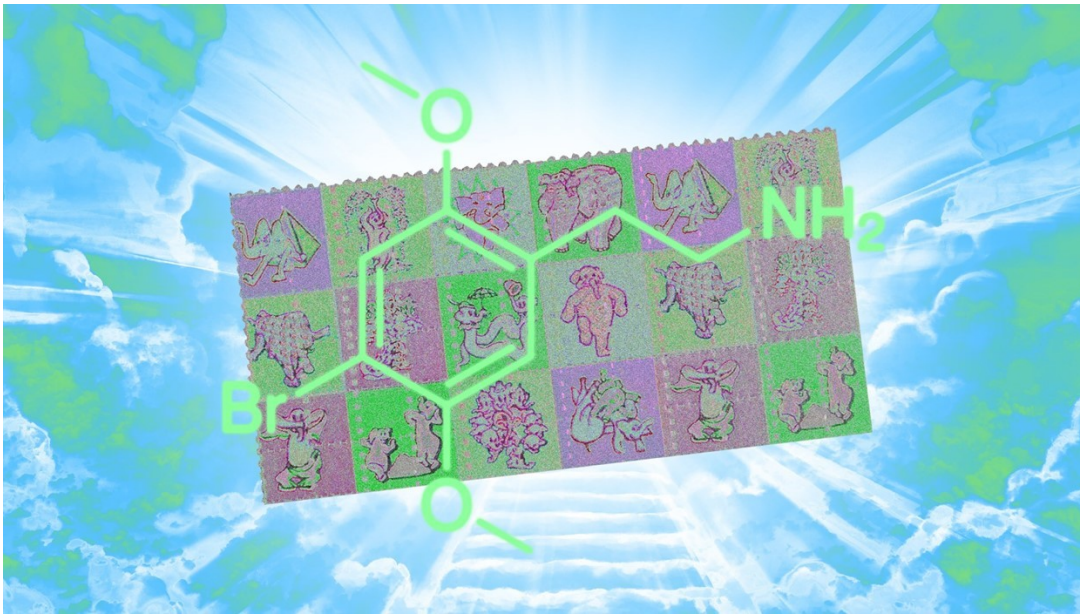




Speaking to people who found God after taking psychedelics

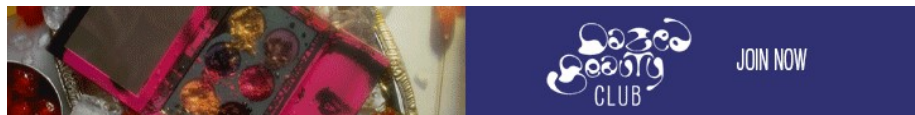
LIFE & CULTURE - FEATURE

A recent study revealed a connection between regular DMT use and belief in a higher power – four people discuss their newfound faith

2nd July 2020

Text Brit Dawson

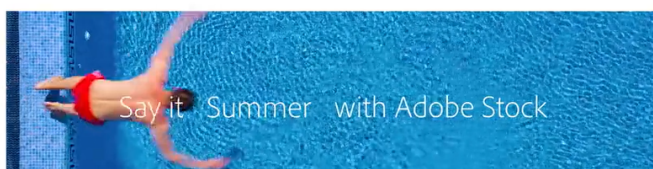
Illustration Callum Abbott



"It feels like the universe is holding you," says 21-year-old Gemma*, "and that faith is enough. Things are going to be OK."

A year and a half ago, Gemma started believing in God after an experience with DMT. Previously an atheist, she thought "religious people were just desperately trying to hold onto something – false hope, or something to rationalise pain". Now, she says that her newfound belief stems from her regular use of acid and magic mushrooms. "I've had some of the most profound experiences during meditation and I've found a path to God," she says.

3



Gemma is just one of many who have found God after taking psychedelics. Last month, a study revealed that most people who regularly use DMT – a hallucinogenic rumoured to mirror a near-death experience – develop beliefs in some kind of higher power. The report by John Hopkins University, published in the Journal of Psychopharmacology, concluded that the DMT experience was one of the most “personally meaningful, spiritually significant, or psychologically insightful” of people’s lives.

Lasting anywhere between a few minutes and several hours – depending on how much you take and the method you do so – DMT appears to have the ability to permanently alter a person's outlook on life. 90 per cent of respondents in the study reported improved life satisfaction and wellbeing after taking the drug, while 80 per cent said they found meaning and purpose. More than half of those who identified as atheist before the experience no longer did afterwards.



"I've done shrooms, acid, and DMT, but DMT was by far my favourite," Martha tells Dazed. "I've been dealing with depression for as long as I can remember but with DMT I felt like my mind was free." During her trip, Martha – who was raised Roman Catholic – says she remembers sitting outside at 1AM and "looking up at the night sky, transfixed by the vastness of everything". After her experience, as well as finding her insomnia had improved and her overall mood had lifted, Martha felt a connection to a different kind of religion.

“With DMT I felt like I was really seeing the world,” she explains. “For the first time, I was thinking outside myself. That experience made me appreciate life more. I think that’s what God is, seeing something outside of yourself – it’s selfless.”

[illegible]

“With DMT I felt like I was really seeing the world. For the first time, I was thinking outside myself. I think that’s what God is, seeing something outside of yourself” – Martha

Located in the centre of the brain, scientists are yet to establish the full function of the pineal gland. One thing they do know is that it produces melatonin, a hormone that’s activated when the sun goes down, which makes you feel less alert and regulates your sleeping pattern. Sometimes known as the ‘third eye’, the pineal gland is often believed to connect the spiritual and physical worlds, as it supposedly provides perception beyond ordinary sight. In his 2001 book, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule*, Rick Strassman hypothesised that the pineal gland, which detects daylight, is responsible for the production and release of DMT, which he says is released at the moments of birth and death.

However, it’s not just DMT that can help you find religion or some kind of higher power. Other psychedelics, including acid, magic mushrooms, and 2CB, can also have a long-lasting impact on a person’s spirituality.



A drawing Alex did of what he experienced during a DMT trip. Courtesy Alex

As well as DMT, Alex has taken acid, mushrooms, and salvia multiple times. “There is so much we have yet to fully comprehend and understand about the workings of the universe, consciousness, and reality,” he says. “(My experiences on psychedelics have) definitely changed the lens in which I

look at the ordinary world.” Alex cites an experience when he took acid at the Museum of Natural History in Los Angeles. “I heard a voice repeating, ‘Unlock your sub-combination’,” he tells Dazed, “and that has stuck with me until this day. Your mind is a door and it has a lock – psychedelics are the key to open the door.”

3ION, a Baltimore-based 29-year-old who asked to go by his artist name, also began believing in a higher power after taking LSD, which he’s now taken once or twice a year since 2013. “I felt at one with everything,” he says. “It felt like I’d found an essential piece of a puzzle, but I still couldn’t articulate what that meant.” 3ION explains that the higher power was there before he started tripping, but says “the LSD made it easier to notice magic in the most mundane parts” of life. “You start to see nature breathing and dancing in this unique way. It felt like the universe was like, ‘I’ve been waiting for you’.

Gemma, Alex, and 3ION all said their psychedelic trips enhanced their creativity. “I felt an afterglow effect,” 3ION tells Dazed, “and felt more inclined to create art.” Alex even made a drawing after one of his trips to “capture the essence” of the experience.

**“Your mind is a door and it has a lock
– psychedelics are the key to open
the door” – Alex**

A [study](#) released in April 2019, also conducted by John Hopkins University, highlighted the profound, life-affirming effects of psychedelic trips. “Experiences that people describe as encounters with God or a representative of God have been reported for thousands of years,” Roland Griffiths, the study’s lead researcher, [said at the time](#). “Although modern Western medicine doesn’t typically consider ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ experiences as one of the tools in the arsenal against sickness, our findings suggest that these encounters often lead to improvements in mental health.”

In recent years, scientists have been discovering the benefits of psychedelics, which have the capacity to relieve symptoms of [anxiety and PTSD](#), as well as [untreatable depression](#). Research which emerged this year found that just one dose of psilocybin – a compound found in magic mushrooms – can reduce depression for [as long as five years](#).

“My life has 100 per cent improved since I started taking psychedelics,” says Gemma. “Looking back, I was lost, I didn’t know what I wanted out of life. (Psychedelic drugs) make you question the narrative you’ve been given, and whether your thoughts, opinions, and actions are your own, which changed my subjectivity and brought me back to myself. I’ve considered God as an option.”



@Nagual222

Alot of scientists believe the Burning Bush is DMT, the Acacia Bush which is abundant in that area is known for its psychoactive properties/ talking to God.

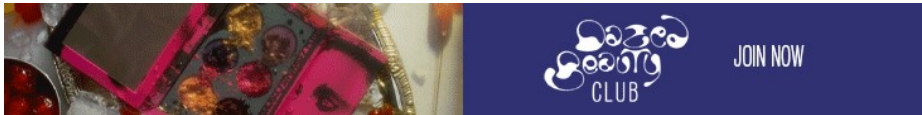
Personally feel this is a bit more accurate due to the intensity of the experience.

Martha agrees. “From my experiences, I’d say my life has changed in the sense that I realised I have to be kinder to myself and take time to pause in the moment,” she explains, adding that her journey with psychedelics is “just beginning” and that she wants “to see more”.

“I always find something profound through these experiences,” Alex adds, “and I’m always on the search to deepen my understanding of myself, the world, and this journey we call life.”

3ION describes his experiences with LSD as “therapeutic”, explaining that it made him feel “more at one with the higher power”. “Rather than making me feel like someone was judging my actions, I began to feel like I am loved unconditionally. I believed in a creator, but my idea of its attributes were skewed,” he says. Now I feel like God is my mother, God is earth, God is the universe, God is multidimensional.”

**Name has been changed*



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Courtesy PDX Stripper Strike

'No justice, no booty': the strippers striking for racial equality

LIFE & CULTURE - NEWS

As part of the PDX Stripper Strike, dancers in Portland have taken to the streets to protest against discrimination in strip clubs across the city

3rd July 2020

Text Brit Dawson



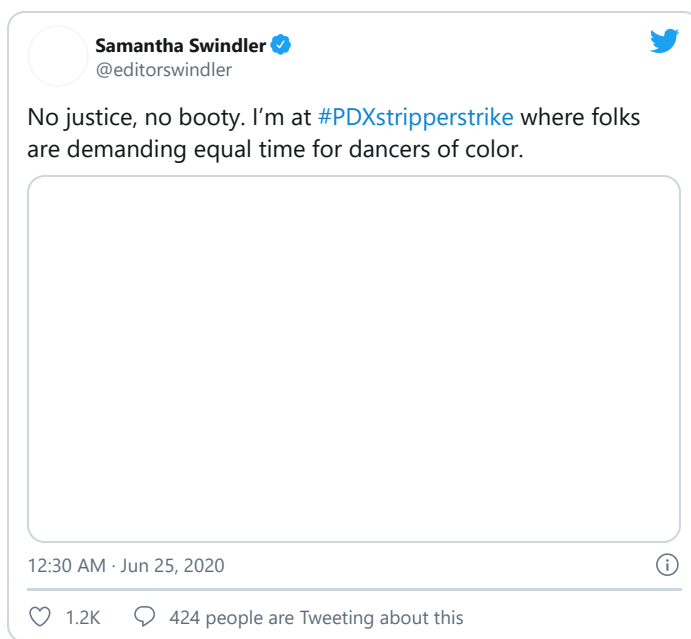
It's a sunny Wednesday afternoon in Portland, and chants of "no justice, no booty" ring out as a group of strippers in patent platform boots march through the city. Holding signs that read, 'Hire Black strippers, tip Black strippers', and 'No reform, no perform', they're striking in protest against racial discrimination in Oregon's strip clubs.

Organised by activist group, the [Boozy Club](#), the strippers are protesting against racial discrimination in Oregon's strip clubs. The group has been holding rallies that have been held since 2019. The group is made up of dancers, DJs, bartenders, and other club workers.

"The thing I've heard over and over," Cat Hollis, the group's leader, tells Dazed, "is that it's the most fun they've ever had at a protest. We usually have a sound system blasting music, and people wearing eight-inch high heels to walk the mile routes."

Activists are campaigning against Portland strip club owners' lack of compliance with current anti-discrimination policies, which they say harm dancers of colour. "Separate is not equal," Hollis continues. "Clubs say they have a certain aesthetic, or that they're a rock and roll club, or suddenly

aren't holding auditions at the time they agreed on the phone after meeting someone in person – or they're asking you to send photos beforehand."



"These are all dog whistles for racism. They are techniques that have been used for a long time in many industries to disenfranchise Black workers."

The group has a list of demands, which include cultural sensitivity training – regarding race, sexual assault awareness, and more – testimonials from current or past staff members about their experiences in the industry, and equal shifts for equal work.

"We aren't asking for anything that we aren't entitled to by our state, local, and federal laws," Hollis continues. "I'm experienced in advocating for my own rights as a Black woman. Seeing the efficiency of past movements in reconciliation in South Africa, post-Jim Crow integration, and #MeToo, it was obvious to me that restorative justice was necessary."

"We aren't asking for anything that we aren't entitled to by our state, local, and federal laws" – Cat Hollis, PDX Stripper Strike

The group plans to deliver their demands by June 30. Portland's retro scene has already had a wealth of responses to the strike, but many clubs haven't heard from. Post-COVID, it's hard to tell which businesses are even open, let alone which ones will stay open. I'm certain many clubs who aren't signed on with us are still doing their due diligence to be in compliance with the law."

It's not just strippers backing the strike. Hollis says customers have been "showing up with a tonne of support for us", adding that they tend to be loyal to dancers as opposed to clubs. "Many of us

already work at multiple clubs,” she explains, “and regular clients will come and see us wherever we’re working. Customers would rather support their favourite entertainers.”

As well as weekly marches, PDX Stripper Strike has set up a [fundraiser](#), which, at the time of writing, has raised almost \$4,000 (£3.2k) of its \$10,000 (£8k) goal. Money donated will be used as a relief fund for those who have suffered income loss amid the [coronavirus](#) pandemic, as well as for future fundraising, legal fees, permit applications so the group can picket particular clubs, and financial support for dancers.



Mary Emily O'Hara 

@MaryEmilyOHara · Jun 25, 2020



Did you know that strippers are on strike in Portland, OR, the city said to have the most strippers per capita of any U.S. city?



Samantha Swindler 

@editorswindler

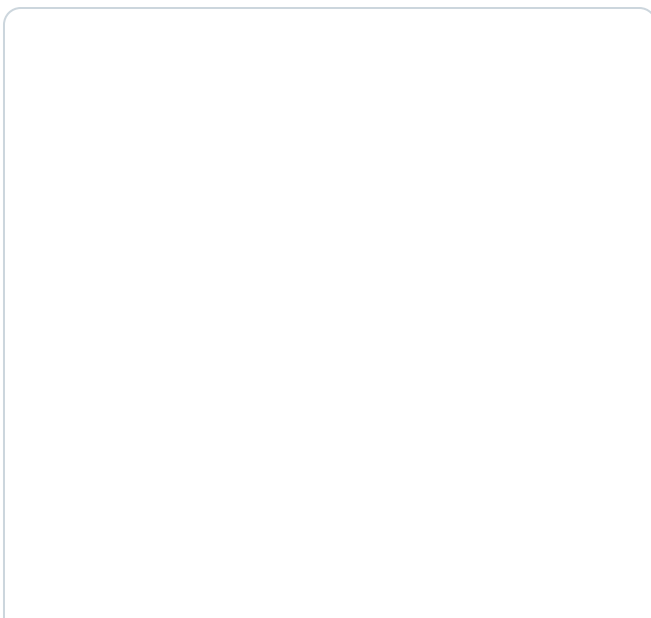
These ladies literally marched a mile and a half in these shoes, y'all.
[#pdxstripperstrike](#)



Mary Emily O'Hara 

@MaryEmilyOHara

Update: I went to the stripper strike today, where dancers picketed Portland's Golden Dragon strip club.
[@HaymarketPole](#) [#pdxstripperstrike](#)



0:27 1.4K views

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“We’re raising money to cover the cost of training for dancers,” Hollis tells Dazed, “as we believe that a dramatic shift in culture will come through education. We’re also providing paid opportunities for Black dancers and dancers of colour to become certified trainers.”

With lockdown only just easing in some parts of the US, many sex workers have faced months with no employment. While some were able to continue their jobs socially distanced – see: Portland’s [drive-thru strip club](#) – most are only just returning to work. Although the PDX Stripper Strike is demanding change, it’s also encouraging customers to support strippers, especially at this time.

“The clubs which are attempting to get in compliance, and are signed onto our programme have had no work stoppages,” says Hollis.

“We are encouraging people to go out to strip clubs,” she concludes, “and not only tip Black butts, but tip all of the dancers, many of whom have not had access to unemployment funding during the crisis.”

You can donate to the PDX Stripper Strike fund [here](#).

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