

A Sonic Perspective of Psychedelic Therapy

Introduction

Psychedelic therapy, a life changing experience. The combination of psychoactive drugs and therapy for an individual can be significant in a patient success.

'Recent clinical trial data indicate psychedelics including psilocybin hold promise in treating patients with depression, anxiety, terminal illnesses, addiction, and other mental health conditions...' (Elsevier Ltd, 2022)

As of 2023, MDMA and psilocybin remain as investigational drugs unapproved by the FDA however, research suggests these can be significant medicines when safely used by experts in the correct environments.

'In the 1950s...it was later found to be a helpful tool to assist in psychotherapy. The patient under the influence of LSD had the ability to recall distant, repressed memories and revisit past traumatic experiences with great clarity.' Sessa Ben. (2006, p. 3)

'LSD was first produced in 1938 by Dr. Albert Hofmann' Trulson, Michael et al. (1985, p. 15)

Legality, Safety & Abuse

Psychedelic drugs shouldn't be seen from a negative perspective. Its legality is the main reason that when people hear psychedelic drugs that they think negatively however compared to other psychoactive substances both illegal and legal, numerous scientific investigations rank harms to the user and harm to society the lowest. Psychedelics are freakishly physically safe.

Cultural Context

Humans have had a relationship with psilocybin throughout our species' existence. Indigenous people all around the world have used psilocybin. *'Wild edible mushrooms are a valuable dietary food to many tribal people around the world...and medicine for various ailments in their communities...'* (Begell House, 2023)

Process of Psychedelic Therapy

Today with modern research humans are discovering therapeutic opportunity for psychedelics. What does the modern process of psychedelic therapy look like? All information was sourced from a conversation about psychedelic medicine by a leader in the field Andrew Penn. (Penn Nursing, 2022) The process of psychedelic therapy as a mental health treatment looks like a combination of medicine and psychotherapy. It's referred to as psychedelic assisted psychotherapy or psychedelic assisted psychedelic treatment. The patient is screened to make sure they are eligible which evaluates their safety. Then the day before the treatment they are educated by what they call the guilds which are the therapists who reassure them what might happen, how to deal with any negative experience, how long it's going to last. The next day they come in for the treatment session, where they are given the drug (the medicine) in a room made to feel most comfortable as possible, they have music playing usually listened through earphones and they lay back in a bed and let things happen. The following day they come back and see the therapist where the real psychotherapy is done, which is called the integration session where the therapist can explain as they can make sense of the patient's experience, memories and thoughts they had and how that explains their disorder, their depression.

Music Role in Psychedelic Therapy

Music when used in therapy with or without drugs music can activate and reveal, make visible aspects of our mind and subconscious mind. Music can create a therapeutic opportunity. *'...music plays a central therapeutic function in psychedelic therapy...'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018) Music being very important to a patient's therapeutic success means there is importance to the music selection. *'...to facilitate personally meaningful experiences that can lead to sustained changes in behaviour and outlook. In order to achieve this, researchers often emphasised the importance of adapting the music to individual patient's changing therapeutic needs, as their therapeutic experience unfolds dynamically.'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018)

Every individual will correlate music with different significant meanings, therefore selecting music individually would dramatically have different effects. Modern research uses the same playlist for each patient taking part in the study. *'...a standardised playlist was created to control for music as a potential confounding variable. Therefore, all patients were intended to listen to the same music playlist.'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018)

Dislike to Music

What if someone strongly dislikes the music? *'...all patients were intended to listen to the same music playlist. In one rare case where the music selection was strongly disliked by one patient...in the first session (a strong preference was expressed to only listen to classical music)...'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018) The definition of a patient is someone who's receiving treatment because of a problem and it's the therapist job to care for the patient. This shows that if there is a strong dislike towards something that can be changed in the case the music, a change will be made.

Psychedelic Therapy Playlists

Music used for psychedelic therapy is organised into a playlist which adapts in synchronisation to effects changing in the psychedelic trip. *'The design of the music playlist...where each phase is associated with a distinguishable set of psychological needs the music can serve. These phases are, in chronological order: "pre-onset", "onset", "building towards peak", "peak", "re-entry", and "return". In the present study, the durations of the phases were adjusted to the shorter duration of psilocybin's effects, compared with LSD.'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018)

Religious Music

A patient may have question towards religious music? *'In addition, a strong emphasis on music with "Christian religious" content may not be appropriate for individuals that are either non-religious or practice a different religion. Therefore, a music playlist was designed for the present study, containing pre-dominantly contemporary music such as the ambient, neo-classical, contemporary classical, as well as traditional/ethnic music styles. The intention with this music selection was to minimise religious associations...'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018)

Patient Results from Music Influence

The patients were interviewed, *'The interview consisted of four open questions: (1) "Did the music influence your experience? And if so: in what ways?"...'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018) Then the interviews were transcribed and analysed. The results were *'Coding analyses identified a total of four separate groups, each including different clusters with related themes.'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018) These results give us answers to how music is used in psychedelic therapy. How music plays a role in a patient's emotional state.

'Ten out of 19 patients (53% of total) described calming effects of the music. From this cluster, nine out of ten (90% of cluster) described "general calming" effects, whereas five out of ten patients (50% of cluster) described the music as providing "mental calming" effects, including sensations of peacefulness and of the music calming and "slowing the mind." One out of ten (10% of cluster) described that the music helped them to feel more physically relaxed. Calming effects of music often referred to ambient music by Brian Eno, Harold Budd, and Stars of the Lid. See Table 3 (Supplementary materials) for a listing of all themes present in the cluster "calming".' (National Institutes of Health, 2018)

Music was also said to give guidance to a patient, metaphorically speaking, leading them through a journey. Mentally traveling music gave a scene of comfort in direction. *'Within this cluster, statements that the music provided a "sense of being on a journey" were identified in 11 out of 15 (73% of cluster). This included descriptions of the music being experienced as a "vehicle" that "transports" or "carries" the listener forward, providing a sensation of "travelling" to different psychological "places",...'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018)

With comes good balances with bad. Unwelcomed influence of music on a patient was talked about. *'The most prominent cluster, including five out of ten patients (50% of cluster), described music to "intensify" emotions they did not want to feel, such as increased "fearfulness", "sadness", or "fear", In addition, five out of ten (50% of cluster) made statements about the music creating a sense of "discomfort", including "unpleasant" or "uncomfortable" experiences, and four out of ten (40% of cluster) described irritation as a consequence of the music...'* (National Institutes of Health, 2018) in therapy is expected to be unwanted emotions and because

music can influence these on a patient is actually best case scenario, this will allow the patient to revisit past traumatic events with clarity therefore healing depression.

Conclusion

With new research developing continuously in modern times psychedelic therapy is a very interesting topic as psilocybin is a compound that has been used from our ancestors for our entire human existence. Its mysteriousness intrigues the many, its drastic effects have huge impact with consumption comes life changing experiences and healing. The use of music has such power in combination with the medicine. Sonically perception altering consciousness, music power to access locked memories shows power.

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