

HIPpocrates Talks About Drugs and Sex

Eugene Schoenfeld M.D.

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Q: Are there drugs that have an effect on sexual activity?

HIP: Yes. There are many drugs that have an effect on sex but there aren't really any true aphrodisiacs that we know about. By this I mean a drug that would cause a person to become sexually stimulated if he weren't so inclined. If a person is a priori interested in sexual activity there are drugs that seem to enhance the feelings that he has during sex. Conversely, there are drugs which can depress these feelings.

For example, alcohol in large quantities doesn't seem to add much to sexuality. In small quantities it may help by reducing inhibitions so that a person can proceed to carry on his natural inclinations if he's hung up. Large quantities have the opposite effect.

There are also drugs like certain of the tranquilizers that can cause impotency. Some of the Phenothiazines for example are known in some people to cause temporary impotency. It depends upon the individual. Some people can take tranquilizers of all kinds and never have this problem.

Q: What drugs would stimulate a person if he were so inclined?

HIP: Drugs like marijuana can increase a person's sensual perceptions. The sense of touch, and of smell, and of sight, sound are all enhanced by the use of marijuana. If you are in a sexual situation and turned on it increases your enjoyment of the sexual act.

On the other hand, if two people are together and they are not turned on to each other and they were to use marijuana, then this would have the effect of driving them further apart. It depends upon the state of mind. That's why I say that there are no drugs which are true aphrodisiacs.



Dr. Eugene Schoenfeld speaking at Community Arts Auditorium, May 28, 1969 at a benefit for Open City.

Photo: Alan Gotkin.

Q: So there is no “love potion,” nothing magic about any drug. Then, biologically, how does a drug function in a person?

HIP: It works on the higher centers of thought in the brain. The exact mechanism isn’t known and I guess won’t be known for some years. Marijuana research has only recently been permitted.

In an article in *Science*, December 1968, what was already known by experienced marijuana users was confirmed on one of the first truly scientific studies of marijuana. That is, that someone who has used marijuana can perform simple tasks the same way or better than he would without the drug. Whereas someone who has not used marijuana before cannot perform these tasks as well but he doesn’t get high either.

Q: Then marijuana or some other drug isn’t going to make a person a sexual superman?

HIP: No, it won’t but if he’s a person who is free and enjoys sex, it probably will make him enjoy it all the more.

Q: Would a drug like mescaline or LSD which has more profound psychological and hallucinogenic effects have a more profound sexual effect?

HIP: Well, apparently it does in many cases. Some people tell me that under the influence of LSD they did not feel at all like having sex. It turned them off. They were interested in other things. Perhaps it affected their nervous systems and they were unable to have sex.

Others have said that the LSD experience has caused them to have a most profound sexual encounter, that went far beyond any minor “psychedelic” like marijuana.

With a drug like mescaline the sexual act is greatly enhanced because the Mescaline produces mainly sensory changes. Changes in sight, sound and touch, without the kind of visual distortions that LSD might cause. Those kinds of hallucinations are rare with mescaline.

Q: What about STP?

HIP: I don’t think very much is known about the relationship between STP and sexual acts. It hasn’t been used very much and there is much more experience with LSD, mescaline and marijuana.

Q: We know of a person who tried STP and found that he had a tremendous sexual feeling, but it was all inside his head rather than in his loins. He felt that he had an orgasm with the All American girl 5,000 times in 30 seconds, but he couldn’t get an erection to save his life.

HIP: Probably the reason for something like that is that the drug affects the nervous system so that an erection would not be possible for that individual at that time, but an erection might be possible for another person under other circumstances or with a different dose.

You mentioned that the person had the experience in his head and this is also quite important because you can’t separate sexuality from what goes on above the neck.

Q: Do you think if you’re more involved with a mind trip, that it is possible that sex may hold no interest for you at that moment?

HIP: I don’t think that it’s sex not holding any interest, but it’s being expressed in a different way. I mean sexuality is not only expressed in the physical act of making love, but in many ways.

Q: How would it be expressed?

HIP: Well you described one way. The feeling that this individual had while on STP. I think that was certainly a sexual act, although not physical.

Q: There is another drug that has been popular on the underground market for the last year—THC; what are the effects of this drug?

HIP: THC is tetrahydrocannabinol. It’s supposed to be the active ingredient of marijuana. Some people think there are more mind altering components in marijuana, but THC is thought to be the major component.

If I were talking about the real THC, then it would have the same effects as marijuana: in small quantities a minor alteration of the senses, time sense and hunger. These effects are well known. In larger quantities it can produce a true psychedelic effect; like LSD. A psychotomimetic effect. Psychotomimetic means mimicking psychosis. These drugs don’t truly cause a model psychosis, although it used to be thought that they did so.

What I mean is large quantities of THC will cause the same effect as large quantities of LSD.

Q: Moving on to “hard drugs,” things like opium, morphine, heroin—what effect do these have on a person’s sexual activity?

HIP: First we ought to consider the classes of addictive drugs. The most widely known are the narcotic drugs, which include heroin, morphine, codeine, demerol, and of course, opium which is the parent drug to all these others. Then there are the barbiturates that are also addictive, which are used mainly as sleeping pills though some people use them to get high or low.

I distinguish narcotic drugs as those used medically for the alleviation of pain and which are addictive. As for their relationship to human sexuality: a very common effect which is described with the use of heroin is that of an orgasm spreading all through the body and continuing to have that effect.

Q: Can a male get an erection?

HIP: No. It tends to depress the actual physical sexual activity of the addict. So what he's getting is a kind of inner feeling.

Q: So it's more of a mind sex trip than a physical experience?

HIP: Yes, but the feeling may be the same. The reason that heroin addiction is so difficult to treat is that it's kind of a cold circle; getting the heroin is enough to meet all the addict's needs. This kind of feeling can only be experienced by someone who is addicted to heroin.

Q: Does opium have the same effect as heroin? Heroin is a derivative of opium is it not?

HIP: Yes. Heroin and morphine are derivations of opium. Opium is usually smoked. Not all people who use opium regularly become addicted. Maybe half the people who use it regularly—daily—would become addicted and half wouldn't. The reason is because the addictive properties of the drug are not concentrated in the form of opium.

Sexual performance with opium does apparently occur, in contrast with heroin use. It seems the use of opium does not restrict sexual activity very much from stories I've heard from people who have been in the Far East.

Q: Does opium heighten sexual activities and sexual feelings?

HIP: Opium produces a dream-like state. Dreams are so real that it's hard to separate dreams from reality so that one might, for example, be told a story under the influence of opium. The story would be very real, so real in fact that one's actual activities might be incorporated into the story so that you couldn't distinguish reality from the story.

Q: Can opium be used for seduction? Or would a person who didn't want to be involved be able to resist?

HIP: I don't think drugs can force people to do things they don't want to do. If a person were turned off to the "seducer," then the turnoff would be accentuated—it would be a nightmare. Hardly conducive to seduction.

Q: What is the effect of codeine, demerol and perkadin sexually?

HIP: I think they tend to decrease actual physical sexual activity.

Q: What is the effect of barbiturates on sexual activity?

HIP: I would think that they would depress it. Barbiturates are medically used for sedation and to induce sleep. They depress the central nervous system and this would tend to inhibit sexual activity. In small quantities you might feel less tense and uptight about the situation, then barbiturates (tranquilizers) might tend to release inhibitions.

Q: What about the amphetamines?

HIP: The amphetamines have a paradoxical effect sexually. Amphetamines usually stimulate a person sexually but they make an orgasm harder to achieve. It may be harder for the male to have an erection and an ejaculation. But if the male does get an erection there may be a longer period of sexual activity without ejaculation.

Q: What are the amphetamines?

HIP: One amphetamine often in the news lately is methamphetamine, or methadrine. People who are hung up on this drug are very often injecting it into their veins.

I think it is foolish to inject any drug into the veins, especially one which is illegal and all that that implies both medically and legally. Probably the most commonly prescribed amphetamine is dextroamphetamine or Dexadrine. It is used for the treatment of obesity.

Q: I've spoken to a person who was taking amphetamines describe the initial effect as one of an immense orgasm. Is this true?

HIP: Perhaps this is someone who is shooting methadrine by the vein. This reaction is commonly reported. This is not physical. A mind trip? Yes, his body is not having orgasm and ejaculating, though the feeling may very well be the same.

Q: What are magic mushrooms?

HIP: Simply a mushroom with psilocybin as the active ingredient. It would probably be in the same range of experience as mescaline. It would be somewhere between a high dose marijuana experience and an LSD experience.

Q: All right then to summarize: There are no known aphrodisiacs. Some drugs under the right circumstances can heighten the sexual experience. What about all these jokes about Spanish Fly?

HIP: This is an irritant to the urogenital tract. It could, in a very small quantity, perhaps stimulate a person. The trouble is that it is more irritating than anything else, and in large quantities it is very dangerous.

There have been several known deaths from its use. It's a poison, extracted from a beetle found in the south and in Latin America. The chief medical use of this extract is in gerontology.

Q: Then these stories about the girl on the gearshift are just myth?

HIP: That tale must be part of American folklore. I heard it many, many years ago.

Q: Is being in good health important?

HIP: Yes, I was about to put in a pitch for being healthy as being really the best way to fully enjoy sexual activity.

If one is physically fit it is true that in all ways he is going to feel better. It is going to effect his mind and his body and help him enjoy all phases of his life.

One thing about these fad diets—a beneficial effect is that they cause people to at least think about what they are eating. So they are not just stuffing carbohydrates into their mouths, or living on cokes and hamburgers.

If a person decides to go on a macrobiotic diet and chooses for his first diet the most stringent one, he's not going to be healthy for very long. I think for many people it is very dangerous to go to the more extreme diets. I don't know if, for example, macrobiotic diets are healthier for a person than another kind of well-balanced diet.

Q: I'm nearly finished with the questions. I wanted to ask you your personal concept of human sexuality.

HIP: I think it's probably the most important force in the world. It is a merging of psychic and physical energies in the best possible combination.

Just the other night I was talking to a friend of mine who has really a nice smile, the kind of smile that gives one a good feeling. This is sort of a corny way to talk about it, but this person and I were talking about his smile and he said when he smiled at someone that it was like a ripple in a pond. It doesn't end with that person, because if you make him feel good then he will, in turn, respond better to other persons. In the same way, being loving with someone doesn't end with that person. It extends to everyone that person encounters.

Q: Part of the purpose of the Sexual Freedom League is minimization of possessive jealousy and the realization that each member of a marriage relationship is a free individual, associated by choice not social pressure. They deal with each other as individuals and not objects this way. Do you feel that a person can or should confine love to one person? I suppose what I'm talking about is possessive love.

HIP: I think love is expressed differently to different people. Possessiveness in that sense can be unloving. I think what you are asking really is whether people should confine actual physical love to one person. Again you can't give one answer that would apply to all people.

It seems borne out by human experience that matedness is a feasible way to live. A man and woman living together, or two men and two women, seems a functional unit. Whether they choose to confine their sexual activities to each other, or have sexual activity outside of that union is something that is their choice. It should not however be done clandestinely. Secrecy could eventually destroy the relationship.

Q: What do you think of the physical and psychological effects of the Sexual Freedom League?

HIP: I think what it's done is bring important questions out into the open. In one respect I'm doing the same thing with my column. I'm trying to answer questions that a lot of people ask and can't ask through normal channels. The League also opens up important doors and allows people to say "we want to express our sexuality and we don't think there is anything wrong with it and if you do, well, why don't we talk about it?" I think the aim of the Sexual Freedom League should be the elimination of the Sexual Freedom League at some future time. Just as I hope that a column such as mine could be carried in any paper—and then, perhaps not be necessary at all.

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