Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Science of

LINDSAY VICTORIA SHAW

BA (Hons) (University of Victoria, 2015)


Social Dimensions of Health Program

Tuesday, August 28, 2018
2:00 P.M.
Cornett Building
Room A319

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Eric Roth, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Nathan Lachowsky, School of Public Health and Social Policy, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

External Examiner:
Dr. Timothy Stockwell, Department of Psychology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Robert Gifford, Department of Psychology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Background: Following years of inactivity, psychedelic research has rapidly expanded within clinical and therapeutic fields. In particular, magic mushrooms (psilocybin), a plant-based psychedelic, have been researched for the treatment of complex mental health and substance dependence conditions, and yielded promising results. Largely due to the historical baggage of the psychedelic movement in the 1950s-1970s, and the stigma of recreational substance use, recreational magic mushroom users have been ignored within the current psychedelic revival. This thesis addressed this gap, examining the magic mushroom recreational substance use patterns of emerging adults in Victoria, British Columbia.

Theory and Methods: Using the normalization thesis as the guiding theoretical framework, this thesis used a sequential-exploratory mixed methods design. Statistical analysis of quantitative cross-sectional interviews (n=558) conducted between 2008-2016 generated rates of use, availability, and self-rated knowledge rates of magic mushrooms users. Qualitative cross-sectional semi-structured interviews (n=20) analyzed through thematic analysis determined substance use behaviors with reference to the current social and cultural context. Participants were recreational magic mushroom users, aged 19-24.

Results: Quantitative results indicated high overall rates of lifetime and past year magic mushroom use, with the lowest reported prevalence rate of lifetime use occurring in 2014 (86%), suggesting mainstream use. There were no statistically significant relationships between year and lifetime or past year rates magic mushroom use. Gender was statistically significantly associated with magic mushroom use, with males being more likely to use magic mushrooms. Qualitative results indicated dynamic and strategically planned magic mushroom experiences. Themes developed include: shifting understandings, optimizing experience, purpose driven use; and post-trip impact. Participants reported using for transformational, micro-dosing, and leisure purposes.

Discussion: Results suggested that magic mushroom use is in the process of differentiated normalization and assimilative normalization, influenced by developmental, social and cultural forces. Recreational users report substance use practices that have not been widely reported with the substance use literature, including using small doses of magic mushrooms (i.e. micro-dosing) for self-enhancement and therapeutic purposes. Results can be applied to the current psychedelic revival in three ways: (1) directing future clinical research directions and; (2) provide lived and experience and relevancy to clinical research, which will improve applicability and; (3) re-conceptualizing the identity of a recreational substance user, which has important implications regarding stigmatization.