

**BES05**

## **Ignorance is hard work: Defending institutions through the production and suppression of discourse**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the problem of institutional maintenance, particularly the problem of how institutions are defended and repaired once they begin to lose their taken for granted status. It examines the persistence of cannabis prohibition for decades after consensus about its dangers and its prohibition broke down. The study finds that supporters of cannabis prohibition engaged in two types of work to stabilize the cognitive foundations of the institution. First, supporters worked to counter frame decay. Because the frames initially constructed to support prohibition had come to appear anachronistic as the social context changed, prohibition supporters worked to generate a new body of discourse to replace older frames with ones more consistent with the new social context. Second, they actively worked to suppress discourses and eliminate texts that could undermine their framing of the drug and challenge the taken for granted status of prohibition. Together these actions helped extend the survival of the institution for several decades. In showcasing this second strategy, the paper highlights a potentially important mechanism of institutionalization not currently developed in the theoretical literature—the use of silencing and ignorance generation in the service of taken for grantedness.

### **Conference Track**

Business Environment - Strategy, Policy, Law, Ethics