

PSYCHEDELICS & MENTAL HEALTH



BY ABBY DODES

WHY ARE WE FINALLY SEEING PSYCHEDELIC TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION BECOME ACCESSIBLE?



Would you trade in your Prozac for Magic Mushrooms? Those unfamiliar with the experience of psychedelics may find the question ridiculous, but those who are familiar more likely than not already understand the potential mental health benefits that can come from psychedelic experimentation.

Drugs such as Psilocybin (the active chemical in psychedelic mushrooms) and MDMA (more commonly known as Molly) have been shown to relieve the side effects of mental illnesses including depression, anxiety, PTSD, borderline personality disorder, and more. [3] What started off in the early 1950's as progressive medical research from doctors like Humphry Osmond - who's experiments involving mescaline and LSD proved they both had therapeutic capabilities through creating a new form of 'self-awareness' - was quickly forced to come to a stop in the 60's due to politicization and legal issues.[15]

After several decades, that politicization began to wane and the legal issues proved to be less obstructive than before.[5] Slowly, as time moved on there were more and more studies that centered around psychedelic drugs, the effects they have on the brain, and their possible medical applications.

In the 1990's there was a resurgence in the scientific study of psychedelics on a wide-spread and mainstream level.[10] Decades had passed since the Controlled Substances Act, the long waged War on Drugs seemed to have been all but lost, and the general social attitude towards psychedelic drugs had turned more tolerant.[5] These substances are ones that have been criminalized and demonized within the United States for decades, but it was not always the case. Before drugs like Psilocybin and LSD were criminalized they were the subjects of scientific study and even part of mainstream alternative medicine.[5] In the 1950's and 1960's psychedelics were popularly used in both medical contexts as well as recreational ones.[5] Many are familiar with the Hippie movement and their association with drugs like LSD, Peyote, and Psilocybin, but few know about the medical research that was being done at the time.



Dr. Nicolas Langlitz – author of *Neuropsychedelica: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research Since the Decade of the Brain* and Professor of Anthropology at The New School – stated in an interview that “... there was a lot of mainstream use in the late 50s and 60s. Especially if you look at late, late 50s, early 60s you got a lot of that. If you look at the work that Humphry Osmond and what these people did in Canada that Erika Dyck wrote about in her book, or if you look at Hollywood’s psychotherapists and psychiatrists. Cary Grant was raving about his psychedelic experiences that he had had in a medical context, and he was doing this in glossy magazines.”[5]

Canadian architect Kiyoshi Izumi is another example of the first wave of psychedelic research and medical application. In the 1960's he developed a hospital under the influence of LSD, in an attempt to better understand what the environment of a hospital would feel like to a patient that possibly suffers from Schizophrenia. [2] This experience showed him the ways that the environment of the mental hospital was in fact highly detrimental to the patients and allowed him to reimagine them architecturally.[2] Despite promising research and creative application, not everybody agreed with the use of these drugs and they were criminalized and limited to underground culture and the black market.



Psychedelics were lumped in with other, more dangerous drugs like Heroin and Cocaine and criminalized as such.[1] The criminalization made it very hard to get research done on them as they were deemed to have no medical value.[10] Psychedelics were lumped in with other, more dangerous drugs like Heroin and Cocaine and criminalized as such.[1] The criminalization made it very hard to get Despite promising research and creative application, not everybody agreed with the use of these drugs and they were criminalized and limited to underground culture and the black market.[1] Psychedelics were lumped in with other, more dangerous drugs like Heroin and Cocaine and criminalized as such.[1] The criminalization made it very hard to get research done on them as they were deemed to have no medical value.[10] Psychedelics were lumped in with other, more dangerous drugs like Heroin and Cocaine and criminalized as such.[1] Research done on them as they were deemed to have no medical value.[10] From the 1970's to the 1990's these drugs saw a stagnation of medical study until decades later when there was finally momentum towards getting the science moving again.[10] Two of the main factors in revisiting psychedelics were time and depoliticization.[5]

Though there was a stagnation of research amongst scientists, those interested in psychedelic studies had remained interested the whole time.[5] So, in the 1990's when the drugs had become much less controversial there was less political influence which meant more opportunity to begin studies.[5] There was also the factor of technological advances in brain scanning and imaging technologies. Neurological imaging was developing quickly and this was seen as an opportunity by scientists interested in the effects of psychedelics on the brain.[5] Dr. Langlitz said that "...by the 90s, there was an incredible hype around the neurosciences and the psychedelics researchers used that for their own purposes." [5] Now, numerous organizations from varying political backgrounds have come out in support of psychedelic research, including capitalist ventures.[5] The potential of getting in on the lucrative ground floor of the psychedelic industry is one that many companies and investors have tapped into. Clinical trials have shown there to be several modes of application in which psychedelics prove to be a beneficial treatment when used therapeutically.[3] Dr. Langlitz describes it as an addition to traditional psychotherapy in which a patient will have traditional therapy sessions and also take psychedelic drugs.[5] The hope is that these psychedelic experiences make the therapy become more effective by allowing the user to reflect deeper into themselves than they would be able to sober.

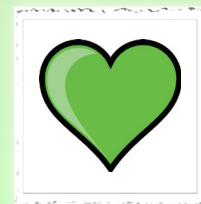
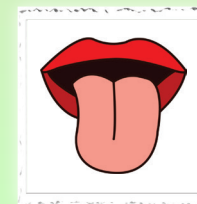
Dr. Nicholas Langlitz discusses the strategy MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) used in raising bi-partisan support.



According to Dr. Langlitz, "The model for psychedelics has been that the substance is only taken a very few times; in many of the trials there are two applications of the actual drug and maybe one placebo session. It's embedded in psychotherapy, which precedes the drug sessions and works on the drug sessions afterwards." [5]

Professor William Scarlett – who also teaches in the Anthropology department at The New School – speculated that this new avenue for profit would be “...a double edged sword. Just like with weed being legal there are corporations dominating the market, but there are also different groups that make attempts to represent the communities most impacted by the War on Drugs, so you have those two competing. I think if there is a possibility for profit, corporations are going to cash in...”[6] Whether this will prove to be more damaging than beneficial is yet to be seen, but the influx of investment and research into psychedelics by capitalists from all political backgrounds will undoubtedly yield scientific progress. The resurgence of this science has been a long way coming, and as it stands today we are at the precipice of commercially available psychedelic treatment, a possibility that may have seemed impossible not a long time ago. The ways in which psychedelic therapy will manifest on a widely available and mainstream level are yet to be fully mapped out, but the practice itself has shown to be very promising according

Psychedelics as a method of healing is a concept that is far from new. Long before the psychedelic revolution happened in The United States, indigenous peoples across the globe had been using psychedelic substances as parts of healing and other rituals for thousands of years.[11] In fact, it was these practices (as well as their heavy romanticization) that the western psychedelic movement was largely influenced by.[6] About the influencers of Western Psychedelia, Professor William Scarlett said that “They were kind of all bound up into the counterculture also. There is a very simple understanding of indigenous cultures as an alternative to capitalist western society and that kind of shaped people’s perception of psychedelics in the 60’s. There was the fear that drugs would make people revolt, a fear of people taking them and not conforming to societal expectation and rejecting that system.



There could also be a correlation between the indigenous ritual and a fear that people would revolt against the status quo.”[6] He later mentions the history of the United States’ own government using LSD in the MKULTRA experiments as a means of mind control, an important part of the history of psychedelics in this country.[6] In the eyes of the government, the psychedelics that people were beginning to use were viewed as a threat and as a potential weapon.[4] Eventually, after numerous studies, the United States passed the Controlled Substances Act which labelled Psilocybin, LSD, Mescaline, and other psychedelics illegal.[1]



After the Controlled Substances Act was passed there was a halt in widespread implementation of psychedelic treatments; both a reflection of the government’s rhetoric towards it as well as the general societal attitude. Thankfully, for research’s sake, those days are behind us and these extraordinary treatments can finally have a chance to help the people that need them the most. It is important to acknowledge that psychedelics are far more than simply medicine or treatment. As Professor Scarlett points out, “The experiences that psychedelics provide disrupt somebody’s sense of self which can be really scary to some people. It shows our society really values the self and controlling your own thoughts, which psychedelics really disrupt. It



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