

Psychedelic State Fluid

Descriptions of the onset of psychosis and of experiences people have had under LSD suggest similar psychic changes

► THE PSYCHEDELIC experiences of an LSD user, a religious mystic or an artist, are "closely related" to the mental changes that precede acute psychosis, two eminent psychiatrists have reported. Whether this period of vision and expanded awareness bodes good or ill for the individual is determined by factors of personality not yet understood.

Drs. Malcolm B. Bowers and Daniel X. Freedman of Yale University base their hypothesis on descriptions of the onset of psychosis given by hospital patients over a two-year period. In every one of eight cases reported by Drs. Bowers and Freedman in *General Psychiatry*, 15:240, 1966, the patients have described an experience comparable to that of an LSD user, or an exceptionally creative individual.

One 21-year-old patient, for instance, reported he "had a great awareness of life, truth and God."

"I went to church," he said, "and

suddenly all parts of the service made sense. My senses were sharpened."

Another said, "Thoughts spun around in my head and everything—objects, sounds, events—took on special meaning for me. I felt like I was putting the pieces of a puzzle together."

A third patient described a "revelation" in which sights and sounds possessed a keenness that he had never experienced before. He felt an unusual sense of empathy with his friend.

Still another stated "I began to experience goodness and love for the first time." Life for him, said the psychiatrists, had taken on an "intense benevolent quality."

All these experiences were followed quickly by illness, ranging from catatonic psychosis to severe agitation and acute paranoid psychosis.

Nevertheless, these "altered" states of thought and perception have much in common, not only with the LSD or mescaline experience but with other intense conditions described by religious converts and artists.

The poets William Blake, Samuel Coleridge, and Rainer Maria Rilke, as well as musician Johannes Brahms, have described experiences comparable to those given by the patients, the psychiatrists said, and have held these shifts of perception to be an integral part of their creative gift.

Also in psychotherapy, crisis periods may be characterized by "exhilaration, new modes of experiencing and perceiving, transient fear mixed with intense happiness."

The wide range of conditions under which heightened awareness can occur indicates an "innate capacity (like the dream) of which the human mind in a most general sense is capable."

Clearly, the psychiatrists said, the psychedelic experience has many potentials. It seems to be a "fluid" state that can lead to excruciating illness, or to new self-knowledge.

To discover exactly what elements of the ego, what assets and liabilities in personality structure, make the difference would be to illuminate crucial questions relating both to psychosis and creative insight, they said.

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