

How Psychedelics Informed My Sex Life and Sex Work

by Annie Sprinkle



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"Few things feel better than getting high and getting laid."
 – David Jay Brown, author of
 "The ABC's of Erotic Alchemy,"
Hustler Magazine, April 2000

"Just say KNOW."
 – Timothy Leary

I was invited to speak at the AllChemical Arts Conference—a week-long event about entheogens and creativity, to be held in a resort hotel in Hawai'i in 1999. I was surprised to be invited, because I had not been a particularly outspoken advocate for these substances. Being a sex worker (call girl/porn actress and director), who often did interviews with the media—especially as I evolved into a controversial performance artist and sex educator—I was routinely trying to debunk the myth that all sex workers were hopeless drug addicts. Fortunately, I have never been a drug addict, but indeed I have tried most every popular drug at least three times.

I was curious about what a conference dedicated to entheogens might be like, and curious about the people who would attend such a conference, so I accepted the invitation to speak. It was as I was preparing my presentation for the illuminati of the psychedelic world that I realized what a profound, and positive impact my psychedelic experiences had had on my life, and in particular, on my sex life. In an *aha!* moment, it became clear that psychedelics had been perhaps my greatest sex educator.

LSD

When I was fourteen (a full three years before I was to lose my virginity), I had my first psychedelic drug experience. I went to high school in Panama City, Panama in the '60s. My father, and most of my friends' fathers, worked with the American Embassy. We were good, responsible teenagers, so on the weekends our parents let us go up the

coast to Panama's beautiful tropical beaches and stay overnight in beach huts. Those spectacular beaches became the laboratories for our innocent drug experiments.

All kinds of inebriants were available; opium, speed, Panama Red *Cannabis*, mescaline, cocaine, magic mushrooms, LSD, etc. One evening a friend, also fourteen years old, offered me a hit of blotter acid, to "expand my mind." There were no instructions, no warnings, and no rituals. I tripped my brains out all night long. Totally unprepared for lysergic acid diethylamide, my teenage fears became magnified a thousand-fold; the beach crawled with snakes, people morphed into previously unknown life forms, my heart beat out of its chest, my eyes bulged out of my head. I did not surrender, but endured, and could not wait until it was over.

Rough as the night was, the next day I was a wiser person. I had experienced alternate realities, new dimensions, other ways of seeing and feeling. I discovered that life was not necessarily as it appeared. I learned that I had the power to radically change my consciousness, and hence the world around me. This was excellent information to have on my way to becoming an adult—a sexual adult.

During subsequent beach weekends I took more LSD trips, usually with a sense of dread and imagined peer pressure, mixed with curiosity. I remember watching water boil for hours, seeing wallpaper patterns becoming kaleidoscopes, and finding God in the eyes of a cat. Mostly I felt paranoid and excruciatingly insecure, but there were moments where I experienced great bliss and yummy sensations. My perceptions were heightened, I felt electric, got all tingly, and was awed by life. My first experiences with altered states came not from having sex, but through psychedelics.

MESCALINE

At sixteen, I finally had my first real sexual experience. On that same night, I also

had my first mescaline experience. My boyfriend Van was twenty-six. He owned a hippie coffee shop. He was kind, adoring, and wise. We rode his motorcycle to his beach house for the weekend. He offered me a hit of mescaline. We each took one. I half expected him to turn into a three-headed monster at any moment like with LSD, but the mescaline was more gentle and more sensuous than acid. We walked on the beach, hand in hand, and it was a magical experience. I'd never seen so many stars in the sky; the ocean waves and sand were filled with phosphorescent algae.

The world was covered in multi-colored glitter. Van kissed me and I couldn't tell where my body started or ended next to his. I felt big love.

After a romantic and transcendental evening on the beach, we went back to his place and he treated me to my first cunnilingus experience. Perhaps it was just timing, but the mescaline was definitely an aphrodisiac. I felt so open, aroused, and trusting. Each touch was amazing. It was the most ecstatic experience I had ever had. A few weeks later, when I turned seventeen, I happily got rid of my virginity with Van. I was expecting intercourse to feel as overwhelming and transcendental as a psychedelic experience. Nice as it was, it didn't feel that way, although later in life it would.

At eighteen, I was living a hippie lifestyle in Tucson, Arizona. I did more mescaline, more LSD, and became wildly sexually adventurous. In a famous *Playboy* magazine interview in 1966, Timothy Leary exclaimed that LSD was the most powerful aphrodisiac ever discovered.¹ I don't remember having much, if any, sex while tripping on acid. I did not find LSD conducive to wanting to be intimate or to be touched, although I've talked with plenty of people who have had mind-blowing sex on LSD. However in retrospect, I see that my drug experiences did free me up from following convention. When most of my schoolmates went on to college, I ended up working in a "massage parlor." To everyone's surprise, especially my own, I found my calling! I was already breaking laws by smoking pot and taking psychedelics (which I felt should be legal), so to do illegal prostitution was not that much of a stretch. I believed prostitution should be legal also, and became involved in the prostitutes' rights movement. I enjoyed my "work" and it fit my needs at the time.

Before LSD became illegal, Dr. Stanislav Grof practiced psychotherapy with his patients while they were on LSD, often with very successful results. Sexual issues would sometimes come up, often in surprising ways. In his book, *LSD Psychotherapy*, he wrote that: "Occasionally LSD subjects experienced themselves as participants in complex sexual rituals and

ceremonies of different cultures, such as fertility festivals, rites of passage, ancient temple prostitution, or scenes of phallic worship. Experiences of this kind frequently convey very specific and detailed, historically or anthropologically correct information that was not previously available to the subject."² When I started working in prostitution, I felt a strong connection to a long lineage of whores and sexual healers before me. Perhaps this connection was inspired by my psychedelic journeys.

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PEYOTE

Every time I was about to ingest a psychoactive substance, I was hesitant and scared, but something told me there was an important experience to be had, and some key information to be gained, so I pushed myself. It was an opportunity to peek behind "The Veil"—to go beyond everyday reality and connect with the Universe in deep and intimate ways. A psychedelic substance was never once something I desired to do, but something I felt I had to do for personal growth.

In the Arizona desert I ate peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) buttons, a plant source of mescaline. People warned me that it was poisonous for the body and would likely make me vomit—it did. I ate the buttons about half a dozen times. One night I had a remarkable erotic experience. I made love with the Earth and the Sky in an energetic and emotional way as I meditated and masturbated ("medibated") under the stars. I became acutely aware of the sensuality of the desert, of every grain of sand, of the wind, and the plants. It was super erotic, immensely satisfying, and oh so cosmic! After that experience, I expanded my concept of what sex was. It was not simply about bodies coming together for physical sex, but about circulating sexual energy, which was everywhere and available just for the asking. I could tap into it just by tuning in and saying "yes." I realized that *everything* was sexual/sensual—that even all my little cells were all having sex. Sex was both microscopic and enormous.

OTHER DRUGS

At twenty-six I was living in Manhattan. I became interested in exploring my "shadow side," "Dark Eros," the worlds of S/M, extreme fetish, dominance/submission. By day I worked in an S/M house as a professional dominatrix/submissive. By night I frequented the Hellfire Club, a veritable smorgasbord of kinky sex. I experimented with some of the non-psychedelic drugs; crack, angel dust, heroin, etc. I was never a lover of drugs, but I honestly felt it was my duty as a "sex researcher" and "pleasure artist" to try them. I had visited the Temple of Delphi and the brothels of Pompeii.

I read that throughout history prostitutes utilized various aphrodisiacs and opiates with their clients. In my experience, these drugs were in a different category than the psychedelics. Although I did have some very interesting sexual adventures with these substances, there was not a sense of deep exploration of my soul and psyche. I had a sense of getting high and tuning out, as opposed to going deeper and tuning in. I also saw firsthand how incredibly destructive particular drugs could be when some of my friends became heavily addicted to them. I never met anyone addicted to entheogens.

MDMA / ECSTASY

By the mid-'80s the Great Dying was well underway; AIDS had taken its huge toll on my community. I'd lost many friends and lovers, and was trying to cope. Being a very sexually active gal, I was desperately searching for new, satisfying forms of sexuality, which could be enjoyed without exchanging bodily fluids. I signed up for a three-day Sacred Sex workshop led by a Tantra teacher named Jwala. At the workshop, my workshop partner gave me my first hit of Ecstasy, and that's exactly what I experienced—ecstasy. It's no wonder "E" is extremely popular in the "sex community." Before MDMA became illegal it had been used successfully during marriage/relationship counseling sessions. Therapists found that partners were better able to communicate with each other while on MDMA. It reduces performance anxiety to zero and creates a yummy, lovey-dovey feeling, and a nice shift in consciousness. Needless to say, I became a convert—to Tantra, and to Ecstasy.

I continued to take Ecstasy, once, twice, or three times a year. Jwala taught me about how to do ritual, about "preparing the space," and stating one's intention before making love. I used those same techniques when I would ingest a substance, which really helped make the experiences more satisfying. I mostly preferred taking Ecstasy alone. I used it as a tool for self-evaluation. Usually I would spend some time making love with myself and doing "sexual healing" on myself. The first time I did "E" alone, I fell deeply in love with myself for the first time, which was very good for me as I had a relatively low self-image. This helped me transition out of working in prostitution and appearing in mainstream porn films, and into doing more of the kind of work I wanted to do at that point. I also found myself desiring to connect with women, both sexually and in my work. I started making "feminist porn." The second time I did Ecstasy, I heard a voice tell me to quit smoking tobacco, which I then did permanently, after 25 years of a heavy smoking habit. Another time, I sat naked in front of my mirror and looked at my repressed anger, and let it surface. I hissed like a snake for several hours, and witnessed my inner Medusa in a remarkably non-judgmental and fearless way. I realized how sexual energy and anger are connected. I realized that in order to go to the next level of my sexuality I needed to learn to better

express my anger. I practiced, and sure enough, I learned to have long, extended orgasms. When I then produced and directed my own video, *The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop* (1992), I captured myself having an extremely intense five-minute-long orgasm. In retrospect I realize that I used a lot of psychedelic imagery in the video. The project was quite successful.

Although I did have some wonderful orgasms on Ecstasy, the experience of Ecstasy was not so much about orgasm or sex, as it was about looking deeply into my Self—heart, soul, and psyche. Each time I took Ecstasy I retained some key piece of information that I could utilize to grow as a person, and expand my (sexual) horizons. I found the lover I had been searching for so long—*me!* When I took it with lovers, I could feel a sense of empathy with my lover without doing anything. I experienced my body as a temple, and sex as prayer. Ecstasy took me into my heart the way that psychedelics took me into my mind and spirit. Also when on Ecstasy I would sometimes have wonderful, long "crygasms." Ecstasy showed me a deeper kind of love, which I was inspired to create more of in my life, without the drug. And I did.

A lover of mine who had studied Tantra in India for several years, told me that with Ecstasy "a person could get to similar ecstatic and spiritual places that took Tantra yogis a lifetime of strict disciplines to get to—if they were lucky enough to ever get to those states." There is of course a down side to Ecstasy. I had some miserable hangovers. I slept with my best friend's husband when I shouldn't have. Oops. Some folks let down their guard and have risky, unsafe sex, and I'm told that a few people have had medical emergencies with extremely serious consequences.

In 1993, I was at my sexual peak. I was an orgasm on two legs. My sexual energy flowed like bubbly pink champagne throughout my body on a daily basis. I studied and practiced Tantra relatively seriously, and all my chakras were spinning like pinwheels in a strong wind. Around this time I started facilitating sexuality workshops for women. The main thing I taught was the Taoist Erotic Massage Rituals (created by Joseph Kramer of the Body Electric School in Oakland), consisting of intensive genital massage strokes combined with lots of rhythmic breathing. It was powerful and effective stuff! Because of my drug experiences I was prepared to handle the very high erotic vibratory states that these techniques propelled our groups into. Sometimes there were very intense emotions and moments of distress. I was comfortable and experienced enough to manage these transcendental states because of my experiences with drugs. I learned how to take women (and sometimes men) on pseudo-psychedelic journeys—without drugs!

KETAMINE

I first heard about ketamine when I went to Hawai'i to visit friends, and to attend the 80th birthday party of Dr. John C. Lilly, the infamous psychobiologist, dolphin re-

searcher, and psychedelic enthusiast (who recently passed away). If Dr. Lilly found ketamine so enlightening, I figured it must be worth trying. My friend injected my buttock with a carefully measured dose of “Special K.” I slipped right into the deepest trance I’d ever been in. I could not (or did not want to) walk, talk, sit up or do anything, but I was intensely aware of Self. I lay on the bed with my eyes closed. It was extremely visual. Projected on my eyelids were quickly moving three-dimensional fractal-like patterns, one after the other. I had multiple *eyegasm*s! At the same time I experienced absolute, total, inner peace, which was something I was hankering for after years of living in bustling Manhattan and jet-setting around the world. It felt exquisite; like being in that delicious post-orgasm afterglow state, but for a couple of hours.

When I came out of the ketamine experience, I brought with me an overwhelming desire to create a more peaceful life for myself. I moved out of New York City where I had lived for twenty-four years, and I have lived by the sea ever since. I learned that one way to experience peace and bliss was to not *do*, but to *be*. My sexuality changed yet again. It became less performative, less active, less energetic. Sex became deeper, slower, and subtler—I call it “Zen sex.” With my newfound understanding of how “less could be more,” I did something totally wild and experimental: I committed to a serious, monogamous relationship!

PSILOCYBIAN MUSHROOMS

Mostly I have used psilocybian mushrooms with lovers that I was in a close relationship with. These trips have ranged from very mild to intense, depending on the freshness of the mushrooms and the dosage. Usually while on mushrooms I have not found myself wanting to make love in the traditional sense, especially when I’m peaking. Instead I usually prefer having physical space. However, I find it very bonding and very intimate to share such an intense and personal experience with a lover. I would sometimes get insights into our relationship, which we could talk about afterwards. I’ve found that mushrooms (as well as the other substances mentioned in this story) can definitely deepen a relationship, in a remarkably similar way that sex does. Coming off mushrooms is an ideal time to do some sensual massage or some serious cuddling. There is a delicious unification with my partner—an openness and vulnerability.

My present girlfriend, Barbara, has done well over a thousand psychedelic journeys. She was even a “guinea pig” at Stanford University when they were studying the effects of heavy doses of LSD in the ’70s. One beautiful summer day, we were on a mountain lake in her rowboat, and we found ourselves tripping without having ingested a thing. Our psychedelic door flew open probably because we had ventured through it many times before. Our *love* was the drug, and it was strong! Our senses became heightened, time warped, colors were brighter. It felt exactly like we were on

mushrooms. I wondered if people who have never done any psychedelics could ever feel the same way, or if our psychedelic experiences enabled us to enhance and intensify the magical feelings of love.

At one point I purposely didn’t ingest any drugs for about six years because I came to feel that drugs were the lazy person’s sex. Why do drugs when one could accomplish the same things from having several hours of sex, and not have any hangover the next day? (This does not work with quickies.) Many people are too lazy, or don’t have the sexual skills to get there. Or they have a limited capacity for sex and pleasure. With a substance there’s no escaping the intensity, and the intoxication. With sex you have to work at it, but in the long run it’s probably better for your health. Then again, variety is the spice of life.

AYAHUASCA

Although I have had a number of opportunities, I have not yet tried the plant brew, ayahuasca. I did however try “pharmahuasca” (the synthetic version) with a group of about a dozen friends. We were led by an experienced guide and his excellent and caring assistants. We prepared for a couple of days with fasting and enemas, then took the pharmahuasca along with a fairly heavy dose of mushrooms. Our guide said the mushrooms helped make the pharmahuasca more visual.

When I took off it was like I had an entire New Age greeting card shop behind my eyelids. It was the longest, most intense, most hallucinatory, most physical of all journeys I’d ever been on. It lasted about ten hours, with several hours more coming down. I lay still the whole time with my eyes closed; except when I rolled over to purge into a bowl, something everyone in the group did repeatedly (a wonderfully kinky and intimate group experience). This substance affects the nervous system quite strongly, so I had lots of sweats and chills, and other very strange physical sensations, like a snake made of air whipping around my body.

At the time of this journey, my father was dying of cancer, so my journey was a lot about pain, fear, and death. I saw the “complexity of the Universe” as a huge, fast, megamachine. I saw clowns, gargoyles, Goddesses, and Virgin Marys. I saw bloodshed in Rwanda, Jon-Benet Ramsey being murdered, and I saw myself being stabbed to death by a serial killer. I saw my father in the hospital on a respirator struggling to stay alive. I saw all these things without any judgments. There was no good or bad. Everything worked together, like yin with yang. I became acutely aware of the “human condition.” I saw compassion as the best salvation for myself and all people and things. Lots of thoughts and feelings came up about my body, and about the aging process. Sometimes I felt strong, healthy, and light; other times I felt old, fat, and polluted. I believed that the ayahuasca was helping to prepare me for my death.

In the months that followed, sex became more about soul merging, loving support, and nurturing and comforting each other before we die. It became more serious than before. It felt like I had achieved a level of sexual maturity, and at the same time I grieved for my youthful enthusiasm and naïveté. This journey inspired me to make a sex film called *Teenage Mermaid Fanta-sea*. I play an elder mermaid who initiates a young mermaid into the treasures of her sexuality. I teach the young mermaid how to seduce a diver, and then in the end I die an orgasmic death.

SEX AND PSYCHEDELICS

Clearly my experiences with psychedelics have been educational and beneficial with regard to my own sexuality and my life's work. From my observations, these psychoactive drugs have not been harmful in any way for me, or for the people I know who have used them. Terence McKenna pointed out that:

*"The profundity of [hallucinogenic inebriation] and its potential for a positive feedback into the process of reorganizing the personality should have long ago made psychedelics an indispensable tool for psychotherapy."*³

And I might add, a tool for sex therapy. Oddly enough, I have not found a whole lot written about psychedelics in relation to sex, when to me they seem so totally interconnected.

From what I have gathered, psychedelics are generally not used much as aphrodisiacs for sexual arousal—although people do report having phantasmagorical sexual experiences on them. More often the user gains some key information, has a new experience, or sees her/himself from a new perspective, and any of this can greatly inform that person's sexual life. Just as each sexual experience can potentially teach us something about sex, each drug experience can potentially teach us something about sex. And for that matter, sexual experiences can potentially teach us something about how to take drug trips more effectively. As I became more sexually experienced, I became much better at handling my psychedelic journeys. I learned how to not have expectations, and how to surrender.

The Drug Workshop (www.drugworkshop.net), a web site with sensible information regarding drug use, says: "*Sex is a drug! The biological chemistry of sex is a lot like that of psychoactive drugs. So when you have sex on drugs, you are having sex with that drug.*" Interesting concept, to have sex with the drug (or plant) itself. The site also stresses the importance of whom you decide to do your drugs with. I couldn't agree more. Set and setting are so important. Journeying with one or more experienced guide(s) is generally the best way to go.

So if psychedelics have the potential to be so beneficial, why did they get such a bad rap? Perhaps for some of the same reasons that sex gets a bad rap. Terence McKenna offered an explanation for why drugs and sex get suppressed and why "just say no" doesn't work:

*"Sexuality is the glory of the living experience. Ecstasy is the contemplation of wholeness. That's why when you experience ecstasy—when you contemplate wholeness—you come down remade in terms of the political and social arena because you have seen the larger picture."*⁴

People tend to link "sex and drugs" because both are condemned by society. Nevertheless, throughout the ages human beings have continually searched for more ecstasy, more sexual satisfaction, for solutions to their sexual problems, and for aphrodisiacs. Psychoactive substances have been used in most cultures because they can be keys to unlock the mysteries of life. Of course as each mystery is unraveled, a bunch of new ones appear. Both sex and psychedelics are ultimately about consciousness, about self discovery, and going beyond everyday reality to that magical place—somewhere over the rainbow, where we feel Divine and we experience some truth. Granted, both sex and psychedelic drugs are generally used unconsciously by most people.⁵ We need to work on that.

Needless to say, the AllChemical Arts Conference in Hawai'i was absolutely wonderful, and so were all the people who attended it. I had a fantastic time and learned a whole lot. Since that conference I decided to support more research into these drugs, support law reform, and come out as an advocate for the safe use of psychedelics—especially with regard to sex research and sex education. I'm hoping someone will soon have the courage to organize a conference on sex and psychedelics. I'll be there with bells on! •

Annie Sprinkle

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- 4) McKenna, T. 1991. *The Archaic Revival*. Harper Collins.
- 5) Pointed out over dinner by Christina Saint Laurent.

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