

A critical examination of LSD

Time-stopper, dream-maker, pain-killer — or murderer?

By MARJORIE BELL

Taken any field trips lately? With the help of morning glory seeds, you can go on one in the comfort of your own home.

"Everyone shouldn't take LSD; on the other hand, I wouldn't say no one should take it," said Dr. Arthur Hoffer, psychiatrist, author, and associate professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

He was addressing the Law Forum Friday night.

LSD, known to the scientific world as lysergic acid diethylamine, is an ergot alkaloid.

"There are three main sources," said Dr. Hoffer. "One is a fungus growing on the rye grain of Spain, Switzerland and Mexico. The second is morning glory seeds from California; and the third, the black market.

The danger, particularly of the latter two, is in poisoning, said Dr. Hoffer. Hands and feet may turn white and stay white for weeks, or if an extreme overdose is taken, death may result. Overdoses are easily taken, as it is difficult to estimate the percentage of psychedelic activity in a given dosage.

"One subject bought what he thought was 300 micrograms of black market LSD; it turned out to be 5,000 micrograms," Dr. Hoffer told his audience.

"LSD has four main effects on normal subjects," said Dr. Hoffer. "These concern perception, thinking, feeling and activity."

Lighting may seem brighter, shapes change, the room may seem to be pulsating, wood floor surfaces can de-

velop a shimmer. Objects may appear to change dimensions; one subject imagined himself to be a part of a picture. Hearing may become so acute that one psychologist claimed to hear his cat walking across the rug while he was under the influence of LSD.

"Only rarely do normal subjects have hallucinations," said Dr. Hoffer. "Illusions are more common."

One minute may seem to be a year to an acid tripper, or an hour may seem to be seconds. One of the most interesting illusions is a reversal of time, such as the illusion that one subject had of drinking his tea before it was poured.

In respect to thinking changes effected by LSD, Dr. Hoffer said, "Thought content more than thought process is influenced."

Often the first hour of a trip is characterized by feelings of tension, which gradually wear off until the subject is extremely relaxed.

"There are two definite kinds of experience," said Dr. Hoffer. "These are the psycho-mimetic, and the psychedelic."

The first is one in which the subject experiences similar illusions to those of a psychotic person. The second, which acid-takers attempt to induce, is mind-expanding. Hippies call the former a "freak-out" or a "bad trip". An alcoholic who took LSD stated afterwards he had experienced his own disembowelling.

On the other hand, the psychedelic experience is usually one of happiness and insight. Acid-takers find they can resolve problems and relax during a psychedelic trip.

"The problem," said Dr. Hoffer, is to assure a normal subject of a psychedelic trip rather than a psycho-mimetic one."

He suggested some ways in which a psychedelic experience in a medical medium could be induced. A careful screening of subjects would rule out persons with a tendency to schizophrenia, unhealthy persons, depressed people and the aged. The attending therapist should be experienced, and have the objective and expectation of inducing a good experience. Finally, the setting should be as comfortable as possible.

"Even with these precautions, there is only a 50-50 chance of a good experience," said Dr. Hoffer.

The dangers of LSD fall into two categories; physical and psychological. However, it is difficult to ascertain the extent, or even the existence of these dangers, said Dr. Hoffer.

Initial surveys indicated that acid could produce chromosomal defects which may appear in the user's offspring. However a more recent survey showed that hippies have no more chromosomal breaks than persons who have never taken LSD, said Dr. Hoffer. The first survey may not have taken into account the fact that many schizophrenics take LSD; these people have a higher percentage of chromosomal breaks than normal persons, he said.

Psychiatric dangers include that of a prolonged reaction, and suicide. Cases of homicide are rare.

Dr. Hoffer questioned the evidence that these were caused by LSD, and maintained studies did not rule out the possibility that these dangers could be wholly attributed to psychological disorders.

"Psychedelic drugs can be useful," said Dr. Hoffer. "They can give the psychologist and the psychiatric nurse insight into the nature of psychiatric disorders."

The psychiatric centre at Yorkton, Saskatchewan, was designed by an architect who was administered LSD, and has become a model for similar structures all over North America.

LSD has been found to give pain relief for up to 72 hours, longer than morphine; thus it helps to remove a modicum of fear from terminal cancer victims.

"Religion and philosophy also make use of LSD," said Dr. Hoffer. "The Native American Church of North America, an American Indian foundation, takes LSD as a part of the sacraments."

Dr. Hoffer maintained that in deciding whether the drug should be illegal, we should consider what people are seeking: the drug, or the experience. If, as he suspects, they are seeking the experience, and LSD becomes unobtainable, there are 70-80 other hallucinogens readily available.

"Did you know common nutmeg is a hallucinogen?" he asked. "Three whole nutmegs could kill you."

He suggested that we look at the problem as a medical matter, not a legal one. One solution to relieve the situation would be to establish rehabilitation centers for chronic users, who in his experience are for the most part psychotics who cannot find help from the outside world.

casserole

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Mind-blowing, demonstration fixing, dead universities and teenie teaching—its all part of this great big world and we bring it to you in black and white this beautiful Friday.

This week's cover will remind you winter is really coming and its only 31, count them, 31 days till Christmas. Note also, engineers, that is your building in the background. We of Casserole do not discriminate.

Our mind-blowing story is a straight analysis of LSD by a Saskatchewan doctor. It is worth noting that some of the earliest research into mind changing drugs has been done in Saskatchewan. They are using them to treat the mentally unstable.

Demonstration fixing on page three is about how the United States army mixed its own suitably disguised troops into the ranks of the demonstrators at the last Pentagon affair.

At the bottom of page three Rich Vivone tells us all about living with the dead. Don't hold a razor blade in your hand while reading this piece.

And teenie-teaching—that is what I call the Freshman Orientation Seminar. A product of that system writes of her impressions of an attempt to upgrade the students coming to the campus for the first time. She is still mentally balanced so I am assuming the system works.



—illustration by linda buck