The Past Lives of Betty Eisner: Examining the Spiritual Psyche of Early Psychedelic Therapy through the Story of a Outsider, a Pioneer, and a Villain

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Abstract: In this thesis, I argue that early LSD research was imbued with a sense of mysticism that was constructed to be commensurable with concurrent scientific epistemology. I demonstrate how mysticism entered psychedelic research and therapy through the history of a pioneer LSD psychotherapist named Betty Eisner. Since the late 1940s, Eisner was a key member of a bible study group that emphasized the psychological foundation of mystical experiences. When she entered psychology in the 1950s, she imported this influence into her research and therapy. As an active member of the small international LSD research community of the 50s and 60s, she participated in ongoing discussions about the place of mysticism in LSD psychotherapy. However, following malpractice accusations in the 1970s, Eisner lost her clinical license. Using records from her license revocation hearings, I will contextualize her work within the larger psychology professions attitudes toward mystically inspired therapy.

Subject: History of science

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His plan hinged on the success of an experimental anti-depressant codenamed MK-869. Still, in clinical trials, it was a new kind of medication that exploited brain chemistry in innovative ways to promote feelings of well-being. The drug tested extremely well early on, with minimal side effects. Behind the scenes, however, MK-869 was starting to unravel. True, many test subjects treated with the medication felt their hopelessness and anxiety lift. But so did nearly the same number who took a placebo, a look-alike pill made of milk sugar or another inert substance given to groups of volunteers.