

Paranormal Experiences and Psychoactive Drugs

a literature review project

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For thousands of years shamanic cultures have worked with plant entheogens to activate psychic capabilities. These sacred archaic traditions have consistently used psychoactive compounds for the diagnosis and treatment of illness, prediction of future events, clairvoyance, communication with other intelligences, and the integration of magic with reality. Harmine, the first psychoactive principle isolated from ayahuasca decoctions, was initially called “telepathine” by Zerda Bayon in 1912, because of its apparently psychical properties.

It has been suggested that all paranormal and mystical phenomena are accompanied by an altered state of being, and the use of drugs to induce such a state is probably one of the primary drives behind most psychedelic exploration. An abundance of psychonauts’ trip reports on web sites such as www.erowid.org and www.lycaeum.com testify to these apparently psychic episodes that seem to occur with most types of mind-expanding substances.

During the psychedelic research boom of the 1950s and 1960s, several controlled experiments explored the relationship of these substances to the occurrence of psychic ability, termed *psi*. Since that time, such research has been largely restricted to psychiatric reports and surveys of paranormal experience in relation to drug use, although recently in Holland there has been a return to conducting some experimental work. In addition, many valuable experiential reports have been accumulated by psychedelic users’ groups. However, aside from work with marijuana (Tart 1993), there has been no concentrated effort to access, document, and evaluate this mass of research literature since Krippner and Davidson published their last review in 1974.

In the past thirty years many advances have been made in methods of investigation within the field of parapsychology studies. As well, the literature on psychoactive drugs has steadily grown, reflecting an expanded knowledge of such substances, which have themselves

increased in variety and number. With the generous assistance of a \$1000 research grant from MAPS, a project is underway to review the literature on parapsychology and psychedelics and evaluate the contributions of such research to our understanding of psychedelic drug use, psychiatry, transpersonal psychology, and parapsychology. Aside from summarizing and evaluating the results of previous investigations, this research will draw on over a hundred years of insights and make recommendations for

future research methodology in the field of parapsycho-pharmacology. Clinicians or researchers who have made any observations of this nature in the course of their work, or who have relevant unpublished or obscure material, are urged to contact the author.

In conjunction with the review, a second research project is underway to survey this psi-chedelic landscape. A confidential web-based questionnaire has been created to gather information on drug use and paranormal experiences and anyone falling into either or both categories is encouraged to complete it at www.dmtech.co.uk/survey. In an area of research that is so dogged by experimental restriction, yet which has such spiritual

significance, personal reports should not be devalued. Those wishing to describe any exceptional paranormal experiences on drugs can e-mail their stories to psychicdeli@happyhippie.com for anonymous inclusion in a richer phenomenological report. •

REFERENCES

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