

Part I

Introduction to  
Transpersonal Psychology

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# I

## A Brand from the Burning

### *Defining Transpersonal Psychology*

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Transpersonal psychology stands to benefit from simple definitions that can serve efforts to create a practical, durable, worldwide awareness of the field. Although it is perhaps the most developed academic discipline still aligned with the cultural forces that inspired the personal growth industry, the alternative health field, the popular spirituality movement, and the vision of ecological sustainability, transpersonal psychology has little name recognition within these circles. Further refinement of the field's identity might support a process of *rebranding* the field, so that it can serve as a more effective and recognized participant in the vast cultural momentum it has helped to precipitate.

There are few disciplines in which the very nature and definition of the field of study are in question. Biology is the study of living organisms, while literature is the scholarly examination of written works deemed worthy of deeper consideration. In most cases, the name of the field provides an easily understood synopsis of its content area: economics, law, engineering, astrophysics. Even within psychology, subdisciplines are readily identifiable by their names: counseling psychology, military psychology, experimental psychology. Transpersonal psychology has not had the luxury of a readily understood name or area of study, and has struggled to define itself in clear and articulate ways.

This situation has come about because the transpersonal project, of which transpersonal psychology is a part, is no simple undertaking, and no modest effort merely to add to psychology by including human spirituality. Rather, it is an ambitious effort to redefine ourselves as humans and the world as we know it. It is a project that sets out to understand the cosmos in ways that are not constrained by either the sometimes-heavy hand of religious tradition or the objectifying eye of science. Instead, the transpersonal approach seeks a new vision, one in which both human science and human spirituality can be honored. For this reason, any satisfying definition of the

field of transpersonal psychology needs to do more than describe its topic area: it must also convey the shifted vision within which this subject matter is considered.

The literature of transpersonal psychology contains scores of efforts to define the field, including, during the past 20 years, several systematic efforts to review published definitions with the goal of arriving at a more comprehensive synopsis (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007; Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992; Shapiro, Lee, & Gross, 2002). Yet even the most recent and detailed of these failures to produce a definition that approaches the succinct clarity with which most other fields of psychology are named. In this chapter, we argue that the results of earlier studies need to be further distilled into a concise, easily understood descriptor of transpersonal psychology, and we offer three characterizing terms—*psychology of self-expansiveness*, *whole-person psychology*, and *psychology of transformative process*—as well as a short-phrase definition that combines facets of these into what may be a somewhat comprehensive overview of the stance of field.

In addition to the characterizations of the field we have listed, evidence will be presented for several positive trends within transpersonal psychology that support its viability as a global discipline. Based on analyses of the primary journals within the field, it appears that there are long-term trends toward greater use of empirical studies and quantitative research methods, increased inclusion of academic voices from beyond North America, and expanded representation of women scholars.

## Defining the Field

The first formal definition of transpersonal psychology was published by Sutich in 1968, and served as the basis for the Statement of Purpose that appeared in various iterations in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* from 1969 until 1983 (Lajoie, Shapiro, & Roberts, 1991). This definition focused mainly on higher human needs, values, states, and potentials. Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) presented 40 definitions of transpersonal psychology published between 1968 and 1991. Based on thematic analysis, the authors suggested that transpersonal psychology studied “humanity’s highest potential,” and “unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness” (p. 91). Shapiro et al. (2002) offered an additional 80 definitions published between 1991 and 2002, and concluded that the most frequent themes pertained to ego transcendence and spirituality, in line with the Lajoie and Shapiro definition of a decade earlier. Based on this work, transpersonal psychology appeared to be concerned primarily with a human potential to go beyond the ego and achieve higher states of consciousness.

A careful reanalysis of 160 definitions of transpersonal psychology published from 1968 to 2003, including most of those cited above, found that this focus on self-transcendence through elevated states of mind was only one of three themes present in descriptions of the field (Hartelius et al., 2007). Rather than counting themes within the definitions, which risks that the themes recognized by the researchers will be biased toward those already formulated, this reappraisal divided the corpus of definitions into meaning units, and then allowed themes to emerge in patterns of relationship discovered through repeated engagement with those units. These findings pointed

to a wider understanding of the field than had been offered by previous analyses of definitions, a view that was found to be in significant harmony with a 1980 effort by Boucouvalas to compile a comprehensive outline of the field from leading scholars.

According to Hartelius et al. (2007), the definitions studied could be classified into three themes: transpersonal psychology as a beyond-ego psychology, as an integrative/holistic psychology, and as a psychology of transformation. As a beyond-ego psychology, it focuses on experiences that are transpersonal in content. It includes exceptional human experiences stemming from intentional practices such as shamanism and meditation, as well as occurrences that arise from various forms of mysticism, psi phenomena, near-death, and out-of-body experiences, which do not necessarily require intentional practices. These can lead to various experiences, such as transcendent, peak, and unitive, and also to a variety of stages or qualities that can be seen as beyond-ego, such as compassion and altruism. These latter are related to developmental levels of optimal human potential, including higher consciousness, advanced ego maturity, and elevated values, meaning, and purpose reflecting such a potential. At the inception of transpersonal psychology, this beyond-ego aspect was a dominant focus of the field, as reflected in the fact that a thematic analysis of the articles in the first five volumes of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (*JTP*; 1969-1973;  $n = 40$ ) showed that 100% contained elements related to this theme. Some decades later (1999-2003;  $n = 46$ ), 93% of articles in the *JTP* still reflected this aspect of the field.

As an integrative/holistic pursuit, transpersonal psychology examines the phenomena of psyche as elements that belong not merely to the ego, but to larger contexts as well: the living body in its entirety, the therapeutic relationship, the social and ecological situation, or the greater-than-human matrix of existence (Hartelius et al., 2007). It also refers to transpersonal as a psychology that embraces wider contexts through holistic, multicultural, integrative, or integral approaches. This theme appeared in only 25% of articles in *JTP* during its early years (1969-1973), but was included in fully 78% of articles published 1999-2003. The significantly increased frequency of this aspect within papers published by *JTP* suggests that this way of defining and using transpersonal psychology has become significantly more common as the field has matured.

As an approach to transformation, transpersonal psychology studies psychospiritual development beyond conventional sexual and cognitive maturity, self-actualization, and other forms of transformative growth (Hartelius et al., 2007). Here the transpersonal is not merely the *content* of a beyond-ego psychology, nor just the widened *context* of a whole-person psychology, but also the force or *catalyst* that drives human development toward its greater potentials. In addition, from this vantage transpersonal psychology considers how its findings might apply to ethical thinking and behavior, compassionate social action, service to humanity, or the transformation of such areas as psychotherapy, education, business, and so on. This facet developed much as the prior theme, growing from a presence in only 28% of *JTP* articles between 1969 and 1973 to representation in 74% of articles during the years 1999-2003.

These three themes were found to represent 91% of the total meaning units identified in the corpus of 160 definitions ( $n = 1395$ ), and 100% of the meaning units with content related to the topic area of transpersonal psychology ( $n = 1270$ ; Hartelius

et al., 2007). Based on this analysis, Hartelius et al. offered the following definition of the field:

Transpersonal psychology: An approach to psychology that 1) studies phenomena beyond the ego as context for 2) an integrative/holistic psychology; this provides a framework for 3) understanding and cultivating human transformation. (p. 145)

As perhaps the most succinct and comprehensive empirically based definition of the field to that date, this effort demonstrated that the field is in fact a coherent enterprise, and offered substantive response to critics who suggested that the field was dead due in part to its inability to define itself (e.g., Wilber, 2000).

Although this definition and the analysis that informed it seem to have achieved a step forward in the refinement of the identity of transpersonal psychology, the result is still slightly unwieldy and obscure in comparison with more lucid descriptions that can be articulated in other subdisciplines of psychology (such as educational psychology or psychology of religion). Of course, these also have their own significant inconsistencies and discord, but to most observers the general thrust of such subdisciplines is less confusing than that of transpersonal psychology. To refer to the field in terms of three separate aspects, each requiring its own explanation, does not provide a readily grasped sense of transpersonal psychology. An efficient descriptor should ideally capture a more central component of vision, so that the three definitional themes can be understood as facets of this element, expressed in simple, clear language.

## Rebranding Transpersonal Psychology

*Branding* is the process of creating a name that identifies and differentiates a product in the mind of the public, and *brand equity* (here referred to as *brand*) is the reputation that the product develops (Clifton et al., 2009). Building a brand involves not only creating awareness of a particular product, but also presenting it in terms that demonstrate its relevance to people's lives and is resonant with their personal values and aspirations (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002). While branding is more commonly associated with commercial than academic enterprises, it is also coming to be recognized as an aspect of successful scholarly disciplines (Moore, 2010).

As an example, the brand of paleoanthropology—the once rather obscure discipline that studies prehistoric humans—has benefitted significantly from the popular fictional works written by Jean M. Auel (Ruddick, 2009). Although criticized by some as factually inadequate (Fagan, 1987) and described by others as romanticist (Stableford, 1995) or controversial extensions of fact (Ruddick, 2009), Auel has succeeded in transforming the genre of prehistoric fiction by weaving the scientific findings of paleoanthropology into prehistoric tales to which contemporary readers—especially women, the main readers of fiction—could relate. In this way, Auel increased the field's “brand *relevance* and brand *resonance*” (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002, p. 3). Now with more than 45 million copies of her books in print (Collett-White, 2011), Auel has arguably made the discipline of paleoanthropology vastly more visible and comprehensible within many parts of Western culture.

In contrast, transpersonal psychology is an example of a field with a branding challenge. The approach has been criticized for being unscientific (Kurtz, 1991; Shermer, 2002), antiscientific, unrealistic, asocial, authoritarian, absolutist, dogmatic, dangerous (Ellis, 1986, 1989), psychologically unsound (Ellis & Yeager, 1989; May, 1986), and unable to adequately define itself (Wilber, 2000) or its methodology (Friedman, 2002). While many of these criticisms have received vigorous responses (Cunningham, 2007; Hartelius et al., 2007; Wilber, 1989), it is clear that the field has not been highly successful in conveying to a broader audience the deep significance its proponents believe that it holds.

Although it may be impossible to reduce transpersonal psychology accurately to a single short-phrase definition that will satisfy all scholars within the field, this chapter examines three succinct characterizations, each of which spans the three definitional themes from the perspective of one of those themes. The first defines the field as a psychology of self-expansiveness, the second as a whole-person, transformative approach to human existence that includes psychology as part of a broader scope of study, and the third as a psychology of transformative process. A definition is by nature selective and reductive, therefore these three are offered as perhaps incrementally closer to one that may serve the branding of the field both within academic circles and broader society, and are preliminary to the discussion of a short-phrase definition that attempts to represent them all.

### A Psychology of Self-Expansiveness

Humanistic psychology arose in the 1950s in response to the then-prevalent behavioral and psychoanalytic approaches, based on the critique that these psychologies offered a limited and illness-focused view of the human psyche—one that left out health, growth, human potential, empathy, inner meaning, purpose, and experience (Jourard, 1966; Rogers, 1963a). The behaviors visible from outside, or the drives arising from unconscious levels, were of significance only as they related to a whole person engaged in creating themselves through the present-moment processes of living. What transpersonal psychology added to this was the notion that the whole person included more—included their relationships with values, visions, and experiences that took them beyond the boundaries of their individual sense of self (Maslow, 1968, 1969).

In its early years, transpersonal psychology functioned primarily as a psychology of these “farther reaches of human nature” (Maslow, 1969, p. 1) understood as states of consciousness, stages of development, practices, and aspirations relating to aspects of the self that are beyond the personal ego (Hartelius et al., 2007). Friedman’s (1981, 1983, this volume) construct of self-expansiveness, although rooted in this traditional understanding of the field, is also relevant to the definitions that frame it as a holistic/integrative enterprise, and as a psychology of transformation (Hartelius et al., 2007). Considered as a psychology of self-expansiveness:

Transpersonal psychology studies the self conceived not only as isolated individual bound to the here-and-now of the present, but capable of expanding to include others, nature, or all of space and time, or of embodying some larger aspect of the world. These shifted boundaries may be reflected as non-ordinary states of consciousness.

From this perspective, the altered states of consciousness that characterize spiritual, mystical, and transcendent experience are not delusional distortions, but can be understood as perceptions and experiences associated with a self that seems expanded beyond its conventional limits.<sup>1</sup> That is, the boundary between me and not-me is shifted inward and outward, as well as forward and backwards in time, and, from that shifted stance, the aspirant or mystic apprehends the world as something quite different—sometimes ecstatically or terrifyingly different—than it appears to be from the ordinary sense of self. This application clearly represents the topic area and perspective of early transpersonal psychology, which understood itself to be examining the capacity of the self to move beyond conventional ego boundaries.

According to Friedman (this volume), this view of the self is based in William James' (1890) insight that boundaries used to define the individual are simply arbitrary limitations on a potentially all-encompassing Self. The notion that the self is capable of expanding beyond conventional boundaries implies that self is relationally interconnected with community and world. Significantly, experiences of an expanded self often bring the sense that self, other, and/or world are interconnected in just this way. This is exactly the domain of transpersonal psychology defined as an integrative/holistic approach—the second of the three main definitional themes described by Hartelius et al. (2007).

These experiences of expanding beyond an ordinary sense of self are sought not so much for their novelty (although this undoubtedly happens) as for their “healing and heuristic potential” (Grof, 2003, p. 52)—their ability to foster an experience of meaning, purpose, and belonging in the world. A psychology of self-expansiveness is therefore engaged not only with these experiences, but with their transformative capacities—which is the focus of the third major way of defining transpersonal psychology (Hartelius et al., 2007). While it describes the capacity for self-concept or identity to become more expansive, the construct of self-expansiveness does not explicitly include any dynamic principles to account for transformation. However, it is implicit that more expansiveness in the sense of self is desirable, provided that it is accompanied by appropriate maturity and personal integration.

Despite its modest reflection of transformative process, the construct of self-expansiveness has the advantage of being amenable to scientific measurement. In addition, in this volume Friedman proposes that self-expansiveness can do more than define a core concept within transpersonal psychology: He suggests that it can be employed as a way to understand the relationship between various psychotherapies, from the perspective that different approaches to psychotherapy operate at different levels of self-expansiveness. For example, cognitive-behavioral therapy might be seen as functioning at a lower level of self-expansiveness than a transpersonal or Jungian psychotherapy.

### A Whole-Person Psychology/Multi-disciplinary Orientation

If the self is capable of expanding beyond its conventional boundaries, and if a transpersonal psychology studies those aspects that are beyond the ordinary experience of self, this suggests the need for understanding the whole person in a sense that includes not only body and mind, but also relationship and situatedness in the world. One of the



authors, Paul Roy, has spent years in leadership of the largest transpersonal institution (Sofia University, formerly the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology). Over much of his time immersed in the field, he has worked on crafting a definition of the field situated within the holistic/integrative theme, but spanning also its other dimensions. His definition is as follows:

Transpersonal studies is a whole-person, transformative approach to human existence and human experience that includes the spiritual and transcendent as well as the social and community dimensions of human life, all within the context of the global eco-system in which we live.

Note that this definition is not of transpersonal psychology, but transpersonal studies as an approach to something broader than psychology: a holistic perspective that examines human life in the context of an interconnected world. If one attempts a whole-person psychology, it soon becomes clear that the psyche is not a discrete thing functioning in isolation from body, community, or environment, but a local aspect of an interconnected whole (Hartelius, 2006)—a whole that must be engaged in order to understand any of its facets. Transpersonal is then necessarily more than a psychology; it must also be a multidisciplinary scholarly *orientation* (Boucouvalas, 1999)—an orientation that has been called transpersonal studies (Wilber, 1995a; Friedman, 2002).

The interdisciplinary nature of the field was identified by Boucouvalas (1980) as part of her work to outline the early field. By this time a transpersonal anthropology already existed (Schwartz, 2000), and it became clear that a transpersonal approach might also be applied in other areas of scholarship, such as sociology (Walsh, 1993), social engagement (Rothberg & Coder, this volume), education (Rowe & Braud, this volume), medicine (Lawlis, this volume), business (Schott, 1992), law (Scoglio, 1998), art (Herman, this volume), literature (Kalaidjian, 1991), philosophy (Hartelius & Ferrer, this volume; Wilber, 1995a), ecology (Fox, 1990), and so forth. These are in addition to resonant areas of study more closely related to psychology: somatic psychology, which examines the body as it is lived (see Johnson, this volume); ecopsychology, which considers the way in which the individual psyche is interrelated to nature (see Davis & Canty, this volume); and cultural psychology (Brooks, Huffman, & Ford, this volume).

The whole-person, transformative approach brings such a wide-angle lens that it easily includes consideration of those experiences in which one expands beyond the normal sense of self, and on the transformative potentials of these and other experiences—thus addressing the other main themes used to define transpersonal psychology. Although the transpersonal approach is sweeping in scope, the reach for grand theory (e.g., Wilber, 1995b, 1996, 1998) has by now been moderated with calls for understanding each facet in its own context (Hartelius & Ferrer, this volume), and for the development of mid-range theory (Friedman, this volume). In addition, as will be presented in a later section, the emphasis in the field on empirical work appears to be slowly increasing. This suggests that there may be two dynamics at play in the development of the transpersonal orientation: a widened scope of inquiry, coupled with a more focused approach on specific inquiry.

### A Psychology of Transformative Process

Transformation as process is specifically distinct from the states and stages of transformation first considered within the field, and implies more than simple progress from one developmental stage to another. An early pointer in this direction was Vaughan (1979), who proposed that transpersonal psychotherapy consisted of content, context, and process. Within this setting, she suggested that content pointed to client experiences that went beyond the ordinary limits of ego and personality, and context was represented by the therapist's values, beliefs, and intentions. Process, for Vaughan, consisted not merely of moving from one stage to another within a fixed landscape, but of a shift in the self engaged in that movement. Early in the journey the self seeks to gain power relative to its surroundings, because it understands itself as distinct from the world. Later, a quite different sort of self realizes that it exists "as a web of mutually conditioned relationships and that one is absolutely connected with all of existence" (Vaughan, 1979, p. 106).

Transformative process is a journey in which there is not simply movement from one place or stage to another, but in which the landscape, the destination, and the journeyer shift and change as part of that movement. One might say that

transpersonal as a psychology of transformative process understands the individual mind, human communities, and the cosmos itself to be interconnected living systems in constant engagement with creative self-expression and self-invention.

Transformative process is a term that evokes not merely psychological self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1958) that drives toward the highest human potential (Vaughan, 1982), but also a philosophy and cosmology that understand the world as living process purposefully evolving toward a meaningful end (Neville, 2007), even though that end may not be distinct from the process itself. In psychology, this type of transformative process has also been called individuation (Jung, 1939, 1969), psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965), the formative tendency (Rogers, 1978, 1980), an actualizing tendency (Rogers, 1963b), autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1980), holotropic (Grof, 1998, 2003), and the evolution of consciousness (Combs, 1995; Wilber, 1979), among other terms. Yet these principles have often been considered cosmological as well as psychological: Rogers (1978) imagined the formative tendency as a property of the universe in which individuals also participated; Maturana and Varela (1980) saw autopoiesis as characterizing all living systems; and Wilber (1979) and Combs (1995) understood the personal evolution of consciousness as microcosmic reflections of an impulse that drives the cosmos. In philosophy, this is the domain of process thinkers who imagine the universe as an ongoing process of becoming (Ferrer, 2008; Gendlin, 1997; Whitehead, 1979). The individual is understood as a participant in this larger transformative process.

A process view differs radically from the philosophical heritage of the West, for it posits that reality is not made of discrete things, but of processes of change (Whitehead, 1979). "Things" are processes in temporary states of greater stability. The scrambled eggs I had this morning were not scrambled eggs yesterday, are not scrambled eggs once they are eaten, and will not remain scrambled eggs even if they are not eaten.

Although this unstable condition allows for no certainty, the process itself can be trusted (Gendlin, 2006). This view has much in common with the Advaita Vedantin teaching that the nature of created reality is illusory (Whitfield, 2009). This non-dual school of Hinduism offers the traditional story of a clay pot, which in the past was unshaped clay, and in the future will be shards; therefore, the notion that there is some enduring “thing” that is a clay pot is illusory. It is only the ultimate divine source of these forms and of their constant transformation, Brahman, who according to this tradition can be trusted. It should be noted that, unlike Aurobindo (1990) who held to a view of historical spiritual evolution toward a divine ultimate, Advaita Vedanta does not see spiritual significance in any process of change.

Under this rubric, the exceptional human experiences examined in the field’s role as a beyond-ego psychology can be understood as *markers of transformative process*. It is when such phenomena are seen as tokens of humanity’s largely untapped potentials, rather than mere oddities, that they gain the meaning and significance that transpersonal psychologists ascribe to them. It is arguably the absence of this notion of transformative process within much of mainstream psychology that accounts for the general dismissal of this category of human experience. In other words, the element of transformative process is not only congruent with transpersonal as a beyond-ego psychology, it provides an essential context that elevates beyond-ego phenomena to the importance they have consistently held within the field.

Likewise, transpersonal psychology may be seen as an integrative/holistic psychology because it understands the human mind as interwoven with the fabric of body, community, and world—all four of these inextricably linked within a *matrix of transformative process*. In other words, the cosmos is not made up of lifeless, rule-following particles within the vast loneliness of space, but rather is an interconnected living system in the constant activity of relationship. In the words of Berry (1996), “the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects” (n.p.). Mind and nature are not separate (Bateson, 1979), but different facets of intertwined, self-organizing process (cf. Maturana & Varela, 1980; Whitehead, 1979), each implicit within the other (cf. Gendlin, 1997). It is because mind is considered within the context of reality as an interconnected process *matrix* that a more holistic approach becomes essential to transpersonal psychology; it is because reality is understood as *transformative process* that transpersonal psychology understands itself to be in relationship with the great spiritual traditions of the world, seeking to integrate Eastern, Western, indigenous, mystical, and scientific insights into a broad, inclusive, and effective human psychology.

Thirdly, transpersonal psychology can be understood as a psychology of transformation, one that studies humans as participating *members of transformative process*. If the world is an interconnected and evolving whole, then individuals are empowered and embedded agents of that process—capable of striving to cultivate mindfully personal, interpersonal, and societal change in line with such higher human values and aspirations as compassion, discernment, and appreciation of differences (Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, 2011).

In order to further illustrate these three aspects of transformative process, it may be helpful to situate them within transpersonal theory. Grof (2003) has identified what he has called *holotropic states*, non-ordinary states that promote healing and

personal transformation. Such states might serve similar functions when invoked in group settings, a practice that has been documented in both Western and non-Western cultures (cf. Hunt, 2010), as well as perhaps supporting an alignment of human society with larger evolutionary forces (Grof, 2000). Holotropic states have been equated with the range of spiritual or mystical states known from a variety of cultures and traditions, and are associated with the cultivation of intuition, extrasensory perception, creative inspiration, experiences of communion with others, with nature, or with more-than-human presences, sometimes yielding insight or psycho-emotional healing (Grof, 2003). Their dynamic has been characterized as self-expansive—that is, one in which the ego is diminished as the self comes to identify with greater expanses of reality (cf. Friedman, 1981, 1983). Holotropic states are exemplary of those that serve as markers of transformative process. They are roughly comparable to the altered states that, as Tart (1975, 2008) has suggested, may yield valuable, state-specific knowledge not available in more ordinary states of mind.

Ferrer (2002, 2008) has called for situating the study of spiritual experience and development within *participatory philosophy*. In participatory thought—and there cannot, by definition, be any single authoritative participatory view—reality is an ever-shifting, self-transforming matrix of relational process. Within this interconnected movement, all persons and communities who journey toward wholeness and spiritual fulfillment, do so from their own unique location. Their path is not so much navigation of some predefined spiritual landscape as it is negotiation of an ongoing relationship with larger presences of life. Dialogue with others and with differing traditions can add perspective, but any generalities that may be drawn must be held lightly because they are mere abstractions from a dynamic and ever-evolving intersubjective process that has no permanent structure.

Aurobindo (1990), Gebser (1972, 1949/1986), and Wilber (Combs, 1995, this volume) have understood individuals and society to be in the grip of evolutionary forces that carry them toward a divine ultimate. *Transformation of consciousness* is not merely developmental maturation, but a process in which the very identity of the participating subject (individual or collective) is radically reorganized as it comes under the influence of higher forces. In the views of these scholars, traditions may vary in their outward form, but the progression of organizing patterns is invariant, the evolutionary spiritual path toward the singular divine clearly defined (cf. Schuon, 1953/1984).

In Washburn's (1995) model, the ego emerges from what he called the Dynamic Ground, the creative source of the psyche. The journey of transformation involves the ego's journey outward as it pushes for individuation from the Dynamic Ground, and, having achieved a degree of integrity, its return into intimate relationship with its source. Psychodynamic theory, within which he situated himself, has described the outward journey; for Washburn it is spiritual traditions that point to and cultivate renewal through return to a deeply reconfigured relationship with the Dynamic Ground. He characterized the process of personal transformation, then, as an evolving relationship with the matrix that birthed and sustains it.

In varying ways, each of these theoretical approaches reflects facets of transformative process. Some emphasize the process of *transformation*, others more clearly reflect *process* as the context and substance of transformation. Some, such as Wilber and Aurobindo, have seen transformation as an *ascending* process of evolution in which

development is cumulative; others, such as Grof and Washburn, have imagined transformation as *descending*, as returning to recover aspects of self lost in earlier stages of growth (Daniels, 2005). What they have in common is the view of humans as agents of evolution in an interdependent and evolving world.

Transpersonal psychology, along with humanistic psychology, arose in response to psychologies that reduced the person to their simplest actions, their basest motivations, and their most material structures: bio-machines in a purposeless physical wasteland. In contrast, a transpersonal approach sees certain non-ordinary states as evidence that humans participate in an interconnected whole, evolving purposefully toward unseen but sometimes deeply felt ultimates. It is the sensed presence of this process, whether expressed in the language of science or spirituality, which infuses life with felt meaning. Healing interventions such as psychotherapy then become focused on aligning the personal desire for wholeness with this larger evolutionary current.

### Rebranding the Field

These three characterizations of the field, each carrying a different emphasis and each resonant with a different aspect of the themes found within historical definitions of transpersonal psychology, may be of service in presenting this approach more clearly and compellingly to a broader audience. In addition, better descriptions may serve as building blocks toward a short-phrase definition that can perhaps begin to bridge the field to the popular movements for which it has relevance. Before considering such a definition, it should be noted that each of the depictions offered here has its own particular virtues.

For example, defining transpersonal as a psychology of self-expansiveness, while it may also require explanation, carries the benefit of being a scientifically accessible method as well as a praxis. This definition focuses on what is unique about the topic area of the field, and does so in a way that is compatible with mainstream scholarship. The expansion of self-concept to include the body fits well with the alternative health field; expansion to identify with the natural world can promote healthy environmental values (Hoot & Friedman, 2011), and expanding one's sense of self to include the whole of the cosmos is consistent with the vision of some contemporary spirituality movements.

Describing transpersonal as a whole-person, transformative approach conveys the unique vision and values of transpersonal psychology in a simple and effective way. In addition, this definition points to the fact that the individual is interconnected with community, and both are woven into the world. This naturally suggests the larger scholarly orientation of transpersonal studies, which can bring a holistic lens to many topics beyond psychology as well. Interest in the whole person has resonance with the personal growth industry, which promotes cultivating a balanced life; it is also consistent with the alternative health field's emphasis on treating the whole person. Whole-person transformation is in harmony with some popular notions of spirituality, and consideration of one's intimate connection with the world may promote ecological sustainability.

Considering transpersonal as a psychology of transformative process emphasizes its interest in personal and social transformation that promotes self-actualization and

compassionate service to humanity. This also points to its alignment with new philosophies that seek to move beyond modern and postmodern thought, toward process-based models and sciences. The emphasis on transformation resonates directly with the core of the personal growth and popular spirituality industries. When healing is understood as a transformative process of making whole, it also finds connection with complementary and alternative health concepts, and can be applied broadly to healing the earth, as well as to its many inhabitants.

*A summary definition.* The rich connotations of each of these strands provides an opportunity to imagine how they might be woven together into an easily accessible short-phrase definition. Here is one such attempt:

Transpersonal psychology is a transformative psychology of the whole person in intimate relationship with a diverse, interconnected and evolving world; it pays special attention to self-expansive states as well as to spiritual, mystical, and other exceptional human experiences that gain meaning in such a context.

From the peak experiences that first intrigued Maslow (1968), to Grof's (1973) research with psychedelics, to spiritual (e.g., Daniels, 2005), mystical (e.g., Lukoff & Lu, 1988), exceptional (Palmer & Braud, 2002) and other beyond-ego experiences (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993), transpersonal scholars have typically held that many of these encounters may represent an engagement with some profound aspect of reality (cf. Ferrer, 2008), one that may have life-changing effects (e.g., Doblin, 1991). Transpersonal psychology typically assumes that there is an intimacy between the individual and the larger world, an interconnectedness that, when directly experienced, can be transformative.

Yet if true, such intimacy between self and world has potential implications for more than the psychospiritual development of the individual. If true, then perhaps the world is not rule-following bits of matter, but a self-organizing living system in which humans participate (Maturana & Varela, 1980). Mind and nature are not separate (Bateson, 1979), but woven of the same fabric, co-participants in complementary forces of creative evolution (Hartelius & Ferrer, this volume). In this view the affective connections that connect the individual to the world also bind us to each other in a shared destiny, making the welfare of each person the concern of all.

This definition robustly represents the holistic/integrative and transformational definitional themes found by Hartelius et al. (2007), as well as the characterizations of transpersonal psychology as a transformative, whole-person approach and as a psychology of transformative process. It gives less emphasis to the traditional terminology of the field, which often focuses more specifically on non-ordinary experiences. However, we would argue that the latter approach limits the field to a specialty topic area, rather than opening it as an approach to scholarship. Furthermore, without an interpretive context that allows transpersonal experiences to hold the significance that transpersonal scholars ascribe to them, such experiences cannot be more than novelties and anomalies.

Transpersonal psychology will likely always require some explanation in order to be grasped. However, a succinct definition that addresses all three aspects of the field,

along with more developed characterizations of those aspects, may be of service in making it more comprehensible to a wider population. Toward this same end, the following section presents findings of research on how certain aspects of transpersonal psychology have developed over time.

## Trends within Transpersonal Psychology

The field is defined not only by how it is described, but by how it takes shape. Following are studies that offer evidence for three trends within transpersonal psychology: a steady increase in empirical research broadly and in quantitative studies specifically, consistent movement toward greater inclusion of work by scholars outside of North America, and growing participation by women scholars. The three studies presented here are based on reviews of the two indexed journals containing the term transpersonal in the name: the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (*JTP*), and the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* (*IJTS*).

### Study 1

As with humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology has generally been more engaged in clarifying its theoretical constructs than it has been in empirical work. In order to look at the role of empirical work within transpersonal psychology over time, a review was conducted of each article published in *JTP* from its founding in 1969 through 2009, and in *IJTS* from its first issue in 1981 through 2009.

*Method.* Articles in the two target journals were differentiated from editorials and reviews, and were then identified as either theoretical or empirical; the latter were further labeled as either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies.

*Results and discussion.* Results from the first year of *JTP*'s publication (1969) were analyzed separately, and the remainder compiled by decade—1970 to 1979, 1980 to 1989, and so forth—in order to track any change in the percentage of empirical articles published within the field in the easily comprehensible increment of calendrical decades.

Of all content articles published in either *JTP* or *IJTS* between 1969 and 2009 ( $n = 654$ ), 13% were identified as empirical. Both journals demonstrated a tendency toward a greater number of empirical articles over time, though *JTP* had a somewhat larger percentage of empirical papers than *IJTS*. Taken together as representing a significant portion of the professional literature within the field, the role of empirical studies can be seen as increasing steadily over time: As a percentage of the total, empirical papers were 0% of those published in 1969 ( $n = 10$ ), 4% of those published between 1970 and 1979 ( $n = 87$ ), 12% of those published between 1980 to 1989 ( $n = 175$ ), 15% of those published between 1990 and 1999 ( $n = 185$ ), and 17% of those published between 2000 and 2009 ( $n = 197$ ). This suggests that empirical studies, although still strongly in the minority, are slowly gaining importance within transpersonal psychology.

Of empirical papers published in *JTP* or *IJTS* from inception through 2009 ( $n = 85$ ), most (57%) were qualitative; quantitative studies represented 31% of empirical studies, and mixed methods just 11%. Over time the percentage of qualitative articles fluctuated but demonstrated no clear trend; mixed methods declined from 43% of empirical articles during the 1970s to just 6% between 2000 and 2009, and quantitative papers increased from 14% in the 1970s to 39% in the 2000s. Although this study suggests that the field has a long-standing appreciation of qualitative research, it also offers evidence that quantitative research is gradually gaining favor as well.

## Study 2

Transpersonal psychology was founded in Northern California, and even today a large number of scholars within the field work in North America. To determine the role that scholars from other parts of the world play within the field, a review was conducted over the same sample of literature examined in Study 1: all content articles published in *JTP* or *IJTS* from their respective dates of founding through 2009.

*Method.* The geographical location for each author of the articles identified in Study 1 was used to assign that author to one of seven geographical regions: North America, Latin America, Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Australasia. Each paper was assigned the value  $n = 1$ , so that each author on a paper by multiple authors was assigned an appropriate fraction of the value of that paper.

*Results and discussion.* Results generally showed an increase in participation by non-North American authors over time within the target journals. Of papers published in the 1970s ( $n = 87$ ), 100% were by authors in North America; this figure decreased to 70% of papers published in the 1980s ( $n = 175$ ) and 1990s ( $n = 185$ ), and 65% of those published in the 2000s ( $n = 197$ ). As an international journal, *IJTS* consistently had a larger representation of authors from outside North America than *JTP*. The percentage of North American authors published in *IJTS* actually increased from 36% in the 1980s to 52% in the 2000s, likely reflecting in part the fact that the journal headquarters moved from Australia (1981-1992) to Hawaii (1993-2002), and then to the U.S. mainland (2003-present). Taken together, however, these results clearly suggest a trend toward greater participation by non-North American authors in the core literature of the field. Inconsistent with this trend are results from the year 1969, showing 90% North American authorship; however, the presence of a single non-North American author had a disproportional impact on this small sample ( $n = 10$ ).

Trends within the non-North American authors include a significant increase in participation by European authors in the target journals over time, from 0% presence in articles published in the 1970s ( $n = 87$ ) to 20% of those published in the 2000s ( $n = 197$ ). At the same time, authorship by Australasian authors decreased from a high of 26% of papers published in the 1980s ( $n = 175$ ) to just 5% of those published in the 2000s. The large representation of Australasian authors in the 1980s can likely be attributed to the founding of the *Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in



Australia in 1981, and the decline to its transformation into the Hawaii-based *IJTS* in 1993.

Of the total number of papers published by *JTP* and *IJTS* during the period studied ( $n = 654$ ), just 4% were authored by scholars in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia combined. This suggests that transpersonal psychology currently has much greater impact in first-world nations, and that its scholarship still needs to be enriched by voices from many more cultures and societies around the world.

### Study 3

In their 2007 paper, Hartelius et al. (2007) found that during the first 20 years of the field's existence, women authors accounted for only 12% of articles published in *JTP*; the percentage of women authors in that journal increased to 25% during 1998 to 2003. The current study updates this earlier work, and, as with Studies 1 and 2, examines both *JTP* and *IJTS* from each publication's first volume through 2009.

*Method.* A list of author names was compiled for each relevant year of publication of the target journals. Gender was determined as in the earlier study: through familiarity with the gender of the author, through web searches referring to the author by personal pronoun, and where necessary through searches to determine the gender typically associated with a particular given name. Each article was assigned the value  $n = 1$ , and for papers by multiple authors each author was assigned an appropriate fraction of that value.

*Results and discussion.* The results of this study were generally consistent with those of the earlier study that examined only authors published in *JTP*, and only sampled certain years. The current study reviewed all years up to and including 2009. Considering the year 1969 separately, the percentage of women authors in this small sample ( $n = 10$ ) was 0. In the 1970s, 14% of total papers published ( $n = 87$ ) were women; this increased to 18% of articles published in the 1980s ( $n = 175$ ), 19% of those published in the 1990s ( $n = 185$ ), and 23% of those published in the 2000s ( $n = 197$ ).

The largest increase in women authors, decade-over-decade, occurred in *JTP* between the 1990s and the 2000s; women authorship increased from 21% of papers published in that journal during the 1990s ( $n = 93$ ) to 33% of those published in the 2000s ( $n = 93$ ). This shift coincided with another positive step toward gender diversity within the field: the selection of the first woman editor of *JTP* in 2000.

### Conclusion

Transpersonal psychology has taken on an extraordinarily complex challenge. Some scholars see this challenge as attempting to study exceptional human experiences using current scientific methods in a careful way that reduces those phenomena in as minimal a way as possible. Others work to understand the world carefully and critically through the shifted lens of a transpersonal vision that understands the intimate interweaving

of all life, and search for ways to extend scientific work that may be compatible with this stance—embracing scientific methods, but rejecting the often-accompanying philosophy that assumes life to be constructed of rule-following particles (cf. Grof, 1983).

Whatever the research strategy, what holds transpersonal psychology together is a shared vision of the world as a vibrant, alive, and intelligent community. Whether it is the insights of the unconscious mind, the wisdom of the body, the cultural repositories built up within human culture, or the adaptive capacities of the ecosystem, a transpersonal approach understands that it needs to engage in inquiry with respect and humility if it is to win a deeper knowledge of the living processes that ripple through the world.

## Note

1. Friedman's (1981, 1983, this volume) construct focuses on self-concept rather than on self-as-experienced, as the latter is notably difficult to measure, it appears to make the assumption that self-concept will be informed by self-experience—a strategic move that allows an intangible to be measured based on its reflection within cognitive beliefs.

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