

Perspectives on the Use and Abuse of Psychedelic Drugs

Daniel X. Freedman, M.D.

University of Chicago

Both the use and abuse of psychedelic drugs (which are "cultogenic") stem from our amazed response to the subjective experience evoked. Current abuse also rests upon the strains inherent in youth. These have been welded by the psychedelic prophets to a drug mystique with sufficient sensationalism to lead to self-experimenting. The results are quite out of control of those who indulge in "advertisements for themselves." Problems in studying patterns of use and inferring what is primary and secondary in the drug reaction are reviewed; e.g., the "power of suggestion" in the use of almost any psychoactive drug to escape drab or threatening reality can complicate the analysis of folk usage and the definition of specifically psychedelic patterns of drug response.

The reasons for the widely different effects and outcomes—psychosis, religious enhancement, or attitudinal or therapeutic change—require analysis. The relationship of the primary state to the mechanisms seen in psychosis is traced. A multipotential fluid state leads to these various outcomes; overemphasis on certain features of the

primary state can lead to poor judgment and alienation as modes of adjustment in the postdrug state. The breakdown of boundaries and constancies in the drug state can persist in benign or traumatic forms. Recurrence of LSD states without the drug are also similar to recurrent nightmares and symptoms in the traumatic neuroses. The drugs produce a "need for synthesis" and adjustments both during and after the drug state are examined. Well-integrated and stable groups and well-structured objectives are important to sustain integrity during the drug state and later to synthesize its effects. There are similarities between the drug state and its after effects on the one hand and the non-drug-induced mystical states, such as conversion, on the other. Review of current studies and a search for "monuments" which record the effects of these drugs on creativity or mental health lead to the notion that we have been more awed than aided by them. Essentially, the drugs pose important and insufficiently pursued basic problems for neuropsychology and experimental psychiatry.

PIPER METHYSTICUM (KAVA)

The Function of Kava in Modern Samoan Culture

Lowell D. Holmes

Wichita State University, Wichita, Kans.

"The Function of Kava in Modern Samoan Culture" deals primarily with the social and ceremonial functions of kava-drinking in contemporary Samoan society. The paper therefore comments more on what kava does for a society than on what it does to an individual. In modern Samoa, kava-drinking is directly associated with village political organization in that the order of drinking corresponds exactly to the status hierarchy. First, kava is a privilege associated with paramount rank. The mythological sanctions of the ceremony are described in order to illuminate the meaning of the numerous ritual details. The paper further describes physiological and psychological effects on Samoan and European kava-drinkers.

While paralysis of the lower limbs, eye disorders, and scaly skin conditions have been attributed to the consumption of the beverage in other Pacific island areas, such adverse effects were not observed in Samoa. Therapeutic claims are also cited and analyzed. This account of kava use in Samoa describes in detail the proper methods and procedures involved in preparing, serving, and drinking kava. It also discusses the role of the talking chief in announcing and directing the ritual. In Samoa, kava-drinking has been sanctioned by both the church and the government. The paper describes the ceremony as a stabilizing force in a culture that is struggling to maintain its identity in the face of increasing western acculturation.