

Cosby testimony puts '70s party drug quaaludes back in news

July 21 2015, by John Rogers



In this Nov. 11, 2014, file photo, comedian and Navy veteran Bill Cosby speaks during a Veterans Day ceremony in Philadelphia. Cosby says he paid women after having sex with them and went to great lengths to hide his behavior and the payments from his wife, The New York Times reported Saturday, July 18, 2015, after obtaining a copy of a transcript from a deposition Cosby gave a decade ago. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File)

Before there was Molly there was the quaalude, the most popular party

drug of the 1970s.

It was also, as we now know, the one Bill Cosby kept on hand to give to young women he wanted to have sex with.

In 10-year-old testimony uncovered this week, Cosby said he would offer the drug "the same as a person would say, 'Have a drink.'"

He never tried to sneak any of it into someone's drink, he added, as many others did during those years. But when asked whether a woman who accused him of drugging and sexually assaulting her in 1976 could have resisted him while on quaaludes, he replied, "I don't know."

One thing is certain. The drug, outlawed in the United States since 1982, was hugely popular 40 years ago. People routinely swallowed it with their drinks at nightclubs from coast to coast.

The 13-year-old girl with whom Roman Polanski pleaded guilty to having unlawful sexual intercourse in 1977 said the Oscar-winning director plied her with champagne and half a quaalude before raping her at Jack Nicholson's house. Polanski fled to France in 1978 to avoid a long prison sentence and continues to live there as a fugitive.

Holly Madison, in her recently published memoir, "Down the Rabbit Hole: Curious Adventures and Cautionary Tales of a Former Playboy Bunny," writes that Hugh Hefner once offered her a handful of quaaludes.

"Usually, I don't approve of drugs, but you know, in the '70s they used to call these pills thigh openers," she says he told her. Hefner has declined to discuss Madison's book.

At one point during Cosby's testimony for a lawsuit he eventually settled

out of court, he said he had seven different prescriptions for quaaludes. He got them by asking his doctor for some, he said. The doctor asked him if he had a "bad back or anything," and Cosby said yes.

But Cosby said in the deposition that he wanted them for non-medical reasons. "Quaaludes happen to be the drug that kids, young people were using to party with and there were times when I wanted to have them just in case," he said.

The drug, synthesized in the 1950s, was originally intended as an anti-malarial treatment, says James Adams, associate professor at the University of Southern California School of Pharmacy. When doctors discovered what a great painkiller and sleep aid it appeared to be, they prescribed it for that instead.

Soon, people discovered that it also released sexual inhibitions, particularly in men, and that when mixed with alcohol it produced a mellow euphoria. It also made it difficult if not impossible for an intoxicated woman to resist a man's advances.

As it spread through the hippie culture and then into the bars and private parties of the hipster crowd, bootleg versions known as "ludes" began to flood the streets. Doctors who prescribed it began to be seen as pariahs.

"Quaalude accounted for less than 2 percent of our sales but created 98 percent of our headaches," the chairman of the William H. Rorer pharmaceuticals company told The Associated Press in 1981, three years after the company sold its rights to make the drug. The following year the Food and Drug Administration banned it in the United States.

It's still legal with a prescription in Mexico, but until Cosby's testimony it seemed to have become the forgotten party drug among American millennials. Save for those fans of the 2013 film "The Wolf of Wall

Street," whose anti-hero, Leonardo diCaprio's Jordan Belfort, was wildly addicted to it.

"Party drugs go in and out of favor," Adams says. "They come and go in waves. MDMA is another [drug](#) from the '60s that used to be really popular and went out of popularity and then came back."

These days it's known as Molly.

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