

ENGLISH 312 AUDIENCE STATEMENT AND ENTHYMEME COVER SHEET

Audience Statement

My audience is PRO/CON: Pro decriminalizing of illegal drugs

(Select one) (Fill in the A Term)

Who is your audience? Why do they find your claim initially unacceptable?

Partner in class

- Decriminalize drug use.
- For keeping distribution of drugs criminalized.
- Because drugs are illegal the stigma prevents progress.
- It keeps addicts from treating their addiction due to the punishment.
- If legal, it will be easier to treat drug abuse from a public health perspective.
- A lot of money is wasted keeping people in jail.
- When illegal, people are more likely to be using drugs in an unsafe manner.

What does your audience value the most?

- Progressing as a society.
- Not negatively affecting the innocent through policies.
- Medically minded and wants to become a doctor. Because of this, people's health is important to him.
- Helping those who cannot help themselves.
- It is not always the addict's fault that they are an addict.
- Effectively using of money for corrections.
- Personal responsibility.

What does your audience fear the most?

- People never getting help for their addictions.
- Tax money wasted.
- Ineffective attempts to take care of the problem.
- Unhealthy population.

Audience Counterarguments:

But . . . the stigma of illegal drugs prevents progress in terms of getting rid of drug use overall, getting people to get help.

But . . . keeping drugs illegal wastes money and creates public health concerns.

Enthymeme

What Are the Consequences of the decriminalization of drug use on drug abuse?

Claim: Decriminalizing drug use increases drug abuse.

Because: No longer having minimum mandatory sentencing for drug offenders removes the stigma surrounding illicit activities.

Implicit Assumption (Whatever V2 C also V1 B): Whatever removes a stigma surrounding illicit activities also increases drug abuse.

Contract Question: What are the effects of decriminalizing drugs?

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Lucy in the Sky with Decriminalized Drugs

Several years ago I was deeply moved by the situation of a shell shocked and shattered family of seven. The father, John, had it all. He was a physician's assistant who ran a weight loss clinic that reportedly earned him ten to fifteen thousand dollars a week. He had a loving wife and family, a beautiful home and numerous friends who would have vouched his goodness at the drop of a hat. Little did everyone know, John was struggling with a powerful addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs that were readily made available to him by his vocation. Almost overnight he lost his practitioner's license, his business collapsed and his wife filed for a divorce and eventually a restraining order.

We both know about the potential consequences drugs pose to individuals and society. Because of this, in 1971 President Nixon initiated what became known as 'The War on Drugs. It started with mandatory sentences involving jail time for drug use and no-knock search warrants, and then escalated to the militarization of drug law enforcement that is common today (Drug Policy Alliance). Unfortunately, drug usage has remained constant throughout this proverbial war with fatalities due to overdose actually increasing over time (Drug Policy Alliance). Ultimately, the government has wasted vast amounts of resources treating the symptoms of a perceived societal disease while doing little to treat its cause: people who can't break their drug addictions by themselves.

Obviously something needs to change. Some have boldly suggested that decriminalization of drug usage could lead to a decrease in drug abuse. Supporters say that decriminalization would make

drug addiction a public health issue thus enabling the government to provide funding for treatment of drug users. Detractors of decriminalization say that it would only create more drug addicts without offering a good solution for treatment. This begs the question, what effect would decriminalization have on the problem of drug abuse?

So what exactly makes decriminalization an appealing option? Most of our ideas come from several progressive countries in Europe have decriminalization drug use. The Netherlands in particular is an interesting case study. Originally their drug policy making organization, the Baan Commission, first repealed their Opium Acts in 1976, allowing for the sale of small amounts of soft drugs like marijuana and no punishment for possession of small amounts of hard drugs (Dolin, Benjamin). In recent years the Dutch have enjoyed watching cannabis rates fall among all age groups with increasing an increasing number of citizens seeking treatment to cannabis addiction (Van Laar et al. 13). The effect of this legislation can be seen in Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, where it is famous for their waterfront coffee shops that sell weed to anyone of legal age.

Sounds reasonable right? Well back across the pond, Colorado has recently taken a similar stand as the Dutch. In the two years since recreational marijuana has been legalized, officials have seen a 24% increase in marijuana use among teens age 12-17 (Wong and Clarke 36). This statistic is made even more alarming by the fact that marijuana usage among youth in Colorado was already 56% higher than the national average before it was even legalized (36). And while research on the effects of youth usage of marijuana later in life is still forthcoming, I am reminded of John for a moment and how his addictions began when he first experimented with alcohol as a teenager which led to his experiments with harder drugs. Even without evidence to support the idea that legalized marijuana acts as a gateway drug to other illegal drugs, I think we can agree that preventing kids from doing drugs in the first place is one of the best ways to start lowering drug usage rates in our

country. Based on the early data, Colorado's drug policy isn't in line with the idea that prevention is the best medicine.

However, decriminalization would affect more than just drug usage rates. It would also affect how our government goes about dealing with drugs as a whole. Generally speaking, The War on Drugs has been considered a very expensive failure since the late 90s. Between police, the judicial system and corrections, the Cato Institute, a policy research think tank, estimated in 2010 that the federal and state governments spend a combined total of 41.3 billion dollars per year on drug related expenses (Miron and Waldock 1). Decriminalization would allow the government to reclaim those funds and as an added benefit create a big pile of new goods coming into the market just begging to be taxed! The Cato Institute again estimates that this would generate another 46.7 billion dollars in tax revenue per year thus adding 88 billion dollars of assets to federal and state governments across the country (1). What's exciting about this is that theoretically decriminalizing drugs could create an extra 88 billion dollars a year for the government. Since preventative medicine doesn't do anything for those already addicted to drugs, why don't we put that money back into programs that would help drug addicts clean up and get their lives in order, or at least ensure drug users are getting their next high in a safe manner? For instance, research has shown that drug users are significantly more likely to share syringes if they do not have an alternative way to get sterile needles, which consequently is a well-known method for transmitting HIV (Bluthenthal et al. 8). However, if the government provided equipment for sanitarly injecting drugs, this could significantly improve public health and safety while simultaneously helping to remove the social stigma that drug users are the pariah of society. And as mentioned before, government subsidized drug treatment programs have seen increasing success in the Netherlands.

But let's be real for a moment; this is the government that we are talking about. The only thing that it is efficient at producing is legislative red tape. The chances of all 88 billion dollars being

funneled directly into public health are next to none. In 2015 Colorado allocated 40 million dollars of the 66.1 million dollars collected from taxing marijuana to school construction, ultimately only putting 12 million aside to be shared between youth and substance abuse programs (Frank). Even more problematic is that we probably won't ever see anything close to the estimated 88 billion dollars. Law enforcement costs are likely to remain high, in part due to policing agencies being reluctant to let go of the additional funding, and if we are following the example of the Netherlands, people will still go to jail on drug possession charges. Dutch law still enforces jail time for anyone found possessing more than five grams of soft drugs or half a gram of hard drugs, but with sentences that tend to be milder than what is given out in the United States (Dolin, Benjamin). As we know, catching, processing and jailing a lawbreaker costs more money than what you'll typically find in a Monopoly box.

Another issue is if we want to decriminalize drugs, then it can't be done as a piece of blanket legislation at the federal level. If decriminalization were truly to be successful then it would take dozens of other laws at the state and county level to ensure that there is adequate funding for rehabilitative programs prior to decriminalization. This turns decriminalization into a complicated, multistep and timing consuming process with many potential points of failure. Unfortunately, this isn't the biggest problem with decriminalization. The problem with decriminalization is the freedom loving American people. Whenever someone tries to take away our freedom, it pulls the tea dumping patriot and revolutionary out of us. Take prohibition for example. With prohibition the attempt to take away American's freedom to drink alcohol failed so soundly that they repealed the amendment, but only after gang violence and other illegal activities grew up around a new found bootlegging business. This is a classic example of how often the effects of a new law aren't seen until years after it has been passed. By the time it becomes clear whether or not decriminalization was a good idea, Americans will feel entitled to their drugs and be willing to fight *hard* to keep them. The

upshot is that if we decriminalize drugs, we will start driving down a one-way street where no re-criminalization u-turns are allowed.

I want to revisit John one last time. Unfortunately, there is no happy ending. He was jailed for possession of meth. The effects of this were also devastating to his children. The last thing I heard about John was that he had managed to get his oldest son, who absolutely idolized his father and supported him in his self-destructive habits, to feign penance to his mother in order to exhort enough money out of her to pay John's bail. While it is useless to speculate, I can't help but wonder how John and his family's story could have been different if better laws and drug addiction treatment programs were in place.

The unfortunate truth about our current criminalized drug system is that it is like a dull two-edge sword that tries to provide a form of preventative medicine against drug abuse through a social stigma created by harsh punishments that makes recovery difficult for those already addicted to drugs. Obviously something needs to change. As citizens who care about our nation and our fellow countryman, we need to actively participate in the political process of our local and state governments to create and pass laws that promote just punishments for criminal drug use while offering helpful and effective options to addicts who want to change their lives.

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