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"Head Shops" and a Growing Paraphernalia Controversy

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NOTE: The original 1,000+ page manuscript for *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* had to be cut by more than half before its first publication in 1998. This is an edited excerpt that was deleted from the original manuscript.

The growing "counter-culture" of affluent young drug users in the 1960s and 1970s was a market to be tapped. Across the country, young entrepreneurs opened small businesses to capitalize on this market. The "head shop," small stores that catered to drug users, provided much of the trappings of local drug cultures and served as gathering place and points of information exchange. Here one could find all the cultural accoutrements: cigarette papers, "roach clips," pipes of every conceivable variety, clothes, hats, jewelry, various "legal highs," incense, literature on drugs, underground papers, candles, records and tapes, posters, buttons, bumper and stickers. Some indication of the extent of marijuana use is indicated by the fact that sales of rolling papers in the United States doubled in twenty four months between 1971 and 1973 (Burnham, 1993). There were specialty books, comic books, pamphlets, and a new generation of glossy magazines that catered to the drug user. *High Times* was introduced in 1972 and later emulated

by *Head Magazine*, *Rush* and one quite remarkably named *Dealer*.

One could watch changing drug trends in the evolution of paraphernalia. In the late 1970s, the marijuana-focused fare offered in head shops gave way to cocaine-related paraphernalia: scales, grinders, gold spoons, silver mirrors, and antique snuff boxes. Then drug-related paraphernalia, clothing and literature moved from small stores stuck between bars and pool halls to convenience stores and shopping malls. It wasn't long after middle-American parents wondered into "novelty stores" in suburban malls and, in outrage, began organizing what would become the "Parents Movement."

References

Burnham, J. (1993). *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History*. NY: New York University Press.