

ALL AROUNDERS

“Your honor, in this case the state waves trial of the defendant Ralph Wiley. It is convinced that he is hopelessly and incurably insane, a condition caused by the drug marijuana to which he was addicted.

More myths exist concerning All Arounders (psychedelics) than any other class of psychoactive drugs.

Part of this has to do with the impact these drugs have on a human beings' perception of the world, a world in which logic takes a back seat to intensified and distorted sensations.

“Psychedelics, um, the need to do them really comes from, people feeling like they need to experience something that's different than their own reality. They want to ah, augment their perceptual abilities essentially, they want to hear a piece of music in a new way, they want to see a tree and see something they haven't seen before.”

The most widely used psychedelics are marijuana and ecstasy, but there are dozens of other plants and synthetic preparations that have been used throughout history to try to speak to the gods, to look into one's soul, or even to heal an illness.

“So you start off with mushrooms. Mushrooms are a pretty easy trip, and it's really all about your attitude. Once you have eaten 3 pounds of mushrooms then you move to LSD.”

While some psychedelics can stimulate the central nervous system like uppers, and others can depress it like downers, the hallmark of this class of drugs is that they can create illusions, delusions, and hallucinations by overloading the brainstem.

“Illusions are physical manifestations or alterations in what you see and how you interpret them. Magicians are illusionists they cause illusions.”

“There were these figures on the computer screen and they were the coolest things I had ever seen in my life, they were like little animals making noises and I was just like Oh my God, and I looked at them for like an hour straight, it was just like, whoa!”

“A delusion is more of a mental thing, it is deluded thinking. It is thinking you are stronger, or more-pretty, or more powerful than you really are. It is a deluded state of thinking.”

“Well I, I may have, may have deluded myself into believing that I was invincible. Fears that I naturally had, I no longer had when I was, umm, using LSD.”

“Hallucinations are experiencing things, hearing things, seeing, or even feeling things that have no physical presence.”

“But, one time I, I was on about four standard drops of bromo-dragonfly and um, several hours into it, probably about six to eight hours into it, I was watching a, a movie and my feet are up in front of me, laying down and ah, smoke just starts to billow out of my shoes like uncontrollably and I knew my feet weren’t on fire and I knew I wasn’t burning and I knew I was just seeing smoke coming out of my shoes so, it was definitely a, definitely a hallucination as opposed to an illusion or delusion.”

Psychedelics disrupt the limbic system, the brain’s emotional center, in a way that often exposes a person to the extremes of euphoria or panic. Ultimately, the user’s trip depends on the person’s mental state, physical condition, the quantity and quality of the drug, and the surroundings.

“I, the room melted around me, and I completely left my body and I was just so sure that I had taken the last drug and that I would just die and that was it, I was so depressed. I said ‘God dammit,’ why did I do that.’”

Based on their chemical composition there are five categories of all arounders.

Perhaps the most infamous of these are the indole psychedelics.

In the 1950s and 60s, the notoriety of certain psychedelics, particularly LSD and psilocybin mushrooms, (both indole psychedelics), seemed to allow users a means to liberate their subconscious. The government, on the other hand, wanted to use them for mind control and warfare while the pharmaceutical companies looked to these drugs as a means to treat mental illness.

“We’re ready to start this experiment. I’m going to give you this cup that contains lysergic acid 100 micrograms. Will you drink it?”

“Two forty-eight.”

“You’re doing fine. Just try to describe it.”

“Oh, you don’t know. You want to give yourself; you want to give yourself as much as you can.

“What happens when I do this? (The doctor claps)

“I don’t know, it was sort of nothing much except that I was sort of getting somewhere and you interrupted it.

“I see.’

“It was sort of irritating in a way I suppose.”

“I know but I thought it was . . . because this experience was getting to be a little overwhelming, isn’t that right?”

“Well I wouldn’t say that. I’d like to keep it up.”

The army, the CIA, and the pharmaceutical companies found the effects of the psychedelics to be too unpredictable so they ceased experimentation. Use of these substances was left to those people willing to explore and alter their minds.

“To me I felt that it helped me to realize that those fears that I had were, were um self-inflicted and made up fears and that it, it brought me to believe that, that ah, I could conquer those fears . . . I could conquer those weaknesses . . . I could be in control of those as long as I was using the drug.”

Unfortunately, the variability in potency and the tendency to overuse almost any psychoactive drug led to a number of problems.

“I dosed myself on an extremely large dose, I suppose, of mushrooms. I ate 28 grams which is about an ounce of that . . . and I realized that it was a poison that I had to get it out of me and that um eventually at one point my sinuses swelled up to the point where I was bleeding from my eyes.”

The use of indole psychedelics to explore consciousness or simply to get high waned in the eighties and nineties, while the use of ecstasy and other phenylalkylamines increased. Again, the desire was to change ones perception of the world.

While ecstasy is currently the most notorious of the phenylalkylamines, it is greatly predated by peyote.

The use of mescaline in the Peyote and San Pedro cacti to alter ones consciousness dates back 3,000 to 6,000 years. Shamans and curanderas, medicine men and women, still boil the plant and drink the potion to produce hallucinations and communicate with the supernatural.

As of the 20th century, mescaline could be synthesized in the laboratory. The unraveling of the molecular structure of mescaline eventually led to the synthesis of hundreds of chemically similar substances including MDA, 2CB, PMA, and particularly MDMA, ecstasy.

Chemically known as methylene-dioxy-methamphetamine, ecstasy has stimulant physical effects similar to methamphetamine, and emotional effects that are particularly appealing to teenagers and young adults.

“It took me out of the reality, that I didn’t like being in, my environment. Cause I was having a lot of like, problems with school and family, and just life and it just made me have fun and I’d go to raves and go dancing....”

The three brain chemicals most affected by “ecstasy” are the neurotransmitters norepinephrine, which produces stimulation; dopamine, which produces euphoria; and serotonin, which produces empathic feelings like closeness and emotional warmth.

“But when you’re like doing “ecstasy” or something, you can just like spill your guts to like anyone you are with and if you are with like a friend or somebody you’re dating or something, you can just say whatever you want and it’s like, it changes everything

because you'll just wake up the next morning and be like, Oh God, what did I say last night but like you remember it."

When ecstasy is used, it releases excess amounts of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that affects mood, heart rate, sleep, appetite and sexuality. It exaggerates emotions while lowering inhibitions, but unfortunately, it also results in serotonin depletion- often causing depression.

"In the morning you just feel like your whole body is drained, like, like you've been dead, like you are just about to die and your whole body is like ugh, and you're, everything has been drained from you."

Counterfeit chemicals are frequently misrepresented as ecstasy because of the money involved in the sale of this drug.

"The ecstasy that I had gotten, I had about a thousand pills, and I was doing it a lot...it was bad. It was a bad dose. Um, and it put me into the hospital for about a month...attacked my heart and gave me a heart problem."

The desire to be separated from one's environment, has led experimenters to frog secretions, nutmeg, mace, and even deadly nightshade, also known as belladonna. Belladonna is the best known of the anticholinergic psychedelics, which also include mandrake, jimson weed, and wolfbane. These plants were popular in the middle ages and were often used in witchcraft and sorcery.

In the continuing search for ways to escape one's environment, a number of experimenters in the 1960s tried the animal tranquilizer PCP.

"When I smoke PCP, I...feel just like on top of the world. You know. You don't feel pain. You don't think about your, your past. You know it's, it's a good drug if, if you want to cover up your feelings, you know. You feel like Superman. It's like, it's like acid without the mind trip"

A similar anesthetic called ketamine, was widely used in field hospitals during the Vietnam War but its dissociative and psychic effects limited its use. It became one of the so-called club drugs along with ecstasy, GHB, and nitrous oxide.

"It is like a hallucinogen, also like in slow motion, like everything feels like real slow, but you also kind of feel like kind of amped."

The psychic effects of both drugs have been described as sensory deprivation that produces a separation between mind and body that making it hard to move and think normally.

“I blacked out, because I usually um, mix it with the alcohol too, so it makes you black out sometimes./ Sometimes I’d end up in the hospital with like scars and shit and I wouldn’t know how I got them.”

There is a thin line between the drugs’ pleasant sensory deprivation and catatonia, coma, or convulsions.

The search for other mind-altering drugs often leads experimenters to substances that are easier to find and sometimes legal. One recent rediscovery is *Salvia Divinorum*, a sage plant that has been around for thousands of years. It is still used by shamans in the mountains of northeastern Mexico to induce a trance-like state. Experimenters are often startled by its potency.

“Once you hit acid, you’re realizing or like *Salvia*, once you try *Salvia*, you never want to use hallucinogen again, cause you’ll never come back, that’s just the craziest hallucinogen ever, it’s like taking 35 hits of acid and peaking hard for about 15 minutes.”

The numbers of people using LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, peyote, and MDMA is dwarfed by the numbers using marijuana.

And unlike other all rounders, where entering a totally different consciousness is the goal, marijuana is more commonly used for relaxation, overcoming boredom, and anxiety control.

“I used marijuana like a sedative for my brain, like, almost like an antipsychotic, it just prevented me from really thinking too hard about things and I know that worked for a time and I feel it did have beneficial properties for my situation but a, I’ve come to the point where I can, I can do it on my own merit.”

Cannabis, or marijuana as it is commonly known, has more than 420 chemicals. The most potent of these is the cannabinoid, delta 9 tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC , which is responsible for most of the psychoactive effects.

“I felt good when I was high. I felt happy and content and um, everything looked better to me.”

THC, an external or exogenous cannabinoid, affects the brain in so many ways because it mimics that organ’s own internal or endogenous cannabinoids, especially anandamide, and 2AG, the most abundant neurotransmitters in the brain. Normally these chemicals affect any number of functions including pain control, information processing, intraocular pressure, muscle relaxation, integration of sensory experiences with emotions, memory, and hunger.

“I used to eat and eat, and eat, just constantly, even if I was full. I’d go back to the kitchen and just scarf.”

“My short term memory is horrible, like I have to remind myself what we’re talking about right now, like knowing what we’re talking about it, like ok, this is what we’re talking about, cause I’ll, I’ll forget and then you know, it’s just really bad.”

In addition to short –term memory loss, impairment of the frontal lobes, which control the decision making process, can cloud judgment.

“I was taught to want to achieve things and I rebelled against the achievement factor. I didn’t want to achieve what you wanted me to achieve. So to keep me from achieving what you wanted me to achieve, I’m going to put a resister in place and that resister is, is marijuana.”

One of the main areas affected by marijuana is the novelty center of the brain, that part of our consciousness that alerts us to the presence of something new, something that should be paid attention to in case it is dangerous, or beneficial. When marijuana over-stimulates this part of the brain, we find even the most mundane things interesting.

“People will smoke weed in a prelude to an activity like oh, lets go get high and then we’re going to go to Dennys or something like that It’s like well is, I don’t know like is eating just not enough for you, you’ve got to fully enjoy that experience by being stoned or like you know, I don’t know like anything like let’s get all baked and go to the zoo.”

Tolerance and even withdrawal symptoms have been commonly observed in heavy users.

“Marijuana is most definitely a tolerance producing drug, you can you know go years and years smoking ever single day and stop a week, smoke a joint and get higher than you’ve been in a year, you know, tolerances can build, build slower but stick harder”

“Withdraw symptoms for the first week, ah, I really didn’t feel them. The second week was far more troublesome I’d say just because um, that’s when the stress of it really started to get to me that’s when my body started to realize, what you don’t have this chemical to use in, in the way that you had been using which was pretty much for stress relief and a, I really started to get aggravated.”

Compulsive use and addictive behavior have been well-documented in chronic marijuana users, mostly due to the higher THC exposure.

“I don’t know if it’s physically addicting but I know it’s mentally addicting, like I couldn’t, I’d, I’d tell myself in the morning I’m not going to do it and then I would that day.”

“Oh, the compulsion to use? It’s to me, it’s constant. I can be high for, you know, already be half an hour or an hour into it and want to smoke some more just for the pure taste of it, not to enhance the high because generally the high doesn’t, doesn’t get better or stronger.”

“I definitely feel like the privilege to obtain a medical marijuana license is a, fairly abused, particularly in this state, being Oregon, and a, but there are people who it genuinely has a positive impact on, um cancer patients, aids victims.”

“When we’re talking about the positive effects of medical marijuana most health, health experts, are not talking about taking bud and rolling it into a joint and smoking it, we’re talking about looking at the actual chemicals in marijuana. There are several different chemicals in marijuana, we’re looking at maybe one of those, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) which is a psychoactive, but also has major health benefits. We’re talking about extracting that, purifying that and administering it in a healthy form rather than the negative form of smoking.”

“I feel a lot of people that say that they want it legalized for the, the medical reasons and so forth and so on, they’re just, they’re just on that, they’re on that, that ticket just because they think that’s the only way that it’s going to be legalized. Well, you know, stand up and say, hey, I want it legalized for the very fact that I just want it legalized.”

Research that honestly examines marijuana, and the other psychedelics, has greatly increased in the past 20 years, hopefully overcoming the myths of the past.

Is it habit forming... dangerous... brain damaging?

“Drugs are like a rocket car, they truly are, if you know how to drive one, you could, you can be taken far beyond the normal veil of human experience, you know, goes to. But if you don’t know how to drive that rocket car, you’re just going crash into a wall and you’re not going to get anything out of it, and that, that goes for everything from marijuana to LSD to mushrooms, peyote to whatever.”