

A REPORT

Heads and Seekers

Drugs on Campus, Counter-Cultures and American Society

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Students who use drugs are usually treated by the mass media as an alien wart upon the student body of America. A spate of articles in popular magazines, specials on television, discussions in state legislatures and hearings by congressmen have helped create an image of the young drug user that equates "drug abuse" with moral leprosy and quite possibly with membership in the Mafia. Few subjects arouse feelings as intense and irrational as does the topic of student drug use; in few areas is there greater tendency to distort, to perceive facts selectively, and to view with alarm. Few topics are treated with so much heat and so little light.

Despite growing public agitation, however, we have remarkably little factual information about drugs on campus. Most colleges have not conducted surveys of drug use—or if they have, they have preferred not to publicize the results. Most students who use drugs do not volunteer themselves as psychological research subjects, for the mere possession of marihuana is a felony under federal law. As a result, what is known about the sociology and psychology of student drug users comes largely from that small minority of students who are sufficiently disturbed to seek out professional help. Surrounded with illegality and the taint of moral depravity, drug use on campus remains a largely unexplored area.

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Yet enough information is now available from scattered studies to permit preliminary extrapolation to a coherent picture of the "student drug abuser." In the discussion that follows, I will not be concerned with the psychopharmacology or physical effects of drug use. Rather I will speculate about the meaning of this phenomenon in a variety of overlapping contexts—psychological, social, educational and historical.

To begin to understand youthful drug use, we must start from a series of more specific questions. Who uses drugs? How do we define "drug use"? What are some of the psychological factors involved in drug use? How can we explain the fact that drug use is very common in certain kinds of colleges, but virtually nonexistent in others? If, as widely claimed, student drug use is related in some way to the characteristics of modern American society, what is the nature of the relationship?

RATES AND PLACES

The term "drug" covers a multitude of substances that affect human physiology and functioning. Virtually every American is a routine user of prescribed and unprescribed psychoactive drugs like aspirin, alcohol, sleeping pills or stimulants whose primary intended effect is to alter mood, feeling, or psychological states. Indeed, at the present time, more than seventy percent of all prescriptions written in the United States are for psychoactive compounds—for example, tranquilizers, painkillers and antidepressants. If we include—as we must—ethyl alcohol, caffeine and nicotine among drugs, then the American

who has never "used" drugs is a statistical freak.

Although drug use itself is not novel in American society, what is novel is the student use of new types of drugs for the sole purpose of altering mood and state of consciousness. Most student drug use involves the hallucinogens—a family of nonaddictive drugs that includes not only marihuana (cannabis) but other hallucinogenic, psychedelic or psychotomimetic drugs like LSD, DMT, STP, psilocibin and mescaline (peyote). Some of these drugs have been widely used since the beginning of recorded history, others are recent discoveries; what is new, then, is their use by a growing segment of American college youth. To be sure, most definitions of "drug abuse" lump together distinct individuals for whom drug use and experimentation have very different meanings. But for a start, let us accept the prevailing definition of "drug user" as anyone who has *ever* tried any one of the hallucinogens, and examine the pattern of use that results from accepting this definition.

Student drug use, defined as use of the hallucinogens, is rapidly increasing. But the widely publicized estimates that one in seven, one in four, or one in two of the seven million college students in America can be considered a "drug abuser" are vastly exaggerated. Even at those few colleges where drug use is most prevalent, surveys arrive at estimates of between five and seventy-five percent of the student body who have "ever used" any of the hallucinogens. These studies, furthermore, tend to have been conducted at select colleges like California at Berkeley, Wisconsin at Madison, Michigan at Ann Arbor, Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Cal. Tech, Princeton, Antioch, Swarthmore, Wesleyan (Connecticut), Goddard and Reed. Approximately three percent of American college students attend these institutions. Among the remaining ninety-seven percent, it already seems clear that drug use is far rarer, and in many instances nonexistent. A recent Gallup Poll arrives at an estimate of five to six percent of college youth who have "ever tried" any hallucinogenic drug. Thus, while

student drug use constitutes an important phenomenon, it probably touches directly less than one in ten of the young Americans who attend institutions of higher education.

The public impression of astronomically high rates of drug use in American college youth stems in part from the great visibility of the colleges where drug use is most common. Students of college cultures have found it useful to categorize colleges according to the relative presence or absence of what they term an "intellectual climate." The correlation between "intellectual climate" and rates of drug use is very close. That is, the highest rates are found at small, progressive, liberal arts colleges with a nonvocational orientation, a high faculty-student ratio, high student intellectual caliber as measured by College Boards, close student-faculty relationships, and a great value placed on the academic independence, intellectual interests, and personal freedom of students. At perhaps a dozen or so such colleges, it seems likely that the proportion of students who have ever tried marihuana or some other hallucinogen exceeds fifty percent. But there are more than twenty-two hundred other colleges in the country.

Farther down the list, with regard to both intellectual climate and drug use, are the private university colleges, like Harvard, Stanford, Yale and Chicago, and the major state universities, like Michigan, Wisconsin and California, with a tradition (at least within their Colleges of Arts and Sciences) of intellectual excellence and academic freedom. Included on this list, as well, should be the major technological institutions like Cal. Tech and M.I.T., notable for the extremely high ability of students they recruit. At such colleges, student drug use rates of between ten and fifty percent will be found at present.* Still farther down on the list are other state universities with a lesser reputation

* Regional differences are also important: drug use is higher on the West Coast than on the East Coast. Also, proximity to a metropolitan center probably increases drug use, other things being equal.

for academic excellence and intellectual or personal freedom. Here one thinks of colleges like Ohio State and the University of Oregon. At such institutions rates of drug use probably vary between five and twenty percent. At the bottom of the list in terms of both student drug use and intellectual climate are those colleges that together enroll the majority of American students—upgraded state teachers colleges, junior colleges, community colleges, normal schools, the smaller religious and denominational colleges, and most Catholic colleges and universities. On such campuses, student drug use rarely exceeds five percent. These are the colleges most notable for their vocational and practical orientation, the absence of serious student intellectual interests, and the presence of strong anti-intellectual student subcultures centered around technical training and/or social activities like sports and fraternities.

Nor are drug users randomly distributed *within* any one institution. At large universities that include a number of separate "schools," drug use is concentrated in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Graduate School, and in the Schools of Drama, Music, Art and Architecture. Rates of drug use are notably lower in such schools as Business Administration, Engineering, Agronomy and Education. Furthermore, within any school or faculty, drug users are most likely to be found in the most intellectual, humanistic and "introspective" fields (for example, music, literature, drama, the arts and psychology); they are likely to be less common in practical, applied, extroverted and "harder" areas like engineering or economics. Indeed, there is evidence from one liberal arts college that students who use drugs are characterized by *higher* grades than those who do not. The demographic evidence suggests a strong relationship between intellectuality and drug use within the college population.

These inferences, however, are open to two different interpretations. On the one hand, we might conclude that colleges with an "intellectual climate" recruit students with special personal characteristics that make them more prone to experiment with

drugs. The institution, according to this view, merely acts as a magnet for young men and women who are likely to smoke pot no matter where they go to college. On the other hand, it could be argued that the climate and culture of some colleges actively push students toward drug use regardless of their personal characteristics. If a student attends a college where "everyone" is using drugs, he is more likely to do so himself. Similarly, certain college pressures (for example, relentless pressure for grades) or certain administrative practices (for example, respect for student autonomy) may also increase the likelihood of student drug use. In practice, both these interpretations seem correct: some colleges attract large numbers of potential drug users and then expose them to a climate in which using drugs becomes even more probable. To understand this interaction, we must consider types of drug users, motivations for drug use, and some of the pressures on college students today.

TASTERS, SEEKERS AND HEADS

A "drug abuser" is often defined as anyone who has ever experimented with any of the hallucinogens—who has ever inhaled marihuana, ever ingested any other hallucinogenic drug, or, in some instances, ever taken a barbiturate to get to sleep or an amphetamine (Benzedrine, Dexedrine) before an examination. If we limit ourselves to the hallucinogens, however, we usually find that up to half of the students listed as "users" turn out to have "used" drugs no more than three times, and to have no plans to continue. To call such students drug "abusers" or even "users" is misleading. It is like applying the epithet "alcoholic" or "drinker" to the college girl who once tasted a sip of beer but didn't like it, or labeling as a "smoker" the adult who at the age of twelve smoked a cigarette behind the barn but was sick and never smoked again. Probably the single largest group called "drug abusers" are in reality *tasters*. Such individuals have no place in a discussion of why students use drugs, since these particular students no longer use them.

If we eliminate the tasters from the ranks of student drug users, we are left with a contingent of probably less than five percent of the college population. These students have used drugs (usually marihuana) a number of times, and they tell us that they "plan" to continue their experimentation. But even within this group of continuing users there are important distinctions to be made. The largest single group of actual drug users are students who have used drugs a relatively small number of times (for example, have smoked pot less than fifteen times) and who do not use them regularly (for example, not every weekend). Such a pattern of use generally indicates that, despite willingness to continue drug experimentation, the individual has in no way organized his life around it. For these occasional users, drug use is generally a part of a more general pattern of experimentation and search for relevance both within and without the college experience—it is one aspect of a more encompassing effort to find meaning in life. Such students can be termed *seekers*, in that they seek in drug use some way of intensifying experience, expanding awareness, breaking out of deadness and flatness, or overcoming depression.

Finally, there is a relatively small but highly visible group of students who have made drug use a central focus of college life. Such students use drugs often and "regularly"—for example, every weekend—and they often experiment with a variety of different drugs. For such young men and women, drug use is not just an intermittent assist in the pursuit of meaning, but a part of a more general "turned-on" ideology, and a membership card to one of the collegiate versions of the hippie subculture. Such students are generally called *heads* (pot-heads or acid-heads) by their contemporaries; and they are by far the most knowledgeable about the effects, side effects, interactions and meanings of the drugs available to students today.

But even among heads, drug use does not invariably constitute the deeply psychopathological and self-destructive phenomenon it is sometimes said invariably to

be. Many such students have sufficient strength of character (and perhaps of physiology) to endure regular experimentation with marihuana (and even with more powerful hallucinogens or amphetamines) without suffering any enduring personal disorganization. Many students who use marihuana routinely do *not* experience the ominous personal deterioration, the "bad trips" or the loss of motivation that is sometimes thought to accompany even casual drug experimentation. To be sure, one of the intended effects of drug use is to produce a *transient* alteration of experience and consciousness; and to those who view this alteration from the outside, it may appear deplorable. Yet a majority of students who have used the hallucinogens report that the experience was enlightening, enjoyable or meaningful. Most students who use marihuana regularly, and many of those who use the more powerful hallucinogens, never appear in clinics or consulting rooms (much less psychiatric hospitals). They "recover" from the drug experience, not obviously the worse for the wear, sometimes proclaiming loudly that they have gained a profound and valuable (if usually ineffable) insight into their own natures or that of the world. Judged by such criteria of mental health as the ability to work, to love and to play, such individuals do not seem especially less "mentally healthy" than before their drug experiences.

A smaller but highly publicized group of "heads," however, suffers serious ill effects from even single experiences with the hallucinogens. Students with serious pre-existing psychopathology are most vulnerable. And these same students seem most likely to experiment with drugs under conditions that even experienced drug users consider adverse—intense depression, personal isolation and unpleasant surroundings. In extremely rare instances, marihuana can produce panic states or transient psychotic reactions, and similar reactions to LSD have been reported more often. Perhaps more important than the highly dramatic but usually reversible drug psychosis is the danger of lapsing into some relatively enduring form of personal dis-

organization—most commonly, a life-style that involves a virtually total and apparently self-destructive immersion in a drug-using “hippie” subculture.

Yet even here, short-term changes and long-range effects need to be distinguished. There are clearly some individuals who “regress” into a drug-using subculture for a period of months and even years, but who eventually reemerge into a productive relationship with their fellow man and with society itself. “Dropping out” into the hippie world seems to be defined, for growing numbers of students, as a way of testing psychological and social limits as a preparation for returning to the world of action and commitment. To be sure, most Americans would argue that there are better ways of testing the relationship of self to society than by entering the hippie subculture for two years. But our evaluation of the “ominous” implications of student drug use must be tempered by an awareness that many of those who “drop out” into the drug-using world eventually slide back into the mainstream. One of the disadvantages of the opprobrium that attends drug use is that labeling drug users “felons” or irredeemable “addicts” may in fact make it virtually impossible for them to return to a productive role in society.

THE QUESTION OF MOTIVES

Drug use is no different from any other form of human behavior, in that a great variety of distinct motives can cooperate to produce it. The particular weight of each of these motives and the way they are combined differs in each individual. Furthermore, drug use is affected not only by motives and forces *within* the individual, but by what is happening *outside* of him in his interpersonal environment, and in the wider social and political world. Thus, any effort to delineate “types” of motivations that enter into drug use is bound to be an oversimplification. For example, there are many individuals who share common characteristics with drug users but who do not use drugs because drugs are not available on their particular campus. Similarly, there are individuals who have little in common

with other drug users, but who nonetheless use drugs.

With these important qualifications, at least two of the more common patterns of motivation in student drug users can be defined. Consider first the “seekers.” Occasional but continuing drug users are rarely part of the hippie subculture, but such students do tend to have certain common characteristics. They are generally better-than-average students; they are intellectual and antivocational in their approach to their educations; and they are likely to be uncertain as to their future career plans. Sociologically, they tend to come from upper-middle-class professional and business families. Psychologically, such students are usually intense, introspective and genuinely involved in their academic work, from which they hope to find “solutions” to the problems of life and society. (Often, however, they are disappointed in this hope.) As individuals, they usually have a great capacity for hard work. They are rarely “lazy” or indolent; and, when called upon, they can be orderly, regular and highly organized. They also find it relatively easy to separate ideas from feelings, a fact that helps explain their high grades. They are strongly opposed to the war in Southeast Asia, do not express anger readily, and are often extremely idealistic.

But despite considerable academic success and the prospects of a good graduate school (possibly with a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship thrown in), such students are less seekers after grades or professional expertise than seekers after truth. They are extremely open to the contradictory cross-currents of American culture; they read widely, be it in the theater of the absurd, modern existentialist literature, or the writings of the New Left. They are not in any systematic way “alienated” from American society, but they have not really made their minds up whether it is worth joining, either. Often, their own life-styles and the exertions required to do well in a demanding college make such students feel “out of touch” with themselves. Although to an outside observer they usually appear more thoughtful and “in touch” than their class-

mates in the School of Engineering or Business Administration, they do not consider themselves to be sentient at all. On the contrary, they are continually struggling to experience the world more intensely, to make themselves capable of greater intimacy and love, to find some "rock bottom" from which they can sally forth to social and interpersonal commitments. Such students characteristically make enormously high demands upon themselves, upon experience and upon life; contrasted with these demands, their current experience is often barren, flat and dull.

Marihuana and the more powerful hallucinogens fit very neatly with the search for experience for such students. On the one hand, they promise a new kind of experience to a young man or woman who is highly experimental. On the other hand, they promise intensity, heightened sentience, intensified artistic perceptiveness, and perhaps even self-understanding. Self-understanding is, of course, a prime goal for such individuals; for they are far more inclined to blame themselves than others for the inadequacies of their lives, and they often deliberately seek through self-analysis to change their personalities.

In students of this type, beginning or increasing drug use is often associated with feelings of flatness, boredom, stagnation and depression. It is surprising how often drug users mention a major loss, depression, or feeling of emptiness in the period preceding intensified drug use. The loss may be a breakup with a girl friend, the realization that one's parents are even more fallible than one had previously known, the blow to intellectual self-esteem that almost invariably accompanies the first mid-term grades in the freshman year at a selective college, or the growing sense of confusion and purposelessness that follows abandoning previously cherished vocational goals or religious values. Under such circumstances, if there is pot around, the likelihood of trying it (and continuing to use it) is increased.

The "head" is in many respects different from the "seeker." Drug use occupies a more central place in the head's life and

is almost always accompanied by disengagement from ordinary social expectations, by intense and often morbid self-exploration, and by a "turned-on" ideology profoundly hostile to the careerist, materialistic and success-oriented goals of middle-class American society. Almost invariably, then, the head is a member of a drug-using subculture, in which he finds an identity that enables him to drop temporarily out of the Establishment America from which he comes and toward which he was headed. For most young men and women, of course, membership in the hippie subculture lasts a summer, a term, a year, or possibly longer, but is followed by a gradual reentry into the System. One student of drug-using college dropouts estimates that they stay in the hippie world an average of a year and a half. After this, most return to their families in the suburbs (average parental income: \$15,000 a year) and usually to the highly academic colleges from which they dropped out. Only those with unmistakable artistic talent and those with major psychiatric problems (or both) are likely to remain longer.

Unlike most seekers, heads are genuinely alienated from American society. Their defining characteristic is their generalized rejection of prevalent American values, which they criticize largely on cultural and humanistic grounds. American society is trashy, cheap and commercial; it "dehumanizes" its members; its values of success, materialism, monetary accomplishment and achievement undercut more important spiritual values. Such students rarely stay involved for long in the political and social causes that agitate many of their activist classmates. For alienated students, the basic societal problem is not so much political as aesthetic. Rejecting middle-class values, heads repudiate as well those conventional values and rules that deem experimentation with drugs illicit. For heads, the goal is to find a way out of the "air-conditioned nightmare" of American society. What matters is the interior world, and, in the exploration of that world, drugs play a major role.

A second characteristic of many heads is

a more or less intense feeling of estrangement from their own experience. Such students are highly aware of the masks, facades and defenses people erect to protect themselves; they are critical of the social "games" and "role-playing" they see around them. They object to these games not only in others, but even more strongly in themselves. As a result, they feel compelled to root out any "defense" that might prevent awareness of inner life; self-deception, lack of self-awareness or "phoniness" are cardinal sins. They have, moreover, a conscious ethic of love, expressed in a continual struggle for "meaningful relationships"—direct, honest and open encounters with others. This ethic is sincerely felt, but it is often difficult for the alienated to achieve in practice. Thus, perhaps the deepest guilts in such individuals spring from their internal impediments to genuineness, directness and open communication with others. As one student said, "For me, sin equals hang-up."

Despite their efforts to make contact with their "real selves" and to have "meaningful relationships" with others, alienated students often feel unusually separated from both self and others. They experience themselves as separated from others by a gray opaque filter, by invisible screens and curtains, by protective shells and crusts that prevent them from the fullness of experience. They recriminate themselves for their lack of expressiveness, spontaneity and contact. One such student described human relations as being like people trying to touch each other through airtight space suits. Another talked of a wax that was poured over his experience, preventing him from rapport with the world. Possessed of an unusually strong desire for intense experience, but also unusually full of feelings of estrangement, such students find drugs that promise to heighten experience a tempting way out of the shell.

A third frequent characteristic of alienated students is a fantasy of fusion and merger, which contrasts sharply with their current feelings of estrangement. Many have a semiconscious concept of almost mystical union with nature, with their own

inner lives, or with other people—of communication that requires no words, of the kind of oneness with nature, people, or the world that has always characterized intense religious experience. For a student with unusual impatience with the boundaries that separate the self from the not-self, the powerful hallucinogens are especially attractive, for they can profoundly alter the boundaries of body and self. This change in boundaries is by no means always pleasant, and one of the most common sources of panic during drug experiences is the feeling of being "trapped" in an isolated, barricaded subjectivity. But at other times, the hallucinogens *do* produce feelings of being in unusually direct contact, even fusion, with others.

On several grounds, then, the alienated student is strongly attracted by drugs and by the hippie world. Arguments against drug use based on traditional American values carry little weight for him; on the contrary, he takes great pleasure in violating these "middle-class" norms. His feelings of estrangement from his own experience lead him to attempt to break through the boundaries, shells, walls, filters and barriers that separate him from the world. And his fantasy of fusion disposes him to seek out chemical instruments to increase his "oneness" with others. For a student who is young, alienated and anticonventional, drug use is primarily a way of searching for meaning via the chemical intensification of personal experience.

In a broader developmental context, too, immersion in the drug-using hippie subculture is generally a part of a phase of disengagement from American society. Confronted with a society whose rules and values he profoundly distrusts, the head seeks in the counter-culture of hippiedom a respite, a moratorium, or an escape from pressures and demands he does not want to confront. Yet merely to note the important element of withdrawal in the hippie's use of drugs may be to ignore the more important developmental meaning of drug use for the hippie. However ill-advised society may consider his choice of methods, the hippie is often unconsciously searching

for a way to engage himself with himself and with others. And however "regressive" or "self-destructive" it may appear to some for a young man to "drop out" of American society, the hippie subculture often proves a rest-and-recovery area, or even a staging area, from which unusually sensitive, talented and/or disturbed individuals take stock of themselves, explore their inner lives and their relationships with a small group of other people, and sometimes *return* to the established society. It seems likely that most hippies will follow this path.

There are, however, a few heads for whom drug use is both a symptom of and a trigger for serious psychopathology. In some cases, drug use clearly accelerates a downhill course upon which the individual is already embarked; in other cases, an overwhelmingly bad trip may topple a student whose previous equilibrium was fragile. Thus, drug use may really be a contributing factor to a picture of psychopathology. Indeed, some of those who are most compulsively drawn to chronic drug use are the same people who can least tolerate it. Already confused and precarious, they are unable to bear the induced alterations of consciousness produced by the hallucinogens, and may move steadily or suddenly downhill.

THE PRESSURE FOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Some of the association between type of college and rate of drug use clearly results from the fact that highly "intellectual" colleges selectively attract students with a particular outlook and psychology. This process of attraction is complex. Admission policies that preferentially admit applicants with "serious intellectual interests" promote the process of selective recruitment. But even at colleges that admit almost all applicants, the power of the college image alone suffices to channel into a relatively few colleges a great many students with psychological characteristics that incline them to experiment with drugs. The image of the intellectual college acts as a magnet for students like the "seeker" and the "head"; for "intellectual" or "alienated"

high school students, certain colleges promise an ingathering of kindred spirits. Conversely, the less intellectual, unalienated, unintrospective and nonexperimental student is generally attracted to less "intellectual" colleges.

But psychological factors will only take us part way to understanding student drug use. Knowing what college a student attends is often a more accurate index of whether he has used drugs than is exploring his conscious and unconscious motives. The probability of drug use is a product of an interaction of individual psychology, institutional climate and broader social setting. To understand what helps create a climate of opinion that is favorable to drug experimentation, we must examine the pressures that impinge upon students at intellectual colleges.

It is noteworthy that colleges where drug use is most common are usually "high pressure" colleges. Typically, a great majority of undergraduates are preparing themselves for professional careers that require advanced graduate training: usually, more than seventy-five percent of graduates plan to continue their educations after the B.A. Furthermore, the magnetism of the college image and the fine screen of the admissions office almost always yield entering freshmen who have extremely high test scores and records of outstanding academic achievement in secondary school. To be sure, many of the most "intellectual" colleges make systematic efforts to mitigate these pressures by down-playing grades, by work-study programs, and so on. But despite the efforts of the college, students themselves are likely to *feel* pressured, both by their own desire to excel intellectually, and by the entrance requirements of graduate schools. And the congregation within such "intellectual" colleges of large numbers of intellectually able, competitive students helps generate an atmosphere that makes intense intellectual interests, outstanding academic performance, and approval by faculty, scholarship boards, *et cetera*, an important standard of personal worth and community recognition.

As a result, the more intellectual col-

leges are noteworthy for their *lack* of emphasis on the traditional American college pastimes of fun, fraternities and football. "Play" and social life are generally downgraded. Students and faculty members agree that the purpose of college is to get a liberal education, not to improve one's social skills, not to make influential friends for later life, and not to enjoy oneself in a frivolous way. Intellectual commitment and cognitive talent are highly rewarded, while these colleges frown on "collegiate" pranks and "childish" displays of adolescent high spirits. What is valued at such colleges (and they increasingly set the tone for American higher education at large) is the ability to delay, postpone and defer immediate gratification in the interest of acquiring a liberal education. "Serious" interests—be they intellectual, artistic or political—are enjoined by a united student-faculty culture.

Such "elite" colleges present relatively few countervailing pressures to become more relaxed, joyous, interpersonally skilled, feeling, courageous, or physically expressive. Throughout the "intellectual" sector of American higher education, the most intense pressures are highly cognitive, narrowly academic, and often quantitative. The tangible rewards of American higher education—scholarships, admission to "good" graduate schools, remunerative fellowships and community acclaim—go for a rather narrow kind of cognitive functioning that leads to writing good final examinations, constructing good term papers, being good at multiple choice tests, and excelling on Graduate Record Examinations. Most of the students who attend these colleges are headed toward a professional world that requires the same kind of abstractive intelligence. Thus, it is the outstanding graduates of such colleges who go on to equally outstanding graduate schools, and eventually to outstanding appointments in outstanding hospitals, scientific laboratories, business corporations, and university faculties.

Over the past two decades, the movement toward "intellectuality" in American colleges has been steady and marked. Throughout American higher education, cognitive,

intellectual and preprofessional outlooks are on the rise, while such traditional American student pastimes as panty raids, popularity contests, campus politics and fraternity rushing are on a steady decline. The highly intellectual preprofessional student has less time and less motivation for the college pranks of his parents' generation. To survive and prosper in tomorrow's technological world, he must work terribly hard in college in order to be "really good in his field." He must perform well academically, and without "mistakes" that would lower his grade average. He must postpone a whole gamut of emotional satisfactions until he is older. A bad course, a bad year, or even taking a year off may mean not getting into graduate school or—worse—getting drafted.

There is much to be said for these pressures for intellectual performance, just as there is much that is admirable about those who possess academic skills. Today's college students at selective institutions are an unusually serious, well-informed, honest and morally concerned group. While they scorn the round of fun and frivolity that dominated the lives of previous college generations, they in fact care deeply about each other, and a growing number are intensely concerned with the social and political future of their world. Yet in describing the self-generated and educationally-generated pressures upon them, I have used the word "performance" advisedly. "Performance" suggests alien activity, acting on a stage in order to impress others, a role played for the benefit of the audience. And to growing numbers of such students, intellectual performance is increasingly seen as a kind of "role-playing" of the worst sort. Indeed, one source of the growing demand for "relevance" and "student power" is this widely shared feeling that much academic and intellectual activity is somehow "alien" to the "real" interests and concerns of the student.

And it is indeed true that although the systematic quest for cognitive competence and academic performance occupies most of the time and effort of the preprofessional student at today's selective colleges, this

quest does little to inform students about life's purposes and joys. One of the peculiar characteristics of academic performance is that even when performance is impeccable, most of the other "really important" questions remain unanswered: What is life all about? What really matters? What do I stand for? Why do I bother? How much do I stand for? What is relevant, meaningful and important? What is meaningless, valueless and false? For many students, then, the pursuit of academic competence must be supplemented by a more private, less academic, noncurricular quest for the meaning of life. When large numbers of students perceive their academic efforts as irrelevant to the really important "existential" and "ultimate" questions, then the way is open for a more private search for meaning, significance and relevance. Together, they have begun to create an informal shared culture that counters and complements the academic professionalism of elite American colleges.

THE EXPERIENTIAL COUNTER-CULTURE

The "better" American colleges rarely attempt to provide students with neatly packaged answers to their existential questions. To be sure, the most demanding colleges make systematic efforts to provoke undergraduates to challenge previous beliefs and to abandon unexamined dogmas. But they expect students to arrive at individual solutions to the riddles of life, all the while occupying themselves with getting good grades and getting ahead in the academic world. The college's message is often highly paradoxical: "Ruthlessly discard previous convictions and values; don't look to us for answers; most of your questions are sophomoric, in any case."

To the most sophisticated undergraduates, the traditional avenues to significance seem irrelevant, exhausted, insincere or superficial. Traditional religious faith and the great political ideologies arouse relatively little interest among today's determinedly anti-ideological undergraduates. Nor does success within the "American way of life" constitute an answer to life's riddles for most students. There was a day

when the quest for campus popularity seemed to many undergraduates but a reflection of a broader life philosophy of making friends, influencing people, and developing social skills. But today, "popularity" has become a dirty word. Nor does "getting ahead in the world" provide an answer for intellectual students, most of whom start out already ahead in the world—the children of well-educated and well-situated middle-class parents. For these students, the old American dream of giving one's children "a better chance" makes little sense: they find it pointless to struggle for greater affluence when they already have more than enough. They are more worried about how to live with what they already have.

As the traditional avenues to meaning have dried up, and as academic performance itself seems increasingly irrelevant to the major existential concerns of students, a new informal student subculture has begun to emerge. Although not opposed to the life of the mind, this subculture is anti-academic. Although students who participate in it are publicly headed for professional careers, they privately focus on experience in the present rather than on long-range goals. Theirs is an informal *experiential counter-culture*, which complements the formal culture of the academically-oriented college. Central to this counter-culture is a focus on the present—on today, on the here and now. At one level, intellectual college students are required to defer enjoyment for a distant future in their academic and preprofessional work. But, informally, they emphasize immediate pleasure and experience. While society at large expects from them a reverence for the traditions of the past and a respect for traditional institutions, they stress in their own subcultures activity and receptivity in the present. Such future-oriented qualities as control, planning, waiting, saving and postponing are little honored in the student subculture; nor are past-oriented qualities like revering, recalling, remembering and respecting much emphasized. In contrast, the experiential subculture stresses genuineness, adventure,

spontaneity, sentience and experimentation. Since the past is seen as irrelevant (or "exhausted") and since the future seems profoundly uncertain, the real meaning of life must be found within present experience—even as one worries about the Graduate Record Examinations.

The experiential counter-culture has many variants, at least some of which are visible on almost every major American campus. One variant is what is sometimes called "student existentialism." At the more sophisticated campuses, this outlook is manifest in an intense interest in existential writers, in the theater of the absurd, and in philosophers and psychologists who stress "existential" concepts. But even at less sophisticated colleges, a similar focus is apparent in student emphasis on simple human commitments as contrasted with absolute values, in a "situation ethic" that questions the possibility of long-range value commitments, and by a pervasively high estimation of sincerity, authenticity and directness. Student existentialism is humanistic rather than religious, and its most immediate goals are love, immediacy, empathy, "encounter" with one's fellow man. Thus, in the counter-culture, what matters most is interpersonal honesty, "really being yourself" and a special kind of open and disinterested genuineness. What is most unacceptable is fraudulence, exploitation, "role-playing," artificiality, hypocrisy and "playing games."

Along with the focus on the present and on "existential" values goes a very great tolerance for experimentation. Youth is increasingly defined (by youth itself) as a time for exploration, trial and error, and deliberate efforts to enlarge, change or expand personality. Experimentation in the interest of deliberate self-change is seen as essential to pursuit of meaning. Convinced that meaning is not found but created, members of the counter-culture consider their own personalities the prime vehicles for the creation of significance. Since significance emerges from the self, it is only by transforming the self that significance can be achieved. In a kind of deliberate, self-conscious and intentional identity-for-

mation, apparently unconnected activities and experiences find their rationale. Self-exploration, psychotherapy, sexual experimentation, travel, "encounter groups," a reverence for nature, and "sensitivity training" are tools in the pursuit of meaning—along with drug use.

The high rates of drug use at the more intellectual and academically demanding colleges are therefore not to be explained solely by the presence at such colleges of students of the same psychological type—although this fact is important. In addition, the more intellectual colleges tend to impose upon students an unusually strong set of pressures for academic and intellectual performance: they require high cognitive ability, a preprofessional orientation, and a postponement of immediate gratifications without offering much in return by way of fun or answers to life's riddles. In such an environment, students have spontaneously created a counter-culture, which, while not explicitly opposed to academic pursuits, complements them with a focus on the present, on "existential" values, on personal experimentation, and on deliberate self-transformation as a way of creating meaning. Participation in this counter-culture provides a powerful support for efforts to explore oneself, to intensify relationships with other people, to change the quality and content of consciousness. It provides a sanctioning context for drug use as one of the pathways of changing the self so as to create meaning in the world.

DRUGS AS A COMMENTARY ON SOCIETY

It is widely feared that student drug use is a commentary upon American society; words like degeneracy, addiction, thrill-seeking and irresponsibility are eventually introduced into most popular discussions of student drug use. So, too, student drug use is said to be related to the excessive permissiveness of parents, to the laxness of adult standards, to breaches in law enforcement, to disrespect for law and order, and to an impending breakdown of our social fabric.

Although these particular interpretations of the social implications of drug use are

incorrect, drug use is importantly influenced by social, political and historical factors. Those students who lust after significance or reject the prevalent values of American society are in fact reacting to and within a societal context. The sense of being locked-off and enclosed in an impermeable shell is related not only to individual psychological states like depression, but to broader cultural phenomena. And the fact that a considerable number of the most able students have become convinced that significance and relevant experience are largely to be found within their own skulls is indirectly related to their perception of the other possibilities for fulfillment in the social and political world. In a variety of ways, then, student drug use is a commentary on American society, although a different kind of commentary than most discussions of youthful "thrill-seeking" would lead us to believe.

To single out a small number of social changes as especially relevant to understanding student drug use is to make a highly arbitrary decision. A variety of factors, including rapid social change, the unprecedented possibilities for total destruction in the modern world, the prevalence of violence both domestic and international, the high degree of specialization and bureaucratization of American life, and a host of others are relevant to creating the context of values and expectations within which drug use has become increasingly legitimate. But of all the factors that could be discussed, three seem particularly relevant: first, the effect of modern communications and transportation in producing an overwhelming inundation of experience, which I will term *stimulus flooding*; second, the effect of *automatic affluence* in changing the values and outlooks of the young; third, the importance of recent social and historical events in producing a kind of *social and political disenchantment* that leads many students to seek salvation through withdrawal and inner life rather than through engagement and societal involvement.

STIMULUS FLOODING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NUMBING. Every society subjects its members to pressures and demands that they

simply take for granted. Such pressures are woven into the fabric of social existence, are assumed to be a natural part of life, and become the object of automatic accommodation. These accommodations are rarely examined, yet they may profoundly alter the quality of human experience. Such is the case with the quantity, variety and intensity of external stimulation, imagery and excitation to which most Americans are subjected. As Robert J. Lifton has pointed out, modern man in advanced societies is subjected to a flood of unpredictable stimulation of the most varied kinds; by newspapers, television, radio and rapid travel, he continually exposes himself to novel and unanticipatable experience. This stimulus inundation, in turn, produces a self-protective reaction which, following Lifton, we can term *psychic numbing*.

Most individuals in most societies have at some point in their lives had the experience of being so overcome by external stimulation and internal feelings that they gradually find themselves growing numb and unfeeling. Medical students commonly report that after their first, often intense reactions to the cadaver, they simply "stop feeling anything" with regard to the object of their dissection. And we have all had the experience of listening to so much good music, seeing so many fine paintings, being so overwhelmed by excellent cooking that we find ourselves simply unable to respond further. Similarly, at moments of extreme psychic pain and anguish, most individuals "go numb," no longer perceiving the full implications of a catastrophic situation or no longer experiencing the full range of their own feelings. This lowered responsiveness, this psychological numbing, seems causally related to the variety, persistence and intensity of stimulation and emotion.

Most Americans have had the experience of returning to urban life from a calm and pastoral setting. Initially, we respond by being virtually deluged with the clamor of people, sights, sounds, images and colors that demand our attention and response. The beauty and the ugliness of the landscape continually strike us; each of the

millions of faces in our great cities has written on it the tragicomic record of a unique life history; each sound evokes a resonant chord within us. Such periods, however, tend to be transient and fleeting; and they usually give way to a sense of numbness, of nonresponsiveness, and of profound inattention to the very stimuli that earlier evoked so much in us. We settle in; we do not notice any more.

This psychological numbing operates at a great variety of levels for modern man. Our experience, from childhood onward, with the constantly flickering images and sounds of television, films, radio, newspapers, paperbacks, neon signs, advertisements and sound trucks numbs us to the sights and sounds of our civilization. Our continual exposure to a vast variety of ideologies, value systems, philosophies, political creeds, superstitions, religions and faiths numbs us to the unique claims to validity and the special spiritual and intellectual values of each one: we move among values and ideologies as in a two-dimensional landscape. Similarly, the availability to us in novels, films, television, theater and opera of moments of high passion, tragedy, joy, exaltation and sadness often ends by numbing us to our own feelings and the feelings of others.

Modern men thus confront the difficult problem of keeping "stimulation" from without to a manageable level, while also protecting themselves against being overwhelmed by their own inner responses to the stimuli from the outer world. Defenses or barriers against both external and internal stimulation are, of course, essential in order for us to preserve our intactness and integrity as personalities. From earliest childhood, children develop thresholds of responsiveness and barriers against stimulation in order to protect themselves against being overwhelmed by inner or outer excitement. Similarly, in adulthood, comparable barriers, thresholds and defenses are necessary, especially when we find ourselves in situations of intense stimulation.

A problem arises, however, if the barriers we erect to protect ourselves from the clamors of the inner and outer world prove harder and less permeable than we had

originally wanted. In at least a minority of Americans, the normal capacity to defend oneself against undue stimulation and inner excitation is exaggerated and automatized, so that it not only protects, but walls off the individual from inner and outer experience. In such individuals, there develops an acute sense of being trapped in their own shells, unable to break through their defenses to make "contact" with experience or with other people, a sense of being excessively armored, separated from their own activities as by an invisible screen, estranged from their own feelings and from potentially emotion-arousing experiences in the world. Most of us have had some inkling of this feeling of inner deadness and outer flatness, especially in times of great fatigue, letdown, or depression. The world seems cold and two-dimensional; food and life have lost their savor; our activities are merely "going through the motions," our experiences lack vividness, three-dimensionality, and intensity. Above all, we feel trapped or shut in our own subjectivity.

The continual flooding of stimulation to which modern men are subjected is thus related not only to the psychological conditions and institutional pressures that help create the feelings of numbness, but, indirectly, to the nature of perception and experience in an advanced technological society. One problem every modern American faces is how to avoid becoming entrapped in the protective shell he must construct to defend himself against being overwhelmed by stimulation. And the use of drugs, especially in the context of the experiential counter-culture, becomes more attractive to youth precisely because the drugs preferred by students often have the effect of dissipating, blurring, or breaking down the boundaries of individual selfhood and personality.

AUTOMATIC AFFLUENCE. No society in world history has ever provided its citizens with the automatic abundance that our society provides to a majority of Americans. In over ten years of interviewing students from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds, I have yet to find one who was worried about finding a job, and have

met relatively few who were worried about finding a *good* job. Whatever their levels of aspiration, today's advantaged youth rarely think in terms of getting ahead in the world, acquiring increasing status, or struggling to "succeed." These goals, both relevant and important to their parents (products of the 1920's and the Great Depression), are largely irrelevant to today's youth. Like youth in every era, they turn from the successes of the past to the problems of the present and future. Thus, paradoxically, although they live in a society more affluent than any before it, they are far more outraged at poverty, injustice, inequality, exploitation and cruelty than were their parents, who lived in a more impoverished society. Indeed, one of the central demands of today's politically active youth is that everyone have the benefits which they themselves have always taken for granted.

One of the undeniable benefits of affluence is that it brings increased opportunities for enjoyment and leisure, and destroys the need to devote oneself to a life of unrelenting toil in order to prosper. Affluence permits a de-emphasis of hard work, self-control and renunciation, and makes possible the development of new cultures of leisure. As work, success and achievement decline in relative importance, new values are beginning to replace them, and new patterns of consumption are beginning already to reflect these new values. As "getting ahead in the world" no longer suffices to define the meaning of life, today's advantaged students turn increasingly to explore *other* meanings of life.

Two rather different alternatives have so far been tried. The first is the solution of the political activist, who remains primarily concerned with the fact that his own affluence and freedom have not been extended to all. Within America, his concern is with the poor, the deprived, the excluded and the disadvantaged. Abroad, he focuses on the many failures of American foreign policy, failures that in his eyes involve a catastrophic gap between the values of a democratic society and the foreign policies that purportedly implement them. The activist would have us support rather than

oppose movements of national liberation, and use our affluence not in military engagements but in programs of assistance to the developing nations. The activist is most likely to accept the traditional values of American society, especially those emphasizing justice, equality, opportunity and freedom, and to insist that these values be more thoroughly practiced.

The second response to the question, "What lies beyond affluence?," while not incompatible with the first, looks in a different area for an answer. This second response turns to a more fundamental critique of the premises and assumptions upon which technological America has been based. Instead of equality, it champions diversity; instead of pressing for the extension of affluence, it questions the meaning of affluence. Associated with a long tradition of romantic criticism of industrial and postindustrial society, this response points to the price of affluence—dehumanization, professionalization, bureaucracy, a loss of power over society, the absence of a sense of small scale, and the erosion of traditional community. For the romantic critic of American society, fulfillment and personal wholeness are more important than abundance and achievement. The life of the affluent middle class in America is seen as empty, spiritually impoverished, driven and neurotic; the vaguely defined alternative involves expressiveness, self-knowledge, involvement with the small group of others, the fulfillment of nonmaterial artistic, spiritual and psychological needs. "Self-actualization" is the goal; "let each man do his thing" is the motto.

Automatic affluence, then, inevitably means that many of those who experience abundance as routine, attempt to create goals beyond affluence. These goals may involve a reform of the world so as to extend affluence to all, or a critique of the technological assumptions upon which affluence itself was based. Insofar as the individual's main effort is to extend affluence, he is relatively immune to the appeals of the experiential, drug-using world, for his energies are oriented toward changing the world rather than himself. But insofar as his primary focus is antitechnological—

upon self-fulfillment, personal change, and spiritual or humanistic fulfillment—this focus is highly consistent with the use of drugs. For drug use among college students is closely related to the effort to change oneself, to become more creative, to be more expressive, more emotionally open and more genuinely in contact with the world. And the use of drugs is associated with a questioning or rejection of the traditional success ethic of American life, and with a search for new styles of living more oriented to leisure, to intimate personal relationships, and to spiritual expression. Thus, affluence indirectly produces a mood among some of its recipients that makes them receptive to drug use and other forms of personal experimentation.

SOCIO-POLITICAL DISENCHANTMENT. In juxtaposing two answers to the quest for meaning beyond abundance, I have implied a certain tension between them. It is not accidental that full-time and committed political activists are rarely intensive drug users; it is also important that the full-time denizens of the drug-using hippie subculture are rarely capable of sustained political activity. Sustained engagement in an effort to change the world is rarely compatible with the kind of self-absorption and inwardness that results from intensive and regular drug use; conversely, however strongly the committed drug user may feel about the inequities of American society, his primary efforts are usually directed toward self-change, rather than changing the world around him. Although some individuals alternate at different times in their lives between activism and alienation, it is very difficult to be an active social reformer and a "head" at the same time.

This argument suggests that disenchantment with the possibilities of meaningful social action is related to the development of an outlook conducive to drug use. To trace student drug use directly to such factors as racial injustices or the war in Vietnam would, of course, be a major oversimplification. But disenchantment with meaningful and honorable political activity creates a general climate of opinion that is, in turn, favorable to drug use. Specifically, the change in student attitudes to-

ward political life and social reform since the assassination of President Kennedy seems importantly connected to the rise of drug use.

The influence of Kennedy upon the attitudes of youth is often exaggerated or stated in an oversimplified way. Many of the young, of course, disliked Kennedy, as did many of their parents. Furthermore, most of those who admired Kennedy personally had no intention whatsoever of entering public life. Kennedy's impact on the attitudes of youth was indirect: he and the group around him symbolized the conviction that it was possible for young, idealistic and intelligent men and women to enter the political world and to "make a difference." Such Kennedy ventures as the Peace Corps further provided an outlet—and more importantly a symbol—for the idealistic energies of activist youth. Although Kennedy himself in fact rarely listened to the advice of students, such symbolic Kennedy acts as pots of coffee for peace marchers in front of the White House indicated at least an awareness of the opinion of the dedicated young.

The image of political life conveyed by the Johnson Administration, especially from 1966 to late 1968, was vastly different. Not only have older views of politics as a form of horse trading, "compromising," and "wheeling and dealing" been reinstated, but large numbers of American college students have come to associate political involvement with gross immorality and even with genocide. In this context, such revelations as that of covert C.I.A. funding of liberal student organizations like the National Students Association have the effect of convincing many intelligent and idealistic youth that politics—and, by extension, efforts to work to change the System from within—are dishonorable or pointless occupations.

The demise of the Civil Rights Movement and the collapse of the War on Poverty have also helped change the climate of opinion about political reform. In the early 1960's, the Civil Rights Movement was the chief catalyst for the rising tide of student political involvement. Sit-ins, Freedom Rides, the work of S.N.C.C. and other

groups in the Deep South helped convince students that their efforts at social change would be honored, recognized and responded to by the society at large. Students in the early 1960's saw themselves not so much in opposition to the policies of the nation as in the vanguard of these policies; and the passage of major Civil Rights legislation in 1964, followed by the promise of a major "War on Poverty," gave support to this conviction. Thus there arose a hope that "American society would crash through" in remedying its own inequities. This hope had a widespread impact, not only upon that small minority of students who were actively involved in civil rights work, but upon others who were indirectly encouraged to plan careers of responsible social involvement.

But the events of subsequent years have altered this initial hope. The "white backlash" has made legislators extremely reluctant to assist the Negro revolution. The war in Vietnam drained funds away from domestic programs just when federal assistance was needed most. The student Civil Rights Movement for its part discovered that legal reforms exposed more clearly the depths of the problem of black Americans, and pointed toward more far-reaching psychological, social and economic changes that were more difficult to legislate from Washington. The War on Poverty collapsed into a small skirmish. Equally important, the rising militancy of black radicals has pushed white students out of organizations like S.N.C.C. and CORE with the demand, "Go home and organize your own people." Lacking national support, and "rejected" by their former black allies, white activists have increasingly despaired of working within the System, have become more radical, and are talking more militantly about "changing the System."

The changing image of political involvement has had two effects. On the one hand, it has contributed to the "radicalization" of those individuals who have remained activists: especially now among such students, disaffection with the established system is at a high that has not been reached in this country since the 1930's. But equally important, the revitalized image of the politi-

cal process as dishonest, reprehensible, immoral and unresponsive to both the ideals of America and the rights of the deprived has created a climate in which it is more and more possible to argue that salvation—if it can be found at all—must be found within the self or the counter-community, rather than within the wider society. Given this belief, the individual in search of meaningful engagement with the world must either create new political institutions (as stressed by the rhetoric of the New Left), or else abandon political struggle altogether in a search for meaning within small groups of other disaffected people. It is in these latter groups that drug use is most common. If the world outside is corrupt, dehumanized, violent and immoral, the world within—the almost infinitely malleable world of perception, sensation, communication and consciousness—seems more controllable, more immediate, less corrupting, and oftentimes more pleasant. To be sure, there is a price to be paid for exclusive involvement in the interior world, but, for many young Americans, there simply seems to be no alternative.

Political and historical events do not have a direct, one-to-one relationship with drug use: the war in Vietnam does not *cause* students to smoke marihuana or experiment with LSD. But the political climate of the past few years has created a negative view of the possibility of meaningful involvement within the established institutions of the society, at the same time that it has convinced many students that society is in desperate need of reform. This climate of opinion in turn contributes to the assumption that if meaning, excitement and dignity are to be found in the world, they must be found within one's own cranium. Drug use can indeed be a kind of cop-out, not from perversity or laziness, but simply because there seems to be no other alternative. Student drug use is indeed a commentary upon American society, but it is above all an indirect criticism of our society's inability to offer the young exciting, honorable and effective ways of using their intelligence and idealism to reform our society.