Transpersonal Sociology: Origins, Development, and Theory

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Transpersonal theory formally developed within psychology through the initial definition of the field in the publishing of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. However, transpersonal *sociology* also developed with the *Transpersonal Sociology Newsletter*, which operated through the middle 1990s. Both disciplines have long histories, while one continues to flourish and the other, comparatively, is languishing. In order to encourage renewed interest in this important area of transpersonal studies, we discuss the history, and further define the field of transpersonal sociology, discuss practical applications of transpersonal sociology, and introduce research approaches that might be of benefit for transpersonal sociological researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: *Transpersonal, sociology*

Transpersonal studies involve many disciplines (Boucouvalas, 1999; Friedman, 2002; Friedman & Hartelius, 2013; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993), despite that it has been largely dominated by the discipline of psychology. Walsh and Vaughan stated, "Transpersonal disciplines are those disciplines that focus on the study of transpersonal experiences and related phenomena. These phenomena include the causes, effects and correlates of transpersonal experiences and development, as well as the disciplines and practices inspired by them" (p. 203). One discipline especially complementary to psychology is sociology. In essence, to be a human individual (i.e., the focus of psychology) is also to be a part of a society (i.e., the focus of sociology), and conversely human societies are comprised of individuals, such that neither exists apart from the other.

For transpersonal studies to provide the most inclusive and holistic approach to the full range of transpersonal phenomena, there has to be attention to its sociology, not just its psychology. Consequently, we provide some basic approaches that might be useful toward further developing a framework for understanding and applying transpersonal sociology. As one of the key disciplines involved in the earliest stages of the transpersonal movement, it flourished for a brief period, but then has since languished in comparison to transpersonal psychology. Our hope is not to create a definitive statement of, but to encourage a renewal of interest in, transpersonal sociology as an important, and maybe necessary, part of transpersonal studies.

For example, in various religious and spiritual systems, transpersonal concerns are balanced between individual and community. Shamans alter consciousness and visit alternate realities not just for their own benefit but for the sake of their community (Krippner & Friedman, 2009), while many different religious and spiritual traditions emphasize both (Friedman, Krippner, Riebel, & Johnson, 2010). In Buddhism, the Sangha or community of those who practice, constitutes one of this faith's three pillars, co-equal to individual liberation while, in Christianity, the Church as a collective body, as well as the salvation of individuals, is of crucial importance. Likewise, in transpersonal psychology there is a growing awareness of the importance of social engagement (Coder, DeYoung, & Friedman, 2014). As noted by Hunt (2010):

> If spirituality is as social as it is individual, the question arises, perhaps especially in the predominantly secular era, of how this human potential for a directly-felt numinosity could or would re-emerge as the potential inner face of an outwardly globalizing world order. (p. 23)

Introduction to Basic Sociology

Sociology arose as an attempt to understand social facts, which transcend the facts of biology and psychology and require a unique method (e.g., Durkheim, 1938). In this way, sociology is the science of societies, in contrast to psychology as the science of the individual and biology as the science of life. Just as psychology, although it

is based in biology, cannot be reduced to just biology, so too sociology transcends individual psychology by looking at collectives that are not merely the sum of individuals as components but arise from a larger interconnected matrix generated through individuals being embedded in a culture with many pre-givens, such as languages and customs, that continually influence the individual through social interactions. For Durkheim, social facts were as real as individuals, having collective origins independent of individuals and with an existence far exceeding that of individuals. If the literal meaning of transpersonal is taken seriously, referring to "beyond the person as an individual," sociology as a discipline is inherently transpersonal. In this regard, we agree with Moberg (2001) who concluded that, "all of sociology . . . by its very nature involves transpersonal concerns" (p. 132).

Sociology focuses on four main theoretical perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, feminist perspectives, and symbolic interactionism (Lindsey & Beach, 2002). According to these authors, functionalism (also called structural-functionalism) is a macrosociological perspective (i.e., looks at the big picture) that "interprets all social groups . . . as systems whose parts are interdependent so that a change in one element necessarily leads to changes in every other element" (p. 19). Additionally, "each part exists for a reason, and if it fails to perform its appropriate function, the whole system works less effectively" (p. 19). One of the main tenets of such a system is to keep equilibrium, and any force that challenges that equilibrium is considered suspect. The main critique of functionalism is that within each system are inherent power dynamics, with those in the majority or in power quelling the challenges to the system posed by nondominant minority peoples or groups in an attempt to keep the status quo. An additional challenge to functionalism is the claim that every system, to maintain health, must change, especially in order to create new, more just, and more effective systems.

Conflict theorists (also a macrosociological perspective), conversely and in response to functionalists "view society as an arena in which different individuals and groups struggle with each other in order to obtain scarce and valued resources, especially property, prestige, and power" (Lindsey & Breach, 2002, p. 21). According to these authors, conflict theorists do not deny that functional systems exist; rather they believe

"we must ask *for whom* they are functional" (p. 21). Thus, conflict theorists tend to focus on social action initiatives, particularly those focused on disempowered groups. Critique of conflict theory revolves around two observations: first, they tend to ignore areas where there is consensus around various socially accepted values and behaviors; second, they tend to overlook institutionalized means of avoiding struggle through consensus-building exercises, such as democratic elections.

The feminist perspective in sociological theory, also a macrosociological theory, is closely related to the conflict theory perspective, with the added emphasis on androcentric attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within cultures. Feminist perspectives also point out the androcentric bias within sociological theory and research, with feminist sociologists inviting open dialogue regarding sex, gender, race, and class (Lindsay & Beach, 2002). According to these authors, "consistent with conflict theory, feminist sociologists argue that structured social inequality . . . is supported by ideologies accepted by both the privileged and the oppressed" (p. 24). A critique often raised against the feminist perspective, in addition to those leveled at conflict theory in general, is the question whether feminist sociologists and their research can remain objective. However, feminist scholars tend to believe this critique a "smokescreen hiding male bias" (p. 24).

The fourth sociological theory, symbolic interactionism, is the only *micro*sociological theory covered in our paper. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the individual's response in face-to-face social settings, and emphasizes that large social structures "are ultimately nothing more than the creations of interacting people and that they can, therefore, be changed" (Lindsay & Beach, 2002, p. 23). According to these authors, the "*meaning* of various aspects of social reality is not predetermined but is established through human action" (p. 23). The main critique of symbolic interactionists is that they "fail to acknowledge how difficult it is to change long-established social arrangements" (pp. 23-24).

Transpersonal Sociology

Walsh and Vaughan (1993) defined transpersonal sociology as "the study of the social dimensions, implications, expressions and applications of transpersonal phenomena" (p. 203). Sociology has long had proponents of transcendence akin to what would be expected in a transpersonal sociology (e.g., Berger, 1969), but which has not used that name. There has also been

a close relationship between humanistic sociologists, such as Marks' (1979) focus on metamotivation and metapathology from a sociological vantage, and what would be congruent with transpersonal sociology. Also, occasional references to the term transpersonal have appeared in the sociological literature, such as in Claire Jacobson's translation of Simmel's classical approach to sociological actions as stemming from "a transpersonal collective entity . . . [in which an individual] participates as member of the whole in the character of an end-in-itself which the whole always possesses" (Simmel, 1908/1965, p. 125). One contemporary writer, Atchley (2010), defined transpersonal sociology as the study of groups and communities of people who share transpersonal states of consciousness and live in accord with such understandings.

The Origin of Our Interests
in Transpersonal Sociology

First, we want to disclose that neither of us are sociologists by profession. This paper's first author's (Ryan) initial experience with the topic of transpersonal sociology arose in early 2002 after he was invited to teach an introductory undergraduate course in sociology. While reorienting himself to the general sociological material, he started to ask the question: If there is a transpersonal psychology, might there also be a transpersonal sociology? He quickly learned that others had used the term, including a well-known name within transpersonal psychology—Ken Wilber. This paper's second author (Harris) did receive academic training, including a master's degree and one additional year of advanced study toward the doctorate, in sociology. However, he left the field of sociology to instead receive his doctorate in psychology. Nevertheless, he has taught both psychology and sociology courses at various colleges and universities, and frequently takes a sociological perspective in his scholarship, as well as often collaborates with sociologists in academic work (e.g., Ardelt & Friedman, 2014).

Ryan's first awareness of the term transpersonal sociology came from one of a plethora of graduate-school readings of Ken Wilber's work. Try as he might, he still cannot find the exact article in which he first read the term; however, the text was likely referring to Wilber's original 1983 book titled *A Sociable God: A Brief Introduction to a Transcendental Sociology* in which transcendental sociology was discussed, along with the transpersonal aspects of this newly emerging

field (Wilber, 2005/2011). That book was reissued in 1984 with the subtitle *Toward a New Understanding of Religion*. The text was reprinted in 2005 with the same subtitle as in 1984, although with updated material and an extensive preface. According to Wilber (2005/2011), "the way is now open to a more integral, balanced, and comprehensive approach to sociology, including the sociology of spiritual engagement" (Introduction to the 2005 Edition: Methodological Outlaw, para. 2). Wilber's main focus in *A Sociable God* was to build an outline of how one might approach a transpersonal sociology, and specifically a transpersonal sociology of religion. Wilber, in typical Wilberian fashion, introduced a developmental model incorporating differing developmental trajectories which, when combined and understood within his pre-rational, rational, and trans-rational context, established a base for evaluating personal and social, horizontal and vertical religious movements (in the form of integration and transformation, respectively). Wilber additionally covered issues of epistemology, ontology, and methodology as they are related to his various developmental levels and as they are related to his proposed transpersonal model of sociology. Wilber's model is discussed in more detail toward the end of this article.

Harris, while working on doctoral studies in a sociology department in the late 1960s and early 1970s, researched the fluid boundaries between personalities in marital dyads, namely how people influence each other in intimate relationships such that, often, they function more as a unit than as individuals (e.g., in completing each other's sentences and using each other as external minds for remembering facts). Working from a systems perspective, he gradually came to the realization that individuals and social systems are inextricably intertwined, like two sides of a coin. This also led to a fuller realization that the level of analysis deemed individual, which appeared compellingly real (especially to humans' socialized into Western culture that widely promotes belief in the privileged reality of the individual), is no more ontologically real than that of marital dyads or other collectives. However, upon switching to a doctoral program in psychology in 1972, Harris discovered the term transpersonal and, in retrospect, realized that his sociological research on love within married couples fit well under the rubric of transpersonal studies. As a transpersonal scholar, Harris has applied sociological methods to a variety of issues. These include analyzing

particular religious traditions, such as Buddhism (Friedman, 2009, 2010), analyzing social problems, such as in criminal justice (Whiteley, Bloom, & Friedman, 2014) and gerontology (Ardelt & Friedman, 2014), and understanding crises at the national level, such as in Fiji (Friedman, Glover, & Avegalio, 2002; Friedman, 2004) and Zimbabwe (Machinga & Friedman, this issue). Using the tools of transpersonal sociology augments his predominant focus as a transpersonal psychologist by allowing a transdisciplinary approach that is broader and more inclusive than relying on only one disciplinary perspective. Keeping the use of the term *trans* congruent with transpersonal, he is also writing further afield, as in a forthcoming book titled *Transcultural Competence* (Glover & Friedman, in-press) and even work on what he is now calling *transpecies* (Bloom & Friedman, 2013), referring to the profound interconnectedness of all species of life and their co-evolution.

The Pioneering Work of Susan Greenwood

In addition to Wilber, Greenwood (1990) ventured into transpersonal sociology through her master's thesis. Greenwood's initial article on this, stemming from her thesis, focused on the sociology of religion. Specifically, Greenwood (1990) compared Emile Durkheim's *collective consciousness* and Carl Jung's *collective unconscious*. According to Greenwood, Durkheim focused on the outward manifestation of religion, while Jung focused on the inner manifestation, with each conceptualizing corresponding structures through which the religious manifests. Durkheim wrote, "religion is in a word the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence" (as cited in Greenwood, p. 484). Jung, on the other hand, wrote of the transcendent function and its manifestation within the psyche of the individual (as cited in Greenwood, p. 485). In each case, Greenwood believed, there was a direct example of representationalism (à la Shopenhauer), where the human mind can only understand abstract ideas (in this case God and religion) through the objects that represent those ideas.

The respective structures of the outward and inward manifestation of religion, thus, directly allowed for the representation of the religious or spiritual experience, either in society or within the individual. For Durkheim, the structures through which humans understood the divine were the *collective representations*, while for Jung the structures were the *archetypes*

(Greenwood, 1990, p. 489). Through the collective representations, an individual could connect with and understand the collective consciousness. Durkheim believed the following about the collective consciousness:

> The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own. By definition, it is diffused over society as a whole . . . . It does not change with every generation but, on the contrary, links successive generations to one another . . . . It is the psychological type of society. (as cited in Greenwood, p. 488)

Jung, on the other hand, wrote of the collective unconscious as a "psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes" (as cited in Greenwood, p. 488).

Greenwood (1990) continued on to describe the similarities of the structures, the origin of the structures, and the similarity of the collective consciousness and collective unconscious. Her main thesis seemed to be that the two were, in essence, two sides of the same coin; one the outward manifestation and the other the inner manifestation of religious and spiritual experience within individuals within a social context. From this recognition, Greenwood built her concept of a transpersonal sociology of religion, where there emerges a potential to unite the subjective and objective epistemologies. Greenwood further stated:

> A transpersonal approach thus offers the possibility of a reconciliation between what many people believe to be mutually exclusive forms of religion, shown in part by Luckmann's (1967) "invisible" or "private" religion (akin to *religio*), which seeks to dissociate itself from public church organization (akin to *religare*). We might even identify the transpersonal process as a "divine" dialectic which synthesizes these forms of religion. (p. 492)

After Greenwood's 1990 article, she continued exploring the concept of a transpersonal sociology of religion and, in 1995, she released a chapter titled "Transpersonal Theory and Religious Experience." In this chapter, Greenwood explored various definitions of transpersonal, including a brief description of Wilber's

and Washburn's models, and provided an overview of various critiques of the transpersonal-psychology movement. From there, Greenwood focused, once again, on a comparison of Durkheim and Jung, paying particular attention to the transcendence of seeming opposites (science/religion, psychology/sociology, subjective/objective, collective representations/archetypes).

She ended the chapter discussing the implications and applications of the emerging transpersonal theory. First, Greenwood (1995) believed if *enantiodromia* is at work *and* we are collectively transcending opposites, this points toward the disintegration of the positivistic paradigm and movement toward a more integrative consciousness. Second, we can understand the "*sui generis* nature [of society] through chaos theory which provides an example of a self-organizing principle . . . through the enantidromia of order and disorder" (p. 513). Third, Greenwood wrote:

> *Is it possible that the ground, earlier* [in Greenwood's chapter] *referred to by Nelson and Washburn, may be located in the tension—energy or vivifying spirit—between opposites*? It is from this question that we can see the importance of simultaneous consideration of temporal and timeless processes with its resultant multilevel dialectic. (p. 513)

Finally, Greenwood ended with a more general sociological affirmation that an "immediate and important implication of transpersonal theory is that out-of-balance situations in the world whether they involve religious, economic, or social collective representations, are in an inexorable archetypal process, a process in which opposites endlessly move toward each other" (p. 514).

Journal of Transpersonal Sociology—
A Valiant Attempt

During the same year Greenwood released her 1995 chapter, a group of interested sociologists and transpersonal theorists joined efforts to discuss the potential for a *Journal for Transpersonal Sociology*. The efforts started as a *Transpersonal Sociology Newsletter*, with issue number 1 released in the summer of 1995. The newsletter was housed within the Department of Sociology at the University of Maine where Susan Greenwood taught, and her mentor and colleague, Kyriacos Markides, was a professor. The first newsletter was a letter to colleagues inviting participation in the efforts to define the field and establish first the newsletter

and later, if appropriate, a journal. In that newsletter, Greenwood and Markides wrote:

> Just as transpersonal psychology emerged from humanistic psychology through the work of Abraham Maslow and other psychologists, so too could humanistic sociology give rise to transpersonal sociology. Several years ago, Ken Wilber, a leading authority on the evolution of consciousness, wrote that "transpersonal sociology is a discipline desperately awaiting birth." Also, Willis Harman, president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences in California, notes that the term "transpersonal," while ambiguous, invites consideration of dimensions currently "unacceptable to the orthodox scientific community." . . . We think that transpersonal sociology describes a holistic approach that not only incorporates the usual subject matter of sociology but that transcends social experience to include a spiritual dimension. While positivism has been a necessary step in understanding our world, we think that humans are mistaken to think that the visible world is all that exists. Great thinkers from Plato to Schopenhauer, Bergson, Jung, Levy-Bruhl, Sorokin, and even Durkheim postulated *something* greater than the reality of the everyday world. (*Transpersonal Sociology Newsletter*, 1995, p. 1)

Through successive newsletters, various individuals contributed toward defining the field either directly, through writing in the newsletter, or indirectly through their own publications that were quoted by the newsletter authors, or offered support for the field in general. In addition to Susan Greenwood and Kyriacos Markides, direct and indirect contributors included Roger Walsh, David Moberg, M. Duncan Rinehart, Don Goodman, Ralph Hood Jr., Richard (Dick) Moodey, and Sara Horsfall. Additional members of the newsletter included Stjepan Meštrović, Edward Tiryakian, Anthony Ladd, Toni Phillips, Art Jipson, and Steven Cohn (ordered in which they appeared in the newsletter). The final known issue, number 5, was released in the summer of 1997 with the following definition of transpersonal sociology:

> Transpersonal sociology refers to the exploration of the social dimensions of those human experiences that have traditionally been called spiritual or religious. It includes evolution of a sense of self,

the evolution of society, and an understanding of consciousness as extending beyond traditional human knowledge. We acknowledge that while "doing" transpersonal sociology, we are participants who seek to develop and enrich this new discipline for others as well as for ourselves. (*Transpersonal Sociology Newsletter*, 1997, p. 1)

At this point it does not seem the newsletter developed beyond 1997, and no known *Journal of Transpersonal Sociology* emerged from these efforts.

**Further Defining the Field
of Transpersonal Sociology**

In order to expand the discussion of transpersonal sociological theory, it might be good here to revisit the history and definition of transpersonal psychology. According to Vich (1988), William James was the first to use the English term *trans-personal*, around 1905 while preparing a course syllabus. Jung has been credited as the first to use the term in a published manuscript, in 1917, referring to *überpersonlich,* which was first translated as *superpersonal* and later translated as *transpersonal*, both of which were related to the collective unconscious. Whoever was first, the concept seemed to be co-emerging in the academic world in the early 1900s and reflected a belief that something beyond the person, *something more*, manifests through the individual.

Further efforts have been made to define the transpersonal in a systematic way (Braud, 2006; Caplan, Hartelius, & Rardin, 2003; Friedman, 2002; Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007; Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992; Maslow, 1971). While it is clear there is a diversity of perspectives, it also seems clear that basic elements emerge throughout. Often the similar elements include acknowledging some type of spiritual reality (either embedded within the material in a monist sense, that transcends the material in a dualist sense, or a complex combination of the two), belief in a paradigm that moves beyond materialism and positivism, and an assertion of the multifaceted aspect of self often through which a transcendent realm may interact or manifest (e.g., in some cases these are claims about different layers of personality structures, and in other cases about energetic sheaths of being). Terms often used when speaking of the transpersonal include holistic or whole-person, integration, transformation, spiritual, transcendent, something more, ground-of-being, the Divine (however conceptualized), and, more often than not, the discussion includes ways of acknowledging,

opening to, or spontaneously experiencing these aspects beyond (or within) the individual self.

In relation to this article, Jorge Ferrer's (as cited in Caplan et al., 2003) definition is illustrative of the importance of definition:

Situated within the wider umbrella of transpersonal studies, transpersonal psychology is a modern academic discipline concerned with the *psychological* study of the transpersonal and spiritual dimensions of human nature and existence (e.g., mystical phenomena, transpersonal states of consciousness, spiritual organizations, the sacredness of nature, spiritual transformation and awakening, archetypes, subtle and ultimate realities, and so forth), as well as with the *spiritual* and *transpersonal* study of human psychology (e.g., memory, cognition, love, empathy, regression, trauma, anger, gender, sexual identity, intimate relationships, psychopathology, psychotherapy, birth, development, death, and so forth). (p. 147)

Note how Ferrer included both the content considered to fall within the transpersonal arena (mystical phenomena, transpersonal states of consciousness, etc.) as well as a transpersonal *approach* to traditional areas of study (memory, cognition, love, empathy, regression, trauma, etc.). For transpersonal sociology this may be a vital point, in that it include both areas of study that might be considered transpersonal sociological *content* areas (e.g., Greenwood's comparison of Jung and Durkheim, field theory, spiral dynamics, social exceptional human experiences, etc.) as well as a transpersonal sociological approach to more traditional sociological issues (educational systems, penal systems, family systems). We posit that a more complete treatment of transpersonal sociology would include both perspectives.

The most recent effort to provide a "definitive" definition for transpersonal psychology may be the most pertinent in an attempt to define transpersonal sociology. Hartelius et al. (2007) conducted three studies, the first of which focused on collecting 160 definitions from a variety of sources in order to establish basic themes within the definitions. The general themes were *Theme I: Beyond-Ego Psychology*, *Theme II: Integrative/Holistic Psychology*, and *Theme III: Transformative Psychology*. The subthemes are described in the following; however, it is important to note that the themes were also parsed as *Theme I: Transpersonal as CONTENT of a beyond-ego*

psychology, *Theme II: Transpersonal as CONTEXT for integrative psychology of the whole person*, and *Theme III: Transpersonal as CATALYST for human transformation.*

The second study applied these themes to Boucouvalas' (1980) article, which provided a general outline of the field at the time, and the authors found a coherence between the identified themes and the content within Boucouvalas' article (as cited in Hartelius et al., 2007). Finally, the third study in Hartelius et al. (2007) tracked changes in the field, which emphasized *Theme I* in the late 1970s to a field that emphasized all three themes from 1999 to 2003. Each of these main themes, the subthemes within each theme, and the formulation as CONTENT, CONTEXT, and CATALYST all provide rich opportunity for informing and raising questions regarding a potential field of transpersonal sociology. In order to proceed, however, we must also examine a few of the main theories and content areas within mainstream sociology.

If we first take a *transcend-and-include* approach to transpersonal theory, then a transpersonal sociological theory would agree that all sociological theories are a part of a larger whole nested, as it were, like holons building toward a greater understanding of the entire multilayered social experience. Add a recognition of the next, overarching theory, that of the transpersonal, similar to how transpersonal psychology recognized psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanism, (and we would add Gestalt, cognitive, and other theoretical stances), before moving into the transpersonal domain. Second, it would be important to recognize the something more, that which moves within and yet transcends the human material condition. Similar to transpersonal psychology, transpersonal sociology would open to the social dynamics of the movements of spirit (Atman, God, Allah, Holy Ghost, Great Spirit, Ground of Being, etc.), investigating how that something more influences the functioning and status-quo of major systems, influences the conflicts over power, prestige, and privilege, influences the recognition of "isms" such as androcentrism, and influences how to make meaning of our social interactions.

Revisiting the definition of transpersonal posited by Hartelius et al. (2007), we now overlay that definition onto the sociological domain previously described by revisiting the main themes, subthemes, and formulation as CONTENT, CONTEXT, and CATALYST within a sociological perspective. These are also compared and contrasted in Table 1.

Theme I: Beyond ego sociology. Within this first main theme are a number of subthemes, including states beyond ego, stages beyond ego, paths beyond ego, aspirations beyond ego, and beyond ego phenomenon not otherwise specified (Hartelius et al., 2007). Considering sociological theory, it would be important to investigate how various altered states, experiences, and beyond-ego developmental trajectories of individual people and groups may influence social groups, institutions, and interactions. From a functionalist perspective, there could be, for example, institutionalized indigenous practices that help keep the status quo of a given indigenous community. The question becomes: *How do these altered-state practices reify the established social structure in order to maintain balance?* From a conflict theorist perspective, using a different example, one might find that an exceptional or mystical experience challenges the status quo. The question becomes: *How does this exceptional human experience* (White, 1997, 1998) *illuminate the power dynamics within the social institution in question?* Entering the feminist perspective, it could be that, for example, awareness of a beyond-ego developmental trajectory contradicts an established reified perspective held by a given institution. With this perspective, the question becomes: *How does knowing and experiencing this beyond-ego developmental trajectory, which honors, acknowledges, and verifies women's experience, illuminate androcentric developmental theory?*

Finally, from the symbolic interactionism perspective (perhaps the easiest to connect with transpersonal psychology, as it is microsociological), a person may connect with a state beyond traditional ego-bound states, which in turn illuminates her or his embodied awareness of meaning and purpose in life (as happens when an individual has a near-death experience). At this point, the question becomes: *How does this individual's experience of a beyond-ego state influence how one creates meaning in one's social life and how one interacts with various social institutions?*

Theme II: Integrative/holistic sociology. The second theme, noted by Hartelius et al. (2007), includes the subthemes of embodiment, social/ecological situation, transpersonal as context, and more-than-ego. The social/ecological situation subtheme is directly relevant to sociology considering this is where those authors placed psychology within the larger social and ecological context. That aside, the important contribution here for a transpersonal sociology is the focus on integration and

a holistic perspective, from the awareness of the body to the awareness of a context containing that something more in which all social interactions take place. Bringing this perspective into the four sociological perspectives, we further expand each theory. Functionalism would include an awareness of how the social institution is embedded within a larger transpersonal context, with the system gaining a more healthy balance through being in alignment with that which people call ground of being, spirit, or God. Conflict theory might recognize the transpersonal context, the transcendent ground of being as it were, as influencing the struggle for change toward equality and awareness of differing power structures within social institutions. Feminist theory may draw on integral, multicultural, and interdisciplinary work, acknowledging a transcendent, holistic paradigm as it enlightens issues around androcentrism in social groups, institutions, and social interactions. Symbolic interactionist theory might acknowledge the ecological, transpersonal, and transformational context people use for making meaning within social interactions.

Theme III: Transformative sociology. The third theme, expounded upon by Hartelius et al. (2007), is even more directly related to sociology. Many sociologists already look at social change at the macrosociological and microsociological levels. Additionally, practical application in sociology is often geared toward social change, be it through educational systems, working in the penal system, helping families, and so forth. However, the key element here is not change per se, but transpersonal *transformation*. We are writing here of a profound, long-lasting change influenced by an awareness of, interaction with, and integration of that something more that would be expected of a transcendent, transpersonal sociological theory. Transformative sociology would typically challenge the functionalist perspective to preserve the status quo. However, it may be that the transformative process would deepen the traditional values and perspective held by a system, rather than enact unnecessary surface-level institutional shuffling. Here reside transcendent values of beauty, love, compassion, and so forth, and how they might infuse the system seeking equilibrium and status quo. Any change would be considered peripheral, a cutting off of perspectives that lead away from the original homeostasis sought by the group or institution in conjunction with the transcendent values. Conflict theorists and feminist theorists might be inherently

drawn to the transformational aspect. However, it would be important, again, to acknowledge that it is not change for change sake, but the seeking of alignment with a transcendent, transpersonal, holistic perspective. Symbolic interactionist theorists might also be drawn to the inherent purpose and meaning making that would arise out of a transformation paradigm. Through interaction with the "transformation, transconventional development, transpersonal self-actualization, psycho-spiritual growth, [and] embodied knowledge" (Hartelius et al., 2007, p. 143), a symbolic interactionist could track the way meaning was forming and changing in relation to social groups and, thus, influencing those social groups, catalyzing further social transformation.

Content, context, and catalyst. One final area of Hartelius et al. (2007) that we wish to touch upon is the structure of the authors' offer: transpersonal as CONTENT of a beyond-ego psychology, transpersonal as CONTEXT for integrative psychology of the whole person, and transpersonal as CATALYST for human transformation (p. 10). Reframing this in sociological language, one could say: transpersonal as CONTENT of a beyond-ego sociology, transpersonal as CONTEXT for integrative sociology of the whole person/global society, and transpersonal as CATALYST for human social transformation. Thus, the content covered by transpersonal sociology would include new areas, including potential areas like socially influenced or socially relevant exceptional human experiences or macrosociological transpersonal influences, such as possible field dynamics. Additionally, transpersonal sociology would acknowledge the transcendent, transpersonal domain as the context within which social relationships, social dynamics, groups, and institutions exist. Finally, transpersonal sociology would acknowledge, investigate, and invite the potential for the transcendent to act as a catalyst for social transformation.

Integral and Participatory Theories

While full coverage is beyond the scope of this article, we believe it important to note where the previously envisioned transpersonal sociology might intersect integrative and participatory theories. Pitirim Sorokin, a sociologist born in Russian in 1889 (Simpson, 1953) and who was the first Chairperson of the newly founded sociology department at Harvard in 1930 (Jeffries, 2001), wrote of an integral sociology that would include three premises for understanding the social world: the sensate, the ideational, and the

Table 1. A Matrix of Transpersonal Sociology

	CONTENT	CONTEXT	CATALYST
Functionalism	Spiritual and transpersonal practices that reify traditional social structure	Identify larger social systems and its balance as held within a transcendent context	Transcendent as inherently balanced, maintaining a healthy, moral social system
Conflict theory	Exceptional experiences (individual, social, participatory) that challenge dysfunctional systems	Awareness of the transcendent within nondominant populations	Motivation for change stemming from transcendent movements, morals, and ethics
Feminist theory	Women's spiritual traditions and experiences as informative to social interaction and social groups	Awareness of the transcendent within women's spiritual development and experiences, and how that informs struggle against androcentrism in social structures	Women's exceptional human experiences and spiritual development motivation for change within social systems
Symbolic Interactionism	Exceptional human experiences facilitating profound sense of meaning and purpose in social setting	Transcendent as ground through which people find meaning in social setting, groups, and group development	Exceptional human experiences and spiritual development as motivational energy for transformation of meaning
Transpersonal Theory	Group and social transcendent, spiritual experiences	Transcendent, field, ground of being as underlying context for all social behavior	Group and social transformation through contact with and manifestation of the transcendent

idealistic. These three premises create distinct types of culture: the Sensate Culture, which depends on direct experience through the senses; the Ideational Culture which corresponds to the Platonic Forms or a unified, transcendent reality; and the Idealistic Culture, "which attempts to fuse and synthesize the other two in a dialectical balance between opposite principles" (Coser, 1977, p. 467). Sorokin believed societies went through successive stages, cycling through these different worldviews, and believed we were currently imbedded in a Sensate cycle, with the natural sciences and society at large focusing primarily on the material world. Jeffries (2005) noted of Sorokin's integralism:

> The foundational idea of integralism is that the reality that is the subject matter of the social sciences contains empirical-sensory, rational-mindful, and superrational supersensory components (Sorokin, 1941a: 741-746; 1956a; 1957b). This assumption opens the spiritual and transcendental realm to consideration and analysis. Since reality contains these three elements, this ontology necessitates a corresponding epistemology suitable for obtaining knowledge regarding all its aspects. (p. 69)

Jeffries (2001) additionally pointed toward Sorokin's integralism, and Sorokin's use of the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, as a basis for establishing an integral, Catholic approach to the social sciences. Johnston (2004), also referring to Sorokin, agreed that an integral approach would align with a Catholic approach to sociology. Johnston, however, continued, advocating for the establishment of a field of sociology wherein the values of a Catholic sociology might reside. This raises the question if transpersonal sociology might be that field, honoring the inherent transcendent component, the super-rational and supersensory, within a Catholic social science paradigm (or one equally congruent with other religious and spiritual traditions).

However, Sorokin is not alone in having proposed an integral theory. As noted previously, Wilber (2005/2011) also proposed an integral, transpersonal approach to sociology. While Wilber's text did not incorporate the full All-Quadrant All-Level (AQAL) model, the underpinnings of this model were present. To start, Wilber firmly placed his method within "integral methodological pluralism [summarized by] the phrase 'Everybody is right'" (Methodological Outlaw, para. 5). Wilber held that each major spiritual and social tradition

may hold a piece of the larger puzzle, as it were, but does not posit that they are all equal. Rather, Wilber placed the various traditions into a notion of holarchy: "Ideally, evolution occurs through a process of 'transcend and include'—transcend the previous stage's limitations but include its accomplishments" (The Basic Inadequacy of Foraging Consciousness, para. 1). Wilber further stated:

> Not only do individuals and cultures develop, but they also interact in unique ways: Each level of the compound individual is actually a *system of mutual exchange* with elements *at the same level of development* (i.e., *the same degree of depth*) in the exterior world: matter with matter (physical food consumption), body with body (sexual procreation), mind with mind (symbolic communication), and so on. At every level, in other words, the subjective world is embedded in vast networks of intersubjective or cultural relationships, and vice versa, not as an afterthought or a voluntary choice, but as an inescapable pregiven fact. As I would later put it, agency is always agency-in-communion. (The Integral Approach, para. 2)

Once Wilber (2005/2011) established the idea of the compound individual in relationship to her or his social surroundings, Wilber described the basic outline of his developmental model:

> Development or growth, then, seems to occur in two primary dimensions: horizontal-evolutionary-historical and vertical-revolutionary-transcendental, or in short, translative and transformative. Horizontal or translative growth is a process of transcribing, filling in, or "fleshing out" the surface structures of a given level; that is, assuming responsibility for the relational exchange of surface structures that constitutes the very lifeline or "food" of that level, a process that must occur if that level and the society of its reciprocal exchange partners are to reproduce themselves both moment to moment (or individually) and generation to generation (or collectively). Transformation, on the other hand, is a vertical shift, a revolutionary reorganization of past elements and emergence of new ones. It is synonymous with *transcendence*, although notice that transcendence is then not confined to the upper levels of consciousness (although it occurs there royally), but rather refers

to the fact that *each* successive level transcends or goes beyond its predecessor(s): myth transcends magic, reason transcends myth, soul transcends reason, spirit transcends soul. (Mana and Taboo, para. 1)

Through his developmental model, Wilber posited that individuals and social structures will move through (or have moved through) the levels of archaic, magic, mythic, rational, psychic, subtle, and causal. Each level is said to contain valid and legitimate religions, horizontal integration, and social structure that provides for increasing integration *at that level*. Additionally, through a process of transcendence, social structures may move from a lower level to a higher level and, thus, must develop a new set of level-appropriate, valid, and legitimate religions and structures for social integration. Thus, transpersonal sociology would necessarily, from a Wilberian perspective, investigate both the process of horizontal integration and vertical transformation (which is the content of transpersonal sociology), as well as methods of working with social structures (and individuals) to increase horizontal integration and, when appropriate, vertical transformation (which is the application of transpersonal sociology). On this last point, we could further expand this discussion from Wilber's AQAL model to that of Spiral Dynamics (Beck & Cowan, 2005; Howard & Hirani, 2013), which specifically works at the cultural level.

Finally, when discussing sociology as a transpersonal area of study, we additionally touch upon the participatory movements, most notably as advocated by Ferrer and Heron. Ferrer (2002) challenged both the universalism of the perennial philosophical foundations of transpersonal psychology, as well as neo-Kantian contextualism, proposing instead a "*multiplicity of transconceptual disclosures of reality*" (p. 145) allowing for a universal experience, that of experiencing the "Ocean of Emancipation" (p. 145). The way to this Ocean, according to Ferrer, is through a radical participatory knowing which he believed is: (a) presentational, or knowing by being, also referred to as knowing through the deconstruction of the subject-object split; (b) enactive, a bringing forth a world through co-creation; and (c) transformative, including transformation of self and world which, in turn, allows for one's transformation of epistemology (Ferrer, 2002, pp. 122-123). Ferrer's participatory model clearly raises

challenges to a transpersonal sociology that might rely solely on a perennial philosophy, raising important questions regarding epistemology and ontology.

Heron's (2007, 2008) participatory spirituality, however, is slightly different than the one proposed by Ferrer. Heron (2008) focused on a holistic and pluralistic epistemology and ontology. Additionally, Heron focused on the dynamic between people, and asserted that knowing, spiritual development, spiritual stages, and spiritual experiences emerge out of relationship. One vital aspect of Heron's participatory model is the co-creation of *meaning*, which may apply directly to the symbolic-interactionist perspectives noted previously.

Practical Applications of Transpersonal Sociology

Envisioning a transpersonal sociology inherently raises issues of direct application of transpersonal sociological theory, for what use is theory if it cannot be applied to understanding and working with daily life? While there may be many ways of visioning applied transpersonal sociological theory, we focus on two examples. Each incorporates potential transpersonal states, stages, development, and/or social transformation at the small- or large-group levels.

Jeremy Taylor (1998, 2009) created, in the late 1960s, a group-based means of working with dreams. The process entails a single person sharing a meaningful dream, which is then worked within the group setting through a process of individuals sharing personal projections with the group, allowing each person in the group to find personal meaning by accepting or denying projections based on her or his own intuitive "Aha" experience with the shared observations. One of us (Ryan) is personally familiar with this style of group work as he received training from Jeremy, and has been involved with dream work since 1999. The individual and small-group transformation that occurs through recurrent, ongoing dream work can be quite profound, ranging from feelings of intense connection (to others in the group or more generally to the world, the Divine, etc.) to experiences of shared dreaming.

There are two levels of sociological significance. First, this practice can facilitate a shift in an individual's sense of meaning and purpose in relation to self and social interactions, which plays into the symbolic interactionist perspective. Second, the small-group itself may go through a transformational process, moving through stages of development from being mere strangers to close friends, and feeling connected with

what Jung termed the collective unconscious (as noted previously). Additionally, this collective attunement and transformation may align with Hunt's (2010) notion of "realizations of individual transpersonal development," which are "also possible as shared states of consciousness on a collective, even planetary, level" (p. 23).

As a leader of projective group dream work, Ryan also found that what he terms the *energy* of the group has led to his own exceptional human experiences (EHEs; White, 1997, 1998) while leading the group; this, in turn, led to his own shifts with regard to making meaning in social interactions (and how social interaction itself can allow for emergence of the exceptional). So, not only does this type of work engage a state beyond the ego, that of the dream, but it also engages a group within a transcendent context and encourages transformation at the individual and group level. Thus, through group projective dream work, we see an example of the application of *Theme I: Beyond-Ego*, *Theme II: Integrative/ Holistic*, and *Theme III: Transformative* transpersonal sociological theory.

A second example of the application of transpersonal sociology could be the reformulation of meaning, through working with personal EHEs for large-scale social change. Both of us have interest in near-death experiences (NDEs), one type of EHE. The NDE is an experience wherein an individual comes close to death or clinically dies and is then resuscitated. While near death or being "clinically" dead, individuals often reportedly have experiences of: (a) exiting the body, going someplace (often into a light), (b) meeting individuals (often either deceased relatives, a being or beings of light, or a religious figure), (c) sometimes having a life review, encountering a barrier or being told to return, and (d) then returning to the body (Fracasso, Aleyasin, Friedman, & Young, 2010; Fracasso & Friedman, 2011; Fracasso, & Friedman, 2012; Fracasso, Greyson, & Friedman, 2013; Holden, Greyson, & James, 2009; Rominger, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, in press). While these experiences may also occur at times other than when in physical jeopardy, the most common occurrences reported are those where an individual is close to death. Those who report such experiences also tend to demonstrate a number of changes in personal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, often referred to as *aftereffects*.

These aftereffects can include a profound change to one's personal life orientation, increased spirituality, decreased fear of death, feelings of profound connection, and reports of a newfound sense of purpose and meaning in life. If this were viewed as a single life event, changing the course of that one person's life, then we might only speak in terms of a transpersonal psychology. However, often the change the individual undergoes also affects others, including the family, workplace, religious community, and broader social networks.

Additionally, because of the NDE, some individuals choose to work within social settings, helping others, leading groups to help others who have had NDEs integrate their experience, or start businesses focused on transpersonal themes or values. At this point, the personal experience of a single person has an effect on multiple small and large groups, and potentially even institutions, and we may now begin to dialogue within a context of a transpersonal sociology. This example demonstrates the application of *Theme I: Beyond-Ego* and *Theme III: Transformative* transpersonal sociological theory.

Transpersonal Research Skills and Methods

Should a field of transpersonal sociology re-arise, one would expect a correlative expansion in understanding of research methods used within sociology. Fortunately, Braud and Anderson (1998) have laid the groundwork for envisioning new types of transpersonal research methods. In essence, the transpersonal epistemology is pluralistic, holistic, post-postmodern, and open to the nonmaterial, spiritual, something more. Additionally, Braud (2006) indicated that researchers utilizing transpersonal research methods would move beyond seeking *information*, necessarily including aspects of transformation, including potential transformation of the researcher, participant, and society (p. 141). Braud's focus on the transformational aspect of research fits well within Hartelius et al.'s (2007) *Theme III: Transformative*.

Braud (2006) further indicated that a transpersonal researcher should have certain qualities. By looking at this stance and replacing "psychology" with "sociology," a better understanding of what qualities a research within transpersonal sociology might require:

> The transpersonal researcher uses quantitative, qualitative, and blended methods research designs in order to explore topics of interest. She or he allows the work to be informed not only by findings and conceptualizations within transpersonal [sociology]; [sociology] at large; and the natural, social, and human sciences; but also by the accumulated knowledge and methods of the humanities, the expressive arts, and the

great philosophical, wisdom, and spiritual traditions—ancient, modern, and postmodern. (p. 141)

It is clear that Braud supported a multidimensional, interdisciplinary approach that includes a variety of research methods. Anderson and Braud (2011) added to this inclusive research focus by expanding the set of specific research skills necessary for transpersonal researchers:

Working with intention: awareness of, and deliberate framing of, intentions for all phases of a research project; facilitates the realization of study aims

Quieting and slowing: sets stage for use of other skills, relaxes and quiets, reduces distractions and noise" [*sic*] at many levels, reduces structures and constraints, allows change, allows fuller observations and appreciation of more subtle aspects of what is studied

Working with attention: practice in deploying, focusing, and shifting attention; deautomatizing attention; attending to different forms and channels of information; changing focal plane or magnification of attention; developing witnessing consciousness

Auditory skills: practice in devoting more complete attention to external and internal sounds and to sound memories and sound imagination

Visual skills, imagery, visualization, imagination: practice in devoting more complete attention to outer and inner sights and images; use of memory images, visualization, spontaneous and guided imagery; active imagination; empowered imagination

Kinesthetic skills: practice in knowing, remembering, and expressing knowing and being through gross and subtle movements

Proprioceptive skills: practice in identifying and attending to subtle visceral and muscular sensations; working with felt senses, feelings, and affective knowing

Direct knowing, intuition, empathic identification: identifying with the object of knowing; knowing through presence, empathy, sympathy, compassion, love, being, becoming, participation; sympathetic resonance; empathic identification; parapsychological processes

Accessing unconscious processes and materials: reducing egoic control; tacit knowing; liminal and transitional conditions; incubation; attention to vehicles that carry previously unconscious information; identifying unconscious tendencies

Play and the creative arts: fosters curiosity, creativity, and insight; encourages beginner's mind; provides novelty, new combinations; encourages excitement, enthusiasm, exploration. (pp. 163-164)

Along with these skills, however, there are additional *sociological* research skills that would lead to an increased transpersonal awareness of groups, group dynamics, social interactions, and institutional structures. Sociologists are primarily known for their quantitative work through using surveys and demographic data, but there are also strong phenomenological traditions (e.g., Schutz, 1970) that find their expression in research approaches, such as ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1991) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), all of which have become basic to the transpersonal armamentarium of qualitative methods. Additionally, when moving into the arena of application of transpersonal-transformational social theory, there might be yet more skills, such as the ability to lead groups and influence group process while acknowledging a transpersonal context. Admittedly, this may be only the beginning of fleshing out what skills a transpersonal researcher within the field of sociology might need. One example is moving assessments from a psychometric toward a sociometric and even cultural-metric approach, something one of us is actively exploring (Friedman, Glover, Sims, Culhane, Guest, & Van Driel, 2013). We hope future work may provide additional suggestions, details, and support for use of alternative, holistic, integral, transpersonal research methods from the perspective of a transpersonal sociology.

Conclusion

We have revisited the area of transpersonal sociology, which briefly flourished as a dynamic area of interest within transpersonal studies, but now seems to have been all but abandoned. We have provided an introduction to some of the basics of sociology and attempted an introductory exploration of what a full transpersonal sociological theory might contain, including aspects of practical application and requisite research skills. We have discussed the approaches of Wilber and Greenwood, as well as the attempts to form the *Journal of Transpersonal Sociology*, and the disappearance of the *Transpersonal Sociology Newsletter*. We hope that this article acts as a catalyst for further

discussion and development of the field by those actually engaged in ongoing sociological work in the world from a transpersonal perspective.

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Note

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