingredient for growing cannabis is, well, cannabis. Cannabis, like other plants, can be grown either from seed or from cuttings taken from existing plants. Seeds are readily available – they are not illegal in the UK. Even if they were seeds are also available from imported ‘**bush**’ cannabis and many growers, especially those just starting out on the path of domestic drug production, grow their first crop from seeds taken from (usually imported) cannabis they have bought on the black market (‘bush’ or non-sinsemilla herbal cannabis). Ten years ago imported bush was the major source of seed for UK growers with 49% of growers starting their plants from this source. By 2000 this had fallen to 21% (IDMU, cited in Hough *et al.* 2003) – a trend which correlates with the decline in market share for imported bush cannabis (Hough *et al.*, 2003). My own research would suggest that such seeds are primarily used by first-time growers and/or by those who are growing for non-financial reasons. At the same

time the use of 'pedigree' seeds – obtained from head-shops or mail order and advertised in magazines and on the internet – rose from 35% to 57% (IDMU, cited in Hough *et al.*, 2003). Seeds are easily obtainable but have certain drawbacks. There is no guarantee of what sex the plant will be – females are preferred by growers as we saw earlier – and no guarantee that seeds will even germinate. With seeds taken from imported bush there is no guarantee of the quality or strain of cannabis either. Using seeds supplied by a reputable seed seller – and many seed sellers take pride in their reputations – mitigates these risks. Pedigree seed suppliers can guarantee the strain and quality of the plants and offer better guarantees on germination. Some even claim to offer 'feminised' seeds guaranteed to consist of a greater than 50% proportion of female plants.

A better way to guarantee both the sex and quality of a plant is for the grower to use cuttings which may be obtained from other growers or from a growers' own previous successful female plant. Use of cuttings tends to reflect a greater experience in growing and a greater affiliation with the cannabis plant (i.e. both horticultural interest and identification with 'cannabis culture'). More experienced growers, and those with greater affiliations to horticultural/ecological ideals, will be more likely to take cuttings. These growers – especially those growing for an extended period of time (and many growers only grow intermittently, or even just the once) – will often maintain a 'mother plant'. That is a female plant of known quality which is artificially kept in the 'growth' stage (prevented from flowering by controlling the 'day period' of a lighting cycle) and from which cuttings can be taken to produce other cannabis plants to be grown to full maturity as and when required. Mother plants can last a long time although continual use of the same mother plant can, according to some growers, lead to a decrease in quality of later crops and, reportedly, increase the eventual risk of developing hermaphrodite plants.

I have mentioned already how growers can manipulate lighting to control the growth patterns of their plants and this is perhaps the crucial point with much indoor growing – especially commercial growing. The most common hi-tech accessory for the indoor grower is the grow-light which very simply serves as an artificial sun, only without the risk of cloud cover. The IDMU showed an increase in the use of high-power grow lighting from 17% (of cannabis growers) to 41% between 1994 and 2000 (Hough *et al.* 2003:6). There are a range of

lighting options available – simple fluorescent tubing, Metal Halide or High Pressure Sodium lights – with some growers employing a combination of high intensity Halide or Sodium bulbs along with fluorescent UV (blue-spectrum light) tubing to mimic the UV from the sun's rays and improve crop quality. Lighting serves two main purposes – firstly and simply it encourages maximum growth. Bulbs are available in a range of strengths – grow rooms that I saw commonly used 400 or 600 watt bulbs but others went up to 1000 watts or more – with stronger light encouraging faster growth. Equally increased periods of light would encourage extra growth: some growers would use 24 hour lighting for the 'growth' phase of cannabis growing to encourage maximum plant size in minimal time although it was more common to use regulated 'day' lengths of 18-20 hours. This brings us to the second purpose of artificial light – regulating the growing cycle. Once plants are established (either waiting for seeds to grow into viable seedlings or waiting for cuttings to establish their own root systems) cannabis growers deal with two phases of cultivation. The first phase is the 'grow' cycle where the plant develops in size. In nature this is the period from spring through to mid-late summer. The indoor grower will aim to grow a plant as big as possible/viable/desirable in this period using an artificial day/night cycle (or 24 hour day cycle) as mentioned above. The second phase is the 'flower' or 'bloom' cycle. This is the stage in nature when the plant flowers and produces most of its resin (as discussed in the first section of this chapter) and is triggered around the period of the Autumn equinox – when day and night are approaching similar length. The indoor grower can trigger this stage of the plant as and when desired (i.e. when grown to the desired size or when time- or financial-pressures dictate) by switching their artificial day/night cycle to twelve hours on and twelve hours off. Lighting cycles are regulated by most growers through use of timer switches although some growers may resort to manual on-off control and others may use high-tech computer-controlled systems. The efficiency of lights can be, and often is, improved by lining the walls of the growing space with a substance called 'Mylar' (which is like a smooth, thin tin-foil) that reflects light back onto the plant.

In nature the whole cycle of cannabis growth takes a full season (i.e. 'Spring' to late 'Summer'/early 'Autumn' away from equatorial regions) – as does outdoor growing in the UK. When cultivated as a drug crop in traditional producer

nations tropical climates can enable two or even three growing cycles (and hence two or three crops) in a year. Using artificial indoor lighting the growth cycle – from cutting to harvest – and specially bred varieties of cannabis the growth cycle for plants will be about three months or, with specially bred varieties and certain techniques, even less. One popular strain of cannabis in South Yorkshire, bred from a combination of *Cannabis Indica* and *Cannabis Sativa* lineage, had a grow cycle of about 10-12 weeks. This was broken down into about 6 weeks on the ‘grow’ cycle of ‘day’ lengths of 18 or more hours and about 4 weeks on the ‘flower’ cycle. Another week or two may be added to the cycle as the period in which cuttings are taken and encouraged to take root. The growth stage in particular could be varied either way with a shorter cycle producing smaller plants, but more quickly, and a longer cycle producing bigger plants but over a longer time period. From this it can be seen that the indoor grower has the potential to produce five or more crops in a year if they so wish. My observations in South Yorkshire would suggest that for those growers who do grow continuously or near continuously four cycles a year would be an ‘average maximum’ with three or four cycles being common. Growing more frequently would be seen by many to be counter-productive in that the total effort involved is greater but the total drug production would be about the same, although a greater number of crops means greater availability of fresh cannabis, with freshness being prized by many users. Of course those utilising multiple growing areas can stagger harvests and overlap growth and bloom stages enabling them to crop even more frequently. But the total amount of cannabis growable by an individual would depend on the area available multiplied by the number of crops they could grow back-to-back in a year for their preferred strain. Producing more frequent crops by overlapping the different stages does not increase the total production in a year – each individual crop will be that much smaller (utilising, for example, half the total space but harvesting twice as often).

The use of lights to both encourage growth and dictate flowering sounds fairly straight forward – and is in theory. However in practice there is room for error. More than one grower in my research harmed a crop through light pollution – the dark period of the artificial day-night cycle needs to be completely dark. One grower told me how he messed up the flowering phase of a crop by forgetting to turn his bed-room light off at night when the plants in his cupboard were

supposed to be in the dark. The light leaking in, although not strong, was enough to stunt the flowering of the plant and thus reduce the quantity, quality and hence value of the crop. Other bedroom-based growers would sit up late at night playing computer games thus compromising the integrity of the 'night' phase of the lighting cycle.

The actual medium the grower decides to grow his plants in is another area which has seen an increase in high-tech methods. Between 1994 and 2000 the IDMU measured a trebling (from 6% to 19%) in the proportion of growers using hydroponic cultivation systems (Hough *et al.* 2003). Hough *et al.* themselves reported a 50/50 split between hydroponic and organic growers. Strictly speaking hydroponic systems have no medium other than water in which the roots are in but many growers who claim to use hydroponic systems actually use rock-wool or some other soil substitute. Purists maintain that organic growing methods produce better quality, and more potent, cannabis although again there is some confusion over use of the term – to some 'organic' means without chemical feed, to others 'organic' means grown in soil. The advantage of a hydroponic system is that the roots get unhindered access to water and any food-stuff therein which leads to a greater uptake of nutrients and thus a better plant. The grower can also regulate what nutrients are available in the water much more readily than when using soil. Hydroponics are the medium of choice for the grower with a scientific interest in cultivation – whatever their reasons for growing – and are used by growers operating all sizes of grow room. Large scale commercial operators have been known to use hydroponic systems although FSS and police experts say that soil is still the most common medium across the range of growers, including the large scale commercial set-ups. Hydroponic systems seem to be most popular amongst small to mid scale growers who have a keen interest in horticulture and cannabis culture in general and for whom a sizeable financial return is not the sole aim.

The hydroponic grower needs a regulated, often automated, water supply – the soil grower may or may not use such a system, alternatively watering the plants manually as one would with any house plant. The hydroponic grower needs to add nutrients to the water as there is no soil to supply these – again the soil grower may or may not add nutrients (the use of common commercially available plant feeds such as 'Baby-bio' is quite common for small scale indoor soil-based

growers). When nutrients are used there are a variety of specialist products on the markets with unsubtle names like 'Cannagro'. These specialist products tend to come in packs of two or four bottles. Two bottle packs contain one set of nutrients for the grow cycle and one for the bloom cycle – four-bottle pack use two separate pre-prepared nutrient mixes for each cycle – the grower mixes the two together as and when required giving a fresher and more effective nutrient mix. Either way the nutrients are mixed with water and fed to the plants at regular intervals – some growers use timer-controlled pump titration systems. Sometimes peroxide or similar chemicals are also added to the water to improve oxygen levels. There is something of a divide amongst growers as to the use of chemical nutrient supplements. On the one hand those with an ecological bent and/or a purist approach to cannabis prefer not to use chemicals. They will prefer to use organic growing mediums and natural fertilisers (e.g. compost). On the other hand hydroponic systems offer greater control over plant development and are an interesting challenge to those of a horticultural persuasion. A compromise employed by some growers who have the interest in hydroponics and a desire to produce top-quality cannabis (for sale of otherwise) but do not want their product polluted by residual chemicals is to stop adding nutrients to the plants a few days before harvest is due and instead feed pure water through the system to leach or 'flush' the residual chemicals. An interesting variation on this theme was those growers who add traces of cordial or fruit-juice to the cleansing water fed through at the end of the grow to add a hint of fruit flavour and aroma to the harvested product. Amazingly this works producing a cannabis that, when smoked, has a fruity smell and taste. One grower I talked to took this one step further feeding his plants a cherry-brandy solution in the final stages of cultivation (he refused to divulge the exact method) producing a crop so pungent that he had to pack his cannabis in triple layers of shrink-wrap – and even then you could clearly smell the cherry-brandy-scented-cannabis through the packaging, from a distance. Again you could taste and smell the cherry brandy in the cannabis smoke.

As with high-powered lighting systems there is room for high-tech feeding systems to back-fire. Unless the nutrient-rich water supply is completely protected from the light algae can develop which consumes the nutrient and risks infecting the plants.

As well as regulating light, water and nutrient supplies the experienced grower can regulate the environment in other ways. High intensity lights also produce a lot of heat which, with the water supplies, can lead to high levels of humidity. Whilst high temperatures are generally welcomed there is a danger of scorching the plants. As was mentioned earlier dry conditions are favourable to the production of THC rich resin: humidity can therefore reduce the potency of the crop. Temperatures, humidity and air flow (plants, of course, need air to photosynthesise and to respire) are often regulated through the use of electric fans. Carbon-dioxide is sometimes released into the air to improve the plants photosynthesis and development. Failure to regulate temperature and humidity can have worse side effects than merely reducing growing efficiency. Hot and humid conditions also increase the risk of fungal infection and may encourage parasites.

The risk of fungal infection – the dreaded ‘weedrot’ – is mitigated by climate control backed up, if necessary, by chemical treatments. However the real worry for many growers is infestation, with spider-mite being an un-welcome, yet common, guest. The risk of infestation is increased for those growers who come into contact with other growers and grow-rooms as mites and similar can be transferred by people or their clothes. Spider mite and other bugs have the potential to ruin entire crops. Chemical pesticides are readily available – and widely used especially by those who rate profit over other considerations. However for the more ecologically minded grower, and for many connoisseurs, adding such chemicals is anathema. For these growers ecological pest-control methods are much more preferable – these may include using friendly bugs to consume unfriendly ones or growing carnivorous plants alongside the cannabis. Carnivorous plants not only eat stray insects they also increase the humidity which discourages bugs in the first place – the flip side of course is that higher humidity increases the risk of fungal infection and decreases the production of resin.

Indoor growers are not easy to categorise by their methods in the way that outdoor growers are. There are a range of variables that the indoor grower has control over and a range of options available for each of these variables. However there were certain observable correlations between the chosen options which are worth commenting on. In essence the methods employed by indoor

growers can be viewed along two axes. Firstly, and most pertinently, there is variance in technology ranging from low-tech growers (using minimal equipment) to high-tech growers who employ lights, pumps, fans, carbon-filters<sup>74</sup> and even computers. Secondly they can be viewed on an axis ranging from organic (using soils, traditional fertilisers and natural methods of pest-control) to chemical (using hydroponic growing mediums, and chemical feeds and pest-controls). These two axis obviously relate to each other some what. Certainly low-tech growers are likely also to be organic growers – although high-tech yet strictly organic growers also exist.

### 3.4 Harvest

Of course the point of growing for the vast majority of cannabis growers (we can exclude here the guerrilla ‘activist’ growers) is to produce harvestable cannabis suitable for consumption as a drug. This aim should be attainable regardless of the grow-op set-up although attention to detail whilst growing will lead to a larger harvestable crop. Harvest can be something of a social affair often involving a team of people working together. For larger scale grow-ops this is necessarily so. For smaller operations growers still like to share the experience – partly to spread the work around and partly to celebrate, and show-off, a successful crop. The harvest process will often be accompanied with alcohol consumption, cannabis smoking and background music or TV, especially for the smaller growers operating out of cupboards or rooms in their own houses. A key ideology of much of cannabis culture generally is in the shared experience: cannabis is usually, and certainly traditionally, a social drug.

The actual process of harvesting involves, firstly, cutting the plants down. For each plant the branches are then cut off the main stem. A ‘good’ branch will have a long clump of flowers (‘**top bud**’) at the top end with smaller clusters of flowers along the branch, thinning out towards the stem end. Branches nearer to the top of the plant generally have more impressive ‘top bud’ – this can consist of six to twelve inches (or more) of dense flowers. A good branch with a long, dense top bud is sometimes referred to as a ‘donkey’s dick’ in reference to its shape and size! The thinner collections of flowers at the stalk ends of the

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<sup>74</sup> Carbon-filters remove many air-borne carbon-based particles – the effect, for the cannabis grower, is to reduce the smell of the grow-op.

branches (and on the entirety of the lower branches, those receiving the least light) are often known as '**bottom bud**'. Each branch is then trimmed – this involves the removal of the larger and mid-sized leaves from the branches and the protruding tips of the smallest leaves. This should leave just the buds themselves and the small leaves that surround them – the bits of the plant with the highest concentration of THC – in a conical shape. Branches are then hung up to dry, often on home-made 'clothes-lines'. Sometimes growers only remove the biggest leaves on the first trim, leaving the medium and small leaves until after the drying process so that they form a cocoon around the buds. This is believed to prevent the unnecessary loss of THC and other cannabinoids in the drying process. Drying can take a week or so in a well aired space although this can be accelerated with the use of fans and heaters to accelerate evaporation and improve air-flow. However there is a danger of over-drying the crop when using heaters leaving a brittle, dry cannabis which tastes different and doesn't smoke as well. It is not unknown for commercial growers to spray an over-dried or 'burnt' crop with water to mask the poor quality so that the damaged crop can still be sold at market value. The optimum is a bud which is dry enough to smoke (in a cannabis cigarette or pipe) whilst still moist enough to taste 'smooth' when smoked.

Once dried the branches are trimmed again – this time the buds are removed from the stalk (although an impressive 'donkey's dick' may be left intact for aesthetic reasons). Purchasers, especially heavy smokers and connoisseurs, don't like to pay for stick – cannabis being (usually) purchased by weight. At the end of the process the grower will have two or three grades of cannabis. Firstly we have the trimmed top-bud. This is the most sought after and most valuable part of the crop. For the commercially minded grower the vast majority of this will be sold although some will be kept back for the enjoyment of the grower(s) and their friends/acquaintances. Then there is the bottom bud – less sought after and less valuable although there may be a market for it at a reduced price and/or to friends and colleagues of the grower. Usually most of this will be kept for the grower and his friends and helpers. Finally there is the '**shake**' which consists of the leaves and pieces of bud which have come off with the leaves, and the sweepings from the floor (usually newspaper or polythene is put down for the harvest and trimming process). This is generally not saleable and will usually be

thrown away although some growers will keep shake for personal use (or for distribution to friends), either to smoke or to prepare in some other way (see below).

It is usual for the cannabis grower – commercial or otherwise – to reward those that assist in the harvesting process. As well as supplying beer and cannabis for the actual harvesting session the grower will reward his helpers with some cannabis – usually a fairly generous share of the top bud (relative to the total crop and the work done) and as much shake as they may want. In commercial set-ups any harvesting assistants may also receive a financial reward. Another, perhaps dubious, reward derived from the act of harvesting is getting ‘passively’ high. The constant contact with the cannabis and inhalation of the air in the room leads to harvesters getting a large dose of cannabinoids aside from anything they may be smoking at the time. The effects can be quite extreme and the inexperienced harvester, or those harvesting large crops, can get very stoned whilst cutting and trimming the plants. With any cannabis they may be smoking and also any alcohol consumption it is not unknown for harvesters to get so stoned that they pass-out, vomit or feel ill or paranoid! With this in mind some harvesters of large scale commercial crops wear gloves and face-masks when preparing the plants so that the passive consumption of cannabis does not distract them from the job in hand.

As well as the traditional preparation of drying cannabis (usually for smoking purposes although some users consume cannabis in food or drink preparations) some cannabis growers experiment with other preparations for some or all of their crop. I mentioned earlier the preparation of industrial grade hemp in milk or butter to extract a viable drug product from a supposedly drug-free strain of the plant and this can also be done with home-grown cannabis, cannabinoids being fat soluble. The milk preparation was not a common one, but many growers would use some of their crop to produce ‘skunk butter’ – cannabis dissolved in heated butter or cooking oil – which can be used in cooking. Another common preparation would involve adding cannabis to spirits – usually vodka. I have seen this done with Absinthe which produces a particularly potent, some might say lethal, drug/alcohol cocktail. Some growers would use some of their prime-grade top bud in such preparations whereas others would use their bottom bud and/or shake seeing this as a good use of otherwise sub-standard cannabis. The alcohol

leaches the cannabinoids from the plant material over time – the consensus would seem to be that the longer you leave the mixture the better but that this should be at least a month. The result is an alcoholic beverage that also gets you high and, so it is reported, also tastes surprisingly nice.

Another preparation which some of my more experienced and more knowledgeable growers experimented with was the production of resin (hash), ‘pollen’, or ‘nederhash’. Strictly speaking these are three different cannabis formulations although the terms seem to be somewhat interchangeable. Hash is the resin of the plant and is the major form of cannabis in the import market (being more potent and more compact, weight for weight, than herbal cannabis). Traditional methods of harvesting hash include rubbing the plant, particularly the flowering tops, between the hands and scraping off the resin that accumulates on the skin. This – the build up of resin on the hands – happens during the harvesting process and it is common for harvesters to scrape the resin off their hands and load it into joints during and immediately after the harvest session. It is rare (I certainly didn’t encounter it) for hash production in this way to be attempted on any larger scale in the UK as it is very time consuming, especially if one hoped to produce any sizeable quantity.

Pollen is a strange term – true pollen comes from the male plants which, in domestic production, are usually removed and which are generally considered to be of significantly lesser quality. However a substance known as pollen, or nederhash, is produced by sieving the flowering tops (and other plant material), sometimes after freezing the material first. The idea is that the THC crystals and fine material from the flowers – the strongest parts of the plant – can be sifted out and then compacted into a greenish-brown powdery material of particularly high potency material. Some growers did this with some of their top bud, others used their bottom bud and shake (although shake does not produce much ‘pollen’). Any ‘pollen’ produced in this way would be incredibly potent and would be prized by the grower to be kept for personal use or for use with friends.

### ***3.4.1 Productivity***

The amount of cannabis produced by an individual plant depends on a number of factors including the strain of the plant, nutrient levels, lighting, water, space and time spent in the growing and (to a lesser extent) flowering stages. As such citing

average yields is fairly meaningless. What is relevant is how much cannabis can be produced in a specific area in a specific time. This still varies by the strain of plant and the skill of the grower. Besides the quantity of cannabis produced may not be as important as the quality –the amounts of ‘top bud’, ‘bottom bud’, ‘shake’ and/or ‘bush’. Bush is normally grown outdoors and when harvested is subject to less rigorous standards of trimming and grading. Sinsemilla top bud is worth far more per unit weight than bottom-bud or bush, and both of these are more valuable than shake. Outdoor growers I spoke to cited ‘average’ figures of about one to four ounces of bush per plant, with one claim of 19 ounces off a ‘nine foot monster’ of a plant. More experienced growers, those growing in better conditions and those who paid more attention to the plants during the growing season tended to get larger crops. Indoor growers – limited for space but controlling growing conditions – varied in their yield claims depending on the aims of the growing operation. Those growing predominantly for personal use (see *Chapter Five*) would yield up to 3 or 4 ounces per plant maximum. The more commercially-orientated growers I encountered, especially those with the benefit of experience (whether their own or that of a growing partner, see *Chapter Six*) would cite average figures of 4-10 ounces for plants grown on an (average) three month growing cycle. Those using a shorter growing cycle and growing smaller plants (but often growing more of them) would cite lower figures per plant but would harvest more frequently. The quality of the cannabis grown indoors – usually both sinsemilla and skunk – would be markedly higher than for that grown outdoors, a difference reflected in the market price.

### 3.5 A summary of grow-ops and the grow cycle

It will be obvious from the preceding discussion of growing methods that growing can be a very complex business for the hi-tech indoor grower (which would include most commercial growers). A grow room can be no more than a space by a window but will more likely involve a complex system of lights, irrigation and climate control, sometimes spread over more than one room each tailored to a different stage of the growing cycle. Cannabis can be started from seed but is often started from cuttings from a ‘mother plant’. After a week or so cuttings are placed into a climate that encourages maximum growth and when the

plant has reached the desired pre-flowering size<sup>75</sup>, or after a certain length of time in the growth cycle, the plant is introduced to a climate that encourages it to flower. After the flowering cycle is completed (the little hair-like trichomes on the flower turn from a white colour to a brownish-orange colour when the flowers are fully developed – and the THC content is at its peak) the plants are cut down, trimmed of the bigger leaves, and hung up to dry. Further trimming occurs when the plant has dried out. The flowering tops produce the best grade cannabis and these may or may not be sold (although at least some will be kept for the use of those involved in the growing and harvesting). The lesser quality buds from the lower parts of the plant, and the ‘shake’ or leaves and other detritus, will usually be kept for the use of those involved in the growing although some may be sold or they may be prepared in some kind of food or drink or for the making of hash or ‘pollen’.

It is clear that at each and all of these stages cannabis growers benefit from previous experience and/or the accumulated knowledge of other cannabis growers and horticultural experts. This knowledge is disseminated by personal experience, word-of-mouth, internet forums and information sites, a variety of cannabis-growing literature (magazines, books etc) and even relevant academic literature (particularly in the plant sciences). Many involved in cannabis growing are very good at what they do – this in part, for some, reflects the improved profits available for the commercially minded grower. For others it reflects, or also reflects, the passion for cannabis and the association with and support for the ideologies associated with both the drug and the plant.

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<sup>75</sup> The plant continues to grow during the flowering cycle.

## **4 – Fertile Ground:**

### **An introduction to UK cannabis growers**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

We have looked so far at the extent and nature of cannabis cultivation within the UK. We have looked also at the methods employed in growing cannabis. This chapter turns the focus of attention back towards those involved in domestic marijuana production: the growers themselves. Here I will focus on the process of becoming a cannabis grower, exploring what the necessary conditions are for somebody to embark on a cannabis growing adventure. This will focus on the physical – exactly what is needed to be able to grow cannabis – and the personal – what sort of person turns to cannabis growing and what motivates them to do this. Essentially we will begin to explore two questions: *who* grows cannabis, and *why*?

#### **4.2 Becoming a Cannabis Grower**

For some cannabis growers domestic cultivation is a one-off experiment, for others it is a regular occurrence, even an integral part of their lives. Some stick with the same methods throughout their cannabis growing careers whereas others adapt and refine their techniques to meet their needs and to reflect their experience. But for now I will focus on one aspect of the individual growing experience that is common to all growers – becoming a cannabis grower.

The act, or process, of becoming a grower can be seen to consist of three elements or sets of criteria – the ‘Who’, ‘Why’ and ‘How’ elements. The ‘Who’ represents the demographic aspect – what types of people get involved in cannabis growing and what specific criteria, if any, are common to or even needed by anyone who gets involved in marijuana production. The ‘Why’ element is the motivation behind becoming a grower – the reasons for getting involved in this particular criminal activity. The ‘How’ consists of the practical issues of actually getting started in cannabis growing – the first ‘grow-op’. In simple terms we can say that for an individual act of cannabis growing to occur we need a person or persons wanting to grow (a willing participant), a reason or reasons for wanting to do so (a motivation) and the opportunity for an act of

growing to take place (an opportunity). In broader criminological terminology I am suggesting a rational actor theory of criminality (see e.g. Hopkins Burke. 2001). The assumption here is that becoming a cannabis grower is an act of personal choice. Few people are forced into cannabis cultivation<sup>76</sup> and I do not believe that anyone is predetermined to grow marijuana! On the one level we can see, as with most other crimes, an offender (cannabis grower) needs both opportunity and motivation to embark on a growing event. On another level, perhaps within that ‘motivation’ element, the anticipated benefits from growing cannabis must be seen by the individual grower to outweigh the potential harms (such as the risk of getting caught).

### ***4.2.1 Opportunity***

The opportunity element of this equation is perhaps the easiest to deal with, and so I will discuss it first. To grow cannabis one needs some growing equipment, some space to grow and some knowledge of how to grow. As the previous chapter demonstrated all three of these can be very simple or very complicated. Almost everyone has the opportunity to conduct very simple cannabis cultivation: all that is needed is a flower pot or patch of ground, some soil, some light, and some cannabis seeds. Most people have sufficient knowledge to put some seeds in some soil to initiate plant growth. However growing cannabis of any quality or in any quantity is a bit harder – having access to sufficient space, necessary raw materials, and detailed knowledge as required to produce cannabis in any quantity or of any quality depends on certain specific opportunities.

#### ***4.2.1.1 Space***

Almost everybody has access to sufficient space to grow some cannabis. Most people will have sufficient space (indoors or out) to grow some good quality cannabis. As mentioned in the previous chapter the standard unit for indoor growing appears to be the wardrobe or cupboard-under-the-stairs. It is possible, as we shall see in *Chapter Six*, to make reasonable financial returns from such a

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<sup>76</sup> As will be seen in *Chapter Six* at least one of my interviewees was coerced, under threat of death, to maintain an existing involvement in marijuana growing. There are undoubtedly many examples where individuals have felt some pressure to get involved in cannabis growing – maybe for financial or medical necessity, or through pressure from peers or loved ones. However even in these cases participation is seen to be a choice.

small set-up if the grower is financially motivated. However if a grower wants to conduct operations on a large scale he must have access to the space to reflect this. Not just room, but room located in a place where security issues – prevention of detection or of damage – can be adequately addressed. To be a cannabis grower, acquisition of space is easy. To be a grower on any scale it gets harder.

#### **4.2.1.2 Materials**

Equally most people have access to the necessary equipment to grow some cannabis. Indeed for the outdoor grower there isn't any necessary equipment given that light, soil and water are all provided by nature. Anybody can get hold of seeds as we saw in the previous chapter.

However once again quantity and/or quality of cannabis produced depends on needs that are harder to meet. Having said this the necessary equipment for successful cannabis cultivation is readily available to anyone. Lights, nutrients, water pumps, hydroponic systems and the rest can be purchased from specialist shops – be it horticultural specialists or head-shops – or, as with seeds, via mail-order. Growing containers, compost, nutrients etc can be purchased from any garden suppliers or outdoor specialist. Seeds are readily available via mail-order or from head shops, or from cannabis growing or using friends, or from non-sinsemilla cannabis bought on the black market. There is also a ready market in second-hand growing equipment amongst and between growers, and many growers take pride in making their own equipment. Many growers, as we shall see in *Chapter Six*, sell their equipment on after successful growing operations as they duck out of growing for a while or replace or upgrade their old equipment with profits from previous grow-ops. Another source of equipment – to the oft-expressed disgust of the right-wing tabloid press – is from police auctions of equipment confiscated from previously busted growers! The only 'equipment' encountered in cannabis cultivation that is not readily available legally would be cannabis cuttings. These tend to be used only by experienced growers and are either self-produced or acquired from other growers. Either way they reflect as much the acquisition of knowledge as of equipment. Knowledge will be dealt with shortly, for now let it be recognised that the equipment and other raw

materials necessary for cannabis cultivation are readily available to anyone who wants to get involved.

#### **4.2.1.3 Knowledge**

Again basic horticultural knowledge is available to all – and possessed by most – but knowledge sufficient to produce good quality cannabis is rarer. But for those who seek it specialist knowledge is easy to come by – on the internet, in specialist books or magazines, or by word-of-mouth from friends or acquaintances already knowledgeable about marijuana production. Two of the web-sites on which I conducted e-ethnographic fieldwork were devoted to growers sharing their own knowledge and equipment – be it horticultural knowledge, breeding tips, technical knowledge (relating to more hi-tech growing equipment) or strategies for law avoidance. Knowledge is also gained by personal experience – trial and error.

Greater knowledge allows growers to utilise the tricks outlined in the previous chapter in producing a better quality and quantity of crop. Knowledge may come before motivation or desire to grow. Some growers I encountered had pre-existing horticultural expertise which they realised they could utilise in cannabis growing. Others learnt by observing cannabis-growing friends and only decided later to get involved in growing themselves. Alternatively knowledge comes after the desire to become a grower with some of my sources describing the process of wanting to grow cannabis, then conducting their own research into how to go about this.

#### **4.2.2 *Who grows cannabis?***

Alongside the opportunity to grow cannabis we also need a person or persons willing to get involved in marijuana production. Having established how easy it is to have the opportunity to grow cannabis – although also considered how a grower aiming to improve quality and/or quantity of cannabis production needs to accommodate more complicated requirements – I will now take a look at the people who become cannabis growers. There are two elements to this – the basic demographic profile of the population ‘cannabis growers’ and a look at certain common shared personal interests and ideologies.

#### 4.2.2.1 Demographic profile

The short answer to the question ‘who grows cannabis?’ is ‘all sorts’. That is to say that I encountered people from a broad cross-section of society who had some involvement with cannabis cultivation. I encountered male and female growers, ranging from teenagers to pensioners, hailing from all walks of life. However within this broad range it is possible to identify certain patterns. Although all backgrounds seemed to be present in the cannabis growing population certain demographic – and certain ideological – backgrounds seem to be prevalent.

On the demographic front it is fair to say that cannabis growers appear to be predominantly, but by no-means exclusively, male. Home Office statistics for those involved in ‘unlawful production of cannabis’ give females hovering between about 10 and 15% of all such offenders between 1990 and 2000 (Corkery 2002, Table S2.3). This may be as much a reflection of internal gender biases in the criminal justice system as a reflection of male domination of cannabis growing as the IDMU data covering much of the same period shows the female proportion hovering just below 30% (IDMU raw data from 1994, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 surveys). In my own samples figures were somewhat lower – about 10% of the growers I encountered face to face were female. It is of course impossible to be sure of the genders of those I encountered over the internet but it would seem that men dominated there as well.

Males definitely dominate the world of cannabis growing – with this dominance increasing for larger-scale and more commercially-orientated operations. This, of course, is also a reflection of male-dominance across the drug distribution and drug use world, and in crime and deviance more generally.

In terms of age I encountered representatives across the spectrum – from teenagers to pensioners. IDMU surveys recorded cannabis growers as young as 12 and as old as 80 (*ibid.*). The peak age of involvement would seem to be in the 21-30 age group – 51.9% of IDMU respondents fell into this category as did the majority of growers I met – with a steady decrease amongst subsequent age groups.

In terms of factors such as education, employment and socio-demographics I met representatives from all backgrounds – students, professionals, workers, the

unemployed; university graduates down to high-school dropouts. In socio-demographic terms, beyond the predominance of young males, there really did not appear to be such a thing as a stereotypical cannabis grower. However when we look beyond these simple descriptive qualities there are certain traits and characteristics which whilst not necessarily true of all cannabis growers certainly cropped up with great frequency amongst the growers I conducted research with.

#### **4.2.2.2 Personal Traits: Interests and Ideologies**

Having said that all sorts of people are involved in cannabis growing, at least from a demographic perspective, it became obvious in my research that there were certain traits – personal interests and personal ideologies – that were common to a large number of the cannabis growers I encountered. That is not to say – by a long way – that all cannabis growers share all or even most of these traits. As will become apparent those involved in cannabis growing can be divided along ‘motivational’ or ‘ideological’ lines between the commercial growers (in it solely or primarily for the financial rewards) and the ideological growers (involved in growing primarily or exclusively for non-financial reasons). Before I elaborate on this distinction it is worth exploring some of the traits and ideologies common to one or other or all of these groups of cannabis growers.

##### 4.2.2.2.1 Drug use.

One major unifying factor or precondition to becoming a cannabis grower is use of drugs although the relationship is not straight forward. Not all cannabis growers currently used cannabis although all the ones that I spoke to had done so at some point in their lives. Some of these had given up using cannabis themselves but still cultivated it – these growers grew for the financial rewards but also firmly affiliated themselves as pro-cannabis. Non-using growers talked about their support of drug use in general and cannabis use in particular primarily as a reflection of liberal ideals – people should be free to use drugs if they want to without fear of repercussions from the state or anyone else as a matter of personal choice. The reasons these growers did not use cannabis anymore themselves fell into two groups – those who used to use cannabis regularly but found that they no longer had a good time with the drug and those who had tried cannabis but never really took to it in the first place.

The majority of growers also had experience with other illegal drugs although this was far from universal. Indeed a broad division could be drawn between two attitudes to drug use. On the one side were those who embraced drug use in general – not necessarily using any illegal drugs themselves but recognising both the right for others to choose to do so and their general reasoning behind doing so. Drug use of any type was seen by these as a personal choice – maybe a hedonistic one but one which was the business only of the individual and should be tolerated so long as others did not get hurt – essentially a Millian philosophical position. The growers here ranged from those that had never taken drugs other than cannabis but were happy for others to do so through those that had tried – and still used – other drugs for recreational purposes to those who were recovering hard-drug addicts – particularly heroin users, many of whom praised cannabis as an aid to coming off heroin and who would warn against (some) drug use but still recognised it as an individual right. This view – of tolerance (and occasionally even encouragement) of other drug use, maybe accompanied with friendly advice stemming from personal experience – represented the majority of growers. A minority however were of a different mindset making a very definite distinction between cannabis and other drugs often being vehemently opposed to other drug use. The distinction is drawn by these growers between cannabis as a natural plant and other drugs as being either chemical compounds made by man or derivatives of plant products processed by man – a position summed up to an extent by the pro-cannabis slogan ‘Man made alcohol, God made cannabis. Who do you trust?’. I witnessed one on-line argument where one pro-cannabis grower I shall call ‘Cable-guy’ was arguing that ‘drug-dealers’ were all evil. It was put to him that some drug-dealers, such as those supplying cannabis to friends, were not evil: not all cannabis users could grow their own and there had to be an acceptance of the need for someone to supply these users and a recognition that these people could not be categorised as ‘evil dealers’. Cable-guy countered that he had said ‘drug dealers’ and that cannabis was a plant, not a drug, and therefore suppliers of cannabis came under a different category. He had been referring especially to those who dealt – or ‘pushed’ – heroin, cocaine and other ‘hard’ drugs which he saw as leading to personal and social problems associated with addiction to such substances. He had no time for anyone who defended the use or distribution, under whatever

circumstances, of drugs other than cannabis. So entrenched was this view that when other subscribers to this distribution list (particularly a recovering heroin addict supporting methadone as an acceptable drug in certain circumstances) tried to support some use and distribution of other drugs the debate got personal and offensive, culminating in Cable-guy un-subscribing and other list members celebrating his departure. There is a key point to be drawn from such a viewpoint – cannabis is seen by many to be distinct from most other drugs (many people with this view would accept the use of magic mushrooms and other naturally occurring hallucinogens, and even opium and coca<sup>77</sup> in their natural forms as plant products like cannabis – a position seemingly lost on the more extremist Cable-guy) through dint of being naturally occurring. For many this is a pertinent point that sets cannabis apart from other drugs.

#### 4.2.2.2.2 Drug dealing.

Drug dealing is a problematic term – not least for the arguments over what constitutes a drug that we saw in the preceding section. For some ‘dealing’ is distribution for profit, for others ‘dealing’ is any form of distribution. Legally we talk of, ‘trafficking’ and ‘supplying’ rather than ‘dealing’. However ambiguities apart it would be fair to say that many cannabis growers (a sizeable minority) have some previous experience in some form of drug distribution aside from whatever they do with their own crop. Obviously most of those who use cannabis, which is practically all of those involved in growing cannabis, are very likely to have been involved in some kind of distribution as cannabis consumption is often a social event with spliffs (cannabis cigarettes) being passed round amongst all present. But further than this many cannabis growers have been actively involved in distributing cannabis in larger quantities (i.e. measurable amounts rather than individual cannabis cigarettes) – this is not always for profit although there will usually be some kind of consideration. Of those that have been involved in some kind of dealing many will have also dabbled in the distribution of drugs other than cannabis (again not necessarily in a commercial or profit-orientated way) with differences of opinion occurring along similar lines to those outlined above for drug use. For most cannabis growers their involvement in drug dealing will largely reflect their involvement

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<sup>77</sup> The raw plant from which cocaine is processed.

in cannabis growing: those growing predominantly for personal use may have experience in social supply of cannabis or other ‘soft’ drugs or may be limited in experience only to the use of cannabis, maybe frowning on other drugs. But those whose involvement in cannabis cultivation is more commercially orientated often have at least some history in drug distribution for financial gain – sometimes only relating to cannabis but often covering other drugs as well.

#### 4.2.2.2.3 Other criminality.

It would be a truism to say that those involved in cannabis growing tend to be criminals what with the very act of growing being a criminal offence. But beside the obvious point it would be fair to say that a degree of other criminality is common to most cannabis growers. This should not be surprising – those willing to break the cannabis laws are obviously not hung-up about law breaking *per se*. For most growers other criminal activity is relatively minor and can be seen in some kind of ideological light. Examples would be minor public order offences relating to political issues and acts of protest (see below), offences that can be seen as a rejection of authority or a challenge to ‘the system’ (such as benefit fraud, or avoidance of TV license fees) and other drug related offences (i.e. use and distribution of cannabis or other drugs and, often, public order offences committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs). Other growers have more tangible criminal records such as property related crimes although generally offences against the person (violent crimes) were not common. The real criminal element in cannabis growing – those with a history of more serious crimes (property related or violent) – are generally those involved in larger scale commercial cultivation although many growers operating at this end of the scale have no particular noteworthy criminal record or previous criminal involvement. In short although cannabis growers could not be described as law abiding most of them would consider their own illegal activity (usually including their growing) as relatively benign and/or justifiable. The exceptions would be those who could be described as career criminals who have added cannabis cultivation to their criminal repertoires – this distinction should become clearer over the next couple of chapters.

#### 4.2.2.2.4 Politics.

Cannabis growers begin to delineate from the general population when we consider measures of personal ideology, attitude and belief – such as drug use.

Political affiliation, for example, is noticeably different amongst cannabis growers than for the population at large. It is difficult to prove this quantitatively although we can support this position by looking again at the 1998 IDMU survey. This survey asked both how respondents voted in the last election (the 1997 general election that saw Tony Blair's New Labour come to power after nearly two decades of Conservative government) and how they intended to vote in the next election (which took place in 2001). Results showed that 'regular users' of drugs – those that had filled in the surveys – did not represent the general population in political views. As table 4.1 shows drug users tend to prefer 'left-wing' or 'liberal' parties and, significantly, show a far higher level of support for the Green Party, a party based on ecological and social-justice ideals, than would be true of the population at large. Although we cannot be sure that this survey of drug users would represent all cannabis growers it seems reasonable that cannabis growers within this sample would follow a broadly similar pattern. It would certainly be true that cannabis growers in South Yorkshire (and elsewhere in the UK) showed a similar pattern of political affiliation with over half of my respondents claiming to support either the Liberal Democrats or the Green Party and only a couple supporting the right-leaning Conservative party. Of course such voiced support may not transfer into actual voting patterns – a majority of my sample did not vote in the last general election (in 2001) regardless of their cited preferences.

Further evidence of the relationship between political views and cannabis growing comes from observed political activity amongst my growers in South Yorkshire and on on-line discussion forums. A number of growers, for example, were active participants of stop-the-war demonstrations over the situation in Iraq. During the build up to and execution of that war many of the cannabis-related e-mail distribution lists were inundated with Iraq-related news issues and debates – so much so that although a majority of list members clearly opposed the war and many welcomed the information others – particularly list administrators – stepped in to stop such posts on the grounds that they were off-topic (i.e. unrelated to cannabis or other list topics).

Table 4.1 – Drug users’ voting patterns in 1997 and voting intentions for future elections.

Party or other voting pattern	% Voted for (1997)	% Intending to vote for in ‘future elections’
Labour	34.6	17.7
Conservative	3.8	1.8
Liberal Democrat	17.5	19.0
Green	12.5	32.0
Scottish National Party / Plaid Cymru <sup>78</sup>	1.9	2.6
Underage (below 18)	2.2	4.0
Did not vote / don’t intend to vote	27.0	20.7
Legalisation <sup>79</sup>	0.5	1.1
Other	0.8	1.1

Table taken from [www.idmu.co.uk/ru3pol.htm](http://www.idmu.co.uk/ru3pol.htm) 8<sup>th</sup> August 2004.

#### 4.2.2.2.5 Horticulture/ecology.

The strong show of support for the Green Party by cannabis growers is symptomatic of a deeper ideology for many growers, particularly those involved in smaller scale cultivation. It would again be something of a truism to say that a sizeable majority of cannabis growers had an interest in growing plants but certainly for many, especially those involved in smaller scale grow-ops, cannabis growing can be seen at least in part as a natural progression from being both a keen horticulturist (whether with a garden or pot-plants) and having an interest in (i.e. using) cannabis as well. However for many involved in growing the connection runs deeper than this.

As well as being interested in growing plants generally – being ‘green-fingered’ – many growers have a keen interest in ecology in a wider sense. This manifests itself politically – as shown by the support for the Green Party – and more practically. It is more than just growing plants of whatever type – a buzzword for

<sup>78</sup> The national parties of Scotland and Wales respectively.

<sup>79</sup> The Legalise Cannabis Alliance (LCA) or other representatives standing primarily to legalise cannabis.

many growers with these interests would be ‘sustainability’. These people are keen gardeners in the purely horticultural sense, but for many they are also keen gardeners because they can grow (or because they would like to grow but do not have the space to do so) their own fruit, vegetables, herbs etc. They support and may also be active in promoting sustainable development and sustainable farming (as both a green-politics and social-politics position) – such as the guerrilla activists we saw earlier who were also involved in distribution of seeds of rare or restricted vegetable varieties. The level of involvement will range from those who are keen on recycling and reducing waste and growing some of their own food through those who are members of Greenpeace or similar charitable or political groups up to those who are ‘active’ – from writing to their MPs and local papers to illegally distributing restricted varieties of seed to pulling up GM crops or sabotaging Fox Hunts. The keenness for ecological issues may also be reflected in other hobbies and interests – many growers had an interest in exotic plants (such as carnivorous ones as we saw in *Chapter Three*), animals (especially exotic ones such as lizards and snakes, often alongside more traditional pets), fish or insects (again exotic ones, such as scorpions and praying mantises). A further area where a general ecological ideology is reflected is in a prevalent interest in outdoor activities such as rambling, biking or climbing.

One grower who exemplified this position told me how he had had tropical fish as a kid, had always been into his ‘living systems’ (self-contained, self-sufficient ecosystems<sup>80</sup>), environmental issues and horticulture, growing various plants (often in symbiotic systems with each other, or with fish or insects). He has grown various exotic plants including carnivorous plants and *Salvia Divinorum*, a currently legal hallucinogenic plant. He also had – and has – a keen interest in green-politics, at times being both vociferous and active on this front. He smoked cannabis from his early teens (quickly progressing to his current pattern of daily or near-daily use) and has experimented with a wide range of legal and illegal drugs. He grew his first cannabis plants when he was seventeen, originally in a low-tech way for his personal use – it was ‘partly the idea of not having to buy it. Partly just because I was interested in it [the cannabis plant].’ He

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<sup>80</sup> Ideally, that is, in reality such a system would be very difficult for one person to construct and run.

moved on to hydroponic indoor growing and also some outdoor growing keeping some for himself but selling part of his crop each time. He studied Landscape Design and Ecology at university, and Landscape Management at post-graduate level, growing in part to fund himself through his studies – and also at times dealing small quantities of cannabis (aside from that he grew himself) and occasionally ecstasy. He has also helped other people set-up and run their own grow-ops providing cuttings and/or equipment as well as expertise for other growers, often receiving a portion of the crop (to use or to sell) as ‘payment’. After university he did a range of environmentally orientated jobs, volunteered at the local ‘city-farm’, set up and ran a preservation society for a small urban woodland in his neighbourhood and finally ended up getting a management job running a local conservation and restoration project in an historic (now disused) cemetery. He is still politically active – primarily on a local level but also attending national demonstrations relating to the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements – and used to be involved in the legalise cannabis movement as a member of an on-line forum debating both the issues and potential forms of protest aimed at changing the law. He also attended legalise cannabis marches, rallies and other events. He currently does not grow cannabis although he will do so again when he lives somewhere more suitable (i.e. with more private space than his current small room in a large shared house). He has a caution for possession of cannabis and another (spent) for misuse of an airgun in his teenage years but no other criminal record although he freely admits to criminal activity such as property damage, trespass and public disorder in relation to his political and ideological beliefs (and occasionally when under the influence of alcohol) and, obviously, for possession and distribution (albeit usually on a minor scale) of various drugs up to and including heroin and crack-cocaine. He enjoys rock-climbing and spending time in the countryside – from rambling and camping to attending outdoor ‘free-party’ or ‘rave’ events which combine both hedonistic and drug-using elements with green- and social-political issues.

Although perhaps at the top-end of the spectrum in terms of involvement in ecological and horticultural issues (he certainly would be at the top-end of the

range of technological and scientific knowledge utilised in cannabis cultivation) and the range of associated ideological activities this grower was surprisingly typical in the range of both cannabis-centric and more general ecological activity portrayed by a large proportion of the cannabis growers I encountered.

### 4.3 Cannabis growing as an ideological position

The general interest in ecological issues and related pastimes (from horticulture to outdoor pursuits) is a key factor in the back-ground of many cannabis growers. The link is strong, perhaps unsurprisingly when we look in more detail specifically at the ideological position of many involved with cannabis (growing or otherwise) towards the cannabis plant itself.

We have already seen how cannabis is an incredibly versatile plant with many industrial and medical uses – and it is easy to see how such utility can engender a certain amount of support for cannabis. But the ideological position taken by many involved with cannabis (but especially predominant amongst those that grow the plant) runs far deeper than that.

Firstly there is the culture associated with the use – and effects – of cannabis. We have seen that cannabis is used extensively in this country and elsewhere in the developed Western world. Cannabis, like other drugs, is culturally significant in that it helps to define sub-cultural groups (i.e. cannabis, or other drug, users versus non-users) providing both an element of identity to individuals and groups and a significant element of their social (and personal) lives (see e.g. Young (1971), Matthews (2003), Kaplan (1970)). The effects of cannabis are hard to define objectively varying as they do from person to person and between drug-use ‘settings’ (Zinberg, 1984) as well as being dependent on the exact variety and nature of the cannabis consumed. However despite rumours to the contrary (originating mainly from the US in the middle of the last century but showing something of a resurgence today particularly in the right-wing and populist media) that marijuana was strongly implicated in much violent and property crime and general delinquency (the idea of ‘Reefer Madness’, see e.g. Booth, 2003; Herer, 1994) it is accepted by most – and is certainly the case in my own observations and those of other experts in the field<sup>81</sup> – that cannabis is relatively

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<sup>81</sup> Including Academics, Police representatives and other ‘expert observers’, and the users and growers themselves (personal communications).

benign. Links to violence, crime and progression to other (harder) drugs have been largely discredited (see e.g. Zimmer and Morgan, 1997). The effects for most users include a general calming effect (although some users may become agitated or paranoid), an increased sensual awareness and enhanced appreciation of music, art and other sensual stimuli. Cannabis can also encourage creativity, and is often credited with ‘mind-expanding’ qualities. Cannabis is also something of a social lubricant for many lowering inhibitions, causing hilarity, encouraging conversation and the like. Unlike with alcohol cannabis users tend to be peaceful and un-troublesome – passive not aggressive. Such effects are largely related to the drug itself – cannabis is both a ‘downer’ in the sense that it relaxes the body (and mind) and a mild ‘hallucinogen’<sup>82</sup>. Not only are (and partly because) the effects of cannabis largely ‘peaceful’, the culture surrounding much cannabis use is as well – one only has to consider the ‘peace and love’ values of the hippie culture of the 1960s and 1970s in which cannabis (and LSD) played a central role. A more recent example would be the circumstantial evidence from the Euro 2000 football tournament held in Holland and Belgium. English football fans, well-known for the violent tendencies of a minority of hooligans, caused no trouble around the first match which was played in Holland where cannabis is widely and readily available. For England’s other two first-round matches, held in Belgium which is famous for its beer, fan-trouble occurred as more usually expected! Following from that the local (Portuguese) police for the Euro 2004 football tournament announced that they would not be policing people (football fans) for use of cannabis (various news sources).

Certain norms exist for most cannabis users during their using sessions and whilst under the influence. Cannabis users expect tolerance and mutual respect rather than confrontation, and peace as opposed to violence. Cannabis users also believe in sharing and reciprocity – joints<sup>83</sup> are passed round so that everyone can enjoy them, even if the cannabis all comes from only one or two members in a given session. No cannabis user would exclude another (unless, occasionally, the other was constantly on the receiving end of this cultural sharing, and never a

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<sup>82</sup> Although not in the strict sense of the term – seeing things which aren’t there is very rare with *any* of the popular drugs (Booth, 2003).

<sup>83</sup> A name for a cannabis cigarette – there are many different names for cannabis cigarettes including joint, spliff, reefer, doobie, blunt and bifta – to list just a few of the more common variants I encountered.

contributor) and leave them without any cannabis – even giving away some of their own stash for someone who is without cannabis (for the moment) to take away for later consumption. It is expected that the favour would be returned if the situation were reversed or, if no direct reciprocity, that ‘what goes around comes around’. Ideally in the great scheme of things everyone would be generous and therefore everyone would be on the receiving end of acts of generosity at some point. Another aspect of this culture is that people do not hold on to the joint for longer than they should. Whilst it is rude to ‘ask to pass’ it is equally rude to ‘Bogart’ or hog the spliff.

From this basis of peace and love, tolerance and sharing, we see that for many cannabis has a special place in their personal cultural values – it symbolises cultural values that, if shared by all, would make the world a better place and it also gives effects that are largely pleasurable and reinforce those cultural values. Again if everybody did it (consumed cannabis) the world would be, in the eyes of many involved in cannabis culture, a better place all round. Such is the esteem in which cannabis is held by many of those most heavily involved with it and the related culture that cannabis users have a saying: ‘Weed will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no weed’. The implication is that cannabis will help with your troubles. It is these values – admittedly alongside the hedonistic and financial values associated with drug use and distribution – which were cited by, and influenced, the smugglers and dealers of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s which we saw in *Chapter One* including Howard Marks (Marks, 1997), those cannabis smugglers studied by Adler (1993) and some of the dealers<sup>84</sup> in the study of Dorn *et al.* (1992).

It is not just on the level of recreational use that cannabis occupies a special ideological position for so many. Cannabis is also seen in a spiritual light by lots of those involved with it. Indeed it rises somewhat to the state of sacrament for Rastafarians and for some Coptic Christians. Many (Christian and non-Christian) have suggested that cannabis may have been used by Christ and may explain some of his healing miracles. Those who cite religion in support of cannabis use are keen to quote the bible, in particular:

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<sup>84</sup> Particularly those operating in the middle decades of the last century, the ‘Trading Charities’ and ‘Mutual Societies’ in particular.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. (Genesis 1:29-30)

Regardless of biblical justification or evidence of use of cannabis by Jesus throughout history (and probably for as long or longer than it has been used recreationally) cannabis has been used spiritually by Shamans, Mystics, Healers and the like (see e.g. Booth, 2003). Others point to the overlap between recreational and spiritual use of cannabis by modern users, as often exemplified by the link between cannabis use and much art<sup>85</sup>. This (both spiritual and artistic use) obviously relates somewhat to the effects of the drug which help make it so popular for recreational use. As well as encouraging creativity and ‘expanding the mind’ many users cite introspective effects of cannabis leading to some kind of insight or ‘inner peace’. Again the perceived improvements to a user’s mental and spiritual self leads to an appreciation of the plant and its properties that for some even becomes reverence.

On top of this there are the medical properties of the plant. Cannabis has been used throughout history for the treatment or alleviation of literally hundreds, maybe thousands, of ailments and conditions. In the modern world this is still the case (as was discussed in *Chapter Three*) with both scientific attempts to isolate and utilise the medical properties of the plant and ‘un-scientific’ (and usually illegal) use of the plant in its raw form as a medical panacea. The range of ailments for which cannabis has been or is used as a treatment cover both physical and mental conditions – one book advocates its (modern) use to treat AIDS (primarily as an appetite stimulant), as an aphrodisiac, to treat arthritis, asthma, cancerous tumours, cystic fibrosis, depression, emphysema, epilepsy, glaucoma, herpes, high blood pressure, insomnia, migraines, multiple sclerosis, muscular cramping, nausea (including the nausea suffered by those undergoing chemotherapy and similar treatments) and post traumatic stress disorder (‘Mel’, 2000). Other sources cite even more impressive lists – especially when we look at historical medical uses of the plant (see e.g. Booth, 2003). Cannabis does not

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<sup>85</sup> The Beatles, for example, are well known to have gone through a period where their music was heavily influenced by drugs.

always treat or even alleviate the symptoms<sup>86</sup>, but is often still considered to be of benefit in ways which can be seen to relate to the spiritual and recreational benefits already outlined. In the words of one female terminal cancer patient ‘cannabis [for me] is the difference between living with cancer and dying from it’. A similar male patient’s wife told me how cannabis ‘might not actually help [with the cancer] as such, but it certainly helps you to forget about it for a while’. Already, with so many benefits to be seen for individuals in mind, body and spirit, it becomes clear why cannabis is held in such high esteem by many people (both users and non-users). But there is more to come. Aside from the benefits – largely based on the drug properties of the plant – to be gained by individuals (and by association, it could be claimed, society at large) consuming the plant cannabis supporters (and most independent observers) recognise a range of other areas in which the plant has much utility. Sticking with consumption by humans we have the nutritional value of the hemp seed – in the words of Jack Herer ‘No other single plant source can compare with the nutritional value of hemp seeds. Both the complete protein and the essential oils contained in hemp seeds are in ideal ratios for human nutrition.’ (1994:43). Certainly hemp seeds are a staple of health-food shops. Then we have the industrial uses of the hemp plant – primarily utilising the plant’s fibres but also centring on the use of hemp cellulose as an alternative to petrochemical hydro-carbons. Uses range from rope, cloth and paper to concrete, paint, cosmetics and fuel (see e.g. Booth, 2003; Herer, 1994. See also *Chapter Two*’s discussion on industrial and agricultural hemp). This last use – fuel – also ties in with the ecological advantages many see in cannabis – it can be used as a bio-fuel substitute for fossil-fuels in heating, power generation or even for transportation. Being a renewable source these benefits of cannabis are seized upon by many environmentalists and ecologists – as are other attributes of the plant. Hemp production could reduce deforestation being able to replace many of wood’s uses in paper making, construction and bio-fuel. Hemp produces a far greater bio-mass per unit time than any tree. It can be grown on and assist in the reclamation of marginal lands – it can survive with poor nutrients and enrich the soil as well as, with its roots system, breaking hard soils or binding loose ones. It can also flourish on lands polluted with industrial

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<sup>86</sup> Although often it does – see Grinspoon (1994) or Mack and Joy (2000) for some recent discussions and reviews of the scientific evidence for cannabis as a medicine.

by-products helping clean up local ecosystems. Hemp can help re-capture and lock carbon from the atmosphere when the hemp is used in manufacturing rather than as food or fuel (with fuel of course the carbon content is returned to the air when burned), thus helping reverse the green house effect. Another advantage often cited in support of hemp cultivation is the rejuvenation of run-down agricultural communities (run-down both economically and environmentally) in both third- and first-world rural communities – witness the support of some Conservative Party MPs for the expansion of hemp cultivation in the UK to help save British farming. Given this wide range of uses – and add them to the medical, spiritual and recreational uses already discussed – it is unsurprising that some cannabis supporters are so fanatical about promoting the plant. Indeed consider Jack Herer’s title of his work on this subject: ‘The Emperor Wears No Clothes: The Authoritative Historical Record of the Cannabis Plant, Marijuana Prohibition, & *How Hemp can still Save the World*’ (1994, emphasis added).

Herer’s title well illustrates the point to be taken here. For many of those with a deeper involvement with cannabis (the regular rather than occasional users, those who use medical marijuana or know others who do, the legalisation activists and/or those for whom cannabis is a definitive part of their lives – those falling into this category would be more prevalent amongst the cannabis *growing* population than amongst the cannabis *using* population) the wide range of beneficial uses of cannabis (or any sub-set of those uses) are enough to convince them that the plant is special and that restrictions on the cultivation and use of cannabis – i.e. its illegality – are misguided, wrong and even immoral. Some would go as far as to say that marijuana’s illegal status is actually *because* of its extreme beneficence – they argue governments have sought to suppress marijuana use as an attempt to control the population, or parts thereof and/or that cannabis has come to be controlled through the influence of big-businesses (such as the paper, wood, oil and alcohol industries) trying to protect their interests from a rival cannabis/hemp industry. When one looks at some of the literature on this both threads of the argument could be given some credence (Booth, 2003; Herer, 1994). It is these views which form the basis of the legalisation debate and the legalisation movement for many who are active in or support that movement (on a political and public-debate level at least – on an academic level the debate may be more sophisticated). It is these views which serve as an element of

justification (for breaking the law) for many cannabis growers. Cannabis growers are almost by definition more involved in, or care more about, wider cannabis issues (including legalisation) than other cannabis users in that cannabis plays a more significant role in their lives (Cannabis growing is an activity that one is employed in *all the time* until the crop is harvested – cannabis use is only an intermittent activity). As such the issues relating to ‘cannabis ideology’ – the view that cannabis is inherently good (for some or all of the reasons outlined above) – are central, to a greater or lesser extent, to many cannabis growers. In a nutshell they see cultivation as more than just the production of an illegal substance – and they certainly see an element of justification in breaking that law.

However the position may be somewhat muddled – the arguments in favour of the different benefits to be obtained from cannabis should not all be lumped together and do not necessarily support each other in coming together to form an overwhelming position supporting the use or cultivation of cannabis and/or active law breaking in this area. Hemp, for example, is not quite the wonder crop some may believe it to be. Although all the separate claims for hemp – ecological, industrial and as an agricultural food crop – are true individually they cannot necessarily be added together. The same plant cannot usually fulfil all the promise as a fibre crop, a seed crop, a fuel substitute and a land-reclaimant as these different ends prefer different growing conditions (Johnson, 1999). Fibre, for example, is best provided by male plants (Weisheit, 1992) whereas seeds come from females – growing both together but for the different purposes would complicate harvesting and processing. Equally to fulfil any or all of these promises hemp would have to be grown on a scale that is too large to be reasonably considered given the need to produce other crops as well (*Ibid.*; Booth, 2003). Whilst it is recognised that hemp has a great future as an industrial crop in many of the areas suggested its ability to meet all the demands that some pro-cannabis supporters claim of it are somewhat limited (Johnson, 1999).

Even if hemp were the wonder crop that some claim there is something of a fudge in the ideology as an argument for legalisation or as a justification for breaking the law. The industrial and ecological claims related to hemp are, well, related to hemp. These could be realised with the low-THC varieties of hemp currently grown legally in the UK and elsewhere and arguably have little or

nothing to do with the drug properties of the plant or the debate over the legalisation of cannabis as a drug (recreational, spiritual or medical).

Even when we consider the arguments relating to the drug element of cannabis the ideological position is still flawed – cannabis could be legalised, and controlled (through prescription for example) as a medicine without legalising it as a recreational drug or permitting personal cultivation. Instead we can have companies like GW Pharmaceuticals developing cannabis products for distribution along the existing medical model. Alternatively, as is the case in Canada, medical users could be allowed to grow their own supplies (under license) for their own use – this does not support a general legalisation of either use or cultivation.

However the point is not whether or not the ideological view of cannabis I have portrayed is defensible – the point is that a large number of people active in the cannabis community, particularly amongst many of those that grow the crop, believe (or at least appear or claim to believe) in this ideology. They believe that cannabis is beneficial to mankind, that repression of cannabis is wrong, and therefore that the breaching of cannabis related laws is justifiable or even, *in extremis*, morally obligated. Alongside this are a number of other ‘ideological’ or non-financial reasons given for growing cannabis by those who are involved such as the assurance of a good quality product and/or the avoidance of the black market and ‘real dealers’ (especially those that overlap with other drugs, and those that deal in **soap-bar** cannabis). I would suggest that the balance between financial and non-financial – ideological – motivational elements are a useful and important way to distinguish different people involved in cannabis cultivation, different types of cannabis grower. I will go on to explore this idea in more detail.

#### 4.4 Existing typologies of cannabis growers

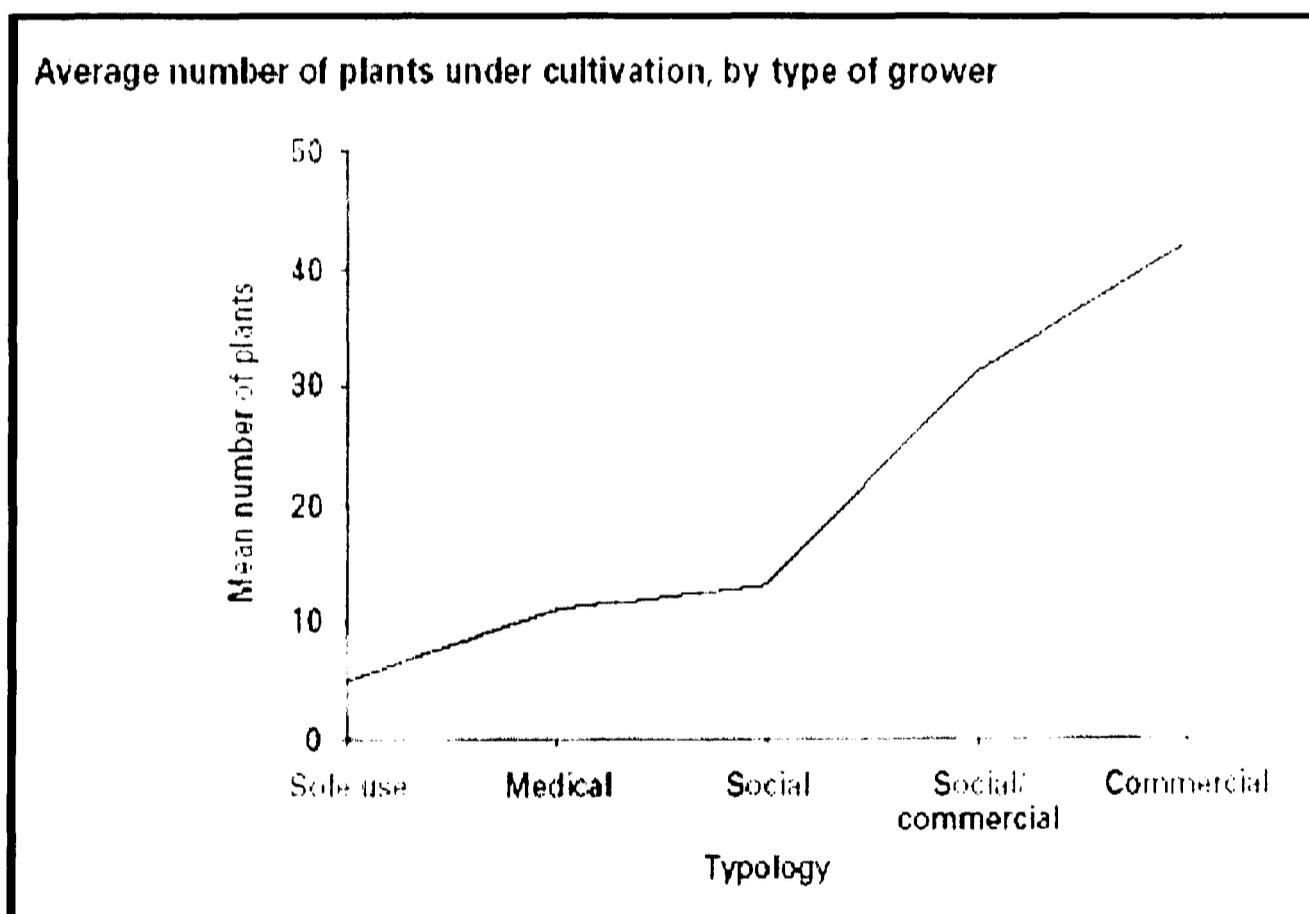
I am not the first person to attempt to construct a typology of cannabis growers – I am not even the first to construct one for Britain. A UK based study was conducted by Mike Hough and his team from London South Bank University (Hough *et al.*, 2003) and consisted of a small-scale study of UK cannabis growers for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This was carried out contemporaneously to my own fieldwork. Their study was of a much smaller

scale than my own utilising interviews from 37 growers. They identified five types of grower:

- [T]he *sole-use grower* (n=9) – cultivating cannabis as a money-saving hobby, for personal consumption only<sup>87</sup>
- the *medical grower* (n=3) – motivated mainly by the perceived therapeutic value of cannabis to those with medical conditions
- the *social grower* (n=10) – growing to ensure a supply of good quality cannabis for themselves and friends
- the *social / commercial grower* (n=10) – those who grew for themselves and friends, at least in part to supplement their income
- the *commercial grower* (n=5) – growing to make money, and selling to any potential customer” (Hough *et al.* 2003: ix, my italics)

These categories were seen to correlate (but not absolutely) to the number of plants grown (figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 – Types of cannabis grower.



Taken from Hough *et al.* (2003:9)

I have already suggested that the number of plants may not be the best way to differentiate the scale of a cannabis growing operation – a grower can produce

<sup>87</sup> Hough *et al.* qualify the term ‘personal consumption’ with their own note which reads “Personal use here includes the sharing of cannabis spliffs with friends, but *not* giving cannabis

similar amounts of cannabis from a number of smaller plants or fewer large ones. However the idea that cannabis growers can be categorised on a 'motivational' axis – distinguishing between those that are driven by financial profit and those who are motivated only to supply their own (and maybe their friend's) cannabis is important. Between profit-seekers and personal-use growers we have a category (social / commercial) of grower who make money out of cannabis production but are not driven purely or even primarily by profit. Another important category recognised by Hough *et al.* are the medical growers who are involved in drug production not to make money, or for any hedonistic drug-taking purposes, but out of medical necessity. Involvement with production or distribution with illegal drugs is normally assumed to be motivated, at least in part, by financial gain. It is clear that for cannabis growers motivation is a complicated issue that may or may not include an element of concern for financial benefits as part of a mixture of different motivational drivers.

Although on the right lines I would suggest that Hough *et al.*'s findings were somewhat limited in their utility (necessarily so given the size of their study). In particular I have already mentioned how 'number of plants' is not necessarily the best indicator of the degree of 'commercialisation' of a grow-op. It is possible to be a commercial grower with only a couple of plants in production at a time – equally I have met growers involved in the production of hundreds of plants for whom profit is not a major consideration.

I would also suggest that Hough *et al.*'s findings are (again necessarily) oversimplified. The boundaries are (as I hope to demonstrate) somewhat blurred between 'sole-use growers' and 'social growers', and between 'social growers', 'social / commercial growers' and 'commercial growers'. The 'medical growers' are a particularly fascinating category – whether they are rightly positioned between 'sole-use' and 'social' growers in a typology which seems to otherwise reflect a profit-motivation axis is debatable.

The category of 'social / commercial' growers recognises the difficulties in distinguishing between those motivated by profit but to varying degrees – there appears to be a conceptual difference between those looking simply to make lots of money and those who make some pocket money as an aside to an activity they

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to friends for their subsequent use." (2003:41 – their emphasis).

are engaged in primarily for non-profit making purposes. This latter group would probably carry on growing cannabis even if they didn't make some money on the side. This distinction reflects to some extent the argument that, in relation to drug distribution, there is a difference between commercial and social supply as illustrated by the idea that most users of 'clubbing' drugs (e.g. ecstasy type drugs or other drugs taken at night-clubs) get their drugs from friends rather than 'dealers' (e.g. Parker 2000).

A more comprehensive study of cannabis growers in a western setting was carried out by Ralph Weisheit in the 1980s focussing on cannabis growers in the United States (mostly in Illinois). His own typology consisted of three categories of marijuana producer:

- “1. *Hustlers*, who take on marijuana growing because it is a business challenge. They are motivated less by the money itself than by the success it symbolizes. Because they view their enterprises in grandiose terms, small growing operations are of little interest to them. Numerically, this type is probably the most rare, but because of the scale of their operations, they may contribute significantly to the illicit marijuana market...
2. *Communal growers* who become involved in the marijuana business as part of a larger lifestyle, in which marijuana plays a part. Nearly all begin as marijuana users and take up growing for their own consumption. Economic necessity or peer pressure may push them to grower [sic] larger crops. If these economic problems pass, they are likely to continue growing, although they may scale back their operation. This group by far constitutes the major category of growers in this study.
3. *Pragmatists* who enter the marijuana business out of economic necessity. They may or may not be users of marijuana. They would rather not be in the marijuana business but feel there are few options available to relieve their economic problems. Unlike the hustler, they are in the marijuana business to help them through economic times, not to become wealthy.”

(Weisheit, 1992: 76)

Again we noted that Weisheit's typology is drawn up on motivational grounds. All Weisheit's growers are commercial growers so financial return, by definition, must be part of the reason for involvement. However Weisheit distinguishes between different types of commercial grower – different ways in which the financial incentive interacts with other drivers or motivational elements. Weisheit's 'Hustlers' would presumably all be 'commercial' growers for Hough *et al.*. 'Communal Growers' seem to equate to 'social / commercial' growers.

They would certainly seem to exemplify the ideological approach to cannabis growing I have begun to outline above. ‘Pragmatists’ could equate either to commercial growers or to social / commercial growers – we would have to know more about the circumstances and intentions of the individual cultivators. Either way there is clearly a degree of overlap between the two typologies – a shared recognition that motivation is an important factor in understanding marijuana growers.

Weisheit focussed on commercial marijuana – i.e. marijuana cultivation with an intention to sell some or all of the crop; cultivation with a necessary trafficking element to it. As such any medical supply growers or personal use growers would have been outside his study. Financial incentives are taken as read for all Weisheit’s growers. What is interesting – again – is that unclear middle-ground where financial incentive only accounts for a part of the driving force behind an involvement in growing. Weisheit’s communal growers, where non-financial drivers are as, if not more, important than the financial element, were his largest category. As with Hough *et al.*’s social / communal growers there seems to be a lot of room for further study and analysis of this group of cannabis producers.

It is clear that taking these two existing studies together provides us with a better framework for understanding cannabis growers more generally. Weisheit concentrates on commercial growers, largely utilising outdoor cultivation techniques<sup>88</sup>, but notes how even for commercial growers motivational drivers can vary. Hough *et al.* focus on a wider range of growers, predominantly utilising indoor growing techniques. They identify some interesting non-commercial approaches to growing and, like Weisheit, explore the blurred area they call social / commercial growing. Once again money isn’t everything.

I intend to draw on both of these studies and to expand upon them. I hope to describe a greater range of approaches to cannabis cultivation. My own typology allows for both financially and non-financially motivated cannabis growers in the UK, and hopes to account also for different methods of growing (as touched upon in the last chapter). Legal (licensed) growers aside all those involved in cannabis production in the UK are breaking the law. Yet they approach this in a

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<sup>88</sup> Although as Weisheit noticed whilst conducting his study in the 1980s indoor growing techniques were coming to play an increasingly important role in American domestic cannabis cultivation.

range of different ways and for a range of different reasons. I hope not just to classify the different type of grower but to explore how these types fit together and provide some level of understanding of the contemporary cannabis growing phenomenon.

## 5 – Roots:

### Ideological Cannabis Growers

#### 5.1 Introduction

We have discussed opportunity – that which is needed to be able to start growing. We now also have a picture of the sorts of people who are involved in cannabis cultivation in the UK – in short that is *all* sorts of people – and some of the ideals of the ‘cannabis culture’ which so many growers are at least loosely affiliated with. On a deeper level we can say – in terms of the numbers of people involved in cannabis distribution – that cannabis growers are predominantly (but by no means exclusively) male, largely aged between about 20 and about 40 (and generally tailing off as age increases). They hail from all walks of life – the unemployed, students, workers, managers and professionals.

Growers are often politically and ecologically minded (with a heavy link between the two, and with cannabis seen by many to be a political or ecological issue as much as a simple ‘drugs’ issue). They are almost exclusively users of cannabis – or at least ex-users – and often use other drugs as well. Many will have been involved in drug distribution, at least in the technical sense and often in a more tangible sense – usually at a level that we might describe as ‘social’ supply (i.e. distributing to friends). Aside from drug use and distribution cannabis growers often exhibit a ‘low-level’ criminality – although this may arguably be true for the majority of the population as a whole! This can range from minor acts of civil disobedience through ‘petty’ and up to more serious and even ‘organised’ crime. From this picture, especially from the political, ideological and criminal elements displayed by many cannabis growers, we begin to get an idea of the motivational drivers behind many cannabis growers involvement in drug production.

#### 5.2 My typology of cannabis growers (part I)<sup>89</sup>

The motivational aspect is perhaps the most criminologically and sociologically interesting part of the ‘becoming a grower’ equation. As we saw at the end of the

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<sup>89</sup> A version of this typology first appeared in Potter and Dann (2005).

last chapter motivation formed an important role in the typologies drawn up by Hough *et al.* (2003) in this country and Weisheit (1992) in America. I have identified a range of motivations – conceptually viewable as a spectrum – which can be broadly polarised with ‘altruism’ at one end and ‘greed’ at the other. In between are a range of motivational positions in which financial incentives play an increasingly significant role although there is almost always an element of an individual grower’s motivation which is separate from the financial. There is a degree of correlation between what motivates a cannabis grower and what approach (method) they will take in growing the plants, and also (perhaps especially) between the motivational drivers of an individual grower and their persona in relation to the ideologies and interests discussed in the last chapter.

### ***5.2.1 Not-for-profit growers.***

Until relatively recently there would have been an assumption by all observers that any involvement in drug distribution or production would be at least partly, and usually mostly, motivated by some kind of financial incentive: drug dealers seek to make a profit. This assumption is probably still taken as true for many observers – academic, political or the general public – and fits the common-view pyramid model of drug dealing outlined in *Chapter One*. However the reality is not this simple, especially when the drug in question is cannabis and especially again when the involvement in distribution is domestic production. Certainly many people involved in cannabis production are very definitely not motivated by profit (although some kind of financial benefit may both be welcome and an extra incentive). These not-for-profit growers – encompassing medical growers, personal-use growers, activist growers and accidental growers – are dealt with in this chapter. Profit orientated commercial growers are dealt with in the next chapter.

#### **5.2.1.1 Medical Marijuana cultivators.**

A large number of people involved in cannabis cultivation in the UK (and other non-traditional producing nations) are, or at least appear and claim to be, motivated by purely altruistic reasons – i.e. those that grow cannabis to be used as medication for others rather than as a recreational drug. We also have those that grow for their own medical use – arguably motivated by their own interests

rather than by altruism, but still clearly distinguishable from those growing for financial gain. Given that scientific medical trials are beginning to prove the utility of cannabis in treating many ailments and symptoms and that throughout history cannabis has been recognised for its medical value in treating a vast array of illnesses and diseases there is little reason for the neutral observer – and even less for those aligned to the medical aspects of cannabis ideology – to doubt that cannabis can be and is a genuine medicine for many sick people. Even if there were no medical benefits to be gained from cannabis the important point would be that there are many people who genuinely and passionately believe that there *are* such medical benefits.

Medical marijuana cultivation and distribution operates in a variety of ways differing primarily in organisational aspects. At the basic level we have those medical users who grow for themselves. Here the motivation is pain-relief – self-interested, yes, but not in any way that any reasonable observer could frown upon, and not in a way that prevents it from being at the altruistic end of the motivational spectrum. These growers are still flouting the law at personal risk of legal repercussion for reasons other than personal material gain. Alternatively the grower may be a friend or family member of the medical user – either one who has been asked to get involved or one who has volunteered to do so. At the next level are those growers who supply more than one medical user – often they will be a medical user or a friend/family member of a medical user supplying not just their prime medical using contact (which may be themselves) but also supplying other medical users who they have come into contact with via the prime user. Often these will be sufferers of the same or similar affliction – who may be members of the same support group, or attend the same hospital, clinic or therapy group. But they may also be sufferers of other conditions who have come across the grower through the prime contact having talked to them about using marijuana as a treatment. Sometimes all or some of the users will have initiated the growing together, other times one (or some) medical user(s) will have initiated a grow-op which has later expanded (both in terms of numbers of medical users supplied and in the scope or scale of the grow-op itself) as other medical users have been introduced or have requested help.

At the next level we have those operations which are centred around a single grower but which aim to serve a wider medical marijuana using public and as

such are more open in that they are, potentially at least, approachable by anyone. Many of these are happily open about their activities and whilst not necessarily actually advertising their involvement they make no particular effort to keep it secret. This openness is a manifestation of two desirable outcomes – to make those who could potentially benefit from medical marijuana aware of the service being provided (and to make the service accessible to these people) and also to challenge the legal position and promote the legalisation of cannabis at least for genuine medical use. Being open is, for these operations, not considered too problematic as the person involved is taking risks only for themselves, and is usually so passionate about what they are doing that they are often willing to go to court – if that turns out to be a possibility – to make themselves heard. Their belief in the righteousness of their activities is usually in no doubt and is both seen to be (by them) and proven to be (in some case-law history) something of a defence if legal action is taken<sup>90</sup>.

Two examples which received significant national news coverage – but which are by no means unique – will serve to illustrate this position:

Tony Taylor, of Tony's Hemp Corner<sup>91</sup> in London had<sup>92</sup> around 250 customers (including doctors and lawyers) to whom he sold cannabis from his health-food shop and grew the stuff in an upstairs room. His customers would have to fill out a form, submit to a 20 minute interview and provide a letter from their GP stating that, in the GP's view, some medical benefit would be gained by that patient from the use of cannabis. He sells it to them at less than street price and refuses to sell to recreational users. He claimed that the police had been aware of his activities since arresting him on charges of cultivation and supply some three years previously<sup>93</sup> and had, since then, turned a blind-eye to his activities even coming "around sometimes [to] say 'How are you doing, are there any problems?'" (Tony Taylor, quoted in *The Guardian* on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2001). The police, however,

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<sup>90</sup> Medical necessity is not a recognised defence in English Law, but it has been shown to convince some juries to return Not Guilty verdicts.

<sup>91</sup> Which, of course, has the initials THC (the main active constituent of cannabis). Names using these initials are quite common amongst cannabis related 'businesses' such as medical co-operatives and head-shops!

<sup>92</sup> As far as I know he still has these customers but this case-study is written in the past tense as it refers to the situation as it was when reported in the press. I would not like to imply any on-going cannabis related activity.

<sup>93</sup> The report from which this information was taken was published in June 2001.

denied this acquiescence and raided the shop, arresting the proprietor and seizing his cannabis (with a street value of £50,000 according to a Guardian article on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of that month) – clearly as a response to the Guardian’s initial report. Charges were quietly dropped later. (Sources: various news stories and personal communications via on-line cannabis forums)

Elizabeth (Biz) Ivol was a severe MS sufferer who grew her own cannabis at her home in the Orkney Islands to use to relieve her pain. Arrested and charged at least twice she escaped a prison sentence both times on compassionate grounds. As people became aware of her (at least partly through press coverage of her 1997 court case) she was inundated with requests from other MS sufferers for supplies of the drug. She distributed this to them in the form of ‘cannabis chocolates’ made by herself with help from sympathetic supporters. Recipients had to supply a doctor’s note proving they had MS in order to qualify and distribution ran along the lines of a mail-order company. Arrested and charged again she stated that if found guilty she would kill herself – preferring to die than to live in pain – to highlight the plight of MS sufferers. She was found guilty (although spared prison), and took an overdose after the court case which failed to kill her. She passed away in September 2004 and was, in both life and death, a celebrity to medical-marijuana campaigners (and other cannabis legalisation campaigners) across the country. (Sources: *Ibid.*)

Both of these were very much single-person operations (although help and support was provided to both by sympathetic volunteers). At a larger scale still are medical-marijuana co-operatives. These are more formal, structured distribution networks supplied by multiple growers and distributing to multiple users. Growers and users will be linked by intermediaries who are the public face of the operation – often with either a web-site or an address at which they can be contacted for medicinal cannabis. Customers usually become aware of the co-operative via word of mouth (often from fellow sufferers), by active ‘recruitment’ by the co-operative members or via the internet. Usually (but not always) evidence of a medical condition is required and prices, if charged at all (many medical co-operatives will provide cannabis for free for those most in

need and/or least able to pay), will be significantly lower than 'street prices' for cannabis. Cannabis is funnelled from the various growers to the various users through this central organisation – often this will be through a delivery service (either utilising the mail or through private distribution). Sometimes distribution is centred around Dutch style 'cannabis cafés' or 'coffee-shops'. Some of these are *only* open to certified medical users, others open to other users as well with profits from recreational users being used to supplement the medical marijuana. Members of such organisations are noticeably more secretive: the 'public face' – the intermediaries, web-sites and coffee-shops may be open but the details of how they are supplied (predominantly by local growers, sometimes supplemented with imported cannabis) and the identities of those involved in that supply are kept very secret. In these set-ups of course members have to consider not just legal action against themselves but legal action against their colleagues if they are too open about the operation.

Again it is easy to find illustrative examples already in the public domain – and again these well publicised cases are representative of many other co-operatives operating on similar lines.

Colin Davies was arrested in 1997 for cannabis cultivation when police seized 18 cannabis plants from his bedroom. Davies claimed to use cannabis as it was the only effective pain relief for his back which he broke in a fall. He said that the various drugs he had been prescribed over the years prompted spasms or sickness or other unwelcome side effects. A jury took 40 minutes to find him not guilty of cannabis cultivation under the 1971 MDA, seemingly convinced by his medical necessity defence.

Colin Davies went on to set up the 'Medical Marijuana Co-operative', supplying medical marijuana to those with certified medical conditions for whom conventional treatments were proving inadequate. He was acquitted by jury again in 1999, this time on charges of cultivating, possessing and supplying cannabis. Mr. Davies next made the national press in October 2000 when he presented the Queen with a bouquet of cannabis in an attempt to draw attention to the medical marijuana situation.

The next stage for his co-operative was to establish a Dutch-style cannabis café called the Dutch Experience in his native Stockport. Cannabis would be distributed for a reduced rate to those who had certified medical conditions – and even for free to those who needed it most and could afford it the least. The costs of producing these medical supplies and running the co-operative and café would be supplemented by recreational users paying for cannabis at the café, as well as the refreshments sold there. The Dutch Experience was closed by Manchester police within minutes of it first opening its doors, with Colin and others being arrested. The café reopened and the battle between supporters and the police was well documented – two MEPs were amongst others arrested as part of a protest in support of Mr. Davies and the Dutch Experience. Mr. Davies was eventually sentenced to three years imprisonment for his role in cultivating and supplying cannabis – the appeal procedure is, at the time of writing, still going through the upper courts. (Sources: *Ibid.*)

THC4MS are a group who until recently supplied mail-order cannabis chocolate to Multiple Sclerosis sufferers around the country. Customers were required to have a doctor's certificate for their condition and were introduced by the group either by word-of-mouth or via their web-site. Cannabis was supplied primarily by a network of UK-based growers. Three members of THC4MS, one an MS sufferer and another her husband, are currently going through the trial process on charges of supplying a controlled substance under the MDA act. The legal process has sparked a wave of protests in support for THC4MS including petitions and letter-writing campaigns which seem to have very broad public support. (Sources: *Ibid.*)

A common thread amongst the various forms of medical marijuana distribution is the requirement for evidence of a medical affliction. In smaller scale medical marijuana distribution this may be taken as read as the suppliers will know the users in person – although even in these cases some kind of doctor's note or other medical supporting evidence may be sought after. On the larger scale

operations where users may be strangers to the suppliers a GPs covering letter is often essential. There are two reasons for this. Firstly medical cultivators, especially those involved in larger scale co-operatives, are taking serious legal risks in pursuit of their cause – the medical aspects of the cannabis ideology. They may sympathise with and support the more general legalisation movement but their prime concern is with medical marijuana. They do not want their activities, risk-taking or ideology abused by recreational or pseudo-medical users. Secondly cultivation and distribution for purely medical reasons is seen to be more defensible – both morally (which ties in with the first reason) and legally – than non-medical cultivation and distribution. There is some evidence that both the public and the legal establishment agree with this view with numerous court hearings taking medical necessity (where there is good evidence for the medical necessity and where the cannabis cultivation was considered proportionate to this necessity) into consideration offering reduced (often non-custodial) sentences, dropping cases or acquitting growers. Acquittals have been most common in trial by jury, as in the initial cases involving Colin Davies, above. Some growers have deliberately opted for trial in crown rather than magistrates court in recognition of the fact that juries (i.e. the public) appear to be more sympathetic to the defence of medical necessity. This would be in line with many opinion polls and surveys which suggest that the general population is largely in favour of legalising cannabis for medical use, and certainly more supportive of legalising for medical use than legalising cannabis completely<sup>94</sup>. Recently there have been some cases where magistrates and even judges have accepted the defence of medical necessity and either found defendants not-guilty, ordered cases to be dropped, or given token sentences. In one case the CPS were quoted as dropping a case because there could be ‘no appropriate punishment’ for a man paralysed from the neck down who was found to be growing seven plants to ease his suffering (BBC news website, story dated September 2003). In other cases judges and magistrates have expressed sympathy but found they still have to be seen to apply the law (although often giving relatively light sentences for the nature of the crime), and in yet other cases medical necessity has been found to

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<sup>94</sup> See [www.ecguide.org.uk/opinions.php](http://www.ecguide.org.uk/opinions.php) for a list of opinion polls relating to cannabis legalisation in the UK, the US and elsewhere.

be no excuse for breaking the law with sentences being passed as they would be for non-medical cultivators of a similar scale.

Tolerance and sympathy seems to be most forthcoming with those that grow their own medical marijuana, although cases like Colin Davies and Tony Taylor show how it can be applied to those involved in the legally-more-serious act of supply. Of course the ailments for which medical marijuana is most widely used, and most widely recognised, tend to be those which often cause crippling pain and restriction to movement, such as MS or the paralysis case cited above. With disabling ailments it obviously becomes somewhat difficult for sufferers to cultivate their own cannabis and instead they must rely on the altruism – and willingness to break the law – of others. However many medical users, subject to ability and available resources (e.g. space), will *prefer* to grow their own supply as much as they can rather than encourage others to break the law on their behalf. The increased recognition of medical cannabis use, both by the public and by some within the criminal justice system, may, perversely, have led to a potential weakening of the medical marijuana defence in the current legal position. On the one hand are those who claim a medical use of marijuana to legitimise their own growing but do not necessarily have a condition for which cannabis is recognised to be beneficial – they certainly don't have a doctor's certificate supporting their medical marijuana use. On the other we have those who *do* supply medical users but only use a portion of their crop in this way whilst much of the rest is sold for *recreational* use. Neither of these positions should truly be seen as medical marijuana cultivation/distribution – especially when cannabis is sold to non-medical users. Selling to medical users, as with Tony Taylor and other medical suppliers, can be justified in covering the costs of the grow-op, and selling to non-medical users to supplement medical users, as with Colin Davies' Dutch Experience may be justifiable for the similar reasons (including covering overheads for the café) but this should be distinguished from those who *primarily* sell for profit but also do medical supply or claim medical use. These people are undoubtedly cannabis dealers in the common sense with financial motivations fitting the 'for-profit' cultivation models discussed in the next chapter. The claimed affiliation to medical marijuana supply seems to be a vain attempt to justify their wider involvement in cannabis dealing. The line may be a fine one, but there is scope for the line to be more clearly defined if a change in the law

recognised use, cultivation and supply specifically for certain medical uses (as is the case in Canada and some American states). On a third hand it is certainly the case that some genuine medical suppliers do keep some of their crops for *personal* (recreational) use. This still blurs the moral certainty of the ideological position but is perhaps more acceptable fitting, as it does, the model of ‘personal use’ growers, discussed below. It is important to recognise that any individual involved in cannabis cultivation or distribution can occupy multiple rolls within that scene – either at the same or different times – as is the case elsewhere in illegal drug distribution, discussed in *Chapter One*.

A final argument that clouds the distinction between medical marijuana use and cannabis use more generally – and undermines those seeking to distinguish legalisation for medical use from legalisation generally – concerns the idea of ‘self-medication’. Self medication – using cannabis to treat a condition without having a doctor’s recommendation – may prove damaging for the medical marijuana movement as it seems, in many instances, that ‘self-medication’ may just be an excuse for recreational use and any associated cultivation. Some pro-cannabis fanatics even argue that all cannabis use can be construed as medical because people use cannabis to make themselves feel better and to treat physical and mental ailments even if they do so subconsciously. Again this may weaken the genuine medical marijuana legalisation campaign as it seems to somewhat trivialise the issue and again reeks of making an excuse for recreational use and cultivation.

#### **5.2.1.2 Activist growers (cannabis growing as political activism).**

At the core at least medical marijuana cultivation is not about money, and nor is it about the self-interested pleasures associated with recreational drug use. There is another area of domestic cultivation which shares these characteristics – and which is perhaps all the more remarkable in that the cannabis is often grown without any hope of ever harvesting any of the crop. We have already encountered these growers in the previous chapter – the **guerrilla activists** – where they were discussed in the context of their opportunistic approaches to growing. Their methods were shared by other growers (the **guerrilla chancers**) but their motivation is perhaps unique in centring on the impact of growing cannabis rather than the harvestable results thereof.

The main aim for the guerrilla activist is to make a political statement, normally, but not always, related to cannabis itself. Examples of growing incidents as activism that were not (or at least not obviously) concerned with cannabis related issues include the occurrence during the May Day protests of 2000 when a selection of seeds – cannabis amongst them – were planted near the House of Commons as part of a series of world-wide protest actions co-ordinated by the anti-capitalist movement<sup>95</sup>. In this example the links between cannabis and the general political, ecological and ideological views of many cannabis growers we considered earlier are apparent. This is so even if there is no direct link between such views as connected specifically to cannabis, its legal status and its potential ecological, medical and spiritual benefits as espoused by many growers (and users) firmly ensconced in cannabis culture. A similar example that again made the national news occurred in 2002 when a cannabis plant was found growing in the grounds of the British Conservative party's Welsh headquarters. A party spokesman was quoted as saying "We have not got a clue how it got there"<sup>96</sup> – a statement which reflects the methodology of such guerrilla activists. In this example there appears to be absolutely no link between the use of (a) cannabis (plant) and the ideologies either associated directly with cannabis or the more general political and ecological ideologies often found amongst those people who grow cannabis or are otherwise heavily involved in cannabis culture. There may have been such a link – without knowing who the culprits were and what the agenda was we cannot be sure – but rather it seems to be the case that cannabis, an illegal substance (which can be grown and therefore suited the purpose), was primarily used as a symbol in an attempt to discredit or otherwise embarrass the targets.

It is more common however for there to be an inherent link between the plant itself (or at least characteristics associated with the plant) and the activism or protest in which it is employed. Here again I can draw on a well publicised example:

Free Rob Cannabis is so into the pro-cannabis cause that he changed his name by deed-poll. He obtained a license to grow hemp in 1993 and runs a shop selling hemp products – many of them made from his own produce.

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<sup>95</sup> Various news reports and personal observation.

<sup>96</sup> 'Dope found at Tory's Welsh HQ', The Guardian, Tuesday June 11th 2002.

In 1998 he was arrested after cannabis plants were moved from a flower display outside his shop – a display which had just won a prize in a local civic bloom contest. Mr. Cannabis denied planting the seeds himself but was charged with cultivation on the grounds that he had watered and maintained the plants when they appeared – and he certainly could not convincingly deny knowing what they were. Both Mr. Cannabis and a local councillor pointed out that cannabis seeds were often scattered around the area – to such an extent that it seems reasonable that more than one guerrilla activist was operating in the area. Whether or not Mr. Cannabis had planted seeds on that occasion he had a history of cannabis-related activism including seed dispersal and the giving away of cannabis every year in a self-promoted event in London. He aims to get arrested for his activity so he can employ the Human Rights Act, specifically Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to privacy), in his defence and hopefully render the current UK cannabis laws illegal themselves.

A quote from Mr. Cannabis after his 1998 arrest neatly sums up the ideological position cited by many pro-cannabis campaigners, including many guerrilla activist and other types of growers: “The main issue here is that this is a plant that we have been using in a variety of ways for thousands of years” (quoted in BBC News, September 24<sup>th</sup> 1998)<sup>97</sup>. (Sources: various news stories and personal communications.)

Although in this example Mr. Cannabis was not himself, on this occasion, found to be involved in the actual planting of cannabis seeds somebody must have been. He was still found guilty of cannabis cultivation – and according to other sources has been directly involved in guerrilla activism at other times. Either way it illustrates the issues that some activists raise, and the passion which some of them put into a range of pro-cannabis activities.

We can also return to the last chapter and consider the two South Yorkshire activist growers I mentioned. Although their helium balloon method of seed distribution seemed to be unique their general approach of randomly scattering

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<sup>97</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/179470.stm> accessed 16/12/03.

seeds, and their reasoning for doing so, was largely representative of other similar guerrilla activists.

There were two elements to the theory behind politically motivated cannabis activities such as random seed distribution. Firstly activists aim to *promote* cannabis (either the plant itself or the drug, or both) by drawing attention to the plant and its many properties: the appearance of cannabis plants around the country would, so my South Yorkshire guerrilla activists hoped, inspire people to ask questions about the plant. This element was reflected in the fact that these two were also active in other areas of cannabis promotion and legalisation campaigning. Both attended pro-legalisation events such as marches and the annual cannabis festival (held in Brixton, London on the first Saturday of May) and were members of pro-legalisation pressure groups. One of them even formed a hemp society at his university arranging events that included a talk by Howard Marks, the legendary cannabis smuggler. Both were also keen on hemp clothing and other products which they owned – and used (wore) as a constant promotion of hemp. The idea of promoting cannabis is also well illustrated by Free Rob Cannabis's activities – where illegal and legal cultivation were part of a range of activities designed to promote cannabis and cannabis issues.

The second aim is to encourage the *spread* of cannabis the idea being that if cannabis could be established as a wildly growing weed in the UK then attempts to control the drug would become pointless as it would be freely available to anyone, or at least anyone who knew where to look and what to look for. This situation exists in the USA where cannabis does grow wild across the country where it is known colloquially as 'ditch-weed' (Weisheit, 1992). Ditch-weed has a bad reputation amongst knowledgeable American growers and users of cannabis due to its poor quality and low strength (it is generally used as a drug source only by inexperienced users) and also because wild male plants make growing all-female crops (sinsemilla) difficult due to pollination<sup>98</sup> (*ibid.*). This, and the fact that despite wide spread ditch-weed American law and law-enforcement still comes down heavily on cannabis use and distribution, seems lost on these activists – they hadn't even considered these implications. However as with other aspects of ideological motivation it doesn't matter that these

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<sup>98</sup> Growers in the UK also expressed doubts about the guerrilla-activist method as it would 'pollute' outside domestic grows of sinsemilla.

grower's beliefs may be misplaced or illogical the important thing is that they believe in their cause and methods and they see their actions as justified political protest against an unjust law.

The link between the ideological views relating specifically to cannabis and the more general ecological ideology mentioned earlier is highlighted again by my two South Yorkshire growers. Both were active in other areas of ecological protest including other areas of ecological direct action with contacts – and some involvement – in activities such as the destruction of Genetically Modified crops and the sabotaging of fox hunts. Having said this there was some discrepancy in their own reasoning – the use of helium balloons would inevitably lead to the dead balloons polluting the countryside, a result that seemingly contradicts their other ecological values. This discrepancy illustrates, perhaps, the passion behind the cannabis issue – as an ecological and social concern, and as one of personal rights and personal pleasure. Cannabis outweighs, for some activists, other personal ideological concerns. The discrepancy is also illustrative of the muddled thinking of some pro-cannabis campaigners but again the logic is not the issue – rather the passion and element of self-justification for illegal actions is, however misplaced it may be.

I would also remind the reader of those who scattered cannabis seeds and also scattered and/or swapped the seeds of rare and/or restricted vegetable varieties in protest over the patenting and ownership of seed varieties as an illustration of cannabis ideology being part of wider ecological and social justice concerns. For these individuals the cannabis situation is one of many related issues. For others, such as Free Rob Cannabis, cannabis is *the* issue (although this may well include the non-drug elements of the plant, as illustrated by his hemp business, as well as the personal rights issues) and one which some activists are incredibly passionate about<sup>99</sup>. The position is muddled, but the point is that many activists believe, or at least say they believe, passionately in the issues. This is probably usually genuine, but may in some situations merely be a front to justify illegal activity.

### **5.2.1.3 Personal use cannabis growers.**

The majority of cannabis growers grow primarily for their own use rather than for financial gain. These growers are fairly common and are not a new

phenomenon (although their numbers seem to be increasing rapidly). What seems to be new is the increased use of technology by even the smallest scale cannabis growers. Whilst many people still employ the traditional methods of a patch of ground, a selection of seeds and the natural growing cycle more and more people are utilising scientific advances in grow-lights, hydroponics and plant breeding. My next two case studies show two distinct but effective approaches to growing cannabis for personal use.

“Jill”, now a middle-aged professional and keen amateur gardener, has been smoking cannabis since her university days. Her consumption dropped while she was bringing up her two children, but she now smokes one or two joints most evenings to unwind. She sees the criminal side of the general drug trade as an “ugly and predictable by-product of current drug laws”. About seven to eight years ago, in an effort to minimise her contact with what she sees as the “seedier” side of the cannabis culture, she decided to utilise her gardening know-how and greenhouse to try to grow a handful of plants for her own use. Now, using nothing more than seeds from previous crops and simple horticultural knowledge she grows almost enough every year to meet her smoking requirements. When she has finished harvesting she dries the crop and stores it in the freezer until such time as it is required. While she still occasionally has need to visit dealers these visits are kept to an absolute minimum. While she will occasionally give away a couple of buds to friends this is infrequent in order to preserve her stocks and money never changes hands.

“Alan” is now in his early 20s. He has recently graduated from university and currently lives in a large shared house with a mixture of students and graduates. He has been smoking on and off for about 7 years, but with periods of abstinence that have lasted up to a year. Although he currently smokes a lot – his household of 9 adults get through over an ounce of skunk a week – he would prefer to ingest his cannabis in food or drink form. Ideally he would like to “infuse [cannabis] in alcohol, and develop a method of ingestion that doesn't involve smoking” but never seems to have enough

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<sup>99</sup> Although not many go to the extreme changing their names to make a political point!

spare skunk to invest to this end. He recently started growing two plants in a cupboard using hydroponics, chemical fertilisers, a carbon-filter and a six hundred watt grow lamp. He expected to harvest about six to eight ounces of top bud per crop and is keeping any leaves and ‘shake’ – and some of the top bud – to put in vodka. His plants started as cuttings, which, along with the growing equipment and lights came from a friend, “Weedhopper” (subject of a separate case study, later). In exchange for this loan and horticultural expertise Weedhopper will receive half of the crop. Alan has no definite plans for his share of the crop; I asked him if he’d considered selling it:

“I haven't decided yet! I mean, if it gets sold, then there still really won't be that much need for it to be sold outside of these walls [i.e. to his housemates]. In which case probably what will happen is I'll give it away and accept gifts for the rest of the year. I certainly don't agree with the old axiom that you shouldn't give to receive. Glad to give to receive!”

Cannabis is an easy plant to grow. It will grow in almost any climate with the minimum of intervention, however a bit of extra care and attention can significantly improve the quality and quantity of a crop. Jill transferred techniques used for growing tomatoes and general gardening knowledge into a successful cannabis growing venture resulting in a product of better quality than that available from her local dealers. Alan used a modern hydroponics system along with sodium lights, timer switches, electric fans and a carbon-filter to much the same effect. The unifying feature of those that grow their own marijuana is that they consume cannabis regularly and intend on consuming their own crop or sharing it with friends rather than selling it. Despite the differing approaches seen here, both Jill and Alan share common motives and ideologies. The developments in hydroponics technology have led to the situation where while a grower like Jill needs a quiet, secluded greenhouse to grow her cannabis, Alan can produce as much cannabis as Jill, of a better quality, in the privacy of his own bedroom wardrobe.

The majority of cannabis growers are growing primarily for their own consumption or for the use of themselves and their cannabis-smoking friends. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds – here we have seen the professional middle-age woman and the unemployed recent graduate. My research included many other

examples from across the socio-economic spectrum. These growers do not even consider any potential profits from their crops - whatever they grow will save them having to buy as much (or any) cannabis from other sources. There are financial benefits in that home-grown cannabis means less has to be bought with cash – the motivation of ‘thrift’ identified by Warner (1986:200).

Beyond this limited financial incentive, motivation to grow is often rooted in pride, practicality and/or personal ideology and ethics, what Weisheit calls the ‘intangible rewards’ of growing (1991). Growers are proud to be able to produce their own cannabis, as noted by Warner (1986) and as particularly relevant to Ralph Weisheit’s ‘Communal growers’ (Weisheit, 1992). This feeling is magnified when the cannabis produced is particularly good, when the crop is particularly bountiful and/or when a new strain – especially one developed by the grower themselves – proves to be a success.

Practical considerations include the desire for a regular, reliable and good quality supply of cannabis. This also reflects an ideological position which has become something of a campaign-within-a-campaign for many in the legalisation movement. In particular home-grown cannabis – either growing it personally or encouraging dealers to offer cannabis from home-grown sources – is promoted as an alternative to soap-bar. Soap-bar is the slang name for poor quality cannabis resin such as dominates large sections of the domestic cannabis market. Usually coming to Britain from North Africa via the Iberian peninsula it is widely believed that soap-bar is ‘cut’ or mixed with other products including dangerous products such as diesel oil and unpleasant ones such as animal excrement alongside more innocuous additives. There is some evidence to support this view as documented in the national media. Middlemen receive the product in Spain (or other European countries) from suppliers based in North Africa. They melt it down in large vats adding other substances to increase the weight and hence the profit margin. Although there is no evidence that this occurs within the UK campaign groups such as the United Kingdom Cannabis Internet Activists (UKCIA) encourage cannabis users to refuse to buy these products from their dealers but instead to either grow their own or push their suppliers to source better quality cannabis.

From an ethical viewpoint a desire to avoid the black market (for reasons of quality and purity of supplies, or as a stand against the organised crime, criminal profit or harder drugs connection associated with dealers) was also frequently cited by my

respondents and also actively encouraged by others in the pro-cannabis community. Another ethical or ideological 'reason' for growing one's own cannabis cited by many growers ties back into the position of the guerrilla activists – if enough people grow their own cannabis then the law will eventually be powerless to control the situation and so will have to be changed, or at least quietly ignored and un-enforced.

#### **5.2.1.4 Accidental cannabis growers**

There is a final group of not-for-profit growers that, on first examination, fall outside the motivational typology that I am drawing up. Accidental growers are those that grow cannabis without intending to do so – as such they have no motivation, no drivers. As with legal hemp growers it may be asked what relevance this group have in a criminological treatise. As with hemp growers firstly there is a desire to be complete in my study of UK cannabis growers. Secondly there is some overlap with accidental marijuana growing and the criminal justice system even if accidentally grown cannabis is separate from any wider drug market. Thirdly the existence of accidental cannabis growing is evidence, for some, of the ultimate futility of trying to prohibit a plant in the first place.

A judge at Nottingham crown court dismissed a case against a man whose garden sprouted five cannabis plants from hemp seed he had scattered for his racing pigeons.

(Guardian 'Front ...to back', 28<sup>th</sup> March 2001, citing Nottingham Evening Post, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2001)

This story exemplifies both how accidental growing often occurs and why it is still a criminological issue. Dispersal of random seeds – bird or animal food or just scattering unidentified seeds to see what grows – and not noticing or identifying what grows if and when they take root seems innocent enough. Yet in this and other cases the grower was still taken to court – which may seem to some like a waste of criminal justice resources. Of course the police often have to take action. The claim of innocence – that the plants were grown accidentally, and that the grower may not even have recognised them for what they were could be a cunning ruse, a story spun only if and when a pre-planned growing operation gets detected. Even if the act is genuinely innocent it is still illegal to produce cannabis hemp without a licence in the UK. If the cannabis plants become known to the police then the police

have to be seen to act – as was mentioned by one of my law-enforcement contacts. If the cannabis plants become known to the grower – or the grower becomes aware that the plants are cannabis, and illegal – then the grower should destroy them. If he doesn't then he is still involved in illegal cultivation, and can no longer claim ignorance. Something else must be driving him to continue his involvement – even if it is only laziness!

Not everyone knows what cannabis is and this has led to some accidental growing cases becoming well publicised, at least at the local level:

76 year old Emmanuel Machen appeared in the gardening pages of his local newspaper to request for help in identifying a plant that had sprung up from some seeds he acquired at a local shop. The seeds developed into six inch high flowers apart from one rogue seed. “This one has kept growing but it has no flowers and it smells awful” Mr. Machen said. The plant was identified as ‘skunk’ cannabis and the police came round to remove it after warning Mr. Machen to cut it down or risk going to jail. (Source: various news reports)

One may wonder how the cannabis seed came to be mixed in with flower seeds in the first place – accident, or mischief on the part of someone involved in the seed packing – although it is hard to doubt Mr. Machen's innocence in this venture. Accidentally planting hemp seeds from bird or animal feed is one thing, but finding cannabis (especially a premium strain) where one expected to find flowers or vegetables is another. This to me suggests an element of activist growing from somebody involved in the packaging of the seeds. Indeed at seed-swap events I attended<sup>100</sup> not only were some participants seen to be swapping cannabis seed varieties with each other (as opposed to the normal fruit, vegetable and flower varieties) but some packets of cannabis seeds were mixed in with the other seed packs, often picked up by the unwary who assumed they were something other than cannabis. The link between cannabis based activism and other ecological issues is clear, as is the link between cannabis activism and some instances of accidental cultivation.

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<sup>100</sup> Events where rare varieties of seeds are swapped by gardeners in an attempt to boost biodiversity and/or make a statement about large bio-tech companies who seek to control seed varieties.

A final case-study for this chapter links elements of personal-use growing, activist growing and accidental cultivation:

Beechgrove Potting Shed is a gardening program on BBC Radio Scotland. Early in 2004 a member of public phoned in with a question about using a propagator to grow cannabis cuttings. Hosts and the panel happily discussed the issue before wishing the caller luck. Later, when the issue was raised, it was claimed that those giving advice had thought the caller had been asking about cabbage. Two police forces began investigations but the BBC refused to pass on the caller's details.

Given that the variety of cannabis the caller mentioned, 'Northern Lights', shares its name with a variety of cabbage and that the words cannabis and cabbage are at least broadly similar this excuse may hold up. However quite why a panel of gardening experts didn't question why anyone would grow cabbage cuttings in a propagator – or indeed grow cabbage cuttings at all – there is room for an element of doubt. The presenters were either genuinely accidentally involved, or were feigning ignorance. The caller seemed keen to get the best advice on growing cannabis – reflecting the ideological driver of producing good quality cannabis. The caller may well have phoned in innocence, but we must assume that they knew cannabis was illegal. Yet they were willing to discuss it on a public broadcast programme – this suggests an element of activism as well, publicising illegal activity as a way of showing disdain for the law.

In terms of my motivational typology of cannabis growers the true accidental grower does not fit, having no motivation to speak of. The grower who claims accident or ignorance when actually they were growing intentionally but are feigning ignorance should rightly be categorised by their original intention. Those making a political point or playing some kind of practical joke may be considered with activist growers, discussed earlier. Those hoping to harvest some cannabis are categorised either with the personal use, medical use or other not-for-profit growers of this chapter, or with the financially motivated growers of *Chapter Six*. However the fact that genuine accidental growing seemingly does happen is still pertinent to the discussion of ideologically motivated growers. It supports the argument that cannabis is ubiquitous, that you can't keep a good plant down. Some legalisation supporters wonder how it can make sense to make a naturally occurring plant or the

cultivation thereof illegal. If the plant crops up without people noticing it, if its seeds appear as a legal product then how can the law be either justified or enforced?

### 5.3 Summary of non-financial motivational drivers

It is normally assumed that an element of financial gain must be part of the reason why people get involved in drug production or drug distribution. With most dealers it is assumed that they hope to make some kind of profit although with those operating at the lower levels – the user-dealers – the financial incentive might be to get their own drugs cheaply, or for free. What this chapter shows is that for cannabis production at least<sup>101</sup> a financial incentive is not necessary for many of those involved. True most of these growers operate on a small scale, but some of the medical marijuana co-operatives operate on a more significant level: large scale drug production and distribution can still be driven primarily by non-financial motivational elements. For all growers I would suggest that motivation may be from a combination of one or more groups of drivers that can be categorised under the general headings or ‘Need’, ‘Weed’ and ‘Greed’. ‘Greed’ represents the traditional drug-dealing goal of making money, but ‘Greed’ is not a necessary requirement. The growers in this chapter have all been motivated by elements of ‘Need’ (i.e. medical necessity) and ‘Weed’ (i.e. an ideological position relating to the drug, or the plant itself) rather than any ‘Greed’.

We have a range of non-financial drivers at work in different combinations for different types of cannabis grower. At one extreme we have pure altruism – those that grow cannabis, despite the legal risks, for the benefit primarily of others. The growers in medical marijuana co-operatives are the prime example here. However those growing as an act of political activism can be seen to share similar traits. If they are trying to address issues or change laws that they see as wrong or harmful to society then they too are involved in criminal activity, despite the personal risks, for the perceived good of others. Personal-use medical growers are also challenging a law they see as wrong and are risking legal proceedings in doing so – the immediate benefactor of their growing may be themselves but they are standing up for others as well.

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<sup>101</sup> How this may all apply to other drugs will be discussed in *Chapter Seven*.

In the terminology of the thesis title these altruistic drivers can be seen as elements of ‘Need’ – that is cultivation of cannabis being driven because the grower sees no alternative. Need also crops up as a financial motivator (as it did in Weisheit’s 1992 study), where it is distinguishable from ‘Greed’, and will be returned to in the next chapter. Here medical users see cultivation as a medical necessity, and activist growers see activism as necessary in trying to change unjust laws.

‘Weed’ encompasses those motivational elements that relate to an ideological position to cannabis cultivation. This encompasses the ecological, spiritual and agricultural benefits associated with the cannabis plant and their use as an argument to justify cultivation. It would also encompass some medical use – those people who have doctor’s certificates stating that cannabis is recognised as being beneficial come under the ‘Need’ heading, but those who believe that cannabis is beneficial to them, or claim to use and grow cannabis for self-medication regardless of a doctor’s opinion, are subject to ‘Weed’ orientated motivation.

‘Weed’ also encompasses those who are motivated to grow so as to ensure a good quality of cannabis and/or a separation from the established black-market and it’s (non-cannabis related) crime and hard-drug elements. Those who have a genuine interest in cannabis *as a plant* and/or wider horticultural or ecological issues can also be seen conceptually to be motivated by ‘Weed’ elements. The non-tangible rewards of cannabis growing identified by Weisheit (1991) fall firmly within my concept of ‘Weed’ as a group of motivational drivers.

‘Need’ growers might more readily get public sympathy for their activities – especially the medical growers. But ‘Weed’ orientated growers still see themselves as justified in their cannabis growing and law breaking, and certainly distinguish themselves from ‘Greed’ growers who do seek to make a profit and who are discussed in the next chapter. ‘Weed’ and ‘Need’ may of course overlap – medical users who are not certified but get a genuine benefit from cannabis, or certified medical users who still ally themselves with other elements of cannabis ideology. ‘Weed’ and ‘Need’ elements can and do overlap also with a degree of ‘Greed’, or may be largely superseded by financial concerns. The next chapter hopes to further explore this distinction.

## 6 – The Budding Business:

### Commercial Cannabis Cultivation

#### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined an ideological approach – or ideological approaches – to growing that helped define many of those involved in domestic marijuana cultivation, and began a typology of growers based around motivational aspects. For those ideological growers the potential of financial returns through selling their produce has little influence on their decision to grow cannabis. Indeed politically motivated guerrilla activists are completely separated from this aspect, and as such are perhaps unique in the world of illegal drug distribution. Other ideologically minded not-for-profit growers are still involved in distribution but not for financial reasons. This is not to say that some of these growers do not welcome some financial return on their growing – medical growers may charge users a nominal fee (considerably lower than open-(black)market prices) to cover their running and distribution costs, and personal-use growers often cite the reduction of their own expenditure on drugs as a motivating factor. However few of the cannabis growers considered so far (with the exception of those medical-use growers who also sell to non-medical users – who are really occupying two roles being engaged in both ideological and financially motivated distribution) can be said to be drug *dealers* in the conventional sense of distributing drugs as an illegal business. Medical-use and personal-use growers do participate in *distribution* of drugs but with no or little profit-motive and, with personal-use growers and some medical-use growers, no financial transaction at all. Where financial transactions – i.e. the sale of cannabis – do occur with medical users the structure and openness of the transaction and the relationship between supplier (who may or may not be the grower) and purchaser clearly separates this form of cannabis distribution from the more common, more ‘criminal’, concept of drug-dealing. I cite here the relative openness of many medical suppliers (with web-sites and/or open premises), the common requirement for a doctor’s certificate and the distinction between medical and non-medical customers (often with the total exclusion of the latter, but otherwise with different pricing structures).

These growers represent a clear and dramatic departure from the standard assumption that drug distribution is primarily about the money – whether in terms of profits (at the upper levels) or in terms of subsidising a dealers’ own drug use (at the lower levels), or both. We have seen a selection of approaches to cannabis cultivation which are *not* about money but are instead motivated by ideological and altruistic concerns. Of course those with no financial interest whatsoever in their cannabis cultivation are relatively rare, confined to the activist growers and the purist medical growers – but for the majority of growers ideological concerns couple with the financial incentive of thrift in making cannabis cultivation seem like an attractive proposition. The growers considered so far can be seen to be predominantly inspired by ideological concerns – those considered in this chapter can be viewed as commercial growers motivated to varying (increasing) degrees by financial return. At the same time it is worth noting to what degree ideological concerns are still influential to many commercial growers. I would contend that there is a conceptual difference between those commercial growers who are still largely influenced by ideological concerns even at the expense of potential profits – more weed than greed – and those for whom ideological considerations are only relevant where they are seen to support financial considerations – more greed than weed.

## 6.2 Commercial Cannabis Growers – My Typology of Cannabis Growers (part II)<sup>102</sup>

There are clear opportunities for money making in cannabis growing – whether on a small scale, ensuring a modest additional or supplementary income, or on a large scale offering potentially huge profits and wealth. This financial incentive can be a factor in the motivation or reasoning behind becoming a grower – where it is we have *commercial* cannabis growers. Commercial cannabis growers are distinguished from Ideological cannabis growers in that they are overtly motivated by money (i.e. beyond simple thrift). In drug distribution terms the key difference is that cannabis is *sold* by the grower (as opposed to given away in the case of most ‘personal use’ growers) with the intent of making money.

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<sup>102</sup> A version of this typology first appeared in Potter and Dann (2005).

Commercial growers can be divided into further categories on the basis of the balance between ideological and financial concerns and also by the size and nature of the growing/dealing operation. Indeed these two elements, *motivation* and *organisation* are, as I hope to show, intrinsically linked.

### ***6.2.1 Small scale for-profit growers***

#### **6.2.1.1 One-off Opportunists and the slippery slope.**

Many ‘commercial growers’ start off with the intentions of being ‘personal-use’ growers but discover that when they harvest their crops they have a surplus of cannabis. Obviously in most cases this was the intention in growing in the first place, but the plan and the reality of what to do with the harvest have a tendency to diverge. Cannabis does not store ideally. One of the advantages of home-grown cannabis, and one of the things which make home-grown skunk varieties so sought after in the market, is its freshness. Cannabis decays over time losing potency and also, in the eyes of connoisseurs, taste and quality of smoke. Having said this cannabis can be kept for a long time before it goes off completely – it may be of a lesser quality as it gets older but it is still cannabis. However those that have grown their own skunk cannabis are likely to be connoisseurs and will generally be unhappy about letting their pride home-grown skunk degenerate. One solution is to freeze cannabis, as with Jill in the last chapter. This will slow, but not stop, deterioration but is acceptable if your concerns are more about availability of cannabis than the quality. Alcoholic preparations are another possibility but these are generally looked upon as something special and not considered suitable for the bulk of a crop. Besides which the majority of cannabis users in the UK still prefer to smoke their cannabis (personal observations; IDMU data). Some personal-use growers – the true personal-use growers – will regulate their growing so they produce less cannabis but more frequently, will happily give away their excesses and don’t worry too much if cannabis is kept for longer and loses its freshness. But the temptation here is obvious – if there is surplus cannabis to be given away then why not make some money from it? After all cannabis users are often, by their nature as cannabis users, generous and reciprocative when it comes to sharing cannabis. Why this means accepting small gifts of cannabis with good grace it also means that with larger or regular gifts

there will often be the feeling of obligation to offer something in return – a favour, or some other cannabis (or other drugs) in return, or cash. We can return to the example of ‘Alan’ from the previous chapter.

Alan grew for himself and for his housemates – and with a particular interest in making some cannabis-vodka. When it came to harvest he actually ended up with about seven ounces of top-bud. With the bottom-bud and shake a couple of ounces of the prime skunk would do his house mates their smoking needs for a month or so. With five ounces left to sit around when offers came in to buy the cannabis – at £100 an ounce – he succumbed to temptation. This seemed preferable than having the cannabis sitting around for ages losing its freshness, stinking the house out, and potentially posing a risk of getting caught and suspected of dealing. On the other hand £500 will always be attractive to a recent and as-yet unemployed graduate.

Shortly after Alan harvested his crop the house tenancy expired. One of his former house mates started growing in his new flat – again citing (at the time of starting) ‘personal use’ as his primary concern. He too, on harvest, sold the bulk of his crop rather than having it sitting around.

It is interesting that one of the reasons cited by some growers for selling the surplus on a supposed personal-use crop was the concern that being caught with large quantities of cannabis would lead the authorities to suspect intent to supply rather than personal use – and that the solution to this was to actively commit an act of supply, for money!

Another reason for getting into selling home-grown cannabis is to meet a particular financial need, whilst still getting a personal supply of cannabis to mitigate future spending and/or meet ideological concerns.

“G”, a postgraduate student, was paying his own way through a master’s Degree. Despite a reasonably termed bank loan, part-time work and occasional forays into small-scale drug dealing (cannabis and Ecstasy), he found the economic pressures too great (partly through excessive spending on alcohol, drugs and nights out) and fell behind on his rent. After some encouragement from a friend (“Weedhopper”, see below) he set up a hydroponics grow-room of two plants. Weedhopper, who arranged in return to take 60% of the sales profit, provided cuttings, equipment and

expertise. Six and a half ounces of top bud were eventually sold to a local dealer. G paid his rent arrears and was left with enough skunk (a mixture of top bud, bottom bud and shake) to see him through many weeks of his personal smoking. Whilst the operation was profitable, having cleared his pressing debts he did not feel the need to grow again ‘unless it’s legalized, of course!’

G corresponds to the ‘Pragmatists’ within Ralph Weisheit’s typology of American marijuana cultivators (1991, 1992), with cannabis growing seen as an expedient way to address a financial trouble which could not easily be solved through legitimate means. In my terms G is a true commercial grower albeit a small scale one – a pragmatist growing out of financial need rather than greed. Alan is also a commercial grower, but would conform more to the ‘Communal Growers’ of Weisheit’s typology and clearly stems primarily from ideological rather than financial concerns – a mixture of weed and greed. However even G stuck to various ideological principles – he took pride in his growing and, like Alan, sold his crop to a single dealer (one who he normally bought off) at below-market rates rather than trying to hold out for a better deal or make extra money through retail sales. A few years later he did grow again, in his back garden, conforming to the ideologies of the true personal use grower sharing his crop with house-mates and friends.

With both Alan and G, and also with most personal use growers who sell an excess, the amount of cannabis *sold* after one crop was considerably less than the amount of cannabis the individual would have used over a year or so. As such in cases like these where the grow, and accompanying sale, was strictly one-off or very occasional it is difficult to say that they necessarily made money out of cannabis cultivation. Instead money from sales of cannabis was used expediently – to supplement a time of unemployment and to pay off a specific debt. The equivalent money – and more – would be spent on cannabis at a later time when cash-flow was healthier and the home-grown had run out.

What unites Alan, and G, and other growers like them is the general method of growing (typically two plants under one light in a bedroom wardrobe) and the approach to cultivation and distribution. Both got into the selling side of cultivation because it was an attractive opportunity to make some money at the time – but neither of them were tempted to repeat the experience, or even to

immediately grow again for any reason. They had satisfied their original aims. Many growers – whether personal-use growers or ‘one-off opportunists’ (like Alan and G) – only grow as a ‘one-off’ or as an occasional occupation<sup>103</sup> having satisfied their original aims – and their curiosity. However for others the taste of financial return is tempting and growing itself proves somewhat addictive. A common development after the first, ‘one-off’, sale of home-grown cannabis is to become a regular producer of small quantities of cannabis. From the perspective of the personal-use grower the temptation to consistently produce and sell a surplus to one’s own requirements is easily satisfied. There is little perceived extra effort or risk involved than in personal-use production – especially as the surplus will usually be sold only to close friends. From the perspective of the pragmatist having done it all once why not do it again – ensuring a small but steady income and a personal supply of good cannabis. Either way the commercial side of cannabis cultivation is tempting and a slippery slope may well be encountered (and often is) leading to an on-going commercial operation.

#### **6.2.1.2 Growing as a business: the self-employed grower**

The most common type of commercial growers are those that grow regularly, primarily for their own use, but selling their surplus to friends. Usually this will result in an income of not more than a few hundred pounds every two or three months – similar to for Alan of G but on a regular or semi-regular basis. Most growers operating on this scale had proper jobs – as such this money is generally less important than the grower’s legitimate income and is seen as a bonus to be spent on day-to-day living and the occasional treat. However for some small-scale growers living off benefits an extra few-hundred pounds here and there could be significant. Either way the *primary* aim behind growing remains providing oneself with good quality cannabis away from the black market, reasons cited by the personal use growers of the previous chapter. The set-up remains small-scale – a cupboard or attic or spare room given over to cannabis grown under lights and harvested every 10-12 weeks. In many ways growing remains a hobby, albeit one which provides a welcome extra income. For others however the money generated from cannabis becomes more important

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<sup>103</sup> Many ‘one-off’ growers actually go on to grow again in the future – but at the time they see their involvement as a once-off. They certainly don’t plan to grow regularly.

representing a major source of income and an alternative from legitimate earnings.

“Bob”, then 25, was (and still is) unemployed. He graduated from university about three years before I first interviewed him and managed to get a well paid job but had to leave due to mental health problems. When he first stopped working he was keen not to claim benefits and looked around for an alternative means of supporting himself. After many conversations with Weedhopper he decided to start growing to provide for himself without the need to claim benefits – although the reality was that he grew cannabis commercially and continued to claim benefits. He grew nine plants at any one time (plus a mother plant for taking cuttings from) divided equally in three stages of growth so that he harvested three plants every month. He usually harvested around eight ounces a month of prime top-bud. He sold most of this for £120 per ounce to a single dealer friend – some of it in smaller amounts to other friends – thus enabling him to pay rent, buy food, socialise and repay debts accrued at university and since.

Whereas Alan and G had seen cannabis growing as a one-off way to make some quick cash, Bob needed something to give him a more regular income. A larger scale grow room, while still fitting comfortably into his one-bedroom flat, and divided into two staggered growing stages (with a separate small cupboard in his bedroom given over to his mother plant and cuttings), gave Bob a regular income and a way to survive without relying on jobs or benefits. He was his own boss, growing as much as he needed to meet his monthly out-goings. Given the size of his growing space (his cupboard-under-the-stairs being bigger than the standard bedroom wardrobes used by G or Alan) he could have easily doubled his income with little extra effort, but chose not to due to the combination of a lack of greed and a fear of unnecessary risk. His system was a little more complicated than others, and needed more time and effort from him. As such his growing was something of a job – it needed regular hours with carefully planned holidays. The reward was earning a reputation for growing some of the best skunk around<sup>104</sup> and living a relatively quiet life away from what he referred to as “the real world”.

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<sup>104</sup> The dealer he sold to noted that customers “often timed their purchasing to coincide with [Bob’s] crop.”

“This whole thing’s kinda like a transitional period. Having been a student and not used to working in the real world, I can’t go straight into an environment like that, I mean from one extreme to the other. I’ve done it before and had a really bad time and thought fuck that shit, I’m not doing that.” (Bob)

Motivation in this case is financial but as a practical consideration or ‘need’ rather than greed or desire, again somewhat reminiscent of Weisheit’s pragmatists. Bob had tried ‘real work’ – he had been a moderately well paid software engineer – but found the rigid hours and social contact did not go well with his mental health. Instead he grew – not excessively, but enough for his needs.

For Bob growing was a chance to avoid work and supplement benefits – arguably excusable (certainly so in his view) on the grounds of his mental health problems. For others it was a chance to fund themselves through university.

“Chris” employed a ‘sea of green’ method to produce about 20 to 30 ounces every eight weeks or so. Using about 5% himself he would sell the rest in small to medium quantities – as a retail level cannabis dealer – to friends and university acquaintances at competitive rates<sup>105</sup>. This allowed him to study, enjoy life and buy possessions such as music equipment and clothes without getting into the sorts of debts UK university students usually face.

“Monkey” adopted a slightly different approach. Growing 15 plants at a time in an attic he produced 140 or more ounces per crop (on a 12 week growing cycle), selling to a dealer friend (conceptually and practically a definite ‘middleman’ by Pearson and Hobbs’ definition of the term (2001)) at £100 per ounce. After a couple of grows he called a halt. He had nearly £30,000 with which he paid the fees for, and funded himself through, a Masters degree in sustainable development.

Both of these growers can be seen to being somewhat pragmatic (in the Weisheit sense) in their approach with their financial concerns representing elements of ‘need’ – if we allow this term to be interpreted in the context of attaining an education – more than ‘greed’. The next example, however, saw cannabis

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<sup>105</sup> He told me he sold to others at £20 per eighth ounce, £35 per quarter, £60 per half and £100 per ounce. The larger units were certainly sold at very competitive rates in the opinion of this observer. Turn to *Chapter Seven* to see how this compares to general market prices.

growing as a way of upping his spending power beyond any concept of 'need' aimed instead at covering expensive consumerism and socialising. In Weisheit's terminology he would be seen as a 'hustler' rather than the 'pragmatists' we have seen so far in this chapter. Despite this change of motive – raw profit, or 'greed', rather than 'need' – the next grower operated on a similar scale to those discussed above.

"Mike" had a well paid occupation as a commercial IT manager. He was a heavy user of cannabis himself, but cited his reasons for growing as 'income and reliability of supply' in that order. Growing 12-16 plants on the sea of green method he harvested about 10-12 ounces of cannabis a month, selling about 90% of his crop to friends at £100 to £120 per ounce and thus supplementing his already reasonably high earnings with a further £1000+ a month of untaxed income.

Although the reasons for growing may differ with different degrees of financial incentive all of these 'self-employed' type growers still adopt the basic indoor method utilising spare space in their own house. They are in sole control of their own grow-op and sell their cannabis to people they consider friends (who may or may not be dealers). There is still a great deal of pride in their own produce and generally an effort to comply with cannabis-culture ideologies such as quality of cannabis, fairness of price and a degree of personal use of their own supply.

### **6.2.1.3 Partnerships and growing friends.**

Most growers – ideological, personal use or commercial – know other growers with whom they exchange information, knowledge and skills. Most growers will have benefited from knowing, or getting to know, other growers and will have learnt at least in part through tuition from a friend or on-line acquaintance. Indeed the whole basis of the on-line growing communities is reciprocity of knowledge as well as a social element. Some growers of all types do exist largely in isolation knowing no other growers, learning about growing from books or magazines or from the internet, or trial-and-error and transferable horticultural skills, but these growers are relatively rare and certainly hard to identify through my sampling means. The majority have other friends – either in person or on-line – who also grow and the mutual aid gleaned from the sharing of knowledge follows the rules of basic friendship and/or cannabis culture ideologies. In other

cases however growing relationships are more formalised. G, for example, was introduced to growing by Weedhopper, a close friend, who provided the equipment, cuttings and expertise and who took 60% of the money made (from selling the crop but excluding the cannabis G kept for personal use). Bob, Monkey and Chris were all introduced to commercial cannabis growing by friends who were already growers – Bob received regular advice and would, in exchange, regularly supply his friend with small amounts of cannabis. Monkey was provided with equipment and assistance by a friend who was heavily involved in commercial cultivation. At the end of the operation the friend (‘Jonah’, considered later in this chapter) reclaimed his equipment and a share of the profits. Although sometimes these arrangements are fairly formal the basis in all these cases is friendship with growing being conducted in something of a partnership – the grower, the person in whose property the grow is set and who ultimately controls the crop, and the friend who is providing expertise for some kind of reward. The relationship is mutually beneficial – usually the more experienced grower getting something for teaching or supervising the less experienced grower whilst the latter gets help whilst maintaining ultimate control. Other, similar, relationships occur when friends are invited to help out with the actual harvest, usually rewarded by cannabis, beer and maybe even some money. In other cases the relationship is more formal – and becomes more reminiscent of the ‘organised crime’ model of drug trafficking:

“JJ” was a university undergraduate. Having been a heavy cannabis smoker since his early school days he went on to deal cannabis – and other drugs (predominantly ecstasy but also cocaine and amphetamines) – throughout his university career. Having got quite heavily in debt he began to investigate other avenues for making cash. A brief foray into cocaine dealing merely landed him in more debt (the temptation to use his ‘profit margin’ being too great), so when he was offered a job as a caretaker for a crop of skunk – to be grown in his cellar – he jumped at the chance. All he had to do was the basic day-to-day management of the crop while his employer, a man referred to as “Mysterious Bob”, visited the house every few days, checked the crop and issued instructions for the next few days’ care. Unfortunately JJ was involved in a drugs bust at a fellow dealers house which led to the police searching his own house and finding

the 10 plants. He was arrested and spent three months in a young offenders institute. He told me:

“The thing is I had to own up to the weed because it was ‘Mysterious Bob’ who was actually doing the funding and growing of it and everything. I actually did nothing for it, but I got like 60% of the crop for taking the risk.”

Although JJ and the other growers in this section were using very similar growing methods and all sought financial reward for their efforts there were clear differences in their approaches. JJ was heavily involved in the local drug-dealing scene and was introduced to growing through his drug-dealing associates. “Mysterious Bob” was very much JJ’s ‘boss’ in that he had the ultimate say over every aspect of the growing operation. Indeed in JJ’s case I would say that although he was *a* cannabis grower in that he was involved in cannabis growing I would not say that he was *the* cannabis grower in that arrangement – as he said himself it was ‘Mysterious Bob’ who did all the important work. Rather, in this case, JJ was a solution to an inherent problem for the commercial cannabis grower who wants to earn more than that necessary to achieve a specific financial goal or supplement an income – to earn more than easily attainable by a single grower growing on his own, at his own property.

### ***6.2.2 The limits to individual grow-ops.***

There are different (but related) ways in which an individual grower is limited as to how much he can grow and therefore how much he can earn. He is limited to space – unless he has a lot of property there is only so much that can be grown. Most of my South Yorkshire growers were growing in the same (usually terrace) house in which they lived and were confined often to a wardrobe, spare bedroom, attic, cellar or a combination of these. The grower is also limited by the resources he has to invest in equipment, but this is easily – and often – overcome by getting bigger over time with some of each crop’s earnings being invested in new equipment. More importantly he is limited in manpower, to the amount of cannabis he could actually oversee the growing of himself. Maintaining bigger crops, necessary for greater profits, and more complicated growing operations takes an increasing amount of time and effort. Primarily, however, small-scale commercial growers were limited from getting bigger through their own

priorities – self-imposed limitations. Either, like the growers we have seen above, they had no particular need to get bigger as their reasons for growing were being met, or the grower does not get any bigger due to the perceived extra risk. Indeed it might be more accurate to say that what limits the size at which commercial growers operate is dictated by a comfortable balance for them between meeting their own personal-use and/or financial demands and being comfortable with the level of risk.

### **6.2.2.1 The ten plant rule**

Many of those I talked to in the course of my research referred to a variant on a “ten plant rule”<sup>106</sup>. The common belief amongst growers and others in the legal services (e.g. police officers) is that while judges and magistrates consider many things before delivering their verdict (and/or deciding on sentence) on a busted grower there is one key factor involved: the number of plants being grown. The consensus of those I spoke to was that below 10 plants would probably result in the avoidance of a custodial sentence, hopefully (from the growers’ perspectives) landing the miscreant with only a police caution. This point was heavily discussed on the UKCIA e-mail discussion group where a barrister colleague of one participant had done some research into sentencing in cultivation cases. Number of plants and grow room technology were found by him to be the two most decisive factors in sentencing. Other respondents in my face-to-face discussions frequently suggested that growing up to ‘about 10 plants’<sup>107</sup> was safer than growing more, but other respondents felt that the limit would be much lower, and others still felt that one could grow a larger number of plants so long as one kept to the one room or grow-op. The 10 plant rule is as such not a strict rule (neither from the growers’ nor the law’s point of view, nor from my own) but is a convenient phrase which reflects primarily the grower’s recognition that if their grow-ops are too large then their risk, in terms of potential sentencing if caught, is increased. Most cannabis growers had their own level of complexity or number of plants at which they were comfortable and it was common for this to be cited as ‘about ten plants’. In reality research by the IDMU has led them to

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<sup>106</sup> My phrase not theirs.

<sup>107</sup> The actual number varied from a couple of plants to a dozen or so, but 10 plants was the modal number cited, when a number was cited.

say that 'growing more than 2-3 plants can result in an "intent" charge, if not conviction.' (www.idmu.co.uk/faqplants.htm, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2006). The most important aspect is not so much quantity grown as evidence showing intent to supply<sup>108</sup> but it is the grower's perception of the existence of this 10-plant rule, or some other limit on 'acceptable' size or scale that is important rather than the reality of the situation. Of course a larger number of plants is harder to explain away as being for personal use only. As such growing larger quantities of cannabis is more than just scaling up the operation – other factors, namely risk, need to be taken into consideration.

### *6.2.3 Co-operatives*

One popular method of avoiding the restrictions of the '10 plant' rule was evident amongst many - perhaps the majority - of my core South Yorkshire study group and similar arrangements were described to me by growers from elsewhere in the country<sup>109</sup>.

“Jason” started smoking cannabis at school. Whilst studying at university he realised that many of his circle of friends grew or dealt, and with their help started growing cannabis;

*Interviewer:* And why did you decide to start growing?

*Jason:* 'Cause I was sick of having to go find for and score decent stuff, and plus for it was a way of making a bit of cash 'cause I was skint.

*I:* And how did you get started? There's quite a lot of expertise involved in setting up these systems.

*J:* Aye! Through friends. Friends that were in the trade.

*I:* They just provided you with information? Or equipment?

*J:* Both.

Jason went on to describe a circle of friends who were all heavy smokers, all “cannabis connoisseurs”. Many of them had taken to growing their own cannabis through a combination of the desires for a reliable source and quality of skunk and for potential financial gain. A few of the members of this growing circle had horticultural backgrounds and were studying related subjects at university. In Jason's own words:

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<sup>108</sup> The more knowledgeable and cautious growers try to avoid having 'dealing paraphernalia' such as bags or packaging, scales or large sums of money on the same premises as their plants.

<sup>109</sup> And abroad – I met a few Australian cannabis growers through English cannabis growing web forums who also described similar co-operative arrangements.

“It's more like a group of growers. They all help each other snip and like whoever's just cropped all the others will help shift it, and it all goes for the same price. I mean if I give it to someone and they want to sell it for a bit more then fair enough. Commercially [wholesale] it all goes for the same.”

Individual members of the group all had equal status – each grew their own plants in their own house and could ultimately decide what they wanted to do with their crop. However they operated on a co-operative basis for mutual benefit. They staggered harvesting to ensure a constant supply of quality cannabis and sold surplus supplies wholesale through a single ‘designated dealer’ splitting profit fairly amongst themselves. Although the group was strictly egalitarian in principle in reality two of the members had considerably more influence than the others. Both “Weedhopper” and “Jonah” (see below) had considerable cannabis growing experience. Both were studying degree subjects related to plant sciences. Operating as a separate entity to the group, but very much an important individual to them, was their middleman dealer, “M”. The roles of these key individuals are discussed below.

During a period of two to three years this group thrived, providing a constant supply of top quality skunk to a market hungry for this commodity. Although there were sometimes as many as 20 people (or more) in the co-operative individual members dipped in and out depending on other pressures such as work, finances or general laziness (a fairly common problem amongst heavier users of cannabis). Most growers in this co-operative chose to keep below 10 plants however some did grow more, especially if cash was tight. Unlike in Iain's story (below) no threats or other intimidation was used to keep members in check, and each member saw themselves as an equal partner rather than an employed grower. They had an understanding that if any individual was busted or suffered crop failure the other members would help cushion the loss from their own crops. Within this circle all members saw equal shares of profits (in proportion to their crop size), benefits, risk and chores such as harvesting and packaging. Although successful, this group, which typifies my concept of a ‘growing co-operative’ (and has strong similarities to Weisheit's communal

growers<sup>110</sup>), dissolved when the majority of the founding members finished their university careers and eventually moved away.

Although equal within the previous group certain members, along with their dealing contact, all had other involvement in the wider cannabis-growing scene.

“Jonah”, “M” (the ‘dealer’ for the group described above) and “Weedhopper” met about 5 years ago through their mutual interest in cannabis and their overlapping social lives. We have looked at their roles within the co-operative described above, but all three had a wider involvement in the local cannabis market. Jonah and M had plenty of experience in growing their own cannabis although neither of them grew in their own houses at the time of this research. Weedhopper grew intermittently although gave up briefly when working for a large wholesale grow-light manufacturer (he didn't want to compromise his job or his own involvement in cannabis growing). All three often socialised together as well as being involved with numerous small- and large-scale cannabis growers across the region. The three of them were founding members of the co-operative described above – M didn't grow within this co-operative but he bought the cannabis off everyone else. Despite their friendship, Jonah and M operated independently, sometimes co-operating with each other, sometimes competing with each other. Both have a history of dealing cannabis and other substances going back years before they met each other. Both have been involved in smuggling cannabis and ecstasy, albeit on a relatively small (but still profitable) scale. Weedhopper was younger and relatively less experienced. He also preferred not to deal, hating the “donkey work” and the high risk/low profit ratio of retail-level drug dealing. He is vocal in his condemnation of the current laws and support for cannabis society, often getting evangelical on the subject. In the utopia of Weedhopper as many people as possible would grow a few plants, thus getting rid of “Babylon” [the establishment] and the financial and criminogenic realities of dealing. (Weedhopper, for example, hates the idea of friends making money off friends whilst recognising the practical

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<sup>110</sup> All my ‘co-operative’ growers could be classed as ‘communal’ growers on Weisheit's typology – all were as passionate about growing a good crop as they were about making money (if not more so) and all demonstrated a greater or lesser (but usually greater) degree of affiliation

need for an income and the justification in making profit if you are taking risks for others.)

Co-operatives do not allow an individual grower to operate much beyond his individual, 'self-employed', growing capacity although there is some benefit. Turnover between crops can be swifter with extra helping hands and with plants staggered between houses so that grows can be more efficiently over-lapped with different crops hitting the market at co-ordinated intervals. Pooled expertise allows each individual grower to maximise his own return. Having other people to rely on to watch over a crop means that growers can get away for holidays or important occasions without having to cut back on growing time or risk having a crop fail. Primarily, however, it is not the benefit to individual growers' production capabilities that are significant from the point of view of the wider market rather it is the fact that *as a unit* co-operatives control a sizeable quantity of cannabis in the local market. To give some idea of this consider a co-operative of 10 growers, each growing the conceptual limit of 10 plants, each of which generates say 8 ounces of top-bud every three months<sup>111</sup> can produce 3200 ounces of cannabis a year. At a price of £100 an ounce to the middle-man dealer this represents about one-third of a million pounds of cannabis a year. We would certainly consider an individual handling those sorts of quantities of cannabis a fairly big dealer.

#### ***6.2.4 Franchises and key individuals***

Within the co-operative I have outlined Jonah, M and Weedhopper were cornerstones of many separate growing projects. The three of them had a lot of cannabis growing experience and some related scientific and technical knowledge. Further to this role both Jonah and M, but especially Jonah, supplied other co-operative members with growing equipment. Jonah explained to me how when he was introducing new people to cannabis growing he would lend them his equipment and expertise in exchange for half of the crop. If they wished

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with cannabis culture and related ideologies discussed in the previous chapters.

<sup>111</sup> These numbers are illustrative and are based on observational averages. Co-operative members in general produce more cannabis per plant and crop more frequently than non-members other factors being equal, a reflection of the combined skills, knowledge and passion of the group.

to grow again then he would usually offer to sell them the equipment, the grower not having to pay until after the harvest (and sale) of their second crop. Having taught them the basics he was happy for these new growers to set up independently of him, and would continue to offer advice and growing tips if asked. This relationship differs to that between JJ and 'Mysterious Bob' from earlier where 'Mysterious Bob' was not offering to help JJ set up independently. Rather it is reminiscent of a franchising operation such as for a fast food company. The individual grower is ultimately in charge of the operation (the fast food restaurant) but the parent grower (the fast food chain) supplies expertise, equipment and managing and marketing skills. They also take a sizeable share of the profits (although this would stop once the student grower had set up independently). In essence it is a way for the parent grower to get over the restriction of space and manpower and to mitigate the risks of running a larger growing empire. Indeed 'empire' is occasionally the right word. Jonah talked of numerous grow-rooms he had helped set-up and run over the years and calculated that he had been involved in growing well over a million pounds worth of cannabis in his time – after making that claim I watched him carry on in the same vein for three further years of my research. For all I know, he's still going strong now!

Jonah was also a supplier of cuttings ('babies') of a top-grade, high-yield skunk to people he was helping to set up and anyone else who wanted one (sometimes for free, but sometimes at a fee – usually 10 pounds per cutting). At one point in my research he boasted, "Everyone's growing what I'm growing!" Although this of course wasn't true it was evident that many growers I observed in South Yorkshire were growing the strain of cannabis he had bred himself and supplied to others. That strain had something of a revered status amongst the local cannabis using community; during my research another grower smoked a few buds and was so won over he asked for some cuttings immediately. Others in the study, notably "Hoover" (a local dealer), observed that many customers would time their visits so that they could obtain this skunk in preference to that he obtained from other sources. Jonah's role as a breeder reflects his general alliance with ideological concerns – a reflection exemplified by his commitment to developing a strain which was so popular with so many heavy users. (Although this particular strain was so potent that many other users would

actually prefer to buy other strains from time to time rather than smoke Jonah's variant constantly - some even refused it all together as they didn't like the intensity of the high it gave them!). The side of Jonah's motivation was also reflected in his willingness to teach others to grow and encourage them to set up their own businesses. At the same time he was concerned with profits – he would seek some financial advantage out of teaching others to grow (by sharing the profits of the first crop and by charging for cuttings). One of the aspects of his special strain that he was so proud of was that it took only ten weeks to grow plants that would, under the right stewardship, yield a good 8 to 10 ounces each (possibly, if tended well, more). Growers he had set up would often come back to him to buy cannabis if they stopped growing, or for growing advice and equipment, or to sell their own surplus crops (he operated as a middleman dealer as well, for cannabis and at times for other drugs). In such scenarios he would often receive a reward, usually in cannabis, which he could sell in his role as a dealer or through dealing friends such as M.

With all this influence it is easy to see Jonah (and also Weedhopper, who also helped many other growers, some encountered in this thesis) as a key individual in the local cannabis market. Like with co-ops the sum of the production, and market share, of all those involved with Jonah – his partnerships, co-operatives and franchises – was greater than for them all as individuals. However unlike with co-operatives Jonah has greater influence within the growing partnerships and franchises he is in than any of his partners do, and a hugely disproportionate influence in the local cannabis supply network than any normal individual member of a co-operative or partnership or any independent, self-employed grower. Jonah very much bridges the gap between those growers who seek profit within ideological constraints and those who seek profit above any cannabis-related ideology.

#### ***6.2.5 'Corporate' cannabis cultivators : the traditional pyramid model?***

“Iain” used to grow his own plants for his own consumption and that of his friends. A “green-fingered hippie” (his description), he was very good at producing top quality skunk on a regular basis. Being justly proud of his

produce he was generous with giving out samples and this eventually “got [him] noticed”. In his words “some of the more serious players in the local drug scene approached me with an offer I couldn’t refuse”. They were to provide equipment, finances, houses and security and he was to provide his knowledge. He was to receive a quantity of the skunk produced as a wage. The operation expanded from 3 or 4 houses scattered around the city to 8 and then 11 – each house having multiple rooms devoted to cannabis cultivation. Getting more skunk as his payment then he could possibly smoke himself Iain found he could make himself a handsome profit as a dealer, but after a while decided he wanted to get out. On trying to end the relationship, which he perceived to be getting “far too dodgy”, he found himself facing death threats if he didn’t carry on. Faced with an ultimatum like that he moved to a different city and returned to growing only small quantities of cannabis – primarily for himself – in his attic.

Iain differs from a grower working in a partnership or even from one in a franchise style relationship. He is closer to J.J., who we met earlier, in terms of being ‘employed’ although Iain was involved on a much larger scale and had much more responsibility being in charge of all aspects of growing (under the direction of his bosses) rather than just over-seeing day-to-day maintenance. The nature of the arrangement here is clearly one of employer and employee – Iain is paid to do a job for his bosses who take ultimate responsibility and control for every aspect of the growing operation. The bosses run a large operation – most houses were dedicated solely to growing cannabis and were otherwise unoccupied, the turnover of this operation was estimated by Iain to be well in excess of £1,000,000 per year – I would suggest that if anything this was a conservative estimate, although cannabis grown and distributed on this scale would probably be subject to a significant quantity discount when sold, wholesale, to middlemen distributors. It was an ongoing enterprise, and an expanding one. It was also one with a range of individuals involved in different roles. Across all these houses Iain was employed as a caretaker/gardener – there were other people bought in to deal with electrics and plumbing and security issues, and also people bought in to help with harvests. His bosses acted as managers or directors and took control of distribution, which Iain knew nothing about. In many ways the structure and organisation of this growing outfit

resembled that of a legitimate business with clearly defined roles for individuals and divisions for different aspects of the business, all operating under the direction of a management team. This differs strongly from the self-employed, partnership, co-operative and even syndicate approaches we have seen so far.

However some aspects of the underlying cannabis ideology seem to remain. Reward, or payment, for workers was calculated in terms of skunk rather than cash in common with the other growing relationships we have looked at. A lot of pride was placed in producing a good crop with an expert appointed – arguably headhunted – to oversee this. Realistically, however, this was a well calculated business response to market demands rather than a nod to the ‘peace and love’ vibes of the traditional cannabis culture: Iain’s bosses were not averse to the use (or at least threat) of violence to protect their interests and Iain was ‘strongly convinced’ that they were involved in other forms of drug dealing and other types of crime. He certainly took their death-threats very seriously. In a nut-shell this corporate form of cannabis cultivation reeks of organised crime.

The attraction of commercial growing is obvious: cannabis growing can produce vast profits if conducted on a large enough scale. However as the scale of growing increases so do the effort, overheads and risks involved. Not only must an entrepreneur monitor many more plants spread over a larger area – possibly with the help of employed growers such as Iain – he must manage larger systems, rent larger premises, sell a larger crop (which may also be subject to a quantity discount) and maybe employ a workforce to help with maintenance, harvest and/or distribution. In terms of risk the entrepreneur faces not only a higher risk of being caught (more employees, bigger/more growing premises, more chance of drug arrests involving users of their produce) and significantly greater sentences but also a higher risk of being ripped off by others in the criminal underworld. As Iain’s case shows cannabis production on this scale can incorporate some of the more unpleasant elements of organised crime operating in the world of drug distribution.

Sometimes a large-scale commercial grow operation does not neatly fit either the franchise or the corporate model:

“Charlie” is a young professional. He worked for a major company and earned a good salary. He supplemented this income by supplying cannabis in wholesale quantities to dealers. This money he used to pay not only for

mundane things like the mortgage on his house but also for a flamboyant lifestyle, which included expenses such as his sports car. He very rarely smokes marijuana. A few years ago he had the idea of growing his own skunk in order to make more profit. He was unwilling to use his own house for this because of the risks involved, so he experimented with the system of growing in other people's houses and employing them, either on a wage or on a cut of the final crop, to look after the crop. This proved unsatisfactory; the first few grows were so problematic that the final crops were substandard if they grew to harvest at all. In one case a whole crop was almost ruined when the janitor got into the habit of checking on the plants during their "dark" periods. In order to circumnavigate the problems he'd been having Charlie decided to rent houses under false names and then use them for the sole purpose of growing a crop. By using this arrangement he successfully separated cannabis growing from the more legal and conformist aspects of his life. Only those he chose to tell knew anything about his decision to grow on a large scale. He only had to visit the grow house every few days, so contact with the crop was kept to a minimum and thus the perceived risks of such a large grow were minimised. The operation was a success and repeated several times, though the quality of the cannabis was not as good as others available in the area grown by more dedicated, smaller scale operators. Charlie has ideas for an even larger enterprise that he plans to be based "somewhere out in the country, in a farm or something".

Here we can see a fine example of what some have called "the opportunistic irregular"<sup>112</sup>, and what Weisheit would have called a 'hustler' (1991, 1992). Charlie had no real belief in the sanctity of cannabis unlike many of my other respondents, indeed he doesn't really smoke marijuana at all. Rather he had seen an opportunity to make money and had taken it and when he had seen an opportunity to cut down on his expenditure as a dealer and make more money he had grasped the chance. Even when he was overseeing a large growing operation he would be selling more cannabis than he produced, dealing for other people as

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<sup>112</sup> See Dorn *et al.* (1992).

well but spending considerably less on his wholesale purchases than other non-growing dealers operating on a similar scale.

The key here is that Charlie ran his cannabis growing industry as part of a bigger drug dealing business, and that the growing industry was run with profit as the prime concern and with minimal acquaintance to cannabis ideals such as quality of crop and separation of the cannabis market from other drug markets and other criminality. He himself cared little about cannabis as anything other than a profit making commodity and his janitors were often amateurish in their growing. However Charlie didn't fit the full stereotype of the organised crime boss – he shunned violence and maintained a lucrative legitimate professional operation, and some of his 'organisational' skills seemed to leave a lot to be desired. The attraction for Charlie was very clearly more than just the money – compared to his dealing business cannabis growing was more complicated and offered less favourable returns – the challenge and excitement (and maybe the glamour) of running a successful illegal cultivation enterprise was obviously a major influence here. Although the ideological aspects of growing cannabis seemed unimportant in Charlie's case there were clearly intangible rewards to his participation as well as the financial ones.

The small-scale growers I have talked about were not greedy. They saw growing as a way to make money for necessary expenses – pressing debts or a comfortable but minimal lifestyle. Jonah, Iain's employers and Charlie, on the other hand, are examples of those who see the fuller potential of cannabis cultivation in funding an active social life and expensive tastes – elements we might identify as pure greed. Problems of increased risk and effort were weighed against increased profits and these entrepreneurs operated to the level they were happy with. Charlie compromised by growing less than he would have liked to maintain a low profile. Iain's boss opted for greater profits, but employed strong-arm tactics to further protect himself. In both these situations there is no doubt that profit is a primary motive, but again other factors come into play. Charlie in particular could be seen to be an entrepreneur with parallels to Weisheit's (1991, 1992) hustlers. Money was important, but equally the challenge of operating and maintaining an illegal industry seemed to be a key motivating factor. Successfully running a business and avoiding the law seemed to give him as

much satisfaction as actually making profits. Charlie was a well paid middle-class professional with intelligence and business sense who could have made a fortune in legitimate enterprises if he so wished whereas Iain spoke of employers involved in many illegitimate enterprises who came from less advantaged backgrounds. They operated more along the traditional lines of organised criminal gangs – again we see how people from a wide variety of backgrounds can be involved in cannabis growing, even on the larger scales. In cannabis growing operations of this scale usually the financial motivation becomes more important whilst the ideological and ‘ethical’ motivations become less relevant. The parallels to the stereotypical image of the drugs baron or the organised crime-type distribution network become greater (as perhaps to those with legitimate businesses and corporations). Consider these last two examples of corporate growing operations:

‘Richard’ was connected to cannabis growing through an old school friend. He wasn’t actually involved in the growing, or the distribution of the cannabis. Instead he was approached by his friend for his computer skills. The grow operation in a large warehouse was already set-up – Richard was employed, at a very good price, to install automated systems for the growing (regulating temperature, water, lights, nutrient levels etc) and also for security (cameras, locks, alarms etc). This allowed the grow-op to be run and monitored from a distance via the internet reducing the risks for the growers of being caught red-handed. From Richard’s description I would estimate this set-up to be capable of producing in excess of £1,000,000 of cannabis (based on kilo prices, from [www.idmu.co.uk](http://www.idmu.co.uk)) per year. Richard also told me of his friend’s gang’s involvement in dealing other drugs – including 250,000 ecstasy tablets *each week*. Richard’s friend and his colleagues were clearly large-scale, well-organised players in the drug dealing scene. Richard was privileged to have inside information – aside from his role in the automation and security of the crop he had no contact with any of the gang involved other than his school friend although he was told a little of the structure of the operation which closely matched that of the outfit Iain was employed by. Even as a friend he was trusted to silence on pain of violence: Richard’s friend had a reputation in the local underground community for following through on such threats, but also of being trustworthy and reliable in his dealings.

John Doman headed an outfit which was uncovered by the police when 600 plants were discovered in an old factory. They were alerted when they investigated a break-in at the property – the evidence suggested that the grow-op had been bigger, but that a number of plants had been stolen before the police arrived. Over £200,000 worth of cannabis was found – police estimated that before the break-in this would have been closer to £350,000. Mr. Doman worked with three accomplices. He, with a history of violence and dishonesty, took the role of the boss of the outfit in charge of overall management including distribution. His partners included an expert builder who renovated the building to make it suitable as a cannabis factory, an electrician who oversaw the lighting and irrigation and a man who came to be known as ‘The Gardener’ who researched how best to grow the plants (forensic scientists at the time were cited as saying that the grow-op was ‘the most sophisticated they have ever seen’ (cited in the Sheffield Star, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2002)). A few of my own sources separately told me that they knew that this was only one of at least three grow-ops the gang were running at the time they were busted. Here there were both clear roles and a clear hierarchy within the organisation, and apparently firm links to a well established distribution network.

The links to a more general criminal underground, the hierarchical nature of these organisation, the threat of crime and the link to other drug markets all illustrate how this corporate approach to cannabis cultivation has strong parallels with the stereotypical organised-crime based pyramid-model distribution network. Most importantly there is an element of *organisation* rather than more informal friendship-based, mutual relationships between those involved. These corporate outfits undoubtedly operate on the largest scale of all cannabis cultivators (although a well-connected franchise-operator can be involved in producing almost as much cannabis) and are the furthest removed from the features of the ideological growers. Money – and an element of power and status in the underground community – are the supreme influences on these growers who generally have a history of involvement in other crime. Greed takes over from both need and weed.

### 6.3 Summary of approaches to cannabis cultivation.

There is a clear delineation to be made between different types of cannabis grower. Perhaps exclusively in the field of drug distribution we have those who are motivated for reasons which are unrelated to the 'recreational' element of the drug – activists do not care for the drug properties at all and medical growers are interested in the medical aspect of the drug, looking for pain relief rather than the raw pleasure element of drug use. We separate these two types – growers who are not growing for their own self interest – from other growers although admittedly these two types of grower represent a small minority of the total number of people growing cannabis. The majority of those involved in cultivation are probably 'personal use' growers and although in reality they are still involved in distribution – sharing cannabis with friends – again this is something of a unique situation in illegal drug distribution in that so many distributors (and so many acts of distribution) do not involve financial transactions. Thus a second delineation is between those who are not motivated by financial consideration but rather by cannabis related ideologies – whether it is promoting the medical or industrial uses of cannabis, or growing one's own to ensure a reliable supply of good cannabis at a competitive price whilst maintaining a separation from 'proper' drug dealers and all that they may be associated with.

Even within those who grow with the intention of selling their crops there are clear differences in both motivation (reasons for growing) and organisation (structure of the growing/distributing outfit) with these two aspects strongly (but by no means completely) related. Most commercial growers are carrying on elements of the ideological position of the personal use grower but also making some money out of cultivation. They generally limit the sizes of their operations through personal considerations – not needing to grow any more to meet their aims and not wanting the risk of running a bigger operation. Their operations are also somewhat limited by resource considerations, but this is usually a secondary consideration. Such growers can enhance their own position in the market and their own abilities as growers by forming co-operatives (which are also formed by personal-use and medical-supply growers). Alternatively a grower can become involved on a larger – and more financially lucrative – scale by entering

into a series of partnerships or franchises. He will have to share the benefits of each crop, but if he is involved in many such partnerships he has the scope to grow a lot of cannabis whilst avoiding the risks associated with a single, centralised, grow-op. Finally some growers choose to ignore these risks and set up big grow-ops of hundreds or even thousands of plants, often spread over a few locations but with each location still consisting of a sizeable operation. The financial returns here are potentially huge, as are the risks involved. As such this approach tends to be adopted by those who exhibit more general criminal tendencies. Often involved in other forms of drug trafficking and or organised crime they operate in hierarchical units with boss figures employing other individuals to perform specific tasks or functions.

## 7 – Bearing Fruit:

### Conclusions

#### 7.1 Introduction

And so we come to the final chapter. Throughout the course of this thesis I have made a number of important observations concerning domestic cannabis cultivation in the UK. In a society where cannabis use is widespread, having increased dramatically over the last few decades (although prevalence has begun to decrease in the last few years), domestic cannabis cultivation has become widespread but is only beginning to receive much notice. We have looked at how domestic cultivation happens – the methods employed by marijuana growers in the UK. We have looked at who is involved – both in terms of demographics and in terms of reasons to grow cannabis. We have looked at how growing operations are structured depending on the balance of motivational elements, the desired outcomes and the available resources of the individuals concerned. The time has come to consider what all this means – in terms of the effects domestic production is having on the UK cannabis market and also in terms of how non-financial drivers and other factors behind the explosion in domestic production may help us understand other drug markets and, perhaps, criminality more generally. In short it is time to reach some conclusions.

I intend to tackle these conclusions under three headings – the ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ elements of cannabis cultivation in the UK. The ‘past’ section will look at some of the factors that may have been relevant to the massive expansion in domestic cannabis cultivation both generally and for each of the different types of grower. The ‘present’ section will focus on those cannabis growers who are involved in drug distribution as we would normally understand the phrase. Activist growers are not usually bothered about the drug product of the plant, merely the symbolism. Their involvement in drug distribution is negligible<sup>113</sup>. Medical-supply growers are involved in drug distribution, as was discussed in *Chapter Five*, but the market they operate in is conceptually very different to other types of illegal drug market. The medical supply networks are unique in

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<sup>113</sup> Some individuals may grow cannabis both as activists and as drug producers. The activism side is largely irrelevant to the wider cannabis market, although it may reflect an ideological

that they are not about profit at all and they often operate openly, or semi-openly. Those involved do not see themselves as criminals, participating in illegal activity only out of necessity and to make a point. The true medical growers and distributors do not overlap with the recreational cannabis market and should be considered, from an academic perspective, separately from other drug markets. Identifying, describing and explaining them has been interesting but discussing their effects on the wider 'recreational' drugs market is somewhat meaningless. They will largely be ignored in this section which will instead focus on those growers who distribute their products for recreational consumption and discuss what impact increased domestic cultivation has had on the wider UK cannabis market.

The 'future' section answers a few final questions – but asks more. Describing the current situation for cannabis cultivation is all well and good but the situation is unlikely to be static. What can we expect for the future? Will domestic production continue to expand? What further effects might this have on the wider cannabis market? And if the cannabis market has undergone such a revolution can we expect this in other drugs markets?

## 7.2 Past : Conditions leading to the expansion of domestic cannabis cultivation in the UK.

One question still to be considered is why is cannabis growing occurring in the UK – and other western non-traditional producer nations. In particular why is cannabis growing happening on such a large scale now and why has it taken off so heavily in recent years. There are, of course, many factors to be taken into account. The purpose of this section is to consider some of these factors, to examine how they interact with each other and to offer an explanation for the current trends in UK cannabis cultivation.

The drug trade is just that – a trade – and as such the question of why domestic production has expanded in the UK and in other similar western countries is arguably best looked at firstly in economic terms. Certainly this was the approach taken by Jansen when considering the situation in Holland which can be seen as being similar to the situation in the UK – only at a more advanced

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factor that contributed to them becoming involved in growing in the first place.

stage. Certainly domestic cultivation has been a feature of the Dutch cannabis scene for many years now and has undoubtedly influenced the situation in the UK. Whereas we are talking now of a 50% self-sufficiency in the UK cannabis market in the Netherlands Jansen puts this figure at 75%. Three quarters of all cannabis consumed in Holland originated in that country in 2002, and in both socio-political and technical areas the Netherlands can also be seen to have been ahead of the UK in generating conditions favourable to domestic production (Jansen, 2002).

The first point Jansen makes about ‘Eurocannabis’ – his term for cannabis produced in Europe ‘mainly, but not exclusively... indoors, under artificial light’ (*ibid.*) – is that it represents a case of what economists call ‘import substitution’. That is to say that domestic production is seen, in market terms, as an economically viable – perhaps even desirable – alternative to relying on an import-led market. This is obviously applicable to all non-traditional producer nations, including the UK and Holland. Jansen claims that ‘Economic theory provides an explanation for both the import substitution tendencies and the resulting global shift of cannabis production towards the Western world.’ (*ibid.*). Cannabis is of course illegal in Holland as in the UK – yet the illegal status has not been successful in controlling the demand for cannabis. ‘As worded in an old economic law: “Where a demand emerges, the supply will follow”’ (*ibid.* section 2). If demand in Holland encourages production there then presumably demand in the UK – greater due both to a larger population and higher prevalence rates for cannabis use<sup>114</sup> in this country – should encourage production here.

The illegal nature of the market does not prevent demand, it merely raises the price of the commodity. Thus attempts at cannabis control lead to the condition where domestic production, under artificial light, becomes economically viable. These conditions exist in the UK and much of the rest of the western world as well as Holland and hence we see the emergence of domestic cultivation, albeit to varying extents, in many Western countries (Clarke, 1998, cited in Jansen, 2002).

However the phenomenon is undoubtedly most pronounced – and most advanced – in Holland. Jansen points out that in the 1980s the breeding of new cannabis

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<sup>114</sup> see e.g. [www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/lif\\_can\\_use#](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/lif_can_use#), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> September 2004

strains to suit different climatic conditions (including different artificial climates) was legal for the Dutch – as was the experimentation with new production techniques. Indeed the Netherlands were already a leading nation in plant-science techniques and also indoor cultivation methods including artificial lighting and hydroponic growing techniques<sup>115</sup> – largely due to being a densely populated nation with limited agricultural space. With this technological background, and a liberal attitude to cannabis, Holland can be seen to have two advantages over other nations in developing cannabis import substitution. In the UK we may not have had these advantages, but once the technologies and techniques were developed in the Netherlands there was nothing to stop them disseminating to Britain. Certainly evidence from both active growers and cannabis growing information sources shows a heavy link between the British and Dutch cannabis cultivation scenes – many of my respondents had Dutch contacts, had visited Holland, or had access to literature originating in the Netherlands<sup>116</sup>. There are also cases of Dutch nationals coming to the UK and getting involved with cannabis cultivation and/or Dutch-style cannabis cafés, or ‘coffee-shops’: Colin Davies’ ‘The Dutch Experience’ was supported and co-managed by a Dutch cannabis activist/investor.

Jansen goes on to cite the role of both coffee-shops (establishments that retail cannabis in Holland which if not strictly legal then at least are officially tolerated) and ‘grow shops’ (establishments that sell the equipment necessary for indoor cultivation of cannabis – these are completely legal) in helping to launch the ‘Green Avalanche’ that saw domestically produced cannabis come to monopolise the Dutch market. Coffee-shops provided domestic growers with practically-legal retail outlets to supply – Jansen notes that rather than being dominated by ‘organised crime’ groups domestic production and supply of the coffee shops is dominated by smaller scale individual and independent growing operations often each producing less than 10 kilograms of cannabis per annum (2002, section 3). Grow shops provide these same people with all the equipment needed to set-up and run these small- (and occasionally large-) scale growing

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<sup>115</sup> Whose application to cannabis growing can be traced back to the 1970s in America where harsher anti-cannabis laws inspired cultivators to concentrate their efforts behind the privacy of closed doors. Bergman 2002; cited in Jansen 2002, section 2

<sup>116</sup> Many of the cannabis related web-sites and distribution lists I monitored were actually hosted by Dutch-based Internet Service Providers.

operations. The UK has, in recent years, seen a similar boom in one industry and the tentative emergence of the other. Grow shops in particular have taken off, particularly over the 1990s, specialising in lighting, hydroponic systems and chemical and organic fertilisers tailored towards cannabis cultivation. One grow-shop manager and grow-light manufacturer told me how his business had boomed in the latter part of the 1990s and the early years of the new century. It had expanded from a small, local retail operation to a large-scale wholesale supplier of grow-lights shipping units to grow-shops all round the country. This massive expansion in business seemed to be true for others in the equipment trade as well (personal communication, manager of grow shop and grow-light wholesale business).

Recent years have also seen the first ‘coffee-shops’ opened in the UK<sup>117</sup>. These outlets have, to date, been doomed to failure operating as they do in open challenge to the law and local police. But where they have opened – often for only a very short time period – they have operated on similar lines to Dutch coffee-shops offering a range of cannabis including both imported and locally produced varieties to customers alongside non-alcoholic beverages, snacks and cannabis paraphernalia. However the cannabis cafés so far opened in the UK do not provide an outlet for growers to sell their product on anything like the same scale as occurs in Holland. Whilst the increased availability of specialist growing equipment – either through grow-shops or mail-order – has undoubtedly played an important part in the expansion of domestic cannabis cultivation in the UK as in Holland<sup>118</sup> cannabis cafés and their role as outlets for domestic cultivators do not seem to be important. The emergence of cannabis cafés in the UK on a similar scale to those found in the Netherlands may well contribute to even higher levels of domestic cultivation but the level of domestic production in the UK remains high without these outlets. Whilst Jansen may have correctly identified coffee-shops as playing a significant role in encouraging the green avalanche in the Netherlands they were clearly not necessary to encourage a

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<sup>117</sup> Cafés, bars and other retail outlets doubling as cannabis retail outlets have existed secretly in the UK for a long time but these new coffee-shops were the first to openly advertise themselves as cannabis outlets.

<sup>118</sup> Although of course this is probably a reciprocal relationship – the expansion in the market for indoor growing equipment is presumably as much a result of the demand for this equipment by cannabis growers as it is a cause of increased cannabis growing. It is the fact that this equipment has become readily available, in part at least due to a lack of legal restrictions on such equipment,

similar situation in the UK. It seems likely that some kind of convenient retail outlet encourages domestic production – especially the smaller-scale commercial production of the individual growers and growing co-operatives. I would suggest that this is met in the UK simply through small-scale localised distribution (dealing) networks. With demand for cannabis so high in the UK – higher than in Holland – few growers would encounter much difficulty in finding customers to buy their product, especially as growers are likely to be cannabis connoisseurs heavily into cannabis culture and as such well connected to other cannabis users. A final factor suggested by Jansen in encouraging the development of the domestic cannabis market is favourable social and legal/political conditions. Certainly it goes without saying that both Dutch society at large and Dutch legal and political conditions are more tolerant of cannabis use and production than probably any other western developed nation. In the UK this element has been perhaps less obvious although recent developments culminating in the downgrading of cannabis to a class C drug do reflect a general social shift towards a greater acceptance and tolerance of cannabis use and, by association, cannabis production. (Having said that the backlash against the downgrading is well documented in the media – this acceptance and tolerance definitely does not permeate to all sections of society. Not that it does in Holland either!) This is further evidenced by studies such as that carried out by Nina Stratford at the National Centre for Social Research. In a report published in 2003 she and her team found that in the two decades from 1983 public support for the legalisation (that is to say greater liberalisation than the recent downgrading) of cannabis had risen from 12% to 41% - with 86% now supporting cannabis use for medical purposes (on prescription from a doctor). This finding reflects a more general liberalisation of British attitudes to cannabis (and, to a lesser extent, other ‘soft’ drugs) (Economic and Social Research Council press release 15<sup>th</sup> July 2003). It is obvious that against such a background of increasingly liberal social and legal attitudes conditions for potential cannabis growers become somewhat easier. Police officers themselves often say that cannabis is not a priority, and is usually policed reactively rather than proactively. A tolerant population is less likely to report a cannabis grower if it stumbles upon his grow-op. The down-grading of

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that is important in both countries.

cannabis seems to have sent out a message, to some at least, that production on a small scale will be dealt with less harshly than before – an ex-employer of a South-Yorkshire head-shop told me how on the day after David Blunkett<sup>119</sup> initially announced the *intention* to downgrade cannabis seed sales rose noticeably.

We can see that most of the conditions Jansen believes helped encourage the ‘Green Avalanche’ in Holland can be seen to apply to a greater or lesser extent in the UK. Increasingly liberal attitudes at both the social and legal levels, increased demand for cannabis, increased access to increasingly sophisticated growing equipment and specialist strains of cannabis and, possibly, the beginnings of the coffee-shop style grower-friendly distribution system alongside an established social-supply tradition of small-scale local distribution networks have made domestic production a viable rival to an import-led market where prices are kept artificially high by the legal situation (and, as was mentioned in previous chapters, there is a high level of risk for the cannabis smuggler). This combination of factors have provided the conditions in which the high-levels of domestic production we now see have flourished. I would add to this list an element that Jansen overlooked – possibly because it wasn’t relevant in Holland at the time. Many of my growers – particularly those who participated in on-line growing forums – learnt many techniques and tips through the internet. Others learnt from magazines or books. Clearly the wide availability of information on how to grow cannabis can only aid those who want to grow, and can only help to encourage a greater prevalence of growing in a society. This relates, conceptually, to the idea of a general level of tolerance to cannabis in the cultural and political discourse of a society.

There are, as we have seen, at least three broad groups of cannabis grower emergent in the UK – the purely ideological (medical and political growers), the purely commercial (including the larger scale producers who are competing with the traditional large scale importers) and those in between (social and social / commercial growers) who seek some financial benefits from their cultivation (if only free cannabis for personal use) but are heavily influenced by ideological motivations related to their affiliation with ‘cannabis culture’. The factors

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<sup>119</sup> The then Home Secretary.

outlined above, as originally applied to the Dutch situation by Jansen, influence cannabis cultivation in the UK to a large extent but the interplay between and relevance of the different factors varies for the different types of grower. Other factors – not identified by Jansen (in his largely economic model) but probably just as relevant to the situation in Holland as that in the UK also come into play. Jansen’s economic model covers most of the factors relevant to commercial cannabis cultivation in the UK. Increased demand, fuelled to a large extent by cultural and political factors, obviously makes the idea of making more cannabis available to the market a financial winner. Domestic production – import substitution – is attractive both financially and in practical terms. Domestic production as opposed to importation removes a layer, or layers, from the traditional supply chain. UK producers take the place of both importers and cultivators in traditional producer nations and may also fill the role of the wholesale distributors within the UK. Whilst many commercial cultivators will still sell their crops en masse to wholesale distributors others will do the distribution themselves. In either case the levels of ‘workforce’ involved in traditional production and importation are reduced as are the costs associated both with paying these workers and with setting up smuggling operations. At the same time domestic production allows for climate-controlled production of premium strength cannabis which fetches a higher price on the open market. Domestically produced cannabis doesn’t travel as far or for as long and so does not deteriorate to the same degree that imported cannabis can. All things considered and import substitution becomes not just financially viable but financially attractive with a greater share of the profits (by unit weight) staying with those who run the production operation than for their counterparts in the importation business.

A second element that makes domestic production attractive to the commercial cultivator (whether operating on a large, medium or even a small scale) is the different nature of the risks involved. This element has perhaps lessened somewhat with changes in priorities amongst customs and excise (which mirror changes in police priorities) arguably lessening the risk to the cannabis importer but there is still, for many growers, a perception of greater control not just in terms of producing a quality crop but also in terms of security and ‘possession’ of product. Even a hands-off grower (who runs an operation but employs others

to do the day-to-day maintenance) has a greater sense of control than, say, a hands-off smuggler (employing drug mules or other smugglers) – he knows where the cannabis is at all times and can plan his security around this knowledge. Smuggling is inherently risky with, at times, not just customs officers but military personnel and bodies such as the Drugs Enforcement Agency (DEA) working together to prevent it. The US armed forces – and other military bodies – are known to have a role in attempting to prevent/reduce drug production in traditional producer nations (especially Latin America and, more recently, Afghanistan) but, at least until the authorities catch on to the extent of domestic production, the domestic grower only has to worry about the police. We have seen that the police may not be fully aware of the extent of domestic production and do not necessarily give it a high priority. In short domestic producers feel they have greater control over their crops (in both security and quality control terms), perceive their chances of being busted as relatively low (and the figures showing a decrease in domestic crop seizures across the same period that domestic cultivation appears to be steadily increasing support this perception, see *Chapter Two*), and see their potential profits (by unit weight) as being that much higher.

For smaller scale commercial producers there is often the calculation that the risk, even if caught, of ending up with a substantial custodial sentence (or any custodial sentence) is very small anyway. Growers are often confident that the police and/or the courts will underestimate the extent of their production. Ongoing production, they hope, can often be passed off as a one-off foray. Small-scale (but still commercial) production can be passed off as personal-use production. Medical necessity can be employed (although not always successfully) as a defence or at least as a mitigation even when some or all of the crop is intended for non-medical purposes.

The various categories of not-for-profit grower are perhaps harder to explain. Clearly the conditions identified by Jansen and discussed above make it easier to become involved in growing but we have to consider also what has encouraged them to get involved in a criminal activity if it is not the obvious attraction of money. Medical growers – especially those supporting medical use only for those with recognised medical problems and their doctor's approval – can be explained purely through need. As long as the medical benefits outweigh the potential

negatives of being caught with cannabis the attractions to the medical user are obvious. This is well illustrated by Colin Davies who wore a T-shirt in one of his court cases with the words “I am already a prisoner of a body that doesn’t work”. Add to this the facts that cannabis growers, especially the smaller-scale operatives, don’t run a huge risk of getting caught and that medical users and growers perceive – arguably with good reason – a climate of sympathy for their plight which may well lead judges, juries and magistrates to take a lenient view and it is no surprise that medical growing (at least for those that really need medical marijuana) is flourishing.

Activist growers represent a different set of conditions which have led people to take advantage of the increased opportunities for domestic cultivation. I would contend that the guerrilla activists, growing cannabis to make a political statement rather than to harvest any drug, are a product of the same contemporary social concerns which have led to the flourishing of political activism. In an age when participation in formal politics is at a very low level<sup>120</sup> – as indicated both by membership of the main political parties and turn-out for elections – many commentators have observed that participation in other forms of political activity is on the rise. Frank Furedi (2002) in his book ‘Culture of Fear’ suggests that participation in such grass-roots activism – involvement in single-issue politics, participation in campaigns, protests and direct action as exemplified by the stop-the-war movement<sup>121</sup> – is a result of or reaction to the dissatisfaction with traditional politics, the increasing recognition that individual voters have little influence on the political process, and that politicians care little for issues which don’t make the headlines and that aren’t election winning issues. For many guerrilla-activist cannabis growers the use of cannabis plants is a means to some other (non-cannabis related) political end: cannabis is a convenient tool for arguing some other political point. For others cannabis is *the* issue. Protest – using cannabis plants, going to legalisation marches, ‘Smokey-Bear picnics’<sup>122</sup>, or the annual ‘jay-day’ cannabis festival or supporting the

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<sup>120</sup> I am talking here about the UK situation – but similar patterns of political involvement can be seen elsewhere in the developed world.

<sup>121</sup> According to some sources up to 2 million people marched against the second Iraq war, a record for any protest march in the UK.

<sup>122</sup> Smokey-Bear are a collective of legalization campaigners who run frequent ‘picnic’ events where they encourage people to come and smoke openly but sensibly (i.e. no other drugs, no misbehaving, no giving cannabis to children), usually in a local park, as a challenge to the law.

Legalise Cannabis Alliance – is an expression of disapproval of the current legal situation. For others cannabis and other drug laws are just one of many contemporary socio-political issues which they see as problematic: drug laws are just another example of global social inequality and control. The atmosphere of protest – both the issues being protested against and the use of direct action as a political tool – is more important here than any of the factors identified by Jansen. For the guerrilla-activist growers the atmosphere of tolerance and the emergence and availability of growing technology are both irrelevant. However for other growers – medical-use campaigners, personal-use growers and those growers who have some commercial intent but are motivated as much by ideological concerns (communal growers) – the protest element of cannabis growing is one other factor, alongside those identified by Jansen and those discussed in the next paragraph.

Non-commercial growing in the form of medical supply or political activism depends on and reflects a wider social trend of political activism. Non-commercial growing in the form of personal-use growing and commercial growing that stems from ideological (weed) rather than profit (greed) concerns reflects another, related contemporary social trend. In essence these growers reflect wider issues of consumer concerns – the idea that consumers can have a significant impact on the way in which a product is produced and marketed, in particular that consumer power can force big businesses to consider ethical or ideological issues rather than concentrate purely on profit. The classic example of this would be the fair-trade movement that aims to provide third-world producers of certain products (such as coffee, sugar, bananas and orange-juice) with a greater share of the profit from those products than they would get if left purely to the whims of the multi-national corporations which control much of the market. I would also cite the move towards organic food-stuffs and the public hostility to genetically modified crops – here the consumers are stating their disapproval of ‘unnatural’ farming methods. Other similar examples would include boycotts of certain company’s products or certain food-stuffs such as the campaign against the Nestlé food company over their supposedly unethical approach to marketing baby-milk powder in third-world countries. Of a different nature, but reflecting the same essential qualities of consumer-demand affecting the market would be groups such as the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) who

are active in maintaining both the quality and variety of real-ale beers available in British pubs.

Elements of these consumer-driven market concerns can be seen in domestic cannabis cultivation. Growers claim that they want to avoid the existing black-market with the 'real-dealers' and their links to other drugs and other forms of crime. In particular they do not want to be contributing to the profits of criminals. They want to ensure the quality of the cannabis they are smoking – in particular they want to avoid soap-bar and to try and eliminate the market for that inferior product. They will often sell their cannabis at very competitive prices – but only to friends and acquaintances – and will give gifts of cannabis to those who are needy or deserving, or if they really don't need the money. They take pride, both individually and as a group, of maintaining not only quality but variety of cannabis produced. In short non-commercial cannabis growing is steeped in ethical and ideological concerns. Smaller-scale commercial cannabis growing is equally steeped in these concerns, and even larger-scale commercial cannabis reflects some aspects of consumer demand in relation to quality and price of product. Even the import market is affected, to an extent, by ideological and consumer-orientated concerns: prices have fallen for all forms of cannabis, imported as well as home-grown. The price fall for imported cannabis can be seen to be a direct result of the competition from the often ideologically-rooted and usually cheaper home-grown market. Of course all of this is only made possible with the factors identified by Jansen which have enabled, in particular, indoor cultivation of premium cannabis varieties on both large and – importantly – small-but-accessible scales.

Although different types of cannabis grower are influenced primarily by different combinations of factors it must be remembered that the combination of all factors is relevant to the overall situation, and (even when not directly obvious) to all types of grower. Politically active 'guerrilla' growers (who are probably the growers most distant in technique, purpose and motivation from other categories of grower) planting seeds outside in strategic places to make some kind of point may not immediately seem to be aided by the technological developments which enable indoor cultivation of quality cannabis plants but they are greatly aided by the increased availability of seeds which stems from the cultural, political, technological and economic climates outlined above. To take a less extreme

example large-scale commercial growers whose overriding aim is almost exclusively profit-orientated may not appear to be motivated by the ideological or cultural concerns of the wider cannabis culture, but many of their consumers and hence the driving forces of their profiteering are immersed in that culture and the pressure is on even the largest corporate growers to produce good quality cannabis. Ideological concerns may not directly influence all growers or all users but will influence at least some of the end users. Equally overall use patterns play a role in deciding policing priorities and the political climate which in turn provide the climate where cannabis growers find they have room to operate with greatly reduced risks of detection and punishment.

### 7.3 Present : Effects on the market

The increase in domestic production can be seen to have had a variety of interesting and important influences on the UK cannabis market. These can largely be seen to stem, ultimately, from the concerns and demands of many cannabis users expressed through a degree of consumer activism. The UK cannabis market – more so than any other drugs market, perhaps even uniquely amongst them – has become very much consumer driven as marked by increases in quality and availability of cannabis and a noticeable decrease in price at retail level. The structure of the market has also altered drastically. It is no longer monopolised by large-scale importers and those dealers who are supplied directly or indirectly by them. Numerous smaller scale producers have sprung up supplying small-scale localised markets which are often well inter-linked into wider local, regional and even national distribution networks. These small-scale producers between them control a significant portion of the market.

At the same time there remains a significant portion of the market that is controlled by growers operating on the ‘corporate’ model. These people are akin to the stereotypical drug barons and gangs of the pyramid model of drug distribution. Showing definite elements of ‘organised’ crime this portion of the market can be violent and can overlap with other drug distribution and other criminal activity. In a sense the market has bifurcated in terms of both *organisation* of outfits involved in distribution and motivational drivers (*ideology*) encouraging involvement. These two different dimensions seem to correlate to a large degree, although not absolutely. All have benefited from

many of the conditions that have encouraged the expansion of domestic cultivation (as described above). All have taken a large portion of the market from the traditionally dominant import-led sector (i.e. the smugglers). However it seems as if it is the more ideologically (and somewhat less financially) and communally (rather than corporately) orientated growers who are having the greater impact on the market structure. Corporate style growers are largely akin – in terms of organisation and positioning in the wider market – to traditional large-scale importers. They occupy the same niche. Often the same types of people are involved in the two. But social / commercial, or communal, growing does not seemingly have an importation equivalent that it is replacing, or at least not one operating on the same scale. The more ethically and ideologically orientated sectors of the market – driven largely by user demand – is gaining ground on the greed-driven organised crime sector.

### ***7.3.1 Quality, Availability and Price***

The quality of cannabis available on the market as a whole seems to have improved, depending, of course, on your view of quality. I would suggest this can be broken down into four elements – purity, freshness, strength and aesthetics (e.g. taste and smell), all of which are interrelated. The increase in domestic cultivation is mostly centred on indoor cultivation of premium strains of cannabis ('skunk'). Indoor domestic cultivation produces cannabis of a better quality than much of the imported cannabis<sup>123</sup> on the market in many ways. Domestically produced cannabis will often be fresher than imported cannabis by the time it gets to the consumer. The end user is closer to the producer in terms of geography, supply-chain length and supply time. This is especially true for the smaller scale growers who sell directly to end users or who have a very short supply chain between grower and consumer. Imported cannabis may deteriorate to some extent on its long journey from more exotic parts of the world.

There seems to be less adulteration – and less chance for adulteration – with domestically grown cannabis. Imported hash (resin) is often believed to be 'cut' or adulterated with all kinds of unpleasant non-cannabis substances. There is not much room for this with freshly harvested cannabis bud – especially if the

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<sup>123</sup> But not all. Most of the connoisseurs I spoke to generally seemed to agree that the best cannabis is still imported resins from traditional producer nations.

customer knows what they are looking for. Having said that I did encounter growers who would spray water on a crop they had over-dried, and one grower talked about witnessing the use of hairspray on older harvested cannabis to make it look extra shiny and sticky like a fresh crop. But these were definitely exceptions – most growers of all types are proud of the crop they produce even if only because a better quality crop will sell better.

Of course one of the most common reasons for growing cannabis cited by the ideologically motivated personal-use and social / commercial growers was to ensure good quality cannabis. These groups of growers especially take pride in the quality of their produce. I would also remind the reader that there was an active campaign against ‘soap-bar’ (poor quality resin) conducted by the various cannabis campaigning groups I encountered. Quality is one of the issues that has helped encourage domestic cultivation – adulteration isn’t going to happen with growers coming from that viewpoint.

As well as being fresher and less prone to adulteration most home-grown comes from pedigree seed varieties and is grown in optimum growing conditions. The vast majority of indoor grown cannabis will be both sensimilla and ‘skunk’. In *Chapter Two* we saw how home-grown and premium cannabis now account for over 50% of the total market with that share looking set to increase. Premium variety sensimilla grown in optimum conditions tends to be significantly stronger than your average imported cannabis. More of the total market is now being taken over by stronger varieties of cannabis<sup>124</sup>.

In terms of availability it seems obvious that the development of domestic production can only have increased the availability of cannabis. Importation hasn’t stopped – home-production is an alternative source, a choice. Importation might be in decline because home-grown is taking over the market but this will only happen if consumer demand is satisfied. Aside from the increase in overall availability the network of small and large scale growers has increased consumer

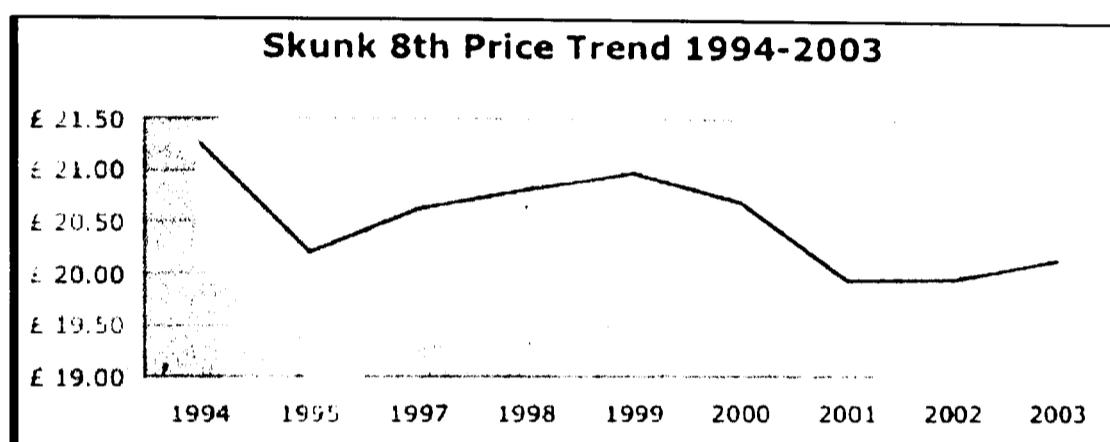
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<sup>124</sup> It should be noted that the experts and connoisseurs I spoke to all agreed that the strongest varieties of cannabis available now are no stronger than the strongest varieties available in previous decades. The very strongest varieties are still the imported resins from cannabis grown outdoors in optimum climates. Resins (if pure) should always be stronger than the cannabis they come from because the material that goes into the resin has the greatest concentrations of THC. The recent scare stories that cannabis is much stronger today than previously are not correct. However stronger varieties now take up a larger share of the total market.

choice over what variety of cannabis they wish to buy. As mentioned previously in South Yorkshire many cannabis users sought out one particular strain ‘invented’ by one of my respondents – although other cannabis users specifically avoided it as it was too strong for them.

Prices of all types of cannabis have generally fallen in the last ten years or so. This can be seen in part to be a reflection of the explosion in home-grown skunk varieties.

Figure 7.1 – Prices per 1/8<sup>th</sup> Ounce unit of ‘Skunk’ 1994-2003.



Supplied by IDMU.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the decline in prices for a 1/8<sup>th</sup> ounce<sup>125</sup> deal of skunk cannabis from 1994 to 2003. The decline has been neither steady nor dramatic, but it is definitely there. More telling were observations of the local markets of South Yorkshire and the South Coast of England. When I first started researching drug markets in South Yorkshire skunk cannabis would retail at £25 an eighth and was something of a rarity. When I finished this research the standard price was £20 an eighth (with discounts for larger but still retail quantities) and was more easily come by than non-skunk herbal cannabis or resin. Many growers, dealers and buyers I talked to felt that skunk was more readily available than it used to be and that it was cheaper than it used to be. Whilst some suggested this might be a result of them becoming better connected in the local scene the fact that so many people quoted the same prices (from £25 down to £20 an eighth<sup>126</sup>)

<sup>125</sup> Cannabis is traditionally retailed in ‘teenth’s, ‘eighth’s and ‘quarters’ or deals of one-sixteenth, one-eighth or one-quarter of an ounce or multiples thereof. Wholesale (bottom end) units are ounces and ‘nine-bars’ – or nine ounce blocks. Those dealing on larger scales revert to metric measurements – Kilos and tonnes.

<sup>126</sup> It should be noted that this price drop applied equally to locally grown skunk and imported skunk. In terms of pricing it was rare for either dealers or customers to distinguish between

over similar time periods (through the late 1990s and early 2000s) suggests to me that this was a genuine market-wide<sup>127</sup> price fall. Falls in skunk prices of a similar magnitude were mentioned by my South Coast respondents and others around the country as well as by the Police and in various news media reports.

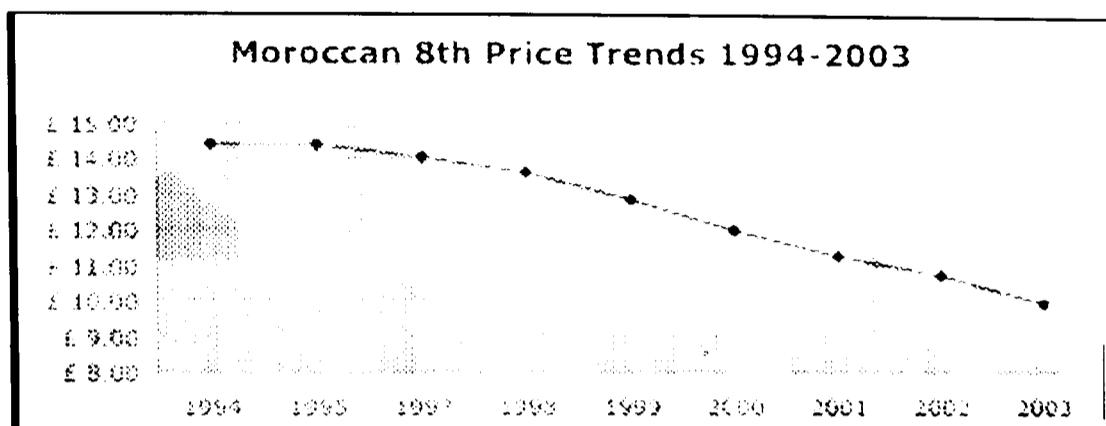
The fall in skunk prices presumably reflects an increase in supply i.e. an increase in domestic production of skunk. What was interesting, and again observable at both a local and national level, was that non-skunk prices seemed to fall across the same time period. Figure 7.2 shows how the price for Moroccan Hash ('soap-bar') – which held the largest share of the UK market before home-grown took over – has fallen from just under £15 per eighth ounce to about £10 on average. This was again reflected in my observations in South Yorkshire and elsewhere, and by the reports of my various contacts. It could of course be that prices would have dropped anyway across that time period but once again a drop in price suggests a flooded market. Respondents of mine in South Yorkshire definitely felt that there was a causal link between the market being flooded with locally grown skunk and the decline in price in imported resin (and non-skunk herbal cannabis). Dealers I spoke to explained how they couldn't sell normal 'weed' or resin at £15 an eighth ounce when customers knew they could get skunk for £20 an eighth. The only people willing to pay that much for a weaker – many would say 'inferior' – product were those who found skunk varieties too strong. Prices had to drop or the market in the imported products would dry up. Dealers I spoke to explained how this price drop was passed up the supply chain – they wouldn't sell weed and resin at reduced prices if they were still paying the old amounts to their suppliers. Again I heard similar stories from elsewhere around the country, although prices obviously vary due to a number of factors, not least the availability of both imported and home-grown varieties of cannabis.

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different premium strains although occasionally a particularly fine variety might fetch an extra premium price.

<sup>127</sup> Local South Yorkshire market that is.

Figure 7.2 – Prices per 1/8<sup>th</sup> Ounce unit of ‘Moroccan’ 1994-2003.



Supplied by IDMU.

### 7.3.2 Distribution and Market Structure

Medical marijuana aside there are two basic models of distribution – dealing – associated with domestic production. Growers either sell their produce wholesale or retail. Most smaller-scale commercial growers – ranging from those who predominantly grow for personal use but sell some of their excess to those growing a few plants in the attic on a continuous cycle to supplement an otherwise meagre income will probably sell retail amounts – that is fractions of an ounce, maybe some ounce deals – to friends. By friends we are normally talking somebody that the grower would have a fairly close and frequent relationship with even if they weren't buying the grower's cannabis. Few people who grow cannabis are short of friends who use and who will buy their crop (assuming the quality and/or price is reasonable) when the time comes – they don't have to go looking for customers.

However there is only so much cannabis that a grower can safely or conveniently sell this way. If growing a larger amount, or more frequently, then the grower may not be able to sell it all in retail amounts to friends alone. Few growers deal retail amounts to non-friends<sup>128</sup> as they perceive the risk of detection to be too high – a constant stream of customers who may not be entirely trustworthy is asking for trouble. Few growers like to be involved in 'proper' dealing *and* growing or even like to be seen to be involved in the two together, as we saw with Alan in *Chapter Two*. The growers feel they have a better chance, if busted,

<sup>128</sup> Some growers – particularly students – could have very large circles of friends and so could get through quite a large amount of retail dealing without breaking the only-sell-to-friends rule.

of escaping custody if they can convince the courts they were not involved in dealing. This, perversely, means some growers who grow more than they use in a short space of time sell their spare cannabis so they don't get caught with it lying around and accused of supply.

The middling size grower – growing alone or in a partnership or co-operative but producing too much to sell through friends alone – will usually have a regular dealer or middleman they sell to. They will take the harvest off the grower usually paying a fixed rate per ounce. Normally in South Yorkshire this worked out at £100, maybe £120, per ounce whereas the grower selling to retail customers would expect maybe £160 per ounce if selling at £20 per eighth, less if he offers a discount to those buying in larger quantities. The person buying the cannabis in these wholesale amounts would either be a local retail level dealer himself<sup>129</sup> or he would play the role of a middleman, supplying to other retail-level dealers (or other middlemen) in wholesale quantities. Usually an individual grower or a partnership or a growing co-operative will operate through a single middle-man or dealer although a single middleman will normally deal with many growers. Most local dealers I met got their supplies from a range of local growers and local middlemen – usually from both locally produced and imported sources. Larger scale commercial cannabis growers – those operating in multiple growing arrangements or following the corporate model – will only use middlemen. The more organised corporate set-ups will have their own distribution wing – individuals who are part of the outfit and who are responsible for distributing the harvested crops and maybe other drugs as well. Growers involved in a range of co-operatives, partnerships and franchises – such as Jonah from *Chapter Six* – may also act as middlemen themselves buying and selling cannabis (and maybe other drugs) in bulk from and to their various growing, dealing and using contacts. But they won't usually act as retail dealers as well – the risks are seen as too high. Having said that most growers, operating to whatever scale or model, will happily sell some retail amounts to their friends.

Once domestically produced cannabis enters the hands of a middleman it enters the wider cannabis market – some middlemen have links across the country whilst others will operate on regional or even local levels (as seen by Pearson

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<sup>129</sup> Those involved in all aspects of the drugs trade do appear to be overwhelmingly male.

and Hobbs, 2001). Most middlemen and most dealers will deal with a number of customers and a number of suppliers. They link the different parts of the wider market together – essentially hooking up demand with supply wherever there is a need, and a profit to be made. However those smaller-scale growers who retail their own cannabis or who operate maybe with one local dealer who retails it for them may essentially be operating in a local networks where they are the sole suppliers. As long as the grower keeps providing he can support a local network completely independently of the wider market. On a larger scale well-organised co-operatives or multi-operation individuals with their own regular dealer or dealers may keep entire local markets separate from any wider cannabis market, again as long as they keep supplying enough to keep their customers happy. More usually there is, as we have seen, some overlap between supply networks facilitated by middlemen and/or retail dealers who have multiple suppliers.

Let us cast our minds back to *Chapter One* and compare the situation we have here (with distribution centred on commercial domestic production) with our models and understanding of other drug distribution networks centred, usually, on an import-led market. We see here many differences to networks studied previously, but we also identify a number of patterns which are reminiscent of similar ones seen elsewhere in the drug-dealing world.

Firstly – obviously but undoubtedly importantly – we see a difference in that the home-grown market is based on domestic production, not importation. This is a major structural change to the market that shouldn't be under-acknowledged just because it is an inherent factor to a study of domestic cannabis cultivation. We cannot assume, for cannabis and maybe for other drugs as well (see below), that the 'drugs problem' stems ultimately from other countries and that customs and excise, the coast-guard, port-controls and the armed forces are our first line of defence. The enemy, so to speak, is already in our territory.

Secondly production does not have to operate on a large scale, as again is an assumption of the import-led model. We may be wasting our time trying to target the 'Mister Bigs' of the drug underworld as a way to disrupt drugs markets. For cannabis, again at least, production can depend on numerous small-scale operations and individuals or a few larger outfits. As we have seen the wider market very much thrives on both, as well as the smugglers of the importation model.

Let us accept that ‘levels’ in a distribution market may be defined by quantities of drugs handled or by position in the chain between production and consumption. Small-scale production shows that the two do not necessarily correlate. Within all levels – large-scale distributors, middlemen and retail-level dealers (as well as importers although we don’t have them here) – it was found in *Chapter One* that both disorganised and organised examples existed. This is true for our producers (the equivalent of importers) as well. *Chapter Six* in particular demonstrated the variety of approaches to both small and large scale commercial growing, with individuals, partnerships, co-operatives and corporate growing outfits being the four most common types of approach to commercial growing representing increasing degrees of (as well as differing approaches to) ‘organisation’. The corporate growers are the most hierarchical in nature, the most akin to the upper levels of the pyramid model. The co-operatives, on the other hand, are by definition non-hierarchical. The nature of distribution (dealing) associated with a grow-op also reflects different types of organisation – the local, friendly retail dealer versus the well-connected underworld middleman or the in-house corporate distribution system.

Like elsewhere in drug distribution violence was present on occasion, but was rarer than people would think. There were stories of people getting robbed or burgled or threatened for their crop or over a deal or for some other reason, but these were rare. Violence was definitely more common amongst the corporate, organised-crime segments of the cannabis-growing world – those parts most far removed from the wider ‘cannabis culture’ and the ideologies associated with it. Iain’s death threats (*Chapter Six*) were one example I encountered. More pertinently the recent stories of violent gangs of organised criminals (often allegedly employing Vietnamese migrants) growing cannabis on a large scale in London and getting involved in turf-wars with other drugs gangs are the extreme example of this. In all other sections of the cannabis growing world violence was very rare indeed.

We also find the range of motivational elements or drivers we find elsewhere in the dealing literature. For commercial growers money is obviously an important part of the equation, but it is not the only one. We actually have some growers and distributors who are not motivated by money at all – particularly the medical marijuana growers who are involved in dealing, but are driven by altruism and or

personal need rather than financial incentives. Most other growers involved in distribution of cannabis have at least some financial incentive – even if it is only thrift. Some of these are driven to drug dealing by need – financial dire straits. Others are driven primarily by greed, maybe coupled with the excitement of being involved in an outlaw activity or coupled with the feeling that they had no legal opportunities to acquire the levels of income possible with cannabis cultivation. Most of my growers, however, were motivated at least in part (and often as much if not more than by financial incentives) by ideological positions associated with cannabis itself – the plant, the drug, or what it represents socially and culturally. Money was not the be-all and end-all, rather the pleasures of growing weed, of providing friends with good quality drugs, or the political statement associated with ‘freeing the weed’ and breaking the law, and maybe the hedonistic lifestyle associated with drug use and illegal incomes, are all important motivational factors – Weisheit’s ‘intangible rewards’ from drug dealing (1991). We can see similarities here with the hippie ideologies of the Marks (1997) and Adler (1985) era smugglers and of Dorn *et al.*s street-level ‘Trading charities’ and ‘Mutual Societies’ (1992). Dorn *et al.* suggested that these ideologically orientated approaches to dealing died out in the 1980s as they were replaced by more criminally orientated drug dealers, and eventually by the violent drug gangs of today’s crack and heroin markets. I would argue that whether or not these alternative, ideological dealing outfits did disappear completely they are back now, at least in relation to the home-grown cannabis market. What is more when you look at the concerns cannabis users have (over drug quality, price and availability, and over involvement with the wider black-market, ‘real’ dealers, harder drugs and other crime) that have encouraged many personal use growers, but also many small-scale, partnership and co-operative commercial growers in the first place we can make the argument that the ideological approach to drug-dealing is fighting back against the criminal element and all that entails. As with the Fair Trade or Anti-Capitalist movements the consumers of the world are fighting back against the excesses of the greed of the capitalist model. We have our ‘need’ growers and our ‘greed’ growers, who between them may control a bigger share of the market, but it is our ‘weed’ growers who are most numerous and represent the most significant challenge to our assumptions of drug markets as being financially driven. *It is as much about*

*the drugs themselves and all that is associated with them as it is about the money involved.*

#### 7.4 Future...

The important points have been made. The world of domestic cannabis cultivation has been described and a start has been made on explaining it. A tentative theory has been laid down that cannabis cultivation has exploded in response to certain favourable, cultural, political and technological conditions. The shape it has taken reflects an underlying trend in the illicit drugs trade for markets to be characterised by the involvement of a range of outfits and individuals reflecting wildly different approaches to organisation and execution of drug trading. More interestingly the shape it has taken reflects a range of motivational drivers instigating involvement in the first place. Consumer demands for good quality drugs, fairly traded and kept separate from other forms of criminality can be seen to have influenced the market. Co-operative growers are challenging corporate growers for both their dominance of the market and the way that business is conducted within it. So what should we expect next? It seems reasonable to me to expect a continued upsurge in domestic cultivation along all models – medical, personal, co-operative and corporate and everything in between. We might perhaps expect the rate of expansion to slow down if only because the overall demand for cannabis, as measured by prevalence rates, seems to be levelling out. But demand for cannabis remains incredibly high and domestic production will remain an attractive alternative to importation as long as small-scale, but still commercial, growers do not feel they are at a great risk of detection or at particular risk of receiving a harsh punishment even if they do get caught. Frankly policing small-scale cannabis cultivation would never be cost effective given how easy it is to grow on a commercial scale even in the smallest property. Harsher punishments may act as some deterrent but seem somewhat incongruous for what are still fairly small-scale peddlers of a fairly benign illegal drug, especially given the current social climate surrounding cannabis. Downgrading seems to be bedding down now that calls for a re-upgrading of cannabis have largely been seen off. The technology is not going to go away, nor the information and experience accumulated by growers and scientists over the years. Neither is the means to access this information.

At the same time the motivational drivers which encourage people to get involved in cannabis cultivation in the first place are likely to continue to be valid. Legal cannabis based medicines may take the heat out of the medical marijuana argument but there will always be some that claim that no artificial substance will be as beneficial as the whole plant (as God, or nature intended it to be). Given the complex combination of active ingredients in the plant they may well be right. Either way this is separate from the recreational cannabis market. There will always be people who feel passionately about cannabis, who do not feel that the prohibition of cannabis is right, who see a minor, victimless criminal act as akin to an act of political protest (especially in a cultural climate where activism and protest have become the new participatory politics) and/or see nothing particularly wrong with making some money out of what they essentially see as a hobby. At the same time there will always be more criminally-minded, financially motivated individuals who will take the risk of breaking the law to make an extra buck – or a million.

It is unlikely that domestic production of any other drug will take off on the same scale as it has for cannabis. Cannabis is unique for a number of reasons. It is the most widely used of our illegal drugs<sup>130</sup>. It has a long history of use with a well established culture associated with it, one which encourages tolerance, peacefulness, spirituality and generosity amongst other commendable virtues. At, as it is, class C it has relatively benign legal consequences associated with it – even before downgrading it was widely recognised that cannabis would be dealt with less severely than other, harder drugs. Most importantly it is easy to produce – i.e. grow.

Cannabis would be easy to grow anyway – it is a hardy and versatile plant and is well nick-named as ‘weed’. However a history of technological developments – in growing lights, in nutrient development, in plant husbandry, in hydroponics etc – and a history of experienced cannabis breeders has made it possible for *anyone* to grow cannabis of a quality and strength rarely obtainable from the import market.

No other drugs share all or even most of these conditions and qualities. None of the other illegal drugs are as popular as cannabis – none has the same high level

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<sup>130</sup> Not as widely used as the legal drug alcohol. Of course home-brewing of beer, wine and even spirits is very common.

of demand likely to encourage market creativity in the form of import substitution in the same way, at least not on the same scale<sup>131</sup>.

Having said that production of other illegal drugs does occur, and occur significantly, in Britain. Laboratories making chemicals such as Amphetamine Sulphate (speed) or Ecstasy-type drugs are frequently found – although nowhere near as frequently as for cannabis ‘factories’. When they are they are usually of a ‘corporate’ model approach: large scale organised crime outfits. However a recent development reported both anecdotally and in the press is the emergence of small-scale drug manufacturers, particularly of ecstasy type drugs. I have heard a few stories of students<sup>132</sup> – and met a few – who have made ecstasy on a small scale for their own use and to give or sell to friends. There are stories of this happening on a larger scale with people manufacturing drugs to help pay their way through university. Chemicals are never going to be as widely accessible as a plant as a means of DIY drug production but it seems that recent chemical breakthroughs made the production of the ecstasy family of ‘pill’ drugs easier to manufacture. This has been linked to the massive reduction in the price in ecstasy tablets in recent years from around £12 a tablet (national average) in 1995 to about £3 in 2003, and even less at the time of writing (anecdotal evidence, various sources; Prices supplied by IDMU).

Magic Mushrooms are another drug where domestic production has already begun on a fairly large scale, although nothing like on the scale of cannabis. Some hallucinogenic mushrooms grow wild in Britain. They used to be legal if not processed or prepared in any way – i.e. if they were fresh. Drug users would pick their own in season and use most of them fresh, but maybe store some for use at other times in the year. Some people would pick far more than they needed and give them to friends, or sell them. Then people started importing fresh but exotic hallucinogenic fungi from around the world and sell them in head shops or at kiosks at music festivals and similar events. Shops and mail-order suppliers started selling DIY mushroom grow-kits. This was all before the recent government decisions to make fresh hallucinogenic mushrooms containing certain ingredients (psilocin and/or psilocybin) class A drugs, the existing

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<sup>131</sup> I should qualify that this prediction only remains true of the foreseeable future. As the popularity of other drugs, some as yet unknown, changes and with the right technology and social climate wide-spread production of other illegal drugs may well take off in the UK.

category for the processed variety. But many of those grow-kits are still out there, and many other people have gone back to pick-your-own.

Heroin and Cocaine are both ultimately plant products – will they not be cultivated here like cannabis? Again yes, but on nothing like the same scale. Opium poppies and coca plants can be and are grown in this country but the quantities needed to produce a viable amount of Heroin or Cocaine make their cultivation unfeasible except as a novelty. The legal risks for these class A drugs would also be higher, especially if you were to attempt to grow on a large scale. So it is unlikely that domestic production of any other popular drugs will occur on the same scale – or anything near the same scale – as for cannabis. However other features associated with the home-grown market described in this thesis may well be pertinent to other drugs markets. The idea of an ethical or ideological element in distribution, of consumer power influencing the market, is an interesting one – and one which seems to crop up elsewhere. The idea of consumer demands – for quality, for value and for separation from the more unsavoury elements of the criminal underworld – having an influence on the shape of an illegal market is fascinating. Indeed the idea that criminals are actively motivated by anything other than self-interest although not new (think of the suffragettes, for an obvious example) is important. To understand crimes like drug distribution we must appreciate that for some the law is wrong and the statement made in breaking the law justifies the illegal act. Again there are links here to historical movements such as the suffragettes where criminal activity is motivated by some greater ideology or some essentially altruistic view-point – such situations should obviously be understood differently, and perhaps treated separately, from those where criminal involvement is about self-interest. It is not just in the field of drugs that ‘criminals’ may see themselves as justified in breaking the law because they see that law as wrong.

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<sup>132</sup> Usually chemistry students, for obvious reasons.

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### Selected web references

This section includes the homepage references for a number of organisations and web-sites cited or referred to in this thesis. It also includes the full web addresses of some specific sources cited. The web addresses of individual new-stories are not cited here. Such addresses change as stories are cached and new news breaks.

[www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news)

[www.ccguides.org.uk/opinions.php](http://www.ccguides.org.uk/opinions.php)

[www.idmu.co.uk](http://www.idmu.co.uk)

[www.motherhemp.com](http://www.motherhemp.com)

[www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/lif\\_can\\_use#](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/lif_can_use#)

[www.overgrow.com](http://www.overgrow.com) (site now closed. The cached pages of the overgrow website are available at:

[www.google.com/search?q=cache:uRg4ajVL-D-QJ:www.overgrow.com:+overgrow&hl=en&lr=&strip=1](http://www.google.com/search?q=cache:uRg4ajVL-D-QJ:www.overgrow.com:+overgrow&hl=en&lr=&strip=1))

## Appendix: Interview schedule/Case-study guide

### Demographic information:

Age

Gender

Ethnicity

Religion

Political affiliation

Voting, party membership, activism etc, views on drug laws etc

Employment

Current, history

Education

Level, specialisms at tertiary level and above

Relationships and living arrangements

Who live with, where, type of housing

### Growing:

Current grow-op(s)

Size, location, technical set-up – lights (details), water (pumps?), nutrients, growing medium, accessories (timers, carbon-filters etc), pest-control, climate control, seeds/cutting (strain), on-going vs. one off, no. of plants, duration of grow, frequency of grow, anticipated harvest (quantities and qualities – cross check once harvested), security concerns etc

Previous grow-op(s)

Details as above

Starting growing

When started (age), how, level of expertise at start, development of expertise over time, changes to grow-op set-ups, methods of learning/improving knowledge, changing in growing over time, future plans

Growing associates

Friends, associates and others who also grow, relationships to them (business and social), participation in online cannabis forums, assistance in grow-op or harvest

## Sources

Of equipment, cuttings, seeds, nutrients, information etc

## Purpose of growing

Intended purpose of crop (personal, social supply, commercial supply, medical supply etc), Reasons started growing, reasons continued growing, justification for growing (justification for breaking law).  
personal identity (ie as criminal, as grower, as cannabis user)

## Harvest and distribution

Harvest technique, harvest associates, drying technique, drying time, quantities by type (top and bottom bud, shake), preparations (hash, food or drink), security in harvest

Distribution – to who (friends, others – nature of relationships), given or sold? (prices, number of customers, medical supply?), security and trust in distribution

## Drug Use:

### History of drug use

When, where, what, changes of drug use over time

### Affiliation to drug use ‘scenes’ and ideologies

Views on and participation in cannabis culture, dance-drugs and similar

## Drug dealing and criminality:

### History of drug supply

Social, commercial, other

### History of criminal activity

Formal criminal record, warnings, criminal activity (probe for minor offences such as public order)

## Social, hobbies, etc:

### Social activities

What, where, when, who with, how often

Pubs, clubs and parties

### Hobbies

Especially horticultural and/or outdoor activities

### Ecological concerns and activities

### Relationships

With other growers, dealers, users and with non-growers, dealers and users – especially family