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**LGBT Inclusivity in Transpersonal Psychology:
A Case for Incorporating LGBT Spiritual Experiences in Transpersonal Education**

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Abstract

Introduction: After conducting three qualitative interviews on the somatic experiences of transgender individuals and finding relatively few resources with which to draw significant conclusions in the field, it is clear that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) scholarship is severely lacking in transpersonal psychology.

Method: This research revealed that an understanding and appreciation for the lived experiences of gay people—specifically that of gay men—are also limited and are not appropriately represented through the use of feminist or queer models. Therefore, an alarming number of issues affecting the transgender and gay male populations are not being adequately addressed within the discipline of transpersonal psychology.

Results: Several key issues surrounding the integration of spiritual and religious experiences were exposed, directly affecting the transgender and gay male populations, as well as areas in which practitioners may support and better understand the innumerable challenges facing LGBT clients and students.

Conclusion: Additional considerations were discussed to demonstrate how members of the trans and gay communities may assist the field of transpersonal psychology, as it seeks to expand its reach and visibility.

Keywords: LGBT, Mental Health, Psychology, Spirituality, Transpersonal

LGBT Inclusivity in Transpersonal Psychology:

A Case for Incorporating LGBT Spiritual Experiences in Transpersonal Education

Transpersonal education can be improved by incorporating more LGBT scholarship, with particular attention placed on the incorporation of gay male and trans experiences in the areas of mental health, sexuality, and spirituality. Current health statistics on the LGBT community are used to determine where the field of transpersonal psychology may be of service to these marginalized populations by pursuing a case for more on the process of inclusivity, rather than on the outcome of diversity alone. An increase in quality representation of the LGBT lived experience may unearth a deeper and fuller understanding of the shared human condition.

A look at the content in the *Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* showed that the term “homosexual” occurred only once, in reference to the Wade (2004) study on transcendent sex (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013, p. 389). Moreover, the term “gay” was used twice: (a) in reference to different forms of lovemaking (Wade, 2004); and (b) in Combs (2013) while alluding to the stages of moral development of Kohlberg (1981). Combs wrote:

Suppose that a man whose moral thinking is based on external sources of authority belongs to a church that denounces gay marriage. It is likely that he will adopt this moral view as well. However, if for other reasons he later finds himself to be a member of a church that actually approves of such marriage then his own views are also likely to change. This would not be because he has undergone a fundamental transformation to a higher and more accepting structure of moral thinking, but simply that his source of authority has changed position, producing the translation in his moral reasoning to the approval of such marriages. (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013, p. 174)

Here, the author is referring to the influences of authority on moral behavior, not that it would necessarily be a moral act to support gay marriage.

References used to support these highlighted works showed the Wade (2013) article on transpersonal sex had the term “gay” or “lesbian” in the title. These articles focused on subjects of androgyny and two-spiritedness (i.e., Tafoya, 1992; Piedmont, 1996). The term “transgender”

was noted only in references and not in context, where the subject matter involved occult practices in Southeast Asia (i.e., Bradford, 1983; Ho, 2009).

Resources on LGBT scholarship show that gay and trans experiences are not being understood effectively in transpersonal education. Hence, if transpersonal psychology aims to incorporate more diversity in its academic pursuits, then articles about sexual orientation must be included more in the scholarly process; more importantly, written by and for individuals who belong to those marginalized populations. If the case for integration is to be furthered, then the call that has been largely pursuant upon heterocentric perspectives on content relating to gender and relational identity must be reconsidered.

The LGBT community is rich with subaltern views related to a vast array of integral and transpersonal interests including spirituality and religious experiences. The field of transpersonal psychology would benefit from a better appreciation for LGBT inclusivity. Therefore, these and other considerations are expressed, including new qualitative data reflecting the somatic experiences of three trans individuals before, during, and after transitioning. Practitioners and clients alike would gain a great deal from the integration of these perspectives.

Historical Influences

The relationship between the terms “transpersonal” and “integral” can be expressed in how they are applied to the field of psychology. The transpersonal is transcendent, in so much as consciousness extends beyond the limits of personal identity, while integral represents a whole-person, holistic approach to one’s fundamental nature as a complete human being. A transpersonal perspective considers that which psychology has historically overlooked, as the field relied too heavily on separateness and the biophysical aspects of a person’s cognitive

faculties. Among other marginalized groups, this discrimination has specifically targeted the LGBT population for centuries.

LGBT Persecution

In 1968, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), published by the American Psychiatric Association, officially classified homosexuality as a mental disorder. Before then, much of the persecution against LGBT individuals had primarily been received from the church and its subsidiary avenues of social control. The first gay-affirming psychology began in the 1970s—around the time when transpersonal psychology was beginning to take shape—and was a direct rejection of the traditional pathology that had been historically associated with homosexuality including: sexual deviancy and symptoms of mental illness (Brown, 1989). It was not until 1987 that the DSM declassified homosexuality as a mental illness, yet by that time the AIDS epidemic had peaked, and the world was in constant fear of the “gay cancer.”

In 1992, the World Health Organization finally removed homosexuality from its Internal Classification of Diseases (ICD). Still, this nomenclature carried with it the construct of “ego-dystonic sexual orientation” noting homosexuality as a preference and one that was associated with psychological and behavioral disorders (Drescher, 2015). It was clear that Western psychology spent far too much time pathologizing that which could not be explained appropriately by delimiting science. Hence, as consciousness evolved, the comprehension of science advanced with it, and a transpersonal approach to psychology gained traction and fervor.

Transpersonal Psychology

The term “integral,” originating from Eastern traditions, represented the wholeness of a person as essential in nature and necessary to one’s ever-evolving experiences of oneness. This

evolution of the transpersonal perspective began in the 1960s with the psychedelic movement that applied science to the study of spirituality. Along with humanistic psychology, the influx of Eastern spiritual traditions in the West paved the way for the first wave of neo-perennialists. Psychologists such as Ken Wilber and Stanislov Grof provided space for the scientific investigation of universal spirituality that countered the dogmatic teachings of organized religions (Wilber, 1975, 1979, 1981; Grof, 1973, 1983). As a result, Western psychology broke away from its historic stronghold to embrace mysticism and nonduality, as evidenced through inner reflection and mind-altering, sensorial experiences.

These reflective journeys led to a second wave of participatory transpersonalism in the 1990s. Psychologists such as Jorge Ferrer emphasized embodied education and social engagement with a focus on diversity and pluralistic epistemologies. Wilber first used the term “integral” in the mid 1990s in his “All Quadrants, All Levels” (AQAL) model. According to Esbjörn-Hargens (2010), “Integral Theory insists that you cannot understand one of these realities (any of the quadrants or the Big Three) through the lens of any of the others” (p. 36). However, Paulson (2004) identified Wilber’s integral philosophy as “a ready-made system, not one codeveloped by the individual participating in life through lived experience” (p. 140). Therefore, Wilber’s model has been determined by Paulson and others not to represent a participatory approach to integral philosophy and can be seen to evoke challenging criticisms on the social needs of contemporary psychology (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998).

Transpersonal Education

As the growing pains of evolving consciousness emerged, traditional approaches to education were more critically evaluated in order to unearth new opportunities for interdisciplinary integration. Terms that once held opposing views (i.e., *integral*, *transpersonal*,

contemplative) were then being merged into more malleable frameworks that encompassed a wider degree of collaborative and participatory events for both inner and outer work. In these global times, “every student – not just the fortunate few – will need wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary knowledge, higher-level skills, an active sense of personal and social responsibility, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge to complex problems” (AACU, 2007, p. 11). It was no longer enough to simply envision a world; one had to actively engage with it.

For many, gone were the days where the educated elite were locked away in ivory towers to reflect upon the world as described by their forefathers. The mere act of contemplation was now a starting point to imbue social interactions with a higher awareness in response to an ever-changing world. An integral understanding of one’s place in society – and in the cosmos – brought forth a vigor to demonstrate an individual's connectivity to a vast array of circumstances that would otherwise have been missed in a contemplative education alone. The transpersonal was seen to extend out that which had been brought in and held with it the seminal truth of conscious awareness for profound personal and social transformation.

Therefore, in order to better prepare students and practitioners for the contemporary world, the challenge for institutions is “to keep personal growth and intellectual rigor in balance” (Wexler, 2011). Academic work should provide ample room for personal and intellectual development. The explicit expectation of higher education is that the intended outcome for rigorous learning is a diploma, while the implicit connotes students grow in other ways during their education process (Wexler, 2011). This is necessary to participate in the world both actively and responsibly. In other words, providing opportunities for marginalized people is necessary to integrate their education more fully in the broader community and beyond.

Current Challenges

A 2017 US Gallup poll concluded that 4.5% of adult Americans identify as LGBT. Of that number, 5.1% were women, 3.9% were men, and 0.6% were transgender (Newport, 2018). Pursuing feminism as a means to garner collective support around the area of marginalized populations could combat the overwhelming saturation of male authorship in transpersonal psychology, but the feminist model already contains much of the lesbian perspective by way of the exclusion of males who identify as gay and/or transgender. Although the work of queer theorists has been commendable, not everyone in the LGBT community identifies as “queer” and the term has largely been associated with politicization and the deconstruction of “existing monolithic ideals of social norms and taxonomies” (Worthen, 2016, p. 94). Queer theory also does not sufficiently provide the gay community with a holistic model of spiritual integration or one that is supportive of social normativity.

Since there are fewer men identifying as gay, according to the Gallup poll, should not the gay perspective be given further consideration since the overwhelming amount of male authorship in the field is derived in large part from heterosexuals? Conclusively, the call for more transgender authorship is a noble one, but out of such a small percentage of the population, it is an even greater challenge to find trans individuals for whom the field currently reaches and who are willing to publish content specifically related to their unique experiences.

Feminist and Queer Models

The inclusion of women’s voices has added a great deal to the field of transpersonal psychology, but within the feminist model there is a major discrepancy between the full acceptance of male voices within the spectrum of queer experiences. Voices from subaltern populations such as transgender or non-Eurocentric perspectives can assist to correct certain biases of a predominantly white, male, cisgender scholarship. Yet, if the call to obtain more

diversity is pursuant upon the exclusion of certain races or gender-conforming people, then it may unintentionally be overlooking important perspectives within the gay male and trans communities.

There are a significant number of trans individuals who may very well identify with one, if not several, of the identified categories listed above. A great deal of knowledge can be ascertained through gay authorship—regardless of race—and if transpersonal psychology wishes to garner more support for specialized classes of individuals, then it must be open to hearing from voices that cross the boundaries of privilege. If the call for diversity is precluding the gay experience for the sake of ethnicity, then it is also not following through with its promise to include more voices.

Since the 1990s, contemporary transpersonal psychology has seen a great deal of changes, none more apparent than its relationship with feminist scholarship. Today, more than ever, the derisive social climate has led many to reconsider how the broader discussion to include a deeper understanding of and appreciation for female voices was originally framed, then later interpreted. The dichotomy inherent in feminist scholarship—based solely upon the construct of gender—has provided a considerable amount of challenges as it continues to silence voices that are not in total compliance with its narrative.

Lanzetta (2005) claimed women's spiritual oppression was the source of all other oppressions. Using gender to divide the human condition is one way of understanding the unique aspects that both lived experiences can offer, but the notion of placing blame or elevation on certain gender characteristics is in itself an example of oppression, especially for those who do not identify with specified gender norms. Lanzetta's notion of the "dark night of the feminine" results from her statement that "the pain of being female is foremost a violation of her spiritual

being” (2005, p. 73). However, referring to one’s experience of pain as a violation of their spiritual makeup is assuming the individual is a victim of circumstances beyond their control. This argument relies on the notion that females are perpetual victims of male dominance, which does not provide an adequate foundation to accept the wholeness of all humans.

Trans Exclusion

Many trans individuals have felt excluded from feminism for a variety of reasons. Some feminists “denounced transgendered people as dangerous to feminism, depoliticized the experiences of transgender people, or celebrated the transgendered identity as emblematic of the subversive character of feminist postmodern theory” (MacDonald, 1998, p. 3). Feminism has largely not supported men and has engendered an impassable rift between polarized gender as being continuously at odds with one another, rather than a mutually beneficial and fruitful union. The struggles trans people face due to much of the oppressive qualities of feminist rhetoric and practices are also seen in literature such as Janice Raymond’s 1979 book, *Transsexual Empire: The making of the She-Male*, where she wrote:

All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist violates women's sexuality and spirit, as well. Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception. (p. 104)

This language and reference to trans individuals as “rapists” is highly offensive and does not take into consideration the lived experiences of trans females or the struggles trans men may face when learning to come to terms with the integration of their own gender identity.

Transpersonal psychology has produced avenues for satisfactory relational and spiritual development, as it continues to assist consciousness-raising for clients in relationship with others (Brooks, 2010). However, feminism specifically accounts for the queer and nonqueer voices of females, thus the idea that feminism speaks for the larger LGBT community is an incorrect

assumption. Through fuller acceptance and integration, the intersection between feminism, transpersonal psychology, and social justice can be more aptly applied. Spiritualized or transpersonally-oriented feminism must advocate for a mutual appreciation of the masculine and feminine aspects in all individuals. Through the recognition of the broader spectrum of human diversity, the truest essence of obtaining intersectionality within spirituality may be realized.

The Gay Experience

Throughout history, numerous gay authors have tried to encompass what the gay male experience is and has been, according to the overarching cultural understandings of the time. Much of the older literature paints a picture that is not fully seen in today's popular culture. For example, in *Gay Soul*, 16 gay visionaries were interviewed to discuss what being gay meant to them. Some men used more of a queer definition in that a third gender would be more indicative of living gay, yet other men compared their lived experiences to characters often seen in literature and religious texts.

Gay Identity

One author in *Gay Soul*, Malcom Boyd, saw the qualities of gentleness, sensitivity, warmth and service to others as some of the main traits associated with the gay soul:

In Christ I find many gay qualities: vulnerability, sensitivity, someone who emptied himself of power, who lived as a gentle but strong person. He also broke many social taboos and found sterling qualities in a number of people who were despised by the society they lived in. (1995, p. 233)

Boyd also equated the gay soul as similar to Razak (2016), who claimed the African diaspora as part of our psyches, which revealed the immense pain many marginalized populations share as part of the larger human collective. It is also a call for privileged classes to recognize where and how to identify with “othered” individuals, regardless of superficial classifications based on seemingly identifiable characteristics.

For many gay males, the question of identity stems from their personal responses to social constructs in relation to the ramifications of their biology with perhaps yet-undiscovered aspects of the human soul. Like many gay authors in *Gay Soul*, both James Broughton and Harry Hay likened the gay soul to that of a third gender or one that is beyond the polarization of a gendered spectrum. Using the heterocentric model of gender polarity, identifications of androgyny, two-spiritedness, and/or gender fluidity are “unnatural state[s], neither one thing nor another” (Thompson, 1995, p. 14). Broughton gave a more expansive approach to identity when he wrote:

Androgyny is the true image of the soul. It is not an amorphous freakhood located between male and female on the scale of human gender. It is a concept of wholeness, a guide to experiencing the full range of yang and yin. (1995, p. 14)

If the fluidity of gender is considered an unnatural state according to the heterocentric model, then one may infer—through the lived experiences of the LGBT community—that the traditional concepts of gender may not be encompassing the totality of identity, expression, and/or orientation.

If this is true, then the experiences of gay men as “othered” might have more similarities to how trans people may experience the world regarding their levels of discomfort with traditional concepts of gender. This can be seen as a response to social constructs that simply do not fit the individual, as well as the result of an undeniable aspect of their individual biological and spiritual makeup. Therefore, further research into gender expression may provide a necessary lens into how these vital aspects of a person’s identity may play out in both personal and social contexts.

Gender Expression

Western science and the historical misappropriation of anthropological research on cultures that incorporate more than two genders has never been seen more prevalently than within the Native American community. In the study of human evolution as it is seen through the development of societies and cultures, transpersonal anthropology includes "the sociocultural evocation, interpretation, and utility of transpersonal experiences, and their involvement in defining social roles" (Laughlin, 2013, p. 43). Hence, one of the major differences between mainstream and transpersonal anthropology is how transpersonal experiences are integrated into one's social identity.

Monophasic cultures concerned with normal states of consciousness and materialism are seen to oppose spectrum fluidity and altered states of consciousness (ASC). Polyphasic cultures, such as Native American communities, are interested in nonmaterialism and perspectives in which "both the world view and the individual's identity are specifically informed from experiences in ASC" (Laughlin, 2013, p. 43). Participation in transpersonal events such as rituals and cultural rites of passage provide anthropologists a richer perspective into a host culture, but co-absorption (Lahood, 2007) or linkage (Bhabha, 1994) can become a research implication if a postcolonial lens is not properly accounted for.

In *Living the Spirit*, gay Native Americans shared their perspectives on sexuality and gender systems both pre- and post-colonialization. Observations made by Eurocentric anthropologists simply did not possess the language necessary to explain the societal differences they were witnessing. Therefore, sexuality, spirituality, and gender systems were defined predominately through the lens of the Western, literate majority and not by the cultures that were being observed (Roscoe, 1988). For example, the term "bottom" has been derogatorily used to represent gay males who may identify more femininely. The term does not always connote a

preferred sexual positionality when discussing one's sexual orientation, yet it is a presumed label and often incorrectly applied. This has been seen problematic in the Latinx community when referring to behavior that runs counter to male-identified social norms, as with the term *passivo*. One author in *Living the Spirit*, Midnight Sun, exposed the term *berdache*, as a word indicative of Native American males who assume the dress, social status, and roles traditionally associated with Westernized perspectives of the opposite sex. All three terms have been used pejoratively and have been readopted or reinterpreted by community members to evoke a sense of empowerment for the individuals who claim them. However, this is not always the case.

Gender and Shamanism

Ferrer (2002) claimed "subtle Cartesianism" distorted the transpersonal movement through an over-reliance on intrapsychic reductionism, inferring that Western science did not account for the subjective experiences of shared reality (p. 21). This is seen heavily along the gender spectrum and challenges the traditional notions of what constitutes normal and abnormal behavior. In order to bridge gaps of understanding regarding nontraditional concepts of gender, a call for the further development of shared visions of scientific naturalism is warranted. This call for integration between nature and spirit is at the very essence of the Native American tradition and can be seen in varying forms of shamanism and the shamanic practice (Winkelman, 2017).

In shamanism, there is no division between the mind and the body. "What Westerners refer to as 'mental illness' is seen as part of the total client being treated by a shaman, a perspective that often includes the client's family, community, and the world of 'spirits'" (Krippner, 2012, p. 72). Similar to shamans, Western psychotherapists employ a variety of approaches when assessing the issue, the client, their environment, and devising an appropriate

course of treatment. One of the major differences is that shamans purposefully claim to enter the spirit world to assist this process.

For many Native Americans, those that display what many Westerners would consider multiple or other gender characteristics were often given specific roles in society. In the Mojave culture, individuals who dressed across genders were called *hwames* and could become powerful shamans, while shamans and chiefs often married *alyhas*. These individuals adopted characteristics usually associated with the other gender and can be seen across cultures in the *kathoey* of Thailand, or the *Mahu* of the Hawaiian and Tahitian people. According to Native American lore:

‘Ever since the world began at *Avi-kwame*, it is said that there have been transvestites,’ and ‘from the beginning of the world, it was meant that there should be homosexuals.’ The fact that cross gender individuals were often shamans or married to shamans or chiefs suggests not only cultural acceptance, but an association with status and prestige, as well. This may be due to their value in production, because they could combine elements of both masculine and feminine economic spheres. (Midnight Sun, 1988, p. 39)

According to these and many other cultures, gender-nonconforming or gender-othered individuals are not seen to possess mental illness and are given specific roles in society that are often congruent with the needs of the community.

Gay Spirituality

This integration of sexuality, gender, and spirituality are important for personal development and social understanding and can provide a great deal of assistance to marginalized members of a given community. Seeing these individuals as nonpathological first and potentially experiencing immediate or chronic spiritual emergence is vital to providing adequate and timely care. If this is not taken into consideration early enough, it can lead to devastating consequences later in life.

Gay men's spiritual imagery expresses itself as the outsider: (a) never belonging to an easily identifiable community; (b) hardly ever having many opportunities to express their feelings openly and to feel heard; and (c) deeply longing to reconcile their feelings of inadequacy and disenfranchisement by excelling in areas where they feel accepted, supported, and encouraged (Johnson, 2000). This path often looks and feels quite different from the journeys of most heterosexual men and leads many gay men to pursue subject areas and career paths "other people would consider peculiar, queer, or eccentric" (p. 15). By pursuing these areas of interest where they feel most drawn to and excel at, which are coincidentally those that are often ridiculed and not fully understood, further leads to feelings of isolation and ostracization. These experiences can be compared to those of gay women; however, most lesbians can identify stronger with masculine expressions and are therefore seen as less weak and more a part of the acceptable team (Berglund et al., 2006).

The difficulties emerge when considering these basic concepts, which for the majority of gay men mean understanding the oppression of women and the subjugation of the feminine, though they will never be fully accepted by women because of their biological expression (Sell, 2001). Congruently, the vast majority of gay men have never felt completely comfortable around heterosexual men because of their lack of connection to the basic tenants of what constitutes masculinity. A basic level of social understanding can feel completely foreign, in that:

Gay men grow up feeling out of place, not connecting with all the talk of wife and family, not understanding what 'normal' people are talking about regarding sex, not getting why jokes about women's breasts, for instance, are funny or provocative.... We may be baffled by other people's obsession with sports and competition. We may prefer womanly interests – the arts, hair, clothes, rearranging the furniture, love, sexual reassurance – to manly interests – athletic prowess, sports scores, hunting, fishing, tools, reassembling an automobile, power, winning. We may be interested in both womanly and manly things, and not understand why other people think them exclusive of one another. We may feel we are the only ones in the world like this. (Johnson, 2000, pp. 15–16)

Similarly, many gay men are often socialized to behave in a masculine manner but develop natural sexual attraction to members of the same sex. During these times of great change in an adolescent's life, these sexual feelings may not be fully understood, while biological developments are occurring without much control. If a modicum of understanding is not obtained on a familial, communal, or societal level, these feelings can be highly obtrusive for the experiencer and can cause severe trauma if left unacknowledged and suppressed.

The Transgender Experience

An even greater degree of cognitive dissonance is experienced by transgender individuals, who have never fully felt comfortable in the body into which they were born. During the aforementioned interviews with three trans people, a significant amount of insight was gained that bridged the challenges experienced as gay man with an even greater call for the integration of sexuality and spirituality within transpersonal psychology. All three individuals identified as transgender yet had unique ways of expressing their sexuality and spirituality.

Somatic Research

Participant 1 (KP) was assigned female at birth, identified as a queer, Caucasian male in his 30s, that had earned both his MA in Psychology and a Master of Divinity. He specialized in assisting individuals—specifically those in the LGBT community—to reconcile their spirituality and sexuality in life-affirming ways. He was raised Catholic but considered himself “spiritual, but not religious.”

Participant 2 (MG) was assigned male at birth, identified as a queer, Caucasian female in her 40s, that had earned a bachelor's degree, graduated from the School of Math and Sciences, and worked in corporate technology. She volunteered for several civic and political organizations

dedicated to serving the LGBT population, was married to a trans man, and had an open relationship with a cisgender female. She was raised Southern Baptist and is a Pagan.

Participant 3 (KL) was assigned male at birth, identified as a heterosexual, Asian/Pacific Islander female in her 20s, who had earned an associate degree from a local community college. She taught dance and fitness classes at local gyms and sports facilities. She was raised Catholic but identified as an Atheist.

When asked to describe the first time the participants felt different in their bodies, the overwhelming responses included memories of childhood and feelings of dissociation, confusion, and disgust. Participants reported performing activities on a regular basis that felt natural to them, but then being reinforced by their parents that the type of behavior they were exhibiting was not acceptable or appropriate. Additional responses evidenced psychological trauma associated with “unnatural” feelings that were suppressed to such a degree that it caused serious psychospiritual and physical illness including mental breakdowns and chronic digestive inflammation.

Questions concerning adolescence and puberty further exemplified the feelings of dissociation, confusion, and disgust, and were amplified by a growing physical appearance that did not match how the individuals felt on the inside. This is often called one’s “identity,” as it is seen as an expression of their internal landscape—often how they think and feel—or akin to how their soul wishes to express itself in physical form (Sell, 2011). A trans persons’ identity is at odds with their birth gender and causes a great deal of suffering until properly managed through intervention. This is a grueling process that is exacerbated by social conditioning that does not take into consideration the importance of integrating one’s sexuality with one’s spirituality.

Once the process of transitioning began, an overwhelming sense of relief and euphoria was reported by all participants. When the decision to live life as the identity the participants felt more closely resembled their internal landscape, a sincere reconciliation of their emotional, psychological, and physical selves became possible. The participants often stated that transitioning did not always take the form of sexual reassignment surgery or going on hormones, however these processes did seem to create a clearer physicalized manifestation of “passing” as their chosen gender. The need to pass as one’s binary gender identification is also under considerable scrutiny in the area of trans scholarship (Sell, 2001).

When asked to discuss how the experience of transitioning affected their spirituality, the participants reported feeling less disconnected from their bodies and more connected with the outside world. Because each participant had varying perspectives on spirituality, the overall takeaway was that the process of walking into their authentic selves—and being able to share that with others—was a deeply profound experience and was described as being rebirthed or transformed. A significant amount of burdensome weight was said to have been lifted off their shoulders and they were able to notice things in newer ways than they ever had been able to before.

Transgender Spirituality

In Sell (2001), 93% of third gender participants reported “transcendent spiritual events or unusual abilities” (p. 16). Because of these unique experiences, many transgender individuals gravitate towards work as healers, counselors, performers, and leaders. A useful question for future research among these individuals could be whether or not they may have had any past-life memories, and if so, what were they, while discovering which ones had the biggest impact on them (in various ways). However, without proper support and opportunities to integrate their

sexuality and spirituality in a positive way, many trans individuals become disenfranchised. This unfortunate side effect of being misunderstood and ostracized can lead to mental illness, risky behavior, and even suicide.

One could argue these experiences are not entirely reserved for trans people, as many in the LGBT community have had exceptionally unique experiences. Because of their seemingly multigendered spiritual makeup, many gay males and trans people have learned how to cope in a world that seems quite cold, which fails to know how to handle their unorthodox insights into the human condition. Because of the community's incredible number of challenges that take the form of ever-increasing, day-to-day stressors, it would be prudent for transpersonal scholars to be more open to hearing from these individuals. Many LGBT people possess unusual abilities to bear witness to aspects of the human experience that the majority of heterosexuals may not have direct access to on a regular basis. This is due to the fact that many cisgender heterosexuals do not have to feel "othered" as often as those who identify with more marginalized populations.

Conclusion

Sexuality involves more than bodily functions and incorporates degrees of spirituality that can be both communing and transcendent. Sexuality is an integral part of a human being's psychospiritual path because the body is an individual's primary vehicle for experience, expression, and growth. Therefore, to commune in this way requires an integration of the whole person and includes the interweaving of psychological, spiritual and physical dimensions (Helminiak, 2006). "The consecration of the whole person leads naturally to the cultivation of a 'full-chakra' spirituality that seeks to make all human attributes permeable to the presence of both transcendent and immanent spiritual sources" (Ferrer, 2017, p. 74). This vital culmination of sexuality and creativity allows human beings to cocreate their transformational path by way of

generativity or connecting to greater cosmogonic forces (Malkemus & Romero, 2012). The bridging of creativity and sexuality can also be seen in the lived experiences of gay males and transgender individuals, who span the boundaries of gender, identity, expression, and orientation.

Limitations

It is clear that LGBT scholarship in transpersonal psychology is limited but the need for inclusivity is becoming increasingly more in demand. Further investigations into the lived experiences of marginalized individuals are warranted, without the need to depend on models that fail to encapsulate the fuller spectrum of diversity and inclusion in transpersonal education. Issues affecting the transgender and gay male populations can and should be addressed in transpersonalism in a way that does not discredit individuals who belong to several privileged and underprivileged categories.

Clinical Significance

Advocating for advancing the field of transpersonal psychology to include more voices of subaltern populations may increase the clinical significance of mental health providers for the LGBT community. Recognition of these voices should not overshadow those who span the boundaries of privilege. This perspective provides supportive avenues of clinical significance for mental health practitioners to become better equipped at supporting and understanding the innumerable personal, spiritual, and societal challenges affecting LGBT people within the broader human community.

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