



CORRESPONDENCE

Letter to the Editor: PTSD, Psychedelics, Entity Encounters and the Precautionary Principle

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Heilman's (2023) comprehensive review of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy highlights the promising therapeutic potential of these interventions for conditions including PTSD, while Tramont's (2023) retrospective on the life and work of Charles Tramont, M.D. demonstrates the complex relationship between psychological vulnerability and encounters with apparently autonomous entities. These papers, published in your journal, underscore both the therapeutic promise and the phenomenological complexities surrounding altered states of consciousness in clinical settings. However, neither addresses a critical convergence that warrants urgent attention: the intersection of PTSD vulnerability, psychedelic-assisted therapy and entity encounter experiences. We write to highlight potential risks that may emerge when psychedelics known to produce entity encounters are administered to psychologically vulnerable populations, especially military veterans with trauma histories who are increasingly being enrolled in psilocybin therapy trials.

There is growing evidence that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be a precursor to, or even a cause of, some alien encounter-type experiences. Powers (1994) studied twenty individuals claiming extraterrestrial abduction and found that 45% showed PTSD symptoms and 70% demonstrated dissociative tendencies, compared to 0% and 10% respectively in a control group of UFO witnesses without abduction claims. This finding is supported by Latorre and Vellisca (2022), who compared 19 individuals reporting alien abductions with a control group and found that the abductee group showed higher levels of PTSD symptoms, although these differences were not statistically significant in their smaller sample. These findings suggest that prior trauma or a predisposition to dissociative experiences may influence the perception or interpretation of unusual events such as alien encounters.

There is also a compelling body of research that the administration of psychedelics – such as N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) and, to a lesser extent, psilocybin – can give rise to experiences resembling alien-type encounters. For example, Luke and Kittenis (2005) highlight that entity encounters, and a sense of presence are notably associated with both dissociatives and the dimethyl group of tryptamines, with DMT being a primary example.

Lawrence et al. (2022), in a large-scale content analysis of 3,778 DMT experiences from 3,305 Reddit posts, reported that approximately 45.5% involved encounters with entities. The types of entities described were diverse, including:

- Feminine forms (24.2%)
- Deities (17.0%)
- Aliens (16.3%)



- Creature-based entities such as reptilian or insectoid beings (9.2%)
- Mythological figures, including “machine elves” (8.4%)
- Jesters (6.5%)

Similarly, Luke (2022) observes that the entities are often described as “*beings, aliens, guides, or helpers,*” and may appear as clowns, reptiles, mantises, bees, spiders, cacti, stick figures, dwarves, elves, imps, angels, spirits, gods or simply as an ineffable presence. He adds:

“...encounters with seemingly sentient discarnate entities is a fairly common feature of the DMT experience...”

He refers to an estimate by Strassman (2008) suggesting that such encounters occur in at least half of all high-dose DMT sessions.

Davis et al. (2020) take this further, reporting that many respondents perceived the entities as “real” in some ontological sense. They note:

“Most respondents endorsed that the entity had the attributes of being conscious, intelligent, and benevolent, existed in some real but different dimension of reality, and continued to exist after the encounter.”

Dr Rick Strassman, then Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of New Mexico, conducted the first government-approved psychedelic research in the U.S. after a 20-year hiatus, beginning in 1990. In his 2001 book, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule*, he explores possible explanations for the entity encounters reported by participants – ranging from subconscious projections and neurophysiological effects to access to alternate realms. While he did not commit to a single interpretation, Strassman remained open to the possibility that these entities might possess an existence independent of the user’s mind.

While researchers such as Kometer and Vollenweider (2018) acknowledge the “complex imagery” and “wide assortment of visual phenomena” of DMT experiences, they maintain the conventional neuroscientific view that they are all brain-generated hallucinations. In contrast, Gallimore (2024) questions whether the human brain is capable of constructing such elaborate realities, noting that users report “objects of impossible geometry and structure that simply cannot exist in our environment.” He

questions why and how the brain should suddenly begin rendering “hypertechnological cityscapes crawling with advanced intelligences with no referent in the waking world, that not only don’t exist but couldn’t exist.”

A trend relevant to this report on medical symptoms is the rapid shift of psychedelics from fringe substances to off-label, and increasingly, mainstream medical treatments. Recent clinical research has demonstrated the therapeutic potential of compounds such as psilocybin and MDMA for conditions including depression and PTSD. As a result, these substances are seeing broader clinical application across diverse populations. Fonzo and Nemeroff (2025) describe this moment as both promising and methodologically complex, while Stringer (2024) characterizes it as a paradigm shift in psychiatric care.

There are two studies in particular looking at the safety and efficacy of psilocybin-assisted therapy specifically for U.S. military veterans diagnosed with PTSD. One is underway at The Ohio State University, led by Dr. Alan Davis (Davis et al., 2023). The study aims to determine whether psilocybin, administered in a controlled therapeutic setting, can alleviate PTSD symptoms in this population. The other study is at the University of Washington (2025) and seeks to assess whether psilocybin, combined with psychotherapy, is a viable treatment option for individuals struggling with mental health challenges, including PTSD. Biscoe et al. (2023) shows that similar work is under way in the UK.

We therefore have the situation whereby military veterans suffer from PTSD and either or both of that diagnosis itself or the use of psychedelics to treat it, would appear to give rise to them seeing alien-type entities. The encounters may be all the more convincing because, as set out above, the experiences feel so real.

It is increasingly common for legitimate treatments involving dissociatives and psilocybin-assisted therapy to be used with military veterans suffering from intractable PTSD. However, it is not unknown for such interventions to produce unintended and disturbing side-effects, including vivid encounters with apparently real entities – experiences not reported prior to treatment. These emergent alternative realities, particularly in a psychologically vulnerable population, raise serious concerns. While questions of medical malpractice are beyond the scope of this paper, we consider such outcomes, at best, unwise. Accordingly, individuals and organizations that promote the use of dissociatives, including for recreational purposes or as a way of engaging with entities, would be well

advised to exercise extreme caution and ensure that they follow good medical practice at all times.

Sincerely,
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None declared.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JP conceived the study and drafted the manuscript. CG provided clinical expertise and manuscript review. GGDT contributed psychological expertise. DW provided input from the perspective of a practicing medical clinician. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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