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Holmes, The Weed Keeper?

Writing Process

I woke up out of a dream with the idea to hold a conversation with Sherlock Holmes (the theme of our class). It is easy enough to hold a fictional conversation with a fictional character discussing facts about why marijuana is a better alternative than cocaine. To make the project a little more academically focused, I also discussed how 19th- century Europeans did not understand addiction. As a process, it came only through research and free writing sessions.

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Holmes, the Weed Keeper?

Justin Smith

I was first introduced to Sherlock Holmes in 2008 when I watched the Guy Ritchie Film *Sherlock Holmes*. One of my favorite scenes involved Dr. Watson finding an inebriated Holmes in the attic of a bar where he had spent all night abusing drugs and conducting a science experiment. I found this scene very laughable for many years until recently, when I noticed a serious trend of drug abuse throughout Holmes' fictional history. With only a small warning from Dr. John Watson, Holmes' partner and biographer, Holmes' addictions go largely unnoticed and treated. After a few enquiries, I learned that in nineteenth-century Europe the term "addiction" had not been coined yet. People with addictions were considered outcasts instead of being treated. This information prompted more questions, but of an odder variety.

Sherlock Holmes has one of the largest fan bases in literary history. His character produced countless stories by innumerable amateur writers who plucked Holmes right out of the world that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created for him, and many rewrote his character to fit in any number of eras. This idea made me wonder: What if I could talk to Holmes? What if I could imagine Holmes sitting down in front of me as the original man that Doyle created? I am going to bring Holmes into 2017 to discuss with him that his continual use of hard drugs is not in his best interest, as well as offer him a different solution to his drug problem. Would Sherlock Holmes of 2017 be willing to substitute the hard drugs that he uses for a greener alternative once explained the advantages were explained to him? I will argue that marijuana (the greener alternative) is a great alternate to harder drugs such as cocaine because marijuana is less harmful than cocaine, is cheaper than cocaine, and growing marijuana is legal in some states where cocaine is not.

Before I can convince Holmes of the advantages of marijuana over cocaine, I need to make him understand that he is an addict. Here is our guest now.

Smith: Hello, Mr. Holmes. It is very nice to meet you having read so much about you.

Holmes: Where am I?

Smith: You are in Dayton, Ohio, in America and it is December of 2017, sir. I can imagine that you are rather confused about what is happening and how you got here. I am a writer that has stolen you from your home in England and placed you into my own fictional creation. I have brought you here to speak about a very real and serious matter.

Holmes: Oh, not again. What is it with you fanfickers always messing with my life? Seems like every other day I am walking about with Watson and I get swept away into some new world where I am mishandled in irreverent ways! Well, get on with it then. Why am I here? A grand case to solve perhaps? Don't tell me you're ANOTHER smut writer.

Smith: No, sir. I brought you forward to my time to tell you about the medical advancements that we have made since the late eighteen hundreds and to specifically tell you of the treatment for addictions and the medicinal use of marijuana.

Holmes: Addiction?

Smith: An addiction is the perpetual abuse of drugs for reasons outside of their medicinal purposes. Until now, I do not think that you could have known this because the society you were born into largely did not understand the consequences of the overuse of certain drugs. We know this now and I would like to tell you about many instances of your drug abuse throughout your history. You have often admitted to being addicted to pain killers.

Doyle, was a doctor and wrote about the drugs of his day in his stories. He wrote about opioids. Whether he meant to or not, Doyle turned Holmes into a habitual drug abuser. Doyle wrote in “The Man with the Twisted Lip” that a character was inspired to smoke opium-drenched tobacco to feel the same sensation Holmes had read about in books (Shmoop Editorial Team). The seriousness of Holmes’s addiction became apparent to me when Doyle wrote in “A Scandal in Bohemia” that Holmes was splitting his time equally between work and cocaine binges (Shmoop Editorial Team).

In one of the many pastiches of Holmes, Dr. House, a Holmes-esque medical sleuth in the television show called *House*, is challenged in an episode called “Detox.” House’s boss challenges him to not take the pain killers that he is addicted to for a week. In that week, House’s judgement is compromised. Because of his overwhelming pain, House makes a couple bad medical decisions. Concluding the episode, House comes to terms with his addiction and says that he had realized that he needs prescription pain killers to function in his day-to-day life, but that he was not hurting anyone else by managing his own medical situation.

Holmes: I was merely trying to fill the gaps of time I was not working is all!

Smith: Sir, I think you might have been trying to free yourself from your mind, so that you did not have to mentally process the numerous traumatic events that you encountered throughout your adventures.

Holmes: How dare you!

Smith: I only think so because I can identify with the same situation. I am a combat veteran of two foreign wars. I have seen some of the real evil that humans can do, just like you. I came away from my military experience with a very cloudy mind that I wanted to escape from, and I did this with marijuana. Like you did with cocaine. I will not lie to you, Holmes. At first, I was very immature with my marijuana habit; I smoked it just to get high. Like you, I just wanted to mute my mind. To live with a muted

mind is no way to live at all. With discipline, I changed my abuse into something more of an informed medicinal regimen.

Holmes: What you are saying does make sense, but if what you are saying is true, all I need to do is take my cocaine at timely intervals so I can call it medicine for my mental health instead of that dreadful word you are using. What was it? “Addiction?”

Smith: What I would like you to understand is that anyone who is on a pharmaceutical drug regiment is in a way addicted to their medicine because they would not be able to function the same way day-to-day without their drugs.

Holmes: What a concept. Did you think of that yourself?

Smith: No sir, Doctors far smarter than I are revolutionizing medicine with their research on marijuana as a medicinal pharmaceutical. What I would like to tell you about next are the advantages marijuana has over cocaine in regards to bodily harm and its value in the medical field.

Within *Safety Compliance Letter No. 2487*, published in 2008 by Aspen Publishing, is a section called “Fast Facts for Selected Drugs.” It lists the side effects of cocaine: “heart attacks, respiratory failure, strokes, and seizures” and in instances of overdose, death.” Cocaine’s list of side effects is very scary compared to the list of side effects for marijuana that include “memory and learning problems, distorted perception, and difficulty thinking and solving problems.” Death is not on the list of side effects of a marijuana overdose. It is impossible to use so much marijuana that you die from it. Conversely, there are accounts of death with first-time cocaine users. Not only is marijuana less harmful than cocaine, its side effects are closer to those of attention deficit disorder medications such as Adderall.

Philip Alcabes, Professor at Hunter College and Yale University, wrote an article titled “Medication Nation,” in which, he discusses the use of many different illicit drugs used to replace prescribed medications. Alcabes writes that in earlier times cocaine was sold over the counter as a remedy for the flu and

states that we do not use such remedies today because of the known consequences. Furthermore, Alcabes writes that in legalized states, marijuana is now being prescribed by doctors for treating anxiety disorders and even attention disorders, even though side effects include learning problems. Patients are having success with their new regimen. As time has passed, we have moved away from cocaine as an over-the-counter drug, and moved towards prescribing medications, such as marijuana, after scientific research concerning its health risks.

Holmes: Marvelous banter concerning scientific research gets me rather excited, you know? Are there any more negative side effects surrounding marijuana?

Smith: There is one more specific side effect, but this stems more from the culture's stereotype of people who use marijuana. Marijuana does have a stigma. Users often get called names such as "pothead" because of a subculture of people that smoke too much. This negative stereotype is concerning because if it is used right, marijuana hardly hinders my ability to think and allows me to think before I speak. I think I best prove my point with my personal success. I graduated on the dean's list while obtaining my associates degree and smoking marijuana. There are exceptions to the rule with discipline.

Holmes: I swear I have said the same thing to Watson. As long as I am succeeding, how on earth can you tell me to change my ways? Tell me this: What is the price of marijuana compared to cocaine? Price is important due to my bohemian way of living.

In April of 2010, powdered cocaine was reportedly being sold wholesale for a price of \$27,000 per kilogram or twenty-seven dollars per gram (Chandra 349). Powdered cocaine sold in such small quantities would inflate the price for individual buyers. The inflated price would be due to the cost of illegal transportation required to sell the drug. It is hard to compare the prices of liquid cocaine in the eighteen-nineties to the prices of today's powdered cocaine; however, we know that twenty-seven dollars for a gram is outrageously expensive.

There are a couple price ranges in the sale of marijuana: price is going to be based on how the drug is obtained. A medicinal marijuana user pays less than a recreational user. Users in marijuana-prohibited states pay more than both. In late 2014, the average price per gram of marijuana for a prescription holder in a legalized state was just under ten dollars. In the same area recreational users were paying an average of eleven dollars per gram (Hunt 235). Meanwhile, in prohibited states, users were paying closer to thirteen dollars a gram making the national average price approximately eleven dollars and twenty cents per gram. Comparing the average price per gram of cocaine at \$27 to marijuana at \$13, a user can have twice as much marijuana for the same price as cocaine without destroying their body and save half the money.

Smith: Your bohemianism is world renown, Holmes. I would have been foolish to talk to you on the subject without considering your frugal nature. I have saved the best part of the money saving subject for last. If you really want to save money, you can grow marijuana yourself.

Holmes: Revelation- after-revelation! You mean to say there are people whose hobby it is to over produce this medicine like modern day apiarists procuring nature's bounty?

Smith: Yes sir.

Holmes: You keep telling me of these positive things about marijuana, so why on earth is it still illegal in most areas? If your progressive society knows about all the good that marijuana can provide while simultaneously weeding out many of the drugs that are bad for you, why is it not legal everywhere for everyone?

Cocaine and marijuana both have been outlawed in America. Where cocaine is being further criminalized, marijuana is gaining ground towards being nationally legalized. The first prohibition of cocaine in America came with the Harrison Narcotics Act (HNA) in 1914. The HNA was enacted because of cocaine's negative health effects, as well as a racist argument that cocaine was responsible for a spike in African-American violence. (History.com Staff).

Marijuana was first prohibited in the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 as part of a campaign to keep American children safe from Mexican influences that were flooding the nation right before World War II (Little). What is unfortunate about the prohibition of marijuana then was that the medical pros of marijuana were known, but the medical advantages were overlooked because white Americans in the 1930s did not want their children mingling with people Mexicans. Today, marijuana is slowly making its way legally while cocaine is coming under heavier scrutiny than before.

The criminalization of cocaine never really stopped the black-market sales. Instead of seeing a pharmacist for cocaine, one would have to find an independent seller, a drug dealer. The criminalization of cocaine did stop a doctor's ability to use the substance as a medicine, specifically in helping recovering cocaine addicts. Products such as cocaine gum, that are incredibly low in cocaine content, are common place in South America, but are illegal in the U.S. (Freedman). However, the prohibition against marijuana is being lifted with states like Colorado legalizing it in 2013. To date, thirty states have legalized marijuana for either medicinal or recreational use. I think this is because of marijuana's medical uses as well as the economic boost it can give a community. Descriptive studies have been done to show the potential economic growth in areas that have legalized marijuana. Results show a steady increase of value in the market as long as marijuana does not become over-cultivated by larger industries (Van Staveren). With the continual success of states like Colorado and Washington, I think we will see pressure begin to grow in all other non-legal states to change their legislation. As we see cocaine being criminalized more, marijuana is starting to be less of a bad drug and more of a common place item such as Xanax or beer.

Holmes: Marijuana won't kill me if I do too much of it, I can save money by switching away from a drug that is killing me, and, if I choose the right place to live, I can freely enjoy my vice without legal repercussions.

Smith: Marijuana can be used as a safe alternative to most drugs for medicinal purposes, the price of marijuana is cheaper than cocaine, and marijuana is moving towards national legalization. But, I will not try too hard to bend the mind of The Master.

Holmes: With your enlightenment, I would like to take this knowledge back to my time to test the validity of your claims within my own society. Hopefully, with any success, I can jumpstart the ideas that you have given me in hopes that by the time you are born, Smith, your world will not be the same as mine. Quickly, I must go. The game is afoot!

Smith: Calm down and smoke this joint Holmes. Remember, you are a fictional character inside my imagination. Because of how monolithic you are in fiction to so many people, I hope I have swayed your opinion with my ideas. Happy hunting, Holmes!

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