

## PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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Before describing the extensive body of research on the psychotherapeutic effects of LSD, and the research program concerning these effects in which I am presently engaged, I think it would be instructive to view the growing interest in psychedelic phenomena, particularly the LSD experience, from a broader perspective—specifically, from the perspective of current trends in psychological science and psychotherapy. It is well-known that psychologists are an unusually self-critical group; one that continually examines and re-examines its present position and future direction. The scientific and professional pronouncements of psychologists reveal an ongoing preoccupation with what they are doing, where they are going, and how they fit into the larger scheme of things. And, in the light of their subject-matter, they are particularly attuned to the society in which they live. It seems reasonable, then, to consider contemporary theoretical issues and recent shifts in psychological research, not only as a sensitive barometer of the present social climate but also as a timetable of future trends in our society. Among the various sciences and professions, psychology seems to reflect particularly well the interests and values of a given time and place. If the following description of the current scene is relatively accurate, it suggests that altered states of consciousness, of the sort induced by LSD, will occupy a central position in American psychology in the near future, and will perhaps become a major public concern as well.

There is considerable evidence in the psychological literature which supports this contention. In a recent issue of the *American Psychologist*, the official voice of the American Psychological

Association, the lead article, written by a well-known research psychologist, is entitled, "Imagery: The Return of the Ostracized" (5). After examining the traditional scientific and cultural resistances to such phenomena as pseudo-hallucinations, hypnogogic and dream images, extrasensory perception, and hypnosis, the author goes on to describe the current status in these fields. He points to a number of recent breakthroughs in a variety of research areas which, according to him, signal the second phase of a psychological revolution. The first phase, covering the first half of this century, was characterized by the scientific extremism of psychoanalysis and behaviorism—movements which purged psychology of the unique and the private. While both psychoanalysis and behaviorism, in their orthodox forms, have made valuable contributions to our understanding of man, it seems evident now that these orientations can no longer exclude altered states of consciousness and novel perceptual experiences from the *primary* subject-matter of a *normal* psychology.

Interestingly, some of the leading exponents of both views, such as H. Hartmann and B.F. Skinner, have recognized these omissions and indicated a need for revision (3)(19). This is not surprising since the most exciting developments during the past decade have occurred in experimental work with dream activity, subliminal perception, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, parapsychology, creativity, and of course, the consciousness-expanding drugs. Viewing this rich array of experimental activity as occurring within a broader historical context, one convergent finding seems of major significance—namely, that richness of imagination and so-called regressive experiences are not the exclusive privilege of madmen and artists. Rather, it has become abundantly clear that, given the right circumstances, most people can greatly expand their experiential horizons without sacrificing effectiveness in dealing with objective reality.

Consistent with the scene in experimental psychology, the beginnings of a trend *away* from viewing psychedelic phenomena as undesirable or pathological can also be discerned in clinical psychology. Before considering the situation in psychotherapy, I want to at least mention a few incidental observations which seem to convey particularly well the flavor of this shift in viewpoint.

First, according to current estimates, 50 percent of the general population experience hypnogogic imagery naturally in the normal course of living (5). Second, repeated surveys among psychologists conducted over the past twenty years show a progressive increase in the willingness to accept extrasensory perception as an authentic experience. The most recent survey indicates that

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Symposium on LSD: Basic Problems and Potentialities. San Jose State College, May 9, 1964.

very few psychologists consider ESP an impossibility (2). Finally, studies involving hypnotizability have found that naturally-occurring altered states of awareness including loss of distinction between self and nonself, transcendental or peak experiences, and oceanic feeling states are fairly common in the *normal* college population (18). In addition, there has been a greater willingness in recent years to acknowledge and report such experiences without apology or embarrassment.

A growing recognition of the potential value of psychedelic experiences also characterizes contemporary trends in psychotherapy. For example, current theorizing in psychotherapy reveals an increasing awareness of the restraints imposed by our language and habitual modes of perception. Thus, we find that recent revisions in psychoanalytic theory attempt to correct the previous overemphasis on maintaining impulse-control and a sharp distinction between self and nonself (8)(16). Instead, present formulations stress the *constructive* use of regressive states and fantasy activity, i.e., the importance of imaginative experience and the relative flatness of our public view of reality are given explicit recognition in current analytic thinking (15). Similar dissatisfactions with traditional concepts of psychological health are expressed in the current upsurge of interest among psychotherapists of all persuasions, in Zen Buddhism, existentialism, and self-actualization.

In this connection, it is worth calling attention to what is, perhaps, the major issue today in psychotherapy—namely, the search for positive criteria of mental health or personal growth which are explicitly based on humanistic values. It is now generally recognized that psychological health or self-fulfillment involves more than the absence of illness or emotional disturbance (6)(11). These developments in mental-health concepts have paralleled the recent discovery that most recipients of psychotherapy are *not* suffering from the traditional forms of neurosis and character disorder. While certainly self-dissatisfied and unfulfilled, the person seeking therapy today is generally *not* unproductive, ineffective, or crippled with neurotic symptoms. Innumerable writers have described the typical therapy patient as one who is relatively free of physical complaints, neurotic anxiety and depression, failures of achievement, and interpersonal conflicts (10)(20). In short, the hallmarks of emotional disorder are conspicuously absent. Rather, the central struggle for an increasing number of successful and relatively well-adjusted people seems to be "a loss of meaning in life, an absence of purpose, or a failure of faith" (17, p. 67). Modern discontent tends to take the form of alienation.

In William Barrett's terms, alienation from God, from nature, from the human community, and ultimately, alienation from self (1). While recognizing that the person with problems in personal identity and life outlook deserves help, some investigators have concluded that the psychotherapist is ill-equipped for such a *priestly* task (23). This belief is somewhat substantiated by the disillusionment which many patients of this type experience in psychotherapy. Yet a dearth of alternative resources seems open to an individual in this predicament.

In the light, then, of what seems to be an incompatibility between psychotherapy, as traditionally conceived, on the one hand, and the nature of modern discontent, on the other, it is certainly less than a coincidence that many people who fit this description express an interest in the psychedelic experience and find their way to LSD. It should, perhaps, be emphasized that the only sentiment these people share with the stereotyped beatnik is a sense of alienation from traditional values.

The attitudes and reactions to LSD, both positive and negative, become more understandable when viewed against this background of present-day trends in experimental psychology, clinical psychology, and psychotherapy. Within this broader context, it is not surprising that the major application of LSD today is to *treat* mental illness rather than to *produce* it. Beyond this shift in emphasis, the use of LSD for therapeutic purposes clearly reflects the ambivalence among therapists toward the ever-growing number of meaning- and identity-seekers who request their services.

The research and clinical literature concerning LSD as a therapeutic agent reveals two major viewpoints which seem representative of this ambivalence. These two theoretical orientations are associated with two greatly dissimilar methods of administration. One emphasizes the use of LSD periodically and in small doses as an adjunct to traditional techniques of psychotherapy. The other major approach employs LSD in a single, large dose, producing an intense and prolonged psychedelic experience. Applied in this manner, LSD serves as a catalyst for inducing rapid and profound changes in the subject's value-belief system and in his self-image. 2

While recognizing the therapeutic effects of LSD, this latter

2. For a more detailed and referenced critique of the extensive applications of LSD as a therapeutic agent, see the reviews compiled by Mogar and Savage and Unger (21).

technique places greater emphasis on its more unique potentialities and value — namely, as a means of facilitating personal growth and self-fulfillment. Rather than freedom from emotional symptoms, the primary objective of the psychedelic experience becomes a major reconstruction of one's belief and life outlook. In short, the first method is essentially illness-oriented, the second, health or growth-oriented.

With regard to their effectiveness, both orientations have reported impressive results. Used in conjunction with psychotherapy, LSD has been found to facilitate improvement in patients representing the complete spectrum of psychological disorders and diagnostic types. In the mass of research and clinical findings published in professional journals, predominately positive results have been almost uniformly reported. The consistency of results is particularly noteworthy in view of the many uncontrolled factors, in this work, which are known to influence reactions to drugs and treatment outcome. In this respect, factors such as dose level, frequency of administration, patient and therapist expectations, and the environmental setting deserve mention. Despite great diversity in the conduct of these studies, impressive improvement rates continue to be reported with both adults and children, and in group as well as in individual psychotherapy. It is also worth noting that LSD has been found effective by therapists of widely divergent theoretical persuasions. Among these are included Freudian therapists, Jungians, behaviorists, existentialists, and a number of eclectic therapies. Furthermore, the therapeutic value of LSD has been reported by investigators from countries all over the world.

In spite of the breadth and consistency of this extensive body of evidence, a number of limitations and shortcomings characterize these studies, if the standards of valid research are applied. The major criticisms include small samples of patients, subjective and vague estimates of improvement, inadequate or short follow-up evaluations, and lack of control groups. While it seems safe to conclude on the basis of this work that LSD can produce far-reaching beneficial effects in some people, under some conditions, the more important questions remain unanswered. Specifically, in what ways do various kinds of people respond to LSD, both during the experience and afterward? What are the optimal conditions of administration for given objectives? And how can we account for the various kinds and extent of change which follow an LSD experience? Beyond these initial questions lies a vast vista of intriguing unknowns which warrant intensive and extensive investigation. For example, can LSD facilitate the cultivation of

special talents and abilities? Is the experience akin to the creative process? Is it related to similar altered states of consciousness such as hypnosis, transcendental experiences, dreams, or religious conversions? From the standpoint of research, attempts to investigate such questions in a relatively objective manner involve a number of methodological problems concerning experimental design and the measurement of such factors as value-belief systems, personality characteristics, behavior patterns, and criteria of improvement or personal growth. It should be emphasized that, although these problems in design and measurement are complex and costly, they are not insoluble.

As a case in point, the ongoing research program currently being conducted at the International Foundation for Advanced Study (IFAS) at Menlo Park, California, has made significant progress in solving some of these methodological problems. Beyond this, a wide variety of carefully collected and reliable data is presently being analyzed, which will throw considerable light on the questions referred to previously. A brief examination of the conduct of this research program and some of our findings to date indicate quite clearly that the various claims and counterclaims made for LSD are readily testable and given to further systematic exploration.

Our initial results were obtained on a large group of voluntary subjects who underwent a single, large dose LSD session conducted in a comfortable, esthetically-pleasing setting. Although trained staff members were present throughout the session day, primarily for emotional support and human contact, no attempt was made to direct or interpret the experience. Rather, the subject was urged to explore himself and his universe without external guidance or intrusion. Prior to the LSD experience, each subject was given a physical and psychiatric examination followed by a series of preparatory interviews. These exploratory interviews were designed to help the individual examine or re-examine his reasons for taking LSD, to clarify whatever problems or questions he wished to explore, and to become accustomed to altered states of consciousness. Following the psychedelic experience, extensive follow-up evaluations were made covering a minimum of six months.

From the moment an individual entered the program to the final follow-up contact, a mass of detailed personal information, ratings, evaluations, and psychological test data were collected. At the present time, analyses are being completed on data concerning *changes* which an individual undergoes following the psychedelic experience. For both theoretical and methodological reasons,

significant changes are assumed to occur along three main dimensions: values and beliefs, personality, and actual behavior in major life areas. Attempts have been made to measure these various aspects of personal functioning at a number of different points in time, both prior to and following the LSD experience. This procedure permits a comprehensive test of the hypothesis that a profound psychedelic experience tends to be followed by a major resynthesis of one's value system and life outlook. It is further hypothesized that this change in basic beliefs will in turn be followed by *slower* alterations in personality structure as well as changes in characteristic behavior patterns. Beyond this general hypothesis, the research program at IFAS is designed to study the role of life-history experiences and personality factors in various outcomes. Also under investigation are different aspects of the psychedelic experience itself and how these relate to the personality of the subject and subsequent changes.

Our findings so far provide considerable support for the general hypothesis concerning changes in values, personality, and behavior (12)(13)(14). For example, three days following the LSD session a consistent and reliable increase was found in the extent to which an individual agrees with test items reflecting a deep sense of meaning and purpose in life, open-mindedness, greater esthetic appreciation, and sense of unity or oneness with nature and humanity. Also significant was the finding that these changes in personal beliefs either remained constant or further increased at the two month follow-up. This was a consistent result cutting across such factors as age, sex, religious orientation, or personality type. Thus, it seems safe to conclude that a rapid and extensive change in values does tend to occur in most subjects, and importantly, is maintained over time.

The additional hypothesis that slower modifications in personality and behavior would occur, consistent with a particular change in life outlook, has also received considerable support. For example, our data indicate that if a person values human brotherhood more after his psychedelic experience, his personality and behavior reflect this new conviction. Specifically, he tends to be less distrustful and guarded with others, warmer and more spontaneous in expressing emotion, and less prone to feelings of personal inadequacy. With regard to characteristic behavior patterns, parallel changes tend to occur in such areas as marital relations and work effectiveness.

Although our overall results indicate that almost all subjects derive some degree of benefit along the lines indicated, it is important to emphasize that the nature, the extent, and the stability of

changes vary considerably. Our present focus is on three major sources of this variability: first, pre-LSD personality structure; second, the type of presenting problem; and third, variations in the psychedelic experience itself. With regard to personality differences, we have been able to establish a number of personality types which are related to particular patterns of response to LSD. For example, recent findings indicate that all subject-groups, defined according to personality pattern, demonstrated significant positive changes during the months immediately following LSD.

However, at subsequent follow-up evaluations, it was found that these groups differed considerably in the ability to assimilate the psychedelic experience, i.e., wide differences were found in the capacity to integrate rapidly acquired insight into one's life style and life situation. In other words, some subjects either consolidated initial gains or displayed further personal growth, while others tended to regress in the direction of pre-LSD behavior patterns. Importantly, none of these personality subtypes completely reverted to its former status. Yet, these differences in the ability to maintain or further enhance newly realized potentialities certainly warrant further study.

With regard to differences in presenting problems and variations in the nature of the psychedelic experience, I will merely mention work which is currently in progress. First, the kinds of change which a subject undergoes, and the stability of these changes over time seem related to whether the motivation for taking LSD involves neurotic symptoms or problems of a more existential nature. While the relationship is presently not clear, nor is it a simple one, some sort of association seems apparent. Secondly, various aspects of an individual's response *during* the LSD session seem significantly related to outcome. For example, recurrent themes such as some form of death and rebirth, self as creator, and the common experience of unity with all life may correlate highly with subsequent changes in values and beliefs. The significance of the occurrence of such themes is not only relevant to outcome but may also serve as an important link to dreams and archetypal myths. The ubiquity of these and other themes in dreams and cross-cultural symbolism, as well as in the psychedelic experience, suggests a number of important convergences in these areas (4)(7)(9)(22).

Although tentative at this point, these lines of investigation seem highly significant and certainly suggestive for future directions in LSD research. And if the historical perspective described earlier is relatively accurate, the exploration of ways of expanding human consciousness will soon occupy a prominent position in the

mainstream of contemporary psychology. Should this prediction materialize, we can look forward to a far more extensive application of these powerful agents as a means of facilitating social as well as individual potentialities. For the present, research with the psychedelics will continue to seek those conditions which maximize their safety, their effectiveness, and their human value.

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