

uppers and downers

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A SPECTRUM BOOK

the transition to amphetamine abuse[†]

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The growing problem of amphetamine abuse by American youth is currently pre-empting much of the concern previously focused on the use of psychedelic drugs. In an effort to understand the increased use of amphetamines in the drug culture, we have studied a group of young drug users who have made a transition from the predominant use of psychedelics to the predominant use of amphetamines, or who use both drugs concurrently. Examination of some of the psychological factors underlying the choice of drugs among these subjects suggests a number of hypotheses which can help us to understand the increased use of amphetamines in the general culture.

In the early days of the hippie movement in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco, most of the hippies had a strong antipathy toward "speed freaks," and warnings that "speed kills" were widely circulated. Amphetamine users coexisted with the "flower children" of 1967, but there is some evidence to suggest that few of the original hippies were using amphetamines at that time. Dealers of psychedelic drugs and marijuana rarely catered to the needs of the amphetamine users, and "speed freaks" were generally distrusted and isolated from the rest of the community. (Pittel 1968; Von Hoffman 1968).^{*} A statement made by Allen Ginsberg to an

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^{*} This statement is supported by the relatively small number of amphetamine users treated at the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic during the spring and summer of 1967. While approximately 75 per cent of the adverse drug reactions

underground newspaper (*The Electric Newspaper of Salt Lake City, Utah*) typified the attitudes of the hippie community toward amphetamine users:

Let's issue a general declaration to all the underground community *contra speed-amos ex cathedra*. Speed is anti-social, paranoid making, it's a drag, bad for your body, bad for your mind, generally speaking, in the long run uncreative and it's a plague in the whole dope industry. All the nice gentle dope fiends are getting screwed up by the real horror monster Frankenstein speed-freaks who are going around stealing and bad-mouthing everybody. (Wiener 1969).

Despite such warnings from sources assumed to be acceptable to the authority-wary hippies, it is now commonly believed that amphetamines are more prevalent than psychedelics in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood and in other hippie enclaves throughout the country.

intruders in the counter-culture

To explain the cultural transition from the use of psychedelics to the use of amphetamines, some observers (Shick, Smith, and Meyers 1969; Smith, Luce, and Dernburg 1970) argue that the real hippies ("the nice gentle dope fiends") emigrated from the Haight-Ashbury as a result of increasing difficulties in making their Utopian experiment work, and they were replaced by a large group of less idealistic types, who used amphetamines and other "hard" drugs. In contrast to the use of psychedelics, said to be motivated by a quest for increased awareness and spiritual development, the use of amphetamines is attributed to the severe psychopathology and generalized deviance thought to be characteristic of these intruders in the counter-culture. Amphetamine use is frequently cited as the explanation for the increased violence and criminality in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, and many young people place the responsibility for adverse reactions to psychedelic drugs on the amphetamines with which they allegedly are combined or adulterated. (Shick, Smith, and Meyers 1969).

treated at this clinic were related to psychedelics, a similar proportion of patients treated at the San Francisco General Hospital during the same period were amphetamine users. (1)

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To support the view that the cultural transition to amphetamine use is based on the emergence of a new population of drug users who have little in common with the hippies, attention has been focused on the many contrasting effects of amphetamines and psychedelics, and on the radical difference between the life style of the hippies and that of amphetamine abusers. The emphasis on the *differences* among drug users is espoused by two disparate groups. On the one hand are the apologists who attempt to maintain a praiseworthy image of the hippies and of psychedelic drugs by attributing the social degeneration and psychiatric casualties of the current Haight-Ashbury scene to the intentional or inadvertent use of amphetamines. On the other hand are those who believe that individuals have unique predispositions to the use of one or another type of drug. (Hartmann 1969; Frosch 1970; Wieder and Kaplan 1969). According to this theory, the effects of each type of drug fulfill specific and long-standing needs of the user. Both of these groups would expect to find great differences in background or in personality organization between users of the two types of drugs.

Little objective evidence is available to test these assumptions about the reasons for the transition to amphetamine use in the hippie culture. It is quite clear that the modal patterns of drug use, life style, and community involvement in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood have changed considerably in the past few years. To attribute these changes, however, simply to the influx of a totally different type of person or to the effects of a totally different type of drug precludes any analysis of the complex interactions among personal, social, and pharmacological variables. We also believe it would be a grave error to overlook the growing problem of amphetamine abuse among those who were once committed to the hippie culture and to the use of psychedelic drugs.¹

the haight-ashbury research project

The amphetamine-using subjects described in this paper were drawn from a larger group of young drug users who have been studied intensively as part of a longitudinal investigation based in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. Each partici-

¹ There is some evidence to suggest that many of the current residents of Haight-Ashbury are quite similar in background and in personality organization to the early hippies (Kendall and Pittel 1971) and that many of those currently using amphetamines might have chosen different patterns of drug use had they entered the hippie community a few years earlier (R. C. Smith 1969).

pant in this research is assessed initially through a battery of tests, interviews, questionnaires, and self-descriptions designed to obtain information about his background, attitudes, current functioning, drug use, and involvement in the drug culture. Through whatever factors determine the self-selection of volunteer subjects for this research, we have found that this group of approximately 250 subjects appears to be more representative of the stereotype of early hippies, or flower children, than of the "street people" who are now thought to dominate the neighborhood (Kendall and Pittel 1970). The majority of them come from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds and have had at least one or two years of college education; virtually all of them espouse the values which we associate with the hippie ethos. A number of these subjects were among the early hippie residents of Haight-Ashbury, and many of them have been involved in the drug culture since its beginnings a few years ago.

From their varied and extensive histories of drug use, we have classified the majority of our subjects as multiple users. Despite their tendency to experiment with a great number of drugs and for some to indulge in episodic shifts in their primary drug of choice, almost all of our subjects show a decided preference for the use of psychedelic drugs and marijuana. Many of them use amphetamines, barbiturates, and narcotics concurrently with psychedelics, but relatively few are heavily committed to the use of these other drugs.²

some similarities between amphetamine and psychedelic drug users

On the surface, the amphetamine users in our sample do not appear to differ significantly from those who use only psychedelic drugs. They come from similar backgrounds, espouse similar values, and manifest many of the same impairments in ego-functioning which we have found in users of psychedelic drugs. (Calef et al. 1970). While there is some tendency for them to be rated as having more severe psychopathology than is characteristic of the total sample, this difference is slight and may be partially or largely accounted for

² Among those subjects who do use amphetamines, either concurrently with psychedelics or as their primary drug of choice, there are few who would be classified as particularly heavy users. Even those who use amphetamines intravenously do not tend to show the extreme patterns of high-dose amphetamine abuse described in the recent literature (R. C. Smith 1969; D. E. Smith 1969). The high-dose abuser of amphetamines is probably too hyperactive, suspicious, and fearful to volunteer as a research subject.

by the bias introduced through knowledge of their amphetamine use.

The finding that amphetamine users among our hippie subjects do not seem appreciably different from psychedelic users in terms of background, values, and life style is in itself an argument against the notion that the cultural increase in amphetamine use is due simply to the influx of a totally different kind of user.* We shall turn now to a discussion of some of the psychological factors which led to a transition from psychedelic drugs to amphetamines among our sample of hippie subjects.

the subjective effects of psychedelic drugs

One striking difference between amphetamine and psychedelic drugs which emerges from our data is the quality of subjects' reports of their drug experiences. Subjects describing their use of psychedelics tend to give detailed accounts of rich perceptual and cognitive experiences. These descriptions are quite similar to those reported in the literature (Kluver 1966; Masters and Houston 1966; Metzner 1968), and they are frequently presented as having had profound religious or philosophical impact. The following fragment from a first psychedelic experience was presented by a 21-year-old girl as a major factor in her decision to enter the hippie culture:

I hadn't wanted to take it [mescaline] but R had a way of imposing his quite strong will on others, and since I loved him and wanted to do what he wanted, I took it—two medium large capsules of white powder. He also took two caps—then his friends came to pick us up in their used ambulance. We went up to Mt. Tamalpais for a rock-music happening in the mountain theater there. I had just begun to come on to it by the time we got there, but as the day progressed, I discovered many new and beautiful things happening. The first thing I noticed was the abundance of gorgeous colors around me. Everything was so colorful! Some boy had jars of fluorescent paint and brushes and I painted my hands and face with them. I was so enthralled by the liquid beauty of the paints that I went around to all the other people I could reach and put spots of paint on their hands very slowly and carefully, explaining to them as I did that the universe was in those colors and that I was giving them a part of myself at the same time. R and I sat together . . . and pressed our fingers

* As has been noted previously, high-dose amphetamine users are not well represented in our sample and may not be amenable to the rigorous assessment procedures we employ. It is not certain how they might compare with either amphetamine or psychedelic users who voluntarily participate in such research.

to our eyes—we could see whole scenes behind our eyelids—bright yellow-green people and things with glowing magenta outlines. Not just anything, either! We both saw the same things, and told each other what we saw. . . . While we were there, a parachutist jumped from a plane and landed in the center of the amphitheater. Everyone but me moved away from the spot he was going to land in. I had never seen a jump and couldn't move from the spot. When he landed about ten feet in front of me, the parachute of orange and white silk settled down on top of me. It was the most beautiful, religious thing that ever happened to me. . . . [later] I began to hallucinate heavily for the first time. I was sitting on a Persian rug and pictures like cartoons began to move on it. I watched a Mickey Mouse and Goofy cartoon in the center, then watched ducks swimming around the edge of the rug turn into long-haired maidens swimming together with graceful strokes. Tactile hallucinations also occurred—my hair and scalp became elastic—I could stretch it across the room and let it snap back. I felt my cheeks disappear and cold air blow through from one side of my face to the other. I also saw inside of my mind as a dark, lonely, cobwebbed cave, with two windows with the shades pulled down as my eyes.

This description illustrates a number of the perceptual and cognitive phenomena which characterize the psychedelic experience and which are valued and sought by users of these drugs. Included here, to varying degrees, are reports of enhanced awareness and perceptual acuity; feelings of closeness, sharing, and ability to communicate; a sense of brotherhood and unity; religious ecstasy; and a variety of perceptual anomalies which are the source of amusement, pleasure, and "insights" into the nature of the self and the world. Other common phenomena not included in this example may be seen as variations of the same themes, all of which suggest that the psychedelic experience is typically one of great beauty, tranquility, and inner harmony.³

The passivity of the psychedelic experience is one of its most important, yet often overlooked, characteristics. Even when other people are present during a "trip," the psychedelic user is rarely involved with them actively, and many users describe the necessity of overcoming the desire to seek stimulation or interaction with others as a prerequisite to having a good experience. Given the regressive nature of the psychedelic experience, presumably elicited by drug-induced perceptual distortions (Pittel 1969) it is not surprising that users have little volitional control over their responses (Kluver 1966). Further, the user must be capable of tolerating this

³ This description does not apply, obviously, to adverse psychedelic experiences ("bad trips"), which are characterized in almost opposite terms.

regressive experience without fearing loss of control. Adverse psychedelic reactions are frequently associated with futile attempts to alter the nature of the "trip" through directed activity or by efforts to fight against an impending alteration in consciousness. In some cases, adverse reactions appear to be precipitated by the user's inability to respond to an actual situational demand while in the drug-induced state. What seems clear in each of these cases is that passivity and the ability to relinquish control are essential to the psychedelic experience and that the inability to remain passive may lead to significantly different, and often unpleasant experiences.

the subjective effects of amphetamines

In sharp contrast to descriptions of psychedelic experiences, accounts of amphetamine experiences make little mention of the subjective effects of these drugs; rather, they tend to focus on the typically frenetic activities of the user while he is under the influence of the drug. References to conscious experience are limited typically to mention of an increased rate of mental activity, hypersensitivity to environmental stimulation, increased feelings of strength and competence, and feelings of euphoria and exhilaration. The following abstracts from subjects' accounts illustrate these themes:

On speed I became free of inhibitions—had a surplus of energy and found I enjoyed having six million thoughts going through my head at once. . . .

The first time I took some amphetamines, I liked it a lot. I was very energetic, my thought patterns were faster, and I felt that my memory power was increased. None of the nervousness that I had expected came about . . .

First time I shot speed . . . can dig the needle shooting up trip . . . You just feel straight energy-power-good feeling. Then you feel super together and excited and intelligent and clear and rap and rap and your head may be together but you lose contact with reality—I'm not here, but like later when you start crashing you can see all the delusions you were under.

. . . I invited a boy over whom I had just met in the street . . . and we dropped some speed. I remember feeling intensely happy and satisfied—"together" with myself. I told him things about myself I would never have told anyone—he did the same. We felt the same, almost as one. It seemed that all my life I had worked to feel as I did on speed. It was wonderful to know that I had finally reached my goal.

. . . two years on speed—diet pills and shots of amphetamines mixed with vitamins. I was extremely nervous, emotional, speeded, fragmented, could do no work efficiently but felt generally manic. For some reason I did not relate my frequent crashes to the speed—I was too delighted with the energy it gave me.

The poverty of these descriptions is particularly noteworthy in the light of Ellinwood's findings (1967) that amphetamine users are capable of almost total recall of their drug experiences. If we assume that our subjects selectively recall (or choose to recount) those drug experiences which strike them as most profound and which are most highly valued, amphetamine use would seem to be based primarily on its effects on mood and behavior. Alterations in the *content* of perceptions and ideation are reported occasionally, but these are insignificant in comparison to more universal affective changes and the elevation of self-esteem and confidence.⁴

In addition to their energizing and antidepressant effects, the amphetamines also produce a variety of somatic experiences which are of great importance in distinguishing their effects from those of psychedelic drugs. Somatic reactions to psychedelic drugs tend to occur, if at all, early in the experience; they usually disappear before the onset of the perceptual phenomena which mark the beginning of the "trip." (Hollister 1968). These reactions, which might include nausea, dizziness, tremors, and feelings of weakness, are all experienced as unpleasant and are seen invariably as side-effects independent of the psychedelic experience itself. With amphetamines, however, the relationship between somatic and psychic phenomena is entirely different. Those who take high doses of the drugs place particular emphasis on the intensely pleasurable experience of the "flash" or "rush" which quickly follows injection of the drug; for some users, this orgasmic experience may be the primary motive for high-dose abuse. (Carey and Mandel 1968). More moderate users do not report these intense experiences, but there are almost universal reports of long-lasting visceral and peripheral effects resulting from the parasympathomimetic action of the drug.

These effects, coupled with the increased tendency toward restlessness and the need to be active, contribute greatly to the amphetamine user's awareness of himself as an entity separate from his sur-

⁴The significance of perceptual and ideational effects in amphetamine abuse may be somewhat exaggerated in the literature dealing with high-dosage abusers suffering from toxic psychoses. Phenomenological reports drawn from patients with amphetamine psychoses contain a number of elements (including auditory and visual hallucinations) not seen typically in more moderate users (Ellinwood 1967; Angrist and Gershon 1969).

roundings. In contrast to psychedelic drugs, which often lead to experiences of loss of body boundaries, fusion, and "ego dissolution," amphetamines lead to a sharper definition of the body image. (Adler 1970). For males, the combination of the energizing and somatic effects seems to enhance the sense of masculinity, and perhaps the sexual drive. The passive receptive experience associated with psychedelic use, on the other hand, is most often described as having strong feminine characteristics.

We could give many other illustrations of the antithetical effects of amphetamines and psychedelic drugs—for example, the aggressiveness and hostility seen among amphetamine users and the pacifism and denial of hostility characteristic of psychedelic users. Most of these additional examples, however, would only reinforce the concept that these drugs give rise to widely disparate somatic, subjective, and behavioral effects, virtually all of which can be shown to relate to the differences already noted.

the transition from psychedelics to amphetamines: hypotheses

In view of these contrasting characteristics of psychedelic and amphetamine effects, how do we account for the fact that many individuals use these drugs concurrently, and for the transition from psychedelic drugs to amphetamines? Two hypotheses will be considered here.

failure of psychedelic drugs to compensate for impairments in ego-functioning

In previous papers (Calef et al. 1970; Pittel 1969) we have attempted to show that our subjects use psychedelic drugs to compensate for certain long-standing impairments in ego-functioning. As one example of such impairment, we have described the typical failure of our subjects in integrating and synthesizing experience—an impairment which has profound consequences on virtually all aspects of their functioning. By providing them with an experience characterized by a great sense of harmony or by helping them externalize their inner fragmentation and disorganization, psychedelic drugs bring about a temporary reduction in their chronic anxiety and renewed faith in their ability to deal with personal and social problems.⁵ Many of them believe that psychedelic drugs will provide

⁵ Thus, the frequent claim of our subjects that their use of psychedelic drugs is motivated by and results in self-cure.

them with the key to better understanding of themselves and of their environment.

From the standpoint of an outside observer, these beliefs about their increased capacity to integrate experience and to cope with problems are illusory, if not delusional. Our data suggest that psychedelic drug experiences lead to further impairment of ego functions and to an even greater inability to resolve psychological problems. In addition, users must eventually face their disenchantment with a drug that they invested with the powers of a panacea. It is at this point that the transition to amphetamines may occur.

The typical rationalization for this transition is that amphetamines provide needed energy and motivation for constructive problem solving. The user feels that, through his use of amphetamines, he is overcoming the passivity associated with psychedelic drugs. Viewing these subjects psychologically, one can discern an attempt to strengthen ego boundaries and to shore up whatever reality-testing ability and synthesizing capacity they may retain. Other desired effects of amphetamines are their ability to counteract increasing anxiety and depression and the sense of pervasive emptiness that results from continued failure to deal with persisting or exacerbated personal problems.

adverse and idiosyncratic experiences with psychedelic drugs

The foregoing hypothesis does not account for the transition from psychedelics to amphetamines in all cases. There exists a second group of subjects whose psychedelic experiences were not conducive to the ideological commitment described above. Included in this second group are: 1) those whose experiences with psychedelics were predominantly adverse; 2) those who failed to achieve any psychedelic effect; and 3) those whose psychedelic experiences are highly idiosyncratic, being more amphetamine-like than psychedelic in quality.

The psychedelic experiences of subjects who fall into this category are typically lacking in rich descriptive detail. In describing them, these subjects tend to focus primarily on the circumstances and setting of the "trip," on unpleasant somatic effects, and on their behavior rather than on their inner experiences. Few of the perceptual, cognitive, or metaphysical phenomena described by subjects who become committed to the use of psychedelic drugs are found in the

protocols of this group of subjects. The following excerpts are taken from descriptions of the first psychedelic experiences of subjects who later shifted to amphetamines:

. . . I bought my first cap of acid from a friend. I took it at home on a Friday night before supper. I started getting high while I was eating, and my food started moving around on my plate. Also, I kept smiling and grinning. I noticed a lot of body feelings, twitches and tingling all over. Then I went in to watch TV and I began to feel warm, good sensations all over, and the TV began to melt and the actors' words were noticeably distorted. I went into my room and hallucinated insects crawling on the ceiling while I was listening to records. My sister came in with a bowl of potato chips and I ate some and freaked 'cause it tasted like glass crunched up. Then I listened to music for about four hours and dozed off.

I was on liberty from my ship in the Navy. I was visiting friends in the Haight. A friend of one of my friends turned us on to a tab of "blue cheer" each. I dropped it and we went to a concert at Speedway Meadows because it was Sunday. Just before we got there I began to feel very light. The music manifested itself in visions of lightning. After awhile I decided to come back up Haight Street. The air in the park was white with yellow spots. I hallucinated in a screen effect with the background looking normal, but at times the background looked like a photographic negative or as through a red or blue filter. Sensually I felt good all over. On Haight Street, I went down shaking everybody's hand, saying "Hello, brother, sister." I was very conscious of love. I could feel, see, and hear its manifestations quite clearly.

In both of these examples there are indications that the drug had some psychedelic effects. Perceptual distortions, somatic changes, and even hallucinatory experiences were reported by both subjects. What is lacking in these descriptions is any symbolic elaboration or generalization of these effects which gives them a special significance. Unlike the experiences reported by subjects who remain committed to psychedelics, these descriptions do not go far beyond a mere cataloging of effects. Neither of the subjects reported the profoundly moving sense of harmony or inner peace which is characteristic of more representative psychedelic experiences. Also, these examples place considerably more emphasis on somatic effects and on activity than is found in most of our data, suggesting that subjects of this type cannot give themselves up to the passivity or to the *diffusion of body image which normally occurs with psychedelic drug use.*

Psychedelic drugs may be used by these subjects as a means of establishing relationships within the hippie culture or in response to peer pressures. In some cases the use of psychedelics is continued,

despite the failure to experience their full effects, or after repeated adverse experiences, because the subjects feel they can overcome *their inhibitions and "hang-ups" through mastery of the psychedelic experience.*⁶

It can be hypothesized that this group of subjects, although they are motivated to seek the reputed benefits of psychedelic drugs, lack the ability to tolerate the passive and regressive aspects of the psychedelic experience. This inability may be due to an already excessive degree of ego disorganization, or to a rigid and brittle defensive structure which does not allow for regressive experiences. In either case, the anxiety produced by psychedelic drugs can be observed or inferred from their descriptions of such experiences. The transition to amphetamine use by these subjects may be seen as an attempt to strengthen their already shaky ability to maintain control and to compensate for basic impairments in ego functions.

conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented observations and hypotheses bearing upon the use of amphetamines among a group of hippie subjects. We have suggested that an understanding of the motives and personality characteristics underlying the transition from psychedelic drugs to amphetamines is important to any consideration of the cultural changes in patterns of drug abuse. An analysis of our subjects' phenomenological descriptions of their amphetamine and psychedelic experiences suggests that those subjects who make a transition to the concomitant or predominant use of amphetamines do so either because of the increased anxiety and lack of motivation related to their use of psychedelics or because of personality characteristics which make the use of psychedelics intolerable to them.

⁶ Among this group of former psychedelic users who have made a transition to the use of amphetamines are a number of subjects whose use of psychedelics was unusually great for a relatively brief span. It is possible that these subjects, one of whom claims to have taken one to three LSD "trips" daily for a six-month period, quickly develop tolerance for the drug. In this way, they are able to avoid experiences which they could not otherwise tolerate, and at the same time remain *bona fide* members of the drug culture.

These subjects may also turn to the use of barbiturates, narcotics, or other psychotropic drugs in their search for an altered state of consciousness that they can tolerate. In subsequent papers, we will attempt to show that the ultimate choice of a drug can be predicted from the nature of the user's initial response to psychedelic drugs.

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