Studies Show LSD Might Damage Human Chromosomes

Simon Galubara

UPS — If you're tripping, don't read this now. Save it for later, and enjoy your trip Otherwise—Evidence, admittedly somewhat inconclusive, has been brought forth seemingly indicating that LSD can do damage to human chromosomes. Studies are being made in Buffalo, Bellevue University Hospital here, and at the University of Oregon. The first work reported on, that of Buffalo scientists, is the least significant.

As reported in *Science* magazine, (Vol. 155, No. 3768: "Chromosomal Damage in Human Leukocytes Induced by Lysergic Acid Diethylamide"), certain white blood cells, grown in a test tube, showed evidence of chromosome damage, after being soaked with LSD. This experiment means little, as test-tube cultures often respond, chemically, quite differently from living flesh. The work done in Oregon gives far greater pause: eight acid users were tested for chromosome damage. Six of the eight registered the damage. The two who did not, both had never had doses exceeding about 200 micrograms, leading some scientists to conclude that damage only occurs with doses over 300 micrograms. A further study, done at Buffalo, found a "highly significant excess" of genetic abnormalities in the blood cells of four LSD users examined, including a baby who had been "exposed to LSD" before birth.

The blood cells studied, leukocytes, help the body to fight disease and combat infection. The results, however, if any, of the chromosomal damage, are not yet understood. All scientists involved have stressed the impossibility of reaching any conclusions at the present time. And, at least one government-approved drug, a live measles vaccine, is known to produce chromosome damage similar to that apparently produced by LSD. The acid damage itself, according to Oregon geneticist Jose Egozque (pronounced "ee-GOTH-quay"), consists of breaks in the chromosomes, and wrong combinations of chromosome pieces. A study being done at Bellevue Hospital in New York will probably solve a few puzzles; unlike most of the tests published so far, the Bellevue study will be statistically sound, being based on a fairly large sampling of acid users.

Meanwhile, many have stopped using acid. Certain others, having heard the news, choose to continue. Rationales for this can get interesting: some say the tests are a government hoax, designed to stop the spread of acid. Others say that any result of genetic alteration from acid will, necessarily, have to be of a beneficial nature. Sorry to bring you down, if this does, but that's simply not possible—the Mutation that proves favorable is one in a billion billion (estimated), and it would hardly be produced by genetic distortion gross enough to be detected in 1967.

No, it's too early to draw any conclusions at all. Since the possibility suggests itself that genetic damage sustained by LSD users may be transferable to their offspring, the ethical question raises itself: does one have the right to experiment on human beings?

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