Looking into the Rabbit Hole: The Psychedelic Renaissance

Re-tracing the role of discourse, policy, and socio-cultural factors in the transformation of psychedelic substances from ‘social evil’ to critical tools in contemporary mental health treatment.
Objectives

The key themes of my proposed doctoral research:

• (Re-)situating Psychedelics

• Psychedelics in Mental Health

• Psychedelics and Consciousness

• Psychedelic as Performance Enhancers?
Understanding Psychedelics(s)

Different Types?

What effects do they have?

This or That?

What are they?

- What are Psychedelics?
  - Do they have a definition? What are the definitions?
  - Substance-wise classification (based on origin)
    - Natural
    - Semi-synthetic
    - Synthetic
  - On the basis of chemical characteristics:
    - Serotonergic
    - Catecholaminergic
    - Empathogens
    - Disassociatives
What's the Difference?

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<tr>
<th>Narcotics</th>
<th>Psychedelics</th>
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<td>Derived from Greek word 'Narkoun' which means to 'make numb'</td>
<td>A combination of the words ‘Psyche’ and the word ‘Delos’ (again Greek, meaning clarity)</td>
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<td>Used in medical contexts as Analgesics (Morphine, Fentanyl, Methadone etc.) and Anesthetics (Ketamine)</td>
<td>Presently researched in medical contexts for treatment and management of mental distresses (MDMA for PTSD, Ibogaine and Ayahuasca for addiction, Psilocybin and Ketamine for depression etc.)</td>
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<td>Considered ‘hard drugs’ which can have really unpleasant side effects and can cause substance dependency (which need not have a psychological angle to it)</td>
<td>Considered ‘soft drugs’, which can mainly produce psychological dependency</td>
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<td>Effects are almost always ‘euphoric’ and give a ‘rush’</td>
<td>Effects are unpredictable and can be dysphoric under the wrong circumstances of consumption (like the consumer’s psyche, the set and setting of consumption etc.)</td>
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Why the bad press? = A war no one won, comes to an end!

Finally!

Q: Is it time to end the War on Drugs? NO. NO. NO.

What happened then? =>

THE DAILY NEWS
EXTRA! EXTRA!

WAR ON DRUGS

THE WAR ON DRUGS
IS A WAR ON US
What’s happening now?

At MAPS

Phase III Clinical trials!

Assisted Psychotherapy

LSD

Ayahuasca

Ibogaine

Medical Marijuana

At MAPS
What more is happening?

At John Hopkins:

Psilocybin and Smoking Cessation

Psilocybin and Depression Study

Psilocybin and Anorexia Nervosa Study

Religious Professionals Study

Psilocybin and Alzheimer’s Disease Study
What more?

- Rest of the world
- Ketamine Infusion Therapy
- Ketamine Clinic
- Ayahuasca Retreats
- Addiction treatment
Why is this happening?

• The role of mental health in a person’s life is being properly understood and acknowledged.
• ‘Mental distresses’ seriously makes us unhappy!
  - Makes us frustrated
  - Can provoke suicidal or homicidal tendencies in people
  - Decreases the quality of life for both the sufferer and his loved ones.
  - Can raise work pressure or makes one unproductive in the capitalist world we inhabit
  - Promotes addictive behavior and people with addictive tendencies develop them further, leading to several foreseeable and unforeseen consequences.

Depression: A menace that wealth, fame or power couldn’t beat!
Rationale?

A few reasons why?

- The perspective with which mental health and its various distresses are viewed in the world (especially the third-world)
- Ending the stigma against psychedelics
- Promote safe use practices
- Unlock previously unknown potential of the brain.
- The war against ‘drugs’ continues in several parts of the world (especially the developing world)
  - The developing world (the erstwhile colonized industrialist societies) is refusing to accept the potential in drugs
  - The meanings implanted into the minds of the people through various discourses are still holding strong
  - Governments are still actively involved in persecuting drug trafficking and thereby increasing the growth of the black-market, which leads to loss of revenue (owing to the infrastructure and resources needed to monitor, contain and process these ‘peddlers’)
Part One: Epistemology

- Clarifying and problematizing the terminology and taxonomy of 'psychedelic' substances
- Shifts in the meaning of ‘psychedelics’: the 60s to the 80s to the 21st century
- Trace and outline the historic and micro-historic accounts of usage of psychedelics by communities and individuals and its relevance to them.
- Specific pharmacological nuances of the substances which makes them useful in mental health treatments.
- The occurrence of psychedelics in literature, mass and popular media, and other knowledge systems
- What meanings have been perpetuated? What effects did they have on our understanding of psychedelics.
- Meaning makers of psychedelics: their possible agendas behind the creation of and dissemination of such meanings.
- Discussing why the use of psychedelics in context of mental health treatment may bring hope to some people.
Part Two: Fracturing Consciousness

- What is ‘Consciousness’?
- Western vs. Eastern ideas of the mind: coming to a new understanding of consciousness.
- Where does subjectivity begin and how does one identify oneself (personally and in relation to society)?
- The subject under the influence of psychedelics: what are the differences in reaction, behavior, motivation levels, priorities etc., understanding the psychedelic ‘trip’ and the changes it causes to the subject.
- Do psychedelics ‘expand’ the mind? Discussing neuroplasticity and psychedelics, the impacts of psychedelic use in different parts of the brain and how they can modulate behavior.

Finally—‘bio-hacking’ the mind:
- Consuming psychedelics outside medical contexts.
- Safe-use practices
- What to do about a ‘bad-trip’? etc.
- Substances in combinations, and safe poly-drug combinations
• Methods I’ll use:
  1. Discourse analysis
  2. Archival Study
  3. Interviews
  4. Observation
  5. Participation in Research (in whichever capacity possible)

(More to be added after consultation with supervisor(s))
Potential Directions for Future Research/Investigation

- This research hopes to:
  1. Open up new avenues of thought and inquiry into the field of discourses, psychedelics and mental health and better understand the relationship between power/culture.
  2. Contribute in whichever small way possible to the latest developments in mental health research.
  3. Re-situate psychedelic substances
  4. Open up new ways of enquiry into topics which permeate several disciplines.
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Please give me your valuable questions and feedback...
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That's all Folks!