

Book Review

pursuit of ecstasy by jerome beck and marsha rosenbaum

REVIEWED BY NICHOLAS SAUNDERS

*Autographed copies
available from
MAPS for \$18.
See page 30
for ordering
information.*

FIRST, I MUST DECLARE my interest: last April I wrote and published a similar book, *E for Ecstasy*. And although mine appeared some 10 months earlier, there was no cribbing as the two were completed at the same time.

Pursuit of Ecstasy kicks off with three lively descriptions of the drug by very different people, exemplifying the three main types of user: The Dancer, The Seeker and The Hedonist.

From then on, the book takes on the stance of an objective, sociological enquiry, but nevertheless is easy to read. The Plan of the Book, they announce, is first to set the stage with the drug's history; then to explore the diverse social worlds where it is used; the reasons people use the drug; why they give it up; and negative aspects. Finally they attempt to answer the question 'What should be done about Ecstasy?'

The authors explore various 'scenes' where Ecstasy is used, and went to Dallas less than two years after prohibition where they "conducted seven formal interviews" with people who were involved in the renowned scene that caused its own downfall:

'[It was] '85, and I moved into a small apartment by myself. That's when I found some good X. It started becoming so much more available. All you had to do was get out in the street life – the night life. That's when it was all over the street life. I mean, suddenly it was like within one weekend, boom! It was everywhere and you could get it anywhere on the streets, in the bars, for 20 bucks a hit from anybody.'

Pursuit of Ecstasy
by Jerome Beck and Marsha Rosenbaum
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State University of New York Press
(Autographed copies available from MAPS
for \$18.00 postpaid priority mail)

Points that particularly interested me include:

Attitudes

One is that the drug 'does things to you', so that the effects noticed are those of the drug itself. The other is that the drug allows the user free expression, so the effects reflect aspects of the user's personality that are normally suppressed.

Group experience

Some New Agers relate the MDMA experience to 'morphic resonance', a term coined by Rupert Sheldrake, as though the MDMA allows them to tap into a field of cumulative collective experience. The forerunners of Raves were Grateful Dead concerts that have been going ever since 1965, and where a large number of people take drugs and feel a group-mind experience.

Acceptability

Ecstasy was used and accepted by straight people who saw it as 'safe' or 'not a drug', particularly before it was prohibited. Several examples of this are given, from the Dallas hedonists (who were well-off young professionals) to New Agers who see the MDMA state as real, not as a stoned state.

Truth serum

"I believe it lowers your sense of fear and you fall in love with yourself. When you do that, you're more willing to take risks, and one of the risks is telling the truth". It enables one to speak the truth, but does not prevent one from lying.

Sex

Prostitutes found MDMA helpful in creating a better atmosphere with clients, and a topless dancer was able to accept and feel less abused by gross behaviour, and to earn more tips as a result. Some people became open to new kinds of sexual experiences.