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# Kicks

By Kylar Loussikian

I hate to advocate drugs, alcohol, violence or insanity to anyone, but they've always worked for me.

- Hunter S. Thompson

My advice to people today is as follows: If you take the game of life seriously, if you take your nervous system seriously, if you take your sense organs seriously, if you take the energy process seriously, you must turn on, tune in, and drop out.

- Timothy Leary

It's time to get the 'high' out of higher education.

- Joseph Califano, National Center on Addicition and Substance Abuse (Columbia University)

Earlier this year, the Yale Herald decided to poll their campus on the 'Yale Thing', famously captured in *American Psycho*; The Yale Thing, Patrick Bateman explains, is a closet homosexual who does a lot of cocaine. And yet, it seems the image of campuses around the world has professionalised, sterilised, scrubbed itself of dirty hippies and beards and smoking on the grass and dropping acid before a psych lecture and and and... Instead we have corporatisation and designer drugs enjoyed by just a few and light beer at the Roundhouse! Is this really the case?

Tracking down marijuana users is not difficult. A stroll through the drama studio blocks and around Gate Ave is enough to glance a few red eyes, a few shadows slinking away into the Village, several empty packets of cigarettes. Finding someone to talk is surprisingly easily. Tom\*, a third-year media student, tells me pot is his definite favourite. "I have quite a patchy history with drugs," he tells me. "I was taking acid a lot for a while, back when I was DJ'ing. I have a mixed relationship with acid. Sometimes I love it, sometimes it does my head in."

Tom and his friends regularly smoke before class. "I find classes more entertaining when I'm high", he says. "I can't contribute much but it's like I'm a



fly on the wall, you know? Martin [tutor] says stuff to me. It blows my mind and I go home and tell my flat mates my mind was blown today. They say yeah you blew your mind before class didn't you and I say yeah." Tom thinks more people smoke pot on campus than is usually believed. I asked him if he'd feel comfortable lighting a joint on the library lawn and he said he would. "In front of the library, yeah; well I wouldn't sort of rub it in people's faces but I could go around the corner, certainly."

The Yale Herald reported that marijuana use was highest amongst colleges, and on their campus wasn't associated with a drug culture, but was a mere part of college life. Speaking to a former dealer, the Yale Herald found that campus smokers were diverse, from people who had encountered pot only a few times, people who were 'idealistically against it', and even included a handful of tutors and even one professor. Speaking on buying or smoking trends, the dealer said beginnings of the month were popular, probably because that's when students were paid or parents added funds to their accounts, and business was especially brisk during reading weeks and immediately after mid-terms.

If marijuana was not particularly drug culture, then what was? At the Village, Roman\* tells me he is a heavy drinker and frequent drug taker. He thinks it isn't so prevalent. "There are people there, you can usually tell from their personality. I'm not at all quiet about my drug use and I'll tell people I use drugs and they'll have to deal with it," he says. He says it closes a few doors, but he finds it opens others. He believes he is the middle ground.

I asked him about some of his friends who have moved out of campus into a house near Kings Cross. Their regular weekend parties involve crack use, and just recently one of them broke up with his girlfriend after she discovered he had begun to smoke crack in the morning. I asked him how they dealt with assessments and assignments and exams with that

lifestyle. “I don’t think it’s as life-ruining as people make out,” Roman says. “It can damage your academic record, but some people are able to pocket their lives into productive bits and relaxing bits.”

UNSW was, at one time, responsible for producing some of Australia’s most prolific counter-culture and drug-affiliated media. Previous editors and writers at Tharunka included Richard Neville, Ian Davison, and Martin Sharp, who, in the early sixties, were responsible for several college pranks including kidnapping Bandstand host Brian Henderson, submitting articles about local brothels to the Sydney Morning Herald and others. Most notably, Neville and Sharp went on to found Oz Magazine, arguably one of the most influential counter-culture magazines in the world. Frank articles on drug use were often accompanied by travelogues and other pieces, notably a travel piece on Timothy Leary dropping acid in Algeria.

Grabbing a passerby in front of Blockhouse, however, shows how much times have indeed changed. When asked how many people he knew took drugs, this poor soul thought he knew no one. “I can’t even imagine smoking. Why would you do that to yourself?” he said. “I wouldn’t know where to buy it first, I don’t know what it would do to me, and I hear about these flashback things where if I smoke a joint I’ll immediately flash back and feel high again.” He drinks though, sometimes heavily, and while he has no problem associating with other heavy drinkers, he says the one person he knows who smokes pot is in his class and he doesn’t particularly get along with him. Sometimes he comes to class smelling of weed.

This same sentiment was echoed by numerous people Tharunka spoke to. Another student said whilst she wouldn’t want to be friends with either heavy drinkers or drug users, she thought drinking was more acceptable because it was legal. “You don’t get involved in all of the sort of criminal activity you do when you have to buy illegal drugs,” she told me. “I think that breaks people and it changes them and it makes things that aren’t acceptable acceptable in their minds and who knows what boundaries they are going to end up crossing later.”

Others are less sure. Tom’s friends start discussing where their favourite campus smoking spots are. “Sometimes I like to lay out in the sun, and if you can light up on the grass there, it’s so fucking



amazing.” They do worry, however, that they may be caught by one of their lecturers. “I have this slow burn fear,” says Tom. “I mean some of them probably smoke all the time, but I don’t necessarily feel like they would be terribly happy with me being there, then, smoking a joint before their class.” He says he knows at least one lecturer who would, however, love the idea of students being stoned in his class. At the end of the day, though, he says when he considers it, he doesn’t think anyone really gives a damn, he doesn’t think half the people who would give a damn know what he’s doing and the other half don’t really care about interfering with his life anyway. The others? Well, fuck them, he says.

Is drug use, then acceptable to other students? According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, over 33% of Australians have smoked marijuana, nearly 5% are addicted to painkillers, analgesics, tranquilisers or sleeping pills, 6% have tried meth-amphetamines, 6% have tried cocaine and 7% have taken hallucinogens. Research, however, in tertiary student use of drugs, is minimal. In America, this is not the case. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University regularly publishes survey results on drug use on campuses. It’s president, Joseph Califano, says the



situation on campuses is deteriorating, even after several campaigns aimed at reducing drug use amongst students. The abuse of prescription drugs and marijuana has increased dramatically, it’s latest report found, since the mid-1990’s. Cocaine use more than doubled between 1993 and 2005, and heroin use tripled.

The Yale Herald report found motivation for use was varied. Students spoke about ‘social anxiety’, because at places like Yale, where it is hard to stand out academically, it is easier to do so with drug use. Others have simply continued habits formed in high-school. As Tom had suggested was the case at UNSW, the Yale Herald spoke to one student who said that although drug use on campus was not acceptable, drugs were concentrated in certain social circles.

I pointed out to another smoker who agreed to be interviewed that some students had specifically mentioned illegality was their major problem with drugs like marijuana, as opposed to drinking. He said that since his last dealer had stopped selling, he’d switched to a product sold at several head shops around Sydney, which had a similar effect but was legal. Herbal smoke mixtures have begun to be sold around Australia, and he said there were many kinds available. “I’ve tried the middle one, purple haze, which is meant to make you relaxed, but encourage conversation, and the last one I tried, tropical infusion or something, was amazing,” he said. “I think that was meant to bake you out.” I asked if that’s what the product description was on the packet. He couldn’t remember. I guess it worked.

I questioned him on if he believed the herbal mixtures were popular. He thought they were. “Well, they’re always out, always running out. I’ve been three times and they’ve been sold out of a few flavours. There are other brands too I think, but they only had one and a quarter grams, so I don’t bother with that.” The minimum he said he’d buy would be seven grams. He’d prefer to be smoking real pot, but it’s more conspicuous. Would he smoke the herbal mixture on campus, I asked. Why not, he said, no-one would know.

The Yale Herald finished their report with a senior who thought a drug culture still exists. He spoke of eliciting crack from strangers. He said his story wasn’t particularly unique.

*\* Names have been changed to protect identities*