

PSYCHEDELIC PSYCHOTHERAPY AND THE CULTURAL CONCEPT OF THE PERSON

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1. Background

Despite the rich transcultural history of psychedelic healing practices, prevailing Western psychotherapeutic frameworks shape emerging psychedelic research and therapeutic models. I add to the growing literature which critiques the adoption of dominant therapeutic frameworks as part of a broader re-emergence of psychedelic medicine in Western psychiatric consciousness.

2. Aims/Objectives/Issues of Focus

I draw on Kirmayer's Psychotherapy and the Cultural Concept of the Person to show how the model of psychedelic psychotherapy is grounded on the egocentric or individualistic cultural conception of the self. While early research shows psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy to be effective for many people, I discuss how the egocentric model of psychedelic psychotherapy may fail to provide an effective therapeutic framework for individuals with different cultural conceptions and normative views of mind, self and personhood.

3. Methods

I offer analysis of cultural concepts of self by drawing on the methods of critical bioethics and transcultural psychiatry. I further use examples from Indigenous ayahuasca practices to discuss the ways that models of psychedelic healing practice reflect diverse cultural conceptions of the self.

4. Results

Despite claims that psychedelic psychotherapy is a generalizable model, it is grounded on culturally specific assumptions about what is normal, moral and psychologically healthy. Psychedelic psychotherapy concretizes egocentric conceptions of self in the construction of healing spaces and practices. The model of psychedelic psychotherapy in American- and Euro-centric contexts may fail to provide a therapeutic framework for individuals with different cultural conceptions and normative views of mind, self and personhood.

5. Discussion/Implications

Without a transcultural approach to the construction of psychedelic therapeutic practices, Western psychiatric researchers and practitioners face a severe limitation for cross-cultural generalizability in practice. Critical reflection on the model of psychedelic psychotherapy necessitates interdisciplinary and culturally informed research that recognizes the socio-historical and transcultural reality of psychedelic healing practices.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize the way cultural conceptions of self are concretized in the model of psychedelic psychiatry.
2. Explore how cultural assumptions underlying therapeutic models may affect experiences and outcomes for culturally diverse patients participating in psychedelic therapy.