

The Personalities Behind the Use of Psychedelics for Technical Problem Solving and Learning Skills

by R. Stuart. 31-October-2024

Myron Stolaroff's IFAS

Myron J. Stolaroff was an executive at the Ampex Data Systems Corporation, a California-based company that specialized in audio and videotape technologies. Captain Al Hubbard and his wife Rita administered a small dose (66 micrograms) of LSD to Stolaroff in 1956. This caused Stolaroff to have a death-rebirth experience that enabled him to realize that much of his unhappiness and many of his neurotic tendencies were rooted in his birth trauma. Stolaroff became convinced that LSD was "the most important discovery of mankind."ⁱ Stolaroff introduced numerous of his co-workers to LSD, causing one skeptical Ampex executive to slam his fist on a table and say, "What if this nutball drives our best men crazy?"ⁱⁱ

By the end of 1956, Stolaroff founded the California Institute for Advanced Study, which in 1960 was re-branded as the International Foundation for Advanced Study (IFAS) in Menlo Park, CA. Stolaroff was also the president of IFAS (pronounced "if as"). From 1961 till 1965, IFAS conducted the only scientific study about using psychedelics (LSD and mescaline) for technical problem solving.ⁱⁱⁱ IFAS charged \$500 per session for clients who wanted to use the psychedelic experience to solve a scientific or technical problem. There were almost 350 subjects in this study.

Technician's testimonial

Retired Navy Captain John Busby, 44, used LSD just once and solved an elusive problem in pattern recognition while developing intelligence equipment for a Navy research project.

"With LSD, the normal limiting mechanisms of the brain are released," he says, "and entirely new patterns of perception emerge."



While using LSD at IFAS, Captain Busby developed sonar so the U.S. Navy could detect Soviet submarines. *Life* magazine, 25-March-1966.

Stolaroff's team consisted of:

- Charles Savage, MD was IFAS's medical director. His wife Ethyl also helped out.
- James H. Fadiman was IFAS's staff psychologist. He was affiliated with the psychology department at San Francisco State College and worked at Stanford Research Institute's Augmentation Research Center. As the youngest member of the team, he is the only one still alive.
- Robert Horton McKim, professor of mechanical engineering at Stanford University.^{iv}
- Robert E. Mogar, associate professor of psychology and director of the Institute for Psychedelic Research at San Francisco State College. Mogar founded this institute in 1965.^v
- Willis W. Harman, professor of electrical engineering and physics at Stanford University and later a regent of the University of California. He learned about LSD from the philosopher Gerald Heard. Hubbard introduced Harman to LSD in the late 1950s.^{vi} Hubbard recruited Harman to be the IFAS vice president.

Alfred Matthew Hubbard (1901-1982) was commonly called "Captain Al Hubbard". He was not formally a part of IFAS's research team or listed as an author on any of its publications. However, Hubbard was instrumental in organizing this technical problem-solving project. He supplied the Sandoz LSD used in IFAS research. Operating outside of the public limelight, Hubbard's unseen hand was busy initiating and shaping clinical psychedelic research in the United States and Canada in the 1950s and early 1960s. Lee and Shlain recounted that, "IFAS was the brainchild of Hubbard, who undoubtedly leaned on his political connections in Washington to insure [sic] that Harman and his colleagues would be allowed to continue their drug investigations even after the first big purge of above-ground LSD research by the FDA in the early 1960s."^{vii}

Due to the federal government shutting down LSD research, IFAS ended its study in 1965. The IFAS team concurrently operated at the Institute for Psychedelic Research at San Francisco State College, now called San Francisco State University. Before this institute could get up and running, it closed in 1966, the same year that LSD became illegal in California.

Willis Harman set up Hubbard to guide LSD sessions at the Stanford Research Institute's Alternative Futures Project, which introduced

influential intellectuals and business leaders to LSD.^{viii} Harman put Hubbard on the SRI payroll as a security consultant, although he did not do security.

Stolaroff lent Hubbard about \$100,000, and their friendship fell apart when Hubbard was unable or unwilling to repay this debt. After LSD was banned federally in 1968, Stolaroff became disillusioned. He concluded that society would never again permit psychedelic research. Eventually, after storing IFAS's voluminous, meticulously detailed records for many years, he threw away most of them away, destroying the invaluable data that described the experiences of the subjects.^{ix} He later regretted this. Nevertheless, Stolaroff discreetly continued working with legal hallucinogens such as 2C-T-2 and 2C-T-7 invented by his friend Sasha Shulgin. He self-published an anonymous pamphlet that described the use of Shulgin compounds for practicing the learning of skills such as a foreign language. He recounted that one woman made progress in learning German when, under the influence of a psychedelic, she realized that German was a beautiful language, whereas previously she thought it sounded unattractively guttural. Stolaroff wrote three other books about psychedelics and spend his later years practicing Buddhist meditation.^x He died in 2013.

A documentary film showed some IFAS members reminiscing about their work.^{xi} Another film shows Stolaroff's lecture at the 1997 Mind States Conference.^{xii}

In addition to the IFAS study, scattered throughout the psychedelic literature are sporadic accounts of individuals using a psychedelic, with or without premeditated intent, to visualize possible solutions to technical issues. Take, for example, Herman Kahn. During the Cold War, Kahn was one of America's leading nuclear strategists. He was employed by the Rand Corporation and founded the Hudson Institute, a CIA-affiliated think tank dedicated to national security issues. He co-authored a book on futurism and used LSD repeatedly during the 1960s. Kahn, who weighed over 300 pounds, waddled around the hippie neighborhood in Manhattan's East Village to monitor the psychedelic scene, but he was not sympathetic toward this subculture.^{xiii} Jay Stevens recounted:

Sidney Cohen was instrumental in turning on not only his colleagues, mostly psychiatrists and psychologists, but a few writers and scientists as well. During one stretch his office was full of analysts from the Rand Corporation, the semisecret think tank located in Santa Monica. One of them, Herman Kahn, took

LSD and lay on the floor murmuring “wow” every few minutes. Later he claimed that he had spent the time profitably reviewing bombing strategies against mainland China.^{xiv}

The Two Bernards

In 1960, Bernard Roseman manufactured the first batch of underground LSD, at least the first that became publicly known. In 1962, he and James Bernard Copley became inseparable friends. They were known as “the two Bernards”. Being interested in hypnosis, they founded the Hypnosophic Institute in 1960 in Joshua Tree, California. In 1963, the two Bernards tried to sell bulk quantities of Roseman’s LSD to various legitimate researchers in the United States and Canada. LSD was still legal and not yet stigmatized. They sold a small quantity to Myron Stolaroff.

Upon learning that the Bernards’ LSD had made some people physically sick, Dr. Humphry Osmond analyzed the drug and ascertained that it was filled with impurities left over from the synthesis. He wrote letter to Myron Stolaroff explaining that the Bernards were selling an improperly manufactured product. Osmond was known for being outspoken and for “calling a spade a spade”. He painted the Bernards in an unflattering light, calling them “obnoxious”. At that time, there was no psychedelic counterculture, but the IFAS staff may have sensed that the development of a black market for low-grade acid portended a shut-down for legitimate scientific research. Al Hubbard then convinced Stolaroff to report the two Bernards to the FDA.^{xv} A newspaper article stated that the two Bernards were arrested for trying to sell LSD to the “Stanford Institute for Psychic Research”, which seems to be a misnomer for Stolaroff’s organization.

Pure LSD is colorless. Roseman was embarrassed that his batch of LSD was discolored from impurities. Therefore, as part of their “sales pitch”, the two Bernards falsely claimed that Roseman had imported the LSD from Israel. This lie was part of what led to FDA agents arresting them in 1963. Because their product was not properly labeled, they were also charged with violating the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. According to court documents, when a federal agent pulled out his pistol and tried to arrest them during a sting operation:

Copley grabbed the special agent’s carbine and began wrestling with him. Roseman jumped upon the special agent’s back and a scuffle ensued. Another agent entered the room and appellants were subdued.”^{xvi}

In July 1964, the two Bernards were sentenced to five years in prison. They each posted \$5,000 bail awaiting appeal. In 1966, they jumped bail. The FBI arrested Roseman trying to cross the border into Mexico. Copley went to South America. Over three years later in 1970, the FBI arrested Copley in the New York area. After a year in prison, he was released after a 90-day psychiatric evaluation. Despite rumors that Copley died in prison, his obituary states that in 2000 he died at age 73 in his home.^{xvii}

Copley published a book about hallucinogens in 1962.^{xviii} In 1963, Roseman published a book about peyote and another about LSD.^{xix} These books described using psychedelics to enhance the learning of skills using a procedure similar to IFAS's technical problem-solving procedure. The primary difference was that the two Bernards used sleep deprivation prior to administering the psychedelic and IFAS administered amphetamine for the intended purpose of enabling their psychedelic subjects to focus attention. The connection between Stolaroff and the two Bernards is intriguing. It is uncertain who thought up the shared elements of their procedures first, or if all parties collaboratively developed it through discussion. Although the two Bernards published first, IFAS was involved in a study that took years to complete, so it is possible that the two Bernards learned their procedures from Stolaroff. We may never know for sure, but Hubbard may have originated the idea of psychedelic technical problem solving.

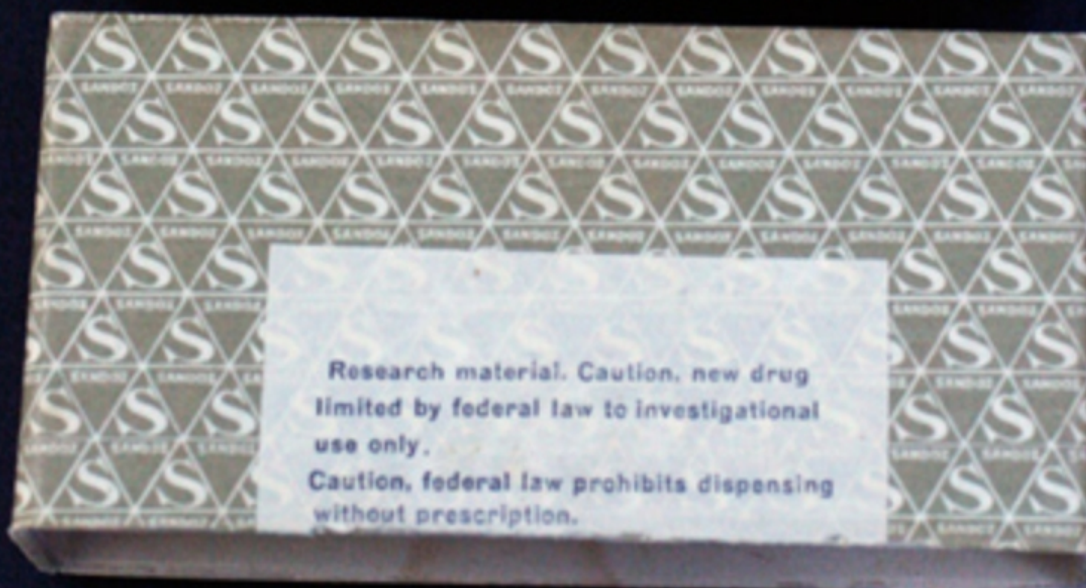
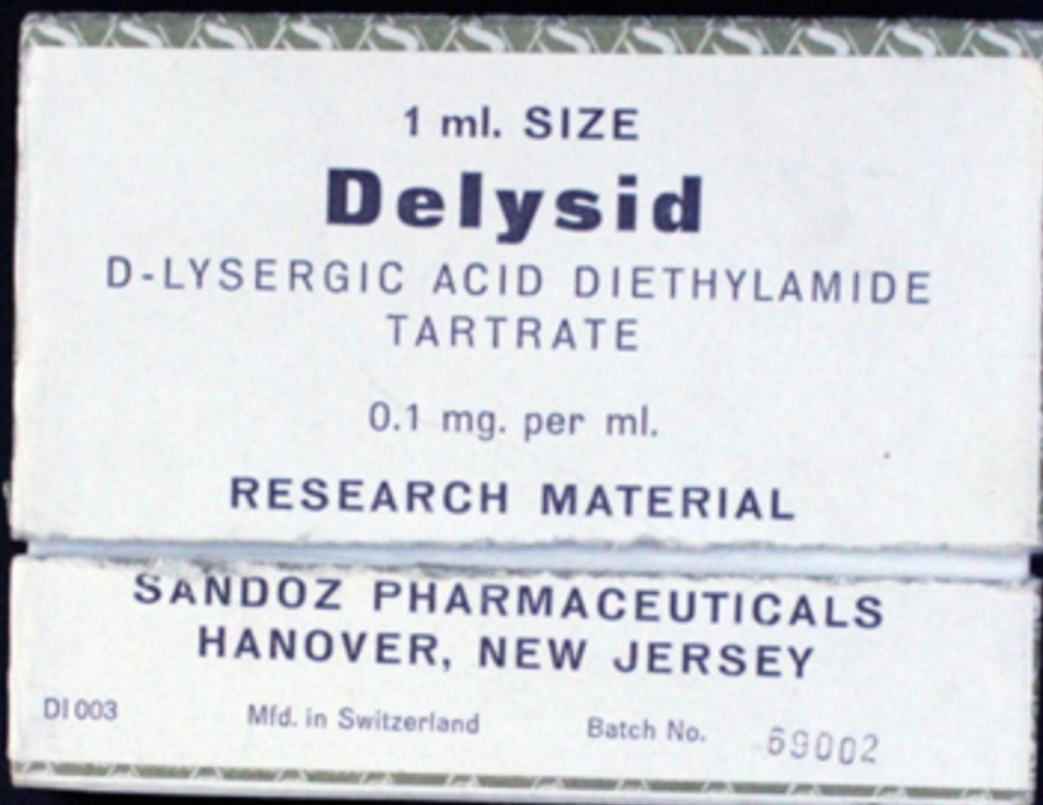


BERNARD ROSEMAN



BERNARD COPLEY

1964 photos (from San Francisco Chronicle)



Empty Sandoz LSD boxes from Stolaroff Collection. Photo by Jon Hanna, 2010.

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