

# Shifting Paradigms: Exploring Multicultural Approaches to Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy in Counseling



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The integration of diverse and multicultural perspectives in psychedelic-assisted therapy represents an important element within this emerging field. As the therapeutic potential of psychedelics continues to capture the attention of mental health professionals, it is essential to underscore the critical significance of considering the diverse cultural backgrounds, belief systems, and systemic influences and barriers of individuals engaging in these therapies. This article explores the importance of embracing a multicultural and social justice lens within psychedelic-assisted therapy that examines the movement through a historical sociopolitical lens. It reviews the integration of social justice and advocacy into potential treatment, highlighting how psychedelic-assisted therapy has the potential to enhance effectiveness, accessibility, and ethical foundations within the counseling profession.

**Keywords:** psychedelic-assisted therapy, multicultural, social justice, advocacy, counseling

Psychedelics are substances that alter states of consciousness (Nichols & Walter, 2021). This classification consists of substances derived from roots and plants, including cacti and fungi-like plants as well as synthetic substances that can affect perception. The association of psychedelics with the counterculture of the 60s and 70s created a stigma around usage and thwarted clinical research (Byock, 2018). However, in recent years, psychedelics have reemerged as a breakthrough therapeutic treatment modality for a variety of mental health disorders (Byock, 2018). The emergence of psychedelic-assisted therapy (PAT) and the results of clinical trials demonstrate significant improvements in treatment-resistant depression, increased psychological well-being, and overall long-lasting positive outcomes (Carhart-Harris et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2023; Ross et al., 2016). It is important to recognize the role that counselors and counselor educators will play in embracing diverse and multicultural aspects within the evolving and emerging field of PAT. Many communities of color face disproportionately high rates of mental health challenges because of a number of factors, including access to culturally competent treatment (Viña, 2024). PAT has the potential to address these disparities, but it can only do so effectively when treatment providers are cognizant of systemic barriers that may impact their clients. It is also important to recognize the influences of culture such as aspects of spirituality and the lived experiences from diverse and Indigenous perspectives within psychedelic therapeutic spaces. Psychedelic medicine use has a rich history in traditional cultures (Celidwen et al., 2023). However, the current psychedelic movement, including the research, predominantly represents Western perspectives, while leaders from Indigenous and diverse communities remain absent (Celidwen et al., 2023; George et al., 2020).

Within the current psychedelic science space, the voices and work of Indigenous communities, racial/ethnic minorities, and other historically marginalized populations often go unnoticed (George et al., 2020). Currently, much of psychedelic research excludes voices and perspectives of diverse

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populations, including those of women and ethnically diverse groups, in both research and practice. These groups must be acknowledged to ensure that they benefit from these novel approaches.

The diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds of both counselors and their clients are important. In this article, we explore an array of multicultural considerations and address the importance of adopting a multicultural lens in the training and practice of counselors and counselor educators within the context of PAT. We aim to provide insights into and a comprehensive examination of the potential benefits, ethical considerations, and multicultural perspectives related to the potential integration of psychedelic training into counselor education and supervision. We also explore the urgent need for a culturally sensitive and inclusive approach within PAT, with a focus on areas such as cultural appropriation, legalization/criminalization, potential barriers to access, diversity in training, and research and future implications. Acknowledgment of multicultural perspectives in psychedelic therapy presents opportunities toward greater inclusivity and equity while expanding upon traditional healing approaches. Adopting this approach can enhance the efficacy and ethical foundation of these treatments within diverse communities.

## **Multicultural Considerations in Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy**

Psychedelic substances have deep historical and cultural roots in many Indigenous and other traditional practices worldwide (K. Williams et al., 2022). Many Indigenous groups express concern over the cultural appropriation of psychedelics by Western medicine (Celidwen et al., 2023). Understanding the cultural meanings, rituals, and beliefs surrounding traditional plant medicine and psychedelic use can help counselors provide culturally competent care and avoid appropriating or misinterpreting these practices. Therefore, it is important that mental health professionals and educators approach PAT with sensitivity and awareness of diverse cultural perspectives. These considerations align with the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Social Justice Competencies by encompassing and explaining the cultural contexts of psychedelic use, respecting traditional healing practices, and promoting inclusivity while ensuring equitable access to treatment (Ratts et al., 2016).

### **Disparities in Psychedelic Research**

Current research demonstrates that PAT is emerging as a promising therapeutic approach by offering potentially transformative treatments for a range of mental health-related issues. Early PAT researchers conducted controlled trials that demonstrated the safety and efficacy of psilocybin-assisted therapy in the context of end-of-life distress and cancer-related anxiety, depression, and addiction (Griffiths et al., 2006). The trial showed psilocybin-assisted therapy improved psychological well-being and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression (Griffiths et al., 2016). In addition, controlled studies conducted in recent years have provided compelling evidence of the potential efficacy of psychedelics in treating mental health disorders, such as treatment-resistant depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance use disorders (Bogenschutz et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2023).

The recent clinical trials pertaining to PAT offer great promise and beneficial impacts to mental health and well-being. However, these trials historically have limited the inclusion of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and other marginalized populations (Michaels et al., 2018; K. Williams et al., 2022; M. T. Williams et al., 2020). For example, a study examining recent PAT clinical trials reported 85% of the participants identified as non-Hispanic White and 5% or less of the participants identified as people of color (Michaels et al., 2018). The lack of participation in the research may be due to factors such as historical mistrust (e.g., trauma linked to medical experimentation), lack of cultural sensitivity, accessibility, stigma and discrimination (e.g., legal ramifications), and non-inclusive recruitment

strategies (George et al., 2020; Michaels et al., 2018; Thrul & Garcia-Romeu, 2021; K. Williams et al., 2022). Furthermore, in the most recent phase-2 MDMA trial, only 9.5% of the participants identified as being ethnically diverse (Mithoefer et al., 2011). Subsequently the sample from the phase-3 trial showed improvement toward diverse sampling (Mitchell et al., 2023). In a study examining ketamine-assisted therapy, researchers reported that all clinicians in the trial identified as White, while 89% of the participants also identified as White (Herzberg & Butler 2019). This data has important implications for current and future studies, as current results may not be as generalizable to the greater population (Michaels et al., 2018). Even with the increase and interest in psychedelic-related research, the recruitment and inclusion of diverse populations is lagging. Because researchers have primarily conducted empirical research in psychedelic medicine with a majority of White male participants, there is a lack of knowledge about the impact of PAT on minoritized populations (Viña, 2024). The absence of diverse ethnic and minority population representation may hinder the advancement of PAT. Inclusion of diverse groups may offer the opportunity to customize treatment approaches that may be better suited to people of color.

### **Cultural Impacts of Legalization**

The contexts of sociopolitical landscapes contribute to societal resistance and stigma around psychedelic therapy (Curtis et al., 2020; Hearn et al., 2022). The demonization of psychedelics in the media as well as government campaigns like the war on drugs not only contributed to the stigmatization of these substances and the perception that their use was inherently dangerous, but also fueled fears of a societal impact (Beckett et al., 2006; Sessa, 2016). This resistance can manifest both within counseling communities and the broader cultural context. Additionally, navigating the legal and regulatory challenges associated with multicultural psychedelic therapy adds layers of complexity to its integration into mainstream mental health practice (Marks & Cohen, 2021). The nature of the legalization and criminalization of psychedelic substances has led to hesitancy and resistance among both researchers and mental health professionals (Curtis et al., 2020; Hearn et al., 2022). Resistance to the integration of psychedelic therapy within counseling communities is often rooted in historical narratives, ethical concerns, and misconceptions associated with use (Smith et al., 2022). Many clinicians may fear the legal consequences, professional repercussions, and social stigma surrounding PAT. These impacts may discourage many educators and clinicians from exploring the therapeutic potential of these substances. This could perpetuate a lack of knowledge and formal training within counselor education, leaving educators and clinicians ill-equipped to integrate psychedelics into education and practice. Addressing this resistance requires comprehensive education initiatives within counseling programs. Educators and professional organizations must foster an open dialogue that provides accurate information about the therapeutic potential of psychedelics.

Some jurisdictions have begun to reconsider their approach through a growing recognition of the need for a more evidence-based and compassionate approach to drug policy. States like Oregon and cities like Denver, Colorado, have decriminalized the use of psychedelics (Siegel et al., 2023). The reevaluation of criminalization has opened doors for advancement in scientific research, leading to a resurgence of interest in therapeutic applications (Smith et al., 2022). Moreover, criminalization may limit access to PAT for individuals and communities that may benefit most from these treatments (Devenot et al., 2022). The illegal status of psychedelics presents challenges for patients to find qualified professionals who can provide these therapies legally and safely. Furthermore, the lack of access creates barriers for individuals to explore alternative and potentially transformative treatments for conditions that may be unresponsive to conventional approaches (Smith et al., 2022). Dismantling decades of stigma and overcoming criminalization will require continued advocacy from the counseling profession and mental health field.

Presently, ketamine stands as the only available legal substance that is often classified as psychedelic treatment in the United States. Ongoing research and evolving regulatory landscapes may pave the way for more legal options in the future (Dore et al., 2019). Although most psychedelics remain Schedule I controlled substances, making them illegal for recreational or therapeutic use, practitioners have legally used ketamine to treat treatment-resistant depression. Medical professionals have administered the drug under supervision in various clinical settings, offering hope to individuals who have not responded to conventional antidepressant therapies (Dore et al., 2019; Marks & Cohen, 2021). In the past, the legal classification of psychedelics as Schedule I substances, coupled with strict regulations, have made it challenging for researchers to obtain the necessary approvals and resources to conduct studies. However, researchers have put forth guidelines for testing psychedelics (Johnson et al., 2008). Although more federally funded clinical trials have emerged to highlight the benefits of PAT in recent years, underground use of the substances in community, therapeutic, and spiritual contexts has disproportionately impacted diverse and Indigenous communities (Williams et al., 2022). Furthermore, even with evidence of potential benefits of PAT, state and federal regulatory guidelines create barriers for the use of psychedelics in treatment (Byock, 2018).

### **Impacts of Criminalization**

The current sociopolitical climate and the overcriminalization of drug use continue to further stigmatize communities of color (Ching, 2019). Almost half of incarcerated individuals are in prison because of drug-related offenses (Buehler & Kluckow, 2024). Black men are imprisoned at a 5.7% higher rate than their White counterparts for similar convictions (Buehler & Kluckow, 2024). Racial disparities among drug arrests continue to persist. Because of these factors, people of color may feel less safe from a legal standpoint and may display more hesitancy to explore psychedelic-related therapeutics (George et al., 2020). People from historically marginalized communities may also be resistant to the use of psychedelics and PAT because of these implications (Ching, 2019). Additionally, psychedelic medicine has been underutilized to treat issues such as race-based trauma within communities of color. A study conducted by M. T. Williams et al. (2021) found a significant reduction in anxiety and depressive symptoms in participants who utilized psychedelics for the treatment of race-based trauma. However, if clinicians are not properly trained and do not understand the mechanics of racism, they can add to their clients' trauma (Smith et al., 2022). In addition, researchers have argued that the current psychedelic-assisted model of therapy does not properly train counselors to treat BIPOC populations (Smith et al., 2022).

On a broader cultural level, because stigma surrounding psychedelic use persists, it often hinders individuals from diverse backgrounds from considering or openly discussing PAT (George et al., 2020). This stigma is rooted in societal misconceptions, fears, and historical prejudices; it may also include mistrust of the practitioners engaging in this mode of therapy (Smith et al., 2022). Addressing this stigma requires collaborative efforts between mental health professionals and community leaders. Public awareness campaigns that are culturally sensitive as well as education programs and community engagement initiatives can be utilized to challenge stereotypes and misinformation. These efforts should not only emphasize the potential benefits but also any associated risks of PAT. These efforts can assist in the destigmatization of PAT and validate its use as a legitimate therapeutic modality. Without legal access to psychedelic-assisted therapeutic modalities, historically marginalized populations remain vulnerable to criminalization. Advocacy efforts should focus on disseminating information geared toward acknowledging past drug policy harm and the potential for psychedelic healing. Addressing these barriers through advocacy and policy are essential to ensuring equitable access.

## Ethical Considerations

The historical use of these substances for spiritual, cultural, and personal purposes challenges the notion of gatekeeping and medicalization. Therefore, ethical considerations extend beyond therapeutic settings to also encompass the possible recreational use of psychedelics (Pilecki et al., 2021). Gatekeepers who limit access to these substances raise questions about equity and personal autonomy. At the same time, there is a risk of overly medicalizing psychedelics, which may strip away the rich cultural and spiritual heritage that has been integral to their use.

### Cultural Appropriation and the Commodification of Psychedelic Experiences

Incorporating diverse and multicultural perspectives into the framework of PAT presents ethical challenges, particularly concerning the risk of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation refers to the adoption or use of elements from one culture by individuals or groups, often from a more dominant culture, without understanding, respect, or permission (Sue et al., 2022). Issues may arise in the context of PAT when people appropriate cultural practices or substances with deep historical or spiritual significance. One of the primary ethical considerations revolves around the respect for Indigenous knowledge and practices. Indigenous cultures have utilized psychedelic substances in their spiritual and healing rituals for centuries, and the current psychedelic movement faces challenges with the cultural and historical appropriation of these traditional healing methods (George et al., 2020). The appropriation of these practices without the involvement, permission, or benefit of Indigenous communities raises substantial questions about cultural exploitation and ethical responsibility. For example, the financial exploitation of plant medicines, without direct benefit to Indigenous peoples, could lead to unsustainable extraction of plant medicines, making them unavailable for communal use (Celidwen et al., 2023).

Indigenous and other cultures from around the world have long-standing traditions of working with psychedelic substances for spiritual and therapeutic purposes (Field, 2022). Many Indigenous cultures position the aspect of spirit as an integral component of healing and understanding (Field, 2022). The exploration and use of psychedelics in therapeutic contexts must confront the ethical challenges associated with cultural appropriation and the commodification of psychedelic experiences, which may exclude aspects of spiritual influences. Some may argue that in many Western-based PAT options, there is often an absence or underrepresentation of the integration of spiritual or transcendental aspects (K. Williams et al., 2022). Studies have shown that participants who undergo PAT, such as psilocybin-based therapy, highly correlate mystical or spiritual experiences with treatment (Reif et al., 2020). Although these treatments primarily focus on the clinical and therapeutic benefits of psychedelics, they may sometimes overlook the profound spiritual or mystical experiences that these substances can induce (Griffiths et al., 2006). The subjective nature of spirituality and the hesitance to incorporate it into scientific and clinical models that seek measurement of experiences as validation methods may be contributing factors (Sessa, 2016; K. Williams et al., 2022). However, for many individuals, the spiritual dimension of their psychedelic experiences is deeply meaningful and transformative (Griffiths et al., 2006). Recognizing the spiritual aspects and the potential for personal growth, healing, and enhanced well-being is important in order to offer a comprehensive and holistic approach to psychedelic therapy. This approach respects the diverse ways in which some individuals find meaning and make connections through these experiences.

### Medicalization and Decolonization

The historical exploitation of Indigenous practices, including the appropriation of sacred rituals, also encompasses commercialization of psychedelic substances (Devenot et al., 2022). Because of a number of promising studies, many companies and entities are positioned to profit from the therapeutic

potential of psychedelic medicines by seeking to patent psychedelic substances (Marks & Cohen, 2021). Marks and Cohen (2021) argued that this may allow a small number of companies to act as gatekeepers, further restricting access to these emerging therapies. However, many marginalized groups, including Indigenous populations, do not receive these benefits (George et al., 2020; K. Williams et al., 2022). By not acknowledging the cultural roots of classic psychedelics, the colonization and appropriation of these practices may result in the erasure and exploitation of Indigenous knowledge and traditions (K. Williams et al., 2022). Mental health professionals engaging with psychedelic therapy must critically examine and address these concerns to ensure ethical and respectful practices.

As a profession, counselors must ensure that the voices of all cultures, including those who have stewarded plant medicines for millennia, are not lost and that advocacy becomes part of the PAT framework in order to create a more equitable future for all. Counselors should approach these practices with humility, respect, and a commitment to cultural preservation. PAT must acknowledge and address power dynamics, particularly in the context of historical and ongoing debate concerning the use of psychedelic substances. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies provide a guide for praxis to address these issues (Ratts et al., 2016). The current focus on medicalization and profit can overshadow the cultural, spiritual, and therapeutic significance of psychedelic experiences (Devenot et al., 2022; Schwarz-Plaschg, 2022). Furthermore, medicalization attempts to position Western approaches to Indigenous practices as the only legitimate way to utilize these substances may lead to restrictions and regulation of access (Schwarz-Plaschg, 2022). Mental health professionals need to recognize the impact of colonialism on Indigenous practices and the potential for appropriation of psychedelic plant medicines (Sessa, 2016). Educators and practitioners should actively work to dismantle power imbalances by engaging in ethical collaborations to promote the inclusion and empowerment of historically marginalized communities.

## **The Role of Counseling in Advocacy, Access, and Equity**

PAT shows promise for addressing major facets of mental health disparities, particularly among vulnerable and underserved communities (Thrul & Garcia-Romeu, 2021). These communities often face higher rates of mental health–related issues, including trauma, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, and they could potentially benefit significantly from these innovative therapies (Thrul & Garcia-Romeu, 2021). Counselors should prioritize access to these treatments in communities that are often disproportionately affected by mental health challenges (Herzberg & Butler, 2019; Michaels et al., 2018; Sevelius, 2017; Thrul & Garcia-Romeu, 2021; Williams & Labate, 2020). Psychedelic therapy should strive for equitable access, ensuring that individuals from all backgrounds can benefit from this modality. This requires addressing barriers such as costs and accessibility. Mental health professionals should work toward making PAT accessible and affordable (Herzberg & Butler, 2019; Michaels et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant for economically marginalized communities that have historically faced barriers to accessing quality mental health care. Many individuals from underserved and marginalized communities may face financial limitations that present as a barrier and could potentially limit access, preventing them from pursuing these investigative treatments (K. Williams et al., 2022). For PAT to be equitable, it is essential to consider financial accessibility. Being proactive and advocating for insurance coverage of PAT could significantly enhance access. This, in turn, can increase health and social disparities faced by these communities. As the field of PAT evolves, addressing these issues becomes increasingly important. Counselors must ensure future equitable access to PAT, as equity aligns with the broader goals of counseling and fundamentally links the idea that everyone, regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background, should have access to innovative and effective mental health care.

Advocacy for policy changes is crucial for improving access to and equity in PAT. Counselors, counselor educators, and the broader mental health community can play a significant role in advocating for policy changes and greater access as these modalities become further legalized. Legal reforms can help decriminalize psychedelics and regulate access to PAT. The creation of standardized training and evidence-based guidelines is essential for those who wish to integrate PAT into their practice (Marks & Cohen, 2021).

Furthermore, counselors can embed PAT in a broader framework of multiculturalism and social justice advocacy by aligning it with the counselor social justice advocacy competencies. (Ratts et al., 2016). This involves addressing historical and ongoing injustices and actively working toward decolonizing practices and systems. Educators and clinicians engaging with PAT should recognize their role in advancing social justice and commit to principles of equity, inclusivity, and cultural empowerment. By approaching PAT with cultural humility and a commitment to ethical practice, professionals can contribute to a more inclusive, respectful, and responsible approach.

Moreover, multicultural perspectives bring depth to the therapeutic process itself. Different cultures have their unique healing practices, spiritual beliefs, and worldviews regarding altered states of consciousness. By embracing multicultural perspectives, counselors can expand their understanding of healing, embrace diverse approaches to well-being, and tailor PAT to meet the specific needs of individuals across cultural backgrounds (Sevelius, 2017). Promoting diversity and inclusivity within the field by training, providing educational opportunities to individuals from diverse backgrounds, and prioritizing the inclusion of diverse perspectives in research and practice can help promote equity. Development of inclusive policies that address historical injustices as well as ethical and cultural considerations aimed at reducing disparities in access related to psychedelics is crucial (M. T. Williams et al., 2020).

## **Multicultural Perspectives, Strategies, and Implications for Practice**

Integrating multicultural perspectives into counseling practice is important for fostering inclusive and effective mental health care, particularly in emerging fields like PAT. Integrating diverse viewpoints and practices can help address systemic barriers, promote inclusivity, and enhance therapeutic outcomes for marginalized populations and other underrepresented groups. By addressing issues related to diversifying psychedelic research, diversifying the counseling workforce, and emphasizing culturally responsive approaches, counselors can create spaces that address diverse experiences. This section outlines actionable steps and strategies designed to incorporate multicultural frameworks into training, research, and practice.

### **Psychoeducation for Advocacy in Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy**

Counselors play a pivotal role in advocacy efforts for PAT by providing psychoeducation that empowers everyone—clients, marginalized communities, and the general public. Counselors can tailor psychoeducation to address the historical use of psychedelics and tackle issues related to marginalized populations, including common barriers to access. One strategic approach is to have counselors engage with clients and communities and educate them about the current changing legal landscape surrounding psychedelic substances, which includes regulatory changes and clinical trials that are shifting the conversation toward wider acceptance (Nichols & Walter, 2021). Providing accurate information about the safety, efficacy, and cultural history of psychedelics, specifically in non-Western and Indigenous contexts, can help reduce stigma and promote informed decision-making (George et al., 2020).

Additionally, professional counselors can offer a variety of workshops and community outreach programs that discuss the therapeutic potential of psychedelics and address concerns specific to underserved communities, such as fears of legal ramifications or historical trauma linked to medical experimentation (George et al., 2020; K. Williams et al., 2022). Legal reforms will help decriminalize psychedelics and regulate access to PAT. This approach should be culturally responsive to ensure that materials and discussions are tailored to the needs, values, and historical experiences of these populations.

Lastly, counselors can advocate for systemic change by collaborating with state and local organizations and policymakers to disseminate information about the potential benefits of PAT, specifically for treating trauma-related disorders in communities of color (Doblin et al., 2019; M. T. Williams et al., 2020). Counselors must also advocate for insurance coverage by lobbying through a call for action to reduce financial barriers for marginalized groups. Through a psychoeducational approach, counselors will advocate for more equitable access to PAT.

### **Diverse Representation in Psychedelic Research**

Discussing multicultural approaches in PAT helps researchers and counselors develop cultural competence, address biases, tailor treatment to individual needs, foster trust, empower clients, and promote social justice. By embracing a multicultural lens, researchers can create more effective and inclusive protocols for care that respect and acknowledge the diverse cultural backgrounds and identities of their clients (Scharff et al., 2010). Considering cultural factors in research of PAT is essential to ensure that therapy is relevant, respectful, safe, and inclusive (George et al., 2020). It promotes cultural sensitivity that acknowledges the diversity of human experiences, which aids counselors in providing effective and meaningful support to their clients so that PAT is accessible to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Diverse representation requires cultural sensitivity training to produce culturally competent research teams consisting of clinicians, researchers, and support staff. One strategy is to offer training that focuses on respecting and understanding diverse beliefs, values, cultural practices, and communication styles (Brennan & Belser, 2022). Diverse representation also entails having culturally different populations as participants in clinical trials. Engagement and collaboration must be addressed when tailoring recruitment strategies, dealing with barriers to access, enhancing language accessibility, and combating historical stigma through community education (Herzberg & Butler, 2019). Recruitment strategies using educational programs that specifically target underrepresented groups should involve culturally relevant communication channels to reduce stigma and increase awareness about psychedelic research within diverse communities.

Partnerships with community organizations and collaboration with community leaders will promote insight into specific cultural nuances and values and help build trust within diverse communities (Williams & Labate, 2020). Ethical considerations, including informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality, must be carefully addressed while also respecting and integrating the cultural contexts and values of participants (Smith et al., 2022). Along with increasing awareness, collaboration identifies barriers, such as financial constraints and transportation, that prevent marginalized individuals from participating. Adapting PAT protocols by incorporating traditional healing practices and spiritual elements that are meaningful to participants from diverse backgrounds creates additional cultural sensitivity around including culturally different populations (Celidwen et al., 2023). Diverse representation in psychedelic research is not only an ethical imperative, as

outlined in the *ACA Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014), but also is essential for producing results that impact diverse populations. It is vital to ensure that individuals from a broad spectrum of cultural and ethnic backgrounds understand the benefits and risks of PAT.

### **Diversifying Psychedelic Training and Workforce**

Specific guidelines for PAT vary and remain unclear (Schwarz-Plaschg, 2022). Moving forward, it is imperative that the counseling profession and governing bodies work together to create diverse training and treatment modalities. Furthermore, it is important that future PAT is reflective of people from diverse backgrounds to better fit the needs of people of color. Many current protocols and training programs are developed without input from diverse voices, which can result in a lack of cultural awareness regarding participants' experiences (Buchanan, 2020). Incorporating a diverse array of clinicians from various backgrounds into psychedelic therapy training is a crucial step in ensuring the cultural relevance and effectiveness of these therapeutic approaches. Ensuring clinicians are culturally competent in training will help to build trust and rapport with clients from diverse backgrounds. Addressing mental health disparities within marginalized communities will also aid in culturally appropriate treatment approaches. Clinicians of color and clinicians from other diverse backgrounds bring valuable perspectives and cultural insights that enrich the field and promote a more inclusive, equitable, and effective approach to psychedelic therapy. Having a diverse workforce also aligns with and promotes the broader principles of social justice and health care equity. In the current landscape of psychedelic research and practice, people of color and women are often overlooked as leaders (Buchanan, 2020; George et al., 2020). Diversity in the workforce also reinforces the importance of making access to PAT equitable through representation. One strategy for diversifying the workforce is to encourage counseling programs to partner with other PAT training programs and offer scholarships and fellowships for training that create educational opportunities for marginalized students, thus promoting diversity and inclusivity. These scholarships and fellowships can specifically fund trainings for historically marginalized students.

As the counseling profession begins to explore ways to incorporate PAT into counselor training, embedding multicultural counseling competency as a foundational element of their PAT curriculum is recommended. One example could include introducing PAT in a counseling theories course as an emerging therapeutic framework to potentially treat treatment-resistant disorders. Exploration of PAT can also be included in a multicultural counseling course. This requires the inclusion of coursework that explores the history, cultural significance, and modern therapeutic applications of psychedelics across different cultures. Students should learn how various communities have actively integrated psychedelics into their healing practices for centuries, particularly in regions where plant medicines play a central role in traditional health and spiritual rituals.

Counseling programs may also include courses that provide specific training on addressing the cultural and historical trauma that may arise in clients from marginalized communities. For instance, the war on drugs disproportionately impacted Black and Indigenous communities in the United States, which may influence how they perceive psychedelics and PAT (Buchanan, 2020; Carhart-Harris et al., 2017). Counselors must receive training on acknowledging and addressing historical traumas when working with clients from these backgrounds, utilizing trauma-informed approaches that validate their experiences and build trust (Williams & Labate, 2020).

In addition, counselors must develop skills in culturally relevant communication to effectively engage with clients from various backgrounds. This includes being mindful of how different communities and clients may interpret the psychedelic experience. For example, some Indigenous

groups may share experiences through a spiritual or shamanic lens, while others may relate their experience to their unique cultural background. Counselors should receive training from culturally competent PAT practitioners and established PAT programs to adapt their communication styles to respect cultural nuances and avoid the imposition of a singular Western therapeutic approach (George et al., 2020).

### **Community Collaboration**

Collaborating with diverse communities in the context of PAT is crucial for fostering culturally sensitive practices that honor traditional knowledge and ensure ethical integration into modern therapeutic frameworks. A potential strategy is for counselors to form community partnerships with individuals from the cultures whose practices are being integrated and ask these individuals to offer valuable insights and guidance on ethical considerations. An example from the literature describes panels from Indigenous communities creating a list outlining eight ethical considerations for engaging in psychedelic medicine. They include concepts pertaining to Indigenous knowledge, nature, and ways of being and knowing (Celidwen et al., 2023). These panels can help ensure that cultural perspectives are appropriately integrated into the therapy process. Moreover, collaboration with Indigenous and other cultural communities should involve mutually agreed-upon benefit-sharing arrangements. These arrangements can include providing financial support, resources, or other forms of reciprocity to recognize the value and utilization of the used cultural knowledge. Collaborating with Indigenous communities and leaders through engagement and partnerships can guide the creation of culturally sensitive and ethically appropriate practices and training while incorporating traditional healing and spiritual elements into research and training protocols. This collaboration can help create culturally competent research teams with diverse representation that can aid in recruiting underrepresented groups for clinical trials through education and trust building. This continual evaluation helps minimize cultural appropriation and preserves cultural sensitivity, which aligns with ethical principles that promote inclusivity, respect, and justice. These principles correspond with the multicultural and social justice advocacy competencies (Ratts et al., 2016).

### **Conclusion**

Looking ahead to the future of counseling in psychedelic therapy, it is essential to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous and other cultural history and traditional use of these substances. Many cultures have maintained profound relationships with psychedelics as healing tools for generations by utilizing them in sacred rituals and healing practices (Fotiou, 2020). This cultural context offers valuable insights into the therapeutic potential of these substances and underscores the need for cultural humility and acknowledgment within the field of PAT. Recognizing Indigenous knowledge and practices not only informs our approach, but it also highlights the importance of collaborating with these communities and leaders (George et al., 2020). By doing so, counselors can foster a more inclusive and equitable future for PAT.

By acknowledging the diverse ways in which individuals experience healing, PAT has the potential to break down barriers and reduce mental health disparities. The future of PAT rests significantly in the hands of counselors and other mental health professionals. Additionally, culturally competent and inclusive psychedelic training can address disparities and promote equity in mental health services. As ambassadors of mental health and well-being, counselors can play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative around PAT. Educators bear the responsibility of imparting the knowledge, skills, and cultural competence required to navigate this evolving landscape. Incorporating psychedelic education into counseling programs equips future professionals with the skills to meet

the diverse needs of their clients. Counselors can assist in these efforts by actively engaging in destigmatizing PAT, advocating for legal reforms, and promoting cultural humility that recognizes the significance of multicultural perspectives. Embracing multicultural perspectives in PAT is not merely an ethical imperative; it is a guide toward a more compassionate and holistic vision of mental health and well-being. Counselors, as educators, clinicians, and advocates, have the potential to shape a future that integrates the potential significance of PAT with cultural competence, offering profound respect of diverse experiences.

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