Dear Alice,

I have been reading some studies that state a correlation between the "religious experience" generated by the psilocybin in magic mushrooms and LSD, and an alleviation of body dysmorphic, obsessive compulsive, and other related disorders. I was wondering if this is anything being pursued, whether these effects have been proven, and how long the symptoms are alleviated for if this is the case. Are there any specific conditions that must be met in order to avoid a "bad trip"? I know people experiencing any kind of mood disorder are susceptible as such.

Regards,
Curious and Dysmorphic

Answer

Dear Curious and Dysmorphic,

Learning more about how to alleviate symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder is the first step to tackling what you've been dealing with. You should feel proud of yourself for doing so. Individuals with body dysmorphic disorder are preoccupied with their physical appearance: they may imagine that they have a physical defect or they may worry excessively about a slight physical abnormality and feel shame and embarrassment. Body dysmorphic disorder may result from a combination of biochemical, genetic, and environmental factors. Antidepressants or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are typically used to treat its symptoms.

Although a 1996 case study notes that an individual experienced a temporary relief of body dysmorphic disorder symptoms with psilocybin found in magic mushrooms (aka shrooms, psychedelic mushrooms), there are no broad studies confirming that the psilocybin alone may cause a relief of symptoms. In addition, in this case, it seems that symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder also disappeared when the individual later took prescription medication.

Lysergic acid diethynamide (LSD) is chemically similar to the psilocybin in 'shrooms. For more information on LSD and shrooms, check out Psilocybin ("Magic") Mushrooms [2] and Considering taking LSD? [3] in the Go Ask Alice! archives. As you already know, LSD and shrooms may cause "bad trips" characterized by terrifying thoughts, feelings of despair, as
well as a fear of losing control and death. The following short-term effects may also occur:

- Extreme changes in behavior and mood; person may sit or recline in a trance-like state
- Chills, irregular breathing, sweating, trembling hands
- Changes in sense of light, hearing, touch, smell, and time
- Nausea, especially in the first two hours
- Increase in blood pressure, heart rate, and blood sugar
- Fatigue the next day

If you feel that body dysmorphic disorder is affecting your life to the point where you are considering using hallucinogens, you may want to consider discussing your concerns with a healthcare provider. S/he can suggest treatment options for what you may be experiencing.

Curious and dysmorphic or not, it's worth mentioning that although psilocybin and LSD are found naturally in some types of mushrooms and are not typically addictive, they are still illegal in the United States.

Alice!
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