Scientists dispel myths about LSD

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Dr. Joseph C. Schoolar of the Houston State Psychiatric Institute and Dr. Thomas Cantrell of the Rice chemistry department spoke at Baker College Tuesday night on “The Raw Facts about LSD.”

They presented a great deal of rather peripheral information on the subject, but were forced to conclude, in Schoolar’s words, that “the hard facts may bring out hard ignorance.”

Schizoid Treatment

Schoolar began by listing some of the different uses to which LSD has been put by psychiatrists and the medical profession in general. The drug has been used with varying degrees of success in the treatment of alcoholism, autistic children, and in cases of terminal illnesses.

The most promising field, Schoolar continued, seemed to be research on and treatment of schizophrenia. It was thought when LSD was first discovered that a drug-induced psychosis bore great resemblance to the manifestations of a schizoid condition.

Schoolar pointed out two barriers to use of LSD for such treatment. He presented evidence from tests at UCLA that the characteristics of an LSD “experience” were actually strikingly different from genuine schizophrenia.

Bad Trips

LSD was disappointing in psychiatric sessions, Schoolar commented, because psychiatrists want patients to “get to the roots of their problems themselves, through their own ego-strength and without artificial release of inhibitions.”

Schoolar presented further information gained at UCLA from people who had entered the mental hospital there for treatment after “bad trips.” He admitted, however, that such data were not reliable because the subjects who turned themselves in were not typical of the average LSD-user.

From the UCLA investigation, however, Schoolar pointed out certain misconceptions about the people who use LSD. Of the seventy people studied, only three were artists and seven were students. Other than 24 who were unemployed, the largest group represented were ten businessmen under treatment.

Heroin

In Dr. Schoolar’s own experience at the Houston Psychiatric Institute, he has never had a patient who has taken LSD who has also had experience with heroin.

At UCLA only 4 percent of the LSD-users had also taken heroin. He therefore concluded that there did not seem to be any connection between the use of the two drugs.

Dr. Cantrell spoke mainly about the chemistry of LSD. Like Schoolar, however, he prefaced his remarks by saying, “at the present time, nobody is sure about anything.”

Chemical Synthesis

Original investigations, Cantrell pointed out, led researchers to think that schizophrenia was caused by an excess production of adrenalin in the body. They arrived at this conclusion by noting that adrenalin converts to adrenochrome by a ring closure.

Injection of this adrenochrome into volunteers created schizophrenia-like effects, but it was soon found that the effects were not the same in all people nor were they as similar to schizophrenia as was originally thought.

Cantrell emphasized that the popular press is dead wrong in saying that LSD may be manufactured by “any reasonably competent chemistry student.” He pointed out that the original synthesis took seven or eight years and the researcher was awarded a Nobel prize for his efforts.

Even if it were not necessary to manufacture one’s own lysergic acid, it would still take sophisticated equipment and a competent chemist to create the drug. Lysergic acid is under strict governmental control, however, and can only be obtained by those whom the Food and Drug Administration deems “qualified researchers.”

To mollify the potential do-it-yourselfers in the audience, Cantrell did point out that it is not very difficult to synthesize mescaline with the proper reagents and a five or six step reaction. He observed that the price of those starting materials is now so low that the chemical houses must be selling them in large quantities.

The discussion following the talks centered around the reliability of the statistics which Dr. Schoolar presented. It became obvious that no data on the subject are even approaching completeness.

Both panelists seemed to agree with Dr. Timothy Leary’s suggestion that no one should take statistics on LSD experiences seriously until much more research is performed.