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PSYCHIATRY ACADEMY

# Decolonizing Psychedelics

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# Disclosures



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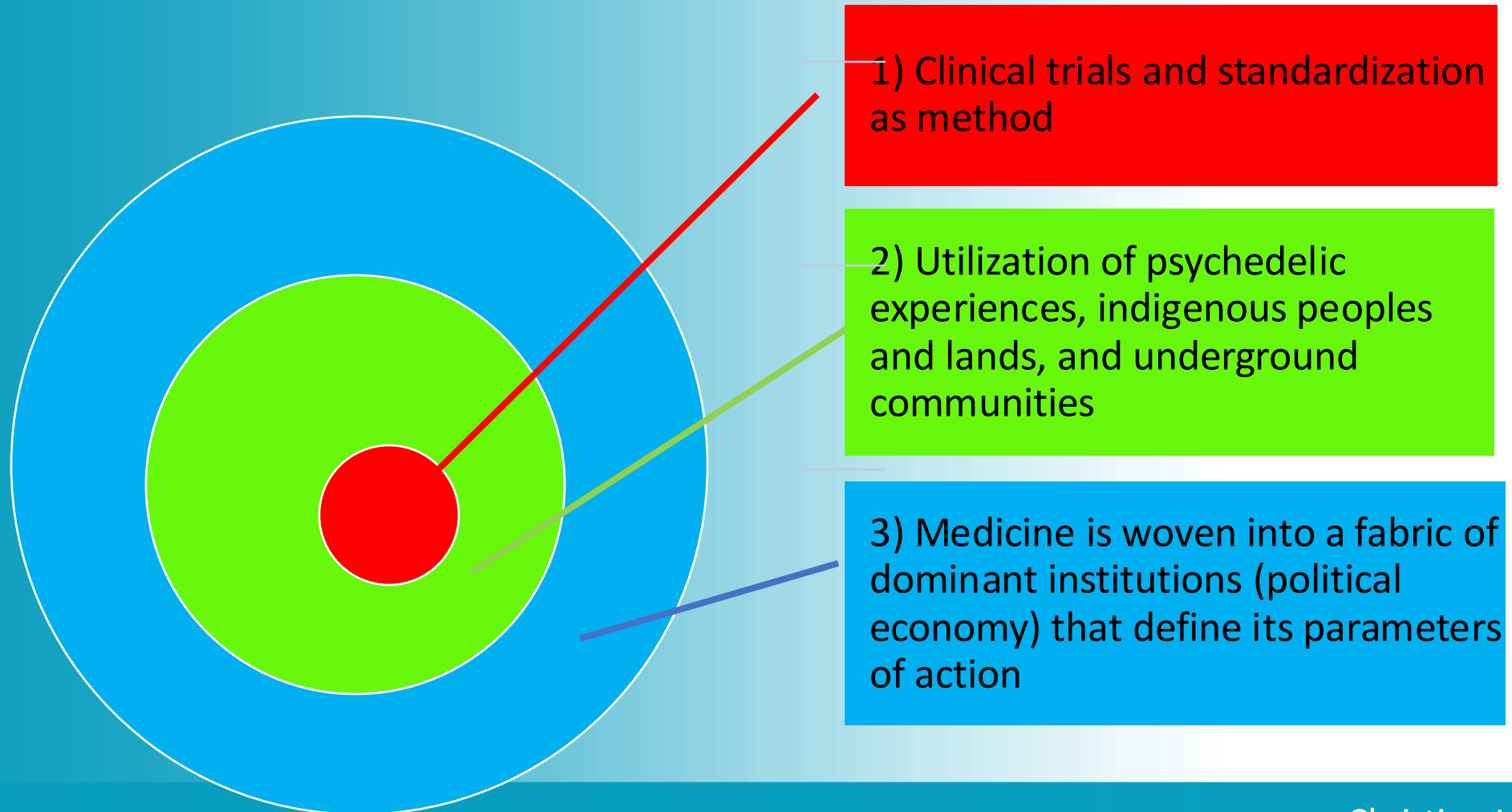
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“Neither I nor my spouse/partner has a relevant financial relationship with a commercial interest to disclose.”

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# Three Dimensions of Power and Control in the Clinical Space





# Colonizations in the Psychedelic Arena

## Methods

- Extraction
- Appropriation
- Adaptation
- Synthetic re-production
- Marketization
- Control of profits

## Colonized as objects


- Psychoactive plants
- Rare animals
- Indigenous knowledges, rituals, and practices
- Indigenous peoples and persons
- Minds and experiences
- Hopes and needs



RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Decolonization is a metaphor towards a different epistemology: a case from psychedelic studies<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Indigenous psychedelic uses have long been imbricated with colonialism and its afterlives. Amidst tensions from accelerating investor interest in psychedelics and calls to decolonize research and practices, we argue that the study of psychedelics is troubled by dualisms used in both colonial and decolonial thought: subject and object, self and other, culture and nature, synthetic and natural, the colonizer and the indigenous, the literal and the metaphorical. Feminist and decolonial theory as well as a discussion of metaphor support our argument that the study of psychedelics often lacks critical engagement with these dualisms. A narrow understanding of coloniality hinders far-reaching critiques of contemporary capitalism, including progressive colonization of the life-world and commodification of psychedelic experiences. Fears that decolonization is becoming just a ‘metaphor’ implicitly reaffirm the conceptual power dynamics of colonization. In research on psychedelics, decolonization as a critical metaphor enables reassessing problematic distinctions that shape thinking, material realities, experiences.

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Bioprospecting; critical theory; decolonization; decolonizing ethics; medicalization; psychedelic patenting; psychedelic studies; Val Plumwood

Argues against dualist distinction ‘literal’ versus ‘metaphorical’

a method from the epistemic playbook of colonization

privileges North-American history and situation

veils ongoing extractive and oppressive practices



➔ Medicalization of psychedelics entails active new colonizations

➔ We need advanced ethic to enable active decolonization

Disruptive interventions against intersecting colonizing practices

### Introduction

This article begins at the generative nexus of decolonial thought and the study of psychedelics in Latin America. Growing interest in the role of psychedelics in health and medicine has accelerated clinical, political, financial, and cultural investments in their healing effects of ayahuasca, Salvia divinorum, and psychoactive mushrooms.

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<sup>1</sup>Exeter Research Group Philosophy and Psychedelic Studies. This article is co-authored by members of the Exeter Research Group Philosophy and Psychedelic Studies at the University of Exeter, UK (EX). Lead author: Christine Hauskeller (EX), with contributing authors Taline Artinian (EX), Amelia Fiske (TU-Münster, Germany) (EX), Osiris Sinuhé González Romero (University of Saskatchewan, Canada), Luis Eduardo Luna (University of São Paulo, Brazil), Joseph Crickmore (EX), and Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes (EX).



Types of commercial semi-legalized experience:

**Party:**

self-abandon in a synchronous crowd

**Church:**

shared community, rituals, ecstatic transcendence

**Clinic:**

cure mental illness/ make people feel/ be more “normal”



# Common Beliefs I Discuss

The war against drugs is harmful, and for many psychedelics unjustifiable

Trials and other ritual spaces, limit and manipulate psychedelic experiences - music

Psychedelics experiences deemed dangerous in western civilization.

Experiencing connectedness indoors or outdoors, alone or with others?

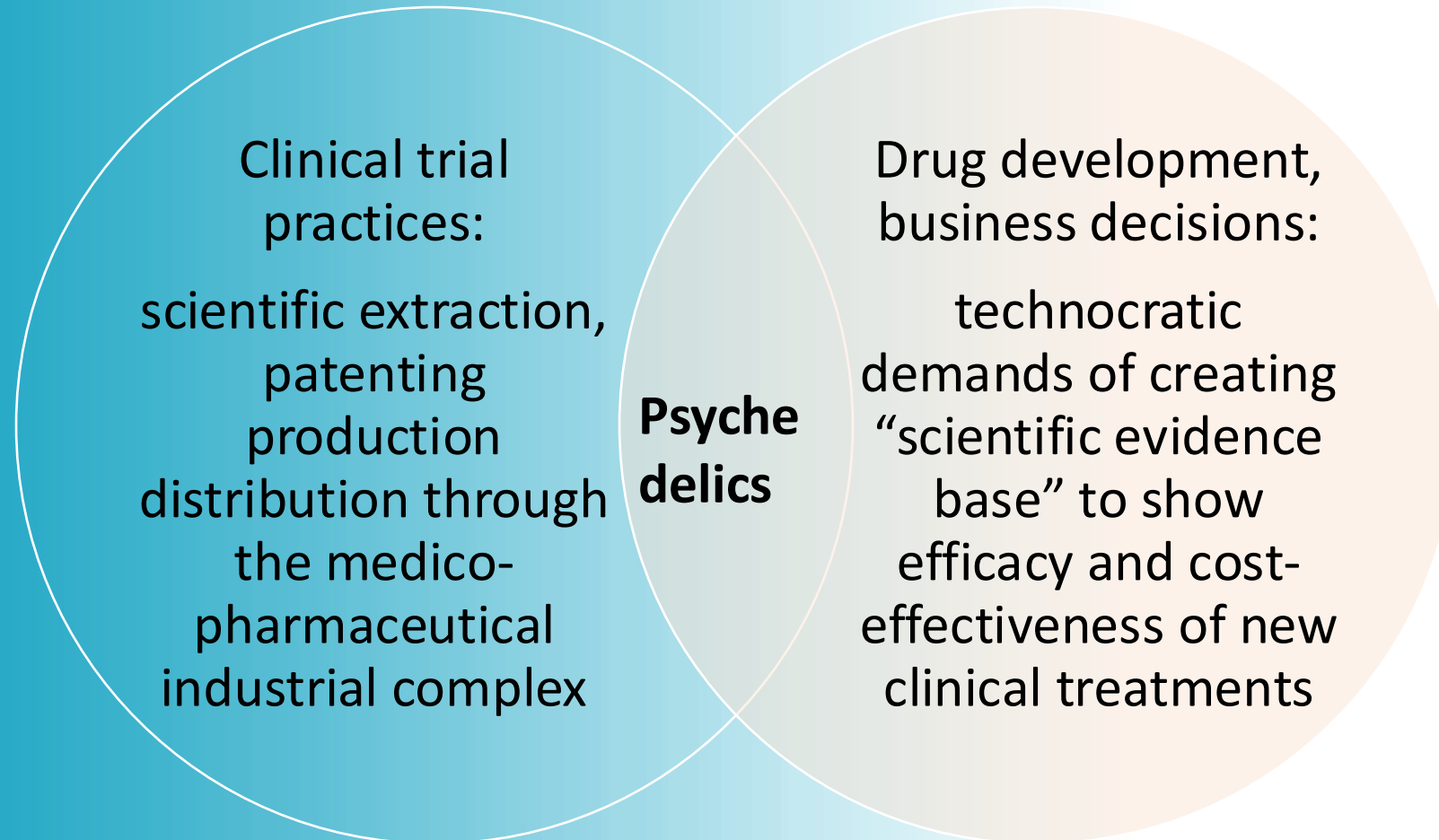
Can “evidence” against alienation take forms beyond individualization, reification, and instrumentalization?

Ethics must remain critical of pre-packaged meaning-making





# Clinical Colonization







# Psychological/internal colonization

What kinds of 'experiences' are allowed?

Therapeutic, party and religious uses but

NOT self-expansion, altered consciousness

Can psychiatry/psychology include fullness  
of experiences without distorting them?

Ethic of equality and self-determination,  
of communities and individuals, needs to  
deconstruct clinical colonization.

Is it ethical for law to restrict experiences?

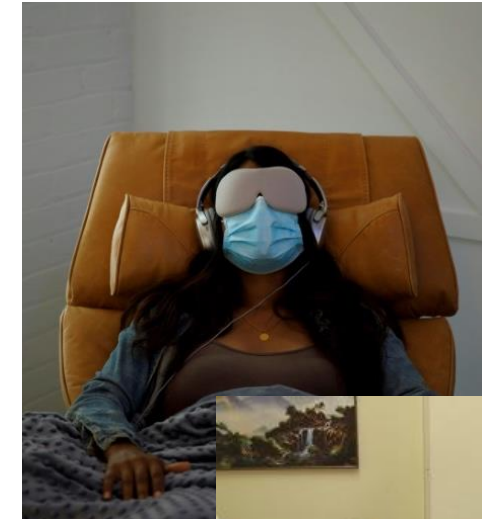




# Study Practice

“Psilocybin was administered in opaque gelatine capsules with approximately 100 mL water. Both facilitators were present in the room and available to respond to participants’ physical and emotional needs during the day-long session, with the exception of short breaks taken by 1 facilitator at a time.

During the session, participants were instructed to lie on a couch in a living room–like environment, and facilitators encouraged participants to focus their attention inward and stay with any experience that arose. **To enhance inward reflection, music was played (...), and participants were instructed to wear eyeshades and headphones.”**



Davis AK, Barrett FS, May DG, et al. Effects of Psilocybin-Assisted Therapy on Major Depressive Disorder: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2021;78(5):481–489. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.3285





For the onset ...the best music is “unfolding and has a dependable structure.... So, it’s a **net of reassurance, almost, and of leadership.**”

The music helps keep participants from prematurely returning to normal conscious awareness, Richards says. The majority of the music is either instrumental or choral with non-English text, and purposefully so. **In order to keep participants “inside” the experience,** only the last section of the playlist uses selections with recognizable words.

# Music Playlists



## Evidence for .... DISSONANCES

“The most prominent cluster, including five out of ten patients (50% of cluster), described music to ‘intensify’ emotions they did not want to feel, such as increased ‘fearfulness’, ‘sadness’, or ‘fear’. In addition, five out of ten (50% of cluster) made statements about the music creating a sense of ‘discomfort’, including **‘unpleasant’ or ‘uncomfortable’ experiences**, and four out of ten (40% of cluster) described irritation as a consequence of the music.”

**Six out of 19 (32% of total) made statements about .. ‘misguidance’;** primarily descriptions of the music being a ‘mismatch’ or incongruent with the unfolding subjective experience.

Less than **30%** include descriptions of the ‘music feeling intrusive’, ...being ‘unable to positively influence a challenging experience, ... **giving a ‘sense of being manipulated’, the music giving a ‘sense of unmet potential’.**

Kaelen M, Giribaldi B, Raine J, et al. The hidden therapist: evidence for a central role of music in psychedelic therapy. *Psychopharmacology (Berl)*. 2018 Feb 235(2):505-519. doi: 10.1007/s00213-017-4820-5.





# ‘A manifesto for embracing the weirdness of psychedelics’ (p. 1472).

Clinical medicine not steer away from the mystical ‘unscientific’ side of psychedelic experiences

Highlight the reality and importance of such experiences for both patient and treatment outcome

Mention methods to quantify & qualify mystical experiences

Stress influence of setting (cultural contexts, expectations) on psychedelic experiences and making sense of them.

Breeksema, JJ and van Elk, M (2021) Working with Weirdness: A Response to “Moving Past Mysticism in Psychedelic Science” *ACS Pharmacology & Translational Science* 2021 4 (4), 1471-1474.



# Keeping Control in RCTs ?

- Too few, too small CTs, varied designs
- Few assess AEs (severity, onset), spontaneous reporting
- Too few placebo-controlled trials for strong conclusions
- Narrow patient demographic (de-selecting most at-risk, many with psychedelic experience, minorities)
- Few qualitative studies not designed to explore AEs and not conducted across the field (0 ayahuasca, 8 psilocybin)
- CT reports lack information on set and setting
- + what counts as an AE/SAE (feel discomfort, commit suicide?)



# Connected-ness

Different forms of feeling connected rather than as a singularity:

- Cosmic or transpersonal connectedness
- Social or interpersonal connectedness
- 'Nature' - connectedness



# Cosmic or transpersonal connectedness

- Oceanic Feeling (Freud and Huxley)
- Mystical Experiences (and mysticism questionnaires)
- Feeling one with the cosmos or with the universe
- 5-MeO-DMt
- Self-loss or dissociation





# Social or interpersonal connectedness

- Non-medical uses are mostly in groups.
  - Creating communities through shared experience and mutual care if situation and people are friendly
  - Setting ought to be free from sexual, gender, racial etc. violence/hostilities
- where a sociality is already present, connectedness can be amplified.



# Nature-connectedness

Psychology:

A measure for the connection to nature

Philosophy:

Linked to environmentally responsible behaviour, an *ecological identity* including self, humans, nonhumans, entire ecosystems

- Nature: a chaotic concept, different meanings.

Culturally ideas about nature “govern our understanding of the natural world and how we behave towards it” (Castree 2005, xxii).

The meaning of ‘natural’ ranges from ‘untamed wilderness’ to a single plant in a clinic room.



# ‘Science’ of connectedness and environmental behaviour

- “Our primary hypothesis of increased nature relatedness following a psychedelic experience was confirmed, providing the first empirical evidence for a causative role of psychedelic use in the enhancement of nature relatedness in a large sample of healthy participants. This represents an important advancement on the correlative association observed between amount of lifetime psychedelic use and nature relatedness in previous studies”. (p. 12)

Kettner H, et al. (2019): From Egoism to Ecoism: Psychedelics Increase Nature Relatedness in a State-Mediated and Context-Dependent Manner. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. Vol 16(24):5147.

*Psilocybe cubensis* (ayahuasca)  
MALPIGHIACEAE





Attention is directed inwards.

- experiences are guided toward visualizations from within the participant's mind
- not physical, sensual encounters (touching, smelling, seeing differently)

→ **Imaginary Connectedness (nature/cosmos)**

Validation of only inner processes of sanitized inner trips may

- **reduce ethical importance and**
- **limit life-changing quality of experience**

## Manipulation of the Self and Irrelevance of the Outside



# An Essay on Liberation

Herbert  
Marcuse



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“The “trip” involves the dissolution of the ego shaped by the established society - an artificial and short-lived dissolution.

But the artificial and “private” liberation anticipates, in a distorted manner, an exigency of the social liberation: the revolution must be at the same time a **revolution in perception** which will accompany the material and intellectual reconstruction of society, creating the new aesthetic environment. **Awareness of the need for such a revolution in perception, for a new sensorium, is perhaps the kernel of truth in the psychedelic search.”** (p. 44)



# Crawley Encounters

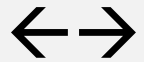
Cyril was lying in a field when insects began to crawl all over him. He contemplated panicking because of his fear of spiders, but then thought “I’m in their home, I’m lying in their home ... it felt like that neural pathway was sort of seared into existence”.

This changed his experience and led him to continue to treat bugs with respect during his trip and since then: “I don’t kill insects anymore”.

Cyril had direct physical encounter with insects during his trip, which he attributes to his changed thinking and behaviour. (Marcus 2022)

# Liberty in Encounters with **what is NOT Self**

- Play-Lists and other manipulation



self-chosen experiments in ethical and health work on the self with others.

If we want respect for nature, psychedelics might provide experiences, multi-sensory encounters with what is outside, not just what is already somehow inside one's mind.







# Alienation, Psychedelics, Connectedness



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“Danger” of psychedelics lies in sensory revolution and actual ethical change

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Clinic, church, and festival don't facilitate such change, but self-chosen practices

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Care for self and respect for nature/life are connected

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→ Aim for decriminalization of psychedelics to enable new ways of connectedness and an ethics of care

Painting by Pablo Amaringo.  
I thank L.E. Luna for permission





## What to do?

- Avoid appropriations
- Recognize contributions of people, knowledge, plants, animals
- Establish fair compensation
- Establish sustainable plant production
- Provide freedom to find personal path
- No dominance of profit interests
- Refuse to do colonizing research



Thank you

