

# PhD Project: A Mixed-Methodological Analysis into Ayahuasca users from Western Society; Parapsychological and Transpersonal Psychological Perspectives

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## Literature Review

Ayahuasca (otherwise known as 'yáge') is a natural hallucinogenic drug which is reported to produce positive psychological and spiritual changes. Ayahuasca is typically brewed by combining Banisteriopsis Caapi (a MAOI containing; alkaloids, harmine, harmaline and tetrahydroharmine) with Psychotria Viridis (contains N, N-dimethyltryptamine otherwise known as 'DMT') (Barbosa, Giglio & Dalgalarondo, 2005). DMT is regarded as the most potent of all psychedelics on the planet (Strassman, 2001). Cognitive psychologist Shanon (2002) participated in 130 ayahuasca sessions in Brazil and Ecuador. One hundred and seventy eight participants and healers completed semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study suggested that ayahuasca usage can generate noetic experiences. Some authors argue plant hallucinogens (i.e. ayahuasca) have 'eco-delic' properties. This means that the 'plant medicine' may awaken individuals to the current ecological crisis the world is presently faced with (Friedman, 2002 ; Luke, 2013).

Luke (2008) highlighted 3 common parapsychological experiences hallucinogenic users may experience; OBEs, telepathy and NDEs. Ayahuasca in particular is known to produce parapsychological/anomalous phenomena. Homan (2011) reported that ayahuasca may lead users to experience remote viewing. Critchley (1929) found users of 'jage' which is nearly chemically identical to ayahuasca have often reported encounters with entities including mythical creatures and serpents. The data on parapsychological experiences and hallucinogens however, is not mapped out clearly and the literature is sparse.

### Rationale

- In the current literature there lies a shortage of qualitative experiential data on the transpersonal psychological and parapsychological aspects of the ayahuasca experience
- Data on ayahuasca users from Western civilisation is limited
- There is an understudy of transformation and ayahuasca drug usage

### Aim

This study aims to collect qualitative data on the transpersonal psychological and parapsychological aspects of the ayahuasca experience from Western users.

## Methodology

A mixed-methodological analysis will be used to interpret data from Ayahuasca users from Western society (Western Europe & North Americans).

### Phase 1

Survey data from anonymous ayahuasca/psychedelic forums (expected 200 participants)

### Phase 2

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews in a secure location (expected 20 participants)

### Ethical considerations

Due to the illicit nature of ayahuasca, certain protocols have been implemented to ensure this study protects participants from legal repercussions. The study will follow the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) which states as long as participants do not indicate possession or intent to supply then experiences can be talked about openly. Participant identities will remain anonymous throughout. Protection from harm – drug abuse agencies and a sensitive and non-invasive interviewing techniques .

## Expected outcomes

- Greater awareness of the complex and sometimes contradictory experiential content of ayahuasca experiences.
- A greater appreciation for adopting a mixed-methodological approach towards these types of experiences.
- Highlighting the importance of 'set' and 'setting'.
- A better understanding of how 'transpersonal psychology,' 'parapsychology,' 'positive psychology' & 'eco-psychology' are linked with transformation.
- Further support for the idea psychedelic science requires a multidisciplinary approach towards advancing our understanding of human consciousness.