

Campus Voice

The National College Magazine



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BASH!

America's Best College Parties (including the Moosehead Caper)

The Strange Saga of Ecstasy

Will the DEA's ban on MDMA really put the clamps on the Ecstasy entrepreneurs?

Now that it's illegal, Ecstasy—the huggy, talky drug with the chemical call letters MDMA—has gone underground with other street drugs. Still, some people are wondering what last year's media frenzy over Ecstasy was all about. "It's been around for years," snips Michael Musto, columnist for *The Village Voice*. "It's passé."

A final decision on whether to continue the July "emergency rescheduling" of MDMA as an illegal drug will be made in early 1986 by the administrative-law judge of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). But according to San Francisco psychiatrist and MDMA expert Jack Downing, "The ban will continue until some corporation undertakes the necessary studies to prove MDMA is nontoxic. And with a generic nonpatented material like this, the question companies are asking is 'Can we make a profit?'"

Much of the information published about Ecstasy during its brief media heyday was just plain wrong. For instance, United Press International consistently labeled the drug a hallucinogen. It's not, experts say. *Newsweek* called it an aphrodisiac, another dubious claim. "Frankly, when it hits me, sex would be almost impossible," reports



one student user. Some of the disagreement about the effects of Ecstasy can be attributed to a lack of information about the drug. The University of Chicago's Charles Schuster and Lewis Seiden have studied amphetamines for eight years and have deter-

mined that MDA, which is chemically similar to MDMA, has caused brain damage in lab mice. However, no similar study has yet been conducted on Ecstasy itself.

It's ironic that one of MDMA's most vocal supporters may have done more harm than good to the Ecstasy cause. Rick Doblin, a student at the University of South Florida, founded the Earth Metabolic Design Foundation—in effect an MDMA lobby. Because Doblin's pre-ban lobbying drew so much attention to the otherwise unknown drug, some Ecstasy advocates blame his efforts at least partly for the DEA rescheduling.

Faced with the prospect of spending 15 years in prison, some students who were attracted to the drug when it was legal have since stopped using it. "It's expensive and scarce now," says one Rice University computer-science student. Downing, however, claims just the opposite. "Since MDMA was banned, it

has been more widely used, because people have heard about the beneficial experience that can be attained from it."

But unless the DEA has a major change of heart in 1986, last July's Ecstasy ban is likely to stay intact.

—Jerome Weeks

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T O Y O U R H E A L T H

The introduction of a drug called Minoxidil could spell relief for the estimated 4.1 million American males in their teens and twenties who suffer from pattern hair loss.

First manufactured as a high-blood-pressure medicine by the Upjohn Company, Minoxidil gained the status of minor medical miracle

when, as a side effect, experimental subjects sprouted hair in previously barren areas. The FDA, however, has yet to approve the medication as a hair-growth catalyst.

Upjohn tested topical Minoxidil on more than 2,200 balding men in 1983 and 1984, and they're still analyzing the data. But the

Washington Hospital Center reports that approximately one-third of the 100 men it tested with the drug achieved cosmetically acceptable results.

Currently available by prescription only, Minoxidil can be mixed with an alcohol solution by a druggist. The resulting goo is then applied directly to the scalp. Although Mi-

noxidil may bring hope to the hairless, the drug will also deplete their bank accounts—a six-week supply costs \$150. And as speculation brews about an

over-the-counter version, Upjohn stock is steadily climbing.

—Ryan Murphy, Indiana University

MELISSA GRIMES