

The Illicit LSD Group and Life Changes

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Dramatic alterations in personality and life style, usually judged to be of a beneficial nature, have been reported by investigators administering LSD to alcoholics and other types of patients (Unger, 1963) in clinical settings, though the evidence has been ambiguous and conflicting. On the other hand, use of the drug in illicit settings, apparently mostly by middle class young adults, has been reported as being associated with what would appear to be less beneficial changes, many users having simply dropped out of conventional society into hippie havens such as the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco and the East Village in New York.

Since the direction of life changes appears to differ so markedly with LSD use in illicit versus licit settings, and since investigators have repeatedly emphasized the influence of set and setting upon the effects of the drug, the possibility arises that the drug may function primarily as a catalyst and that the social context in which it is taken may serve to channel any subsequent life changes. However, while there have been a wealth of clinical studies, the information presently available having

to do with life changes in illicit settings is largely derived from sensationalistic press accounts. To date two studies only have dealt with illicit LSD use. Blum and his associates (1964) interviewed 12 members of one illicit LSD group while Ludwig and Levine (1965) examined the use of psychedelic drugs by addicts at Lexington. Neither of these studies focused upon the relation between life changes and social context.

The present paper reports some preliminary observations of three illicit LSD-using groups and their members in which social characteristics of the groups (modes of functioning, goals, values, etc.) are related to self-reports of life changes in their members. The three groups were all located in a Northeastern U. S. seaboard city. The largest group, which was examined in greatest detail, included 7 to 10 core members and about 25 peripherals. Most of the members were young, well-educated, middle class homosexuals. The two smaller groups each consisted of a core of three and a periphery of 5 or 6 persons, mostly heterosexuals.

These observations constituted a pilot study conducted in order to test the feasibility of such research and to begin the development of appropriate techniques and instruments. The pilot study is reported here, despite its preliminary nature, because of the paucity of objective information in this area. However, in a more comprehensive study now in progress, ten groups of illicit LSD users representing a variety of types of interest in the drug, such as sex, magic, religion, self-therapy, communal living, etc., are being studied and changes in their members over time are being examined in more rigorous fashion with a battery of psychological tests and interviews. In this way more definitive findings regarding the relation between social context and life changes with LSD in illicit settings will be obtained.

PROCEDURE

In the study of the large homosexual group, several methods were used: (1) informal observations of drug and non-drug activities of the group over a period of one year; (2) tape-recorded interviews with the three group leaders in which standardized interview schedules were used to examine the characteristics both of the group and of the individual users; (3) self-administered questionnaires filled in by 12 members of the group. The two smaller heterosexual groups were studied by means of interviews with the leaders.

The *Inventory of Group Characteristics* was used to collect group data. This was based on Hemphill and Westie's (1950) list of group characteristics and covered such matters as history of development of the group, modes of introduction of new members, types of activities of the group, hedonic tone, intimacy, goals of the group, and so forth.

For the tape-recorded interviews obtaining individual data, *The Inventory of Psychedelic Experience* was developed. This covered such matters as background data (age, sex, etc.), use of drugs (non-psychedelic), and use of psychedelic drugs. Under use of psychedelic drugs were included questions regarding the amount of experience the person had with the various psychedelics, usual dosages taken, frequency of use, settings in which the drug was taken, purposes of LSD use, perceived consequences, attitudes regarding control of LSD, proselytism, and so forth.

THE HOMOSEXUAL GROUP

The homosexual group had come into being about one and a half years before the study. It grew out of a large, loosely organized group, all in the age range 19 to 30, consisting mostly of female homosexuals who had known one another over a period of years. One of this group began to take LSD in connection with an association with the people around Dr. Timothy Leary at Castalia, and she was very eager to introduce her friends to it. The others were curious, had seen articles about LSD and heard that it was a consciousness-expanding drug. Though somewhat apprehensive, three of them decided to take it with her.

Pattern of Growth

From this nucleus of four, the group of illicit users began to grow. For the first few months, new members derived largely from the original group and from other long-term friends who were curious about the drug. About 5 or 6 people were introduced to the drug at this time. However, not all the original group wished to join the LSD group. When asked how those who did not join differed from those who did, our informants replied that these were likely to be people who lived at home and who tended not to be independent in their thinking.

After the first few months, the group suddenly began to grow rapidly as a result of contacts with psychedelic organizations like the Neo-American Church. "Everything began to change. We started to meet

new people, we started to *want* to meet new people. Prior to that we had been solely in contact with homosexuals." Several of the newcomers, mostly experienced users, began to take LSD with the group on an occasional basis. Additionally, old friends who were curious about the drug, or new acquaintances who could be checked out readily, continued to be a source of new members.

The structure of the group now began to change. In addition to the core members who saw one another frequently, a peripheral group emerged who attended the parties irregularly. Some of these took LSD with the group, and nearly all smoked marijuana. At the time of the study, the group consisted of about 7 core and 25 peripheral members.

The Members

Seventeen of the group were female, 15 were male. The age range was 19 through 45, with a median of 24 years 6 months. Twenty-one were single, 11 were married. Sixteen had attended college for four or more years, 6 had some college, 8 had graduated from high school, while the education of the remaining 2 was unknown. Twelve of the group were professionals—social workers, university professors, school teachers, etc.; 6 were artists, dancers or musicians; 7 were students, 5 were in white collar occupations, 1 was a housewife and 1 was unemployed.

Seven had participated in the group during most of the one and one half years of its existence, 20 for about a year, 5 for less than a year. Seven had very frequent contact with the group, at least once per week with constant telephoning, 10 were involved only once or twice a month, and 15 made occasional appearances.

One had not taken LSD at all, 4 only once, 10 twice, 9 from ten to twenty-nine times, 6 from thirty to ninety-nine times, 2 more than one hundred times.

Homogeneity of Attitudes and Life Styles

The core members of the group were all Jewish and homosexuals, though some of the peripheral members were neither. The group as a whole consisted mostly of young adult professional, middle or upper middle class persons.

One of our informants described the group as "not over-rebellious non-conformists. We are pretty strongly individualists." She felt that they were all characterized by a lack of dogmatism in their beliefs, while their political orientation tended to be both liberal and passive. Our informants showed some ambivalence with regard to the desirability of

similarity of attitudes and life style in the group. On the one hand, all seemed to feel that they enjoyed the commonality of their interests, but there were complaints that the situation was too confining. One person felt that the inclusion of more heterosexuals in the group would help to broaden their orientation.

Stratification of the Group

The three core members whom we interviewed might be regarded as a coalition of leadership, for they initiated, planned and organized the activities of the group. Also, they had had more experience with the drug than the others, and status in the group was said to be partly a function of "level of development" in relation to the drug. This was variously defined as "lack of paranoia," "loving more," "insight into your own being," "seeing that choices exist and being able to make them" and so forth.

Introduction of New Members

In view of the need for secrecy, because of the illicit nature of the activity around which the group was organized, the introduction of new members presented special problems. While the original major source of new recruits was old and trusted friends, later, when the contacts of the group suddenly expanded, new acquaintances were introduced. In general, the recommendation of a friend was sufficient to check out new members.

One of our informants described how the group located new members as follows:

Usually one or another of us meets somebody who strikes us as being a particularly beautiful type of person and . . . it's like a whole kind of sharing thing, like wow! you're beautiful, I want to share you with my friends and I want to share my friends with you. (Beautiful was defined as "unpretentious," "on our level intellectually," "honest," "doesn't try to put on a big act.")

On the other hand,

We would not invite people that are strictly conformists, and would not invite people who are narrow-minded. We would not invite people who have a very middle class fear of drugs and, quote, addicts, and we would not invite people whom we haven't anything in common with.

Potential members were usually introduced to the group at a social occasion and brought into a drug session only later, after an informal consensus of the members. It was not regarded as necessary to ask permission, although notice was usually given beforehand when a visitor

was to be introduced. If the visitor was congenial to the others, one of the core members would slip around his neck a defraction-jewel necklace of a type originally purchased at Castalia. Then it would be left up to him whether he wanted to continue to come or not.

If a new member wished to take the drug, he would say something like, "Oh, I'd like to take a trip," and the group would reply, "Okay" or "Well, no." Before taking the drug he would be asked to read Leary's *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964), allowed to observe a drug session, and carefully coached with regard to what might happen.

In the beginning, the group felt the whole world should be turned on; later they became "very, very, very careful." On the whole, members were negative to signs of depression in the would-be drug taker, to "extreme reactions," and to those who were "weak personally." One member felt, however, that even "prepsychotics, psychotics, and schizophrenics" might benefit from LSD.

Thus, whereas in its early stages the group actively tried to interest others in becoming involved and taking LSD with them, this pattern had altered by the time we began our study. Our informants felt that a few might still proselytize, but in general, new members were not sought out. "They come because they met us and they stay if they like us." Some people were said to remain with the group even though they were afraid to take the drug.

Types of Activities of Group

This was an informally organized group. No formal records of activities were kept, though some members kept notes of the times they had taken LSD and the dosages. Also, there were no regularly scheduled meetings. The group, or part of it, would get together about once a week, but close friends might meet more often and spend much time on the telephone. Drug sessions occurred about once a month; the other meetings were social.

Sessions were usually held at the apartment of one of the three core members whom we interviewed. When the group first formed, ritual played an important part in the taking of LSD. Elaborate ceremony was planned around its ingestion, one such move being to dissolve the sugar cubes in a "common vessel" of tea to be passed among the members. A cornucopia for "natural" foods, and objects such as shells and driftwood, were often placed in the middle of the room; candles and incense were lit, poetry or psychedelic literature read, and Indian music played.

At the time of our study, some ritual was still employed in initiating new members on their first "trip," but the group had become impatient with lengthy preparations. As the capsule had largely replaced the sugar cube, the partaker of LSD now typically tended to pop it in his mouth, and "sit around and squirm and smoke a lot" waiting for the drug to take effect.

At the beginning, marijuana might be smoked to allay tension, and after three or four hours smoked again to prolong the "high," boost the experience, or break up "repetitive game patterns." Marijuana might also be used to ease re-entry at the end of the session.

Drug sessions could be divided into two categories: (1) work sessions with LSD, and (2) play sessions with LSD.

The purpose of a work, or "housecleaning," session was to enable the individual to get rid of his psychological hangups. Such a session, occurring about once a month, was preceded by a week or more of meditation on problems. The sessions were kept small (2–4 persons), only one person taking a large dose of LSD (250–500 mcg.), the others taking 80–150 mcg. This was done so that only one person would go deeply into himself, the others acting as guides, who might function as mirrors or a bridge between the two worlds.

Props were almost always used, but "at these sessions you try to keep the artifacts down, you know, and the music particularly soft and pleasant, and you try not to disturb anybody else."

Sessions usually began in the evening, and might last all night. Afterward, all present would have a meal together at the apartment or a favored restaurant. Then a kind of group therapy session would take place where the experiences were "interpreted" rather than "analyzed." Sometimes, however, the person who had taken LSD therapeutically would not want to discuss it until several days later.

Play sessions were described as looser in structure. These were sometimes planned and sometimes arose spontaneously. They might take place anywhere and might include people not on LSD. Play sessions quite deliberately had no "objective." They were primarily for fun, emphasizing the sensual. Usually, all would go outside and "just look at the world." Members might take a trip to the country, walk in a park, visit a museum, go to a concert, play or movie. All these activities were characterized by a strong feeling of "togetherness." There was a preoccupation with externals, and, in contrast to work sessions, emphasis on interaction—conversation, laughter, "ego play." When inside, the group often played with toys such as kaleidoscopes or plastic

bubbles. Like the work sessions, play sessions would invariably end with a common meal.

The members whom we interviewed felt that the original distinction between “work” and “play” sessions was now beginning to disappear. One said,

Usually we find that we accomplish more in terms of psychological development and working through problems at a play session than we will on a work session. This is something that we’ve only recently discovered. You know, you go after something and chances are you’re going to miss it.

Asked about bad trips, our informants stated that all members have had moments of fright under LSD, but that only one case of real panic had occurred, while drug-induced psychosis had never erupted in this group. Warmth and reassurance on the part of the guide was thought to be the best way to handle bad trips should they occur.

Non-LSD sessions took place at least once a week. These were usually parties held at the home of one of the core members at which the guests, who might include non-drug friends of the members, would converse, eat, dance, or play with a homemade stroboscope. Alcohol, usually beer or wine, was drunk sparingly by some. Marijuana was always available, DMT also had been tried. The group also enjoyed going to nice restaurants, movies or plays, without drugs.

All the members of the research team commented on the air of innocent gaiety which seemed to pervade the group. All their activities tended to be at once more childlike and more restrained than those at the alcohol parties typical of this age group. For instance, at Easter, the group regularly had an Easter-egg coloring party.

If they wanted to smoke pot, they smoked pot . . . and if somebody wanted to paint an egg, they painted an egg, and finally we all got together and decided we were going to scramble all the eggs and eat them, so that we did all together.

Hedonic Tone, Intimacy, Potency

The atmosphere of the group was described by all as pleasant and gay, with no fighting and little griping or complaining. One member described the group as “like a family. There’s a special kind of love that everyone has for everyone else.” The word love was frequently mentioned—“there’s lots of love and affection around,” and affection was expressed physically: “We kiss, we kiss a lot—we’re a real kissing group.”

On the other hand, physical sex was said not to be a part of their

drug experience, while drug-involved mass sex was apparently rare and hardly ever discussed. An orgy involving one boy and three girls did once occur spontaneously, however, and was said by one (who had not been on LSD at the time) to have been "a beautiful thing . . . very interesting." Nevertheless, sex-oriented or sado-masochistic groups which exist primarily for this purpose were disapproved of.

Our informants all said that the members of this group had developed a very intimate knowledge of one another. However, they stressed the fact that this intimacy was not sought, but just came up in relation to the drug experience. "You can't take LSD with somebody and not know what they're like inside."

All felt that this group had more significance for them than others they had belonged to. Their best friends were in the group, both because they tended to introduce people they were specially fond of to the group—"I love you so I want to share you with my group and my group with you"—and because relationships tended to become very close in the group. But all stressed the fact that they had outside friends and interests.

Group Goals and Shaping of Behavior

At its first drug experience, the goal of the group was mystical experience, as a result of the Castalia influence of the girl who introduced the others to LSD. This soon shifted to an interest in personality development and growth. "I think everybody's goal is to attain a high degree of productivity and peace of mind, freedom to make choices in a situation." Apart from this general common goal, the individual members had a variety of interests they wanted to explore under the drug. One, a scientist, wanted to examine the criteria for genius, another to experiment with ESP and telepathy. However, "we have a lot of ideas about what we'd like to do, but we haven't really gotten down to doing anything yet."

One of our informants attributed the interest of the group in personal development to its special character.

I think this group has a particular kind of makeup in its general homosexual background and I really feel that you have people who are more apt to be interested in changes than you might have in an ordinary heterosexual group.

The members felt that changes in their homosexual orientation had occurred and this was described as follows:

The human personality is like a diamond and has many facets, and I think what's happened to me or to Letty* and Matilda by talking to them is that you discover that your homosexuality is just a facet of your behavior and that it's allowed to be a facet that's dominating and there's no reason for that.

Another member described changes she had seen in the following ways:

Well, first myself. I went back to school and I got a better job. I took a position of authority which I'd never had before, and Matilda went back to school, even though she's teaching. We've definitely increased our activities, very social things and it used to be antisocial things. We used to go out to bars, but now we've been having a lot of home gatherings or we've been going out to some kind of activity, either music or art kind of functions.

The warmth and intimacy of this group and its basically conventional orientation appeared to facilitate beneficial life changes in its members which other LSD-taking groups might not. For instance, a young man who had recently begun to associate with the group told us he had taken LSD about eight times over a two-year period in other group contexts. Then in a state of "fear and desperation" he went off to Florida where he stayed for about five months. Toward the end of this time, when he was beginning to feel ready to return North in order to begin a new life, he happened to meet one of the core members of the homosexual group who was visiting Florida. Suddenly "everything changed." He came North, got a job which he very much likes, and when interviewed was happily enjoying the warmth and friendship of the group. He felt that the LSD which he had taken in another context had opened him up and prepared him for changes, but only in the warmth of the homosexual group did he begin to realize his potential.

In another case, one of the core members lost his job as a result of being taken to a psychiatric hospital in an LSD panic attack. Becker (1966) has pointed out that such a crisis can often be the first step in a frankly deviant career. However, this young man simply got himself another job in which such an item on his record would not cause him trouble. It is also of considerable interest that this panic attack occurred when he took LSD away from the group with some friends he was introducing to LSD.

In general, the group represented itself as very tolerant with regard to the behaviors of others in the group and their goals; however, in fact not all goals appeared to be equally acceptable. One member, an

* Names are fictitious.

advertising man, was using the drug for purposes of which the others did not approve—self-advancement at the expense of others. He was expelled from the group, but his expulsion was attributed to the fact that he was noisy and disturbing during LSD sessions—“he just annoyed the hell out of everybody else.”

Another member was expelled for awhile because she was on heroin, which the group did not approve. Later this member went to the hospital for treatment because she was told she couldn't go to yoga camp with the leader of the group unless she was off heroin.

This is a very funny thing you know. Sally never went in the hospital like that in her life. All of a sudden she goes in the hospital to get off heroin so she can go to yoga camp.

When the group disapproved of a behavior,

Well, first of all, we mention it to them and see if they're aware of what they're doing, and if they're aware of what they're doing, this is something that they have to do, then we don't say any more about it. Sometimes this is something that they're not aware of and it's enough just to call their attention to it.

However, if the individual was aware of his behavior and wished to persist in it,

We feel very strongly that the individual is the only one who can dictate to the individual . . . they have to do what they have to do, and we have no right to tell them, but we can avoid contact with them.

But this exclusion was not seen as punishment.

It's not, 'Oh well, you're doing a bad thing so you're getting punished now.' It's just a completely selfish thing. It's 'You're doing this and I don't want to be in contact with this myself so I will avoid contact with you while you are in this particular state.'

Attitudes Toward the Law

The group is composed of people who currently are law-abiding aside from their involvement with LSD and marijuana. There have been one or two who have taken narcotics in the past, an occasional charge of petty larceny, one arrest in connection with picketing, one of prostitution, and most, as mentioned before, are practicing homosexuals. All except the last mentioned are not generally characteristics of the group.

Their attitude toward the illegality of their drug activity is well summed up by one member who compares the present legal situation

to prohibition. They think these laws both ineffective and unwise, serving only to drive people underground, perhaps into the hands of the Mafia, or to "encourage kids out for kicks or to break the law on principle."

The group, in fact, tends to "find it amusing that something like this should be illegal." Another says: "We're breaking a law we don't believe in." And still another: "I've taken illegal drugs before and I felt guilty, but I never have (a guilty feeling) about LSD; I honestly believe in the drug."

Attitudes Toward Society at Large

Our informants reported that most of the members feel less conflict between their own styles, values and attitudes and those of society than they did prior to taking LSD. Asked about a tendency to withdraw from the concerns of society as a result of taking the drug, one member replied: "On the contrary . . . the only thing it's done is make us more discriminating in our choice of friends." She adds that they have less compulsion to do things they really don't want to do, and have a clearer perspective on this. Regarding society's goals and norms, she says she isn't sure what these are any more, but that she is much surer of her own. "And I would say (these) are productive and beneficial both to ourselves and for society in general."

THE TWO HETEROSEXUAL GROUPS

The two heterosexual groups developed in a similar way from a nucleus of close friends to a small core plus peripheral members. However, neither of these groups grew large as the homosexual group had done.

The *first group* consisted of two men in their mid-twenties, both members of the artistic, literary world. Each had had previous LSD experience. They took the drug together for a period of about one year, at which time a homosexual threat ended the relationship. During this time 8 or 9 visitors participated in drug sessions with the two core members, but most only came once; two others came more than once, but not more than three or four times. By and large, these visitors were also involved in the arts, and most had taken the drug before joining the group.

Our informant thought that this group had not grown larger because they were not people "prone to group activities." When taking LSD they did not want to be infringed on by someone else's personality—

Generally I find that most people have a tendency to bring me down, bring the level of experience down, so I don't feel it is desirable for myself to take it in a large number of groups unless I know that we have a strong rapport.

As in the homosexual group, active proselytizing was not a policy.

Most of the time it went this way—like we were always discussing it with many people, everyone was talking about it, I guess, and we said 'We're going to get some LSD, do you want to get some?' and they'd say, 'Yeah, here's my five dollars' and we'd all throw our money in and we'd all get the LSD on the same day. Now some of the people, we'd say, 'Okay, we're going to get it today. We're going to take it like Saturday. Do you want to take it Saturday?' and some of them would say, 'No, I can't,' and they'd take their cube and go home. The others would stay and it was like a consumer's co-op.

While this sounds rather casual, only those who were "intellectually curious or fairly open and ready to accept" were invited, and not "anybody that looked in any way deranged or was mad or looked violent." Nevertheless, a need for care in introducing new members was not stressed.

Drug sessions almost always took place at the home of the informant, about once every three months, occasionally more often. The drug was usually taken around six on a Saturday morning (when the two had got home from work), orally, without ceremony. The usual dosage was 250 mcg., or so they assumed, although our informant had once taken 1500 mcg. Various props were used, including Indian classical music, candles, the informant's paintings. The two would then settle down, either talking or silent, almost always with music.

Intimate personal matters were not discussed under the drug or after. There was exploration of self in post-drug sessions, but on a sort of mystical Jungian level. Therapy was not the object of the enterprise for this group. The goal was, in the words of our informant, "The clear light. Total mystic state. God."

Also, the day after taking the drug, our informant would paint. "The main reason I took LSD was to get ideas for painting and I always painted afterwards. I felt that it greatly enriched my creative sense."

However, in addition to these mystical and creative interests, one of the purposes of the sessions was to explore telepathic communication and "extrasensory vibratory experiences." The other man was very interested in black magic and demons, and we were told by our informant that "I saw him one day sit there in a chair and change physically into some sort of hissing, spitting, cat-like strange thing."

This interest in magic led to the following experiment by our informant and his friend.

We were both working in this bar together and this girl we worked with was the boss's sister, very hung up, very aggressive, very nasty, a noxious chick, and she was drinking Manhattans, so about the third Manhattan, Ted and I, he said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'I'm making another Manhattan for Alice,' and he said, 'Okay, let's make a good one this time,' and he incanted and he made special signs over the Manhattan and we gave it to her and she went home and died of cerebral hemorrhage, so I don't know if it's got anything to do with it or not, but he believed it, you know. She went home right after that and died of cerebral hemorrhage, half an hour later! Interesting.

Asked by our interviewer how he felt about this, our informant replied: "Well I tried to do it to her brother too, but it didn't work. Her brother really deserved it too."

While the two were taking the drug together, their already close friendship increased, enhanced, our informant felt, by the drug. However, the group ended, as we have indicated earlier, with a homosexual threat:

When he and I took it the last time, Penny (our informant's girl friend) was in the room and I was very much digging her. I was watching Penny change from a Vermeer into a dwarf, you know, run across the floor, and I was having a great time with that, and Ted apparently felt rejected in a certain sense and I felt his rejection, though I tried to overcome it, and then he had a homosexual thing going in his own mind which he didn't tell me anything about till later, but I suppose I sensed it . . . as far as mutual sharing the experience, it didn't come off.

Some months after we had interviewed this young man, we were notified that he had been acting strangely for some time. It appeared, on our going to see him, that six weeks previously he had taken two pink pills which he thought to have been either LSD or psilocybin, there following a "trip" from which he had not returned. When we saw him, he was delusional, suicidal, confused and disoriented. However, his friends and business associates, most of whom were college graduates, had made no attempt to get him to see a psychiatrist. They felt he was going through a useful experience and that he would come out of it at the proper time. Also, they thought a psychiatrist might actually be harmful to him because he wouldn't understand the situation. However, in their own way, they did try to help by reciting over him various magic numbers and formulas.

At our suggestion, the young man visited a psychiatrist who gave him a more conventional form of treatment with good results. He has since told us that he is now unable to take LSD, because it gives him severe headaches.

This incident throws an interesting light on Becker's (1966) theory that over time there have been fewer reports of psychotic disturbances associated with the use of certain drugs because there has been less anxiety produced by their use as knowledge of their effects has increased. It would appear that the reduced number of mental disturbances may result from the fact that the users tend to develop a tolerance for psychosis and take it as a natural and probably beneficial event. Interestingly, this point of view about mental illness is described in a recent paper by Mogar (1967).

The *second heterosexual group* consisted of two men and the girl friend of one. Our informant and his girl had already taken LSD together when they met the second man, and they introduced him to LSD. During the next six months, till the group broke up when the second man had to leave the city, the three took the drug together. From time to time one or two others took the drug with them, usually people who had not previously taken it. Our informant attributed the lack of growth of the group to the fact that the three core members had developed a sort of private feeling that tended to exclude others.

The members of this group, and the visitors, were all in their twenties, "working people," with some college background but by no means professional. They tended to hold similar religious and political views, and the short life of the group was attributed to this similarity.

The reason I think these groups have only lasted a certain amount of time is that the people were very similar and they exhausted their common experience in a fairly short time.

The major requirement for visitors to the group seemed to be an emotional bond, "people of whom we were fond enough to want to share the experience with," and these people would probably have "a certain openness, not a lot of grasping, a person who wasn't likely to be very demanding of any other person in the group." On the other hand, people would not be brought in "if it seemed likely that there was going to be some personal problem (which) might arise in an LSD session so all their attention would be diverted." The group did not actively try to bring new people in; however, "the group had a sort of rapport and freedom about them that would naturally make other people curious and maybe envious."

The drug was taken every Sunday. As the two men worked at night and got home at two or three in the morning, they would turn on then or get a few hours sleep first and then turn on. Sessions were

usually held in the same place—the apartment of the second man. Concertos by Vivaldi, Indian music and madrigals were played. No books or poetry were read during the session, though they would always make reference to Leary's *Manual*. Incense and candles were used, and psychedelic jewels served as a centering device.

Our informant and the other man ordinarily took either 250 or 500 mcg. of LSD; the girl never exceeded a 250 mcg. dose. On two or three occasions, our informant took 1000 mcg.

While the location of the sessions, the times and the props were always planned, there was no plan made for their content. A typical session was described as follows:

We would take it, just casually, not in a ritualistic way, and then while we were waiting for it to take effect, we usually would separate out and try to achieve a state of quiet in ourselves. We'd interact very little. However, while there was very little interaction on a rational level, there would be a great deal of communication on a subrational level. We would become well aware of the presence and the state of mind of the other persons in the group . . . then the group would gradually begin to drift together and then we would sort of discuss what was happening and we would explore this area and that area and after about four or five or six hours we'd do something if we were going to do it, such as going to the Botanical Gardens or bicycling or to a museum.

Though sometimes they went out, all on the drug, "usually Sunday in this city is a very harsh experience and we'd end up getting back in the house as soon as possible, because of the harshness and ugliness of what was going on there."

On a few occasions the one man and his girl would go off together for sexual experience during the session. The drug was said to produce "sexual intensification" and "total emotional involvement," though our informant reported that his own sex experience under the drug ranged from impotence to ecstasy. The first was more frequent when he began to attempt sex under the drug.

Sessions typically lasted about fourteen hours and they would eat ritually at the end, about half the time going out to eat at one particular place. If at home, they would have fresh fruits, bread, wine and cheese.

The atmosphere of the group was very warm. "It became a very emotional and satisfying unit, a very loving unit." Our informant described the goal of the group as follows: "Trying to achieve a natural unity with the cosmos and with ourselves."

Dramatic changes of personality were not reported for the three members or any of their guests. However, our informant told us, both

of the men felt they were better able to make decisions as a result of their drug experience, while the girl, too, who had been very shy and introverted, became much more outward-going and relaxed and was able to give up her private therapy sessions which had gone on for several years.

DISCUSSION

The three groups showed many similarities and some differences. Before relating the group characteristics to life changes in their members, let us review some of these similarities and differences.

In the first place, each of the illicit LSD groups showed different patterns of growth and development, apparently in relation to the personalities of their core members. The homosexual group, with several very active extroverted types among its founding members, grew rapidly and has existed for several years. The two heterosexual groups, whose core members "were not prone to group activities," remained small and went out of existence after a few months when the core membership was seriously disrupted.

While one group was primarily composed of homosexuals and the other two of heterosexuals, each group tended to include persons similarly young, middle class and fairly well educated, and in each the members were described as being alike in terms of social, political and religious attitudes and opinions. This similarity was deemed desirable by the users because of the intimate nature of the contact which took place under the drug. On the other hand, it was also felt that some variety in the orientation of the members was desirable in order not to exhaust the common experience of the group. Indeed, the decline of one of the heterosexual groups was attributed in part to lack of variety in the membership.

In all the groups we were told of increased intimacy and closeness related to the drug experience. However, this was associated with different effects in each. In one of the heterosexual groups, a homosexual threat broke up the group when one of the men became jealous of the other's relation with the girl. In the other heterosexual group, the three core members developed "a sense of unity which tended to exclude others." On the other hand, the homosexual group, which had a more extroverted style, developed considerable freely-expressed warmth and intimacy which was readily shared with outsiders.

However, none of the groups tended to function as active proselyt-

izers for the drug, though the homosexual group reported they had initially acted in this way. Various reasons, apart from the fear of informers, were given for not introducing people casually to the drug. These ranged from a sense of responsibility for what would happen to the initiates, to a simple disinclination to share so intimate an experience with just anybody. In all groups, caution was expressed about giving the drug to severe neurotics or potential psychotics.

All three groups were informally organized with a small core of active members and a larger periphery who participated less frequently. The informality of the three groups was shown by their lack of formal records and regularly scheduled meetings. It is of interest that while various props such as incense, music and flowers were routinely associated with drug use in all three groups, in none did a very rigid form of ritual develop. On the contrary, in the homosexual group even the work session-play session differentiation, with which they had begun, disappeared in time.

We noted many similarities, such as a common meal after the experience, in the three groups. Indeed, we felt that none of the groups tended to develop a specific style of "culture" of its own, but that all borrowed heavily from the general psychedelic culture, with little subsequent modification. We felt it possible that some of the ways in which they became similar—e.g., food preferences (like most psychedelic people, the members of all three groups favored fruits, nuts, vegetables and cheese)—might be related to the effects of the drug itself. Other similarities, like the language patterns (all used words like "acid," "beautiful," "wow"), probably derived in part from interaction with other psychedelic persons and also from exposure to the hippie culture in the psychedelic journals and the popular press.

While the groups did not show great eagerness to turn on non-psychedelics, all of them seemed very eager to get in touch with other psychedelics. In part these contacts were made in order to ensure sources of supply. Group members also greatly enjoyed and profited from sharing information regarding the various drugs available and special methods of producing interesting effects. In addition, they could gossip about the psychedelic community and the efforts of the police. These interactions served to develop and disseminate the psychedelic culture.

It is also true that the popular press, with its many articles on the psychedelic users, has helped to spread among the group itself a common knowledge of their rituals, language and behavior. This has facili-

tated the development of a common style and sense of identity. Thus, as is common in non-conformist groups which tend to regard themselves as highly individualized, to the observer the psychedelic users appear remarkably alike in attitudes and behavior.

However, variability in the groups did appear with regard to their goals in using the drug, although, probably as a result of Leary's influence, mystical experience was seen, or had at some point been seen, as a goal in all cases. Both heterosexual groups could be described as seeking "the clear light," though one group additionally leaned in the direction of personality growth and the other toward magic and "vibratory experiences." After a very brief flirtation with mysticism, the homosexual group had settled down to self-therapy, and only in this group was self-therapy seen as a major purpose.

Interestingly, marked personality benefits, such as homosexuals being helped toward heterosexuality, members going back to school, giving up heroin, etc., were reported only in the homosexual group. Indeed, the therapeutic activities of this group reminded us very much of a hospital program in which we had treated alcoholics with LSD and group therapy (Cheek, 1966). The illicit setting had the advantage of long-term intimate follow-up of those who took the drug but the disadvantages of lack of medical supervision and lack of trained psychotherapeutic guidance. As one of our informants said, "We're not psychiatrists and we're not saviors and all we can do is love somebody."

The members of one of the heterosexual groups also reported less dramatic benefits in terms of better ability to make decisions and more relaxed sociability. But in the other heterosexual group, where magic was a major preoccupation, a movement toward homosexual interest occurred and a murder by magical means was attempted.

Thus, our preliminary observation of the three groups suggested that LSD use by their members had served to open up new possibilities for experience and that the direction and extent of life change was, as hypothesized, related to the group setting in which the drug was taken. It was of interest that in the illicit setting we had observed life changes which society would regard as favorable as well as some that appeared less so.

SUMMARY

This paper describes a preliminary investigation of the nature and functioning of illicit LSD-using groups and the significance of these

groups for life changes in their members. Over a one-year period three such groups were studied by means of informal observations, focused interviews with strategic members regarding group and individual characteristics, and self-administered questionnaires. The three groups included a large homosexual group, oriented mainly towards self-therapy, and two smaller, heterosexual groups, both of which were seeking mystical experience, and one of which had an interest in magic and "extrasensory vibratory experience." In the large homosexual group, dramatic alterations in attitudes and behavior were reported and these appeared to be related to the warmth and intimacy of the group and its basically conventional orientation. In the other two groups, no such dramatic changes were reported. In a study now in progress these matters will be pursued in greater depth and more rigorously.

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