

The Great Banana Hoax

BY LOUIS BOZZETTI, JR., M.D., STEPHEN GOLDSMITH, M.D.,
AND J. THOMAS UNGERLEIDER, M.D.

The recent practice of smoking dried banana scrapings to achieve a "psychedelic experience" led the authors to investigate the hallucinogenic properties of bananadine, or "mellow yellow." They conclude that the "active ingredient" in bananadine is the psychic suggestibility of the user in the proper setting.

INTEREST in psychedelic or so-called "mind-manifesting drugs" has been phenomenally accelerated in the recent past. The dangers(8), alleged joys(1, 2), and alleged "therapeutic" effects(3) of LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide tartrate) have received nationwide coverage in both professional and lay publications. Indeed, a journal, *The Psychedelic Review*, has been founded which reports experiences resulting from LSD. Although the greatest proportion of interest in psychedelics is focused on LSD, several other substances have been implicated as hallucinogens.

Among the more bizarre alleged psychedelic agents are dried banana peels, dried hydrangeas, chlorinated lettuce leaves, rotten green peppers, and, as *Time* magazine reported, "anything from the supermarket spice rack"(7). Of these substances, the smoking of dried scrapings from the inner portion of the banana peel (bananadine or mellow yellow) has received the most national publicity. Indeed, a tongue-in-check

admonition was noted in the *Congressional Record* recently by Congressman Thompson of New Jersey in which he states, "I asked Congress to give thoughtful consideration to legislation entitled 'The Banana and Other Odd Fruit Disclosure Act of 1967.' The target is those banana smoking beatniks who seek a make-believe land . . ."(6).

The following announcement appeared in the May 26, 1967, issue of the UCLA campus newspaper, the *UCLA Daily Bruin*: "The Second Smoke-in sponsored by sociologists for love and peace will include all students . . ."(5). The announcement does not refer to smoking of marihuana but to the inhalation of the products of combustion of bananadine or mellow yellow. In the past year there has been a marked increase in the popularity of taking psychedelic "trips" on bananadine, particularly in the San Francisco Bay area and in the Los Angeles area. In 1966, a popular song entitled "Mellow Yellow" by the British folk singer, Donovan, seductively implied an association between bananadine and psychedelic "tripping."

Chemical Features

Mellow yellow is prepared from charred portions of the inside of the skin of bananas. It may be readily prepared in the kitchen or purchased for approximately 20¢ per joint (cigarette). It may also be obtained by mail for \$5 per half ounce by responding to advertisements of the Mellow Yellow Company in several California newspapers.

Chemical analyses of scrapings of "unprepared" banana peels and several samples of mellow yellow (homemade and purchased) revealed the only constituent to be inert carboniferous material. Specific tests for arsenic, serotonin, ergot-like compounds,

At the time this paper was written, Dr. Bozzetti was a psychiatric resident at the Neuropsychiatric Institute, University of California at Los Angeles. He is now with the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Behavioral Sciences, 55 Shattuck Street, Boston, Mass. 02115. Drs. Goldsmith and Ungerleider are with the Neuropsychiatric Institute, University of California at Los Angeles, where Dr. Goldsmith is psychiatric resident and Dr. Ungerleider is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry.

and adrenergic compounds were all negative at the level of one part per million.

There are no known hallucinogens in bananadine. Nevertheless, many individuals have reported getting "high" on mellow yellow, including the experiencing of visual hallucinations. To date, no adverse reactions or "bad trips" have been reported. In personal communication with one of the authors, several "users" have reported the side effects of nausea, sore throat, dizziness, and cough during and after smoking banana scrapings.

Bananadine may be smoked alone, but is usually used in a group setting, at a party where there may be dancing and psychedelic lighting. From informal interviews at several "banana parties" attended by one of the authors, it was apparent that the more experienced users of drugs like marihuana and LSD were much less likely to "get high" on bananas than the novice. This has implications about the importance of suggestion: i.e., the active ingredient in bananadine appears to be the setting.

Discussion

From the chemical analyses of mellow yellow, it is clear that all claims purporting this substance to have psychedelic or hallucinogenic properties are fraudulent. As already stated, the only active ingredient in bananadine appears to be the psychic suggestibility of the smoker in the proper setting. Indeed, Reed and Witt have demonstrated experimentally the decisive influence suggestion had on subjects given LSD and placebo(4). In their two-step experiment, the subject given placebo and the message that he was receiving LSD reported a visionary experience; whereas when told he was being given a placebo but, indeed, did

receive LSD, the subject did not report any unusual effect.

Besides the sought-after "psychedelic effect," another factor appears to be operant. It is the ecstatic feeling many adolescents experience in baiting the authorities (police). The authors have interviewed teenagers and young adults who have elaborately maneuvered situations leading to false arrest for possession of marihuana when, indeed, all that was present was mellow yellow.

Summary

The recent hysteria over psychedelic substances, of which LSD is most prominent, has more recently extended to smoking banana scrapings, or mellow yellow. Chemical analysis of this substance revealed nothing but carboniferous material. Without doubt, this is "the Great Banana Hoax."

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