

Would Madam Like A Line With Her Blow-dry?

From hair-salon dealers to narcotic speakeasies aimed at women, investigative journalist Max Daly explores how and why the culture of recreational drug use has become so female-friendly

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STELLA TRENDALL

Amy is in her 30s. She is intelligent, attractive and energetic. And every other weekend she goes out dancing on MDMA (ecstasy) at one of Manchester's trance nights. She's also a college tutor. She manages her drug use like the rest of her life – with precision.

'When I'm on ecstasy I feel profoundly content. But you need to be able to balance the hedonism with hard graft. I work a 60-hour week, so I think I'm allowed a little indiscretion,' she says. Amy has never been arrested or missed a day of work. She puts the fact that she has never had a bad experience on MDMA down to the strict way in which she buys her pills. 'I only buy from people I know – I've been using the same person for the past six years.'

She claims she feels safer with strangers in a trance club than she does getting drunk in a regular pub or bar. 'It's all focused on the music – people are there to hear their favourite DJ, not to get chatted up,' she says.

“THE DRUGS TRADE MOULDS ITSELF AROUND WOMEN'S NEEDS”

There are lots of Amys. Today's career professionals are twice as likely to have taken drugs than their parents are. In Britain, one of the world's most prolific drug-consuming nations, there are more frequent users of illegal substances than there are vegetarians.

In the same way that pubs have made themselves female-friendly in the past 20 years by stocking up on Pinot Grigio and getting rid of the beer-stained carpets, the same can be said of the world of drugs.

The rise in women's spending power, as well as recreational drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy establishing themselves as part of our 'going-out'

culture, means the rules of supply and demand have kicked in. The result is a drugs trade that increasingly moulds itself around women's

needs. Moreover, women themselves have created a marketplace that suits the way they purchase their highs.

This is one of the more surprising discoveries I made while writing my book *Narcomania: A Journey Through Britain's Drug World* with {continued}