ABSTRACT: Entheogenic spirituality involves the consumption of psychedelic substances within a spiritual context. The entheogenic community in Australia prides itself on being inclusive, progressive and transgressive, but as in many new religious movements, alternative spiritualities and countercultural communities, there is some question as to whether these values extend to the domain of gender. This article presents the findings of an online survey that canvassed perceptions of gender within the entheogenic community in Australia; findings show that while the majority of the community believes its progressive values do indeed extend to gender, a significant minority do not, with noticeably different levels of satisfaction between male and female respondents.

“...It’s great to see all these beautiful, well-read and articulate men. But I have one question: Where are the women?”

This question was posed by a female conference attendee at Entheogenesis Australis during one of the Q&A sessions. The conference took place in December 2010 at The University of Melbourne and services the entheogenic community in Australia, one largely composed of people who are interested in psychedelic spirituality. This was a very good question indeed. Looking around, it was difficult to identify any gender imbalance in the audience—comprised as it was equally of beautiful men and women—but the speaker program told another story. Apart from a few anomalies, the speakers were all men.

The entheogenic community is one that prides itself on being inclusive, progressive and even transgressive. Certainly, in terms of welcoming forms of spirituality that are considered by mainstream society to be not only fringe but outright illegal, this is certainly the case. But the question posed above casts doubt on whether these inclusive, progressive and transgressive values extend into the domain of gender, asking whether the community simply echoes mainstream—or, following Mary O’Brien (1981), ‘malestream’—society. In the following, some perceptions about gender in the entheogenic community in Australia are revealed. After a framing exercise introducing entheogens and how gender functions in loosely comparable communities, the results of an anonymous online survey are presented. By allowing the survey respondents to speak in their own voices, and then viewing those responses via a feminist analytical lens, we see that while the majority of the community believes its progressive values do indeed extend to gender, a significant minority do not.

Entheogens

Entheogens are psychedelic substances used within a specific context and with a particular intentionality on behalf of the user. The term is commonly attributed to Carl Ruck et al. (1979) who sought to communicate a meaning of containing (or releasing) god and becoming god, and has since gained significant momentum (Forte 1997; Smith 2000). Various streams of influence can be identified within the historical and cultural construction of entheogens from considering them as artefacts of suppressed religious histories through to part of a (neo-)shamanic revival (Harner 1990; Heinrich 2002; Hoffman, Ruck, & Staples 2002; Merkur 2000; Ruck, Heinrich, & Staples 2000; Shanon 2002;...
Within a historical and (neo-)shamanic context, entheogens are often considered to be of a traditional and organic nature, such as ayahuasca, peyote, iboga, and amanita muscaria. However, from the beginning of the use of “entheogen” Ruck et al (1979) allowed room for interpretation, suggesting “the term could also be applied to other drugs, both natural and artificial, that induce alterations of consciousness similar to those documented for ritual ingestion of traditional entheogens “ (p. 146). Consequently, entheogens now come in a fantastic array of chemical guises (Shulgin & Shulgin 1991, 1997; Strassman 2001), and even unlikely sources such as cough syrup (Carpenter 2006; Gelfer 2006) resulting in a variety of traditions (Clifton 2004; Lyttle 1988; Stolaroff 1999; Stuart 2002) including those in Australia (Tramacchi 2000), in which entheogens are perceived to function in a sacramental capacity (Baker 2005).

Until recent years, consuming entheogens has been a distinctly subcultural activity, but it is now enjoying a renaissance due to the increasing popularity of ayahuasca tourism (Tupper 2008; Winkelman 2005) and its significant role in the popularisation of the 2012 phenomenon (Hoopes 2011; St John 2011).

William Richards (2002) argues that entheogens ‘can be profoundly revelatory of truths, both spiritual and psychodynamic—truths that could prove highly relevant to our well-being, personally and culturally’ (147). This statement reveals an assumption within the community that entheogens communicate some kind of authenticity unmediated by social construction, and that these ‘truths’ are of significant value to the individual. This, then, is the promise that should be extended into the realm of gender.

**Gender in Alternative Spiritualities and Countercultural Communities**

Examples of how gender functions within contemporary entheogenic communities—whether in Australia or other regions—are elusive, so in order to establish an expectation of what might be revealed within the anonymous online survey it is necessary to look instead to loosely comparable communities such as those of late twentieth century new religious movements (NRM)s, alternative spiritualities and other countercultural communities. There is also something to be learned from how gender is framed when it occasionally surfaces in contemporary psychedelic literature.

Angela Aidala (1985) examined communal groups of both NRM and secular types from the 1960s and 70s in North America. She noted among the spiritual communities four distinct elements: a pre-defined and coherent framework for sex and gender; gender normativity was allocated elaborate transcendental justification; gender expectations received wide support; and, importantly, in none of the religious communes did ideological formulation or practice pose a direct challenge to the traditional allocation of greater social and economic power to men (297). Aidala also found that even within secular communal groups where ‘free love’ and sexual experimentation were encouraged, these ‘more often than not, included continued discussion, negotiation, and conflict about changing sexuality and gender roles (297; see also Jacobs 1991; Pike 2007).

Of course, not all NRM and alternative spiritualities are the same. Susan Palmer (1994) unpacks NRMs that function in three distinct ways: sexual polarity, sexual complementarity and sexual unity. Palmer’s canvassing of NRMs spans those which assume male leadership (and those with female leadership), those which embrace partnership between male and female leadership, and those which seek to disrupt categories and boundaries between male and female. Similarly, Elizabeth Puttick (2003) offers a typology that includes on the one hand more traditional NRMs such as the Unification Church and International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and on the other hand more liberal NRMs such as the Osho movement and Brahma Kumaris. Puttick notes that it is significant that the former, ‘tend to have a male majority, sometimes 2 to 1 or higher, whereas in more liberal NRMs the ratio is typically reversed’ (242).
It is noteworthy, too, that even when gender issues are proactively ‘addressed’ within alternative spiritualities, things are not necessarily as they seem. One example is integral spirituality, as theorised by Ken Wilber (2000). This alternative spirituality claims to integrate both the masculine and feminine ‘type’ into its model of consciousness development. However, an analysis of integral spirituality literature shows not only a distinct bias towards the masculine, but a clear depoliticising agenda that seeks to dispel patriarchy as a myth, opting instead for understanding society historically as ‘patrifocal,’ an order that was decided upon jointly by both men and women (Gelfer 2009:103-115).

Moving away from NRMs and alternative spiritualities, two recent studies provide insights into the way gender functioned in countercultural movements of the 1960s: Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture by Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo (2009) and Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities by Timothy Hodgdon (2008). Lemke-Santangelo argues that women in such communities were largely caricatured as ‘earth mothers’ and ‘love goddesses’ by both the mainstream culture and a curiously patriarchal culture that existed within their own communities. The women were conscious of at once embodying contemporary and even radical values (such as ‘free love’), while also performing a domestic femininity in the community that would have been familiar even to their grandmothers. Hodgdon examines two sharply contrasting hip communities: The Farm and the Diggers. The Farmies identified a dangerous hyper-masculinity in modern men and the devaluation of women’s maternal nurture, both of which were to be mitigated by a performance of ‘knightly’ masculinity. In contrast, the anarchist Diggers concluded that ‘progress’ had effeminised corporate men while brutalising working-class men. What both Hodgdon’s subjects demonstrate is a distinct acceptance of gender normativity, albeit spun in different directions.

Another analogous community is the intersecting rave scene, which often mobilises entheogenic aesthetics and themes. Maria Pini (1997) sees much to commend for women in such spaces, which again are seen not just as progressive but Utopian. Pini refers to ‘claims made by women ravers regarding the apparent ability of rave to dissolve social divisions based upon sex, sexuality, age, race and class’ (118) and for women ravers to experience ‘a non-phallocentric subjectivity’ (125). However, Angela McRobbie (1993) notes women and girls are ‘less involved with the cultural production of rave, from the flyers, to the events, to the DJ’ing, than their male counterparts’ (418), and engage complex sexualised performances (418-419). Similarly, according to Julie Gregory’s (2009) study or ravers, ‘the overwhelming majority of interviewees discursively constructed older and younger female rave-goers—including themselves—as particularly misplaced within rave’ (76, original emphasis), with the assumption that rave was not a space in which female raves intuitively belong. Rave is, then, as described by McRobbie, ‘a series of social tensions (including those around gender and sexuality)’ (422).

Readjusting our focus one again, Lemke-Santangelo states that, “Countercultural literature is virtually silent on the subject of women’s drug experiences” (113). The anomalous way in which women’s psychedelic experiences are presented within the broader body of psychedelic literature offers further insight into what we may discover in the following survey responses. Take, for example, the book Sisters of the Extreme: Women Writing on the Drug Experience (Palmer & Horowitz, 2000), which includes drug narratives from a variety of female authors. The question, of course, is would one find a book called Brothers of the Extreme: Men Writing on the Drug Experience? Probably not, as men’s writing comprises the vast majority of all the other publishing on psychedelics.

Similarly, the Psychedelics Encyclopaedia (Stafford & Bigwood, 1992) contains an entry called “Women in Psychedelics”:

Another manifestation of receptive Earth-orientated, feminine-centred qualities in psychedelic culture is the growing interest in “neo-pagan”, pantheistic, Wiccan and Goddess-
focused ways of life … Many of these belief systems place high value on the feminine, receptive and healing qualities of the shaman who played an important role in archaic cultures now thought by many to be largely matriarchal … Much as in other arenas of Western culture, the exploration of psychedelic consciousness has been largely dominated by men—or so it would appear from the manner in which the movement has usually been documented. (Stafford & Bigwood, 1992, 52)

The entry concludes with some notable examples of women in psychedelic culture. Aside from the “Women in Psychedelics” entry indicating by its very existence the rather anomalous position of women in psychedelic culture, there are two other elements worth noting: a normative presentation of what constitutes the feminine (receptive, healing); a male dominated psychedelic culture is tabled, but somewhat suspiciously with the caveat, “or so it would appear”. Across these and other well-meaning examples of psychedelic literature (Tolbert, 2003; Vogel, 2003), we are left with the occasional telling of what might be described as “women’s stories in psychedelics” that rely on normativity or which seek the feminine as a technical solution to a more balanced approach to psychedelics (Adams, 2011).

Certainly, this poor representation of women has not gone unvoiced within the entheogenic community, at least in North America. In 2002, the Women’s Entheogen Fund was established because, “while women have historically played a central role in investigating the use of entheogens, their work has been funded less frequently and has been consistently underrepresented in the scientific and popular entheogenic literature” (Harrisson, 2006, 34). Particularly pertinent within the opening quote of this article, Harrison goes on to state, “It has been especially distressing to see relatively few female entheogenic researchers presenting their work at relevant conferences over the years” (34). The Women’s Entheogen Fund has now been extended into The Women’s Visionary Congress, “an annual gathering of visionary women healers, scholars, activists and artists who study consciousness and altered states”.

Following these loosely comparable examples of NRMs, alternative spiritualities, countercultural communities in the 1960s, and the representation of women in a broader psychedelic culture, it is reasonable to assume that there will be a perception of gender inequality in the entheogenic community in Australia.

Methodology
Data was gathered using an anonymous online survey that used a combination of fixed-, multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The survey was aimed at people aged 18 and over who self-identified as being members of the entheogenic community in Australia. Two organisations were used as gatekeepers to the community: Entheogenesis Australis (EGA) and Psychedelic Research in Science and Medicine (PRISM). While these organisations by no means define the entheogenic community in Australia, they nevertheless play an important role in its composition. Leaders from EGA and PRISM emailed an invitation to participate in the survey to their networks and posted notices on various subject-related discussion forums and social media sites. The survey was then mobilised in the community via a snowball method (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The survey began with a range of framing questions that constructed a demographic representation of the community, as well as an indicator of which substances they had used within an entheogenic context. 148 respondents completed the survey.

Findings
Demographic and quantitative data derived from the survey includes the following:

Age: 28 respondents were aged between 18–24 years; 62 aged 25–34 years; 34 aged 35–44 years; 17 aged 45–54 years; 6 aged 55–64 years; 1 aged 65+ years.

Sex: 97 respondents were male; 51 female.

Sexual orientation: 8 respondents identified as gay; 21 bisexual; 113 straight; 6 “other”.

Vol. 3 No. 3 25
Employment (respondents could choose more than one option in this question): 43 respondents identified as being a student; 11 parent or carer; 17 unemployed; 80 professional; 14 trade.

Years involved with the entheogenic community: 8 respondents selected less than one year; 38 1–4 years; 42 5–9 years; 38 10–19 years; 22 20+ years.

Substances used in an entheogenic context (respondents could choose more than one option in this question): 45 respondents had used ayahuasca; 73 cacti; 107 cannabis; 94 DMT; 115 LSD; 128 mushrooms; 92 MDMA; 73 “other”.

The survey then asked a number of open-ended questions designed to glean qualitative data, testing how respondents felt about gender as an aspect of the entheogenic experience, and how they felt gender functioned within the entheogenic community.

The first open-ended question asked, “Do you perceive a person’s gender and sexual orientation to be a significant aspect of their entheogenic experience?” 63 percent of respondents answered negatively to this question. Mostly, these responses were answered with a simple “no”. Where the answers were elaborated, the entheogenic experience was typically considered to be beyond gender, such as, “I feel that the entheogenic experience transcends boundaries such as gender” and, “As we aim to access the spiritual plane through use of entheogens, I believe gender and sexuality are irrelevant in these highest dimensions”.

21 percent of respondents answered positively to this question. While there were plenty of simple “yes” answers, these respondents were more inclined than their “no” counterparts to elaborate as to why. The reasons as to why they answered “yes” were quite diverse. Some responses appeal to the idea that gender is a social construction: for example, “Although we could say that gender stereotypes (e.g. masculine active, feminine receptive) are an artificial construct, I think that these would influence many people’s experiences”. Other responses appeal to the idea that gender is biologically determined: for example, differences were “probably due to innate differences in mental/cognitive processes. i.e. women are often more emotionally driven than men”. The combination of the socially constructed and biologically determined was also addressed by one respondent:

“Yes, there are significant biological and hormonal differences between the brains of women and men, and significant differences in their cultural and psychological motivators and conditioning. Sexual orientation likewise is accompanied as a general rule by neurobiological and psychological variation. To assume that this would not impact on the entheogenic experience flies in the face of everything I have learned from my elders and from science and from my experience with entheogens, regardless of how un-politically correct it may be to state. However the variation between experiences does not mean that the chemical mechanism is any different, the experiences will presumably still fall into the same categories, Just the personal content, intensity and experience modality will vary.”

A further theme that emerged from this question was that entheogens enable more authentic understanding of gender, as suggested by the following respondent:

“Entheogens reveal who one truly is, if the partaker is open to receiving that knowledge. For men and women, entheogens can be a gateway to getting in touch with their true masculinity or femininity. For women, it can also be about getting in touch with the masculine aspects of self (the inner warrior) and for men, it can be about connecting to their inner feminine. So gender is important, but not definitive, in an entheogenic context.”
The remaining 16 percent of respondents to this question were unsure. Both male and female respondents answered yes, no or unsure to this question in similar proportions.

The second open-ended question asked was, “Do you perceive there to be anything different about the way gender and sexual orientation function in the entheogenic community compared to society at large?” 49 percent of respondents answered positively, with the overwhelming reason given being that the entheogenic community is more welcoming of diversity and open-minded than mainstream society. More respondents referred to the accommodation of differing sexual orientations in the community than general perceptions of gender. One respondent extended the acceptance of gay people as a fundamental part of the rationale behind the community:

“From my experience, representation of the gay community seems higher than in the general population. I believe that this is due to society forcing the gay community to challenge what is considered normal behaviour which then leads to questioning of other ‘normal’ behaviour such as the non acceptance of the entheogenic experience by law enforcement and policy makers.”

29 percent saw no difference and typically answered with a simple “no”. On the few occasions a more elaborate answer was provided it was suggested the community reflects mainstream culture, as typified by the following response from one woman:

“Not really, in order to facilitate the usage of DMT/Ayahuasca there are two men who are quite well known in the entheogenic community, unfortunately they both know the power they hold over everyone else who wants to use this in a spiritual way. They see themselves almost god like and infallible. I think like most men who run corporations. I haven’t met any females who do the same as these men, if there were I don’t think they would be taken in with this god like mentality that the men do, I think women would come more from a place of love than ego.”

The remaining 22 percent were unsure. We see here a small difference between the answers of men and women, inasmuch as women were slightly more inclined to see no difference relative to mainstream society, and were more inclined to give detailed reasons as to why.

The third open-ended question asked, “Do you perceive there to be equality in the entheogenic community surrounding issues of gender and sexual orientation?” 61 percent of respondents answered positively, either answering with a simple “yes” or reiterating the answers of the previous question in regards to acceptance of diversity. A number of respondents who answered yes provided a caveat such as there being more equality relative to mainstream society. Sometimes respondents answered positively, but gave a negative follow up, such as “Yes—though there will always exist inequality” and, “Yes. Trashbags can be sexist and discriminatory but that is no different from many other communities I suppose”.

18 percent of respondents thought there was inequality. Some negative responses were framed simply in terms of statistical representation, such as “No, in terms of members, there seems to be a rarity of women. Of the people I’ve met, about one in eleven are women”. Other negative responses suggest the community merely reflects mainstream society, such as “The community can be a bit of a boys club, and like elsewhere I feel that women have to prove themselves more to achieve recognition, and are often sidelined as just ‘the girlfriends’”. 21 percent of respondents were unsure. However, the difference between men and women’s answers widen here: while 18 percent of respondents overall identified inequality, the figure rises to 31 percent among female respondents.

The fourth open-ended question asked was, “Is there anything about gender and sexual orientation that you would like to see function differently in the entheogenic community?” 48 percent of respondents answered negatively, largely
with a simple “no” answer. 25 percent of respondents answered positively, generally with a desire to see more gender equality: notably, this question was answered with greater emphasis on the role of women than sexual orientation. 27 percent of respondents were unsure. Again, we see a difference between men and women’s answers to this question. While 25 percent of respondents overall wanted to see change, the figure rises to 37 percent among female respondents (or viewed from another perspective that incorporates unsure answers, only 33 percent of women clearly expressed satisfaction with the status quo).

The final open-ended question asked, “Is there anything about gender and sexual orientation in the entheogenic community that you would like to say that is not covered by the above questions?” 22 percent of respondents took the opportunity to answer this question, mostly reiterating points about the progressive nature of the community. Several respondents questioned the concept of the “entheogenic community” and what could be learned from an online survey. Several others among the female respondents reiterated their dissatisfaction with the way women were treated in the community, including the following response, which is the lengthiest and most detailed offered in the whole survey:

“There is little to no feminist critique of the entheogenic community. There are some people who are outspoken in their belief that women’s contributions and women’s experiences are inferior or unimportant to the community in general. Others however, maintain that there is equality within the community, but are unwilling or unable to examine the causes of obvious inequality (for example, the reasons why the presenters at the EGA conference are almost all men), choosing to blame it on the women for not ‘wanting’ to participate rather than examining the many reasons why women feel marginalised and unwelcome to participate within the community. The few exceptions are generally either held up as evidence of inclusivity (for example ‘we had one woman amongst the six men on the panel, therefore we aren’t sexist!’), used as evidence of exceptionalism (for example ‘she may be a woman, but she does chemistry like a man.’), or treated as a special category of ‘women’s spirituality’, separate from the more general category of spirituality (for example, shamans and female shamans). Many women’s contributions to the field are ignored entirely, attributed to men or minimised. I believe that there is little to no difference between the entheogenic community and the broader Australian community in the area of gender and sexuality.”

Discussion

Insights into how gender functions within the Australian entheogenic community can be found even from the demographic data harvested from the survey. Clearly, in any community reflecting a “natural” ratio of men to women, we would expect to find around 50 percent of each. However, 65 percent of survey respondents were men. This ratio of men to women does not say anything in itself about the values and perceptions of gender within the community, but it nevertheless suggests it is a space weighted towards men. Speculatively, it may be reasonable to suggest that this figure conceals a greater imbalance in numbers. Most people who research or teach in the area of gender and sexuality will have experienced significantly greater interest from women than men. If this insight were mapped on to the survey respondents it would be possible to conclude that a higher percentage of women than men in the community responded to the survey, which would move the ratio towards the statement voiced by one respondent that “about one in eleven are women”. If we were to refer back to Puttick (2003) and her typology of traditional and liberal NRMs—the former, “tend to have a male majority, sometimes 2 to 1 or higher, whereas in more liberal NRMs the ratio is typically reversed” (242)—we would likely
align the Australian entheogenic community with the traditional.

The second pertinent insight we can gather from the data is in regard to sexual orientation. It is a highly problematic exercise to quantify the percentage of non-heterosexual people in society due to the elusive nature of what “homosexual” means depending on when and where a study was undertaken. In order to sketch a spectrum of what we might expect in the survey, Anthony F. Bogaert (2004) suggests a figure typically between 1 and 6 percent of people identifying as homosexual, while Randall L. Sell, James A. Wells and David Wypij (1995)—shifting the focus from homosexual “behaviour” to “attraction”—suggest anything up to 20 percent. In the survey a very significant 24 percent of respondents chose not to identify as heterosexual. More interestingly, there is a significant problematising here of the gay/straight binary, with three times as many respondents identifying as bisexual or “other” than gay.

But it is the questions regarding women’s role within the community that are most revealing within the survey due to there being such a broad spectrum of perceptions. Right from the start of the survey, while there are often majority views, there are also significantly opposed minority views. In the first question, “Do you perceive a person’s gender and sexual orientation to be a significant aspect of their entheogenic experience?” nearly two-thirds of respondents said “no”. But what of the remaining third? The two primary types of responses in this group both speak to issues of power and gender: how gender stereotypes are socially constructed, and how experience is biologically determined (an argument often mobilised to justify the “natural” order to men’s privileged positions).

The largest single group of respondents were positive about the community when asked the main questions: “Do you perceive there to be anything different about the way gender and sexual orientation function in the entheogenic community compared to society at large?”, “Do you perceive there to be equality in the entheogenic community surrounding issues of gender and sexual orientation?” and “Is there anything about gender and sexual orientation in the entheogenic community that you would like to say that is not covered by the above questions?” But when negative and unsure answers are combined we begin to see an even split in the community about perceptions of gender. Importantly, as the questions progress we see the opinions of men and women begin to diverge: men are inclined to see the community in a positive light and respond with short confident answers; women are inclined to see the community in a more problematic light and respond with more subtle and critical answers. As each question unfolds, these diverging opinions become more pronounced and the women’s positions more expansive and critical.

A feminist analysis of this process would claim that the men in the community—either consciously or unconsciously—have more invested in the status quo as they enjoy certain privileges within it. It is therefore not surprising that men are less inclined to analyse the community and find problems. When asked the final question, “Is there anything about gender and sexual orientation in the entheogenic community that you would like to say that is not covered by the above questions?” it was the male respondents who took the opportunity to question whether much could even be learned from such a survey. Certainly, these may be methodologically sound criticisms, but equally they may be interpreted as a defensive response to the act of surfacing “gender issues” which are automatically assumed to highlight problematic male behaviours. This echoes the Psychedelics Encyclopaedia “Women in Psychedelics” article where the comment about men’s domination of psychedelic culture is qualified with “or so it would appear” (Stafford & Bigwood, 1992, 52).

Conclusion
Within the loosely comparable examples of NRM, alternative spiritualities, and countercultural communities in the 1960s we find two notable responses to issues of gender (or, more specifically, women’s role within those communities): a large degree of silence on the matter which results in the perpetuation of
mainstream values, and women (albeit a minority) voicing dissatisfaction at their marginalisation. Broadly similar responses can be identified in the survey findings about the entheogenic community in Australia.

The issue of sexual orientation deserves to be treated separately from gender in this survey discussion. Certainly, queerness is valued and welcomed within the community in a way that would be hard to find elsewhere in communities that were not defined by queerness. While the survey questions referred to “gender and sexual orientation” there was both some slippage between the two in the responses, and generally different perceptions of each. The overwhelmingly positive response to inclusivity of sexual orientation (largely in reference to queer men rather than queer women) was not extended to the experiences of straight women. This disconnect between the experiences of gay men and straight women is noteworthy, as the two are often conflated in a discourse of patriarchy and homophobia where both are dominated by heterosexual men. However, it is possible that this conflation is responsible for the relative lack of satisfaction of women in the community: specifically, the commonly held assumption that the community is welcoming to gay men is automatically (and incorrectly) extended to women without addressing the cultural and political specificities of women’s experiences (whether gay or straight).

Aside from queerness, certainly most members find the community more open to diversity than society at large and that gender equality has been realised. However, when it comes to straight gender politics there are significant levels of dissatisfaction among women (and some men) typified by the respondent who claimed, “Many women’s contributions to the field are ignored entirely, attributed to men or minimised”. Clearly, those inclusive, progressive and transgressive values do not fully extend into the domain of gender (at least according to the perceptions of the respondents, a significant but partial representation of how this issue actually plays out within the community). However, there appears to be some awareness of this fact within the community that has actively been identified not just by the conference attendee cited at the beginning of this article, but in public communications within the community (Şenol, 2012). And somewhat paradoxically, because those with access to communication dissemination within the community, it was mostly men who promoted the survey and discussion within the community, and they did so with enthusiasm.

This article is weighted heavily towards gender dynamics within the community: the socially constructed nature of the gendered experience within the community rather than the gendered nature of the entheogenic experience per se. A different line of argumentation might emerge if the specific entheogenic spiritual practices and performances of men and women in the community were examined. A further differing line of argumentation might emerge if the questions sought to reveal in greater depth if men and women’s entheogenic experiences qualitatively differ. For example, are members’ typical perceptions of gender confirmed or problematized by their entheogenic experiences? Is there some spiritual self or reality that is perceived as “authentically” masculine or feminine? And whatever the outcome of such lines of investigation, do they tally with the social dynamics presented here? For example, in the present survey, how do the 63 percent of respondents who felt that gender is not a significant aspect of the entheogenic experience bridge the gap between this belief and the practical reality of women’s experiences in the community? As we see, across the domains of both gender and sexual orientation, the entheogenic community in Australia holds several positions simultaneously: a mirror to the malestream; an exemplar of queer-friendliness; probably more inclusive than mainstream society. It is a community in transition, seeking to bridge the gaps, caught in some elusive territory between what it is and what it aspires to be.

References


