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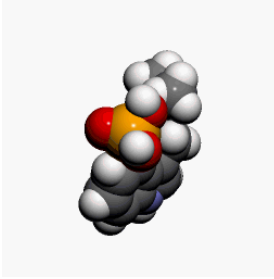
Are mystical experiences key to the therapeutic effects of psychedelics?

Samuli Kangaslampi, PhD

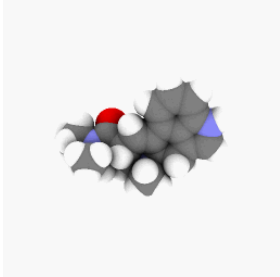
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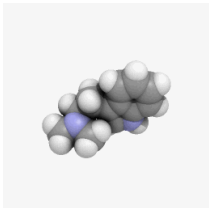
Psychedelics¹



Psilocybin



LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)



DMT (*N,N*-Dimethyltryptamine)
/ Ayahuasca



Single-dose psilocybin-assisted therapy in major depressive disorder: a placebo-controlled, double-blind, randomised clinical trial

Robin von Rotz,^{a,*} Eva M. Schindowski,^a Johannes Jungwirth,^a Anna Schuldt,^a Nathalie M. Rieser,^a Katharina Zahoranszky,^a Erich Seifritz,^b Alina Nowak,^b Peter Nowak,^b Lutz Jäncke,^c Katrin H. Preller,^{a,d} and Franz X. Vollenweider^{a,d}

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Research

JAMA Psychiatry | Original Investigation

Percentage of Heavy Drinking Days Following Psilocybin-Assisted Psychotherapy vs Placebo in the Treatment of Adult Patients With Alcohol Use Disorder
A Randomized Clinical Trial

Michael P. Bogenschutz, MD; Stephen Ross, MD; Snehal Bhatt, MD; Tara Baron, MA; Alyssa A. Forcehimes, PhD; Eugene Laska, PhD; Sarah E. Mennenga, PhD; Kelley O'Donnell, MD, PhD; Lindsey T. Owens, MA; Samantha Podrebarac, MA; John Rotrosen, MD; J. Scott Tonigan, PhD; Lindsay Worth, MA

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Trial of Psilocybin versus Escitalopram for Depression

Robin Carhart-Harris, Ph.D., Bruna Giribaldi, B.Sc., Rosalind Watts, D.Clin.Psy., Michelle Baker-Jones, B.A., Ashleigh Murphy-Beiner, M.Sc., Roberta Murphy, M.D., Jonny Martell, M.D., Allan Blenkins, M.Sc., David Erritzoe, M.D., and David J. Nutt, M.D.

Psychological Medicine

cambridge.org/psm

Original Article

Cite this article: Palhano-Fontes F et al (2019). Rapid antidepressant effects of the psychedelic ayahuasca in treatment-resistant depression: a randomized placebo-controlled trial. *Psychological Medicine* 49, 655–663. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291718001356>

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Revised: 16 April 2018
Accepted: 24 April 2018

Priority Communication



Lysergic Acid Diethylamide–Assisted Therapy in Patients With Anxiety With and Without a Life-Threatening Illness: A Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo-Controlled Phase II Study

Friederike Holze, Peter Gasser, Felix Müller, Patrick C. Dolder, and Matthias E. Liechti

Rapid antidepressant effects of the psychedelic ayahuasca in treatment-resistant depression: a randomized placebo-controlled trial

Fernanda Palhano-Fontes^{1,2}, Dayanna Barreto^{2,3}, Heloisa Onias^{1,2}, Katia C. Andrade^{1,2}, Morgana M. Novaes^{1,2}, Jessica A. Pessoa^{1,2}, Sergio A. Mota-Rolim^{1,2}, Flávia L. Osório^{4,5}, Rafael Sanches^{4,5}, Rafael G. dos Santos^{4,5}, Luís Fernando Tófoli⁶, Gabriela de Oliveira Silveira⁷, Mauricio Yonamine⁷, Jordi Riba⁸, Francisco R. Santos⁹, Antonio A. Silva-Junior⁹, João C. Alchieri¹⁰, Nicole L. Galvão-Coelho^{5,11}, Bruno Lobão-Soares^{5,12}, Jaime E. C. Hallak^{4,5}, Emerson Arcoverde^{2,3,5}, João P. Maia-de-Oliveira^{2,3,5} and Dráulio B. Araújo^{1,2}

- Around two dozen modern studies suggest psychedelics may have therapeutic potential in treating, e.g., treatment-resistant depression and addiction, when combined with psychological support or psychotherapy in a carefully controlled, therapeutic setting^{2 3}

Search Results

Viewing 1-10 out of 96 studies

Showing results for: **Other terms: psilocybin** | **Not yet recruiting, Recruiting studies**

☐ ☒ RECRUITING


NCT06067737

Outpatient Buprenorphine Induction With **Psilocybin** for Opioid Use Disorder

Conditions

Opioid Use Disorder

Locations

 Baltimore, Maryland, United States

☐ ☒ NOT YET RECRUITING

NCT06399263 **NEW**

Study of **Psilocybin** for Anorexia in Young Adults

Conditions

Anorexia Nervosa

Locations

 San Francisco, California, United States

☐ ☒ NOT YET RECRUITING

NCT06141876

Evaluation of **Psilocybin**-Assisted Psychotherapy in Treating Severe Depression in Patients With PTSD

Conditions

Depression

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Locations

Location not provided

☐ ☒ RECRUITING


NCT06378229 **NEW**

Psilocybin for Hospitalized Patients With Treatment-resistant Depression

Conditions

Treatment Resistant Depression

Locations

 Gent Oost-Vlaanderen, Belgium

☐ ☒ NOT YET RECRUITING

NCT06416085

Psilocybin-assisted Existential, Attachment and Relational (PEARL) Therapy for Patients With Advanced Cancer

Conditions

Advanced Cancer

Endocrine Cancer

Stage IV Lymphoma

Stage IV Melanoma

[Show 2 more conditions](#)

Locations

 Toronto, Ontario, Canada

"I saw time falling into the future. I no longer existed"

"a complete ripping out of myself into another form of being and reality"

"[T]he rest of the universe just disappeared and all of a sudden, we were everything ... I actually felt like I was the world"

(Finns' first experiences with psychedelics)⁶

"[P]silocybin can induce states of consciousness which are indistinguishable from, if not identical with, those experienced by mystics"

Walter Pahnke (1963)⁴

"[P]sychedelic substances reliably induce religious, spiritual, or mystical experiences, even in tightly controlled laboratory settings"

Yaden et al., 2017⁵

Mystical Experiences Questionnaire⁷

Mystical

- 4. Gain of insightful knowledge experienced at an intuitive level.
- 5. Feeling that you experienced eternity or infinity.
- 6. Experience of oneness or unity with objects and/or persons perceived in your surroundings.
- 9. Certainty of encounter with ultimate reality (in the sense of being able to experience).
- 14. Freedom from the limitations of your personal self and feeling a unity or bond with what was felt to be greater than your personal self.
- 15. Sense of being at a spiritual height.
- 16. Experience of pure being and pure awareness (beyond the world of sense impressions).
- 18. Experience of the insights that “all is One”.
- 20. Experience of oneness in relation to an “inner world” withing.
- 21. Sense of reverence.
- 23. You are convinced now, as you look back on your experience, that in what was really real).
- 24. Feeling that you experienced something profoundly sacred and holy.
- 25. Awareness of the life or living presence in all things.
- 26. Experience of the fusion of your personal self into a larger whole.
- 28. Experience of unity with ultimate reality.

Positive Mood

- 2. Experience of amazement.
- 8. Feelings of tenderness and gentleness.
- 12. Feelings of peace and tranquility.
- 17. Experience of ecstasy.
- 27. Sense of awe or awesomeness.
- 30. Feelings of joy.

Transcendence of Time and Space

- 1. Loss of your usual sense of time.
- 7. Loss of your usual sense of space.
- 11. Loss of usual awareness of where you were.
- 13. Sense of being “outside of” time, beyond past and future.
- 19. Being in a realm with no space boundaries.
- 22. Experience of timelessness.

Ineffability

- 3. Sense that the experience cannot be described adequately in words.
- 10. Feeling that you could not do justice to your experience by describing it in words.
- 29. Feeling that it would be difficult to communicate your own experience to others who have not had similar experiences.

“[T]hose who experience the most profound mystical experiences invariably receive the greatest symptom improvement”

David Nichols (2016)⁸

If that's the case...
We should try to foster or facilitate mystical experiences in people if they are offered psychedelics for therapeutic purposes!

E.g., Richards (2008)⁹;
Gandy (2022)¹⁰

Mystical experiences key to therapeutic effects?

For the first psychedelic experiences of Finns⁶:

- Level of mystical experience associated with positive changes in all areas of well-being surveyed, but strongest for positive changes in relationship with nature, in relationship with oneself, and in creativity



For most significant psychedelic experiences of French people¹¹:

- Those with a complete mystical experience more likely to report improvements in relations with self and others, in psychological well-being, in the feeling of connection or proximity with nature, and in creativity



Mystical experiences key to therapeutic effects?

Association between mystical-type experiences under psychedelics and improvements in well-being or mental health – A comprehensive review of the evidence

SAMULI KANGASLAMPI* 

Faculty of Social Sciences / Psychology, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

- Up to 2022, 36/44 identified studies found a link between mystical experiences under psychedelics and later improvements in well-being or mental health¹²
- More, and more unequivocal, evidence for this
 - a) among healthy people than in clinical populations, and
 - b) for changes in general well-being and life satisfaction, attitudes and behavior, and anxiety than for depression or other areas

Major issues

Uncovering psychological mechanisms mediating the effects of drugs: some issues and comments using the example of psychedelic drugs

Samuli Kangaslampi¹ 

Received: 30 September 2020 / Accepted: 30 October 2020

1. Methodological problems in how psychological mechanisms of action have been studied in psychedelic research¹³
- Much to learn from psychotherapy research!

Major issues

2. Is it ethical to cause mystical experiences in people? ^{14 15 16}
- Especially if they lead to changes in beliefs or worldviews?

Transformative experience and informed consent to psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy

Edward Jacobs^{1,2*}

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²Wellcome Centre for Ethics and Humanities, Nuffield Department of Population Health, Medical Sciences Division, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

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Viewpoint

Consciousness, Religion, and Gurus: Pitfalls of Psychedelic Medicine

Matthew W. Johnson*

Ethics and ego dissolution: the case of psilocybin

William R Smith¹,

Dominic Sisti²

¹Department of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

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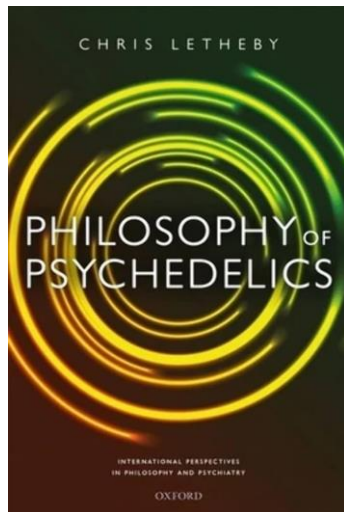
 Cite This: *ACS Pharmacol. Transl. Sci.* 2021, 4, 578–581

 [Read Online](#)

Major issues

3. Are we reliably measuring a distinct, well-defined unified phenomenon or construct reasonably called a mystical experience? ¹⁷

- Mystical experiences, as defined and understood in psychedelic research, may be quite a culturally-loaded, perennialist, Christian-specific formulation^{18 19 20}



BOOK REVIEW

Journal of Psychedelic Studies 2(1), pp. 1–4 (2018)
DOI: 10.1556/2054.2018.003
First published online May 4, 2018

The psychedelic religion of mystical consciousness

William A. Richards
Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences
Columbia University Press, New York, 2016, 244 pp.
Hardback ISBN: 978-0-231-17406-0

Rick J. Strassman, MD

aps
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Mystical and Other Alterations in Sense of Self: An Expanded Framework for Studying Nonordinary Experiences

Ann Taves
Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Perspectives on Psychological Science
2020, Vol. 15(3) 669–690
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Psychedelic-induced mystical experiences: An interdisciplinary discussion and critique

Sharday Mosurinjohn^{1*}, Leor Roseman² and Manesh Girn^{3*}

¹School of Religion, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada, ²Department of Brain Sciences, Centre for Psychedelic Research, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom, ³Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery, Montreal Neurological Institute, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

Major issues

4. Is the link to therapeutic effects **specific** to mystical-type experiences, in general or in some particular cases?

- Some studies suggest psychological insights and emotional breakthrough experiences may be even more linked to positive changes^{12 21}
- There are other types of subjective content, other types of psychedelic experiences!

Autobiographical psychedelic experiences

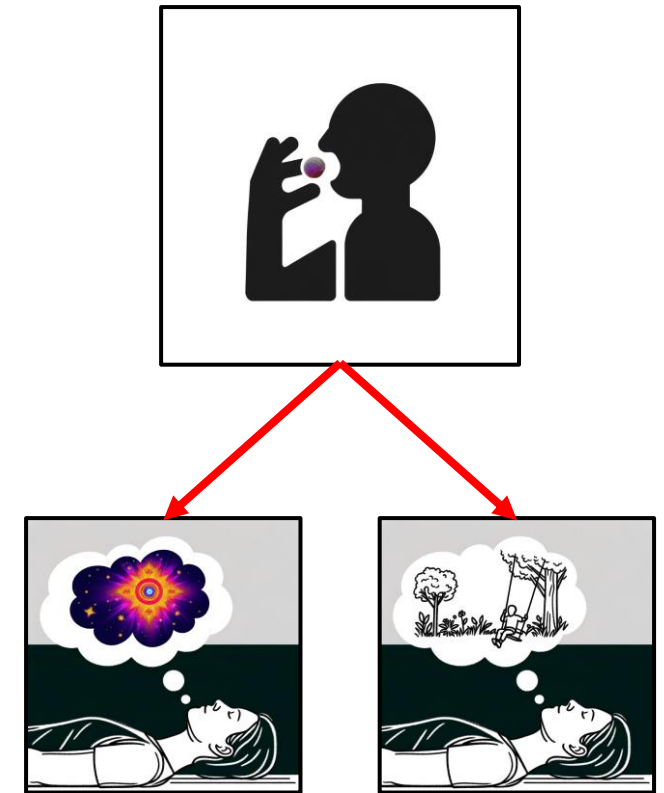
“[LSD] permitted a re-examination of significant experiences of the past, which sometimes were relived with frightening realism”

Busch & Johnson (1950)²²

- Autobiographical (aka. psychodynamic) experiences recognized as one major type of experience in “psychedelic cartographies” over the decades ^{9 23 24 25}
- Largely absent from modern research²⁶, but noted in qualitative work^{27 28 29}
 - e.g., Gasser et al., 2015²⁷: “(sometimes hypermnestic) reliving of incidents from the past”

Conclusions

- Psychedelics occasion “mystical experiences” quite reliably – this is really remarkable!
- High ratings on scales of mystical psychedelic experiences are commonly, though not universally, associated with positive changes in well-being and mental health
- Is fostering mystical experiences key to therapeutic use of psychedelics? There are major unresolved questions about
 - a) ethical issues involved,
 - b) the way we study and understand mystical experiences, and
 - c) whether other types of experiences may be as, or more, associated with therapeutic effects (for some indications³⁰)



- Psychedelics also occasion other types of psychedelic experiences that warrant careful study - especially autobiographical experiences!

Thank you!

Planning to take a psychedelic?

Help us understand the role of memories in psychedelic experiences!

This scientific study involves

- Answering questions and questionnaires about yourself, your well-being and mental health, your memories, and your psychedelic experience, before and after taking a psychedelic for a total of 3 x 10–20 minutes.
- Reporting on mental health symptoms and adverse life events, which may arouse some negative emotions in you.
- No compensation for participating.

You can take part if

- You are 18 years of age or older and fluent in English.
- You are planning to take a long-acting psychedelic like LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, or ayahuasca soon in any context.

This study has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee Psychology and Neuroscience at Maastricht University (ERCPN-278_36_02_2024).

We do not condone, promote or encourage the use of psychedelics. Only take part in this study if you are going to take a psychedelic anyway.

The University cannot be held liable for possible adverse effects or inconveniences arising from the use of these drugs on your own initiative. Due to limited research, we cannot rule out that using psychedelics can negatively affect you in the short or long term.

More information and to participate:

<https://tinyurl.com/psmemory>



Study coordinator: Dr. Samuli Kangaslampi
Responsible researcher: Dr. Kim Kuypers

For questions, please contact
fpn-pim_p149@maastrichtuniversity.nl



Slides with references available at
<https://kangaslampi.net/icp2024.pdf>

Email me at
samuli@kangaslampi.net

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