

Turn on, Tune in, Drop out: a Typology of Modes of Uses of Psychedelic Microdosing



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Abstract

In 2011, American psychologist James Fadiman coined the term ‘microdosing’, - taking small doses of psychedelic substances that do not induce intoxication or altered states, but rather subtle outcomes such as, among others, increased focus. Psychedelic microdosing has quickly become a mass media phenomenon, with accounts claiming microdosing has become the new secret to enhancement in work contexts. Drawing from literature on psychedelic microdosing, technologies of the self, self-identity and sociology of work and leisure, this study understands microdosing as a technology individuals introduce into their lives to modify themselves for various purposes and explores the ways in which the 1960s iconic drug that once offered turning on, tuning in and dropping out, is now finding new uses across different contexts. The study asks *how do individuals use microdoses of classic psychedelic drugs? And how do these individuals make sense of microdosing in their daily lives regarding their work and the self?* The findings indicate three different uses of psychedelic microdosing: (1) as technology of self-esteem and control at work, (2) as a self-help technology, and (3) as a technology of ‘slow living’.

Keywords

Psychedelic drugs, microdosing, self-identity, work, leisure, modernity

International Peer-reviewed Journals in the field:

- 1) International Journal of Drug Policy, Elsevier, Available at:
<https://www.journals.elsevier.com/international-journal-of-drug-policy>
- 2) Cultural Studies, Taylor & Francis Online, Available at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rcus20/current>
- 3) Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, Taylor & Francis Online, Available at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ujpd20/current>

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Introduction

The phrase ‘turn on, tune in and drop out’ (Leary, 2009)- echoed at the Golden Gate Park during a ‘Human Be-In’ Gathering, - the prelude to San Francisco’s Summer of Love. ‘*Turn on*’- advocated Timothy Leary, calling to activate one’s neural ‘equipment’ and become mindful of the environmental triggers we are continuously surrounded with and our own consciousness. ‘*Tune in*’- represented a harmonious interaction with the outside world. ‘*Drop out*’, -disengage from unconscious or forced societal commitments. Dropping out, as Leary suggested, was a symbol of self-reliance and a commitment to change and choice (Leary, 2009). Leary proposed, that the use of psychedelic substances was one means to live what he preached. Beyond these countercultural ideas fueling peace protests and birthing hippie communes, LSD-induced states played a part in motivating ideas and pushing technological progress in various professional fields. Well-known innovators such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Richard Feynman are among the many figures that took up the mind-altering drug for its ability to inspire creativity and fuel new ideas.

Since the counterculture movement, psychedelics were placed on schedule I list of illegal substances and went off-radar in mainstream media. However, in the past decade, clinical research in psychedelics has experienced a revival and spurred what is now called the third wave of psychedelic research¹. This renewed interest attracted substantial media attention. Today, psychedelics have made their comeback, but only in very small doses.

In 2011, Dr. James Fadiman, - an American researcher published *The Psychedelic Explorer’s Guide: Safe, Therapeutic and Sacred Journeys* (Fadiman, 2011). In the book, Fadiman explored the use of psychedelics in different doses. One of his described doses, a microdos, came to be known as a ‘subculture’ of psychedelic use. Although using small doses of psychedelics was known in various indigenous cultures for its perceived benefits, and has been taken up by modern professionals, Fadiman’s book coined the term ‘microdosing’ and introduced it into the mainstream (Johnstad, 2018). Besides, the piece detailed microdosing ‘effects’, awakening imaginations and curiosities of many seeking to improve their lives in various ways.

¹ Pollan (2018) coins 2006 as the sunrise of the third wave of psychedelic research. The first wave is seen to have started with Albert Hoffman’s (Swiss chemist’s) synthesizing of LSD (followed by the now iconic LSD bicycle ride that symbolizes the first ever LSD trip); the second wave was marked by the clinical trials testing psychedelics’ affordances in the 1950s and the 1960s.

Microdosing entails ingesting small doses of psychedelic drugs that do not provide intoxication or alter users' consciousness in significant ways (Johnstad, 2018). Instead, microdosers say they are seeking more subtle outcomes that contribute to living a 'better' life (Johnstad, 2018; Webb, Copes and Hendricks, 2019). The trend quickly spread over the internet and social media, where individuals share their experiences and information, which further facilitates access to these practices on a mass scale (Johnstad, 2018). Its popularity can be observed across social media platforms: in 2015, a *Reddit* forum dedicated particularly to the practice had 1,600 subscribers (Solon, 2016). Since then, its subscriber base has grown to 99,7000 (Reddit, 2020). Google searches for the term 'microdosing' have increased by 400% from 2013 to 2020 (google trends, n.d.). Reflecting this growing interest and visibility of microdosing classic psychedelics, news media coverage has increased too. On the one hand, a growing line of media reports has focused on how microdosing LSD is helping professionals across fields increase their concentration, problem solving and productivity (Solon, 2016; Swisher, 2018). These reports frame microdosing as the new 'productivity hack' in a world where 'no one can afford to lose a step anymore' (Swisher, 2018). Another strand of media reports focused on microdosing classic psychedelics in combating depression and anxiety (Garlick, 2019; Boseley, 2018).

Incorporating taking microdoses of psychedelics into one's week on a regular basis means intentionally adjusting the body and the mind. The felt need to change and transform bodies, as in the case of microdosing psychedelics, is situated within the larger social and cultural context. According to Bauman (1998), the capitalist work ethic advocates discipline and self-control as a major trait of a decent worker. Similarly, Martin (1992) suggests that the drive for flexibility and productivity in western societies under late capitalism led towards the need for a vigilant, responsive, and tireless body that can perform at high levels for unending stretches of time. Fasting, biohacking and cognitive enhancement through nootropics are only some of the technologies geared at optimizing the body that have made it to today's work floor.

Although research into psychedelic microdosing is burgeoning, empirical accounts exploring individuals' meaning making around microdosing psychedelics are largely lacking, with only a few exceptions (Johnstad, 2018; Beaton, Copes, Webb, Hochstetler & Hendricks, 2020; Webb et al, 2019). And while mass media channels are continuously displaying microdosing to be the new way to 'win' at work, to this day no research has looked at the ways people think about the use of microdoses of psychedelic drugs at work and in relation to the self. This research asks the following questions: *how do individuals use microdoses of classic psychedelic drugs? And how do these individuals make sense of microdosing in their daily lives*

regarding their work and the self? The sub-questions will tap into what, how often and for what purposes people choose to microdose. delve into how people use microdosing as a technology of the self in re-shaping the very notion of their identity, and what role microdosing plays in their relationship to their work and other people. Further, this research will explore how microdosing can be linked to wider societal trends in the domains of work, well-being and self-improvement that may motivate people to use psychedelics in their everyday lives.

This research aims to contribute to building knowledge on how classic psychedelics² find new uses and gain new meaning through their re-appropriation in work contexts and in re-shaping the ‘self’ in everyday life. Does this rising phenomenon reveal something about the ways in which we think about work, free time and ourselves in a post-industrial society? And could it be changing the ways people relate to these spheres in their waking lives?

Further, building on ideal types that surface from the data, this study will draw a typography of the various ways in which individuals understand their use of microdosing psychedelics. This is one of the major contributions of this study. The empirical research is informed by seven semi-structured, in-depth interviews with individuals that engage in a microdosing practice (n=7) and 67 self-reports posted on social media platform *Reddit* (n=67).

Theoretical Framework

Drug effects.

Notably, this research considers drugs as entities with stable qualities, yet, their ‘purported effects are produced in their encounters with various other actors, contexts and practices.’ (Pienaara, Murphy, Race & Lea, 2020, p. 2). Drug effects are not solely properties of inherent qualities of the drug itself but are constructed by the contextual structures that are commonly seen as separate from the substance (Fraser, Moore & Keane, 2014). In light of this view, Dennis (2019) suggests that drug effects cannot be tracked to the choices of the user, the qualities of the substance or even the context of use, but must be seen as a complex interaction of ‘bodies, technologies and forces’ (p.21). These notions help give insight into why the same drug behaves and is perceived in various ways in different times and contexts.

Following this view, drug use in any amount does not exist in a vacuum of drug effects, but also in the social and cultural climate, inter-personal relationships, environments in which individuals find themselves, and the self. An important implication of this approach then is that

² Such as LSD, DMT, 2-CB, mushrooms, psilocybin and others.

it allows to expand the focus of this analysis and consider more carefully the agency of human and non-human actors in producing drug effects. Particularly significant for this research, it provides a route to mapping out actors, meaningful relationships, practices and views that together produce individual experiences of drug effects.

Microdosing as a Technology of the self

‘Today, after several decades of suppression and neglect, psychedelics are having a renaissance. A new generation of scientists, many of them inspired by their own personal experience of the compounds, are testing their potential’ (Pollan, 2018, p.4). While researchers and individuals themselves are experimenting with various doses of psychedelic compounds, to this day, much of the existing sociological research is concerned with high doses of psychedelics. These studies explore the culture and culture shifts around psychedelics since their popularization in the 1960s (Lee & Shlain, 1992), and the techno-appropriation, or the drug use of individuals from the fields of tech and IT to aid their innovating potential in their fields (Pham & De Kosnik, 2019).

The rising popularity of psychedelic microdosing has received increasing attention from qualitative scholars, yet, to this day, only a handful of qualitative studies have focused on the social aspects of the phenomenon (Beaton et al. 2020; Webb et al. 2019; Johnstad, 2019). These studies look at individuals’ motivations and perceived effects of psychedelic compounds microdosers report. In one of the first studies that looked at why and how people microdose psychedelics, Johnstad (2018) demonstrates that microdosers do not aim for intoxication, but for the enhancement of their everyday functioning. Further, Beaton et al. (2020), encountered the following main justifications for microdosing psychedelics among their informants: denial of injury, self-sustaining, self-fulfillment, appeal to loyalties, appeal to normality and knowledgeableness³. They also suggest that none of the study participants ‘made excuses’ for their microdosing but based them on the grounds of their justifications. The authors show that by emphasizing justifications and acknowledging their drug use, participants positioned

³ Beaton et al. (2020):(1) Individuals justified their drug use by pointing at the lack of harm from classic psychedelic substances. Some individuals believed psychedelics were safer than over the counter medications. (2) People that used self-sustaining justification offered that psychedelic drugs were a means of treating personal hardship, and if done safely, should not be condemned. (3) Individuals that appealed to self-fulfillment justification emphasized the use of psychedelics in enhancing perceptions, creative abilities, developing an inner life and heightening sensations, and in turn better themselves. (4) Individuals justified their psychedelic drug use as appeal to loyalties: the belief that their behavior is appropriate, since it not only benefits themselves, but the people around them, through improving and modifying the self. (5) Appeal to normality justification entails the recognition of drug use being normal in other settings and cultures. (6) Knowledgeableness was a justification people offered appealing to their curiosity and the need for knowledge around substances.

microdoses of classic psychedelics as ‘being a tool for success’ (p.12), allowing them to show how their substance use was socially acceptable. The issue of felt stigma around drug use and the felt dichotomy between social expectations and substance use surfaced in the study by Webb et al. (2019). They show how the participants in their study showcased ‘middle-class values’, by creating social distance between those who use drugs recreationally and themselves, - who aim for an improvement in their lives, in this way normalizing their drug use.

More recently, a study by Pienaara et al. (2020) looked at the use of drugs as ‘technologies of the self’ and explored the role of drug use in LGBTQ+ communities as a tool in shaping sexual behavior and suggest that drug use can transform gendered experiences and allow the expression of non-normative gender identities. They treat drug use as a form of ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault, 1988) and position drug use as a productive force in enacting queer identities. While Pienaara et al. (2020) look at full recreational doses of drugs in regard to shaping sexual behavior, the Foucauldian framework they utilize offers interesting avenues for the study of microdosing classic psychedelics.

Technologies of the self are one of the four technologies⁴ coined by the social theorist Michel Foucault (1988). Foucault (1988, p.18) states that technologies of the self are technologies which ‘permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own *bodies* and *souls*, *thoughts*, *conduct*, and way of *being*, so as to *transform* themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’. In other words, Foucault used this notion to describe how and why individuals perform various operations on their minds and bodies. In the context of this research, I offer that microdosing is one such technology. However, the theory does not offer a cohesive, developed framework and poses some tantalizing questions. For this reason, I now turn to scholars that have contributed to further theorizing Foucault’s ideas.

Ian Burkitt (2002) addresses some of the theoretical gaps Foucault had not lived to complete and expands upon the notion of technologies of the self. Picking apart the definition of technologies of the self, asks what we mean by soul and ways of being? What about bodies, thoughts and conduct? Here, he addresses several crucial questions that are relevant for this study. Burkitt (2004) defines technologies as ‘*the practical rationality that accompanies and guides productive activities, and, thus, is enmeshed in those social relations in which people are educated and trained.*’ (Burkitt, 2004, p.223)

Foucault (1988) suggests that each of the technologies relates to modes of training and modification of human beings, not only in terms of building and acquiring skills but in

⁴ Others being technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of production.

establishing attitudes as well. He then links this notion to Karl Max's Capital, in which 'every technique of production requires modification of individual conduct' (Foucault, 1988, p.18). Burkitt (2004) brings this forward, arguing that the training of the human body and the formation of self through practices instill 'habitus, capacities and skills in the human body, along with certain attitudes and beliefs' (p.221). A similar narrative is found in the work of Mauss (1973). Speaking about techniques of the body, he suggests that in any culture, education involves training the body. He states that such training is present in techniques of production, of sports, art, or learning the 'correct' moral predispositions.

Foucault (1998) offered that the four types of his proposed technologies never function independently of each other and cannot be reduced to one another because they lead to different kinds of domination. Burkitt (2004) adds that, besides domination, technologies are always associated with production. Burkitt argues that human beings do not only produce labor or objects, they also produce selves. He suggests that the 'dark side' of *habitus* is such that it figures in relations of power to support the current social system. He argues that what human beings 'produce through their own powers leads automatically to a state of unambiguous domination' (p.221). The self is a product of these technologies, as much as it is a product of technologies of the self. Here, reflexivity and critical reason, according to Burkitt, becomes a necessary capacity of a developed self.

The framework of technologies of the self in light of the making of the cultural self, outlined here, and the intercontextuality of technologies allows to contextualize the microdosing phenomena. This study is unique in that it addresses the question how individuals make sense of microdosing practices in their lives, focusing on their perceptions around work and the self. Further, it will shed light on how microdosing is used and looked at as a technology of transforming 'the self'. I here aim to show that drug use, and in particular microdosing, does not exist in a vacuum. This study aims to conceptualize the ways in which individuals make sense of microdosing psychedelics and tie it into the larger context of work, leisure and the self in postmodernity.

The Reflexive Self and Work in 'High Modernity'

In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens (1991) suggests that in an uncertain postmodern world, the self transforms into a reflexive, circular project, where mastery over one's own body and the self provides the certainty essential for everyday living. 'What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity' (p.71). Giddens (1991) offers that the increasing complexity of globalized institutions

has forced individuals to live more reflectively. Further, this awareness creates a potential for transformation, and may even induce change in itself. For Giddens reflexivity is a tool, that facilitates building the necessary self-understanding to plan and construct what the author calls a 'life trajectory' that is in line with the inner wishes of the individual.

The aim set by such a reflexive project is to create or re-introduce unity (from fragmentation), certainty (from uncertainty) and gain back empowerment. Giddens (1991) illustrates that the means through which individuals accomplish such a task is through appropriating various strands of knowledge expropriated by modernity's systems. According to him, this varies from natural to social sciences to the self-help movement. Eventually, this leads to individuals piecing together various strands of knowledge to create self-narratives, stories about themselves, their lives and worlds. These self-narratives then must demonstrate biographical continuity both intelligible to yourself and others. Actualizing these narratives, lifestyles are formed, and guidelines set for self-development. Importantly, Giddens' theory suggests that the reflexivity of the self extends to the body. Here, the body is far from a passive object, and instead a part of the action system in shaping the self. This is achieved through what he calls body awareness, which the individual looks at for indication of its requirements (for example, exercise or diet). In the context of microdosing classic psychedelics, the body is subjected to psychedelic compounds aiming to transform the functioning of one's physiology and, essentially, the self.

Further, the actualization of self-identity entails the control of time. Fundamentally, it implies establishing areas of time detached from connections to external temporal orders. Leading time sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2010) suggests that the accelerated pace of life and the frequently felt scarcity of time is a product of socioeconomic and technological developments. Due to the changed conditions of work and private life, time becomes increasingly valued. In terms of microdosing, control of time means breaking away from universalized standards of measuring time and arguably, the modes of utilizing time in terms of productivity standards. This is an interesting point of consideration, as one of the areas of study in new pharmacological research on psychedelics and microdosing has been concerned with the ways it impacts individuals' perception of time (see Yanakieva, Polychroni, Family, Williams, Luke & Terhune, 2018), finding that microdoses of LSD produced temporal expansion of perception of time intervals without subjective alterations of consciousness. A question of whether microdosing helps remove, to some extent, the consideration of time on the part of the microdoser arises.

Another fundamental aspect of the self in high modernity that Giddens (1991) outlines is the notion of authenticity. He argues that '[a] moral thread of self-actualization is one of

authenticity, based on 'being true to oneself' (p.78). Scholars suggest a variety of reasons for the growing need for individuals to reach and emphasize authenticity in their lives in modern, post-industrial societies, such as increased mobility, distrust in social order and distrust in authorities (Erickson, 1995; Gardner et al., 2011; Lindholm, 2009). For instance, mobility increases the time people spend among strangers, encouraging and enabling people to negotiate who one 'really' is in face of the masses. Given that the rising importance attributed to the notion of authenticity in people's lives, Carroll (2015) suggests it has also increasingly become a 'gold standard [...] in organizations' (p.2)

Lastly, a discussion on lifestyles and work is an important point of departure for this study. Although the sphere of work is, for a large part, structured by economic compulsion and the ways in which individuals behave on the work floor are shaped less by individual control, the activities of lifestyle and life trajectories are intrinsically linked to all spheres of life including work. Further, as I will discuss later, various changes in the nature of work today have further blurred the boundaries between leisure and work. 'Work is by no means completely separate' from other areas of people's lives 'and choice of work and work milieu forms a basic element of lifestyle orientations in the extremely complex modern division of labor' (Giddens, 1991, p.82). Further, work and the time spent working shapes much of our experience of life, suggests Aileen O'Carroll (2015). She offers that with the increasing flexibility of work (contracts, hours, telework technologies) work and time spent working have become increasingly ambiguous and unpredictable. People no longer simply leave the office once they close the office door; the office is now a click away, making its way into other areas of one's life.

In this light, the reflexive self is as active in their leisure and personal lives as in the work they do. This is brought forward, I would argue, not only by a complex division of labor, but by raising the bar and (both interior and exterior) pressure for advanced intellectual and creative skills among the highly educated in the 'knowledge economy' and the new meanings around work. Numerous scholars (i.e. Cohen, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, & Baker, 2008) in the past decades have noted the rising pressures in the modern workplace and particularly in highly skilled and creative fields.

Acknowledging that individuals move between various milieus, like work and home, Giddens calls various segments of modes of lifestyle choices and behavior within them *lifestyle sectors*. 'A lifestyle sector concerns a timespace `slice' of an individual's overall activities, within which a reasonably consistent and ordered set of practices is adopted and enacted.' (Giddens, 1991, p.84). This could, for example, mean what someone chooses to do on a certain day of a week, or a specific time of the day. This notion is important to this thesis, since microdosing is

practiced in certain segments of time and contexts (that co-determines how drugs are experienced), likely various based on his/her own aims and motivations.

Giddens's theory of the self in modernity, in combination with Foucault's notion of technologies of the self, proves especially useful for this study. It gives a holistic view of social agents controlling and managing themselves in the context of uncertainty in modernity and explains the ways in which such control over the self is motivated (reflexivity) and executed (technologies of the self).

Methodology

Qualitative Approach.

This study uses a qualitative approach to investigate the ways in which individuals engage in microdosing of psychedelic drugs and how they construe, understand and make sense of microdosing in relation to their work, relationships and the self. A qualitative approach was adopted to gain a detailed understanding of the 'webs' of meaning that underlie this phenomenon, including people's perceptions, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Geertz, 2003). Further, the qualitative approach and the aim to understand and explain phenomena rather than generalize, lends itself to the ontology of qualitative research and is closely related to the notion of the *emic* perspective, which 'compels the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities' (Fetterman, 2015, p. 181). O'Dawyer and Bernauer (2013) suggest that the recognition of the social world as containing 'multiple' realities through which people view the outside world, is one of the most significant underpinnings of qualitative research. This research not only deals with various points of views, but also perceptions of altered consciousness (in microdoses). It is important to acknowledge that multiple realities may exist both between people (and within them) at different times and states of consciousness. Documenting these realities in this study is central to building an insight into why people think and behave in the ways they do.

Data.

This study relies on qualitative data collected from seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals that microdose classic psychedelics in the Netherlands, and 67 self-reports posted on social media platform *Reddit*. Interviews are a form of communication through which individuals are asked to talk about their lives, experiences and views, and by which empirical data about the social world is generated (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). Holstein and Gubrium (1999) offered a view of the interview as an 'interpersonal drama with a developing plot' (p.112).

In other words, interviews are co-constructed forms of knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee. A major advantage of using qualitative interviews for this study was the depth of data which can be collected on the ways in which people, see, think and feel about microdosing psychedelics regarding their work, leisure and relationships. Through actively posing questions, interviews provide the opportunity to glimpse into the minds of others and therefore are an effective way of mapping out people's perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors.

Another data source this study uses are self-reports from a social media platform *Reddit*. *Reddit* is an online social platform 'that has attributes of a forum: it allows sharing blurbs of text and media as posts that involve votes and commentary' (De Choudhury & De, 2014, p.71). The platform is commonly used as a social feed of information. De Choudhury & De (2014, p.71) offer that *Reddit* is an excellent channel to study social phenomena since it offers a dissociative anonymity 'clock' which allows users to discuss feelings and sensitive information that may be considered socially unacceptable or stigmatic.

Sample.

I began recruiting the participants using purposeful sampling techniques. First, I had visited a gathering organized by a member a *Facebook* group by the name Amsterdam Conscious Community. The group organizes meetings, dinners, lectures and other social activities. I had initially joined this group in 2017 out of personal curiosity. I never was an active member of the group, but would see posts about microdosing come up once and again from the users of the group. This signaled that some of the members of the group may engage in the practice. This was confirmed when I attended the mentioned gathering, at which I spoke to some other guests and was able to recruit three individuals that were microdosing psychedelics at the time. Through the conversations in the gathering, the prospective participants were screened for eligibility. The major characteristics that functioned as selection criteria were: (1) systematically microdosed in the past year, and (2) based in the Netherlands. From there, the recruited participants were invited for an interview. The next four participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. In other words, interviewees pointed out people they believed were microdosing. In total, eleven other people that participants had suggested were contacted, and four agreed to meet for an interview.

Six out of seven interviews were conducted in person and took place both in public spaces, such as cafés, and the participants' homes. The seventh interview was conducted over a phone call. Considering that speaking about drugs can be sensitive to some, the choice of the location was left up to the respondents. The length of the interviews varied from 48 minutes to 1

hour 02 minutes. The interviewees were informed about the research, and all gave consent to have the interviews recorded and transcribed. To protect participant identities, each individual was given a pseudonym (summary of participant demographic characteristics is included as Appendix A).

Initially, the study was designed to only use interview data from 15-20 interviewees. However, due to the uneasy times in which the data collection for this study took place, further sampling and getting people to participate in the study became increasingly difficult. In the midst of March 2020, the world had come under lockdown due to regulations put in place by governments around the globe to contain the spread of the new COVID-19 virus. Following these new regulations, one after the other interview cancellations began to come in, and not surprisingly. Many people expressed being preoccupied with learning to deal with the new world and were therefore not able to go on with the study.

Luckily, I have been able to speak to six interviewees prior to the lockdown and one was willing to speak over the phone. While seven interviews could have sufficed for drawing a typology, I went on to look for rich data sources, and wound up on the social media platform *Reddit*. Like the interviews, this platform proved to be an excellent source of data in answering the questions this research poses for a couple of reasons. *Reddit* has been both criticized and praised for its lack of provision or ‘filter’ over the content that can go onto *sub-Reddits* (various forums; Gilbert, 2013), therefore, the platform hosts a variety of viewpoints and experiences. Further, as I have previously mentioned, *Reddit* provides people with an anonymity ‘cloak’, allowing them to discuss sensitive topics that may be considered stigmatic (De Choudhury & De, 2014), such as in the case of drug use. Drawing from here, a random sample of *Reddit* posts under the category ‘report’ were collected from *Reddit*’s microdosing page. Reports were searched from January 2019 until January 2020. This time slot was selected for it to coincide with the year in which the interviews took place. A total of 334 reports were found. A random set of 20% of the reports were sampled. Starting with one, every fifth post has been included into the sample.

Data Analysis.

The transcribed interviews and *Reddit* data were subjected to qualitative analysis using a grounded theory approach. The concept of grounded theory (GT) was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. Although the approach underwent significant refinements, GT data analysis focuses on building useful analytical categories from the analysis of data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) offer two basic principles for this iterative process. First, the categories should emerge

from the data through the continuous process of data analysis, rather than categories being forced on the data. And second, researchers must develop and employ *theoretical sensitivity* or, in other words, they must be open to reflect and see the empirical material with the help of theoretical terms. Guided by the key principles of GT, individual cases have been analyzed and compared, resulting in a descriptive typology of different uses of microdosing. In practical terms, the coding process went through several stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Analysis and Results

The analysis of the interviews and *Reddit* self-reports showed a variety of ways in which individuals think about and use psychedelic microdosing and how they position microdosing in relation to the self and their work. Three major categories surfaced in both strands of data. In the analysis that follows, I address three key uses of microdosing classic psychedelics:

- 1 Turn on:** microdosing as a technology of self-esteem and control at work
- 2 Tune in:** microdosing as a self-help technology
- 3 Drop out:** microdosing as a technology of ‘slow living’

Before diving into the descriptions of these modes, it is important to distinguish here that the analysis that follows is concerned with different types of *uses* of microdosing, rather than types of *individuals*. Further, the described types also showcase some underlying communality. Most significantly, focus, sincerity, self-reflection and improvement were notions emphasized in all three types but applied in diverse ways in various scenarios.

Turn on: microdosing as a technology of self-esteem and control at work

One of the most common experiences of adult life is work. It is not surprising, therefore, that work was both one of the major motivations for - and spheres in which microdosing psychedelics appeared to be used and discussed both on *Reddit* and in the interviews. All the interview respondents, as well as the accounts that identified their occupation on *Reddit*, were highly skilled individuals in high-end competitive occupations. From the software engineers to dancers, painters, academics, and designers in this study, the perceived potential of microdosing to introduce higher productivity, concentration, focus and creativity into their lives was the major motivation for many to start taking small doses of psychedelics. However, the way that people narrated their use of psychedelics at work appeared to derive from the mainstream view of microdosing as merely a cognitive kick. Microdosing, here, has a strong relationship with

the shaping of the self and negotiating temporalities and pace of life, where work appears to be one of the major axes around which identity is developed. Further, it stems deeply from the increasingly hybrid nature of the modern workplace and its anxieties. Finally, microdosing is used in the quest for 'authentic' work in creative occupations.

In today's world, we spend a third of our waking hours at work. It is not surprising then that work comprises a big part of our lives. Individuals in this study felt that work makes up a big part of their identity. Work is far from merely a means to earn a living, but is an important contributing factor to developing the self and one's inner world. Mia, a twenty-six year old PhD candidate, asked whether she uses microdoses of psychedelics at work, answers:

'I think many academics, myself included see work as part of themselves [...] I feel it's part of my identity, and I think that's why it's so hard for me to define the line between work and not-work' (Mia, 26, PhD candidate)

While she refers here specifically to how her identity is tied to being an academic, other study participants seem to express a similar sentiment. Mateo (29), a software engineer in a large Dutch corporation expressed:

'I think yes work is one of the things I focus on [when microdosing]. But work is a big part of who I am and doing my work well too... so I think by working on work I am also working on myself...' (Mateo, 29, Software Engineer)

And painter Santiago (37) describes his relation to work, for which he uses microdoses of psychedelics as '*something that comes from within you*' and as an '*inner process*' (Santiago, 37, Painter).

These accounts make clear that work to these individuals goes beyond a nine-to-five schedule. It is also a source for self-expression, recognition and meaning. This is most likely due to the sample of individuals that are both highly knowledgeable experts in their respective fields. The gratifications these individuals derive from their work feeds into the loss of boundaries between work and leisure time. In the past decades, scholars have noted the blurring boundaries between work and non-work. Some have even gone as far as to suggest that work can be considered the 'new leisure' (Lewis, 2003). This has especially been noted in the case of home-based working and freelance work, where 'the blurred spatial and temporal boundaries between work and non-work are often associated with work intruding into non-work time' (Lewis, 2003,

p.347). This contributes to erasing the boundaries between spheres in life; in this way, work can never be 'completed', which further draws people away from other activities. Lewis (2003) links this development to the ever-increasing presence of communication and information technologies that allow people to work anywhere and anytime. This sentiment was expressed by this study's participant Mia:

'I think for me it can be difficult to 'leave' work, even when I have physically left, I might still think about my project, or even answer some emails' (Mia, 26, PhD candidate)

Similarly, Pustovrh, Mali and Arnaldi (2018) in their study on pharmacological cognitive enhancement in the workplace suggest that the modern workplace has become hybrid. Today, people work in increasingly complex environments where they interact with smart digital technologies, or are in some way affected by them. According to the scholars, these technologies facilitate greater responsiveness and productivity, as well as generally higher performance in the workplace. However, beyond technology's unquestionable convenience, it also raises the bar when it comes to expectations and norms that are being put upon human actors. Mateo refers both to technological advancements and the human relation to them by saying:

'I think the pressure is coming from everywhere. It's not like in the old days when you had a computer as big as the wall and you have the whole day to make a calculation... no, now everything goes quickly and you should, too... That's maybe sad and it leaves a lot of people out...but it's either you adapt or you don't' (Mateo, 29, Software Engineer)

Besides technologization in the workplace, the bar rose with the arrival and persistence of capitalist logic. However, the notion of capitalist logic of production has transformed from indicating obedience and working tirelessly for a great number of hours at the conveyor belt, to being primarily occupied with monetizing creative skills and advanced intellectual capacities of individuals. This also presents the dominant way in which by working hard and 'adapting' to the pace, as Mateo (29, Software Engineer) expresses, highly educated individuals with unique skillsets can transform their cultural capital into economic capital. While this unquestionably adds a layer of meaning to work, it also makes these individuals more susceptible to forms of exploitation, as in the case of artists not being rewarded for exhibitions (because they like

making art), or academics working long hours and weekends voluntarily ‘sacrificing’ for the sake of their jobs. This new kind of *invisible exploitation* makes these individuals achieve incredibly well. This is reflected in Mateo’s views above (29, Software Engineer) and Lotte’s (23, Photographer) explanation on how she was faced with tasks such as learning theory prior the project. She contextualized that theory and philosophical ideas are increasingly a part of contemporary art. She continues:

‘During my work I had to read quite some [...] theory, [...] but I have dyslexia, which gives me [...] a hard time, when I was a child especially. Microdosing really helps to give me more concentration and actually focus on the words and on the sentences [...] it’s part of my job’ (Lotte, 23, photographer)

In this line of thought, microdosing is used to treat something that is seen as ‘deficient’, in this case a learning disorder, and adjust the body using techniques such as microdosing in such a way as to achieve what is perceived as ‘normal’ in order to fulfill work requirements. The preparation for the internship, in Lotte’s case, which took place after work, was seen as a given, and as something she herself had to ‘improve’ in her own time. Adjusting the body and mind, therefore, to become more vigilant and responsive to perform at high levels in a neoliberal society becomes one of the technologies at the individuals’ disposal.

Mia (26, PhD candidate) does not express having struggled with disorders prior to starting using microdoses of psychedelics. Instead, she explains how pressure to produce is changing the ways in which she perceives how much she should in fact be producing, and ascribes her anxieties over the amount of work to be a product of her subjectivity:

‘Sometimes it can get much, but it’s not really... it’s not that it’s objectively much, it’s much in my head, because [...] I think I just did not maybe know how to manage with it very well... and then it becomes difficult.’ (Mia, 26, PhD candidate)

Here, Mia (26, PhD candidate) also communicated a certain hesitation over her capabilities to deal with the pressures that ‘come with the job’. Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist most widely known for introducing his hierarchy of needs, asserted that self-esteem and job satisfaction are fundamentally interconnected. Maslow conceptualized self-esteem as a product of the feeling of competence, self-respect and gratification (Rouse, 2004). Yet we have seen, with increasingly pervasive technology and the excellerating pace of work, expectations sky-rocketed. And along with them, so did the feelings of a lack of competence to fulfill these expectations. While the interviewees were

highly skilled professionals, the feeling of lack of competence in the workplace was one of the determining factors that drew them to - and motivated them to stay microdosing psychedelics. Lotte (23, Photographer) explains this in the context of her photography practice:

‘I used microdosing when I was photographing and that just gave me a certain focus and a boost in my self-esteem. I don't know what comes first, but for me that was interesting. I get more focus on the day itself... completing my task and it was more fun as well.’ (Lotte, 23, Photographer)

Here, she explains how the perceived focus in the context of her practice, and being able to finish a task, worked to boost her self-esteem. Creative and ‘knowledge-intensive’ work has also been noted to carry a lot of ambiguity given the non-standardized and highly specialized nature of this work. This ambiguity has been noted to be most problematic in the case when a knowledge worker lacks established status and credentials that are assigned in traditional professions (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012). This applies in particular to several of the interviewees, in whose work ambiguity is conspicuously present: freelance designers, photographers, painters.

In my sample, microdosing was used as a technique to remove ambiguity from work situations. By being able to focus on the present moment, which Lotte (23) identifies as a central ‘drug effect’ in microdosing, she is able to control the situation and thus remove felt loss of control. Mia (26, PhD candidate) conveys a similar sentiment by saying ‘*It (microdosing psychedelics) just makes me at ease and feel in control of the flow, it brings me a little bit further...*’ (Mia, 26, PhD candidate). A *Reddit* user reports: ‘*it feels as if it comes from your head saying you can do this instead of the physical capacity to do so*’ (*Reddit* user 1).

Taking control of one’s work, relationships and own behaviour was one of the most common themes in the interviews (4 out of 7 interviewees) and the *Reddit* reports (21 out of 67 *Reddit* reports). Further, the felt control and rise in self-esteem that the participants noted as one of the major ‘drug effects’, was caused by inducing slowness in work and in such a way, re-creating their relation to work. Mia, who microdoses for work once or twice a week, said:

‘With microdosing, it’s like this to do list disappears into the background, and so you can focus on what is right in front of you... I think that was the main thing why I needed, or maybe wanted it... to kind of just, not worry what’s next, what else I have to do, and just do...’ (Mia, PhD Candidate, 27)

A *Reddit* user, who is a dancer by training and microdoses at work, has also pointed at a similar focus on the now and how that had helped her transform her experience at work:

‘You can even feel where the muscles originate from, join to and end. This helps movement execution become easier as you can feel your muscles and ‘access’ them easier.’ (*Reddit* user 1)

Slowness at work was further regarded as the main ingredient to ‘authenticity’ at work. The notion of authenticity surfaced both in relation to work and to ‘the self’. Interesting here is how the blurring line between work and leisure, both closely linked to identity, seems to play out in overlapping reasons for use are mentioned for both spheres of life. In relation to microdosing to access an ‘*authentic place*’ (Santiago, 37, painter) within oneself to reaching one’s full potential at work, Santiago suggests:

‘You’re creating something rather than copying. Yeah, that’s the first point, I guess. Or can you merely copy to create something? That’s the question of being honest, being authentic with your work [...] then you create something worthy’ (Santiago, 37, painter)

In a similar fashion, Santiago (37, painter) communicates the same quest for authenticity with microdosing in his personal life: ‘*it helps you be completely and truly yourself, raw and authentic*’.

The theme of authenticity also dominated the work discourse on *Reddit*, with numerous accounts reading ‘*I feel like my work has become more authentic [...] I can put more of myself in it*’ (*Reddit* user 36) and in relation to one’s social environment at work: ‘*I am more original and honest with myself. I can be authentic with my colleagues [...] I think that influences my work too*’ (*Reddit* user 12).

In *Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work: New Forms of Informal Control*, Peter Fleming (2009, p.6) suggests that an ‘immense ideological apparatus is being deployed that aims to develop a ‘dialogue’ between capital and labour, work and life; and to harness competitive, productive, and innovative energies required in the global economy.’ Appealing to the notion of the authentic self at work, according to Fleming, is one of the ways such ends are

met. Further, scholars have suggested features of the changing social structure including anonymity caused by increased mobility as one of the denominators for a reach of authenticity (Erickson, 1995; Lindholm, 2009). While the location of the individuals behind *Reddit* reports is unknown, all of the interviewees in this study lived in the major cities in the Netherlands, and had further addressed the role of the city environment in their choice to microdose classic psychedelics. This will be further discussed in section ‘*Drop out: microdosing as a technology of slow living*’.

Tune in: microdosing as a self-help technology

‘The unexamined life is not worth living’ is a famous dictum Socrates uttered during his trial for corrupting the youths of Ancient Greece. This is also a dictum that echoed in the accounts of a number of this study’s participants. Microdosing, some participants suggest, can be a tool of self-examination and subsequently, - adjustment for the better and with the aim of a more healthy, happy and fulfilled life. These ideas gave ground to the formation of the third ideal-type: microdosing as a self-help technology. The echoes of self-help in microdosing practices were present in three out of seven interviews and eleven *Reddit* reports.

Liepa, a twenty-three year old media studies student based in Amsterdam, describing her experiences with microdosing psychedelics, came back to the notion of self-examination and reflexivity. For her, the drug of her choice (LSD) that she microdoses during her days off, is a tool of self-examination:

‘It (microdosing) has much to do with my philosophical stance. ‘The unexamined life is not worth living’ or in other words: if you do not know yourself, how can you know anything else. It’s about continuous thinking and going deeper within yourself’ (Liepa, 23, student)

Liepa’s use of microdosing in her daily life resembles what came to be known as ‘self-help’. Drawing from her belief that self-examination leads to positive change in oneself, she argues:

‘I don’t think change is possible if you are not willing to change. That’s why no one can really help you...you need to do it yourself’ (Liepa, 23, student)

The interviewee put the responsibility for modifying herself so as to be able to deal with various issues in her life, upon herself. Liepa explains that her motivation to microdose arose from a realization of personal trauma, and the wish to liberate herself from behaviors that resulted from it. Heidi Marie Rimke (2000) defines self-help as an activity ‘presumed to be voluntary and individualistic. Based upon notions such as choice, autonomy and freedom, self-help relies upon the principle of individuality and entails self-modification and ‘improvement’ (p.62). Having identified their own ‘fallbacks’ through continuous examination, individuals are then set out to adjust themselves and their behaviour in the quest of ‘improvement’. Or in Giddens’s terms: employing reflexivity to build self-understanding and accordingly set ‘life trajectories’ in line with own’s inner wishes.

What is interesting in the case of microdosing as self-help in contrast to phenomena like self-help literature, is that it does not rely on experts that have the authority to give advice and guide individuals through the process of self-modification. Instead, the authority of self-knowledge and self-modification is seen as locked ‘within’ an individual and it is with the help of microdosing that these answers can be ‘extracted’. This discourse was apparent in many *Reddit* reports:

‘It feels as though, for the first time, the ‘how’ is clear and within my grasp. As if the answer always were, because, truly, it always has been.’ (*Reddit* user twenty-two)

‘I believe LSD supplemented in helping me look inward instead of outward.’ (*Reddit* user twenty-one)

Similar accounts emerged in the interviews:

The answers are within you all the time. Just a social kind of model that doesn't allow you to express everything but [...] since a young age, I would say, actually I had opinions about many topics since a young age, I needed a little push to put them outside’ (Santiago, 37, painter)

‘In the essence, it's that you find answers inside yourself [...] so I think it's (microdosing) a very good development.’ (Lars, Designer, 29)

Both these *Reddit* users and interviewees expressed the belief that the needed knowledge already resides within oneself. Further, Santiago (37, painter) saw social norms and modes of thinking as the obstacle that one needs to go beyond in the reach of total autonomy. According to him, this is the place where the ‘authentic self’ is found:

‘Well, as soon as they do it (microdosing) with a purpose [...] you can become a hundred, two hundred, three hundred percent sincere and authentic. Then you can [...] see who you are finally, as you really are. And not the product of your background or cultural issues...’ (Santiago, 37, painter)

In other forms of self-help the expert claims the role of the connoisseur that is able to ‘uncover’ why and how one’s inner life impacts one’s social condition and offer tools and ‘secrets’ to becoming sufficiently autonomous to ‘cure’ one’s underlying psychological causes or failures (Rimke, 2000). This authority, in the case of microdosing, is transferred onto the individual. Therefore, the self is seen to contain a wealth of power and knowledge that needs to be accessed through diverse technologies. This suggests an enormous amount of accountability that the individual voluntarily puts upon himself and that can be enlisted for self-modification .

Liepa (23, student) describes microdosing as a method of self-help and self-therapy by providing a metaphor:

‘I imagine that it’s as if I were performing a micro-surgical surgery on myself. In a way... It’s different from going to see someone and actually figure out where is your problem and talk to a professional... instead I take kitchen knives and perform it on myself, which is interesting and can be fun... but you need to have guts for that’ (Liepa, 23, student)

Here, Liepa explains her views of microdosing as a tool for self-transformation. She further expressed the belief that self-examination and self-modification were more legitimate tools to work on one’s imperfections than relying on expert help:

‘No one can know you better than you [...] not even a very good therapist or a bestselling author’ (Liepa, 23, student)

The self becomes a container of knowledge. This discourse, with the self at its axis, contributes to building a shared world view in which the individual is seen as a sole source of

self-mastery and self-control and is exalted over the social. Not only does this discourse deny the sociality and interconnectedness of human beings in societies, it also puts the social as the antagonist of the 'authentic' and 'true' self.

Rimke (2000) suggests that the focus on the self and denial of the social is consistent with the ideological and political rationalities advertised in liberal democracies. In this line of thought, technologies of self help, such as presented here, aid in further producing, organizing and disseminating 'liberal modes of truth about the social world' (p.62). She calls this the production of self-helping citizens, rendering people as 'natural self-governing objects' (p.62).

Further, the heightened occupation with self-liberation and improvement can be seen as a product of hyper-individuality. Advocates of the principle of individuality suggest that the social world is an aggregation of autonomous, self-governing individuals, rather than seeing individualism as a historical product of interconnected social processes rendering individuals the sole responsible entities for their failures, successes, happiness and sadness. Employing technologies such as microdoses of psychedelics, then, becomes a means of transforming and governing the self in an individualist society.

Drop out: microdosing as a technology of 'slow living'

'Living in the city there is so much to do... there is a lot of trouble going on. You can read it in the news, can see it in cinema or you can just step in the streets and you see all this trouble. And they really indirectly tell you hey... take care. And I think that asks for more time to be with yourself.' (Lotte, 23, photographer)

The troubles of the modern world, with its ever-increasing speed and the resistance my interview participants expressed to this perceived pace was one of the main categories that emerged from the analysis of data. Both the interviews and *Reddit* data showed that one of the reasons why individuals use microdoses of classic psychedelics (LSD most commonly) is to introduce 'slowness' into their daily routines, relationships with others and the self.

The need for this perceived slowness seems to surface from a reflection on social and cultural processes in postmodernity. Similarly to what I have previously outlined, the features of the changing pattern of our society that make individuals seek 'authentic' ways of living. One of these features is increased mobility: the interviewees in this study lived in major cities in the Netherlands and described the city as a sphere that promotes speed, making them choose 'slowness' (signaling authenticity) instead.

Many of the interviewees and *Reddit* users subscribed to the view of today's world as messy and loud, causing them to feel overwhelmed. According to one of the interview participants, Lotte (23, photographer), this leads to either shutting oneself out or employing a line of technologies in order to manage oneself in such a way so as to be able to navigate this new order. She illustrates that introducing microdosing into her weekly schedule in the weekend has allowed her to take time for 'slowness':

'I maybe didn't see a hundred people but instead baked bread in my own oven, poured myself a nice coffee...saw maybe six people but really look them in the eye and maybe have a small talk or conversation.' (Lotte, 23, Photographer)

Microdosing, according to the interviewee, played a role in determining and building her current lifestyle that invites 'slow-living' by inducing reflexivity and focus and take-away 'lessons', as the participants named it, from altered states and incorporating them in their daily lives. Ingesting psychedelics helps break the 'cycle' or a 'loop' of habits that the study participants did not see as fitting anymore, and replace them with a reflexive 'awareness', which aids them to consciously choose their behaviors rather than follow a system of instilled habits and ideas. Aurel, a twenty-six-year-old software engineer based in Utrecht, illustrates how taking up microdosing in the weekend, and 'slowing down' by not scheduling anything during his microdosing days allows him to break from his busy everyday life. Further, this perceived 'slowness' is created through a combination of contextual factors, such as choosing a time of day or a week which is kept free for LSD-induced slowness. He illustrates this by saying:

'To get, sort of to make the weekend into some kind of... something less of two days between work and more like a very relaxing experience. Something to like, really be detached from the day-to-day. [...] In the everyday, I have a routine, I have things to do, I usually have things to do in the evening as well, and on the weekend I just prefer to go with whatever [...] just improvise' (Aurel, Software Engineer, 26)

Wendy Parkins (2004, p.364) suggests that 'slow living involves the conscious negotiation of the different temporalities which make up our everyday lives, deriving from a commitment to occupy time more attentively.' The individuals in this sample described becoming aware of their own behavioural patterns in the larger cultural context and choosing to have moments of mindful activities with the aid of microdosing. This echoes the notion that Giddens (1991) offers

of the self transforming into a reflexive being that, through mastering one's own body, brings back certainty and unity into everyday life.

Another interesting pattern within this ideal type was the way individuals choose to consume and abstain from consuming various types of media. Giddens (1991) suggests that in 'high modernity', distant happenings have entered the private sphere and reflected upon the intimacies of the self. Various types of media have played a role in bringing news and information of various types and qualities into our lives. In that light, mediated experience has long been impacting self-identity and social relationships. Two interview participants, as well as numerous (11) *Reddit* accounts, mentioned that after having started microdosing, they decided to quit using various strands of (social) media, and most often, - news media.

Lars, a twenty-nine-year-old designer from Rotterdam explains how whenever he microdoses, he chooses not to consume news media, by saying:

'I just saw it in my phone and heard about it...so now you know its in me already, but its not from me, and all that energy that would go into thinking about that now I can use for myself, and maybe go meditate or work on myself in any different kind of way...so I think so, it's sometimes too much information also'
[...] 'So... why should I read it if it's negative? I choose not to do that because I just know that it will not bring me anything, you know? So then I can focus on what is here and now' (Lars, Designer, 29)

On a similar note, a *Reddit* user adds:

'I've ditched all forms of social media, it's a waste of time and ironically disconnects you from the world and the moment.' (*Reddit* user 15)

In this line of thought, refusing exposure to diverse types of media becomes a technology of the self through which the boundary of the personal space is protected. Indeed, Giddens (1991) suggested that the rising use of media is one of the factors contributing to the felt uncertainty in the postmodern world. The individuals in this study, through microdosing and reflecting upon their lives, have noted becoming increasingly aware of the 'necessary' boundaries. This is reflected in the words of one of the *Reddit* users:

‘Everything is a choice, and whilst we choose what we choose based on a plethora of variables, the important factor here is that we own those choices’
(*Reddit* user 22)

A question surfaces: why do individuals feel the need to use micro-doses of psychedelics for such a purpose. In justifying their use to achieve such ‘slowness’, interview participants refer to natural sciences and research on psychedelics. They highlight physiological aspects of psychedelics and refer to ‘firing neurons’ (Eduardo, Software Engineer, 26) and the ‘brain functioning differently’ (Aurel, Software Engineer, 26) to induce reflexivity and focus on improving behaviors. In this way, these individuals position microdosing as a technology of self-modification and control, or in Liepa’s (23, Student) words ‘performing a surgery’ on oneself. The interviewees referred to the features of the substances that allow them to control their bodies in ways that give them control over their behaviors and experiences.

Conclusion and Discussion

A couple of drops are pushed out of a pipette and a picture of a man with a flower tucked into his hair appears. The man is Timothy Leary. In this forty-three second video posted on YouTube in 2013, we hear the words ‘turn on, tune in, and drop out again’. Leary is giving a speech sitting in a circle. He preaches: ‘Do not politic (be discreet, diplomatic), do not vote. These are old men’s games. Impotent senile men, that will put you under their old chess games and war and power. *Drop out*. Tune in with natural things. Take off your shoes. Get back in tune with God’s harmony. Surround yourself with beauty and sacred ambience. We can’t get caught in the conforming, growth lockstep which we call American society.’ (Sampson, 2012). In the 1960s countercultural climate, many employed an array of technologies, such as spiritual practices, practices of eastern traditions, and recreational drug use with the aim of coming to a deeper understanding of life, the universe, and breaking away from the societal troubles of the day: ‘dropping out’. In other words, it formed and diffused the idea that established institutions and people in positions of power, or as Leary calls them ‘senile men’ that evoked wars and the politics around them, were to be ignored and loathed. On the other hand, mentioned techniques were appropriated in other spheres, motivating technological innovation and inspiring figures across fields.

Many media accounts covering the renewed interest in psychedelic use, frame microdosing as a trend of self-enhancement, commonly with the aim of optimizing the self for productivity. These media reports are based on single cases and deductively apply the logic of

business owners, and Silicon Valley professionals to all microdosers. Instead of jumping into these deductive assumptions, in this study, I tried to show how individuals across various fields use and understand their use of psychedelic microdosing in their everyday lives. By inductively studying qualitative data gathered through seven interviews with people that microdose psychedelics in the Netherlands, and 67 self-reports published on social media platform *Reddit*, I find three major modes of the different uses of microdosing: (1) microdosing as a technology of self-esteem and control at work, (2) microdosing as a self-help technology, and (3) microdosing as a technology of 'slow living'. These different uses, and I must say, the different contexts of use, of psychedelic microdosing today also share underlying communalities. Particularly, individuals in this study were using psychedelics to find focus, sincerity, self-reflection and improve themselves in various ways and in different contexts. For some, it was bringing back focus, in what they felt was a distracted world. For others, a means to 'meet themselves' and find answers to questions they had in their personal lives. Further, I have shown the systematic differences in the ways in which microdosing is used. Microdosing as a technology of raising self-esteem and gaining the feeling of control in work contexts is systematically taken up during the week, once or twice a week and used particularly with the aim of arriving at work 'authentically' and in control. This finding shows that microdosing is indeed not used solely to get an extra 'edge' at work, and links to the wider context of the blurring boundaries of leisure and work in highly skilled knowledge work. In a similar light, microdosing surfaced as a technology of self-help which is less clearly linked to the balance between work and leisure. Yet, in this mode of microdosing, individuals microdosed on a less systematic schedule, and did so both in leisure and work time. As I had argued, in both these modes of uses, the responsibility for one's successes and failures either in one's personal or professional sphere is transferred completely to the individual, leaving one in constant negotiation of the self and its modification and improvement. Finally, many used psychedelics to 'slow down the time' that they felt was getting quicker with the increasing pace of life in post-industrial society. This microdosing use takes place in the comfort of people's own homes, that provide a space of resistance to the accelerating time.

In this study, I suggest that the renewed turn towards various technologies such as microdosing is neither new nor unexpected. It is, rather, an answer to trends such as increasingly pervasive technologies, that both bring convenience and increase the pace and consequently, the expectations of production in today's work floor. Further, I would like to propose that the uses of psychedelics today echo those offered by the 1960s counterculture movement, while also getting integrated into today's societal systems and institutions. In other

words, a large portion of society still ‘*turns on, tunes in and drops out*’, but in more subtle ways. The difference is, they do so at the office, or at home in the weekend, and with doses that make the change in perception barely noticeable. Individualism that has pervaded today’s societies has relocated the weight of public issues into the sphere of personal troubles (Mills, 2000), leaving the individual responsible for one’s happiness and failures in a society that still believes in the myth of the American dream. In this light, and in the words of this study’s participant Mateo (29, Software Engineer): ‘*either you adapt, or you don’t*’.

All three modes of microdosing conceptualized in this study are a response to an increasingly fast, demanding, individualist society where people, driven by the responsibility they feel for their successes and failures, make use of various technologies to manage their minds and bodies to be more productive, healthy, reflexive and authentic. Individuals in this study stressed that microdosing played a role in ‘thinking out of the box’, distinguishing the authentic self from the inauthentic society, and reflexively re-evaluating and re-defining self-identity. In this way, turning themselves into self-helping and self-governing citizens.

This research project adds to the growing line of empirical studies on the use of psychedelic microdosing. However, there still lies a wealth of questions surrounding this phenomenon, that future studies could address. First, studies could investigate the life histories of individuals that use psychedelics in various ways. This study gives some indication on the types of individuals that take up microdosing for work and leisure, however, it remains unknown what defining (if any) moments drove individuals to engage in microdosing in one or another way. Are there underlying personality characteristics or traits that microdosers share? How do these highly-skilled professionals navigate the issue of the legal stance of psychedelic drugs, and how (and if) does that intervene with their self-identity? Further, media accounts are often saturated representations of reality, and the ‘size’ as well as the focus on work in terms of the phenomena may be exaggerated. Future studies could quantitatively look to what extent is microdosing known and widespread, as well as what are the views on microdosing of people that have never engaged in the practice.

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Appendix A: Interview Participants

Number	Pseudonym	Age	Based in	Interview duration	Occupation
1	<i>Lotte</i>	23	Rotterdam	56:42 min	Photographer/Artist assistant
2	<i>Liepa</i>	23	Amsterdam	1:02:49 min.	Student (media studies)
3	<i>Santiago</i>	37	Amsterdam	53:28 min.	Painter
4	<i>Isaak</i>	28	Rotterdam	55:22 min	Designer
5	<i>Aurel</i>	26	Amsterdam	47:26 min	Software Engineer
6	<i>Mia</i>	26	-	58:36 min	PhD Candidate
7	<i>Gael</i>	27	Amsterdam	52:16 min	Software Engineer

Appendix B: List of Reddit Reports

Nr	Name
1	7 Months Microdosing. Full Report, Experiences and Thoughts
2	If I'd know about MD when I was 18....
3	My 3 months of Microdosing LSD experience
4	My experience microdosing mushrooms for 3 months
5	3 week experience of microdosing
6	Macro revelations on micro dose
7	Profound changes in just a week
8	Microdosing is a godsend when spending the coming months working@home with kids
9	Day 1 Microdosing (Ex-Addict)
10	Here is a story of how I think MD works
11	Microdosing shrooms for breaking bad habits/ addiction
12	Trying to be strong in these difficult times
13	Three weeks after trying out microdosing for the first time, and HOLY SHIT.
14	A Few Points About MDing
15	7 months in

16 microdosing for self improvement purposes, I would really appreciate some
guidance

17 Microdosing

18 First week MDing and I'm faced with 10 years of tax returns

19 I think I entered a flow state at a music festival and it was amazing

20 First time microdosing today

21 Months of Microdosing 8-14ug of LSD

22 A silly sigh.. been musing.

23 I was frustrated because I wasn't having the profound effects that everyone else
seemed to be having, but when I look back at it, It has catapulted me light years
ahead.

24 One month update microdosing psilocibin for anxiety and ADHD

25 I'm insane or this "awareness" is just normal?

26 My Experience so Far

27 First dose today LSD

28 Awareness

29 A somewhat atypical experience with Psilocybin

30 My Experience- first month micro dosing

31 Microdosing helped me open my heart

32 Two months md report (shrooms) and what happened when i took 2-week break

33 A couple of months in...

34 Microdosing is altering my self image

35 First week of microdosing

36 Psilocybin NGF, drug recovery and staying focused

37 A surprising outcome...

38 After microdosing mushrooms for a while with good effects the lsd is helping with
motivation just like I hoped.

39 First week MD'ing!

40 Been microdosing for a couple of weeks

41 Finished my first round of microdosing!

42 Microdosed mushrooms for anxiety for the first time yesterday. I finally felt normal
again.

43 Microdosing helped me fix relationships in my life.

44 Microdosing Mushrooms Effect

45 From Distracted and Anxious to Immersed and Engaged
 46 Microdosing is literally a miracle drug
 47 Microdosing has made me realise just how lonely I am
 48 Okay...so my tinnitus is nearly gone.
 49 Stamets Protocol & My Much Improved Memory
 50 Went a lil heavy on this microdose
 51 Micro dosing lsd analogies
 52 Md'd on morning of mid term before studying for class I haven't looked at
 53 Mushroom Microdosing for the Creative Process
 54 One month microdosing
 55 Day 3 microD'ing and finally grieving my father's suicide
 56 After using psilocybe cubensis
 57 First microdosing experience, I got anxiety! Advice needed
 58 IQ improvement and LSD
 59 Report: At work
 60 LSD + mushrooms microdosing. Pros and cons
 61 Vivid dreams and new childhood memories
 62 Wow still recovering from yesterday.
 63 Seeing a therapist while microdosing
 64 Ready to live
 65 Microdosing for creativity
 66 0.3g shrooms sunday... incredible
 67 Working on microdose

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Topic	Question	Main Points	Related RQ
Neutral	Can you tell me about yourself?	-Age	<i>-Demographic Characteristics/</i>
Initial		-Occupation	<i>Personal Background</i>
Question		-Residence	
		- Sex and Gender	

Microdosing Motivations	Could you tell me about how and why you started microdosing? What were your major motivations?	-Personal motivations -Professional Motivations -Perceived importance	<i>What are individuals' motivations to start microdosing psychedelic drugs in these two fields? - What are individuals' personal motivations? - What are (if any) individuals' professional motivations?</i>
General Questions Microdosing	What is a typical microdosing day like for you?	-Why microdose on some days over others? -Purposes? -Personal Feelings on microdosing	-
Microdosing & Social Network	In your opinion, how is microdosing received in your social environment? How, in your opinion, is microdosing received in your professional environment?	-Relation to friends/colleagues that microdose? (if -	<i>What role does social and work environment play in their microdosing practices? (e.g. if colleagues/ friends microdose)</i>
Microdosing & Work	How do you feel microdosing may contribute to your work? Do you feel it fulfills certain requirements specific to the field?	-relation to work requirements -relation to 'passion' for work -pressure creativity/productivity	<i>What role do work requirements play in individuals' motivations and microdosing practices?</i>
Closing Question	Is there anything you would like to add? / Have we missed something you think is important?		-