Call for Papers - Transcultural Psychiatry

Cultural contexts and ethical issues in the therapeutic use of psychedelics

Guest editors: David Dupuis (Durham University) & Samuel Veissière (McGill)

After decades of prohibition and widespread concern about their hallucinogenic properties, there is increasing public, scholarly, and clinical interest in the alleged therapeutic potential of psychedelic substances. This special issue of Transcultural Psychiatry proposes to investigate the cultural assumptions, political dimensions, and clinical and ethical implications that arise from this renewed interest. Once confined to local Indigenous practices (predominantly, but not exclusively bound to the pre-colonial Americas), the ritualized and institutionalized use of hallucinogens has undergone an important transnational diffusion in the last century. As “indigenous” practices were transformed to accommodate growing interest from the outside world, ritual hallucinogenic use gradually integrated Western idioms of psychotherapy, personal development, and novel forms of "New Age" syncretic religiosity It is through their association with ‘therapy’ that serotonergic substances in particular (DMT, psilocybin, and LSD) are now being tested as treatments for such ailments as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder, among others. These historically novel, culturally specific modalities of self-enhancement, the medical theories in which they are framed, and the neurocentric idioms of distress targeted in clinical psychedelic use have remained largely unexamined in the new “science of psychedelics”. For this special issue, we invite articles that address the cultural contexts, assumptions, and ethical implications of this new engagement with psychedelics. In particular, we welcome papers that address the following questions:

- What are the social and cultural assumptions, which, in the West and in other neo-shamanic contexts in the Global South, influence the "therapeutic" requalification of hallucinogenic substances?
- What is the place of laboratory studies and scientific knowledge in this transformation of collective and professional representations of these substances?
- To what extent is the perception of phenomena considered pathological by the idiom of Western medicine reconfigured by these practices (e.g. "hallucinations" being perceived as therapeutic and educational "voices" and "visions")?
- What definitions of therapeutic, normal and pathological effects and what kinds of epistemic authority do current claims for efficacy mobilize?
- Do cultural assumptions about psychedelic properties provide an implicit set and setting to frame therapeutic drug experience?
- What ethical and practical issues are raised by integration of these practices in the field of psychotherapy and medicine? Are there specific social, cultural or ethical risks associated with psychedelic therapeutics?
- What are the challenges associated with these emerging and hybrid practices?

Submission process: Please send a 250 word abstract and short bio note to david.dupuis@durham.ac.uk, and samuel.veissiere@mcgill.ca by June 30th, 2019. After confirmation of provisional abstract acceptance, the final MS (7500 words max) will be expected by October 15th, 2019 and will be sent out for peer review.