

Erika Dyck, *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD on the Canadian Prairies*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0887557330

Lysergic acid diethylamide, the semisynthetic psychedelic drug widely known as LSD, hasn't always been the mysterious archetype of dangerous escapism that it is today: it was once thought of as a major addition to the psychotherapeutic process and a gateway to the elusive unconscious. The researchers of the Weyburn, Saskatchewan research centers, who hailed from every corner of the Western World, didn't merely study LSD on a speculative or theoretical level. They, alongside their participants, used the drug themselves from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, in order to explore the many facets of an altered consciousness that they believed could change the world's understanding of the human mind. Author Erika Dyck, who is the Canada Research Chair in History at the University of Saskatchewan, describes this important movement mainly through the eyes of psychiatrist Humphry Osmond, one of the leading figures of this captivating and unheeded movement. She repeatedly and adamantly highlights her sense that this use of human research was not as unethical or precarious as it may sound. On the contrary, she shows that the experimental practices carried out in this center were just as rigorous as those used today in psychological research, from participant consent, to data interpretation. *Psychedelic Psychiatry* explains how researchers and scientists of the early post-World War II era believed that the spiritual experiences engendered by psychedelic drugs were more than defiance or a diversion to their consumers — and why sociopolitical forces condemned and halted their efforts.

Dyck did extensive historical fieldwork through the Weyburn research archives, as well as other institutes that investigated the scientific usage of LSD, and interviewed dozens of investigators, therapists, and research participants who were directly involved in the psychedelic psychiatry movement. She reports that these sources agree overwhelmingly that the LSD's cognitive and sensory effects, still widely assumed to be the drug's main effect, were dwarfed by the "mystical, religious, and spiritual experience" (Dyck 41) they provoked. Osmond had originally been exploring the relationship between psychedelic drugs and adrenaline, positing that an irregularity in adrenaline production could be the cause of psychosis, but this transcendent sensation of bonding with the world was Osmond's validation that LSD could be instrumental in psychology's efforts to develop new levels of empathy and connection between psychotherapists and their patients. A drove of psychologists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists were rapidly convinced by Osmond's empirical demonstrations of this notion and psychedelic psychotherapy quickly spread out from the Weyburn laboratories to clinical psychology private practices, and eventually, onto university campuses and then into the wider population of North America over the span of a few years.

This promising research on the use of psychedelics in psychological settings, and the ensuing clinical applications, which quickly became mainstream practice, were quickly dented by embellished media descriptions of the terrors of LSD *bad trips* and the atrocious behaviors of those who became addicted to it. These often-fabricated stories turned the government against the new LSD-abusing counterculture, to which psychedelic researchers like Osmond were hurriedly associated. Ironically, individuals suffering from alcohol dependence were one of the main clinical populations whose psychological well-being was shown to improve significantly when using LSD as part of their therapeutic process. In fact, although the recently-founded Alcoholics Anonymous group quickly dissociated itself from the psychedelic movement on the grounds that replacing the abuse of one substance with another is unproductive, its co-founder Bill Wilson's experiences with LSD in his own

efforts towards sobriety had made him a believer in the cause and a silent supporter of Osmond's efforts. The socio-political ramifications of a hasty association between LSD and a rising antisocial counterculture, fueled by the overstating media, brought psychiatric LSD research to a quick expiry. By the end of the 1960s, almost all research of this kind had been stopped globally.

For much of her book, Dyck Osmond's methods of selecting participants for these studies, as well as the settings and methods that best fit them. Her accounts of these psychometric and procedural aspects of his research often seem to be accompanied by a sense of longing for an era when scientists benefited from the nonexistence of the many inflexible standards of methodical examination that technologists of our time must categorically yield to. She seems to suggest that this occasionally granted them the opportunity to let their creativity and imagination lead the way to innovative and exhilarating empirical work.

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