

ARE WE PILL-POPPING,  
SNORTING, SMOKING HEDONISTS  
—OR IS ALL THAT JUST SO PASSE?



LET'S TALK ABOUT *DRUGS* BABY

# GAY PEOPLE ARE SEVEN TIMES MORE LIKELY TO TAKE ILLEGAL DRUGS THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION

CRIME SURVEY FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Every generation of homosexuals has their drug of choice. In Shakespeare's day his characters were often implicated in some mind-altering substance thrill or more. And even the man himself, according to Kate Wong in *The Scientific American*, the South African Journal of Science says, "The presence of cocaine and myristic acid (a plant-derived hallucinogen) in clay-pipe fragments were retrieved" from the writer's home in Stratford-upon-Avon. The analysis discussed there also hints at the presence of marijuana residue naturally. The man, and his band of brothers, certainly knew how to indulge.

Moving forward, look at our best friend and first queer Oscar Wilde, who is known to have enjoyed hashish, opium and even forms of absinthe in all its variants. It was the Victorian era after all, and it kept Oscar and his long list of lovers occupied. It may have even been the reason the man perished. The glittered and glued gay boys at Studio 54 loved cocaine, and the raving homos of the 1990s loved ecstasy as they danced into the night (and day).

According to Ethan Brown, in his piece "Crystal Ball" in *New York* magazine, "Name a drug - any drug - and a social scene springs to mind." "Marijuana is smoked by hip-hoppers and hippies, ecstasy consumed by wide-pupiled clubbers, cocaine snorted by socialites and social climbers." But as he says, "Rarely has a drug been so intertwined with one subculture as crystal meth is with New York's underground gay-sex scene, which has been flourishing of late, particularly post-Giuliani." However, all kinds of drugs are still seemingly everywhere, both in small and big quantities, available in plain sight and obscured from piercing eyes and hungry noses, mouths and perhaps veins.

In the *New York Times* this June, Irina Aleksander quoted a source that said,

"Molly is the big thing now. Coke is sort of grimy and passé. Weed smells too much and is also sort of low rent and junior high." Molly of course is the nickname for pure MDMA in molecules. Aleksander goes on to say, "Known for inducing feelings of euphoria, closeness and diminished anxiety, Ecstasy was quickly embraced by Wall Street traders and Chelsea gallerinas. But as demand increased, so did the adulterants in each pill (caffeine, speed, ephedrine, ketamine, LSD, talcum powder and aspirin, to name a few), and by the new millennium, the drug's reputation had soured."

So with the naughties, and this current decade we're in with Bill De Blasio as New York's mayor instead of good old hardcore Giuliani, drugs like GHB ( $\gamma$ -Hydroxybutyric acid) and a mixture of ketamine and cocaine have become the drugs du jour. From the clubs to the boardrooms and all the way to the playgrounds (children optional) - it's still all about the drugs.

But let's not discount the alternatives. According to Max Daly, author of *Narcomania: A Journey through Britain's Drug World*, there is a new batch - a breed of unbanned legal highs: AMT, originally an antidepressant in Russia, which is a long-lasting tryptamine (magic mushroom family) hallucinogenic; Benzo Fury (6-apb), an MDA analogue; Ethylphenidate, a version of Ritalin where the chemical formula has been tweaked; Methiopropamine, a tweaked version of methamphetamine (crystal meth); Camfetamine, a legal version of the stimulant fencamfamine; MDAI, a serotonin releaser; Etizolam and Pyrazolam, legal thienodiazepenes, drugs with similar effects to valium/benzodiazepenes.

According to Andy McNicoll, who interviewed Yusaf Azad, the director of policy

and campaigns at the National Aids Trust, "The drugs being used on the gay scene have changed in recent years, with gay men reporting more use of crystal meth and former legal highs like the stimulant mephedrone and the sedatives GHB and GBL."

Again, the drugs are all right. Or are they?

## LOOKING AT THE FIGURES

Statistics are varied across the world and so it is difficult to see whether the drug abuse, or call it drug fun, is on the rise or dipping down to a grand fall, regardless of gay or non-gay use. In the UK (England and Scotland specifically) around 1 in 12 (8.2%) adults had taken an illicit drug (excluding mephedrone) in the last year, a drop compared with 2011/12 (8.9%), and the proportion of adults aged 16 to 24 taking any drug in the last year was 16.3%, down from 19.3% in 2011/12. In the U.S. things are a little different: a nationwide survey made public last month found that 7.3% of Americans aged 12 or older regularly used marijuana in 2012, up from 7% in 2011. In mid-September 2013, research by the Australian Bureau of Statistics valued the contribution of the illicit drugs market to the Australian economy at A\$6 billion. And then of course the media's obsession with the "war on drugs" shows that the industry is certainly burgeoning. Mexico anyone?

In its annual "Club Drugs: Emerging Trends and Risks" report, the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse in London says that despite a decline in overall use, around one million adults are estimated to have used club drugs in 2011-12. Ecstasy is used the most, but its popularity is waning: use is down from 502,000 in 2005-06 to 461,000 in 2011-12. Ketamine use has changed little over the last three years, hovering at around 200,000 adults. Just 0.1% of the adult po-

pulation recently used either GHB/GBL or methamphetamine.

Antidote, a drug and alcohol project in London, which supports exclusively LGBT men and women, suggests that GHB/GBL and methamphetamine now account for almost all of its work. According to The Substance Misuse Skills Consortium in the UK, men accessing Antidote – “a space they consider safe, confidential, and, crucially, aware of their lifestyles” – have reported how their drug use has changed and about the sometimes risky behavior that occurs while they’re using.

According to the report many men say that these drugs have a “strong, sexually stimulating effect” and that having sex with “five or more partners in a weekend” is common. Some even specifically look for bareback sex. “Wider official figures show a gradual increase in GHB/GBL and methamphetamine, along with the rapid rise of mephedrone use, but within the LGBT population this increase has been

# GHB AND MDMA HAVE CHANGED THE WAY SOME GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN SOCIALIZE, KEEPING THEM IN CLUBS FOR LONGER, AND INCREASINGLY MOVING INTO PRIVATE PARTIES AND SOURCING SEXUAL PARTNERS VIA ONLINE DATING SITES AND SMART PHONE APPS SPECIFICALLY TO USE DRUGS WITH

enormously steep and almost exclusively linked to sexual use by gay and bisexual men. These drugs have changed the way some gay and bisexual men socialize, keeping them in clubs for longer, and increasingly moving into private parties and sourcing sexual partners via online dating sites and smart phone apps that specifically to use drugs with.”

In the same report, reflecting on recent trends, addiction psychiatrist Dr. Adam Winstock says: “With new drugs such as mephedrone there is a honeymoon period, and now we are seeing people who are having problems. Its risk profile fits

with other drugs such as GHB, GBL and ketamine, which have been around for a decade. Heavy users report deterioration in personal functioning, low moods, and lack of control.” But even that somehow doesn’t deter anyone - drugs are still everywhere.

The report also shows that 70% of methamphetamine and over half of all GHB/GBL users in treatment were in their 30s or older. This group may be typified by older male users being treated for these and possibly other drugs – “a by-product perhaps of the popularity of these drugs among LGBT clubbing communities.” Dr. Owen Bowden-Jones, a consultant psychiatrist who runs a club drug clinic in London, says his clinic treats two broad groups: “LGBT people form a large part of the clinic, with the other made up of heterosexual clubbers and students.”

In the UK’s Independent newspaper in September, Sarah Morrison makes the case that it could be either a “coping mechanism in the face of homophobia” or just “hectic partying”, but new figures suggest that gay people are seven times more likely to take illegal drugs than the general population (Crime Survey for England and Wales). Morrison goes on to quote David Stuart, the Education, Training and Outreach Manager at London Friend, the UK’s only targeted LGBT drug and alcohol service, who believes that feelings of “rejection” and “fear” as well as “shame around sex” could be factors leading to this substance abuse.

## EVEN THE CELEBRITIES

Last month’s cover girl Lady Gaga admitted to Brit magazine Attitude that she became dependent on marijuana after her hip operation, while Madonna has wildly

## MILEY CYRUS – I’M CAN’T STOP LYRICS

SO LA-DA-DI-DA-DI WE LIKE TO PARTY  
DANCING WITH MOLLY  
AND EVERYONE IN LINE IN THE BATHROOM  
TRYING TO GET A LINE IN THE BATHROOM

— *It depends who’s doing what. If you’re aged ten [the lyric is] Miley, if you know what I’m talking about then you know. I just wanted it to be played on the radio and they’ve already had to edit it so much... I don’t think people have a hard time understanding that I’ve grown up. You can Google me and you know what I’m up to — you know what that lyric is saying*

MILEY CYRUS



admitted to enjoying the green grass on occasion. But is it Mary Jane that is keeping the gay community occupied (yet again) or have they moved on from the series of drugs the clubs have been full of all summer?

In the Daily Beast this September, Kent Sepkowitz reports that while MDMA, a “purer, powdered form of Ecstasy chemically known as methylenedioxymethamphetamine has been around for decades,” it has lately surged in popularity with “college students, and is being name-checked by mainstream artists ranging from Kanye West and Rick Ross to Miley Cyrus and again Madonna”. Sepkowitz says, “It was first created as a diet drug in 1914, and in the 1970s was used by doctors as an aid in psychotherapy. In the 1980s and 1990s it burst upon the club scene as a party drug.”

In the New York Times piece Irina Aleksander quotes Rick Doblin, founder of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, who said, “As we move more and more electronic, pe-

ople are extremely hungry for the opposite: human interaction on a deeper level where you’re not rushing around. The rise of Molly is in tune with how people are feeling emotionally.”

#### FEELING EXTREME

And in terms of interaction on a deeper level, what could be more intense than Party and Play. PNP, for lovers of acronyms, has been one of the gay community’s sub-cultures for the last half century – some even call it an “epidemic.” In the last 10 years or so PNP has taken on a whole new tenor with the increase in phone apps and dating sites, including Scruff and Adam4Adam, tailored for the users to choose their own adventure. However some sites, such as Manhunt.net, prohibit members from saying that they want PNP or from making other positive references to drug use. The drug of choice is typically methamphetamine, aka “crystal” or “tina” in the gay community. Other party drugs such as MDMA and GHB seem to be less popular at these PNP get-togethers, says the National HIV Prevention Conference (a collaborative effort by the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, a U.S. Government agency, and other governmental and non-government organizations).

As stimulant drugs go, like methamphetamine, it’s a perfect party friend - a drastic delay for the need for sleep and also tends to inhibit ejaculation. PNP events are meant to go on for hours and since methamphetamine highs lasts about eight hours, or several days on multiple doses, it’s the best friend for the party of course. But then there is the problem of “crystal dick” – a slightly embarrassing and frustrating inhibited erection - less play and definitely too much party. But drugs like sildenafil, vardenafil, and tadalafil are used to fix that (according to the pharmaceutical brands). And so the cocktail continues but possibly with some disastrous consequences.

#### AND THE TROUBLE IS

Naturally, there are problems. “We’re seeing a strong correlation between crystal and HIV infection,” says the Pride Institute of New York. Men who PNP with

methamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA, and ketamine are twice as likely to have unprotected sex (sex without using a condom), according to The Pink News. The study, from City University, London, also found that up to 20% of gay men from central London gyms have tried methamphetamine, the drug most associated with PNP.

According to Elizabeth Hartney, in her piece on About.com, although some gay men assert that, “party-and-play involvement is a kind of initiation into the gay scene”, actually many gay men “choose not to use drugs or to have anonymous or unprotected sex.” She goes on to say that in the same way not all gay men have anal sex, whether drug fueled or not, it is “unfortunate that vulnerable young men, uncertain of their sense of belonging in the gay community, buy into these myths and take drugs in order to perform and feel part of the gay scene.” Hartney sees it as a way of feeding “a false negative stereotype of gay men as superficial, irresponsible and uninterested in committed relationships.”

Writer Patrick Cash, in QX magazine, talks about the term syndemic. Related to epidemic, it’s defined as “two or more diseases/societal problems that work together to create a bigger negative impact on a community’s health than if there was just one.” He believes that most people will be able to tell you that the “last epidemic the gay community lived through was the AIDS decimation of the 1980s. However, what many may not know is that our community is currently, in 2013, technically living in a new syndemic: that of widespread party drug use – mephe-

drone, GHB and crystal meth – combined with high-risk sexual practices.”

Drugs have been there all along. They’ve thrilled us, scared us and given us a place to escape reality. The statistics, inconclusively, show that it is both bigger and smaller than before. As the celebrities bring it to the mainstream, the junkies below the surface concoct mixtures and blends that will never reach the surface for some light. Even if cultures decide on their weapon of choice, the fact remains that drugs, no matter how much or little get used or abused, will always be part of the very fiber of life. People, humans, want to escape; they want to see deeper into the very fabric of existence. Drugs, in all their forms (including the legal stuff), give humans that god-like quality of reaching through the veils around us and touching something on the other side. Then of course, you might just be so consumed by materialism and all of life’s nonsense that you no longer feel anything. Drugs might give you the ability to feel yet again, the ability to feel alive, truly alive. Tomorrow is so far away that it doesn’t matter at all.

The only tricky part is the kind of sex that comes hand in hand with the drug-gery happening across the planet. Forget the superbug - the super drug infestation will come with behavior, whether you’re crashing cars or having unprotected sex. It can ruin not just your night but possibly your life as well as the lives of others. So even if it’s apparently not about a specific drug, it’s all about sex, drugs and seemingly no rock ‘n’ roll. Just some iPhone on shuffle in the corner of the room and sex with somebody you think you used to know.