

Moving forward by looking back: What can the critiques of commercialized mindfulness teach us about a future of commercialized psychedelics?

Abstract

Much has been written in both the academic and popular press on the positive consequences of psychedelic-induced mental states. Following the vanishment of psychedelic research from the public eye between the 1970s and early 2000s, a second wave of psychedelic research is gaining increasing interest from private sector actors looking to explore commercial opportunities. The commercialization of psychedelic substances will likely have consequences for how they are used, to what ends, and to what degree of efficacy.

In this paper, we reflect on the critiques of commercialized mindfulness and explore how they may also apply to a future of commercialized psychedelics. Mindfulness and psychedelics share several qualities including their often-spiritual origins and self-transcendent nature. However, mindfulness has already undergone a period of commercialization and thus represents a precedent case from which to imagine the possible outcomes of the commercialization of psychedelics. By considering the problems associated with the separation of the practice from its spiritual roots, co-option to reinforce neoliberal principles, and alterations to the form of administration to cut costs, the paper demonstrates the tensions that arise when trying to implement practices that are rooted in the enhancement of well-being within societies dominated by consumer capitalism.

Key words: psychedelics; meditation; mindfulness; self-transcendent experiences; mystical experiences; commercialization; capitalism; neoliberalism; health; well-being; environment

1. Introduction

Psychedelic substances have a rich history dating back thousands of years¹. Following their absence from public eye and academic research between the 1970s and early 2000s, psychedelics have experienced a resurgence of interest in Western societies in the last two decades thanks to the growing evidence of their therapeutic efficacy. This heightened interest in the benefits of psychedelics has not been limited to academic scholars and has spanned both public and private sectors as well as the general public. In line with this, we observe the emergence of a psychedelics industry that is attracting billions of dollars in funding. Although commercialization can, arguably, be seen as a positive development providing more people with access to psychedelic's therapeutic benefits, caution is needed. The commercialization of psychedelic substances will likely have consequences for how they are used, to what ends, and to what degree of effectiveness.

In this work, we look forward and consider what consequences the commercialization of psychedelics could have on their therapeutic and broader potential. We do so by looking back. That is, we review literature from the established field of mindfulness as a starting point for our analysis. We therefore reflect on the common critiques of commercialized mindfulness and consider the extent to which they could also apply to a future of commercialized psychedelics. Commercialized mindfulness represents a precedent case and useful analytical lens from which we can begin to anticipate the implications of psychedelics being produced, marketed, and sold within market-based economies.

We chose to examine parallels between the commercialization of psychedelics and mindfulness for several reasons. Indeed, eminent meditation teachers such as Jack Kornfield advocate for the complementary nature of both.² Firstly, mindfulness is a practice that, like psychedelics, has a strong evidence base suggesting benefits for mental health and both pro-social and pro-ecological outcomes. Secondly, mindfulness and psychedelic experiences are qualitatively similar, in the sense that both can be understood as forms of self-transcendent experiences.³

¹ Michael Winkelman, "Introduction: Evidence for entheogen use in prehistory and world religions." *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 43-62. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2054.2019.024>

² "At the Intersection: Psychedelics and the Buddhist Path," Allan Badiner and Alex Grey, video, accessed September 8 2022 <https://www.spiritrock.org/ZZ1V17-345987>

³ Patrick Elf, Amy Isham, and Tim Jackson, *Self-Transcendent Experiences and Sustainable Prosperity* (Guildford: Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity, 2022). <https://cusp.ac.uk/themes/sl/wp32/>; Note that we follow Yaden et al. 2017 in that they treat Self-Transcendent Experiences as an umbrella term with

Thirdly, although its history spans back as far as the first millennium BCE in Eastern traditions, mindfulness has been increasing in popularity within Western societies over the last half century, and, in particular in the last decade. A process of commercialization can also be seen for this practice, with significant investment in apps such as MyDelia, self-help books and courses utilized by global corporations.

The rise of commercialized mindfulness has attracted criticism, with some arguing that attempts to maximize profit extraction has led to practices that reduce the therapeutic potential of mindfulness and ignore its initial purpose to reduce suffering as outlined in Buddhist writings.⁴ Similar problems may arise for commercialized psychedelics. Whereas research has stressed the importance of set and setting as part of psychedelic-assisted therapy⁵, the commercialization could result in a profitable yet watered-down version with implications for the therapeutic efficacy of the drugs.

The paper progresses as follows. The remainder of Section 1 will introduce both psychedelic substances and mindfulness practices, briefly considering their history, proposed benefits, and signs of having undergone a process of commercialization. We focus primarily here on the therapeutic benefits that have been shown for patients suffering from poor physical and mental health, as well as those that concern benefits for sustainable well-being, that is social *and* ecological well-being. Section 2 is dedicated to exploring three specific critiques of the commercialization of mindfulness. We explore the problems associated with the separation of the practice from its spiritual roots, how mindfulness may be co-opted by and to reinforce neoliberal principles (rather than bring about genuine positive change), and how the administration of the practice is (detrimentally) altered to deliver higher financial returns. For each critique, we reflect on how it may also be applicable, or not, to the recent developments in psychedelics research. Section 3 ends by considering the implications of highlighted problems for commercialized psychedelics for health, well-being, and societal progress.

‘mystical experiences’ as a sub-category. In this paper, we refer to both terms usually referring to ‘mystical experiences’ when reported in the respective reference.

⁴ João Simão, "Some Tensions between Capitalism and Buddhism: A Reflection from McMindfulness." *International Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Society* 9, no. 3 (Sept 2019): 75-88. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v09i03/75-88>

⁵ Natalie Gukasyan, and Sandeep M. Nayak, "Psychedelics, placebo effects, and set and setting: Insights from common factors theory of psychotherapy." *Transcultural Psychiatry* online first (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461520983684>; Brian A. Pace, and Neşe Devenot. "Right-Wing Psychodelia: Case Studies in Cultural Plasticity and Political Pluripotency." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (December 2021): 4915. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2021.733185/XML/NLM>.

1.1. Psychedelics

Psychedelic substances are broadly divided into classic psychedelics and non-classic psychedelics. Classic psychedelics exercise their effects primarily through agonist activity at the serotonin 2A receptor (5-HT_{2A})⁶ whilst non-classic psychedelics have more varied pharmacological mechanisms.⁷ We focus on research conducted on classic psychedelics which include LSD, Ayahuasca, psilocybin and mescaline, amongst others. They can induce changes in perception, thought and/or mood.⁸ Scholars have tried to capture the phenomenological features of psychedelic experiences using a variety of terms. For example, the term ‘ego dissolution’ is used to describe people’s loss of sense of self and a blurring of self-world boundaries.⁹ Heightened feelings of connectedness are often described as feelings of “oneness” or “unity”.¹⁰ Terms such as ‘mystical experiences’ have been used to cover experiences with characteristics of unity, the noetic quality, and sense of sacredness.¹¹

The medical potential of classic psychedelics has been acknowledged historically, where they have played an important role in shaping the cultural and spiritual development of ancient and indigenous societies. For instance, DMT, providing the main active ingredient in Ayahuasca, has been used by indigenous societies across South America for many centuries.¹² Equally, psilocybin and mescaline have been consumed in many Mesoamerican societies for

⁶ Enzo Tagliazucchi, “Early and Contemporary Human Neuroimaging Studies of Serotonergic Psychedelics.” *Preprints* (2020) doi: 10.20944/preprints202005.0510.v1

⁷ Fúlvio Rieli Mendes, Cristiane dos Santos Costa, Victor Distefano Wiltenburg, Gabriela Morales-Lima, João Ariel Bonar Fernandes, and Renato Filev, “Classic and non-classic psychedelics for substance use disorder: a review of their historic, past and current research.” *Addiction Neuroscience* 3 (September 2022): 100025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addicn.2022.100025>

⁸ Roland R Griffiths, William A Richards, Una D McCann, and Robert Jesse, “Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance.” *Psychopharmacology* 187, no. 3 (2006): 268–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00213-006-0457-5>.

⁹ Raphaël Millière, Robin L Carhart-Harris, Leor Roseman, Fynn-Mat his Trautwein, and Aviva Berkovich-Ohana, “Psychedelics, Meditation, and Self-Consciousness.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (September 2018): 1475. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01475>.

¹⁰ Chris Letheby, and Philip Gerrans, “Self Unbound: Ego Dissolution in Psychedelic Experience.” *Neuroscience of Consciousness* 3 (2017): 1-11. doi: 10.1093/nc/nix016

¹¹ e.g. Griffiths et al., “Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance”; Katherine A MacLean, Matthew W Johnson, and Roland R Griffiths, “Mystical Experiences Occasioned by the Hallucinogen Psilocybin Lead to Increases in the Personality Domain of Openness.” *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 25, no. 11 (2011): 1453–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881111420188>.

¹² Dennis J McKenna, *Ayahuasca: An ethnopharmacologic history* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1998), 40-62.

similar periods of time,¹³ with ergot, the fungus from which LSD was synthesized, being used by the ancient Greeks as part of their rituals.¹⁴ In most of these societies, the healing properties of psychedelics were revered and the plants or fungi that contained these compounds considered sacred.¹⁵ Since their introduction to Western societies in the aftermath of the second world war, the fortune and reputation of psychedelics has been mixed. It could be argued that psychedelics have been introduced in two waves, the first one beginning in the early 1950s and the second one in the early 2000s.

During the first wave of research and use, psychedelics were initially hailed as potentially revolutionary medicines by modern psychiatry. Indeed, preliminary research conducted on the use of psychedelics to treat alcoholism¹⁶ and several mental health conditions¹⁷ obtained remarkably positive results. In the mid-1950s, the growing popularity of these compounds within the medical and research profession attracted the broader intellectual establishment. Eventually, as artists and intellectuals started to openly talk about the effects of and their experiences with psychedelics, the topic spread among the general public. By the late 1950s and early 1960, some countercultural movements began to use them as instruments for spiritual enlightenment and personal growth. However, at the end of the 1960s psychedelic use was prohibited and quickly became stigmatized.¹⁸ In the midst of the ‘War on Drugs’¹⁹ i.e., throughout the 1970s and beyond, psychedelics were widely banned from public discourse and academic research.

Only in the last two decades has the interest in psychedelics, their chemical compounds and inherent spiritual practices resurfaced among the scientific community. This is what we refer to as the second wave and will discuss further in section 2.1.2. The recent interest in psychedelics has largely been fueled by research documenting their potential to treat mental

¹³ Mike Jay. *Mescaline: A Global History of the First Psychedelic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

¹⁴ Brian C Muraresku, *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2019).; R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A P Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008).

¹⁵ Jay, “Mescaline”.

¹⁶ Dyck, Erika. “‘Hitting highs at rock bottom’: LSD treatment for alcoholism, 1950–1970.” *Social History of Medicine* 19, no. 2 (2006): 313-329.

¹⁷ Sandison, R. A., and J. D. A. Whitelaw. "Further studies in the therapeutic value of lysergic acid diethylamide in mental illness." *Journal of Mental Science* 103, no. 431 (1957): 332-343; Ulrich, Robert F., and Bernard M. Patten. "The rise, decline, and fall of LSD." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 34, no. 4 (1991): 561-578.

¹⁸ Martin A Lee, and Bruce Shlain, *Acid dreams: The complete social history of LSD: The CIA, the sixties, and beyond*. (New York: Grove Press, 1992).

¹⁹ “A History of the Drug War,” We are the Drug Policy Alliance, accessed July 30 <https://drugpolicy.org/issues/brief-history-drug-war>

ailments such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁰ Providing a rationale for decriminalization and legalization,²¹ these findings led more and more state governments²² and Canada,²³ among others, to contemplate a wider decriminalization of psychedelics.²⁴

Moreover, the potential of psychedelics might extend beyond their medical benefits, as research has suggested that they could also help to enhance social and ecological outcomes. Psychedelics can induce what has been called a “self-transcendent experience”.²⁵ During a self-transcendent experience, a person’s sense of self is temporarily altered such that they experience a lessening of the boundaries between self and ‘other’ alongside increased feelings of connection. These self-transcendent experiences can lead people to place more importance on the well-being of other people and the environment. Isham, Elf, and Jackson²⁶ outline evidence to suggest that classic psychedelics can support the achievement of ‘ecological well-being’, whereby high levels of human well-being are achieved alongside increased care for the environment. Indeed, preliminary evidence shows that psychedelic users report higher levels of connection with others and nature,²⁷ as well as greater engagement in pro-ecological

²⁰ Bruno Romeo, Laurent Karila, Catherine Martelli, and Amine Benyamina, “Efficacy of Psychedelic Treatments on Depressive Symptoms: A Meta-Analysis.” *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 34, no. 10 (2020): 1079–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881120919957>; Kristoffer A A Andersen, Robin Carhart-Harris, David J. Nutt, and David Erritzoe, “Therapeutic Effects of Classic Serotonergic Psychedelics: A Systematic Review of Modern-Era Clinical Studies.” *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 143, no.2 (2021): 101–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ACPS.13249>.

²¹ Claudia Schwarz-Plaschg, “Socio-Psychedelic Imaginaries: Envisioning and Building Legal Psychedelic Worlds in the United States.” *European Journal of Futures Research* 10, no. 1 (2022): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/S40309-022-00199-2/METRICS>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Associated Press in Vancouver, “Canada to decriminalize some drugs in British Columbia for three years,” *The Guardian*, May 31, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/31/canada-decriminalize-drugs-british-columbia-overdoses>

²⁴ It must also be noted that psychedelic use may be unsuitable for certain ‘at-risk’ groups, such as those with a family history of mental illness or those facing significant health issues. David Nutt, and Robin Carhart-Harris, “The Current Status of Psychedelics in Psychiatry.” *JAMA Psychiatry* 78, no. 2 (2021): 121–22. <https://doi.org/10.1001/JAMAPSYCHIATRY.2020.2171>.

²⁵ David Bryce Yaden, Jonathan Haidt, Ralph W Hood, David R Vago, and Andrew B Newberg, “The Varieties of Self-Transcendent Experience.” *Review of General Psychology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 143–60. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000102>.

²⁶ Amy Isham, Patrick Elf, and Tim Jackson, “Self-Transcendent Experiences as Promoters of Ecological Wellbeing? Exploration of the Evidence and Hypotheses to be Tested.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 13, (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1051478>

²⁷ Hannes Kettner, Sam Gandy, Eline C H M Haijen, and Robin L Carhart-Harris, “From Egoism to Ecoism: Psychedelics Increase Nature Relatedness in a State-Mediated and Context-Dependent Manner.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 24 (2019): 5147. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16245147>; Matthew M Nour, Lisa Evans, and Robin L Carhart-Harris, “Psychedelics, Personality and Political Perspectives.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 49, no. 3 (2017): 182–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2017.1312643>.

behaviors.²⁸ In addition, Roseman et al.²⁹ suggest that psychedelic sessions could be used to reduce social conflicts and increase empathy and understanding. In support of this, several studies document increases in empathy following use of psilocybin and LSD.³⁰ Whereas the research is still in its infancy, the argument goes that, if confirmed, psychedelics could be considered powerful tools for dealing with pressing issues such as the ecological crisis and societal ills.

As mental health issues are on the rise, so is the market for health and well-being solutions. Depression affects 3.8 percent of humanity according to the World Health Organization³¹ and the two most common mental health conditions, depression and anxiety, are responsible for \$1 trillion in damage to the global economy due to time being taken off work (absenteeism), and poorer performance and productivity in the workplace (presenteeism).³² The market for antidepressants alone is \$15.6 billion.³³ Given this, alongside the looming ecological crises,³⁴ both public and private sector actors have started to explore ways to harness the supposed potential of psychedelics.

The psychedelic industry is projected to grow from \$2 billion in 2020 to \$10.75 billion by 2027.³⁵ As of today, more than 80 companies, including Atai Life Sciences, Eleusis, Innerwell and Mimosa Therapeutics are ardently developing psychedelic compounds. These are often co-

²⁸ Julie Whitburn, Wayne Linklater, and Wokje Abrahamse, “Meta-Analysis of Human Connection to Nature and Pro-environmental Behavior.” *Conservation Biology: The Journal of the Society for Conservation Biology* 34, no. 1 (2020): 180–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13381>.

²⁹ Leor Roseman, Yiftach Ron, Antwan Saca, Natalie Ginsberg, Lisa Luan, Nadeem Karkabi, Rick Doblin, and Robin Carhart-Harris, “Relational Processes in Ayahuasca Groups of Palestinians and Israelis.” *Frontiers in Pharmacology* 12 (May 2021): 300. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fphar.2021.607529/BIBTEX>.

³⁰ Natasha L Mason, Elisabeth Mischler, Malin Uthaug, and Kim P C Kuypers, ” Sub-Acute Effects of Psilocybin on Empathy, Creative Thinking, and Subjective Well-Being.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 51, no. 2 (2019): 123–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2019.1580804> ; Patrick C Dolder, Yasmin Schmid, Felix Müller, Stefan Borgwardt, and Matthias E Liechi, “LSD Acutely Impairs Fear Recognition and Enhances Emotional Empathy and Sociality.” *Neuropsychopharmacology* 41, no. 11(2016): 2638–2646. <https://doi.org/10.1038/npp.2016.82>

³¹ “Depression,” World Health Organisation, accessed September 1, 2022, <https://www.yale.edu/about-yale/yale-facts>. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>

³² Amy Isham, Simon Mair, and Tim Jackson, “Worker wellbeing and productivity in advanced economies: Re-examining the link.” *Ecological Economics* 184, (June 2021): 106989. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.106989>

³³ “Antidepressants Global Market Report,” The Business Research Company, accessed September 1, 2022 <https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/antidepressant-global-market-report>

³⁴ Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig, “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration.” *The Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019614564785>

³⁵ “Psychedelic Drugs Market Size Is Projected To Reach \$10.75 Billion By 2027,” FinancialNewsMedia News Commentary, accessed September 1, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/psychedelic-drugs-market-size-is-projected-to-reach-10-75-billion-by-2027--301273405.html>

developed together with universities which are showing a keen interest in collaborations to secure funding. For instance, UC Davis has finalized a \$70 million financing round that aims to advance its drug development of psychedelic compounds through clinical trials towards market introduction.³⁶ It has been noted that since the 1980s, industry has come to wield greater power over universities³⁷ further fostered through the withdrawal of significant government funding through the marketisation of the higher education sector in countries such as the UK making academic researchers increasingly reliant on corporate funding.³⁸ In addition, psychedelic retreat centers are becoming an increasingly common sight in Latin American countries and even some Western countries such as The Netherlands. These come with often hefty price tags that can easily exceed several thousand dollars. Psychedelics have even made it to the heart of capitalism in the form of a full week of themed talks at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2022.³⁹ Taken together, this suggests that the commercialization of psychedelics through the adoption of a profit-driven approach for the management of these substances is accelerating on several fronts.

Whereas psychedelics have gained more respectability through more rigorous research during the recent second wave, the pendulum has been swinging the other way again: not back toward stigma or calls for prohibition as in the first wave, but away from uncritical hype and toward a desire for a more circumspect approach to research, its processes, and the claims that can be made about it.⁴⁰ This questioning of the hype around psychedelics has brought some uncertainty for psychedelic businesses in their attempt to develop legally-available solutions in treating depression and various forms of addiction. Finance news site Benzinga reported that the 30 largest international public psychedelic companies are trending downward in stock prices and predicted that 2022 might be a year of consolidation of psychedelic companies,

³⁶ "UC Davis psychedelics start-up Delix Therapeutics raises \$70 million for clinical trials," Sacramento Business Journal, accessed September 1, <https://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/news/2021/09/27/delix-therapeutics-raises-70-million.html>

³⁷ Alex K Gearin, and Neşe Devenot, "Psychedelic medicalization, public discourse, and the morality of ego dissolution." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2021): 917-935. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779211019424>

³⁸ Peter Fleming, *Dark Academia: How Universities Die* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

³⁹ "Forget Burning Man — Psychedelic Shamans Now Heading to Davos," Bloomberg UK, accessed September 1, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2022-05-16/forget-burning-man-psychedelic-shamans-now-heading-to-davos>

⁴⁰ David B Yaden, James B. Potash, and Roland R. Griffiths. 2022. "Preparing for the Bursting of the Psychedelic Hype Bubble." *JAMA Psychiatry*, online first (August 2022): <https://doi.org/10.1001/JAMAPSYCHIATRY.2022.2546>.

especially smaller ones that might need to either “be acquired or perish”.⁴¹ Yet, with High-Net-Worth Individuals such as Tim Ferris, Elon Musk and venture capitalist Peter Thiel and other billionaires providing investment driving commercialization,⁴² the hype seems far from over.

1.2. Mindfulness

The history of mindfulness goes back as far as the first millennium BCE where the practice can be found in Hindu texts. However, today mindfulness practice is mostly associated with Buddhist writings,⁴³ where it is the English translation of the Pali word *sati*.⁴⁴ *Sati* has slightly ambivalent uses across Buddhist texts, but Bodhi⁴⁵ emphasizes that it refers to an approach to one’s present experience that aims to foster sustained attention on an object to bring it vividly before the mind. More contemporary Buddhist scholars have equated mindfulness with ‘bare attention’,⁴⁶ which describes a direct and immediate experiencing of the present moment without any emotional reaction or judgement.⁴⁷ Accordingly, mindfulness refers to a state of focusing attention objectively on the present experience,⁴⁸ observing both internal and external events as they happen, but not reacting in any immediate or reactive way.⁴⁹ Mindfulness is cultivated through the practice of meditation.⁵⁰

The current wave of popularity of Buddhism and mindfulness practices in Western societies began in the 1960s,⁵¹ a time of spiritual experimentation when psychedelics were also

⁴¹ “Are Psychedelics Stocks in Trouble or is the Market Reaching Maturity?”, Natan Ponienan, Benzinga, accessed September 1, <https://www.benzinga.com/analyst-ratings/analyst-color/22/04/26434471/are-psychedelics-stocks-in-trouble-or-is-the-market-reaching-maturity>

⁴² “GoDaddy Billionaire Bob Parsons Believes Psychedelics Can Heal Trauma—And He’s Putting His Money (And Brain) On The Line”, Will Yakowicz, Forbes, accessed September 2 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/willyakowicz/2022/04/17/godaddy-billionaire-bob-parsons-believes-psychedelics-can-heal-trauma-and-hes-putting-his-money-and-brain-on-the-line/?sh=13a076a73df7>; “Meet the top 11 VCs who’ve bet the most cash on turning MDMA and magic mushrooms into medical treatments” Yeji Jesse Lee, Insider, accessed September 2 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/list-top-vc-venture-capital-investors-psychedelics-industry-2021?r=US&IR=T>

⁴³ Tamara Ditrich, “Buddhism between Asia and Europe: The Concept of Mindfulness through a Historical Lens.” *Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2016): 197–213. <https://doi.org/10.4312/AS.2016.4.1.197-213>.

⁴⁴ Jessie Sun, “Mindfulness in Context: A Historical Discourse Analysis.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 15, no. 2 (2014): 394–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2014.978088>.

⁴⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, “What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 12, no. 2 (2011): 394–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564813>

⁴⁶ Nyanapinika A Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (London: Rider, 1962).

⁴⁷ Bhante H. Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2002).

⁴⁸ Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1994).

⁴⁹ Scott R Bishop, Mark Lau, Shauna Shapiro, Linda Carlson, Nicole D Anderson, James Carmody, Zindel V Segal, et al., “Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition.” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11, no. 3 (2004): 230–41. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bph077>.

⁵⁰ Jonathan D Nash, Andrew Newberg, and Bhuvanesh Awasthi, “Toward a Unifying Taxonomy and Definition for Meditation.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (November 2013): 806. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00806>.

⁵¹ Joshua Eaton, “Gentrifying the dharma: How the 1 percent is hijacking mindfulness.” Salon, March 5, 2014. https://www.salon.com/2014/03/05/gentrifying_the_dharma_how_the_1_is_hijacking_mindfulness/

attracting greater interest among the counterculture movement in the US and elsewhere. As Asians emigrated to the US, prominent Tibetan and Zen missionaries, including the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, were able to spread Buddhist teachings.⁵² Academic studies on the health benefits of mindfulness followed in the 1970s, with Jon Kabat-Zinn's now widely popular mindfulness-based stress reduction being first devised in the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre in the US in 1979.⁵³ This work gave rise to a more secular form and understanding of mindfulness, focused on its clinical and psychological benefits.⁵⁴ The study of mindfulness-based applications among academics then gradually started to grow, with an exponential increase in the late 1990s.⁵⁵ Mindfulness is now commonly implemented within healthcare systems both in the UK and US,⁵⁶ amongst others, where it is considered to be a cost-effective means of treatment.⁵⁷

Like psychedelic-induced experiences, mindfulness is considered a form of self-transcendent experience.⁵⁸ Mindfully attending to specific objects or objectively observing one's own stream of thought can reduce self-referential thinking and identification with an existing, static sense of self.⁵⁹ Taking part in mindfulness training sessions has also shown to lead to the dissolution of body boundaries, such that individuals do not experience themselves as discrete and separate from the surrounding world.⁶⁰ In line with this, mindfulness promotes

⁵² Matthew C Nisbet, "The Mindfulness Movement: How a Buddhist Practice Evolved into a Scientific Approach to Life," *Skeptical Inquirer* 41, no. 3 (2017). <https://web.northeastern.edu/matthewnisbet/2017/05/24/the-mindfulness-movement-how-a-buddhist-practice-evolved-into-a-scientific-approach-to-life/>

⁵³ J. Mark Williams, and Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on Its Meaning, Origins and Applications* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁴ Sun, "Mindfulness in Context"

⁵⁵ Williams and Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness".

⁵⁶ Alice Tickell, Susan Ball, Paul Bernard, Willem Kuyken, Robert Marx, Stuart Pack, Clara Strauss, Tim Sweeney, and Catherine Crane, "The Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in Real-World Healthcare Services." *Mindfulness* 11, (2020): 279-290. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-1087-9>

⁵⁷ M.M.P Demarzo, A Cebolla, and J Garcia-Campayo, "The implementation of mindfulness in healthcare systems: a theoretical analysis." *General Hospital Psychiatry* 37, no. 2 (March–April 2015): 166-171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2014.11.013>

⁵⁸ Elf et al. 2022, "Self-Transcendent Experiences and Sustainable Prosperity."; Yaden et al., "The Varieties of Self-Transcendent Experience."

⁵⁹ Adam W. Hanley, and Eric L. Garland, "Spatial Frame of Reference as a Phenomenological Feature of Self-Transcendence: Measurement and Manipulation through Mindfulness Meditation." *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory Research, and Practice* 6, no. 4 (2020): 329–45. <https://doi.org/10.1037/CNS0000204>.; Britta K. Hölzel, Sara W. Lazar, Tim Gard, Zev Schuman-Olivier, David R. Vago, and Ulrich Ott, "How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action from a Conceptual and Neural Perspective." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 6 (2011): 537–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691611419671>.

⁶⁰ Michaël Dambrun, "When the dissolution of perceived body boundaries elicits happiness: The effect of selflessness induced by a body scan meditation." *Consciousness and Cognition* 46, (2016): 89–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2016.09.013>

an allocentric (rather than egocentric) frame of reference, whereby individuals experience feelings of unity with the social and natural worlds.⁶¹

Similarly to psychedelics, mindfulness has been shown to have benefits not only for individual well-being, but also social and ecological outcomes. Taking part in mindfulness practices can improve outcomes for patients suffering from clinical conditions such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder and chronic pain.⁶² Practicing mindfulness is also linked to reductions in stress and negative moods, alongside increases in positive feelings and self-esteem in non-clinical populations.⁶³ As mindfulness is a self-transcendent experience, scholars have argued that it is well-equipped to increase pro-social and pro-ecological tendencies.⁶⁴ Studies show that mindfulness can foster empathy and compassion, as well as increased feelings of connection with nature. When people feel more connected with nature and start to acknowledge how their actions can affect other people, species, and future generations, this can prompt them to engage in more ecologically sustainable behaviors.⁶⁵ Schneider suggests that mindfulness practices can help to overcome the ‘polarized mind’, whereby people fixate on a single point of view, which contributes to bullying and out-group

⁶¹ Hanley et al., “Spatial Frame of Reference as a Phenomenological Feature of Self-Transcendence”.; Adam W. Hanley, Michaël Dambrun, and Eric L. Garland, “Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Self-Transcendent States: Perceived Body Boundaries and Spatial Frames of Reference.” *Mindfulness* 11, no. 5 (2020): 1194–1203. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01330-9>

⁶² Jenny Gu, Clara Strauss, Rod Bond, and Kate Cavanagh, "How do mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and mindfulness-based stress reduction improve mental health and wellbeing? A systematic review and meta-analysis of mediation studies." *Clinical Psychology Review* 37, (2015): 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.01.006>

⁶³ Tegan McKay, and Benjamin R Walker, “Mindfulness, self-compassion and wellbeing.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 168, (2021): 110412. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110412>; Dawn Querstret, Linda Morison, Sophie Dickinson, Mark Cropley, and Mary John, “Mindfulness-based stress reduction and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for psychological health and well-being in nonclinical samples: A systematic review and meta-analysis.” *International Journal of Stress Management* 27, no. 4 (2020): 394–411. <https://doi.org/10.1037/str0000165>

⁶⁴ David R. Vago, and David A. Silbersweig, "Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S-ART): a framework for understanding the neurobiological mechanisms of mindfulness." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6, (2012): 296. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2012.00296>

⁶⁵ Margaret E. Kemeny, Carol Foltz, James F Cavanagh, Margaret Cullen, Janine Giese-Davis, Patricia Jennings, Erika L Rosenberg, et al., “Contemplative/Emotion Training Reduces Negative Emotional Behavior and Promotes Prosocial Responses.” *Emotion* 12, no. 2 (2012): 338–50. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026118>.; Christine Wamsler, and Ebba Brink, “Mindsets for Sustainability: Exploring the Link Between Mindfulness and Sustainable Climate Adaptation.” *Ecological Economics* 151 (September 2018): 55–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ECOLECON.2018.04.029>.

abuse.⁶⁶ By disrupting habitual thought patterns and broadening awareness, mindfulness also allows for new, adaptive appraisals of the self and world.⁶⁷

Although both mindfulness and psychedelics have been suggested to have similar beneficial consequences, mindfulness practices are deemed as less controversial than psychedelic use and have largely had a positive reception, both across industries and by the public. They are the subject of uncountable self-help books and mobile apps to help alleviate the stressors of modern lifestyles. It is estimated that the global mindfulness meditation apps market alone will be worth over \$4 billion by 2027.⁶⁸ Institutions such as Google, Procter & Gamble, Goldman Sachs, and the U.S. Army are implementing mindfulness meditation practice within their workforce with mindfulness gurus offering luxury meditation retreats, sometimes costing thousands of dollars.⁶⁹ Accordingly, we see evidence of mindfulness being commercialized and implemented for financial gain.

2. Critiques of commercialized mindfulness: Do they apply to commercialized psychedelics?

Whilst we have outlined the proposed benefits of psychedelics and mindfulness for individual, social, and ecological well-being, we must be clear that these substances and practices are not a guaranteed route to what we would consider to be desirable outcomes. Scholars have questioned whether such practices are “intrinsically progressive”⁷⁰ and highlighted the importance of the environment in shaping each subjective experience and its consequences.⁷¹ Rather than consistently prompting users’ beliefs to be more pro-social and/or pro-ecological, mindfulness for example, can also have the effect of making existing values and beliefs more

⁶⁶ Kirk J. Schneider, *The Polarized Mind: Why It’s Killing Us and What We Can Do About It*. (Colorado Springs: University Professors Press, 2013).

⁶⁷ Eric L. Garland, and Barbara L Fredrickson, “Positive Psychological States in the Arc from Mindfulness to Self-Transcendence: Extensions of the Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory and Applications to Addiction and Chronic Pain Treatment.” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 28 (August 2019): 184–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.01.004>.

⁶⁸ “Mindfulness Meditation Apps Market Share, Forecast | Industry Report, 2027,” *Polaris Market Research*, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.polarismarketresearch.com/industry-analysis/mindfulness-meditation-apps-market#:~:text=The%20global%20Mindfulness%20Meditation%20Apps,41.01%25%20during%202020%2D2027>

⁶⁹ “The 7 Most Luxurious Meditation Retreats in the World,” *Savoir Flair*, accessed July 28, 2022, <https://www.savoirflair.com/culture/231386/luxurious-meditation-retreats>; Michael Stone, “Abusing the Buddha: How the U.S. Army and Google co-opt mindfulness” *Salon*, March 17, 2014, 3–6. https://www.salon.com/2014/03/17/abusing_the_buddha_how_the_u_s_army_and_google_co_opt_mindfulness/

⁷⁰ Michael L Ferguson, “Symposium: Mindfulness and Politics.” *New Political Science* 38, no. 2(2016): 201–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2016.1153190>

⁷¹ António Carvalho, “Rethinking the politics of meditation: Practice, affect and ontology.” *The Sociological Review* 69, no. 6 (2021): 1260–1276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261211029457>

salient.⁷² Notably, the meaning-making potential of psychedelics can also open up moments of change that can be exploited in different ways. Pace and Devenot, for example, highlight that such moments can be used for radicalization by rightwing groups.⁷³

Accordingly, although popular media is inclined to present techniques such as mindfulness or the use of psychedelics as quick paths to greater mental well-being or panaceas for tackling multiple ills within societies,⁷⁴ the potential for such practices to improve individual, social, and ecological well-being is likely to be dependent upon the societal context in which they are implemented.⁷⁵ Commercialization under neoliberal logics is one such way in which the social and economic context can impact upon the nature, use, and consequences of mindfulness and psychedelics. The commercialization of mindfulness has already gathered attention from scholars, with some arguing that the more secular and commercialized versions of mindfulness (what they refer to as ‘McMindfulness’) can undermine its effectiveness.⁷⁶ Indeed, critics have outlined several ways in which the commercialization of mindfulness can be problematic.⁷⁷

In this paper, we focus on three themes which capture the broad range of criticisms of McMindfulness whilst also having applicability to the commercialization of psychedelics. These are: (a) the separation of the practice from its spiritual roots, (b) the use of the practice to reinforce neoliberal principles, and (c) alterations to the form of administration of the practice to deliver higher financial returns. In this section, we will cover each of these themes in turn, outlining how the problem has been suggested to disrupt the effectiveness of mindfulness practices to deliver improvements in individual, social, and ecological well-being, and then exploring how such problems may also apply to the commercialization of psychedelics.

⁷² Matthew J Moore, “Buddhism, mindfulness, and transformative politics.” *New Political Science* 38, no. 2(2016): 272-282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2016.1153195>

⁷³ Pace and Devenot, “Right-Wing Psychedelia.”

⁷⁴ Brendan D. Kelly, "Mindful, mindless, or misunderstood? A critical perspective of the mindfulness concept." *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* (2022): 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipm.2022.31>

⁷⁵ Gearin and Devenot, "Psychedelic medicalization”.

⁷⁶ Ron Purser, and David Loy, “Beyond McMindfulness” Huffington Post, August 31, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-purser/beyond-mcmindfulness_b_3519289.html

⁷⁷ Terry Hyland, "McDonaldizing spirituality: Mindfulness, education, and consumerism." *Journal of Transformative Education* 15, no. 4 (2017): 334-356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344617696972>

2.1. Critique 1. Separation of the practice from spiritual roots

2.1.1. *Mindfulness*

One of the most prominent themes within the critiques of *McMindfulness* concerns how the practice has been stripped of its traditional Buddhist ethics and values.⁷⁸ This criticism is increasingly shared even by influential practitioners such as Jon Kabat-Zinn, who has expressed concern over how superficial *McMindfulness* ignores the ethical foundation of traditional meditation practices and thus may lose its transformative potential.⁷⁹ This critique therefore emphasizes the importance of set (i.e., state of mind or mindset the person is in) to the outcomes of mindfulness practices.

Buddhists use mindfulness as a means of fostering compassion, wise action, and social harmony. As highlighted by the late Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, “we are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness”.⁸⁰ By becoming aware of the present reality and habitual thought patterns, people can begin to understand the causes of suffering and develop ways to intervene to reduce it.⁸¹ When meditation is undertaken with these positive intentions, it is considered as *samma sati* or ‘right mindfulness’.⁸² However, given that several Buddhist views embed metaphysical assumptions (such as the belief in rebirth) that are at odds with Western tradition of philosophical materialism,⁸³ the pioneers who introduced mindfulness to the West clearly understood the difficulty in popularizing the practice if it remained anchored to these alternative cultural traditions.⁸⁴ It is thus not surprising that mindfulness was rapidly separated from its Buddhist culture to legitimize the practice in the eyes of the Western public.

⁷⁸ Freddie Lymeus, "The City Mindful: Commentary on “Mindful engagement, psychological restoration, and connection with nature in constrained nature experiences.” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 222 (June 2022): 104403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104403>

⁷⁹ Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness has huge health potential—but *McMindfulness* is no panacea.” *The Guardian*, October 20, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/20/mindfulness-mental-health-potential-benefits-uk>

⁸⁰ David Loy, “Awakening from The Illusion of Our Separateness.” *Huffpost*, December 11, 2011. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/awakening-from-the-illusion-of-our-separateness_b_988590

⁸¹ Ron Purser, and Edwin Ng, “Corporate mindfulness is Bullsh*t: Zen or no zen, you’re working harder and being paid less.” *Salon*, September 27, 2015. https://www.salon.com/2015/09/27/corporate_mindfulness_is_bullsh*t_zen_or_no_zen_youre_working_harder_and_being_paid_less/

⁸² Purser and Loy, “Beyond *McMindfulness*”

⁸³ Simão, "Some Tensions between Capitalism and Buddhism”

⁸⁴ Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Some reflections on the origins of MBSR, skilful means, and the trouble with maps.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 12 (2011): 281–306. doi:10.1080/14639947.2011.564844

This separation has led to two main issues. First, mindfulness can now be used in any context, even those that arguably contradict Buddhist ethical principles. For instance, Hyland⁸⁵ highlights how the use of mindfulness within US army training regimes conflicts with Buddhist values of compassion and harmony. Mindfulness was not originally intended to be a means of creating more efficient soldiers. The first ethical principle that the Buddha taught as part of living mindfully is “not killing”.⁸⁶ Yet, the separation of mindfulness from its more spiritual and ethical roots has allowed such practices to occur.⁸⁷ Indeed, Ferguson expresses concern over a process of “selective appropriation” whereby, when decoupled from Buddhist teachings of compassion, mindfulness may not generate an ethic of care for others or lead to pro-social and pro-ecological action.⁸⁸ Secondly, Purser⁸⁹ argues that marketing strategies exploit the exotic appeal of Buddhism to sell commercialized versions of mindfulness to the public. Many Buddhists are suggested to be concerned that their religion is being turned into a “designer drug for the elite”.⁹⁰ Degrading a foreign culture to a mere marketing tool is thus seen as another form of colonialist appropriation.

However, mindfulness should not be considered as a practice that can exist only within the Buddhist framework.⁹¹ For example, there is an episode in ancient Buddhist texts where the Buddha himself teaches mindfulness for purely therapeutic purposes to a king. But the critique here is not that Buddhist meditation is the only worthwhile form of meditation. Rather, that the grandiose narrative around the therapeutic and social benefits of mindfulness might be delusional if the value of conscientious compassion in which Buddhist mindfulness is rooted in is not included.⁹² Purser and Loy⁹³ argue that there is limited empirical evidence that McMindfulness actually delivers its proposed benefits for personal well-being and development. Van Dam⁹⁴ similarly voices concerns over definitional and methodological

⁸⁵ Terry Hyland, "McMindfulness in the workplace: Vocational learning and the commodification of the present moment." *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 67, no. 2 (2015): 219-234.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2015.1022871>

⁸⁶ Stone, “Abusing the Buddha”

⁸⁷ David Forbes, "Modes of mindfulness: Prophetic critique and integral emergence." *Mindfulness* 7, no. 6 (2016): 1256-1270. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0552-6>

⁸⁸ Ferguson, “Symposium: Mindfulness and Politics.”

⁸⁹ Ron Purser, *McMindfulness: How mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality* (London: Repeater, 2019).

⁹⁰ Eaton, “Gentrifying the dharma”

⁹¹ Bhikkhu Anālayo, “The myth of McMindfulness.” *Mindfulness* 11, no. 2 (2020):

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01264-x>

⁹² Purser and Ng, “Corporate mindfulness is Bullsh*t”

⁹³ Purser and Loy, “Beyond McMindfulness”

⁹⁴ Nicholas T. Van Dam, Marieke K. Van Vugt, David R. Vago, Laura Schmalzl, Clifford D. Saron, Andrew Olendzki, Ted Meissner et al., "Mind the hype: A critical evaluation and prescriptive agenda for research on

issues which raise questions about the reliability of evidence suggesting mindfulness to be a panacea for consumers or ‘consumerism’. Pursuing what Buddhists may call *miccha sati*, or ‘wrong mindfulness’,⁹⁵ and separating mindfulness from its spiritual roots, may therefore limit its true potential to deliver positive societal changes whilst also having only minor individual benefits.

2.1.2. Psychedelics

Historically, classical psychedelics have been tightly intertwined with spirituality in human societies that ritualized their use.⁹⁶ The mystical experiences facilitated by psychedelics, in particular, are an important component of healing ceremonies and other rituals.⁹⁷ However, contemporary Western societies are dominated by an epistemology grounded in scientific materialism, limiting openness to a more spiritual side of psychedelics.

Looking back at the two periods, or waves, when psychedelics were introduced to Western cultures provides evidence of how Western countries have separated psychedelics from their spiritual groundings. During the first wave, facilitated in the West through the synthesis of LSD, the scientific community studied the potential therapeutic use of these substances within a materialistic framework, thus paying little or no attention to the nature of psychedelic-induced mystical experiences. The few researchers that started investigating in more depth this side were relegated to the margin of academia.⁹⁸ When psychedelics first gained popularity within the countercultural movement in the US, the mystical side of psychedelics received much more attention. Indeed, parts of the counterculture, especially those groups that firstly gathered around San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury neighborhood and those that had a beatnik background, were unified by their ritualized use of LSD and other psychedelics, as well as by their fierce opposition to the Vietnam war and a desire for peace.⁹⁹ Here, the growing individualism and consumerism of American society¹⁰⁰ were rejected in favor of practices which encouraged sharing, spirituality and community life. The psychedelic experience of unity, shared consciousness and being part of the whole was crucial in driving the deep desire

mindfulness and meditation." *Perspectives on psychological science* 13, no. 1 (2018): 36-61.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617709589>

⁹⁵ Purser and Loy, “Beyond McMindfulness”

⁹⁶ Winkelman, "Introduction: Evidence for entheogen use in prehistory and world religions."

⁹⁷ Jay, “Mescaline”.

⁹⁸ Stanislav Grof, "Brief history of transpersonal psychology." *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 27, no. 1 (2008): 46-54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2008.27.1.46>

⁹⁹ Lee and Shlain, *Acid dreams*

¹⁰⁰ Oliver James, *The Selfish Capitalist: Origins of Affluenza*, (London: Vermillion, 2008).

for connection with others and the natural environment.¹⁰¹ These dynamics led to the (re)discovery of Eastern philosophies and religions, contributing to the development of what is now known as New Age culture.¹⁰²

However, this mounting interest in spirituality was rapidly ended due to a multitude of reasons.¹⁰³ For instance, the ‘hippie culture’ became commercially attractive and commodified, leading to a generation whose psychedelic use was not fueled by a genuine search for spiritual enlightenment per se, but rather a longing for community and a sense of curiosity.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the War on Drugs started by the US administration generated an environment of fear and misinformation that disincentivized people from trying psychedelics.¹⁰⁵ Reports of so-called ‘bad trips’ changed how and why people consumed psychedelics, inducing a shift from high to lower doses, which led to a reduction in both the intensity and frequency of psychedelic-induced mystical experiences.¹⁰⁶

The second, more recent wave shares a similar sentiment opposing psychedelic’s spiritual roots. Controversy within the scientific community around the role of mystical experiences remains, with some scientists preferring to refer to them with more neutral terms such as peak experience.¹⁰⁷

Given the above scenario, we further reflect on what the risks of this separation are. Firstly, similarly to how McMindfulness is suggested to represent a form of colonial appropriation,¹⁰⁸ scholars have highlighted how the use of sacred plant medicines by those in Western societies

¹⁰¹ Ibid; Andy Roberts, *Albion Dreaming: A popular history of LSD in Britain*, (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd, 2008).

¹⁰² Ido Hartogsohn, *American trip: set, setting, and the psychedelic experience in the twentieth century*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020).

¹⁰³ Notably, the reasons for the abrupt end of the counterculture(s) are not clear cut as demonstrated in the volume by Bhambra and Demir unearthing the complex dynamics during and in the aftermath of the 1960s in which “Others (i.e. the counterculture) failed to attain autonomy as a result of their own incompatibility with the universalism of liberalism” that eventually gave way to a strengthening of capitalism. Indeed, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the counter culture of the 1960s was co-opted by not rejecting its ideas and criticism of dominating working conditions in the form of “inhumane Taylorism”, and, instead using these to avoid future rebellions; Gurminder K. Bhambra and Ipek Demir (eds.), *1968 in Retrospect: History, Theory, Alterity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See especially chapter 11 by Mihnea Panu for an analysis of the Subjectivization, State and Other during the 1960; Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005, p. 185).

¹⁰⁴ Lee and Shlain, *Acid dreams*.

¹⁰⁵ Hartogsohn, *American trip*.

¹⁰⁶ Roy F. Baumeister, and Kathleen S. Placidi, "A social history and analysis of the LSD controversy." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 23, no. 4 (1983): 25-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167883234003>

¹⁰⁷ Sam Gandy, "Predictors and potentiators of psychedelic-occasioned mystical experiences." *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 31-47. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2054.2022.00198>

¹⁰⁸ Ron Purser, *McMindfulness: How mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality* (London: Repeater, 2019).

also reflects a form of cultural appropriation.¹⁰⁹ Hauskeller et al.¹¹⁰ note how psychedelic treatments are often presented as the product of Western laboratory studies, failing to recognize that knowledge of psychedelic substances and their effects is also indebted to their rich history within indigenous cultures. Secondly, several scholars argue that the mystical experiences induced by psychedelics are a key component of their therapeutic potential. The work of Griffiths and colleagues has been crucial in showing that mystical experiences can play a role in reducing existential angst, anxiety, and depression.¹¹¹ Research on psilocybin shows a strong correlation between the intensity of the mystical experience and the longevity of the positive clinical outcomes.¹¹² Undervaluing the mystical or spiritual side of psychedelic experiences might therefore turn out to be counterproductive if the goal is to address the current mental health crisis. Similarly, to our discussion of McM mindfulness then, both the medical and (more broadly) societal revolutions promised by psychedelics could be frustrated by the decoupling of spirituality from psychedelics.

2.2. Critique 2. Reinforcement of neoliberal principles

2.2.1. Mindfulness

McMindfulness has been criticized for reinforcing neoliberal principles. Though neoliberalism is often used in political economy to define a political ideology that favors free

¹⁰⁹ David Dupuis, and Samuel Veissière, "Culture, context, and ethics in the therapeutic use of hallucinogens: Psychedelics as active super-placebos?." *Transcultural Psychiatry* (2022): 13634615221131465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634615221131465>

¹¹⁰ Christine Hauskeller, Taline Artinian, Amelia Fiske, Ernesto Schwarz Marin, Osiris Sinuhé González Romero, Luis Eduardo Luna, Joseph Crickmore, and Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes. "Decolonization is a metaphor towards a different ethic. The case from psychedelic studies." *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* (2022): 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03080188.2022.2122788>

¹¹¹ Roland R. Griffiths, Matthew W. Johnson, William A. Richards, Brian D. Richards, Robert Jesse, Katherine A. MacLean, Frederick S. Barrett, Mary P. Cosimano, and Maggie A. Klinedinst, "Psilocybin-occasioned mystical-type experience in combination with meditation and other spiritual practices produces enduring positive changes in psychological functioning and in trait measures of prosocial attitudes and behaviors." *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 32, no. 1 (2018): 49-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881117731279>; Roland R Griffiths, William A. Richards, Matthew W. Johnson, Una D. McCann, and Robert Jesse. "Mystical-type experiences occasioned by psilocybin mediate the attribution of personal meaning and spiritual significance 14 months later." *Journal of psychopharmacology* 22, no. 6 (2008): 621-632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881108094300>

¹¹² Matthew W. Johnson, Peter S. Hendricks, Frederick S. Barrett, and Roland R. Griffiths. "Classic psychedelics: An integrative review of epidemiology, therapeutics, mystical experience, and brain network function." *Pharmacology & therapeutics* 197 (2019): 83-102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pharmthera.2018.11.010>; Leor Roseman, David J. Nutt, and Robin L. Carhart-Harris. "Quality of acute psychedelic experience predicts therapeutic efficacy of psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression." *Frontiers in pharmacology* 8 (2018): 974. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fphar.2017.00974>; Stephen Ross, Anthony Bossis, Jeffrey Guss, Gabrielle Agin-Liebes, Tara Malone, Barry Cohen, Sarah E. Mennenga et al. "Rapid and sustained symptom reduction following psilocybin treatment for anxiety and depression in patients with life-threatening cancer: a randomized controlled trial." *Journal of psychopharmacology* 30, no. 12 (2016): 1165-1180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881116675512>

market and privatization over state intervention,¹¹³ here we refer specifically to the cultural norms associated with it. These are: a strong focus on personal responsibility, individualism, and competition. This critique therefore focuses on the importance of the wider setting in which mindfulness is implemented.

McMindfulness places the responsibility for managing the ill-effects of structural problems on individuals.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Dawson¹¹⁵ notes that whilst “secular mindfulness is based on a culture of individualism; Zen Buddhist mindfulness is based on a culture of community”. Symptoms of poor mental health and well-being within a workforce, for example, are often caused by company practices such as excessive job demands or job insecurity.¹¹⁶ However, rather than trying to improve company operations, it is seen as a more cost-effective option to send employees to a mindfulness seminar. In this way, employees are sold mindfulness as the way to comfort the self, boost resilience, and increase well-being within a neoliberal society,¹¹⁷ as corporations argue that transformational change begins with oneself.¹¹⁸ This resembles the Thatcherite notion of the ‘individual’ employee as a way to dismiss any process towards solidarity among workgroups and frees the company, many of whom are responsible for causing such stress in the first place, of responsibility for alleviating it.¹¹⁹ Whereas the last decade has seen the emergence of Chief Happiness Officers and other quirky-sounding corporate well-being offers, they often gloss over the need of actual, structural change within and beyond businesses and their ways of working.¹²⁰ Indeed, it is paradoxical given that Buddhist teachings emphasize being mindful to understand the causes of collective suffering.¹²¹

¹¹³ Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

¹¹⁴ Mira Karjalainen, Gazi Islam, and Marie Holm. "Scientization, instrumentalization, and commodification of mindfulness in a professional services firm." *Organization* 28, no. 3 (2021): 483-509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419883388>

¹¹⁵ Geoff Dawson, "Zen and the mindfulness industry." *The Humanistic Psychologist* 49, no. 1 (2021): 143. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000171>

¹¹⁶ Isham, Mair, and Jackson, “Worker wellbeing and productivity in advanced economies”

¹¹⁷ Forbes, "Modes of mindfulness”

¹¹⁸ Purser and Loy, “Beyond McMindfulness”

¹¹⁹ Klaus Nielsen, "McMindfulness in the Era of Accelerated Life." *International Review of Theoretical Psychologies* 1, no. 1 (2021): 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.7146/irtp.v1i1.127078>; Hyland, “McDonaldizing spirituality”.

¹²⁰ William Davies, *The happiness industry: How the government and big business sold us well-being* (London: Verso Books, 2015).

¹²¹ Purser and Loy, “Beyond McMindfulness”

A perhaps more contested criticism is that McMindfulness could reduce our capacity for critical thinking¹²² and thus stifle motivations to create positive change. Leggett¹²³ argues that an emphasis on the present moment can prevent reflection on the past to understand the origins of current problems, as well as imagination of more desirable futures. Similarly, instructing workers to be non-reactive to their emotions and thoughts can be problematic if such (negative) emotions and thoughts are tied to one's objective circumstances. This means that, when implemented as a form of 'care' in the workplace, companies can use mindfulness to prevent employees from engaging in deeper reflections on how their work may be negatively contributing to their well-being.¹²⁴ The fact that mindfulness can be implemented to boost productivity whilst concurrently driving acceptance of the status quo¹²⁵ creates what has been called a 'corporate quietism'.¹²⁶ Workers may become (temporarily) able to participate in the frantic workplace whilst also withdrawing from critical thinking about objective working conditions. Leggett¹²⁷ argues that this twin aspect of "participation and withdrawal" is prevalent in workplace mindfulness programs.

It is worth mentioning that this point is disputed in the mindfulness literature. Anālayo,¹²⁸ for instance, agrees with the general skepticism towards a commercialized use of mindfulness while rejecting the idea that this would reduce critical thinking as an unsubstantiated criticism. He argues that mindfulness' stress on the importance of the present moment and non-judgment does not involve rejecting thoughts and critical thinking, but rather helps individuals to control their thought processes more effectively and avoid falling prey of obsessive and overwhelming thoughts. In a similar vein, he stresses that some of the points raised by the McMindfulness literature presuppose a specific political view and advocate for a critical understanding of contemporary society. However, even if it is clearly impossible to teach mindfulness outside social and political contexts, he argues that it is unacceptable to impose on or demand from mindfulness teachers and practitioners to align with a specific world view.¹²⁹

¹²² Purser, Ronald E. 2018. "Critical perspectives on corporate mindfulness." *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 15, no. 2: 105-108.

¹²³ Will Leggett, "Can Mindfulness really change the world? The political character of meditative practices." *Critical Policy Studies* 16, no. 3(2022): 261-278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2021.1932541>

¹²⁴ Purser and Loy, "Beyond McMindfulness".

¹²⁵ Carrette, Jeremy, and Richard King. 2004. *Selling spirituality: The silent takeover of religion*. Routledge.

¹²⁶ Purser and Ng, "Corporate mindfulness is Bullsh*t".

¹²⁷ Leggett, "Can Mindfulness really change the world?"

¹²⁸ Anālayo, "The myth of McMindfulness".

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

2.2.2. *Psychedelics*

Besides influential online outlets, only a limited number of published articles have examined whether we can expect psychedelics to be exploited to foster neoliberal values. For instance, Plesa and Petranker¹³⁰ argue that there are substantial reasons to think that marketisation and commercialization of psychedelics, as well as market pressures more generally, could lead to the use of these compounds to reinforce neoliberal values and thus dub these practices as McPsychedelics. This is in line with recent work by Pace and Devenot.¹³¹ While focusing first and foremost on psychedelics' impact on political ideology, they argue that “[c]orporadelic actors are currently folding psychedelics into a corporate ethos predicated on novelty and cognitive labor: from microdosing coders to ayahuasca business coaches, psychedelics are seen as shortcuts to divergent market insight in a globalized, neoliberal marketplace”.¹³²

Mark Fisher¹³³ poignantly illustrated this by arguing that “[c]onsidering mental illness an individual chemico-biological problem has enormous benefits for capitalism” since it “reinforces Capital’s drive towards atomistic individualization (you are sick because of your brain chemistry)” and “provides an enormously lucrative market in which multinational pharmaceutical companies can peddle their pharmaceuticals”. In a similar vein, Gearin and Devenot¹³⁴ highlight that the focus on the therapeutic potential of psychedelic-induced ‘ego-dissolution’ works to locate the cause of poor well-being and mental illness inside the individual’s head. This is similar to mindfulness in that people are taught that distress can be relieved by altering their mental processes, rather than through changes in their environment. In the case of psychedelics, people are taught that if only they can reach a subjective mental state whereby they experience reduced self-focus and enhanced feelings of connection, then this can help resolve their problems. In this way, psychedelics have the potential to be employed to reinforce neoliberal values of individualism and personal responsibility.

Further evidence that psychedelics *could* be used to promote neoliberal values is the growing interest in microdosing.¹³⁵ When discussing commercialized mindfulness, we noted

¹³⁰ Patric Plesa, and Rotem Petranker. "Manifest your desires: Psychedelics and the self-help industry." *International Journal of Drug Policy* 105 (July 2022): 103704.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2022.103704>

¹³¹ Pace and Devenot, “Right-Wing Psychedelia.”

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?*, (Alresford: Zero Books, 2009, p. 37).

¹³⁴ Gearin and Devenot, "Psychedelic medicalization"

¹³⁵ Vince Polito, and Richard J. Stevenson, "A systematic study of microdosing psychedelics." *PloS one* 14, no. 2 (February 2019): e0211023. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0211023. PMID: 30726251; “A Psychedelic May Soon Go to the FDA for Approval to Treat Trauma,” Jennifer M Mitchell, *Scientific American*, accessed September

that it is suggested to promote a process of “participation and withdrawal”, whereby employees become able to participate in the workplace through effects such as enhanced productivity whilst also withdrawing from critical thought on the underlying workplace structures that may be causing negative impacts on their well-being. Microdosing may promote a similar process. Following anecdotal reports on internet blogs and a recent growth in scientific research, new major research projects are exploring the alleged benefits of MDMA, psilocybin and LSD microdosing. These include enhanced productivity and creativity.¹³⁶ In this way, whereas in the 1960s ‘hippies’ consumed LSD to unify and revolt *against* the system, today mainstream consumers of psychedelics microdose to work better *for* the system. Indeed, online websites are already selling legal versions of LSD for microdosing using the promise of higher productivity as an advertising tool. Following the potential legalization of psychedelics, companies seem likely to follow in line trying to exploit promising commercial opportunities.

There is preliminary, though yet inconclusive evidence, that high doses of psychedelics can have more profound and long-lasting effects.¹³⁷ Higher doses are related to more intense mystical experiences, which in turn can foster feelings of unity, and enhance a spiritual understanding of the world. By focusing on microdosing, corporate organizations are therefore able to limit opportunities for profound insights that could lead individuals to question the current status quo. In this way, companies can foster more productive and less stressed workers but avoid making them more critical of the structure and incentives of contemporary society.

2.3. Critique 3: Alterations to the form of administration to deliver higher financial returns.

2.3.1. *Mindfulness*

As mindfulness became commercialized and employed as a tool by businesses, its form has often been altered to deliver higher financial returns. Indeed, a primary driver of the implementation of mindfulness within workplaces is likely the fact that it is more cost-effective for managers to send their employees to brief mindfulness seminars than it is for them to

10 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-psychedelic-may-soon-go-to-the-fda-for-approval-to-treat-trauma/>

¹³⁶ Kim P C Kuypers, "The therapeutic potential of microdosing psychedelics in depression." *Therapeutic advances in psychopharmacology* 10 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1177/2045125320950567>; Joseph M Rootman, Pamela Kryskow, Kalin Harvey, Paul Stamets, Eesmyal Santos-Brault, Kim PC Kuypers, Vince Polito, Francoise Bourzat, and Zach Walsh, "Adults who microdose psychedelics report health related motivations and lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to non-microdosers." *Scientific reports* 11, no. 1 (2021): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01811-4>

¹³⁷ Griffiths et al., "Psilocybin produces substantial and sustained decreases in depression and anxiety in patients with life-threatening cancer".

address the root causes of employees' stress such as inadequate resources and staffing. When mindfulness is being used as a tool to drive business outcomes such as enhanced productivity at a low cost, practitioners and companies are inclined to take steps to ensure the financial costs of such programs are limited.

For example, corporate mindfulness sessions may be quick and one-off, when it is suggested that broader, long-lasting training that is rooted in ethical and spiritual principles may provide larger beneficial effects for employees.¹³⁸ Dawson¹³⁹ highlights how Zen practice involves a lifelong commitment to mindfulness. This can require daily meditations, frequent attendance to intensive meditation retreats, and ongoing relationships with a Zen community or specific teachers. Providing only short periods of mindfulness training, with the suggestion to learners that this can adequately improve their well-being also leads to the view that mindfulness is an easy, quick fix. In reality, mindfulness is not always something that is immediately enjoyable and rewarding. In fact, by increasing awareness of one's thoughts and feelings, mindfulness meditation can be uncomfortable and unpleasant.¹⁴⁰ For this reason, having positive relationships with a guide or teacher to help integrate and understand these new insights is important. Yet, mindfulness sessions are increasingly being offered through websites or apps that exclude in-person, human interaction and guidance.¹⁴¹ In attempts to reach broad audiences at low costs, mindfulness programs are also often standardized.¹⁴² But a one-size-fits-all approach fails to take into consideration the needs of each individual learner. Where tailoring does occur, this is often to fit company demands,¹⁴³ rather than through a consideration of individual learners.

The rapid growth in popularity of (commercialized) mindfulness has also made room for a new cohort of mindfulness teachers. However, the heightened demand for mindfulness teachers has meant that the training process is sometimes short-circuited. Reflecting on his own

¹³⁸ Hyland, "McMindfulness in the workplace"

¹³⁹ Dawson, "Zen and the mindfulness industry".

¹⁴⁰ Tim Lomas, Tina Cartwright, Trudi Edginton, and Damien Ridge, "A qualitative analysis of experiential challenges associated with meditation practice." *Mindfulness* 6, no. 4 (2015): 848-860. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0329-8>

¹⁴¹ Dana Schultchen, Yannik Terhorst, Tanja Holderied, Michael Stach, Eva-Maria Messner, Harald Baumeister, and Lasse B. Sander, "Stay present with your phone: A systematic review and standardized rating of mindfulness apps in european app stores." *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 28, no. 5 (2021): 552-560. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-020-09944-y>

¹⁴² Hyland, "McDonaldizing spirituality".

¹⁴³ Karjalained et al., "Scientization, instrumentalization, and commodification of mindfulness in a professional services firm".

experience of becoming a Zen teacher, Dawson¹⁴⁴ reports attending over 60 week-long meditation retreats and over 100 shorter retreats, undertaking daily practice, and receiving supervision for multiple years before becoming qualified. In contrast, he notes that the training standards for secular mindfulness are far less rigorous than those required to be a spiritual teacher. Individuals can become certified mindfulness practitioners, sometimes after training retreats that last only a matter of days or weeks. This is fast when compared with training to be a counsellor or registered psychologist, which can take three years or more. This can result in teachers being less well-equipped to understand and deal with the nuances of mindfulness practices such as the uncovering of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings mentioned previously.

In addition, demonstrating the cost effectiveness of mindfulness training means that organizations seek measurable outcomes of the training.¹⁴⁵ Such a requirement for demonstrating results is also partly the consequence of the application of scientific principles to the study of secular mindfulness. Under this approach, methods must be evidence-based and thus outcomes of mindfulness training need to be objectively documented.¹⁴⁶ Karjalainen et al.¹⁴⁷ explored the implementation of a mindfulness program at a Finnish company. They noted that having to fill out surveys immediately before or after the meditation experience disrupted the flow of the practice and created an aura of surveillance which limited the extent to which employees could feel safe to share their true experiences.

2.3.2. *Psychedelics*

There are some initial signs that psychedelics are also being managed and administered in ways that could lead to detrimental side-effects. One of the key characteristics of current psychedelic-assisted therapy is that it is labor intensive. Patients must be supervised by several trained practitioners during the psychedelic experience and the following integration, leading to high therapeutic costs. Examples for this are plentiful with estimates of the costs of MDMA-assisted PTSD psychotherapy currently ranging from \$4,000 to \$20,000 per patient. Whereas analysts suggest that potential long-term benefits offset some of the costs making the treatment

¹⁴⁴ Dawson, “Zen and the mindfulness industry”.

¹⁴⁵ Hyland, “McDonaldizing spirituality”.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Karjalainen et al., “Scientization, instrumentalization, and commodification of mindfulness in a professional services firm”.

more cost effective than a life-long administering of conventional drug therapy, it remains unclear and doubtful that health insurers pay the significant up-front costs.¹⁴⁸

The incentive for a profit-driven company is to minimize the costs, which could lead to innovations and practices that try to reduce the amount of labor required or the cost of training the therapists in similar ways that have occurred for McMindfulness. For example, scholars have suggested that the acute subjective effects of psychedelics will be necessary for full and enduring therapeutics impacts.¹⁴⁹ However, in an attempt to provide a more reliable service to patients, researchers are trying to create new molecules that would provide therapeutic effects of psychedelics *without* the need for the therapy or even the psychedelic experience itself.¹⁵⁰ For instance, Cameron et al.¹⁵¹ and Olson¹⁵² suggest that the increase in neuroplasticity induced by psychedelics is the key element that produces the beneficial effects highlighted above. Thus, they argue that careful molecule engineering could be able to generate compounds that remove the psychedelic effects while enhancing neuroplasticity. Rosalind Watts recently argued that “if we try to squeeze [the transformational potential] into a pill-popping industrial healthcare model, its vast promise may never be realized”.¹⁵³ Indeed, if it holds true that mystical-type experiences mediate the positive outcomes of a psychedelic sessions and that professional support is required for successful integration of the often-substantial experiences, removing these aspects would likely lead to less effective outcomes. In line with this, Yaden et al.,¹⁵⁴ whilst supporting access to non-subjective psychedelics where appropriate, stressed the

¹⁴⁸ Elliot Marseille, James G. Kahn, Berra Yazar-Klosinski, and Rick Doblin. "The cost-effectiveness of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for the treatment of chronic, treatment-resistant PTSD." *PLoS One* 15, no. 10 (2020): e0239997 doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0239997

¹⁴⁹ Katherine M Nautiyal, and David B. Yaden. 2022. "Does the trip matter? Investigating the role of the subjective effects of psychedelics in persisting therapeutic effects." *Neuropsychopharmacology* (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41386-022-01424-z>

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Lewtom, "The trip treatment." *New Scientist* 254, no. 3389 (2022): 46-49. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0262-4079\(22\)00985-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0262-4079(22)00985-X)

¹⁵¹ Lindsay P Cameron, Robert J. Tombari, Ju Lu, Alexander J. Pell, Zefan Q. Hurley, Yann Ehinger, Maxemiliano V. Vargas et al., "A non-hallucinogenic psychedelic analogue with therapeutic potential." *Nature* 589, no. 7842 (2021): 474-479. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-3008-z>

¹⁵² David E Olson, "The subjective effects of psychedelics may not be necessary for their enduring therapeutic effects." *ACS Pharmacology & Translational Science* 4, no. 2 (2020): 563-567. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acspsci.0c00192>

¹⁵³ "Can You Take the Trip out of Psychedelics and Still Treat Depression?" Thomas Lewtom, *NewScientist*, accessed September 4 2022. <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg25433892-400-can-you-take-the-trip-out-of-psychedelics-and-still-treat-depression/>.

¹⁵⁴ David B. Yaden, Brian D. Earp, and Roland R. Griffiths. "Ethical Issues Regarding Nonsubjective Psychedelics as Standard of Care." *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 31, no. 4 (2022): 464-471. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S096318012200007X>

importance of ensuring that the subjective effects of classic psychedelics remained the default treatment option given their reported meaningfulness to many participants.

Plesa and Petranker¹⁵⁵ highlight the risk that cost minimization will lead to a watering down of the standards for training new therapists. Faster and more superficial trainings might reduce costs, but this could come at the expense of the quality of the service and make the integration part of the therapy less effective. Although there is currently no evidence that this process is happening, the fact that mindfulness practitioner training already suffers from this can be considered a good indicator of the future direction of psychedelic-assisted therapy.

However, a profit-driven company is not only interested in minimizing costs but also in charging the highest possible mark-up on its services. This incentive is already evident in the psychedelics market. Indeed, ‘psychedelic start-ups’ show signs of adopting business tactics and practices of ‘big pharma’.¹⁵⁶ For instance, psychedelic start-ups have eagerly paraded aggressive patents¹⁵⁷ that can provide potentially lucrative opportunities while locking out competitors through legal fences around new compounds, their chemical formulations, and even their application processes. As another tool in the capitalist toolbox, whereas, in theory, patents foster innovation, in reality, they prevent changes to the status quo and ensure an exclusive access for those who are able to pay often significant amounts of money to potential solutions that could benefit the many.¹⁵⁸ As mindfulness does not require any material substances or material to enact, patents are less of a threat to this practice. This may imply that the commercialization process as applied to psychedelics could have wider negative implications than those also implicated for commercialized mindfulness.

Lastly, the commercialization of psychedelics might alter the form of administration outside the Western world. This can be evidenced by the increased popularity in travelling to South America for Ayahuasca retreats with local shamans, which has become a lucrative business.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Plesa and Petranker, “Manifest your desires”.

¹⁵⁶ John Abramson, *Sickening: How Big Pharma Broke American Health Care and How We Can Repair It* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2022).

¹⁵⁷ “Terran Biosciences and University of Maryland, Baltimore announce exclusive licensing deal for a portfolio of patents and data supporting novel innovation in the psychedelic therapeutic space,” Terran Biosciences, Inc., Cision PR Newswire, accessed September 4 2022
<https://www.prnewswire.com/il/news-releases/terran-biosciences-and-university-of-maryland-baltimore-announce-exclusive-licensing-deal-for-a-portfolio-of-patents-and-data-supporting-novel-innovation-in-the-psychedelic-therapeutic-space-877770461.html>

¹⁵⁸ Robin C. Feldman, David A. Hyman, W. Nicholson Price II & Mark J. Ratain. “Negative innovation: when patents are bad for patients. *Nature Biotechnology* 39, no. 8 (2021): 914–916. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41587-021-00999-0>

¹⁵⁹ Daniela M. 2016. "Global ayahuasca: an entrepreneurial ecosystem," in *The World Ayahuasca Diaspora*, eds. Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Clancy Cavnar, and Alex K. Gearin (London: Routledge, 2016), 223-242.

Here, indigenous healers and practitioners are attracted by the higher income offered in the tourist-oriented centers, creating a shortage of traditional health practitioners for locals.¹⁶⁰ Further, research has shown that several shamans admit to performing bogus ceremonies for tourists to create a sense of cultural authenticity.¹⁶¹ Accordingly, the lure of greater profits may be encouraging practices that are not equipped to support genuine improvements in human, social, and ecological well-being.¹⁶²

3. Discussion and conclusion

3.1. Discussion

In this paper, we set out to examine the critiques of commercialized mindfulness as a means of anticipating the potential problems that may arise through the commercialization of psychedelics. Our goal was not to provide a cosmogram of predictive pathways for psychedelics but to facilitate an opportunity for reflection. We aimed to exploit the benefit-of-hindsight by contrasting the status quo of psychedelic research and its commercialization with the recent history of mindfulness commercialization. Ensuing findings aim to provide both researchers and practitioners in the field with insights to rewrite psychedelic-assisted therapy's history and utilize its therapeutic potential for the betterment of societal and environmental ills towards greater sustainable well-being.

The critiques of commercialized forms of mindfulness ('McMindfulness') reflect three common themes. The first expresses concern over how the separation of mindfulness from its spiritual roots, whilst perhaps making the practice more palatable to a general or scientific audience, can allow mindfulness to be used for non-compassionate ends and reduce its therapeutic potential. The second highlights how McMindfulness is used to maintain the neoliberal status quo, rather than foster positive change. The third emphasizes how the form and administration of the practice is altered in commercialized forms, often in ways that can undermine the therapeutic effectiveness of mindfulness. Across all these critiques we have noted the potential for similar problems to occur for commercialized psychedelics. Psychedelic experiences are increasingly discussed and examined without reference to their mystical

¹⁶⁰ Joshua Homan, "*Charlatans, seekers, and shamans: The ayahuasca boom in western Peruvian Amazonia*" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2011).

¹⁶¹ Girish Prayag, Paolo Mura, Colin Michael Hall, and Julien Fontaine, "Spirituality, drugs, and tourism: tourists' and shamans' experiences of ayahuasca in Iquitos, Peru." *Tourism Recreation Research* 41, no. 3 (2016): 314-325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2016.1192237>

¹⁶² Abramson, *Sickenings*.

component, which is suggested to be crucial for their therapeutic potential.¹⁶³ The use of psychedelic microdosing to boost creativity and productivity whilst limiting opportunities for profound insights to inspire change¹⁶⁴ exemplifies how the substances can be used to reinforce neoliberal values. Additionally, the rise of microdosing or short retreats demonstrate how the administration of commercialized psychedelics is often in a form which is designed to provide a quick fix, rather than putting in the necessary preparation or integration required to deliver transformative experiences and acknowledge the importance of the right set and setting.

These potential problems of commercialized psychedelics have implications for health and well-being. While psychedelics are increasingly painted as the ‘future of healthcare’,¹⁶⁵ the reality is clearly more complex. Indeed, as stressed during an interview with Dr Albert Garcia-Romeu, while “[p]articipants think that once they take the drug, their problems will go away...it doesn’t work like that”. If taken in isolation, without therapy and extensive guidance before, during and after the psychedelic experience, psychedelics do not automatically produce beneficial outcomes. Commercialization practices which turn psychedelics into a self-help industry to minimize costs and boost profits risk the creation of a shallow version of the practice, as in the case of McMindfulness, which could hinder their potential to deliver health and well-being benefits.

To ensure the safe, responsible, and effective administration of these potent compounds, guidelines laying out recommendations for ensuring equitable, high-quality standards for administering psychedelics will be required. BrainFutures¹⁶⁶ have started developing a comprehensive overview that can inform pathways towards a safe and effective use of psychedelics. These guides must be informed by independent evaluations and scientific rigor and must not be watered down through corporate interest. When reflecting on the possible

¹⁶³ Johnson et al., “Classic psychedelics”; Roseman et al., “Quality of acute psychedelic experience predicts therapeutic efficacy of psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression”; Ross et al., “Rapid and sustained symptom reduction following psilocybin treatment for anxiety and depression in patients with life-threatening cancer: a randomized controlled trial”.

¹⁶⁴ Polito and Stevenson, “A systematic study of microdosing psychedelics”; Kuypers, “The therapeutic potential of microdosing psychedelics in depression”; Rootman, “Adults who microdose psychedelics report health related motivations and lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to non-microdosers”.

¹⁶⁵ “Why Psychedelics May Be the Future of Health Care,” Adi Zulloff-Shani, *Psychology Today*, accessed September 4 2022 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psychedelics-the-rescue/202208/why-psychedelics-may-be-the-future-health-care>

¹⁶⁶ J Davis, & J Lampert, *Expediting Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy Adoption in Clinical Settings* (Lutherville: BrainFutures, 2022). <https://www.brainfutures.org/mental-health-treatment/expeditingpatadoption>

future of psychedelics using socio-psychedelic imaginaries, Schwarz-Plaschg¹⁶⁷ notes how there is an inherent ‘politics of responsibility’ surrounding the establishment of accountability structures and who these are comprised of. Here, yet again, we find reasons to worry: Partnerships aiming to deliver guidelines for the effective use between companies such as MindMed¹⁶⁸ or Cybin Inc.¹⁶⁹ and mindfulness-millionaire Deepak Chopra’s The Chopra Foundation are likely to raise questions about the actual aim of commercialized psychedelic solutions.

We have noted how psychedelics, like mindfulness, can benefit social and ecological well-being.¹⁷⁰ While we agree that they cannot serve as “a tool of political reconciliation”¹⁷¹ alone, there is evident potential for psychedelics to support processes towards ecological or sustainable well-being.¹⁷² However, to do this, psychedelic use must be grounded in deep-rooted ethical frameworks.¹⁷³ As stated by Rick Doblin,¹⁷⁴ “[i]t’s not the drug – it’s the therapy enhanced by the drug”. Indeed, psychedelics *can* be (mis)used in several ways¹⁷⁵ and thus, positive use often requires *active integration* of the experience into people’s lives through offering an ecology of practices such as psychotherapy.

In this regard, a rather bold argument could be suggested: If research on psychedelics will be able to prove that certain settings allow for the enhancement of pro-ecological values and behaviors, then psychedelic-assisted therapy should be designed to ripe these benefits (among others). Indeed, given the pressing ecological crisis that humanity is facing, potentially powerful tools that could help tackle environmental and social degradation should be welcomed. In this perspective, while potentially posing a political anathema for critics of state

¹⁶⁷ Schwarz-Plaschg, “Socio-Psychedelic Imaginaries: Envisioning and Building Legal Psychedelic Worlds in the United States.”

¹⁶⁸ “The Chopra Foundation and MindMed Enter into Letter of Intent to Partner on the Future of Psychedelic Medicines & Mental Wellbeing,” Psychedelic Alpha, accessed August 31 2022 <https://psychedelicalpha.com/news/the-chopra-foundation-and-mindmed-enter-into-letter-of-intent-to-partner-on-the-future-of-psychedelic-medicines-mental-wellbeing>

¹⁶⁹ “The Chopra Foundation Announces Partnership with Cybin Inc. to Increase Education and Awareness of the Potential Use of Psychedelics in Supporting Well-Being and Mental Health,” The Chopra Foundation, Cision PR Newswire, accessed August 31 2022 <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/the-chopra-foundation-announces-partnership-with-cybin-inc-to-increase-education-and-awareness-of-the-potential-use-of-psychedelics-in-supporting-well-being-and-mental-health-301482059.html>

¹⁷⁰ Elf et al., “Self-transcendent experiences and sustainable prosperity” propose the wider term ‘sustainable wellbeing’ to describe both social *and* ecological well-being.

¹⁷¹ MAPS’s Executive Director Rick Doblin cited in Pace and Devenot, 2021

¹⁷² Elf et al., “Self-transcendent experiences and sustainable prosperity”.

¹⁷³ Petranker et al., “Psychedelic Research and the Need for Transparency: Polishing Alice’s Looking Glass”.

¹⁷⁴ When referring to MDMA-assisted PTSD therapy: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/03/health/mdma-approval.html>

¹⁷⁵ Pace and Devenot, “Right-Wing Psychedelia”.

control, the role of regulation in determining an appropriate setting to foster those values and behaviors might be fundamental. This chimes with the argument that if psychedelics are separated from ethical frameworks and employed to support neoliberal principles, they may lose much of their potential to facilitate the questioning of capitalist culture and enable people to overcome individualistic and consumerist tendencies.

With research exploring the biomedical potential of psychedelics in rigorous ways, this is actively driving the legalization of psychedelics, as the growing evidence of therapeutic benefits lend legalization a rationale. Interestingly, the decriminalization imaginary has emerged as a response to the acceleration of commercialized psychedelics in an attempt to “bring psychedelics to ‘the people’ before Big Pharma can make a monopoly out of them”.¹⁷⁶ With Big Pharma rapidly catching-up, co-opting its potential into yet another commercial opportunity, it seems misguided to expect that psychedelics will bring significant positive change to social and environmental well-being if they are implemented within a setting that devalues and undermines these very outcomes.¹⁷⁷ In other words, psychedelics should not be seen as a magic pill (as McM mindfulness is often promoted to be) that will solve all of society’s ills, but rather, we argue, as a tool that should be explored to determine how best they can be implemented to help address current pressing societal issues such as the mental health and ecological crisis.

3.2. Conclusion

Our analysis shows that mindfulness and psychedelic’s recent history crosses at various occasions. In our exploration, we identified three major overlaps between mindfulness and psychedelics that lie in how they have been, or are currently being, appropriated by capitalist tendencies, turning them into what has been described as McM mindfulness and commercialized psychedelics respectively. That is, the commercialization of psychedelics under capitalist tendencies appears likely to evoke an active watering-down of their potential for social and environmental betterment, as they become marketed as an easy, quick fix.

We conclude that, moving forward, the future of psychedelic research and its commercialization must be conducted in an ethical, systematic and transparent manner. Importantly, this must be done without compromising on their therapeutic potential for the sake

¹⁷⁶ Schwarz-Plaschg, “Socio-Psychedelic Imaginaries”, 8.

¹⁷⁷ As the late Mark Fisher mused on his popular K-Punk blog describing the capitalist system as the very basis of the attempts to improve the system itself: “Taking MDMA is like improving [Microsoft] Windows: no matter how much tinkering \$ Bill [Gates] does, MS Windows will always be shit because it is built on top of the rickety structure of DOS”, accessed March 3 2022 <https://k-punk.org/psychedelic-reason/>

of profit under capitalist regimes and its escalatory tendencies grounded in an economic growth addiction. Moreover, we must pay close attention to the set and setting as well as the intentions underlying psychedelic-assisted therapy and its general use. Only then can we introduce transformational change that will allow us to interpret our world differently and drive sustainable well-being at scale. Indeed, without holistic approaches grounded in thorough research and ethical foundations that aim for the advancement of sustainable well-being, psychedelic research might be doomed to remain a “problem child”.