

PROPOSITION FOR A CONSCIOUSNESS SUB-BRANCH OF PSYCHOLOGY

Proposition for a New Sub-Branch of Psychology,

“Esoteric Psychology”

Under the Main Branch of Cognitive Psychology

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Psyc 8207 – History and Systems of Psychology

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Author Note

Although Mr. Klein's bachelor's and master's degrees are in Computer Science, he has been studying "the mysteries" since childhood. These are the great questions of humanity: the meaning of life, whether there is life after death; what death actually means; whether there are ways to 'cheat' death, whether religion or science holds better answers to these questions. In order to try to find the answers, or at least clues, Mr. Klein studied and practiced meditation for many years, apprenticed in the esoterically based institute of G. I. Gurdjieff for twelve years, took a one-year intensive training course in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, learned lucid dreaming techniques for three years, spent three years with Harley Reagan's Deer Tribe, learning meti-medicine ways of the Lakota and Nabeho peoples, studied the effects of psychedelic substances with the Phoenix Research Society for two years, and has been initiated in an Amazonian syncretic (merging shamanic spiritism with Christian mysticism) religion for fifteen years. Mr. Klein approaches his PhD studies with the intention of systematizing and clarifying the extra dimensions of knowledge, senses and abilities available in the supernatural side of the self.

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Abstract

The author proposes a field as a new sub-branch of psychology, called Esoteric Psychology. This would be a sub-branch of Cognitive Psychology. The author claims that even the newest forms of psychology are not able to investigate special or higher states of consciousness, due to being too externally oriented; that is, standing outside of the subjective space of the subject. The author cites a wealth of information and guidance which has come down to us from ancient times, and which is practiced in the forms of shamanism, certain religions, martial arts and yoga; he claims that these can be organized and used to deliberately attain the desired states and, in these states, the scholar-practitioner will be able to study, understand and assist in new therapies and larger ideas than otherwise. The aspiration is that the subconscious and unconscious minds could be better understood and accessed, and also legendary features of the mind could be apprehended, such as miracles and the supernatural. The author claims that, in so doing, 'reality' could be transformed and the general consciousness of society could be uplifted.

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Introduction

Topic of the paper

Within the main psychological branch of Cognitive Psychology (Schultz & Schultz, 2008), I am proposing a sub-branch which, for now, I am calling *Esoteric Psychology* due to its roots in ancient mystical traditions and also to its connections to such modern traditions as shamanism, sorcery, yoga, Zen Buddhism and occultism. This field of study is not intended as some sort of compendium of these arts and traditions, but an abstraction of the ideas and practices which foster access to fabled higher states of consciousness, including what have been referred to as enlightenment and cosmic consciousness, formulated as a teachable and practiceable system of scholarship. The scope of this paper is not to fully define such a study, but simply to show that this ‘new’ (quotation marks because it draws heavily on previous knowledge and disciplines) branch is both possible and important. I expect this branch to draw on the best practices of the existing branches of psychology, as well as expand them with the new ideas I mentioned.

Importance of the topic

My survey of conventional psychological literature reveals that *consciousness* has been used and studied in only narrow terms in the field of psychology. We have animal studies involving natural and conditioned behaviors, we have people running mazes alongside rats, we have responses to various kinds of stimuli and optical illusions and we have observations of people with psychoses and brain damage. None of these observational methods comes near to either observation or understanding of the hidden potentials alluded to in world-wide traditions, both ancient and in modern times, and yet

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the subject area has intrigued and even obsessed mankind throughout history and prehistory, to the degree of repeated religious wars, inquisitions, purges and preventable suffering, almost entirely over differences in beliefs about the mystical side of the mind without the benefit of direct, personal access to that side. That is to say, the actual content of man's mystical side has, with a few exceptions, been replaced by sacrosanct priesthods and dogma. This proposed field of psychology can help to remedy such disconnects.

Conventional psychology (that is, prior to Esoteric Psychology) regards people as having four or five states of consciousness: slumber (some scholars distinguish between dreaming and non-dreaming), waking consciousness (many authors regard 'waking' and 'consciousness' as redundant, as if we were all obviously self-aware and conscious), hypnotic trance, and drug-induced states (researchers often lump drug states together with psychotic manifestations, while others distinguish between narcotic states and visionary states, such as may occur with the psychedelics). My full exposition will expand this list into a whole spectrum of observed and possible states of consciousness.

Part of my purpose, in this paper, is to show that, if we have at least the potential for states of consciousness in which we may have, for example, special senses or abilities, we would be remiss in ignoring them, especially if their study would supplant and expand upon our understanding of the subconscious and its effects on our decisions and relationships. Besides, the ideas and praxes of this 'new' discipline have been practiced all over the world, for thousands of years, and make up the foundation for the world's mythologies and religions. It would be a shame not to examine this enormous body of humanity's legacy to discover any meat left on the bones, as it were.

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More importantly, however, is how very much may be learned from going beyond what has previously been considered “the edge of the world” in terms of what is thought possible for a person and for a society. I will argue that there are perceptions, thoughts, experiences and whole systems of ideas and revelations which can only be realized in certain states of consciousness, and then illustrate what may be required in order to remember and communicate them. I assert that previous such attempts have resulted in works which have lasted through millennia – these include the Bible, the Upanishads, the pyramids, the stone henges, mythologies of the world, and the great religions. Even if few people know what they all mean anymore, their value is sensed universally. My goal is to quantify that valuation and to show that the sources of these great vessels of humankind’s knowledge are accessible to those whose wish is strong enough.

Individuals affected

The proposed new field of study should interest anyone who wishes to understand all the references to enlightenment or higher consciousness as referred to in religious doctrines and mythology, and especially those who wish to investigate the extraordinary possibilities of the human potential. As researchers and therapists become more adept in these new levels of awareness and ability, their clients as well as society in general must obviously benefit.

Impact on the individual

This proposed discipline is not new, but new as a proposed branch of psychology. As such, it may provide new forms of treatment and assessment, and also paths for

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individual happiness and fulfillment. As our new field of study becomes more defined, it will become important to evaluate the risks of unprepared people's gaining access to the knowledge and power of the special states of consciousness; most of the horror stories of conventional literature are at least partially based on such abominations as *Frankenstein*, *Jekyll and Hyde* and many others. People who undertake the disciplines involved almost universally find that personal integrity, compassion and sense of service are essential to being effective in this work (Quevedo, 2009).

Definitions of Key Terms

Altered state – any state of consciousness which does not fall into the range including sleeping and ordinary waking consciousness.

Attention – the faculty with which we direct our awareness, our energy and our will (Castaneda, 1981).

Conscious – awareness of the dance of self and not-self in the moment of the present.

Divine – a supernatural being or phenomenon which gives rise to the most profound sense of awe and rightness.

Energy – for the purposes of this paper, the intensity of purpose which an individual is able to gather and manifest with, as with oriental Qi or Chi.

Enlightenment – a state of consciousness in which the universality and connectedness of everything (including oneself) is apparent, and that one's very existence both does not matter and, at the same time, is everything equally.

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This definition is necessarily incomplete and because, in Enlightenment, words cannot express the Truth.

Entheogen – a natural plant or combination of plants, or a substance derived from plants, which expands awareness to a divine level – literally, “giving birth to God within.”

Esoteric – known only to the inner circle of adepts, priests or magi (Ouspensky, 1947).

Illumination – a step toward Enlightenment or Divine Revelation; any state of consciousness may become illuminated.

Knowledge – for the purposes of this paper, what is revealed in higher states of consciousness (Castaneda, 1981). The Bible’s reference to “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” actually refers to a degradation of knowledge, to a level of duality in which everything is seen as being in contention and disharmony; i.e., ordinary consciousness.

Mythology – a culture’s knowledge and history, cast in symbols and metaphors, passed orally from generation to generation, usually by a special lineage of story-tellers.

Psychedelic – literally, “mind manifesting.” Similar to entheogen, but may be only hallucinatory rather than of divine character. These terms actually apply more to the user than to the substance or method, since the level of consciousness attained is a function of attention and power.

Power – for the purposes of this paper, “spiritual luck” might be as good a definition as any. The word can mean “ability to manifest Spirit” or it can mean

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“having a good gift of intuition.” This definition overlaps with *energy* (Castaneda, 1981).

Religion – literally, “reconnecting.” For the purposes of this paper, we use the original sense of religion as a method for reconnecting with Divine Consciousness or at least with a life-changing supernatural experience. Priests were introduced into the rituals to help people reconnect with their own individual visions and experiences; afterwards they sometimes became the preventers of individual experiences. Eventually the purpose of the rituals was forgotten, but societies had become conditioned to religion’s being central in their lives (Pagels, 1989).

State of consciousness – a perspective from which to experience one’s world.

Ordinary ‘waking’ consciousness encompasses thousands of different perspectives without necessarily any unifying theme or purpose (Castaneda, 1981; Ouspensky, 1947).

Wisdom – a balance between Knowledge and Power: Knowing and having the energy and maturity to direct the Knowledge properly (Castaneda, 1981; Ouspensky, 1947). Many masters have the wisdom to go into seclusion with their power so that it would not be misused.

Wish – a yearning for completion and for reuniting with one’s divine nature (Ouspensky, 1947).

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Literature Search Strategies

The books I include in the references are among those that I have read throughout the course of my life and which have inspired me and taught me how to formulate larger and deeper questions, and also how to navigate the worlds of knowledge and wonderment available through the alternative states of consciousness which I endeavor to bring to the reader's attention with this paper.

Through the databases available from the Walden online library, I searched for peer-reviewed articles with every combination of keywords I could think of (see Section C - *Definitions of Key Terms*). Not only the standard literature of psychology and other behavioral sciences, but neuroscience, medicine and even the physical sciences proved bereft of peer-reviewed articles on my subject: *states of consciousness*.

Extent and Nature of the Literature

Where results did show up in my searches, they consisted only of studies related to behavioral responses, perception, drug interactions and dependencies and sleep studies. All the scholarly articles even touching on my thesis are recent dissertations, generally referring to entheogenic experiences or studies involving the effect of psychedelics as treatments for such psychological diseases as ADD, PTSD and ASD, although there were some cases involving physical or neurological treatments.

Background of the ideas and theories of Esoteric Psychology

Ancient sources

Many legends, artifacts, relics and monuments have survived since ancient times. These have generally been treated as mythologies, cultural traditions, religion, superstition or even simply as curiosities. Interest has revived, in recent times, with such

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discoveries as finding that the pyramids and stone henges were built with sophisticated engineering methods and in alignment with astronomical relationships or events which could not have been observed without telescopes. Special qualities are being attributed to scrolls like the Hebrew Torah, which appear to make predictions or give secret information (as per *The da Vinci Code*). There is renewed interest in tarot, astrology, Zen (Watts, 1989), I Ching, runes and other ancient tools of divination. Graham Hancock (2006) has even shown that cave dwellers of 35,000 years ago left useful information for us on the walls of their caves.

Why should these ancient relics be of interest to us as scholars of psychology? First, because our predecessors exhibited qualities to which we moderns aspire. That at least puts a question to our assumptions about evolving monotonically, ever higher; the ancients could do astronomy, engineering, forecasting and also writings, art and architecture of great beauty, wisdom and endurance – these are all plainly obvious to anyone who looks. My second point is not as obvious, but has become an item of fascination for many researchers: the cave drawings and tablet scratchings from thousands of years ago somehow match up with the utterances and unconscious scribbles of modern people with certain kinds of neurological disorders, and also with people who submitted to laboratory experiments involving injections of dimethyl-triptamine (DMT) and also with traditions of East African shamans, as with psychic mediums and UFO abductees (Hancock, 2006).

All of that may be intriguing, but the contents of all these relics are even more intriguing. What are generally regarded as superstitious mythologies, children's stories or even just fantasy can, instead, be regarded as clues to whole worlds of "realities"

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accessible by specific states of consciousness, and also to how to find these states in ourselves. It is telling, how frequently and how similarly these clues occur.

Mythological examples include “the end of the rainbow,” Shangri-la, El Dorado, the fountain of youth, the forbidden or lost city, the philosopher’s stone, hidden libraries, treasures guarded by monsters and sorcerers, and on and on.

Biblical clues include miracles of all kinds, the sun and moon changing places, rivers running backwards, bushes burning without being consumed, fiery furnaces that are survived, inscriptions magically appearing on stone, multiplication and transformation of food, drink, oil and other necessities, life restored to the dead, vision restored to the blind, mobility restored to the lame, the parting of the waters, the conquest of the mighty by the meek, and so on. I am not trying to assert that any of these examples are historically factual or literally true, but only that they point to alternative perspectives and relationships that are available to us in non-ordinary states of consciousness. I will detail these further down in this paper.

Modern-day activity

Currently, we are seeing a growing revival in tribal rituals, shamanism, mysticism in both Eastern and Western religions and spiritist/mediumistic formats, with or without the use of mind-altering plant substances (Dawson, 2009; Church, 2010; Friczewski, 2010; Quevedo, 2009). People travel, often with organized groups set up for this purpose, to Peru, Ecuador, Brazil and southern Mexico to have experiences in the pyramids and to work with shamans, mediums (two main spiritist groups in South America are Candomblé and Umbanda, somewhat analogous to the Caribbean religions

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of Voudou and Santería, all of which are African based), *curadors* (spiritual healers) and *ayahuasqueros* (shamans who work specifically with some form of ayahuasca (the “vine of the soul” plus, usually, some other plant which contains DMT). Participants who drink this tea (or other, similarly acting substances, including LSD) report having spiritual visions and religious experiences, spontaneous healings, both physical and emotional, religious experiences and life-changing events (Trichter, 2006) – these effects continue well beyond the time of the experience, especially if the sessions were repeated multiple times (Kirchner, 2010; Schmid, Jungaberle, Verres, 2010).

Current trends in research

Despite the updated usage of the Altered States of Consciousness rating scale (OAV), research on altered states has been largely subjective and qualitative (Studerus, Gamma, Vollenweider, 2010). Some research is conducted via interviews within the context of the session during scheduled breaks or immediately afterwards; data is collected during laboratory or healing sessions; and survey questions are sent out to participants of certain types of sessions, even years after their experience (Dawson, 2009; Friczewski, 2010; Quevedo, 2009).

In these ways, we have been limited to either standardized assessment tools like the OAV which, despite their being re-evaluated and tested regularly, can only force responses into preset categories, or subjectively qualitative responses from interviews and surveys. These have been yielding only generally consistent results, but are highly subject to researcher bias and participant predisposition (Church, 2010).

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The need for systematizing the discipline

It is helpful that the above-mentioned research has been done, because it gives us raw data to sift through, but it has largely been viewed without an overall, systematic perspective, as if these states and conditions were a brand-new discovery, like an archaeological dig on Mars. My claim is that, by taking from the science and methodologies of the ancient wisdom I discussed earlier, we do have a rationale and a systematic paradigm available to us.

The theory of this paper

It has generally been assumed that the beliefs of the ancient world were all about external gods and external supernatural events (miracles), and that these were either fabricated (usually over time, as with myths) or delusional (as with oracles exposed to toxic gases or rye fermentation, or even simply mental illness). Instead, I propose to demonstrate at least the possibility that what the ancients were attempting to describe were the perceptions, thoughts, feelings and abilities available to at least certain people in specific states of consciousness. This idea is partially illustrated by understanding how Aramaic, the language of much of biblical Palestine, has caused confusion in the modern world. Today's religious scholars seek to settle on an authoritative translation of the New Testament (Pagels, 1989). What they do not realize is that Aramaic was a living language, the ultimate meaning of whose sentences was not determined until a given consensus relationship was reached by the participants. Thus, Aramaic prayers were done analogously to yoga movements so that one's body and emotions were involved in

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producing the state of prayer. Mental thoughts were considered to be mainly guidelines for getting to the actual state of prayer (Dovber, 2004); therefore, no ‘authoritative’ translation can ever be reached except on an individual basis (or in tightly related groups), in an appropriate state of reverence.

The argument for what can be realized in higher states of consciousness is similar to the above. Professor Gergen, in the video on Postmodernism (2010) stated the seemingly reasonable position that, if we did not have a framework from which to describe something, we could not really know about it. In the paradigm I am introducing here, however, dropping all of one’s rational frameworks is a crucial step toward knowing, because it is these learned and conditioned frameworks which lock us into preconceptions and even whole “realities” (Castaneda, 1981; Ouspensky, 1947). The understanding, according to Gurdjieff (2006) is that, if two people are in different states of consciousness, they cannot communicate; the situation is worse than if they spoke entirely different languages, because at least rough translations can almost always be made between languages. But, he goes on to say, if the people are at the same level of consciousness, it does not matter what words they use – they will understand each other. In this situation, no words are even necessary for understanding.

Due to the internal nature of these higher states and their attributes, it will not be possible to prove that those attributes are real, any more than “the supernatural” itself can be proven. The theory of this paper is that the ubiquitous legends and aspirations of mankind can be organized into intentional studies, and that researchers can be trained to

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attain the states of consciousness required in order to access their knowledge and perceptions. As in any science, 'laboratory' conditions must be met for the object of study, and the laboratory conditions for Esoteric Psychology entail acquiring abilities and sensitivities on the part of the researcher, as they (his or her own "apparatus") will be one's instruments.

Desired outcomes

My hope is that Esoteric Psychology comes to be seen as a legitimate science, albeit one which requires unusual efforts by the scholar-practitioner. In fairness, however, the task of becoming a scholar-practitioner of psychology, in general, is the daunting work of sustained excellence in scholarship for the several years required for the degree, so asking for a renewed commitment of devotion to this work does not seem inappropriate. The benefit to science and to mankind is that this newly systematized field will help to close the gap among the disparate demesnes of mankind; after all, there was a time when science and religion were not considered to be two separate fields.

Proposed research

Since it will not be possible to directly observe the features of higher states in other people as subjects (notwithstanding behavioral tests like the OAV), it would be necessary for researchers to attain these states themselves (Schmid, Jungaberle, Verres, 2010). Then they can confirm or refute the theory of this paper, that the subject of mankind's mythologies is verifiable and communicable among people sharing a given higher state of consciousness, that there is an actual 'place' in all of us which we may call

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“the supernatural” or even “the divine” which is accessible if all the necessary steps are followed. These steps are outside of the scope of this particular paper, but they can be deduced and extracted from the ancient sources as well as from authentic disciplines which have continued into the present.

Summary

There is a need for new (or newly systematized) sub-branch of psychology which I am terming “Esoteric Psychology,” belonging under the main branch of Cognitive Psychology. This need is due to my belief that even the newest forms of psychology are still too externally oriented to be able to investigate, and then operate within, special or higher states of consciousness, which are often confused with mental disease. Even Darwin’s codiscoverer of the theory of evolution, Alfred R. Wallace, believed in the importance of recognizing the spiritualistic qualities of the mind (Gross, 2010). There is a wealth of information and guidance which has come down to us from ancient times, and which is practiced in the forms of shamanism, certain religions, martial arts and yoga; these can be organized and used to deliberately attain the desired states and, in these states, the scholar-practitioner will be able to study, understand and assist in new therapies and larger ideas than otherwise. Specifically, the subconscious and unconscious minds could be better understood and accessed, and also legendary features of the mind could be apprehended, so that, perhaps, even ‘reality’ can be transformed.

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Castaneda, Carlos (1981). *The eagle's gift*, Washington Square Press.

The Eagle's Gift is the central book of Castaneda's series on "the teachings for the left side." This series comprises the three books *The Second Ring of Power*, *The Eagle's Gift* and *The Fire from Within*, and describes what it takes to remember the other side of one's being, the side of the supernatural – the *nagual* in the vernacular

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of Castaneda's (probably fictitious) teacher, don Juan Matus – and then to be able to manifest on that side.

Dawson, Andrew (2009). Positionality and role-identity in a new religious context:

participant observation at Céu do Mapiá. Elsevier, Ltd.

DOI: 10.1016/j.religion.2009.09.007

Céu do Mapiá (“sky, or heaven, of the Mapiá tributary of the Purus River, which is itself a tributary of the Amazon River in far-western Brazil) is the headquarters of a numerically small, but worldwide, syncretic Amazonian religion which uses a form of the ayahuasca tea as its sacrament for bestowing visions and teachings upon its participants. This paper is basically a sociological study of how one finds one's place in a sort of ‘cult’ society, coming in as a newcomer from the outside and then gaining trust and access among the established members.

Church, A. Timothy (2010). Current perspectives in the study of personality across cultures [electronic version: <http://pps.sagepub.com/content/5/4/441>]. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2010 5: 441. [DOI: 10.1177/1745691610375559].

This scholarly article compares the ideas and observations of a large number of thinkers and researchers on the subject of what aspects of personality are innate and which are a function of the culture in which a person is born. The article is very useful in showing what progress has been made, and what still needs to be done, in integrating all the research that has been done in this cross-disciplinary field.

Dovber, Rabbi of Lubavitch (trans. 2004). The focus of prayer [translated, with notes, by Rabbi Dr. Shimon Cowen]. *Journal of Judaism & Civilization*, 2004, Vol. 6 Issue 5764-65, p. 1-59.

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Rebbe Dovber, the second Grand Rabbi of Lubavitch (seat of the Chassidic movement of Jewish revivalism), wrote this treatise on “the inner structure and movement of prayer” in the Yiddish language, recently translated into English.

Gross, Charles (2010). Alfred Russell Wallace and the evolution of the human mind.

The Neuroscientist. DOI: 10.1177/1073858410377236.

This paper explores how the co-discoverer of the theory of evolution parted ways with Darwin on spiritualistic issues.

Gurdjieff, G. I. (2006), *Beelzebub's tales to his grandson*, Tarcher/Penguin.

Often referred to as *All and Everything* (actually the title for Gurdjieff's proposed three-book series), and generally modeled on Mark Twain's *Letters from the Earth*, this deliberately turgid tome is a compendium of Gurdjieff's criticisms of mankind, and also an instrument for surmounting those inherent defects.

Hancock, Graham (2006). *Supernatural: meetings with the ancient teachers of mankind*.

New York: The Disinformation Company, Ltd.

Kirchner, Katharina (2010). LSD-supported psychotherapy: effects on daily life and long-

term changes (master thesis in psychopathology). University of Zurich: *Institute of Psychology*.

This paper is a study of new research, recently made available by changes in the laws, on the salutary effects of LSD in reducing anxiety and fostering relief in several people with life-threatening illnesses. Aside from periodic interviews with the patients and their wives, the participants' progress was compared to several standardized questionnaires, and their data evaluated using proper statistical methods.

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With the use of LSD, one might have expected something of the sensationalism of a Timothy Leary, but this paper is scholarly, methodical and well researched.

Quevedo, Deborah J. (2009). Psychospiritual integration of an ayahuasca retreat experience (a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Transpersonal Psychology). Palo Alto, California: *Institute of Transpersonal Psychology*.

This well researched and thorough study uses quantitative methodologies to measure internal qualities related to general well-being and also to changes in participants' state of consciousness. Standard test and measures are used, and the data is properly analyzed and validated. The paper concludes with demonstrating marked benefits of the use of ayahuasca, and calls for further study in terms of addiction, psychotherapy and screening.

Studerus, Erich; Gamma, Alex; Vollenweider, Franz X. (2010). Psychometric evaluation of the altered states of consciousness rating scale (OAV). *Plos One* (August 2010 | Volume 5 | Issue 8 | e12412).

This paper updates the underpinnings of the 20-year-old Consciousness Rating Scale to ensure that its results actually conform to the data and conditions of the studies.

This current research was conducted with 46 studies of three different psychoactive substances, and concludes carefully with the limitations of this particular study and what further parameters should be included in future research.

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Trichter, Stephen M. (2006) Changes in spirituality among ayahuasca ceremony novice participants (a clinical research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology). Point Richmond, California: *Argosy University*. This piece is a scholarly dissertation on the need for tools or drugs which would give patients more self-authority and clarity in their recovery, rather than being numbed or restricted by conventional antidepressants or antipsychotic medications. Artists, writers and musicians complain about loss of creativity and disruption of thought process with allopathic medications, so the author proposes the use of the ayahuasca potion, which has a long history of usage among the South American shamans, and which has enjoyed a rising popularity among Westerners for therapeutic, spiritual and transformative experiences. The article is effective, clearly written and in conformance with scholarly standards regarding the gathering of data and the conclusions drawn from it.

Watts, Alan (1957, 1989). *The way of Zen*. Pantheon Books.

Along with that of D. T. Suzuki, this seminal work by Alan Watts has continued to be one of the most popular and useful introductions to Zen Buddhism for Westerners. It helps the reader, especially those new to the subject, make sense of the intrinsic inscrutability of this valuable discipline.