Guided and Structured Use of Entheogenic Substances in Western Culture.

For my doctoral dissertation in the clinical psychology program at CIIS I looked at therapeutic psycho-spiritual issues in guided, group settings (what Metzner has called “hybrid shamanic psychotherapeutic rituals”) utilizing psychedelic substances. These groups are hybrid in that they incorporate some shamanic or indigenous techniques with a western psychological orientation.

My interest in these groups began with my work with Pablo, the guide in one of the groups analyzed in my dissertation. Pablo’s work was an adaptation of the earlier work of Mexican psychiatrist Salvadore Roquette. (Roquette had a psychiatric background and incorporated the indigenous teachings of Mazotec Indian healer Maria Sabina.) I was always interested in the development of the varying approaches of different groups as well as the implications for results.

My interest was further piqued by the fact that because these groups are underground, research had been minimal to non-existent since the 1960s. There has been sizable literature on the psychedelic experience, but other than the cut-short research in the 1960s, most of it has been personal, theoretical and anecdotal.

I was supported by the Kranzke research scholarship twice; once for a project studying the effects of calea zacatechichi, and the second for my dissertation research with ayahuasca. The scholarships were very important in allowing me to move forward with the research I was doing with Dr. Frank Echenhofer at CIIS. Brainwave (EEG) research requires a lot of lab equipment and supplies that would have been prohibitive without this type of financial support.

My research reiterated and developed some familiar points such as the importance of preparation, integration, and the complex dynamics of the relationships between participants and guides, etc., as well as some less familiar themes that point toward future research questions, such as: what is the psycho-spiritual and therapeutic difference in the impact of one medicine from another, the relationship of ecstatic or transpersonal experiences to the psychological. Another important focus was the relationship of the psychedelic experience to work with addictions.

With the support and encouragement of a school like the California Institute of Integral Studies in combination with the financial support of Robert Barnhart’s generous gift of the Kranzke endowment, the psychedelic experience has, since 1998, been regularly researched at the graduate level. Thanks to CIIS and Mr. Barnhart’s creative and generous idea, there is now a significant and growing body of psychedelic research residing in one place.

(Roger has a chapter, co-written with David Lukoff, in the new two volume set, Psychedelic Medicine, edited by Winkleman and Roberts.)