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# Community Forums at Psychedelic Science 2017: A Vibrant Dialogue Between Scientists and Practitioners

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## PSYCHEDELIC SCIENCE 2017

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I AM THE CURATOR OF the Plant Medicine Track, and also of a series of community forums in Psychedelic Science 2017. As an anthropologist working on a conference that is largely geared towards biomedical research, I am pleased that we are bringing together the cutting edge of scientific research on psychedelics and creating a plural and inclusive space that hopes to actively strengthen local and international communities of people with kindred interests.

Among the Community Forums we are hosting are: *Exploring Legal Strategies, Harm Reduction and Best Practices for the Ayahuasca Community* (led by Robert Heffernan, Ben Christie, and Andrea Langlois); *Ayahuasca Researchers Meeting: Ayahuasca Science in the Twenty-first Century* (led by Helle Kaasik); *Ibogaine Safety* (led by Christine Minanga Fitzsimmons, Jamie McAlpin, and Clare S. Wilkins); and *Ayahuasca Best Practices, Sustainability and Reciprocity* (led by Matthew Watherston, Deanna Rogers, Adam Andros Aronovich, and Tanya Maté.)

Through these forums we are promoting ties between scientific researchers, and creating the opportunity for them to share experiences and challenges around their work. At the same time, their goal is to foster a dialogue between academics, therapists, religious leaders, facilitators, activists, artists, enthusiasts, indigenous representatives, and other voices. Finally, these forums hope to give back to the community, in more accessible ways, part of the knowledge that is being produced in academia.

In these spaces, we will openly discuss best practices and ethics associated with the rapid expansion of the uses of ayahuasca and iboga. We will also address the sustainability of these plant medicines and our responsibility to take into account the perspectives of people who live where these substances originate, and to reciprocate in fair ways.

This is important, because purely scientific discussions often omit some of these aspects. This happens either because science takes a long time to gather “data” or due to the fact that, often, researchers are afraid to openly address controversial aspects of their work. Yet, as a collective interested in advancing the public understanding of psychedelics, we must contemplate the conflicts and problems that exist—such as the need for

screening, interaction with drugs or pharmaceuticals, legal risks, proper training of therapists or ritual leaders, commodification, proselytism, sexual abuse, accountability, the proliferation of dubious “alternative” treatments and medicines, the emergence of pseudo experts, and other challenges in this growing field.

Above all, by giving space to multiple voices, we recognize that science does not happen in a vacuum, but rather is inserted in a specific socio-cultural context. Currently, the context of psychedelic science and knowledge is one of prohibition and stigma. No one can deny that investigations that might alter current drug schedules are constantly being obstructed and suffer from a lack of funding. As we incorporate the perspectives of practitioners and discussions around cultural and legal aspects, we are also creating a better scenario for the development of the science of psychedelics.

Scientists must be educated about the cultural contexts and sensitiveness surrounding these substances; practitioners need to understand the challenges involved in psychedelic research; scientists and practitioners must collaborate to improve the quality and utility of research; policy makers need to reevaluate restrictions on scientific research; and all parties need to promote benefit maximization and help strengthen informal and cultural controls for safe psychedelic use.

Besides gathering data and producing “scientific evidence,” we need to create dialogues between science, culture, and society, to better navigate the perilous regulatory waters. 🌀

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