# Varsity Greens: The Stigmatization of Cannabis-Using Canadian University Athletes

by

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## Abstract

Cannabis was legalized in Canada on October 17, 2018. However, it remains prohibited in amateur sport. Canadian university athletes still face punishments for their use of cannabis such as, suspensions, loss of awards and scholarships, and social stigmatization. This thesis presents the results of 12 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Canadian university athletes. I utilized Grounded Theory methodology to produce and analyze the data. The results of these interviews indicate that Canadian university athletes use cannabis in a multiplicity of ways. They use it to manage pain, promote satiety, and aid in sleep. They also use it to manage stress and anxiety, and to promote optimal experiences in recreational and non-competitive activities. Moreover, cannabis is used socially between teammates.

Athletes undergo a process of role engulfment, meaning that their role as an athlete demands so much time and energy that other roles, such as academic and social, become overwhelmed by their athletic one. In some cases, cannabis is used to manage the process of role engulfment and in other cases it may promote the process. Athletes are stigmatized for their cannabis use because of their unique prestige status. Public expectations, or virtual demands, are imposed on athletes which result in an elevated stigma if they are caught using the substance. The athletes I interviewed implemented a variety of techniques to conceal their use from the public, drug testing agencies, coaches, and teammates.

The spirit of sport (SoS), or the intrinsic values of sport, is used as a criterion to determine whether a substance is to be prohibited in amateur sport. Athletes' definitions of the SoS are similar to the World Anti-Doping Agency's, but the interpretations of them are vastly different. Canadian university athletes do not perceive cannabis to be an unfair performance-enhancing drug. They position it closer to drugs like caffeine and ibuprofen. These perceptions

promote the concept of fluid drugs, or the social construction of drugs. Drugs, and the stigma attached to them, are constructed as a result of social circumstances and contexts. Drugs are not neutral chemical compounds. Rather, they have been socially constructed as harmful, deviant, and contrary to the SoS. The shifting legality of cannabis in North America and around the world, along with the changing drug policies in professional leagues, like Major League Baseball, provide evidence of a changing drug milieu. Furthermore, the incongruencies between cannabis-using athletes' perspectives on cannabis and the World Anti-Doping Agency's is indicative that amateur sports' cannabis policies may be lagging behind social consensus.

# Preface

This thesis is an original work by Alec Skillings. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta, Cannabis Use Amongst Canadian University Athletes, Pro00084843, October 10, 2019, renewed October 7, 2020.

# Dedication

"You can't start swimming until you get in the water"

-Howard Becker in *Writing for Social Scientists*

## Acknowledgments

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# Table of Contents

## List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| AD | Athletic Director |
| CBD | Cannabidiol |
| CCES | Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport |
| CFL | Canadian Football League |
| eCB | Endocannabinoid |
| IOC | International Olympic Committee |
| MLB | Major League Baseball |
| NFL | National Football League |
| NHL | National Hockey League |
| PED | Performance Enhancing drug |
| PTSD | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| SoS | Spirit of Sport |
| THC | Tetrahydrocannabinol |
| WADA | World Anti-Doping Agency |

# Introduction and Background Information

## Introduction

This is an exploratory qualitative study of current and former Canadian university athletes who use cannabis.[1] Theorizing, data collection and analysis, and writing took place as the nation of Canada rolled out cannabis legalization in October of 2018. The legalization of cannabis, however, has not ended the prohibition of this drug within amateur sport competition. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) posits that cannabis has the ability to enhance athletic performance and that it poses a risk of harm for athletes. But, the continued prohibition of cannabis in sport largely relies on the substance's incompatibility with the 'spirit of sport' (SoS) and the lingering effects of past social constructions of the drug. The SoS is the inherent values found within sport, as WADA defines them. It is a set of foundational ideals upon which the modern anti-doping program is built.

In this study I sought to find out how and why Canadian university athletes use cannabis in the context of a changing legal milieu. I found that athletes perceive that the use of cannabis promotes their physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Some athletes mention that using cannabis can promote focus and concentration, therefore improving training outcomes. Others suggest that using cannabis is valuable simply because the drug's effects are fun and enjoyable and it provides temporary relief from the intense demands of being a student-athlete. Cannabis may be

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[1] The term cannabis is used throughout this thesis to refer to the dried and cured flowers of the *cannabis sativa* plant. The flowers of *cannabis sativa* contain a variety of psychoactive chemical compounds called cannabinoids (i.e. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD) among many others). Cannabis is most often smoked, vaporized, or eaten to experience the psychoactive effects of these cannabinoids. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) uses the term cannabis synonymously with marijuana, hashish, and THC in the Prohibited List.

a passive or indirect PED for athletes insofar as it may increase the feelings of physical and mental wellbeing in their social, academic, and athletic lives. The potential indirect performance enhancing effects of cannabis may be interpreted in a way that supports the continued prohibition of cannabis in sport, but I will use the results of this study to problematize the current approach to anti-doping in sport. The current approach to anti-doping leads to the stigmatization of athletes who choose to legally use cannabis for recreational purposes. I argue that the prohibition of cannabis in sport, along with WADA's current 'War on Doping' approach, must be re-evaluated.

I draw upon the work of Goffman (1963) to understand how cannabis-using athletes experience the process of stigmatization. Stigmatization is a process that involves the disqualification of an individual from full social acceptance because of a socially acknowledged discrediting mark. According to Goffman (1963), there are three types of stigma, "abominations of the body", "blemishes of individual character", and "tribal stigma" (p. 4). The use of cannabis is neither a visible abomination of one's body, nor is it tribal in nature, that is, a trait that is transmitted through lineages such as race or nationality. The use of cannabis is a stigmatizing trait for university athletes insofar as it is a blemish on their character. Athletes are expected to be role models for their peers and younger generations of athletes. They are representatives of their schools, teams, and sports. They are expected to adhere to the socially constructed ideals of what athletes should be; clean, pure, and morally righteous (Dimeo, 2016). According to current ideals within sport, drug use is not compatible with this image of an athlete, especially the use of drugs deemed to be hedonistic, performance enhancing, and anti-social. The public expects athletes to adhere to their socially constructed image of what an athlete ought to be. Goffman (1963) calls these publicly imposed expectations *virtual demands*, and a social tension may arise if an athlete does not act in accordance with these virtual demands.

Although nearly one-fifth, and possibly more, of Canadian university athletes use cannabis, they must hide their use of the drug from certain coaches, staff, anti-doping agencies, and the general public lest they face negative outcomes (Spence & Gauvin, 1996). These negative outcomes range from reduced playing time, lengthy bans from competition, and reduced life chances because of public shaming and negative labelling. To avoid these negative consequences these cannabis-using athletes utilize techniques such as timed cannabis use strategies, shared knowledge, backplace use, and simply keeping quiet in order to avoid getting caught using cannabis.

The athletes in this study define and understand the concept of the SoS similarly to how WADA presents it in the WADA Code. However, the athletes' interpretation of how cannabis relates to this concept is vastly different. The participants in this study problematize the doping criterion SoS as being too subjective and unrelated to maintaining fair competition. The athletes' perspective of the SoS share similarities with critiques made by several scholars (D. R. Campos et al., 2003; de Hon, 2017; Hanstad et al., 2008; Henne et al., 2013). These athletes unanimously agree that there needs to be doping control in sports, but at the same time, they argue that anti-doping regulators should only be concerned with drugs that markedly and unnaturally enhance the physical performance of individuals . The respondents in this study do not believe that cannabis is a drug that has the ability to unnaturally and undoubtably enhance athletic performance. I will argue that the prohibition of recreational drugs in sport, such as cannabis, is a form of moral regulation that seeks to uphold traditional sporting ideals—ideals that are becoming increasingly incompatible with contemporary definitions and constructions of drugs in society.

Athletes in this study strongly agree that anti-doping policy is necessary in order to maintain the fairness in sport by eliminating drugs that markedly enhance the physical capabilities of athletes, such as anabolic steroids. They largely disagree that recreational drugs—that may enhance performance minimally and indirectly by improving or maintaining quality of life—should be controlled in similar fashion to more obvious PEDs. Respondents routinely position cannabis as comparable to drugs such as caffeine and ibuprofen in terms of performance enhancing effects and potential health risks. The plethora of ways athletes use cannabis, along with the discrepancies between their definitions and WADA's definitions of the drug, brings to light the various ways cannabis is constructed given social and other contextual factors.

This thesis will present the results of interviews with 12 current and former Canadian University athletes from universities across Western Canada. It offers important insight into the experiences and perspective of cannabis-using university athletes in the context of changing cannabis laws in Canada. These perspectives and insights are important considering the persistent movement toward legalization of cannabis in North America and other countries around the world.

In this introductory chapter I will present a social history of the Olympics, anti-doping policy, and WADA, and cannabis' relation to these institutions. I conclude by posing the research questions on which this study is based. In Chapter One I detail my methodological approach. I used Grounded Theory (GT) to synthesize, analyze, and make sense of the data that I collected. Chapter Two provides specific details about the recruitment of participants, the sample of actors in this study, how I used qualitative interviews to gather data, and how I coded this data. Chapter Three presents the findings to my first research question—How and why do Canadian university athletes use cannabis? I explore the reasons and motivations behind the cannabis use of the study participants. Broadly, cannabis is used because athletes perceive it benefits their mental and/or physical wellbeing. This section draws upon the ethnographic work of Adler and Adler (1991) and their concept of role engulfment. University athletes must manage a unique set of strains. Their athletic role can be so demanding that it may engulf other aspects of the self, such as academic and social lives. The use of cannabis by athletes can be interpreted as a way to mitigate the process of role engulfment or to manage its negative effects. Chapter Four presents the unique expectations placed on university athletes and the stigma that is attached to using cannabis as a university athlete. I utilize the foundational work of Goffman (1963) to understand how cannabis-using university athletes experience and manage the process of stigmatization. For some teams and sport disciplines cannabis is somewhat accepted (i.e. basketball), and for other disciplines athletes must hide their use from other teammates (i.e. hockey). Athletes must always hide their cannabis use from the public lest they undergo stigmatization and face lasting negative consequences such as suspension, public humiliation, and loss of scholarships and awards. Chapter Five presents athletes' perspectives and definitions of the intrinsic values of sport, also known as the SoS. Athletes place the concept of fair play as the most important value inherent to sport. They agree that drugs should not be used to gain an unfair and unnatural advantage but disagree that cannabis is a drug that provides these advantages. I use the work of King et al. (2014) and Morgan and Zimmer (1997) to present the concept of the fluid drug. This model poses that drugs are socially constructed, and humans' relationships with drugs are in constant flux. In the final and concluding chapter I summarize my findings and present an argument that anti-doping policy, along with social conceptualizations of drugs, are in the beginning stages of a dramatic shift. WADA's prohibition of non-PEDs, like cannabis, can be interpreted as acts of moral regulation instead of attempts to maintain equality and fairness. Fair sport is currently defined almost exclusively through anti-doping policies, but current constructions of drugs are changing, and approaches to anti-doping and fair sport ought to be re-evaluated. Moreover, the social acceptability of cannabis is changing in Canada and around the world, and it is becoming clearer that WADA's policies are beginning to lag behind new social consensuses regarding this drug.

## Cannabis, The Olympics, and WADA

In the 1998 Nagano Olympics Canadian snowboarder Ross Rebagliati was stripped of his gold medal and detained by the Nagano police for testing positive for Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive compound found in cannabis. After being detained and questioned by the Nagano police it was later discovered that THC was not included in the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Prohibited List, therefore Rebagliati's gold medal was reinstated (Rebagliati, 2009, pp. 133-4). Having just won the first Olympic Gold medal in the inaugural Snowboarding Giant Slalom event, Rebagliati was welcomed back to Canada by the counter-cultural snowboarding community. Within mainstream North American society, however, Rebagliati's association with cannabis became a discrediting mark. This incident resulted in Ross Rebagliati losing sponsorships, and it made crossing the U.S.-Canada border a challenging and often costly endeavor for him. This effectively ended his professional snowboarding career ("Ross Rebagliati Is Chasing Cannabis Gold," 2018).

In the years leading up to, and including 1998, the amount, severity, and visibility of doping incidents seemed to be increasing. These cases include, Rebagliati's highly publicized positive cannabis test in the 1998 Winter Olympics, high profile Canadian athlete Ben Johnson winning the 100-meter sprint gold medal in the 1988 Olympics and subsequently being disqualified for testing positive for steroids, and the systematic team-sponsored doping program within the Festina cycling team in the 1998 Tour de France “that shook the world of cycling” (WADA, 2013). The Festina incident is considered to be the main catalyst in the development of modern anti-doping policy. Incidents such as these thrust the Olympics into a crisis of legitimacy (Hanstad et al., 2008). The credibility of the Olympics as a site for fair sport was challenged. In this same moment there was an intensification of a widespread moral panic over illicit drugs supported by politically-motivated campaigns spurred by U.S. President Nixon’s War on Drugs efforts in the 70s, and strengthened by the intensification of drug laws throughout the latter decades of the 20th century (Beamish, 2009; Hanstad et al., 2008). The establishment of WADA and the moralization of doping was mainly a response to the soiled reputation of the Olympics, which was a result of their failure to address widespread doping amongst athletes. As the Olympic Games increasingly relied on corporate sponsorships in the 1980s and 1990s, and illicit drugs became a more significant social concern, pressure was put on the IOC and the Olympics to ‘clean up’ sport (Hanstad et al., 2008; Hoberman, 2001).

The principles that influence anti-doping policy in sport are directly influenced by broader societal concerns for the health and social consequences of drug use (Henne et al., 2013). Corporate pressure along with anti-drug sentiments that had permeated society throughout the latter decades of the 20th century obliged the IOC to more strictly control doping in sport. Thus, WADA—an independent and centralized anti-doping agency—was established in 1999 to create a universal set of anti-doping regulations and to manage global anti-doping and fair sport policy within the Olympics and much of amateur sport around the world. The WADA Code was first published in 2003 with the purpose “to advance the anti-doping effort through universal harmonization of core anti-doping elements" (WADA, 2021)[2]. Cannabis was included in the WADA Code when it was implemented in 2004 (Bergamaschi & Crippa, 2013)

In 2013 WADA increased the threshold amount of THC allowed in urine tests from 15 ng/mL to 150 ng/mL. WADA tests for THC because it is the main psychoactive compound found in the cannabis plant. Raising the THC threshold by ten times the previous amount was thought to account for potential second-hand smoke inhalation or consumption of cannabis that occurred out of competition (WADA Laboratory Committee, 2013). In 2018 cannabidiol (CBD) was completely taken off of the Prohibited List (World Anti-Doping Agency, 2018). CBD differs from THC in that when it is isolated from the *cannabis sativa* plant and consumed by itself it does not produce the impairing effects that are commonly associated with cannabis consumption. CBD does not make its users 'high' or 'stoned' and it shows preliminary scientific evidence to be an anxiolytic, a neuroprotectant, and an immune system modulator (Alvarez et al., 2008; Blessing et al., 2015; Sales et al., 2018). Evidence of CBD's potential to enhance performance is ever-increasing. THC is on the Prohibited List, while CBD is not. This means athletes can freely consume CBD isolates without fear of repercussions. Curiously, in Canada, cannabis-derived CBD is legally regulated just as THC is. This is because both cannabinoids are found in the cannabis plant. Although both are regulated the same, and current evidence shows that CBD has performance-enhancing qualities, CBD has been removed from WADA's Prohibited List while THC remains banned.

[2] "The World Anti-Doping *Code* was first adopted in 2003 and took effect in 2004. It was subsequently amended three times, the first time effective 1 January 2009, the second time effective 1 January 2015 and the third time effective 1 April 2018 (compliance amendments). The revised 2021 World Anti-Doping *Code* is effective as of 1 January 2021." (WADA, 2021)

The WADA Code utilizes a three-pronged approach to determine what substances will be prohibited. If WADA determines that a substance meets two of these three criteria it shall be included in the Prohibited List:

> Medical or other scientific evidence, pharmacological effect or experience that the substance or method, alone or in combination with other substances or methods, has the potential to enhance or enhances sport performance;
>
> Medical or other scientific evidence, pharmacological effect or experience that the *Use* of the substance or method represents an actual or potential health risk to the *Athlete*;
>
> *WADA's* determination that the *Use* of the substance or method violates the spirit of sport described in the introduction to the *Code.* (WADA, 2021, p. 20)

According to WADA, cannabis meets all three of these criteria and is therefore prohibited. Cannabis has been prohibited since the implementation of the WADA Code in 2004. Several peer-reviewed publications have compiled literature and provided arguments to support the prohibition of cannabis in sport (Bergamaschi & Crippa, 2013; Lorente et al., 2005), but Huestis, Mazzoni, and Rabin's (2011) article, "Cannabis in Sport: Anti-Doping Perspective", is the most commonly referenced paper in support of WADA's determination. This paper is referenced on the Canadian Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES) cannabis information webpage[3] and has been the main reference in discourses regarding cannabis as doping in sport (Bergamaschi & Crippa, 2013; de Hon, 2017; Henne et al., 2013, p. 20; Heuberger & Cohen, 2019; Kennedy, 2017; Maslov et al., 2016; Waddington & Møller, 2019; Ware et al., 2018; Zeiger et al., 2019). Huestis et al.'s (2011) paper presents evidence that cannabis has the

[3] https://cces.ca/cannabis#anchor6

potential to enhance performance, that it poses a risk to athletes, that it is against the SoS, and therefore, it should be included on WADA's Prohibited List. I will briefly unpack Huestis et al.'s claims and subsequent critiques in order to provide context into the debate surrounding cannabis as a banned substance in sport.

Huestis et al. (2011) claim that cannabis has the potential to physically enhance performance. This conclusion relies on the results of a 1986 study on the exercise performance of cyclists. The 1986 study found that cannabis increased the vasodilation and bronchodilation of cyclists, which Huestis et al. argue "could also improve oxygenation to tissues" (p. 954). Huestis et al.'s argument that cannabis has the potential to enhance performance is also based on unpublished WADA observations from "hotlines developed in support of doped athletes" (p. 955). These hotlines supposedly provided evidence that athletes use cannabis because it "has significant positive effects in sports, such as improvement of vision for goalkeepers and muscle relaxation" (p. 955). The authors cite cannabis' ability to decrease anxiety, fear, depression and tension. Huestis et al. are also sure to note that cannabis can play a role in the extinction of fear memories, and that it may be able to aid the performance of athletes "who experienced traumatic events in their sport career" (p. 955). Huestis et al. use sources such as blog publications, surveys, drug hotlines, and comments from health professionals to provide several more arguments that cannabis can enhance performance by promoting relaxation and sleep, relieving performance pressure, increasing caloric intake, enhancing creativity, and improving concentration. Ultimately, Huestis et al. find that for some athletes and sport disciplines, cannabis can be performance enhancing.

In reviewing Huestis et al.'s cited evidence, we can call to question their central premises. The study on cannabis' effects on cyclists found that the effect of bronchodilation "did not modify the respiratory pattern during exercise" (Renaud & Cormier, 1986, p. 689). Furthermore, Renaud & Cormier conclude that, although the Forced Expiratory Volume of cyclists was increased by smoking cannabis, "marihuana did not improve exercise performance" (p. 688). In fact, this study concluded that the cyclists experienced a "decrease in peak exercise performance caused by marihuana" (p. 688) because the effects of the drug resulted in maximum heart rate to be achieved prematurely.

Many scientific papers that address the performance enhancing capabilities of cannabis in sport similarly note that in most circumstances and contexts cannabis is actually detrimental to athletic performance in that it impairs motor and cognitive functions and puts strain on the cardiovascular system (Bergamaschi & Crippa, 2013; D. R. Campos et al., 2003; Huestis et al., 2011). Most evidence shows that cannabis can decrease anxiety, fear, depression, and tension (Blessing et al., 2015; Hillard, 2014; Papagianni & Stevenson, 2019; Parker, 2017a). The results of this study will show that athletes do use cannabis for this purpose, along with promoting relaxation, sleep, and improving concentration. However, it is unclear the extent to which cannabis can improve athletic performance through these means, or if these positive effects of cannabis should be considered unfair. Decreasing fear of a traumatic event could be seen as performance-enhancing, but it can also be considered a positive outcome of cannabis use that promotes wellness in the lives of athletes. Additionally, CBD is not on the Prohibited List, but there is strong evidence that this cannabinoid has the potential to aid athletes in nearly all the ways that Huestis et al. purports cannabis does (Alvarez et al., 2008; Blessing et al., 2015; Sales et al., 2018). Huestis et al.'s arguments that cannabis should be prohibited in sport are based in misinformation, subjective reasoning, and an unclear definition of what constitutes unfair performance enhancing.

Next, Huestis et al. (2011) present arguments that cannabis poses a potential health risk for athletes. According to these authors, “Anti-doping authorities are always concerned about the impact of doping on athletes’ health” (Huestis et al., 2011, p. 953). The health criterion is included because doping was monitored by the IOC Medical Commission in the past. When WADA was formed and became the governing anti-doping organization it opted to include this criterion as a way to make sure athletes do not use harmful doping substances. Huestis et al. argue that cannabis poses a health risk to athletes because it can alter perceptions of risk, negatively affect coordination, lead to psychosis and paranoia, and chronic use may lead to decreased cognitive performance, bronchial irritation, and it has potential to exacerbate symptoms of schizophrenia. Also, Huestis et al. note that the use of synthetic cannabinoids may come with greater risk. And, the withdrawal symptoms of cannabis are psychological and can include “restlessness, anxiety, insomnia, muscle tremor, and increased aggression” (p. 954), while making note that the effects of THC are similar to cocaine and amphetamines.

The proposition that cannabis is harmful to athletes is valid. The use of cannabis does come with risks, as most drugs do. The fundamental issue with this argument is that while cannabis may hold potential to harm the athlete, the level of harm that cannabis may cause is not compared with the potential benefits, of which Huestis et al. (2011) present many under the category of performance enhancing effects. Furthermore, the risks that athletes take by simply participating in sport are largely ignored in this determination. Huestis et al. argue that withdrawals from cannabis can lead to “restlessness, anxiety, insomnia, muscle tremor and increased aggression” (Huestis et al., 2011, p. 954). The shortcoming in this argument is that these symptoms can arise purely from participation in high-level sport. In fact, the intense training and competition requirements of elite sport and the pressures of competition can result in all of these negative symptoms along with more pronounced acute and lasting chronic physical injuries (Waddington et al., 2013; Zeiger et al., 2019). Additionally, an argument can be made that some contact, collision, and combat sports such as football, hockey, boxing, and rugby, may actually necessitate aggressive tendencies.

The risks for cannabis use are well studied and must be appropriately considered. Cannabis can cause acute cognitive and motor impairment, as well as memory loss. Chronic use in early adolescence can result in altered brain development and is associated with negative educational and mental health outcomes (Groce, 2018; Huestis, 2002; Huestis et al., 2011; Ware et al., 2018). Using cannabis may pose a risk to athletes, but it is unclear how these risks surpass the risks of other non-prohibited drugs as well as the risks inherent to the participation in sport. And, if WADA is actually concerned with athlete health, it is unclear why the potential benefits of drugs are not considered in the doping review process.

Synthetic cannabinoids, commonly known as K2 or 'spice', carry a greater risk profile than naturally occurring cannabinoids, such as those found in cannabis. Synthetic cannabinoids have been associated with "severe hazardous health effects on multiple systems and with death" (Cohen & Weinstein, 2018, p. 5), and the effects and side-effects of synthetic cannabinoids can be more severe and longer lasting than naturally-occurring phytocannabinoids. THC, a naturally occurring cannabinoid, is stored in fat cells. It metabolises slowly and can be detected for as long as four weeks after consumption, and even a one-time use of cannabis by an occasional user can yield a positive urine test five days after consumption (Huestis et al., 2011; Ware et al., 2018). Although the threshold of THC in urinalysis' was raised in 2013 to account for its slow metabolization, there is still a possibility that athletes will test positive even when using cannabis out of competition. For this reason, athletes may choose to use alternate substances such as synthetic cannabinoids, which have been proven to have higher risk profiles. New synthetic drugs and doping technologies may have greater and unknown risks than 'traditional' drugs. Moreover, punitive anti-doping policy promotes the use of these new, and potentially higher-risk, drugs and doping technologies because drug tests are often unable to detect them (Dimeo & Møller, 2018).

Last, cannabis is contrary to the SoS. As Huestis et al. (2011) admit, this criterion is difficult to define. The SoS refers to the values intrinsic to sport. It is a collection of values and characteristics that include, "ethics, fair play and honesty, health, excellence in performance, character and education, fun and joy, teamwork, dedication and commitment, respect for rules and laws, respect for self and other participants, courage, community and solidarity" (Huestis et al., 2011, p. 956). The ethical judgments of WADA ethicists and scientists determine what drugs are incompatible with the SoS. Huestis et al. argue that cannabis is illegal in most parts of the world, and athletes are seen as role models, therefore they should not be using this substance. The authors use the example of multi-gold-medal-winning Olympic athlete Michael Phelps losing sponsorships and eliciting negative reactions from the public as support for the unethical nature of cannabis.

Several critiques of the SoS have been posed since its implementation in the WADA Code. These critiques deal with the SoS both practically, as it exists as a criterion in the WADA Code, and conceptually as it is supposed to refer to values inherent to sport. This criterion has been critiqued as being problematically interpretive and ambiguous, being that the vague characteristics are constructed and enforced by WADA (de Hon, 2017; Henne et al., 2013); that the criterion is used to regulate morality in sport instead of enforcing fair competition and protecting the health of athletes (D. R. Campos et al., 2003; de Hon, 2017; Henne et al., 2013);

and it is being used by WADA circularly because the SoS is the foundational principle of anti-doping policy, yet the SoS is used as only one of three criterion to classify drugs as doping substances (de Hon, 2017).

Since the creation of WADA and the implementation of the Prohibited List and WADA Code, cannabis has remained a banned substance within all sporting organizations that are signatories to the WADA Code. This includes the organization that is responsible for the implementation and management of Canada's anti-doping program, the CCES, which manages anti-doping policy in U SPORTS. In 2017 a Saint Mary's University football player received a two-month suspension for a positive cannabis test (Palmeter, 2018). Additionally, the recipient of the U SPORTS Football Rookie of the Year trophy was stripped of his award and received a suspension for a positive cannabis test (*U SPORTS Rookie Stripped of Award*, 2018). In both cases the suspension was for two months, and for one student these two months occurred in the off-season. The CCES applied suspensions to both of these athletes even though their cannabis use was "social in nature and unconnected to sport or training" (CCES, 2017b, 2018a). Although it was determined in these players' incident outcome summaries that their use of cannabis was not motivated by performance-enhancing goals, the suspensions were nonetheless administered, and the prestigious Rookie of the Year award was still stripped. These punitive sanctions for the use of cannabis may seem relatively lenient, but the strict liability clause that WADA applies means that punishments are applied regardless of context. It seems that the CCES may account for contextual factors in the administration of punishments, but this strict liability rule holds the athlete unconditionally responsible for any positive drug test regardless of intent to consume a substance and enhance performance, or knowledge that a substance is prohibited. This is troubling because though it seems like the punishments applied by the CCES distinguish between recreational cannabis use and cannabis use for performance enhancement, athletes will still face penalties if they caught using cannabis regardless of their intent.

In summary, WADA was created in 1999 because of the increasing publicity of doping incidents along with solidification of anti-drug sentiments in society. It employs a three-pronged approach to determine what substances ought to be prohibited. Cannabis is deemed to have the potential to enhance the performance of athletes, it can cause harm to athletes, and it is contrary to the SoS. Huestis et al.'s (2011) evidence and argument that cannabis adheres to all three of these criteria is problematic. Furthermore, the prohibition of cannabis has severe and lasting effects on athletes who submit a positive drug test. The CCES appears to account for the motivating factors of cannabis use when administering punishments, but the strict liability rule results in negative consequences for all athletes who test positive for cannabis regardless if their use was social or recreational in nature. The effects of cannabis may be detrimental to athletic performance or not affect performance at all, and consequences of using cannabis are severe and lasting. Given the potential negative outcomes of cannabis use, why then, do athletes choose to use it?

## Research Questions

Though cannabis has been legal in Canada since October 17, 2018 its position as a prohibited substance in sport has not changed and is not predicted to change (Palmeter, 2018). Amateur sporting organizations such as U SPORTS, are ultimately signatories to WADA's Prohibited List through the CCES's jurisdiction. Canadian athletes are not permitted to consume cannabis in competition regardless of the drug's legal status, and consumption out of competition may still lead to a positive drug test because THC may take many days to metabolize in one's body (Bergamaschi & Crippa, 2013; D. R. Campos et al., 2003). The prohibited status of cannabis is also problematic as it is one of the most commonly used substances amongst university athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b; Spence & Gauvin, 1996).

The most recent survey on drug use amongst Canadian university athletes reports that nearly 20% of student-athletes consume cannabis (Spence & Gauvin, 1996). A more recent survey of American collegiate athletes supports Spence and Gauvin's findings. One-quarter of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletes consumed cannabis in the year leading up to the study (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b). Additionally, this NCAA study reports that 77% of athletes that use cannabis do so for social reasons. This recent NCAA study has offered a slightly deeper probe into why university athletes use cannabis, but beyond these two publications there is a significant lack of scholarly attention given to the use of cannabis by university athletes. One reason for this absence of attention is the near century-long prohibition of cannabis in Canada. This presented hurdles such as acquiring research funding, and difficulty finding participants because of legal ramifications and the social stigma. The stigma of cannabis and its impact on participant recruiting was confirmed in my study and will be discussed in detail in both Chapter Two and Chapter Four.

There is currently a global trend towards the decriminalization and liberalization of cannabis. Medical cannabis has been legal in Canada since 2001. Cannabis for medical purposes is also legal in Israel, Uruguay, Chile, Columbia, Jamaica, Finland, the majority of U.S. states, and many other countries. Recreational cannabis is decriminalized in countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Switzerland, Croatia, and some states in India. Recreational cannabis is completely legal to consume in 12 American states, Spain, Uruguay, and Canada. Given this global trend, academic research on cannabis is becoming more common. However, much of this research is being done within the fields of biochemical and pharmaceutical science, medical psychology, and economics. This exploratory qualitative project has been completed from a social science perspective. In this thesis I will unpack the experiences and perspectives of Canadian cannabis-using university athletes, and in so doing, I will critically approach the current state of cannabis regulation in amateur sport in the context of a global trend in liberalized drug policy, which can be seen as a response to failing and costly abstinence-based and punitive approaches to drug regulation. Considering this trend, along with escalating critiques on WADA's approach to anti-doping policy by authors such as Dimeo and Møller (2018), it is vital to seek understanding into how and why amateur Canadian athletes use cannabis, along with how current anti-doping policies affect these athletes.

This is an exploratory project that utilizes a GT approach; one that inductively constructs theory from data instead of applying ready-made theories to a phenomenon. I sought to answer the basic and broad question of "what is going on here?". In order to answer this question, I developed more specific research questions concerned with the motivations and perceptions of cannabis use among participants, the stigmatization of cannabis users in a changing legal milieu, and the participants' experiences with, and opinions of, the current anti-doping framework. The nature of GT research necessitates iteration throughout the research process, and for this reason, research questions were revised repeatedly throughout the data collection and data analysis processes as new data and theorizing emerged. These three research questions are the final product of this iterative research process and will be addressed throughout this paper.

1. How and why do university athletes use cannabis?
    a. What are the reasons and motivations for the cannabis use of Canadian university athletes given the substance is prohibited for in-competition use? And, how do

these reasons and motivations relate to the current knowledge on the effects of cannabis?

2. To what extent do Canadian cannabis-using university athletes experience stigma because of their cannabis use?
    a. How do these athletes avoid, mitigate, and manage the stigmatization of cannabis users?
    b. How, if at all, has the legalization of cannabis altered Canadian university athletes' experiences of cannabis-related stigmatization?
3. How do university athletes define the 'spirit of sport', and is cannabis use compatible with this definition?
    a. How do participants' perceptions of the definitions and applications of the 'spirit of sport' relate to WADA's definitions and applications?

These research questions were answered through qualitative interviews with 12 current and former Canadian cannabis-using university athletes recruited from universities throughout Western Canada. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling methods and were interviewed. Out of the 12 participants five were current university athletes, while the remaining seven were former athletes. The overwhelming majority of participants are white males, and all participants played team sports such as hockey, football, basketball, and volleyball. One of the 12 participants was female. The extent of cannabis use of each individual ranged from daily chronic use to occasional recreational use one to two times per month. The average age of participants is 23 years old, with the age ranging from 20 to 34 years old. This sample and the impact of this sample on the results of this project will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

From these research questions and this sample of participants three themes emerged from the data. First, athletes use cannabis because they perceive it to be beneficial to their mental, physical, and/or social well-being. This includes using cannabis to practice mindfulness, de-stress, aid in sleep, ease pain, enhance social activities, and simply for fun or recreation. Most university athletes do not want to compete high, but the results of this study show that some athletes do use cannabis to enhance their athletic performance. However, the enhancement to their performance is largely an indirect result of their cannabis use. Athletes use cannabis as a tool to aid in relaxation, for pain relief, and to enhance social leisure. They use it to combat the mental, physical, and social strains of university sport. The rigorous demands of sport have been found to induce strain between university athletes' academic, social, and athletic roles. Adler and Adler (1991) developed the concept of role engulfment to explain the process of how athletes on a Southern U.S. NCAA basketball team experience their athletic role creeping and consuming their social and academic roles throughout their career. I argue that this concept may exist to a lesser extent in U SPORTS athletes. And, these U SPORTS athletes use cannabis to manage and maintain academic and social roles when confronted with role engulfment.

Second, though cannabis has been legalized in Canada, a definite stigma remains. This stigma is demonstrable partially through an explication of the ethical dilemmas and methodological challenges I faced while conducting this research. I was required to exclude an entire campus of potential participants because of a refusal of research support from a university campus' Athletic Director (AD). This refusal of support is indicative of persisting negative sentiments toward both cannabis and the users of the drug. Additionally, my public and unsolicited recruitment methods such as poster advertising were met with suspicion and skepticism. As I found out through the interview process, athletes are highly concerned with being outed as a cannabis user. The punishments and potential implications are too great of a deterrent for many athletes to be open with their cannabis use. This is clear through both the ease at which I was able to recruit former university athletes who used cannabis versus current university athletes who use cannabis, along with the techniques these current university athletes employ to keep their cannabis use covert.

Cannabis-using athletes employ techniques such as timed cannabis use strategies, shared knowledge, backplace use, and simply keeping quiet in order to avoid getting caught using cannabis. Athletes are role models in their communities and representatives of their teams, programs, and schools. They are held to a higher standard than their non-athlete peers. Athletes are expected to be ‘pure’ and ‘clean’, morally righteous, and ideal citizens according to the current socially constructed ideals of sport. Though cannabis is now legal in Canada, athletes must keep their cannabis use hidden from public view because they perceived that sporting communities and the general public consider its use as amoral, hedonistic, and incompatible with the SoS. Athletes who are caught using cannabis are stigmatized. Being a drug user or ‘doper’ is perhaps the most discrediting mark that can be placed on a sport competitor and can have profound consequences on the athletic career and life chances of a Canadian university athlete.

Third, the athletes in this study perceive that anti-doping is both necessary and important in the pursuit of fair sport. Athletes who I interviewed unanimously consider doping to be contrary to the SoS, and believe that anti-doping is an important, if not the most important, factor in the preservation of fair sport. Respondents largely agreed with the concept of fair sport through anti-doping, however their definitions of an unfair performance-enhancing drug (PED) differ from WADA’s definitions. Athletes are concerned mainly with drugs that unnaturally enhance one’s abilities and produce unmistakable physical changes to one’s body. Consistent with this definition, the overwhelming majority of the athletes who I interviewed maintain that cannabis should not be considered a PED because the effects of the drug do not obviously and directly affect one's physical body. Athletes' definitions of what constitutes an unfair PED are different from the three Criteria WADA uses to determine what drugs are banned. Athletes find WADA's third doping criterion, the SoS to be concerning in both its logic and its application. They largely agree with the idea that sport does have implicit values, and even agree with most of the characteristics that WADA uses in its definition of the SoS, such as fairness, sportsmanship and respect, and community. But they find that these concepts can be interpreted in contradictory ways. Some athletes can conceive how WADA places cannabis as contrary to the SoS, while others argue that using cannabis is not in contradiction with the SoS. Athletes do not agree that this criterion is an effective way to determine whether or not a drug should be prohibited.

Drugs, and furthermore the values of sport, must be understood as fluid social constructions. With the creation of WADA in 1999 and the implementation of the Prohibited List in 2004, it is apparent that the values of sport have shifted and flexed with the popular concerns of the time. In this case, the dangers of drug use became a top social concern in the latter decades of the 20$^{th}$ and into the 21$^{st}$ century. Now, nations such as Canada are slowly moving toward different approaches to drug regulation, as is seen with the legalization of cannabis. Portugal has decriminalized personal possession of drugs, and instead addresses drug-related problems with a public health approach. Portugal's health-care approach to drug regulation is found to be unarguably successful, seeing a decrease in the social costs of drug abuse, along with lower levels of drug use in young adults (Cabral, 2017). As societal approaches to drug policy find successful outcomes by moving away from criminalization and punitive means of deterrence, and toward health-based and harm reduction philosophies, anti-doping institutions in sport should reconsider their current prohibitionist stance. New approaches to drug policy are gaining momentum in response to failed ‘War on Drugs’ policies. With this, I argue that the IOC’s approach to fairness in sport, one that is grounded in ‘War on Doping’ sentiments, must be re-evaluated.

# Chapter One: Using a GT Methodology

## Introduction

I utilized a GT approach throughout this research project. Instead of using an existing theory or developing one from literature and then testing it in the research field, a GT approach supposes that theory ought to be generated from the data collected in the field. Theory should be grounded in the data. Condensed and simplified, the process of GT looks something like this; collect data, code and analyze this data, construct categories from the codes, use these categories to theorize and develop a theory of the studied phenomenon. The goal of GT is to generate theory. Since it's 'discovery' in 1967, several iterations of GT have emerged in a spiral of methodological development (Mills et al., 2006). The steps to doing GT may vary slightly in terminology and procedural focus depending on the particular strain of GT, but the general process, goals, and key characteristics remain relatively consistent across the variations. What must be noted is that GT is not a linear process, as these abbreviated steps may suggest. The most important characteristic of GT is that it requires a constant comparative approach. A constant comparative approach is a process of comparing new data with emerging categories (Creswell, 2007). Emerging categories may be continually altered, supported, or refuted by new data through this constant comparative approach. The research stages do not occur in sequential order, and in fact, it is imperative that an iterative movement between data collection, analysis, and theorizing occurs.

Glaser and Strauss developed GT in 1967. Since this time, different strains of GT, which place emphasis on different characteristics and goals, have developed. Now, "It has become impossible to think of the approach as unitary" (Pawluch & Neiterman, 2010, p. 16). Even the two inventors of this approach, Glaser and Strauss, went on to develop two different methodological forms of GT. More recently, Charmaz (2014) and Clarke (2005) have proposed constructionist and post-modern applications of GT. In this section I will briefly elaborate on the different strains, or brands, of GT and establish the key characteristics of GT used within this project: construction, iteration, and reflexivity. I will outline how and why I implement GT in this research project. Additionally, I will briefly address several critiques of GT and present some limitations in my implementation of this approach.

**The Discovery of GT and its Various Brands**

Glaser and Strauss developed GT in 1967 as a response to the substantial authority granted to quantitative methods and positivist leanings within the social sciences. Glaser and Strauss sought to bring theorists out of the armchairs and into the field, and to bridge the "embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research" (Pawluch & Neiterman, 2010, p. 8). To close this gap, Glaser and Strauss proposed that theory should be discovered from the data. The goal was to figure out a way to systematically use research findings to develop theories inductively. This contrasts a deductive approach, which involves generating a theory and then testing it through the observation of social phenomena. Glaser and Strauss proposed that theory ought to be developed from the research data rather than being reliant on canonical 'great old men' theories. In *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* Glaser and Strauss (1967) produced the basic philosophy of GT. The simplest definition of this first form of GT is the "discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed in social research" (Glaser, 1967, p. 1).

After the invention of this methodological approach both Glaser and Strauss went on to develop different procedures and techniques to accomplish this goal of theory discovery from data. The 'Straussian' brand is more systematized. It involves breaking down the process of GT into a set of definite procedures, and then further breaking down these procedures into steps, techniques, and practices (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Procedures such as memo-writing, theoretical sampling, coding, and diagramming are explained in-depth by Corbin and Strauss (2015). These standardized and highly systematized procedures introduce more transparency and academic rigour into the methodological process. The 'Glasserian' approach differs from the 'Straussian' approach insofar as it aims to keep the process as simple as possible by emphasizing a few key characteristics and concepts. This form of GT promotes flexibility and creativity, while heavily emphasizing the concept of constant comparison—that is, constantly testing the emerging theory against old and new data. Glaser poses defined steps to the GT process, but they are not as specific and technical as Corbin and Strauss' version of GT (Pawluch & Neiterman, 2010). These two strains of GT may present slightly different means to produce a theory, but they share a common goal of generating theory from data.

The GT approach has continued to evolve and develop as researchers in various fields capitalize on its usefulness in exploratory research and seek to understand understudied social processes. New developments in this methodology have come from authors such as Charmaz (2014), who proposes a constructionist approach to GT. Those taking a constructionist perspective would argue that Glaser and Strauss' 'discovery' of theory from data ought to be understood as 'construction' of theory from data. Constructionist GT rejects grand narratives of the nature of reality and instead recognizes that multiple realities exist amongst social actors. Importantly, the researcher is recognized as a social actor instead of a neutral or passive observer. A constructionist approach requires the researcher to participate in a highly reflexive manner and to be flexible, engage in critical thinking, and eclectic in theorizing. A constructionist approach to GT posits that the research is co-constructed by both the researcher and subject(s).

Throughout this research project I drew upon the methodological techniques and perspectives from Glaser, Strauss, and Charmaz. The 'Straussian' approach provided me with techniques and tools to develop rich analysis from the data through rigorous coding and theorizing exercises such as memo writing and diagraming, while the 'Glassarian' approach's emphasis on flexibility and creativity was essential in implementing GT philosophies holistically throughout this project. And, Charmaz's constructionist approach provided a heightened sense of reflexivity. GT can no longer be considered a unitary methodology. New spirals of methodological development have spawned iterations of Glaser and Strauss' original version of GT. Using a form of GT bricolage, I implemented a GT methodology that is informed by Glaser (1967), Strauss (1990), and Charmaz (2014). Three methodological characteristics that became especially prominent over the course of this project are; construction, iteration, and reflexivity.

## Three Major Components of GT: Construction, Reflexivity, and Iteration

### *Construction*

First, construction is the most essential component for GT research. In the past, the concept of construction may have been deemed 'discovery', 'generation', or 'development'. With a constructionist GT approach, however, theory is constructed by both the researcher and the participants through the interpretation of data. Instead of 'discovering' theory through data, theory must be actively constructed and reconstructed throughout the research process. And though Charmaz (2014) is most closely associated with the development of constructionist GT (formerly termed constructivist GT), the 'evolved approach' of Corbin and Strauss also utilizes constructionist ontologies (Mills et al., 2006). The co-construction of theory in this project is evident through the openness and mutuality I put forth during interviews. For instance, I openly and frankly discussed my developing theories and research questions with my participants after and during the interviews. Especially in the later interviews, this collaborative theorizing encouraged more rich analytical thinking from myself and elicited more thoughtful and directed contributions from the participants. For example, after my interview with Neil I handed over my interview guide for him to look over. After looking through it, Neil picked out some questions we had not had a chance to fully discuss over the course of our conversation. He voluntarily offered further insight into the feelings of stigma brought about through the stereotyping of cannabis users. The stigmatization of athlete cannabis users developed into a major theme in coding.

Constructionist GT is highly compatible with the recent constructionist turn in drug research (Gootenberg, 2005). Constructionism is being utilized more commonly in social sciences drug research and is producing innovations in our understandings of how people interact with drugs at micro and macro scales (Gootenberg, 2008; Morgan & Zimmer, 1997). Constructionist methodologies have also been proven to be of great importance in research on the social aspects of health, illness, and the body (Pawluch & Neiterman, 2010).

***Reflexivity***

The second element of GT I found to be of great importance in this project is reflexivity. Conducting and writing research is never a neutral act (Charmaz, 2014). All research is in some way influenced by the researcher's decisions and actions. Reflexivity, within qualitative research, is accepting and addressing how one's decisions as a researcher affect and are affected by the research process. It is essential to attempt to unpack implicit biases embedded in the various research processes. This is often accomplished through GT techniques such as memo writing and free-writing. I employed memo writing techniques throughout the entirety of this research process. I constantly challenged my own position as both an outsider (non-student athlete), and as an insider (cannabis user). I came to terms with the limitations of my methods and methodology. Using reflexive techniques, I came to an understanding that qualitative interviewing will not allow me to directly experience or observe the trials of student athletes. I addressed this major limitation by attending more closely to my interviewing techniques. I put greater emphasis on compassion and openness as interviews progressed, seeking to understand the athletes' experiences from an outsider's perspective. Conversely, I found my insider status as a cannabis user a bit more challenging to address. From a practical standpoint, being open about my past and current cannabis use with participants signaled solidarity to participants and encouraged more openness and honesty among interviewees. However, my personal consumption of cannabis could be interpreted by readers as an obvious pro-cannabis bias. I cannot argue that this bias has not impacted the research. If I were an anti-cannabis prohibitionist, this study might have been about the addictive potential, harms, or negative aspects of athlete cannabis use. In no way was the goal of this project to produce a 'pro-cannabis' stance, and through consistent reflexivity in the form of memo writing and free-writing I constantly challenged the 'pro-cannabis' positions that I may have assumed. I believe that I present the cannabis use of university athletes from a perspective that explores the realities of these cannabis users. I argue that the potential bias of myself as a cannabis user has reinforced mutual understandings between myself and participants, strengthening the validity of the interpretations of the data.

***Iteration***

The third vital characteristic of GT is that it is iterative. Iteration is most obviously accomplished through the use of 'constant comparison'. This is essentially comparing emerging categories to new data as it is being collected in a constant cycle. An iterative movement from data collection to analysis occurs throughout the research process. This non-linear process in GT is essential in the development of theory. Theorizing is strengthened through constant construction and reconstruction based on new data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I applied this concept of constant comparison in this project not just with emerging categories, but also between categories, new data, writing, and literature. For instance, Adler and Adler's (1991) work on athletic role engulfment was not known to me until later on in the data collection process. The emergence of a category of role conflict in my research resulted in discovering the work of these authors, and subsequently drawing upon their concept of role engulfment. More drastically, revelations from the first stage of data collection led to a change in recruitment technique, brought forth new research questions, and convinced me to alter my participant requirement criteria and change the sample group. I was experiencing extreme difficulty in recruiting current university athletes to speak about their cannabis use, and this difficulty illuminated the importance of the emerging category of stigma. Ultimately, this challenge led me to expand my research pool to include both current and former university athletes. Understanding that this recruitment challenge was itself a crumb of data, I altered my sample group and continued to develop this emerging theory. Applying iterative techniques throughout this GT research led to the development of new, unconsidered, and divergent ideas in every stage of the process. GT is reliant on the insight and flexibility that iteration produces through the constant comparison technique.

**Critiques and Limitations of GT**

GT was the most appropriate methodological approach for this particular project because of its usefulness in exploratory qualitative research. That said, there are critiques and limitations to this approach. GT has been critiqued as too interpretive to be reliable research. The researcher is a medium that the data must pass through, and the data is therefore muddied or tainted by the interpretations of said researcher. This is an understandable critique. However, this critique can be applied to all research that relies on the decisions of a principal researcher. Whether these decisions involve generating a hypothesis or research question, analysing data, and presenting the data or findings of a project. All research must undergo some level of interpretive work from the researcher. If one considers all the ways that a researcher influences the research process (how a topic gets selected, the method chosen, and nearly every decision in research design), it is undeniable that every research project faces these interpretive problems. How GT differs from many other methods is that it applies reflexivity. As previously discussed, GT posits that there is no such thing as a neutral researcher. In fact, I argue that GT better addresses these problems of interpretation than other methodologies in that GT does not assume the researcher is neutral.

Some argue that GT is simply reinventing ‘theoretical wheels’ through ignorance of established sociological theories, while others claim it is “adhockery” because of its highly flexible procedures (Pawluch & Neiterman, 2010, p. 13). These arguments largely rely on the assumption that GT is carried out in a theoretical vacuum. This is a common misconception. GT research does not require the researcher to ignore *a priori* theoretical frameworks. In fact, a crucial stage of GT according to Glaser and Strauss is drawing on existing theory to inform and inspire grounded theorizing throughout the process. Data operate dialectically with existing theoretical frameworks but are not meant to be encompassed by them (Lather, 1986). In this way, GT work is informed by existing theoretical frameworks while constructing novel theories of unique processes and phenomenon. GT necessitates an open mind, not an empty head (Glaser, 1967).

**Conclusion**

A GT approach was necessary for this project given its usefulness for exploratory studies. GT was developed as a way to develop theory from the data instead of relying on armchair theorizing. My methodological approach drew from the various brands of GT and put great emphasis on three key characteristics; construction, iteration, and reflexivity. Some critics of GT posit that it relies too heavily on the interpretation of the researcher, or that it ignores existing social theories. These critiques fail to recognize that all research relies on some form of interpretation, and that a key step in the GT process is maintaining dialogue with established theories.

# Chapter Two: Research Methods

## Introduction

In this chapter I will detail the methods I used to gather and analyze the data for this study. I recruited 12 current and former university athletes who used cannabis during their university athletic careers. I engaged in semi-structured interviews with each of these athletes to inquire about their experiences with cannabis and their perspectives about cannabis and sport. These interviews were the main source of data and were transcribed and coded according to GT procedures, which include first-pass and line-by-line coding, focused coding, and axial coding. I faced several methodological and ethical challenges throughout the research process such as recruitment difficulty and administrative disapproval. In addition to these ethical and methodological challenges I will elaborate on the various limitations of this study throughout the chapter.

## Recruitment

Given the sensitive nature of this topic of study, a non-random snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants. This technique initially relies on key informants to recruit and advertise to potential participants. Recruitment then occurs through the participants' social networks. Ideally the 'snowballs' then expand and gain momentum as more participants advertise through their social networks and help with recruitment. This snowball sampling method proved to be much more effective than the other supplementary methods that I employed such as, poster recruitment, word of mouth, and advertising through the media. I believe the successes of snowball sampling over broader and more public techniques was because of cannabis' very recent legalization. Though legal, a latent stigma on the use of the drug remains.

Considering that cannabis is still prohibited in U SPORTS, athletes remain wary of publicizing their cannabis use. This became evident after hearing one participant, Brody, explain what his teammates had thought of the study recruitment posters I had placed around campus, "…a bunch of the guys, when they saw your posting up there, they're all like 'it's bait!'…". The athletes had taken pictures of these posters and shared them amongst their teammates as a warning to steer clear. These posters[4] were made with the intention to recruit athletes who would fall beyond the reaches of any recruitment 'snowballs' I could generate. Upon reflection, these posters were an utter failure. But even though they discouraged some athletes from participating, this recruitment failure provided evidence into the continued stigmatization of cannabis, along with insight into the measures that athletes take to keep their cannabis use covert. Further along in the recruitment process a version of this poster was privately and digitally distributed to potential participants within the recruitment 'snowballs'. This digital poster was met with better intentions and interest when individuals received it directly from myself or from one of my informants than when it was displayed publicly.

Beyond the snowball technique and the poster, I used two supplementary methods for recruitment. First, I took it upon myself to attend local U SPORTS games as both a fan and a photographer. As a non-athlete, I positioned myself as close to the social field as I could. This helped recruitment in two ways. First, attending games and socializing with fans, university sport alumni, and event workers provided opportunities for me to informally advertise my project. These university games are sites for members of athletic communities to socialize and maintain connections within the community. I would routinely run into old coaches and teammates, along with acquaintances, past participants, and other informants during intermissions. By attending these events I strengthened my existing connections within the athletic community. Taking pictures of sporting competition gave me an excuse to get closer to athletes. Though this method

[4] See Appendix C and D

of recruitment was not outlined in my preliminary plan, my recruitment difficulties necessitated I attempt these low-risk methods such as ‘hanging out’ in the research field. My role as a photographer and sports fan was not used to directly recruit participants, but it allowed me to strengthen relationships with key informants and maintain the momentum of my sampling ‘snowballs’. Through this recruitment process I realized that athletes were comfortable speaking with me only if they had a referral from a close friend or teammate. Without a party to vouch for the legitimacy and confidentiality of this research project it was highly unlikely any athlete would be willing to speak with me.

The second supplementary recruitment came about as another unexpected result of my poster recruitment attempt—this time it was a more positive result. Writers from a campus newspaper contacted me and requested an interview to discuss my project topic. The interview was published, and I was able to solicit recruitment within the article. This article in a campus newspaper provided me with a document to legitimize my project. I sent this article to would-be participants to provide further context and to ease potential concerns of the project’s legitimacy. I found this valuable considering that Brody’s teammates had thought my poster could have been some sort of anti-doping sting operation. Much like the posters, this news story did not yield any participants outside of my snowballs. Nonetheless, it did aid in recruitment by legitimizing the project and providing context to would-be participants.

I make note of the failures and success of these alternate recruitment methods to emphasize the most important factor that led to successful recruitment for this project; to have or to establish close and trusting social connections with the population of interest. I found ‘hanging out’ at sport events, and socializing with players, friends of friends, and the like, provided a level of connection and comfort between potential participants. It was very unlikely that cannabis-using university athletes would speak about their cannabis use with someone with whom they were not completely comfortable. For future qualitative research on the cannabis use of athletes I recommend a strong focus toward building rapport with key informants and potential participants. This can be accomplished through maintaining past relationships and/or continued field work and participant observation efforts.

Recruiting current university athletes who use cannabis proved to be a challenging endeavour. I was ultimately unable to recruit enough current university athletes to fulfill the goals of this project. The difficulty and time spent acquiring the first four interviews made it necessary for me to expand the participant criteria to include both current and former athletes who used cannabis during their university athletic careers. The final sample consisted of five active university athletes and seven former university athletes. Additionally, I modified my recruitment criteria from “must be a cannabis user” to “must have used cannabis in the last 12 months” in order to include people who may not define themselves as a ‘cannabis user’, yet still use cannabis. I had purposefully used the criterion ‘cannabis user’ with hopes of gaining insight into how people define ‘cannabis user’, but I found that casual and infrequent users of cannabis would not define themselves as such. Even regular and frequent cannabis users would not wish to have themselves defined as cannabis users because of lingering stereotypes and stigmas attached to the label (‘lazy stoner’, ‘pothead’, etc.).

**The Participants**

Out of the 12 participants, five were current university athletes, while the remaining seven were former athletes. The overwhelming majority of participants were white males who played team sports. One participant identified as Black and Hawaiian, while one identified as Caucasian and Pakistani. Six were basketball players (Karl, Josh, Corey, Leroy, Neil, and Riley), while two athletes played football (Brody and Max), three hockey (Charles, Owen, and Mavis), and one volleyball (Sylvester). The only female participant was Mavis, a former hockey player. All athletes participated in team sport disciplines. The average age of participants is 23 years old, with the range being 20 to 34 years old. All participants played in the U SPORTS athletic league (previously known as the CIS), and engaged in cannabis use during their university athletic careers. The extent that these participants used cannabis ranges from daily chronic use to occasional recreational use. The frequency and amount of cannabis use of all the participants fluctuate depending on several contextual factors. Though it would be ideal to identify cannabis users by the frequency of use, I found it nearly impossible to categorize respondents by their use patterns. Each participant's use pattern varied based on the time of year, involvement with athletics, and their social environment. Distinctions between daily, frequent, casual, and occasional users are rather arbitrary because, as mentioned, the cannabis use of athletes fluctuates during the year, and as I found in my interviews with former athletes, the cannabis use trajectories vary greatly not only month-to-month but also year-by-year. That said, some general trends of use patterns are worth mentioning.

When not in their competitive seasons, three athletes, Brody, Karl and Josh, engage in daily cannabis use, but when in the midst of their season Brody and Karl choose to fully abstain from using cannabis while Josh merely decreases the frequency of his use. In fact, the majority of athletes note that their cannabis use either drops significantly or completely diminishes when in the midst of their competitive season. Four athletes stated that they use(d) cannabis two or less times per month during their competitive season, and four stated that they use(d) cannabis approximately four to 12 times per month during the season. Additionally, the majority of former athletes (Sylvester, Corey, Charles, Leroy, Owen and Mavis) experienced an increase of cannabis use upon their exit from their university sporting careers.

An important point that Charles made during our interview is that one's frequency of cannabis use is only part of the equation in determining use categories. The amount and type of cannabis consumed must also be considered when attempting to categorize usage. Charles, a former hockey player and now a near-daily cannabis user, notes that though he may smoke cannabis approximately five times a week, he is smoking from a one-hitter, meaning that his dose would be approximately 0.1g of cannabis. A joint, which some may consider a 'serving' of cannabis, can vary greatly from 0.5g to over 1g. Additionally, the chemical varieties, or strains, of the cannabis plant vary in cannabinoid type and amount, meaning that strains may have drastically different levels of THC and CBD content. Strains high in CBD and low in THC, which are less impairing, are now readily available for Canadians. The wide variety of cannabis strains, and cannabinoid isolates, available to consumers means that researchers must be aware of what kinds of cannabis individuals are consuming and how they are consuming them. Given the very recent implementation of cannabis legalization at the time of data collection, most participants continued to use illicit cannabis acquired from their existing networks of friends, black-market sources, and 'grey-market' websites. Most athletes used black market cannabis which is often high in THC. Most athletes also noted that they commonly consumed cannabis through combustion-inhalation methods using joints, pipes, or one-hitters. Two athletes mentioned they occasionally consumed cannabis edibles, and two used cannabis concentrates[5].

[5] Cannabis concentrates are high-potency cannabis products prepared by using solvents to extract cannabinoids from the *cannabis sativa* plant matter.

The majority of athletes did not use CBD strains or CBD specific products, though many expressed interest in using these products in addition to or in replacement of high-THC cannabis.

In looking at frequency of use, this sample can be split into three categories; daily or heavy users (20+ times per month), frequent users (5-19 times per month), and casual users (4 or less times per month). But these categories are flawed in that they do not take into account that some heavy users completely abstain from cannabis use during the season, and users in other categories often reduce their cannabis consumption. It is reductionist to present the sample of respondents in this study as simply daily, frequent, or casual cannabis users. The cannabis use of an individual is not static, nor is it easy to accurately gauge the true extent of one's cannabis use given the variability of frequency, dosage, and type of cannabis consumed. Amongst the participants there is high variability of frequency and amount of cannabis used depending on the time of year, the stage of their athletic career and other contextual factors. That said, it is clear that all participants in this study mostly consumed black market cannabis, presumably high in THC, mainly through combustion-inhalation methods. During the competitive season, ten athletes state that their cannabis use was four or less times a month (including zero). Though I argue the classification of cannabis users is somewhat arbitrary, the majority of participants in this study may be classified as 'casual' cannabis users.

***Sample Limitations***

This sample consists of mostly white male athletes who play team sports. This homogeneity, brought about through the non-random snowball recruitment method, limits the generalizability of the findings of this study. Though limiting, the lack of gender and racial diversity within this sample may be an indicator that characteristics, such as race and gender, may affect the level of stigma one experiences as a cannabis user. My inability to recruit non-white and non-male participants could be solely a result of the recruitment method I employed, but it could also indicate that non-white and non-male athletes may have more to lose if they were to be exposed and labeled as a cannabis user. Non-white and non-male athletes may face a greater risk by participating in this project. It has been well documented that cannabis prohibition is grounded in racial and cultural fear and that people of colour are disproportionately charged with cannabis-related crimes in both the United States and Canada (Abel, 1980; Browne, 2018; I. Campos, 2018; Torgoff, 2016; White & Holman, 2012).

This project began with the goal to recruit a diverse sample, but the difficulty in recruiting participants necessitated that the participant criteria be broadened. That said, it will be important for future projects to be alert to the diversity of the sample. I believe that the experiences of non-white and non-male athletes who use cannabis may be different enough to elicit studies that focus solely on the relationships between female athletics and cannabis, and/or the relationships between race, cannabis, and athletes. The latter has already been initiated (Dickerson, 2012).

Additionally, the sample consisted only of cannabis users. Though the main goal of this project was to explore the experiences of cannabis-using athletes, it may have been beneficial to include a control group of non-cannabis-using athletes. It is likely that the respondents volunteered their time for this project because they had positive views toward cannabis, and the results of this study reflect these athletes' generally positive views toward cannabis. For future qualitative studies that explore the substance use of athletes and anti-doping policy within sport it may be beneficial to take into account the experiences and perspectives from both cannabis-using athletes and non-cannabis-using athletes.

**The Interviews**

During the months from November 2018 to March 2019 I conducted 12 one-on-one interviews with current and former university athletes who used cannabis during their varsity careers. These 12 interviews were the main sources of data. These interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes to two hours. In accordance with an exploratory GT approach I implemented a semi-structured and open-ended interview style. Considering the dearth of research and knowledge within this particular field, this open-ended and semi-structured qualitative approach was necessary to uncover and establish common patterns and themes between participants. The flexibility of this interview style allowed me, as an interviewer, to be more attentive to the respondents' experiences and concerns. Instead of setting out a precise track for the conversation to adhere to, this qualitative approach gave me the ability to *wander with* the respondents (Warren, 2011). The qualitative interviews that I administered allowed more focus to be placed on the concerns of the participants than with following a precise route of questioning. This style of interview did pose challenges, such as digression away from the topic of focus. Ultimately this open-ended approach yielded a plethora of rich data and discovery which would not have been possible if I implemented a survey method or a more rigid approach to interviewing.

I used an interview guide for all 12 of these interviews.[6] I brought this guide into every interview, but as I advanced through interviews the guide became less necessary and served only as a life-preserver if the conversation drifted too far off of topic. The questions in my initial interview guide were informed by a pilot study conducted in a graduate-level research design course, existing research on doping in sports and anti-doping policy, and my own learned and experiential knowledge of cannabis. After the fourth interview was conducted, transcribed, and

[6] Interview guides are included in Appendix A and B

first-pass coded, I altered both the structure and several questions in the interview guide. It was through this iterative development of questions that I was able to create better flow in the interviews and yield richer discussion and theorizing on specific concepts. I found that some of my initial questions were either poorly designed, irrelevant, or of little interest to the respondents. For example, question 2: "When and how were you first introduced to cannabis", was changed to "What led you to first try cannabis?" followed by questions asking to explain the process and trajectory of their cannabis use. By changing this particular question, I was able to encourage discussion about their changes in use patterns instead of forcing the respondents to remember and describe their first exposure to cannabis, which was most likely irrelevant.

The entire interview process was intensely iterative. It involved continuous interviews, memo-writing, transcribing, and coding. I revised my interview guide questions only once, but my approach to the interviews changed with every new interview. I adjusted my mannerisms, way of phrasing questions, type of probing questions, and the order I asked questions in to flow in accordance with each respondent and the conversational paths we moved along. I was not hesitant to share my own thoughts and conundrums, to answer questions, or present ideas brought up in prior interviews. My efforts to be candid and converge on the participants' topics of interests fostered the creation of dependable data and thoughtful theorizing throughout the entire interview process.

***Interview Limitations***

Conducting multiple rounds of interviews would have been a useful tactic and more in line with the iterative nature of GT. I believe more rich and crystalized data would have been generated from doing an initial interview, and then returning for a follow up interview with more specific and probing questions. I did administer probing questions and follow-ups within all the interviews, but these probing questions could have been better developed given time to theorize in between an initial and follow-up interview. I was unable to administer multiple rounds of interviews given the rigid time constraints of a master's thesis project. Most interviews took place in-person in private rooms at mutually agreed upon locations. Three interviews were done over the phone, and one interview was done in the house of a participant. The phone interviews were challenging because spotty connection sometimes ruined the flow of conversation. Poor connection was especially bad for the flow of the interview if participants were not eager to elaborate or expand upon their answers. In the future, video-call interviews should be used in place of telephone conversations whenever possible. The one interview I conducted in the home of Charles was the longest, clocking in at nearly two-hours. Generally, phone interviews proved to be more challenging than face-to-face interviews. Though the anonymity of the phone interview may have prompted more candid answers, I found that the more participants knew about me the more comfortable they were, and therefore were more willing to openly share their experiences. Additionally, I suggest that methods that rely more on field work and necessitate consistent interaction with participants, such as ethnographic methods, should be employed in future research. Adler and Adler's (1991) multi-year ethnographic study within a Southern United States university basketball program poses an ideal scenario to produce a deep understanding of the social field and the actors within it.

**Data Analysis**

The main data for this project was collected through recorded interviews. These recordings were manually transcribed, and subsequently coded. GT requires a non-linear coding process. In-depth coding of transcripts occurred after interviews had taken place, but because of the iterative necessities of GT I engaged in coding practices before interviews had taken place. Real data is not exclusively transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). Other events can be included, such as being denied recruitment access to a certain population, and media statements from organizations of interest like U SPORTS (Pinkerton, 2018). Events such as these influenced the coding and theorizing process before transcripts had been produced. The events that took place prior to interview offered starting points for developing the codes that were more wholly developed once main data collection had initiated. For instance, one AD’s written refusal to support this research project provided an indication of persisting institutionalized stigma toward cannabis using-athletes, thus prompting further theorizing and directed coding toward concepts of stigmatization.

All 12 interviews took place from November 2018 to March 2019. Given this five-month data collection window for 12 interviews, I was able to dedicate lots of time with the interview documents. I wrote extensive coding notes on each transcript multiple times over and created several progressively more organized and theoretically developed code books. My coding process was informed mainly with the guidance of grounded theorist Kathy Charmaz (2014). First, I used line-by-line and open coding, then focused coding, followed by axial coding. These three major steps in coding were not applied systematically to every interview transcript but were used iteratively as needed. Some descriptive codes turned into analytic codes and developed more quickly into theoretical codes than others, while some first-pass codes never reached a point of theoretical development.

***The Coding Process***

After transcription, line-by-line coding was implemented in order to approach the data with as little judgement as possible. This line-by-line method of coding requires purposefully utilizing simple and descriptive codes to minimize assumptions and preconceptions of data. An example of an assumption of mine that was challenged through line-by-line coding was that I assumed participants would not be supportive of the anti-doping efforts of the CCES and WADA because it meant they could not use cannabis. It turns out that most athletes deeply support anti-doping policy, and some even agreed with the logic for prohibiting cannabis in sport. In vivo codes were also used abundantly at this phase of coding in order to preserve participant meaning. In vivo codes are "concepts used by participants themselves to organize and conceptualize their world" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 17). Terms like "chillin'" were often used by athletes to describe both the activities they engaged in when using cannabis and how they experienced the effects of the drug. Terms like "chillin'" were useful during the coding process to understand how athletes conceptualized their cannabis experiences. However, I began to ask probing questions to unpack these in vivo codes in later interviews because of their ambiguity. The particular in vivo code, "chillin'", was used by athletes to describe social, mental, or physical recovery or activity. Exploring this in vivo code led to theoretical insight into the reasons many athletes choose to use cannabis. This first-pass coding approach constructed a broad picture of the data. This broad picture contained a comprehensive collection of the thoughts and perceptions of cannabis using student athletes.

Some GT researchers prefer to skip line-by-line coding to focus their energy on the 'cream' of the data (Stern, 2007). Considering the exploratory character of this project, I found it necessary to use line-by-line coding in order to identify what, exactly, the 'cream' of my data was. In fact, the line-by-line coding of the first three interviews heavily influenced subsequent interviews. The interview guide was altered to focus more directly on some of the emerging concepts and themes that I identified in the line-by-line coding phase, such as cannabis use for recovery and relaxation. As more data was collected, these descriptive codes collected through line-by-line coding began to crystalize into groups and categories. Reoccurring and similar codes were grouped together, while codes that I thought to be intriguing and significant were treated with the same importance.

As I moved further through the data collection process the line-by-line approach became redundant. After the third interview I began to move away from line-by-line coding because I was able to easily identify information related to key developing themes, or the ‘cream’ of the data. Of course, I did not completely ignore the ‘filler’ during the first-pass coding of these later interviews. New insights were still being identified in later interviews, but they did not extend far beyond the initial picture that had already been constructed. In later interviews it was still important to complete first-past descriptive coding in order to pull back analytical and theoretical thinking. This gave room for new findings to emerge. As analytical categories further crystalized, line-by-line coding ceased to be practical. From here, I implemented focused coding.

Once line-by-line and descriptive first-pass coding of transcripts had been completed, focused coding was used to further develop these groups of codes, often called categories. By studying the first-pass codes and highlighting what I interpreted to be important in my emerging analysis, I constructed focused codes. Focused codes are more abstract and analytical than initial codes (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). I used a constant comparative approach which involved moving back and forth between old codes and new data. This process allowed for a cyclical interaction between the emergent categories, old codes, and new data. Testing and retesting codes with new and old data proved to be an intensive and rigorous method for generating analytical codes and categories. Of course, these categories began to rely further on my interpretation of the data; how I chose to code the data, the connections I made between codes, and the perspectives of my analysis. My analytical interpretations of these codes are reliable because I utilized an iterative and constant comparative approach to coding advised by all

Grounded Theorists (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1967). The cyclical interaction between initial codes, the emerging categories, and data helped to highlight and develop analytical links and also directed me to abandon hunches that lacked sufficient support.

For many researchers, axial coding comes after focused coding. Axial coding was developed by Strauss and Corbin (2015) in an effort to systematize the coding process of GT. Some scholars criticize this approach to coding as being too linear and procedural, and that it forces relationships instead of allowing them to emerge (Wasserman et al., 2009). Axial coding requires creation of major categories which are then used as hubs to connect related codes. I found this axial coding model to be helpful in synthesizing and organizing data. Furthermore this 'hub and spoke' model provided a structure to arrange codes and conceptualize their relationships. My findings were split into three categories; athletes using cannabis for perceived benefits to personal wellness, cannabis use as a stigmatizing act, and athlete perceptions of the SoS. These three broad categories acted as the axes that connected codes and fostered theorizing about how the codes operated in relation to one another.

Coding is a process that provides a pivotal link between collecting data and developing theory (Charmaz 2014). As the constant comparison approach cycles and codes and categories become constructed, it is necessary to constantly apply theoretical sensitivity. That is, "the ability to understand and define phenomena in abstract terms and to demonstrate abstract relationships between studied phenomena" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 161). Attempting to make sense of the data and decipher the picture that has been formed requires theoretical interpretation and application. Throughout line-by-line, focused, and axial coding, I constantly analyzed the data and codes with a theoretical sensitivity in mind. This coding process along with the existing theories and theoretical concepts of Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, Adler and Adler's (1991) role engulfment, and the fluid drug theory (King et al., 2014) allowed me to produce a detailed sociological depiction of the experiences of cannabis-using Canadian university athletes.

**Additional Ethical Considerations and Methodological Challenges**

I gave consideration to the unpredictability of open-ended interviewing before I began administering them. I knew that in speaking with current and former athletes about their cannabis use it would be possible that triggering topics, such as punishments resulting from substance use or the abuse of substances, may arise. I prepared for scenarios like these by bringing a printed list of community health resources to refer participants to, if necessary. I soon discovered that this slip of paper could not serve as an adequate response to the participants' current and past traumas and troubles. In one of the first interviews, one athlete told me that they had once used cannabis to help themselves through a depressive state after the passing of one of his best friends. In interviews with two hockey players, both shared detailed stories of the mental and physical trauma they had experienced throughout their careers as elite hockey players. And many athletes cathartically shared stories about the stresses and challenges that they faced as student athletes. I handled these situations with as much empathy and compassion as I could, and I made sure to be attentive to the emotional state of the participants during each interview. I felt that every interview ended with positivity and on good terms. It has become clear to me that when researching the substance use of student athletes, the researcher must be prepared to deal with conversations of trauma, stress, physical and mental health, and potentially other negative life experiences.

During the recruitment process I experienced a major recruitment roadblock. In the process of acquiring ethics approval for this project it was recommended that I submit proposals to the ethics boards of universities from which I planned to recruit participants. Approval from their university ethics boards was required if I wanted to use campus resources like posting boards or mailing lists to advertise for this study. Unfortunately, my ethics proposal for one Western Canadian university was denied on the grounds that I could not get support from their AD. Upon contacting this AD to request their written support for this project I received an email back explaining that if any athletes were found to participate in my study they would be sanctioned for “jeopardizing their sport opportunity, personal health and not abiding by a commitment they have made to the university, league and their team mates to compete drug free”[7]. I did not end up recruiting any active athletes from this particular school given that these athletes now faced a heightened risk by merely participating in this study.

Whether or not the opinion of this AD is consistent with other ADs in Canada is unknown. What was taken from this email, however, is that the stigma of drug use, especially cannabis, in sport is strong. So strong that the AD of this particular university would not offer their support for a research project seeking to understand how and why Canadian athletes use cannabis. This email shows that there is still a need or desire for athletic programs to maintain an image of ‘clean sport’ at all costs. It exemplifies an increasingly outdated and problematic view toward substance use within athletics. Through blissful ignorance or naivety, this AD refused to acknowledge that any of the athletes in their university’s athletic programs have used a now-legal recreational substance. By adhering to ‘just say no’ rhetoric and assuming that all athletes maintain complete abstinence from cannabis use, this AD impeded research seeking to understand the substance use of athletes. This email was certainly a recruitment roadblock in that it caused me to exclude an entire campus’ population of athletes from my study. But this incident provided important insight into the intensity of institutional disapproval of cannabis use within

[7] Personal email communication

university sport. The contradiction between this AD's opinions on the cannabis use of their university's athletes and the most recent data that indicates that one-fifth to one-quarter of university athletes use cannabis was a strong indicator that it was necessary for this research to proceed (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b; Spence & Gauvin, 1996).

This email has made it clear that unforeseen roadblocks will come up in this field of research. Though this incident limited my recruitment pool it provided information that informed the discussions of stigmatization in subsequent research interviews. Even though cannabis is legal in Canada, it is still prohibited within U SPORTS, and it does not mean that research on cannabis users can be freely conducted. For future social science-based research on the cannabis use of athletes it is likely roadblocks such as the one mentioned above will occur, and the researcher should be attentive to how these roadblocks may influence the various stages of the research as well as the results.

**Conclusion**

The data for this study is comprised of 12 transcribed interviews with current and former university athletes from across Western Canada. I administered one-on-one open-ended and semi-structured interviews with all these athletes who engaged in varying levels of cannabis use throughout their varsity careers. The sample of athletes is predominantly white and male, and participated in team sports. I experienced several challenges in recruitment, but the nature of these roadblocks facilitated my constant theorizing and ultimately informed the findings of this study. With the aid of GT coding techniques, I have produced a picture of how and why Canadian university athletes use cannabis and the social implications of their use. In the following chapters I will present the results of this qualitative GT study on the cannabis use of Canadian university athletes.

# Chapter Three: How and Why Canadian University Athletes Use Cannabis

## Introduction

This chapter will address my primary research question, "How and why do university athletes use cannabis?". Cannabis is prohibited in amateur sport partially because it poses potential to harm as well as enhance the performance of athletes (Huestis et al., 2011). It may seem as though these two doping criteria are at the foundation of this chapter's inquiry because the results presented in this chapter broadly address how athletes experience the effects of cannabis. This includes its effects on athletic performance and its perceived harms. However, the goal of this chapter is not to definitively argue for or against cannabis' performance enhancing potential or its potential to harm. Many authors have already presented an argument about whether cannabis does or does not enhance performance, or if it is harmful or harmless and whether it should be prohibited (D. R. Campos et al., 2003; M. Dunn, 2013; Huestis et al., 2011; Waddington et al., 2013). The goal of this chapter is to present and unpack the multitude of ways that athletes use the substance because their motivations and reasons for cannabis use are largely unknown. That said, a quantitative study on the substance use of American college athletes suggests that athletes use cannabis mainly for social and pain-management reasons (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b). Furthermore, these contextual factors of drug use, such as motivation, ought to be considered for future anti-doping policy and management of recreational drug use in sport.

Athletes use cannabis because they perceive it benefits their physical, mental, and/or social wellness. This presents an incredibly broad spectrum of motivating factors for use, but it is consistent with the wide-ranging and highly variable effects of cannabis. Depending on the chemical variety of the plant, the cannabinoid profile (i.e. percent of THC and CBD), and other factors such as dose amount, method of ingestion, tolerance, environmental setting, and the mindset of the user, the effects and experiences of the drug can be drastically different (Hartogsohn, 2017; Parker, 2017a). Athletes may use cannabis to manage pain, decrease anxiety and manage stress, or to bolster team comradery or affirm an identity outside of sport. The ways that athletes use cannabis are expansive.

In this chapter I show that cannabis is used by athletes because they perceive it is in some way beneficial to their wellbeing. It can be argued that bolstering physical, mental, and social wellbeing may increase athletic performance. The implications of the indirect performance enhancing effects of cannabis and how this interacts with conceptualizations of doping will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. With every drug there is potential for harm, but athletes' concerns about the health risks associated with cannabis are dwarfed by their concern for the punitive consequences that come from being caught.

**Physical Wellbeing**

***Pain***

Cannabis is purposefully used by some athletes to manage acute and generalized pain. It was similarly employed to cope with injuries, which are often either caused or aggravated by sport activity. Half the athletes in this study report using cannabis for either injury treatment or general pain management. High intensity training regimens imposed on student athletes can put a significant strain on their physical health and wellbeing. The start of season training camp is particularly demanding. This is a time where coaches want to make sure their athletes are in top physical shape for the upcoming season, and to see who has 'got it' and who does not. It is also a time when veteran and returning university athletes are confident that they will not be drug tested. Even though some athletes choose to abstain from cannabis for various reasons throughout their competitive season (fear of getting caught, no time, worried about diminished performance), sometimes the positive benefits of cannabis can outweigh the risks of getting caught and its potential adverse effects. Neil, a former basketball player, explains how using cannabis helped him with recovery and pain management during training camp.

> The one notable exception to me would be the beginning of the year at training camp. It typically started in August and you're not getting tested in August, there's no way. At the same time those are the hardest practices of the year because they're ramping up to get you into shape. Sometimes it's two-a-days. In any case, you come home from practice and you feel like you just got beaten with a bat. And I know that there were times during those periods where we would come home and smoke, and it would just make me feel better… The schedule was so demanding at those times and the risks were so low, I guess in the cost-benefit analysis in your head, I guess it's like well, yeah obviously I'm going to do this.

Athletes, like Neil, are aware of the risks of using cannabis. He notes that at the beginning of the season the risks are low. Anti-doping agencies are not testing athletes during training camp. A WADA approved drug test can cost between $500-800 to administer and it is possible that the high level of resources required to administer a drug test limit the randomness of them (Maki, 2012). Athletes are confident that no one is going to get tested during training camp. There are certain times, however, where there is a higher likelihood that they may be selected to submit a urinalysis such as conference or league final tournaments. In these times the risks of getting caught outweigh the benefits of using cannabis.

Along with Neil, two active basketball players, Karl and Riley, both report using cannabis specifically to help manage pain symptoms that were the result of sport-related injuries.

> It [cannabis] helps me. I felt better. My calf wasn't throbbing all the time… I couldn't really move. I was hobbling around… it would ache and throb, and I had pain medication, but it didn't do much I found. I was cooped up in the house too. I couldn't really do anything so I would just get high and hang out…maybe it just took my mind off of it too. (Riley)

Here, Riley explains how he used cannabis to manage pain. Even though he was technically liable to be tested, Riley adds, "they're not going to test the guy who's in a boot on the bench." The benefits that are perceived to be gained from cannabis can, in some circumstances, outweigh the risks of getting caught. Unpacking this quote further, it is clear that Riley is unsure if cannabis physiologically affects the pain experienced or if provides psychological relief. Even so, Riley preferred to use cannabis instead of prescription pain medication to manage pain symptoms. Athletes are not sure if cannabis actually has an analgesic effect. All athletes who used cannabis for its pain-relieving qualities were generally uncertain of how it helps them manage pain. Some athletes speculated that cannabis heightens their awareness of activities or movements that may bring about pain, so it helps them avoid these situations. Or, as Riley considers, the cognitive effects of THC may act as a temporary distraction from the pain. In some cases, athletes do see cannabis as a drug that pharmacodynamically decreases pain.

Two athletes, Karl and Riley, used cannabis specifically as a replacement for physician prescribed pain medication. Research on phytocannabinoid interactions with the endocannabinoid (eCB) system has shown that eCB receptors regulate pain signals in the central nervous system. Phytocannabinoids, abundantly present in cannabis, modulate the CB1 and CB2 eCB receptors, and have been proven to provide analgesic effects to humans when compared to placebos (Parker, 2017b). While Karl and Riley have actually used cannabis as substitutes for other drugs, other athletes expressed support and optimism for the possibility that cannabis and specific cannabinoids, such as CBD, could be viable replacement drugs for standardly prescribed analgesic medication, such as opioids. Charles, a former U SPORTS hockey player, expressed reserved optimism toward cannabinoid therapy as a substitute for opioid-based pain management.

> I think that [cannabis] is absolutely worth trying, especially as a replacement to an opioid. Try it for sure. Because opioids are—I mean that's the scariest thing of all—is that people get addicted to an opioid that they get from breaking their nose. I still have Tramadol here in the house when I broke my nose a couple months ago and I got put under and they reset it and they gave me like 25 pills of Tramadol and it didn't hurt two days later… and the problem with those is that when you take them you just feel good. You do just feel good. That's the scary part about them, right? So, athletes, either they get prescribed it for whatever reason and you feel good on it and then eventually you can't get them and then you're trying heroin or some shit... So, if CBD could be a replacement for that, then hell yeah. If it's working for you then that's awesome. I just don't like it being replaced for all applications because opiates still have their place, right? (Charles)

Here, Charles details his experience with being prescribed an excess amount of Tramadol, an opioid medication. The over-prescription of opioid pain medication has become an increasing concern in professional sport, specifically high-contact sports such as football and hockey. The rate of opioid use in the National Football League (NFL) is three times that of the general population, and over 70% of those who used opioids in the NFL report misuse (Cottler et al., 2011). In recent years professional athletes, especially within the NFL, have come forward in the media detailing their history of problematic opioid use during and after their professional careers

(Nguyen, 2019). Many of these athletes, like Nate Jackson, noted that they had never used opioids before playing in the NFL, and that the over-prescription of these pain-killing drugs is a widespread issue within the league (N. Jackson, 2017).

In the summer of 2019 Major League Baseball (MLB) pitcher Tyler Skaggs was found dead in his hotel room, and his toxicology report indicated presence of alcohol, fentanyl, and oxycodone (Torres & Digiovanna, 2019). Fentanyl and oxycodone are both opioids and played a role in the death of this 27-year-old professional baseball player. Furthermore, there are reports that indicate Skaggs had a history of prescription opioid dependency and misuse (Quinn, 2019). Skaggs' opioid-related death has spurred dramatic drug policy changes in the MLB that now treat non-PED-related drug use through treatment plans instead of punishment. MLB's new drug policies, which take effect in the 2020 spring training camp, will remove cannabis from their prohibited substance list (Wagner, 2019). All professional leagues determine their own drug policies, so these changes will only effect MLB and its minor league affiliates.

Within amateur sport, it has been found that adolescents who play high-injury sport (i.e. football and wrestling) and collegiate athletes who experienced injury are more likely to engage in non-medical use of prescription opioids (Ford et al., 2018; Veliz et al., 2013). The major adverse side effects of opioid treatment include, nausea and vomiting, drowsiness, constipation, increasing tolerance and physical dependency, respiratory depression, and death (Abrams et al., 2011; Benyamin et al., 2008). Though Charles makes note that opioid therapy may still be useful for some individuals, the ease and amount which opioid medications are distributed within sport leagues is becoming a greater concern for sports people. Charles' account of being prescribed a surplus amount of Tramadol is indicative of a broader issue within professional and potentially amateur sports—the over-prescription of opioids.

Interestingly, athletes like Nate Jackson have begun to advocate publicly for medical cannabis as a replacement for opioid painkillers. Cannabis as a viable analgesic, neuroprotectant, and anti-inflammatory drug is steadily gaining support from the sport community. Along with this public support, the scientific research on cannabis and the eCB system is growing (Committee on the Health Effects of Marijuana et al., 2017; Parker, 2017b). Moreover, emerging research suggests that cannabis may be a viable alternative or support drug for opioid-based pain management (Abrams et al., 2011). Parker (2017b) states, "Drugs that target the cannabinoid system often affect the opioid system in tandem" (p. 137). Opiate receptors and eCB receptors demonstrate various relationalities. This means that using cannabinoid therapy in conjunction with opioid therapy could be a viable option for pain management as it may allow the doses of both substances to be lowered, thereby lowering the potential negative side effects of both substances.

Further, there is evidence that medical and non-medical cannabis users are already using cannabis to manage pain symptoms. Similarly to how Karl and Riley chose to use cannabis instead of their doctor-prescribed medication, Bachhuber et al. (2019) and Lucas, Baron & Jikomes (2019) find that a significant portion of cannabis users perceive cannabis to be less harmful, to offer better symptom management, come with less adverse side effects, and have fewer withdrawal symptoms than their prescribed opioid medication. As well, a decrease in opioid prescriptions and opioid overdose-related deaths has been found to be associated with access to medical cannabis (M. Bachhuber et al., 2019; M. A. Bachhuber et al., 2014; Bradford & Bradford, 2016). In recent years Veteran Affairs Canada has seen an increase in medical marijuana prescriptions, while seeing a simultaneous drop in opioid prescriptions (Hager, 2016). These recent studies support the potential for cannabis to augment opioid medication for analgesic purposes. It is possible that cannabis can be used in conjunction or in replacement to opioid medication.

It is irresponsible to suggest that cannabis is a silver-bullet solution to an epidemic of opioid addiction and opioid-related overdose deaths and that it should be used instead of physician-prescribed pain medication. However, the research that supports cannabis' efficacy as an analgesic drug is growing. Like Charles, many athletes in this study expressed a fear and reluctance to use opioids while offering optimism and support for the use of cannabis as an alternative pain management drug. Some athletes, along with authorized medical users and non-medical users of cannabis already use the drug as a pain management tool. Canadian university athletes are using cannabis to treat symptoms of pain and may already be using it as a replacement for physician-prescribed opioids. The athletic community should remain open to the emerging research of cannabis as an effective pain management drug.

### *Sleep and Satiety*

Along with acute pain management for injuries, Canadian university athletes also use cannabis for general physical recovery and maintenance. In order to compete at an elite level throughout lengthy seasons, student athletes must maintain sufficient physical conditioning and health. Daily practices, workouts, and often one or more games on the weekend, give athletes little time to fully recover. Athletes are usually given one to two days rest after a game to recover, then it is back to practices and training. This continues until the last game of the season, the championship playoffs, or the final meet. Depending on the sport, seasons can last from August to November for football, or from September to March for hockey. The seasons for sports such as tennis, wrestling, swimming, and athletics can comprise of several meets with training taking place throughout the entirety of the year. The length and intensity of competitive seasons varies between sport disciplines, but the bodies of all athletes undergo immense strain and trauma throughout the season. Expression of the intense demands of the competitive season was a point shared by all athletes in this study.

Maintaining a healthy sleep schedule during the competitive season was a concern for many athletes. Balancing athletic, academic, and social responsibilities is a challenging feat for nearly all student-athletes, and often, athletic demands took precedence over academic and social pursuits. Corey explains how he used cannabis to manage sleep during the school year:

> Sometimes, every once in a while, just to help me fall asleep at night. You're drinking coffee, two to three coffees a day and you're trying to power through a bunch of studying and stuff and you're just wired, and its midnight and you have to fall asleep. I find it helps.

Corey explains that cannabis helps him fall asleep after a long day of studying because it counteracts the stimulating effects of caffeine. Several other athletes, Brody, Josh, Leroy, Neil, and Mavis, all stated that using cannabis has aided their sleep. In some cases, athletes use the drug by itself for its relaxing and sedating effects, while in other cases cannabis is used to counteract the effects of other drugs like caffeine or alcohol. Leroy supposes that consuming cannabis after a night of alcohol consumption can minimize hangover effects the next day. Conversely, some athletes, like Karl and Charles find that cannabis is not useful and can even be detrimental to their sleep.

A recent survey distributed to non-medical cannabis users in Colorado has shown that improving sleep outcomes is the second most common reason, after pain, for engaging in cannabis use (M. Bachhuber et al., 2019). Though this only shows evidence that non-medical legal cannabis users choose to self-medicate with cannabis to improve sleep outcomes, according to a report by the Committee on the Health Effects of Marijuana (2017) there is moderate evidence that cannabis can improve short-term sleep outcomes. Additionally, there is emerging evidence that cannabis and its constituting cannabinoids can help reduce sleep disruptions, and improve sleep quality (Crippa et al., 2018; Kuhathasan et al., 2019). This evidence is mostly based on self-reported data, and in studies reviewed by Kuhathasan et al. (2019), cannabis' effects on sleep were not the primary topic of focus. Many non-medical cannabis users, including Canadian university athletes, use cannabis to improve sleep outcomes, but there is a need for further research on the effects of cannabis on sleep before conclusions can be made on the efficacy of cannabis as a sleep aid.

Another common effect of cannabis consumption besides sedation is increased hunger and appetite (Berry & Mechoulam, 2002; Hollister, 1971; Parker, 2017c). The 'munchie' effect is stereotypically assumed to involve uncontrolled gorging on unhealthy snack foods, however, three athletes mentioned how cannabis can positively affect eating habits.

> I was never really a good eater because of the stress from hockey… I would never eat well, and I would be feeling terrible, so it sort of helped with my satiety, I guess. So that was a benefit. (Charles)

Stress from the high pressures of hockey caused a decreased appetite for Charles. Furthermore, the scheduling of practices sometimes made it challenging to get a nutritious meal between practices and classes. In this case, Charles felt that his eating habits benefited from cannabis insofar as it helped increase his appetite that had diminished from sport-induced stress. Corey, a former basketball player, expressed the possibility that cannabis could be used as an appetite enhancer for athletes. "You could be smoking as like an appetite enhancer. I'd be putting on more weight and more muscle in the gym." This comment highlights how some athletes could potentially use cannabis to purposefully increase their appetite, build weight, and ultimately get bigger and stronger. Corey admits that using cannabis could enhance athletic performance in this way. Additionally, Owen, a former hockey player who has found a career working in a cannabis retail store, explains how cannabis can be used to make healthier eating choices, to the contradiction of the 'munchie' stereotype:

> …instead of going out to eat or getting Skip the Dishes now it's like, 'I can't wait to get home to make my new meal because I'm excited for it now', and it's not such a big deal because I smoked this lemon sour diesel [uplifting strain of cannabis], which is a bit energizing, and now I'm excited to do it. Whereas everyone associates cannabis with 'I'm going to go home and sleep all day'.

Whether or not the effects of cannabis unfairly enhance athletic performance is a question that will be addressed in Chapter Five. The fact is, some athletes use cannabis with the intention to positively impact their eating habits. Negative physiological responses to stress such as decreased satiety or difficulty sleeping may be partially attributed to the demands of university sport and the balancing act between academic, athletic, and social responsibilities. Both the sedating effects and increased satiety caused by cannabis were seen as positive by most respondents.

## Mental Wellbeing

### *Stress and Anxiety*

The athletes who I spoke with commonly claimed that cannabis was useful because of its ability to alleviate stress. Athletes used cannabis to 'chill', de-compress, de-stress, and to self-reflect. Two-thirds of respondents used cannabis to manage stress and promote relaxation. The symptoms they are addressing are mostly the same, but athletes find stress relief from cannabis in different ways. Some athletes used cannabis to push aside their worries and anxieties, while others use cannabis in an effort to recognize and address these challenges in their lives. The latter was the case for Karl.

> One of my best friends passed away… That was about a year after I began my cannabis use. And I found that it kind of helped me get through it. I wasn't like, smoking to get rid of the memories or whatever. I would just sit back and kind of just reflect on life. It helped me through some depressive states.

The passing of a close friend is, at the very least, a majorly stressful, traumatic, and challenging time in one's life. Karl found that using cannabis helped him address difficult emotions and thinking patterns instead of pushing them aside. Other participants, like Josh and Neil, described cannabis as a good way to "get things off my mind" (Josh) and to "take a mental load off" (Neil). Cannabis is well known to promote stress relief and relaxation through its interaction with CB1 eCB receptors. The eCB system is a critical component of the homeostatic regulation of the body, and phytocannabinoids such as THC and CBD that affect CB1 signalling will affect stress responses (Hillard, 2014). Whether the use of cannabis increases or decreases stress symptoms is dependent on experience of the user, frequency of their use, dosage amount, and ratios of cannabinoids. For instance, acute high doses of THC may increase stress and anxiety for infrequent users, while small doses of CBD will likely have an analgesic effect (Parker, 2017a).

Beyond generalized stress, two former hockey players, Charles and Owen, mentioned specific stress symptoms brought about through their participation in competitive hockey.

> I still have nightmares about playing hockey and just sucking or something like that. Like giving the puck away or being the worst player on the ice… I never really handled the stress that well… I didn't even want to be the person on the ice in the last minute because I couldn't handle it. I really couldn't handle the stress. (Charles)

Charles reveals that his experiences playing hockey have elicited stress-induced nightmares, even after his hockey career. Similarly, Owen notes, "I don't follow hockey anymore. It's too triggering for me." These expressions of intrusion and avoidance symptoms by both Charles and Owen are not unlike symptoms exhibited by people with clinical stress disorders. Charles still gets nightmares involving poor performance in hockey, while Owen often chooses to avoid talking about certain hockey experiences because they elicit negative memories and emotions. Charles' and Owen's negative experiences with hockey and their persistent anxiety and stress-related symptoms indicate that participation in highly competitive elite sport may result in chronic symptoms of stress. Charles and Owen used cannabis to manage some of these stress symptoms. Furthermore, current and former professional hockey players, such as Riley Cote and Steve Ludzik, have begun to advocate for the use of cannabis to manage stress and anxiety given their positive personal experiences with the drug (T. Dunn, 2018; Robson, 2017). The current state of research of the therapeutic use of cannabis to aid in treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is promising (Parker, 2017a). Cannabinoid therapy should be further researched in the context of stress, anxiety, and depression stemming from elite sport competition—especially in amateur and professional hockey.

***Flow***

Some current and former athletes use cannabis because they perceive it promotes a heightened state of attention, increases their mind-body connection, and it stimulates optimal experience, or enjoyment, during some activities. These effects are analogous characteristics to what is commonly known to athletes, coaches, and sport psychologists as flow. The concept of flow was first established by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Flow, according to Jackson (1999), is a "harmonious experience where mind and body are working together effortlessly" (p. 5) and "a state of consciousness where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions" (p. 5). Jackson's definition of flow, as it relates to sport, extends to include nine fundamental dimensions. These fundamental dimensions are useful to conceptualize what characteristics the flow experience can consist of, but dimensions such as the 'challenge-skill balance', and 'having clear goals' limit the application of the concept of flow to competitive activities that rely on set definitions of success. Several athletes claim to have experienced cannabis-facilitated flow-like states in non-competitive, non-performance-based recreational activities such as running, shooting hoops, flag football, downhill skiing, and unstructured play. These recreational flow-like states do not necessarily conform to all the nine dimensions presented by Jackson (1999) or promote peak performance. They are described as optimal experiences in that the enjoyment and fun of the activity is maximized. Sylvester describes the effect that cannabis has on sense of focus and enjoyment of recreational downhill skiing, "…everything kind of just feels better. It feels like you're more in the moment, I suppose. It's like what's happening right now is awesome just enjoy it" (Sylvester).

Charles echoes a similar experience with using cannabis to diminish the likelihood of distractions during his runs.

> …sometimes if I smoke a sativa before I go I don't feel as much hunger or thirst, or I don't think about having to get home and think about the next thing, having to make dinner and then do something right after. I'm just running.

Brody speaks of the merging of action and awareness while also describing loss of self-consciousness while shooting hoops and playing on a flag football team.

> When I'm high I kind of just let it take over. Like, I'm not really thinking too much about what actions I'm doing. I'm not thinking about how to beat the guy. I just kind of move and let it take me. My shot form feels way better. Like, I'm actually a better shooter when I'm high. It's just a thing. Even with football I feel like I'm more finessed, almost. I'm smoother when I'm high. When I'm sober I'm pretty choppy and I go pretty hard, but I feel like I just kind of slow everything down a bit and—not like think through it but just like kind of see it happen in front of me a little more, and then I kind of just play.

Last, Karl describes his experiences of time transformation while stretching.

> I don't really stretch that much when I'm not high but if I smoke I'll just sit on the ground and before you know it 45 minutes have passed and I've stretched every muscle in my body and I just feel so good.

These four athletes are able to achieve flow-like states in moderate and light physical activity situations through the use of cannabis. Their experience of flow is not necessarily reliant on performance outcomes, but on achieving an optimal experience of the activity. The flow experience is a highly sought state of consciousness among athletes because it is associated with peak performance. Flow as it is defined as a state of optimal experience or enjoyment extends beyond the restrictions of performance-based sport goals. Four out of 12 athletes said that they used cannabis to promote flow states in recreational sport activities. Nine athletes use cannabis because it increases the fun and enjoyment, or optimal experience, of structured and active activities like playing flag football, or passive and unstructured activities like playing videogames or listening to music. There is a strong consensus among the interviewed athletes that, simply, “weed makes things fun” (Sylvester). Whether cannabis can help facilitate flow, as defined by Jackson (1999), is unproven. It appears, at the very least, that cannabis can increase the enjoyment of some recreational activities by promoting heightened states of focus, merging action and awareness, loss of self-consciousness, and time transformation. Although four athletes have used cannabis specifically to enhance physical activities, none felt as if cannabis would be beneficial in a high-intensity and competitive environment. As well, several athletes avoid using cannabis for training or workouts because they find the effects are uncomfortable, or they perceive it diminishes their performance.

**Social Wellbeing and Role Engulfment**

Adler and Adler (1991) used a Grounded Theory approach in a near-decade-long ethnographic study of American college basketball players. Through their extensive fieldwork Adler and Adler (1991) observed that the demands of playing on a university basketball team outstretched the boundaries of the playing field. The academic and social lives of the athletes became engulfed by their commitments to college sport. Role engulfment is a process of yielding one’s self to one dominant master role. Other pursuits and dimensions of the self are sacrificed as one particular role rises to prominence (Adler & Adler, 1991). In the case of college athletes, the athletic role is found to intrude on, and ultimately engulf, the academic and social dimensions of their lives.

There are indications that this concept of role engulfment occurs within U SPORTS athletes, and that their cannabis use may be used to mitigate and/or manage this process. Using cannabis provides some athletes with relief from sports-related pain, and it is used to aid in rest and recovery. Athletes also use cannabis to promote flow, fun, and mindfulness in social and recreational activities which may serve to strengthen their identities outside of competitive sport. They can separate from their master roles and exist 'in the moment' for a brief period of time. Adler and Adler (1991) find that athletes are placed in public view, and they lose an element of privacy in their lives, which results in feelings of decreased autonomy. Athletes' underground use of cannabis may provide a temporary disengagement from the athlete master role. Using cannabis is contrary to the public conception of athletes, and therefore challenges socially defined role expectations.

Much of Adler and Adler's key findings from their ethnography of a southern US university basketball team are consistent with the experiences of the multi-disciplinary assortment of Western Canadian university athletes with whom I spoke. These U SPORTS athletes commonly expressed difficulties in balancing their social and academic lives in accordance with athletic commitments. Practices, training, and competitions can persist for four months to all year-round, depending on the sport discipline. Often, athletic demands take precedence over academic and social lives. In some cases, this leads to physical and mental fatigue.

> We would practice in the morning, so it was tough sometimes. We would practice at 7:30 so we'd be up at 6:15 everyday… sometimes I would be falling asleep in class… That was the toughest part, I think, about it all because just managing my sleep and trying to stay active and focused in my classes when I was kind of exhausted.  We tried so hard to

> negotiate to get an afternoon practice, but they always wanted it practice in the mornings. They thought it was better for us or something.

Charles finds that the practice schedule of his hockey team created issues with sleep and focus. He notes how this commitment was not conducive to success in the classroom. The demands of university sport that Charles experienced is an example of how athletes' athletic lives can take precedent over academic successes and even their own health. Adler and Adler (1991) find that relentless practices and games often result in fatigue, and consequently academic work takes a back seat. Charles' morning practices interfered with his ability to focus on schoolwork. This is indicative of how the process of role engulfment occurs in the lives of U SPORTS athletes.

> I stopped playing because I basically didn't enjoy it anymore.  I felt beaten down and awful. And my grades weren't good, and I didn't want to do it anymore, so I stepped away and got my grades up. (Neil)

In some cases, athletes respond to these demands by removing themselves from university sport. Neil explains how being a student athlete diminished his enjoyment of basketball and led to a drastic decline in his well-being. Ultimately, Neil had to temporarily step away from university sports in order to re-establish his academic life.

Beyond their academic lives and their own physical and mental health, the commitment that university sport requires affects the social lives of athletes. Max tells me, "…most of my friends are athletes or teammates." Most athletes mentioned that they faced challenges in socializing outside of their athletic lives. Most commonly, the reason for this is because they do not have the time or energy to maintain close relationships with others outside of their teams and wider athlete-based social networks. Again, the time constraints that U SPORTS athletes face may result in their social lives becoming engulfed by their athletic identity. A contributing factor to this is that athletes may relocate from their hometowns in order to play for a particular university sports team. Charles voiced the benefits of being involved with a university team and moving to a new city, "…when I moved there and didn't know anyone, I had 20 new friends. So that part was awesome for me." By increasing nearly all modalities of association (intensity, frequency, priority, and duration) with their teammates, athletes come to rely heavily on this peer group as a social reference point (Adler & Adler, 1991; Wesley G. Jennings & Ronald L. Akers, 2011).

The athlete is an active agent in the process of role engulfment. Though the demands of university athletics may impose social restrictions, some contributing factors to role engulfment are willingly supported. Athletes find community and solidarity within their teams, and most athletes find that the strong social connections they foster through their athletic involvement are important and beneficial in their lives.

U SPORTS athletes described very similar circumstances and pressures that the NCAA athletes in Adler and Adler's (1991) study experienced. The NCAA is a markedly larger entity than U SPORTS. The NCAA generated one-billion-dollars in 2017-18, while U SPORTS generated four-million-dollars in revenue the same year (National Collegiate Athletic Association and Subsidiaries & Deloitte, 2018; U SPORTS, 2018). The stakes for NCAA athletes, coaches, programs, and schools may be much higher than U SPORTS. Expectations of athletes and the professionalization of amateur sport could have greater influence in the process of role engulfment amongst NCAA athletes. The intensity of role engulfment may not be as great for U SPORTS athletes, but nonetheless, it still exists as some athletes vie for playing time, professional contracts, spots on national teams, and academic scholarships. The results of this study indicate that aspects of U SPORTS athletes' social and academic lives may become engulfed by their athletic lives.

The use of cannabis can be interpreted as a response to the experiences of role engulfment, either as a way to manage or mitigate the effects of role engulfment, or potentially to support the process. All athletes used cannabis socially. Some athletes in this study used cannabis with non-athlete peers. This form of use distances them from their athletic peer group and their athletic identity. In other cases, athletes used cannabis to augment social activities with teammates. This form of cannabis use may bolster comradery and support their athletic identity. Athletes also use cannabis to promote relaxation and recovery. In the struggle to operate at peak athletic performance while keeping up with academic work some athletes turn to cannabis in order to wind-down, ease pain, and de-stress. Corey describes cannabis as "a nice way to unwind after a day, especially after a productive day. It's nice to smoke a little bit and sit on the couch have dinner hang out with your friends and that." In this scenario, Corey details how he uses cannabis to help mitigate the negative effects of time restraints and life-stressors, which are heightened through participation in university athletics. In this way, cannabis can be seen as a tool to manage the fatigue and exhaustion that many athletes face during their university careers.

Cannabis can be a way for student-athletes to temporarily distance themselves from their athletic identity. The arena of college athletics is a "quasi-total institution" (Adler & Adler, 1991, p. 78) in that it operates within a highly controlled bureaucracy that isolates individuals. Coaches drill 'bad' habits out of athletes, enforce rules of behaviour, and athletes are socialized in ways that transform their identities.

> I feel as an athlete people don't think that you smoke and when they find out they're almost surprised because they feel that—the people that I've talked to that were surprised felt like smoking weed wasn't for athletes… (Max)

Cannabis is perceived by the public as fundamentally contrary to the identity of the university athlete, and its use is a rejection of the traditional expectations of what a university athlete ought to be.

> …when [my teammates] grew up in high school it's like, none of us, the athlete group, smoked weed at all. But all the skaters and these music kids, they're the ones smoking pot at lunch. They've kind of held on to that mentality that's like, you're a stoner—stoner and athlete—it's a Venn diagram where there's a tiny, slimmest bit that is in the middle. That's how they would see it, I guess. (Charles)

Some athletes, like Charles, maintain social networks outside of their sport team. After emphasizing the distance between the different subcultures of the stoners and athletes, Charles continued on to explain that he had many non-athlete friends from his university residence who he would often smoke with. Charles had only a few companions on his U SPORTS hockey team that used cannabis, so he would smoke cannabis with his friends from his dormitory. Charles used cannabis to move between social groupings and affirm identities outside of university sport. Using the example of a Venn diagram, Charles explains that his status as both a hockey player and cannabis user is uncommon. Cannabis use is generally perceived to be contrary to the identity of athletes, at least in the discipline of hockey. During his U SPORTS career Charles rejected total role engulfment by maintaining a social identity outside of hockey with his non-athlete cannabis-using friend group in his university residence.

Conversely, in some cases the use of cannabis can be seen as affirming one's athletic identity when it is used socially amongst teammates. Neil gives a sense of what a night of cannabis use looks like with friends;

> Let's go to the grocery store and get snacks to prepare because we're going to be hungry, and then we'll smoke. We will play video games or a board game or put on a movie and we'll hang out, and then eventually we'll go to sleep.

Within basketball and football teams specifically, cannabis was commonly used during down time. Teammates used cannabis to "chill" and "hangout". "Chillin'" usually involves passive activities like watching movies, listening to music, playing video games, conversing, or making food together. The energy and time demands of university sport can create challenges for athletes to socialize outside of their teammate peer group. Teammates using cannabis together increases the modalities of association between the teammate peer group. By increasing the intensity, frequency, and duration of association with their teammate peer group cannabis-using athletes may intensify their reliance on this group as a social reference point. In this way, cannabis may promote the process of role engulfment.

U SPORTS athletes use cannabis to mitigate or manage some of the negative effects that sport may have on their personal, social, and academic lives. Athletes use cannabis as a sleep aid, an appetite stimulator, a social drug, and to generally manage stress and relax. This allows some athletes to manage the symptoms and direct pressures of the process of athletic role engulfment. Cannabis use within some teams, appears to be more accepted, and can be perceived to support the process of role engulfment by intensifying relationships amongst teammates and tightening social ties. That said, cannabis use amongst teammates can also serve as a way for individuals to connect outside of their athletic roles and the bounds of the quasi-total institution of university sport. Using cannabis in social settings can be both a way to challenge the process of role engulfment, or a way to reaffirm it.

**Athletes' Accounts of the Negative Effects of Cannabis**

Athletes claim that cannabis affects them positively by managing pain, aiding in sleep and satiety, increasing relaxation and decreasing stress and anxiety, and it may help them achieve flow states in certain situations. The majority of athletes tended to downplay the potential risks and negative effects of the drug. As mentioned in the sample limitations, it is likely that all the athletes in this study held positive views toward cannabis, and therefore would present the drug in high regards. Additionally, some of these cannabis users have sufficient enough experience with the drug—or surround themselves with people who have experience with the drug—to use it responsibly. Much of the negative experiences that were shared by athletes involved uninformed use, misuse, or polysubstance use. Athletes noted that negative experiences were more likely to occur for inexperienced users. One of the most common ways of misusing cannabis is overconsumption. Overconsumption is especially risky when consuming cannabis edibles with unknown levels of THC, and/or the user is inexperienced and unaware of how they will react to cannabis. In some cases, athletes claim that smoking cannabis after a night of drinking can mitigate an alcohol-induced hangover the next day, while in other cases using both cannabis and alcohol can cause extreme disorientation and nausea. The results of alcohol and cannabis interactions may be dependent on both the timing and the size of the dose of each substance, among other factors such as the user's familiarity with both drugs. Other negative impacts of cannabis noted by athletes include, lethargy the day after use, detriment to memory, and a decrease in focus in some activities like reading. Generally, athletes found that the negative impacts of cannabis were easy to identify and avoid. Also, most athletes either abstain or minimize their cannabis use during the season, so they find it does not negatively impact their athletic performance.

Beyond the potential for overconsumption, negative interactions between multiple substances, and effects like decrease in memory function and lethargy, a concern for athletes was how cannabis smoke can impact their respiratory system. The negative effects of inhaling combusted plant matter were discussed in every interview, but again, athletes tended to downplay the negative impacts that this had on them. This may be because they choose to not use cannabis frequently during the season or in times leading up to competitions.

> …if I'm smoking my lungs don't feel the greatest in the morning or the day after… it's not like it's lasting or anything like that. (Sylvester)

Even though combustion-inhalation through joints, pipes, or one-hitters was the main consumption method for most athletes, nearly all expressed minor concerns with inhaling cannabis smoke similar to Sylvester. Some athletes chose to use edibles or dry-herb vaporizers when they were able to, but smoking cannabis proved to be the quickest, easiest, and generally most effective method of consumption.

These concerns about the negative health effects of cannabis smoke are warranted. Current research suggests that smoking cannabis is associated with chronic respiratory symptoms such as coughing and breathlessness and is correlated with symptoms of chronic bronchitis (Tashkin, 2015). Interestingly, the nominal concerns athletes have for the respiratory harms of cannabis match the current scientific evidence that finds, “the risks of respiratory complications of cannabis smoking appear to be relatively small and to be far lower than those of tobacco smoking” (Committee on the Health Effects of Marijuana et al., 2017).

Most athletes also made sure to point out that a very small number of people would actually choose to play a competitive game while under the influence of cannabis. As mentioned with regards to flow states, the effects of cannabis are perceived to be beneficial for low-stakes recreational activities or training exercises, but when it comes to fast-paced and aggressive competition, using cannabis does not make sense.

> I've played baked before and it affected me, for sure. It definitely affected me. I wouldn't say as much physically but the mental part of it… I'm more directing the game and setting everyone up... in my position I have to think like three steps ahead, whereas I was more in the moment when I was high... if I had a serious game, I wouldn't get baked beforehand. (Mavis)

Mavis found that using cannabis before a hockey game in a recreational tournament negatively impacted her abilities. Much like Mavis describes here, Brody, Max, Josh, and Riley explicitly state that being under the influence of cannabis during competitive sport was or would be detrimental to their performance. No respondents ever purposefully got high before a serious competition, but several players had shared stories of playing recreational sport while under the influence of cannabis. Additionally, several athletes mentioned they knew of professional and amateur athletes who would often use cannabis before games.

Canadian university athletes perceive there to be minimal negative effects of their casual cannabis use. The most common concern was regarding smoking cannabis and its potential effects on respiratory health. However, current scientific evidence presents little cause for concern for occasional or casual smokers of cannabis. Along with minor respiratory harms, athletes found that cannabis can be deleterious to their memory, promote lethargy, and may interact poorly with other substances such as alcohol—though contradictorily, it is also purported to negate some of the undesirable effects of alcohol. Additionally, overconsumption can be an issue with inexperienced users, especially when the potency of the dried flower or cannabis edible is unknown.

**Conclusion**

Athletes use cannabis to manage physical pain. Neil details his experiences with using cannabis to aid in recovery during pre-season training camps, while Karl and Riley both used cannabis to manage pain resulting from sports-related injuries. Furthermore, both Karl and Riley used cannabis to replace physician-prescribed pain medication. The high rates of opioid use or pain management along with the high prevalence of misuse in professional and amateur sport is alarming. There is growing evidence that cannabis may be a viable and lower risk analgesic when used as a replacement or in conjunction with opioid medication (Lucas et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2019). Beyond physical pain, athletes also purport that cannabis is a useful sleep aid and appetite stimulant.

Athletes also use cannabis to manage mental wellbeing, mainly by reducing anxiety and stress. Former hockey players Charles and Owen both share how cannabis was used to mitigate symptoms of stress and anxiety that resulted from their participation in high-intensity competitive sport. Former professional athletes are advocating for cannabinoid therapy as a treatment for PTSD, and scientific research supports the possibility that it could be a viable treatment (Parker, 2017a). Cannabis is used by some athletes because it increases a sense of flow in certain activities. For these respondents, flow states were often achieved during non-competitive activities such as recreational downhill skiing. Athletes do not wish to participant in competitive sport under the influence of cannabis, though some purport that they know of other individuals who do.

Adler and Adler (1991) find that the athletic role consumes so much time and energy that the other roles of the individual—the academic and the social—are often enveloped by the dominant athletic role. This process is called role engulfment. The academic and social roles are neglected or are molded to fit within their athletic lives. I argue that U SPORTS athletes undergo a similar process, though perhaps not as intensely as their American counterparts who Adler and Adler (1991) studied. The requirements and demands of university athletics affect the social lives of athletes in many ways. Athletes may experience positive effects that result from athletic role engulfment. For instance, being part of a sports team provides strong and lasting social ties. However, these strong social ties may be a barrier for some individuals to establish or maintain an identity outside of athletics. Considering cannabis' prohibited status in sport, it can be used to challenge the process of role engulfment. Athletes like Charles may use cannabis to maintain a peer group separate from his hockey team. It can also be used individually to temporarily distance one's self from their athletic identity. Conversely, many of the participants who played basketball and football used cannabis with teammates. In this way, cannabis may serve to support role engulfment insofar as it strengthens socialization amongst teammates.

Athletes also note the negative effects of cannabis. The major negative effects of cannabis are a result of uninformed use (i.e. improper dosing) and polysubstance use (i.e. using alcohol and cannabis together). A common concern for athletes was the respiratory harms that occur from cannabis smoke inhalation. That said, the respondents mostly downplayed the potential harms of using cannabis.

Athletes are using cannabis to address negative symptoms brought on through sport involvement. Injuries and burnout occur because of intense training regimens and high-risk sport competition. Athletes face difficulty sleeping, eating, and maintaining mental health given the demands of being a student athlete. Furthermore, the large time and energy commitments may result in role engulfment. The results of this study show that cannabis is used by Canadian university athletes to manage or mitigate negative physical, mental, and social effects that result from elite sport participation.

Cannabis is used by university athletes in a myriad of different ways, but it is prohibited because it has potential to enhance performance and cause harm, and because it is contrary to the SoS. Although health risks of using cannabis are present, athletes tend to minimize them. Instead, athletes are more concerned with the punitive consequences of being caught using cannabis, along with the stigmatization that occurs after being exposed as a cannabis user.

# Chapter Four: The Stigmatization of Cannabis-Using Athletes

## Introduction

The negative consequences that come about from cannabis use occur, most commonly, not because of physiological interactions with the substance, but because of the negative constructions of the drug in both society and sport. The use of cannabis amongst university athletes is not uncommon. The most recent figures find that one-fifth to one-quarter of university athletes use the drug (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018b; Spence & Gauvin, 1996). Both of these surveys were administered in places and times under cannabis prohibition and both rely on self-reported data of illegal substance use. Given how the legal and social context of cannabis has changed, and is continuing to change in Canada, it is not unlikely that these figures underestimate the extent of cannabis use amongst university athletes today. That said, cannabis is still prohibited in university sport competition in Canada. Athletes can face official punishments in the form of suspensions or expulsions from U SPORTS if they are caught using the substance. Athletes' scholarships may be cancelled along with their opportunity to attain higher education through sport. Coaches may choose to cut an athlete's playing time as punishment, meaning their position on the team may be put in jeopardy. Athletes may face exclusion and stigmatization from teammates and the sport community if they are perceived to be cannabis users. Last, the online publication of positive drug tests of U SPORTS athletes results in a permanent blemish on the character of individuals which may negatively impact their life chances such as future career and athletic opportunities. Much of the negative consequences that come from cannabis use are social in nature. These negative social consequences are vestiges of a near century of cannabis prohibition and stigmatization in Canada.

Athletes have been constructed to be public role models. The development of professional sport along with the socially constructed ideas of what athletes ought to be and how they ought to behave have produced unrealistic expectations for athletes to adhere to. Virtual demands are assumptive social facts imposed upon an individual by the public (Goffman, 1963). They function as form of social control in that they impose a certain role that individuals ought to adhere to. Varsity athletes are expected to present themselves as model citizens, and above all adhere to modern ideas of Olympism that are based in unrealistic ideas of purity. Although negative consequences for the occasional use of legal cannabis are highly unlikely for U SPORTS athletes, the repercussions can be severe and long-lasting. Athletes perceive that cannabis use is a discreditable act because of the unique expectations the public places on them. Even though cannabis is legal, athletes face stigmatization if their use is made public.

With the wave of legalization and decriminalization measures occurring in Canada, and throughout the world, it may appear that negative views toward cannabis are changing. However, vestigial social structures that stigmatize and punish cannabis users still remain, such as its continued ban in most amateur and professional sport leagues. In contradiction to this ban, both the current data on cannabis use rates of university athletes and the results of this study show that cannabis use is not unusual within U SPORTS. In fact, cannabis use is normalized to a certain degree in some sport cultures (i.e. basketball). One basketball player even remarked, "…if they [drug] tested everyone I just don't think we would have a basketball team anymore". Within sport disciplines where cannabis is more normalized cannabis may fall under a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy. Cannabis is banned in a sport, but often its use is only unacceptable if athletes are caught using it. The level of acceptability of cannabis is dependent on the level of inter and inner-team competition, type of sport, and coaches' and teammates' perceptions. Although some teammates, coaches, and administration may impose harsh consequences, others may choose to turn a blind eye to cannabis use. Their decided ignorance may be because they do not want to jeopardize their team's chances of success or because they personally do not perceive the use of cannabis to be anti-social or discrediting.

Understandably, athletes who use cannabis perceive cannabis use to be fairly normal. The fact remains, however, that it is still banned in U SPORTS, and athletes who wish to use cannabis must do so covertly and discretely. An ever-increasing number of professional athletes are going public with their use and support for cannabis (Bishop, 2016; Robson, 2017; "Ross Rebagliati Is Chasing Cannabis Gold," 2018). However, using cannabis is still a discreditable and punishable act within both university sport and global amateur sport. Athletes employ various information control techniques to avoid detection of their cannabis use. These techniques range from abstinence, to predicting when drug tests will occur, and retaining information within a tight-knit in-group of cannabis-using teammates and friends. Athletes experience unique virtual demands imposed on them by the public, and their cannabis use conflicts with these demands. There is a perception among athletes that some coaches, teammates, and others choose to remain purposefully ignorant of athletes' cannabis use. The discrepancy between the use of the drug, its conditional acceptability, and its prohibition indicate that the social constructions of cannabis are in flux. There is an inconsistency between the current U SPORTS cannabis policy and how sports people use, perceive, and understand cannabis use. It appears that the most severe negative consequences that come from using cannabis occur if an athlete is caught by an anti-doping authority or exposed to the public as a cannabis user.

**Stigma**

A stigma is a mark that disqualifies an individual from full social acceptance (Goffman, 1963). According to Goffman (1963), there are three types of stigma. These include, abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigma (i.e. race, nationality, religion, and class). A stigma can take the form of a visible characteristic, an act, or an inherited trait. Using cannabis is an act that blemishes the character of athletes. Cannabis use is not coherent with the socially agreed upon image of what an athlete ought to be and is therefore a discreditable act for them.

Stigmatization is a process that discredits or discounts an individual. This process is culturally and socially specific insofar as the acts or characteristics that society deems to be discrediting are highly contextual. An act that leads to the stigmatization of one individual, such as the use of cannabis, may be inconsequential for a different individual. Stigmatization does not occur indiscriminately.

For publicly notable individuals, an act may be permissible in their personal life but not in their public life. The act may be incompatible with the image that the public has constructed of them. "Where an individual has a public image, it seems to be constituted from a small selection of facts which may be true to [them], which facts are inflated into a dramatic and newsworthy appearance, and then used as a full picture of [them]" (Goffman, 1963, p. 71). A selection of social facts which may be true and inflated, or perhaps altogether false, are applied to individuals who maintain public notoriety. A notable individual's publicly constructed image is often not the same as their actual identity. Goffman (1963) calls this constructed image a virtual social identity.

> I smoked weed around my mom and she was shocked…like for my brother it was expected in a sense of the image that he portrays because he has dreadlocks and stuff like that. But for me, being an athlete, she didn't think that I smoked or anything like that. She thought I was all academic… (Max)

Here, Max explains how his mother had constructed a virtual identity of himself as a strait-laced student who does not use cannabis. Max's mother does not apply the same virtual identity to his non-athlete brother. Symbolic identifiers and disidentifiers affect one's virtual identity, and thus affect whether an individual is stigmatized. Max's brother, who wears his hair in dreadlocks, presents identifying traits of a cannabis user. Therefore, cannabis use is not considered a discreditable act for Max's brother. Other athletes, like Josh and Karl, described similar experiences of people applying assumptions about their biographies because of their notable status as university athletes. Even Josh's cannabis dealer was "hella shook" to learn that he was a varsity athlete who used cannabis.

When a part of an individual's biography is constructed by the public it can conflict with their actual identity. Virtual demands are the expectations that the public imposes on notable individuals. These expectations are created when a small selection of facts (which may be true, dramatized, or even false) are applied to an individual with public notoriety. Furthermore, "…discrepancies between virtual and actual identity will always occur and always give rise to the need for tension management (in regard to the discredited), and information control (in regard to the discreditable)" (Goffman, 1963, p. 138).

Information control is the selective disclosure or concealment of social information. It is required when there is an incongruency between one's virtual and actual identity. Individuals who practice discreditable acts, such as athletes who use cannabis, must practice information control techniques to keep this act from becoming discrediting and subsequently stigmatizing. They must appear to correspond to their virtual identity. In other words, they must pass. "What are unthinking routines for normals can become management problems for the discreditable" (Goffman 1963, p. 88). The average Canadian adult can use recreational cannabis without concern, but the Canadian university athlete must both conceal their cannabis use from the public and avoid submitting a positive drug test.

A stigma is a discrediting mark applied to an individual. The process of stigmatization is contextual insofar as stigmas are not applied indiscriminately to all individuals. Individuals who maintain public notoriety often must manage their virtual and actual identities. Virtual demands are expectations placed on individuals based on a small collection of social facts that may or not be true. An individual whose virtual and actual identity are incongruent must utilize information control techniques in order to pass in society and avoid stigmatization.

**The Discredited Athlete and Virtual Demands**

Using cannabis is a discreditable act. It was prohibited for nearly a century in Canada, and the users of the once-illicit drug are stereotypically perceived as criminal deviants. Of course, cannabis is now legal in Canada. This indicates that cannabis use is becoming more socially acceptable, but as indicated by Goffman (1963), "not all undesirable attributes are at issue, but only those which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be" (p. 3). The type of individual of concern here is the university athlete. Being a university athlete comes with a unique set of expectations implied and enforced by the public. The expectations set upon athletes may be a result of the increasing importance Western society has placed on sport in the development and socialization of youth (Dimeo, 2009). As such, sport has become solidified as a fundamental institution and is presented as a site for the reproduction of pro-social behaviour.

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five on the SoS, modern sport reproduces mythologized ideals of absolute purity and cleanliness amongst amateur athletes (Dimeo, 2016; Ritchie, 2014). Historically, the prohibition of cannabis has disqualified the users of the substance from full social acceptance, making its use anti-social and morally wrong. Athletes are expected to present themselves as drug free, lest they face repercussions. Furthermore, their status as an athlete places them in public view and under heightened scrutiny to appear ‘clean’.

> Even when I'm at softball, I’ll see the team that we’re playing first and I’ll see if I know anyone on that team because if they smell weed coming from the dugout and I’m up there batting up next they might—even if I'm not smoking—they'll look at me and be like, ‘that's a university basketball player. I know who that is.’ If I'm just a regular university student with that shit they won't even bat an eye. (Karl)

Here, Karl perceives that his status as a university basketball player affects how others interpret social information that he makes visible. During a recreational softball game Karl needs to manage his association with cannabis in order to avoid stigmatization. This quote from Karl highlights the unique position of university athletes because he makes sure to note that if a “regular university student”—or a ‘normal’—was found to be smoking cannabis, the process of stigmatization would be unlikely to occur. Karl’s status as a varsity athlete comes with certain expectations imposed by the public. Goffman (1963) refers to these as virtual demands. These virtual demands are a type of social control that involves the public creating an image and imposing social facts upon an individual who has notoriety. The public act of using cannabis may not be stigmatizing for ‘normals’, but it is certainly contrary to amateur sporting ideals that seek to uphold impossible ideals of purity, and is therefore stigmatizing for athletes (Dimeo, 2016).

Athletes are required to present themselves as role models to younger athletes and the general public. Some universities hold summer sports camps, which are often staffed with varsity players. As well, youth sports teams are encouraged to attend league games through discounted tickets and special promotional nights. Varsity athletes are also students who represent their schools. They are expected to be both elite athletes who exhibit proper sporting values, and competent university students who represent their school and maintain status as respectable community members. Leroy states, "You're the face of the University when you're an athlete… You're a representative, even still. I used to play for [the university], so I'm still unofficially a representative." In this quote Leroy explains how his status as a former varsity athlete affects how he must present himself to the athletic community. The student athlete must not only be a studious academic, but a respectable community member. They represent their school and their community and must manage social information, such as their cannabis use, to comply with their virtual identity.

According to Goffman (1963), "…every time an individual joins an organization or community, there is a marked change in the structure of knowledge about [them]" (p. 67). In joining a varsity sports team, individuals receive a new status or notoriety, often within the local community. Their notoriety means that some teams have formal rules on the social information they are allowed to share in public.

> …we had to sign a contract that says we weren't going to wear any of our varsity gear out and we could get into a lot of trouble even if we were just going to a pub for wings and you're having a beer. No, you can't do that. It's the Integrity of the school. I can't imagine if there was a video of me smoking weed with my varsity gear on and I was still an athlete. That would have been horrendous. (Mavis)

The symbol of varsity-logoed clothing acts as an identifier, marking individuals as part of a prestigious community. If an individual who is associated with this community is found to be taking part in hedonistic, illegal, or distasteful activities, the positive coherence of both the individual and the prestigious community is broken up. Disidentifiers—symbols that are contrary to an individual's virtual identity—such as cannabis consumption, can be detrimental to the image, status, and public perception of the individual and communities they are a part of.

Cannabis is legal and its social acceptability is undergoing a process of change. However, the virtual demands that are imposed on university athletes are different than those imposed on non-athletes. The notoriety of university athletes means they are held to different expectations. They must adhere to the modern ideals of sport and present themselves as role models for the community. Using drugs, especially cannabis, is still a discrediting act amongst sports people, and therefore, athletes must keep their cannabis use hidden from the general public.

University athletes can face severe and lasting repercussions from using cannabis. These repercussions range from suspensions from leagues, to decreased playing time, to the limiting of athletic and life chances through the publication of their doping infraction on the CCES sanction registry. All of these penalties can continue to negatively affect the individual by marking them with a stigma. Though cannabis is legal in Canada, virtual demands are imposed on university athletes because of their prestige status. Cannabis use may not be a discrediting trait for 'normals' but it still is for athletes.

**Consequences of Cannabis Use**

If athletes are caught using cannabis through a drug test, they can face official punishments in the form of suspensions or expulsions from U SPORTS. During the 2017 U SPORTS football season two athletes tested positive for cannabis. Both players received two-month suspensions (CBC News, 2018; CCES, 2017b, 2018a; Palmeter, 2018). Additionally, the recipient of the U SPORTS Football Rookie of the Year trophy was stripped of his award for his cannabis violation (*U SPORTS Rookie Stripped of Award*, 2018). More recently, A University of Waterloo football player received a similar two-month suspension for a positive sample collected on the last day of their competitive season and ten days after cannabis was legalized (CTV Kitchener, 2019). Suspensions like these, which continue to occur after cannabis legalization, can jeopardize an athlete's position on the team and potentially any scholarships or awards they held. Furthermore, the public posting of the names in the form of outcome summary reports leaves a lasting stigma for these university athletes. Posting these infractions on the online Canadian Sport Sanction Registry[8], and posting media releases that detail some doping cases[9] make information surrounding an individual's doping infraction public and permanent.

> It's really unfortunate because that'll obviously go with them after they're done. Chances are these guys aren't going to go play professional sports, but you go to an interview and your employer Googles your name and that's the first thing that comes up? That's unfortunate. (Charles)

Charles highlights the potential reverberating effects of the CCESs punishment through public disclosure, noting that this form of public shaming could negatively impact future job prospects. Additionally, if athletes do try out for a professional or higher-level team, it is likely that this doping infraction will hinder their chances. Through these online postings of doping infractions, athletes are officially marked with both the stigma of being a cannabis user as well as the stigma of being a doper.

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[8] https://cces.ca/canadian-sport-sanction-registry
[9] https://cces.ca/node/73

If athletes are found to be using cannabis by their coaches or other team staff, it is highly unlikely that they will receive formal sanctions from anti-doping organizations. Instead, coaches would likely choose to handle the infraction internally in order to avoid negative attention toward their team. No athletes with whom I spoke were ever on the receiving end of internal punishments, but they all had a fairly good idea of what disciplinary action would be taken if they were caught using cannabis irresponsibly.

> If our coach found out, there would still be repercussions in a sense of practices where you just get bagged or one weekend you're not playing, or something. It also depends on the coach too. I know some coaches maybe would turn a blind eye to it and some coaches would be super intense about it. It would depend on the coach. (Sylvester)

Along with punishments coming from coaches, athletes may face exclusion and stigmatization from teammates and the sport community if they are perceived to be cannabis users. That said, the acceptability of cannabis varies between sport disciplines and level of competition. Six of the 12 participants in this study are basketball players, and it appeared that within the basketball community the use of cannabis was generally accepted. In fact, one of my key informants, who did not use cannabis, helped me recruit participants because he knew which players on his team did.

Within football, teams are so large that various drug-users and drug-using groups may exist within them. Brody draws a dichotomy between the cannabis smokers and the alcohol consumers on his football team,

> …since we got like 90 guys, we got a pretty big split. There are the guys that will go drinking every weekend—the partiers. And there are the guys that will just kind of sit back and smoke and hang out. (Brody)

With only one volleyball player interviewed it is difficult to get a sense of the acceptability of cannabis use within this sport discipline, but Sylvester makes the point that other factors besides sport discipline also come in to play. Sylvester has a sibling currently playing on his former team, and notes that the "team culture" is drastically different than when he played:

> We played together, and we also partied together, hung out together after the fact. Everyone was good friends. And now I've heard it's very, very volleyball oriented, which isn't a bad thing or anything but it's just, like, you go to practice do your thing and then go home. I guess a few of them drink but that's about it… very different team culture… it's more straight-edged. It makes sense. It just happened to be the group of people that got together. (Sylvester)

It is not known whether the difference in "team culture", in this case, is a result of generational differences in perceptions of drugs, professionalism in amateur sport, or simply happenstance. However, all of these factors could influence if and how athletes use drugs like cannabis. Furthermore, Mavis, the only woman participant in this study, brings forth how gender could be an influencing factor in the acceptability of cannabis in sport:

> From a young age we are thinking, okay, if women smoke weed, they're not an athlete. Definitely think that there is a higher standard for even just women in sport to begin with. It's just harder in general, and that's just another layer on top of it.

A key point that Mavis makes is that being a woman athlete is a challenge in and of itself. Mavis plays in a hockey program and notes that this program was added to match the number of men's athletic teams but does not reap the financial benefits that other teams do. Women's hockey is self-funded, and Mavis notes an extreme discrepancy in funding and scholarship allocations between female and male programs. Moreover, this particular team that Mavis played on has historically been one of the stronger contenders in their conference and in the overall U SPORTS league. These factors mean that the inner-team competition is heightened as athletes vie for playing time. Furthermore, they may be competing without the financial support of a scholarship, which raises the stakes of using cannabis.

> A lot of the girls on our team play for varsity and they play for [the provincial team] and they play for Canada, so they don't want [cannabis] to affect them at all. I think that that's why a lot of girls on our team aren't involved in that aspect, even with drinking to be honest with you. (Mavis)

Here, Mavis makes note that with this high level of competition, some athletes will choose to avoid all types of drugs because they do not want to risk jeopardizing their sporting success in any way.

Cannabis use within hockey appears to be highly stigmatized. Mavis highlighted that athletes who aspire to play at higher levels generally avoid all recreational drugs. Similarly, other hockey players may view cannabis as detrimental to their performance or as another reason for coaches to limit their playing time.

> Other guys on the team would call me and the other guys dopers. ‘Oh, you guys like dope eh?’. They were trying to tease us in the room so that we would get in trouble and then [the coach] wouldn’t be on them. (Owen)

This quotation from Owen highlights the competitive nature of hockey. The instance that Owen referred to took place during his time playing Junior-level hockey, where players are fighting to prove themselves to National Hockey League (NHL) or other professional leagues’ scouts. By drawing attention to the athletes who used cannabis it could result in less negative attention toward themselves and potentially more playing time and an increased chance of being noticed by scouts. Moreover, the hockey players who used cannabis noticed less of this cut-throat inner-team competition during their U SPORTS careers. This may be because U SPORTS is generally not a feeder organization for professional hockey leagues. U SPORTS is also not considered a feeder organization for professional basketball leagues. U SPORTS does produce Canadian Football League (CFL) players, but the CFL does not test for cannabis.

Given these findings, it is likely that the acceptability of cannabis in sport disciplines and specific teams relies on factors such as the competitiveness both within the team and amongst the league, along with the prospects of moving up to higher levels of competition, be it professional or national. This theory is supported by the NCAA National Study on Substance Use Habits of College Student-Athletes (2018a). This survey shows that Division III athletes report higher use of cannabis in every sport, both male and female, compared to the more elite Division I athletes. Furthermore, certain drugs appear to be more commonly used in particular disciplines. For instance, men’s ice hockey tends to have the highest rates of alcohol use and the lowest rates of cannabis use. Wrestling and baseball have high rates of anabolic steroid use, while lacrosse is near the top in almost every category of drug use. By and large, women’s rates of drug use in the

NCAA are lower than men's rates. Additionally, the "team culture", which is influenced by the members who comprise the team, the goals of these members, and the sport discipline itself, may influence the level of stigmatization toward cannabis users. Gender may influence the level of acceptance of cannabis use in that the stakes may be higher for women athletes they and may be weary to risk their position on the team.

**'Just Don't Get Caught': The Conditional Acceptability of Cannabis**

Many athletes still choose to use cannabis even though they may face severe penalties. Moreover, some athletes are often not overly concerned with keeping their cannabis use hidden from teammates, and in some cases their coaches. Veteran players often know who uses cannabis on their team and who does not, and rookies are quick to learn who uses cannabis and how acceptable it is within their new team:

> When I was on the team everyone knew exactly who used it and didn't. No one cared or anything like that, but I don't know, maybe there's the thought that things might somehow get back to a higher level rather than just players; coach, trainers, whoever it is... it's not like your teammates are going to rat you out. (Sylvester).

As I have explained in the previous section, the sport discipline, the specific team, and other contextual factors may impact on the potential consequences of cannabis use. Logically, these factors also affect how overt athletes are with their cannabis use. Cannabis use in and of itself is not a discrediting trait according to the athletes who I interviewed. What makes cannabis use a discrediting trait is if it is exposed to the public or disapproving coaches and teammates, or if it negatively affects the success or general functioning of the team. Some athletes mentioned that the acute or chronic physiological effects of cannabis may cause an athlete to perform poorly and therefore could affect the success of the team. However, as we have seen, it is unlikely that an athlete would continue using cannabis if it negatively affected their performance. The worst thing that can happen to an individual and a team, according to the respondents, is testing positive in a drug test. Players who test positive for cannabis could be suspended from competition, banned from the league, lose their scholarships, compromise the reputation of the team and school, and hinder the teams' chance of success.

It is not common for fellow teammates to discredit each other because of their cannabis use. Most athletes perceived cannabis use to be accepted or tolerated among teammates. Sylvester communicated this perception by stating, "When I was on the team everyone knew exactly who used it and who didn't. No one cared." Only in situations where the team is put at a disadvantage or when heightened competition between teammates is prevalent will the use of cannabis be discrediting. Situations where teammates are discredited for their cannabis use have been presented in the previous section using hockey as an example. Otherwise, it is the act of being caught by authority figures that creates the discrediting mark. The head coach is the main figure of authority with whom athletes are in closest relation to. The coach represents the first level of social grouping that all athletes choose to conceal information of their cannabis use from.

The coaches (head, assistant, or position-specific) decide who is on the team, who gets to play, and are often the first line of discipline for the players. Teams often have a set of rules or expectation that they must adhere to throughout the season. These rules can be formal, taking the form of signed contracts. The rules can be verbally discussed and mutually agreed upon. Or, they can be expected and assumed through the actions or sentiments expressed by the coaches. These rules often included clauses such as not engaging in drug or alcohol use or participating in illicit or irresponsible behaviour. Coaches and players have the same ultimate goal of sporting success, and they also share a high degree of responsibility over the reputation of themselves and their athletic program. Team rules are put in place with the goal to promote the success of the team, but also are used to maintain the reputation and appearance of the athletic program. "[The coach] is like 'if you guys use it it's your lives. It's your choice. Just don't be stupid and get kicked off the team and embarrass us'" (Brody).

Every coach is different. Some are former varsity athletes who may have used cannabis themselves, while others are ardently opposed to cannabis and its recent legalization. However, it is very clear to athletes that no coach wants to catch their athletes breaking rules and to have to issue punishments or sanctions to athletes who break those rules. Similar to how some teammates maintain indifference to each other's cannabis use, some coaches appear, at least to the athletes, to exhibit a similar indifference. Athletes suspect that coaches have some idea that their players engage in cannabis use.

> Another player on the team who was our best player for four years, it was the same thing. He was smoking every single day and I feel like our coach had to have known too, but he's not going to do anything. He's not going to report his best player to WADA. Especially with our coach too, because he was in the same situation as us. He was a varsity student athlete, so he had the same experiences. I'm sure that he has to know but it's his job to relay to us that it's still banned, and we shouldn't be doing it. (Riley)

Players perceive coaches to be either willfully ignorant, naïve, or out of touch with regards to the activities their players engage in during their time off the court. Coaches do not want to know that their athletes are using cannabis and players do not want to put their coach in a position where their cannabis use needs to be addressed in a disciplinary manner. Even though coaches would have to enforce their team rules and discipline, or in some way deal with knowledge that one of their athletes were using cannabis, it is still very much the act of getting caught that is discrediting for the athlete. The athletes who I spoke with determined that coaches, to a certain extent, must be aware that at least some of their athletes are using cannabis. Yet, coaches often do not wish to discipline athletes for such acts unless they have to. Coaches may choose to ‘turn a blind eye’ toward the cannabis use of their athletes if no higher authorities will hold them accountable. According to the athletes, unless the reputation of the coaches or the university is at stake, coaches would not discredit athletes for their cannabis use unless they felt pressure from higher authorities such as athletic or program directors.

The exception to this indifference of fellow teammates’ cannabis use occurs in teams where there are different individual goals, such as advancement to professional leagues. Particular sporting disciplines that have an excess of talented players and can act as pathways to professional or international competition, such as ice hockey, may be more likely to exhibit a lack of tolerance for cannabis use. On these teams, teammates are battling for playing time, a spot on the team, or to be noticed by professional scouts. The hyper-competitive atmosphere of these kinds of teams amplify any prospective discrediting act or trait. There were only two participants who were uncomfortable with allowing their cannabis use to be known amongst their teammates. Both participants were hockey players who played in highly competitive Junior leagues prior to their U SPORTS careers. It was during their time playing in their respective Junior leagues where they experienced a greater sense of inner-team competition and a heightened sense that their cannabis use was discrediting to their team roles. As Charles explains, “You don't want the coach to know you're doing anything but working out and playing hockey...”

**Information Control and Detection Avoidance Techniques**

Athletes can face severe repercussions if they use cannabis. These range from long-term suspensions from leagues, to decreased playing time, to the limiting of athletic and life chances through stigmatization. Yet, athletes continue to use cannabis. In order to use cannabis without experiencing negative consequences athletes employ various types of information control and detection avoidance techniques based on their perceptions of the risk and rewards of cannabis use. Athletes employ techniques such as timing their use and changing use patterns to avoid the potential for positive tests. They also relegate their use to backplaces and speak only to in-group members about their use.

Some athletes choose to abstain from cannabis use during the competitive season. This is the case for Brody and Karl, two frequent cannabis users out of season. To them, the consequences of submitting a positive drug test are too severe to risk using cannabis during the season. While these two athletes completely abstain, some athletes exercise timed-use strategies in order to decrease the likelihood that they will submit a positive drug test.

> There's the whole, 30 days it'll be out of your system, whether or not that's true, whether it's less or it's more. In our mind we would think it's 30 days, and we would count down and be like, okay we have a competition on this day, how many days is it from now? Okay, it's 31 days we can do it tonight and we can do it tomorrow, but we can't do it after. We would count down when we were able to do it. (Mavis)

Mavis indicates an understanding that THC metabolises slowly in one’s body. Using a 30-day rule, she and her teammates time their cannabis use to give a 30-day buffer between their consumption and the date of competition, when they might be tested. An understanding of the slow metabolism was mentioned by several athletes, and this 30-day rule was commonly used as a guide, though some athletes deduced that their high energy output as athletes may allow THC to metabolised more quickly. Along with this 30-day rule, veteran athletes also learn what times they are likely to be drug tested. The National Championships were unanimously agreed upon to be the most likely time one might get drug tested. Neil explains the logic of this, “You're like, we're probably going to make Nationals, I need to not smoke 30 days leading up to Nationals, other than that I'm good.”

The knowledge of the frequency and likelihood of being tested in U SPORTS is acquired through experience in the league. Athletes like Neil express how veteran players, who have played in U SPORTS for several years, become confident in their ability to predict when and who will be drug tested.

> …you're 18 and you don't know how any of this works and you show up and you're like, oh God the drug police, I need to be very careful. Versus my fourth and fifth year as an undergrad student and I'm like, I know how this works. This is not a risk, nothing's going to happen.

Athletes in this study note that drug testing would likely occur only for players who are breaking records or exhibit obvious excellence and talent, or during nation championship events. Although it may be thought that all drug tests are random, according the Canadian Anti-Doping Program, both random and targeted tests are administered (CCES, 2017a).

It is not a secret that the CCES faces challenges in administering a sufficient number of tests to deter athletes from doping and that administering a drug test is costly (between $500-800 per test) (Maki, 2012). In the year from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019 CCES administered a total of 498 drug tests (in and out of competition) in university sports (CCES, 2018b). U

SPORTS consists of 56 member institution and approximately 40,000 athletes. This means that approximately 0.01% of these 40,000 athletes get tested per year. For some veteran athletes the knowledge about the lack of certainty of drug testing makes the severity of the punishment irrelevant. In one case, Sylvester mentioned that his school's volleyball program had not had a single athlete drug tested in eight years, while Neil claims that with a combined nine years of U SPORTS participation between himself and his partner they had seen one teammate drug tested, and this was after a National Championship game. Indeed, the probability of being drug tested—for the majority of athletes—is so low that some find that the occasional use of cannabis is not much of a risk at all.

Avoiding detection from drug tests is one thing, but hiding cannabis use from teammates, coaches, and the public is another. In some cases, athletes do not perceive any threat in teammates or coaches knowing of their cannabis use. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, athletes who play on teams with a high level of inner-team competition, or perhaps face greater penalties for being marked as a cannabis user have more need to keep their cannabis use covert. Moreover, the virtual demands that athletes must manage means that all athletes, and in some cases even former athletes who still maintain status within the local athletic community, must hide their cannabis use from the public.

> There was only about four of us that smoked pot on that team, but that was like… pot-growing central. When we would smoke pot, they would be like yeah, we shouldn't tell anyone else on the team. It would be secret. (Charles)

Charles, a former hockey player, notes that even while in a region in Canada well known for their production of cannabis, within his team it was still important for him and his teammates to conceal their cannabis use. Charles, along with other cannabis-using athletes, keep their use hidden from the public and some teammates by using cannabis in backplaces where they do not have to worry about detection. Backplaces are both spatial and social. According to Goffman (1963), "the individual's spatial world will be divided into different regions according to the contingencies embedded in them for the management of social and personal identity…" (p. 83). Rarely would athletes like Charles overtly use cannabis at team functions or public places where the stigma of cannabis use might be identified and discredited by others.

**Conclusion**

Athletes are stigmatized if they are caught, or it becomes known that they are using cannabis. Cannabis is legal for recreational use and may no longer be a discrediting trait for 'normals', or non-athletes. However, Canadian university athletes must adhere to virtual demands that come with being part of a prestige social group. They are expected to adhere to modern ideals of sport which emphasize purity and fairness through 'clean' sport. Furthermore, they are role models for the athletic community as well as ambassadors of their school. Their unique status and social expectations mean that they face severe consequences for being caught using cannabis while 'normals' do not. These consequences can be instrumental, such as suspensions or removal of awards or scholarships. They can also be social, such as the online publication of athletes' doping infractions, and stigmatization from the public, coaches, and in some cases teammates.

The acceptability of cannabis varies between teams and sport disciplines. Two hockey players, Owen and Charles, described a low level of cannabis use among teammates. This was not the case for other participants who played basketball, football, or volleyball. Recent data from the NCAA shows that substance use rates vary by discipline, gender, and level of competition. It is possible that factors such as sporting discipline, team or sport culture, level of competition, and gender may be related to the acceptability or rates of cannabis use in Canadian university sport.

The acceptability of cannabis use in sport appears to vary depending on several factors. This also means that the consequences may be more severe in different contexts, and therefore, athletes apply information control and detection avoidance techniques to different degrees. The hockey players took heightened measures to conceal their use from teammates, such as backplace use. This is in contrast to the experiences of basketball, football, and volleyball players. As Sylvester notes, "…it's not like your teammates are going to rat you out."

Athletes change use patterns to avoid detection from tests. Some athletes completely abstain from cannabis use during the competitive season while others employ the '30-day rule'. Veteran athletes are privy to targeted drug testing procedures of the CCES and choose to use cannabis in situations which they are confident they will not be drug tested. These situations include pre-season training or when they are injured. Furthermore, the CCES lacks the resources to administer a sufficient amount drug tests to establish certainty that cannabis use will be punished.

Cannabis may be legal, but it is still prohibited in amateur sport. The few unlucky athletes who are caught through drug tests face severe and lasting consequences. The virtual demands imposed on athletes position their cannabis use as a discrediting trait. This means that athletes may face stigmatization if the public, or in some cases their teammates, become aware of their cannabis use. Athletes who are caught using this legal drug are discredited and disqualified from full social acceptance.

# Chapter Five: Cannabis and the SoS

## Introduction

According to WADA cannabis is prohibited in amateur sport because it poses potential to harm athletes and enhance their performance. It also goes against the SoS. These three criteria—harm, performance enhancing, and the SoS—are used to determine if a substance should be placed on the Prohibited List. In this chapter I will first define the SoS and locate it in a modern context by presenting several critiques of this concept from academic literature. I will then present a brief social history of this phrase. The concept of the SoS has been constructed through the modern Olympic programme and its interactions with society throughout the last century. The SoS is defined as the intrinsic values of sport, but I will show that the values put forth through this term have been continually reconstructed to promote specific ideals of the time. The SoS is flexible and fluid. Currently, the SoS is constructed to promote drug-free sport.

I will then present how cannabis-using athletes define the SoS, and how they situate cannabis in relation to it. When asked about the SoS, all athletes were unfamiliar with WADA's official definition of the phrase. The majority were surprised to learn that the SoS is one of three reasons why cannabis is prohibited and may actually be the sole reason for its prohibition. Huestis et al. (2011) claim that cannabis poses a high risk of harm and that it enhances the performance of athletes. Both of these claims are refuted by the evidence shared by several scholars (D. R. Campos et al., 2003; M. Dunn, 2013; Waddington et al., 2013). The SoS is the "fundamental rational" (WADA, 2021, p. 10) for the WADA Code, therefore the SoS can be seen as the major contributing factor for the prohibition of cannabis.

Without knowing WADA's official definition, the university athletes in this study provided three key characteristics of what they believe the intrinsic values of sport are: respect, community, and fair play. Athletes unanimously agree that fair play is one of the most important values of sport. Doping is not the only factor that affects fair play in sport, but respondents most commonly defined fair play through an anti-doping lens. Although these athletes are cannabis users, and therefore considered 'dopers' according to anti-doping organizations like WADA and CCES, they placed doping control as a top concern in the pursuit of maintaining fairness in sport.

Unsurprisingly, all cannabis-using athletes in this study are of the opinion that cannabis should not be on the Prohibited List, especially now that it is legal. Their conceptualizations of doping substances are different from WADA's. Athletes find that the SoS criterion is confusing, inconsistent, and a redundant way to define doping substances. While WADA uses criteria that take into account health factors and adherence to the supposed intrinsic sporting values, most athletes are primarily concerned if a substance unnaturally and unfairly enhances an individual's athletic performance. There is a divergence between athletes' and WADA's definitions of doping.

I conclude this chapter by presenting the concept of drug fluidity. The fluid drug model emphasizes the importance of socio-contextual factors in human-drug relationships. The athletes in this study do not believe that cannabis unnaturally enhances one's performance, nor do they believe that the use of the drug provides an unfair advantage. They perceive it to be similar to substances such as caffeine, alcohol, or ibuprofen, and distance it from drugs like steroids. Athletes situate cannabis on a continuum in relation to other drugs based on their perceptions of its acceptability, performance-enhancing potential, and risks. The ways that athletes describe and use cannabis, along with the incongruencies between athletes' and WADA's definitions of doping, provides support that drugs are fluid social constructions instead of static chemical compounds.

**Background and History of the SoS**

The SoS is defined by WADA as the intrinsic value of sport, which is the "ethical pursuit of human excellence through the dedicated perfection of each *Athlete's* natural talents" (WADA, 2021, p. 10). The entire anti-doping program has been constructed to uphold the SoS. WADA uses three criteria to determine whether a substance should be prohibited in sporting competition; if the substance has the potential to enhance performance; if it may harm the athlete; and if the substance goes against the SoS (WADA, 2021). If a drug is deemed to hit two of these criteria it is placed on the Prohibited List. According to WADA, the SoS is both the intrinsic value of sport as well as a criterion used to classify drugs as banned doping substances. The concept and application of the SoS is vague and may be interpreted in various ways (International Network of Humanistic Doping Research [INHDR], 2012; Waddington & Møller, 2014). It is therefore important to present the expanded official definition of the concept. In this expanded definition WADA identifies a set of particular values that make up the SoS. According to WADA the SoS is,

> …the celebration of the human spirit, body and mind. It is the essence of Olympism and is reflected in the values we find in and through sport, including:
>
> • Health
>
> • Ethics, fair play and honesty
>
> • *Athletes'* rights as set forth in the *Code*
>
> • Excellence in performance
>
> • Character and *Education*
>
> • Fun and joy
>
> • Teamwork
>
> • Dedication and commitment

• Respect for rules and laws

• Respect for self and other *Participant*s

• Courage

• Community and solidarity

The spirit of sport is expressed in how we play true. Doping is fundamentally contrary to the spirit of sport. (WADA, 2021, p. 10)

The SoS has not always existed as it does today. The creation of this concept of intrinsic values in sport is the result of the establishment of the modern Olympics. In the late 19$^{th}$ century Pierre de Coubertin sought to generate a social movement stemming from the revitalization of the Greek Olympics. In reaction to increasing industrialization and commercialization in 19$^{th}$ century Europe, Coubertin proposed a rebirth of the ancient Greek Olympics. This new Olympic movement heavily mythologized the ideals of the inherent purity of sport. It positioned sport as a pursuit for the elite, chivalrous, and pure. Coubertin argued that amateur sport was above the "crass materialism of industrial capitalism" (Ritchie, 2014, p. 823). Sport and Coubertin's Olympic movement was a site for the presentation and perpetuation of moral righteousness as defined by Coubertin and the IOC (Beamish, 2009). The romanticized characteristics of amateurism, purity, chivalry, elitism, and comradery that Coubertin attached to sport were realized as the 'essence of sport' in the inaugural 1896 games.

The Olympic games continued to promote Coubertin's 'essence of sport' into the 1930s. It was also during this time that nationalistic-fueled desire for victory became an increasingly important objective for countries competing in the Olympic Games. Nations used Olympic competition as a site where they could prove superiority on an international stage. Scientific innovations in the form of PEDs were developed for this reason. It was commonplace for steroids and amphetamines to be administered by team physicians during this time (Dimeo, 2007). The use of these PEDs was not seen as problematic. Amphetamine and steroid use by athletes proliferated throughout the early 20th century. But, the 1950s and 60s brought about new mythologies and constructions of sport ideals (Waddington et al., 2013). This time period in the 50s and 60s brought forth an emphasis on the concept of fair play. Up until the 50s, the use of PEDs such as steroids were fairly normalized, but a new head of the IOC, Avery Brundage, positioned the use of these drugs as contrary to the Olympic ideals of fair play (Beamish, 2009). With an increasing moral panic surrounding recreational and problematic drug use during this time, the concerns of the sporting world began to reflect the concerns of broader society (Coomber, 2014). The increased emphasis of fair play in sport thus materialized as anti-doping policy.

The concept of fair sport based solely on anti-doping has continued to exist within amateur sport well into the 21st century. Anti-doping has become heavily institutionalized and drug-free sport is now expected in most sporting competitions. Formal anti-doping measures were introduced in the 70s, but athletes still continued to dope. As drug detection technology become more reliable and 'clean' sport become synonymous with fair sport more and more athletes were caught using steroids and other PEDs. However, it was the increasing number, severity, and visibility of doping incidents that diminished the Olympics' credibility as a site for fair play (Beamish, 2009). High profile Canadian athlete, Ben Johnson, won the 100-meter sprint gold medal in the 1988 Olympics but was subsequently disqualified because of a positive steroid test; a team-sponsored doping program was discovered amongst the Festina cycling team in the 1998 Tour de France; and last, Rebagliati's cannabis incident in 1998 heightened the long-standing moral panic about drugs and doping. An intensifying War on Drugs during the 80s and

90s was promoted and reified by Western governments while being supported by fearful citizens. The IOC was obliged to implement a more systematized approach to curb doping and drug use in sport. Thus, WADA was established in 1999 by the IOC. At this point, "anti-doping had become a mechanism for pushing forward and imposing specific ideals about behaviour and ethics" (Dimeo, 2009, p. 38). These ideals of behaviour and ethics, known better as the 'essence' or 'spirit' of sport have been constructed by the social circumstances and forces of the particular time (Ritchie, 2013; Waddington et al., 2013). Those circumstances and forces were a sustained moral panic about drug use and a politically supported war on drugs and drug users. The establishment of WADA and the contemporary definitions of the SoS has solidified anti-doping as the most important factor in the maintenance of fair sport. Furthermore, the very concept that there is one unchanging ideal of sport is found to be problematic insofar as, "the spirit of sport clause itself emerged out of a specific set of unique social and political forces" (Ritchie, 2013, p. 199). By examining the social history of the SoS and anti-doping policy it is apparent that definitions of what constitutes doping are socially and culturally constructed (Loland & Hoppeler, 2012).

The rationality, practicality, and ethicality of using SoS as a criterion in the determination of the banning of substances in sport has been critiqued by scholars in several ways. First, the SoS criterion has allowed WADA to shift away from their initial goals of eradicating unfair doping toward regulating the morals of athletes (Waddington & Møller, 2014, 2019). Waddington and Møller (2014, 2019) explain that the SoS criterion creates a possibility for athletes to be punished for drug use that is recreational and completely unrelated to performance-enhancing. WADA's shift toward policing the morals of athletes has produced a definition of doping that is more concentrated on eradicating athletes' drug use, both in and outside of sport, than maintaining fair sport.

The second critique on the SoS is that it acts as a 'catchall' criterion because it is logically circular and vague. The SoS is the "fundamental rationale" (WADA, 2021, p. 10) for the WADA Code. However, it is also only one of three criteria that is used to determine the prohibition of drugs in sport. Since WADA has determined that a substance need only go against two of their three criteria to be banned, a substance can be banned without going against the SoS criterion. However, the circularity occurs when we understand that the other two criteria (the potential to enhance performance and the potential to harm) are constructed from the "fundamental rational" (WADA, 2021, p. 10) of the WADA code—the SoS. The SoS is embedded in two of the three criteria and is a criterion itself. Using the SoS as both the fundamental ideal upon which these criteria are based as well as using it as one of the three criteria is logically unsound. The SoS cannot be required and at the same time optional (de Hon, 2017). This logical circularity in the application of these three criteria means that if a substance is determined to have the potential to enhance the performance or to harm the athlete it will inevitably go against the SoS criteria. This circularity also allows the SoS to act as a 'catchall' criterion in its interpretation and application (INHDR, 2012).

WADA's definitions and applications of the SoS are logically problematic. Moreover, the vagueness of the SoS poses a challenge in interpretation. The breadth of characteristics embedded in the SoS criteria allows WADA to deem nearly any substance to be contrary to the SoS. This calls to question the prohibition of non-performance-enhancing recreational drugs such as cannabis. McNamee (2012) suggests that WADA's application of the SoS criterion ought to be more transparent. Moreover, the vagueness and troubling logic of the SoS, as well as the lack of transparency in its application, may result in decreased perceptions of legitimacy of the WADA Code (Henning & Dimeo, 2018).

**Athletes' Definitions of the SoS**

The SoS, as defined by WADA, represents the intrinsic values of sport. These values include "Health, Ethics, fair play and honesty, *Athletes'* rights as set forth in the *Code,* Excellence in performance, Character and *Education,* Fun and joy, Teamwork, Dedication and commitment, Respect for rules and laws, Respect for self and other *Participant*, Courage, Community and solidarity" (WADA, 2021, p. 10). The assumption that sport has values in and of itself is problematic. Every athlete who I interviewed shared their own unique conceptualizations of what the intrinsic values of sport are. When asked about the SoS, most athletes merely recognized that it was in some way related to anti-doping policy. Few athletes had never heard the term before. One athlete vaguely remembered a CCES spokesperson using the term in a pre-season presentation, or possibly a mention of it in a mandatory online anti-doping education module. Most were unfamiliar with WADA's official definition of the term, but all were able to immediately arrive at what this phrase implies—the inherent values of sport. After presenting their own ideas of what values are intrinsic to sport, as well as reviewing the characteristics that WADA offers, athletes presented three values they felt are intrinsic to sport; community, respect, and fair play. According to participants the most essential value of these three is fair play. All three of these characteristics align with the characteristics that WADA offers in their SoS definition. Although the athletes' definitions of the SoS align with WADA's definition, the interpretation of these characteristics is drastically different. The different interpretations are apparent in that the overwhelming majority of cannabis-using athletes find that cannabis use is compatible with the SoS instead of against it.

***Respect***

Respect is a characteristic that two athletes explicitly specified to be a vital to the SoS. Mavis and Sylvester both placed emphasis on this characteristic in the context of sportsmanship and respect for others. Mavis states, "…the other part is the whole sportsmanship part so carrying yourself and your team well and being respectful to teammates officials opponents things like that".

Mavis, a former hockey player, referred back to her interactions with opponents and the culture of mutual respect shared amongst opponents and other members of the community. Mavis' and Sylvester's perspectives on the importance of respect in sport are consistent with the SoS definition presented in the WADA Code, "Respect for rules and laws, Respect for self and other *Participant*s" (WADA, 2021, p. 10). Also included in this definition is the respect for rules, and while some athletes, like Mavis, initially emphasize that a vital part of respect and sportsmanship is the treatment of opponents and officials on and off the playing field, this idea of respect was also presented in the context of anti-doping.

> Respect for self and others… Obviously if you're taking steroids that goes against the respect for self and other participants rules because I feel like that's actually performance-enhancing. I don't think cannabis would apply to any of those characteristics. (Riley)

Riley presents this concept of respect in relation to anti-doping. He notes that taking substances that undoubtably improve performance, such as anabolic steroids, is not respectful to opponents and not consistent with the SoS. Considering that cannabis is still prohibited, some athletes recognize and understand that even though they do not agree with cannabis prohibition in sport, they should still respect the rules and accept the consequences of breaking it. That said, most athletes agree with Riley insofar as they do not believe that using cannabis is disrespecting their selves or their opponents. To all participating athletes, cannabis is perceived to be compatible with the SoS, especially now that no laws are being broken with its use.

Cannabis' status as a banned substance is partially reliant on the fact that it is an illegal substance. Now that it is legal in Canada, cannabis use no longer breaks any rules, and should not be prohibited based on the 'respect for rules' SoS characteristic. "Justifying a rule by reference to the wrongness of breaking it implies logical circularity and is invalid." (Loland & Hoppeler, 2012, p. 348). Now that laws have changed in Canada, and are changing in many jurisdictions throughout the world, the "respect for rules" characteristic of the SoS is becoming redundant. The logic of this characteristic as a criterion for doping is flawed. Doping cannot be "fundamentally contrary to the spirit of sport" (WADA, 2021, p. 10), but also defined by the use of the SoS concept (de Hon, 2017). Unfortunately, WADA does not offer any transparency to how the SoS characteristics are interpreted, so the organization's conceptualization of respect for the rules, self, and others is unclear. What is clear, is that cannabis-using athletes do not find their use of cannabis to be disrespectful of the rules now that is legal, nor do they find its use to be disrespectful to opponents or themselves as it is not perceived to offer unfair performance enhancing effects.

### ***Community***

Four athletes found that the fostering of, and engagement with, an athletic community comprised of teammates, opponents, coaches, alumni, and youth to be a vital characteristic of the SoS. These athletes found that their participation in university athletics created valuable lifelong social connections and ties to their local community. As discussed in Chapter Three, these athletic social connections may be part of the process of role engulfment and may present athletes with challenges in the maintenance of their roles and identities outside of sport. And in

Chapter Four, it was made clear that university athletes are local public figures and must present themselves as such by concealing their discreditable acts, such as using cannabis, lest they face stigmatization. Karl recognizes his prestige status in the community and notes that it is important to live up to the public's definitions of what university athletes ought to be.

> …the spirit of sport is just being a person in the community that people look up to… So, you need to kind of be held to a higher standard. That's the only reason that I really see that they had an illegal substance on the banned substance list, obviously. But now that it's legal and everybody and their mom can go buy a joint from a fucking store, I think student-athletes should be allowed to be in that same boat. (Karl)

Athletes like Karl know that they are held to a high standard in their communities. They can understand the reasoning for the banning of cannabis in the past, but Karl notes that cannabis is now legal and there should not be any reason for athletes to hide their use from the public as they are expected to. Karl finds that the recent legalization may have destigmatized the use of cannabis for 'normals' but the stigma of cannabis use lingers for athletes who must manage virtual demands. The inconsistency between national cannabis legality and global anti-doping policy is a frustrating experience for athletes like Karl.

WADA is a global entity and must take in to account the changing drug laws around the world. Canada along with Uruguay have legalized cannabis, and in the United States 12 states have implemented legal cannabis measures. Countries such as Georgia, Spain, Argentina, and The Netherlands have varying degrees of cannabis decriminalization and legalization measures. Furthermore, Portugal approaches drug use and drug abuse through a health and harm reduction perspective (Cabral, 2017). Drug laws vary between nations, and in this moment a distinct global shift of liberalization of cannabis and general drug policy is occurring. The global agreeance on doping criteria is already an impracticable and idealistic approach to fair sport (de Hon, 2017). By continuing prohibition of cannabis even as it becomes legal and more accepted as a recreational drug around the globe, WADA continues on their path to be moral regulators instead of a fair sport and doping control agency (Waddington & Møller, 2019).

***Fair Play***

The characteristic of fair play, or maintenance of a level playing field, is central to university athletes' conceptualization of the SoS. Concepts of respect and community are important, but the concept of fair play was the primary value that athletes perceived to be intrinsic to sport. Some athletes posited that fair play is influenced by factors such as, a home crowd advantage, unequal ability to access sport equipment because of financial constraints, an imbalance of funding and support between women's and men's sport programs, lack of opportunity because of 'old boys club' mentalities in certain sporting communities, and of course, the use of PEDs. The topic of this research is drug use in sport, and it is unsurprising that fair play was most commonly conceptualized through an anti-doping lens during interviews. That said, WADA's doping-centric definition of fair play has been taken for granted as the standard approach in the pursuit of fair sport. Athletes recognize that there are many other factors that may result in unfair play, but doping is perceived to be the ultimate form of cheating and therefore the greatest threat to fair sport. A contradiction lies in the fact that these athletes place high importance on fair play through anti-doping, yet many actively use a banned substance (i.e. cannabis) during their competitive season. This contradiction leads to cannabis-using athletes to make the distinction between cannabis and unfair PEDs.

> Some things like steroids, obviously a huge problem, like in football where it's a collision sport and if you have someone who is unnaturally strong and causes injury, it obviously is an unfair playing field for someone who's not using that substance. (Neil)

Neil notes that steroids' ability to unnaturally alter an athlete's body provides an obvious unfair athletic advantage. Cannabis was argued to be different from steroids in that it does not markedly alter an individual's physiology. The physiological effect of a drug was a key factor in the respondents' determinations of fair versus unfair drugs. Cannabis does not directly affect an individual's ability to get stronger as do anabolic steroids. What cannabis may do, however, is provide athletes with indirect benefits that could result in increased athletic performance. Benefits such as, providing motivation or concentration during training, increasing appetite which may promote weight and strength gains, and promoting relaxation and recovery leading to increased physical and mental wellbeing. The performance enhancing aspects of cannabis were differentiated from the performance enhancing features of other drugs, specifically steroids, in that the performance enhancing aspects of cannabis are perceived to be indirect and natural. Neil, a former basketball player distinguishes cannabis from unnatural performance-enhancers, "I don't consider it a PED because, again, it's just because it's not increasing your body's ability to do anything you naturally wouldn't have been able to do without taking it." Neil, along with most other athletes, see cannabis as a 'natural' performance enhancer in the same category as substances like energy drinks, coffee, and ibuprofen.

The intention of use was also presented as key factor in the determination of whether a substance is a PED. Neil poses that cases of PED use in sport ought to be approached through answering the question, "Is this person actively using this substance to gain an advantage in their performance in an unnatural way?". Most athletes do not use cannabis to intentionally enhance their sporting performance. As discussed in Chapter Three, cannabis is most often used recreationally, socially, or with the intent to promote physical and mental well-being. Of course, some athletes, like Karl or Charles, state that they often use cannabis to heighten their focus during workouts and exercise. To this point, and contrary to current conceptions that cannabis reduces cognitive performance, the possibility that cannabis could be a cognitive PED was considered by some athletes but disregarded given that it does not always produce definite and unnatural enhancement for everyone. Ultimately these athletes find that the use of cannabis does not unnaturally enhance one's sport performance and is used by the majority of athletes in contexts separate from sport competition. The participants in this study unanimously concluded that cannabis should not be considered a doping substance.

**Fluid Drugs**

There was agreement amongst athletes that cannabis should not be prohibited because it is more natural and less of an obvious and unconditional performance-enhancer than other drugs. In making this distinction between cannabis and other drugs, athletes were confronted with the fact that there may not be a clear definition of an unfair PED.

> I've got it down to how it can help me. If someone came to me with what I had known now, like, said, if you smoke sativa before you work out this is going to help your energy and your satiety… and said smoke this amount, then I don't know, maybe… it would help with the training which would inevitably make me a better player but I don't know how you would describe the actual definition of a performance-enhancing drug. Do you know? (Charles)

Athletes commonly expressed confusion and inquiry over what qualifies certain drugs as PEDs and deems others permissible. For instance, many athletes questioned why some drugs, like caffeine, are allowed to be used to enhance one's performance, while other drugs, like cannabis, are inadmissible. A dichotomy between 'good' drugs and 'bad' drugs was offered by some athletes, but often, this dichotomy dissolved with the attempt to categorize cannabis . A consensus of confusion emerged over where cannabis fits in this dichotomy. The quandary over whether cannabis is 'good' or 'bad' brought to light a fundamental issue with the current ontological approach to anti-doping policy, and drug policy broadly. Drugs are not always 'good' or 'bad'. Even anabolic steroids, the most demonized drug in sport, may be used in some cases to manage performance deficiencies and allow an athlete to compete on equal terms with other athletes.

The current 'pharmacocentric' approach to understanding drugs does not take into account the social factors and contexts surrounding the existence and use of drugs. The 'pharmacocentric' approach is one that places the chemical composition and the physiological effects of drugs as central in understanding how and why they are used (Morgan & Zimmer, 1997). This perspective is not as useful as an ontological model that positions drugs as plastic or fluid—drugs are not good or bad, they are constructed and defined through the social contexts they exist in (King et al., 2014). This fluid drug model highlights the importance of various social factors involved in drug use such as, method of consumption, cultural context, dose, intent of use, and the demographics of the user. These factors affect how drugs and their users are defined and treated in society. This social constructionist model of drugs may be a solution to current failing anti-doping approaches, and furthermore can be applied to drug policy outside of sport. Charles queries, "To me, [cannabis] is accomplishing the same thing that a pharmaceutically produced drug does. Is it really performance-enhancing or is it just a regular drug that helps people?".

Charles' quandary about what kind of drug cannabis is speaks to the confusion that athletes face in defining and justifying their cannabis use. What differentiates cannabis from other drugs that are not prohibited? This fundamental question can be partially answered by examining the social histories of cannabis. Cannabis and its users in North America were demonized and stigmatized out of racialized fear in the early 1900s (Abel, 1980; Torgoff, 2016). This fear resulted in the prohibition of the substance and the criminalization of Hispanic and Black users. In the 1960s and 1970s cannabis became a signifier of counter-cultural ideals, and in the early 2000s support for cannabis as a medicine began to heighten. Now in the 2010s and 2020s, cannabis is a legal recreational substance in Canada as well as an increasing number of jurisdictions around the world. The answer to Charles' question would be different in all of these contexts. Cannabis can be a performance-enhancer, a drug of addiction and abuse, a life-changing medicine, and a recreational substance depending on a myriad of social conditions. The fluidly changing definitions of cannabis highlight the importance of social context in the definition of drugs.

The perspectives of the athletes in this study provide clues to the ways that new conceptualizations of cannabis are being formed. Many athletes found it was useful to compare and contrast cannabis with other drugs in order to understand cannabis' position in their lives and in sport. By doing this, they formed a type of continuum of substances based on acceptability, risk, and performance enhancing benefits. Everything from coffee, energy drinks, pre-workout supplements, soda, sleeping pills, alcohol, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, opioids, steroids, and human growth hormone, were compared and contrasted to cannabis.

> It's no more of a performance-enhancing drug than caffeine. I drank a cup of coffee before every basketball game I played, or Ibuprofen, where my knees are really sore and I

> need to get through practice so I'm going to pop an Ibuprofen before practice. Those are legal, so where is the line? Why are we drawing the line here vs. here? It's an arbitrary measure of what's helping you to what degree. I would say that Ibuprofen and caffeine are much more performance enhancing substances than cannabis is. (Neil)

In a sport performance context, cannabis was most often compared to coffee and ibuprofen. These comparisons may be made to emphasize the perceived innocuousness of the substance and push its categorization closer to socially acceptable drugs. Drugs like anabolic steroids and opioids were commonly spoken about negatively. They were positioned further toward the 'bad' end of the continuum because they were perceived to have a high health risk and to be socially unacceptable. These many comparisons that athletes offer between various drugs presents a fluid approach to the categorization of drugs. The comparison of cannabis to other drugs, especially with regards to performance enhancing, breaks down the dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' drugs into a continuum. This disrupts the current categorization of cannabis as a doping substance. Furthermore, this disrupts WADA's current 'drug-free' approach to fair sport by positioning substances like caffeine and ibuprofen on the same continuum as drugs like cannabis and steroids. Neil goes so far as to say that Ibuprofen and caffeine are more performance enhancing than cannabis. It is unarguable that ibuprofen reduces inflammation and pain, and coffee is a stimulant that promotes alertness, yet these drugs are fully embraced socially and legally. The allowance of these drugs in sport does not align with WADA's stance on PEDs and the SoS. The perspective of Neil—a perspective that challenges the current position of cannabis on this good/bad drug continuum—is an indicator that this continuum is not static. It is in constant flux as drugs move fluidly within it as a result of various interrelated social factors.

The concept of the plastic, or fluid, drug is ontologically rooted in social constructionism. A social constructionist approach to drugs is not new. Howard Becker (1953) first utilized this perspective in his work, Becoming a Marihuana User. In looking at the social setting and contexts of how individuals use cannabis, Becker proposed a sociological theory about the process of how one moves through the various stages of cannabis use from a non-user to a chronic user. This is a drastic departure from the typical biomedical perspectives that utilize addiction paradigms and that "…defined mind-altering drugs primarily by their chemical properties and effects, and often linked these to determined social outcomes (the perils that separate "drugs" from other commodities or healing medicines) and even drug-control strategies (the need to contain menacing substances)" (Gootenberg, 2005, p. 480). There is an increasing recognition that biomedical and 'pharmacocentric' perspectives ignore the importance of the social circumstances of use and promotes ideas of a unilateral relationship of drugs to humans (Morgan & Zimmer, 1997).

The main proposition of the fluid drug model is that drugs are defined contextually. Whether or not a drug is performance enhancing, recuperating, recreational, or social is determined by the spaces the drug is used in, the intention of use, the mores of social circles, prevailing economic and political interests, and the gender and race of the user. King et al. (2014) use the example of Vicodin:

> Thus, opioids such as Vicodin may sometimes act as medicine or sometimes as poison. They may function as a way to get high or as a gateway to a good night's sleep. They can be taken as party drugs among large groups of friends or hurriedly and secretively swallowed by single users at home, alone. Painkilling drugs can be thoroughly intoxicating or thoroughly unremarkable in their physical and psychic effects. They can

> be procured legally or illegally, for free or for hundreds of dollars. For some users, such drugs allow a new lease on life as their pain subsides and their anxieties fade; for others, they act as a constraint, undermining their social relationships and their ability to fend for themselves and others. (p. 251)

According to athletes, they use cannabis to promote relaxation and sleep, to manage symptoms of pain, to increase general wellbeing, to aid in focus during exercise and training, to socialize, and because it is fun. Furthermore, cannabis can be used by an individual for all of these reasons and more at different times in their lives, or even different times of the day. Just as Vicodin can be used in many ways for various reasons, so can cannabis. It is without question that many drugs exert obvious physiological effects on humans. But even the pharmacodynamics of drugs are affected by internal psychological and physiological differences in individuals as well as the external environment. Chemicals affect humans, but the breadth and diversity of contextual factors involved in consuming these chemicals have greater influence over their effects, user experiences, and their social acceptability (Hartogsohn, 2017).

**Conclusion**

The SoS refers to the intrinsic values of sport. These values include, "Health, Ethics, fair play and honesty, *Athletes'* rights as set forth in the *Code,* Excellence in performance, Character and *Education,* Fun and joy, Teamwork, Dedication and commitment, Respect for rules and laws, Respect for self and other *Participant*, Courage, Community and solidarity" (WADA, 2021, p. 10) (Though these values are purported to be intrinsic to sport, they are defined by WADA and are products of the popular ideals and social circumstances of the time). Over the last century the acceptability of drug use and the definitions of doping in amateur sport have gone through obvious changes. In the beginning of the 20th century drug use was accepted in sport, but by the middle of the century doping started to become a concern. Presently, nearly all drug use in sport is deemed to be unacceptable. Waddington and Møller (2014, 2019) argue that WADA has extended their doping control into in the lives of athletes by regulating non-PEDs like cannabis. It is clear that the position of drugs in sport changes given social circumstances.

Canadian university athletes define the SoS in very similar ways to WADA. They place emphasis on the values of respect and community, while emphasizing fair play as the most important value in sport. Their definitions of the SoS may be similar to WADA's, but their interpretations of the SoS characteristics are not. Cannabis, according to cannabis-using university athletes, is not contrary to the SoS. Athletes present it as drug that does not create unfairness in sport because it does not unnaturally enhance an individual's performance. They place it closer to drugs like caffeine and ibuprofen with regards to risks, performance-enhancement, and social acceptability.

By comparing and contrasting cannabis with other drugs, athletes challenge the dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' drugs. This dichotomy is reinforced through laws and rules regulating certain drugs and allowing others. The legalization of cannabis has caused a friction between Canadian drug law and anti-doping regulations in amateur sport. These divergent policies have exposed how drugs are constructed differently depending on the social contexts. Cannabis is a legal recreational substance, but also a doping substance. Drugs are socially constructed based on a myriad of social and contextual factors.

# Conclusion and Discussion

## Summary of Results

The data for this research project was constructed through 12 semi-structured interviews with current and former cannabis-using university athletes. Utilizing a GT methodology, I have developed a broad picture of how and why university athletes use cannabis, and how their cannabis use relates to their lives as athletes, academics, and social individuals. I have shown how they manage their cannabis use in the face of stigmatization and other negative consequences. I have also presented the ways that Canadian university athletes attempt to define unfair performance enhancement and how they believe cannabis is related to this definition.

University athletes use cannabis. This is clear from available survey data as well as the findings of this study. The sample of this study consisted mostly of occasional cannabis users and several frequent, or chronic, cannabis users. Challenges in participant recruitment resulted in theoretical revelations regarding the extent that cannabis use is stigmatized for athletes.

Some athletes have used cannabis to relieve pain and in two cases it was used as a substitute for physician-prescribed pain medication. There is growing evidence that cannabis is a viable analgesic medication, and its use in conjunction with, or replacement of, opioid therapy may be beneficial for treating symptoms of pain (Abrams et al., 2011; Parker, 2017b). Using cannabis to mitigate pain, and to promote relaxation and sleep is a common reason for cannabis use amongst university athletes, and some athletes are willing to risk using cannabis during the season in order to reap its perceived benefits. Professional athletes such as Nate Jackson are advocating for cannabis as a viable analgesic medication for athletes, and the MLB has now lifted the ban on cannabis while moving toward a treatment approach to athlete opioid use (Wagner, 2019).

Some athletes use cannabis as a sleep aid and to promote satiety. Academic and athletic stresses and time commitments can make it difficult for athletes to maintain healthy sleep patterns and proper nutrition. The current evidence shows that cannabis may improve short-term sleep outcomes in some individuals, and many cannabis consumers are already self-medicating for this reason (M. Bachhuber et al., 2019).

Another reason why athletes use cannabis is to promote mental wellbeing through decreasing stress and increasing mindfulness during recreational, and social activities. Athletes purport that cannabis helps promote states of optimal experience, or flow, in recreational activities and in some cases training. Athletes find that cannabis can also be used to relax and unwind. Athletes who experienced an increased level of sport-related anxiety and trauma, such as the two hockey players Owen and Charles, use cannabis to manage symptoms related to these traumas. Cannabis affects the eCB system, and burgeoning research suggests that cannabinoid therapy may be a useful drug for individuals who are experiencing PTSD-related symptoms (Parker, 2017a). Last, athletes find that using cannabis is a fun recreational activity in that it offers a way to heighten recreational activities. As Sylvester bluntly puts it, “weed makes things fun”.

Athletes’ cannabis use can be partially attributed to the physical, mental, and social strains that are attributable to participation in elite university sport. The process of role engulfment occurs amongst university athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991). The demands of university sport results in the academic and social roles of athletes to fall to the wayside or be enveloped by athletic roles. Cannabis is perceived to be fundamentally contrary to the identity of the athlete, and in some cases its use challenges the role engulfment process by affirming the identity of the individual outside of the quasi-total institution of university sport. In other cases, cannabis may be used to bolster comradery amongst teammates and strengthen social ties, thereby supporting the process of athletic role engulfment.

No athletes in this study perceived that using cannabis in an athletic competition would increase their performance. Nearly all athletes felt that being under the influence of cannabis in highly competitive situations would be detrimental to their performance. Furthermore, some athletes report that they cannot use cannabis during training or any physical exercise because it is distracting or a generally unpleasant experience.

The main reported negative effect of cannabis is the potential respiratory harm that comes from the inhalation of smoke. Other negative effects of cannabis, according to athletes, include nausea and disorientation from overconsumption or co-use with alcohol. These negative effects occur more commonly with inexperienced users. Athletes are more concerned with the punitive consequences attached to being caught using cannabis than with any potential negative physiological risks.

Cannabis is legalized in Canada but still prohibited in university sport. Athletes may face sanctions from the CCES who operate under WADA's anti-doping policies. If athletes submit a positive drug test for cannabis, they will face suspensions, loss of awards, and public shaming. These punishments place a mark of stigma on cannabis-using athletes and may negatively affect their future athletic and occupational careers. The most negative consequences of cannabis use do not appear to come from the actual use of the substance, they come in the form of the punishments and stigmatization of the athletes if they are caught using the substance. Cannabis is discretely accepted within certain athletic networks. Teammates are familiar with who on their team uses cannabis, but cannabis use is concealed because of its prohibited status. Athletes suspect that some coaches are aware of players' cannabis use but choose to turn a blind eye if the use does not affect the success of the team. It appears that the acceptability of cannabis varies depending on sport disciplines and the level of inter and inner-team competition. Hockey players felt that their cannabis use was distinctly looked down upon by their teammates and in some cases inner-team competition resulted in animosity between the few 'dope smokers' and other teammates vying for playing time.

University athletes must manage virtual demands imposed upon them through their status as public figures. They are role models and expected to live up to the image of what the public perceives them to be. Cannabis is contrary to this image, and they must exercise information control techniques to conceal this discreditable trait. Athletes change their cannabis use patterns, hide their use from certain teammates and the public, and use their learned knowledge of U SPORTS drug testing procedures to conceal their cannabis use. Cannabis use may not be a discrediting trait for the general public now that it is legal, but for athletes their use of the substance is still stigmatized and will remain so unless the ban is lifted, and new conceptualizations of fair sport are promoted.

Cannabis is banned because it is deemed to enhance athletic performance, it poses potential harm to athletes, and it is contrary to the SoS. The SoS refers to the intrinsic values of sport, or more accurately, the values that WADA has defined as intrinsic to sport. The term emerged in relation to anti-doping policy and was formalized with the inception of the WADA organization in 1999 and the creation of the WADA Code in 2003. Before this time, the intrinsic values of sport were asserted to be amateurism, purity, and chivalry. With the modernization of the Olympics, these values slowly morphed to emphasize fair play above all else. In the context of a society at war against illicit drugs, doping became the forefront of sportspeople's concerns.

Although unfairness in sport exists in ways such as unequal access to technologies and resources, and funding differentials between gendered sport, the use of PEDs have been defined as the ultimate form of cheating. Thus, fair play has come to be defined solely through anti-doping.

The SoS is used as the foundational principle of anti-doping policy. The SoS is also a criterion used in the determination of whether a substance should be prohibited. The critiques of this concept of the SoS are wide ranging. It has been argued that the intrinsic values of sport are not intrinsic at all, and they are constructed based on the social circumstances of the time (Waddington et al., 2013). In a contemporary context we can see that the SoS is used to regulate morality instead of to uphold fair sport (D. R. Campos et al., 2003; Henne et al., 2013). WADA's use of the SoS as both the basis of anti-doping policy and as a criterion itself is logically problematic (de Hon, 2017; Loland & Hoppeler, 2012). The SoS cannot be mandatory and also optional. The fact that the SoS is embedded in two of the three criteria (potential to enhance performance, and potential to harm) and is a criterion in itself gives it a 'catchall' quality. Furthermore, the vagueness of WADA's SoS definition and the lack of transparency in its interpretation is problematic.

Athletes view the SoS as important to uphold. They agree that sport should promote the values included in WADA's definition. Specifically, athletes place the values of respect for one's self, others, and the rules, along with fostering community as important. The most important value to them, and consistent with the social history of sport, is the value of fair play. Athletes largely agree with WADA's values of the SoS, but they do not agree with WADA's interpretations of them.

Canadian university athletes who use cannabis do not perceive cannabis to be contrary to the SoS, especially now that it is a legal substance in Canada. Cannabis may offer indirect performance-enhancing effects, and athletes place it closer to ibuprofen and coffee with regards to social acceptability, risk factors, and performance-enhancing effects. By placing this drug in relation to these socially acceptable substances, they draw attention to the fluidly changing status of drugs. Drugs and their definitions, perceptions and uses in society are in constant flux and are dependent on social and contextual factors. The concept of the fluid drug can be used to understand humans' ever-changing relationships with substances.

## Discussion

The perceived inherent values of sport are not static. They shift in relation with social circumstances. Cultures of fear and drug mythologies "have meaningfully shaped policy in the non-sporting world and… had a significance if not fundamental impact on the discursive understanding of 'drugs' in the sporting world and the trajectory of anti-doping policy…" (Coomber, 2014, p. 173). The social acceptability of cannabis is increasing around the world. A 'second wave' of decriminalization of the drug has occurred in Latin American and European countries and Australian States and Territories. And a 'third wave' of full cannabis legalization is taking place in Canada, a growing number of American States, and several other countries (Chatwin, 2017). Sport and its supposed intrinsic values are also changing along with these shifts in global drug policy.

High Rollerz, "the dopest martial arts tournament in the world"[10], is a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu tournament where competitors ceremonially consume cannabis together before their bout and the

[10] https://highrollerz.com/

tournament winner takes home a pound of high-quality cannabis. This event occurs with the goal of de-stigmatizing cannabis and promoting a fun sporting event that "formally and responsibly"[11] merges the mixed martial arts world with cannabis.

The 420 Games at the Santa Monica Pier in Los Angeles, California promotes advocacy and education on how cannabis can play a role in an individual's healthy and active lifestyle (Bonner, 2018). The main event is a 4.2-mile run, and the 2018 event was complemented with cannabis-infused yoga led by former NFL star turned cannabis advocate Ricky Williams. Cannabis-infused yoga is becoming a common feature in yoga retreats and studios[12] (Winer, 2012).

Furthermore, athletes like Ricky Williams, Tour de France disqualified victor Floyd Landis, Canadian Olympic Gold Medalist Ross Rebagliati, former NHL 'enforcer' Riley Cote, and edible-company-sponsored ultra-marathon runner Avery Collins have all begun to advocate for the use of cannabis to aid athletes' mental and physical health (Bishop, 2016; Hesse, 2016; Loudin, 2019; Robson, 2017; "Ross Rebagliati Is Chasing Cannabis Gold," 2018). These athletes have all also become involved in the cannabis industry, with most focusing on non-impairing CBD products.

The MLB has opted to remove cannabis from its prohibited substance list. This is partially a response to Tyler Skaggs opioid-related death (Kepner, 2019). Other professional leagues such as the CFL and NHL either do not test or do not publish test results for cannabis. Former commissioner of the National Basketball Association David Stern has reversed his stance on cannabis, stating that it "probably should be removed from the banned list" (Guardian Sport,

[11] https://highrollerz.com/
[12] https://www.ganjayogatoronto.com/; http://www.420yogaretreats.com/

2017). Indeed, there is an increasing support for cannabis in professional sport, especially given high rates of problematic opioid use and the high-profile opioid-related deaths in professional sport leagues (Cottler et al., 2011; Torres & Digiovanna, 2019).

The High Rollerz tournament, The 420 Games, certain professional leagues, and the short list of the many current and former athletes who have come out as public advocates for the use of cannabis are poignant examples of a changing milieu of drugs in sport. Sport is not required to reproduce traditional conceptions of what doping and fair competition ought to be. Sport is routinely being actively reconstructed by sportspeople. This reconstruction of sport occurs in relation with society. The medical and recreational use of cannabis is becoming increasingly socially accepted in North America and around the world. Moreover, a current epidemic of opioid-related overdose deaths necessitates alternate approaches to drug policy. A shift in the social constructions of drugs in sport is evident in recent cannabis legalization measures, cannabis-friendly sport competitions, and the drug policy changes made in the MLB.

As cannabis' position in society and sport changes, so must the conceptualization of the SoS. The most important sporting value to athletes and WADA is fairness. Fairness, however, is defined almost exclusively through anti-doping policy. The entire organization of WADA is founded on the goal of eliminating doping in sport. Even if doping were to be eradicated, sport would not be an equal playing field for all (Dingelstad et al., 1996; Mazanov, 2009; Waddington et al., 2013). Economic inequalities from a local to global scale create an imbalanced system where some athletes have access to facilities and resources, while others struggle to acquire equipment to participate. Furthermore, Dingelstad et al. (1996) and Mazanov (2009) note that performance-enhancing technologies are permitted to a certain degree and are only accessible to those that can afford them. Stakeholders in sport is not as concerned with equality or fair play as much as they are concerned with anti-doping. Fairness ought to take into account that some drugs may allow an individual to overcome a performance detriment so they can compete to their natural ability. Some nations, schools, sport clubs, or gendered teams, may have unequal access to financial and material resources. This promotes an uneven and, in some cases, a discriminatory playing field. The concept and implementation of fair sport must be expanded beyond doping-centric definitions to encompass other social, financial, and political factors that may skew the supposed even playing field in sport.

It is clear that cannabis-using athletes do not interpret their cannabis use as unfair or against the SoS. They determine that cannabis does not offer direct, obvious, or unnatural performance enhancing benefits. However, cannabis remains prohibited in sport. The SoS criteria creates a catchall quality that allows WADA to act as moral police, prohibiting any substance they decide is against the supposed intrinsic values of sport (Mazanov, 2013).

In two outcome summary reports of student-athletes who tested positive for cannabis their use of the drug was found to be "social in nature and unconnected to sport or training" (CCES, 2017b, 2018a). The CCES has factored in the intention of drug use for these two athletes in their punitive sanctions. The CCES accounting for contextual factors of doping violations indicates that it is possible for this fluid drug model to be implemented in anti-doping policy. Having established that contextual factors such as motivation or intention for cannabis use can influence sanctioning decisions by the CCES, it is worth considering that these contextual factors be embedded in the foundation of anti-doping policy instead of only the punitive portion. I suggest that this model of fluid drugs be used to inform future anti-doping policy. This model can be used in contrast to the premise of strict liability which can result in sanctions for athletes who choose to use cannabis outside of sport recreationally, who use drugs without intention to enhance their performance (i.e. over-the-counter cold medications that contain the banned substance pseudoephedrine), or who accidentally consume a banned substance present in a workout supplement.

Drugs are used in a myriad of different ways for a myriad of reasons. The fluid drug model highlights the importance of various social factors involved in drug use such as, method of consumption, cultural context, dose, intent of use, and the demographics of the user. These factors affect how drugs and their users are defined and treated in society. Furthermore, the incongruencies between athletes' and WADA's definitions of doping provides support that drugs are fluid social constructions instead of static chemical compounds. The fluid drug model emphasizes the importance of socio-contextual factors in human-drug relationships and may be an effective approach to future drug policy and research.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The challenges in recruitment that I experienced early on in the project enlightened me to develop theories about the stigma athletes face and how they keep their use of cannabis discrete. They also brought to light the existing stigma that athletes face with their cannabis use. Through my recruitment challenges I learned the importance of forming and strengthening trusting relationships with participants. For this reason, I recommend that future research explores the topic of cannabis use amongst university athletes using an ethnographic approach. An ethnographic approach will allow the researcher to build and foster relationships with participants and allow for more in-depth engagement with the cannabis use practices and detection avoidance techniques of athletes. Furthermore, consistent engagement with a particular sport team along with prolonged field work, much as Adler and Adler (1991) have done, will provide great opportunity to explore the experiences of cannabis-using athletes and the networks of cannabis users on a team. The next several years will be an opportune time to engage in this research because of the inconsistency between the legality of cannabis in Canada and the prohibition of it in sport. Researching the friction between law and anti-doping policy may lead to revelatory findings in the sociological fields of deviance and sport. Furthermore, future research that explores the experiences of drug-using athletes may aid in future restructuring of fair-sport policy.

Qualitative and constructionist research continues to strengthen the field of drug studies (Gootenberg, 2005, 2008). For this reason, I propose that the GT approach ought to be used in future research regarding the cannabis of university athletes. This research project has constructed a broad image of the cannabis use of Canadian university athletes, but there remains lots to unearth. The sparse knowledge of this topic still necessitates a GT approach. That said, theories of stigma, role engulfment, and fluid drugs proved to be useful in understanding the processes of stigmatization, identity and role formation, and the construction of drugs in sport and society.

An ethnographic GT approach to this research ought to address several themes that this research project was unable to. First, how the factors of gender interact with acceptability and patterns of cannabis use amongst athletes. In the one interview I conducted with a female participant I found that it is likely that female athletes face different expectations, or virtual demands, regarding substance use than males. Perhaps fewer women athletes use cannabis because some women teams are self-funded and they face a greater risk if caught, or there is a greater stigma for female cannabis users and they must conceal their use more effectively. It is also possible that the non-random snowball sampling method should be reconsidered in order to generate more diversity in the sample. Data from the NCAA (2018a) supports the proposition that less women athletes use cannabis. This trend ought to be explored further.

Additionally, the majority of athletes who I spoke with were white. The experiences of non-white athletes and their cannabis use may be drastically different. I spoke with one participant who identified as Black and Hawaiian and one participant who identified as Pakistani and White. Considering the historically racist history of cannabis prohibition, the impact of race on the experiences of drug-using athletes ought to be addressed in a more meaningful way (Browne, 2018; Dickerson, 2012; White & Holman, 2012).

The relation between sport discipline, sporting cultures, and drug use should also be addressed, either by completing an in-depth study into one sport discipline or team, or by studying several different disciplines that include both individual and team sports. I found that the competitiveness of the league and team may affect the acceptability and likelihood of cannabis use within that team. Whether an athlete has professional dreams, plays sport to get a higher education, or simply enjoys the game may be a determining factor in the extent and intention of their cannabis use.

The experiences of non-cannabis users and their perceptions of cannabis' position in sport should be addressed in order to compare and contrast how they define fair and unfair performance enhancing. It is crucial to understand how non-cannabis-using athletes construct this drug in the context of sport.

The gender and race of the athlete, along with their sporting discipline may heavily influence how and why athletes use cannabis. If the researcher has the luxury of being able to control diversity of the sample, these factors ought to be more intently studied. That said, the stigma of cannabis use amongst athletes may continue to make generating a diverse sample difficult. There is also a need to further study former athletes' use of cannabis—especially athletes who experience heighten trauma from sport.

The concept of flow in relation to cannabis is also worthy of further exploration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Some athletes expressed great excitement in sharing how cannabis can alter their perceptions and generate more optimal experiences in their recreational pursuits. The concept of flow has been applied to sport mostly in the context of performance (S. A. Jackson, 1999). I propose that flow ought to be further examined in relation to cannabis and mindfulness and wellbeing. Research on how cannabis affects flow states may lead to revelations on why cannabis seems to promote focus and wellbeing in some contexts but produces lethargy and deleterious effects in others.

This exploratory research project has constructed a foundational image of cannabis use among Canadian university athletes. The directions that future research may take on this topic are limitless. That said, I propose that future research ought to be implemented with the goals to further understand the experiences of cannabis-using athletes in relation to their continued stigmatization. Future research should also recognize the social construction of drugs and the fluid nature of cannabis. Conceptualizing drugs as social constructions challenges existing social structures that stigmatize and cause harm to drug users.

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## Appendix A

Original Interview Guide:

Interview Guide: Cannabis Use Amongst Canadian University Athletes

<u>Basic personal information</u>

a) Age
b) Gender
c) Sport discipline

<u>Section 1 – Cannabis use and athletic career</u>

1. Could you tell me a bit about your sporting career? Specifically, how long you've played __________ competitively, how long you've played at the varsity level?
    a. Do you participate in any other unorganized or organized physical activity? Recreationally, or competitively?

2. When and how were you first introduced to cannabis?
    a. Can you elaborate how you reacted to cannabis your first time?
    b. Were you playing competitive sports at the time when you were first introduced to cannabis?

    -If participant used cannabis before playing university sport:

    a) Why did you start using cannabis?
    b) How often would you use cannabis after you were first introduced?
    c) In what ways would you use cannabis when you were first introduced to it? (social, with other substances?)

    -If participant was introduced to cannabis after university sport:

    a) Who introduced you to cannabis?
    b) Why did you decide to start using cannabis?

3. How often would you say you use cannabis now? (Regular, casual, infrequent)
    a. How many times a week/month/year

4. Does your frequency of cannabis use depend on the time of year? (remember answer for 6c)
    a. Did/do you use cannabis during the competitive season?
    b. If not when did/do you usually use cannabis?

5. Can you describe the context of your usual cannabis use?
    a. Are you usually alone, or in a group?

            i. If with one or more people, who are you with?
    b. What activities did you usually do while high?
    c. Do you usually consume other substances with cannabis (alcohol, tobacco, other drugs?)
    d. What happens to you when you consume cannabis?
    e. How do you usually consume/use cannabis? (Smoking, vaping, edible, etc.)

6. What is the primary reason you use cannabis?
    a. Are there other reasons why you use cannabis?
        i. If yes, how do these reasons differ?
    b. Have you used cannabis for different reasons in the past?
    c. Do you consume cannabis for different reasons in competition vs. out of competition?

7. What do you enjoy about using cannabis?

8. What do you dislike about using cannabis?

9. Have you ever played sports or done any physical activity while experiencing a cannabis high? Competitively, or otherwise?
    a. YES
        i. Can you tell me what it is like to be under the influence of cannabis while playing sports?
        ii. Did/do you find it affected your performance at all?
    b. NO
        i. Why not?
        ii. Have you ever played sport or done any physical activity under the influence of any other substance?
    c. Do you know anyone that use cannabis and engages in physical activity?

10. Do you think cannabis affects your athletic performance?
    a. In what ways?
    b. Is cannabis a performance enhancing substance?

<u>Section 2 – Perspective on cannabis and policy</u>

11. Is your cannabis use known about in your social circles? (Family, friends, teammates, etc.)
    a. If your teammates or coaches knew about your cannabis use how do you think they would reacted? What would the consequences be, if any?
    b. Do you know if any of your teammates use (or have used) cannabis?

        i. Would you be able to give a rough estimate of the number of players or percentage of players that you know use cannabis on a regular or semi-regular basis?
    c. How is cannabis discussed and dealt with amongst your team? (if individual competitor still ask, but also ask about how cannabis is discussed with competitors, and discipline in general)
        i. Is it discussed openly or covertly?
    d. Do you think the drug use by an amateur athlete, like yourself, is perceived or treated differently than a non-athlete or even a professional athlete?
        i. Do you feel like there are any expectations to use or not use cannabis? If yes, who do you feel is imposing these expectations?

12. Do you think cannabis use is stigmatized?
    a. Do you think cannabis use is more socially acceptable for some people over others? (age? occupation?, gender?, race? Sport discipline?)
        i. Why? Or why not?

13. Have you ever been drug tested?
    a. What happens when you find out you have to submit to a drug test?
    b. Would you like to see these drug testing procedures changed? If yes, how should they change?

14. Can you tell me about the current cannabis policies of U Sports and CCES?
    a. Why is cannabis prohibited?
    b. Do you agree with the current policies?
    c. Should Canadian student athletes be allowed to use cannabis?
        i. When and under what circumstances should C.U.A.'s be allowed to use cannabis?
    d. Does your team have any rules regarding the use of cannabis?

15. Do you think the use of performance enhancing substances undermines the 'spirit of sport'?
    a. What would you say the 'spirit of sport' is? What are the defining or important characteristics that sport embodies? (Share WADA definition to clarify formal 'spirit of sport' definition if asked)
    b. Does the use of cannabis undermine the spirit of sport?

16. Do you think the legalization of cannabis will lead to changes in the current U Sports and CCES cannabis policies?
    a. Why or why not?

b. Do you think that the use of cannabis by athletes will be more less stigmatized in the future?
c. What roll will cannabis play in the future of sport?

17. Do you have any questions for me about anything we've discussed over the course of this conversation, or anything that you'd like to share that you didn't get a chance to?

Thank you.

**Appendix B**

Revised Interview Guide:

Revised Interview Guide (MARCH 6) – FORMER ATHLETES

<u>Demographic Information (DO THIS QUICKLY WITH THE PSUEDONYM AND CONSENT FORMS)</u>

a) Age
b) Gender
c) Race
d) Sport that you played in university

-Thank you for speaking with me!

-This project was initially intended to be about current university athletes, but I have had challenges getting athletes to speak about cannabis. As a former athlete, **do you have any thoughts about why athletes wouldn't be completely comfortable speaking with me about cannabis?**

-Athletic director of a university would not provide support for the project. **Does this surprise you?**

Part 1 – **I will be asking questions about both your cannabis use in the past as a university athlete and your current cannabis use.**

1. What led you to first try cannabis?
    a. I know it has been a while but can you walk me through how you've used cannabis from that first time until now? Feel free to go into as much or as little detail as you would like (Frequency, reasons, key events in cannabis use).
    b. Do you use cannabis differently now, than when you were playing university sport?

2. How often would you say you use cannabis now?

3. Can you tell me a bit about your athletic career as well? Specifically about your time playing university sport? And any sports you play now.

4. Can you **tell me more about the context of your usual cannabis use when you were a U SPORT athlete**? (Do you remember what a typical session was like when you were on your university team? Can you walk me through that experience?)

    a. Who were you typically with?

    b. What activities would you enjoying doing while you were high?
        - i. Can you **describe a typical session** or a typical experience when you get high.
        - ii. So that was a typical experience. Do you remember the last time you used cannabis? Can you **walk me through that experience**?
            1. How does this most recent experience compare with your past use as a university athlete?

    c. Was using cannabis something you **mainly** did with other men (potentially teammates)?
        - i. Do/did you know many women (athletes) who also use cannabis?
            1. Do/did you smoke with them?
            2. Do/did you ever talk with them about cannabis?
        - ii. Does it seem like women use cannabis in different ways than you, or other men? How so?

    d. Do you use **other substances** with weed? (blunts, spliffs, alcohol, other?)

    e. Do you prefer a certain method of consumption? Why?

    f. Have you used or heard of CBD?

5. What are the **reasons that you used cannabis when you were a university athlete**?
    a. PROBE (What is fun? How is it relaxing?)
    b. Have you used cannabis for any other reasons?
    c. Have your reasons changed now that you're not a university athlete?
    d. What positive things have happened to you because of your cannabis use?

6. What do you **dislike about using cannabis**?
    a. Are there times when you choose not to use cannabis or it's not appropriate to use cannabis?
    b. What negative things have happened to you because of your cannabis use?

7. Have you ever played sports or exercised while high?
    a. YES
        - i. Can you walk me through a specific time where you have? Is this typical?

        ii. Did it affect your performance at all?
    b. NO
        i. What are the reasons you haven't or don't like to?

8. Have you heard of people using cannabis for exercise?
    a. Can you see why people would?

9. Do you think cannabis affects your personal athletic performance?
    a. What about indirectly? (sleep, mental well-being, training, stress)
    b. **Is cannabis a performance enhancing drug**?

STIGMA

1. **How open are you** about your cannabis use now compared to when you were a university athlete?
    a. Did your friends and family know about your cannabis use?
        i. How might they react to knowing about your cannabis use?
    b. Did your teammates know about your cannabis use?
        i. What does cannabis use within your team look like?
        ii. How did you talk about cannabis within your team?
    c. Did your coach know about your cannabis use?
        i. Do you think you would get into trouble or there would be any **punishments if they were made aware of your cannabis use**?

2. When you were playing in university did you feel like there was an **expectation that you shouldn't be using cannabis**?
    a. Where (or from who) do you think these expectations are coming from?
    b. Was there an expectation that you were to act as a **role model** for the community?

3. How would you say the **general public views cannabis users**?
    a. Has that changed at all in the last couple years? Has legalization done anything?
    b. Can you share any personal experiences of either seeing this or having these views/stereotypes/perceptions directed towards you?

SPORT POLICY

4. Have you heard of the term **'Spirit of Sport'**? (basically the intrinsic values of sport determined by WADA)
    a. To you, what are the most important values of sport? How would you describe what the spirit of sport is?

    b. Does cannabis use contradict (go against) your concept of the ‘spirit of sport’? What about WADA’s? [Show WADA’s definition after discussion]

5. <u>**How do you feel about the current policy**</u> of cannabis being banned in U SPORTS (in-competition)?
    a. Why do you agree or disagree with the prohibition from U SPORTS?
    b. Should Canadian university athletes be allowed to use cannabis? Why do you think cannabis is prohibited in U SPORTS still?
    c. Have you been told why cannabis is prohibited?
    d. What about anti-doping policy in general? <u>Is it something that you feel is necessary in sport</u>?
    e. Is it unfair for athletes to use cannabis during the season?
        i. What about other drugs?

6. Why were you kind enough to volunteer to participate?

7. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that has occurred to you during this interview?

8. What questions do you have for me?

## Appendix C

Original recruitment poster:

# Student athlete?

**Participants are needed for a sociological study on the cannabis use of university athletes**

Eligible participants must:

- Be a current varsity athlete
- Have used cannabis in the last 12 months
- Be over 18 years of age
- Be willing to participate in one 45-60 minute interview between February and April 2019

Please contact Alec Skillings at for inquiries

**ALL INQUIRIES AND INTERVIEWS ARE COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS AND CONFIDENTIAL**

**Appendix D**

Modified digital recruitment poster:

# Student athlete?

**Cannabis is legal in Canada but still prohibited in U SPORTS competition**

**PARTICIPANTS ARE NEEDED** for a qualitative sociological study about the experiences of cannabis-using athletes.

Eligible participants must be:

- A current or former university athlete who has used cannabis during their varsity career (in or out of the competitive season).
- 18 years of age.
- Willing to participate in one 45-60 minute interview (in person or over the phone).

Please contact to participate or to learn more about this research project.

All interviews and inquiries are completely anonymous and confidential.