Runaways, Hippies, and Marihuana

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The summer of 1967 Haight-Ashbury seemed to offer youth a solution to the ills of modern society. Runaways, who used the city as a refuge from society or home, did not exhibit the delinquent characteristics observed by earlier authors. The complex and cohesive role of drugs, especially marijuana, was unprecedented. The authors suggest that further attention should be directed not to the question "Why don't they stop using drugs?" but to "Can we offer them viable alternatives to drugs?"

THE SUMMER of 1967 was San Francisco's "summer of love." The newspapers predicted that 100,000 young people would flock to the bay area to join in it. Thirty thousand actually came, inundating the city. As part of a major research program in adolescence sponsored by the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, a large apartment in the Haight-Ashbury district was converted into a combination home, office, laboratory, commune, and "crash-pad"—a place where transients, including runaway teen-agers, could spend the night. From this base, a research team of two psychiatrists, three college undergraduates, and three graduate students observed the life and times of the hippies.

Hippies

The mass media popularized the term "hippie" and created the Haight-Ashbury myth through extravagant reports about the district's psychedelic drug-using inhabitants, described as colorful "flower children," who espoused a style of life and a world view based on sharing, tolerance, love, and freedom for each individual "to do his own thing."

Most of these denizens of Golden Gate Park and nearby were either amused or disgusted by the hippie label. Asked if he were a hippie, one answered, "Hippie, what's that? . . . I'm just a human being." And when a prominent reporter asked a Haight-Ashbury "town meeting" what they preferred being called, one bearded spokesman declared, "People!"

Davis(4) suggests that the hippies represent a bona fide social movement, noting that they "are expressing, albeit elliptically, what is best about a seemingly ever-broader segment of American youth: its openness to new experiences, puncturing of cant, rejection of bureaucratic regimentation, aversion to violence, and identification with the exploited and disadvantaged."

Berger(2) has suggested that they are merely reviving elements of bohemias of the past: fraternity, salvation through the innocence of the child, living for the moment, mind expansion, and freedom of self-expression (provided that it does not harm anyone else). But the availability of synthetic psychedelic drugs and their role as a cohesive factor in Haight-Ashbury that summer had no real parallel in earlier bohemias.

West and Allen(12) call the hippies the Green Rebellion, distinguishing them from other rebellious youth such as the New Left and Black Power groups. They see the movement's goals as "beauty, freedom,

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creativity, individuality, self-expression, mutual respect, and the ascendance of spiritual over material values." They also differentiate true hippies from the many similar-looking drug-using pseudo-hippies, plastic hippies, teeny boppers, and runaways, who have become pharmacologically with them but are not philosophically of them. West and Allen warn that self-intoxication with powerful drugs, which is presently both a sacrament (LSD) and a unifying force (marihuana), will inevitably drain the Green Rebellion's energies and destroy it.

Runaways

In the summer of 1967 the Haight-Ashbury myth seemed to offer possible solutions to the problems of youth: an assurance of acceptability, a romantic new identity, and an escape from the hypocrisies of elders. It proffered magical solutions to some of the pressing problems of our time: violence, the dehumanization resulting from technological progress, and urban man's increasing alienation from and defilement of nature. The flow of runaways into Haight-Ashbury, together with the increasingly important role of drug use in the pattern of adolescent rebellion, quickly became an important focus of the research team's attention, and one of the authors (J. K.), was assigned full time to the study of the runaway and his problems, including marihuana.

A syndrome of prolonged absence from home, referred to and accepted by the individual as running away, has frequently been defined as a manifestation of juvenile delinquency. Foster(5), describing 100 runaways who had been referred to a juvenile court, noted a predominance of what he termed "typically delinquent" behavior. Reimer(10) reported three types of runaway: truants; children taking refuge from unbearable environmental situations; and runaways proper, showing "characterological abnormalities" manifested by antagonism, surly defiance, impulsiveness, unprovoked assaultive behavior, and periodic docility.

Following Cohen's(3) suggestion that differing delinquent acts have differing meanings for the individual, Robins and O'Neal(11), in their 30-year follow-up of children who were seen in a child guidance clinic, found that adults who were once runaways had a more frequent diagnosis of sociopathic personality than the rest of the group. Nye and Short(9) found that running away was characteristic of a population drawn from a juvenile correctional institution but rare in a high school population.

We saw runaways in their "natural habitat": on the road, on the streets, in hamburger joints, at dance halls, in the parks, and in the pads, including our own. Most of these youngsters never came to the attention of legal or medical authorities. Unlike the runaways of Nye and Short, these teen-agers came chiefly from the high schools. Unlike those of Reimer, they rarely manifested obstinacy, assaultiveness, or pathological docility. Unlike Foster's subjects, they rarely engaged in acts that are generally labeled delinquent, with one glaring exception: they used illegal drugs, particularly marihuana. Furthermore, they did so without apparent guilt or fear, often expressing a self-righteous enthusiasm for the value of drug effects and scorn for the prohibitions of society and its laws forbidding sale and use of drugs.

For these youngsters, running away can be formulated as a result of the interaction of socioeconomic history with personal history. Today's youth are, to use Keniston's(6) term, "post-modern," and the post-modern style is characterized by the conviction that in a world of rapid change adult (parental) models and values are increasingly irrelevant. Keniston(7) also suggests that the myth behind our society—society's goals and ideals—has become tarnished and negative. Post-modern youth are disillusioned with it and alienated from the society that spawned it.

Many of today's runaways, rather than being candidates for reform school, are reminiscent of the wandering bands of youth described long ago by Makarenko(8). Since the Children's Crusade, if not before, there have been times when large numbers of youngsters, almost in epidemics, have run away to seek fortune, romance, a dream. Many of the children who flocked to Haight-Ashbury were pilgrims, inspired by a myth

that was largely a creation of the mass media; they were seeking a utopia where the problems of adolescence would not bother them.

The mind-expanding psychedelic drugs (LSD in particular) were often endowed by these romantics with religious properties. Some even waited until they finally arrived in Haight-Ashbury before partaking of the LSD sacrament, "saving" themselves for it like a virgin for her husband. But marihuana was their friend and companion, the medium through which camaraderie was found all along the road. The frustrations and hardships of that road were eased by the drug's beneficent euphoria, and interpersonal antagonisms among the travelers went up in its aromatic smoke.

Not all runaways were seekers of the dream. Some might be just as cogently termed "pushaways" as "runaways." One boy was a "caboose" child, pawned off repeatedly by his parents onto older brothers. Some came from broken homes. In some cases the parents had competed for the child's loyalties until he took flight.

Many runaways received either covert or overt parental sanction to leave, expressed as scorn, indifference, or obvious envy; here the parents used the child to act out vicariously their own immature desires for adventure and escape. For such adolescents the fashionable 1967 public myth of the flower children had a double appeal. Without the myth some of them might have stayed home, but other maneuvers would then probably have been sought for resolution of the conflicts within the family setting. Marihuana was already becoming available nationwide; some stay-at-homes were planting it in their backyards.

Sometimes precedents for running away were already set in the family. For example, one 16-year-old girl's sister had run away, but her parents neither alerted the police nor looked for her themselves. When she returned months later they did not even question her about where she had been. The younger girl correctly assumed that if she ran away there would be no danger of her being reported to the police or of her being rejected when she returned.

Most of the runaways gave false names, either to throw off pursuit or to symbolize the taking on of a new identity. One girl chose the name Wendy Golightly to symbolize both her search for the never-never land of Barrie's *Peter Pan* and her desire to be free of social inhibitions, as was the heroine of Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Usually only first names were given. Nearly everyone claimed to be over 18 and thus not a runaway by legal criteria.

The Role of Marihuana

Marihuana was almost always the first illegal drug used by runaways. Many had been introduced to it before leaving home or while on the road. In Haight-Ashbury it was so universally employed that it was considered a staple of life like bread and jam. But as Becker(1) notes, "turning on" is not as simple as just smoking; one must learn the technique: how to inhale and retain the smoke and how to recognize, enjoy, explore, and control the perceptual and affective changes that occur, hopefully maintaining the "high" without excessive intoxication. Acquiring these skills gave many runaways a sense of achievement, a talking point, and a password.

The horrible reactions to marihuana predicted by various authorities were virtually never seen. The runaways generally took this to mean that all the widely advertised dangers of drugs were establishment lies. This further alienated them from the social structure and made them more willing to experiment with all sorts of chemicals.

Meanwhile, the circumstances of the runaway made it unlikely that he would note the degree to which marihuana might interfere with his intellectual functioning. More chronic reactions (apathy, depression, loss of motivation) were seldom attributed to smoking pot. Instead, diminished aggressiveness was considered a desirable effect of drug use; the undesirable corollary effects (such as diminished energy) were minimized or interpreted as results of other factors.

The role of marihuana among the runaways is complex. To begin with, it offers the excitement of the forbidden, the companionship and acceptance of other explorers, and the promise of pleasure. Some users define the role of pot as a social

experience, an escape, or a way to rebel, but most insist that the pharmacological effects are a significant source of gratification. Certainly marihuana and other drug use largely structures the Haight-Ashbury dweller's time. Most days are spent in getting money for staples(including marihuana and other drugs), taking drugs, and talking about sources, brands, prices, risks, legalities, and trips—both good and bad.

Observations to date suggest that most of the summer pilgrims—runaways and others —will eventually rejoin "straight" society, whether or not they return to their parents. But such returns are dependent on many factors, including psychopathology, affective state, cognitive dissonance, relationships with others (both in the psychedelic community and in the "straight" community), and the pressures of reality. Of those who do go home some, having had a bad experience, may not try drugs again. Others are now exploring meditation and other nonchemical "turn-ons."

Some Possible Lessons

However, a significant number of ex-runaways are continuing to use marihuana and are introducing it to others at home. Some of the psychosocial factors that are presently drawing millions of youngsters into marihuana smoking have been described, but further study is clearly required. For those youngsters who are graduates of Haight-Ashbury and for their friends (whom they are probably indoctrinating), the important question that faces mental health personnel may not be "Why don't they stop using drugs?" but "Can we as individuals and as a society offer them viable alternatives to drugs?"

It is difficult to compete with the fascination of the cabal, with its private slang, secret symbols, shared experiences, exhilarating camaraderie, and special mystical, presumably transcendental zeitgeist. The psychedelic posters and the acid-rock musical groups convey a host of messages and serve to expand or recreate the psychedelic experience. Such a song is "White Rabbit," by the Jefferson Airplane. There are many others referring to marihuana and other drugs.

One song that was of particular importance in the summer of 1967 was "She's Leaving Home," by the Beatles. Most of the runaways felt that it illustrated their inability to communicate their goals and values to their parents. The song's message seems clear: the youngster who runs away, whether his trip be geographical, pharmacological, or both, can best be understood in terms of the interaction of significant intrapsychic maturational variables, current sociocultural factors, and the all-important relationship of the child to his parents.

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