

International Connections Paper #2

For this international connections paper, I want to examine how power dynamics affect legislation and public perception in regards to tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. Worldwide, tobacco is consumed in different forms such as cigarettes and chewing tobacco. Many types of alcohol are also consumed, from low-alcohol beverages like beer or cider to higher-proof distilled alcohols such as vodka, tequila, and whiskey. Marijuana is illegal in many parts of the world. In many of these countries, it is perceived as being a hard drug with a high potential for addiction and severe health consequences. In the West, however, it is slowly gaining social acceptance and countries are beginning to push for legalization.

Tobacco and marijuana are both commonly used by smoking or vaping. While both substances can be dangerous, it has been shown that tobacco is more harmful to our bodies than marijuana (Imtiaz et al. 653). One study done in Vancouver, Canada showed that while smokers of either substance had an increased chance of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the chance of developing COPD in tobacco-only smokers was higher than the chance of developing COPD in marijuana-only smokers (2.74% odds versus 1.66% odds) (Tan et al. 818).

Tobacco and alcohol companies have worked tirelessly to remain on the favorable side of public perception. Even as we come to learn and recognize the dangers of tobacco use, tobacco remains a fully legal and highly available substance. Alcohol is even more egregious, as public perception of the substance is that it is harmless when consumed in moderate amounts, and certainly more safe than tobacco.

Alcohol companies aggressively advertise their product. Though the industry has self-imposed rules against advertising on many different mediums if more than 30% of the audience is under 21, these mediums do not include magazines, and ads placed in publications such as *Sports Illustrated* and *Rolling Stone* have caused Americans aged 12-20 to be exposed to up to 45% more alcohol advertisements than adults of legal drinking age (Barry and Stanton 2-3). Tobacco companies have a history of lobbying politicians so that legislation remains favorable for their business, despite a clear conflict of interest between the two: "Because public health regulations are often in direct conflict with the interests of profit-driven corporations, it is important to protect the policy process from industry influence" (Barry and Stanton 2).

As marijuana continues to gain acceptance and legalization worldwide, we must take care to not allow large companies to shape policy surrounding distribution, advertisement, and sale of marijuana products. Despite evidence that marijuana is less dangerous than tobacco, use of the substance is still inherently prone to causing harm to consumers.

Works Cited:

Barry, Rachel Ann, and Stanton Glantz. "*A public health framework for legalized retail marijuana based on the US experience: Avoiding a new tobacco industry.*" PLoS medicine 13.9 (2016): e1002131.

Imtiaz, Sameer, et al. "*The burden of disease attributable to cannabis use in Canada in 2012.*" Addiction 111.4 (2016): 653-662.

Tan, Wan C., et al. "*Marijuana and chronic obstructive lung disease: a population-based study.*" Cmaj 180.8 (2009): 814-820.