



# Selected Papers of William L. White

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## Look-Alike Drugs

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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.

Look-Alike drugs are drugs that look like and are sold as a particular prescribed or illicit drugs but contain little if any of the drug it is represented to be. They usually contain non-controlled substances that mimic the effect of the controlled substance they are sold as. Look-Alike drugs emerged out of the reduced supplies of amphetamines in the illicit market following new controls on amphetamines in the Controlled Substances Act of 1970.

Between 1970 and 1972, amphetamine production was reduced by over 80%, and it was within this vacuum that the Look-alike drugs appeared. Look-alike amphetamines sold in the illicit market usually contained a combination of three ingredients: caffeine, ephedrine, and phenylpropanolamine. Later, there were look-alike versions of a wide variety of controlled substances.

The look-alike phenomenon evolved within the drug culture. First, there were illicitly manufactured white cross (amphetamine tablets). Then there were white cross tablets that were diluted with caffeine. Finally there were white cross tablets that were only caffeine or amphetamine. The appearance of the tablets through these phases was identical.

As widespread as the sale and consumption of these substances were, there was no statutory jurisdiction for any agency to respond to these substances. The Food and Drug Administration acted in 1982 by banning the sale of over-the-counter preparations that contained caffeine, ephedrine, and phenylpropanolamine in combination. Later, both federal and state statutes made it illegal to sell a legal substance alleged to be a prohibited drug.