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Jack Howell

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**Name**

Jack Howell

**Title of Paper**

The Ethnobotany of Ayahuasca: Botanical, Spiritual, and Scientific Perspectives

**Class Year**

Junior

**Date Research Undertaken**

Fall 2021

**Citation Style Used**

MLA

**Affiliated Course**

BOT 308/ANT 308/ES 308 Methods/Theories of Ethnobotany

**Faculty Name**

Professor Rachel Spicer and Professor Manuel Lizarralde

**Student Major**

Neuroscience major, Psychology minor, Public Health Pathway

## Narrative Questions

- 1) Describe how you came to choose your topic, specifically noting any pre-research that you did. What sources did you use in this pre-research? To what extent did you consult with librarians, faculty, or others? How did this pre-research lead you to your topic?**

The therapeutic potential of plant medicines used by indigenous populations fascinates me. Some years ago, I became aware of clinical research investigating psilocybin, the active ingredient of psychedelic mushrooms, for the treatment of terminally ill cancer patients experiencing anxiety and patients with treatment-resistant depression. These conditions are not treated effectively by western medicine and cause needless suffering. Research conducted at Johns Hopkins University, Yale University, and Harvard University demonstrated the profound improvement of these conditions. While taking Methods and Theories of Ethnobotany with Professors Lizarralde and Spicer, I learned more about the context of plants used by indigenous South Americans. I wanted to learn more about the therapeutic potential of plants in South America and had an enlightening conversation with Professor Lizarralde on ayahuasca, a sacred medicine used throughout the Amazon for thousands of years. In my pre-research, I used the OneSearch platform and read the article "Ayahuasca's 'afterglow': improved mindfulness and cognitive flexibility in ayahuasca drinkers," and an ebook "Ayahuasca Healing and Science." Our class had a library session with Kathy Gehring, who helped me fine-tune the scope of my topic and establish a system to collect and review sources. She also guided me through the process of ordering books through the Conn-Trinity-Wesleyan consortium, which was an invaluable resource for my final project.

- 2) Describe your process of finding information for your project. Note specifically the tools you used to undertake your research, as well as the specific search strategies you used within these tools. (Note: "Ebsco," being an umbrella vendor, is not a specific enough response when identifying tools; listing the "library database" is also an unacceptably vague answer. Specific tools include JSTOR, America: History & Life, Web of Science, etc., along with OneSearch, the new library system.)**

I used RefWorks to collect and organize the sources for my research project. I primarily utilized OneSearch to search for articles and books. I started with the broad keyword "ayahuasca" to get a scope of the resources available, but eventually narrowed my search results by using search phrases like "ayahuasca AND ethnobotany" "ayahuasca AND South America," "ayahuasca AND depression," "ayahuasca AND the Amazon" and botanical phrases like "Banisteriopsis caapi" and "Psychotria viridis." After locating books from Conn, Trinity, and Wesleyan that fit my topic, I narrowed my search results to peer-reviewed journals to meet a requirement set by my professor and find the most scholarly information available. To make sure I found all relevant sources for my project, I used the same search method for Google Scholar and PubMed.gov

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- 3) Describe your process of evaluating the resources you found. How did you make decisions about which resources you would use, and which you wouldn't? What kinds of questions did you ask yourself about resources in order to determine whether they were worthy of inclusion?**

Once I had my resources collected on RefWorks and the books I requested from the CTW consortium, I evaluated them individually based on whether they fit the scope of my project. I ensured the articles and books I evaluated contained information related to the botanical aspects of ayahuasca, the anthropological aspects of ayahuasca in South America, or included clinical research on the therapeutic effects of ayahuasca in peer-reviewed journals. For the peer-reviewed article portion, I selected sources based on how recent they were published and whether they included information relevant to my thesis. As I went through this process, I considered potential biases, the credibility of sources, and the sources' intended audience. I included sources that I deemed to be objective, scholarly (e.g., from a university press or other credible publisher), and the level of research put into the publication (e.g., included references for claims that were not a part of original research).