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## Toward a Psychedelic Youth Culture

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**NOTE:** The original 1,000+ page manuscript for *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* had to be cut by more than half before its first publication in 1998. This is an edited excerpt that was deleted from the original manuscript.

### **A New ABCs: LSD, STP, MDA, DMT, PCP**

When LSD was being utilized as an adjunct in psychotherapy in the 1950s and early 1960s, and even while Leary and other proponents were spreading its use primarily within intellectual circles and institutions, there were surprisingly few reports of adverse consequences related to use of the drug. The early recognition of the power of LSD led to precautions related to who used LSD, the dosage used and the circumstances of use. It should be remembered that LSD was legal during this period and dosages of legal, pharmaceutically pure LSD coming from Sandoz Laboratory could be precisely determined without worry of unknown adulterants. There were also elaborate rituals surrounding early LSD use that screened out many high risk users and provided controls surrounding the drug experience that lowered the potential risks of use. The concepts of "bad trip," often indicating a psychotic-like reaction to LSD,

and "flashback," indicating subsequent recurrences of the hallucinogenic experience following LSD use, did not become common until after the mass diffusion of LSD into the illicit drug culture. This began around 1965.

Because of increased publicity and controversy surrounding LSD, Sandoz stopped LSD production and distribution in 1965 (Hofman, 1983). In 1966, LSD research was curtailed by the FDA and NIMH and a wave of anti-LSD legislation swept through every state as Time magazine and others reported on the "LSD epidemic." In April of 1966, Sandoz turned over its entire supply of LSD to NIMH to dole out to those few researchers who could get through NIMH's approval procedures to conduct LSD research.

Researchers during this period continued to describe LSD in language more poetic than scientific. Humphrey Osmond, for example, wrote in 1967:

*I believe that the psychedelics provide a chance, perhaps only a slender one for homofaber, the cunning, ruthless, foolhardy, pleasure-greedy toolmaker to emerge into that other creature whose presence we have so rashly presumed, homo sapiens, the wise, the understanding, the compassionate, in whose fourfold vision-- art, politics, science and religion are one. Surely we must seize the chance (Hoffer and Osmond, 1967, p. 134).*

Sidney Cohen's *The Beyond Within* appeared in 1967 as the first scientifically objective book on LSD. Cohen's book included warnings about indiscriminate and uncontrolled use of LSD.

LSD (along with marijuana) became the central offering of that portion of the illicit drug culture catering to youthful polydrug users. A single dose of LSD could be purchased in the late 1960s for anywhere from \$2.50 to \$10 and brand names changed constantly: Pink Dots, Orange Sunshine, Purple Haze, Yellow Caps, and Pink Wedge, to name just a few.

A large number of other hallucinogens emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with names ranging from the quaint to the alphabet soup. STP (2, 5-dimethoxy-4-methyl amphetamine), MDA (Methylenedioxyamphetamine), and DMT ((Dimethyltryptamine) were typical of these offerings. STP was synthesized in 1964 and appeared in California in 1967. Its chemical structure resembled both mescaline and amphetamine. *The Berkeley Barb* reported that the name STP stood for "Serenity, Tranquility, Peace," but legend had it that the alleged "cook" and distributor of STP named the drug after the popular oil additive and advertised that it "made your motor run smoother and lubricated your head." STP developed much of its negative notoriety from adverse reactions to the drug during the 1967 "Summer of Love" in the Haight Asbury district of San Francisco.

MDA was synthesized by Gordon Alles in 1932 but didn't appear in the illicit drug culture until the late 1960s because it was far more difficult to manufacture than other hallucinogens. The first illicit supplies

of MDA were diverted from Department of Defense experiments with the drug.

MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine), known in the illicit drug culture as "Ecstasy," "XTC," or "Adam," was first developed as a potential diet aid in 1914 by the Merck pharmaceutical company in Germany. Its medical use was quickly discontinued because of such side effects as nausea and vomiting. MDMA may be synthesized or derived from nutmeg, saffron, crocus, or parsley. It is closely related to two other drugs, MDA and methamphetamine. The drug has both stimulant and hallucinogenic properties, the latter effect noted with increased dosages (Siegel, 1986). Alexander Shulgin began publishing papers on the effects of MDMA in 1962. It first appeared in the illicit drug culture in 1970 but never gained the popularity of LSD and MDA. During the early 1980s, the drug began being used as an adjunct in psychotherapy in a manner similar to earlier work with LSD. As a result of reports of positive experiences with the drug in this setting, interest in the drug increased which was followed by the emergence of the drug on the illicit drug market. MDMA was consumed orally and was usually sold in a gelatin capsule or white pill at \$35 to \$50 per dose.

DMT was a semi-synthetic hallucinogen first synthesized by Manske in 1931. It was known in the 1960s for its rapid onset of action and short duration of effect. It was called "businessman's lunch" because the high could be experienced over a lunch hour. Its close chemical cousins included DET and DPT.

Phencyclidine hydrochloride (PCP) was developed in the early 1950s and introduced into medicine in 1959 by Park, Davis & Company under the trade name *Sernyl*. The drug seemed to have great promise as a surgical anesthetic. It produced rapid unconsciousness and also lessened post-surgical pain. The problem that arose was during clinical trials with humans was that about fifteen percent of patients receiving the drug awoke from anesthesia in a state of profound disorientation resembling

schizophrenia. Due to these toxic reactions, the drug's use with humans was banned and further legal availability was restricted to its use as an immobilizer of upper primates in veterinary medicine until it was replaced in the late 1970s with a more effective alternative. It was that same period in which PCP ("angel dust") use gained popularity in the illicit drug culture until the accumulation of adverse reactions led to its declining use and castigation (as "dummy dust").

The illicit culture also offered an alleged menu of natural hallucinogens that ranged from peyote buttons, mescaline, and a variety of hallucinogenic mushrooms. Beginning in 1975, manuals began to appear in "psychedelic shops" that provided instructions for growing your own hallucinogenic mushrooms.

### **On Hallucinogenic Bananas**

The phenomenon that was the psychedelic era of the 1960s was marked by farce as well as tragedy. One of the most remarkable of such farces began when the Berkeley Barb, as a spoof, announced that you could get high smoking banana peel. Held up as a "legal turn-on," newspapers across the country picked up the story and there was a run on bananas in grocery stores across the country. Banana joints became the momentary rage as were recipes for preparing this special banana concoction. Like everything in the sixties drug culture, it was even given a special name--"Mellow Yellow." Drug connoisseurs in underground papers compared the banana high to everything from opium to psilocybin--a nebulous comparison for youthful drug users who for the most part had tried neither drug. Concerned parents carefully watched their children for any tell-tale signs of precocious interest in fruit. While Yellow Mellow turned out only to be what it remains--a tasty source of potassium. Other common household products that the media warned might have hidden intoxicating qualities included oregano, catnip, nutmeg and mixing aspirin and Coca-Cola.

### **Cultural Shifts**

The decade of the 1960s was one of great cultural turbulence. It was a decade that opened with such socially significant medical breakthroughs and ominous warnings: the introduction of the first birth control pill and intrauterine birth control device and the discovery that severely deformed babies had been born to mothers taking the new tranquilizer thalidomide. It was a decade that began with jarring international political events: the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the erection of the Berlin Wall. It was a decade of movements: civil rights, the war on poverty, student's rights, anti-war protests, and women's rights. It was a decade of urban riots and "police riots." It was a decade of assassination: Medgar Evers (1963), John Kennedy (1963), Malcolm X (1965), Robert Kennedy (1968), and Martin Luther King (1968). It was a decade of daily body counts from Vietnam.

The decade of the 1960s was a decade of personal exploration as encounter groups and sensitivity groups spread eastward from the Esalen Institute in California. Personal styles changed as young men grew long hair in emulation of a suddenly popular Liverpool rock group. It was a decade in which traditional values and aspirations were being challenged by a significant portion of the largest generation of youth in American history. America's "war babies" were leaving home in mass to find their niche in the world. Heavily programmed for academic and occupational achievement, many began to question that path. Even the most casual observer nodded in agreement to Bob Dylan's anthem for the 1960s: "The Times, They are A-Changin'."

The development of a youthful polydrug using subculture within the U.S. is a story within this saga of political and cultural turbulence. And even the relationship between these large and smaller stories is an interesting one that has been a subject of much speculation. Jill Jonnes notes in her recent account of this period how the political right viewed drugs as a provocative agent in the radicalization of

American youth, while the political left charged that the infusion of drugs was a government plot to depoliticize American youth (Jonnes, 1996, p. 236). While retrospective analyses of the causes will continue, what was clear in the early to mid-1960s was that week by week, city by city, the diffusion of LSD and cannabis experimentation was moving across America. Those who couldn't wait migrated toward where its use was already concentrated, and in the mid-1960s that place was California.

In 1965, a *San Francisco Examiner* reporter, Michael Fallon, coined the word "hippie" in an article on the Blue Unicorn coffeehouse (Stevens, 1987, p. 298). The term, a variation of Norman Mailer's term "hipster," described a new rebellious style of long hair, exotic dress, and exotic chemical tastes (Smith & Luce, 1971, p. 99). Other self-applied terms were more common such as "freaks" and "heads." The term "freak," like the earlier used "dope fiend" used a term of derision from the dominant culture as a badge of pride. The term also captured the essence of feeling outside the mainstream culture and voluntarily choosing to embrace this outsider role.

This style blossomed into a fully developed culture with its own language, music, dress, food, rituals, symbols, values and underground economy. There were full time participants in the culture and weekend hippies who held "straight" jobs during the week and donned their more exotic garb for weekend forays into America's burgeoning counter culture. Some were drawn to its values and politics, some to its chemical sacraments, and some to media promises of "free love." Others simply stumbled in by accident or curiosity.

LSD and marihuana became the temporary sacraments in a blossoming youth drug culture. It was a culture characterized by psychedelic and black light poster art, Zig-Zag cigarette papers, incense sticks, candles, exotic light shows, underground comics, tie-dyed t-shirts, bell-bottom pants, Mexican ponchos, mod miniskirts, paisley dresses, and Jesus-look-alikes. Members of this new culture

eschewed their birth names for such monikers as "Bear," "Tank," "River," "Boo," "Speedy," and "Girl." Conversations were laced with such over-used phrases as "far out," "groovy," and "out of sight" and a rich mixture of bastardized hipster talk. It was a time of conversations about peace, love, harmony, freedom, and "cosmic consciousness." It was a time of pre-AIDS liberated sex, communal living, and road trips to rock festivals. It was a time of growing political consciousness and the emergence of "new left" political action groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The drug using youth culture splintered--with some seeking detachment from the world, others seeking confrontation with the world.

Counterculture literature of the era included the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, *I Ching*, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the *Tao Te Ching*, *Black Elk Speaks*, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, *Summerhill*, and *Stranger in a Strange Land*. LSD-themed movies of the day included *LSD I Hate You* (1966), *Hallucination Generation* (1966), *Psych-Out* (1966), *The Love-Ins* (1967), and *The Trip* (1967), but LSD users were more likely to be found appreciated the vivid visual effects of movies like *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Yellow Submarine* (1968), and the revival of *Fantasia* (1940).

A whole genre of music--Acid Rock--grew up around LSD and was popularized by such groups as the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company and Jimi Hendrix. Other musicians integrated drug themes into their music: first Dylan, Donovan, and the Rolling Stones and later the Beatles and many other groups. Media coverage of drug use and/or drug arrests of such personages as Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and George Harrison seemed to bless the use of these new sacraments at a time songs like "White Rabbit" and "Purple Haze" wafted and ripped through the airwaves.

If there was a coming out party for this new culture it was surely the 1967 "Summer of Love" when more than 100,000 young people flocked to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco to absorb themselves in

this new cultural awakening. The Haight was also the epicenter of the explosion in polydrug use in the 1960s.

By the early 1960s, Haigh-Ashbury had deteriorated from a stable middle-class community to an emerging ghetto whose Victorian homes and low rents attracted a bohemian community of intellectuals and artists and persons seeking alternative lifestyles. These were the "beats" or "beatniks": intelligent, well-read, non-conformist, and open to novelty in both their sexual and chemical experiences. While some drug experimentation was evident, the central intoxicant within this community was unquestionably alcohol. In 1963, Haigh-Ashbury was a little known, slowly growing bohemian community. Newspapers, magazines and television put the story of this evolving community under a microscope in 1964 and 1965. The media coverage both depicted and transformed the community. The Haight became increasingly commercialized and national coverage brought thousands of wayward youth to its streets in 1967.

Efforts to respond to the needs of these legions of young people were reflected in "underground" newspapers, such as the *Berkeley Barb* and the *Oracle*; indigenous systems of support, such as the "Diggers" free food programs; and more formal institutions such as the Haight -Ashbury Free Medical Clinic (Smith and Luce, 1971).

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