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**The British Press and Psychedelic Policy: The  
Role of Newspapers in the Escalating  
Legislation Against LSD, 1966-71**

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## **Abbreviations**

ACDD – Advisory Committee on Drug Dependence

LSD – Lysergic Acid Diethylamide

MDA – Misuse of Drugs Act, 1971

## Introduction

‘One can well understand that, with all the other things on their mind, Her Majesty’s Government do not want to have to contend with hallucinations as well’.<sup>1</sup>

So said Conservative Peer, Lord Sandford, during the parliamentary debate on adding the psychedelic drug Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) to the 1964 Drugs (Prevention of Misuse) Act. Approved in 1966, the Modification Order to the Act criminalised the unauthorised possession of LSD for the first time in Britain. Those caught with the drug could face up to two years imprisonment, a fine or both. The underlying message of Lord Sandford’s comment, disguised by an uneasy satire, was seminal to the Order’s materialisation and came to represent the political establishment’s stance on LSD over the next five years: the government must control the ‘hallucination-producing’ drug.

Between 1966 and 1971, LSD saw dramatic changes to its legislative regulation. By 1971, the penalty for possessing LSD was set at seven years by a novel piece of drugs legislation, the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA). Designed to provide more ‘comprehensive and flexible provisions’ for policymakers, the MDA created a new classification system placing a variety of drugs into three categories based on their ‘relative harmfulness’ – though the definition of harm was not established.<sup>2</sup> LSD was firmly placed in the highest category, Class A, with the strictest penalties for breaching the law. For simply possessing LSD, this marked an increase of 5 years in prison from the penalties under the 1964 Act.

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Sanford, House of Lords, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter HC or HL Deb), 4 August 1966, vol.276, col.1463.

<sup>2</sup> Kew, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), CAB134/2864, ‘Misuse of Drugs’, 9 December 1969, p.2.

During a period that witnessed ‘a battery of legislation’ on drugs, LSD saw the most significant escalation in penalties, yet a focused study of LSD in drugs legislation between 1966 and 1971 has often evaded scholarship.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation aims to start the restoration of this omission. Recognising the complexities of the legislative process and the wide array of factors involved in forming legislation and policy, it does not claim to be a comprehensive account of all the influences on LSD’s legislation. Rather it seeks to unravel the role of one authority: the national press. Newspapers often play a crucial role in policymaking.<sup>4</sup> As fundamental but subjective vehicles of communication, what newspapers choose to report and how they choose to report it often influences the perceived salience of an issue and, correspondingly, the political response.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have noted that this causal relationship is complex and variable, dependent on factors such as newspaper coverage, subject, source respectability and political party interest.<sup>6</sup> This study of the press’ role in LSD’s legislative evolution between 1966 and 1971 presents a historical example of this relationship and offers invaluable insights into the intricacies of the press-policy nexus, specifically between the press and drug policy.

This dissertation contends that the press was instrumental in setting and shaping the political agenda on LSD that determined legislative action throughout this period. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of four national newspapers, parliamentary debates and government records reveals that two political responses to LSD emerged either side of summer

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Kidd and Roger Sykes, ‘UK Policy’, in *Illegal Drug Use in the United Kingdom: Prevention, Treatment and Enforcement*, eds. Cameron Stark et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p.19.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Soroka et al., ‘Mass Media and Policymaking’, in *Routledge Handbook of Public Policy*, eds. Eduardo Araral et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p.204.

<sup>5</sup> Soroka, p.205.

<sup>6</sup> Soroka, pp.205-206; Susan Christie, ‘Trial by Media: Politics, Policy and Public Opinion, the Case of the ACT heroin trial’, *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 10:1 (1998), 37-51 (p.39).

1967. Driven by themes of reporting in the press, politicians' perception of LSD transformed from viewing LSD as an external American 'problem' between 1966 and mid-1967 to an internal youth 'problem' from mid-1967 to 1971. Correspondingly, the political agenda shifted from one of prevention to one of control.

A bipartite, chrono-thematic structure is employed to examine exactly how the press influenced these two political agendas and what impact this had on legislation. **Chapter One** looks at the period from 1966 to mid-1967 when LSD first appeared on the political agenda. It illustrates that the press framed LSD as inherently dangerous to public health and societal values. Yet, due to the focus on its misuse in America, politicians perceived LSD as an American 'problem' that required a response to prevent the emergence of these dangers in Britain. The result was not only the addition of LSD to the 1964 Prevention Act but an increased paranoia of LSD translocating across the Atlantic. **Chapter Two** examines the period from the summer of 1967 to 1971, when the agenda against LSD intensified. It first highlights how the press encouraged a shift in the political narrative through changing its focus. Maintaining that LSD was dangerous to public health and societal values, the press increasingly began to report on extreme examples of LSD's misuse among British youth, influencing the growing political perception of LSD as a pressing youth problem that demanded further control. The Chapter highlights how the press maintained this agenda throughout the parliamentary processes of the two Misuse of Drugs Bills, cementing LSD's classification in Class A.

## Literature Review

This dissertation fills somewhat of a surprising scholarly lacuna. In recent decades, a large body of scholarship has emerged on the 'long' 1960s in Britain, with many regarding it as an

era that saw great change.<sup>7</sup> A focused legislative exploration of LSD has, however, evaded such accounts. In studying the role of the press in the evolution of legislation against LSD between 1966 and 1971, this dissertation contributes to three broad arenas of historical inquiry: the history of psychedelic drugs in Britain, the history of British drug policy and the history of the relationship between politics and the press.

First, this study contributes to histories of psychedelic drugs in Britain, a nascent but evolving historical domain. In the late 1990s, revived interest in psychedelics as an adjunct to psychotherapy began after over thirty years of inactivity in the medical community. Inspired by this ‘psychedelic renaissance’, medical and socio-cultural histories have emerged in an attempt to understand the historical use of these mind-altering drugs.<sup>8</sup> However, focused accounts of individual drugs have remained few in these broader inquiries. Important exceptions to this are the works by Andy Roberts, arguably the most authoritative voice on the history of LSD in Britain, having dedicated three books to the hallucinogen.<sup>9</sup> His 2008 work, *Albion Dreaming* marked the first – and currently only – attempt to chart LSD’s history in Britain. Building on medical and socio-cultural approaches within the broader field and applying them to LSD specifically, *Albion Dreaming* traces the evolution of LSD’s use by the military, the medical community and the counter-culture.<sup>10</sup> It offers an important departure from the American bias of LSD’s history and sets the foundations for this study’s focus. However, as a popular history with a primary focus on the narrative, Roberts’ account brushes

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<sup>7</sup> For example: Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> See: Ben Sessa, 'A Brief History of Psychedelics in Medical Practices: Psychedelic Medical History "before the Hiatus"', in *The Psychedelic Policy Quagmire: Health, Law, Freedom, and Society*, ed. J. Ellens and Thomas Roberts (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015); Antonio Melechi eds., *Psychodelia Britannica: Hallucinogenic Drugs in Britain*, (London: Turnaround, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Andy Roberts, *Albion Dreaming: A Popular History of LSD in Britain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Marshall Cavendish, 2012); Andy Roberts, *Acid Drops: Adventures in Psychodelia* (Falmouth: Psychedelic Press, 2016); Andy Roberts, *Divine Rascal: On the Trail of LSD's Cosmic Courier, Michael Hollingshead* (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Roberts 2012.

over and oversimplifies valuable aspects of LSD’s history. For example, his examination of legislation affecting LSD is confined to 1966 and is little explored, owing its initial criminalisation solely to the fact that Home Secretary ‘Roy Jenkins believed that LSD was dangerous’.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Roberts skims over the MDA, failing to assign any significance to its place in LSD’s historical account.<sup>12</sup> This study builds on Roberts’ work by affording a critical account of LSD’s legislative history.

A study of LSD’s prohibition further contributes to scholarship on British drug policy. Specifically, it contributes to histories focusing on policy and legislation during the 1960s and 1970s. The MDA is universally recognised as the most significant piece of legislation to come out of this period, resulting in pertinent focus on its historical context, inner workings and legacy – particularly since its fiftieth anniversary in 2021.<sup>13</sup> Yet, due to the Act’s composite nature, many accounts tend to homogenise drug policy, overlooking the nuanced histories of specific drugs the MDA was designed to control.<sup>14</sup> Toby Seddon and John Davies depart from this tendency, focusing predominantly on cannabis in their incisive accounts of the MDA.<sup>15</sup> Situating the Act within the socio-political climate of the 1960s, both Seddon and Davies explore why cannabis penalties decreased under the MDA. Building on their one-drug approach, this study widens analyses of the Act through the case study of LSD. However, an evolutionary approach to LSD’s legislation simultaneously departs from the scholarly tendency

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.122.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.181.

<sup>13</sup> Blaine Stothard, 'Fifty years of the UK Misuse of Drugs Act 1971: The Legislative Contexts', *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 21:4 (2021), 298-311; Toby Seddon, 'From Law to Regulation: Re-Appraising the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971', *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 21:4 (2021), 289-297.

<sup>14</sup> For example: Stothard.

<sup>15</sup> Toby Seddon, 'The Sixties, Barbara Wootton and the Counterculture Revisiting the Origins of the MDA 1971', in *Drug Science and British Drug Policy: Critical Analysis of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971*, ed. Illana Crome et al. (Hook: Waterside Press, 2022); John Davies, 'The London Drug Scene and the Making of Drug Policy, 1965–73', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17:1 (2006), 26–49.

to focus exclusively on the MDA during this period, illuminating the history of the more obscure 1966 Modification Order to the 1964 Drugs Act.

Finally, this dissertation builds on scholarship of the British press, extending academic analyses on the relationship between the press and politics.<sup>16</sup> Scholars of media communications and public policy have established that the press is pivotal in setting agendas that affect the political development of both public opinion and the political establishment.<sup>17</sup> Yet, despite this dual impact, recent histories of the press have almost exclusively focused on newspapers as a window into the former.<sup>18</sup> The role of the press in establishing ‘macro-political agendas’ is not only understudied but is often presumed to be a by-product of its influence on wider society.<sup>19</sup> Kevin Williams provides a formative account of newspapers’ role as a vehicle of public moral panic in the eighteenth century, arguing that through this intermediary role, the press contributed to the ‘process of governance and policy formation’.<sup>20</sup> Whilst valuable, his approach overlooks the more direct influence the press can have on the political agenda. As Soroka has acknowledged, the press can shape the political agenda on an aggregate and an individual level.<sup>21</sup> In addition to raising the public profile of an issue and thus increasing the likelihood of political response, given that ‘politicians are affected by media in the same way as ordinary citizens’, the press can directly impact individual politicians’ perception of the same issue.<sup>22</sup> Drawing on this media-policy theory and applying it to a historical framework,

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<sup>16</sup> For example: Ralph Negrine, *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Christoffer Green-Pedersen and Rune Stubager, ‘The Political Conditionality of Mass Media Influence: When Do Parties Follow Mass Media Attention?’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 40:3 (2010), 663-677 (p.663).

<sup>18</sup> Adrian Bingham, ‘Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain’, *History Compass*, 10:2 (2012), 140-150.

<sup>19</sup> Green-Pedersen and Stubager, p.663.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Williams, ‘Moral Panics, Emotion and Newspaper History’, in *Moral Panics, Social Fears, and the Media: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Sian Nicholas and Tom O’Malley (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.28.

<sup>21</sup> Soroka, p.205.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

this study expands historical analyses of the press and its complex relationship with the political establishment.

Overall, the contribution of this study lies at the intersection of these three important fields of historical scholarship. In examining the press' role in the evolution of the political agenda between 1966 and 1971, this dissertation provides a unique insight into LSD's history, 1960s and 1970s drug policy and the press' role in driving macro-political drug agendas.

## Methodology

Newspaper articles, parliamentary debates and government records form the empirical foundation for this study. Though each source type has limitations, drawing from this multi-layered source base allows for a holistic understanding of the press' role in LSD's legislative evolution.

Using newspapers as historical sources is contentious amongst historians. Some have argued that their empirical value is limited due to the inherent subjectivity of reporting that results from the 'constant temptation to look for sensational bits of news' to increase sales.<sup>23</sup> However, it is precisely their subjectivity which offers value to this study. In actively choosing *what* to write and *how* to write it, newspapers crafted an agenda for the hypersensitive political debate around LSD. Given the wide array of newspapers that circulated in Britain during the 1960s, this research concentrates on four major national papers – including, where applicable, their Sunday sister papers – to allow for a focused analysis. National newspapers are

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Baumgartner, 'Newspapers as Historical Sources', *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 9:3 (1981), 256-258 (p.256).

particularly relevant due to their high circulation and perception as the voices of national opinion.<sup>24</sup> Though this approach naturally limits the scope of inquiry, the papers have been selected to ensure that a wide range of editorial perspectives and styles are represented. The *Times* and, in particular, The *Telegraph* were the era's most conservative broadsheets, with respective circulations of 282,000 and 1.353 million in 1966.<sup>25</sup> The *Guardian*, the only paper here without a Sunday counterpart, was also a quality broadsheet but instead took a more liberal stance and had a circulation of 281,000 in 1966.<sup>26</sup> The *Mirror* was the most popular 'left-wing' tabloid of the era, with a peak circulation of 5.82 million in 1967.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, despite their differences, each took a similarly conservative stance on LSD.

Parliamentary debates and government records constitute the study's macro-political sources. Parliamentary debates are particularly useful as they offer insight into the views and opinions of a range of politicians and the issues they viewed as politically salient. They are also easily accessible online through *Hansard*, which has published parliamentary debates since 1909 with the aim of delivering political transparency between the public and government.<sup>28</sup> However, their public nature warrants a degree of caution as parliamentarians, aware they were being recorded, may have adjusted their comments. Acknowledging this, comments are examined carefully against the context in which they were made and, where possible, supplemented by secondary literature. Government records such as Home Office and Cabinet documents as well as files from the Advisory Committee on Drug Dependence (ACDD) are employed to expose political movements behind the scenes. They offer valuable insights into

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<sup>24</sup> Bingham, p.143.

<sup>25</sup> Excluding their Sunday Counterparts: TNA, BT169/193, 'A Report on the Proposed Transfer of Fleet Holdings PLC to United Newspapers PLC', August 1985, p.5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Excluding its Sunday Counterpart: Kevin Williams, *Read All About It!: A History of the British Newspaper* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.187.

<sup>28</sup> John Vice and Stephen Farrell, 'The History of Hansard' (London: House of Lords Library, 2017).

the private governmental perspective on LSD and shed light on the public *Hansard* debates. Regrettably, information on the authors of some documents is absent but their representative department is cited for context.

A quantitative and qualitative approach has been adopted for analysis of both newspapers and parliamentary debates. This has enabled a large sample of articles and debates to be included in my study whilst maintaining the ability to conduct a thorough examination of language and sentiment. To ensure that all relevant articles and debates were included, an initial exploration into the terms commonly used to describe LSD was conducted. This was achieved through the use of the Gale digital scholar lab and its word cloud function.<sup>29</sup> Once terms were established, the online databases of the newspapers along with *Hansard* were searched and the results screened to ensure only relevant data was included in the dataset. The results have been organised into two tables that can be found in the Appendix.<sup>30</sup> From this data, various graphs have been modelled to facilitate a comparative visual study of the overall trends as well as trends within the subthemes of America and British Youth.

It is clear from Figure 3 that there was a direct correlation between newspaper reporting and parliamentary debates between 1966-71.<sup>31</sup> Supplementary graphs illuminate the shift in both newspaper reporting and parliamentary debates from LSD in connection with America to LSD in connection with the British Youth.<sup>32</sup> Qualitative analysis of articles, debates and government documents allows for a deeper exploration into these connections, revealing the centrality of the press in driving the legislative agenda. Overall, this methodological approach

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<sup>29</sup> See appendix for search terms used to create the dataset and its subsets.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix, Fig.1; Fig.2.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix, Fig.3.

<sup>32</sup> Appendix, Fig.4; Fig.5; Fig.6.

provides a sound framework for a thorough analysis of the press' role in the escalation of legislation against LSD between 1966-71.

## Chapter One: Preventing the American ‘Problem’, 1966-67

‘Unless the Government act quickly, in five years the situation will be as dangerous as that in America’.<sup>33</sup>

Referring to LSD, this comment by Labour MP Renée Short embodied the cross-party political perception of the hallucinogen between 1966 and mid-1967. During this year-and-a-half period, LSD was inextricably linked to America in the minds of politicians. In every parliamentary debate on LSD in 1966 and the first half of 1967, the ‘problem of America’ surfaced, coated in concerns for the development of British society.<sup>34</sup> This chapter explores how the press set and shaped this American-LSD nexus and the impact this had on the formation of policy and legislation. It reveals that, through framing LSD as an external – yet threatening – issue, the press encouraged an agenda centred on prevention. Politicians viewed reports of LSD’s widespread and dangerous use in America as a warning for what *could* materialise at home. Consequently, their goal became preventing this menace from evolving as it had done across the Atlantic.

It is evident from the trends in Figures 4 and 6 that parliamentary discussion strongly correlated with newspaper coverage of LSD in America. As seen in Figure 4, newspaper coverage of LSD in America peaked in 1966 with between 60 and 70 per cent of the articles written on LSD in 1966 focusing on America.<sup>35</sup> For each newspaper, this marked the height of American-LSD coverage, with an ensuing downward trend characterising the period after 1966. By 1971, the percentage of articles discussing America had almost halved, from an average of

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<sup>33</sup> Renée Short, HC Deb, 3 August 1966, vol.733, cols.644-45.

<sup>34</sup> Appendix, Fig.6.

<sup>35</sup> Appendix, Fig.4.

65 per cent in 1966 to an average of 33.5 per cent five years later.<sup>36</sup> An almost identical trend is seen in the number of parliamentary debates discussing America during the same period. In Figure 6 we see that 100 per cent of parliamentary debates on LSD in 1966 included dialogue of America, signifying the height of parliamentary interest in LSD's misuse in America.<sup>37</sup> Apart from an especially low dip in 1968 – likely due to there being only two debates that year – the number of debates involving America followed a similar downward trajectory as that in Figure 4.

This correlation was not, however, simply circumstantial or reflective of American trends. Political interest in LSD's misuse in America was a direct result of British reporting on the subject. Publicity on LSD had been gaining momentum in America since the mid-1950s, amounting to a 'media hype' that spanned the nation's news outlets by the turn of the decade.<sup>38</sup> Yet its use remained an obscure topic in Britain until 1966. When the American author William Caldwell visited London in 1963, he was shocked to find that LSD held such a low profile: 'This word which I hardly dared mention in the States, was technical trivia in England, little known and less worth discussing'.<sup>39</sup> This disinterest was manifest in parliament. Prior to 1966, there had only been one parliamentary discussion concerning LSD, in which the proposition to add LSD and mescaline to the drugs legislature was promptly denied due to 'no evidence that these drugs [were] addiction-producing'.<sup>40</sup> This changed dramatically after reports on LSD's misuse in America flooded British papers in early 1966, resulting in five ensuing debates in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix, Fig.6.

<sup>38</sup> Stephan Siff, *Acid Hype: American News Media and the Psychedelic Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), p.99.

<sup>39</sup> William Caldwell, *LSD Psychotherapy: An Exploration of Psychedelic and Psycholytic Therapy* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p.92.

<sup>40</sup> HC Deb, 11 December 1958, vol.597, cols.485-486.

parliament.<sup>41</sup> Though already causing a commotion in America, it was only after the British press took an interest that the political establishment began raising concerns.

In addition to simply drawing politicians' attention to LSD in America, the British press shaped their understanding and perception of the drug and thus their response to it. Two threads emerged in reporting during 1966 and early 1967 that were particularly influential. The first were the lurid and sensationalised stories of LSD in America. Articles emerged across all papers detailing a range of horrific effects LSD had on its American experimenters. Dramatic headlines such as 'Man Took LSD-Accused of Murder' and 'LSD Drug "More Dangerous than Heroin"' littered the papers throughout 1966 and into 1967.<sup>42</sup> Such articles would characteristically expand their focus to highlight the extent to which LSD was causing catastrophe across America. The *Sunday Mirror's* article, 'Bride, 18, Murdered after LSD Drug Party', epitomised this style of journalism.<sup>43</sup> After outlining details of the brutal murder of a 'teenage bride' from New Jersey, including the seemingly unrelated use of 'the "Alice in Wonderland" drug' at her house the day before, the journalist zoomed out to situate the event within the broader concerns on LSD.<sup>44</sup> The last two sentences of the article read:

'The evidence of drugtaking has disturbed local police — particularly the introduction of LSD. Already New York doctors have labelled it the most dangerous of all the under-the-counter drugs.'<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Appendix, Fig.1.

<sup>42</sup> 'Man Took LSD-Accused of Murder', *Guardian*, 13 April 1966, p.11; 'LSD Drug 'More Dangerous than Heroin', *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1966, p.25.

<sup>43</sup> John Smith, 'Bride, 18, Murdered after LSD Drug Party', *Sunday Mirror*, 10 April 1966, p.7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Citing two authoritative bodies, Police and Doctors, offers a sense of authenticity to the journalist's broader judgement of LSD. It conceals the generalisation of the statements and validates the use of overly dramatic comments such as the description of LSD as 'the most dangerous' illegal drug.<sup>46</sup> Though LSD was not directly linked to the girl's death in the article, its connection provided a window through which these broader comments and concerns could be voiced. This sensationalist style of journalism was most prominent in the *Mirror*. As a tabloid geared towards the circulation of popular news for 'ordinary people', this is unsurprising.<sup>47</sup> The owners of the *Mirror* openly prided themselves on the sensational presentation and tone of their papers.<sup>48</sup> Yet, whilst lacking some of the descriptive vividness of the *Mirror*, sensationalised stories of the 'very dangerous drug' spreading through America appeared frequently in the other national papers.<sup>49</sup>

The impact of these stories on the political agenda for LSD was significant. For many politicians, as with the rest of the British public, these newspaper reports represented their first serious encounter with the hallucinogen. Initial discussions on the drug in the Lords in May and June 1966, indicate that many parliamentarians knew little about LSD and its effects. During one sitting, a speculative debate ensued over whether LSD 'enables you to remember what happened when you were born' or 'to forget and imagine that you are otherwise and elsewhere than you in fact are'.<sup>50</sup> The repeated emphasis on the 'newness' of LSD in these early debates – despite its arrival in Britain in 1952 – further illustrates a lack of knowledge.<sup>51</sup> Politicians were thus particularly susceptible to influence from the portrayals of LSD in

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Williams 2009, p.182.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp.186-187.

<sup>49</sup> Sean Day-Lewis, 'LSD ritual looks like faith-healing', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 1967, p.19.

<sup>50</sup> HL Deb, 4 August 1966, vol.276, col.1464-1465.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example: Lord Derwent, HL Deb, 11 May 1966, vol.274, col.660.

newspapers. Just as the media could be a ‘powerful force in developing the public’s perception to certain drugs’, it could likewise strongly influence politicians’ perceptions of them.<sup>52</sup> The multitude of sensationalist stories highlighting the dangers of LSD in America clearly shaped their understanding of the drug as a dangerous threat, inspiring the subsequent quest to control it ‘before the danger arises’.<sup>53</sup>

Politicians frequently referred to sensationalised reports of LSD’s use in America as evidence of the dangers of the drug’s effects. An article in the *Times* headlined ‘Reports from America: Hazards of The Hallucinatory Drug’ was directly referenced in the Lords in August 1966. Described by the Conservative Whip, Lord Sandford, as ‘alarming’, the article detailed the rapidly increasing use of LSD in American society.<sup>54</sup> The nature of this article was more composed than the article in the *Mirror*, referring to authoritative sources with specific evidence and offering balance in places. However, the way it was framed ensured that the dramatised information remained in the reader’s imagination. The more subdued facts and realities, such as the acknowledgement that LSD’s popularity was unknown, were buried in the fine print in the middle of the article. In comparison, those highlighting the ‘hazards, abuse and use’ of LSD dominated the beginning and end of the article.<sup>55</sup> Such framing adheres to Steve Chibnall’s theory of journalistic dramatisation that, in the interest of grabbing reader attention, information is actively organised with the most ‘pertinent, important, or dramatic material’ at the beginning and end.<sup>56</sup> The use of large and emboldened subtitles further draws attention to specific points in the article, framing what information is presented as important. Indeed, the

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<sup>52</sup> Morag McArthur, ‘Pushing the Drug Debate: The Media’s Role in Policy Reform’, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 34:2 (1999), 149-165 (p.153).

<sup>53</sup> Lord Derwent, HL Deb, 30 June 1966, vol.275, col.820.

<sup>54</sup> Lord Sandford, HL Deb, 4 August 1966, vol.276, col.1464.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Reports From America: Hazards of the Hallucinatory Drug’, *Times*, 2 August 1966, p.8.

<sup>56</sup> Steve Chibnall, *Law-and-Order News: An Analysis of Crime Reporting in the British Press*, Vol 2 (London: Routledge, 2001), p.vii.

focus of the article's discussion in the Lords centred around the information pertaining to one subtitle: 'Britain one source'. Lord Sandford raised a concern about the first line under this subtitle which stated that 'LSD [was] not too hard to make, given the precursor lysergic acid'.<sup>57</sup> Alarmed by the potential of laypeople producing LSD and other hallucinogens in Britain, he wanted to ensure that the Home Office were given 'all the powers they need with which to curb and control the misuse of these drugs'.<sup>58</sup> In linking Britain with the American-LSD 'problem' and the ease with which the drug could be manufactured, the article and its bold subtitle evidently shaped Lord Sandford's perception of LSD as a danger which needed to be managed. It therefore comes as no surprise that he and other parliamentarians welcomed the government's order to add LSD to the 1964 Drugs (Prevention of Misuse) Act.

There are no cabinet documents that shed light on the government's hasty decision to criminalise LSD in the summer of 1966.<sup>59</sup> This is likely because the statutory framework was already in place: the Home Secretary, under section 6 of the 1964 Act, had the power to add drugs to the schedule after parliamentary approval. However, the sentiment of government ministers in parliament reveals that the American-LSD nexus, and specifically its propagation in the press, contributed to the decision. In the third sentence of her introduction of the Modification Order into the Commons, Alice Bacon MP, Minister of State for the Home Office, stated that:

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<sup>57</sup> 'Reports From America: Hazards of the Hallucinatory Drug'.

<sup>58</sup> Lord Sandford, HL Deb, 4 August 1966, vol.276, col.1464.

<sup>59</sup> Based on an examination of cabinet documents from 1966, held by TNA.

‘Hon. Members will hardly need to be reminded that this drug has recently been much in the news both here and in America. Newspapers have given us reports of the sometimes quite startling effects that LSD can have on its users.’<sup>60</sup>

Taking newspaper reporting as indisputable evidence of the effects of LSD, she went on to detail a case from an unnamed newspaper of a girl in hospital who ‘thought that she could fly’ after taking LSD, adding that there had been ‘other reports of deaths, both suicide and murder’.<sup>61</sup> Considering that the first death in Britain linked to LSD by the newspapers was in January 1967, it can be inferred that the reports she was citing referred to news stories on America.<sup>62</sup> It therefore seems evident that the basis for adding LSD to the drugs schedule was the American experience, suggesting that the Home Office’s agenda was largely preventative. The lack of opposition to Bacon’s sentiments or to the Order itself, which passed through both houses of parliament unopposed within two days, further indicates that this agenda was shared and supported across both houses and parties.

The second influential thread of newspaper reporting during this period was on the emerging psychedelic movement in America. Articles on LSD’s role in the rise of a social movement across the Atlantic inspired notions that LSD was not only a potential threat to the lives and wellbeing of those taking it but also to society at large. When reporting on LSD began in the spring of 1966, a few articles featured stories of an emerging section of American society who were experimenting with LSD as a ‘passport to a world of exquisitely heightened sensibility’.<sup>63</sup> One particularly colourful column in the *Sunday Telegraph*, headlined ‘Doctor’s

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<sup>60</sup> Alice Bacon, HC Deb, 5 August 1966, vol.733, col.888.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Roberts 2012, p.133.

<sup>63</sup> Alistair Cooke, ‘Drugs and Drugmakers Under Fire’, *Guardian*, 7 April 1966, p.11.

311 LSD “trips”, detailed Timothy Leary’s involvement in this LSD movement, including his own accounts of taking the drug.<sup>64</sup> Leary was LSD’s strongest advocate in sixties America, a feat that has secured him a central spot in many histories of drug.<sup>65</sup> At the time, Leary’s fame presented newspapers with a figurehead to pin LSD’s social dangers on. The language used to describe Leary and his ‘followers’ in the *Telegraph* article was distinctly religious. Employing words such as ‘high priest’, ‘cult’ and ‘prophesised’, the journalist forged an image of Leary’s movement as one of religious deviance and thus a threat to traditional Christian values.<sup>66</sup> Such provocative language evidently scared some in parliament, with Bacon warning the Commons in August that ‘in America there has grown up something of a cult for psychedelic drugs of this kind’<sup>67</sup>

However, it was predominantly after LSD was added to the drugs schedule in August that stories on the American psychedelic movement started to have a noticeable influence on the political agenda. When drug debates resumed in January 1967, there was an increasing political tendency to frame LSD as a threatening ‘social evil’, not just a danger to public health.<sup>68</sup> This uncoincidentally developed in the context of an increasing number of critical newspaper articles on Leary and his psychedelic followers from September 1966 onwards. Most pronounced in the more conservative pages of the *Times* and the *Telegraph*, this growing attention was likely due to the explosion of publicity on Leary in America after his extensive interview with *Playboy* Magazine in September 1966. However, the way his LSD ‘cult’ was described and criticised in the British press adopted a uniquely European tone. John Morgan’s

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Doctor’s 311 LSD “trips”’, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 1966, p.2.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example: Jennifer Ulrich, *The Timothy Leary Project: Inside the Great Counterculture Experiment* (New York: Abrams Press, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> ‘Doctor’s 311 LSD “trips”’.

<sup>67</sup> Bacon, HC Deb, 5 August 1966, vol.733, col.890.

<sup>68</sup> Bacon, HC Deb, 30 January 1967, vol.740, col.167.

article in the *Sunday Times* affords one typical example. In his outsider's interpretation of the 'bizarre, exciting and gravely troubled' LSD micro-society in California, Morgan simultaneously embodied, exploited and encouraged the anti-American tradition that pervaded European societies throughout the twentieth-century.<sup>69</sup> Extensively studied by Egbert Klautke, this anti-Americanism arose from the perception of America as the symbol and source of unchecked 'modernity', including the societal ills that came with it.<sup>70</sup> For Morgan, the societal ill of Leary's movement was, ironically, the aggressive individualism he rendered the antithesis of the British 'traditional view of family life'.<sup>71</sup> Indubitably accentuating this notion for the conservative middle-class readers of the *Sunday Times*, his vivid and exotic descriptions of 'the apostles of LSD' nonetheless framed this micro-society as a foreign, yet concerning example of LSD's power to inspire non-conformity and social disintegration.<sup>72</sup>

Concerns of this burgeoning social movement in America were not explicitly voiced in parliament in the first half of 1967. However, the increased characterisation of LSD's use as a 'disturbing social phenomenon' suggests a developing perception of LSD as a potential aid to social disintegration outlined in articles such as Morgan's.<sup>73</sup> This is further illuminated by an examination of the early files of the ACDD. The ACDD was created by the Labour Government at the end of 1966 to research illicit drugs and advise the Home Office on their social and medical dangers. At the first meeting of the ACDD's Hallucinogens Sub-Committee in May 1967, a representative from the Home Office instructed members what information the

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<sup>69</sup> John Morgan, 'The LSD Society', *Sunday Times*, 18 September 1966, p.10.

<sup>70</sup> Egbert Klautke, 'Anti-Americanism in Twentieth-Century Europe', *Historical Journal*, 54:4 (2011), 1125-1139 (p.1125-1126).

<sup>71</sup> 'The LSD Society'.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Robinson, HC Deb, 6 April 1967, vol.744, col.536.

department sought on LSD. Mr Beedle indicated that, where the department had previously 'been concerned only with the safety of the users', it now wanted to know:

'Were LSD takers likely to constitute a Movement rather than to remain isolated experimenters; might they soon become a cohesive and determined social force.'<sup>74</sup>

Though Mr Beedle did not expand on why this concern had developed in the Home Office, given the press attention to the development of such a movement in America and its portrayal as a threat to British values, it is evident Leary and his followers were on their minds. The Sub-Committee itself linked the potential threat of a cohesive social force to America, utilising Leary's *Playboy* interview as evidence to confirm the Home Office's concerns. The American-LSD relationship thus continued to pervade the political discourse, offering further evidence for the necessity of preventing LSD's use in Britain.

Prevention remained the key political agenda in early 1967. Despite growing concerns about the development of a social movement, it was recognised in parliament that as there was 'very little information about the number of people taking LSD', additional political action would not be warranted.<sup>75</sup> While other 'hard drugs' such as cocaine and heroin saw stricter legislation, LSD thus remained under the preventative 1964 Act. With no logical reason to legislate further but with the ongoing coverage of societal disintegration in America, Bacon's sentiment sums up the political establishment's position on LSD during the first half of 1967: 'We are keeping a very close watch on this problem'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> P. Beedle, TNA, HO319/371, 'Minutes of the First Meeting', p.3.

<sup>75</sup> Arthur Blenkinsop, HC Deb, 6 April 1967, vol.744, col.499.

<sup>76</sup> Bacon, HC Deb, 30 January 1967, vol.740, col.172.

This Chapter has illustrated the importance of the British press in informing and shaping the political focus on the American-LSD nexus between 1966 and mid-1967. By framing LSD as a danger to public health and to the values of society through the lens of America, the press shaped the political emphasis on prevention during this period, culminating in LSD being added to the 1964 Drugs (Prevention of Misuse) Act. Clearly evidenced in Figures 4 and 6, LSD's association with America did not simply halt by mid-1967. However, as the press started to shift attention to LSD users in Britain, the external threat that politicians had sought to prevent was increasingly seen to be developing. Thus, whilst continuing to serve as a barometer against which this 'new' problem was measured, the prominence of America in the political discourse began to fade as the summer of 1967 approached.

## Chapter Two: Controlling the British Youth ‘Problem’, 1967-71

‘This evil of the “soft” drugs is spreading throughout our society...The longer we delay any action to deal with drugs of this kind, the worse it will be for the young people who are following us.’<sup>77</sup>

The political agenda for LSD underwent a significant transformation in 1967. Driven by the perceived spread of LSD among British youth, the policy focus on prevention was replaced by a more pressing focus on control. Lord Leatherland’s proclamation about the urgency of dealing with the evil of ‘soft’ drugs like LSD became a central tenet for the bipartisan demand for stronger legislation. This Chapter builds on the significance of the press established in Chapter One, exploring the nature of its role in setting and shaping this remodelled agenda between mid-1967 and 1971. It outlines how the press transformed the narrative on LSD into an internal youth problem that demanded further controls. By ensuring this perception continued into the deliberations on the Misuse of Drugs Bills, the press was critical in securing LSD’s Class A classification under the new drugs legislation.<sup>78</sup>

The shift of focus to the British youth’s association with LSD was not an instantaneous phenomenon. Just as reporting and parliamentary discussion on America did not simply halt in mid-1967, the attention afforded to LSD and the British youth did not suddenly begin. This is evident from the data in Figures 5 and 6. When LSD burst onto the media and political agenda in 1966, references to British youth did feature. However, they were infrequent and

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<sup>77</sup> Lord Leatherland, HL Deb, 21 July 1967, vol.285, cols.565-566.

<sup>78</sup> Due to the general election in June 1970, the Labour Bill did not complete its passage through parliament. It was reintroduced, unchanged, by the successive Conservative Government in July.

overshadowed by the focus on America. A mere average of 21.9 per cent of articles on LSD focused on British youth, marking the era's lowest figure.<sup>79</sup> Correspondingly, only 40 per cent of debates mentioned British youth independently of America, again signalling the lowest point during this period and 60 per cent lower than those discussing America in 1966.<sup>80</sup>

This correlative trend persisted throughout 1966-1971, with a visible upward trend evolving in both Figure 5 and 6. Despite a dip in 1968, newspaper reporting on LSD's use among young people increased steadily, peaking in 1971 at an average of 63.6 per cent.<sup>81</sup> Parliamentary debates followed a very similar trend. Debates concerning the youth rose significantly after 1966 and dominated the discourse by 1967. Despite peaking two years earlier than reporting, the proportion of debates on the youth remained high, keeping above 80 per cent until 1971.<sup>82</sup> As with the discourse on America, this clearly highlights the interconnectedness of political discussion and newspaper reporting on LSD and British youth.

Within this upward trend, 1967 was a significant turning point. Importantly, it marked the year that parliamentary attention to LSD's use by the young overtook interest in the American use of LSD.<sup>83</sup> As established in Chapter One, in the first half of 1967, the political establishment was on the lookout for any slight indication that Britain was heading in the same direction as America. By the end of summer in 1967, it is evident that they believed their fears were materialising. In a letter to the Government Social Survey Department in September, I.J.

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<sup>79</sup> Appendix, Fig.5.

<sup>80</sup> Appendix, Fig.6.

<sup>81</sup> Appendix, Fig.5.

<sup>82</sup> Appendix, Fig.6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Croft – a representative of the Home Office research unit – expressed the Office’s newfound concerns:

'The use of "soft" drugs has recently come into rather sudden prominence in this country. As a social habit among young people, it appears to be spreading and perhaps becoming something of a cult among some sections. The Department is greatly concerned at these developments'.<sup>84</sup>

Referring to amphetamines, cannabis and, of particular interest here, LSD, Croft’s comment tacitly highlights the impact of newspaper reporting on political concern. As he observed, the summer of 1967 saw a notable increase in attention to LSD’s use among young people. In the papers, 1967 marked the year with the highest raw number of articles on LSD and the British youth, with a total of 130 printed across the four newspaper groups.<sup>85</sup> Given that the Home Office was requesting a social survey into the extent of ‘soft’ drug taking, it is evident that they knew little about the true prevalence of LSD’s use among young people. Yet, regardless of their lack of knowledge, Croft and the Home Office held the assumption that, based on the increased prominence in outlets such as the media, LSD was becoming a youth problem that required investigation. The press’ role in inspiring this judgement is further highlighted by the fact that recreational use of LSD was not new in 1967. As Roberts notes, though LSD is popularly associated with the 1960s, and 1967 in particular, its recreational use among young people can be traced to the period 1956-59.<sup>86</sup> Only after the press increased reporting on this use did the political concern outlined in Croft’s letter begin to surface.

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<sup>84</sup> I.J. Croft, TNA, FD23/1943, 5 September 1967.

<sup>85</sup> Appendix: based on calculations from Fig.1 and Fig.5.

<sup>86</sup> Roberts 2012, p.84.

In addition to raising the profile of LSD's connection with British youth, newspaper reporting also framed the political establishment's understanding of this 'new problem'. Emulating the reporting on America, newspapers from mid-1967 onwards continued to emphasise the dangers of LSD to public health and, more significantly, to the values of society. That this was achieved through examples of British youth however, prompted the emerging argument for tightening the legislative agenda. Articles with dramatic headlines such as 'Youths on Drugs Still Had "Visions" After Treatment' and 'LSD "Trip" Student Tried to Walk on Water' frequently appeared in reporting between 1967 and 1971, emphasising the psychologically harmful effects of LSD on young people now experimenting with it 'for kicks'.<sup>87</sup> Some particularly lurid stories were disseminated across the papers. One example was the story of a law graduate who, after taking cannabis and LSD, 'drilled a hole into his skull with a dental drill' in the drug-induced belief that 'by releasing cerebral pressure' he would be able 'to conquer time'.<sup>88</sup> The *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Mirror* each printed almost identical accounts, drawing on the same supplemental details to enhance the shock-factor of the story. For example, all three articles detailed the man's honours degree as well as his youthful age. An examination of the original story in the *British Medical Journal* reveals that this selection was further premeditated for dramatic effect. The original letter detailed four case studies about those who had taken cannabis and/or LSD, yet only the most graphic story appeared in any of the newspapers.<sup>89</sup> The impact of this 'cherry-picking' process, which each journalist engaged with in the same way, was to accentuate the most dangerous effects of LSD and further emphasise its misuse among the young.

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<sup>87</sup> 'Youths on drugs still had 'visions' after treatment', *Guardian*, 5 August 1967, p.10; 'LSD "Trip" Student Tried to Walk on Water', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 1969, p.23.

<sup>88</sup> 'Honours Man Drilled Hole in Skull', *Daily Telegraph*, August 4, 1967, p.15.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Dally, 'Undesirable Effects of Marijuana', *British Medical Journal*, 3:556 (1967), p.367.

The continued manifestation of these sensationalised and selective articles strengthened perceptions of LSD as an inherently dangerous substance that could ‘induce madness’.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, politicians’ conclusions on LSD’s effects became more assertive as the drug debates continued. In his maiden speech in 1970, the Conservative MP, Thomas Stuttaford, declared that LSD was ‘the most dangerous drug we have...because it produces either temporary or permanent insanity’.<sup>91</sup> Given that the ACDD concluded that such effects only occurred ‘in some subjects’, Stuttaford’s sweeping statement was evidently founded on conjecture conflated with his own judgement.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, his hyperbolic conclusion reveals the intense fear and concern over those stories of people who *had* experienced a ‘bad trip’. That it was predominantly young people associated with such horror stories further intensified this concern. Protecting ‘the future of the nation’ from the ‘insidious influences’ of LSD became paramount from the summer of 1967 onwards.<sup>93</sup> Such sentiment inspired Lord Leatherland’s comment as early as July 1967: ‘the longer we delay any action to deal with drugs of this kind, the worse it will be for the young people’.<sup>94</sup> In failing to protect the nation’s youth, the 1964 preventative Act was increasingly viewed as insufficient.

Another strand of reporting that influenced growing concerns over the effectiveness of the 1964 Act was on the rise of a youth subculture that used LSD as a means of escaping ‘straight’ society. During the summer of 1967, newspapers shifted their focus from the psychedelic movement in America to the ‘increasing’ number of British youth seen emulating their American counterparts. Stories on these ‘hippies’, ‘flower children’ and ‘tripsters’ pervaded reporting but their representation varied slightly from journalist to journalist. Some

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<sup>90</sup> Lord Stonham, HL Deb, 20 June 1967, vol.283, col.1271.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Stuttaford, HC Deb, 16 July 1970, vol.803, col.1762.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, HO319/381, ‘Third Draft Report on the Amphetamines and Lysergic Acid Diethylamide’, p.33.

<sup>93</sup> Lord Stonham, HL Deb, 21 July 1967, vol.285, col.561.

<sup>94</sup> Lord Leatherland, HL Deb, 21 July 1967, vol.285, col.566.

articles offered a more holistic and neutral overview of the hippie culture, in which drugs were referenced as a single feature of the broader culture.<sup>95</sup> However, most were extremely critical of this subcultural activity. An example was Suzy Menkes' *Times* article on the youth drug scene in July. The typically fashion-focused journalist described the London hippies, 'who elevate drug-taking into a ritualistic cult', as 'bums and layabouts', 'unwilling, and often incapable, of doing their share of work'.<sup>96</sup> Menkes' condemnation of the hippies and their use of drugs like LSD framed this youth subculture as a direct challenge to social norms, reflecting a strain of social conservatism that regarded the unorthodox hippie 'way of life' as the subversion of a society that celebrated hard work and social conformity. She even labelled them as 'social outcasts' and members of a 'new society'.<sup>97</sup> The fact that she strayed from her usual upbeat focus further highlights the conviction of her views as well as the range of voices contributing to the crusade against LSD. Her pseudo-communist sentiment was mirrored across the papers. Even the more liberal pages of the *Guardian* often maintained such a stance, with one article labelling the young hippies 'not only as "drop-outs" ... but "cop-outs"' of society.<sup>98</sup> In framing LSD as a tool that facilitated social rejection among the youth, these articles accentuated the perceived social danger of its use.

Following this press attention, politicians increasingly associated LSD with the socio-cultural effects it was having on the young. The Home Office's concern about the development of a 'cult' among young 'soft' drug takers, as outlined in Croft's letter, was undoubtedly a reference to the increasing visibility of this youth subculture.<sup>99</sup> Yet, whilst most articles in the national press were indeed critical of this subcultural activity, it was not their stance that

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<sup>95</sup> For example: John Ardill, 'Geordie Hippy', *Guardian*, 26 September 1967, p.7.

<sup>96</sup> Suzy Menkes, [prevailing attitudes towards drugs among young people], *Times*, 14 July 1967, p.7.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Charles Marowitz, 'Groovy for the Drop Outs', *Guardian*, 24 June 1967, p.6.

<sup>99</sup> Croft, FD23/1943.

heralded such concerns but the publicity they afforded to LSD's misuse. As Bernard Cohen famously hypothesised, the press 'may not be successful much of the time in telling people *what* to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think *about*'.<sup>100</sup> The host of articles associating LSD with the alternative hippie lifestyle drew political attention to the use of LSD by these young 'social outcasts', rousing an existing social conservatism held by many politicians regarding youth culture.<sup>101</sup> Alice Bacon's stance on LSD by July 1967 exemplifies this. During a debate on 'soft' drugs before the summer recess, Bacon condemned the young people who took LSD and cannabis in their quest of 'questioning traditional values and social judgments of all kinds'.<sup>102</sup> Explicitly stating her belief that the young 'were the core of the problem', her stance emulated Menkes' critical assessment of youth culture.<sup>103</sup> Bacon likewise equated young people's use of mind-enhancing drugs to the erosion of societal values, rhetorically asking the Commons, 'what sort of society will we create if everyone wants to escape from reality?'<sup>104</sup> However, these conclusions stemmed from her existing philosophy of the young. As current Labour MP Rachel Reeves wrote in a biography on the former minister, Bacon possessed an 'innate social conservatism' which often surfaced when it came to questions of the youth.<sup>105</sup> As shadow Home Office minister in 1961, Bacon proved this when arguing for the clause to raise the minimum age of capital punishment from 18 to 21. Though taking a progressive position on this matter, her justification was that 'among a great many teenage people today there is an instability. They are impressionable, they lack judgment.'<sup>106</sup> For Bacon, the portrayal of LSD in the press would have served as corroborating evidence for her deep-rooted mistrust of the nation's youth.

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<sup>100</sup> Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.13.

<sup>101</sup> Menkes.

<sup>102</sup> Bacon, HC Deb, 28 July 1967, vol.751, col. 1164.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, col.1160.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, col.1164.

<sup>105</sup> Rachel Reeves, *Alice in Westminster: The Political Life of Alice Bacon* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2017), p.231.

<sup>106</sup> Bacon, HC Deb, 12 April 1961, vol.638, col.281.

Though Bacon's sentiment was particularly strong towards the youth, it sheds light on the growing consensus within the political establishment on the need to control LSD. Indeed, Bacon's conclusions on behalf of the government in July marked a stark evolution from early 1967. When in January she assured the Commons that the government was 'keeping a very close watch on this problem', by July she asserted that they now 'believe[d] that it [was] time for responsible influences to check this trend'.<sup>107</sup> This materialised when LSD was placed in Class A of the MDA in 1971. The MDA was a broad piece of legislation which covered a plethora of drugs and was not introduced solely for LSD. However, when the Home Office, led by the 'authentic representative voice' of traditional values, James Callaghan, was preparing the first Bill in 1969 and early 1970, the government's perception of LSD was firm: it belonged in the highest class of the new drugs schedule.<sup>108</sup> Whilst there was significant debate on, and alterations to, cannabis' place under the classification schedule in both the Home Affairs Committee and Cabinet, no such deliberation took place for LSD.<sup>109</sup> This is indicative of the consensus among Wilson's government on the dangers of LSD and the necessity to increase its controls. The press' role in this agenda was to elevate the notion of LSD as a menace to the health and values of society through extensive reporting on its misuse among young people.

The press continued to shape the political perception of LSD throughout the two parliamentary processes of the Bills between March 1970 and May 1971. During both series of debates, parliamentarians raised no questions on the placement of LSD in Class A. There was also little discussion on LSD in and of itself apart from members highlighting that it was

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<sup>107</sup> Bacon, HC Deb, 30 January 1967, vol.740, col.172; Bacon, HC Deb, 28 July 1967, vol.751, col. 1165.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.320.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, CAB134/2862, 'Home Affairs Committee Minutes', 12 December 1969; TNA, CAB134/2865, 'Home Affairs Committee Minutes', 29 January 1970; TNA, CAB128/45/10, 'Cabinet Conclusions', 26 February 1970.

‘perilous stuff’, further illustrating the established views among politicians on LSD towards the end of this period.<sup>110</sup> However, the hallucinogen did not evade the political discourse completely. Predominantly appearing in the Commons, a new development surfaced in which politicians on both sides of the house considered there to be a causal relationship between cannabis and LSD. Specifically, it was argued that the danger of cannabis was the possibility its young users might progress onto LSD. Davies has described this concept as the escalation theory, highlighting that politicians commonly used it to justify the retention of controls against cannabis.<sup>111</sup> While Davies’ examination of this theory is pertinent, his exclusive focus on government documents meant he only identified the cannabis-heroin escalation debate, overlooking the emerging argument in parliament that the “pot”-LSD connection... [was] the principal danger now’.<sup>112</sup> Though politicians used this theory as an argument to keep cannabis under Class B, that they employed LSD as the barometer of danger cemented LSD as a dangerous drug that required the tightest restrictions.

The press was seminal in promoting this emerging connection. From early 1969, newspapers increasingly printed articles connecting the two drugs. One particularly influential strand of reporting saw journalists publish authoritative studies and surveys linking cannabis and LSD misuse among the youth. Most prominent in the *Guardian*, such articles publicised authoritative sources that mirrored the escalation theory used in parliament. One article in January 1969 quoted a doctor specialising in drug addiction who believed ‘there was...a greater chance of progression to LSD than heroin’.<sup>113</sup> Another in November 1969 published a survey indicating that Leeds University students who smoked cannabis, ‘seemed to have a high regard

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<sup>110</sup> William Deedes, HC Deb, 25 March 1970, vol.798, col.1467.

<sup>111</sup> Davies, p.35.

<sup>112</sup> Deedes, HC Deb, 16 July 1970, vol.803, col.1780.

<sup>113</sup> Alan Smith, ‘Opinion Still Split on “pot”’, *Guardian*, 9 January 1969, p.18.

for “heads” (LSD users)’ and ‘might consider trying [it] in the future’.<sup>114</sup> These informative articles were, on occasion, directly referenced in parliament as evidence of cannabis-LSD escalation, indicating not only that politicians were engaging with the subject in the papers but that the information displayed was influencing their opinions. During the second reading of the Labour Bill in the Commons, Labour MP Gordon Oakes cited an article echoing the *Guardians*’. Taken from the *Daily Express*, he quoted an American survey that claimed, among students ‘who smoked pot once a month, 22 per cent went on to LSD and other drugs’.<sup>115</sup> For Oakes, this was ample evidence for retaining strong controls over cannabis, and by implication, over LSD. The report in the *Daily Express* also suggests that other national dailies were following a similar trend to the papers in this study.

Like all forms of journalism however, even these informative articles were selective. As the more measured and knowledgeable Labour MP and member of the ACDD, Arthur Blenkinsop, noted there was a ‘lack of adequate scientific evidence’ on the matter and ‘a division of opinion’ within the medical community on the escalation theory.<sup>116</sup> Yet nowhere in the *Guardian* articles is this complexity acknowledged. Partly explained by the press tendency to focus on and accentuate the dangers of drugs, as other articles cited in this study confirm, the impact was to provide readers with only one half of the information. Out of the eight parliamentarians who spoke on the subject, Blenkinsop was the only one to directly acknowledge the empirical complexities of this escalation argument. It is impossible to know whether the others chose to focus on the evidence that supported their argument, however, as Seddon observes, the general debates on the Bills were fairly measured, with most speakers

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Parkin, ‘Even an addict has his pride’, *Guardian*, 27 November 1969, p.4.

<sup>115</sup> Gordon Oakes, HC Deb, 25 March 1970, vol.798, col.1507.

<sup>116</sup> Blenkinsop, HC Deb, 16 July 1970, vol.803, col.1794.

recognising the need for more information on drugs.<sup>117</sup> Even Oakes called for more research into why ‘young people in particular find themselves in the mesh of drug taking’.<sup>118</sup> It is thus likely that Oakes, and others who echoed his sentiment, was influenced by the selective reporting within newspapers. By propagating the notion that cannabis was dangerous due to its potential escalation to LSD, the press contributed to the uncontested notion that LSD belonged in the highest class of the MDA.

This Chapter has clearly illustrated that the press was instrumental in influencing and maintaining LSD’s agenda of control between the summer of 1967 and 1971. Through shifting and sustaining attention to the internal use of LSD among the British youth, the press incited a growing notion among politicians that the preventative penalties under the 1964 Act were no longer adequate. By the time the MDA received Royal Assent on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1971, LSD was viewed as one of the most dangerous drugs in Britain.

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<sup>117</sup> Seddon 2022, p.185.

<sup>118</sup> Oakes, HC Deb, 25 March 1970, vol.798, col.1508.

## Conclusion

27<sup>th</sup> May, 2021 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Misuse of Drugs Act. Following this milestone, an online campaign developed under the trending hashtag #50YearsOfFailure, calling for reform to the prohibition-centred approach to drug policy and legislation. This study has provided valuable historical insights into the development of this prohibitionist drug policy for one Class A drug under the MDA, LSD.

By analysing the role of the press in the escalating legislation against LSD between 1966 and 1971, this dissertation has demonstrated its centrality to the development of political perception towards the hallucinogen. Exploring two phases of LSD's legislative history has exposed how newspaper reporting and subjective journalism set and shaped the political agenda that determined legislative action. Chapter One argued that, by framing LSD as an external danger to public health and societal values, the press was instrumental in driving and maintaining the political perception of LSD as a threat to British society. Its portrayal as an American phenomenon, however, drove the preventative agenda that landed LSD in the most lenient drugs legislation, the Drugs (Prevention of Misuse) Act. Chapter Two expanded on this theme, arguing that the press shifted the political narrative to one of pressing concern over the British youth's 'newfound' interest in LSD, despite limited scientific or social study corroborating this sentiment. Portraying LSD as inherently dangerous, the press stoked the growing criticisms of the preventative legislation and its eventual placement in Class A of the MDA. Viewing the two Chapters together, it is clear that the press was and can be an influential force in shaping macro-political drug agendas.

Further research is needed to uncover the entirety of LSD's legislative history. Newspapers were certainly not the only influence on the political agenda and future studies might look at the specific role of the ACDD and opinion within the medical community. However, as the first of its kind to explore LSD's legislative evolution, this dissertation serves as a foundation for such works. In addition, it hopes to provide a framework for further inquiries into the press' role in drug policy during this period. Though LSD was the most notorious of the hallucinogens, it was not the only one that saw legislative changes. Research into the legislative manoeuvrings of other psychedelics such as psilocybin and mescaline, which followed a similar trajectory to LSD, would further enrich the budding field of historical inquiry into psychedelic drugs. This study chose to focus on the role of national newspapers due to their substantial platform and perception as the voice of national opinion. However, Britain holds a rich body of regional and alternative newspapers that are yet to be explored in the context of LSD's legislative history. This line of inquiry would offer an interesting channel for building on the findings of this study.

The press remains a core institution embedded within the fabric of modern-day society and politics. Unravelling its historical role in influencing the political agenda on LSD serves to enrich contemporary understandings of the roots of a static drug policy that has characterised the last fifty-two years. As the #50YearsOfFailure campaign continues to gain momentum, this study provides a powerful example of the influence the news media can have on political development, good or bad.

## Appendix

**Figure 1: Table of Newspaper Articles Relating to LSD Between 1966-1971.**

<b>Year</b>	<b><i>The Times and The Sunday Times</i></b>	<b><i>The Mirror and The Sunday Mirror</i></b>	<b><i>The Telegraph and The Sunday Telegraph</i></b>	<b><i>The Guardian</i></b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1963</b>	9	2	4	1	<i>16</i>
<b>1964</b>	5	0	8	1	<i>14</i>
<b>1965</b>	5	0	5	0	<i>10</i>
<b>1966</b>	45	31	42	33	<i>151</i>
<b>1967</b>	111	82	135	52	<i>380</i>
<b>1968</b>	66	27	51	35	<i>179</i>
<b>1969</b>	62	34	82	43	<i>221</i>
<b>1970</b>	83	34	112	51	<i>280</i>
<b>1971</b>	82	38	91	49	<i>260</i>
	<i>468</i>	<i>248</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>265</i>	<b>1511</b>

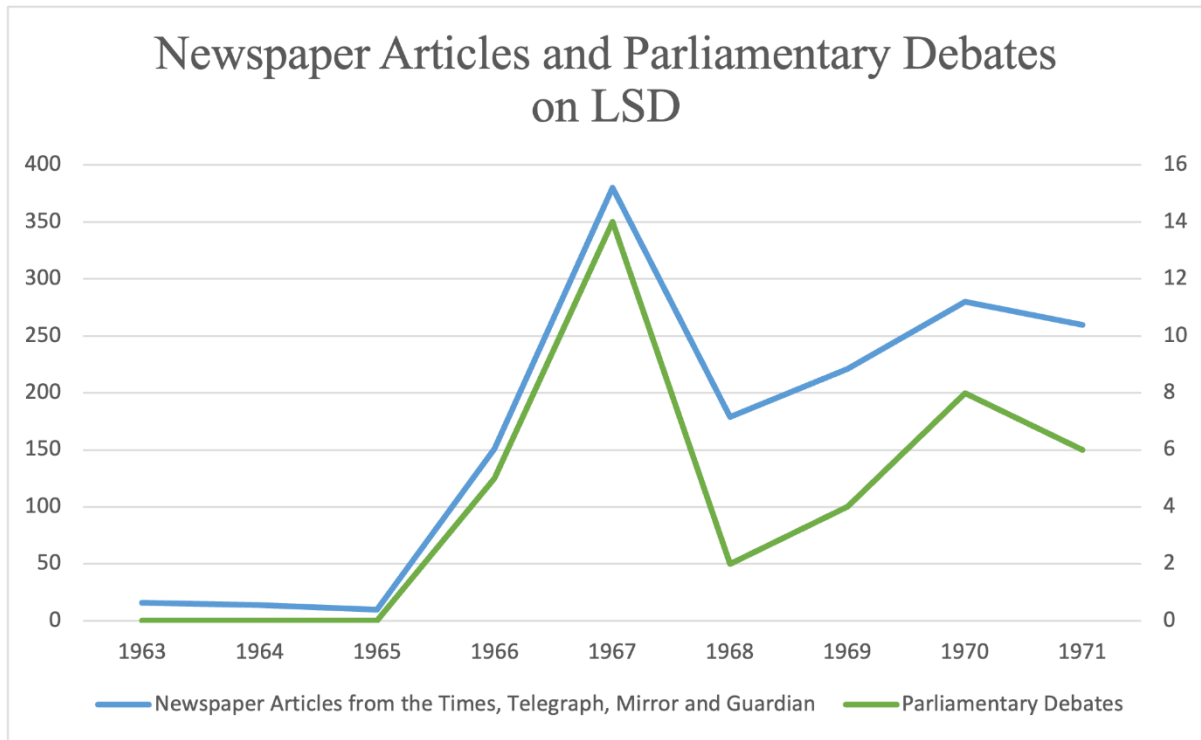
NB: This table includes data sourced from the Gale Primary Source database: *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Mirror*, *The Sunday Mirror* and from the Proquest Historical Newspaper database: *The Guardian*. Articles were included if they contained any of the following terms: ‘Drug’, ‘Drugs’ AND ‘LSD’, ‘hallucinogenic’, ‘hallucinogen’, ‘hallucinatory’, ‘lysergic’, ‘lysergide’, ‘psychedelic’. Search results were screened to ensure only relevant articles were included.

***Figure 2: Table of Parliamentary Debates Relating to LSD Between 1966-1971.***

<b>Year</b>	<b>House of Commons</b>	<b>House of Lords</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1963</b>	0	0	0
<b>1964</b>	0	0	0
<b>1965</b>	0	0	0
<b>1966</b>	2	3	5
<b>1967</b>	8	6	14
<b>1968</b>	2	0	2
<b>1969</b>	2	2	4
<b>1970</b>	8	0	8
<b>1971</b>	0	6	6
	22	17	<b>39</b>

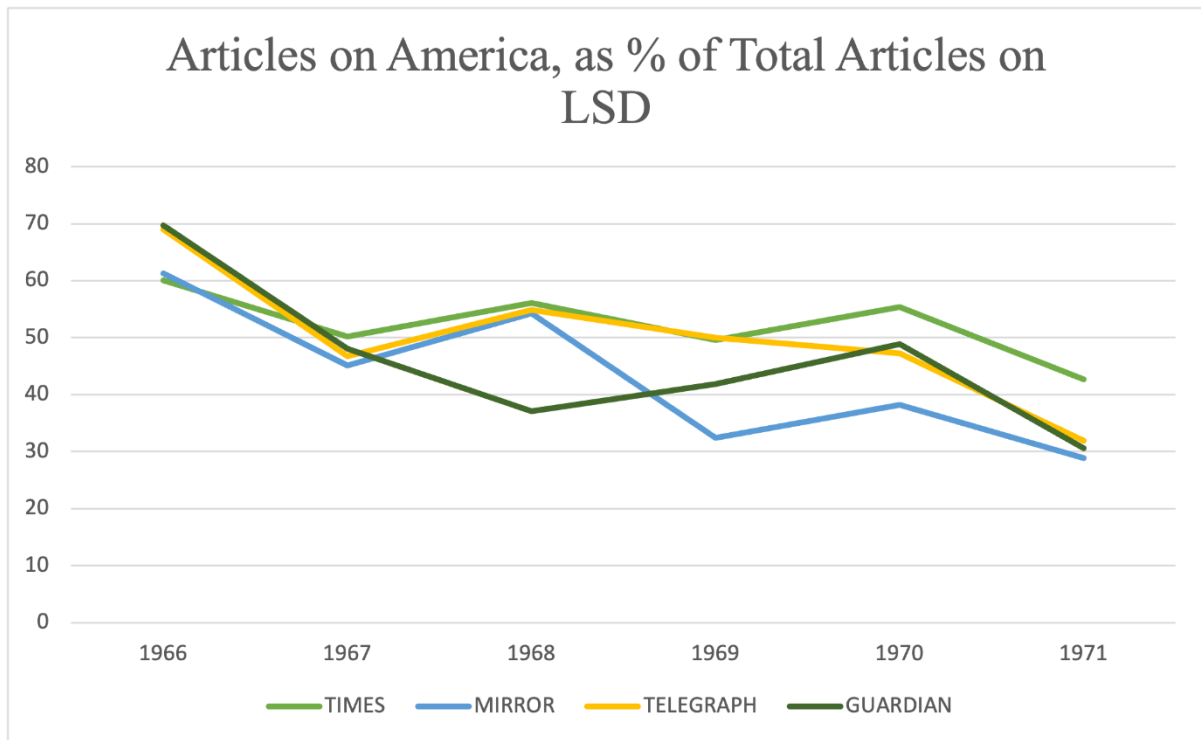
NB: This table includes data sourced from *Hansard*, the official database for all parliamentary debates. Debates were included if they contained any of the following terms: ‘Drug’, ‘Drugs’ AND ‘LSD’, ‘hallucinogenic’, ‘hallucinogen’, ‘hallucinatory’, ‘lysergic’, ‘lysergide’, ‘psychedelic’. Search results were screened to ensure only relevant debates were included.

***Figure 3: Graph of Total Newspaper Articles and Parliamentary Debates on LSD***



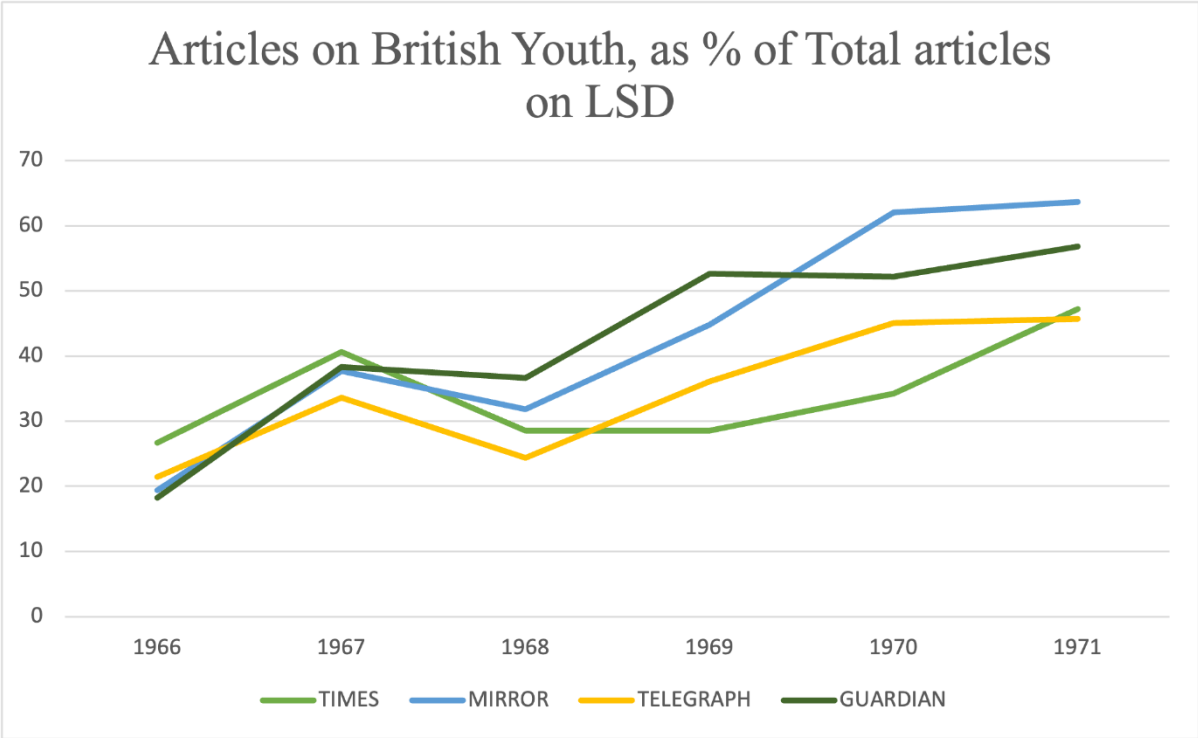
NB: The data in this graph is sourced from the tables in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

***Figure 4: Graph Showing the Percentage of Articles on LSD Relating to America***



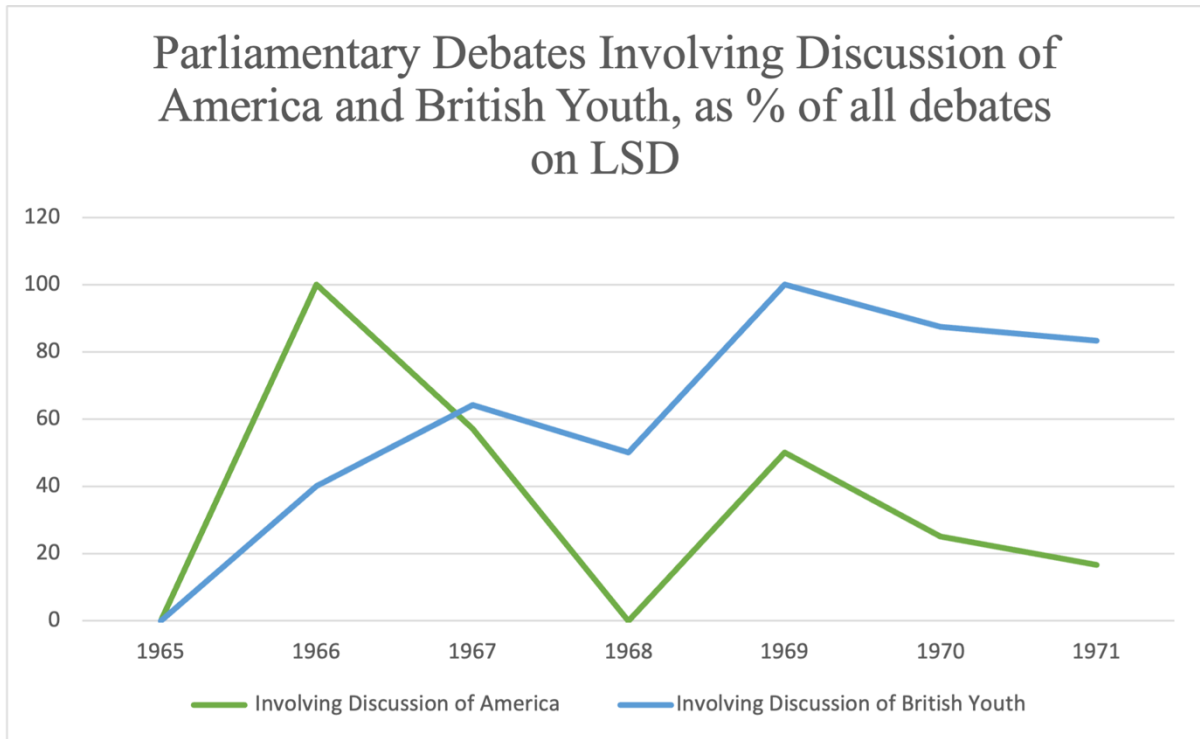
NB: The data in the graph is sourced from the table in Figure 1. The dataset was searched and articles were included in the subset if they contained any of the following terms: ‘America’ OR ‘United States’ OR ‘American’ OR ‘Leary’ OR ‘USA’ OR ‘New York’ OR ‘New Jersey’ OR ‘California’ OR ‘Washington’. The results are shown as a percentage of the total number of articles on LSD in Figure 1 for each paper in a given year. Search results were screened to ensure only relevant articles were included.

**Figure 5: Graph Showing the Percentage of Articles on LSD Relating to the British Youth**



NB: The data in the graph is sourced from the table in Figure 1. The dataset was searched and articles were included in the subset if they contained any of the following terms: ‘youth’ OR ‘young’ OR ‘children’ OR ‘child’ OR ‘student’ OR ‘teenager’ OR ‘university’ OR ‘girl’ OR ‘boy’ OR ‘adolescent’ OR ‘juvenile’ OR ‘school’ OR ‘undergraduate’. Articles were excluded if they involved discussion of American youth. The results are shown as a percentage of the total number of articles on LSD in Figure 1 for each paper in a given year. Search results were screened to ensure only relevant results were included.

**Figure 6: Graph Showing the Percentage of Parliamentary debates on LSD Relating to America or the British Youth**



NB: The data in the graph is sourced from the table in Figure 2.

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