

Transpersonal Psychology  
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Abstract

Transpersonal psychology is considered the fourth force psychology with psychoanalytic, classic behavioral and humanistic psychologies comprising the first, second and third forces. Begun as a formal psychological modality by Italian psychiatrist, Roberto Assagioli, in the 1960s, one might say that transpersonal roots began with William James, Carl Jung and Abraham Maslow. Not recognized today by mainstream psychology, transpersonalism goes beyond the other three models and considers the evolutionary nature of consciousness with its innate striving toward self-transcendence. Without rejecting the other three models, transpersonal psychology embraces them as part of the unfolding and development of human consciousness.

## TRANSPERSONALISM DEFINED

The term *transpersonal* means beyond (*trans*) the personal or beyond the ego. Jennings (1996) refers to the psychoanalytic, behavioral, humanistic-existential and transpersonal psychologies as the thinking, sensing, feeling and intuitive psychologies, respectively. Transpersonal refers to human consciousness which develops along a spectrum and beyond the conventional, personal or individual levels (Scotton, Chinen & Battista, 1996). It holds the belief that human consciousness can reach beyond the average into higher levels of functioning. We commonly refer to these higher levels as mystical states or as self-transcendence. Transpersonal psychology assumes a continuum or spectrum of human consciousness ranging from the prepersonal (before the formation of a separate ego), to the personal (with a functioning ego), to the transpersonal (in which the ego remains available but is superseded by more inclusive frames of reference). Though not rejecting completely the widely accepted biopsychosocial model, transpersonalism moves beyond to a biopsychosocial-spiritual model (Scotten, et al., 1996) such that the psychoanalytic, cognitive/behavioral and humanistic models are subsumed under the transpersonal model of the spectrum of consciousness. Some techniques utilized in psychotherapy in order to induce these transpersonal states are guided imagery, breath work, past life regression, journaling, biofeedback, dream interpretation, meditation, hypnosis along with nonconventional interventions such as bodywork, prayer, silence, solitude, chanting, drumming, movement or art therapy, yoga and tai chi. One can see within transpersonalism the respect for, and utilization of, wisdom traditions such as shamanism, Native American spirituality, yoga and Hinduism, Buddhism, Christian and Jewish mysticism which have historically been ignored and

dismissed by the traditional psychoanalytical and cognitive/behavioral psychological models (Scotton, et al., 1996).

The birth of transpersonal psychology in the late 1960s when Abraham Maslow and Stanislov Grof coined the term and separated it from the humanistic psychological model with which they had been associated (Scotton, et al., 1996). However, one can look back at the writings of William James and Carl Jung to find many of the seeds which fostered the growth of transpersonalism.

### SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

The cultural and social context of transpersonalism can be found in the late nineteenth century American transcendentalist writers Emerson and Thoreau who were keenly interested in Eastern religions. Also of significance was the increasing number of college educated individuals which resulted in a rebellion of the social and cultural norms of the day and, ultimately, to the experimentation of psychedelic drugs unlike had been seen in America. Another factor was the economic prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s where advertising emphasized idealized images of the self and where the industrial economy shifted from a mechanistic focus to a service oriented focus emphasizing human relations at work. Yet another factor was the Vietnam war in which millions of Americans faced the sobering and tragic truth of a conflict which cost so many lives, yet was, in the end, a war that America should never have allowed to continue for so long. Last, these factors combined with increased travel and communication resulted in a greater interest in Eastern religions (Scotton, et al., 1996). The outcome resulted in people of this era calling for a review of the meaning and purpose of life. By the 1960s and 1970s, the social context demanded something beyond the reductionistic,

deterministic and mechanistic views of the psychoanalytic and cognitive/behavioral models.

### PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES

The philosophical differences between the transpersonal model and the other psychological models are that the former presupposes a worldview that is romantic in nature (Strohl, 1988). Deterministic thinkers who are the psychoanalysts fail to recognize the spiritual or numinous aspect and, instead, consider its appearance to be a manifestation of a neurosis or a pathology. Reductionistic thinkers, i.e, behaviorists, seek to understand humankind by breaking things down to their smallest material components. Physical matter is the yardstick by which these smallest elements are observed. The humanistic paradigm emphasizes the value and dignity of the person and does not espouse understanding human nature by breaking it down to elements or constructs. While they validate subjective experiences, they fail, however, to recognize the dualistic and monistic models which refer to transcending.

The dualistic model accepts transcendence as a normal human experience. Human experience is understood to be an integration of matter and consciousness. The monistic model believes all phenomena to be an expression of a unified field of consciousness and that all humans can reach an awakened state of unity consciousness. These philosophies parallel most Eastern psychologies such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. Mainstream modern psychology accepts the reductionistic and humanistic models, but reject and dismiss the dualistic and monistic philosophies.

## TRANSPERSONAL THEORISTS

According to Vich (1988), the term 'transpersonal' was first used by William James in a 1905 lecture at Harvard University. As a result, James is considered by many to be the father of modern transpersonal psychology (Scotton, et al., 1996). James graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1869 and began studying anatomy and physiology. However, his legacy to the field of psychology is his lifelong interest in the evolution of consciousness which he termed "stream of consciousness;" his concept of the pluralistic self in which there are the biological, material, social and spiritual selves; his studies of paranormal mental states; and his interest in non-Western concepts of personality and consciousness. According to Scotton, et al., 1996, three primary themes emerge from James' work: 1) religion lies within the individual and it is phenomenological, 2) the exploration of the subconscious is a doorway to transformational experiences, and 3) mystical experiences can only be measured in terms of their results. His famous work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is his statement on the psychology and analysis of mystical experience. He believed that the legitimate purview of psychology was everything the human could experience, therefore, he sought to legitimize the study of subconscious processes, psychic phenomena, accounts of after-death communication and nonnormative religious experiences (Scotton, et al., 1996). James sponsored talks by Hindu Vedanta philosopher, Swami Vivekananda, and Buddhist practitioner, Anagarika Dharmapala and is noted for writing on topics such as dreams, hypnotism, automatism, demoniacal possession, witchcraft and genius (Taylor, 1982).

In 1942, translators of Carl Jung used the term transpersonal unconscious as synonymous for collective unconscious (Strohl, 1998). Jung was the first clinical transpersonal psychiatrist and depth psychologist (Scotton, et al., 1996) and was among the first to move away from a focus on psychopathology and, instead, concentrate on healthy, optimal psychological development. Transpersonal psychology is most closely related to Jung's theoretical model although the field of transpersonal psychology did not emerge as a separate and distinct field until the 1960s when Abraham Maslow and Roberto Assagioli added a substantial amount of theory and research to the transpersonal field (Scotton, et al., 1996).

The scope of Jung's work is beyond the scope of this paper; however, several key concepts from his model are important in understanding transpersonalism and in understanding its forerunner, Analytical Psychology. Jung has been credited with incorporating eight (8) key concepts:

1. archetypes: psychological forms common to all people regardless of race, culture, etc. An example is the mother archetype.
2. reconciliation of the opposites: a common theme within the dualistic and monistic philosophies of Hinduism and Taoism, Jung saw this as a critical component of the mature and healthy psyche.
3. the Self: the "imago dei" or God image, Jung wrote substantially of what he called the Undiscovered Self or the transcendent Self. This closely resembles Assagioli's Higher Self.
4. persona: the mask that "covers" the ego and presents the best face to the world.
5. animus and anima: these refer to the masculine with the female psyche and the feminine within the male psyche, respectively.
6. shadow: those aspects (typically negative, although not always) of the Self outside of conscious awareness.
7. individuation: "ego transcendence." This is the process whereby the person's ego is transformed in service of the Self. This parallels Maslow's self-actualization and Assagioli's Higher Self.
8. ego-Self axis: an imaginary axis between the ego and Self whereby the shortening of this axis symbolizes the movement from the ego to the more mature and healthy individual, i.e., toward individuation.

Jung's primary split with Freud derived from Jung's emphasis on the spiritual dimension of human consciousness and of the innate striving of the human toward individuation. Freud insisted that Jung abandon the spiritual themes and, when Jung refused, Jung was no longer part of the Freudian circle. Instead, Jung continued to be interested in, and to study, a broader range of consciousness which included mythical symbols, the paranormal, mystical and meditative states induced by Eastern practices such as meditation. He was not interested in objective validation, but in the phenomenological aspects of these altered states of consciousness. According to Scotton et al. (1996), below are four key areas which Jung explored which have contributed substantially to current transpersonal theory:

1. the belief that psychological development should include growth to higher levels of consciousness and continue throughout life,
2. the concept that the transcendent lies within and is available to each individual,
3. the willingness to explore the wisdom traditions of other cultures and the West for insights relevant to clinical work, and
4. the recognition that healing and growth often result from experiences of symbolic imagery or states of consciousness that cannot be grasped by rational or logical explanation.

Understanding spiritual development to be a normal part of human development, Jung believed that the lack of spirituality resulted in developmental arrest (Scotton, et al., 1996). Later in life, he became less interested in academic acceptance and more concerned with speaking his own experienced truth (Scotton, et al., 1996). Indeed, in Jung's late years, he was interviewed on the BBC and was asked whether he believed God exists to which he replied: "I don't think, I know He exists" (Scotton, et al., 1996).

The humanistic pioneers, May, Frankl, Rogers and Maslow, were rejecting the psychoanalytical and cognitive/behavioral models because of its limited and

reductionistic focus on pathology. Like Jung, they believed humankind has an innate growth potential which sought higher levels of psychological functioning. Indeed, Frankl believed that “human existence is not authentic unless it is lived in terms of self-transcendence” (Frankl, 1969). Believing the prototype of humankind was more than what Allport referred to as “the rat model” or the “machine model” of classical behaviorism, Frankl understood “self-transcendence as the essence of existence” (Frankl, 1969). Frankl would contribute much in his lifetime to the furtherance of transpersonal theory.

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and study of self-actualized individuals laid more groundwork for transpersonalism. Like Jung, Maslow saw the psychoanalytical and behavioral models as only partial aspects of a broader view of consciousness. He furthered the phenomenological approach, thus, moving beyond the humanistic-existential movement. His study of self-actualized individuals allowed him to arrive at a list of psychic attitudes and behaviors which this population exhibited. Maslow coined the term “peak experiences” to refer to rare, intense, mystical states of consciousness such as those experienced by some yogis and referred to “plateau experiences” as peaceful and serene states of mind one can experience in everyday life. He also coined “nadir experiences” to explain the importance of near-death experiences or confrontations with death and the role they played in moving toward self-actualization.

In his later years, Maslow further refined his hierarchy of needs into a three-fold model of deficiency motivations (theory x), humanistic motivations (theory y) and transcendental motivations (theory z). He attempted to apply this model to business, religion, psychotherapy, philosophy and politics (Scotton, et al., 1996). For example,



psychotherapy conducted at the deficiency level would operate along the traditional medical model where the therapist is an authoritative figure telling the client what to do. Psychopathology is thought to exist due to inadequate parenting, learning or gratification. At the humanistic level, therapy is concerned with the person realizing his identity and integrating toward a strong ego. Psychopathology is considered as resistance to innate growth potential and the therapist assumes an authentic, empathic stance toward the client. At the transpersonal level, therapy is about self-transcendence and the therapist acts as a compassionate teacher who guides the client toward realizing their highest potentials. Psychopathology is understood to be a lack of meaning and purpose (Scotton et al., 1996).

While Maslow explored various dimensions of transpersonal phenomenology, Roberto Assagioli developed a new typology of personality and also a concept of a two stage process of mature, healthy development. As did Frankl and May, Assagioli also began studying and incorporating within his theory and clinical work the power of the human will.

Although Assagioli was a pioneer of psychoanalysis in Italy, he maintained that Freud's theory gave insufficient weight to the higher aspects of the human personality and functioning and, hence, to the human potential. From this belief, Assagioli developed a synthetic view of human growth—a task which is never considered to be finished. By its very nature, psychosynthesis is always open to new approaches or to other approaches to human development (Assagioli, 1974).

The lower Unconscious is what we commonly refer to as the subconscious or unconscious which cannot be revealed in every day life. The middle Unconscious is

equivalent to Freud's notion of the personal unconscious which lies just beneath our conscious awareness and takes little to reveal its contents. Unlike Freud, Assagioli's concept recognizes not only biological drives (from the lower Unconscious), but also posits a higher Unconscious or what he referred to as the Superconscious. This is a psychic realm from which all highly evolved impulses such as altruistic love and will, spiritual insight, humanitarian action and purpose and meaning of life derive. It was this largely untapped psychic realm on which Assagioli focused his attention because it is a source of inspiration and wisdom.

Assagioli's concept of the Transpersonal Self or Higher Self is found in nearly all the major world religions (Assagioli, 1974). It is the focal point of the Superconscious realm where a deeper being exists and where individuality and unity blend (Assagioli, 1974). We now turn to Assagioli's two stages of psychosynthesis.

Assagioli's two stages of human psychological development consisted of personal psychosynthesis and spiritual psychosynthesis. Personal psychosynthesis refers to the integration, control and balancing of what he called "subpersonalities" to a conscious center which Assagioli called the "I" or "personal self." The two central functions of the personal self are *consciousness* and *will*. In psychoanalytical terms, this first stage refers to the maturation, development and integration of the ego. In personal psychosynthesis, the client explores the structure of one's psyche. The client becomes familiar with her/his personal unconscious and with the subpersonalities which develop due to intrapsychic conflict so as to ultimately coordinate, integrate and have control over these subpersonalities. This step of examining, understanding, integrating and controlling the

subpersonalities resembles Jung's emphasis of reconciling the opposites and was understood to be a prerequisite to spiritual psychosynthesis.

Once the "I" or personal center was integrated and formed, the client could then engage in a spiritual process whereby the "I" is transcended by the Higher Self. This Higher Self is similar to Jung's concept of the Self. One outcome of transcendence would be a sense of connection to all humanity and nature, i.e., a sense of unity with all things. This closely resembles one of Maslow's self-actualizing qualities. Some techniques used in spiritual psychosynthesis are meditation, guided imagery and an inner dialogue technique in which the client asks questions of an inner sage.

The therapeutic techniques to engage these two stages are broad in scope since the theory assumes that any method which assists in the personal evolution of the human being is a psychosynthetic method. While the therapist should be well trained in a variety of psychosynthetic techniques, people are different, therefore, trying various methods and sometimes even allowing the client to choose a method which feels would work best with them is acceptable. Techniques honor Eastern, Western, Native American and shamanistic cultures are include, but are not limited to, guided imagery, movement, gestalt, meditation, drumming, journaling, the development of intuition, ideal models, past life regression, breathwork, hypnotherapy and dream analysis. The goal is always to develop the will of the personal self and, ultimately, the will of the Transpersonal or Higher Self toward a spirit of goodwill and unity (Assagioli, 1974).

One of today's foremost transpersonal theoretical psychologists is Ken Wilber who was first recognized as a graduate student for his works in this area. No mention of transpersonal psychology would be complete without mentioning Wilber's contributions.

Perhaps only Jung outranks Wilber in his ability to study an unprecedented scope of disciplines including psychology, philosophy, science, sociology, anthropology and Eastern and Western religion and arrive at an integrated vision of what otherwise appears to be conflicting viewpoints. Wilber's contributions are too numerous for this paper, but of note are his expanded studies of altered states of consciousness; Eastern mysticism within Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism; his belief that reality is a multilayered ontological hierarchy called a holoarchy including matter, body, mind and spirit; and his belief of the consciousness of humankind evolving toward Universal Consciousness. Wilber, as other transpersonalists, understand that intellectual analysis alone is insufficient to reach the Higher Self. Wilber states that interventions based on logical analysis and philosophical reasoning are limited and that direct experience is necessary for a true understanding of one's deepest nature and of the world (Wilber, 1980).

#### SUMMARY

In summary, transpersonal psychology—the fourth force—can be viewed through an evolutionary lens with the stage of instincts and drives (psychoanalysis), environmental influences (behaviorism), self-determination and free will (humanistic) up to transcendence (transpersonalism) (Strohl, 1988). Transpersonal psychology presupposes a higher potential for humankind beyond Freud's ego. Human consciousness evolves and spiritual dimensions are an ultimate and normal facet of the evolving human consciousness. In the words of transpersonal author, Swami Ajaya, “all human suffering is ultimately the result of spiritual impoverishment, that is, non awareness of our transcendent being” (Strohl, 1988).

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