

comment

Ending Campus Drug Incidents

The use of drugs—primarily marijuana and LSD—has become an increasingly important and time-consuming problem on college campuses. Much of the thinking and writing (that done by adults, anyway) focuses on the drug use itself, asking why so many students take drugs and what can be done to prevent them, or lessen the impact of their use of drugs.

But instead of asking why students use drugs, let us ask how a campus comes to have a drug incident—thus suggesting that we *ought* to be concerned with a problem somewhat different from the one we conventionally are.

I propose this, first, because it is very likely impossible, given our resources and our will, to stop students from using drugs. No college administration has the personnel to root out drug use by itself. (It may try, however, to achieve the same end by opening the college to undercover agents of off-campus police forces, or it may—as in the recent action at Stony Brook, Long Island—find off-campus forces invading the campus openly, without asking permission first.)

In addition, we need more knowledge before we can get any firm answer to the question of why students use drugs—and any program designed to eradicate drug use not founded on this knowledge will surely fail. Third, it seems to me that the processes involved in a campus drug incident do not require intensive study, and that we may find a way out of our current difficulties by attacking the problem at this level.

Finally, available evidence and the experience of campus physicians indicate that drugs are a minor health hazard. LSD apparently presents some difficulties, but marijuana (the most widely-used psychedelic) has no demonstrable bad effects. Campus psychiatrists know that alcohol presents them with far worse problems. In short, students who think there is no good rea-

son for attempting to restrict student drug use are right.

I thus mean to distinguish campus drug incidents from campus drug use. Students may use drugs without incidents occurring. An incident occurs when students use drugs, the college administration is confronted with the fact publicly, and it takes some punitive action in consequence. The press, radio, and TV are frequently involved.

What do students and administrators do that produces the typical campus incident? Students contribute to the growing number of incidents in two ways. First, more and more of them use drugs. My guess is that marijuana use is now viewed by many college students in the same way that chastity is said to be viewed by college women. Once students did not recognize any legitimate argument in favor of drug use; they knew that it was, quite simply, "wrong," just as the "nice" college girls knew that "nice girls don't." But college girls now see chastity as a matter for individual decision; they can envision many circumstances in which premarital intercourse is morally acceptable. So each girl must make up her mind for herself; she no longer believes that an absolute moral rule governs such decisions. Similarly with drugs. Students who once thought all drug use immoral now believe that the consequences of use are so negligible that it is a matter for each student to decide.

Further, the greater availability of scientific information convinces students, approaching it as they do in a rational and "scientific" manner, that they have nothing to fear. This, of course, occurs most frequently with respect to marijuana, where the scientific evidence most clearly favors that interpretation.

But increased student drug use alone is not sufficient to create a campus drug incident. For that to happen, students must also be caught, which they are doing more and more frequently. Students get caught in a variety of ways.

A number of incidents have been triggered by students who sold marijuana to policemen. Sometimes students smoke the drug so openly as to make detection almost inevitable—the very openness of the act, in fact, makes the police or other officials feel that they are being taunted and thus increases the students' chances of arrest. Sometimes students create a campus incident by giving drugs to other people without their knowledge, possibly as a prank. These people may respond very badly, and official action is provoked by the medical opinion that drug use is thus very dangerous.

What students do to provoke a drug incident, then, is to get caught. And they get caught for two reasons: ignorance and ideology. They are either ignorant of the devices and precautions that might protect them against arrest, or they are willing to risk it on ideological grounds.

Most of the college students who use drugs today have no desire to get caught. On the contrary, they fear arrest and its effect on their lives. They do not want to be kicked out of school, or have police records, or be branded as dope fiends. But they have learned to use drugs in an atmosphere where strict security measures do not seem essential to avoid arrest, and where no one has told them what those measures are.

Drug users of past generations knew that they had to fear the police. These experienced users were cautious about whom they bought drugs from and whom they sold them to, about where they used drugs and whom they allowed to know, about where they kept their supplies and about the people before whom they would dare to appear "high." These precautions were part of the culture that drug users learned at the same time they learned to use drugs, and the necessity for such precautions and their character were passed on from one user to another. It appears now that a large number of college students have gained access to drugs without acquiring this aspect of the drug-using culture. They know how to get high, but they don't know how to get high without getting caught.

Other students, a smaller number, get caught for ideological reasons. Some believe they have a constitutional right to get high on drugs. (Indeed, constitutional issues have been raised in many cases, some of which will probably find their way to the Supreme Court: These students may be right.) They want to use drugs, feel that they are legally entitled to do so, and wish to provoke a legal confrontation on the question. Or

they simply do not wish to bother about being secretive. They may adopt an ideology of psychological freedom, believing that the psychic energy they expend in secretive maneuvers could be spent better in other ways. They recognize that they are taking a chance, but consider the chance worth the price. Either of these ideologies leads students to be quite open about their drug use, perhaps using drugs in public places, or announcing publicly that they use drugs.

In short, whether out of ideology or ignorance, students use drugs with increasing openness and lack of caution. This leads to situations in which they are very likely to get caught and become the objects of publicity. And at this point college administrations complete the process of creating a campus drug incident.

College administrations, as a rule, respond to the pressures of publicity by taking some kind of action. They will very likely not have a reasoned approach to the problem. Confronted with letters and calls from angry and worried parents, with strong pressure from boards of trustees (and, in the case of public institutions, from state legislatures), with continuing newspaper questioning, they act hastily. They may expel the student. They may pass new harsh regulations, or make new interpretations of the broad discretionary powers they already have.

These responses assume that the number of drug users is small; that, once weeded out, they will not be replaced by new users; and that the problem can be dealt with within the confines of the campus proper. But none of these assumptions are correct. The number of users is large and growing; they cannot be weeded out, only driven underground. Since students can always purchase drugs "in town," in nearby cities, or on other campuses, no college can contain the activity on its own. So harsh action by university authorities simply brings even more cases to light and increases the unfavorable publicity—at least until students get the message and become more cautious.

The same considerations apply to the increased surveillance that students are subjected to. Many of the actions students are now caught for might have gone unnoticed, flagrant as they are, if campus officials had not alerted campus police, dormitory counselors, student-health personnel, and others to bring relevant evidence to the attention of the authorities. Some of this increased attention followed F.D.A. Commissioner James L. Goddard's appeal

for such cooperation with federal and local law-enforcement officials; some was probably a simple response to massive national publicity. All increases in surveillance, of course, multiply the number of cases that come to public attention as campus drug incidents and thus increase the difficulties the surveillance was supposed to solve.

Administrators take strong actions because they fear there may be some danger to the students involved—and because of the pressure of publicity.

Many deans of students worry about the dangers of drug use. After all, we cannot expect that they will have expert knowledge of drugs. Nor is the most appropriate time for such an educational effort likely to be in the midst of a great public-relations crisis.

In any case, knowledge alone will not solve the problem. Many college administrators know perfectly well that marijuana is a harmless drug. Nevertheless, their public-relations problem persists. We can see how the maintenance of a favorable image lies at the heart of the administrators' concern by comparing the amount of activity against marijuana and LSD use to that against the use of amphetamines, quite widespread on many campuses for years (students use Benzedrine as an aid for staying up and studying at exam time). I do not recall any administration's taking severe action on the use of amphetamines, though I believe that physicians agree that amphetamines are potentially a great deal more dangerous than marijuana. And we can note the same kind of differential response to students' use of alcohol.

Suppose we take as our goal the reduction of the number of campus drug incidents. This might be accomplished by trying to do away with student drug use. But students want to use drugs and can easily do so; few college administrations will decide to use the totalitarian methods that would be required. One might institute a daily search of all student rooms and perhaps, in addition, inaugurate a campus "stop-and-frisk" law. But they are not going to do these things, so student drug use will continue.

We might also educate administrators to take a calmer view of the problem. This, no doubt, would do some good, but even the most knowledgeable administration would not be able to avoid the difficulties of a public-relations crisis.

We might, finally, educate students to take precautions to avoid detection. If an educational program of this kind, perhaps sponsored by the student government, were started on a campus, and

if students took their lessons seriously, many fewer might engage in those actions likely to provoke arrest or detection. There would be fewer incidents to make publicity about, fewer incidents for the administration to respond to. The administration no doubt would still be aware that students were using drugs on campus, but it would not be confronted publicly with that use and would not be required to respond.

If students could be so educated, some kind of implicit bargain might be struck between university administrators and student drug users, a bargain not unlike the one that seems to characterize homosexuality on most college campuses. All campuses of any size have a homosexual underground that probably includes both students and faculty members, yet we hear very little about homosexual incidents on campus. Administrations seldom seem to get upset about this problem, seldom take strong punitive measures, and almost never make a big public outcry about it. I suspect that this is because they have, in effect, come to terms with the homosexual community on their campus. They regard it as an evil, no doubt, but not as an evil that can be easily done away with. They worry about the physical and psychological harm the community's existence may cause members and non-members. But they know they must live with it, and they do. They take action only when some provocative incident occurs, such as when a student blackmails a faculty member, when minors are involved, or when the matter comes to police attention (as it seldom does). In effect, the homosexual community and the university administration have made a bargain that goes something like this: The homosexuals agree to keep things out of the newspapers and the administration agrees not to look for trouble. An ethic of "live and let live" prevails.

This strikes me as the most likely solution to the problem of campus drug use. Administrators must take a calmer view of drug use, and students must become more cautious. The main obstacles to such a bargain will be nervous administrators afraid to take such a step, and ideological students who wish a confrontation on the issue.

But college administrators have learned to live with sex and drink. They may yet be able to learn to live with drugs as well.

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