

From Newton To ESP: Parapsychology And The Challenge Of Modern Science

Psychoactive Substances and Paranormal Phenomena: A Comprehensive Review

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This paper investigates the relationship between psychoactive substances and so-called paranormal phenomena falling within the study of parapsychology. It is primarily concerned with extrasensory perception (ESP)—telepathy, precognition, and clairvoyance—as well as out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and near-death experiences (NDEs). Psychokinesis (PK), aura vision, encounter experiences, and sleep paralysis only make a very limited contribution to this review as they are seldom related to psychoactive drugs within the parapsychological literature. The paper borrows widely, but by no means exhaustively, from parapsychology as well as transpersonal studies, anthropology, ethnobotany, phytochemistry, psychiatry, psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, and neurobiology, particularly neurochemistry. It is organized into neurochemical models of paranormal experience (section 1), field reports of intentional and spontaneous phenomena incorporating anthropological, historical and clinical cases, and personal accounts (section 2), surveys of paranormal belief and experience (section 3), experimental research (section 4), and a methodological critique of the experimental research with recommendations for further work (section 5).

Keywords: *psychedelic, hallucinogen, entheogen, neurochemistry, parapsychology, psi, ESP, clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, OBE, NDE*

Ever since the beginning of the 20th century when Western scientists and academics began earnestly turning their attention to psychedelics there has been a clear association between the use of these substances and the transpersonal or paranormal experience. Indeed, those people most readily associated with the discovery and popularization of psychedelics also witnessed and explored both the transpersonal and the parapsychological dimensions that these substances induced, such as Albert Hofmann, Humphrey Osmond, John Smythies, Aldous Huxley, Gordon Wasson, Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey, Duncan Blewett, Walter Pahnke, James Fadiman, and Stanislov Grof, to name but a few (Luke, 2006; Stevens, 1988). The overlap between transpersonal and paranormal experiences is apparent (e.g., Daniels, 2005), but while a great deal has been written in recent years about psychedelic experiences from the transpersonal perspective, a comprehensive review of the parapsychological literature relating to psychedelic experiences is long overdue.

This review focuses primarily on the class of psychoactive substances that largely induce visionary and trance-like experiences. For the purposes of the present review this includes drugs and sacramentals such as mescaline, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), psilocybin,

ayahuasca, *N,N*-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), marijuana (which is treated as a psychedelic in the current review), and ketamine, but not opiates or cocaine. This class of visionary substances has been termed differently by different authors, usually dependent upon the connotation they wish to convey about the psychoactive effects or how the substance is used. Within the literature of the present review, they have been termed "mind-expanding" (e.g., Palmer, 1979), "psychotropic" (e.g., Irwin, 1994), "psychodysleptic" (Cavanna & Servadio, 1964), "hallucinogenic" (e.g., Blackmore, 1992), and even "entheogenic" (Ruck, Bigwood, Staples, Wasson, & Ott, 1979), meaning bringing forth the divine within, which is a useful term to convey the apparent divinatory and visionary nature of these substances (for discussions see Letcher, 2004; Ott, 1996; Smith, 2000), although they might be more correctly termed "potential entheogens" as they do not automatically produce such experiences (Krippner, 2006b, p. 1). Finally, there is the most frequently used term, "psychedelic", which was created in 1956 by Humphrey Osmond and means "mind manifesting" (Osmond, 1961a, p. 76). Where specified, the original term used by the authors will be preserved to reflect their orientation to the issue. However, elsewhere, where appropriate, the more widely used term "psychedelic" will be used.

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