

INTEGRATING THE INEFFABLE
A SOCIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PSYCHEDELIC
EXPERIENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

There has been a renewed and growing interest in psychedelic drugs in the 21st century. Drawing on social-phenomenology, cognitive sociology, and ‘set and setting’ theory, I delineate how individuals use socially defined frameworks of understanding to attribute meaning to psychedelic experiences. These frameworks refer to the ‘ready-made’ schemes that structure subjective experience of objects, people, and a variety of other phenomena. Hence, I investigate how experiences with psychedelic drugs are meaningfully integrated into everyday understandings of reality. The main question guiding this thesis is: How do users of psychedelic drugs reconcile the experience with everyday waking consciousness and social reality? I attempt to answer this question in three phases that will 1) describe the quality of the psychedelic experience, 2) identify how individuals integrate the experience into everyday life, and 3) outline what these experiences can tell us about the social construction of everyday reality in the United States. This study uses conventional and directed content analysis of accounts originally collected between the years 1960-1964 as part of the Harvard Psilocybin Project. Specifically, I analyze over 200 narrative reports from 100 individuals collected from the Timothy Leary Papers archival collection held at the New York Public Library. These reports recount experiences with psilocybin, mescaline, and LSD. Using this data to describe the character of psychedelic experiences, how individuals integrate these experiences into everyday life, and what constitutes valid knowledge in the United States, I hope to ‘demystify’ the psychedelic experience and generate more useful ways of thinking about psychoactive substances.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

There is a venerable tradition in philosophy that argues that what the reader assumes to be real is but a shadow and that by attending to what the writer says about perception, thought, the brain, language, culture, a new methodology, or novel social forces, the veil can be lifted. This sort of line, of course, gives as much role to the writer and his writings as is possible to imagine and for that reason is pathetic. (What can better push a book than the claim that it will change what the reader thinks is going on?)

-Erving Goffman, Frame Analysis

You must recognize by now the difficulty of my task. I am trying to expand your consciousness, break through your macroscopic, secular set, 'turn you on,' give you a faint feeling of a psychedelic moment.

-Timothy Leary, Politics of Ecstasy

In pursuing the goal of developing a more useful understanding of psychoactive substances, I have become aware of the disparate assumptions about human cognition that inform our collective (mis)-understandings about psychoactive substances. Subsequently, I will be touching on debates that have been taking place in the social sciences and highlight the tensions between subjective and objective approaches to cognition. While I suggest that a holistic understanding of human-

cognition is possible and preferable, I do not pretend to offer a definitive solution to the elusive mind-body problem. Nevertheless, I hope that contributing a cognitive-sociological understanding that avoids both ‘universal’ and ‘individual’ understandings of cognition will help advance more useful ways of thinking about ‘drugs’.

In my experience, phenomenologically grounded approaches appear to be most conducive to this effort. As Weil (1972/2004:11) plainly put, “Consciousness is everybody’s business because we all carry it about in our heads.” Conscious experience concerns all humans, regardless of their characteristics. Taken as such, the control of conscious experience must be of equal concern. In the language of Nagel (1974), I assume that if you are reading this, there is something that it is like to *be* you. Moreover, I assume that we share the precarious position of existing in the world. Hence, my theoretical starting point for this proposal (in line with Alfred Schutz, William James, Edmund Husserl, and many others before me) is that a personal consciousness exists. A variety of practices and tools exist with the precise function of facilitating changes in conscious experience. I find that the study of psychoactive substances, the experiences they facilitate, and the societal response to these substances provide a number of salient insights regarding culture and cognition. Psychoactive substances are of particular interest because they intervene in our biological processes to facilitate certain *types* of subjective experience. Yet, these subjective experiences are attributed meaning according to socially defined

frameworks of understanding, which are exchanged through socialization and variable across cultures.

Socially defined frameworks of understanding are the ‘ready-made’ schemes and typifications that structure subjective experience of objects, people, and a variety of other phenomena (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009; Schutz 1970; Torowetz, Hollander, and Maynard 2016). As stated by Huxley (1954/2004:23), “Every individual is at once the beneficiary and victim of the linguistic tradition into which he [or she] was born.” Thus, through processes of socialization, these linguistic frameworks are exchanged and shape subjective experience. For instance, in the United States many consciousness-changing tools bare a heavy stigma associated with their classification as ‘drugs.’ This cultural classification has implications for the seemingly biological process pertaining to how individuals experience the effects of psychoactive substances, which will be explored further below. Psychedelics, arguably one of the most stigmatized categories of substances, are especially informative in this regard.

In order to move towards a more useful ways of thinking about psychoactive substances, I have investigated how experiences with psychedelics are attributed meaning. Along these lines, I have also attempted to answer the question: how do users of psychedelic drugs reconcile the experience with everyday waking consciousness and social reality? In this thesis, I attempt to provide a preliminary answer by first addressing the subjective character of the psychedelic experience and transitions into the psychedelic state. Moreover, I assess how participants communicate this experience through written reports of psychedelic sessions.

Specifically, I delineate how individuals use socially defined frameworks of understanding to attribute meaning to psychedelic experiences. This was pursued with the intention of shedding light on how psychedelic drug experiences are conceived as valid sources of knowledge and integrated into everyday life. I conclude by presenting my interpretation of what the psychedelic experience can tell us about the construction of everyday reality. Specifically, I discuss how conflicting definitions of psychedelics and the conscious experiences they produce have come to be seen as subversive to socially defined reality in the West.

A Sociological Perspective on Drug Effects

The word 'psychedelic' frequently refers to variety of natural and synthetic substances, including (but not limited to): psilocybin, LSD, ayahuasca, DMT, peyote, mescaline, iboga, ibogaine, ketamine, amanita muscaria (fly agaric), and sometimes marijuana. This term was coined by Humphrey Osmond in a letter to Aldous Huxley in 1956 (Baker 2005; Huxley 1956/1999). The word is intended to represent the psychological effects of these substances, meaning, 'mind manifesting.' The social process of classifying these substances becomes increasingly messy as researchers use disparate standards of chemistry, pharmacology, phenomenology, and cultural applications for their determinations. The application of these different terms is often concordant with the attitudes of the researcher and frequently represent particular thought communities. For example, those who orient their approach to the question of drugs around 'substance abuse' are likely to refer to this class by the term

‘hallucinogen.’ This term originates from the psychotomimetic tradition of psychiatry, which asserts that the effects of these drugs are akin to schizophrenic hallucinations. Others may use the term ‘entheogen’—meaning, “That which causes god to be within an individual,” (Miller 2015:4). Those who employ the word entheogen to refer to this category of substances may wish to highlight the religious or mystical qualities of these substances and downplay any associations with ‘recreational’ uses.

For the analysis, I will be referring to the ‘classical’ psychedelics, defined by their similar action on serotonergic brain receptors (Nichols 2016). Classical psychedelics include LSD, DMT, psilocybin, and mescaline. I employ this term for the specificity of substance types, as the data for my proposed analysis only spans classical psychedelics. These substances elicit a vast range of subjective effects such as alteration or intensification of sense perceptions, cognition, and emotion and dissolution of the ego or self (Swanson 2018). Moreover, they are non-addictive and present little physiological risk (Nichols 2016).

The use of psychedelics is well-established to have occurred among humans in religious contexts for millennia (Carod-Artal 2015; El-Seedi et al. 2005; Miller 2015; de Rios 2005; Grinspoon and Bakalar 1983; Nichols 2016).¹ Aside from being a remarkably consistent observation, this understanding is generally indicative of the irony surrounding the predominant stance toward psychedelics in the United States.

¹ See Appendix A for a broader history of the religious use of psychedelics.

While cultures around the globe have been using these drugs for an untold number of years, contemporary clinical researchers must again establish the safety of psychedelics for use in medical contexts. Scientific inquiry into psychedelics has occurred since about the nineteenth century (Grinspoon and Bakalar 1983; Langlitz 2013). Yet, a culmination of factors associated with the countercultural movement of the 1960's led to a decision to criminalize the use of psychedelics in the Controlled Substances Act of 1970, stifling prospects for research.

Nonetheless, there has been a renewed and growing interest in psychedelic drugs in the 21st century. Bolstered by a pragmatic scientism that functions to sanitize psychedelics of cultural stigma (Langlitz 2013), a contemporary resurgence in psychedelic studies has identified psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy as a prospective treatment for a variety of mental health disorders (Rucker, Illif, and Nutt 2018; Tupper, Wood, Yensen, & Johnson 2015). Recent evidence shows that psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy can remediate symptoms associated with ailments such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, drug and alcohol addiction, and anxiety associated with terminal diagnoses (see Bogenschutz et al. 2015; Bogenschutz & Johnson 2015; Gasser, Kirchner, & Passie, 2015; Griffiths, Richards, McCann, & Jesse 2006; Johansen and Krebs 2015; Johnson, Garcia-Romeu, Cosimano, & Griffiths 2014; Krebs and Johansen 2012; Mithoefer, Wagner, Mithoefer, Jerome, & Doblin 2011; Osório et al. 2015). With neuroscience and psychiatry leading the way, “Professions of soberness and the display of dispassionate objectivity were used

rhetorically to reinstate the legitimacy of scientific and therapeutic uses of psychedelics.” (Langlitz 2013:4).

In conjunction with the influx of clinical-psychiatric and other psychological research, a remarkable amount of knowledge from anthropological and ethnobotanical traditions have persisted. For instance, there has been an array studies variously focused on the use of plant medicines by indigenous cultures (see De Rios 2005; Furst 1972; Labate and Cavnar 2018) and the growing Western interest in ‘psychedelics’ manifested in both the phenomena of ‘drug tourism’ and ‘psychedelic science’ (see DeRios 1994; Fotiou 2016; Kavenska and Simonova 2012; Labate and Cavnar 2018; Langlitz 2013; Prayag et al 2016; Winkelman 2005). Consistent with my aim of advancing a more holistic approach to cognition that moves beyond materialist and constructionist conceptions of cognition, Langlitz’s (2013:18) anthropological examination of psychedelic science suggests that the field of ‘psychedelic studies’ has already moved toward a more monist approach. Defined by the materialist orientation of the neuroscientific turn, this shift in perspective transcends the previous dualism of ‘mind and body’ in favor of a monist conception of mind *as* body. However, the ontological and epistemological implications of this transition have yet to be realized.

Although psychedelic studies appears to be a great area by which to advance a materialist understanding of cognition the discovery of neurological correlates to psychedelic experiences, an overemphasis on neuroscientific understandings may risk a *pharmacocentric* perspective on psychedelics. Pharmacocentrism essentially gives primacy to the substance and its pharmacological effect on users at the expense of the

psychological and social factors concerning how individuals experience and conceptualize the states of consciousness a substance produces. Thus, in my proposed effort to advance more useful ways of thinking about psychoactive substances, I am making an explicit effort to avert a pharmacocentric approach (Decorte 2011). However, I do not wish to be dismissive of neuroscientific understandings of psychedelics or other psychoactives, as they are complementary in a holistic view of cognition. Additionally, compared to research on substances such as cocaine (Decorte 2011), psychedelic research has been less plagued by pharmacocentrism due to the established importance of context for the psychedelic experience (Becker 1967; Bunce 1979; Carhart-Harris et al. 2018; Hartogsohn 2017; Leary, Metzner, and Alpert 1964; Metzner and Leary 1967; Nichols 2016; Swanson 2018; Zinberg 1984).

For instance, while classical psychedelics have been found to share an affinity for specific receptor types, evidence suggests there are differences in the subjective effects individual substances produce (Swanson 2018). In addition to the substance type and dose, the effects of psychedelics have been found to present themselves differently according to a variety of contextual factors. These ‘extra-pharmacological’ factors include the inner world of the individual using the drug, the immediate physical environment, and the broader socio-cultural context where the drug use takes place (Barber 1970; Becker 1967; Bunce 1979; Carhart-Harris et al. 2018; Eisner 1997; Hartogsohn 2017; Metzner and Leary 1967; Metzner, Litwin and Weil 1967; Neitzke-Spruill and Glasser 2018; Nichols 2016; Wallace 1959; Zinberg 1984).

The concepts developed to refer to these factors are *set and setting*. Originally coined by Timothy Leary and his colleagues (1964), the terms set and setting have remained a constant in the literature pertaining to psychedelic studies. Set refers to the inner conditions of the person using psychedelics and includes factors such as: their mood, attitudes, personal history, personality, expectations, motivations for using, and beliefs about themselves and the use of drugs. It can be further divided into the categories of ‘long-range set’ and ‘immediate set’, which respectively refer to lifetime characteristics of the individual and characteristics of the individual at the time of using the drug (Leary et al. 1964). Setting, on the other hand, refers to the physical environment where the use of psychedelics takes place, the number of others present and their relationship to the user, as well as the socio-cultural context that the use takes place.

For example, if I decide to use psilocybin, my experience is mediated by a variety of variables. I make the decision to ingest psilocybin with a specific *purpose* in mind and likely have some *expectation* about what I might experience. My mood at the time of ingestion will also play a role in how I interpret the resulting changes in my consciousness. Aspects of my biographical history (e.g. values, beliefs, religious beliefs) will contribute to my perspective. Furthermore, the aforementioned factors are simultaneously impacted by the location where I take psilocybin, who I am with, and the nature of the situation (e.g. religious, clinical, naturalistic, recreational, etc.). Finally, the broader cultural definitions surrounding states of consciousness induced

by drugs and meanings of drug use in general may inform my approach to the decision to ingest substances, as well as my interpretation of the effects.

In other words, outcomes of the experiences are related to the *meaning* that is attributed to them. An example of this can be found in Wallace's (1959) cross-cultural comparison of peyote experiences. In his comparison, he found that white peyote users had negative experiences; whereas, Native American peyote users had positive reactions characterized by feelings religious reverence. Wallace (1959) attributed this difference to the varying meanings ascribed to the mental events that transpired after ingesting peyote. The differences were concordant with varying worldviews of the Native Americans and whites. Specifically, whites perceived the phenomena as "hallucinations" signified insanity (representative of the psychotomimetic perspective on psychedelics), while the religious cosmology of the Native Americans led to largely positive interpretations of the experience (Wallace 1959).

More recently, clinical investigations of psilocybin and LSD have shown that psychedelics can facilitate meaningful experience (Griffiths et al. 2006, 2008; Preller et al. 2017). This process of 'meaning-modulation' (Garcia-Romeu & Richards 2018) is associated with therapeutic efficacy and has shown to be long lasting (Garcia-Romeu et al. 2014; Griffiths et al. 2008, 2011). Furthermore, Hartogsohn (2018) has suggested that the ability of psychedelics to enhance meaning is integral to their therapeutic effects. Here, we begin to reach the epistemological limits of neuroscience.

The Relevance of Subjectivity

While neuroscientific investigations of psychedelic experiences can identify the biological underpinnings of meaningful psychedelic experiences, meaning is necessarily experienced and attributed to phenomena subjectively. Consequently, knowledge production and dissemination is predicated on the subjective experience of the actors involved (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The social sciences often presuppose the existence of a social reality full of symbols, organizations, systems, and social groups—all corresponding with the existence of subjective actors with a certain structure of consciousness (Schutz 1970). As such, meaning originates from a variety of enculturating processes throughout the life of a subjective actor, making it contingent on sociocultural forces. Therefore, in line with Nagel's (1974:444-445) argument against reduction, "If the subjective character of experience is fully comprehensible only from one point of view, then any shift to greater objectivity that is, less attachment to a specific viewpoint-does not take us nearer to the real nature of the phenomenon: it takes us farther away from it." In turn, it is precisely these aspects of the psychedelic experience, which are antithetical to a purely materialist ontology, that invite sociological input and the potential for a more holistic conception of cognition.

The potential for sociological input is rooted in the Weberian concept of *Verstehen*, which centers meaning in social scientific inquiry (see Schutz 1970:265-275). With the goal of 'understanding' social phenomena, this interpretive framework for the study of the social world aims, "to find out what the actor 'means' in his [or

her] actions, in contrast to the meaning this action has for the actor's partner or a neutral observer," (Schutz 1970:274). Here, the subjectivity of the actor is given greater credence. Building on this interpretivist orientation in his development of 'social-phenomenology', Schutz (1970) did much to illustrate how meaning is subjectively attributed.

The process of meaning attribution is best described via the process of 'phenomenological reduction' (Schutz 1945:82). The phenomenological reduction entails suspending our belief in the existence of reality of the various phenomena, concepts, and objects encountered in our daily life. The remainder of consciousness, called 'pure duration', that stands in relation to our stream of cogitations is experienced as undifferentiated. Here, as Schutz (1970:63) states, "Each phase of experience melts into the next without any sharp boundaries as it is being lived through." A significant insight in this regard is that consciousness is always *of* something (Schutz 1970:58). Regardless of whether I am hearing the bark of a next-door neighbor's dog, noticing the feeling of my body as it is supported by the chair I am sitting on, or thinking about what I would like for dinner, my consciousness is always directed toward a subjectively experienced phenomenon. When reflecting upon a conscious phenomenon as an 'experience,' I am making an attempt typify, mark, classify, categorize, organize, associate, and otherwise draw boundaries to distinguish subjectively experienced phenomena (Schutz 1970; Zerubavel 1991). Despite the subjective nature of this process, I attribute meaning to mental phenomena according

to socially defined frameworks of understanding that I have acquired throughout my life.

Nevertheless, the frameworks I use to attribute meaning to various phenomena are not unique to me. Nor, are my patterns of thought the result of a universal human element. Rather, my thought patterns are the result of my membership in what are referred to by Zerubavel (1997) as ‘thought communities’. Inevitably, membership in particular ‘thought communities’ contributes to how I subjectively make determinations regarding the reality of a particular situation or experience (Zerubavel 1997). In other words, while I can subjectively interpret the province of religious practice as ‘real’, I can also selectively interpret the world through a religious lens. Thus, my determinations as to the ‘realness’ of some phenomenon will vary according to atheistic beliefs or adherence to a Jewish, Hindu, or any other religious understanding of the world. These determinations may also vary depending on whether I view the world as a scientist, a United States citizen, or an activist for a specific political party. Given that individuals can differentially apply the accent of reality to their experiences, the meaning we attach to situations rather than the ontology of worldly events forms reality.

Therefore, through intersubjective social processes, subjectively experienced phenomena are selectively elevated to the status of ‘reality’ based on taken-for-granted frameworks of understanding that have been established beyond our control (Schutz 1970). I follow Schutz with my conceptualization of ‘reality’. Borrowing from William James, he states, “everything that evokes our interest is real: to call an object

real signifies that this object stands in definite relation to us,” (Schutz and Luckmann: 22). However, Schutz diverges from James when it comes to the partitions of reality. While James refers to various so-called ‘sub-universes’ of reality, Schutz (1970) develops the concept of ‘finite provinces of meaning’ to which we attribute the ‘accent of reality.’ In this sense, we *give* the accent of reality to a number of distinct provinces of meaning which each have their own ‘cognitive styles’ that define them. For example, there is the province of everyday reality, the province of science, the province of religion, the province of religious experience, the province of dreams, and the province of art.

Sociologists have developed and adopted number of similar concepts to describe how these socially-derived structures of meaning interact with and shape cognition, including: frames (Goffman 1974), filters (Friedman 2011), cognitive styles (Schutz 1970), mental lenses (Zerubavel 1997) schemata (Cerulo 2010; Zerubavel 1997), and domains (Cerulo 2010). Ignoring some of the finer differences between these concepts for the time being, the relevant feature for this thesis is that individuals attribute meaning to perceptual phenomena according to these interpretive frameworks. Furthermore, these frameworks are linguistic in nature and vary according to one’s thought communities. Thus, through the processes of socialization, these linguistic frameworks are passed down and shape our orientations to everyday reality (Schutz 1970; Schutz and Luckmann 1973).

Everyday reality is considered the *paramount* reality (Schutz 1970; Schutz and Luckman 1973; Berger and Luckmann 1966). I experience everyday reality as

paramount because regardless of the province of reality I transition to, I always return to the reality of everyday life concerned by pragmatic motives. Experiences with psychedelics constitute what Berger and Luckmann (1966) call a 'flight from everyday reality.' Essentially, a flight from reality constitutes a shift from the experiences of everyday waking consciousness, and everyday waking consciousness has a specific character that is socially constructed.

Perhaps, you can recall times when you have encountered an experience that led you to shift between provinces of meaning in order to adequately attribute an explanation to the event. In the course of writing this thesis, I have underwent a number of these shifts between provinces of meaning in order to type, contemplate, read the work of another thinker, and attend to the pragmatic necessities of everyday life. While not uncommon, integration of the various flights of reality into normal consciousness is vital for the maintenance of 'routinized existence in society' (Berger and Luckmann 1966:116). Integration may be enabled through a variety of mechanisms informed by the symbolic structures of a culture or society. Integration can be achieved by 'making sense' in terms of conceptual frameworks that legitimate the reality of an experience or phenomenon. Or, experiences can be entirely denied the status of 'reality' through a process of 'nihilation' that classifies them as deviant or criminal. Both of these processes can operate at the subjective, subcultural, and societal levels. In this sense, I aim to examine how individuals have made sense of their psychedelic experiences in everyday terms, as well as how these experiences have been conceived of as deviant in the intersubjective stock of knowledge.

A Social-Phenomenological Approach

In order to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences with psychedelics, a major aim of this thesis is to understand the subjective effects of psychedelics. The variety of ‘set and setting’ factors that jointly contribute to the psychedelic experience hinder attempts at succinctly characterizing the effects of these substances. Nevertheless, this has not prevented researchers from identifying consistent phenomenological elements of these experiences (Huxley 1954/2004, 1956/2004; Masters and Houston 1966; Shanon 2002; Swanson 2018). For example, Masters and Houston (1966:5) provide a short, non-exhaustive overview that speaks to the complexity of these experiences.

“Even the briefest summation of the psychological effects of these drugs would have to include the following: Changes in visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory and kinesthetic perception; changes in experiencing time and space; changes in the rate and content of thought; body image changes; hallucinations; vivid images--eidetic images—seen with the eyes closed; greatly heightened awareness of color; abrupt and frequent mood and affect changes; heightened suggestibility; enhanced recall or memory; depersonalization and ego dissolution; dual, multiple, and fragmented consciousness; seeming awareness of internal organs and processes of the body; upsurge of unconscious materials; enhanced awareness of linguistic nuances; increased sensitivity to nonverbal cues; sense of capacity to communicate much better by nonverbal means, sometimes including the telepathic; feelings of empathy; regression and ‘primitivization’; apparently heightened capacity for concentration; magnification of character traits and psychodynamic processes; an apparent nakedness of psychodynamic processes that makes evident the interaction of ideation, emotion, and perception with one another and with inferred unconscious processes; concerned with philosophical, cosmological, and religious question and in general apprehension of a world that has slipped the chains of normal categorical ordering, leading to an intensified interest in self and world and also to a range of responses moving from extremes of anxiety to extremes of pleasure.”

Many significant strides were made in the wave of psychedelic research that occurred from the time Albert Hofmann synthesized LSD in 1943, until psychedelics were federally outlawed by the Controlled Substances Act of 1970. More recently, clinical and cognitive neuroscientific studies have contributed to the pool of knowledge concerning the effects of psychedelics (Swanson 2018).

In addition to the breadth of influential variables, the project of describing how drugs objectively affect subjective human consciousness is made difficult by reliance on people's descriptions of the change in their subjective experience while using the drug. In other words, descriptions of drug effects necessarily rely on individuals' post-hoc rationalizations of an experience had in the present moment. As we move from present experience to our recollection of particular phenomena, our recollection is defined, categorized, and assigned meaning according to the provinces of meaning and language structures that inhabit our mind. In turn, our description of an experience is inevitably removed from that experience. Consequently, this fact is especially salient for the study of drug experiences as findings become limited by the constraints of language.

Along these lines, Huxley and Schutz both maintained that symbolic modes of communicating such as language never amount to the actually experienced phenomena they represent. Yet, Huxley's experiences with mescaline led him to introduce two of the most famous works written works of psychedelic phenomenology to date. While others before him certainly have described experiences with psychoactive substances, Huxley contributed to a renewed interest into the

significance of the conscious experiences these substances facilitate. Moreover, Huxley (1956/2004, 1961/1999) approached his analysis of psychedelic experiences with the assertion that commonalities in these experiences can be ascertained despite the unusual nature of the phenomena encountered. The main characteristics identified by Huxley include: experiences of light, visionary figures, modifications or transformations of the surrounding world, a general sense that things are ‘all-right’ in the world, and a feeling of gratitude associated with life and being (1961/1999). Huxley interpreted many parallels between the psychedelic experience and mystical states of consciousness pursued and described in religious traditions around the world. Taking a comparative approach, his experiences seemed to reaffirm hypotheses about an intrinsic commonality to world religious traditions that were advanced in *The Perennial Philosophy*.

Huxley’s (1954/2004, 1956/2004) work led him to assert that pursuit of transcendence is a virtually ubiquitous human characteristic. He concluded that psychedelics were a valid and valuable means of pursuing transcendence. Moreover, he noted the inherent conflict with cultural values that this posed (Huxley 1954/2004, 1963/1994). This conflict between the subjective and intersubjective reality deserves more attention and will be revisited in the final chapter of this thesis. In any case, the work of Huxley helped set the stage for other phenomenological important studies of the psychedelic experience (e.g. Masters and Houston; Shanon 2002).

One other work of psychedelic phenomenology relevant to mention in relation to my social phenomenological approach is Benny Shanon’s (2002) *The Antipodes of*

the Mind. Shanon (2002) employs an explicitly phenomenological approach grounded in cognitive psychology in a study of the Amazonian brew ayahuasca. In total, he outlines seven major facets of the conscious domain produced by ayahuasca. Shanon presents his study as an extensive model of a phenomenological ‘charting’ of non-normative states of consciousness. Following the lead of Huxley, Shanon (2002) aims to contribute to an ongoing effort of mapping the regions of the psyche. Along these lines, Shanon (2002) provides an incredibly salient analogy for viewing the project of phenomenology. He compares his role as a phenomenologist studying psychedelics to that of a cartographer. Where the map-makers produce a map based on the collective efforts of surveying a particular region, phenomenologists produce a ‘map’ of the psychedelic experience on the basis of a variety of accounts. Here, Shanon (2002) distinguishes between the plethora of subjective reports of psychedelic experience (which remain important data sources) and the scientific analysis of experiences. He states that, “it is in the passage from these [subjective reports] to the drawing of the unified map that all the real professional work actually lies,” (Shanon 2002:49). I have approached my thesis very much in this light.

However, I intend to contribute to this collective effort by introducing a social-phenomenological approach that focuses on meaning and the intersubjective process of reality construction to the study of psychedelic experiences. Thus, my efforts here cannot be seen as an attempt to map the regions ‘psyche’ in the way that Huxley and Shanon approach their investigations. Rather, with this shift in focus, I contend that the mental phenomena are inevitably the result of cultural transmission of certain

cognitive frameworks. As Metzner and Leary (1967:17) have previously pointed out, “The process of being brought up and educated in a particular culture is a process of having the nervous system imprinted with a few thousand tribal concepts and symbols.” In this sense, while Huxley posits that the brain functions as a reducing valve (Swanson 2018), I propose that culture is the mechanism by which we reduce our experience. Neurobiology is the instrument. The use of psychedelics and other means may allow one to ‘cut through the fence’ of culture, as Huxley (1963/1999) has eloquently described. But, the content (perceptual, archetypal, or otherwise) is attributed meaning according to the complex and varying exposures to human culture an individual has endured in the time leading up to psychedelic use.

As Swanson (2018:9) has suggested in his description of Huxley’s ‘filtration theory’, “it remains unclear exactly *what it is* that the brain is filtering and consequently *what it is* that emerges when the filter is pharmacologically perturbed by a psychedelic drug.” In shifting the discussion towards culture, I will show in the coming chapters how socially-derived linguistic frameworks are subjectively applied to make sense of psychedelic experiences. This will help advance theory about integration of psychedelic experiences. Moreover, I also hope this work will help move us toward a healthier integration of non-ordinary conscious experiences into our collective understanding.

In order to do so, I conducted a social-phenomenological content analysis that draws on narrative accounts of experiences with psilocybin (both naturally and synthetically derived), mescaline and LSD written by participants in the Harvard

Psilocybin Project. A major caveat to social-phenomenology as an analytic approach is that phenomenology is *empirical* rather than scientific in the experimental sense (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This distinction rests on the descriptive nature of phenomenology, and I make no predictive claims as a result. Hence, I make no assertions regarding the ontological status of the phenomena experienced in the ‘psychedelic reality.’ For instance, when a participant says he was confronted by the devil, whose face was green with a black goatee, I do not place value on the ‘realness’ of the experience based upon a comparison with some canonical description of the devil. Nor do I disregard an experience like this as ‘merely a hallucination’, as some would if I attempted to communicate that I have been ‘hearing voices.’ For this thesis, it is sufficient to treat these experiences as real insofar as subjects assign meaning to the phenomena they encounter. Similarly, I will be unable to make assessments regarding the temporal stability of reported changes in the subjective realities of participants. Thus, while participants may interpret experiences as being ‘life changing’, I have no way of evaluating any behavioral or attitudinal changes beyond what is reported at the time the reflections were written by the participants.

Despite these limitations, a phenomenologically grounded approach is employed here with the intention of nearing the ‘essence’ of the psychedelic experience (Schutz 1945). Illustrations of attempts at determining the ‘essence’ of a phenomena can be found in any taxonomical categorization. Take a bird for example. What are the features of a bird that must remain the same across all imaginable variations in order to maintain its status as a bird? One may start by suggesting that

birds have feathers, beaks, make nests, lay eggs, and fly. Yet, the discovery of ostriches and penguins (among other species) would require a revision to this list of essential characteristics, and so on. Simplistic as this example may be, it demonstrates the effort to reach the ‘kernel’ of a particular phenomenon. While others before me have done much to identify the essence of psychedelic phenomenology, I present the essence of how psychedelic experiences remove filters and dissolve boundaries of ordinary experience. Furthermore, I describe a few of the prevalent frameworks that individuals apply to their experiences in order to integrate these experiences into everyday life.

General Structure

Thus far, I have introduced my aims for this thesis. Drawing on multiple fields of study, I hope to illustrate how psychedelic experiences are made meaningful, as well as extend the contributions of cognitive sociology to the study of psychoactive substances. In order to do so, I will be conducting a social-phenomenological content analysis, which prioritizes the social frameworks used by individuals to subjectively attribute meaning to various phenomena. Chapter 2 will further detail my source of data, as well as the methods I have taken for analysis.

Chapter 3 of my thesis will present the subjective quality of the psychedelic experience as it is described by the authors of psychedelic experience reports. Beyond the themes that arise from the authors’ descriptions, I will also detail the cognitive style pertaining to the subjective experience of psychedelics. In addition to inductively

identifying the ‘essence’ of the psychedelic experience, I aim to examine the six features that make-up cognitive styles: (i) a suspension of belief (referred to Schutz as an *epoché*), (ii) tension of consciousness, (iii) spontaneity, (iv) time sense, (v) way of experiencing the self, and (vi) form of sociality (Schutz 1970; Schutz and Luckmann 1973).

Chapter 4 deals with the social influences on the psychedelic experience. By highlighting the ways that social structures become manifest in subjective cognitive processes, I demonstrate how individuals linguistically integrate their experiences into their normal waking consciousness and everyday life using socially-derived frameworks of understanding. Moreover, I explore the processes by which individuals derive knowledge from psychedelic experiences by ‘breaching’ the cognitive frameworks that characterize normal waking consciousness and everyday reality (Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984).

In the final chapter of my thesis, I explore what the subjective experience of psychedelics can tell us about social construction of everyday reality. Specifically, I explore the historical processes of rationalization that have contributed to the devaluation of certain types of knowledge. Along these lines, I suggest that the perception that psychedelics are deviant has stemmed from legal, scientific, and religious rationalization that perceives ideological conformity as a necessity for the maintenance of a social order geared towards ‘progress’.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Recentering ourselves in our subjectivity means a tremendous new reempowering of language, for language is the stuff of which the subjective world is made.

-Terence McKenna

And if it be objected that these terms are but artificial conventions created by our 'will and pleasure,' and that therefore we cannot utilize them for real insight into the meaning which social acts have for those who act, but only for our interpretation, we could answer that it is precisely this building up of a system of conventions and an honest description of the world which is and is alone the task of scientific thought

-Alfred Schutz

In order to investigate the psychedelic experience, its social influences, and the integration of the psychedelic experience into everyday reality, I have conducted a content analysis of psychedelic experience reports collected by Timothy Leary in the early 1960's. The reports were written by prisoners, graduate students, beatnik poets, professors, religious scholars, and others who happened to brush shoulders with Leary's projects during the four year period between 1960 and 1964. I selected these data first because the reports were relatively accessible to me. I obtained the reports from the archive titled "Timothy Leary Papers" at the New York Public Library. Above and beyond the availability of these data, I am interested in this data primarily due to the rich socio-historical context in which these reports were produced.

These are by no means the most recent data on psychedelics available. The advent of the internet has made more contemporary subjective reports of psychedelic readily available to interested scholars. However, the reports I have accessed are unique in that they were collected at a time when the use of these substances was sanctioned, albeit controversial.² Thus, the setting shaping the psychedelic experience reports I am using is unique in that the experiences reported frequently occurred in direct association with a legal research study associated with Harvard. In other words, although some of the experiences were ‘naturalistic,’ there was legitimacy associated with the use of psychedelics being reported.³ A final advantage of these data is the wealth of biographical and contextual information surrounding the project at Harvard and an even greater number of historical analyses on social movements of 1960’s.⁴

Many of these reports were collected as part of the Harvard Psilocybin Project. The inception of this experiment began in villa in Cuernavaca, Mexico when Timothy

² Importantly, the controversial reception of these substances in the 1960’s has only been further realized in the cultural and institution memory of the United States. Psychedelics remain criminalized, with Schedule I status in the Controlled Substances Act. I will argue that certain cultural staples that have contributed to the experience and integration of these substances have persisted to the present day.

³ This legitimacy may contribute to a different set of meanings for the psychedelic experience compared to those occurring in a contemporary context that prohibits the use of psychedelics.

⁴ While a full socio-historical analysis is beyond the scope of the proposed project, I will touch on some of the general historical significance of these reports and Timothy Leary’s research in the final portion of my analysis.

Leary was vacationing with a few academic colleagues (Stevens 1987). During his time in Mexico, Leary had the opportunity to try psilocybin containing mushrooms, which have historically been referred to as ‘flesh of god’ in local traditions (Miller 2015). The mushrooms have a long history of religious use among *curanderos* of Southern Mexico and were also used by Aztec and Mayan cultures (Carod-Artol 2015; Masters and Houston 1966; Miller 2015). Appropriately, Leary (1990:3) described his first experience with the substance as, “above all and without question, the deepest religious experience of my life.”

Immediately upon returning to his lecturing position at Harvard, Leary initiated the Harvard Psilocybin Project. The project centered on naturalistic experiences with the substance, leading to numerous sessions in a variety of settings (Leary, Litwin and Metzner 1963; Stevens 1987). One publication from this project reports data from subjects that were mostly men between 22 to 35 years in age (Leary, Litwin, and Metzner 1963). Yet, psilocybin was given to, “graduate students, professional writers and artists, academic psychologists, musicians, housewives, and inmates of a correctional institutions,” (1963:563). In total, from 175 volunteers consisting of mostly male faculty members and graduate students.

The research team quickly understood the importance of context for experiences with psychedelics. This realization contributed to the decision to hold many of the psychedelic sessions at Timothy Leary’s home in Newton, Massachusetts in order to provide a comfortable, naturalistic environment that could not be provided by the facilities at the university (Stevens 1987). In addition to participant observation

and administering questionnaires, Leary and his research team collected subjective reports of the experience, which vary in the level of detail. Prior to sessions held at Leary's house in Newton, participants had informal discussions aimed at answering questions about the experience, counseling participants who were hesitant, relaying the range of potential experiences, describing standard feelings and experiences induced by psilocybin, and informing participants about dosage (Leary et al. 1963).

Most of the reports I have collected come from the sessions that occurred as a part of this study. In addition to experience reports written about psychedelic sessions at Leary's home, a sizable portion of the reports were obtained as part of a peripheral experiment aimed at demonstrating the social worth of the states that psilocybin and other psychedelics produced (Stevens 1987). The Concord Prison Experiment ran from 1961 to 1963 (Leary et al. 1965). Using group-based, psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, Leary and colleagues sought to demonstrate the behavior change potential of psilocybin using recidivism as an outcome measure (Leary et al. 1965).

Prior to drug sessions at Concord, groups would meet twice a week for two weeks to review what drug effects could be expected and encouraged to develop personal goals for the psychedelic sessions. Knowledge previously gained about the impact of "set and setting" on the drug experience led Leary and his team to strive for an egalitarian atmosphere that is not clouded by, "traditional doctor-patient, researcher-subject, or professional-client roles," (Leary et al. 1965). In other words, they did not assume the role of inactive observers. Often Leary or his graduate students would take psilocybin with the participants. While they made an *effort* to

reduce some of the influential power dynamics, their power as researchers likely remained when passing along information regarding what the prisoners could expect for their experiences.

Following the drug sessions, more group meetings were held to assist with integration of the experiences. Thus, the meanings the research team had already attributed to the psychedelic experience were likely transmitted to the participants when discussing the psychedelic sessions. Additionally, throughout the Concord study, Leary and his team (1965) had to calibrate their protocol by manipulating the size of the group and doses, eventually settling on a group size of about 5 people (including a guide) and a moderate dose of about 30 mg. of psilocybin. The results have since been interpreted as inconclusive (Doblin 1998).⁵ Nonetheless, it marks one of the major scholarly investigations associated with the Harvard Psilocybin Project.

A smaller portion of the reports I have obtained were collected during the summer of 1962—when Leary and a group of researchers and graduate students went to Zihuatenejo, Mexico for an extended experiment in consciousness expansion (Stevens 1987). As Leary (1966/1990:342) described the atmosphere around these sessions:

“One time we were running a training center in Mexico. That year we were using a Buddhist text, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, as our psychedelic map. The aim of the game was to move from stupor to symbol to sense to cell and finally to arrive at home base, the white

⁵ The impact of the methods used on the experiences had by prisoners will be elaborated upon in association with the analysis.

light of the void. So we proceeded to do as human beings always do; we set up a hierarchical game. All sorts of invidious, competitive distinctions developed. ‘Well, I was in the white light 3 hours in my session last night.’ ‘Oh, you didn’t make it at all?’”

Although they did not explicitly set up a ‘game’, Leary’s comments touch on the way that attainment of spiritual clarity was paradoxically used as a marker of status among the individuals in Mexico. In any case, between Zihuatanejo, the Newton sessions, and the Concord sessions, there are three settings which offered distinct physical and social contexts shaping the psychedelic reports I have obtained for this study. In addition to these three, the remainder of the reports occurred at a variety of locations other than Timothy Leary’s Newton house, Concord Prison, or Zihuatanejo. Some refer to sessions affiliated with the project, while others may have been mailed to Leary from other locations or collected after Leary’s time at Harvard.

Data Collection and Analytic Approach

I retrieved these reports from the Timothy Leary Papers archival collection at the New York Public Library in September, 2018. I took hundreds of photos of documents from the archive (scanning was not permitted as a measure to help maintain the quality of the materials in the collection). Although unsure whether I would actually find any detailed experience reports, the archive directory indicates that session reports from Leary’s Harvard study are available in some sections of the collection. At the time of writing, there are twelve “series” in the collection, containing a variety of materials corresponding to Leary’s life.

I focused primarily on Series IV: 1960-1976. This series encompasses the entirety of Leary’s affiliation with Harvard and much of his continued work with

psychedelics that followed his departure. In total, I was able to collect 200 reports from 101 individuals. Additionally, I collected an assortment of contextual information including: profiles on the Concord participants, group meeting notes, project notes, and documents surrounding Leary's involvements after his time at Harvard.⁶ Most reports cite the type of substance their experiences were based on, however a few make no direct mention of the substance.

I collected 72 reports written by participants in the Concord Prison Experiment. All of these reports refer to psilocybin sessions (as indicated by written reports and the procedures outlined in Leary et al. 1965), with the exception of four who indicate using psilocybin in combination with mescaline. Additionally, I have collected 34 reports that describe sessions that occurred during an excursion to Zihuatanejo, Mexico. The remaining 94 reports depict sessions that occurred at Leary's home near Harvard and other locations. The majority of reports recount experience with psilocybin. Yet, seventeen reports recount LSD experiences, six recount peyote or mescaline experiences, and four recount DMT experiences.

Males make up the majority of authors of the reports for this study. Specifically, this sample contains 76 males and only 12 females. There are 13 documents with unknown authors, which prevents any determination of gender. Some

⁶ These involvements include the International Foundation for Internal Freedom (IFIF), a private research organization centered on experimentation with psychedelics, as well as some organizations attempting to legitimize the religious use of psychedelics.

of these documents have no signature and others sign with initials, but they do not provide enough contextual information to be identified. However, I treat will not be reporting the names of participants in my analysis.

In any event, I do not have written reports for all of the participants that have been documented elsewhere by Leary and the research team. While I attempted to do an exhaustive search of the appropriate sections of the collection, I may not have accounted for all of the potential session reports that are available in other series of the collection. It is unclear as to whether or not some written reports went uncollected by Leary. The environment around the project and Leary's Newton home has been reported to be especially busy due to the great interest in psychedelics that was developing at the time (Stevens 1987). Thus, although Leary attempted to remain scientifically oriented and was constantly playing-catch up to survey participants, it's likely that reports for a number of sessions were missed. Moreover, I have no indication that any reports exist somewhere outside the archive among participants or their families, or have been lost or destroyed. Nevertheless, the contents of the collection do not appear to have been specially curated or biased in any way. Although I do not have reports for the totality of individuals who used a psychedelic in association with Leary and his projects, the reports I have appear to span the demographic range of individuals who were associated with the project.

After I had collecting photographs of the documents, I proceeded to skim the documents in order to determine which photos belonged together and combined the photos into digital documents. I subsequently labeled the documents according to the

name of the participant, as well as the particular substance used where applicable. Prior to uploading the documents to NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software, I converted the documents to a text-searchable format, which will allow me to better utilize the software's search function (Bazeley and Jackson 2013). In order to achieve this, I converted the images to PDF documents. I then input the documents to the Google Docs text recognition software. I corroborated the resulting text documents with the original photographs and corrected mistakes, in some cases transcribing entire documents.

The process of transcription and verification of the text-searchable psychedelic experience reports served as my first reading of the texts. Although I did not know exactly what I was reading *for*, I had the general sense that I was interested in the degree to which these reports are socially constructed. I anticipated that these reports would reveal participants' deeply emotional and even religious or mystical experiences. This was informed by my encounters with a considerable amount of academic and clinical research on psychedelics, books, documentary films, and my own research involvement (see Neitzke-Spruill and Glasser 2018). In any case, I began with a general 'grounded theory' approach in my initial readings of the experience reports, reading for the emergent themes. However, I did not consciously apply any of the guidelines developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Nevertheless, my initial readings focused solely on Concord participants, which in retrospect appears to align with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) suggestion of using comparative methods for theory development. At the outset there appear to be two obvious groupings for the psychedelic sessions: those that occurred within the prison setting and those that

occurred elsewhere.⁷ Nevertheless, comparisons are not limited to these two groups, as notable differences arose between reports produced out of Concord, Zihuatanejo, and Harvard settings.

Analytic Procedures

As previously mentioned, I have conducted phenomenological content analysis, using both inductive and deductive coding strategies, to characterize the essence of the psychedelic experience and identify ideological elements that contribute to the interpretation of the experience. This analysis has been undertaken in two distinct stages described below. Additionally, in the concluding chapter of this thesis, I present explore the social dynamics that have contributed to the perception that psychedelics are deviant. The following sections will outline the processes I have taken to examine these experiences phenomenologically.

The initial steps pertaining to the first phase of my proposed analysis constitutes a “conventional” content analysis, in that I have avoided preconceived categories in order to reach the ‘essence’ of the psychedelic experience (Hsieh and

⁷ I will note that the data I am using for the proposed study can and will be thought of in multiple lights. First, each report can be considered a case of a unique description of the conscious state experienced while under the influence of a psychedelic. Second, each individual can be considered a case with one or more reports. The former will provide insight regarding the cognitive style of the psychedelic province of reality because each description of a unique instance of psychedelic use can contribute to the overall conceptual model. With the latter point of view, I will be able to compare the ways that psychedelic experiences are reconciled with normal waking consciousness over time and how integration may be influenced subsequent visits to the psychedelic province of reality.

Shannon 2005). The process of inductive coding for a phenomenological analysis of this type was loosely outlined by Hycner (1985). Hycner (1985) points out that there is nothing formulaic about phenomenological approaches to data analysis. In fact, one of the critiques of Schutz's social-phenomenology is the lack of methodological direction (Heritage 1984:72). Nevertheless, these guidelines suggest highly detailed readings of the reports, which would first mark every 'general unit of meaning.' Each of these units could be a word or phrase that has a discrete meaning.

In turn, after my initial reading, I coded this way on a sub-sample of 47 unique psychedelic experience reports, attempting to equally represent reports from across the various 'contextual groups'. Once units of meaning were identified, I clustered these units into 'codes' that represent specific phenomena described by the authors.

Following this initial process, I coded the remaining reports in a more general manner in order to adequately capture the meaning intended by the authors within the whole context of their written passages. With subsequent clustering of these codes into meaningful groups, I identified codes that meaningfully distilled themes are identified that could be used to delineate the 'essence' of the psychedelic experience as described by the authors. Throughout this process, special attention is paid to taken-for-granted assumptions and where participants direct their attention (Starks and Trinidad 2007). Although the technique just described may not be uniquely phenomenological in the method, the theoretical backdrop and aims of my approach make it so.

The next component of this phase constitutes a ‘directed’ content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This deductive component specifically relates to Schutz’s concept of a ‘finite province of meaning’ and the cognitive styles that define them. Specifically, I developed codes for the (i) *epoché*, (ii) tension of consciousness, (iii) spontaneity, (iv) time sense, (v) way of experiencing the self, and (vi) form of sociality reported during the psychedelic experience (Schutz 1970; Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Although I descriptively separated these two inductive and deductive components of coding, temporally they were not so discrete. For example, the directed portion of this analysis took place *after* the initial development of codes and *before* I distilled these codes into themes.

The second phase of my proposed analysis will deal with the social influences on the psychedelic experience. This portion is intended to address the social origins of the meaning structures applied to the experience. Specifically, I describe how psychedelic experiences are subjectively interpreted through socially derived frameworks of understanding. In other words, this phase identifies the ideologies (which pertain to specific thought communities) being used to attribute meaning to the psychedelic experience. In order to do so, I identified codes related to how individuals subjectively interpret and derive knowledge from the experience. This second phase specifically addresses the aim of describing how individuals integrate the psychedelic experience into everyday reality. Moreover, it will shed light on how subjective actors may integrate the experience differently based on association with various thought communities.

As Starks and Trinidad (2007) show, phenomenological and grounded theoretical orientations are distinct, but have some similarities in terms of their general approach to phenomena. While phenomenology aims to discover the essence of a phenomena and the meaning it receives, grounded theory seeks explain social processes (Glaser and Straus 1967; Schutz 1970; Starks and Trinidad 2007). Subsequently, Chapter 3 attempts to illustrate the ‘essence’ of the psychedelic experience, while Chapter 4 describes the process by which these ‘ineffable’ experiences are made social by interpreting (i.e. filtering) them through socially derived frameworks. Moreover, I demonstrate how knowledge is derived from these experiences that may be validated in spite of conventional frameworks.

In order to preserve the integrity of the authors’ reports, I have made every attempt to bracket my own beliefs in an effort to remain ‘true’ to the descriptions of the phenomena (Starks and Trinidad 1987). Yet, to bracket my beliefs is not to achieve ‘pure objectivity’ (Hycner 1985). Instead, it is an effort to retain the meaning of the phenomena as it was experienced by the participants. However, the theoretical approach I outlined in the previous chapter inevitable has shaped how these experiences have been interpreted and presented here. For instance, the fact that I do not subscribe to the ‘psychotomimetic’ theory of psychedelic effects has undoubtedly influenced my interpretations.

Thus, in the concluding chapter of this thesis, I reflexively interrogate the theoretical influences that have informed my study of psychedelics. Furthermore, I examine the historical processes that have contributed to the perception that

psychedelics are a 'deviant' and 'criminal' behavior. When examining the conflict between perspectives and what this can tell us about the culture of the United States, I take an approach more akin to that of researchers who use discourse analysis. Here, I explicitly delineate my own standpoint in the relative to my questions and how my academic role shapes my thinking about the observed processes (Starks and Trinidad 2007).

In summary, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions. What is the subjective quality of the psychedelic experience? How do users integrate/reconcile the psychedelic experience within their normal conscious states? How do authors derive knowledge from their experiences? What can the psychedelic experience tell us about the social construction of everyday reality? The following chapter attempts to illustrate the subjective experience of psychedelics, as well as outlines the cognitive style of psychedelic consciousness.

Chapter 3

THE EXPERIENCE

Those who have known these profoundly meaningful states of consciousness have often shared them with no one, or only with those most intimately trusted, for fear of being misunderstood, called crazy or weird, or viewed as mentally ill.

-William A. Richards

My goal in this chapter is to generally answer the question: 'what happens when one ingests a psychedelic substance?' As we will see in the coming pages, this is an intrinsically complex question for a variety of factors. Complexity appears to be something inherent to psychedelic experiences. Each data quote that I will present here is likely to report more than one theme or quality of the psychedelic experience. Some may even seem contradictory. The diversity of effects and experiential content unique to individuals makes a comprehensive and precise delineation of the potential effects difficult.

Due to the relative abundance of studies based on firsthand administrations of psychedelics, I merely intend to provide a general outline of the subjective experiences produced by psychedelics. This is done with the pragmatic intention of providing readers who are unaware of the experiences occasioned by psychedelics glimpse into the changes in conscious experience that are possible. After presenting the descriptions of the intermediate time between taking a substance and the onset of effects, I work through the description of experiential categories in no particular order. The experiences reported are diverse and many phenomena appear and are reported

simultaneously. Additionally, the largely retrospective nature of my data prevents effective sequencing of phenomena encountered during the psychedelic experience. However, I provide a wide range of examples to illustrate the variability of these experiences.

People present their experiences in a number of ways and interpret them through a number of lenses. I am largely relying on the perspectives and experiences described in the psychedelic reports, which I have collected in order to construct this description. While I highlight the major themes that emerged in my sample, much literature is out there concerning the effects of psychedelics. Thus, to those who are deeply familiar with these experiences, the following description may seem incomplete. Nevertheless, sufficient information is provided towards furthering my present goal of understanding how knowledge derived from these experiences. The quotes are presented as they appear in the original reports. Thus, I have retained the original typographical errors in the data quotes.

The following section begins our trip through the phenomenology of the psychedelic experience with a description of the early effects and impacts on cogitation. I follow with the sensory phenomena, emotional or affective experience, cognitive phenomena, and I conclude with a few accounts of boundless or unitive experiences. The subsequent chapters will deal with social influences on the experience and how knowledge or insight is derived from psychedelic experiences.

The Waiting Game

Have you ever dreamed of a place of truth, beauty and tranquility? Where peace and contentment, and the sense of well being prevail. A world in which colors are more vivid and more defined, a place where everything takes on dimension, and life. Well all this and more await you in the 'New World of the Mushroom.'

In terms of introductions to an experience report, few were as attention grabbing as Erick, a thirty-year old Concord inmate who was formerly a member of the Marine Corps. Although he eventually realized the folly of overvaluing material things and witnessed a precession of perfect geometric designs and shining paisley printed snakes, Erick's session began quite unremarkably. Waiting is not an uncommon activity for individuals who have just ingested a psychedelic. Many individuals reported waiting for their effects to begin. For example, Allison, an affiliate of the Harvard Psilocybin Project, succinctly describes the immediate feeling many encounter after receiving a psychedelic.

For the first hour after I took (5) mushrooms I felt no change -- there was only the feeling of expectation and waiting for "something" to happen.

Allison's quote illustrates the role that *anticipation* plays in the act of waiting. Anticipation of a psychedelic experience may take many forms depending on the history and inclinations of the user. For example, Grant, a graduate student who was trying mescaline for the first time, mentions how the waiting surpassed his expectations.

This was my first encounter with mescaline. I was uncertain as to what to expect and apprehensive because of my uncertainty. It was easier to resort to the expectations available from my past psilocybin experiences and in this I was disappointed. The first difficulty lay in the waiting. I think it must have taken at least two hours or more before I began to feel something besides a vague physical uneasiness.

Although Grant had experience with psilocybin, the unexperienced effects of mescaline that lie ahead represented a subjective unknown for which he simply had to wait.

The buffering period between the ingestion of a psychedelic and the onset of the experience can serve a number of purposes for the individual who has decided to use a psychedelic. Some report using this time for relaxation, others take on a heightened state of excited-nervousness, and others still may use this time to reflect on their intentions for this sessions. Nevertheless, even as some individuals perceived the substances to be ‘inert’ or thought themselves the victims of a practical joke, nearly all eventually felt conscious experiences facilitated by these substances.

The Psychedelic Experience

As mentioned above, the order in which I present the experiences that follow the ‘waiting period’ is rather arbitrary. Although some have embarked on the painstaking journey of differentiating between types of visions, stages of the experience or session, such a task is beyond the scope of this manuscript. Furthermore, though I find such work to be important, it would be antithetical to my stated goal of describing the

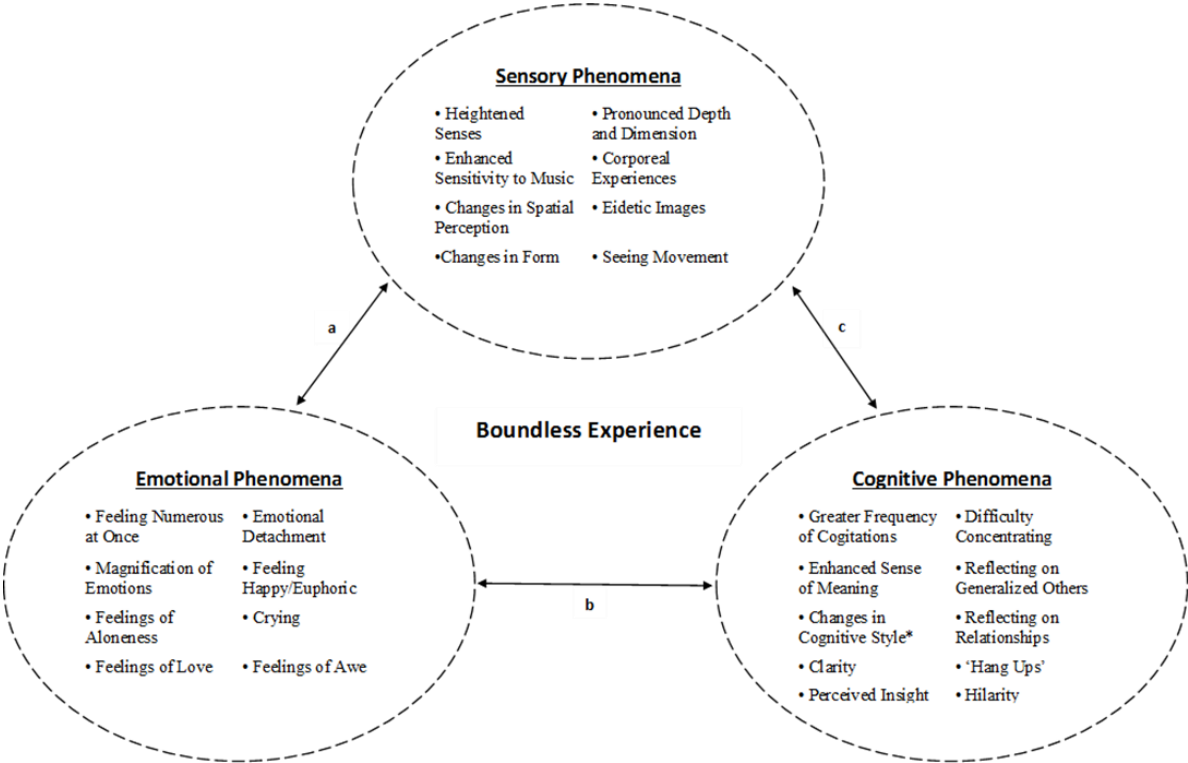
‘essence’ of the psychedelic experience. I do not perceive the essence of the psychedelic experience to lie in the minute details that separate individual experiences. Upon reflection, we carve distinct chunks out of our experiences to which we ascribe meaning (Schutz 1970; Zerubavel 1991). However, as in psychedelic experiences and life in general, “Each phase of experience melts into the next without any sharp boundaries as it is being lived through,” (Schutz 1970:63)

When reflecting upon a conscious phenomenon as an ‘experience,’ I am making an attempt typify, mark, classify, categorize, organize, associate, and otherwise draw boundaries to distinguish subjectively experienced phenomena (Schutz 1970; Zerubavel 1991). Yet, the experience of psychedelics inherently challenges the boundaries everyday life and ordinary waking consciousness. Thus, in the process of classification, the immediate reality of an experience does not remain intact. Thus, the ‘psychedelic experience’ remains our primary concern. As I will show, psychedelic experiences blur the lines between systems of classification that distinguish between mental phenomena. Inevitably, I will need to use a system of classification in order to speak about these things and adequately convey the psychedelic experience in an organized fashion. However, I do so reluctantly.

In figure 1, I present the scheme by which I will continue in my description of the experience. As you will see, the figure presents a few distinct categories that will provide the framework for my description of the psychedelic experience: ‘sensory’, ‘emotional’, and ‘cognitive’. The arrows connecting the categories are meant to show

that the phenomena are not always experienced as discretely as these conceptual distinctions (and literal borders) imply.

Figure 1 Indistinct Phenomenal Categories of the Psychedelic Experience



The connection between (a) sensory and emotional phenomena concerns those experiences in which the authors report simultaneously ‘feeling’ and ‘seeing’, for example. Other instances of this connection may include: feelings of aloneness coupled with eidetic images, emotional reactions being induced by a musical number, or bodily discomfort being accompanied by sad or depressing feelings. The distinction between (b) emotional and cognitive phenomena in a psychedelic experience becomes similarly blurred as authors report the simultaneity of phenomena such as an enhanced sense of meaning and euphoric feelings. Examples of similar connections are: feelings of empathy when reflecting upon a generalized other or reflecting on relationships in

conjunction with feelings of guilt or regret. A fuzziness also exists between the borders that define (c) cognitive and sensory phenomena. For instance, authors report: seeing eidetic images with an enhanced sense of meaning, a sense of clarity associated with heightened vision or visualizations, or experienced preoccupying ‘hang ups’ on certain bodily sensations. The center of this figure represents the boundless experience that can be occasioned as these various phenomena are experienced as undifferentiated.

The next sections in this chapter will follow Figure 1 in a counterclockwise fashion. Beginning with sensory phenomena, I provide a brief summation of the potential changes in the senses that occur as described by the authors. Moving towards a description of the emotional phenomena, I ‘blend’ into the description a few ways that the lines between sensory and emotional phenomena are sometimes blurred during psychedelic experiences. Subsequently, I give a brief sense of the range of emotional effects that may occur, weaving in examples of phenomena that shed light on the porous boundaries between the emotional and cognitive aspects of the psychedelic experience. Finally, I will give a sense of the general cognitive effects that were reported, coupled with descriptions of experiences that ‘unify’ these categories. Here, I will also provide an outline of the cognitive style(s)⁸ of these experiences. Thus, rather than discussing the categories in mutual exclusivity, I describe the interrelationships between the phenomena as they arise in the experiences reported by the authors. This is done in an effort to preserve the integrity of the reported experiences, as well as the emergent nature of the phenomena perceived during the

⁸ Cognitive style represents the subjective time sense, experience of self, spontaneity, suspensions of belief, conscious tension, and form of sociality.

psychedelic experience. For the sake of simplicity and organization, I limit my description to only two phenomenal categories per section until the final description of ‘boundless’ experiences.

Sensory Phenomena

After the waiting period, various sensory phenomena often serve as cues that a psychedelic has taken effect. Whether it be nausea, enhanced visual sensory, or simply beginning to really ‘dig’ the music, subjects typically report some sensory phenomena as the first thing noticed during a psychedelic session. For our first example, Don became aware that the psilocybin he took was beginning to after he attended to nausea *and* changes in vision.

Reaction set in after approximately 40 minutes. Early symptoms included vague nausea (temporary), some wobbly knee stuff. Visual perception markedly increased. In beginning, some fluttering around edges of field of vision, but pleasurable rather than disturbing. Colors seemed deeper, more essential. Looked at brick wall; some 15 stories high - weathermarks in bricks seemed to form fabulous design, like an elaborate oriental tapestry (thought of Djenghis Khan)...

Don reported experiencing a generally heightened visual acuity that accounted for a richer color vision, accompanied by some peripheral fluttering. Additionally, he encountered both nausea and ‘wobbly knee stuff.’ Taking ‘wobbly knee stuff’ to mean he felt dizzy and/or weak, Don’s description is representative of authors that report impacts on their sense of balance. For those who report encountering such phenomena,

this made moving around during the psychedelic experience a difficult. One described this as something akin to drunkenness from alcohol, and others mention the abnormal necessity to ‘focusing’ in order to execute simple movements.

Although mention of this feeling was relatively sporadic, nausea, the first bodily sensation mentioned by Don, has been one of the foremost bodily experiences reported by the authors in my sample. For some, nausea contributes to a generally uncomfortable feeling that adds to their overall restlessness as psychedelic effects become more apparent. As I describe later on, the experience of nausea is capable of becoming an intensely emotional affair (see Diane’s example). However, nausea ended up being an afterthought for most of the subjects.

Open-eye visualizations akin to those reported by Don are also quite common among the reports I have encountered. Moreover, they have been consistently found in clinical studies of psychedelics (Swanson 2018). Many authors described basic changes such as enhancement of color vision, more pronounced outlines of objects, greater awareness of depth and dimensions, and perceiving movement. Oftentimes when these visualizations occur, the most overlooked objects are the ones most frequently noticed.

My chair was still swinging, although the sensation was frightening, I decided I would just relax. I turned and looked out the window next to me. It was snowing. Each individual snow flake looked like those paper stars I used to cut out as a child. In my sophistication I had forgotten the beauty of the individual snowflake. I only thought of snow as an inconvenience except on the ski slope.

The branches of the trees were stark and stood out like in a painting by Bernard Buffet. The sky, though gray, had a velvet sheen.

Here, Christopher provides us with our first glimpse at the porousness of boundaries between the senses and emotion. His newfound perspective appears to produce both a sense of ‘nostalgia’ and a feeling of ‘beauty’. Christopher’s nostalgia relates specifically to the visual definition of snowflakes, which had become taken-for-granted in his everyday life. Furthermore, the visual changes he felt highlighted the beauty of something as simple as a snowflake.

Scholars of aesthetics and psychology have long quibbled over the nature of beauty. I have no desire to enter into a philosophical discussion of the nature of this slippery concept here. My decision to conceptualize beauty as an emotion is best described by a simple statement from Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell (2008:312): “Beauty is felt, not discerned.” Yet, they go on to suggest that emotion and cognition have a ‘subtle relationship.’ When considering people’s explication of beauty in everyday life, I have no doubts that this is the case. Intersubjective socialization primes individual actors to perceive a certain objects as beautiful. Similarly, the emotional experience of beauty, like most experiences, become distorted after the fact through a host of cognitive processes. However, for our present purposes, my assertion that beauty is an emotion refers to the qualitatively immediate experience of witnessing something beautiful, the feeling that precedes explication.

Just as Aldous Huxley noticed the ‘sumptuousness’ of his gray-flannel trousers in *The Doors of Perception*, authors of the reports I have analyzed remark on the

marvelousness of ordinary objects such as snowflakes, brick walls, telephones, carpets, and candy-wrappers. One Concord inmate named Luke provides us with a humorous example of experiencing beauty in the everyday.

I took a bite, but realized that it needed some salt... There was nothing that had ever tasted so good before, than that potato. And beautiful? I've seen the sun rise and set at sea, seen the Grand Canyon from the air, and I've driven through the Berkshires in the fall, but the inside of this potato had them all beat. How can I describe it? I tell you how beautiful this potato was, and you sort of snicker and dig your elbow into the ribs of whoever is unlucky enough to be sitting next to you. Your friend with the battered rib-cage then whispers something to the effect that "I'm not all here."

In Luke's comparisons to some truly immense scenes that trigger feelings of beauty, we are verging on the emotion of awe. Awe may be distinguished from beauty on the grounds that feelings of awe may be also brought about by devastating (Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedel 2008; Keltner and Haidt 2003). The following example Concord participant named James also verges on the experience of awe when he encountered the devil during one session with psilocybin.

After more patterns and colors my mood seemed to have changed, and so did the patterns. I seemed to have been thrown into a huge inferno. It looked like a big cave lined with fire. Then a face of the devil appeared. Green and black in color. And at once he changed from one color to another and from one form to

another. I must say, it was both frightening and beautiful at the same time.

However it seemed to have been more frightful than beautiful.

Although James did not report his experience to be ‘devastating,’ his image appears to him as frighteningly-beautiful. The addition of ‘fright’ to this account may be suggestive that James’ experience was in fact ‘awesome.’ Moreover, the experience of being thrown into a ‘huge’ inferno and witnessing the face of the devil is in line with research that indicates experiences of awe have been frequently associated with religious experience and a sense of ‘vastness’ (Keltner and Haidt 2003). As we will continue to see, a sense of vastness and religious interpretations are common to boundless psychedelic experiences.

James’ example also moves us beyond changes in outward vision and the reactions accompany them. Many authors report astonishment at basic changes in how they see the world around them, as I have shown above. Yet, a considerable amount of individuals who use psychedelics report seeing much more than bright colors, hyper-defined objects in their surroundings, and wave-like movement. Researchers have referred to what I am calling visualizations by a variety of terms. These visualizations occur most frequently occur with eyes closed, yet apparently may occur with eyes open in some circumstances. Masters and Houston (1996) refer to them as aesthetic and eidetic images, while Swanson (2018) cites neuroscientists who describe them as elementary and complex hallucinations. These dualist conceptions of the visualizations that occur are similar in that they distinguish between visualizations without much intrinsically meaningful content (e.g. shapes) and those that portray

ancient architecture or scenes of man. On the other hand, Shanon (2002) developed a delineation of the various types and content categories relating to ayahuasca visions, which function loosely as stages of the experience.

For our purposes here, I am neither concerned with the ‘stages’ of psychedelic experiences, nor am I interested in the differences between visualizations per se. Nonetheless, the variety of potential visualizations is worthy to note. The authors of my source documents reported imaging a wide range of content, including: shapes and geometric designs; light or fire; significant others; religious themes of god and the devil; a variety of different scenes of the past, future, being adrift, historical scenes, or daily; and cosmic visions of the universe or life cycles. Scenes can be witnessed as still or moving images or environments with varying degrees of subjective involvement. Rather than slog through a textual example for each cluster here, I will allow these various visualizations to emerge in the context of other discussions. However, the following vignette from one psychedelic explorer serves as an effective illustration of the qualitative difference between the changes in outward visual vision and visual imagery.

I assumed a Yoga position and began to meditate. This meditation became more and more intense and I felt my head begin to drop slowly towards my chest. For some reason (and to this day I don't know why) I began to pronounce the word OM in a hum-like fashion. I continued this for three or four minutes setting off a vibration which extended from my right ear to my left. At this point, something was released in my body and I began to transcend

both time and space. A golden illumination appeared in a circle from a distant place in my mind. Around the fringes of this circle, a panorama of faces old, young, infants', bodies, a galaxy of humanity living, dying, fornicating, giving birth; in short, the life process. They seemed to be mumbling and chanting a chorus which never became clear to me on an oral level. However, I realized that it was the liturgy of mankind. They began to fade in a cloud-like yellow which turned to a blue-gray mist, and the images of mythological figures as if sculpted from grey alabaster began to occur.

Christopher's description of witnessing the 'life process' clearly goes beyond the changes in outward vision described above. Instead, this visualization occurs in both a timeless and spaceless 'environment.' Others who experience similar visualizations sometimes report greater emotional responses to the content witnessed. However, Christopher's description appears nearly emotionless. Instead, he continues by mentioning that at the center of this precession of life was an image of the Buddha, leading to an interpretation of this experience in terms of Eastern mysticism.

To recap, the above discussion of visual stimuli contributing to the emotional experience of beauty and demonstrates how lines dividing sensory and emotional experiences are fuzzy. As we will continue to see, the relationship between these phenomena is not unidirectional, as emotional states sometimes impact sensory phenomena. However, before moving onto the section on emotional experience, I would like to address auditory perception, which arguably has a stronger relationship with emotion during the psychedelic experience than visual perception. Auditory

perception has been tied to enhanced emotional response during the psychedelic experience (Kaelen et al. 2015). Moreover, it has the potential to influence vision and visualization in a blending of perceptions referred to as ‘synaesthetic’ experiences (Swanson 2018).

A generally enhanced sensitivity to audible stimuli, particularly music was frequently noted by participants. Jason an inmate at Concord describes the various instruments of a musical number ‘jumping out’ at him.

The jazz music affected my mood very much. The instruments seemed to project themselves individually, and I seemed much more alert to the strains of the music than normally.

Jason appears to use the term ‘project’ in reference to an enhanced ability to ‘lift up’ or pick out specific instruments. Moreover, we also see that auditory sensations, which undoubtedly constitutes a unique sensory domain, can hardly be parsed from emotion. One other author reported that music ‘took hold of their emotions’, while many others report that music brought them joy in many cases.

In addition to engaging emotional responses, authors sometimes report auditory phenomena such as imaging musical notes, perceiving movement in sync with music, or even seeing music as imagery. The next example from a Harvard student named Diane presents two excerpts from a report that recounts a single experience that illustrates both the connection of music and emotion, as well as the blending of auditory and visual perception. In Diane’s first encounter with music, she reports experiences a very negative reaction that is likely related to her nausea.

I felt relaxed before taking the drug, but I was also excited and eager to begin, I expected only pleasant things to happen and consequently I was a little surprised about 10 minutes after we began, when I stated having a very unpleasant physical reaction - extreme dizziness, nausea, and a feeling of a great pressure pushing me back against the chair. At this time Schoenberg's Transfigured Night was playing and although I ordinarily like this very much, it was now horrible - like a torture devised ~~by some demented sadist~~ [struck through on the original] to drive us out of our minds...

Sometime later, Diane remarks on witnessing a beautiful dissolution of boundaries between seeing and hearing.

All of this time I was drifting about in a wondrously beautiful heaven of visual imagery and music, although the two were not separated in experiences the way they must be in words. I was never aware of music as a sound coming from a certain place, with a beginning and an ending. It just was.

Diane's description shows us not only how multiple sensory experiences encountered during the psychedelic experience are experienced in conjunction with one another.

Her first quote begins to show us how the bodily sensation of nausea can contribute to a generally negative 'feeling tone.' In her report, she indicates that this tone blends with her perception of a familiar song invoking a negative response. Moreover,

Diane's second quote explicitly describes a heavenly experience in which sight and sound become one.

Thus far, I have shown how psychedelic users report experiences of visual, auditory, and corporeal experience that often defy the boundaries of both sensory and emotional phenomena. Before moving on to the proper category of emotional phenomena, I must address the dearth of bodily and spatial sensations addressed in this section. The authors whose reports I have analyzed describe a variety of experiences in which their relationship with their body has shifted. Common phenomena are that a subject feels to have shrunk in size, changed form, or feel as if their limbs are elongated. I have referred primarily to nausea, as it has been far and away the most frequently reported bodily sensations among my participants. Similarly, I have ignored the changes in spatial perception, since these are described fairly regularly in relation to ‘boundless’ experiences. Nonetheless, many of the specific experiences, I may have left out here are likely to emerge in my descriptions of emotional and cognitive phenomena in the next two sections.

Emotional Phenomena

Authors of the psychedelic experience reports describe an incredible range of emotional phenomena, and some may consider this the most important component. This strengthening may manifest as a magnification of emotions felt prior to a session. However, the preceding emotional state is not necessarily determinative of experiences with psychedelics. Participants frequently report being surprised or caught off guard by their contradictory reactions.

In either case, participants who feel emotions during the psychedelic experience generally report feeling them more intensely than in everyday waking consciousness. Yet, in the midst of the emotional whirlwind that can be a psychedelic

experience, authors sometimes report moments of being entirely 'devoid' of emotion. For instance, in contrast to visualizations that *are* accompanied by some emotional feeling, Russell describes images that have no accompanying emotion.

During these experiences I became intermittently aware of a feeling of loneliness and emptiness or discrepancy in relation to my partner - we were living as it were only alongside of each other. We were feeling in different directions; there was no encounter, no crossing of direction. In addition to this my visions became more distorted and ugly. I had images of grotesque and distorted forms before my eyes, the same recreation of Picasso's Guernica - type visions as I had previously during the first session, disconnected limbs, distorted, twisted bodies, eerie apparitions. However, there was a peculiar lack of emotional underpinning. I could visualize distortions and ugliness without feeling it. No emotional reaction, only visual experience and the awareness of distance between me and the images perceived.

A more psychoanalytically inclined reader may note what a glaring coincidence it is that a feeling of loneliness preceded the 'grotesque' visualizations experienced by Russell. Nevertheless, Russell makes no connection between these phenomena, nor does he feel any emotions during his immediate experience of visualizations. Others may experience similar feelings of detachment in conjunction with bodily sensations such as feeling like a rock, a log, or a statue.

Contrary to experiences that are emotionally empty, Anthony reports that he was able exert control over emotional responses in what he describes as his most

powerful drug experience. This will serve as our first introduction of cognition as it relates to emotion and the psychedelic experience.

All through the experience, I reaffirmed for myself the incredible arbitrariness of a given state of consciousness. I was able to manipulate emotional and cognitive states by will.

I also "felt" subjective evidence that emotion is a colossal game, one having much to do with conditional states, and that powerful as learned emotional reactions can be, they do not have to be accepted into consciousness.

Comparing emotion to a game of learned reactions, Anthony suggests that one may subvert these reactions. Thus, per Anthony's suggestion, emotional experiences are afforded the status of reality through *cognitive acts*. As I progress in this description of emotional experiences, we will see that acts of cognition serve as 'book-ends' to emotional experience. In other words, cognitive acts like reflecting and framing prime individuals for emotional experience. Moreover, in addition to *explaining* the emotion, cognitive acts that engage an emotional experience after its duration may serve to extend or amplify the experience.

For example, feelings of fear were often accompanied by rapid cogitations, reflections on negative life-events, attempting to 'fight' the experience⁹, thinking the

⁹ Fighting the experience concerns a cognitive attempt to override the conscious shifts that occur as one enters a psychedelic experience.

changes in their conscious experience may be irreversible, or feeling as if they are dying. One graduate student named Stella experienced fear as a result of her rumination on her nauseas feeling.

About this point I began to feel nauseated. Was frantically trying to pay attention to other things, capture this feeling of a moment before, so as to discourage the nausea (I was thinking I could probably guide, somehow, away from the unpleasant feeling.). Somehow I began to be very afraid -- and tried to reason with myself: "What on earth are you so frightened of? What could possibly happen beyond being sick?" I knew it was the nausea that was terrifying, but it was way beyond any logical argument -- worse and worse, and there didn't seem to be anything I could do.

Stella's experience shows us how bodily sensations may influence cognition and emotion, as well as how cogitations may amplify emotions. Contrary to suggestion that emotion could be avoided through cognitive acts, Stella experiences her fear reaction to a nauseous feeling *in spite of* her cogitations. Her attempts at redirecting her attention were failed. Moreover, her interrogations into her reaction were not sufficient to reduce the feeling of fear the nausea brought about. Consequently, her fear was only increasing in intensity and bringing up a helpless feeling.

While fear was one of the more popular emotions with a negative valence, others reported feelings of sadness or depression, jealousy, guilt, and loneliness. The sources of these feelings often vary. For example, in some cases, inmates at Concord began to reflect on their life history and experience negative emotions as a result.

Nonetheless, the presence of these emotions did not necessarily lead the authors to interpret their experiences negatively.

Considering that we have covered emotionless (neutral) experiences and negative emotional experiences, it is only right that I describe some of the positive emotional experiences that occur during psychedelic session. The positive emotions felt by the authors include: feelings of happiness, beauty, euphoria or bliss, freedom, love, and patience. Often the most wonderful feelings that were reported came along with the dissolution of many boundaries including a subjective sense of self. Thus, some of the more memorable instances of positive experiences will be referenced in the discussion of boundless experiences. Luke, a 34 year old business executive, reported experiencing intense feelings of love despite not having reached a boundless state.

I'm in love. So similar a feeling to that when I first fell in love with Carla. But this is much greater. It includes my love for Carla, our family, our work, our life, --all I have known and everything else.

Here, Luke describes feelings of love that appear to be magnified or reinvigorated. Furthermore, it extends to a general appreciation and love for life. Similar emotional experiences are often reported in sessions involving groups of closely related friends. Authors who report these experiences frequently describe a generally enhanced connection with the group or feelings of 'oneness' that approach or become 'boundless.'

In summary, emotional phenomena often have significant overlap and exchange with cognitive and sensory phenomena. There are a plethora of ways that emotion and the senses interact, as I have been shown. Furthermore, cognition interacts with emotion both by framing situations that may lead to an emotional response, as well as contributing to further engagement with that feeling and explaining it in some way. As we continue to follow Figure 1, the next section provides a brief overview of some cognitive effects and outlines the aspects of cognitive style during the psychedelic experience.

Cognitive Phenomena

Thus far, I have discussed the ways that sensory and emotional, as well as emotional and cognitive phenomena relate during the psychedelic experience. In order to complete our movement around Figure 1, this section present the various cognitive phenomena reported about the psychedelic experience. Specifically, I present specific effects related to thought, as well as the cognitive style of the experience (e.g. the conscious tension, spontaneity, time-sense, experience of self, and suspension of belief). Furthermore, I complete the loop of Figure 1 by describing the relationship between cognitive and sensory phenomena throughout these examples.

Similar to the previous two phenomenal categories I have covered, the authors who participated in the Harvard psilocybin project reported a wide variety of cognitive phenomena. These cognitive phenomena include but are not limited to: difficulty concentrating, clear thinking, greater frequency of cogitations, empty thoughts, hilarity or absurdity, ruminating on or becoming preoccupied with certain ideas, a stronger

attribution of meaning to phenomena, reflecting on relationships and philosophical topics, perception of insight, or changes in cognitive style. Discussing the entire spectrum of cognitive phenomena is not pertinent to my present goal, but I describe a few of these below. Specifically, I provide examples of authors describing experiences of increased thought-frequency, clear thinking, and an enhanced sense of meaning.

The first example comes from a Concord participant named Warren who reports an LSD experience. There is no record of LSD being used at any point during the Concord Prison Experiment, so it is likely that Warren's report refers to an experience that occurred after being released from Concord. In any case, Warren reports that many cogitations came at a rapid pace.

And what did I think about when this lonely feeling had taken hold of me, well I am not at all to sure because everything was moving so fast, many thoughts ran through my mind.

Thoughts like the future and the past, I think it was the past that really broke me down. I try not to think to strongly about the past and how I made a mess of my life by being so foolish and not thinking or resoning things out, but these things were before me and there was nothing I could do but think them out. To some extent I'm glad that I could not put it out of my mind, why? because I can say now that I see things just a little differentlly by looking into the past like I did, helped me to see the future as something different than I had seen before.

Not only does Warren experience an unusual amount of cogitations in a rapid manner, but the content of his thoughts force him to reflect on various aspects of his life. Moreover, Warren's reflections about the experience at the time he was writing communicate a new perspective on past life events, as well as hope for the future, the experience of loneliness, and self-reflection during his psychedelic session.

Although some report being flooded with thoughts, others report remarkably clear thinking. One participant named Pat described a few different cognitive phenomena that he experienced at the beginning of his session.

I felt beautiful. My thinking was extremely lucid; associations and contrasts were simple. I became preoccupied with the arrangement of objects in the room. Although the room was in disorder, everything seemed to be right in place; everything was perfect and beautiful.

In this short excerpt, Pat describes multiple cognitive phenomena. First, he reports feeling 'beautiful', which also reflected in his general appreciation of the surrounding room. Next, he remarks on being able to think especially clearly. Moreover, this clarity of thought contributed to an enhanced capacity to both associate and distinguish between various phenomena.

Another commonly reported cognitive characteristic of the psychedelic experience is a heightened sense of meaning. Our next example comes from a report in which the author, a Concord participant named Clark, described his session entirely a question and answer format.

Q. Did I get anything from this session

A. Yes I believe that I could look at things with more of an understanding and meaning.

I believe that my session was more of the observing type, and that I would like to proceed with this until I can if possible, find my true self, or a key in which I may improve my ways of life.

In reflecting on what he received from his session, Clark asserts that meaning was more apparent to him during his session. Furthermore, he was able to acquire a greater understanding through introspection.

As I previously mentioned, I am forced to skim over a host of cognitive phenomena that were reported by the authors. Nevertheless, the cognitive style that was reported by participants referring to their psychedelic sessions cover much of that ground. Specifically, the following series of short sub-sections will cover the major components of Schutz' articulation of a cognitive style. The first section will cover time-sense, which has been alluded to above and represents one of the referred to aspects of the psychedelic experience among the authors. The next section will cover the conscious-tension of the experience, referring to the degree to is awake and able to devote full attention to the pragmatic motives of everyday life (Schutz 1970). Following conscious tension, I will describe the spontaneity exhibited during these experiences, meaning what types of 'work' or actions are taken up by the subjects. Next, I cover the epoché or 'suspension of belief' characteristic of this experience. Similar to the study of disattention, this section will cover some of the things that subjects take-for-granted during the experience. I continue by discussing experiences of the self. Admittedly, this section warrants its own paper, so I attempt to provide a

distillation of the wide-ranging experiences of the self. Finally, I discuss the form of sociality taken on by the authors during psychedelic experience sessions.

Conscious Tension

Previously, I have described the conscious tension of the natural attitude, as wide-awakeness with ability to give full (active) attention to life and the outer world (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). Contrary to wide-awakeness and the ability to meet life in the present moment, dreaming has been said to be the lowest possible tension. When we are sleeping or dreaming, we are obviously unable to meet the demands of life or respond to events around us that are happening in the vivid present. In referring to the psychedelic experience, authors sometimes describe the experience as dreamlike. For instance, in a section of Stu's experience report, he reports being convinced that he was in an 'uncomfortable' dream during a portion of his session.

4. Search for Reality. I had gradually become aware of the fact that everything seemed exactly like dream, the way people seemed to loom out at me and then subside into the background, the fact that my voice seemed to come from somewhere outside of myself and especially the sensation that I was an intelligence somehow apart from every thing, and looking down upon myself and others whom I observed and listened to, but never communicated with. It was a dream in which I felt uncomfortable and from which I wanted to wake up. For an hour and a half, I concentrated on trying to come out of it. I kept looking at my watch, as the sole assurance that time was indeed passing and that I wasn't really dreaming, yet everything I experienced continued to

suggest that this was, in fact, a dream.

In this excerpt, Stu seemingly cannot discern whether his experience was a dream or whether it was 'reality'. Moreover, his discomfort that was associated with an out-of-body experience led to attempts at 'waking up' through concentration. Others who describe the experience similarly also invoke the incongruence of the standpoints from which they observe phenomena during the experience and everyday reality. Some report continuations of dreams from the night before, while others still describe the negative experiences as nightmarish.

Although certain authors described the experience as dreamlike, indicating a more passive tension of consciousness, Description of the experience as dreamlike insinuates a passive stance to life and phenomena observed. However, the authors maintained conscious awareness throughout the experience. Thus, although the experiences may have dreamlike qualities, subjects are not precluded from acting and giving full attention to life. For example, Raymond indicates that his experience brought him closer to 'vivid present.'

The drug also tended to be relentless in that it magnifies the present moment, by bringing so many of the small details of that moment so sharply into focus. It seemed to take a terribly long time, for instance, to finish one's coffee, or walk down a flight of stairs, simply because one became so involved with the heat, and taste of the coffee (for example) and because between each sip, one

would think of other cups of coffee, tasted under different circumstances within other relationships.

Raymond's description of the 'magnification' of the present moment aligns closely with Schutz' conceptualization of 'ecstasies' or the 'great transcendences' (Schutz and Luckmann 1983). With increased awareness of the present moment, individual subjects cross boundaries of reality when they are wide-awake and able to give full attention to their experience. However, during the psychedelic experience, 'attention to life' does not refer to everyday intersubjective reality. In turn, the next section dealing with spontaneity will deal with the forms of meaningful action taken by the participants.

Spontaneity

Spontaneity generally refers to the manner in which a subject acts when living out a particular cognitive style (Schutz 1970). In everyday life, spontaneity is characterized by actions that are planned out and deemed relevant to producing a projected experience that can be achieved through engagement with the outer world (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). In the case of psychedelic experiences, the actions of the authors that were reported are obviously limited to the constraining factors of the circumstances under which the psychedelics were taken. Most reports refer to instances of psychedelic use that occurred in relatively controlled settings that did not allow for opportunities to engage in the 'demands of everyday life'. Nevertheless, the authors' reports indicate no desire to meet those demands during the course of their sessions.

The reports I have read discuss a number of meaningful actions that may be considered when attempting to characterize the spontaneity of the psychedelic experience. Subjects variously engage in acts that relate to passive observation of the experience, analysis or categorization of the experience, engagement with the visuals, attempting to solve problems, attempting to change the experience through manipulation or change of surrounding, or trying to combat the unpleasant phenomena. Other considerations may be made to meaningful acts of communication or engagement with others. In many specific instances of action, the spontaneity pertaining to the cognitive style of the psychedelic experience frequently relates to what to do *about* or *with* the phenomenal changes in subjective experience. For example, a Concord inmate named Randy describes how he took action to control his visualizations during a psilocybin experience that led him to ‘recommend the drug to everyone.’

...We all just (more or less) sat there thinking. I closed my eyes, and placed my hands over them and I began to see all sorts of colors and strange objects! I would have liked for it to have lasted for days that way! I could then see, whatever I chose to see. I'd just think of a character of some kind, and I would see him or her. I saw people like Cortez, Lewis, Clark, and so forth.

Controlling the nature and content of one’s own visions is just one example of the ways that individuals can act during the psychedelic experience. Although this does not have any direct implications or meaning in terms of action in the immediate world

surrounding the subject, these cognitive acts may be accompanied by tremendous meaning associated with the experiential immediacy of the phenomena

Aside from specific acts aimed at what to do with or about the conscious changes, the spontaneity of the psychedelic experience can be generally characterized by meaningful acts of cognition toward the acquisition of knowledge. Many individuals report actions geared towards introspection. One beatnik named Arthur describes an experience in which he begins a period of introspection, only to act in accordance with the unpleasant bodily phenomena he experiences.

After an hour when the chemical effects began to be noticeable to me, I withdrew into visual introspection and regarded all intrapersonal activity as a plot and affront to my desire to contemplate my own mind. I lay down on a large comfortable couch ... and drifted off into a reverie about the origin of the universe which involved the visualization of a sort of octopus of darkness breaking through out of the primal void. The presence of this creature became increasingly real and I felt a sort of hissing at the back of my mind-- I allowed myself to be inundated by the Presence and it was a scary feeling-- I became nauseus--my usual reaction to anxiety-provoking situations-- I went to the bathroom but did not vomit.

Arthur's act of introspection only extended to the actual *act* of turning inwards.

Beyond this, his spontaneity was characterized by passive observation of the phenomena. For many people, passive actions such as this occur most often during their first experience, when the phenomena are 'new'. Nonetheless, these authors often

report performing actions in the outer world that are geared towards contributing to their introspective experience such as, moving to isolated locations or covering their heads to be blocked off from the outer world.

Others appear to take a more active approach towards the acquisition of knowledge during the experience. For instance, some authors reported trying to ‘solve’ various problems that have they have faced in their lifetimes, while others attempt to analyze the experience more generally. In the following report, Jordan, a Concord participant, demonstrates the form of spontaneity that is characterized by a pursuit of knowledge.

My second session was a much diferent and better one than the first. I dont if it was the adding of the mescaline drug that made this difference or not but I was much more relaxed and my thoughts were confined to one subject and not wondering or drifting as before. I wanted to listen to the music as before and this accomplished very well as well as to give plenty of thought to a family problem that with me for a few months. I discussed this with ... (our Harvard Instructor), and I can see how that with His help, and the aid of the mushroom, I can se my way clear in solving this problem as well as gaining a better understanding of myself and the Third party involved.

This complete report from Jordan shows how individual subjects start to use the time during the session to consider things that may be unresolved in their minds. In the context of Concord, Jordan also received input from the researchers and guides that he perceives to be a potential asset for ‘solving’ his family problem.

Time Sense

Time perception in the natural attitude of normal waking consciousness is characterized by a synchronization of an individual's inner time and conventional 'clock' time. During a psychedelic experience, subjective changes in time perception frequently leave individuals reporting that time was sped up, slowed down, or ceased to exist during their session. Authors in my sample have frequently described experiences such as their inner clock going 'haywire' or floating in a timeless existence. It is not uncommon for awareness of this particular phenomena to occur when judging the time it takes to complete ordinary tasks. For example, when taking a bite of a pear, one Concord participant noted that it took an especially long time for the pear to reach his mouth. In a similar manner, Todd describes an instance during an LSD experience in which his verbal abilities were impacted by his time perception.

Everything seemed funny, and we all laughed and laughed, compulsively; even when I got tired of it and complained of it, my face seemed to shape itself into a laugh against my will. I would begin a sentence and before I got to the end, the beginning would seem like ancient history -- the time sequence lost its proportion and neither past nor future seemed related to now. The normal measuring of the present against memory and expectation thus became impossible.

For Todd, he was engrossed in the present moment to a degree that prevented him from discerning the relevance of the past or future, no matter how recent or near. Others who reported being similarly engrossed in the present moment have described

a general *disregard* or *disinterest* in the time. For instance, Conor reported that time was moving slower than usual.

Time moved slowly but this did not seem to matter and I had no desire to look at a clock. Due to the lack of time consciousness the exact order of events is confused to me now.

Evidently, the lack of synchronization with inner time and conventional time contributes an inability to reconstruct a definitive sequence of phenomenal events. Some have noted that time perception during psychedelic experiences may be influenced by the perception of a greater number of ‘events’ that correspond with the increased frequency of cogitations. Along these lines, time may move ‘slowly’ in the sense that one may perceive much time to have passed along with the events witnessed. Conversely, time may be perceived as passing much more quickly from the standpoint of having perceived a months, centuries, or lifetimes worth of experiences during a period of a few hours.

Epoché

Epoché refers to things that are taken for granted when experiencing consciousness according to a particular cognitive style. In everyday life, there are a whole host of things that we take for granted when we move about our daily lives. Schutz and Luckmann (1973:28) have previously suggested that in order to describe the cognitive style of a particular province of meaning, one would have to show how things previously taken-for-granted lose their ‘self evidency’. Moreover, to demonstrate this,

it would have to be shown how a new epoché forms around the suspension of new beliefs.

There are a few obvious ways that the natural attitude begins to lose its self-evidency during the psychedelic experience. The first relates to the transition into the state itself. When a psychedelic begins to change subjective consciousness, the subjects are made aware of conscious experiences that are inaccessible to everyday life. Thus, as experiences that are so emotionally, cognitively, and perceptually intense are felt by participants, much of the basis of everyday reality may come into question. One participant named Warner began questioning science after reflecting on his intention to conduct an experiment on himself during his session.

However, when I was well into the experience I did not seem to have any interest in the experiment, and I was led to reflect on the futility of much scientific investigation. Perhaps this suggested to me the role of ... as an observing "scientist," and his interest in his degree. From this thought I went on to the idea of the essential absurdity of the whole Ph.D. business, and I verbally caricatured the farce of degree-granting

In this excerpt, Warner takes an especially pessimistic view of higher education and the prospects of science generally. Sparked by his initial intention to conduct an experiment, he alludes to scientific investigation as ‘futile’. While he does not elaborate much beyond this, this is a salient example of how taken for granted aspects of everyday life begin to lose their self-evidency.

Two possible ways that authors suspend their belief during the psychedelic experience relate to how they attribute reality to the phenomena they encounter. First, a beatnik named Paul reassures himself in the face of potentially alarming visualizations.

All the fearing fantasies I get I don't mind because I realize they are only dream fantasies in my mind & I wanted to summon the angels of heaven to come to aid of earth worried people & the tents of angels were preparing to depart & enter earth thru the horn of some vast horn.

Here, Paul is able to withstand potentially unpleasant visions and engage in them more by convincing himself that they are merely fantasies. In this way, subjects in the psychedelic experience may forego any attribution of meaning to phenomena that hold negative connotations.

Conversely, many of the authors I encountered maintain that the experience was as real for them as any they encounter in their daily life. Consider this excerpt from a report by an unknown author for instance.

Looking back at the experience from the inside of my wheat kernel I feel that pressures of the reality we know telling me that the experience was unreal, that these were just crazy imaginings that come out of my own head; that the understanding I thought I had was only a delusion and that I couldn't even carry a simple thought to its conclusion: in short, that I was for a time in and unreal world and was suffering from a form of delusional madness.

I know this to be false with a certainty that I fear will fade with time in

the complacent self assurance that this tiny island of space and time making up the three dimensions in which we operate is the "real" world. I am sad that the understanding I have had must in large part be lost.

For many who experience the vividness of the psychedelic experience, the suggestion that the experience is not real becomes difficult to grasp. The above quote is representative of the many authors who consider the experience to be as real or ‘even more’ real than everyday life. Along these lines, subjects who take this attitude before, during, or after their experience suspend belief in the notion of ‘hallucinations’ or ‘drug’ experiences being unreal. Similarly, others may attribute reality to an explanatory province such as religion, which can be used to interpret these experiences.

Experience of Self

Experiences of self is one of the most remarked upon components by participants in my sample. Although this would warrant its own chapter in another context, I only cover some basics pertaining to how individuals experience themselves. The authors report a variety of phenomena pertaining to the experience of self, including: increased self-awareness or self-consciousness, evaluation or critique of behaviors, seeing one’s true or whole self, or dissolution or dissociation from self entirely. Our first example comes from a Concord participant named David who reports that his entire world crashed down around him during his psilocybin session.

I fooled everybody but the biggest fool was me. I was fooling myself and doing a good job of it. It is utterly annoying the lengths one will go to fool one's self.

I thought I was so suave, debonair and omnipotent. Then it dawned on me how little I knew and that my degree of suavity and debonairness were only an iota.

From David's point of view, his psilocybin experience destroyed his previous view of himself along with the accompanying attitudes, values, and behaviors. Similar statements are especially common among the reports written by other Concord participants. Yet, many people report realizations concerning the behaviors of their past self, providing new direction for the future. Austin's first experience with psilocybin gave him exactly that.

Under the experience I was given a number of insights into my behaviour and demeanour, that I had areas of great selfishness in me, that I talked too much without "being in what I was saying," that I had much to learn about being more purely myself that I still fell into artificial responses when I thought I was being "natural." That I needed to extend my area of caring and to "suffer for others."

Much like David's experience of self-evaluation, Austin's experience of himself is largely reflective in nature. He was able to recognize his past tendencies such as overconfidence and inauthentic behavior. Although he goes on to conclude that this experience coupled with an earlier LSD experience gave him one of the most 'life-transforming' weeks of his life, Austin maintains that a practice of some sort is necessary to bring his insights to fruition.

Critique and evaluation are two major experiences of the self that are

characteristic of the psychedelic experience. However, some authors report that their experiences of insight allow them to discover who they are 'at base' or provide them a glimpse at their 'real' or 'true' self. For example, a Concord inmate named Ryan reports an encounter with his real 'self' during a psilocybin session.

In conclusion I must state briefly that I enjoyed the mushroom on the one hand, but on the other hand it frightened me. I am frightened, because I seen myself for what I really was, but even tho this picture was seen for what it really was, I look to the future with enthusiasm, and to pursue psilocybin to its end.

Displeased with the picture of his former self, Ryan's glimpse at what he 'was' gave led him to believe he was 'fighting himself' with his previous non-conforming behavior. In his conclusion, this awareness inspires the potential for change and self-development.

While many experiences of the self during the psychedelic experience concern self-reflection and understanding, authors frequently report experiences in which the self is dissolved or merged into a unified whole with other persons, the environment, or the cosmos. In the next example, Frank describes how he lost himself in the surf of Zihuatanejo, Mexico.

I proceeded to the beach alone for a swim and was soon lost among the waves of surf, with which I merged. I became one with the sea. The sea was threatening and I was part of it. I became everything in the sea and for awhile

I played with the thought and the instinct to plunge forward and ahead into the sea. There was complete ego loss, transcendence of time and space, subject and object. It was the greatest experience I have had.

The loss-of-self described by Frank covers much of what entails a selfless experience according to those who have experienced them. Although this occurred during an encounter with nature, others report similar experiences during the ‘ordinary’ proceedings of a psychedelic session. Take Caleb, for example, who reports on a spontaneous moment of understanding during his session with mescaline.

Suddenly, without warning or reason, I suddenly felt lifted into a state of sublime serenity, a state of complete comprehension about the all. It was not that I now had the answer to the question of existence, there just was no question. I simply was, and that was sufficient. No explanations were needed or sought, for to be was an explanation in itself. There was no me; I was no longer a meaningful concept. It was purely, and simply existence, and the important corollary, the awareness of existence. At the same time, words (hah!) that I had previously used to describe an accompanying emotional feeling to a similar state of mind had also lost their meaning; ecstasy, elation, Joy did not apply to this state. It was existence and being only.

Caleb’s description is a great representation of the subjective experience of selflessness that is possible during a psychedelic experience. I previously used the word ‘understanding’ to describe his state of being prior to the duration of

selflessness. However, it may be more accurate to describe the feeling as ‘being at peace’, since Caleb indicates that he is not yearning for anything. In this case, the spontaneity of the experience is passive because it is characterized by ‘being’. Along these lines, the experience of selflessness may be thought of as an experience of undifferentiated consciousness, or ‘pure duration’. Neither of these examples were associated with any visualizations, yet some participants do report the dissolution of self in conjunction with intense imagery. In either case, an experience of the self that is characterized by dissolution is generally indicative that a subject endured what can be interchangeably referred to as ‘boundless’ or ‘unitive’. However, before proceeding to a description of boundless experiences, I must briefly cover the forms of sociality that were reported by the authors.

Forms of Sociality

The final aspect of cognitive style discussed here pertains to how individual subjects engage with and relate to others. During everyday life, we engage with intersubjective reality through our interactions and encounters with others, as well as the objects they produce (Schutz and Luckmann 1973:27). Communication, interaction, and action geared towards intersubjective reality generally define our natural attitude towards the world. In other words, social interaction is the norm compared to dreams, which may be characterized by solitude.

The authors reported various attitudes towards the outer world of others during their psychedelic session. Yet, most authors reported feelings associated with a desire to disengage with social interaction or a desire to connect with those around them. In

the case of the former, subjects described feelings of suspicion towards others, disinterest in others, annoyance at talking or laughing, and a general desire to be alone that oftentimes motivated the subject to move to another location. For example, a Concord participant named Andrew, who we met earlier, reports wanting to be alone after an interruption by other participants.

After laying on the floor for five minutes a warm glow came over me and I felt real peace with the world, except for few times when Ray and David came in to ask me to get in to the other room, then I felt that they were just plain intruding on me and I was a little nervous and upset each time, and that they came in because they interrupted my thoughts each time also the laughing and the giggling of Kyle and Sully as beginning to get on my nerves. It just seemed to me that I wanted to get away from everyone and everything to be absolutely by myself.

Andrew's antisocial feelings appear to have been brought about by intrusive sounds stemming from the interactions with others. These social interferences hindered his ability to introspect or bask in his peaceful feeling. While this experience prompted Andrew's desire to be 'absolutely' by himself, others express a general disregard for others in spite of their interruptions. Take Hector for example, who reports also reports an experience of intrusion.

Generally I was not awfully concerned with other people, I knew that they were around me and was basically glad that I was sharing the experience with

others but as far as any feeling of dependence upon or need of them was concerned -- it simply was not an issue. I did notice that their faces seemed to have become creased, wrinkled and distinctly older looking at brief moments and on other occasions I was slightly annoyed at what seemed to be mundane, suspicious, irrelevant or interrupting comments. In general, however, I was only mildly aware of others and not really much interested in them.

Rather than wanting to be alone, Hector reports a lack of concern with those around him. Aside from changes in their appearance and annoying interruptions, he paid little attention to those around him. Moreover, Hector's relation to those around him was generally positive, in that he was 'basically glad' to be around them for his experience.

Hector's appreciation for a group setting, but general indifference towards others, was echoed by a fair number of participants. These participants straddled the line between 'wanting to be near others who are experiencing similar phenomena' and 'not wanting to interact with anyone'. Others even report an enhanced connection with the group despite their antisocial behaviors during their session. For example, Randy, who we were introduced to above, simultaneously reports connection to and separation from his group.

About two hours, I suppose I'd forgotten (entirely) that I was here in prison, and placed myself into a world of nothing but beauty. Nothing bothered me, or mattered to me. I felt very close to everyone, and very friendly. I did not, however, feel much like talking or conversation with anyone. I was enjoying

my own little world.

Here, Randy's pleasant experience in his 'own world' discourages him from engaging in any social interactions, despite his positive feelings towards others in the group. Consistent with the previous instances of antisocial tendencies during psychedelic sessions, Randy describes an instance where his disinterest in others stems from his desire to turn inward.

In contrast to the above examples, many authors also report experiences that are more outward-oriented. These outward experiences are more frequently occasioned by an active form of sociality. However, authors generally restrict their interactions to those who are sharing a psychedelic experience. Just as there were some who reported annoyance at the talking of others, some authors reported a compulsion to speak about the experience. In the following excerpt, Janet reports an attempt at conversation toward the end of an LSD experience.

At lunch, I more or less came to myself and asked Terry whether I had actually been physically hungry or if I'd made myself hungry. He said probably the latter and we talked about things that have now slipped my memory. Terry, however, wasn't interested in chattering much and I was so we passed a somewhat frustrating half hour at cross purposes with him sinking into laughter occasionally.

Janet's desire to talk was met with resistance from Terry who was likely still engrossed in the effects of the LSD they had consumed a few hours earlier.

Nevertheless, Janet's account demonstrates the desire to connect with others throughout the experience. Other participants exhibited a similar desire to connect through physical contact. For instance, Arthur the beatnik was somewhat surprised at his enhanced connection to one individual.

ate 14 Psylocybin-- this time I let most of the other people do the talking-- I got nauseous, vomited, came back in the room, found Juliette there, a girl with whom I share apartment much of the time but with whom I have no deep rapport generally for various reasons--here saw her as a warm lovely capable spectral Eternal Feminine, went to her couch and lay down with her, my head on her breast, soft safe and sighed my fears away in her arms.

As Arthur describes an abnormal connection with Juliette, their physical exchange was reported to bring about a greater sense of safety following his bout with nausea. An enhanced connection with others, even those who are not ordinarily close, is one of the major changes in sociality during the psychedelic experience.

Individuals who reported an enhanced connection with others, often felt that they were able to see other people as 'human beings' rather than whatever labels they had previously associated with them. For example, Ruben provides a description of a scene that enabled participants in a group session to establish a connection beyond the everyday roles that ordinarily structure interactions.

During the whole experience the fact that I was sharing this with others was exceedingly significant. Most of the time we were sitting around the

fireplace. Pop corn and refreshments were served and every effort was being made to make us comfortable. The atmosphere could hardly have been made more pleasant and congenial. The freedom, spontaneity, and personal warmth within the group and between members of the group become very meaningful. In these moments I think I gained an insight into what Tim Leary means when he talks about getting beyond the game structure. In these moments the psychology vs. theology business dropped off, the faculty-student barrier just did not matter, even the friend-stranger game was minimised. For those few moments we interacted not as solo players of status seekers but as human beings-- men who share common sorrows and common joys, some of which we discussed.

Ruben's description of the scene where his LSD experience took place presents an example of how a positive setting can be fostered. The comfortable environment that was constructed allowed members of the group to connect as humans rather than interact according to social roles or labels.

The extreme manifestation of connection with group members brings us near to the discussion of boundless or unitive experiences. Our example was written by Caleb, who previously described an experience of selfless understanding. In this instance, Caleb describes an experience which began with almost a 'total loss of self' and proceeded to unify the minds and bodies of various individuals that were present.

At this stage we were all lying on the bed, limbs entwined. G. was breathing

heavily and sniffing, which I interpreted as suffering in order to reach the transcendental state, this carried me further in my desire to achieve the illumination. At this point R. appeared, as though she had just materialized in the room. We were all feeling an exceedingly intense unity of mind-body, and R. was immediately drawn into this complex. I had the feeling that we were on a stormy voyage in Charon's boat across the Styx, and R. was to be part of the voyage (I actually lived for an instant that portion of Michealangelo's "Last Judgement" where Charon is standing in his boat paid a writhing mass of bodies and souls).

With this excerpt, we may begin to recognize the ways that feelings of connection with others may lead to experiences that can be considered boundless or unitive. Although this particular example is not a boundless' experience per se, Caleb explicitly invokes the notion of unity when describing the interrelation between himself and the other subjects that were present during the experience.

Boundless or Unitive Experiences

As I have shown thus far, psychedelic experiences transcend everyday reality by making available a variety of phenomena to the subjective actor. In other words, the psychedelic experience points to a reality that is literally beyond what is experienced as one occupies the natural attitude of everyday reality. Frequently these occur during intense conscious experiences that blur the lines between sensory, emotional, and/or cognitive phenomena. However, our movement around Figure 1 would be incomplete without a discussion of 'boundless' experiences. Thus, I must say a bit about when all

of the boundaries implied in Figure 1 dissolve. In contemporary research, the ‘boundless’ experiences are more commonly referred to as ‘mystical’ in the contemporary psychedelic literature (Griffiths et al. 2006; Griffiths et al. 2008; Richards 2015; Yaden 2016). Others may refer to phenomenologically similar experiences as ‘unitive’ or ‘oceanic’. I only choose to use the term ‘boundless’ here because I have not explicitly pursued the established ‘dimensions’ of a mystical experience used in contemporary psychological research. Furthermore, I wish to highlight those aspects of the experience, which dissolve, blur, or transcend the boundaries framing our everyday experiences. Along these lines, the degree to which similar experiences take on a ‘mystical’ or religious quality will relate to cultural and biographical factors. In any case, not all psychedelic experiences will advance to the level of ‘boundlessness’ or ‘mystical’.

Our first description of a boundless experience is provided by a woman named Ella, who described a boundless experience that occurred during a session with 15 reported phases. While the ‘boundless’ phases of her experience occurred during various phases, the following quote is taken from the phase that came directly after her transition into a vast ‘luminescent light’.

Phase 6

*One-ness, All one. In-Godness. Indescribable. Utmost. Emotion-less.
No self. No sensations, Self was within and without. Time gone. Space gone.
Nowhere but infinitely everywhere. No time, but eternally now. Vast Oneness.
In-God. Lost but found. Full space. Nothing seen or heard or touched or felt.*

*There. No within or without but all one. No wholly other or beyond but in it. IN
the Infinite. In the eternal and infinite. In mystery. Part of it. All one. This
seemed an eternity or in no time.*

Notice the language used by Ella to describe a boundless experience. Specifically, she describes the experience as a timeless, space-less, eternal, ‘Vast Oneness’ experience. Moreover, she uses a number of contradictory themes in order to communicate the immediate experience of being ‘nowhere but infinitely everywhere.’ Taken together, Ella describes the dissolution of nearly all of the phenomenal components I mentioned above, indicating a truly ‘boundless’ experience.

In contrast to Ella’s boundless experience, which appears to indicate total dissolution into an expansive and boundless space, our next example describes an experience that might be considered ‘unitive’. Rather than total dissolution, Roman’s description entails unification accompanied by a limitless capacity for emotion.

I found myself fixating on reflections, pictures, books, the rug, the kitten, some of these things not really very beautiful by the standards I am used to judging things. Physical contact with the objects to which I was attracted were producing in me what may be described as a series of non-sexual orgasms coming in faster succession and with greater intensity. As the experience got so intense that I was crying with each new impact, the difference between various things became more blurred. It was not that the shapes or colors became similar but that all things seemed to share whatever it was that was producing such an intense response in me. I felt that this was in people also but only

when the sight of a person did not recall me to a level nearer to that at which we normally live. As the importance of the Great Common element in all things grew, I had less idea of my own distinctness until this concept disappeared completely. This disappearance was followed quite directly by the feeling that there was no limit to the intensity of love that I was capable of feeling and hence no limit to the intensity of suffering of which I was capable because above a certain level the feeling of ecstasy was distinctly painful.

Beginning with a feeling of enhanced beauty, Roman arrived at an intensity of experience that brought tears to his eyes. Subsequently, distinctions between things became blurred. The blurring of lines did not culminate in an experience of merging with a boundless expanse in the way that Ella's did. Instead, this experiential crescendo resulted in a recognition of the commonality in all things. This feeling of commonality implies a boundlessness that accompanies the unification rather than dissolution of all things. Nevertheless, Roman's sense of oneness was coupled with a dissipation of his sense of self, which was closely paired with emotional phenomena. Specifically, he reports a limitless potential for love that is counterbalanced by a limitless potential for suffering.

An awareness that conscious experiences of boundlessness are possible during psychedelic sessions led many participants to make the attainment of these states a goal for their session. For instance, many participants who attended the trip to Zihuatanejo, Mexico explicitly attempted to reach an experience that was referred to

as the ‘clear light’. In the following excerpt, Derek provides a vivid description of what it felt like to reach the ‘clear light’.

Intense concentration on nothingness, emptying of my mind, forgetting my body by ignoring its existence -- an immobile body is no longer. Unaware that I was under until I was. The readings of Frank treading but never falling over the fine line between the sublime and the ridiculous; always sublime, always leading me upward. The vibrations between Frank’s voice and my being in harmony, and strong. The Clear Light there more than I had expected, hoped for, imagined possible. Body being destroyed after it became so heavy as to be unbearable. Mind wandering, ambulating throughout an ecstatically-lite indescribably landscape. Utter calm throughout. How can there be so much light-- layers and layers of light, light upon light, all is illumination. And it goes on and on, and on.

Derek’s description provides our first instance of a ‘guided’ session. In psychedelic sessions, guides may play a passive role (serving essentially as a safety-net) or take an active role in shaping the content and direction of the session. In this case, his guide Frank, takes an active role by reading aloud from a copy of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. As Derek begins to harmonize with Frank’s voice, he simultaneously perceives the destruction of his corporeal body, leaving him in a field of light to bask in a duration of boundlessness.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have outlined the general characteristics of a psychedelic experience as it

has been described by the authors from my sample. I began by describing the initial period between taking a psychedelic and beginning to experience the first phenomena. Then, I proceeded to make my way around Figure 1, describing my conceptualization of the experiential components of psychedelics. The main feature of this conceptualization is that these ‘experiential’ components are in many ways indistinct. Along these lines, the essence of the psychedelic experience is the blurring of boundaries in the various perceptual domains. In turn, I provided examples of the ways that sensory, emotional, and cognitive phenomena are intertwined during the psychedelic experience. Furthermore, I described the ‘cognitive style’ of the psychedelic experience in the context of the cognitive phenomena that occur during psychedelic sessions. Finally, I covered the experience of ‘boundless’ or ‘unitive’ experiences. These are frequently referred to as ‘mystical’ in the contemporary fields of psychedelic medicine/therapy and the psychology of religion.

The next chapter will cover how the psychedelic experience is socially influenced in its production and interpretation. In other words, I describe how the nature of the experiences I have outlined above, as well as how individuals attribute meaning to them, are shaped by social frameworks of understanding that are inherited through social processes. Beyond this, I provide one ‘session’ study, where I present a description of a psychedelic session from multiple points of view. This will serve the purpose of further detailing the social influences on psychedelic experiences and how subjective reality becomes a social product. In the closing chapter, I describe the

nature of knowledge that is perceived and constructed on the basis of the psychedelic experience.

Chapter 4

PSYCHEDELIC KNOWLEDGE

In a world where education is predominantly verbal, highly educated people find it all but impossible to pay serious attention to anything but words and notions.

-Aldous Huxley

Until this point, we have covered the phenomenology of the ‘natural attitude’ of everyday life, as well as the ways that individuals transcend the natural attitude during the psychedelic experience. Approaching the psychedelic experience from a social-phenomenological perspective, I have thus far attempted to near the ‘essence’ of the psychedelic experience. Following Huxley and many others who have examined the phenomenology of the psychedelic experience before me, I have assumed that there are consistent features of the experience that may be observed (Huxley 1956/2004). However, as Zerubavel (1997:76) points out, “Classification is an artificial process of concept formation rather than of discovering clusters that already exist.” Thus, although I had to classify *some* types of experiences for the purposes of communication, I assert that an overemphasis on classification misses the forest for the trees.

Rather than attempting to classify or typify the various aspects of experience, I highlighted how psychedelics dissolve experiential boundaries. Beyond this, we have also seen the potential differences in the cognitive style that may arise during these experiences that are characterized by ‘boundlessness’. As I will show, the psychedelic experience frequently allows individuals the opportunity to transcend the linguistic

frameworks that structure their everyday reality. Nevertheless, these frameworks are extremely influential on how meaning gets attributed to the experience.

In turn, this chapter will explore how socially derived frameworks of understanding influence the production and interpretation of the psychedelic experience. My analysis directly pertains to the concepts ‘set and setting’ that I previously described. I have used various factors endemic to these concepts as guideposts in my exploration of how social factors operate to shape the psychedelic experience and its integration into everyday life. However, since these factors that have been shown to be influential on the psychedelic experience elsewhere, I do not explicitly cover the totality of set and setting as it relates to the experience. Instead, I describe how particular ideological frameworks have been used to attribute meaning to individual experiences. I begin by outlining the crucial role of language for the integration of these experiences. Then I describe some notable frameworks used by the authors and their social origins. Furthermore, I compare how these frames variously contribute to the authors’ experiences at various points during a psychedelic session.

Mere Words!

I am only able to attribute meaning to life through communicative effort. Whether it be through acts of cogitation (e.g. self-talk) or a variety of interpersonal acts, my experiences only begin to take on the character of ‘objects’ that are able to be distinguished and evaluated in relation to one another through language. In my own attempts to articulate my study of the psychedelic experience, I often struggle to find words to begin a description. In fact, I frequently feel like Alex J., an inmate at the

concord correctional facility, who began his description of a mushroom session with these words.

"I suppose there comes a time in the life of everyone when ordinary words seem futile to express our innermost feelings and to describe our deepest emotions. Especially is this true for yours truly. I'm confronted with a desire to expound on Psilocybin. How can layman like me tell you that, I was very pleased with my session."

While I do not aim to express my deepest emotions here, I think ineffability is an appropriate starting point given the previous emphasis language. Language is an essential device for the achievement of intersubjective reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 51-51; Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 233-235; Zerubavel 1997: 79).

Furthermore, as life obtains its meaning through communication, language is a quintessential medium for attributing and expressing meaning. As McKenna (1992:15) has previously stated, "Languages appear invisible to the people who speak them, yet they create the fabric of reality for their user."

The linguistic tools we use to refer to discrete experiences are obtained through a process of learning that are referred to as socialization. These conceptual tools are embedded within a conventional sign system that enables communication through a common understanding (Berger and Luckmann 1966). By applying these customary signs to a particular experience, we are able to distinguish and symbolically 'objectify' our subjective experiences in a way that is accessible to others. In this way, we

effectively crystallize our subjective experiences in order to make them more real to ourselves and others.

When using symbolic language to ‘make real’ or crystallize experiences that transcend our immediate experience of the world, we are faced with the task of using language to meaningfully integrate these experiences into everyday reality. In turn, as individuals write about their experiences with psychedelics, they attempt to make their experiences real in a way that is accessible to themselves and others in everyday life. Yet, authors of psychedelic experience reports consistently indicate that they have difficulty describing their experience. In the following quote, Evelyn conveys the difficulty of expressing the content of her experience with mescaline.

To report on the mescaline experience is a major job of selection. There was so much experience, perhaps more than a lifetime or maybe lifetimes.

Here, we can see that Evelyn’s perception of more than a lifetime of experience leads her to believe that she could not represent her experience in its totality. Similar to Evelyn, many authors (in this sample and elsewhere) have similarly described the psychedelic experience as *ineffable*. By definition, this means that the experience is beyond description. The reports I have analyzed offer a variety of reasons for why the experience may be ineffable. For instance, authors report changes in cognitive pace, the perceived amount of experiences during a given time period, and the general complexity of the experience. For Evelyn, the condensation of a vast *amount* of experiences into one session gave her the impression that she had to ‘pick and choose’ what to share.

Along these lines, we always ‘pick and choose’ what experiential content is relevant in a given situation. As individual subjects objectify their psychedelic experiences, the only available tools for framing their experiences are those that have been internalized through processes of socialization. These tools help to ‘frame’ experiences according to a particular understanding of worldly phenomena. In the act of framing experiences, we necessarily draw boundaries around phenomena to delineate and distinguish what is relevant to an experience (Zerubavel 1997). In doing so, we transform the meaning of the ‘framed’ phenomena.

The social origins of the linguistic tools necessary to develop specific frameworks of understanding contributes to a ‘social distribution of knowledge’. The notion that knowledge is socially distributed means that individuals variously hold knowledge according to the socializing processes that define their biographical history. Subsequently, socially derived ‘frameworks of understanding’ inform how individuals variously approach, interpret, distinguish, and otherwise attribute meaning to their subjective experiences.

Despite the fact that knowledge is socially distributed, there appears to be no major difference in the reported ineffability of psychedelic experiences between authors of various levels of education. For instance, one Concord participant named Dan implies that he has not received the proper tools for describing the sensations he experienced.

The first sensation that came is a complete feeling of strangeness throughout my entire body. To give this feeling any other description should be beyond the gift of tongues - certainly mine at any rate.

Yet, assertions such as these were not unique to Concord participants. Even the more accomplished scholars who participated in Leary's studies found describing the psychedelic experience to be a difficult task. For example, Hamilton notes,

To begin with, the usual: the experience is so fantastic in both its novelty and its power as to beggar all possibility of adequate depiction through words. The most what can be hoped for by way of description is an approximation, and only those who have had the drug can know how far removed from actuality the approximation must be.

Here, an academic who has achieved the pinnacle of education in the United States finds that words are insufficient to meet the task of describing the psychedelic experience. Echoing sentiments that I previously attributed to Huxley and Schutz, Hamilton notes that the movement from the experience to a symbolic representation of that experience produces a measly approximation. Even the Harvard graduate students found their experiences to be similarly ineffable.

Taken together, the wide assertion of ineffability demonstrates that authors of psychedelic experience reports do not have appropriate interpretive frameworks whether one has received a PhD from an 'elite' university or an inmate number at a 'correctional' facility. Hence, in addition to other reasons I have mentioned for ineffability (e.g. impacts on memory, changes in time perception, etc.), I find that

ineffability has social origins. As psychedelic use has not been widely accepted in the United States, individuals often lack cultural frameworks to inform their use of psychedelics. Similarly, the dearth of frameworks may impact individual interpretations of psychedelic experiences and inhibit the potential to meaningfully ‘crystallize’ psychedelic experiences using socially supported definitions of reality. Moreover, the transcendent nature of the psychedelic experience coupled with the dissolution of boundaries that characterize the natural attitude make the experience difficult to convey in the language of everyday reality and normal waking consciousness. In other words, the lack of available frameworks for interpreting psychedelic experiences makes it difficult for individuals to integrate their experiences.

Nevertheless, despite the claims that the experiences are inaccessible to language, the subjects appear to utilize whatever frameworks they have at their disposal to describe their experiences. The following section illustrates how individuals attribute meaning to psychedelic experiences according to ideological frameworks, thereby integrating their transcendent psychedelic experiences into everyday reality. By tracing the social origins of certain linguistic frameworks, I also show how social influences contribute to the authors’ experiences with psychedelics.

Framing the Experience

The common understanding of the experience as ineffable may indicate a general lack of affirmative frameworks for integrating these experiences. Yet, as you may have noticed prior to this sentence, the notion that the psychedelic experience is ineffable is

quite a paradox. People who witness the effects of psychedelics often have much to say about their experiences. Moreover, the entire aim of this section is to understand how individuals use social frames to interpret the experience. So how is that they also lack frameworks for understanding? I suggest that the lack of affirmative frameworks pertains to a general stigma surrounding the experience of psychoactive substances. As a result of this stigma, there are a few social rituals or institutions that assist in the understanding of non-normative states of consciousness. However, occasions with psychedelics are experienced so vividly, that one could hardly brush it off in the way dreams are generally disregarded. Therefore, in the absence of a common understanding, subjects are tasked with developing an idiosyncratic understanding. Still, the meaning applied to these experiences is never entirely individual. Subjects use frameworks of understanding that are concordant with various communities of thought. As such, the ‘social distribution of knowledge’ may yet apply to the amount of frameworks an individual has at their disposal, which frameworks are used to ascribe meaning to the experiences, the origins of these frameworks, as well as the degree to which they are affirmed in everyday reality.

Unsurprisingly, one of the most prevalent frameworks that arose in the experience reports stems directly from Timothy Leary’s psychological theories. Considered an off-shoot of the general growth in ‘humanistic psychology’ in the mid-twentieth century, Leary’s ‘existential-transactional’ psychology takes a naturalistic approach to the study of psychology that recognizes the active role of the researcher (Stevens 1987). Leary’s spin, which was frequently echoed in my sample, asserts that

social life is comprised of unique ‘games’ that pattern social interactions. In Chapter 3, we were briefly introduced to one author named Ruben, who recalled an evening in which the professor-student, friend-stranger, and psychology-theology distinctions were transcended for moments of unmediated human interaction. He first used Leary’s framework as a tool for describing his transcendent experience with psychedelics. Then, referring to the ‘game-structured’ social interactions of everyday life, Ruben applies Leary’s framework to his integration of the psychedelic experience, reporting:

I came away from this experience with a little better perspective on the roles and games in which I am involved and am, I hope, less likely to absolutize any of them. Also, when I become a loser in one of these games I don't think it will hurt quite so much.

Here, Ruben uses the ‘game’ framework to structure his integration of the experience. Specifically, his new perspective on interpersonal relationships motivates a resistance to the crystallization of various games. Others have described their own experiences in terms of the game framework. For instance, Bryan interprets his own encounters with psychedelics to have been wrapped up in games

I knew that what I had been doing was actually games and not a transcendental state. I realized that there just didn't seem to be a better word for the process than the "game" concept., and as much as I hated to, I would have to leave Leary's camp brain-washed in this respect.

Beyond merely critiquing his own behaviors in terms of Leary’s theory, Bryan highlights the social origins of the framework shaping his interpretations. Just as

Leary's psychological orientation influenced Ruben and Bryan, his influence extended to a variety of others who participated in his project.

Moreover, in addition to framing social life as a series of games, Leary imparted an awareness cognitive preoccupations called 'hang ups'. The following excerpt from a graduate student named Edward illustrates the subjective process of framing cognitive preoccupation with specific ideas during his experience.

Eventually things became decidedly unpleasant. My space and time framework was deteriorating fast and I seem to have resisted this process. Memory is weaker in this period and the outstanding characteristic of the things that were happening was confusion. Rather than letting things happen, I fought it, and the ideas of space and time became very important. I now was "hung up" on these ideas. I realized that what was happening was unpleasant and I wanted it to end. I remember then trying to make it end by talking myself into the notion that it was all a "game." I must have been hung up on this idea for a long time.

In order to maintain some semblance of his everyday understanding of space and time, Edward develops a preoccupation or 'hang up' on these concepts. Moreover, in his effort to cling to everyday consciousness, Edward similarly developed a hang on the notion that what he was experiencing was in fact, a game.

The inmates at Concord were similarly influenced by Leary's theoretical perspective. For example, one participant named David frames some of his newfound insights in terms of hang ups.

It also came to me that a man should do what he wanted (in reference to work) to. Dress, money, living (state) make no difference, if you believe in what you are doing. This is connected with me because I am hung up on money and clothes and position.

By highlighting that he has been hung up on money clothes and position, David frames his personal growth in terms of being subjectively preoccupied. Embedded within his perception of a hang up is the social critique that meaning does not necessarily stem from traditional social markers of success. Thus, David's hang up illustrates a perception that the goals and values pertaining to the predominant 'games' in society are empty in meaning. While perceptions of knowledge and insight will be explored later in this chapter, it is worth mentioning here that David's insight about his misplaced values was also framed according to Leary's 'game theory'.

Despite Leary's influence on individual framings of the psychedelic experience, individuals used a variety of social frameworks to interpret their experiences with psychedelics. Sticking with psychological frameworks, one participant named Dale interpreted the conscious changes he experienced in Freudian terms.

I was surprised by the ease with which psychoanalytic concepts seemed to explain what was happening to me. I felt as though my defense mechanisms had been greatly lowered and the forces of my id were being expressed in my thoughts and actions, although I retained some degree of control over these. It seemed to me then that some of the others did not react this way; while under

the drug they were still controlled by their egos, resulting in more rational actions than mine. One of the id forces seemed to be destruction - directed inward and outward.

Dale explicitly invokes psychoanalysis to frame his interpretation of his subjective experience of psychedelic effects. As a result, he perceives his own actions to be the result of an underlying and destructive 'id'. While I have no intention concern myself with the merit of psychoanalysis for interpreting psychedelic experiences, Dale's report is a fairly low-hanging example to demonstrate the way that social frames can shape subjective experiences with these substances. Others framed their experiences in terms of philosophical debates occurring in academic psychology at the time.

I fastened upon the question of the distinction between knower and known, recalling Allport's and Hall and Lindsey's discussions of whether the self should be conceptualized in terms of the processes of knowing (self-as-subject, James pure Ego) or in terms of the structures, patterns, abstractions by which one defines himself (self-as-object, proprium). It seemed to me that these were being dissociated in me, and I as knower was unable to confirm my knowing or to sustain my sense of identity by referring to any stable elements of myself.

In the above quote, Todd uses debates taking place at the borders of philosophy and psychology to contextualize his subjective experience of 'dissociation' from ordinary self-conceptions. However, I do not want to give the impression that individuals only ever report one way of framing their experiences. In the same report, Todd later opines on the religious implications of these experience. Yet, he ultimately concludes that the

value of these experiences largely lies in their therapeutic potential, which may have religious connotations for the individual.

Nonetheless, authors used a variety of philosophical and religious frameworks to interpret their experiences. Beginning with philosophical frames, one unknown author asserts that the descriptions are beyond concepts and words, leaving us to the use of ‘feeble metaphors’.

The best metaphorical description of the expanded consciousness experience is presented by Plato in the seventh book of the Republic. In this image -- the most familiar of western philosophy--we find all of the problems -- political, interpretative, conceptual -- encountered by researchers in this field.

Socrates speaks and we listen:

What follows is the full text of “The Allegory of the Cave” in place of any recollection of personal experiences. In this case, the author presents the Allegory as the best verbal representation of the psychedelic experience, which he refers to as ‘expanded’. An exploration of the Allegory is beyond the scope of this paper. However, for readers familiar with the thought experiment, the conscious experiences facilitated by psychedelics can be described as an ‘unshackling’ from the frameworks that structure everyday reality.

Others with philosophical inclinations invoked various twentieth century philosophical frameworks. For example, as one participant named Alvin reflects on his experience, he asserts that a work by Wittgenstein does better to describe the experience than his own words.

Direct effects were wearing off. But even now, some 24 hours later, the fundamental tranquility remains. I still understand the basic principle of my "vision." It is quite lucidly explained in the last section of Wittgenstein's Tractatus! But I wonder if he knew what he was saying.

In Alvin's report, he perceives the subjective experience he encountered to align with the framework laid out by Wittgenstein. But, Alvin implicitly questions whether the understanding put forth by Wittgenstein was intellectual or experiential in nature. In a similar fashion, another participant assumed psilocybin mushrooms to be the inspiration for Sartre's existential-fiction *Nausea*.

While psychological and philosophical interpretations of the psychedelic experience were frequent, religious frameworks were among some of the most prevalent that arose in the psychedelic experience reports. This was somewhat a function of the theological training of certain participants. Yet, the religious rhetoric was also representative of a general influx of Eastern mysticism and philosophy into the culture of the United States that was occurring at the time as well (Masters and Houston 1966: 260). Take Emma's reported embodiment of Eastern concepts, for example.

Experience evoked a number of Buddhist and Hindu terms, but always with the awareness of the gulf between concept and the sort of immediate experience which, I believed, had given rise to the words. The first one to occur to me was anissa, the perpetual perishing and regeneration of all things which in Buddhist meditation one tries to feel in one's own body. How I felt it! Each

busy cell, the popgun firing of nerves and network of pulse, the lovely articulation of joints.

This quote provides only a snapshot into Emma's overall experience in which she claims to have felt things previously known with a 'new conviction'. In this way, her previous knowledge of Eastern mysticism contributed to her framing of the experience at the outset. Subsequently, her interpretation of subjective effects that readily fit into these social frameworks of understanding served to solidify or crystallize her understanding of these terms.

In some cases, the religious frameworks contributed to the motivations for using psychedelics. As the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* made its rounds among the network associated with Leary's project, many participants used the language that was originally intended to guide individuals through stages of death. For instance, Caleb actively frames his session in these terms by reading the text before his experience.

This was the most intense experience to date. The beginning of the experience had none of the usual features: no physical, visual, or self-gate insights. It seemed as though I was immediately transported to a state of almost total loss of self. Having read the Tibetan Manual before the experience, I decided to make an effort to reach the stage of clear light; the first bardo. To do this, I felt I must kill the last remaining fragment of my ego, and this would be a battle which I felt ready to undertake.

Caleb's framing of the experience in Buddhist terms informs his goal of reaching the 'clear light'. As you may have noticed, his religious framing was also littered with various psychological themes that I identified above.

Before moving on, I should note that Eastern mysticism was not the only religion used to frame experiences with psychedelics. In fact, all of the Concord participants who used religious frameworks, interpreted their experiences from a Christian standpoint. One inmate named Randy reported seeing an image of 'God' that took a form he was not expecting.

Then, I thought I'd bring a little religion into the picture, and I began to think of Bible characters. Many people of Biblical times. And then, finally, Christ himself. I looked then for God, our Supreme Being. Instead of a figure of a person, I saw a thing. A small round ball, with a large ban around it, turning and floating around, and giving out beams of light, and sound like a code-transmitter. The harder I looked, the more I saw this object.

Although Randy's encounter with the divine came about through his own efforts during his experience, he expected to witness God in an embodied form. However, he was surprised to witness what could be described as an orb of energy that became more vivid with attention.

Aside from experiences that were interpreted to be direct encounters with divine entities, Christian themes contributed to how various authors' attributed meaning to their experiences. The following quote from Warner demonstrates how psychedelic experiences become imputed with meaning upon later reflection.

Another very basic discovery was a clear sense of values--I knew what was important in my life and what was less important more clearly than ever before. I saw clearly how certain fatuous and confused Ideas were leading me in wrong pathways; so some & my sentimentalities were peirced.

Though ideas of God and Christ were not prominent in my experience I have no doubt of the essentially religious nature of the experience.

Warner's experience of clarity did not actually have any explicitly religious content. Nevertheless, Warner's religious predisposition led him to attribute significance to his psychedelic session. While Warner used religious frameworks for his subjective understanding, he asserted that social manifestations of religion would not be accepting of tools that facilitate 'foundation shaking' experiences. The suggestion that social institutions of religion may not understand psychedelics as the powerful tools will explored in greater depth in the final chapter.

Before we grapple with questions of that nature, we must cover the ways knowledge is derived from the experiences. In order to so adequately, I must describe one more way that authors framed their psychedelic experiences. Specifically, I would like to address the ways that immediate social context can influence the ways that individuals frame psychedelic sessions. Rather than provide multiple examples pertaining to the various physical and social phenomena that frame the prisoners psychedelic sessions, I will provide one vignette pertaining to how this framing can contribute to the experience and interpretation of psychedelics. More of the

perspective shifts that occurred during these sessions will be presented in terms of the knowledge derived from these experiences. Here, our example comes from an inmate named Gregory who had visualizations pertaining to crime.

The Next thing that came to me surprised me greatly. It's the same thing I wanted to think of before. I saw my friends, everyone I ever knew, had anything to do with, I knew their names. But all I saw, all I heard scared me. It's all the bad things I'd ever done to this certain person, that certain person, people I thought I loved, I'd hurt them and they in turn hurt me. I saw the girls I'd gone with, the guys I hung with, my family, my relations, different people I knew. But all that would come was the bad, stealing, lying, beating, hurting, swearing, cheating, insulting, things I could no longer think of without feeling guilty. I saw guys in here in other jails heard about what they were doing, what they'd done. It was all so scary, so horrible. Sickening in its impact. I saw what a life of crime was, hated it, fought it, licked it. Hopeless people caught up in it, the small times doing the pettiest vilest things. Things that make me shake to just think of them. The poor small time criminal, unfortunate, gutless being, fighting the world they live in. They fought the people they hated people that did not a wrong.

The content Gregory's experience was explicitly related to his historical experiences with crime and strongly associated with guilt and general negativity. The prison context framing his experience impacted the sensory, emotional, and even the

cognitive phenomena he encountered. As his experience continued, Gregory reflected on the foolishness of crime and the pervasiveness of childhood trauma among himself and other inmates. Eventually, the negative tone of his experience turns hopeful, as he lists what he hopes to get out of life: love, peace, intelligence, and friends.

In summary, I have demonstrated the ways that individuals apply socially derived frameworks to understand their experiences. By interpreting the phenomena encountered during the experience in terms of familiar frameworks, individual authors are able to integrate their non-normative experiences into their everyday understandings of the world. The various social influences that individuals use to frame their experiences operate at multiple points in the phenomenological succession of psychedelic experiences. Here, I have addressed how frameworks can function to predefine the experience—shaping the expectations, motivations, and the phenomenal experience of the user. Moreover, certain ideological frameworks are frequently used to interpret the sessions after they have already passed.¹⁰ Thus far, I have left out an integral component of both the attribution of meaning to psychedelic experiences, as well as the construction of reality in general. The next section deals with knowledge and how individuals derive knowledge from their experiences of psychedelics.

Embodied Knowledge

Knowledge pertains to a subjective, “certainty that phenomena are real and that they

¹⁰ One aspect of framing, interpreting, and integrating psychedelic experiences that I have not covered here pertains to the direct influence of intersubjective communication. There was evidence in a number of cases that participants described ‘realizing’ the meaning of certain experiences after speaking with others.

possess specific characteristics,” (Berger and Luckmann 1966:13). Our perception of phenomena as ‘real’ often entails the subjective process of meaning attribution. As I have shown above, linguistic frameworks of understanding contribute to the production, interpretation, and subsequent integration of psychedelic experiences into everyday understandings. In turn, an individual may attribute ‘realness’ to the perceived phenomena by linguistically situating the experience within these frameworks. This may be one way that psychedelics can be said to produce knowledge for the user. However, the knowledge perceived by the authors oftentimes stems directly from the expansion of consciousness beyond the boundaries delineated by the frameworks that ordinarily shape their experience of reality.

For most of us, our experience of everyday consciousness is characterized by boundaries. The frameworks that arise as we linguistically draw boundaries impact our mental and physical realities. While many scholars have described linguistic structures that shape our experience, similar observations are made by individuals who experience psychedelics. For instance, Alex J. observes how social influences shape our subjective experiences.

Throughout our life we are influenced by words. Words from our parents, religion, friends, philosophers, et al.

There is no such thing as a good influence. All influence is immoral-immoral from the scientific point of view. Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with

his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him.

As we go about our daily lives, our natural attitudes to everyday life are shaped according to the boundaries delineated by *a priori* frameworks that have been passed down to us. In this way, reality has been defined for most of us. Yet, “as real as they may feel to us, boundaries are mere figments of our minds. Only the socialized can ‘see’ them.” (Zerubavel 1997: 80). Nevertheless, Alex J.’s recognition of socializing influences implies that we are able to transcend our socialization in order to achieve a new perspective and develop a new understanding.

This perception of knowledge has been referred to by others as a ‘noetic quality’ (Hood 1975; James 1902/1983: 380). The root of this knowledge stems from the direct bodily experience of psychedelics. In this sense, I will be distinguishing between *intellectual* and *embodied* knowledge. Others have made similar distinctions. For instance, in Jackson’s (1982) classic argument against physicalism titled ‘Epiphenomenal Qualia’, he presented the famous ‘Mary’s Room’ thought experiment. In short, Jackson asserts that it is possible to know the totality of factual knowledge about seeing color, yet miss out on the embodied knowledge that accompanies seeing red. Beyond this philosophical defense, the ‘qualitative immediacy’ of seeing red constitutes what Vannini, Waskul, & Gottschalk (2012) call a ‘bodily way of knowing’. As Shanon (2010:165) observed in his phenomenological

study of ayahuasca, “Often the things I saw under the intoxication impressed me as being so real that the conclusion seemed to be unavoidable: truly existing other realities are being revealed.”

Along these lines, the knowledge derived from the psychedelic sessions stems from the subjective embodiment of experiences, which challenges the epistemological boundaries that ordinarily inform normal waking consciousness. For example, our everyday understanding of reality does not include the possibility of boundary betraying experiences of the sort that I described in the previous chapter, let alone the possibility of other realities. Nonetheless, the authors in the reports I have analyzed maintain that the phenomena they experienced were ‘real’. For example, one unknown author reports feeling the frameworks of everyday reality impinging on their experience after crossing the boundaries of normal waking consciousness into a .

Looking back at the experience from the inside of my wheat kernel I feel that pressures of the reality we know telling me that the experience was unreal, that these were just crazy imaginings that come out of my own head; that the understanding I thought I had was only a delusion and that I couldn't even carry a simple thought to its conclusion: in short, that I was for a time in an unreal world and was suffering from a form of delusional madness.

I know this to be false with a certainty that I fear will fade with time in the complacent self assurance that this tiny island of space and time making up the three dimensions in which we operate is the "real" world. I am sad that the

understanding I have had must in large part be lost.

For this author, as the everyday world boundaries are re-drawn, the reality of the psychedelic experience comes into question.¹¹ Nevertheless, the author maintains a *certainty* that the experience was real. As William James (1902/1984:72) has stated in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, “They are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experience can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by logic ever are.” In this sense, due to the immediate certainty in the realness of phenomena encountered during the psychedelic experience, individuals obtain ‘knowledge’ through embodied experiences that challenge boundaries of ordinary consciousness. The following sections will explore how individuals obtain knowledge through experiential shifts of the boundaries characterizing one’s natural approach to everyday life and the dissolution of boundaries altogether.

Boundary Shifts

As I have thus far established, the psychedelic experience generally produces

¹¹ As I have previously pointed out, everyday reality is the predominant reality. It necessarily envelopes any other experience of the world, since we always return to the natural attitude of everyday life. This anonymous author’s report suggests a tension between the subjective reality of their experience and the frameworks that shape their everyday reality, the author remains certain that the experience was real. The misalignment between experience and cultural frameworks of understanding plays a large part in the phenomena of ‘bad trips’. As Becker first suggested, the prevalence of these negative experiences related to the insistence that the phenomena encountered in these experiences were a sign of insanity. However, as a subculture developed around the use of psychedelics, the preponderance of ‘bad trips’ generally decreased (Bunce 1979; Zinberg 1984).

embodied knowledge associated with a particular sort of experience. However, this begs the question: “What do users come to know from the psychedelic experience?” In the Chapter 3, I attempted to show how the psychedelic experience subjectively challenges a number of boundaries. During psychedelic sessions, users report conscious experiences that transcend the linguistic knowledge structures that frame our everyday conceptions of reality. Although they are fleeting, these subjective experiences of transcendence allows for new associations, fresh perspectives, and a sense of relativity, which recognizes the malleability of frameworks.

For instance, consider the implications of subjectively embodying an experience in which you are able to perceive things from many perspectives, effectively moving beyond the ordinary frameworks that are used as you progress through daily life. One participant named Ronald vividly recalls embodying an experience of this sort.

New relationships, new associations presented themselves to me in abundance. Ability to look at a single object, or a single person, from many differing (and formerly mutually excluding) viewpoints was increased. I looked about a room full of people, who were sitting at tables. I would see a young boy, picture how I would look to him, and picture how a third party would look to him, quickly calculating the difference in physical angle, the age difference, the quality of perception. Then I would see that boy, myself, and others, from the viewpoint of the third party, who might be, say, an old woman. I found it easy, under

these circumstances, to empathize with widely divergent personalities viewpoints...The drug, further, made possible new insights into familiar subject matter. Old attitudes were re-examined. Certain things were seen from an entirely new and sometimes unconventional aspect.

As Ronald transgresses the boundaries of experience by observing himself and various phenomena from the perspective of idealized others, he subjectively experiences the transcendence of the frameworks that ordinarily structure his perceptions. Thus, since the boundaries that delineate the schemes of relevance in everyday consciousness have been shifted, Ronald may perceive associations that may have not been previously considered. You may have also noticed Ronald's remark that new insights were received about familiar information. In this sense, the embodied knowledge perceived by the authors does not entail the knowledge of new content. Rather, authors like Ronald may be able to develop new understandings based on a reappraisal of old information.

Oftentimes, the shifts in perspective experienced by the authors are reported to produce 'self-knowledge', as subjective reappraisals frequently occur in terms of the author's previous behaviors, attitudes, or general perceptions of Self. One instance of this comes from a woman named Caroline who saw a stranger when looking in the mirror.

I passed a mirror and looked at myself. I watched my reflection in the mirror and looked at myself. I watched my reflection in the mirror as if I were watching a stranger. I saw a woman who was perfectly groomed, hair in place,

carefully made up and well dressed. But it was if I were looking at a photograph, there was no dimension.

I AM EXTREMELY CONCERNED WITH MY EXTERNAL APPEARANCE: THE FACE I PRESENT TO THE PUBLIC. TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, I AM AN ATTRACTIVE WELL POISED WOMAN, A GOOD WIFE AND MOTHER. ALTHOUGH COLLEGE TRAINED, I RARELY TAKE PART IN ANY DISCUSSIONS EXCEPT ABOUT CHILDREN. I USUALLY SIT AROUND LIKE A PIECE OF STAGE SCENERY. I SAW MYSELF AS OTHERS PROBABLY SAW ME, A MANNEQUIN. I HAD NO PERSONALITY, NO INDIVIDUALITY.

Remarking that her view was visually ‘flat’, Caroline observed herself as if she were a stranger in a photograph. Her reflections on the experience, which followed in all capital letters, reveal a dissatisfaction with the dimensionless image of perfection that characterizes her presentation of self. In turn, Caroline’s transcendence of her ordinary perspective to view herself as an ‘other’ allowed her to develop a new understanding of herself and her relationships.

The acquisition of self-knowledge by shifting perspectives was similarly reported among the participants at Concord. Oftentimes, the prison context was a major contributing factor to the experiences for inmates. In addition to the recidivism angle of the Concord experiment, the physical setting served as a sustained reminder of the circumstances informing the experience. Specifically, the physical and social environment of Concord prisons presented individuals with a variety of symbols and

interactions that influenced the experience and interpretation. In turn, self-knowledge during psychedelic sessions were frequently interpreted in terms of past lives of crime. In the following recollection, Gerald reports a vivid experience that revealed his potential future if he continued along the same path.

I asked myself what I felt about me as a man and of my life and had a feeling of great disgust. I looked at each one in the group and saw dead me walking around and sitting down. I could feel now and looking back that it is me myself that is living in a walking dead world made by the life I have had. I fear this and will get away from it, everyone of us were skin and bones and very pale pallor. It was sickening. I also felt pity for Jack because I could see he is a real old, old, man and it goes right back to me again. I could be the one who is real old, and what a rotten life it has been. I keep thinking of this and about myself and can feel and see that I have been all my life inflicting self-punishment, but I'm getting away from that and will make something of the rest of my life.

Gerald's disgust with his past behaviors indicates a shifted viewpoint on his life and himself. When he experienced a visualization of himself as 'dead' moving about in a 'walking dead world', Gerald came to the realization that the 'walking dead world' was of his own design. Moreover, upon looking at an older inmate, he saw what the future may hold if he continues the same patterns that so disgusted him earlier. Taken together, his experience gave him a holistic 'bird's eye view' of his past, present, and

potentially-future life provided him. Ultimately, this resulted in his inspiration to ‘make something’ of his life.

In turn, we can see how Gerald’s embodied experience enabled the realization of his role in the process of subjective reality construction. Thus, transcending the boundaries shaping his ordinary perspective, Gerald was able to view his life from the viewpoint of a stranger. Coupled with the experience of witnessing himself and others as the ‘walking dead’, Gerald’s session allowed him to reexamine past tendencies that led to his incarceration. In both Gerald and Caroline’s cases, the vivid experience of taking on a new perspective contributed to the development of self-knowledge. Although many report developing a new understanding from their shifts in perspective, many authors also deriving knowledge from experiences where boundaries are dissolved entirely.

Moments of Clarity

Much in the way that experiences of embodying an alternative viewpoint contribute to new understandings, the authors report gaining knowledge from experiences of dissolution that betray the boundaries of everyday life. In chapter 3, I introduced boundless experiences and how certain phenomenal categories are dissolved during psychedelic experiences. Here, my discussion of boundlessness concerns the paired transcendence of phenomenal categories and linguistic frameworks. In review, when referring to boundary dissolving or ‘boundless’ experiences, I mean experiences similar to the following excerpt from Russel.

I am within and out of myself at the same time, I have no body any longer, no sense of structure or organization, I am like a bowl, that can be seen from the inside and the outside at the same time, a vessel full of gas, full of spirit, my own spirit. I am nothing but spirit, a spirit that is trying to become intertwined and mingled with another spirit. I am far removed, all structure, all traditional forms and connections, all relationships have dissolved...

The immediate subjective experience of the sort that Russel reports does not appear rich with 'knowledge' in the traditional sense. However, as I have previously distinguished between embodied and intellectual knowledge, we must consider what it means for individuals to subjectively transcend the boundaries of the frameworks that structure normal waking consciousness.

Oftentimes the vivid experience of dissolution brings one to question the frameworks that shape everyday reality. In other words, the expansion of conscious awareness beyond the frameworks that ordinarily narrow our experience provides a vivid sense of relativity. For example, in a report titled 'Every Damn Way of Saying it is Wrong', Jared reports questioning taken-for-granted assumptions that characterize his everyday reality.

The existence of the realm of the undifferentiated called into question every possible assumption about the time-space world: the reality of time, separate existences, moral discriminations and evaluations. It gave a highly uncertain status to any action in the everyday world. Awareness of these ambiguities, of

the impossibility of knowing for sure, was what made a person a true Philosopher. All things were radically questioned, and there was no logical way out.

Here, Jared reports understanding the ‘impossibility of knowing for sure’. By subjectively experiencing boundlessness, Jared figuratively ‘stretched’ his consciousness beyond the conventional boundaries characterizing everyday reality. Along these lines, the knowledge produced in this case might constitute what Zerubavel (1997) calls, a more ‘flexible’ mind. Understanding the ‘impossibility of knowing for sure’, Jared recognizes that his ordinary frameworks may be merely a relative understanding of reality, since he realizes “any entity can be situated in more than one mental context,” (Zerubavel 1997:121). Recent experimental research on psychedelics has supported this view, showing that psilocybin experiences significantly contribute to increases in ‘openness’ (Maclean, Johnson, and Griffiths 2011).

In addition to potentially fostering a more flexible mind, boundless experiences with psychedelics allow individuals experiences that may be temporarily free of conceptual influence.¹² Huxley (1963/1999) posited that psychedelic experiences allow individuals to ‘cut through the fences’, which mark the culturally defined

¹² Still, these experiences are culturally constructed in many ways, but participants may experience a momentary respite from the linguistic frameworks that structure normal waking consciousness.

boundaries that are continually reified through hierarchical processes of socialization. The knowledge derived from this ‘hole-cutting’ is often expressed as a recognition of the limitations of linguistic frameworks of understanding. As Huxley (1963/1999:249) states, individuals who have transcended the boundaries of their cultural frameworks, “will find it hard to take too seriously the boastings and dogmatizings of his [or her] own tradition.” The ‘deconditioning’ quality of the experience is a salient contributing factor to the development of a new understanding for many authors. In this way, one anonymous author reports an authentic knowledge of freedom that is separate from ordinary hierarchical frameworks of understanding.

Freedom...Here I tell you that I have more idea of this than you have because my aloneness, my privacy, my freedom from involvement is truer. I may only have involvement, detached and unselfish, when I may realize utter solitude. I no longer want to hear anyone talk about Freedom. Who can try to sell it to me when I know what it is - limitless, infinite, personal, not a public lie. Now I am impatient and argumentative. I can find volumes of arguments in a line, in a second - it is all clear and absolutely right... I am amazed at their rightness and simplicity. I am confident, I am

Here, the author reports that an understanding of ‘freedom’ has been attained through their psilocybin experience. Through embodying an experience undifferentiated from linguistic-conceptual boundaries, the author realizes the ways socially-derived conceptual frameworks shape individual understandings. Moreover, the author implies that social influences may distort conceptual understandings by referring to common

understandings of freedom as a ‘public lie’. Ultimately, we are brought back to the epistemological import of embodied understanding, as the author simply asserts ‘I am’.

As I suggested above, the subjective validity of the knowledge derived from psychedelics stems from the immediacy of the embodied psychedelic experience. In turn, since the experience may be characterized by expansion of conscious experience beyond the boundaries of everyday life, the understanding engendered by psychedelics moves beyond conventional notions of knowledge as merely a, “gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing,” (Freire 1968/2005:72). For instance, a concord inmate named Dan recalls his ability to come to conclusions through his own thoughts and experience.

The taking of the drug opens strange windows, but it seems natural to think constructively while under its influence and thereafter to think constructively if one so chooses, simply because the proper way to think has been pointed out in such a fashion that you may not rightly dispute it. It seems to come to one through his own thoughts or thought-processes and not merely because someone else said so. It is a fascinating experience and I am gratified that I have learned something, and that there is yet so much more to be discovered.

Here, we see how Dan validates his knowledge using his subjective embodiment of consciousness expansion. Specifically, as Dan shed the frameworks that shape everyday consciousness, he was able to think more constructively. In turn,

Dan's knowledge came to him through his 'own thoughts', free from the influence of the frameworks characterizing everyday reality.

Conclusion

Taken together, the experiences I have described in the above sections suggest authors of psychedelic reports derive knowledge from consciousness expanding experiences in spite of their ineffable quality. As I have previously shown, these experiences are oftentimes framed and filtered through social frameworks. In this sense, we may recognize an alternative interpretation to Huxley's original filtration theory, which purports that the brain reduces experience. An alternative interpretation in light of these findings would suggest that the brain provides the physical mechanism that reduces conscious experience and sociocultural factors define how the experience is to be reduced. Nevertheless, the reported ineffability of these experiences suggests a lack of adequate frameworks for effectively integrating these experiences.

In any case, participants often report gaining some knowledge from their experiences. First, individuals may perceive knowledge in terms of their social frameworks of understanding that are applied or deemed relevant to the experience. Here, phenomena encountered during these experiences could be interpreted through philosophical, religious, or a plethora of other frameworks. Second, knowledge may accompany boundary shifts that provide subjects with an alternative perspective on phenomena. In these cases, subjects may report a broadening of perspective or expansion of horizons. This has been supported by recent evidence that psilocybin contributes to increases in 'openness' (Maclean, Johnson, and Griffiths 2011). Finally,

knowledge may be derived from the transcendence of linguistic frameworks. By surpassing the conventions that characterize normal waking consciousness, subjects are able to ‘cut through the fences’ that form the boundaries of everyday reality (Huxley 1963/1999). In doing so, individuals may experientially acquire knowledge rather than hierarchically, which gives the impression of agentic participation in the production of understanding. Yet, as I will argue in the next and final chapter, the freeing from influence with psychedelics and achievement of subjective understanding separate from traditional knowledge structures has been a major part of why psychedelics are considered deviant. Specifically, in the next chapter, I will delineate how major institutions of social control have contributed to the stigmatization of psychedelics.

Chapter 5

MOVING FORWARD

A culture cannot be discriminatingly accepted, much less be modified, except by persons who have seen through it—by persons who have cut holes in the confining stockade of verbalized symbols and so are able to look at the world and, by reflection, at themselves in a new and relatively unprejudiced way.

-Aldous Huxley

Given the archival nature of my data, this thesis suffers from a number of limitations. First and foremost, I have explicitly taken an approach that centers the subjective experience. My subjective approach may garner criticism from many perspectives by those who prefer a more ‘objective’ approach, resting on biological or pharmacological understandings. Moreover, I suspect that this approach will be seen as equally limiting from the perspective of other social-scientific disciplines. Specifically, the subjective orientation of this study risks the ‘individualist’ critique by those who would prioritize institutions, organizations, and other social phenomena (e.g. sociologists; Overgaard and Zahavi 2008). Yet, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe declared in 1792, “it goes without saying that experience, as in everything we undertake, has and should have the greatest influence in science” (2010:19). Consequently, for some my social-phenomenological approach may not be *subjective enough*, since I have not for the sake of this study engaged in self-experimentation with any of the substances used in the reports I have analyzed.

While Goethe was referring to the natural sciences, which on its surface makes for a much more radical proposition, social sciences often strive to model themselves after the natural sciences (Schutz 1970). In line with this desire, an ‘aperspectival objectivity’, aimed at neutralizing the idiosyncrasies of the scientific observer, has become fashionable throughout natural and social sciences (Daston 1992). Although a proper interrogation of ‘objectivity’ is beyond the scope of this project, I have previously argued the relevance of subjectivity on philosophical grounds (see Chapter 1). Following the phenomenological logic I laid out, I have so far attempted to remain true (that is, retain the meaning of phenomena as it was reported) to the subjective accounts made by authors of the experience reports by bracketing my own interpretations. However, as Goffman (105) has previously described the difference between genuine and contrived presentations of self, “we tend to see real performances as something not purposely put together at all, being an unintentional product of the individual’s unselfconscious response to the facts in his situation.” And so, I conclude this thesis by presenting my understanding of the implications of psychedelic experiences in light of my findings in the previous chapters.

In doing so, I will be presenting an interpretation of how psychedelic experiences have been *framed* as deviant in the United States. However, as I ultimately conclude, the core aspects of psychedelic experiences are not inherently subversive. Nevertheless, in drug research, Zinberg (1984) points out that investigators are often forced to toe-the-line between providing valid, objective, and ostensibly ‘real’ information and ensuring not to undermine the general sensibilities about drug

policy. These drug experts must engage in the presentation of an objective, scientific self. Yet, as Weil (2004:3) has stated, “Drugs are not an emotionally neutral topic of discourse. There is no such thing as a disinterested drug expert, despite the stance of many scientists who claim to be presenting purely objective information.” I recognize that the questions I am pursuing, my analysis, and my interpretation of the findings that follow are inevitably influenced by my standpoint as a researcher embedded in a particular historical context (Tracy 2010).

Psychedelics, Rationalization, and Social Control

To begin a description of the context influencing my perspective, I would begin with the observations of Max Weber. In a speech given at Munich University in 1918, Weber claimed that, “The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world,’” (1946:155). For Weber, rationalization is a process by which societies organize actions in a systematic way and according to certain values (2011:96-98). Historically in the ‘West’, this has meant that mystical, magical, or otherwise mysterious explanations of the world, whether that be the internal or external world, have been deemed irrational. Hence, the world has been disenchanted because as a society we, “venture to rationalize the image of the world as a cosmos governed by impersonal rules,” (Weber 1946:282).

Weber’s speech was aimed at German youth, who seeking ‘redemption’ from the processes of scientific intellectualization that reap the meaning from life, turned to

religious and mystical experiences. Although Weber claims to despise intellectualization and grants that science fails to illuminate the *meaning* of life, his aims were to validate the scientific project by delineating its positive contributions. In doing so, Weber situates the role of the scientific actor within a ‘progressive’ advancement of intellectualization that has occurred for thousands of years. This assumption of inevitable progress was an integral feature of sociological work at the time (Connell 1997). Resting on the conception of a ‘primitive other’ who provided a baseline to measure modern ‘advancements’, the notion of progress reflects, “the process of economic and colonial expansion, inscribed in the social structure of the empires that the North Atlantic powers constructed,” (Connell 1997:1519).

Additionally, Weber conceives of the scientific vocation as a generally innocuous project, describing science as “a ‘vocation’ organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts.” As this description of discrete disciplines suggests containment, Weber disregards the role that science (including sociology) plays in constructing and bringing the world into being. Since Weber made this statement more than a century ago, Weber had no conception of the degree to which ‘scientific’ knowledge would come to predominate in the everyday life in the ‘West’. The prevalence of rational disenchantment through technological development has only appeared to take a greater hold in everyday life. However, in his presentation of the ways that science contributes to (what we may

call) ‘intersubjective reality’,¹³ technology was the first-listed and least attended-to contribution of science identified by Weber. Yet, I do not expect for an individual born in the 1800’s to have anticipated the explosion of technological development that occurred in the past 100 years.

Nevertheless, by the mid-twentieth century, various intellectual ‘movements’ associated with a ‘counter culture’ began to identify and pushback against the overgrowth of the scientific and technological rationalization (see Agar 2008). It has likely been clear up to this point that my understanding of this issue has been influenced by the works of various thinkers borne out of these twentieth century movements. My interest in the interaction between drugs and society was sparked by Howard Becker’s studies of behaviors labelled deviant or ‘countercultural’, such as the use of marijuana or psychedelics. Parallel with my exposure to the ideas of Becker, I became increasingly aware of the ‘resurgence’ of clinical research on psychedelics. As such, I did not have to look too deep into the research to find reference to the ‘legacy’ of Timothy Leary.

While his contribution to the perception that psychedelics and psychedelic experiences are deviant will be touched on below, Leary’s work opened me up to the works of various thinkers who took part in a purportedly concerted effort to develop a

¹³ Specifically, Weber (1919/1976:150-151) suggests that science may contribute: 1) technology to manipulate the ‘life-world’ (Schutz and Luckmann 1973), 2) methods of thought and the capacity to teach these methods, and 3) clarity.

‘culture of drugs’ (Leary 1983:37). For instance, I have cited Aldous Huxley frequently throughout this thesis. Huxley’s work has influenced a variety of scholars (see Elcock 2013; Langlitz 2013; Shanon 2010:48). With *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley provided a quintessential example in the study of psychedelic experiences, as well as direction for the future by presenting a phenomenological account of the drug mescaline. Moreover, Huxley’s explorations of psychoactive substances frequently intertwined critiques modern society. Fueled by concerns, “about the development of mass communication that ran the risks of descending into brainwashing like dictatorships,” (Elcock 2013:298), Huxley’s work contributed to the ‘countercultural’ movements against the processes rational disenchantment described by Weber years earlier. Huxley even facilitated the introduction of French philosopher Jaques Ellul’s *Technological Society* to the United States (Agar 2008), which found a home in sociological circles (see Douglas 1970). In turn, where Weber presented science as a generally contained venture and technology as a positive function of scientific progress, scholars in the mid-twentieth century began to frame scientific rationality and the resulting technology as mechanism for social control.

In addition to Huxley’s concern about technological rationalization for political and consumerist purposes (Elcock 2013), Huxley and Weber notably diverge in their appraisal of the ‘concept’. Although both agree that linguistic means are ideal for ‘disenchanting’ (Weber 1918/1946:139) or taking the ‘mystery out of reality’ (Huxley 1963/1999:250), the implications they draw from the predominance of linguistic knowledge in differ greatly. For example, using reference to the ‘Allegory of the

Cave’, Weber asserts that the concept has been “one of the great tools in all of scientific knowledge.” While Huxley acknowledged the generally positive things that may have come out of the uses of language, he suggests that it has been responsible for various social problems. Furthermore, he laments the undue ‘realness’ afforded to linguistic concepts and describes ‘conceptual lattices’ and ‘cultural fences’ that limit our perception of reality (Huxley 1963/1999).

In the previous chapters, I have illustrated ways that psychedelic experiences remove these perceptual blockages. As I found in Chapter 3, the essence of psychedelic experiences appears to be the transcendence of boundaries pertaining to cognitive, emotional, and sensory phenomena. In Chapter 4, I presented how the reports of boundary dissolving experiences facilitated by psychedelics may be interpreted (i.e. filtered) through culturally derived linguistic frameworks when reflecting on phenomenal experiences or upon ‘returning’ to normal waking consciousness and everyday reality. Yet, the transcendent experiences with psychedelics challenge these linguistic frameworks that structure conventional everyday reality. Specifically, as I described in the second half of Chapter 4, when these boundaries of perspective are crossed, the clarity of experience free from linguistic structuring permits the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions characterizing everyday reality and normal waking consciousness. In this way, the psychedelic experience can be seen as what Garfinkel (1967:54) calls a subjective ‘breach’ of the linguistic structure that shapes the subjective experience of normal waking consciousness. This conscious breach of social frameworks provides

individuals with embodied knowledge, which receives the status of reality due to the subjective immediacy of the experience.

Thus, in order to understand how the psychedelic experience itself may have contributed to criminalization and the perception that psychedelics are ‘deviant’, we might ask, “what happens as more individuals transcend the linguistic frameworks shaping subjective experience?” The proliferation of acts considered ‘deviant’ contributes to a general, “breakdown in social controls which ordinarily operate to maintain the valued forms of behavior,” (Becker 1963:59). In this case, psychedelic experiences evoke subjective transcendence of social controls embedded within the linguistic frameworks shaping cognitive life. Sociologists Kaiser and Gold (1973:150) suggest that consciousness expanding experiences such as these may contribute to social change, stating:

“Altered states of consciousness create nothing less than new perceptual configurations which may well spell the end of social institutions based upon modes of perception which are incongruent with new perceptions being attained by increasing numbers of people via technological breakthroughs, societal alterations, and of course, the psychedelic experience.”

Along these lines, the knowledge incurred from the psychedelic experience challenges the conventional frameworks imparted upon individuals through processes of socialization. Yet, as Huxley (1963:253) points out using his confining ‘fence’ metaphor, “most persons in authority have a vested interest in the maintenance of cultural fences.” As such, we begin to see the conflict between embodied experience of psychedelics and intersubjective definitions of reality.

Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk (2014) have referred to the social structuring of experience as a ‘sensory order’. Sensory orders are frequently unobserved in our natural attitude of everyday life, but are enforced through formal and informal social controls. These controls are made visible through various ‘disturbances’, or breaches as I described above. Moreover, as I suggest in the following pages, the controls pertaining to psychedelic use emanate from the historical processes of rationalization that have persisted in so-called ‘Western’ culture. The important piece here pertains to how rationalization and disenchantment has contributed to the social and ideological forms resting on the pernicious notion that we live in an ‘advanced-technological society’. As Douglas (1970:15) points out

“The steady increase in application of the scientific-technological world view has increasingly made ours a knowledge-based society—that is, a society in which scientific-technological information is the legitimate basis of action and, at least for a growing part of the population, a goal in itself. This has produced a steady increase in knowledge occupations and in the percentage of our national product devoted to them, which in turn increases the commitment to the scientific-technological world view.”

In addition to the general dependence on bureaucratic decision making and systems of production that arises from this structuring of reality, ‘expert knowledge’ acquired through rational means becomes regarded as the most valid type of knowledge.

However, the embodied knowledge derived from psychedelics arises from experiences that transcend ordinary frameworks of experience based upon expert knowledge.

Along these lines, the psychedelic experience, “brings us to the boundaries not only of science, but also of the entire Western worldview and its philosophies,” (Shanon

2010:39). In turn, psychedelics may be perceived as ‘deviant’, since the experiences they facilitate experiences that challenge conventional notions of ‘reality’.

Pointing to a variety of historical factors, I suggest in the brief sections below that the confluence of legal, religious, and scientific/medical rationalization in ‘Western’ society has contributed to the devaluation of psychedelics. Based on my analysis of psychedelic experience reports, I find that this devaluation stems partially from the subjectively embodied transcendence of social frameworks constructed with hierarchical knowledge that operate as mechanisms of social control. Moreover, in the course of my research into psychoactive substances I have been made aware of the fact that in many cases, “the regulation of many substances that alter consciousness shows not a value judgment with respect to the substance to be regulated, but rather a value judgment with respect to the group with which the substance is most frequently associated,” (Bodamer 2005:1314-1315). Hence, many of the historical examples also pertain to judgements about the value of indigenous groups whose knowledge and lifestyles that have been frequently conceptualized and subsequently disregarded as ‘primitive’.

Psychedelics and Law

The overlap between the fields of law, religion, and medicine will become especially apparent as they intersect on the subject of psychedelics. Thus, while I separate these for analytical purposes, the trajectories of rationalization for each of these institutions are not mutually exclusive. In turn, the precise role that each institution has had in the historical effort to conceive of psychedelics as deviant remains unclear. As such, I make no judgement as to whether or not any of these institutions bare greater

responsibility than another for the stigmatization of psychedelics. However, I think it is useful to begin the discussion with law, since legal restrictions are in some ways determinative of the religious and scientific orientations towards psychedelics. Moreover, legal prohibitions are legitimized by the state monopoly on violence (Weber 1918/1976), making laws an especially salient mechanism of social control.

The first laws prohibiting the use of psychedelics are likely those enforced by Spanish colonial powers after the invasion of North America in the 1500's (Masters and Houston 1966; Miller 2015, Chapter 2). The Spanish attempts at cultural-genocide has led to a biased filtering of knowledge concerning practices involving psychedelics prior to the presence of Spaniards in North America. Masters and Houston (1966:38) indicate that, "unfortunately the Aztec records were destroyed upon the orders of Cortez, so that what we know of the native drug use has come down to use mainly through pious attacks on pagan practices made by Spanish clergy or by those under their influence." However despite prohibiting the use of various psychedelics, such as peyote and psilocybin mushrooms, the use of these plants persisted underground (Masters and Houston 1966; Miller 2015). With these early laws against the use of psilocybin (also referred to as *teonanácatl* meaning 'God's flesh') and peyote, the intersection between religion and law start to become apparent. The conscious states facilitated by these substances among the indigenous cultures of North America were used as methods of religious communion of the divine, as well as rites of divination (Masters and Houston 1966; Miller 2015). Although these practices were certainly troubling to the Catholic sensibilities of Spanish inquisitors, the indigenous use of

psychedelics were not threatening to the Spanish *per se*. Rather, the threat of indigenous psychedelic use stemmed from the growing interest in these practices by non-indigenous people. For instance, in the case of peyote, Dawson (2018:20) points out that, “It was not banned because indigenous peoples were drawn to its power... it was banned because Europeans and *castas* (people of mixed race) were drawn to it.” In turn, the roots of psychedelic prohibition are tied to the Spaniards’ perception of these substances as threatening their claim to social control of consciousness.

Hundreds of years later, the War on Drugs is still being fought in an effort to retain control over the consciousness of individuals believed to be at the center of American society. Contemporary laws concerning psychoactive substances in the United States are determined by the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). First enacted in 1970, this piece of legislation divides a variety of substances into “schedules” or categories ranging I-V which are meant to represent the relative danger a substance poses to individuals and society, as well as how they should be regulated by the various offices of the law. The substances that we are concerned with, psychedelics, belong to Schedule 1, meaning they have a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical uses.¹⁴ Despite being physiologically safe and non-addictive (Nichols 2016),

¹⁴ The fact that the groupings of substances on this list are political rather than scientific in nature is not a novel critique, but it is worth reiterating given the obstacle this presents to achieving religious freedom and freedom of inquiry.

the present state of the law classifies them as being potentially more harmful than cocaine or even fentanyl.

The glaring contradictions held within the regulatory structure of the CSA represents racialized nature of drugs discourse in the United States. Historically, drugs in the United States have been associated with certain marginal groups, in order to equally stigmatize the substance as well as the associated group. The racialization of ‘drugs discourse’ has been institutionalized into the general policies of drug control under the auspices of the ‘War on Drugs’, contributing to a variety of racial disparities. Marijuana’s association with Blacks and Mexicans is just one example of how the demonization and racialization of certain groups has been used to justify the criminalization of drugs (Miller 2015). For instance, due to Harry Anslinger’s attempts to demonize marijuana in the early 20th century, “[users] were usually portrayed as young Mexicans and Blacks whose lust for white women was inflamed by marijuana, frequently leading to brutal rapes,” (Miller 2015:240). Furthermore, it has been well established that the arbitrary legal distinction between crack and cocaine has contributed to a variety of racial disparities (Fellner 2009). As such, African American communities have been disproportionately impacted by disparate sentencing laws for crack-cocaine and War on Drugs policy generally (Hart 2014:92; Mitchell 2008; Provine 2011; Scully 2002). These and other punitive drug laws have been major contributing factors to mass incarceration (Roberts & Chen 2008:115).

The persistence of this racialization is evidenced by the “Fair” Sentencing Act of 2010, which improved but preserves the disparity in sentencing for crack and

cocaine offenses (Hart 2012:294). Similarly, the recent epidemic of opioid overdose deaths (see Jalal et al., 2018) has shed light on the racialized narratives surrounding substance use and addiction (Lassiter 2015; Netherland & Hansen 2016). While the difference can be simply exemplified by the general shift from criminalizing toward medicalizing drug users, Netherland and Hansen (2016) also found that White opioid users are portrayed in the media as blameless and unlikely victims of substance abuse—a stark contrast from previous epidemics

Although psychedelics have frequently been associated with ‘hippies’, race was not absent from the development of the laws attempting to control consciousness by prohibiting the use of psychedelics. In Dawson’s (2018) examination of peyote, he suggests that prohibition took followed a similar ‘logic’ as the discourses alluded to above. Specifically, this logic suggests that psychoactive substances,

“poison the body, causing that body to degenerate and be unsuitable for work, discipline, and other forms of reproduction. That personal tragedy then became a social tragedy through various forms of contamination, as that body first contaminated other bodies, encouraging the same behavior, and then contaminated society as a whole.”

(Dawson 2018:22)

In the case of psychedelics, since the body does not degenerate from harmful physiological effects, inputting psychedelics into this logic would imply that the experiences facilitated by these substances produces a worldview antithetical to the reproduction the valued societal forms. This can be in part related to the Puritan roots of United States culture, which generally rejects the potential for any positive experiences resulting from ‘intoxicants’ (Zinberg 1984:27).

However, much of the concern surrounding psychedelics centered on distinctions drawn or comparisons made between the use of psychedelics by indigenous peoples and a drug culture comprised mostly of middle class whites. For example, psychedelic use in the ‘West’ has been commonly framed as idiosyncratic, rebellious, deviant, and culturally subversive; whereas, indigenous use of psychedelic plants is frequently described as culture-affirming though use in rites of passage and religious rituals (Furst 1972:xii). Similarly, Grinspoon and Balakar (1983:22) point out that “Drug use in modern industrial society is often contrasted pejoratively with primitive and pre-industrial drug use as haphazard, hedonistic, individualistic, psychologically disturbed and disturbing, and culturally disintegrative rather than unifying.” Along these lines, justifications for prohibition may be tied to the trivialization of ‘Western’ psychedelic use, coupled with juxtaposition of indigenous use that is conceived of as fundamentally different. This distinction rests on the construction of a ‘primitive other’ whose psychedelic use, although culturally reaffirming, remains non-rational and in turn non-threatening.

From a slightly different angle, prohibition may be also connected to the perception that psychedelic use among ‘Western’ citizens actually resembles a pejorative conception of the ‘primitive’ use of psychedelics. For example, early efforts to control Native Americans peyote use emphasized the primitive nature of the ceremonies (Dawson 2018). Although these efforts have been largely unsuccessful, the perception that these practices are ‘primitive’ became especially salient as peyote and its active component mescaline gained the attention of the counter-culture.

Specifically, the peyote became, “tied to the collapse of civilized behavior,” (Dawson 2018:25). In this sense, the perceived threat posed by the psychedelic experience is toward the reproduction the collective self-conception of the United States as an advanced-technological society. Nevertheless, in both cases, psychedelic use is seen as a threat to major values propping up the ‘progressive’ framework I previously outlined, which holds that Western culture is advanced. First, as psychedelic use became associated with hedonism and escapism, the notion of ‘getting high’ for kicks violated a major value (i.e. the Protestant work ethic) As Weber pointed out, “Of all the sins, *the wasting of time* constitutes the first and, in principle, the most serious,” (Weber 2011:160). In the second case, psychedelics signify a regression from the civilized way of life brought about by years of rational progress.

Before proceeding to the ways that religious rationalization has contributed to the perception that psychedelics are deviant, it is informative to begin exploring the intersections of law, religion and psychedelics. Yet, the law has and continues to run into the dilemma that is posed by the religious use of psychedelics. How can the use of psychedelics which is said to be dangerous and a threat to law and order simultaneously be considered a bona-fide religious practice? Judges have had to grapple with this issue in a number of First Amendment cases that concerned the sacramental use of drugs. Although the history of First Amendment cases relating to psychedelics is long, it is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive history. As a result, I gloss over many of the nuances and complexities that characterize the legal trajectory of this issue. In turn, I generally focus on the example

of the Native American Church (NAC) in line with the previous discussion and the NAC as a baseline for making a more general point about the deviant construction of psychedelic use.

As we have seen, the use of peyote (among other psychedelic plants) in North America well predates the arrival of Europeans. However, the expansion of these practices across the geographic regions of the United States did not occur until in the late 19th century (Feeney 2014; Jones 2007). This expansion across the United States has been characterized as, “a reaction, intertribal and pan-Indian in form, to white domination and cultural disintegration,” (Grinspoon and Bakalar 1984:67). Although the peyote cactus itself is not native to many regions where tribes adopted its use, peyote rites, “allowed American Indians to maintain a sense of cultural heritage and identity while simultaneously adapting to an environment where their populations had been devastated, their tribal customs crippled, and one where many tribal groups had been removed to desolate reservations to face an unknown future,” (Feeney 2014:66-67). Consequently, rapid expansion of peyote use among was met with pushback by Christian missionaries. The missionaries, who saw peyote as a threat to their aspirations of conversion, spearheaded some of the first efforts to prohibit the use of peyote in the United States (Feeney 2014). The development of NAC was an official response to thwart these efforts with by establishing religious legitimacy.

In turn, as the use of peyote and other psychedelics became popularized in the mid-20th century, the conception of a ‘primitive other’ was encapsulated in law with a

series of racialized exemptions to formal sanctions against the use of peyote. As I alluded to above, the attempts to control mescaline and peyote in the 20th century explicitly distinguished between native and non-native use of the cactus (Dawson 2018; Feeney 2014). In some cases, these exemptions were interpreted and selectively enforced based in terms of ‘blood quantum’—requiring that individuals must have at least 25% Native ancestry to be eligible for the religious exemption from drug laws. The idea that peyote use was to be strictly relegated to native populations was reinforced after a major court decision challenged the freedom of Native Americans to religiously use peyote. However, tribal membership became the new criteria for eligibility.

In 1990, a decision handed out in the case *Employment Division, Oregon Department of Human Resources v. Smith* the deciding judges found that any neutral law can be applied to individuals without regard to infringements upon religious activity (Schuman 2007). As we have seen, it is certainly up for debate whether any of the laws regulating psychoactive substances can be considered neutral. Nevertheless, this decision prompted a quick response from congress with the passage of Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) three years later. The RFRA restored the requirement of the government to establish compelling interest for infringing on religious rights (Schuman 2007; Shah 2006). Together with the American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments (AIRFAA), the rights of Native Americans to use peyote as part of religious practices were affirmed by federal law.

While these exemptions should be lauded as victories for indigenous rights and religious freedom, the efforts to draw sharp distinctions between Native vs. non-Native use of peyote raise concerns about the reification of Native Americans as a ‘primitive others’. For instance, the racialized character of these controls illustrates the desire to prevent the conscious ‘contamination’ of non-Natives with religious use of psychedelics. Moreover, with these distinctions, the state aims to control the deviation from conventional conscious frameworks by preventing the growth Native religions beyond individuals who may ethnically identify with Native cultures. Additionally, the boundaries drawn between Native Americans and non-native also reflect the desire of the state to control consciousness by attempting to prevent the proliferation of psychedelic use not rooted in Native tradition. Yet, the religious character of these practices raises further questions about the merit of other petitions for religious exemption from the CSA (Edge 2006). As such, the following section explores how religious rationalization contributed to the deviant construction of psychedelics and shaped the control of these substances.

Psychedelics and Religion

I have previously noted that the use of psychedelic substances has occurred among various cultures for thousands of years (De Rios 2005).¹⁵ Psychedelics are also

¹⁵ The purpose of this section is not necessarily to provide an overview of the use of psychedelics in religious contexts. For a general overview of the religious use of these substances in contemporary and historical contexts, see Appendix A.

commonly referred to as ‘entheogens’, which means literally, “That which causes God to be within an individual,” (Miller 2015:4). Soon after psychedelics broke onto the cultural scene of the West in the 1960s, the religious nature of these substances became well established (Smith 1964; Pahnke 1966). In an effort to determine the relationship between psychedelic drugs and religious experience, Walter Pahnke (1966) gave a group of protestant graduate students capsules containing either psilocybin or nicotinic acid as an active placebo during a Good Friday religious service. His results indicated that individuals who received psilocybin showed significantly higher scores on questions measuring mystical experiences compared to the control group (Doblin 1991). It was later observed that these results had persisting effects in a follow up study conducted over 25 years later (Doblin 1991). Similarly, philosopher Huston Smith (1964) argued that drugs can reliably produce mystical or religious experiences in about one-third of the population. Further, he notes that three-fourths of individuals with higher religiosity will have religious experiences with these drugs. In support of this notion, a recent survey-based study has found that use of psychedelics with religious intent is associated with mystical experiences (Neitzke-Spruill and Glasser 2018). Moreover, comparisons of mystical experience have shown that psychedelic experiences are reported to be stronger (i.e. higher scores on measures of mystical experience) and more conducive to increases in spirituality than experiences facilitated by other means (Yaden et al. 2016).

Despite the mystical quality of these experiences, the mystical experiences facilitated by psychedelics, oftentimes interpreted through a religious lens, are not

validated by most major religions the West. Take, for example, the development of Protestantism as described by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which I alluded to above. The Protestant ethic emphasizes the value of work, as work at one's calling is thought to be *the* method of attaining salvation. This form of worship made the asceticism previously practiced by monks obsolete, as removal from this-worldly endeavors is considered antithetical to the will of God. In turn, as Grinspoon and Balakar (1983:256) suggest, "In identifying religious duty with rule-governed master of everyday life, [the Protestant ethic] opposes all forms of other-worldliness in religion... it also opposes all mysticism, for in mysticism the highest virtue is to be possess rather than active, a vessel rather than an instrument of divinity." As such, economic production becomes a morally imperative activity. Thus, as the Protestant work ethic has been linked to the development of a highly rational of capitalism (Weber 1920/2011), religious denigration of psychedelic use and other forms of mysticism may also be connected to the notion that the United States is an 'advanced-industrial society'.

It is important to note here that in referring to the mystical experiences, I am referring to primary religious experiences. These instances may occur through a number of activities, such as meditation or prayer, and are not *necessarily* received as visionary experiences. Obviously, all religious activity correlates with an individual's subjective experience and understanding. Nonetheless, the religious forms necessary to uphold the systems of production required to maintain an 'advanced-industrial society' oriented towards 'progress' may not be receptive to widespread religious

mysticism. Instead, a disproportionate amount of emphasis has been placed on secondary religious experience, which refers to knowledge received through teachings and scriptures inspired by the primary experiences of others. For instance, while many of the major religions are based around individuals who are revered for their proximity and experiences with the divine, modern religious practices are largely removed from the experiential forms of mysticism from which they originated (Aiken 1963). In other words, the “Creeds rituals and ceremonies... have become ends in themselves, and the organisations which control and administer these creeds, rituals, and ceremonies, become vested interests, and in their turn come to be regarded as ends, rather than means,” (Aiken 1963:1). Therefore, the disapproval of psychedelic use on religious grounds may stem from the perception that individual consciousness expansion through psychedelics and idiosyncratic religious pursuits subvert the general values and constructed doctrines of established religious institutions.

As such, despite the evidence that psychedelics facilitate mystical experiences, psychedelic experiences have not been accepted as a genuine form of religious practice barring certain exceptional circumstances, such as the case of the NAC. Consequently, the opposition to experiential forms of mysticism, especially those related to psychedelics, can also be explained by the inherent threat that experiential mysticism poses to the authority of religious institutions. The introduction of psychedelics to Western culture has let the beatific cat out of the bag. Psychedelics allow individuals to have mystical experiences. Since religious bureaucracies are in the business of relaying the lessons learned from *other people's* experiences with the

divine, religious institutions no longer hold a monopoly over the direct line to the divine. Moreover, as will be further discussed down the line, perceptions of drug use may also contribute to stigmatization of drug-induced mystical experiences as being illegitimate or “artificial.”

The bias towards rational forms of religion has been exhibited in the cases where religious exemptions from the controlled substances act have been granted on religious grounds. Consider our previous example of the NAC. The practices of peyote use among the NAC adopted aspects of Christianity to form a syncretic religion involving the use of peyote. The NAC maintains that it resembles Christian religions in form, worships the Christian God, and incorporates the Ten Commandments into their religious practices (Jones 2007). This suggests that incorporation of Christian principles or mimicking the bureaucratic forms of Christianity may have been integral to the acceptance of peyote use by the NAC. This is informative because it is likely that use was decentralized in the past, similar to the shamanistic use of peyote practiced by the Huichol tribe (De Rios 2005). In other words, the use of peyote by the NAC became more tolerable, or at least justifiable in the law, because it shifted away from ‘primitive’ manifestations of psychedelic religions.

Recent exemptions from the CSA granted by the Supreme Court suggest similar conclusions (*Gonzales v. O Centro* 2006; *Church of the Holy Light of the Queen v. Mukaskey* 2009). In both cases, the use of ayahuasca, an Amazonian brew containing the Schedule I substance DMT, was permitted for churches that incorporated Christian elements or deemed non-threatening to the status-quo. For

instance, in *Church of the Holy Light of the Queen v. Mukaskey* (2009:3), it was pointed out that, “Santo Daime is a syncretic religion, blending elements of Catholicism with indigenous Amazonian and African beliefs. Followers of the Santo Daime religion believe that Daime tea is the blood of Christ, analogous to wine in the Catholic Communion.” In the latter case, the Supreme Court found the Uniao de Vegetal to be non-threatening to the social control, stating, “If such use is permitted in the face of the general congressional findings for hundreds of thousands of Native Americans practicing their faith, those same findings alone cannot preclude consideration of a similar exception for the 130 or so American Members of the UDV,” (*Gonzales v. O Centro* 2006:6). The above cases may be taken as evidence that conformity to a rational-bureaucratic religious standard resembling Christianity may be a necessary precondition for exemption from the CSA.

In contrast, a Rastafari case illustrates how religious use of psychoactive substances may be denied if the religion being claimed does not take the form of a rational bureaucracy. The case, which was heard in a state court, found that Rastafarian cannabis use could not be treated similarly to Native American peyote use (Edge 2006). Specifically, the Court asserted that the, “US has a special duty to respect the political and cultural integrity of the Native Americans,” (Edge 2006:170). While the genocide of indigenous peoples surely compels a responsibility to respect the cultural integrity of their descendants, this distinction similarly reifies the notions of Native Americans as ‘primitive others’ that have previously been outlined. To the discussion at hand, the Court held that it is more difficult to regulate marijuana use by

Rastafaris, since their use is frequent and a much more widely used substance. In other words, because the use of cannabis is not relegated to a ceremony that occurs at a specific time and place, Rastafarian practices do not align with the rational-bureaucratic conception of religious institutions, which would relegate communion with the divine to specific places and times. Furthermore, these practices are said to make Rastafarian use of cannabis less conducive to control and monitoring by regulatory agencies. This example provides further evidence for the notion that substances use for the purposes of religious practice are considered deviant in the eyes of the law, unless it occurs within the confines of a religious organization that resembles a rational bureaucracy.

In sum, while psychedelics have been shown to reliably produce mystical experiences, these primary experiences have largely come to be seen as deviant in the United States. Psychedelics may be perceived as a threat to the authority of religious institutions, as they subvert religious intermediaries by bringing ordinary people in closer proximity with the divine. Additionally, a dominant religious paradigm in the United States, Protestantism, has rejected mysticism and given primacy to this-worldly religious practice via work at one's calling. As a result, the Protestant ethic gives primacy of economic production in capitalism. This emphasis on production has bolstered rational notions of 'progress' based on continued technological development and differentiation from the 'primitive other'. Consequently, the legal dilemma posed by religious use of psychedelics has been handled by generally restricting exemptions to Native Americans and non-threatening religious institutions that resemble conventional notions of religion based on Christian forms. The following section

examines how science and medicine have contributed to the devaluation of psychedelics.

Psychedelics and Medicine

Following our earlier definition, rationalization refers to the organization of the world systematically and according to certain values. In the previous sections, I have described how the stigmatization of psychedelics historically stems from legal and religious rationalization. Specifically, law and religion have been rationalized according to racial ideology and Abrahamic constructions respectively. In addition to these institutions of social control, medicine has also contributed to the construction of psychedelics as deviant. Medical rationalization generally occurs along scientific lines. Concordant with the grand narrative of the ‘progress of an advanced-technological society’ previously described, medical rationalization has been supported by scientific and technological advancements (Friedson 1970:15-16). Consequently, medical knowledge is highly regarded, which may be in part illustrated by the autonomy and authority granted to physicians. As Eliot Freidson (1970:209) points out, “Medical knowledge is thought to be ‘scientific,’ which is to say more reliable, ‘objective,’ and less variable than other forms of knowledge or beliefs.” Thus, physicians are generally thought to be the definitive authority in our culture regarding health and illness, since they are in possession of a body of knowledge and skills seen as esoteric by the layman (Freidson 1970).

The perception of medical expertise contributes medicine’s authoritative monopoly on defining and treating ‘illness’ (Freidson 1970). In turn, the development

of a medical profession stems from access to specialized knowledge and having a service orientation. Moreover, this perception of expertise has played a large part in the medicalization of a number of social problems (Conrad 1992).¹⁶ However, the medical profession's jurisdiction extends beyond the definition and treatment of illness to psychoactive substances. Here, there is a convergence of various medical professions, para-professions, and scientific specialties with a stake in a particular understanding of psychoactive 'drug-effects'. While considering the distinctions and interrelations between psychiatry, pharmacy, neuroscience, and the various academic disciplines relating to pharmacology may be fruitful under different circumstances, we may lump these fields together as a representation of the medical understanding of psychoactive substances. Specifically, this understanding conceives of drug effects as resulting strictly from pharmacological action in the brain. This objectivist conception of drug effects that props up the medical authority to determine the social uses of drugs has been variously referred to as 'pharmacocentrism' (Decorte 2011) and 'pharmacologicalism' (Degrandpre 2006).

¹⁶ According to Conrad (1992:211), medicalization is the process of, "Defining a problem in medical terms, using medical terms to describe a problem, adopting a medical framework to understand a problem, or using a medical intervention to 'treat' it." The cognitive realm is one area of social life that has been particularly vulnerable to processes of medicalization. While a proper treatment of the development of the category of 'mental illness' is beyond my present scope, the insights derived from psychedelic studies may have significant implications for broader understandings of cognitive ailments.

For my purposes, I focus on the case of psychiatry which has been highly involved in the deviant construction of psychedelics. Historically, the pharmacocentric approach has been integral to the professionalization of psychiatry as a legitimate branch of medicine (Langlitz 2013). As we have seen in the previous chapters, psychedelics elude this understanding in many ways due to the influences of social frameworks on the experience and interpretation of their effects. However, consideration socio-cultural factors would have undermined psychiatry's desire to be perceived as scientific (Langlitz 2013:120). Moreover, the field of psychiatry generally viewed psychedelics as psychotomimetic, a perspective originally popularized by French psychiatrist named Jean Joseph Moreau in his study of hashish (Hartogsohn 2017).

The psychotomimetic perspective posits that psychedelic effects resemble symptoms of psychosis or schizophrenia. In turn, psychedelics would be adopted as a tool for psychiatrists to investigate the 'roots of insanity' (Hartogsohn 2017). Consequently, as this perspective was adopted in psychiatric investigations into psychedelics during the 1950's, researchers paid little attention to factors pertaining to set or setting. Hartogsohn (2017:5) describes how expectations that psychedelics produce 'model psychoses' would contribute to a number of negative lab experiences.

“Presupposing that patients become mentally ill under the effects of LSD, they were creating expectancies which fostered negative experiences and aggravated adverse effects. Other factors of set and setting were also liable to unleash a variety of adverse reactions. Many of the subjects who participated in research were hospitalized psychiatric patients who had little choice about partaking in experiments. Preparation for sessions was poor, often consisting of the casual suggestion that the patient will experience a few hours of

madness following the ingestion of the drug, not a soothing notion, to say the least.”

Hence, as psychiatric investigations into psychedelics anticipated a temporary psychosis and ignored factors pertaining to set and setting, researchers facilitated unpleasant responses from participants, thus reinforcing their own expectations. While some psychotomimetic researchers began to realize how study designs influenced reactions to psychedelics, the pharmacocentric approach was never fully questioned (Hartogsohn 2017). In turn, notions that psychedelics produce experiences of acute and permanent psychosis were reified in public discourse (Becker 1967).

Yet, this should not be taken to mean that psychiatric interests were the only driving factor in conceiving of psychedelics as a deviant. The scientific reflects a more general process of rationalization toward pharmacocentric understandings of drugs effect. During this time, randomized controlled trials were becoming the standard and the preceding skirmishes of the War on Drugs had already been fought. Using Degrandpre’s language, Langlitz (2013:120) points out that, “Pharmacologicalism prevailed because it helped psychiatry to be acknowledged as part of scientific medicine, enabled pharmaceutical companies to fulfill the FDA’s regulatory requirements, and legitimized the war on drugs.”

Nevertheless, psychiatric definitions of psychedelics were highly influential in constructing psychedelics as deviant, especially as psychedelics began to be perceived as a threat to predominant scientific understandings. For instance, Leary’s research, which spawned the concepts ‘set and setting’, utilized a naturalistic approach that appeared unorganized to some colleagues (Bunce 1979; Leary et al 1963; Stevens

1987). Furthermore, the participation of Leary and other investigators appeared particularly unsavory to the scientific and medical community (Bunce 1979). Coupled with the increasing emphasis on the mystical aspects of the experience, the understanding of psychedelics promoted by Leary's research team and the burgeoning 'counterculture' subverted the standard pharmacocentric and psychotomimetic approaches.

For many in science, this shift in understanding signified, "a methodological break with established canons of scientific inquiry and ultimately involved a renouncing of positivistic origins embracing instead religious, non-western and 'primitive' cultural traditions," (Bunce 1979). While this transition did not happen all at once, their efforts met strong opposition from colleagues. A quote from Harvard faculty David McClelland is illustrative of the ways that psychedelics were seen as an irrational pursuit, which threatens the goals of science and society at large:

"It is probably no accident that the society which most consistently encouraged the use of these substances, India, produced one of the sickest social orders ever created by mankind, in which thinking men spent their time lost in the Buddha position under the influence of drugs exploring consciousness, while poverty, disease, social discrimination and superstition reached their highest and most organized form in all history"

(Quoted in Gordon 1963:37)

In addition to the critiques resting on ethnocentric notions of 'progress', the notion that psychedelics facilitated mystical rather than psychotic experiences became untenable to psychiatric establishment of the time. Moreover, the publicity garnered by Leary's research and provocative public-relations campaign was perceived as a threat to medicine's authoritative monopoly on psychedelics.

“Ultimately psychiatric and other medical professions mounted a campaign to re-establish their own exclusive authority to determine access to these drugs. Although initially provoked by the issue of access, the conflict itself became focused on the nature of psychedelic effects. Medical interests turned to the political arena to secure laws that would ensure access only for physicians, announcing that the drugs produced madness, insanity, psychosis.”

(Bunce 1979:226)

Here, we can see how the experience of psychedelics was directly invoked when constructing psychedelics as deviant. Specifically, the subjective experience of psychedelics conflicted with predominant scientific-medical understanding of psychedelics, which has been rationalized according to pharmacocentric approach and purports the psychedelic experience to be psychotomimetic.

In sum, the rationalization of the medicine according to a pharmacocentric perspective has shaped the deviant construction of psychedelics as psychotomimetic. Moreover, the response by the psychiatric field which, sought to maintain its authority, exemplifies how a general process of medical, legal, and religious rationalization jointly contributed to the deviant construction of psychedelics as a class of substances. Specifically, as definitions of psychedelic experiences took on a mystical character, the psychotomimetic tradition in psychiatry was directly challenged. Additionally, understandings of psychedelic effects began diverge from the prevailing scientific understandings of drug action were inconvenient to the predominant pharmacocentric views of drug action. Thus, with both of these affronts to their authority, members in the field leveraged their status as ‘experts’ in order to retain their monopoly with legal support. Moreover, the perceived irrationality of religious mysticism and the rigid distinctions between religion and medicine prevented medical professionals from conceiving of how mystical experiences could constitute a form of healing.

Conclusion

I have set out in this study to advance more useful ways of thinking about psychoactive substances, particularly psychedelics. In the introductory chapter, I outlined my sociological approach to drug effects, the relevance of subjectivity in the investigation of human cognition, as well as my social-phenomenological orientation for this study. Moreover, I suggested an alternative interpretation to Huxley's 'filter theory' that has been adopted in various forms among neuroscientists investigating psychedelics.

In order to achieve the goals laid out, I conducted a phenomenological content analysis of psychedelic experience reports. In Chapter 3, I described the essence of the experience as it was described by the participants in Leary's studies. Rather than developing a structural typology of the experience, I found that the 'essence' of these experiences lay in the blurring of distinctions between cognitive, sensory, and emotional phenomena, as well as the unique phenomena within each of these categories. Moreover, I reported the ways that individuals describe aspects of the 'cognitive style' they embodied during the experience. For some participants, their set and setting combined with psychedelic in such a way that facilitated an experience of boundlessness.

Next in Chapter 4, I described how these experiences that transcend the ordinary boundaries of every reality and normal waking consciousness are socially influenced in their production and interpretation. Here, I interrogate the notion of ineffability. I find that a lack of readily available frameworks for interpreting the

experience of psychedelics contributes to this phenomena. Nonetheless, the participants used a variety of frameworks to interpret their experiences. In some cases, these frameworks corresponded directly with the phenomena encountered during participants' experiences. This is suggestive of the ways that social understandings predispose individuals to certain experiences or provide them with definitions that prime them to react to conscious changes in certain ways. Moreover, these social frameworks of understanding facilitate the linguistic integration of these experiences into daily life, offering definitions for the experience and direction for future action in light of their experiences.

In the previous chapter, I also covered the ways that individuals may derive knowledge from the experience of psychedelics. First, individuals derive knowledge from their experiences in terms of social frameworks of understanding. That is, they may report having gained knowledge of some metaphysical truth relating to their understandings of religion, philosophy, science, or other specific frameworks. Second, individuals may derive knowledge directly from the embodied experience of transcendence. This may manifest as a shifted or expanded perspective that broadens the horizons of the subject. Additionally, the transcendence of ordinary frameworks may function as a 'deconditioning' experience, offering subjects knowledge that is separate from the ordinary hierarchical forms of knowledge production.

Following this logic, I considered the implications of the subjective experience of psychedelics in relation to the historical construction of these substances as 'deviant'. Specifically, I suggest that transcendent experiences facilitated by

psychedelics threaten conventional frameworks of reality. These frameworks generally rest on the notion of progress beyond a 'primitive other' supported by a historical process of technological rationalization. Continued technological development supports the maladaptive perception that we live in an 'advanced-technological society'. Thus, as psychedelics facilitate experiences that transcend conventional frameworks of understanding that inform everyday life, they may be seen as threatening to cognitive frameworks employed by various institutions social control that function to uphold the existing social order. In turn, I described how historical processes of legal, religious, and medical rationalization have contributed to the stigmatization of psychedelics. I described how law has been rationale according to racial ideologies (i.e. racialized). Furthermore, I described how religious has been rationalized according to Abrahamic traditions, particularly Protestantism. Finally, I described how medicine has been rationalized scientifically with a stake in a pharmacological understanding of psychoactive substances.

Despite the perceived threat that psychedelics pose to conventional frameworks of understanding that contribute to social control, the results I have found bare implications for a variety fields that I would have liked to explore in greater depth in this manuscript. However, these implications offer many directions for future research. For instance, although the Concord experiments have been interpreted as inconclusive in terms of the long-term impacts on recidivism (Doblin 1990), the reports I have analyzed suggest that subjective changes experienced during psychedelic sessions may support desistance. For instance, as individuals transcend

ordinary waking consciousness allowing a new perspective on their criminal behavior. Future analyses might explore these data using more recent criminological theories, such as Paternoster and Bushway's identity theory of desistance (2009).

In addition to the potential as a tool for reducing recidivism, the results here also support recent evidence suggest therapeutic benefits from these experiences for a variety of mental health ailments (see Garcia-Romeau, Kersgaard, and Addy 2016). It has been shown by some researchers that the benefits of these substances are at least partially attributable to the mystical experiences that occur as a result of the altered states of consciousness induced by these substances (Griffiths et al. 2006; Griffiths et al. 2008; Griffiths et al. 2011; Johnson et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2017). In the present study, I have shown how psychedelics enable experiences that allow individuals to transcend ordinary frameworks that shape their subjective experience of everyday life. This lends theoretical support to models of therapeutic application which purport that psychedelics, "facilitate cognitive reframing of detrimental schemas and self-identity constructs," (Garcia-Romeu and Richards 2018:295). Coupled with advancements in understanding neuroscientific action of these substances, further theoretical and empirical development along these lines may give rise to significant shifts in understandings of the etiology of 'mental illness'.

Moreover, the findings I have reported here have implications and directions for future research beyond therapeutic applications of psychedelics. As we have seen, subjective experiences with psychedelics are shaped by the social in a variety of ways (i.e. through the multiple prongs of set and setting). Thus, in spite of the biological

nature of drug-action, social frameworks of understanding shape the expectations for, reactions to, and interpretations of psychedelic experiences. Additionally, the experiences of psychedelics allow individuals to transcend the social frameworks of understanding that limit everyday experience. These findings suggest an alternative interpretation of the filtration theory presented by Huxley. Along these lines, as patterns and expectations are engrained via processes of socialization, neurobiology provides the material constituents through by which our experiences are filtered. Meanwhile, cultural frameworks of understanding define the parameters of how our experiences are filtered. This sociological understanding of the filtration process may advance interdisciplinary understandings of human cognition and sociological understandings of socialization. For instance, research guided by similar understandings may explore how frameworks become neurologically embodied through socialization and subsequently altered through continual social interactions.

My findings here are also theoretically to the sociology of knowledge. I have shown psychedelics are frequently perceived as a valid source of knowledge for those who experience them, in spite of prevailing notions that the experiences are markers of insanity or mental derangement. As I described previously, psychedelic experiences can produce knowledge in a number of ways. For instance, individuals may perceive knowledge by shifting perspectives to view things from someone else's point of view or entirely transcending social frameworks of understanding that characterize everyday reality. Here, when individuals broaden their perspectives, expand their horizons, "[or] increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their

observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena,” (Freire 1970/2005:82). This allows for critical re-examination of various frameworks of understanding and the taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie normative frameworks. Additionally, the increased capacity for association reported by participants in psychedelic sessions could facilitate enhanced synthesis of knowledge. Previous research has suggested psychedelics can facilitate creativity and creative problem-solving (Garcia-Romeu and Richards 2018; Stafford and Golightly 1967), however contemporary evidence is lacking. Nonetheless, scholars have suggested that psychedelics may be a useful tool for education and the production of knowledge generally (Masters and Houston 1966; Richards 2015; Stafford and Golightly 1967). While further attention to the applications of psychedelic for education is beyond the present scope, there is much room for theoretical development of applications for academic problem solving and pedagogy. Moreover, future research may look to demonstrate a ‘proof of concept’ beyond experiments conducted in the 1960’s in order to establish the feasibility of such applications.

As originally stated, part of my aims for this study is to advance more useful ways of understanding psychoactive substances. I have made a point to highlight the role that language plays in the production and interpretation of experience, whether referring to everyday reality or the reality of experiences with psychoactive substances. My emphasis on language comes from a place of (perhaps naïve) optimism, which suggests:

“In our species, culture-specific, situation-specific syntactic software in the form of language can compete with and sometimes replace the

instinctual world of animal behavior. This means that we can learn and communicate and thus put maladaptive behaviors behind us. We can collectively recognize the virtues of peace over war, or of cooperation over struggle. We can change.”

(McKenna 1992:51)

For some, it may seem improbable that historically persistent problems like ‘war’ can be overcome with the proper language. While I am not concerned with such lofty goals, the historical trajectory of our collective relationship with psychoactive substances suggests that this may be equally far-fetched. After all, I am writing this in the midst of the midst of the ‘War on Drugs’. Yet, language has been identified by many social theorists as one of the most powerful tools for constructing of our social world, and the subject of psychoactive substances appears to be especially fertile ground for language to sow the seeds of change. As Langlitz (2013:114) suggests, drug experiences are a ‘human kind’, “[which] are transformed by their descriptions. New ways of talking about drug experiences certainly leave the drugs unchanged, but not the experiences, which they elicit in self-conscious human beings.”

By demystifying the psychedelic experience, how individuals derive knowledge from their experiences, and the processes by which psychedelics have been made deviant in Western society, I hope to contribute to the development of frameworks that transcend deviant notions of psychedelics. At this point, certain cultural phenomena are indicative of positive changes in this regard. Federal exemptions to the controlled substances act have been granted to two syncretic Churches that use the plant-brew ayahuasca as a sacrament. Furthermore, since I began this research, psilocybin and other plant psychedelics have been decriminalized

in two U.S. cities. The safety of controlled psychedelic use has been well established (Nichols 2016). As research continues, it is necessary for our policies, which stifle legitimate inquiry into these substances, to move beyond the false pretenses under which they were established. In order to do so, I wish to promote a framework oriented around education, harm-reduction, free-inquiry, and self-determination when it comes to making decisions about changing one's personal consciousness. With these emphases, I hope we can transcend the dysfunctional and unrealistic notion that 'drugs' can be eradicated from society and develop an approach to psychoactive substances more suitable for the 21st century.

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Appendix A

PSYCHEDELICS IN HISTORY

The use of psychedelics is well-established to have occurred among humans for many thousands of years (Miller 2015; de Rios 2005; Grinspoon and Bakalar 1983; Nichols 2016). For instance, while peyote use among the Native American Church is relatively new religious movement in the United States (de Rios 2005; Jones 2007), the use of peyote in the area that is now the Southwestern part of the United States dates back well over 5000 years (El-Seedi et al. 2005). To avoid redundancy, I will point out that many of the traditions mentioned here can be traced back many thousand years. While I aim to point out the persistence of psychedelic use, I do not intend to carelessly group or conflate unique cultural practices. Practices have over time been shaped or transformed by the impact of colonialism on the Western hemisphere. This prompts a difficulty and rather arbitrary decision about where to begin a pragmatically brief history of these drugs. Furthermore, since this is not a comparative study of religious psychedelic practices, the coverage of these practices will be surface level and inevitably overlook some of the details which uniquely define the various uses of these drugs. I find it useful to begin with the various traditions that use psychedelics which have persisted until the present day.

The history of psychedelic use is inextricably linked to religion. The relative abundance of naturally occurring psychedelics in the Americas has led to the incorporation of these substances into the religious practices of many indigenous cultures. In addition to the previously mentioned NAC, the Huichol of Western

Mexico continue to make a yearly, 300 mile pilgrimage into the Chihuahuan desert to gather peyote for their religious practices (de Rios 2005). Another notable example is the use of psilocybin containing mushrooms among *curanderos* of Southern Mexico. The mushrooms, referred to as “flesh of god”, have a long history of use in pre-Colombian cultures, such as the Aztecs and Mayans (Carod-Artol 2015; Masters and Houston 1966; Miller 2015). The threat of violence from Spaniards drove these practices underground, but they were never fully eradicated (Miller 2015).

Anthropological and archeological evidence indicate that the religious use of psychedelics was common in pre-Colombian societies of Mesoamerica and included not only mushrooms and peyote, but also a species of morning glory (referred to as *Ololiuhqui*) that produced seeds with chemical constituents that have properties similar to LSD (Carod-Artol 2015; de Rios 2005; Miller 2015).

In South America, there is a similarly rich tradition of psychedelic use. The use of a brew, containing the *banisteriopsis caapi* vine and one or more species of leaves that contain DMT, occurs frequently throughout the Amazonian regions of South America (Miller 2015; Shanon 2002). Referred to by a variety of different names including (but not limited to) *ayahuasca*, *yage*, *caapi*, *hoasca*, and *Daime*, the shamanic use of this psychedelic brew continues and has influenced people far beyond the amazon via drug tourism and the development of new religious movements such as Santo Daime, Uniao de Vegetal, and Barquinha (Shanon 2002; de Rios 2005; de Rios and Grob 2005; Harris and Gurel 2012; Prayag 2016). While the shamanic use of ayahuasca continues, there is debate concerning the impact of Western interest in

ayahuasca may have on indigenous shamanic practices (de Rios 1994; Fotiou 2016; Winkelman 2005). Regardless, the development of new religious movements has led to use that is a step removed from shamanic religious practices. For instance, the Supreme Court of the United States has even granted exemptions from the Controlled Substances Act for select syncretic churches that use ayahuasca (*Gonzales v. O Centro* 2006; *Church of the Holy Light of the Queen v. Mukaskey* 2009).

Leaving the vast literature of ayahuasca aside, the use of psychedelic snuffs is one practice that has persisted among some indigenous populations. For instance, the Yanomamo people of Brazil famously use long tubes to blow a DMT containing snuff into a recipient's nasal cavity (Brewer-Carias and Steyermark 1976; Pinchbeck 2002). Further archeological evidence from the Andes region of Peru suggests that DMT containing snuffs were used at Chavín de Huantar (Burger 2011). This is in addition to the evidence that the use of San Pedro occurred at the site (Glass-Coffin 2010). A large cactus containing mescaline (same active ingredient as peyote), San Pedro rituals have continued in the Andes since pre-columbian times and have similarly been subject to the interest of tourists (Glass-Coffin 2010).

It should be noted that the religious use of psychedelics is not limited to the Americas. Adherents of the Bwiti religion in Western Africa use the root from the iboga plant (de Rios 2005). Similar to the conditions that formed the NAC, it is said that the use of this results from an, “adaptation to cultural upheaval caused by European domination of their society,” (de Rios 2005:7469). Recently, ibogaine, the isolated component of iboga, has received attention for its potential to treat drug

addiction (Rodgers 2012; Brown and Alper 2017). A final example of a persistent religious use of psychedelics comes from Siberia. The use of the *amanita muscaria* mushroom continues to occur among various tribes and rock carvings of mushrooms suggest that these practices have ancient origins (Miller 2015). This is the same drug that was identified by Gordon Wasson to be the true identity of the substance called “soma” that appeared in the Hindu Vedas (Miller 2015).

The work of Wasson and his wife Valentina was in line with the growing interest in psychoactive substances and in the mid-20th century and greatly expanded the field of mycology (Miller 2015). By asserting that the identity of soma was really a psychedelic mushroom, Wasson’s work also represents an inclination to attribute the origins of religion to these substance. Although Wasson’s conclusion as to which psychedelic the identity of soma belongs has since been challenged (McKenna 1994), others have hypothesized that the origins of religions such as Christianity and Judaism have been similarly impacted by psychedelic drugs. For example, in *The Sacred Mushroom and The Cross*, John Marco Allegro (in)famously attributes the development of the Christian tradition to ancient fertility cults based around the use of *amanita muscaria* (1970). Shanon (2008) has also hypothesized that stories central to Judaism may be the result of psychedelic-induced visionary experiences. Shanon (2008) considers the phenomenology of ayahuasca to be similar to experiences relayed in the Old Testament and finds that plants with the same psychoactive components of ayahuasca grow where the stories are believed to have occurred.

Despite the proliferation of unverifiable hypotheses, there was a generally burgeoning interest in these substances among Western scientists and intellectuals by the mid-20th century. The study of peyote use had already been occurring since the 1880's (Masters and Houston 1967), and Albert Hofmann synthesized LSD in 1938 and discovered its psychedelic properties in 1943 (Miller 2015). During the same period there were growing anthropological and ethnobotanical literatures on the uses of psilocybin, ayahuasca, and peyote (Miller 2015; Shanon 2002). By the 1950's, psychedelic drugs were well on their way in science and popular culture. Aside from being researched as psychological weapons and catalysts for social control by the CIA, psychiatric research advanced and popular accounts of the psychedelic experience from Aldous Huxley and Gordon Wasson brought these substances into public awareness (Miller 2015; Stevens 1987). Psychedelics helped to shed light on questions of many disciplines and yielded a considerable amount of scholarship from fields including pharmacology, neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, and chemistry.