



Research paper

Creating the cannabis user A post-structuralist analysis of the re-classification of cannabis in the United Kingdom (2004–2005)

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Abstract

In January 2004 the British government announced that cannabis would be reclassified from Classes B to C, taking into account its level of harmfulness for human health and considering the penalties for possession and supplying. It was argued by the Government, that cannabis reclassification would save some resources and stop the criminalisation of otherwise law-abiding citizens. One year later, in 2005 the discussion about cannabis reclassification shifted from the argument about efficiency in the use of resources toward a debate about the effects of cannabis on mental health. The purpose of this article is to determine what happened between these two moments, and how the discussion originally formulated in terms of public management and efficiency became a matter of both mental health and criminality. Using a post-Structuralist approach, based on selected ideas from the French philosopher Michel Foucault, and supported by extensive research, this article proposes that the political decision regarding cannabis reclassification can be understood as part of the re-definition of the 'cannabis problem' and hence, the creation of a new type of 'cannabis user'. Although the debate took place in the United Kingdom, the main arguments can be extended to other reforms on cannabis legislation in other European countries.

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Keywords: Cannabis re-classification; United Kingdom; Foucault; Post-Structuralism; Discourses; Archaeology; Genealogy

Introduction

After more than 30 years of the Misuse of Drugs Act, 1971, Britain's legislation on cannabis has experienced very few substantial changes. Cannabis consumption has not, in spite of its prohibition, decreased in this period, nor has cannabis disappeared from the market. The British Crime Survey (2005/2006) shows that 8.7 percent of people aged 16–59 have used cannabis in the previous year, it being a popular substance among young people: 21.4 percent of users are 16–24 years old (Roe & Man, 2006). Although the legislation prescribes severe penalties for consumption and supplying, the application of the law varies across the regions in Britain depending on the Police attitude to this offence. Nevertheless, by 1997 cannabis possession offences represented the

largest category of all drugs offences: 78,000 out of a total of 113,000 (Runciman, 1999). The criminalisation of cannabis users takes up the time and resources of the criminal justice system; by 1999 it was costing the tax-payers around £350 million, not including the time invested by police officers in arresting people who eventually ended up with no more than a caution (May et al., 2002).

The United Kingdom has a particular approach in its legislation of drugs, based on a three-tiered classification system by which the law ranks certain substances according to their relative harm; it thus attaches penalties to a class in which a drug is placed. In this way, Class A drugs include substances such as heroin, cocaine, crack cocaine, LSD and, recently, magic mushrooms or psilocybin. Class B contains amphetamines, barbiturates and codeine, and it used to include cannabis. Class C takes in anabolic steroids, benzodiazepines, and minor tranquilisers acquired without a doctor's prescription. This classification has constituted

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the foundation of the government's policy on drugs during the last three decades. Notwithstanding the many calls for changes in the British cannabis legislation, it was not until 2002 that the British government allowed a revision of its classification in the Misuse of Drugs Act, 1971. After the second victory of the New Labour Party in the polls, the Home Secretary, then David Blunkett, announced that he was considering an amendment to the legislation the re-classification of cannabis. This initiative, though, was part of a series of reports and political and scientific debate regarding the status of cannabis in the British legislation, as well as the revision of cannabis policies at the international level (Dorn & Jamieson, 2000; Van Het Loo, Hoorens, Van't Hot, & Kahan, 2003).

In 1997 an independent inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act commissioned by The Police Foundation aimed to balance the legislation with the current characteristics of the British context (Runciman, 1999). It was the opinion of the experts in this inquiry that the status of cannabis in the legislation did more harm than it prevented; because apart from being an expensive policy to enforce, it criminalised large numbers of otherwise law-abiding, mainly young, people to the detriment of their futures (Para. 30). It was also acknowledged the existence of a non-problematic use of this substance, related mainly to recreational and medicinal purposes. Just a year before, in 1998, the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology had evaluated the medicinal use of cannabis. They recommended a change in the status of cannabis, to be effected by re-classifying it under Schedule II in the Misuse of Drugs Regulations and by allowing medical practitioners to prescribe the substance (House of Lords, 1998). In addition, in June 2001 a 6-month pilot experiment implemented by the Metropolitan Police in the London Borough of Lambeth demonstrated that when cannabis offences were addressed with a warning, rather than with an arrest, it was possible to save considerable amounts of the time and resources of police officers (Police Foundation, 2002). In the context of managerial changes in Britain's public administration, following a neo-liberal approach, the re-classification was also viewed as a way of using resources efficiently by saving the time of police officers who could thus be directed towards fighting Class A drugs, perceived as more dangerous to British society.

Given such circumstances, the decision of the Home Secretary to call for an 'adult and intelligent debate on cannabis' was not surprising, although it was the first time that such a further step in Britain's drug legislation had been proposed Home Affairs Committee (2002). In general, politicians had avoided the issue, mainly due to their fear of appearing 'soft' on drugs. Indeed, the Prime Minister's statements on drugs have used terms such as 'menace', 'threat' or 'scourge' when referring to this topic (Stimson, 2000); thus indicating the fears of his office that any attempt to review cannabis legislation could be perceived as an admission of defeat in the battle against drugs (Trace, Klein, & Roberts, 2004). Despite these

precautions, the proposal of the new Home Secretary was supported by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, with the result that cannabis was downgraded from Classes B to C, a decision to be implemented from January 29, 2004 (ACMD, 2002).

In practical terms, the re-classification produced minor changes in the punishments for cannabis possession and supply; however, it produced a debate about the possible effects of this measure on British society. Newspapers and other social sectors began to question the re-classification, on the basis of a possible rise in cannabis consumption and the risk of sending 'the wrong message' to young people and to the international community (INCB, 2002). In order to respond to the public controversy, the Home Secretary modified the original purpose of the re-classification and its legal effects. The re-classification of cannabis as finally applied did not alter the power of arrest by police; instead, it specified certain circumstances that would aggravate the possession of cannabis (ACPO, 2003). As a result, penalties for cannabis possession diminished from 7 to 2 years' imprisonment. However, penalties for supplying cannabis and other Class C drugs increased to 14 years' imprisonment, a move intended partly to demonstrate the government's commitment to fighting drugs. Surrounded by a fog of confusion generated by the official re-classification, many of these changes became indistinguishable, yet they altered significantly the initial purpose of the revision of cannabis legislation.

During the year after the re-classification, i.e., 2004–2005, a number of reasons opposing the implementation of this measure appeared in different arenas. For instance, it was said that stronger varieties of cannabis – such as 'skunk' – could be more harmful because of their composition of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). On the other hand, it was argued that cannabis use may act as a trigger to psychotic episodes. The link between cannabis use and mental health is not an entirely new issue. However, the fact that the results of certain scientific investigations were made public during the year after the re-classification could have influenced society's perception of this aspect. Some of the most frequently cited concerned the studies into cannabis and mental health in New Zealand (Fergusson et al., 2005), the Netherlands (Henquet et al., 2005) and Britain (Arsenault et al., 2004). The reports suggest that the possibility of developing psychosis is contingent upon heavy cannabis use by certain vulnerable segment of the population, such as young people or individuals with a pre-existing mental condition.

While the reports mentioned above neither condemned nor supported the re-classification of cannabis in Britain, public opinion as reflected in the mass media assumed the existence of a (new) condition called 'cannabis psychosis'. This form of psychosis is still a matter for debate, although it has been a factor strong enough to constitute a major argument against the downgrading of cannabis. As part of the political change at the end of 2004 a new Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, succeeded David Blunkett. Clarke responded to public opin-

ion by proposing the reversal of the re-classification. Had the personal opinion of the new Home Secretary indeed influenced his proposal, it is also a matter of fact that many other sectors in British society clamoured for the reversal of the cannabis re-classification. Actually, sections of the popular media added fuel to this claim by reporting that cannabis was currently 'ten times stronger than that consumed in the 1960s', and other newspapers reported that the relaxation of the law had led to an increasing level of consumption among young people.

Paradoxically, the public discussion about the effects of the re-classification failed to question the effects of this change on the proportion of cannabis use, which had actually diminished slightly: among 16–59 years old, cannabis use during the past year had dropped from 10.8 percent in 2004 to 9.7 percent in 2005 (Roe, 2005), even if resources had been saved: an estimated 180,000 hr of police time, according to government calculations (May et al., 2002). Instead, emphasis was placed on the possibility of reversing the measure, thus responding to increasing pressure from the public regarding the cannabis policy. To summarise: ultimately, the re-classification of cannabis failed significantly to change the legal status of cannabis in the context of its constituting an arrestable offence, yet it provoked a number of reactions at the social and political levels. The process through which social and political discussions shaped this view of cannabis is the focus of this paper. The period between 2004, when the re-classification was made official, and 2005, 1 year after its implementation, represents a turning point where the discussion, originally formulated in terms of the efficiency and adequacy of the legislation, became a matter concerning mental health and criminality.

This article proposes that the political decision regarding cannabis re-classification can be understood as part of the re-definition of the 'cannabis problem' and hence, the creation of a new type of 'cannabis user'. Through applying a post-Structuralist approach based on selected ideas from the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, and supported by extensive research, this article aims to show how this process has taken place and to demonstrate its effects within the social and political consideration of cannabis and other drugs in the United Kingdom. In order to develop this theory, the document is divided into the following sections: as presented, the first section concerns a brief description of the process of cannabis re-classification in the context of Britain's drugs policy. The second section presents a summary of the major methodological aspects considered in this research and introduces some of the theoretical aspects of the work of Foucault. The third section focuses on an analysis of the main discourses about cannabis in the public debate and their effects on the political appreciation of its re-classification. The fourth section aims to address the issue of how the problem of cannabis has been re-defined, with its consequences of the 'creation' of a cannabis user. Finally, some conclusions are presented.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research relies on an interpretative approach in the understanding of drugs policy, particularly in the ideas about social constructivism. It is considered that cannabis, as are other drugs, is defined through social constructions emerging during certain historical periods (Cohen, 1990; Davies, 1997; Levine, 1978; Reinerman, 2005). Without denying the pharmacological effects of certain substances, this approach allows an understanding of why some groups of drugs are defined as more being dangerous than others, and the consequences in legal terms of such, whereas others are not. It is thus possible to argue that both concepts of 'addiction' and 'prohibition' associated with certain drugs have been defined by institutions and social actors, based on their appreciations of these drugs and their use (Reinerman, 2005). These actors and institutions represent specific interests; their opinions are supported by relevant knowledge produced in certain historical moments. Following this approach, an analysis of the drugs policy focuses on the different 'appreciations' held by policy makers and social groups regarding drugs and the concomitant problems; the discourses used in talking about drugs, including both scientific knowledge and common perceptions of them; and the historical conditions surrounding these perceptions. Social constructions concerning drugs can be found in official documents, political speeches, media messages, or through individual opinions. Accordingly, when analysing a political decision such as cannabis re-classification, it is necessary to focus on 'what is said' about cannabis in a particular period and context in order to understand how certain problems are socially constructed. In addition, it is important to consider other contextual elements such as political and social concerns in a particular period.

In order to respond to these considerations a suitable methodology must be able to organise and identify different discourses about cannabis. Consequently, the methodology adopted here applies some ideas from systems thinking methodologies because of their competence to include different elements about a situation, the wider context in which these elements emerge, and the links and connections between the elements and within the context (Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Jackson, 2000). By following a systems approach, a rich picture of the situation may be obtained in which different and sometimes contradictory views of the situation are included, as are other aspects influencing the political discussion (Acevedo, 2004). This phase can be seen as the 'archaeology' of discourses on cannabis emerging in a particular historical period. As a complement, a post-Structuralist approach allows the understanding of how discourses are produced; it also reveals the dynamics of power and knowledge involved in the political decision on cannabis re-classification.

Once some typical discourses about cannabis are identified, the next step is to analyse how these discourses changed throughout a particular period. For the purposes of

Table 1
Media messages collected from 2004 to 2005

Sources/number of messages	January 2004	2004–2005
The Guardian/The Observer	17	28
The Times	2	4
The Independent	10	4
Daily Mail	17	21
BBC online	8	10
Scottish Newspapers	4	5
Other media messages	12	12
Total	70	84

this article, 154 media messages from the British media are included in the analysis. They come from different sources (e.g., newspapers, both broadsheets and tabloids, and the Internet) and originated during the period 2004–2005. The selection of these messages occurred in two moments of the re-classification discussion: firstly, in January 2004, and secondly, between February 2004 and March 2005. The criteria for the selection considered a variety of sources, as follows (Table 1).

It is acknowledged, however, that media messages are a representation of the mainstream opinion and that they may sometimes be 'distorted or exaggerated' (Coomber, Morris, & Dunn, 2000). Indeed, those who write the news messages can be considered opinion makers or 'moral entrepreneurs' in the sense that they, for members of the public, define deviant behaviour related to cannabis use (Becker, 1963). Nevertheless, these media messages represent what is said in a particular moment, expressing social concerns, and adding to the configuration of the cannabis issue. In this article, the media messages are taken as source of evidence towards identification of the different discourses about cannabis in the public debate, and they constitute the focus of this presentation. It is not the intention of this article to prove the veracity of those discourses, nor whether they make sense; instead, the interest lies in determining how these discourses actually create, define or construct the problem of cannabis use. The analysis of these discourses is based primarily on the work of Michel Foucault, in the context of his quest to create "a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects." (Foucault, 1983, p. 283). For the purposes of this article, the statement becomes relevant in the understanding of how the re-classification of cannabis defines both the 'subject', i.e., the cannabis user, while characterising the nature of the 'problem', i.e., cannabis use.

Briefly, some of the aspects in Foucault's approach considered in this article are described. Firstly, Foucault addressed history as a means towards understanding certain processes of what he called 'normalisation' while focusing on the transformation of the discourses, identities, and power relationships concerning a particular situation. In the context of the discussions about cannabis policy, it is possible to determine how the 'problem of cannabis' is defined during a particular period of time. Such analysis must be understood in relation to a wider process of the normalisation of drugs use by

the legislation, in which cannabis re-classification is merely one element. Secondly, Foucault concentrated on the different discourses about a particular problem, being those discourses he called the 'archaeological material'. In his view, 'archaeology' refers to the work of collecting facts in the form of statements, representations or expressions of a specific situation (or problem) during a period of time. The aim is to collect those statements while making no judgement as to their veracity or whether they make sense. Instead, the archaeologist is interested in the way one discursive formation comes to be substituted for another (Foucault, 1972).

The collection of different discourses on cannabis from media messages, political statements or scientific documents is therefore part of the archaeology. Nevertheless, as Foucault acknowledged, the archaeology alone is insufficient to answer questions about how those discourses emerge, and how one or a group of them can achieve prevalence over others (Foucault, 1977). When analysing the decision on cannabis re-classification it is necessary to formulate additional questions regarding the drugs policy-making process: How do discourses about cannabis change? What role do these discourses play in the political decision? In order to respond to these questions, Foucault proposed to focus on the 'genealogy' of the discourses. For him 'what is said' about certain topic represents not only knowledge, but also power. In his view, power and knowledge are two sides of the same aspect; thus, to analyse how certain knowledge is produced can in itself provide information about how power is exerted over subjects and their behaviours (Foucault, 1979).

The relevance of Foucault's approach to the understanding of problems related to drugs is evident in the analysis of some of the questions asked by drugs researchers. In the United Kingdom, for example, a number of researchers have analysed the role of medical professionals in the creation of the concept of addiction as a disease in relation to opium and other substances (Berridge, 2005; Berridge and Edwards, 1981; Coomber, 1994; Stimson & Oppenheimer, 1982). Among them Harding (1998) analyses the historical conditions under which opiate addiction was socially constructed, through examining different anti-opium discourses expressed by doctors, writers, and health professionals. Similarly, Lart (1998) suggests that the history of drugs policies and regulations in the United Kingdom cannot be seen as a simple dichotomy between treatment and control. Instead, by using a Foucauldian approach regarding power and knowledge, she argues that these aspects are inseparable. It is thus possible to infer that the discursive structures supporting one or other perception of cannabis are expressions of knowledge and power, in turn ultimately influencing the distribution of responsibilities and resources among institutions and disciplines.

In summary the methodology used in this paper combines the 'archeology' with the 'genealogy', adopting a post-Structuralist approach. The 'archaeology' allows the identification of a number of typical discourses about cannabis. This classification follows a systemic approach

in the sense of incorporating a variety of opinions, the discourses, about cannabis and its re-classification. Next, the 'genealogy' aims to clarify how these discourses changed during the period under analysis; why some discourses take prevalence over others, and their effect on the definitions both of the problem of cannabis and of the cannabis user.

Archaeology: discourses on cannabis

Taking into account the variety of discourses on cannabis expressed in the public debate, the first task of the archaeology is to organise them. Among many other means, this article proposes a classification produced by combining two contrasting appreciations of cannabis use. In simple terms, it may be noted that the public discussion oscillates between two poles: whereas some consider cannabis as a 'remedy' for various maladies or as an spiritual enhancer (e.g., medicinal, ritualistic, and recreational uses of cannabis), others may argue that cannabis is a 'poison' for an individual's body and mind or soul (e.g., affecting mental health and encouraging criminal acts). By intersecting these two binaries, the resultant matrix integrates the perception of cannabis as a 'remedy' or as a 'poison' affecting two realms of human life: the individual's 'soul' and/or 'body'. This intersection can be illustrated as follows (Fig. 1).

It is, therefore, possible to identify eight typical discourses on cannabis by developing each combination as expressed in the four quadrants. In the first quadrant, cannabis is perceived as a poison for the soul. In this view, cannabis use is associated with its potential threats to the social order: deviance, or crime. In either case, the solution is perceived as being to eliminate the menace from cannabis by two means: firstly, by its prohibition and secondly, by punishing those who break this prohibition. Although apparently similar, prohibition

and criminalisation involve different discourses. The former includes moral, social, scientific or security reasons, whereas the latter relates to the laws and regulations prescribed within a particular criminal justice system or based on international agreements. Thus, two typical discourses are identified here:

- (a) the prohibitionist discourse;
- (b) the criminalisation discourse.

In the second quadrant, cannabis is perceived as a poison for the body. Here, the problem is defined in medical terms, and medical practitioners are responsible for treating any negative effects on physical and mental health. In a context where the State provides both health and security services, cannabis use is defined as a social problem that may fall within the remit of the administration. As mentioned above, the managerial aspects involved in the proposal of cannabis re-classification became important reasons for this decision. In terms of typical discourses, it is possible to identify the following:

- (c) the treatment of cannabis-related problems;
- (d) the [Public] management of the cannabis problem.

The combination in the third quadrant represents cannabis as a remedy for the soul. This argument can be found in the accounts of religious practices involving cannabis use, such as amongst the Rastafarians (Barrett, 1988), and the Sadhus in India (Charles, Bewley-Taylor, & Neidpath, 2005). In a more contemporary example, the Universal Church of the Holy and Sacred Herb in the United Kingdom regards cannabis as a central aspect of the beliefs of its adherents. On the other hand, the remedial characteristics for the soul can be found in terms of the recreational uses of cannabis, as part of spending 'time out' or as a means of relaxation (Goode, 1970; Parker,

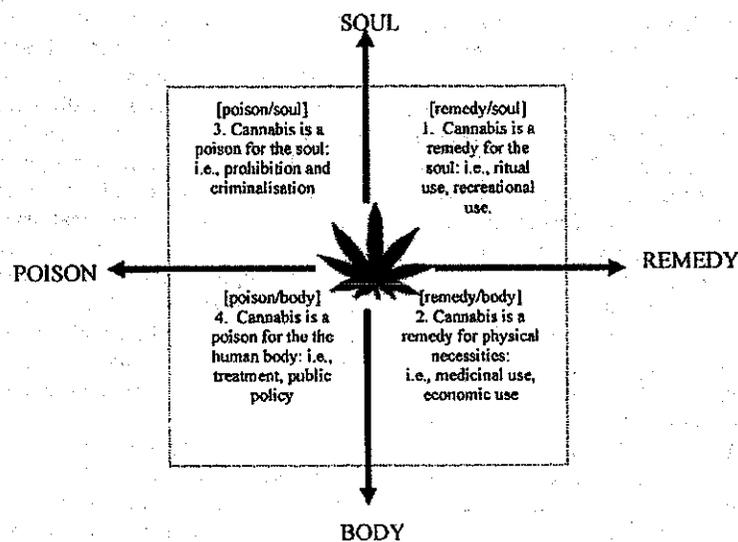


Fig. 1. Matrix of discourses on cannabis.

Aldridge, & Measham, 1998). In consequence, two typical discourses can be identified:

- (e) the ritual use of cannabis;
- (f) the recreational use of cannabis.

Finally, the fourth quadrant addresses the cannabis as a remedy for the body. In this category, the medicinal use of cannabis should be included, as argued by many who use it for treating or alleviating different illnesses (Coomber, Oliver, & Morris, 2003; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1993). Secondly, it is possible to include an additional view, where people justify their involvement in cannabis cultivation as a way of alleviating financial difficulties. In the United Kingdom, a 'growing' market cannabis provides almost half of the internal demand for the substance (Hough et al., 2003). Hence, two discourses can be identified as follows.

- (g) the medicinal use of cannabis;
- (h) the economic use of cannabis.

It is important to note that these categories do not necessarily include all aspects of cannabis. However, they represent a comprehensive means of including different perceptions of cannabis to be examined in the context of its reclassification in the United Kingdom. By organising discourses into these eight categories, the material collected and classified constitutes an 'archaeology' of the discourses on cannabis. A further step is to understand how these discourses define the cannabis problem and the subject experiencing those problems.

Genealogy: defining a cannabis problem

For the effects of the genealogy, the period of analysis is determined by two moments: firstly, the discussion previous to the official re-classification in January 2004 and secondly, the debate on cannabis re-classification during the year after its implementation, thus from 2004 to 2005. During this period the different discourses on cannabis identified above changed. The aim of the genealogy is thus to reveal those changes and the forces and influences supporting them.

The reclassification of cannabis as originally proposed had a two-fold purpose: firstly, to save police resources and secondly, it was acknowledged that the use of cannabis by 'otherwise law-abiding citizens' should not be penalised severely. Nonetheless, the re-classification allowed the materialisation of conflicting opinions about cannabis. As a public survey published by the newspaper *The Guardian* demonstrated, public opinion in Britain is divided over the downgrading of cannabis. Some 53 percent of adult voters say they do not support the re-classification of cannabis as a less harmful drug. Only 38 percent say they support the move. As ever, when it comes to issues of drugs, the nation divides strictly according to age, social background, and voting intention (Travis, 2002). In fact, the discussion represented in

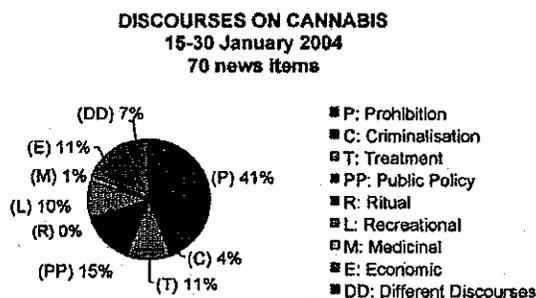


Fig. 2. Discourses on cannabis (I).

the media reflected the division between those who were in favour of re-classifying cannabis, emphasising its properties as a 'remedy', and those who opposed it because of its 'poisonous' nature. This is the first moment of the analysis. The following figure illustrates the representation of the different discourses (Fig. 2).

In this sample, it is possible to note a majority (56 percent) of the news items referring to negative appreciations of the measure are expressed in three types of discourse: prohibitionist (P), criminalistic (C) and treatment (T). However, a significant proportion of the news items represented a more liberal approach to the uses of cannabis, represented in the graphic by the discourses on recreational (L), medicinal (M) and economic (E) uses. The messages supporting the re-classification frequently quoted the favourable opinions of activists and campaigners regarding changes in the legislation. Similarly important is the reference to 'medicinal users' and the quantity of news items reporting on the pharmaceutical development of a cannabis-based medicine, *Sativex*[®]. In general, the news messages quoted politicians, police officers, public officials, medical experts, parents, and a very limited proportion of certain users, especially medicinal users. In addition, the discourses labelled as Public Policy (PP) were mainly explanatory messages about the efficiency of the re-classification and the possibilities in terms of saving resources. At this time of the discussion, the media messages reflected a relatively balanced presence of the different opinions about cannabis. The following table presents some statements related to the eight discourses identified in this first moment of analysis (Table 2).

Paradoxically, the re-classification failed to clarify what to do regarding cannabis offences, thus created confusion amongst police forces. In some cases, the reaction of police officers was to take a tougher approach regarding cannabis possession and supply. Warburton, May, and Hough (2005) argue that the police had, prior to the re-classification, dealt informally with offences of cannabis possession. Thus, instead of formalising this procedure, cannabis re-classification had the effect of reinforcing the strict application of the law, making the application of the law in a more formal – and visible – way. On the other hand, it is possible to understand why the power of arrest is such a 'cherished' prerogative of police officers. Throughout a number of

Table 2
Discourses on cannabis expressed in media items

Discourse	Expression in media items
Prohibition	As a young and academically gifted teenager, our daughter, in the company of her inner-city peer group, was seduced and transformed by the hideous flirtation with various drugs. At the centre of it all, cannabis destroyed her compliant nature and her intellect, and she became a travesty of her former self. The demands of voices she heard in her head led her into alcoholism, unprotected promiscuity, acute poverty, and socially destructive paranoia. The Times online, 19 January 2004
Criminal	Having been on the receiving end of an abusive partner, I have every reason to believe that his excessive use of cannabis was the cause of his violent mood swings and severe changes in personality. Julia, BBC online, 29 January 2004
Treatment	We studied people who recently developed [schizophrenia], then followed them up after four years. . . The people who were taking cannabis when we first met them and continued taking cannabis were doing three times worse than people who had never taken cannabis. In particular they still had some of the positive symptoms of schizophrenia. Dr. Robin Murray, The Guardian, 20 January 2004
Public policy	Re-classification should make our job slightly easier because it will free up some resources, the amount of arrests at street level will drop and that will probably mean less police time, less paperwork. PC Richard Price, Drugs Co-ordinator for Norfolk Police, Evening News, 26 January 2004
Ritual	People that have never taken drugs don't understand that a big part of it is the ritual: going to score, scoring, getting the drugs home, going through the motions and getting the end result. Take away that ritual from a drug addict and you take away a huge part of their lives. James, 35, from Catton, has been using drugs for the past 22 years. Evening Standard, 26 January 2004
Recreation	The drug cannabis is safe in moderation. However, like all 'drugs' excessive misuse can have negative effects. Most users will experience these effects in some form but like everything in life it's up to the individual to know their limits. I have used it for ten years and still have a lust for life and a decent memory although like drinking there can be a 'hangover'! Jaime, BBC online, 29 January 2004
Medicinal	It's a step in the right direction for people with MS. I say it's time the stigma was lifted from cannabis. I had been banging my head against a brick wall. The doctors and neurologists were not friendly. MS gave me sleep problems and anxiety; they prescribed anti-depressants. But cannabis helped me to sleep and to concentrate. Patrick Donnelly, 35, The Independent, 18 January 2004
Economical	Being called a 'dealer' makes me sound like some kind of underworld king that wears huge sovereign rings and has minders on the door. It's not like that at all. I buy my stuff from a bloke I used to go to school with who gets his from someone he met when he was abroad. Bradley, 37, who lives in Earlham, has sold cannabis to his friends for the past ten years. He has a full-time job, a partner and two children. The sale of cannabis supplements his income by around £150 a week. Evening Standard, 26 January 2004

interviews conducted by the author with police officers and experts in this area, it was found that the powers of arrest for cannabis offences are frequently used as a first step towards inquiring into other type of crimes. Although it might seem an improper use of the powers, police officers regard them as a way of exercising their authority. In contrast, the privilege can be seen also as the expression of a what Agamben (2005) calls the 'state of exception' regarding security measures taken on exceptional occasions in response to terrorism or other defence alerts, which seems the case in Western countries after the events in the US of September 11, 2001.

In general terms, the controversy about the effects of the re-classification during the year after its implementation continued to oscillate between the 'poison' and 'remedy' ambivalence. An increasing number of news collected during the 2004–2005 post-re-classification period shows how the perception of cannabis problems was dominated by a negative view, emphasising the poisonous nature of cannabis (63 percent of the media messages). In terms of the discourses, the categories of prohibitionism (P), criminalisation (C) and especially the reference to a 'cannabis psychosis' as part of the treatment view (T) increased in the media messages. In addition, references to a possible reverse of the re-classification appeared throughout the year (U-turn). The following figure illustrates how these debates were represented in a sample of news items gathered during this period (Fig. 3).

During this period a number of articles reporting criminal offences and brutal murders tended to include the element of cannabis as a possible factor in stimulating criminal behaviour. For example, in reporting violent crimes, newspapers emphasised the fact that some of the criminals were also cannabis users:

His fascination with knives, his enjoyment of cannabis joints and the fact he was double-dating Jodi with a girl who, according to one witness was almost identical,

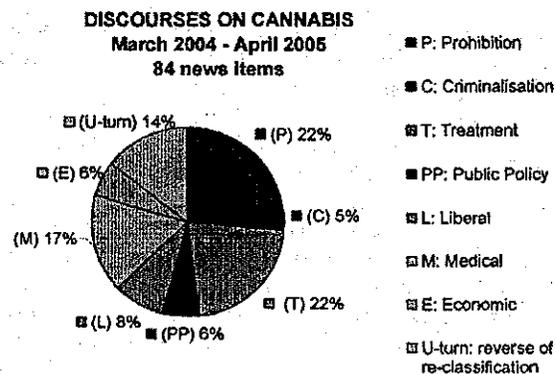


Fig. 3. Discourses on cannabis (II).

emerged during evidence. The boy accused of murdering schoolgirl Jodie Jones smoked the equivalent of 600 cannabis joints a week.

Daily Mail. *How Jodi's killer outwitted police*. January 21, 2005

Two men who murdered black teenager Anthony Walker were jailed for life today for what their trial judge described as a "poisonous" attack. [It is said] that Paul Taylor, 20, who smashed an ice axe into the 18-year-old's head after ambushing him in a park in Huyton, The Independent. *Racist killers get life for 'poisonous' attack*. December 1, 2005

The connection between cannabis, madness and crime is not new in the history of Britain's relationship with this substance (Mills, 2000, 2003). However, at the dawn of the 21st century it appeared as the reinforcement of an old moral panic (Cohen, 1972). In comparison with the period of January 2004, references to any positive uses of cannabis decreased significantly. Although there are messages regarding the medicinal uses of cannabis, they concentrated on selected scientific studies on the difficulties of launching Sativex® in the UK, yet failed to include interviews or quotations from active medicinal users, despite having done so in the earlier period.

A possible explanation of this change of emphasis in the discussion lies in the transformation in the definition of the cannabis problem. In the period 2004–2005, an issue defined as a matter of 'public management' related to the use of certain management criteria of efficiency and adequacy became one of 'mental health' and 'criminality'. In addition, whereas the cannabis user was in 2004 defined as an 'otherwise law-abiding citizen' who happened to use cannabis for medicinal or recreational purposes, this cannabis user became in 2005 a sick person in need of treatment, or a criminal deserving punishment. To paraphrase Becker's seminal work, it is possible that re-classification has, instead of updating the legislation according to contemporary social trends, created a new 'Cannabis user'.

Creating the cannabis user

A second aspect to be analysed in this article addresses the consequences of cannabis re-classification in relation to the creation of subjects: in this case, the cannabis user. Following a Foucauldian approach, this process involves two aspects: firstly, how the subject is defined by different disciplines and secondly, how the subject defines him/herself. These aspects are related within the dynamics of power and knowledge in defining the problem of cannabis use. When the re-classification of cannabis was initially proposed, newspapers, official documents and interviews gave a wide range of examples of non-problematic uses of cannabis,

including medicinal and recreational. These types of users had gained visibility in the first phase of the discussion, and were portrayed as having a certain degree of control over their own behaviour: the former by deciding to use cannabis within certain settings and for specific purposes; the latter by exercising their right to self-prescription. Similarly to other practices such as eating, smoking or drinking, the individual is responsible about what s/he may do with his/her body. Re-classification failed, despite this acknowledgement, to change any of the references to such cannabis users. The official documents insisted on using the term 'drug misuse' without any inclusion specifying the different types of cannabis use. All of these linguistic terms represent the way in which drugs are defined at the institutional, scientific and political levels.

By adding the category of 'cannabis psychosis' to the concept of addiction in relation to cannabis use already embedded, the responsibility is transferred from the person to the medical practitioner, to the police or to any other authority. This category thus becomes a useful social construct because in this way cannabis use is redefined as a contemporary moral panic, and its problems can be explained as an 'external' force taking over the individual. The external force representing the addictive properties of cannabis can be seen as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it justifies the special powers of the 'addiction doctor' required to fight the evil (Cohen, 2000); on the other, it provides an alibi for the user, who becomes a 'victim' or a 'psychothic individual' acting under its influence (Davies, 1997). In fact, when 'cannabis psychosis' became popular in the media, the cannabis user began to be described by others (i.e., parents, medical experts, psychologists, and treatment agencies) in such terms. It has been observed that users, in some cases, referred to 'psychosis' when describing the effects of their own practice, this constituting a justification of certain problematic behaviour. In other words, it is possible to argue that the definition of the problem of 'cannabis psychosis' seems to have preceded its affliction.

Hence, it may be claimed that one of the main consequences of the re-classification has been to re-define the problem of cannabis and to create a new cannabis user. Indirectly, the debate on cannabis has allowed the definition of cannabis use within the realm of mental health, and has thus re-situated the medical expert as being the authority responsible for treatment. Such a definition is, however, neither merely a better or more accurate, more humane way of treating cannabis issues; instead, identifying cannabis use as a 'disease' or as a cause of 'crime' represents a new dynamic in the configuration of power among disciplines and institutions, and in the relation between the state and its citizens. This new approach justifies actions such as the powers of arrest by the police, or the confinement of psychotic individuals in psychiatric institutions. At the same time, both health and criminal justice are services provided by the State, which ultimately exerts its authority and power over individuals. Influenced by a neo-liberal approach, the state in Britain adjusted its need for control while re-defining problems and subjects, and

applying new technologies of governance (Zibbell, 2004). In brief, the re-classification of cannabis has created a new type of subject: for drug policy makers, there are no drug users; the subject is instead defined as a drug misuser, drug user, or drug addict. In this view, s/he seems to require treatment, punishment or education, and possibly other disciplinary measures.

Conclusions

It is possible generally to assess some of the effects of cannabis re-classification in the United Kingdom in relation to the wider context of drug policy-making and the social constructions of cannabis problems. The final area of this article concerns the efficiency of the decision to re-classify, in terms of the goals originally proposed. Given the fore-going analysis, its efficiency is clearly unrelated to the purpose of saving resources; nor it has affected the criminalisation of cannabis users. It offers no better understanding of the variety of reasons for using cannabis. If these had been the real purposes of the re-classification, then the powers of arrest would have been definitively withdrawn, and the re-classification would have been taken further in challenging the whole issue of drugs prohibition. On the contrary, the message was clear: cannabis is still an arrestable offence, and prohibition is the best way of dealing with drugs-related problems in British society.

Some aspects may express this: firstly, re-classification worked as an efficient means of rendering invisible certain types of cannabis use, i.e., medicinal and recreational, while revealing the problems associated with its use. At the same time, certain other actions became more visible. Police action regarding cannabis offences has become more formal or more visible; similarly, issues associated with cannabis use in relation to mental health became visible. Cannabis possession and supply are still arrestable offences, thus a person caught with cannabis may be sent to prison or fined. If the person is not caught, there remains the risk of the individual developing a 'cannabis psychosis'. In this way, body and the soul, as represented by the mind, are regulated by cannabis re-classification: there is no escape.

Secondly, the re-classification of cannabis must be understood in the context of power relationships among different types of knowledge, institutions, and agents. In general terms, the ways in which the medical profession and the criminal system tend to dominate the discussion could now be identified. Users and campaigners who appeared to be prominent actors, especially in the first part of the debate, were replaced by medical practitioners, psychiatrists, police officers, and parents as the 'experts' in this matter. Indeed, the previous non-problematic use of drugs has been disregarded, and the notion of misuse is supported by a rejuvenated knowledge of the negative effects of cannabis on human health. In this way, the two traditional institutions, i.e., the Prison and the Hospital, seem post-re-classification to have retained their

predominance in treating or addressing cannabis problems and subjects.

Thirdly, the reclassification of cannabis can be used as a template for further discussion in other countries. While there is an increasing demand for changes in legislation across Europe, it seems that the argument of 'cannabis psychosis' can be applied in different countries as a means through which to oppose those changes. In the context of the increasing surveillance of citizens, justified because of the new menace of terrorism and other anti-social behaviours, it is unsurprising that a decrease in controlling mechanisms such as the power of arrest is not particularly welcomed by the authorities. Governments in Western societies are, by re-defining drugs problems as part of discussions of public management and efficiency, in fact applying new technologies of governance, where control is retained and private practices are increasingly regulated by the state.

The study of drugs policy, viewed along the lines of Foucault's quest for the process of the normalisation of certain behaviours, represents an illustrative means of observing how the dynamics of power and knowledge can create 'problems' and 'subjects'. The definition and creation of drugs-related problems seems to recycle anachronistic arguments in the guise of positive developments in the fields of medicine, welfare, public management, security, and science. After more than a century of discussion about drugs, the arguments categorising them still oscillate between as remedies or as poisons. Indeed, this ambivalence seems to justify the maintenance of questionable interventions by the State into the private behaviour of its citizens. Supported by a complex dynamic of power and knowledge, the re-classification indeed represents a new technology of governance supported by the creation of a cannabis user in need of being disciplined, regulated or punished.

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