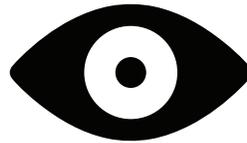


# Psychedelic Society Goes Global

DANIEL JABBOUR



**psychedelic society**  
SAN FRANCISCO



*Daniel Jabbour*

*Editor's Note: In April 2014, shortly after completing this article, my dear friend and colleague Daniel Jabbour passed away. His death was a shock to his entire community. Daniel was a respected leader and a role model for many of us working to create spaces for open and honest conversations about psychedelics. We are profoundly grateful to Daniel for so bravely articulating his vision, and for inspiring those of us still here to carry that vision forward. If you would like to start a Psychedelic Society chapter where you live, please contact [info@psysociety.org](mailto:info@psysociety.org).*

PSYCHEDELICS ARE AT LEAST AS popular today as they were in the 1960s, an era often thought of as the psychedelic revolution. We're now in the midst of a psychedelic resurgence, but it is distinctly different from the countercultural movement of the previous century. When I founded the Psychedelic Society of San Francisco a little over two years ago, our mission was clear: to spread unbiased education and information throughout the world, and to help bring the psychedelic community together and engage in a dialogue.

Our San Francisco chapter now has over 5,000 members receiving our updates. As the psychedelic community grows larger every day across the rest of the world, we search for ways to retain our sense of connection. There's always been a vibrant international psychedelic festival scene exemplified by events such as Burning Man and Boom, but as psychedelics reach into the mainstream, we need to create more safe spaces for dialogue and for integrating lessons learned during psychedelic experiences into our everyday life. The fact that our San Francisco chapter grew so quickly shows just how hungry the community is for this dialogue.

## BRINGING TOGETHER

There's safety in numbers, and the Psychedelic Society of San Francisco is showing just how deep and wide the psychedelic community really is. Doctors, lawyers, software engineers, artists, scientists, and hippies alike are all members of the group. It's rare in Western society to see elders respected and dialogues between young and old, but our events are built on mutual respect between generations, each having wisdom and knowledge to bring to the table. Elders draw from decades of experience, while youth often keep up with modern scientific research and know about the benefits and risks of new compounds.

Psychedelics have only been illegal for a short time in human history, as many traditional cultures have sanctioned psychedelic use for hundreds of years. Take ayahuasca—in indigenous cultures that drink the brew, we find ritual, context, and initiation, usually within religious settings. The religious context provides a system for learning, a dialogue between the elders of the community and the youth, and a guide to help integrate or interpret the experiences.

LSD and MDMA both started off as medically accepted psychotherapy drugs, and some therapists used the drugs on hundreds of patients before they were made illegal. While they were criminalized in an attempt to control the counterculture, today we see new waves of neo-shamans and self-styled healers popping up all over the world. In the San Francisco Bay Area, we see this expansion most evidently as small groups routinely use ayahuasca and other psychedelics for ceremonial and healing purposes.

The practice is so prevalent that one member of our group reported, "I was walking down the sidewalk and overheard someone talking about drinking ayahuasca at a studio in my neighborhood." What will happen as this expansion continues? When will we have a search engine like Yelp for psychedelic medicine circles? How about ethics guidelines or practices? Or a system for reporting sexual abuse or other inappropriate behavior? Just as in psychotherapy, when working with psychedelics in a ceremonial way, power dynamics exist that require ethical consideration. A major goal of the Psychedelic Society is to facilitate such discussions in a public forum by bringing the community together at our events.

## COMING OUT

The drug policy community builds upon and stands on the shoulders of the gay rights and other social justice movements that have seen tremendous strides in recent decades. And the gay rights movement has seen such success in large part due to "coming out." This same phrase is often used by people who are afraid to tell their family or employer just how important psychedelics have been in their lives.

Social justice movements don't succeed until they have a face, and psychonauts won't have a face until we stand up and tell our family, neighbors, and friends about our own experiences. Of course, as MAPS and others work to develop psychedelics into legal medicines, we'll see even more "coming out" of subjects who were treated in the initial studies. But the vast majority of psychedelic users aren't diagnosed with a mental illness.

It's much harder to dismiss an uncle, brother, or childhood friend who has been benefited medically, psychologically, or spiritually from psychedelics.

If you decide to come out of the psychedelic closet: Be yourself, be educated, and talk about your own experience as much as you can. It doesn't hurt to point out that FDA-approved clinical research is taking place with multiple psychedelics.

Just last week, the Psychedelic Society helped promote a Change.org petition calling on President Obama to pardon a drug offender who is serving two life sentences on

an LSD charge. In less than a week, the petition collected over 250,000 signatures. The fact that a quarter million Americans are willing to tell the President that it's not okay to lock someone up for the rest of their life because of LSD is encouraging, and further demonstrates the power of the new psychedelic community.

## PROTECT THE CHILDREN

Despite all these wonderful advances, the War on Drugs is still causing significant harm. America has one of the highest drinking ages, and has exported its restrictive drug policies around the world. While these policies are often justified under the banner of "protect the children," drug use rates in America remain among the highest in the world. Studies show that U.S. high school students find cannabis is easier to obtain than alcohol, and smoke twice as much as their Dutch counterparts.

Drugs have very real dangers, and psychedelics aren't for everyone, but when our education system lies to young people, we leave young people without a mainstream, honest information source and not knowing who or what to believe. This further necessitates the need to develop modern rituals and social contexts that open up the dialogue between young people and their parents about the potential risks and value of psychedelic use.

As the Psychedelic Society started growing, we received multiple emails from parents who were confused about how to help their children who had difficult psychedelic experiences. There is a great need to provide a safe space for parents to discuss the issue, which in many cases could include referrals into the mental health community. It can be challenging to find doctors who are willing or capable of working with psychedelic users. All too often, traditional abstinence-focused medical professionals refuse to treat someone until they "stop using drugs."

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*Psychedelic Society founder Daniel Jabbour with Alexander "Sasha" Shulgin, the discoverer of the therapeutic effects of MDMA.*



The Psychedelic Society at the 2013 International Drug Policy Reform conference in Denver, Colorado.

Part of educating young people about drugs includes harm reduction. The Psychedelic Society is working to make drug testing kits more available in our communities in order to reduce the risks of mislabeled compounds or unknown analogue drugs, which become more common as law enforcement seizures temporarily make some drugs more expensive or difficult to obtain. We also hope to use the testing data to facilitate new and exciting scientific research.

### MODERN RITUAL AND SCIENCE

A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision protected the União do Vegetal church's use of ayahuasca despite its main psychedelic ingredient being DMT, a Schedule I drug. Yet in our society, science often fills the existential void of explaining the universe. While traditional cultures explained the mechanisms of these plants and compounds through religion, it's through scientific discovery that we can now introduce these compounds to mainstream Western culture. Both models of psychedelics entail initiation, context, and ritual. In today's world, it's up to us to create this ritual and context in a new way that Western culture can embrace.

This generation is shaping up to be the one that brings psychedelics into the mainstream. It's an exciting time to be a part of the community. The Psychedelic Society will continue to play a pivotal role in hosting educational events, film screenings, and discussions in order to provide a community forum and establish modern psychedelic ritual. If you would like to start a Psychedelic Society chapter where you live, please contact [info@psysociety.org](mailto:info@psysociety.org).

*Daniel Jabbour was the founder of the Psychedelic Society and its flagship San Francisco chapter. Prior to living in San Francisco, he helped organize a similar group in NYC. In college, Daniel founded a Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) chapter, and remained active with SSDP. He served on a Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) committee working to end NYC's marijuana arrest epidemic, and spoke at several rallies in NYC. His previous political work also included lobbying at the local and national level, and organizing student volunteers for a mayoral race in Hoboken, NJ. When he wasn't hacking on Drug Policy, he was a software engineer working on various startup projects, and mentored young hackers at Hack the Future. Daniel passed away in April 2014.*