

First I want to enter an apology for messing up mailing of SF WEEKLY for Andy Porter; it's been hectic around the Magic Farm. Hopefully after the beginning of the year things will smooth out.

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I got a long letter from New Mexico on a Recent Topic in FIRST DRAFT, which will probably string out into two issues (since I don't want to do a four-page FIRST DRAFT just now). It's by no means in agreement with the things I said, and for this reason I feel bound to print it, as being a little of the Other Side in the discussion.

Kay Anderson, 234 Shangri-la NW, Albuquerque, NM 87107 - Dec 11, 1967

Dear Dave,

I'm interested in your discussion of LSD in the copies of FIRST DRAFT that came today. I'd like to make some comments, if I may. (I've never taken marijuana, LSD, or any such, and I'm not well acquainted with anyone who has.)

You mention that an LSD experience can be a good thing if a person knows what to expect and what he is getting into. I wonder how a person can know this, since from what I've read a major factor in a trip is the impact on the senses of all sorts of previously unknown experiences. Most descriptions of trips that I've come across emphasize how strange the experience was, how ecstatic or terrifying or whatever. None of the trip-takers seemed to have had any idea what was going to happen, and it seemed that the trip was made up for the most part of their reaction to stimuli -- the sound of a telephone ringing would set off sequences of hallucinations, for instance. I should think that it would be as hard to know what to expect of an LSD trip one was embarking on as to know what to expect one's dreams to be about tonight. (Well, if you seldom have nightmares in your dreams, then likely tonight you won't have a nightmare. And in spite of what you say, experienced trippers seem to have a pretty good idea of the type of experience they are going to have. This seems the crux to me. -- dgv}} Then there are numerous cases of someone "freaking out" disasterously after several, or many, good trips...surely he should have known what to expect and should have been in no danger, if your hypothesis is correct. (True. But it seems clear to me that there are two kinds of "freaking out" or bad trips. One is genuinely a psychotic break, a kind of mental disaster that can conceivably rack a person up fairly permanently. The other is described as a "bad trip" but the person describing it makes it clear that it didn't bother him. This second variety of bad trip is, I suspect, far more common than the first, and in fact seems to be almost as productive as a good trip. However, I agree that this needs more checking out. -- dgv}}

I also wonder how it is possible to "study up" and know what to expect of a trip, since every description I've read has been very unclear on just what did happen. Usually the person describing his trip will be emphatic that he learned a great deal about something...himself, God, the universe, but what he learned somehow can't be communicated. Maybe great emotional experiences can't, but it certainly doesn't help anyone know what to expect. To quasiquote a physician, "I'm suspicious of any experience that slithers out the bottom of the mind, leaving behind only a vague sense of conviction."

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((KAY ANDERSON's letter continues, but first with a dgv comment)):

{(What you describe here are the failings of people who are basically inarticulate in the first place, and, yes, to me also much of the reports are unsatisfactorily vague. But try Alan Watts on the subject. I came across him after I'd done the four issues on the subject, and if you want clarity, there is the man with clarity. In fact, that's a general recommendation to everyone. -- dgv)}

Possibly I fill the bill as the non-user who writes to tell you you don't know what you're talking about...except that I'm not saying you don't know what you're talking about. Neither do I. I'm just offering you my hear-say in response to yours. I'd be interested to know what any actual LSD users that might write to you would have to say. But now we come to some points that I do know something, if not a great deal, about.

About the broken-chromosome phenomena: I haven't heard that aspirin and coffee cause chromosome breakage. If they do, you must consider how frequently, how readily (does it take 90 gallons of coffee, or how much, to begin to cause breakage), and which chromosomes. Certain substances have an affinity for damaging or changing certain chromosomes and leave all others alone. The substance that causes German measles to cause Mongolian idiocy has an affinity for a certain pair of chromosomes... the rubella Mongoloid shows these damaged chromosomes. ((The broken chromosomes in LSD users, according to the work done so far -- which has been seriously and scientifically challenged by other researchers -- have been found in examining, I recall, the white blood cells. Whether the chromosomes in the spermatazoa and eggs are similarly damaged seems not yet to have been investigated, altho this wd seem to me to be the crucial point. -- dgv)}

LSD has not been around for very many years, actually. I don't think it was over ten years ago that the first studies on LSD affecting the behavior of animals came out. I remember seeing a newsreel in school showing a cat dosed with LSD cowering in terror of a mouse in his cage. Human experiments came later and at first were virtually confined to men, I believe. Remember how long thalidomide was on the market before it was found to cause deformities in children born of women who had taken it at a certain stage of their pregnancy. It had been certified and released by European equivalents of the FDA, after years of study and experimentation. It just happened that in those years no researcher happened to take the right amount at the right time in her pregnancy and bear a defective child. {(And yet Thalidomide is a superb sleeping compound -- as long as you're not pregnant.)}

As a matter of fact, I recall three cases from the Journal of the AMA in which a child with congenital deformities attributed to the mother having taken LSD was presented. {(Attributed -- but by whom and for what reason? The mother had taken LSD? Post hoc, propter hoc. I want to see more than just an occasional coincidence. LSD is far from being the only substance that might be capable of causing deformities; how many others had these mothers been exposed to? I wdn't be surprised if 50,000 females by now had taken LSD; perhaps many more. There shd be thousands of hysterical hippie mothers with deformed babies by now, if the stuff's as bad as thalidomide. But we're at the bottom of the page. Horrible Examples will be continued next week, and my apologies for breaking this highly interesting letter, Kay. -- dgv)} □□ And here is dgv back at his regular stand, hoping you are the sane...

-- dgv