



Why Marijuana Use by Celebrities is a Big Deal

Michael Phelps made history winning 8 gold medals and breaking international records at the 2008 Olympic Games. Now he is making a different kind of history with his admitted marijuana use at a college party in South Carolina, a DUI in 2004 and anecdotal stories of heavy alcohol use. His actions send a powerful message. To kids, this behavior shows that you can have it all: achieve extraordinary success, break the law and earn huge sums. To the general public, his behavior is one more example of marijuana use as being normative. Even though the majority of the public does not use marijuana, celebrity use without corresponding sanctions mainstreams the issue and is a big deal. To its credit, USA swimming has suspended him from competition for 3 months. South Carolina authorities are considering prosecution. Kellogg has cancelled its contract with Phelps. Why are his other sponsors not following suit? There are good reasons why marijuana is illegal in the United States and throughout most of the world.

Pushes to Legalize Marijuana Sends the Wrong Message to Youth

- Of the 10 states that have approved “medical” marijuana, 8 have the highest percentages of young people ages 12-25 who have used marijuana in the past month.ⁱ They are the majority of states in the top ten for first time use of marijuana and marijuana use in the past year.
- Early initiation of marijuana use reduces educational attainment of youth.ⁱⁱ
- Youth who use marijuana are more likely to have higher rates of other illegal drug use.ⁱⁱⁱ This is most evident for heavy users. It is even more pronounced for adolescents than for adults.
- Students who smoke marijuana regularly are more likely to drop out of high school.^{iv} Students who have smoked marijuana within the past year are more than twice as likely to have cut class as students who did not, while health problems associated with using marijuana can keep students from attending school due to illness.^v
- Heavy marijuana use may damage developing brain in teens, and young adults.^{vi} Research has also shown that the human brain goes through the most growth during the adolescent years. Marijuana can affect proper development of the brain, which could not only cause learning problems in high school, but also in the future.^{vii}
- Marijuana use is a major cause of highway crashes, injury and death.^{viii} In a study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration about 17% (1 in 5) of crash victims under the age of 18 tested positive for marijuana.^{ix} A study in Maryland found that half of the seriously injured drivers 20 and younger tested positive for recent marijuana use.^x

Marijuana Use Impacts Mental Health

- Prevalence of depression and anxiety increases with higher rates of cannabis use.^{xi} This pattern has been shown clearest in young women who use cannabis daily. They had more than a fivefold increase in the odds of depression and anxiety compared to non-users.

- Teens who smoke marijuana at least once a month are three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts than are non-users.^{xii}
- Using marijuana may increase the chance of psychosis.^{xiii} Even infrequent marijuana use could raise the small but real risk of this mental illness by 40%. In an analysis of 35 studies of marijuana users, the risk for psychosis for heavy marijuana users (daily or weekly) was 50% to 200% higher than for nonusers.

Marijuana is Addictive

- As many young people are being treated for marijuana problems as are treated for alcohol and all other drug problems combined.^{xiv} Youth younger than 20 years old account for nearly half of the total number of treatment admissions for marijuana dependence.^{xv}
- Frequent marijuana use results in high risk of dependence. Rates of cannabis dependence are estimated at 20% to 30% among those who have used at least five times, and even higher estimates (35%-40%) are reported among those who report near daily use.^{xvi}
- The marijuana sold today is far more powerful than the marijuana used 30 years ago. From 1992 to 2006, there was a 175% jump in the potency of marijuana that was seized.^{xvii}
- Heavy use of marijuana creates physical dependence (including tolerance and withdrawal).^{xviii}
- Signs of marijuana withdrawal include anxiety, depressed mood, decreased appetite, irritability, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, stomach pain, aggression and anger. Withdrawal symptoms due to marijuana use run similar courses to withdrawal symptoms due to other drugs in terms of magnitude and duration.^{xix}

Smoked Marijuana is NOT “Medicine”

- Smoking marijuana also causes changes in the brain that are similar to those caused by long-term use of cocaine and heroin.^{xx}
- Smoking is not a safe or consistent way to deliver a drug. There is no way to control dose. No medicine used anywhere in the world is prescribed by smoking because smoke is bad for lungs.
- Marijuana is more harmful to lungs than tobacco.^{xxi} Smoking one joint is as harmful to lungs as having up to 5 cigarettes in succession.^{xxii} Marijuana smoke has ammonia levels that are 20 times higher than tobacco smoke. Marijuana contains hydrogen cyanide, nitric oxide and aromatic amines at 3-5 times higher than tobacco smoke.
- Marijuana smokers can face faster deterioration of lungs – 20 years ahead of tobacco smokers.^{xxiii}
- The FDA does not approve of smoked marijuana as medicine.^{xxiv} Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is approved by the FDA only in a synthetic, tested form called dronabinol (“Marinol”) which is used to treat nausea in cancer and AIDS patients. It is not smoked crude marijuana. This medicine, approved by the FDA 20 years ago, can be prescribed by any licensed physician.
- Some marijuana is laced with cocaine, PCP and even chemicals like formaldehyde.^{xxv}

More information can be found at www.ibhinc.org.

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- ^{iv} What are the Long-term Effects of Smoking Pot? <http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/help/ask-the-doc/long-term-effects-of-smoking-pot.aspx>
- ^v Analyses of Substance Abuse and Treatment Needs Issues Analytic Series. Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA, 1998
- ^{vi} Heavy marijuana use may damage developing brain in teens, and young adults. ScienceDaily. Feb. 3, 2009.
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- ^{viii} *Marijuana: Facts for Teens*, Revised, NIDA, September 2004
- ^{ix} Drug Info: Five Myths About Marijuana <http://checkyourself.com/FiveMyths.aspx>
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- ^{xii} Office of National Drug Control Policy. 2008 Marijuana Sourcebook. July 2008.
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- ^{xvi} Budney, A.J., & Moore, B.A. (2002). Development and Consequences of Cannabis Dependence. *Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*, 42, 28S-38S.
- ^{xvii} New CASA Report Finds: Marijuana Potency up 175 Percent, Medical Diagnoses, Treatment Admissions, ER Findings for Teen Marijuana Use Up Sharply. National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. June 18, 2008.
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- ^{xx} *Marijuana: Facts for Teens*, Revised, NIDA, September 2004
- ^{xxi} Marijuana Smoke Contains Higher Levels of Certain Toxins Than Tobacco Smoke, *Science Daily*, December 18, 2008.
- ^{xxii} One Cannabis Joint As Bad As Five Cigarettes. Reuters. July 31, 2007.
- ^{xxiii} Marijuana Smokers Face Rapid Lung Destruction – As Much as 20 Years Ahead of Tobacco Smokers, January 27, 2008.
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- ^{xxv} Department of Health and Human Services on www.abovetheinfluence.com

Phelps photo no joke, some say:

Sponsors, many fans standing behind swimmer after tabloid picture, but acceptance of incident, illegal drug use frustrates others

By Kevin Van Valkenburg and Childs Walker | Baltimore Sun reporters
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After a photo of him apparently smoking marijuana surfaced, Michael Phelps admitted Sunday to "bad judgment." (AP file photo / November 8, 2008)

Ten years ago, a photo that showed an athlete like [Michael Phelps](#) apparently getting high at a party probably would have resulted in considerable fallout.

That might still happen to the athlete who has won the most gold medals in Olympic history, who has millions of dollars in endorsements riding on the outcome. But his admission that he used "bad judgment" has been greeted mostly with forgiveness, humor or a shrug of the shoulders.

Four of his sponsors - Speedo, Omega, [Hilton Hotels](#) and PureSport - released statements yesterday saying they still support him, even if they don't condone his actions, and will continue a business relationship with him. No sponsor has publicly tried to drop Phelps as an endorser. Even Phelps' [Facebook](#) page was bombarded with messages of support, with many of his younger fans expressing frustration that he even felt compelled to apologize.

That's frustrating to Dr. Gary Wadler, a professor of medicine at [New York University](#) and a key adviser to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), one person who isn't interested in seeing it so quickly dismissed. He said he was disappointed because he regards any use of illegal drugs as antithetical to the spirit of sports.

"For probably the most accomplished athlete in the history of the Olympics to be doing that, I found it very disheartening," Wadler said. "Any sanctioning aside, the message it sent is very sad to me."

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/olympics/bal-sp.phelps03feb03002017,0,1429252.story>

Mike Gimbel, a substance-abuse expert who served as the Baltimore County drug czar for 23 years, said he has already grown a little frustrated with how casually some people are dismissing it as no big deal.

"The facts are, pot is the No.1 drug that sends kids to drug treatment in Maryland," Gimbel said. "It's really out of control because the drug has gotten so much stronger than it use to be. To make it that it's an issue about pot is the wrong approach, I think. It's not. It's an issue of Michael's judgment and decision-making."

Society's changing views

But for the most part, Wadler and Gimbel are swimming against public opinion.

"It's something that seems to happen almost every day to a professional athlete," said Bob Dorfman, a sports marketing consultant for San Francisco-based Baker Street Partners. "For a 23-year-old kid who has been in heavy training for most of his life to want to blow off some steam, people are going to be pretty forgiving of that."

In part, that's a reflection of the way marijuana use is viewed by mainstream society today compared with the way it was viewed the past. It's still illegal, yes, but it's not exactly high on the country's list of potential sins.

A 2006 [United Nations](#) report found that more than 160 million people use marijuana annually, and a U.S. government survey found that 83 million Americans have tried the drug at least once. Since 1996, 13 states have legalized it for medicinal use.

Two of the past three presidents, [Bill Clinton](#) and [Barack Obama](#), have admitted experimenting with it, and [George W. Bush](#) simply declined to answer questions about past drug use. Clinton received more derision for claiming he had not inhaled than for saying he had tried pot. Barack Obama later played off the line, saying: "When I was a kid, I inhaled. That was the point."

Some of this generation's most successful entertainers, from film director [Judd Apatow](#) to Phelps' musical favorite, Lil' Wayne, have laced their art with references to marijuana and the culture around it.

And then there are the hundreds of athletes who have either admitted marijuana use or been caught in possession of the drug. From [Kareem Abdul-Jabbar](#) to [Randy Moss](#), you could build a Hall of Fame of superstars who have been associated with pot. Santonio Holmes just caught the game-winning pass in the [Super Bowl](#), three months after he was charged with marijuana possession.

Disturbing pattern?

Dorfman said most people will regard Phelps' actions as harmless or at worst harmful only to him.

"There are so many worse things you can do in public, things that affect other people," he said. "I think his DUI was much worse. That could've killed someone."

With two incidents now on his resume, Phelps could seriously hurt his marketability with a third offense, Dorfman said.

Phelps' citation for driving under the influence in 2004, which also came in the months following an intense Olympics, complicates the issue. This is his second public stumble while partying, and when viewed together, it raises the question: Does Phelps party too much?

It's a question some within the world of swimming have privately been asking for several years. Pictures of him in bars and at parties have been popping up on the Internet with increasing frequency in recent years. But at what point does playful fun become an actual concern?

"If you look at the numbers in studies, about 60percent of kids in the ninth grade have experimented with drinking and drug use," said Dr. James F. Mulligan, the executive director of Seabrook House, a nationally recognized inpatient drug and alcohol treatment facility in New Jersey. "When those kids turn 30 years old, between 12 and 22 percent have problems with addiction. ... It looks like [Phelps] handled it reasonably well, but only he and his family members are going to know if they should be worried about this guy. If someone continues doing it when they know it's wrong, then that's when they might have to ask themselves if there is a problem."

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/olympics/bal-sp.phelps03feb03002017,0,1429252.story>

'By no means aberrational'

But if Phelps doesn't have a problem, is this all much ado about nothing? Most athletes take the Phelps approach to image repair and apologize for letting down teammates, fans and sponsors, which bothers Allen St. Pierre, director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), who called the Phelps story "bittersweet" for the pro-pot community.

"The bitter part is the immediate denial and refutation of an activity that he probably enjoyed doing," St. Pierre said.

At the same time, the NORML director is thrilled to see images of high achievers smoking marijuana.

"It mainstreams the issue and highlights the fact that incredibly successful people, whether athletically or intellectually, are cannabis consumers," he said. "Had this happened 10 years ago, Mr. Phelps would have been in trouble with his commercial interests. Today, it's almost a badge of honor among people 25 years old or younger. Michael is by no means aberrational."

What's clear is that Phelps is still adjusting to the reality that after winning eight gold medals in a single Olympics, almost everywhere he goes, all the eyes (and cameras) in the room are going to be on him.

Before the Olympics, while having dinner with a reporter at his favorite deli in Ann Arbor, Mich., Phelps was asked whether he felt like he could still have a private life, despite his growing fame. He quickly acknowledged that he couldn't.

"I don't think it's possible," Phelps said. "Everybody knows everything about me. I have no private part of my life. It's just a part of what I do. You can't hide anything. Everyone finds out everything anyway. And if they don't, they just make something up, and no matter what you say, people believe it anyway."