Unidentified Allies: Intersections of Feminist and Transpersonal Thought and Potential Contributions to Social Change

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Contemporary Western feminism and transpersonalism are kaleidoscopic, consisting of interlocking influences, yet the fields have developed in parallel rather than in tandem. Both schools of praxis developed during the climate of activism and social experimentation of the 1960s in the United States, and both share a non-pathological view of the human experience. This discussion suggests loci of synthesized theoretical constructs between the two disciplines as well as distinct concepts and practices in both disciplines that may serve the other. Ways in which a feminist-transpersonal perspective may catalyze social change on personal, regional, and global levels are proposed.

   Keywords: *feminism, feminist psychology, transpersonalism, transpersonal psychology, social justice, spiritual development, spirituality, interdisciplinarity.*

Contemporary Western feminism (which will be defined below) and the transpersonal movement both came of age in the climate of activism and experimentation in the United States during the late 1960s, and both movements continue to evolve today. As with many schools of thought that blossomed during the height of modernism and then transformed during the postmodern turn, both feminism and transpersonal studies[1] are kaleidoscopic disciplines made up of interlocking yet distinct influences and sources. However, as evidenced in the literature of both fields and demonstrated herein, feminism and transpersonalism have moved in parallel rather than in tandem over the course of their development. Feminist thought, and even the voices of women scholars, are woefully lacking in transpersonal literature. Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007) devoted an entire section of their discussion of a contemporary working definition of the transpersonal field to evaluating gender diversity in the literature; it is interesting to note that they found that only 25% of the 182 articles published in 30 years in the key journal of the field, the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, were attributed to women. This led the authors to conclude that, "if transpersonal psychology is to stand for human wholeness and transformation, it needs to embody what it teaches; there can be no lasting human transformation without inclusiveness, nor holism without diversity" (p.

19). The absence of women's voices in the professional literature takes on political and social significance in relation to such burning questions: who among transpersonalists is publishing in the professional literature, and what barriers continue to exist in transpersonal circles that maintain the invisibility and silence of many women? The ongoing diversity work at the core of feminist movements, described below, may serve as a rich resource as transpersonalism moves, as Rothberg (1999) and Hunt (2010) urged, into a more socially-engaged phase.

   Michael Daniels (2005) suggested that the field of transpersonal psychology has relied heavily on aspects of theory and practice historically related to an *ascending* (transcendent) model of psychospiritual development rather than a *descending* (immanent) model. Daniels went on to argue that ascending models value the masculine while descending models are often related to aspects traditionally related to feminine qualities. The problematics of gendering psychospiritual qualities (i.e., using terms such as masculine and feminine to describe psychological or spiritual qualities) is a topic worthy of scholarly inquiry in its own right; though it will be a running question throughout this piece, the full attention that this burning issue deserves within the field is put off for a future inquiry. It must suffice here to note that the frequent utilization of binary gendered language (i.e.,

masculine and feminine qualities)—notably common in transpersonal psychology—is an area ripe for additional critique, research, and theory in the future of the field.

As a researcher and educator who straddles the two disciplines in my own work, I began my exploration of the relationships between feminist and transpersonal thought with a series of questions: What are the intersections between feminism(s) and transpersonal studies? Where do these progressive movements align? How do they differ? What does it mean to identify as both feminist and transpersonal? It is not my intention herein to trace the entirety of the complex and compelling histories of both transpersonal and feminist thought, although excellent sources for both are noted below. My goal is to highlight a few locations of synthesized theoretical constructs and practice between the two disciplines. Additionally, initial proposals of how a feminist-transpersonal perspective may catalyze social change will be addressed.

The Transpersonal Terrain

As the field of transpersonal psychology matures, histories of its origins and continuing research seeking to define the boundaries of this field of inquiry and practice have become more prevalent (Daniels, 2005; Hartelius et al., 2007; Hastings, 1999; Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992; Lukoff, Lu, & Turner, 1996; Shapiro, Lee, & Gross, 2002; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). Hastings (1999)[2] placed the birth of the field of transpersonal psychology in the late 1960s with the publication of Maslow's (1968/1999) second edition of *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Originally published in 1962, Maslow's work explored peak experiences and how such experiences promote "a transcendence from a doing level of self to the level of being" (Hastings, 1999, p. 193). Additional influences in the development of the discipline include the work of Anthony Sutich and the Palo Alto Group who associated transpersonal theory with the field of psychology to establish what Maslow viewed as the *Fourth Force* of psychology. However, many concepts at the core of transpersonal psychology pre-date this era and reflect ancient wisdom traditions such as Buddhism and Sufism as well as theories about spirituality developed by earlier psychologists such as William James (1902/1997) and Carl Jung (1934/1954).

Citing William James' approach to the psychology of religious experience, transpersonal scholar William Braud (2006) referred to James' concept of "becoming conscious of and in touch with 'a More'" (p.

135) in the human experience. In short, in transpersonal psychology there is an explicit acknowledgement of the spiritual nature in human consciousness and recognition that the study and understanding of the spiritual experiences in people's lives deepen a psychologist's comprehension of the human condition. Building upon the work of humanists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, the field has devoted much of its theory building and scholarship to understanding concepts such as exceptional human experience, higher states of consciousness, and altruistic behaviors and attitudes such as compassion, mindfulness, and forgiveness.

Transpersonal psychology additionally challenges the rigid, materialist epistemology of traditional schools of psychology in favor of a system that is flexible enough to hold many perspectives at once (Mack, 1993, p. xi). As Mack noted: "Psychology in this [materialist] paradigm, has limited its healing potential by following a therapeutic model in which one person treats the illness or problems of another, separate, individual, whose relevant world is confined to a few principle relationships" (p. xii). The burgeoning transpersonal field has offered an alternative view:

> In the transpersonal universe or universes, we seek to know our worlds close up, relying on feeling and contemplation, as well as observation and reason, to gain information about a range of possible realities. In this universe we take subjectivity for granted and depend on direct experience, intuition, and imagination for discoveries about the inner and outer worlds. A transpersonal epistemology appreciates the necessity of ordinary states of consciousness for mapping the terrain of the physical universe, but nonordinary states are seen as powerful means of extending our knowledge beyond the four dimensions of the Newtonian/Eisensteinian [sic] universe. (p. xii)

This epistemology values multiple ways of knowing, moving beyond scientism and embracing the complex and diverse voices comprising the transpersonal field to date. Additionally, Mack's (1993) view of transpersonal psychology suggested the validity of the subjective experience. As will be noted below, the primacy of the subjective voice is a major locus of intersection between transpersonal psychology and feminism. However, it is important to note, albeit briefly, that a distinction is to be made between individualism

and subjectivity. For the present purposes, individualism considers the individual as a discrete whole, an entity aware of and intentionally participating in its own growth and development, a process that is decontextualized and not dependent upon others. Subjectivity is rather the state of awareness of inner and outer events *as one's own experience*, the experience of a contextualized, bodily-located self. Such a distinction is important to consider with regard to the evolution of both the feminist and transpersonal fields over the course of the past four decades.

As noted above, the field of transpersonal psychology (much like the social movement of feminism and the field of feminist psychology) has multiple faces. Over the more than 40-year course of the development of the field, definitions of transpersonal psychology have evolved from Maslow's early focus on peak experiences. In 1992, Lajoie and Shapiro published a synthesized definition from more than 40 definitions of transpersonal psychology: "Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the study of humanity's highest potential and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness" (p. 91). As I examine this definition almost two decades after its publication through my own feminist lens, two elements stand out: 1) a privileging of transcendence and higher states of human potential and consciousness rather than an acknowledgement of the complexity and depths of all lived experience (cf. Daniels 2005); and 2) a seemingly exclusive focus on the decontextualized individual.

So much has changed in the intervening years since this definition was developed: the internet alone has expanded the capacity to network, connect, and interact with one another at levels never dreamed possible, while also highlighting the increasing isolation felt by many in a world too fast and demanding to encourage actual person-to-person interaction. Increasing globalization of the marketplace has created opportunities for extreme levels of wealth for a very few while simultaneously threatening ecological and economic disaster as human and material resources continue to be consumed at unsustainable levels. The frenzy of capitalism and consumption has led to the explosion of the sustainability movement that seeks to restore a healthy relationship to the planet and replace entitlement with respect for the relationships needed to fulfill the most basic levels in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs: food, water, shelter, and love.

In this climate, transpersonal psychology has needed to evolve in order to stay relevant. Mainstream

psychology is beginning to embrace its own roots in spirituality, re-engaging with both psyche and spirit in both practice and research.[3] In the United States positive psychology (e.g., Snyder & Lopez, 2007) and health psychology (e.g., Sheridan & Radmacher, 1991) are now established fields of research and clinical intervention, and spiritual practices such as mindfulness meditation are studied and taught as mainstream psychological treatment to minimize stress and promote healing (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney, 1985; Stahl & Goldstein, 2010).[4]

A contemporary definition of the transpersonal field addresses these cultural changes and the evolution of the field. Following the example of Lajoie and Shapiro (1992), Hartelius et al. (2007) conducted a thematic analysis of 160 definitions and concluded that transpersonal psychology is comprised of three interacting themes: *Beyond-Ego Psychology*; *Integrative/Holistic Psychology*; and *Transformative Psychology*. Hartelius et al. wove the themes into a new definition of the transpersonal field: "An approach to psychology that 1) studies phenomena beyond the ego as context for 2) an integrative/holistic psychology; this provides a framework for 3) understanding and cultivating human transformation" (p. 11). While this definition may be viewed as individualistic in scope, the authors stressed that the transformation of the individual is but one important aspect of creating change in the world:

> The three aspects of the field complete rather than compete. As beyond-ego aspects of human experience become understood, a view emerges in which human individuals are integrally interconnected with much larger contexts. This larger vision, in turn, allows glimpses of how to become a greater, deeper humanity. As humanity transforms, individually and collectively, it cultivates more beyond-ego development worthy of study. Together, the three themes of transpersonal psychology form an interdependent, mutually supportive cycle of inquiry. (p. 11)

This statement seems to mirror the often-paraphrased quote by Gandhi: "Be the change you want to see in the world." Such a comparison is not meant to diminish either the nuanced complexity of the above definition, nor to frame Gandhi's quote in a reductivist manner. Rather, it is to point out that both concepts focus on the vital importance of individual agency and action

as catalysts for personal as well as social transformation: moving from rigid individualism to the embrace of unique subjective experiences within intersubjective milieus. As will be discussed later, it is important to highlight that transformation begins with the individual in this frame, and thus subjectivity is reaffirmed as the locus or starting point of the process. The self is the place where transformation begins, though not its full and final purpose.

The Feminist Terrain(s): A Brief History of Western Academic and Activist Feminism

Western (or Euro-American) feminism,[5] generally understood to include the movements developed in the late 60s through early 80s in the United States, Western Europe (notably the United Kingdom), and Australia, has contemporary roots, as well as a deeper lineage reaching back to the "first wave" of women-centered activism focused primarily on suffrage (womens' right to vote) that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States and United Kingdom (Freedman, 2002). What is generally understood as Western feminism is one faction among many in the broader global women's rights movements that focus on issues such as human trafficking, reproductive and family planning rights, violence against women, women impacted by war, women's representation in government and the workplace, and poverty—to name but a few of the crucial areas of concern (Morgan, 1996). Consideration of the complexities, nuances, and rich history of the myriad women's movements that now span the globe and interlock in multiple ways through scholarship (e.g., Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994), activist endeavors (e.g., Women in Black and Code Pink, two international war protest groups), social media (e.g., websites such as Facebook and GlobalSister that seek to connect and inform women) and non-government organizations (e.g., Sisterhood is Global Institute and the Global Fund for Women) are beyond the scope of this work; thus, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive overview of feminism here. Major concepts describing key schools of thought and evolutions of the Western feminist movement that have influenced my perspectives on feminisms will be briefly noted to provide context for the considerations at hand (but see Freedman, 2002; LeGates, 2001).

The Western feminist movement of the 1960s to 1980s, now referred to in many feminist academic circles as *second wave feminism* and understood as the modern origin of contemporary Western feminism(s), was greatly influenced by the civil rights, anti-war, and youth activism movements in the United States during the 1960s (LeGates, 2001); its development paralleled the counter-cultural inception of contemporary transpersonalism. The movement was "driven by a wide variety of women's concerns, including sex discrimination; limited opportunities in employment; restraints on reproductive freedom; and concerns about domestic violence, sexual victimization, and women's unpaid labor" (Biaggio, 2000, p. 3). Early activism and political action focused on women as a distinct class (differentiated from men) who shared the common experience of dominance and oppression simply by being women (Lerner, 1986; Spivak, 1988). The construct of a monolithic class of women has become increasingly complexified as the rise of diverse voices in the movement(s) has demonstrated the problems that come with conceptualizing women as a class. Nonetheless, early feminist thought demonstrated the need to delineate a starting point for the movement that starkly highlighted the extreme inequity and disparity of privilege that women have experienced due to gender and/or sex roles associated with biological sex (Jehlen, 1990; Kessler & McKenna, 1985).

This early activism began to dismantle assumptions about women's position in society as well as what had traditionally been assumed as fixed gender roles. The feminist movement grew through grassroots efforts, notably the formation of *consciousness-raising* (CR) groups. These groups were collectives of women gathered together, "focused on facilitating personal awareness of a central tenet of the movement: the personal is political" (Biaggio, 2000, p. 6)[6]:

> All across the [U.S.], as if by spontaneous combustion, women were meeting to discuss their personal plights and arriving at the same conclusion: that their problems were not unique or isolated phenomena, but rather reflections of a political environment that devalued and subjugated women .... This is how the movement caught fire; women bonded around the new insight that they were being treated like second-class citizens. They realized that they had grown so accustomed to this status that they had been blind to its very existence. This awareness and the fervent sense of sisterhood it gave rise to fueled the movement. (p. 6)

Acts of consciousness-raising often also led to personal and public confrontations of long-held views on race, class, and social injustice, along with protests of gender inequality. Women began to write personal narratives of their own experiences as subjective accounts of such issues (Friedan, 1963/2001; Pratt, 1984; Rich, 1979/1995). This early work became the heuristic ground of qualitative information that coalesced into feminist theory through various manifestos and anthologies (e.g., Morgan, 1970; Redstockings, 1969/2010).

The Spectrum of Feminism

Feminism is, and has been from its inception, a collection of many movements. What is generally referred to as second wave feminism developed out of four major sub-categories: *liberal feminism* (or *equality feminism*), *radical feminism*, *socialist feminism* (or *material feminism*), and *cultural feminism*. Radical feminism and cultural feminism have been greatly influential in contemporary feminist psychology and warrant brief explication herein.

Radical feminism. Radical feminists believe that the patriarchal structure of society oppresses women. Radical feminists have conducted research and created theory demonstrating how some of the most sacred cultural institutions, including marriage and child-bearing/care, operate as mechanisms of control and domination over women (Rich, 1979/1995; Firestone, 1970). Psychologist Laura Brown (1994) is dedicated to dismantling and restructuring theory, practice, and even "the patriarchy inside ourselves" in an effort to create a "vision of the just society in which oppression and domination are no longer the norm" (pp. 233-234). Brown's voice displays the intermingling of theory and politics that most often characterizes the radical feminist perspective. The prominent social and political work of radical feminism pursues the elimination of violence against women and highlights issues of sexuality—most notably the issues of rape and pornography—and the effects these two elements have on women (Dworkin, 1981; MacKinnon 1982/1993). Amid the criticism of unrealistic separatism leveled at some of their political stances, radical feminists nonetheless have been at the forefront of antiviolence legislation and were among the first to develop rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters (Echols, 1989) and have had a lasting impact in feminist psychology.

Cultural feminism. Cultural feminists are generally credited with seeking to resurrect, reconsider,

and re-vision the cultural meanings of female qualities such as the concept of *the feminine* as it is used in areas such as Jungian analytic work (e.g., Woodman, 1990, 1997; see also Downing, 1992/2003) and feminist spirituality (e.g., Christ, 1992, 1997). A core assertion of many cultural feminists is that women have been oppressed due to inherent unique qualities such as intuition, emotionality, and relationality (Alpert, 1973; Donovan, 1992; Noddings, 1984; Wilshire, 1989).

> Cultural feminists…have tended to embrace the biological and psychological understandings of the differences between men and women. From their perspective, the social problem women encounter is not the differences per se, but rather the differential value placed on those differences. (Whalen, 1996, p. 23)

Or, as Wilshire (1989) noted in her explication of how ancient philosophers laid the groundwork for ongoing oppression of women qua women:

> One sees that the more things change, the more they stay the same, for philosophic tradition *continues* to extol things culturally perceived as male (e.g., knowledge in the mind) and suppress things culturally perceived as female (e.g., knowledge in the body). Note here, briefly but pointedly, that *maleness and femaleness in this context often have nothing to do with being a woman or a man*. (pp. 94-95)

Three major contributions of cultural feminism are: (a) the celebration and honoring of motherhood; (b) a resurgence of women's spirituality, including the resurrection of goddess traditions; and (c) re-evaluations and reformations of traditional philosophies of knowledge such as strict empiricism, materialism, and logical positivism (Alpert, 1973; Starhawk, 1979/1999; Wilshire, 1989; Lips, 1999).

A Third Wave in Feminist Thought and Action

As in political parties, each branch of feminism has a particular platform and mandate upon which the members of the group operate. However, the boundaries between these ideologies are fluid, and many feminists hold beliefs from more than one group and/or create hybrid platforms such as *ecofeminism*, a fusion of ecology and feminism (e.g., Daly, 1978; Griffin, 1978/2000; Shiva, 1988), *womanism*, an African-American feminist movement highlighting the strengths of women of color (e.g., Higgenbotham, 1992; Walker, 1983), and *post-*

colonial and *critical race theories*, schools of thought critical of mainstream American feminism for universalizing the experience of women and thus flattening the complexity of identity (e.g., Ahmed, 2006; McClintock, 1995; Sandoval, 2000; Spivak, 1988). Additionally, the voices of lesbian, queer, and transgender women continue to impact feminist endeavors through the exploration of how sexuality (including sexual orientation and affectional orientation), gender orientation, and biological sex interplay in multivalent ways and further complexify and differentiate the experiences of women (Ahmed, 2006; Bornstein, 1995; Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997; Rich, 1979/1995).

Contemporary U.S. political, social, and academic feminism of the late 20th and early 21st centuries has come to be called the *third wave* (Findlen, 1995; Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Walker, 1995). This movement is a pastiche of history, politics, and pop culture (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000) and embraces the contradictions of identity and the subjective voices of a variety of perspectives to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of women's experience in response to perceived earlier *essentialist* stances taken in some feminist activism. *Essentialism* is understood here as adhering to the belief that there are unique attributes that women possess that are different from men; thus, this perspective is also referred to as *difference* feminism. While third wave voices are prevalent in the fields of women's studies and philosophy, many of the rhetorical and conceptual devices employed in this school of thought have yet to penetrate into the institutional structures of psychology—and are notably absent in transpersonal psychology. These offer promise for future theory and research.

The Evolving Voices of Feminism:
Considerations of Diversity

Theorizing and research in feminist work continues to evolve the field, notably in relation to continued efforts to understand the complexity of identity. Some third wave feminists have viewed the stance of cultural feminists as essentialist. Much work in third wave feminism argues for the varying utility of this stance, and questions whether the essentialist view "contributes importantly to the feminist goal of liberating women from oppression grounded in devaluation" (Bohan, 1993, p. 6). However, the point remains that "these [essentialist] theories have been criticized for presuming universality and ignoring diversity in human experience"

(DeLamater & Hyde, 1998, p. 13; for additional critique of such essentialism in feminism, see also Bohan 1993; Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Stone, 2007).[7] The ongoing dialectic around the concept of essentialism underscores the challenging work of exploring the socio-cultural nature of identity and demonstrates the vital need to keep issues of diversity at the fore of research and theory-building.

The critique against essentialism arose within feminist camps because early theory and research in the second wave years was primarily conducted by and generally included an overwhelming majority of white, middle-class women (Yoder & Kahn, 1993). As feminism has continued to evolve in the past three decades, scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990), bell hooks (1981, 1989, 2000), and Johnnetta B. Cole (1986) have highlighted the absence of the voices of women of color in second wave feminist theory and research. Cole noted the "chauvinism among white women," that "takes the form of attitudes and behaviors which ignore or dismiss as insignificant differences in class, race, age, sexuality, ethnicity, and physical ability" (p. xiii). Peggy McIntosh (2002) wrote about white chauvinism, the "weightless knapsack" (p. 358) of white privilege that is, as McIntosh wrote of her own racial awakening to whiteness, the "invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 10):

> [This privilege] leads white women to make the assumption that their experiences are universal, normative, and representative of others' experiences, although well-motivated, white, middle-class feminist scholars have fallen into the trap of presenting the experiences of "mainstream" women as the yardsticks of women's experiences. Therefore the impacts of racial, cultural, and class-based factors are ignored, not only for women of color, but also for white women. (Espin & Gawalek, 1992, p. 91)

Over the past three decades, feminist psychological theory has begun to move beyond a consideration of gender in a vacuum, recognizing that the intersections and interplay of gender, race, class, physical ability, sexual orientation, other socio-cultural factors, and personal identity create matrices through which people experience their lives (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002; Brown, 1994; Crenshaw, 1991;

Espin & Gawelek, 1992; hooks, 1989). A contextual consideration of identity is especially urgent in the field of transpersonal psychology, which has sidestepped the mundane self in much of the literature, relegating that discussion to traditional forms of personality psychology (see Daniels, 2005). However, new work is beginning to appear that addresses the concept of a transpersonal self (see MacDonald, 2009), and further theoretical and empirical work will need to continue to flesh out such a concept, as described further in sections below.

The ongoing revelations of the complexity of female experience—on national and global levels—have led to continuing, lively debates in feminist camps. Spivak (1988) suggested early on that at times it is necessary to rely on *strategic essentialism* in order to focus directly on realities that impact the lives of women. She suggested that one must not lose sight of harm against women in the process of creating philosophy or theory, and that alliances must be created across ideological differences in order to achieve social justice. Since Spivak's early statements, others have suggested more sophisticated models of coalition-building (Anzaldua, 2007; Anzaldua & Keating, 2002), *bridge identities* (Ferguson, 1997), and complex models that better represent the *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991)[8] of identity. The intention is to create feminist theory and practice that embraces "contradiction, multiplicity, and difference" (Gillis et al., 2007, p. xxiv) so that activism on behalf of women's rights and safety may continue without relying on an exclusively essentialist understanding of women as a monolithic class.

I see parallels in this critique of essentialism to questions Ferrer (2000, 2002) has raised in transpersonalism with regard to the perennial philosophy. Ferrer argued against the universalization of understanding concerning religious/spiritual experience. In the context of feminist discourse, if universalizing constructs are relied upon, then which classes or categories of (female) experience become foregrounded, and which experiences are erased or backgrounded? Questions related to who has the right or power to name and legitimize their own experiences are at the heart of much feminist work and also at the core of Ferrer's work through the past decade.

Who Speaks for Women?

While the rhetorical and philosophical stance of postmodernism is at risk of being dismissed by some as a futile, nihilistic project,[9] the core understanding of the power of language (and other forms of signification) is nonetheless valuable in a consideration of pluralistic movements such as transpersonalism and feminism. *Postmodern theory*, a term conflated and interchanged with *social constructionism* in the field of psychology, "seeks to deconstruct the very categories (e.g., sex, gender, masculine/feminine, disorder) that have achieved truth status within psychology" (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002, p. 22). Some scholars argue for a distinct difference between strict postmodern theory and the principles of social constructionism (Butler, 1990). However, the two schools of thought hold fast to a common understanding that "we have no way of knowing with certainty the nature of reality" (Bohan, 1993). Bohan defined the basic structure of this theory and how it may ameliorate the assumptions promoted by essentialism:

> So-called knowledge does not reflect the discovery of a free-standing reality, existing apart from the knower and revealed by careful application of procedures. Rather, what we purport to know, what we see as truth, is a construction, a best understanding, based upon and inextricably intertwined with the contexts in which it is created. Among the most forceful factors that shape our constructions of knowledge are the modes of discourse by which we exchange our perceptions and descriptions of reality. Thus, knowledge is a product of social interchange; what we call knowledge is simply what we agree to call truth. (pp. 12-13)

In a detailed account of potential intersections and understood contradictions of postmodern and feminist schools of thought, Cosgrove and McHugh (2002) underscored the tension between wanting to explore the subjective expressions of research participants while adhering to postmodern tenets. Language thus becomes a primary tool of a combined feminist/postmodern method in that "language (the term discourse is frequently used because of its inclusive connotation) is seen as *constituting* rather than *revealing* reality. Language affects what we do (and don't) notice, what we do (and don't) experience" (p. 24). Holding the tension between feminist identity politics and a postmodern perspective as described above allows a theorist, researcher, or practitioner to "examine the relationship between ontology (being) and epistemology (knowing)" (p. 25).

While language is of central importance to postmodern thought, scholars such as Butler (1990,

1997) and Barvosa-Carter (2001) have been careful to move toward a *poststructuralist* stance in which language is but one aspect of the discourse that constructs reality and subjectivity. The importance of this differentiation rests in these theorists' insistence on constant reflexivity in order to uncover the power structures through which reality is socially constructed. In an overview of Butler's contributions to both postmodern and feminist schools of thought, Barvosa-Carter (2001) summarized the central tenet of their collective thinking:

> Poststructuralist theories (including Butler's) describe the social world in large part in terms of the production of norms and veiled attempts to deem those norms "natural" or "universal." Butler's strident anti-normativity is born out of her attempt to unmask the pretense, falsehood, and will to power behind attempts to declare socially constructed norms universal across space and time. To reveal the contours of normative precepts and the activities of those who advance them is neither to dispense with the need for norms within political practice nor to eliminate their complex role in the formation and transformation of social relations and practices. Hence, from a poststructuralist perspective, acknowledging the subordinating misrepresentations by which some social norms are created, advanced, and maintained will not banish norm generative activities from feminist political practice. (p. 133)

Thus, the inclusion in feminist discourse of schools of thought such as postmodernism, social constructionism, and poststructuralism, each focused squarely upon the political act of delimiting the source(s) of power and influence upon which norms are created, has broadened feminist perspectives toward a new school of thought which "can and must attend to both symbolic and material politics" (Barvosa-Carter, 2001, p. 135). In relation to psychology, and notably and specifically to transpersonal psychology, a field in which the symbolic is often deemed as vital to subjective experience as material reality (Campbell, 1974; Hillman, 1997; Jung, 1976; Woodman, 1997), the above perspectives may contribute new and nuanced frames of reference from which to explore how power and reified gender roles are replicated in classical transpersonal work. This occurs, for example, through tactics such as using terms such as masculine and feminine to describe psycho-spiritual constructs and states.[10]

Applied Feminism:
Psychology and Spirituality

Feminist psychology, as a field, has been dedicated to centering women and women's issues in psychological research, theory, and treatment modalities. Utilizing the strong analytical tools developed in academic and activist strands of the movement, feminist psychologists have served key roles in addressing gender as a crucial locus of psychological health and development. Accounts of the many feminist threads that inform feminist psychology and psychotherapy are prevalent in the literature, including Enns' (2004) comprehensive overview, *Feminist Theories and Feminist Psychotherapies.*

A core concept that informs many of the scholars and researchers in feminist psychology is *relationality*, or the theory that we, as human beings, grow and develop through relationship and not in individual vacuums of experience. *Relational-Cultural Theory* is a feminist construct that has posited the need for and value of interpersonal relationship in healthy psychological development; as a theoretical model, it has become a keystone of efficacy in the therapeutic process (Baker Miller, 1978; Jordan & Hartling, 2002). Additionally, feminist psychologists have highlighted the necessity of focusing on *subjectivity*, or the actual lived experience of women in order to create valid, verifiable data upon which to build theory and practice that will serve diverse populations of women (Lerman, 1986), since the need remains to continually build diverse theory that no longer speaks only to narrowly-defined populations (Brown, 1994).[11]

In the past decade, Suyemoto (2002), for example, has proposed a model of socially-constructed self and identity as perpetually shifting and developing rather than relying on rigid, step-wise, hierarchal concepts of personality development that have defined personality psychology as a field. Suyemoto asked of traditional theorists and researchers: "Who determines what my … personality is or is not … what is or is not healthy or pathological in personality?" (p. 74) Additionally, Ballou et al. (2002) created an ecological model of human nature that includes community, ecology, and cosmos as influences that shape the self and one's understanding of identity. Similar to the earlier work of Bronfenbrenner (1979; see also Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), the Ballou et al. model extends a holistic model of identity to include consideration of the sociopolitical realities of intersectional identity as understood and interpreted through a feminist lens (Crenshaw, 1991).

Feminist work has been primarily focused on identity politics and conceptualizations of what it means to be a socially-constructed self, differentiating these models from the psychospiritual models generally utilized in the field of transpersonal psychology, which have historically placed primacy upon spiritual experience and the importance of ego-transcendence as a move toward wholeness (Wilber,[12] 1973, 2000; see also Washburn, 1995, 2003; Ruumet, 2006). In overly-simplified terms, the political orientation of much feminist theory has served well the motto noted above, "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969/2006). Just as it was suggested above that Gandhi's exhortation to "be the change" might signify the gestalt of contemporary transpersonalism, this simplification of a classic feminist slogan is not meant to be reductive; rather it is to suggest that the core focal strength of feminism(s) is that it values subjectivity while acknowledging that the socio-political reality of such lived experience impacts the lives of actual individuals. In my own work as an educator, theorist, and researcher, I find that feminism informs the transpersonal, and vice versa, to create new synergistic lived spiritual activism. It may be that this sort of mutually-inspiring relationship can also evolve between the fields themselves.

Feminism and Spirituality

Throughout the varied and voluminous anthologies of academic feminist theory,[13] research literature,[14] and textbooks on feminism and psychology,[15] issues of spirituality or religion are often noticeably absent. Women's studies and political science professor Leela Fernandes (2003) devoted an entire work to highlighting the lack of focus on—arguably even avoidance of—the issue of spirituality in mainstream Western academic feminism and women's studies programs. In her work, *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social Justice, and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*, Fernandes posited that academic feminists "have been wary of religious institutions that have sought to control women's bodies and sexualities" and that "this wariness had inadvertently allowed conservative religious and political organizations and movements to colonize spirituality" (p. 9). She further suggested that "secular, urban, middle-class feminists" (p. 9) would benefit from an exploration of the "possibility of social transformation" through "a spiritual revolution, one which transforms conventional understanding of power, identity, and justice" (p. 11).

The author recounted that the students in her women's studies courses are loath to discuss spirituality in the context of feminism, and her work is offered as a bridge between these academic circles and the lived spiritual reality of most women.[16]

While Fernandes makes the case that spirituality has often been missing from mainstream feminist academic discourse, she has not addressed the interdisciplinary feminist scholars who focus attention on aspects of spirituality, most specifically issues related to women's religious and spiritual experience. Her work circumvented the fact that the relationship between feminism and spirituality is not absent, but ambivalent; while her point may be valid in the feminist circles in which she resides, it does not take into consideration the richly complex vista of feminist spirituality that affords interesting locations of intersection between transpersonal and feminist schools of thought.

The field of feminist spirituality developed alongside the activist and academic camps of the movement since the inception of the second wave and also has deep roots in the religious motivations espoused by first-wave feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1895/2003). Accounts of the history of feminist spirituality are available, including an overview of feminist influence in monotheistic religion and goddess worship by Stuckey (2010) and the history of women's spirituality as researched by Eller (1995). Much scholarship has been written concerning institutional religions, especially, in the United States, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism; notable works include Plaskow (1979/1992, 1991), Gross (1979/1992), Schűssler-Fiorenza (1983, 1984), Reuther (1983, 1985), and Daly (1978, 1968/1985). Some of these works (including Schűssler-Fiorenza) seek to re-establish women as active participants in the living traditions of religion, while some scholars seek to re-vision the sacred scripture, liturgy, and ritual of religion to make it more inclusive for practicing women (as in the work of Reuther, Gross, and Plaskow). Daly's work argued for women to abandon patriarchal religious institutions altogether due to the inability of such religions to truly value and honor women and women's experiences. Goddess traditions, Wicca, paganism, shamanism, earth-based spiritual traditions, and women's circles are also present in prominent literature in the field (Christ, 1979/1992, 1997; Noble, 2001; Starhawk, 1979/1999; Teish, 1988). Activist and emancipatory spirituality

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are continuing to evolve and diversify, and one such example among many is the work of Lillian Comas-Diaz (2008) on *Spirita*, a spiritual perspective focused on collective liberation and social justice, grounded in *mujerista*, or Latin women's spiritual and liberatory work.

Several core constructs are central to feminist spirituality theory and practice: *women-centeredness*, *processes of reclaiming or renaming*, *praxis*, and *educating other feminists*. Prime examples of these constructs can be found in the Women's Spirituality master's program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California.[17] The program is explicitly woman-centered:[18] placing women's experience as the central focus of study and research (D. Jenett, personal communication, April 6, 2009). The program is interdisciplinary and focuses on the archeological and mythological roots of matrifocal culture and goddess worship, as well as contemporary social and political issues affecting how and whom women worship (thus, reclaiming and renaming). Courses in the program include the use of ritual, and women enrolled are required to engage in an applied learning practicum in a community setting (praxis). Finally, the program is an excellent resource for feminists who have not encountered spiritually-oriented feminism before (educating other feminists). Similar accounts of parallels to these core concepts can also be found throughout the feminist spirituality literature (e.g., Christ & Plaskow, 1979/1992; Plaskow & Christ, 1989; Powers, 1995). The concepts noted from the feminist spirituality research and literature above, grounded primarily in the fields of women's studies, history, archeology, mythology, religious studies, and social and political activism, have recently begun to contribute to the field of psychology.

**Feminist Spirituality
and Psychotherapeutic Practice**

The academic journal *Women & Therapy* has devoted two full issues to the topic of women and spirituality in the past two decades (Kaschak, 2001; Ochshorn & Cole, 1995). Both of these volumes explored the multiple ways in which spirituality affects the therapeutic process, including the use of spiritual elements such as ritual in therapy, and the place spirituality holds within the realm of mainstream feminist psychology. The 1995 issue had three articles of note: Ballou's "Women and Spirit: Two Nonfits in Psychology," Bewley's "Re-membering Spirituality: Use of Sacred Ritual in Psychotherapy," and

Hunt's "Psychological Implications of Women's Spiritual Health." The articles in the 2001 issue had a similar theme, building upon the platform established in the former issue: namely, the vital importance of spirituality in the development of a holistic understanding of the self (Funderburk & Fukuyama, 2001; Perlstein, 2001; Weiner, 2001). While none of the articles in either issue mentioned transpersonal theory specifically, Noble (2001) utilized alternative "nonrational knowledge techniques" (p. 193) and "ancient healing techniques" (p. 193) in her conception of bringing spirituality into the therapeutic setting. Such techniques included "ritual, dreams, oracles, hands-on healing, and other forms of shamanistic technique that are applied in hopes of disrupting the entrenched pathological patter and simultaneously stimulating a rebalancing to take place on its own" (pp. 194-195). Transpersonal psychotherapeutic literature is thick with analogous sentiments as evidenced in the works of authors such as Fox (1990) and Vaughn (1993).

The language used to introduce the later issue (Kaschak, 2001) also demonstrated compatibility with much transpersonal thought:

> Spiritual practice contributes to a dimension of consciousness untouched by psychodynamic and other approaches that emphasize awareness. It also demands a profound level of responsibility for oneself, to oneself, to others, and, finally, to all beings and to the earth herself, thereby acknowledging and making visible the inevitability of our mutuality and connectedness. We need not create connection; we need simply to awaken to it. (p. xxii)

The absence of specific transpersonal voices indicates a place for exploration and potential research and theory-building that may further illuminate intersections of feminist and transpersonal perspectives and generate transformative professional conversations.

Contributions that transpersonal psychotherapy could make to feminist therapists' work include expertise in techniques that assist in the discernment between pathology and spiritual emergency (Grof & Grof, 1989; Lukoff et al., 1996), the integration of spiritual techniques such as meditation in clinical practice (Vaughan, 1993) and personal wellness (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010), non-pathological language to better understand exceptional human experiences (Palmer & Braud, 2002), and applications of forgiveness in therapeutic practice or work

with groups in conflict (Luskin, 2002; Lewis, 2005). Additionally, the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology has developed excellent models of whole-person clinical training programs that illustrate the importance of the integration of personal and professional development as forms of transformational learning (Braud, 2006; Frager, 1974; see also Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2006; Meizrow, 1997).

Therapists, scholars, researchers, and educators in both feminism and transpersonalism tend to be eclectic and interdisciplinary. Thus, the fact that these fields may already share some common vernacular, as tentatively illustrated above, may serve as a bridge between them. Additionally, of course, there are already feminist-oriented transpersonal practitioners and transpersonally-oriented feminist practitioners, as evidenced by the other transpersonal/feminist works included in this special issue of IJTS, as well as a litany of excellent dissertations produced by doctoral students in schools such as ITP, the California Institute of Integral Studies, Saybrook University, the Pacifica Graduate Instutite, and other similar schools globally.[19] These works serve as a tentative beginning to the mapping of such intersections.

Feminism and Transpersonal Psychology: Intersections

Similar to many feminist psychologists, including the work of Ballou and Brown (2002), Hare-Mustin and Maraceck (1990), Maraceck, (2001) and others, the pioneers in the field of transpersonal psychology found the emphasis on pathology and malady in mid-20th century psychology only representative of a fraction of human experience and sought to create a field of study that would honor the fullness of humanity's multiple ways of being, knowing, and experiencing the world around us. While self-proclaimed feminists are active clinicians, researchers, theory-builders, educators, and spiritual guides within the transpersonal milieu, the relative absence of feminist voice is problematic with regard to theory-building and models of effective clinical interventions. This lack threatens to perpetuate sexism in the field of transpersonal psychology through silence.

It is possible that some of this gender gap may be attributable to what Ferrer (2002) has pointed to as an over-reliance on the perennial philosophy during the first quarter century of the field's development. Ferrer described perennialism as:

the idea that a philosophical current exists that has endured through centuries, and that is able to integrate harmoniously all traditions in terms of a single Truth which underlies the apparent plurality of world views. … this unity in human knowledge stems from the existence of a single ultimate reality which can be apprehended by the human intellect under certain conditions. (p. 73)

As Ferrer observed, "despite their professed inclusivist stance, most universalist visions distort the essential message of the various religious traditions, covertly favor certain spiritual paths over others, and raise obstacles for spiritual dialogue and inquiry" (p. 71). Just as perennialist views homogenize the topography of human spiritual experience, they may flatten the plurality of lived experience that results from inhabiting a gendered body, and overlook the need for participation by women scholars.

As noted earlier, feminist postmodern scholars employ dialectics that continually question the validity of universal truths or monolithic theories claiming to represent all human experience. The inclusion of women's voices generally, and feminist voices in particular, can support the field's efforts to overcome unexamined presuppositions and, through embracing diversity, achieve a greater degree of plurality in the philosophical foundations of the discipline.

Louchakova and Lucas (2007) have recently written a critique that also suggests that the avoidance of the examination of the self in transpersonal psychology is linked to the roots of the field in the personal growth endeavors of the 1960s, which sought to differentiate from other mainstream schools of thought and relied heavily on Eastern conceptions of *no-self* as a template for enlighten-ment. As ego-transcendence was and still is a core value of the field, the question of self (as identity or contextualized subjectivity, which *includes* the ego) has been a problematic conundrum that has only recently been addressed in transpersonal circles (see also MacDonald, 2009). The deep and skillful socio-cultural analytic tools developed in feminist psychology may be essential to help transpersonal theorists and clinicians ground solid definitions of growth and transformation beyond (or through) ego, but *in situ*, in cultural context. While spiritual experiences are often described as ineffable, decontexualizing the individuals experiencing such ineffability risks creating essentialist models that may not fit diverse experience, as Ferrer (2002, 2009) has suggested.

Epistemologies and Research Methods: Explicit Intersections

Feminist perspectives have greatly influenced a body of scholarship exploring alternative epistemologies that challenge the positivist position held in science for more than a century (Lips, 1999). Feminist theorists have explored and critiqued the ways in which knowledge is collected, interpreted, and transmitted (Chelser, 1972; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Jaggar & Bordo, 1989). As Ballou and Brown (2002) pointed out, "epistemologies deriving from … psychologies such as postmodern, multicultural, and ecological are more commonly utilized and more broadly understood" (p. xiii) to be more inclusive and flexible, and thus better tools for the study of models such as Relational-Cultural Theory (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991) or the feminist ecological model of the self (Ballou et al., 2002).

The above epistemological frames complement and, in some instances, intersect with some of the core constructs that have been developed in transpersonally-grounded research methods (Anderson, 2004; Braud, 2004; Braud & Anderson, 1998, 2011; Clements, 2004). Both feminist research methods (grounded often in the perspective of social constructionism) and transpersonal research methods seek to move beyond exclusive reliance on experimentally or objectively gathered data, demonstrating an early valuing of and confidence in qualitative research methods, including the use of heuristics, hermeneutics, and phenomenology (Anderson, 2004; Ballou, 1992; Braud & Anderson, 1998). As noted, neither field seeks to do away with empirical methods of data gathering (Bohan, 1993), but rather to select a method that best fits the research questions at hand (Braud, 1998). However, in the case of a social constructionist stance one is reminded of the differentials of power in all research endeavors, and is urged to remain "skeptical of received truths and taken-for-granted frames of reference…knowledge is never innocent, but always value-laden and predicated on specific sociopolitical conditions that it serves to legitimize" (Maraceck, 2002, p. 6).

In the case of a transpersonal stance toward research, the transformative and liberating potential of doing research is highlighted, while close care is paid to the integrity and reflexivity of the researcher (Braud, 2004; see also Anderson, 2000; Clements, 2004). Research is not to be taken lightly and attention is to be paid to vigilant self-development in order to create as clear a vision in data analysis as possible. A researcher with a feminist orientation may be influenced by the values of egalitarianism, mutuality, multiple viewpoints, and a respect for subjective experience (Reinharz, 1992). Additionally, emphasis may be placed on lived experience and the subjective voice of research participants—often referred to as "co-researchers" in both feminist- and transpersonally-oriented models.

Within the transpersonal field, two research methods embrace explicitly feminist epistemologies: intuitive inquiry and organic inquiry. Intuitive inquiry is a process through which objective and subjective data is analyzed through successive hermeneutic cycles of data collection and reflection (Anderson, 2000). According to Anderson (2004), this method is rooted in both feminist and transpersonal concepts; she identified the process of intuition as a transpersonal act that may take several forms and is admittedly difficult to quantify. "In one moment, intuition seems vibrant and breathtaking to behold—and then it disappears" (p. 4), yet Anderson nonetheless purported that intuition is a viable form of knowing—an argument also made in feminist work (Wilshire, 1989). Symbolic processes, sensory modes of intuition, and empathetic identification are all forms of knowing that are valued—indeed, encouraged—within the method. Anderson (2001) also encouraged embodied writing as a technique that:

> brings the finely textured experience of the body to the art of writing. Relaying human experience from the inside out and entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world, embodied writing affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world in which we live our lives. As a style of writing, embodied writing is itself an act of embodiment. Nature feels close and dear. Writers attune to the movements of water, earth, air, and fire, which coax our bodily senses to explore. When embodied writing is attuned to the physical senses, it becomes not only a skill appropriate to research, but a path of transformation that nourishes an enlivened sense of presence in and of the world. (p. 83)

In intuitive inquiry, the subjectivity of the researcher is valued equally to the voices of the co-researchers. These research methods and techniques demonstrate models of conducting research that value transformation, personal responsibility, and a researcher's capability, and are

useful for understanding human experience through a transpersonal lens.

Another method valued in transpersonal research is organic inquiry, which:

> stands at the intersection of feminine spirituality and transpersonal psychology. … Organic studies to date seem to be motivated by a desire on the part of the researcher to investigate and share the meaning of her or his own deeply-held experience in order to improve the life of another, by a desire for social and individual transformation, a goal which mirrors the high ideals of both the feminist and transpersonal movements. (Clements, Ettling, Jenett, & Shields, 1999, p. 5)

Like intuitive inquiry, the organic method seeks to understand and legitimize ways of knowing traditionally dismissed in mainstream psychological research (Clements, 2004). This method utilizes nature metaphor such as the cycle of planting, growth, and harvest to highlight non-rational processes available to the researcher as well as synchronistic experiences that may arise while the research is being conducted and reported. Additionally, there is an explicit social justice mandate for research conducted in this manner: not only should the research transform the researcher, it should also positively impact the co-researchers and the readers of the research, and should lead toward social transformation for all exposed to the material (Clements, 2004). Additionally, the method encourages the reporting of findings through the actual voices of the co-researchers: the researcher uses as much of each participant's story as possible to flesh out the findings. Thus, organic inquiry is a technique that values the subjective nature in qualitative research and feminist theory in general.

The explicit ways in which feminist theory is utilized in the aforementioned transpersonally-oriented methods may serve as an excellent template for additional ways in which feminist perspectives may support and enhance continued development in transpersonal methods. Ongoing development may include considerations of the unique nature of power, relationship, and identity, and how socio-political and personal factors impact the generation and production of research findings. Such feminist critique could contribute to the already-existing gifts of the spiritual focus of transpersonal research methods and techniques.

A Rare Published Example
of Feminist Critique in Transpersonal Psychology

In the areas of transpersonal developmental theory, an early (and solitary) example of a deconstruction, based upon gender, of one widely-accepted model of transpersonal development was produced by Peggy Wright in the mid-1990s.[20] Wright (1995, 1998) sought to explore, critique, and engage with Ken Wilber's pre/trans fallacy model, which privileges transcendence of the ego as the ultimate goal of spiritual development. Wright's critique and reevaluation of Wilber's model is of note because she, like Karen Suyemoto (2002), raised questions and alternate perspectives in order to bring to the fore the supposition of universal human experience—a task central to the feminist model of theory-building (Lerman, 1986) and, as noted, not often seen in transpersonal psychology.

Wright's (1995, 1998) primary assertion was that much of Wilber's theoretical framework hinged on an understanding of the self in which the development of higher states of consciousness are universal across not only culture, but also gender. Wright made the argument, based upon the work of Chodorow (1978) and Jordan (1984), that women's ego development and conception of the self differ from the developmental experience of men. Referring to the relational aspects of women's development, Wright (1995) "relies on … 'permeable' boundaries to allow the simultaneous experience of self and other. The self-boundaries are permeable in the sense that they are open to the flow between self and other" (p. 6). Due to this experiential difference, Wright postulated the following:

> Because women's prepersonal development differs from men's, it is not much of a stretch to postulate that women's transpersonal development may also differ. … I propose that the connected self, with its permeable boundaries, cuts across developmental lines in the prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal stages. Permeability affects all levels of experience. … In terms of how it affects transpersonal development, it may subtly change the developmental path.
>
> I speculate that because of permeable self-boundaries, women's experience of an isolated, unitary self already may be diminished. Awareness may naturally focus on the holographic, interwoven nature of reality. In this awareness, the hierarchical structures that the mind uses to reduce experience

into comprehensible packets of reality can be more easily dissolved, and formlessness and ambiguity are better tolerated.

Boundary permeability may ease the path to union with a spiritual self. The merging and embedding of the self into God or Self may not always be experienced as a loss of self. Instead it may reflect a coming to "self/Self." (p. 7)

Building upon her theoretical constructs, Wright (1998) further suggested alternative visions to Wilber's assessment of how contemporary Western culture must undertake its own healing. Drawing upon the self-in-relation models of female development, Wright (1998) suggested that we, as people, must heal the splits between mind/body and culture/nature not as individuals only, but also in community. In addition, she disagreed with Wilber's conception of the differences between transcendence and regression, insisting that, at times, one must regress in order to heal. Wright posited:

A diagnosis of what needs to be healed in our culture and the process of healing can be clarified through theoretical models, but the healing itself requires lived experience. This healing is sometimes an exceedingly difficult and unpleasant process. Coming back into the individual and collective bodies to heal trauma often means reliving our suffering. Without healing, we may "ascend," but we cannot be whole. … Healing the split at times requires messy, emotive, and nonrational "regressive" experiences. In addition, it requires developing personal, empathic relationships with the elements of the biosphere and with each other, as well as with Spirit. Ultimately, individual and social healings facilitate our spiritual development. (p. 225)

Wright's theoretical stance (1995) called for " multiple approaches to transpersonal development" that "may be needed to keep a balanced perspective" (p. 10). Like Ferrer (2002), Wright (1995, 1998) brought into question the rigid adherence to perennialist models that may not adequately represent the experience of non-dominant groups—in Wright's case, the category of women.

However, Wright did not address issues of essentialism, and her work is now more than a decade old. A contemporary development of her critique into theory would be of value in order to explore how a feminist critique of essentialism, as well as of other developmental models (e.g., Washburn, 1995; Ruumet, 2006), would enhance transpersonal psychology as a field by exploring assumptions in models that tend towards generalization across gender or other aspects of identity. Such a critique might demonstrate ways in which some models fail to represent non-dominant experience, which in turn might highlight the need for expanding and revising those models in ways that increase inclusivity. This might enhance the potential relevance and applicability of the models.

A Contemporary Opportunity for Dialogue: The Work of Jorge Ferrer

As noted throughout this exploration, intersections in the ways feminists and transpersonalists view common psychological and spiritual phenomenon have yet to be explicitly formulated. The work of Jorge Ferrer (2002, 2009) may be a ripe place to begin formal conversation on the richly complex matrix of potential agreement and contradiction that can be found in exploring transpersonal studies' relationship to feminism. A specific place to initiate this inquiry may be the tension between a postmodern skepticism for the acceptance of universals and the pursuit of for universal human experience found in some transpersonal theory. Most notably, such universalization relies on works such as Huxley's (1945) and Schuon's (1953/1984) explication of *perennial philosophy*, which, at its most basic level, holds belief in an ultimate reality or Truth.[21] Debate on this issue can be found in Ferrer's (2002) work, who put forth a concept of a *participatory nature of spiritual knowing*; this perspective seeks to re-vision and broaden transpersonal theory beyond either postmodernism or perennialism. Ferrer critiques transpersonal psychology's roots in a perennialist paradigm in which specificity and diversity are eschewed in favor of a search for common spiritual ground. As an alternative view, Ferrer suggested it is time to deconstruct transpersonal models that adhere to the validity of monolithic Truth in search of a more flexible theoretical model able to hold a "participatory spiritual pluralism" (p. 189).

Ferrer (2002) believed that transpersonal phenomena are not solely "individual inner experiences," but are rather "*multilocal participatory events*" (p. 117). Thus, transpersonal phenomena are:

(1) events, in contrast to intrasubjective experiences;
(2) multilocal, in that they can arise in different loci,

such as an individual, a relationship, a community, a collective identity, or a place; and (3) participatory, in that they can invite the generative power and dynamism of all dimensions of human nature to interact with a spiritual power in the cocreation of spiritual worlds. (p. 117)

Ferrer criticized the field of transpersonal psychology for reifying the inner experience of spiritual and transpersonal phenomena, which leads to "intrasubjective reductionism" (p. 23). Such reification, Ferrer suggested, holds back the evolution of the field:

> The task of emancipation of spirituality set forth by the transpersonal project will be incomplete as long as transpersonalists remain committed to the experiential vision. … We need to free transpersonal theory from its modern experiential prejudices and expand the reach of spirituality out of its confinement to the subjective space to the other two worlds, that is, the objective and the intersubjective. (p. 23)

In his vision of transpersonal psychology, grounded in participatory, pluralistic perspectives, Ferrer (2002) sought to move transpersonal thought and practice into a stance of active engagement and embracement of the wide variety and expressions of spiritual experience. This participatory turn does not do away with the individual or with individual experience, but rather honors contextualized experience and subjective reality; the participatory turn aims to "foster our spiritual individuation in the context of a common human spiritual family, but also turns the problem of religious pluralism into a celebration of the critical spirit of pluralism" (Ferrer, 2009, p. 140). From this starting place, it may be interesting to inquire how Ferrer's (2002, 2009) participatory concepts could create an important dialectic of theory and praxis with a feminist construct such as the Relational-Cultural concept of *growth-in-relation* (Jordan & Hartling, 2002; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller, 1987). Judith Jordan (2001) succinctly summed up the clinical application and utility of this model:

> Therapy based on the relational-cultural model suggests that the primary work is to bring people back into healing connection, where they begin to reconnect with themselves and bring themselves more fully into relationship with others. We posit that growth occurs in connection and that we grow, learn,

expand, and gain a sense of meaning in relationship. This does not mean that we are in actual physical relationship with people at all times, but that there is an attitude of relatedness, of mutuality, of openness, of participating in experience. This can occur in solitude, in nature, when we feel connected and in relationship with our surroundings. In isolation, we are not in relationship, we are cut off, we are not in mutual responsiveness. (p. 97)

The emancipatory and relational/participatory sentiments of the above constructs (both the work of Ferrer and Jordan et al.) suggest a place of opening for conversation about how socio-cultural realities such as gender and other intersectional identities impact participatory events. Ferrer (2000) sought to break through the long-held perennialist viewpoint "in the hope that the exposition and airing of the presuppositions of perennialism will help create an open space in which transpersonal theory need not subordinate alternative perspectives but can enter into a genuine engagement and a fertile dialogue with them" (p. 25). Ferrer's (2002) vision of transpersonal psychology, firmly grounded in participatory, pluralistic perspectives, seems closely aligned to feminist principles and suggests several intersections in theory and practice that may contribute to a feminist transpersonal perspective.

Conclusion:
Toward a Socially-Engaged
Spiritual Future

So what might this all mean for a socially-engaged, spiritually-focused psychological paradigm of human experience? Both the feminist and transpersonal fields are concerned with the concept of consciousness-raising, which is clearly an elemental aspect of their shared counter-cultural roots, as noted above. However, the forms of this consciousness-raising seem to have taken somewhat divergent paths over time, with feminism and feminist therapy doing an exceptional job with socio-cultural analysis and political action in support of groups and individuals who traditionally have not had voice in dominant cultures. Concurrently, transpersonal psychology has fostered forms of consciousness-raising with regard to altered states, alternative ways of knowing, self-knowledge, and personal growth: concepts related to Jung's models of psychological health, which includes the process of individuation, or moving toward wholeness and integration.

In the transpersonal camp, Elgin (1993) wrote that "the evolution of our consciousness (and supportive social forms) is not a peripheral concern; rather, it is of central importance to our human agenda" (p. 249). Rothberg (1999) spoke of the need for a "socially-engaged spirituality" that is concerned with "ethics and action" (p. 41). Thus, in the transpersonal world there exists a call for social engagement and the recognition that one cannot stop change at the personal growth stage, and also that one must use that change to transform the world (thus, back to Gandhi's exhortation "be the change"). However, feminist expertise in social organizing and the long history in feminism of critique, analysis, and personal reflection as social action (e.g., Hanisch's (1969/2006) "the personal is political") would serve as a rich model for the applied ethics and action Rothberg (1999) sought.

Conversely, transpersonal studies may offer new insights into conceptualizations of spiritual development, novel approaches to integrating spiritual interventions into clinical practice, and reminders that psychology encompasses the beauty and richness of the full range of human experience in each client seen and each student educated—not to mention in one's own lived experience. As early as 1994, Laura S. Brown saw feminist psychological theory moving toward considerations of the "'spiritual' or existential" realms (p. 233). Leela Fernandes (2003) and others (Flinders, 1999; Klassen, 2009) have demonstrated the deep hunger in academic feminist circles for a more spiritually-infused form of activism. The conversation between the two fields has barely begun. Readers who seek to integrate the sacred, the mundane, the social, the personal, and the righteous into a holographic understanding of psychology and human consciousness, are invited to contribute their efforts in forging paths that lead to further intersections of thought and practice between transpersonal studies and feminism.

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Notes

1. See Friedman (2002) and Daniels (2005, p. 265) for the argument that transpersonal studies encompasses a wider scope of what is truly taking place among transpersonally-oriented scholars and that this term, rather than transpersonal psychology, is utilitarian as the field of transpersonal psychology continues to develop and grow.

2. Another excellent overview of the field and the core theoretical constructs that inform transpersonal psychology is Michael Daniels' (2005) "Approaching Transpersonal Psychology."

3. A report was recently published in the professional magazine of the American Psychological Association (Monitor on Psychology) on neuroscientific research demonstrating that religious belief in humans fosters stronger social bonds as well as staves off existential angst (Azar, 2010). This report took a distinctly non-pathological view of the religious impulse—a relatively new stance for a mainstream psychological publication. "'We've had this long history of believing that the things of the spirit are in one camp and that science and technology are in another camp,' says [Thomas] Plante, professor and director of the Spirituality and Health Institute at Santa Clara University and president of APA's Div. 36 (Psychology of Religion). 'If anything, this work reiterates that we are whole people; the biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual are all connected'" (para. 16).

4. All three fields, positive psychology, health psychology, and mindfulness studies and applications are commonplace in the U.S. market today, with specialized professional journals and conferences in each field—and all three disciplines are core areas of consideration at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and other like-minded schools in the field.

5. Western feminism is generally understood to include the movements developed in the late 60s through early 80s in the United States, Western Europe (notably the United Kingdom), and Australia.

6. This phrase was originally coined as a title for a treatise written by Carol Hanisch in 1969. For a detailed history by Hanisch and the original article of this title, go to <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>

7. For a differing perspective that seeks to reaffirm the value of second wave feminist research while simultaneously critiquing some of the flaws and assumptions of earlier feminist research, see Hayes (1997).

8. An intersectional perspective is the ability to view the lived human experience through multiple lenses of identity which influence how one walks in the world. Examples of these multiple lenses are class, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, region, physical ability, religion or spiritual orientation, sexual or affectional orientation, or gender.

9. Philosophers from within and outside of postmodern circles continue to debate the value of deconstruction as a process (see Habermas, 1981). Nonetheless, understandings of the power structure of language and the social construction of the self have been invaluable projects in feminist and queer theory building with the goal of de-centering assumed and implicit identity and power structures (e.g., Foucault, 1970, 1980; Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997; Gergen, 2001).

10. Transpersonal psychology is rife with examples of gendered language that have gone unexamined with regard to how such usage reinforces gendered roles based upon psychospiritual developmental expectations. Examination of how and to what purpose such language is used may expose problematic, rigid gender roles that do not represent or symbolize the lived experience of individuals who do not easily fit into categories such as masculine and/or feminine. It is the hope of the author to address these very issues in a future essay.

11. Feminist psychotherapist Laura S. Brown has written for decades on the complexity of the feminist endeavor to create flexible, non-pathologizing, and holistic theory and practice in order to address the experiences of women. Nontheless, Brown (1994) has continued to hold strong to the perspective that the feminist project must include novel approaches to psychological theory-building rather than an additive approach to broadening what already exists in mainstream psychology. She stated: "I believe that we can continue to borrow from mainstream developmental theories only at our peril. The feminist clinical psychologist and theoretician Rachel Hare-Mustin has aptly noted that feminist personality theorists continue to 'stand

on the bellies of dead white men' in building our theories (personal communication, July, 1993)…A feminist theory of personality requires starting afresh, departing from the patriarchal universe of knowledge, standing on our own feminist feet, and allowing our politically oriented way of knowing to represent good personality theorizing" (pp. 231-232). Her perspective may be controversial to some, but her stance is one that suggests that a careful examination of unspoken oppression and tacit acceptance of gendered stereotyping in much psychological research and theory may continue to maintain patriarchal power dynamics unless care is taken to make such unidentified discrimination plain throughout the research and theory building processes.

12. Wilber would, most likely, disagree with the supposition that there is a lack of consideration for socio-political issues in integral theory, even though it is clear that this area has not received significant development or emphasis in comparison with topics of personal transcendence. It is also clear that significant gaps remain within transpersonal studies, including critiques of the socio-political implications of spiritual development.

13. The three major third-wave theory anthologies do not address religion or spirituality in any substantive form. If mentioned at all, spirituality is eschewed for activist work (see Baumgardner & Richards, 2000) or addressed so peripherally as to have no substantive presence in feminist theory-building in these contexts (see Gillis et al., 2007; Heywood & Drake, 1997).

14. A search conducted in the Psychology of Women Quarterly archives (dating from 1997 to the present) yielded a total of three articles in response to the the keyword "spirituality" (Retrieved from EBSCO Host database, December 23, 2010). This is the flagship journal of Division 35 of the American Psychological Association, the Society for Women in Psychology.

15. Examples include Biaggio and Hersen (2000) and Lips (1999).

16. The Pew Forum for Religious and Public Life conducted the U.S. Religious Landscape survey in 2009 and reported that 86% of women in the U.S. were religiously affiliated and in many factors score higher on religious measures than men (http://

pewforum.org/The-Stronger-Sex----Spiritually-Speaking.aspx).

17. This is one of two programs in the San Francisco Bay Area of California dedicated specifically to the study and practice of women's spirituality. The other program is housed at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco.

18. Woman-centeredness does not denote gender or sex exclusivity with regard to those invited to study the field. Rather this perspective is grounded in transformative teaching practices and feminist theory: through de-centering norms (such as male-centeredness, or the primacy of male experience, in patriarchal religious structures), new vantage points of understanding and shifts in frames of reference may create opportunities for profound personal, social, and intellectual change through viewing one's self or experience as centered rather than othered or non-normative.

19. With the comprehensive indexing of dissertations and theses on databases such as ProQuest, access to this rarely considered literature is now widely possible. As noted elsewhere in this piece, the politics of why these dissertations have not been published to date as articles or books in the professional literature continues to go unexamined.

20. Another early self-identified feminist author in the field who utilized gender as a locus of psychospiritual exploration (notably through the lens of self-psychology) is Judy Schavrien (1989; 2008). Her use of classical Western drama as a tool to explore the rise of (her term) The Feminine in the development of a mature psyche is further explored in an article in this special issue.

21. Tarnas (2002) encapsulated the unfolding of trans-personal theory based upon "inherited principles that …revealed themselves to be acutely problematic" (p. viii). He continued:

> With modernity's focus on the individual Cartesian subject as the starting point and foundation of any understanding of reality, with its pervasive assertion of the knowing subject's epistemic separation from an independent objective reality, and finally with the modern disenchantment of the external world of nature and the cosmos, it was virtually inevitable that transpersonal psychology would emerge in the

form that it did: namely, with an overriding commitment to legitimate the spiritual dimension of existence by defending the empirical status of private, individual intrasubjective experiences of an independent universal spiritual reality. … And since experience of the ultimate spiritual reality was regarded as one shared by mystics of all ages, it was, like scientific truth, independent of human interpretations and projections, and empirically replicable by anyone properly prepared to engage in the appropriate practices. In turn, this consensually validated supreme reality was seen as constituting a single absolute Truth which subsumed the diverse plurality of all possible cultural and spiritual perspectives within its ultimate unity. This was the essential transcendent Truth in which all religions at their mystical core ultimately converged." (p. ix)

About the Author

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