

MOTIVATION FOR SELF-ADMINISTRATION OF LSD*

BY WILLIAM A. FROSCH, M.D., EDWIN ROBBINS, M.D.,
LILLIAN ROBBINS, PH.D., AND MARVIN STERN, M.D.

INTRODUCTION

The popular books and articles which have been written about LSD in recent years have primarily heralded its beneficial effects, particularly its capacity to "expand the consciousness" and open the way to greater self-understanding, increased artistic powers, and a richer and fuller life in general. The increasing popularity of the drug and the avidity with which it is now used would appear to be a testimonial to the hopes and expectations of the takers. This increased popularity of the drug is reflected in a striking increase in the number of patients admitted to Bellevue Hospital following ingestion of LSD. Clinical observations on these patients have been published elsewhere.^{1, 2}

In the early part of 1966, 34 patients hospitalized following ingestion of LSD were extensively interviewed with regard to the positive effects they felt had accrued from taking LSD. In this paper, their opinions of the changes that occurred from taking the drug as well as the writers' objective impressions and evaluations will be presented.

OBSERVATIONS

A surprisingly small percentage said they took the drug primarily for its beneficial effects. Only two patients took LSD to achieve personality improvement by way of psychedelic experience. Fourteen sought kicks or highs, and the rest, although primarily interested in excitement or companionship, said they would not have minded if they were helped psychologically in addition to achieving an experience.

In evaluating the effect of the drug, the subjects were given encouragement and as much latitude as they desired in speaking of their trips, so a maximum number of positive responses could be made. In rating, any statement which reflected a subjective feeling of gain was scored as positive. Exclusions were rare and were limited to vague descriptions of the experience, such as "beautiful."

*From the Department of Psychiatry, New York University School of Medicine, and the Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital, New York City. This work was supported in part by Public Health Service Grant MH-08618 from the National Institute of Mental Health.

Nevertheless, only 13 of the 34 patients could identify a beneficial effect from their transcendental experience. Seven people emphatically said they felt worse after taking LSD. They reported increased feelings of depression and hopelessness and two of them had attempted suicide while taking the drug. Fourteen reported no change.

When a statement about positive change or feeling of improvement could be elicited, it was classified in one of the following categories: (1) philosophic-religious, (2) greater love of fellowman, (3) intellectual changes, (4) insights, (5) loss of social inhibition, (6) aesthetic changes, or (7) lessening of ambition. People variously reported change in one or several of these areas.

1. In the *philosophic-religious* area, changes reported included awareness of a supernatural being, or God, in a new, more significant, and highly personal way; or an increasing interest in mysticism or Far Eastern religion. The patients reporting such experience were most often persons who had been deeply religious as children, or who had become interested in mysticism prior to taking LSD. None of the present patients turned to organized religion after taking the drug, nor were they able to pinpoint any changes in behavior as a result of their having had a spiritual experience.

For several, the mystical experiences were extremely important and seemed to make them feel more at ease in the world. They felt less need to struggle with understanding complexities, since they had been able to feel at one with the universe during the period of depersonalization and loss of ego boundary. They spoke of their experiences with great conviction, although at times they became lost as they tried to put them into metaphysical language.

2. Most of the patients who reported *greater love of fellowman* were isolated, hostile persons who had had few close contacts and were often chronic schizophrenics. As a rule, this feeling of peace and love did not persist long after the drug-effect wore off. There was subsequently a feeling of disappointment at not being able to sustain in daily life the warmth experienced under the influence of LSD. While this disappointment could conceivably have become the first step in a program for improving interpersonal relations, this did not happen.

3. Several reported increased *intellectual capacities*. They be-

lieved that they had learned how to see to the heart of a problem while in the transcendental state and that this heightened ability remained forever after. They now saw themselves as incisive in thought, accurate in perception, and no longer in need of supporting data before making judgments. One previously non-psychotic person, always sensitive to the feelings of others, became convinced that he could feel vibrations from people and planets. He felt that his taking LSD had made him clairvoyant. Others, more concerned with interpersonal relationships, became aware of heightened empathy. They thought that they knew what people were thinking. Despite the earnestness with which these statements were made, we could find no substantiating evidence. None of the patients tested their conclusions rigorously. Even though they could acknowledge that there was no evidence to bolster their view, this lack did not seem to affect their beliefs. The feeling of oneness with the universe and faith in the power of their newly found empathic skills, appeared to be too deeply rooted in mysticism to be touched by the powers of rational persuasion.

4. *Insights* seemed to be limited and were not well formulated. For most, all they could report was a feeling that something good had happened to them. This could not be correlated by the subjects with any positive behavioral change. Only two patients were able to organize the thoughts they had under the effect of LSD well enough to derive conscious benefit. One was a prostitute who was "high" when the police raided her apartment. In a flash, she realized that it was her answering service who reported her. In discussing this episode, she was grateful to the LSD for enabling her to solve a hitherto unsolved mystery. The other subject, also a woman, had a vision of a grossly distorted, horrible face of a man. For her, this symbolized her fear of men. She had not previously been aware of this. She was able to use this vision as the nucleus of considerable introspection and ultimately was able to enjoy more harmonious relations with her father and husband.

5. *Loss of social inhibition* was experienced by some schizophrenic men who felt increased freedom in approaching strangers and attempting to strike up a conversation, if only about their drug experiences. These contacts did not lead to friendships, since the content of the subject's talk and his personality were usually not geared to establishing permanent ties and the recipients them-

selves were often severely disturbed. Most of the women in the study said they felt less social constraint after taking LSD, one going so far as to change her occupation from office work to prostitution. For two musicians there was a feeling of being more at ease in front of an audience. They felt that their increased ability to relax improved their skills.

6. *Aesthetic changes* were reported primarily by artists and musicians, who reported increased perceptual capacities as a result of taking LSD. One musician, in words reminiscent of the marijuana users of the 1930's, spoke of her new-found ability to hear music in a more meaningful fashion. She first heard subtleties of phrasing when she was taking LSD and had been able to hear them ever since. For artists, the intensification of color was important. However, this change did not persist indefinitely. New ways of perceiving visual patterns were of interest to some who enjoyed studying patterns they had never been particularly aware of before taking LSD. Although one artist said that her palette had changed since she took LSD, she refused to show the writers any of her paintings. In two instances there was improvement in artistic functioning concurrent with LSD usage. One person was a frequent multiple user and the other had had only three exposures to the drug over a period of several years. Both, however, made an intensive effort to improve their performance during the period of growth, in addition to their having used LSD.

In some cases where there was no previous concern with aesthetics, the subjects also reported that they felt artistically creative for the first time in their lives. As a result of their discovery, they exercised what seemed to be poor judgment in hoping to exploit commercially their realistically limited talent.

7. Finally, as part of a more general alteration of values, many patients felt a *lessening of ambition*. This was often accompanied by the formulation that life is a game. Withdrawal from competition and social interaction followed and was accompanied by diffuseness of interest and the giving up of goals. Instead of striving to become more skilled in a limited number of areas, they tended to spread themselves over many. At times, work was directed toward new and unproductive fields. Careers were retarded because of diffuseness of purpose and lack of effort. For some, a downward movement in the social scale was justified by the in-

sight and empathy they felt they had derived from taking LSD. For example, a woman who had been a productive artist and who had taken LSD in an effort to help her use of color, stopped painting because it became "too easy."

DISCUSSION

It is always difficult to validate subjective impressions of improvement, especially where there are no controls and virtually all subjects are highly aware of the effects they are supposed to achieve. In the literature on LSD, the effects of the drug are described in great detail and, in addition, communication between users further serves to disseminate knowledge about the typical reactions. It is difficult to find an uninformed user. As a result, the role of anticipation and expectation most probably colors both the experience and its interpretation.

Objectively, the patients did not appear to be doing as well as they claimed. For example, several who were psychotic following LSD, still spoke of its beneficial effects. There was no objective evidence of increased productivity, improvement in school work, or better interpersonal relations subsequent to multiple ingestion of LSD. Nor did anxiety or tension appear to decrease; or self-esteem, increase. Although some patients felt that they had obtained valuable feelings as a result of their drug experience, these were incommunicable. There did not seem to be any new thoughts which could not have been revealed without the drug. It was the writers' impression that the stimulating effect of the drug distorted and altered ideas that were already present rather than bringing unconscious thoughts to the surface.

One of the major differences between the present subjects and some of the gifted people who have described their LSD experiences seems to be in the capacity to integrate the perceptions and thoughts aroused by LSD. It was typical for the patients interviewed to content themselves with watching buildings bend and follow them as they walked down the street, or in the hope of recapturing some of the feelings, to stand, long after an LSD experience, behind a garbage truck and watch the blinking purple light.

Although LSD has been described as being of particular use in "expanding the consciousness" of mental health professionals, clergymen, and artists, it appears to be most often used by a part

of the community who also use other drugs illicitly. Apparently, even in this group, it lends a quality of significance and conviction to some of the experiences which are undergone while under the influence of the drug. In addition, LSD experience in certain circles may lend a quality of prestige.

The search for truth through the use of drugs has been important in the history of mankind. With many drugs that affect the level of consciousness, a feeling of elation and understanding has taken place. Many years ago, under the influence of an anesthetic drug, Oliver Wendell Holmes³ wrote down the inspiration which had come to him:

The veil of eternity was lifted. The one great truth, that which underlies all human experience, and is the key to all the mysteries that philosophy has sought in vain to solve, flashed upon me in a sudden revelation. Henceforth all was clear: a few words had lifted my intelligence to the level of the knowledge of the cherubim. As my natural condition returned, I remembered my resolution and staggered to my desk. I wrote, in ill-shaped, straggling characters, the all-embracing truth still glimmering in my consciousness. The words were these (children may smile; the wise will ponder): "A strong smell of turpentine prevails throughout."

SUMMARY

The reason for self-administration of LSD and the resulting subjective changes in 34 patients hospitalized following ingestion of LSD were studied. Only two patients were primarily interested in its reputed beneficial effects. Although 13 patients reported such effects, the authors were unable to document any objective improvement. Seven patients reported that they felt worse after LSD and experienced increased anxiety or depression. Fourteen reported no change.

New York University School of Medicine
550 First Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10016

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