

MDMA RESEARCH AT MCLEAN HOSPITAL

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MAPS funding to our laboratory (\$12,000) is now being applied to a new pilot study we have undertaken to investigate whether repeated use of illicit MDMA induces functionally significant neurocognitive damage. Much like our prior study comparing Navajo members of the Native American Church who ingest peyote with Navajo who ingest peyote, have a history of extensive alcoholism only or have no history of significant drug or alcohol use, our blinded rater administers an extensive battery

of neurocognitive tests to users and non-users of MDMA. Our study is distinct from prior published reports in that we are securing volunteers who have minimal to no exposure to any other drug of abuse or alcohol. Moreover, we are carefully assessing for past and current evidence for psychopathology, and thus we will be able to control for extent of depression and anxiety at time of testing, for example. Psychiatric conditions must be screened for, since we already know that these illnesses negatively impact cognitive performance. Few controlled studies of MDMA users' cognitive performance have also carefully tested for these illnesses. In order to also control for possible differences between groups due to sleep deprivation, we have chosen control subjects who also experience a comparable amount of sleep deprivation from sharing in the same all-night-party lifestyle. By controlling for sleep patterns, we increase the likelihood that any differences are due to Ecstasy but not to the lifestyle which accompanies it (and we do know that sleep deprivation causes impairments on many of these tests). At present, 15 controls and 25 MDMA users have completed this protocol. Preliminary results will first be used in an NIH grant application to expand the study to eventually test approximately 200 individuals. Interim results may be presented at a relevant scientific conference as well as in a further update to the MAPS Bulletin. We are greatly indebted to MAPS for providing the needed "seed money" and helpful advice and assistance in securing the published papers from the relevant literature. ■

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