

# A Dissertation On The Constructive (Therapeutic and Religious) Use of Psychedelics: A Request for Support

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Regular funding for off-mainstream research is hard to find, even in The Netherlands. After ten years of studying, lecturing about and researching drug use, I've decided to compose a thesis (dissertation) from published and unpublished research material at the 365-year old Utrecht University. Some additional study, however, is needed to complete this enterprise, which is focused on understanding drug use not as pathological, criminal or otherwise deviant behavior, but as a functional, constructive, meaningful drive. For this additional work I will need about \$3000 in order to cover traveling costs, pharmacological analyses of ayahuasca tea (DMT/harmaline alkaloids) and small compensations for respondents. All other expenses are covered by private money.

The thesis starts out in Chapter 1, with a discussion of motivational science and the exploration of altered states of consciousness (ASC). It is argued that the omnipresent health concept of 'risk' is only one aspect of the meaning of drug use for the user, very much like it is one aspect of driving for the driver. To understand the significance of drug use, one has to move to other meaningful aspects. Critical issues of methodology in drug research are discussed from the viewpoint that most of our knowledge of, for instance, addiction, is in fact constructed by the way social science operates in an anti-drug context. These and other issues provide a theoretical framework that relates the themes to be treated in the following chapters.

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Several settings have been studied where people deliberately sought to explore altered states of consciousness for therapeutic reasons, for spiritual/religious reasons and for recreational reasons. Chapter 2 deals with hallucinogenic drugs and the therapy of the Dutch psychiatrist Bastiaans, who treated many patients who were traumatized by the Second World War, mostly resistance fighters and concentration camp survivors, who would now be diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The small survey indicates that severe, chronic symptoms and complaints have been palliated or cured in his 'psycholitic' therapy. As of today, a majority of our respondents indicate partial to complete recovery from the traumas and related symptoms from which they suffered upon entering LSD (and/or ketamine and/or psilocybin) assisted treatment. They were and are positively satisfied

with their treatment [See: Ossebaard, H.C. & Maalsté, N. (1999). The Bastiaans method of drug-assisted therapy. *Bulletin of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies* 9(2), p. 3-9; <http://www.maps.org/news-letters/v09n2/09203maa.html>]. Further study will enlighten this important area of human suffering and the role of drugs, be they licit or illicit, in its alleviation. A series of 10-20 additional in-depth interviews will be done in 2001/2002 with the elderly respondents who are willing to participate.

Chapter 3 is about DMT and contemporary ritual. The Santo Daime church is a 'new age' religion rooted in ancient Amazonian shamanism. The ritual use of a natural psychoactive preparation called 'ayahuasca tea' (containing the indole psychedelic substance DMT - dimethyltryptamine - and an indole alkaloid, harmaline) is an essential feature of this religion. The drink has traditionally been used for medical and religious reasons without any acknowledged risks to public health. The modern use of ayahuasca as a sacrament of Santo Daime in the United States and Europe has involved thousands of persons seeking religious, spiritual truth and mental well-being without any reported serious problems. For this reason its ritual use is no longer illicit in The Netherlands, according to a recent legal verdict (May, 2001). The research for this chapter will be conducted in collaboration with the Dutch ethnopharmacological foundation 'Friends of the Forest' and the Dutch branch of the Santo Daime church. In 2001/02 we aim to study adult, consensual and motivated Santo Daime congregants who will complete a translated version of Strassman's Hallucinogenic Rating Scale. Pharmacological samples of the preparation will also be taken. We hope to be able to show the specific spiritual meaning of intoxication in a religious setting and the moderating motivational variables, and to compare them internationally.

Chapter 4 comprises the 'cyberdelic experience'. Altered states of consciousness may be achieved not only by the use of psychoactive substances but also by involvement in a range of intensifying experiences. Illustrations of the latter are dancing or meditation. Rhythmic (audio)visual stimulation is another method of proven

effectiveness with regard to ASC. In the 2nd Century AD, the Greek astronomer Ptolemy described how during an experiment, the rays of sunlight falling through a rotating spoked wheel were forming patterns of color and light that induced euphoria in a bystander. The 19th Century French psychologist Pierre Janet discovered the calming effect of flickering light on his hysteric patients. In correspondence with cultural and technological changes, human aspirations for ASC find new routes. Brainwave

synchronizers are examples of today's non-drug technologies. They are said to induce a relaxation response by entraining alpha brain-wave (8-13 Hz) activity, even in the long-term. These and other claims galvanized their therapeutical and recreational use. The latter was reinforced due to the similarities between subjective experiences with 'digital drugs' and drug-induced experience. The present study investigates the major assertions with regard to stress reduction in a double blind quasi-experiment. The results show that immediate relaxation effects are attained though not in the longer term [See: Ossebaard, H.C. (2000). Stress reduction by technology. An experimental study into the effects of brain machines on burnout and state anxiety. *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* 25(2), p.93-102].

The last chapter will be a summary and concluding discussion of the psychological and cultural meaning of ASC, the pursuit of which may be an inherent human motivation. In the summer of 2002 most of the additional work (on LSD and DMT) will be done if I can find some financial support. Later next year, I will try to publish the results for a wider audience. Thus, I hope to contribute to a climate of freedom and understanding with regard to the issue of drug use. If anyone is interested and able to support this project financially this would be most welcome. I'd be happy to answer questions about my project and can be reached through e-mail at: [intox@wanadoo.nl](mailto:intox@wanadoo.nl)

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: 100% of any donations to MAPS for Hans Ossebaard's research will be allocated directly to him. MAPS has recently donated \$500 for additional follow-up research with Dr. Bastiaan's patients, for Chapter 2 of the study.]*

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