Stone me: cannabis users don’t like hard work

**Tom Whipple, Science Editor**

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Cannabis users don’t hate the idea of working for “the Man”. They just hate the idea of working.

The results of a study into the effects of marijuana use on motivation levels might not, admittedly, be that much of a surprise: scientists concluded that people smoking the drug don’t like to exert themselves.

However, for anyone who has sat in a student room late at night, listening to yet another interminable Marxist critique of capitalism from a stoner, it is at least a comfort to learn it is laziness rather than a strong philosophical position that lies behind his or her workshy tendencies.

Will Lawn, from University College London, said: “Nobody has ever really tested the hypothesis that being stoned lessens your motivation.”

In an experiment described in the journal *Psychopharmacology*, he and his colleagues gave 17 people a balloon to inhale filled with cannabis vapour, and then tested their motivation for earning money.

They were given the choice of taking on either a high-effort task, which involved pressing a space bar 100 times in 21 seconds to earn up to £2, or a low-effort task, which required pressing the space bar 30 times in seven seconds to win 50p.

The cannabis users were significantly more likely to go for the easier option, even though they earned less.

Dr Lawn said that this was not surprising, but a follow-up study found an unexpected result. Separately, he looked at 20 long-term cannabis users, testing their motivation levels while they were not under the influence of the drug — and, contrary to the stereotype, there was no clear difference found between them and non-users.

“The implications of the studies for regular cannabis users are that when they are high they are less motivated than when sober,” said Dr Lawn. “This is an important thing to know. If the results of the second study are correct though, then what we have shown is, at least in terms of motivation, they needn’t be too worried about long-term use. So long as they can stop for 12 to 24 hours, that gives the user time to escape the hazy fog and return to their previous motivation levels.”

The precise mechanism through which cannabis may act on motivation is not known but it is possible it interferes with the brain’s reward system.

Of course there is another school of thought: that the most sensible state is not sobriety at all. The comedian Bill Hicks once said: “They tell you pot-smoking makes you unmotivated. Lie! When you’re high you can do everything you normally do. You just realise that it’s not worth the effort.”

**Behind the story**  
There is no shortage of studies that appear to confirm the obvious *(Tom Whipple writes).*

Some have shown that talking on your mobile phone makes you a less attentive driver; others that texting is even worse.

A 2009 study of 3,300 women found that high heels are uncomfortable, and a 2005 survey hinted that men don’t like going bald. Common sense, you’d think.

For decades teenagers have been given robotic babies who cry through the night as a way of preventing teenage pregnancy. They have been shown prisons to scare them straight. It took studies into the “obvious” to show that both initiatives have the opposite effect: making pregnancies and crime more common.